

SUBJECT: Eligibility under the Early High School Graduation Scholarship program

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Grusendorf, Branch, Dawson, Dutton, Eissler, Griggs, Hochberg
0 nays
2 absent — Oliveira, Madden

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 28 — voice vote

WITNESSES: For — Julian Shaddix, Texas Association of Secondary School Principals
Against — None
On — Ann Smisko, Texas Education Agency

BACKGROUND: Texas high school students may participate in the Early High School Graduation Scholarship Program, codified in 1995 as Education Code secs. 56.201-209. The program pays \$1,000 toward tuition at any Texas public or private institution of higher education that will match the award for high school students that completed the requirements for a public high school diploma in 36 consecutive months or less. The state pays for the grants through some of the savings to the Foundation School Program that result when students graduate early. In 2001-2002, the program granted 4,141 awards to students.

There are three main tracks toward graduation from a public high school: minimum, recommended, and advanced. Education Code, sec. 28.025 requires the State Board of Education to set the curriculum requirements for the minimum, recommended, and advanced high school programs.

DIGEST: SB 1366 would limit eligibility requirements for participation in the Early High School Graduation Scholarship Program to students who completed the recommended or advanced high school programs. A student who did not complete the needed course work within the time limit still would be eligible

if the student's transcript indicated that the student was unable to complete the appropriate curriculum solely because necessary courses were unavailable to the student at the appropriate times in the student's high school career as a result of course scheduling, lack of enrollment capacity, or other causes beyond the student's control. The bill would require school districts to begin noting such facts on the transcripts of students entering ninth grade in the 2003-04 school year or thereafter.

The bill would take effect on September 1, 2003, and would apply to students entering grade nine during or after the 2003-04 school year.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 1366 would require students to complete at least the recommended high school curriculum to be eligible for the tuition credits available under the Early High School Graduation Scholarship Program. Raising the eligibility standards for this program would give students added incentive for academic achievement in high school. Taking the more rigorous recommended or advanced curricula would better prepare students for college and would maximize the state's investment in them.

The bill would not penalize students who could not take courses in the recommended or advanced curriculum for reasons beyond their control. For the purposes of scholarship program eligibility, students who attended schools that did not offer these courses or who otherwise were not able to complete either curriculum would be treated the same way as students who had.

The recommended program will be a graduation requirement for all students by 2008, so it makes sense to apply this standard today to the scholarship program.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The enhanced eligibility requirements under this bill are too stringent and would disqualify many hard working, deserving students. A student who took and completed the minimum curriculum requirements for graduation within 36 months under any circumstances should continue to be eligible for the grant.

**OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The purpose of the scholarship program is twofold: to help college-bound students afford a university education, and to encourage students to graduate early from high school, which results in savings to Foundation School

Program through reduced average daily attendance costs for early graduates. By raising eligibility standards for participation in the program, this bill not only would make more students ineligible, it could reduce resulting savings to the state.

NOTES:

SB 86 by Wentworth, which would require high school students entering the ninth grade in the 2003-04 school year to complete the recommended or advanced curriculum to qualify for the top 10 percent automatic admission to state colleges and universities, beginning with the 2007-08 academic year, was postponed from the General State Calendar until today.