

- SUBJECT:** Requiring block scheduling for certain public junior college programs
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Zerwas, Howard, Alonzo, Crownover, Martinez, Morrison, Raney, C. Turner
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — Clardy
- WITNESSES:** For — Justin Yancy, Texas Business Leadership Council; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Nelson Salinas, Texas Association of Business; Courtney Boswell, Texas Institute for Education Reform)
- Against — None
- On — Bruce Leslie, Alamo Colleges; Roberto Zarate, Community College Association of Texas Trustees; Steve Smith, El Paso Community College; Richard Rhodes, Texas Association of Community Colleges; Richard Moore, Texas Community College Teachers Association; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Rex Peebles, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; Juan Mejia, Mike Metke, and Kim Russell, Tyler Junior College)
- DIGEST:** CSHB 1583 would require public junior colleges in the state to establish a block schedule curriculum for each of their career and technology, allied health, or nursing associate degree or certificate programs. Courses required for enrollment as a full-time student in these disciplines would be offered in blocks, such as morning, full-day, afternoon, evening, or weekend blocks.
- The bill also would require each junior college to publish available block schedules before the start of each semester in all applicable associate degree or certificate programs offered. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board could adopt rules necessary to administer the changes

under CSHB 1583.

This 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, 2015, and would apply beginning with the fall 2016 semester.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 1583 would improve postsecondary education completion rates and time-to-degree metrics by establishing block scheduling for certain programs at the state's community colleges. Unlike traditional college course schedules, in which students meet for class two or three times per week during a semester, block scheduling delivers instruction in predictable blocks of classes that meet for longer periods of time on fewer days overall. Many career and technical and allied health course offerings in Texas are delivered in this manner, and this bill would benefit community college students by increasing the availability of offerings delivered under a block schedule curriculum.

About half of all community college students currently attend school part-time while balancing work or family-care responsibilities. Taking classes that meet across multiple days, times, and semesters, all while juggling other obligations, can lead to slow or low postsecondary completion rates for students, which can cost more in tuition for students and in financial aid for the state. This bill would increase schedule predictability and help more students attend class full time and complete their degrees on time.

CSHB 1583 would increase competitiveness in the state's workforce and in education attainment. Texas has a growing need for more college-educated and trained individuals, and this bill would help the state develop this workforce more quickly. Additionally, block scheduling has emerged as a nationally recognized best practice, and it is a model recommended by both Gov. Abbott and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Other states have realized notable gains in graduation rates when using block scheduling, and Texas should join the ranks of national leaders on this front. Texas State Technical College and some other community colleges in Texas already have started to implement block scheduling.

Establishing block scheduling would be a student-centered change to help schools better serve students and accommodate their busy lives. Block scheduling could foster stronger peer relationships because students spend more time studying a comprehensive subject area together, forming a cohort and a learning community. This cohort mentality can boost students' academic experiences, leading students to form study groups, carpool together, and share other resources.

While HB 1538 as introduced would have required all public junior college degree and certificate programs to offer block scheduling, the substitute instead would be narrowly tailored to three areas of study for which block scheduling has proven to be particularly effective. In addition, many allied health and nursing programs in Texas already use block scheduling. CSHB 1583 would help more colleges phase in this approach and would address any challenges that might develop. While there may be challenges to implementing block scheduling for all disciplines, students, and institutions, this bill would be a good way to begin studying and tackling those issues.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

By requiring junior colleges to introduce block scheduling for each of their career and technology associate degree or certificate programs, CSHB 1583 would require community colleges to do too much too soon. Many junior college professors also teach part-time, and block scheduling might be a poor fit for them. Moreover, funding for community colleges still has not fully recovered from recent cuts, and community colleges are being asked to do more with less. The costs, administrative burden, and funding implications of implementing block scheduling are unknown. For example, block scheduling could impact contact-hour funding.

The bill would mandate a practice that might not benefit all students and institutions. Block schedules could exacerbate issues with students missing school, struggling in a certain subject area, or dropping out of courses. Students in block-scheduled courses also might not form the peer relationships that they would if they saw their classmates more often for shorter periods of time.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

CSHB 1583 should implement block scheduling as part of a larger strategy of guided academic pathways, aligning high school with community college, and community college with baccalaureate programs. This would help junior college students plot out long-term education and career goals in a way that would maximize the effectiveness of a block schedule curriculum.

NOTES:

The author plans to offer a floor amendment that would require at least 50 percent of career and technology associate degree or certificate programs to offer block scheduling beginning with the fall 2016 semester.