

**SUBJECT:** Creating a pilot program to help prospective students with enrollment

**COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 8 ayes — Rangel, F. Brown, Farabee, Goolsby, J. Jones, Morrison, E. Reyna, West  
0 nays  
1 absent — Uher

**WITNESSES:** For — *Registered but did not testify:* Cindy Ashby, Texas School Counselors Association and Texas Counseling Association  
Against — None

**DIGEST:** CSHB 400 would establish the Higher Education Assistant Pilot Program and would require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to administer and coordinate the program in three regions with low post-secondary enrollment rates, as determined by the board.

The pilot program would have to provide information related to higher education enrollment, including on admissions and financial aid, and would have to help prospective students complete applications for enrollment, admissions, and financial aid. THECB would have to provide the information and assistance at least twice a year at one or more locations and could coordinate with a university or other entity to provide these services.

By August 31, 2003, THECB would have to report to the Legislature on the effectiveness of the pilot program, including recommendations on whether to implement the program statewide. The pilot program would expire on that date.

THECB would have to implement the pilot program only if the Legislature appropriated money specifically for that purpose. Otherwise, the board could implement the program using other available appropriations.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2001.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSHB 400 would establish a much-needed pilot program to help high school seniors and their parents understand the importance of higher education and the necessary steps to prepare for college. Financial aid applications can be extensive and complex. Completing the necessary forms can be confusing and challenging for many, but especially for students and families who speak English as a second language or who may not be familiar with higher education in general. Strategically targeting the pilot program to areas that have low postsecondary enrollment rates is a common-sense solution that would enable the state to use its resources efficiently to steer more students toward higher education in those areas and to eliminate barriers.

According to Postsecondary Education Opportunity, a nonpartisan group that tracks college-attendance rates, Texas continues to lag behind almost every other state in college-participation rates. Recent studies show that 39 percent of all 19-year-olds across the nation attend college, but Texas ranks 45th with only about 31 percent of Texans in this age group attending college.

Texas has a lower enrollment in higher education institutions than most other states of similar size and demographics. According to THECB, Texas falls short in higher education enrollment rates, degrees awarded, federal research funding, and nationally recognized programs. The educational enrollment and success rates for all Texans will have to rise more quickly than before to avoid a decline in educational levels. The Special Commission on 21st Century Colleges and Universities, in its report issued to the 77th Legislature, concurred with THECB's proposition that a substantial increase in participation in higher education is critical to the future of Texas.

One of the THECB's goals is to close the gap in participation by enrolling 500,000 additional students by 2015. Reaching that goal will require more faculty members, more creativity in using resources, and greater recognition of the need to reach every student. Reaching that goal also will require increasing participation from every population group, but especially from Hispanics and African-Americans, who traditionally have enrolled in relatively lower numbers.

A large gap now exists among racial and ethnic groups in enrollment in and graduation from higher education institutions. Groups with the lowest enrollment and graduation rates soon will constitute a majority of the Texas population. Unless the state addresses its problem with low minority enrollment rates, the number of students enrolling statewide will decline steadily.

CSHB 400 would not establish a duplicative program. Even though universities promote and recruit students independently and high schools offer counseling for students wishing to continue their education, these programs are insufficient in themselves. School counselors are overwhelmed by the number of students they must advise, and sometimes one counselor must advise several hundred students.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

CSHB 400 would be an expensive experiment to see if helping students to fill out application forms would help get them into college. It would use state resources to provide a service that high school guidance counselors already provide. If the proposed pilot program were to be instituted statewide, it would require additional state appropriations in future years. It would commit the state to an undetermined level of future financial support, a questionable move at a time when higher education in general is underfunded.

OTHER  
OPPONENTS  
SAY:

Although increasing access to higher education is important, it is not clear whether the Legislature intends to appropriate additional money to THECB specifically to administer the proposed pilot program.

NOTES:

HB 400 as filed would have required the pilot program to be established in Dallas and Houston and in Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy counties.

The House-approved version of SB 1 by Ellis, the general appropriations bill for fiscal 2002-03, contains Rider 40, which would require THECB to administer and coordinate the pilot program from its biennial appropriation. The Senate-approved version of SB 1 does not contain this rider.

The fiscal note for CSHB 400 anticipates no significant fiscal impact to the state. The fiscal note for the bill as filed estimated that the pilot program would cost \$229,000 in fiscal 2002-03.