

SUBJECT: Allowing joint credit for junior college and private high school courses

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, with amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Sadler, Dutton, Dunnam, Grusendorf, Hardcastle, Hochberg,
Oliveira, Olivo, Smith

0 nays

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, February 14 — voice vote

WITNESSES: For — Janie King; Joe Ramos, Texas Association of School Boards

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Education Code, sec. 130.008 authorizes a public junior college, under an agreement with a school district, to offer a course in which a high school student in that school district can enroll and simultaneously receive course credit toward the student's high school academic requirements and course credit as a student of the junior college, if the student has been admitted or later is admitted to the junior college. The junior college can waive the tuition fee for a high school student enrolled in such a course.

DIGEST: SB 82, as amended, would require a public junior college that admitted or enrolled high school students in courses offered for joint high school and junior college credit to apply the same criteria and conditions to each student who wished to enroll in the course, whether the student attended a public high school, a private or parochial school, or a home school. To enroll high school students in a joint-credit course, the junior college would have to have an agreement with the school district or, in the case of a private high school, with the organization or other person that operated the high school.

For purposes of this bill, a student at least 16 years old who attended a school that was not organized formally as a high school would be considered to be attending high school.

The bill would apply beginning with the 2001 fall semester.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 82 is needed to clarify that all Texas high school students, including those in private or parochial schools or home schools, could take advantage of the joint-credit program offered by public junior colleges. About 25 public junior colleges in Texas now offer concurrent enrollment to private high school students based on partnerships between the private schools and the public junior colleges. Before these programs are expanded further, however, the law should be clear about authorizing these agreements.

Students in public high schools have been able to take advantage of the joint credit program since 1995, when the Legislature enacted HB 1336 by Rodriguez. Until that time, students had to obtain approval from their high school, pass all sections of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test, and obtain college-level placement scores in reading, writing, and math on a college entrance exam, as well as pay for tuition.

In a 1999 opinion (JC-0013), Attorney General John Cornyn determined that the Legislature could amend the Education Code to extend joint-credit public junior college courses to private school students and that this would be consistent with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

According to the bill's fiscal note, existing partnerships generated about 80,000 contact hours in the fall 2000 semester at a cost to state general revenue of about \$300,000. This is the reimbursement cost the state pays to junior colleges for waiving tuition for these courses. Although enrollment would increase because of SB 82, the fiscal note anticipates no significant fiscal implications for the state or for units of local government. This would be a sound investment for the state and would give all high school students an opportunity to get a head start on their higher education.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The committee amendment would specify that a public junior college could agree with an organization or other person operating a private high school to offer the school's students joint-credit courses.