

SUBJECT: Pilot project to target disadvantaged students for dual-credit programs

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Morrison, Goolsby, F. Brown, Harper-Brown, Rose
0 nays
4 absent — Dawson, Gallego, Giddings, J. Jones

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 24 — 28-3 (Estes, Ogden, Staples)

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND: Education Code, ch. 54, subch. D sets forth exemptions from higher education tuition, dues, and fees. Sec. 130.008 authorizes courses for joint high school and junior college credit.

DIGEST: SB 151 would establish a pilot project at five public community colleges to waive tuition and mandatory fees for economically disadvantaged dual-credit students. The pilot would not be implemented unless sufficient funding were appropriated to reimburse the colleges for tuition and fee exemptions required by the bill.

The bill would authorize the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to select the five institutions and would set forth the requirements for the selection, including diversity in geographic location and enrollment. SB 151 would require the State Board of Education (SBOE) to provide funding for free textbooks for participating students and would require the SBOE to set aside funding out of the Available School Fund to provide the textbooks. The SBOE would adopt rules to provide for a school district to reimburse a higher education institution for textbook costs.

The bill would require the THECB to conduct an ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the pilot project in encouraging students to graduate from college in a timely manner as well as any other benefits or problems that might result from the pilot project. The commissioner of higher

education and the commissioner of education would collaborate in making these evaluations, and THECB would issue two reports to the Legislature — one by December 31, 2006, and the other by December 31, 2008.

The bill also would set guidelines to account for the time a dual-credit student spent in the college-credit-bearing class, so that those hours also would be counted toward high school graduation requirements.

The provision establishing the pilot project would take effect and apply to students enrolling in a dual-credit course beginning with the fall 2005 academic semester. It would expire on August 15, 2009. The provisions of the bill requiring free textbooks for dual-credit students would expire on August 15, 2009.

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:**

SB 151 would target a specific group of students that particularly would benefit from the opportunity to pursue dual-credit programs, which involve high school students taking courses at public junior colleges to earn high school and college credit simultaneously. According to the THECB's "Closing the Gaps" state higher education plan, participation in higher education among Hispanics is lagging behind that of other demographic groups. The state must increase Hispanic enrollment by an additional 48,000 students to reach the target 2005 target, and educational enrollment and success rates for all Texans will have to rise rapidly to avoid an overall decline in educational attainment.

Dual-credit programs have been very successful in getting high school students to enroll in college. SB 151 would increase participation in dual-credit programs among economically disadvantaged students, which would help close some of the gaps in the attainment of higher education. It also would encourage high school students who take college courses to continue their higher education studies for completion of a degree or certificate. This eventually would result in a savings to the state by allowing students to complete their educations and enter the workforce more quickly.

There are many economically disadvantaged students who would like to take advantage of the dual-credit program but are unable to afford

expensive college textbooks. Although funding for textbooks occasionally is available from a school district or community college, paying for college textbooks under the current system generally is the responsibility of the student. SB 151 would allow more needy dual-credit students to receive free textbooks.

The bill would not overlook the needs of middle-class students. Rather, it would target a group of students in greater need for the purpose of meeting a major state goal in expanding higher education opportunities to students across Texas.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Dual-credit programs are beneficial to all students who wish to pursue higher education while still in high school. However, the bill would target only economically disadvantaged students and would not address students from middle class-families with two working parents who also may not be able to afford college textbooks.

NOTES:

According to the fiscal note, the bill would cost approximately \$7.4 million in fiscal 2006-07. However, according to the Legislative Budget Board, it is possible that the tuition and fee costs could be financed in future years by savings resulting from reductions in the number of courses taken by undergraduate students.