

## Additional elements for the state’s master plan for higher education

SB 1234 by Zaffirini (Rose)

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### DIGEST:

SB 1234 would have amended the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s higher education master plan – also known as *Closing the Gaps* – to ensure that higher education students were sufficiently prepared to meet the challenges associated with participation in the public affairs of Texas and in the global economy. The bill would have added 14 separate elements to the master plan, including but not limited to reexamination of the purposes, needs, and goals of higher education in Texas and consideration of methods for defining the roles and missions of higher education institutions in a way that was consistent with the state’s needs and goals. The amended plan would have called for consideration of more effective methods for funding higher education, establishing a coherent long-term student financial aid strategy that would have addressed financial need and achievement, and recommendations for strengthening collaboration between two-year and four-year institutions and between primary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions. Consideration would have been given to the state’s allocation of resources for medical education and the geographic distribution of those resources as well as the value of associating a medical school with a general academic teaching institution.

Additional elements included identification of incentives to promote seamless transitions between high schools, junior colleges and technical institutions, state colleges, and general academic teaching universities. Enrollment capacity at the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University would have been considered, as well as the possibility of creating additional four-year flagship institutions and where to locate them while ensuring a diverse student body at those institutions. Consideration would have been given to adding new components to the TEXAS Grants and other financial aid programs, including addressing the needs of preschool, primary, and secondary school students. The effectiveness of individual college savings plans and prepaid tuition plans and whether or not such programs contribute to increased student achievement, readiness for higher education, enrollment rates, dropout prevention, student success, and reliance on student loans would have been added to the plan.

### GOVERNOR’S REASON FOR VETO:

“Senate Bill 1234 would add 14 specific elements to the currently required 5-year higher education master plan prepared by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB).

“The bill is unnecessary and duplicative. THECB is currently authorized to include in its plan these or any other elements it deems necessary.

“The Governor’s Business Council’s House Concurrent Resolution No. 159 creates a joint select commission on higher education and global competitiveness to develop the long-term vision and step-by-step plan to attain specific goals. This commission should be allowed to complete its work before modifying the existing statutory planning requirements of THECB.”

**RESPONSE:** Sen. Judith Zaffirini, the bill’s author, said: “I am astounded that Gov. Rick Perry vetoed SB 1234. Passed unanimously by the Legislature, this omnibus bill would have redefined planning for higher education by requiring the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to redirect its higher education master plan to prepare students to participate effectively in the state’s public affairs and in the global economy. SB 1234 combines four bills that were priorities of legislators interested in greatly enhancing the state’s ability to foster an excellent higher education system. What’s more, the bill was filed at the request of the Commissioner of Higher Education and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, which received \$2.6 million in private donations to carry out the provisions in SB 1234.

“In his veto statement the governor claims that the bill is ‘unnecessary and duplicative,’ then suggests that the provisions outlined in SB 1234 should be developed by the Governor’s Business Council’s Select Commission on Higher Education and Global Competitiveness. Why the governor would waste taxpayer dollars and scarce resources by circumventing his own appointees at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board by creating a new commission is beyond comprehension.

“SB 1234 would have advanced the state in achieving the goals of *Closing the Gaps* in an efficient and responsible manner and would have assisted the legislature in deciding how to allocate tax revenues judiciously. Its veto is a slap on the face of the Higher Education Coordinating Board.”

Rep. Patrick Rose, the House sponsor, had no comment on the veto.

**NOTES:** SB 1234 passed the House on the Local, Consent, and Resolutions Calendar and was not analyzed in a *Daily Floor Report*.

HCR 159 by Morrison, adopted by the 80th Legislature during its 2007 regular session and signed by governor, requests the governor, the lieutenant governor, and the speaker of the House to create a 15-member Select Commission on Higher Education and Global Competitiveness. The commission’s mission is to draft a Texas Compact to attain the goals of educating Texans to levels comparable to the highest performing competitor states and nations, achieving global recognition for Texas public higher education institutions, and serving the unique needs of the different regions of the state. The concurrent resolution lists several specific issue areas related to global competitiveness in educational attainment that the commission should examine.