

**SUBJECT:** Changing the Vernon Regional Junior College District service area

**COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

**VOTE:** 6 ayes — Rangel, F. Brown, Farabee, Goolsby, J. Jones, West  
0 nays  
3 absent — Morrison, E. Reyna, Uher

**WITNESSES:** For — Deanna Jordan; Ken Lane; Billie McKeever, Haskell Consolidated Independent School District; Deanne Morgan  
Against — Dr. Rey Garcia, Texas Association of Community Colleges

**BACKGROUND:** Texas public junior colleges are two-year institutions primarily serving their local taxing districts and service areas and offering vocational, technical, and academic courses for certification or associate degrees. The service area of the Vernon Regional Junior College District includes Wilbarger, Archer, Baylor, Clay, Cattel, Foard, Hardeman, Haskell, King, Knox, Throckmorton, and Wichita counties.

**DIGEST:** HB 3303 would remove Haskell County from the service area of Vernon Regional Junior College District.  
  
The change would apply beginning with the 2001 fall semester. However, in the 2001-02 academic year, the college district could continue to treat Haskell County as if the area were still in the district service's area to avoid an unreasonable interruption of junior college services.  
  
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, 2001.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** HB 3303 would enable Haskell citizens to obtain bachelor's degrees from a university more easily. Haskell receives two-year college services from Vernon Regional Junior College. However, students must transfer their

credits from Vernon to a four-year university to complete their degrees. The closest public four-year university is two hours away. Commuting is not convenient for students who must care for their families. Not all students can afford to quit their jobs. Allowing a four-year university to serve Haskell students would allow the students to keep their jobs and still obtain four-year degrees.

The bill would make it easier for Haskell County to attract the services of four-year college. Four-year colleges have informed Haskell County that it would not be economically feasible to serve the area if the two-year college was allowed to keep serving it. The first two years consist of large classes with more students. These large classes help the university raise the revenue to offer smaller specialized upper-level courses. If the two-year college continues to serve the area, students would attend the two-year institution first, and the four-year institution could not raise enough revenue to remain until the students transferred there for upper-level courses.

HB 3303 would provide the Haskell community with affordable educational alternatives. The closest universities to Haskell are private universities in Abilene. The classes offered at the private universities cost about \$1,000 per course. Even with financial aid, these universities are too costly for the rural town of Haskell. Other two-year colleges near Haskell still would provide an alternative for Haskell citizens who would rather attend a junior college their first two years. Although classes are available by satellite or over the Internet, these classes can be expensive and the course offerings are limited.

The bill would fill a large need in the Haskell community. The University of North Texas in Denton is only about 30 minutes from Dallas. It, however, was able to establish a campus in south Dallas to meet the large need there for access to a public university. A four-year university offering classes in Haskell would save Haskell students money that would have to be spent on commuting. It also would serve a large area that is not served now by a state public university.

HB 3033 would ensure that students received credit for the time, effort, and money invested in their education. A four-year university would offer more classes, allowing students to major in a variety of fields. Students who started off in a four-year university would not have to worry if the classes

they took would transfer for credit. Universities do not always recognize or give credit for classes transferred from junior colleges.

Haskell would not be asking to be removed from the Vernon Regional Junior College District service area if it was not sure that a four-year university was willing to serve the area. Midwestern University already has agreed to serve Haskell on the condition that it does not have to compete with Vernon.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

HB 3303 would defeat the purpose of the 74th Legislature in establishing junior college district service areas. These service areas were established to ensure that all areas of Texas would have access to community college services. In the past, counties have been transferred from one district service area to another. However, HB 3303 would remove Haskell County from the Vernon Regional Junior College District service area without placing it in another district service area.

The bill would eliminate access to services unique to community colleges. Community colleges provide adult basic education and technical workforce education along with transfer credit education. Four-year institutions do not provide technical workforce degrees such as air conditioning maintenance.

HB 3303 could sour relations between Haskell and Vernon. If the Haskell community decides it would like to be served again by Vernon, Vernon might be reluctant to serve the Haskell community again. Even if it was willing to, Haskell would be a low priority for Vernon. Vernon would be responsible for serving communities in its district first and then for serving Haskell, which no longer would be part of the district.

Vernon is committed to doing whatever is necessary to work with a four-year institution in establishing a two-plus-two program. People in the Haskell community have no guarantees that a four-year institution would serve them. It would be better for Haskell to see if Vernon could work something out with a four-year institution before it took a drastic step based only on a "gentleman's agreement."