

SUBJECT: Extending alternative methods for high school graduation requirements

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 13 ayes — Dutton, Lozano, Allen, Allison, K. Bell, Bernal, Buckley, M. González, Huberty, K. King, Meza, Talarico, VanDeaver

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Andrea Chevalier, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Heather Sheffield, Decoding Dyslexia and Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment; Chloe Latham Sikes, Intercultural Development Research Association; Fatima Menendez, MALDEF; Grover Campbell, TASB; Kristin McGuire, TCASE; Dena Donaldson, Texas AFT; Barry Haenisch, Texas Association of Community Schools; Amy Beneski, Texas Association of School Administrators; Paige Williams, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Suzi Kennon, Texas PTA; Starlee Coleman, Texas Public Charter Schools Association; Dee Carney, Texas School Alliance; Portia Bosse, Texas State Teachers Association)

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Education Code sec. 28.0258 requires school districts and charter schools to establish an individual graduation committee for students in grades 11 or 12 who have failed to pass one or two of the five end-of-course exams required for graduation. A student must successfully complete the required curriculum and additional requirements established by the committee to be recommended for graduation. This section expires September 1, 2023.

DIGEST: HB 1603 would repeal the September 1, 2023, expiration date for certain alternatives to high school graduation requirements for students who have failed to pass all of their five required STAAR end-of-course exams.

The bill would repeal the expiration date for the requirement that districts

and charter schools establish individual graduation committees at the end of or after the junior year of a student who has failed to pass up to two end-of-course exams, as well as the expiration date for related reporting requirements by schools.

HB 1603 also would repeal the September 1, 2023 expiration date for provisions establishing:

- that a student who has failed to pass the Algebra I or English II end-of-course exam but receives a proficient score on the Texas Success Initiative diagnostic assessment for the corresponding subject satisfies the requirement; and
- that criteria be established for the graduation of certain former students who entered the 9th grade before the 2011-2012 school year and have not performed satisfactorily on a required exam after at least three attempts.

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.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

HB 1603 would make individual graduation committees a permanent and effective alternative to evaluate those students who have failed to pass one or two of their five required end-of-course exams. Graduation committees have been widely supported in public schools by administrators, parents, and students because they consider the entirety of a student's work and assign additional remediation as well as the completion of a project or portfolio in the relevant course.

Since the graduation committee alternative was established by the Legislature in 2015 for an initial two-year period, the issue has been revisited each session by lawmakers and the expiration dates have been extended. This bill would make the committees a permanent fixture of our public school system.

All students must pass their required courses to qualify for approval by a graduation committee, and HB 1603 would not change that. Unlike Texas, many states do not require passage of a standardized test for graduation. The bill moves Texas away from high-stakes testing and allows students, especially those with language barriers, testing anxiety, or learning disabilities, to stay on the path to graduation.

Schools are not abusing the process as only about 5 percent of graduates statewide in 2019 were approved by a graduation committee. About 21,000 students were assigned to a graduation committee, and 83 percent of those students were approved for graduation.

CRITICS  
SAY:

HB 1603 would permanently lower testing standards for graduation at a time when too many students are graduating without being ready for success after high school. The most recent data from the Texas Education Agency show that 53 percent of high school graduates were college ready and about 73 percent were considered ready for either college, the workforce, or the military.

It is premature to permanently extend the graduation committee process without sufficient data comparing whether students who graduate using this alternative do as well after high school as their peers who passed all of their required state exams.