

SUBJECT: High school curriculum requirements for higher education admission

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Morrison, McCall, F. Brown, Alonzo, C. Howard,

0 nays

4 absent — Alonzo, Giddings, Patrick, Rose

WITNESSES: For — Drew Scheberle, Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Texas high schools offer three levels of curriculum: minimum, recommended, and advanced. Current students must complete at least the minimum requirements in order to receive a high school diploma. The 77th Legislature in 2003 enacted HB 1144 by Grusendorf, which established the recommended high school program as the default high school curriculum for students entering the 9th grade in 2004-05 academic year, unless the students, the parents, and a school counselor agree that the student should be permitted to opt out of the recommended program and take courses under the minimum high school program.

Education Code, sec. 51.803 requires all general academic teaching higher education institutions admit undergraduate applicants for admission if the applicant graduated with a GPA in the top 10 percent of the applicant's high school graduating class in one of the two school years preceding the year for which the applicant is applying. Applicants must be Texas residents who graduate from a public or private accredited high school in Texas or from a high school operated by the U.S. Department of Defense.

Sec. 51.804 allows selected institutions to adopt an optional admissions policy for first-time freshman that automatically admits students who graduate from a public or private high school in the top 25 percent of their high school graduating class.

DIGEST:

HB 3826 would require all high school students who graduate from a public or an accredited private high school in Texas to graduate under the recommended or advanced high school curriculum or its equivalent to qualify for admission to a higher education institution in Texas. This requirement would apply beginning with admissions for the 2008-09 academic school year.

The bill also would amend sec. 51.803 to require that students graduating with a GPA in the top ten percent of their graduating class complete the recommended or advanced high school curriculum, or its equivalent, to qualify for automatic admission to a higher education institution as an undergraduate. If a high school did not offer the curriculum, the student would have to successfully complete a curriculum that was equivalent in content and rigor to the recommended or advanced high school program.

If a student only completed a portion of the recommended or advanced curriculum requirements, or its equivalent, but not the entire curriculum program because the necessary courses were not available at the proper time due to course scheduling, lack of enrollment capacity, or another cause not within the student's control, the student would be deemed eligible under the provisions of the bill.

High school graduates who did not qualify for automatic admission could apply to any general academic higher education institution, but would have to have graduated under the recommended or advanced high school program or its equivalent and follow the prescribed application procedures. Likewise, students who applied to an open enrollment institution would have to satisfy the high school graduation requirements of the recommended or advanced high school program, or its equivalent. The bill would require students who graduated in the top 25 percent of their high school graduating class and applied to a university that had an optional admissions policy to complete the recommended or advanced high school curriculum or its equivalent to qualify for automatic admission.

To qualify for admission, all applicants would be required to submit an application by an institution's application filing deadline and provide a high school transcript or diploma that showed no later than the end of the student's junior year whether or not the student satisfied or was on schedule to satisfy the graduation requirements, or whether the student had completed the portion that was available.

THECB, in consultation with the Texas Education Agency (TEA), would establish by rule standards for determining whether a private high school was accredited by an appropriate accrediting organization and whether a student completed a high school curriculum that was equivalent to the curriculum requirements for the recommended or advanced high school program. Each school district would be required to notify every student who registers for one or more courses required for high school graduation for the 2007-08 school year about the state's higher education admissions policies.

The bill would also establish that applicants who graduate from a high school operated by the Department of Defense would be considered Texas residents and would be entitled to pay in-state tuition.

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, 2007.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 3826 would allow Texas to take the next step towards fully implementing the curriculum requirements recommended by Closing the Gaps, the state's higher education plan, by requiring all students automatically admitted under current law to graduate from high school under the recommended or advanced high school program (RHSP) or its equivalent.

The recommended or advanced curriculum has been the default in public high schools since the 2004 academic year and most high schools in Texas now offer RHSP. Over 80 percent of all Texas high school students graduate under the program. Texas has experienced about a 3 percent growth each year in the number of students graduating under the RHSP. In fact, a survey of Texas public and private general academic institutions shows that 97 percent of freshman entering public institutions in the fall of 2006 graduated under the RHSP, and 95.5 percent of the freshman entering private or independent colleges and universities during the same time graduated under the program. Now that Texas is reaching a critical mass of students who already are graduating under the program, it is time to make it mandatory for admission to higher education institutions.

Requiring this advanced and rigorous high school curriculum as a condition for admission into higher education would have a significant impact on the remediation rate in Texas. Currently, the remediation rate

for students who graduate under the tougher graduation plan is half that for students who graduate under the minimum graduation plan.

A well-educated work force is crucial to the ongoing success and growing economy of Texas. Even students who decide to go into performing arts or athletics should still take this course track to ensure they are ready to meet the demands of the modern workforce. HB 3826 would be an important step in ensuring that students are well prepared for the rigors of higher education and beyond.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

It is critical for Texas that more students to go to college, yet this bill unfairly would penalize and eliminate an entire pool of highly qualified students. Students who have other career interests like music, dance, performing arts, or athletics and for a variety of reasons choose to take fewer math and science courses and graduate from high school under the minimum high school plan would not have other options because the bill would make no provision for students on these career paths.

NOTES:

In 2001, the Senate passed a similar measure, SB 974 by Wentworth, which died in the House Higher Education Committee. In 2003, a similar bill, SB 86 by Wentworth, died in conference committee.