

- SUBJECT:** Transferring adult education to Higher Education Coordinating Board
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 6 ayes — Branch, Alonzo, Brown, D. Howard, Johnson, Lewis
1 nay — Patrick
2 absent — Castro, Bonnen
- WITNESSES:** For — Dennis Brown, El Paso Community College, Texas Association of Community Colleges; Blas Castaneda, Texas Border Coalition Workforce & Education Committee

Against — Barbara Tondre; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Melissa Sadler-Nitu, Texas Committee of Adult Basic Education; Ellen Thels)

On — Jennifer Jacob, Texas Education Agency (TEA); Gloria Mwase, Jobs for the Future; Raymund Paredes, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB); Suzii Paynter, Christian Life Commission, Texas Baptist Convention; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Joanie Rethlake, Harris County Department of Education)
- BACKGROUND:** The U.S. Department of Education, through the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, provides the majority of funding for adult education in Texas. The state provides the required 25 percent matching funds. The Texas Education Agency has the federal and state fiduciary responsibility for adult basic education in Texas and provides program assistance, monitoring, and compliance with federal requirements. The program is administered by a TEA-approved contractor, *Texas Learns*, within the Harris County Department of Education.

In 2007, the Texas Legislature directed the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to collaborate with the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Workforce Commission to develop and implement plans to align adult basic education with postsecondary education.

DIGEST: CSHB 3461 would transfer adult education and literacy programs from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board as of January 1, 2012, make conforming changes to reflect the transfer, and define various related terms.

The bill would require the coordinating board to:

- provide adequate staffing to develop, administer and support a comprehensive statewide adult education program and coordinate related federal and state programs for educating and training adults;
- develop the mechanism and guidelines for coordinating comprehensive adult education and related skill training services with other public and private organizations;
- administer all state and federal funds for adult education and related skill training services for the state;
- prescribe and administer standards and accrediting policies for adult education;
- prescribe and administer rules for teacher certification for adult education;
- accept and administer grants, gifts, services, and funds from available sources for use in adult education;
- adopt or develop and administer a standardization assessment mechanism for assessing all adult education program participants who need literacy instruction, adult basic education, or secondary education leading to an adult high school diploma or the equivalent; and
- monitor and evaluate educational and employment outcomes of students who participate in the board's adult education and literacy programs.

The assessment mechanism would have to include an initial basic skills screening instrument and comprehensive information about baseline student skills before and student progress after participation in an adult education program.

The bill would require adult education programs to be provided by public school districts, public junior colleges, public technical institutes, public state colleges, general academic teaching institutions, public nonprofit agencies, and community-based organizations approved in accordance with state law with rules adopted by the coordinating board.

Programs would have to be designed to meet the education and training needs of adults, to the extent possible, using available public and private resources. Bilingual education could be used to instruct students who did not function satisfactorily in English whenever it was appropriate for students' development.

Advisory committee. The coordinating board would be required to establish an adult education and literacy advisory committee of no more than nine members appointed by the board. Members of the committee would have to have expertise in adult education and literacy. The committee would include three representatives from public junior or community colleges and could include adult educators, providers, advocates, and current or former adult education and literacy program students.

The committee would be required to meet at least quarterly and report to the coordinating board at least annually. The committee also would be required to advise the coordinating board on:

- the development of policies and program priorities that supported the development of an educated and skilled workforce in Texas;
- the development of statewide curriculum guidelines and standards for adult education and literacy services that ensured a balance of education and workplace skill development; and
- any other issue the coordinating board considered appropriate.

State funding. Appropriated funds would be required to implement statewide adult basic education, adult bilingual education, high school equivalency, and high school credit programs to eliminate illiteracy in Texas and to implement and support a statewide program to meet the total range of adult needs for adult education and related skill training. The coordinating board would have to ensure that public local education agencies, public nonprofit agencies, and community based organizations had direct and equitable access to those funds.

The Legislature could appropriate additional funds to the coordinating board for skill training in direct support of industrial expansion and new business development and to those locations, industries, and occupations designated by the board.

The Legislature also would be authorized to appropriate an additional amount to the coordinating board for skill training that was conducted to support the expansion of civilian employment opportunities on U.S. military reservations.

By December 1 of each even-numbered year, the coordinating board would be required to report to the Legislature about the educational and employment outcomes of students who participated in the adult education and literacy programs.

