

SUBJECT: Creating a pilot project for junior colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — Morrison, F. Brown, Chavez, Giddings, J. Jones, Mercer

0 nays

2 absent — Nixon, Smithee

WITNESSES: For — Manuel Benavidez, Jr., South Texas Community College; Rey Garcia, Texas Association of Community Colleges; Steve Hazelwood, Dow Chemical; Millicent Valek, Texas Association of Community Colleges and Brazosport College

Against — None

On — Steve Head, North Harris Montgomery Community College District; Richard Jolly, Midland College

DIGEST: CSHB 1544 would require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to create a pilot program to study the feasibility and effectiveness of allowing public junior colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees in applied science and applied technology. Participation in the pilot project would not alter the role and mission of a public junior college.

THECB would have to operate the project at Brazosport College, El Centro College of the Dallas County Community College District, Midland College, North Harris Montgomery Community College District, and South Texas Community College.

A participating junior college could offer no more than five baccalaureate degree programs at any time, and the programs would be subject to continuing approval by THECB. Participating colleges would have to meet all applicable accreditation requirements of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

In determining what degree programs to offer, the junior college and THECB would have to consider the need for the programs in the region served by the college; how the programs would complement the college's other programs and courses; whether the programs unnecessarily would duplicate degree programs offered by other higher education institutions; and the adequacy of the college's facilities, faculty, administration, libraries, and other resources to support the program.

Each participating college would have to enter into an articulation agreement with one or more general academic teaching institutions to ensure that students enrolled in the pilot program could complete their degrees if the junior college ceased to offer the degree program. THECB could require a university to enter into such an agreement with the junior college.

In making recommendations to the Legislature about state funding, THECB would have to recommend that a junior college receive about the same state support for junior-level and senior-level courses under the pilot project that a general academic teaching institution would receive for similar courses. The bill would set forth the requirements for determining contact hours necessary to provide the appropriate level of state support. It would not prohibit the Legislature from directly appropriating state funds to support junior-level and senior-level courses offered under the pilot project.

Each college that participated in the project would have to prepare a biennial report for THECB. By January 1, 2009, THECB would have to prepare a progress report. By January 1, 2011, it would have to report to the governor, lieutenant governor, House speaker, and the chairs of higher education committees in the House and Senate on the project's effectiveness.

Unless the Legislature continued the pilot project, a junior college could not enroll new students in the program after the 2011 fall semester, offer junior-level or senior-level courses, or award a baccalaureate degree after the 2015 fall semester, unless otherwise authorized by THECB to do so.

THECB would have to prescribe procedures to ensure that the junior colleges informed each student in the degree program of the nature of the program and of the agreement between the junior colleges and universities. Authority for the pilot project would expire January 1, 2020.

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, 2003.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 1544 would create a pilot project for selected junior colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees in applied science and technology. Demand for higher education is growing much faster than funding, and in some regions, enrollment is growing too fast for four-year institutions to accommodate. As a result, policy makers are looking to community colleges to fill this need, particularly in areas with workforce shortages.

Technology growth and the demands of today's industrial workplace have created a disparity between the need for and supply of workforce education programs. Community colleges already provide an invaluable service by offering educational opportunities to their local communities at an accessible distance and affordable cost. They strengthen local economies by responding to the workforce training needs of local industries through associate degree programs. For many citizens, especially the economically disadvantaged, these credentials have allowed them to attain self-sufficiency.

Several states, including New York, Florida, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Utah, and Arkansas, already are acting on the concept proposed by CSHB 1544. Three community colleges in Florida have received legislative approval to offer four-year degrees. Early reports have been positive. For example, the baccalaureate program at St. Petersburg Community College has been so successful that enrollment projections were well exceeded. Seventy-five students were expected to enroll in the tech management program, but 500 applications were submitted. The program enrolled 175 students with an average age of 30 to 35. Many of the students work and attend school part-time through night classes or online.

CSHB 1544 would authorize the pilot project on a limited basis without spending much money. The intent is not for these colleges to compete with four-year institutions, but to fill specific needs in their communities. If found successful, the project would be a cost-effective tool for Texas to ensure an educated workforce for the future. This could be particularly helpful for minority students, who studies have shown to be more successful at attaining baccalaureate degrees if they remain in their local communities.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 1544 would cost the state more than \$1 million through fiscal 2008, according to the fiscal note. It also could result in increased property taxes for residents of the affected community college districts, adding to the heavy burden that local taxpayers already bear.

NOTES:

The committee substitute would change the original version of HB 1544 by requiring that a participating junior college meet all applicable accreditation requirements and enter into an agreement with a general academic institution to ensure that students enrolled in the pilot program could complete their degrees if the program ended. The substitute also would require THECB to prescribe procedures for the junior college to inform students about the nature of the project and its duration.

The companion bill, SB 1500 by Janek, has been referred to the Senate Education Subcommittee on Higher Education.