

SUBJECT: Undergraduate admissions requirements for graduates of unaccredited schools

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Morrison, Chavez, Giddings, J. Jones, Smithee

0 nays

3 absent — F. Brown, Mercer, Nixon

WITNESSES: For — Dr. James A. Freeman, St. Thomas' Episcopal School; Tim Lambert, Texas Home School Coalition

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Public higher education institutions, including community colleges and technical institutions, may have different undergraduate admission requirements for students who did not graduate from an accredited high school. "Nontraditional" applicants, including home schooled students and graduates of non-accredited high schools, may be required to submit individual essays or provide general education development (GED) or other test results to show proficiency in basic subjects.

In the proprietary school rules for the Texas Workforce Commission — Texas Administrative Code, Title 40, part 20, subchapter A, sec. 807.2(22) — "secondary education" is defined as the successful completion of public, private, or home schooling at the high school level or obtainment of a recognized high school equivalency credential.

DIGEST: HB 944 would add sec. 51.9241 to the Education Code, prohibiting public higher education institutions from applying different admission requirements to students who have completed a "nontraditional secondary education," defined as a course of study at the secondary school level in a non-accredited private school setting, including a home school.

The bill would affirm that the state of Texas considers successful completion of a nontraditional secondary education to be equivalent to graduation from a

public high school, and would prohibit public institutions from requiring nontraditional applicants to obtain or submit evidence of obtaining a GED certificate or other credentials equivalent to a public high school degree.

HB 944 would take effect September 1, 2003, and would apply only to admissions for a term or semester beginning after that date.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 944 would ensure that applicants to public higher education institutions were treated equally, regardless of where they completed their secondary education. Many public institutions currently require nontraditional students to score higher on standardized tests or to submit additional materials, such as proof of obtaining a GED or a personal essay. Even though many nontraditional students score much higher on standardized tests than their public school counterparts, this policy is unfair. Test scores, transcripts, and other materials required of all applicants should provide the criteria to evaluate traditional and nontraditional students alike. Institutions that no longer have special application requirements for nontraditional students have not experienced particular difficulty in evaluating applicants.

The bill would not require that nontraditional students be admitted to the institution, only that they be treated in the same way as graduates of public high schools in the application process.

HB 944 would make it clear that the state of Texas considers successful completion of a nontraditional secondary education to be equivalent to graduation from a public high school. This position already is included in rules governing procedures at the Texas Workforce Commission, which the bill simply would reinforce in statute.

In 2001, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board issued a memorandum to all colleges and universities in Texas to explain that home school graduates are eligible for Texas grants and scholarships, another indication that the state considers home school graduates to be comparable to public school graduates.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 944 would establish in statute an overly broad policy equating graduates of non-accredited private schools, including home schools, with graduates of public high schools. Students who complete a nontraditional secondary

education might have impressive credentials, including higher standardized test scores, but this does not mean that their experience is equivalent to graduation from a public high school. Public high school graduates are required to complete certain degree requirements, attend classes, and maintain a certain grade point average in order to receive a diploma. While some unaccredited private schools, including home schools, may meet or exceed these standards, there currently is no way to be sure that all nontraditional secondary schools provide an education that is equivalent to graduation from a public high school.

By prohibiting institutions from requiring nontraditional applicants to submit a GED certificate and other information, HB 944 would make it difficult for these institutions to evaluate the qualifications of nontraditional applicants. Undergraduate institutions that require high school transcripts from public school graduates should not be prohibited from asking nontraditional students to submit test scores or other documents in lieu of public high school transcripts. Without this information, institutions may be limited to using standardized test scores or individual transcripts prepared by a parent or other home school teacher to compare nontraditional applicants with graduates of accredited schools. These materials alone often do not provide sufficient information on which to evaluate an applicant's academic abilities. Open enrollment institutions, such as community colleges, rely on GED scores or other test instruments to ensure a basic level of competency.

**OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:**

By establishing in statute that a nontraditional education is equivalent to graduation from a public high school, HB 944 would establish a precedent that could be used to gain other rights and privileges for home schooled students and students from non-accredited private schools.