

SUBJECT: Counseling public school students regarding higher education

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Sadler, Dunnam, Hochberg, Oliveira, Olivo, Smith

0 nays

1 present, not voting — Grusendorf

2 absent — Dutton, Hardcastle

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, February 22 — 29-0

WITNESSES: For — Rene Lara, Texas Federation of Teachers

Against — None

DIGEST: SB 158 would require each counselor at an elementary, middle, or junior high school, including an open-enrollment charter school offering those grades, to advise students and their parents or guardians regarding the importance of higher education, coursework designed to prepare students for higher education, and financial aid availability and requirements.

During a student's first year of high school or at the high school level in an open-enrollment charter school, and again during a student's senior year, a counselor would have to provide information about higher education to the student and the student's parent or guardian. Such information would have to include:

- ! financial aid eligibility and instructions on how to apply for federal financial aid;
- ! the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's center for financial aid information;
- ! automatic admission to general academic higher education institutions of students who graduated with a grade-point average in the top 10 percent of their high school classes; and

! eligibility and academic performance requirements for the TEXAS Grant.

The education commissioner would have to adopt rules regarding the required counseling for high school students or open-enrollment charter schools, other than those for whom the 2001-02 school year was the first or senior year of high school.

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. It would apply beginning with the 2001-02 school year.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

SB 158 would require public schools below the high school level to counsel students on the importance of higher education, the advantages of completing the recommended or advanced high school program, financial aid eligibility and applications processes, academic requirements for the TEXAS Grant, and the automatic admission of students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their class.

Although programs that offer counseling and financial aid are available, the governor's Special Commission on 21st Century Colleges and Universities found that many schools failed to provide counseling to inform students and their parents of educational opportunities and of the standards necessary to qualify for assistance. This bill would underscore the importance of student counseling by placing specific requirements in statute and by requiring the education commissioner to adopt the relevant rules.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

Not all students have the same opportunities and goals. While it is important to inform the top 10 percent of a class, or even the top 25 percent, of higher education opportunities, SB 158 could create frustrations or false expectations among students who would not qualify for automatic admission or financial aid. The state should put equal emphasis on job counseling for students who do not intend to attend college.

**NOTES:**

A related bill, HB 400 by Giddings, which would establish a program for informing students in schools with relatively low enrollment in higher education institution about enrollment and financial aid options, passed the House on April 24 and was reported favorably, as substituted, by the Senate

Education Committee on May 9 and recommended for the Local and Uncontested Calendar.