

SUBJECT: Authorizing a dual usage educational complex by a junior college district

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Morrison, Goolsby, F. Brown, Dawson, Gallego, Giddings,
Harper-Brown, J. Jones, Rose

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Manuel Benavidez, South Texas College Starr County Advocacy;
Nick Gonzalez, Juan Mejia, South Texas College

Against — None

DIGEST: HB 1737 would authorize the board of trustees of a junior college district, with the approval of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), to operate a dual usage educational complex as a shared facility for educational activities of the district and other participating entities. The board could enter into a cooperative agreement on use of the complex with a county, municipality, or school district located in whole or in part in the junior college service area or with another higher education institution that had a campus or education facility in the same service region.

The junior college district would coordinate and supervise the operation of the complex, but the costs for operating it would be shared by the district and the participating entities under the terms of the agreement.

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, 2005.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Small, rural areas of Texas are concerned with educational quality, equity and access as well as high unemployment rates. HB 1737 would authorize a junior college district to create a facility within its district that could be shared with other entities throughout the region.

HB 1737 particularly would help serve the emerging urban area of Hidalgo County and the rural area of Starr County. South Texas College

serves 18,000 students and has become a viable economic engine for workforce development and economic development in the area. Fifty-one percent of the population is below the poverty level with annual incomes of around \$16,000. Only 7 percent of 25-year-olds and older have baccalaureate degrees, compared with 23.2 percent of the rest of the state. The college offers dual credit classes schools at three different high schools but has experienced a large increase in the number of students taking academic classes, as well as career and technology classes.

Having a central facility would increase the educational opportunities for both high school and community college students trying to gain the marketable skills needed to be successful in life. It would improve student participation in higher education, improve workforce development, increase equity by meeting the needs of specific regions of the state, and would mobilize community support for children and higher education.

The college has made tremendous progress in forging partnerships with the local government in Starr County to provide classroom settings for students but still suffers from a lack of course offerings due to a lack of space and resources. Texas is in an era of tight fiscal constraints, and HB 1737 would maximize space and resources by combining the efforts of South Texas College and other educational entities to achieve a common goal that would benefit local communities and the state.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.