

- SUBJECT:** Establishing a pilot program for dual credit courses at rural colleges
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 10 ayes — Murphy, Pacheco, Cortez, P. King, Muñoz, Ortega, Parker, Raney, C. Turner, J. Turner
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — Frullo
- WITNESSES:** For — Brenda Madore, Grayson College; Jennifer Kent, Victoria College; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Daniel Womack, Dow Chemical; J.D. Hale, Texas Association of Builders; Mike Meroney, Texas Association of Manufacturers)
- Against — None
- DIGEST:** HB 2766 would establish a pilot program to award grants to public junior colleges to pay the enrollment costs of educationally disadvantaged high school students participating in dual credit courses. The bill would set requirements for colleges participating in the program, detail which students were eligible for financial assistance, and require a report on the program's effectiveness.
- Establishment of pilot program.** HB 2766 would require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to establish a pilot program under which the board would award grants to participating public junior colleges to provide financial assistance to educationally disadvantaged high school students for all or part of the cost of enrolling in dual credit courses at the college. THECB would be required to select no more than 10 public junior colleges in the small or medium peer group as identified by the board to participate in the program. THECB would be required, to the extent practicable, to include at least one public junior college from each region of the state.

Participating college requirements. A participating public junior college would be required to:

- use grant funds awarded under the program to provide financial assistance to eligible students for all or part of the cost of tuition and required fees for dual credit courses at the college;
- work with high schools that partnered with the college to provide dual credit courses and elected to participate in the pilot program to inform students about the program and assist students in enrolling in courses; and
- collect and report participation, outreach, and financial data to THECB.

Financial assistance. A student would be eligible to receive financial assistance under the pilot program if the student:

- was educationally disadvantaged;
- was enrolled in a participating public or private high school, including a home school, in the service area of a participating college; and
- had completed less than 60 semester credit hours at an institution of higher education.

Funds provided to an eligible student would have to be used for the cost of tuition or required fees for dual credit courses at the participating college.

Required report. THECB would be required to evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot program and report the results of the evaluation to the Legislature by December 1, 2022. In evaluating the pilot program, THECB would be required to determine:

- any increase in participation rates by eligible students in dual credit courses;
- any increase in the number of dual credit semester credit hours attempted by eligible students;
- any increase in the number of eligible students who graduated from

high school in the top 10 percent of the student's class or with a workforce certificate or credential; and

- whether the pilot program should be expanded to all public junior colleges in the small and medium peer groups as identified by the board.

Other provisions. A school that partnered with a participating college to provide dual credit courses and elected to participate in the pilot program would be required to provide students in grade 9 or the equivalent information on dual credit opportunities and the available funding under the pilot program.

THECB would be required to establish the pilot program as soon as practicable following the effective date of the bill. The pilot program would expire September 1, 2023

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 2766 would increase participation by rural high school students in dual credit courses at public junior colleges at a reasonable cost to the state. Rural enrollment in dual credit courses consistently lags behind enrollment in urban areas. Unlike urban junior colleges with large tax bases, rural colleges often require high school students to pay the tuition costs of dual credit courses. This creates an issue of affordability for rural students and depresses enrollment in these courses. Dual credit courses are often weighted by high schools and this in turn leads to unequal representation of students who cannot afford to enroll in them in the top 10 percent of their class, which can harm their chances of being admitted to a public university in the state.

The pilot program established by the bill represents a relatively small cost to the state that is justified by the life changing impact it could have on affected students. Despite the large fiscal note, only \$3 million could be made available for the pilot program in Art. 11 of SB 1, the general

appropriations act, contingent on passage of this bill. The potential benefit to rural high school students and the knowledge gained about the long-term viability of such a program make this an appropriate cost.

CRITICS
SAY:

Funding enrollment in dual credit courses should not be a government function and should not be done at taxpayer expense.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have a negative impact of about \$75 million to general revenue related funds through fiscal 2023. The bill would make no appropriation but could provide the legal basis for an appropriation of funds to implement the provisions of the bill.

A contingency rider for \$3 million for the pilot program was included for consideration in Art. 11 of SB 1 by Nelson (Bonnen), the general appropriations act for fiscal 2022-23.