

SUBJECT: Requiring a study about best practices for students with autism

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 8 ayes — C. Turner, Stucky, Button, Frullo, Howard, E. Johnson, Schaefer, Walle

0 nays

3 absent — Pacheco, Smithee, Wilson

WITNESSES: For — Charis Nelson; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jacquie Benestante, Autism Society of Texas; Chris Masey, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities; Jolene Sanders, Easterseals; Linda Litzinger, Texas Parent to Parent; Maverick Crawford)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Rex Peebles, Higher Education Coordinating Board)

BACKGROUND: It has been suggested that public institutions of higher education may be inadequately prepared to assist students with autism spectrum disorder and that these institutions could benefit from identifying successful best practices in other established postsecondary programs.

DIGEST: CSHB 3612 would require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to conduct a study to determine best practices for assisting students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who were enrolled at institutions of higher education.

The study would have to identify and track:

- the number of students with ASD who graduated from secondary schools in Texas;

- the number of students with ASD who were enrolled at institutions of higher education;
- the student financial assistance available to students with ASD who enrolled at institutions of higher education; and
- the graduation rates of students with ASD who enrolled at institutions of higher education.

The study also would identify and examine best practices and program modules from public and private postsecondary institutions outside of Texas that have achieved successful results in working with students with ASD.

THECB would collaborate with school districts that offered specialized programs for students with ASD to determine how those programs could be replicated at or extended to postsecondary institutions.

The board would submit the study's findings and recommendations to the governor, lieutenant governor, the House speaker, and the commissioner of education by December 1, 2021.

The provisions of the bill would expire January 1, 2022.

The 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, 2019.