The coordinating board and the Texas Education Agency would be authorized to adopt rules to administer the transfer of adult education and literacy programs. By October 1, 2011, TEA and the coordinating board would have to enter into a memorandum of understanding relating to the transfer, including a timetable and specific steps and methods for the transfer on January 1, 2012. The memorandum would have to include measures to ensure against any unnecessary disruption to adult education and literacy services provided at the local level.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2011.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

Transferring responsibility for federal adult basic education (ABE) to the coordinating board would be the most effective way to administer the program. Research has shown that moving ABE students into the higher education pipeline is the most effective pathway for these students. The bill's provisions would be in line with the coordinating board's current collaboration with TEA to develop and implement a coordinated, long-range plan to align ABE and post-secondary education.

CSHB 3461 merely would annex oversight of ABE to the coordinating board. Collaboration among the coordinating board, TEA, and the Texas Workforce Commission would not change – all three agencies would continue working together just as they currently are.

Other states, including Illinois, Washington, Oregon, and others, have followed the most current research and integrated ABE into their community college systems.

Texas spends the minimum requirement for the federal/state matching funds, while other highly populated states, such as California, New York, and Florida, match the federal allotment at higher rates. Given the limited

spending on ABE in Texas, it is essential that Texas make the most of the resources available for this critical program. The coordinating board would be able to leverage more federal funds as well as expertise within the agency to lower administrative costs and direct more resources to expand direct service delivery by providers.

Additional resources could be used to:

- create a cost-efficient delivery system, expanding the provider base to include the entire community college system. The current federal program excludes over half of the state's community college districts. There are over 3 million adult Texans in need of adult basic education services. The program currently serves about 80,000 Texans;
- provide better service options for English language students inappropriately enrolled in developmental education and academic English as a second language (ESL) classes at community colleges.
- align assessments with the state's college readiness assessment program;
- leverage the activities to compete for external funding from private foundations to serve more students;
- create targeted career pathway programs for ABE students beginning at the 8th grade functional literacy level, rather than after obtaining a GED;
- create a statewide data system for provider reporting, student tracking, and wraparound service referrals not possible with the current administration;
- align reporting and accountability of the program with the state's higher education accountability and reporting system;
- integrate the program providers and workforce boards into the state's P-16 council system; and
- eliminate redundancy in state leadership activities, professional development programs, technical assistance contracts, and research and evaluation contracts being implemented at both TEA and the coordinating board.

If the coordinating board took oversight of ABE, there would not necessarily be a wholesale change to the administration of the programs. The current contractor would likely remain in place. In addition, nothing in the bill would prohibit ABE programs from being offered at an ISD campus or facility.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

The adult education program administered by TEA is a very effective, stable, and prosperous program, and it should not be moved. There are significant processes and infrastructure in place, like the information management system that tracks the program across the state, that would be extremely expensive to recreate. In today's budgetary climate it is not clear how this would be accomplished financially.

Eighty percent of adult learners function below an 8th grade level. A large number of adult learners are not college ready and are not ready to make the transition to higher education. Only 20 percent of adult learners are at the GED level of college readiness. It is important to remember that most adult learners are learning to read and write English. They simply are not comfortable being on a college campus because the college environment is intimidating. Currently, most adult education classes are held on ISD campuses and facilities or in education centers. Often an adult learner will drop off their children at school and attend their classes on the same campus.

ISDs are offering a majority of the programs now and are linked with the local communities they serve. They are able to provide access to the programs because there are far more ISD facilities than community college facilities. It is not known how adult learners in rural parts of the state would continue to have easy access to the programs they need if they were no longer held in the local ISD campus.

ESL and GED classes currently are free. It is not known if they would continue to be if they were moved to a community college.

If students lose their motivation to continue their courses or struggle with the college atmosphere, seeing it as something they cannot navigate, then the entire state would lose. If they did not succeed then they would not be able to find jobs, become productive, and pay taxes.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

Whether ABE is administered by TEA or the coordinating board, the largest obstacle for the program is the lack of funding. Other large states spend much more. For example, California spends 10 times the amount Texas does on ABE.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 1763 by Rodriquez, was reported favorably, as substituted, by the Senate Higher Education Committee on May 5.