

SUBJECT: Automatic university admissions of valedictorians regardless of class size

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 10 ayes — C. Turner, Stucky, Button, Frullo, Howard, E. Johnson, Pacheco, Schaefer, Smithee, Walle

0 nays

1 absent — Wilson

WITNESSES: For — Jeff Harvey, Fayetteville ISD

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Under Education Code sec. 51.803, recent Texas high school graduates qualify for automatic admission to public undergraduate institutions in the state if they graduated with a grade point average in the top 10 percent of their class and meet certain other standards of achievement, including a statutory minimum score on the SAT or ACT assessment. The University of Texas at Austin is required to fill only 75 percent of its openings with applicants qualifying for automatic admission.

DIGEST: CSHB 539 would require public institutions of higher education in the state to admit any applicant for undergraduate admission who had graduated from high school as a class valedictorian within the past two years, provided that the student met all other statutory requirements for automatic admission. In the case of the University of Texas at Austin, valedictorians would count toward the university's 75 percent minimum threshold of automatically admitted students.

The bill also would make class valedictorians eligible for an existing state scholarship intended for outstanding high school students who ranked in the top 10 percent of their graduating class, subject to available funding.

It would apply beginning with admissions and scholarships awarded for

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the 2019-2020 academic year.

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.

SUPPORTERS CSHB 539 would ensure that the top-performing student of each high school graduating class in the state was eligible for automatic admission to public universities regardless of the student's class size. Under the current "Top 10 Percent Rule," a valedictorian can be excluded from automatic admission because the student's graduating class has fewer than 10 students, making it mathematically impossible for the student to reach the 10 percent threshold. No valedictorian should be excluded from a state university because of the size of the graduating class, which is outside of a student's control. The bill still would require valedictorians to meet the same admissions standards as other students admitted automatically.

OPPONENTS No concerns identified.
SAY: