

SUBJECT: Allowing transferring seniors to graduate under certain conditions

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 8 ayes — Huberty, Bernal, Bohac, Dutton, Gooden, K. King, Koop,
VanDeaver

0 nays

3 absent — Allen, Deshotel, Meyer

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Mark Wiggins, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Celina Moreno, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund; Seth Rau, San Antonio ISD; Ted Melina Raab, Texas American Federation of Teachers; Barry Haenisch, Texas Association of Community Schools; Amy Beneski, Texas Association of School Administrators; Dax Gonzalez and Robert Westbrook, Texas Association of School Boards; David Hinojosa, Texas Latino Education Coalition; Kyle Ward, Texas PTA; Colby Nichols, Texas Rural Education Association; Dee Carney, Texas School Alliance; Heather Sheffield; Greg Worthington)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Adam Cahn)

On — Heather McGregor, Region 8 ESC; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Drew Scheberle, Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce; Kara Belew, Monica Martinez, and Shelly Ramos, Texas Education Agency)

BACKGROUND: Under Education Code, sec. 28.025(c), with exceptions for students served by special education and certain others, a public high school student may graduate and receive a high school diploma only if he or she successfully completes the state curriculum requirements and demonstrates satisfactory performance on required end-of-course assessments, which are administered throughout the high school grades and to some students in grade 8.

Education Code, sec. 28.0258 provides that if a public high school junior or senior fails up to two end-of-course tests, school districts and open-enrollment charter schools are required to establish an individual graduation committee to determine whether the student may qualify to graduate.

DIGEST:

CSHB 1980 would create a process through which an individual graduation committee (IGC) could determine that a senior who transferred into the Texas public school system after grade 11 could graduate despite not meeting state requirements. The bill would apply to students in their senior year who:

- were unable, based on coursework completed in a different state, to comply with the curriculum requirements of Texas for graduation by the end of senior year; or
- had difficulty complying with the end-of-course (EOC) assessment requirements for high school graduation.

A school district would be required to create an individual graduation committee for such a student at the beginning of his or her senior year to determine whether the student qualified to graduate. The committee would be composed of:

- the principal or the principal's designee;
- the department chair or lead teacher for each subject covered by an EOC assessment; and
- the student's parent or person standing in parental relation to the student, or the student if he or she was 18 years old.

In determining whether a student was qualified to graduate, the IGC would consider:

- the recommendation of the student's teacher in each course for which the student did not take an EOC assessment;
- the student's performance on alternative nationally recognized norm-referenced tests, including the ACT or SAT, or the Texas

- Success Initiative test that the student requested to be considered;
- the student's overall preparedness for postsecondary success; and
 - any other academic information designated for consideration by the board of trustees of the school district.

After considering these criteria, the IGC could determine that the student was qualified to graduate. The decision of the IGC would be final and could not be appealed.

The Commissioner of Education by rule would establish a timeline for making an IGC determination. The commissioner also would allow a student who transferred to a Texas school after grade 11 to satisfy the EOC assessment requirements and qualify for a high school diploma by achieving satisfactory performance on one or more alternative nationally recognized norm-referenced tests and establish required performance levels for these tests that corresponded to the performance levels of the EOC assessments.

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, 2017, and would apply beginning with students enrolled in public high schools as a senior during the 2017-18 school year.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 1980 would allow students who moved to Texas late in their high school careers the ability to graduate if the coursework from their previous school did not meet Texas graduation requirements for public school students. Coursework and assessment requirements in other states do not always align with Texas graduation requirements, and too many students moving to Texas are unable to graduate on time as a result, creating a hardship for them and their parents. Students who cannot graduate on time often must delay college or employment and are at greater risk of dropping out.

The bill would provide flexibility to students in unique circumstances who had completed most of their coursework and might only lack a language or other minor course requirement. School administrators and parents

would be given local control to make a holistic determination if the student was ready to graduate.

Recent reports from the Texas Education Agency for the 2015-16 school year show that schools are not graduating 100 percent of students who receive an individual graduation committee, with some declining to graduate 30 percent or more. This demonstrates that these committees can take a balanced view on whether to offer diplomas to individuals who do not meet certain requirements.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Individual graduation committees are incentivized to graduate students who might not be prepared for the workforce or college. Because school accountability measures take graduation numbers into account, schools can be quick to pass along many students through individual graduation committees who are not ready, which devalues the high school diploma in Texas.