

- SUBJECT:** Awarding certain financial aid for home school graduates
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Morrison, F. Brown, Alonzo, Giddings, D. Howard, Patrick, Rose
- 0 nays
- 2 absent — McCall, Aycock
- WITNESSES:** For — Tim Lambert, Texas Home School Coalition; Tom Sanders, Home School Legal Defense Association
- Against — None
- On — Jane Caldwell, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
- BACKGROUND:** Education Code, sec. 56.301 regulates the Toward Excellence, Access, and Success (TEXAS) Grant Program for well-prepared high school graduates with financial need. Generally, under sec. 56.304, students may apply for an initial award if they:
- are Texas residents;
 - have not been convicted of a felony;
 - can show financial need;
 - are graduates of an accredited high school in Texas under the recommended high school program or distinguished achievement program;
 - enroll in a non-profit public college or university in Texas within 16 months of graduation from a public or accredited private high school in Texas and;
 - have not accumulated more than 30 semester credit hours, not counting those earned for dual-credit courses or awarded for credit by examination.
- Education Code, sec. 56.451 regulates the Texas B-On-Time Loan Program. Generally, under sec. 56.455, applicants must:

- complete a federal financial aid form (FAFSA) and be eligible for federal financial aid;
- be enrolled full time at a Texas institution;
- be a Texas resident; and
- graduate in the 2002-03 academic year or later from a high school operated by the U.S. Department of Defense or under the recommended high school program from a public or accredited private high school in Texas.

Loans are forgiven if the student graduates in four or five years, depending on the degree, with a GPA of at least 3.0.

In Texas, home schools are considered private schools. In 2003, the Texas Legislature enacted HB 944 by P. King, which required state-supported colleges and universities to treat home-school graduates on the same basis as public high school graduates for admission purposes.

DIGEST:

HB 1250 would allow a graduate of a non-accredited private high school in this state who graduated no earlier than the 1998-99 school year and who completed the recommended or advanced high school curriculum or its equivalent to be eligible initially for a TEXAS Grant.

Graduates from non-accredited private high schools in this state who graduated no earlier than the 2002-03 school year under the recommended or advanced high school program or its equivalent would be eligible initially for a Texas B-On-Time loan.

The change made by HB 1250 would apply beginning with financial aid awarded for the 2008-09 academic year.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2007.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 1250 would end the discriminatory practice of excluding home-school graduates from receiving scholarships from the TEXAS Grant or B-On-Time loan programs. Texas should not discriminate based upon whether or not a school was accredited. There is no link between high school accreditation and a student's success and performance.

Home education is a proven and successful tutorial method of education. An increasing number of home-school students graduate and attend college, and Texas leads the nation in the number of home-school families.

Currently there are around 300,000 home school students in Texas, with about 20-25 percent in high school.

Not allowing home school graduates to be eligible for these scholarships is discriminatory because many of these students have done well on their college entrance exams and some have achieved perfect scores. The American College Testing organization, which administers the ACT college entrance exam, has noted that Texas home-school graduates as a group score 5 to 10 percent higher than the state average.

Claims that evaluations cannot be made of the high school coursework of home school graduates are unfounded. These students must have their coursework evaluated for college admission purposes, so it is logical that their coursework also could be evaluated for state-supported financial aid. Home school students who have taken college preparatory classes already have their coursework evaluated, so evaluation of high school curriculum could be adjusted to accommodate home school students.

HB 1250 would be consistent with the access and opportunity goals outlined in Closing the Gaps, the state's higher education plan. Many home school students are low-income and otherwise would be eligible for needs-based grant awards. Allowing these students to have access to financial aid would not affect the TEXAS Grants program significantly because of the small population of home-schooled students entering college. Allocating more funding for financial aid would be a better approach than restricting a small number of otherwise eligible students.

Home-school students have not been a financial burden on the state because they are not using state resources, yet their families pay taxes that fund the TEXAS Grant program, so they should be eligible to apply for the awards as long as they meet the eligibility requirements. A change in the law regarding eligibility to receive state-supported financial aid would not affect parental decisions about home school education before college entrance.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

This bill would increase the strain on the TEXAS Grants program, which already turns away many eligible students each year. More students become eligible for the grants each year, which means fewer students would get served.

In order to be eligible for a TEXAS grant award, a Texas student must graduate under the recommended or advanced high school curriculum or the equivalent. Individuals graduating from accredited private high schools must certify that they have taken the equivalent of the recommended high school curriculum by having the counselor complete certification forms that show equivalence to the 22.5 credit requirements of the recommended high school curriculum. Even the valedictorian of a public or private accredited high school who took advanced placement courses and had a high GPA, but who failed to take half a credit of one of the required courses, would not be eligible for a TEXAS Grant.

Currently, there is no provision or process for a home-school student to be evaluated or audited to ensure that the coursework that student completed would be equivalent to the recommended high school curriculum, as other similar students are required to do. It would set a bad precedent simply to take their word for it. It would not be fair or reasonable to expect graduates from accredited public or private high schools to follow one set of criteria, while allowing graduates of home schools to follow a less stringent set of criteria.