

SUBJECT: Establishing the Texas Fast Start Program

COMMITTEE: Economic and Small Business Development — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — J. Davis, Vo, Bell, Y. Davis, Isaac, Murphy, E. Rodriguez, Workman
0 nays
1 absent — Perez

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, March 26 — 31 - 0

WITNESSES: (*On House companion bill, HB 834*)
For — Jon Engel; Dale LaFleur, Total PAR; David Lindsay, NCCER; Marinell Music, BASF; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Joe Arnold, Texas Association of Manufacturers; Kathy Barber, NFIB/Texas; Steve Hazlewood, The Dow Chemical Co.; Leslie Helmcamp, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Steven Johnson, Texas Association of Community Colleges; Mike Meroney, Huntsman Corporation & Sherwin Alumina Co.; Carlton Schwab, Texas Economic Development Council; Stephanie Simpson, Texas Association of Manufacturers; Michael White, Texas Construction Association; Daniel Womack, Texas Chemical Council)

Against — None

On — Brenda Hellyer, Texas Assoc. of Community Colleges; Mike Reeser, Texas State Technical College System; Larry Temple, Texas Workforce Commission; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Garry Tomerlin, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)

DIGEST: SB 441 would require the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), in partnership with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), to establish and administer the Texas Fast Start Program, a career and technical education program designed to help students earn postsecondary certificates and degrees and quickly enter the workforce.

The program would identify and develop methods to support competency-based, rapid-deployment education delivery models for public junior colleges, public state colleges (Lamar State colleges in Orange and Port Arthur and the Lamar Institute of Technology) and public technical institutes (Lamar Institute of Technology and the Texas State Technical College System). The models would be designed to assist students in maximizing academic or workforce education program credit to expedite their entry into the workforce.

TWC would be required to work collaboratively with THECB and the colleges and institutes to create the program and establish models. The colleges and institutes could use the models in developing or expanding a Fast Start program that would:

- focus on the current and future needs of Texas employers;
- enable students to obtain postsecondary certificates and degrees at an accelerated pace in high-demand fields or occupations, as identified by local employers;
- incorporate competency-based learning techniques;
- feature a variety of access channels designed to maximize job preparedness for groups such as veterans, high school graduates, and those seeking retraining; and
- be designed for rapid deployment statewide.

Through the collaboration, TWC could award grants to expand existing or develop new programs. Grants would be used only to:

- support a course or program that prepared students for career employment in fields or occupations that were identified as high-demand by local employers;
- finance the initial costs of developing a Fast Start program, including the costs of building or renovating facilities, buying equipment, and other associated expenses;
- finance the development or expansion of a Fast Start program leading to a postsecondary certificate or degree; or
- offer a new or expanded dual credit Fast Start program jointly with a public high school.

TWC and THECB could adopt rules to administer the program. They

would administer the program using money appropriated for that purpose, money received from federal or other sources, or money from holding accounts that could be used by TWC for skills development.

SB 441 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, 2013.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 441 would establish the Texas Fast Start Program to promote rapid delivery of workforce education and development. Demand for skilled workers continues to grow as the Texas economy flourishes. Most of the fastest-growing job sectors will require workers with some postsecondary education, many in the form of skills certification. Community colleges, public technical institutes, and others play a vital role in training workers in the state. The bill seeks to help those institutions in training students by requiring the Texas Workforce Commission and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to work collaboratively with institutes of higher education in establishing this new program.

The Fast Start program would fill a gap in workforce education by training workers more quickly and in the skills local industries most need. It would take a competency-based approach, allowing students to advance through classes as they mastered skills, rather than requiring an arbitrary number of hours in classrooms or labs. This would allow students to move more rapidly through training and into paying jobs. Many students and unemployed workers do not have the time, resources, or interest to sink into longer, calendar-based programs, which leads many to drop out or avoid the programs altogether. A growing number of people need skills training or upgrading but cannot afford to go to school full time for up to two years.

For employers, rapid technological changes have reshaped the types of skills they need their employees to have. The Fast Start program would allow a faster and more flexible response to these changes.

Concerns that SB 441 would not be adequately prescriptive, especially regarding input on program development, are off target. The bill intentionally was drafted broadly so the program could be adaptable and to avoid affecting existing workforce programs at some of the larger community colleges. It would be more appropriate to have details, such as

incorporating support services and regional planning, handled during rulemaking.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The Texas Fast Start Program under SB 441 should provide for support services, such as child care, which often present the biggest barrier to unemployed and underemployed workers seeking further skills and training.

Also, because regional planning is a critical factor in successful workforce development, the bill should require that Fast Start providers work not only with colleges and institutes but also with nonprofit organizations and other entities in their regions. Such entities could include business and industry, workforce development and community-based organizations, school districts, and adult education programs. Input from these groups in all aspects of program development, including student recruitment and selection, would help reduce barriers and promote successful completion of the Fast Start program.

NOTES:

HB 834 by J. Davis, the identical companion, passed the House by 146-0 on April 11 and was referred to the Senate Committee on Economic Development on May 7.