

SUBJECT: Providing measures to assist adult learners completing academic programs

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Cortez, Frullo, Ortega, Raney, C. Turner, J. Turner

2 nays — Murphy, P. King

3 absent — Pacheco, Muñoz, Parker

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Dana Harris, Austin Chamber of Commerce; Gerald Lee, San Antonio Chamber of Commerce; Mike Meroney, Texas Association of Manufacturers; Ashley Harris, United Ways of Texas; and 11 individuals)

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Concerns have been raised that the number of adult learners successfully completing degree or certification programs in the state is too low. Interested observers contend that tuition assistance and paid internships could help adult learners complete degrees.

DIGEST: HB 4487 would require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to provide tuition assistance and incentive funding, arrange final semester internships, and establish an assisting program for adult learners, defined as persons at least 25 years old but no older than 34 who had within the preceding 48 months achieved at least 75 percent completion of a baccalaureate or associate degree or certificate program.

Tuition assistance for adult learners. HB 4487 would require THECB for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 academic years to provide to each adult learner enrolled in a baccalaureate or associate degree or certificate program at an institution of higher education a grant for each semester or term in an amount equal to 25 percent of the average statewide amount of tuition and required fees that a resident student enrolled full-time in such a degree or certificate program would be charged for that semester or term

at the type of institution at which the adult learner was enrolled. Adult learners receiving this grant could use the money only to pay the cost of tuition or required fees for the program in which they were enrolled.

Incentive funding for adult learners. For the state fiscal biennium beginning September 1, 2023, THECB would be required to distribute incentive funding to each institution of higher education based on the number of adult learners enrolled at the institution who, during the preceding biennium, had received a baccalaureate or associate degree or certificate in a target field as established by THECB rules, or had timely completed:

- a baccalaureate or associate degree program in accordance with the adult learner's degree plan; or
- a certificate program as established but THECB rule.

Subject to the availability of funds, the amount of such incentive funding distributed per adult learner could not be less than the amount of funding per student for that biennium for achievement of certain other equivalent student success measures.

Final semester internships for adult learners. For the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 academic years, the board would be required to collaborate with employers who participate in the Texas WORKS internship program to ensure that:

- employers gave priority under that program to adult learners in the final semester of baccalaureate or associate degree or certificate program; and
- each adult learner employed through that program during the learner's final semester of a degree or certificate program received an additional \$2,500 stipend as part of the wages under the program.

THECB would certify internships provided through the program through which adult learners could earn course credit toward their degree or

certificate.

Grad TX Program. THECB would be required to establish the Grad TX program in collaboration with higher education institutions to support the reskilling, upskilling, and high-value degree or certificate program completion of adult learners. The program could include academic and career advising, assistance with financial aid options, and flexible degree or certificate programs designed for adult learners.

Other provisions. The total amount spent under the bill's provisions could not exceed \$50 million. THECB could accept gifts, grants, and donations from any source for the purposes specified by the bill. No later than December 1 of each year, THECB would submit to the governor, the lieutenant governor, and the House speaker a report on the status and effectiveness of the measures established by the bill. THECB could adopt rules as necessary to implement those measures, and in adopting rules would consult with higher education institutions, the Texas Workforce Commission, members of the business community, and other relevant stakeholders. The bill's provisions would expire September 1, 2025.

THECB would be required to implement a provision of the bill only if the Legislature appropriated money specifically for that purpose. Otherwise the board could, but would not be required to, implement a provision of the bill using other available appropriations.

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, 2021.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have an estimated negative impact of \$50 million to general revenue through fiscal 2023. The bill would make no appropriation but could provide the legal basis for an appropriation of funds to implement its provisions.