

SUBJECT: Providing credit by examination for public school students

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 10 ayes — Aycock, Allen, J. Davis, Deshotel, Dutton, Farney, Huberty, K. King, Ratliff, J. Rodriguez

0 nays

1 absent — Villarreal

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 15, 2013 — 31-0

WITNESSES: (*On House companion bill, HB 2694*)
For — Anthony Holm, Texans for Education Reform; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Bill Hammond, Texas Association of Business; Adam Jones, Texans for Education Reform; Drew Scheberle, Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce; Theresa Trevino; Paula Trietsch Chaney; Peggy Venable, Americans for Prosperity; Allen Weeks, Save Texas Schools; Justin Yancy, Texas Business Leadership Council)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Maria Whitsett, Texas School Alliance)

On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* David Anderson, Texas Education Agency)

BACKGROUND: According to State Board of Education (SBOE) rules, school districts must offer examinations for acceleration at every grade level and for every subject area in grades 1-12.

At the option of the local school district, students in grades 6-12 who have not received credit but have received previous instruction in a subject area may earn credit for the subject by passing an exam.

Students in grades 1-5 who have not received instruction at the grade level tested must be promoted one grade if they achieve a minimum score on the grade-level exam in each of the following subject areas: language arts,

mathematics, science, and social studies. School district and parent approval also is required.

DIGEST:

CSSB 1365 would change Education Code provisions for students who sought to be promoted or obtain high school course credit by passing examinations.

The bill would specify that requirements of minimum attendance for class credit did not apply to students who received credit by examination.

It would require each district to select, if available, at least four SBOE-approved examinations for each subject. The exams would have to include advanced placement (AP) exams administered by the College Board and Educational Testing Service, and exams administered through the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP).

The bill would lower the passing standard from the 90th to the 80th percentile for students in primary grades to be promoted and for students in grades 6-12 to receive credit. Students who received credit would not be required to take an end-of-course assessment.

Students in grades 6-12 could receive credit if they scored a three or higher on a SBOE-approved AP exam administered by the College Board or Educational Testing Service or a scaled score of 60 or higher on a SBOE-approved CLEP exam.

School districts would be required to offer credit by exam within 30 days of a written request from a student or a student's parent or guardian if the exam was offered electronically and at least three times per year if the exam was not offered electronically. Electronic exams could not be administered to a student more than two times each year.

A student could not attempt more than two times to receive credit for a particular subject. If a student failed to test out of a class before the beginning of the school year in which the student ordinarily would be enrolled in that class, the student would have to complete the course.

The bill would take immediate effect if passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2013 and would apply beginning with the 2013-14 school year.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

CSSB 1365 would give students more flexibility in shaping their education by allowing them to demonstrate that they were ready to be promoted to a higher grade or receive credit for a course. This would prevent these high achievers from wasting valuable seat time in a grade or course.

While many legislative efforts focus on helping struggling students, this is one bill that could help advanced students accelerate their learning and get an early start on college. Credit by exam also allows high school students in rural districts with limited course offerings to have access to credits that they might not otherwise be able to obtain.

The bill would make it easier for students to take an exam by requiring the district to respond within 30 days of a request when electronic versions of the tests were available.

The University of Texas, Texas Tech University, and many universities around the nation offer versions of CLEP exams, so it should not be difficult for districts to find four exam versions in any subject. Different tests measure different learning styles so students would have more options to take an appropriate exam.

An 80th percentile passing standard, while lower than the 90th percentile now required, still would be a high standard and an indication that a student truly had mastered a subject. Many top colleges and universities require a 4 score on an AP exam before awarding credit, so a 3 score would be appropriate to award high-school credit.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

CSSB 1365 could drive up costs to school districts by requiring them to pay for four different versions of each test. The Legislative Budget Board fiscal note estimates that there likely would be additional administrative costs to districts to administer more exams at more frequent intervals.

Lowering the passing standards for grade promotion and course credit could prompt some students to think credit by exam would be an easy out when it might not be the best option for that student's educational development.

On the other hand, requiring a student to score a 3 or higher on an AP exam to receive high school credit may be too stringent. Many colleges

award college credit for a score of 3.

Allowing students credit by exam for AP courses would be no substitute for a student not having access to AP courses at their local high school.

The bill's 30-day deadline to honor requests for electronically available tests could put new demands on counselors' already demanding duties. It also assumes that electronic tests would be available on demand, and that might not be true for all.

NOTES:

The House companion bill, HB 2694, was reported favorably as substituted by the Senate Education Committee on May 14 and recommended for the Local and Uncontested Calendar.