

SUBJECT: Establishing the Opportunity High School Diploma Program

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 8 ayes — Kuempel, Paul, Bucy, Burns, Clardy, Cole, Howard, Lalani
0 nays
3 absent — Burrows, M. González, Raney

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, (April 20) — 31 - 0

WITNESSES: None (*considered in a formal meeting on May 2*)

BACKGROUND: Some have suggested that more options are needed for adult students to gain basic education credentials for workforce preparedness.

DIGEST: CSSB 2139 would establish the Opportunity High School Diploma Program to provide an alternative means by which adult students enrolled in a workforce education program at a public junior college could earn a high school diploma. The bill would require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to administer the program in consultation with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC).

Approval of alternative high school diploma program. The bill would allow a public junior college to submit an application to participate in the Opportunity High School Diploma Program to THECB. The application would be required to propose an alternative competency-based high school diploma program to be offered for concurrent enrollment to adult students without a high school diploma who were enrolled in a workforce education program at the college. The program could include any combination of instruction, curriculum, achievement, internships, or other means by which a student could attain sufficient knowledge to prepare for postsecondary education or additional workforce education. A public junior college could submit such an application together with one or more

public junior colleges, general academic teaching institutions, school districts, or nonprofit organizations with whom the proposed program would be offered. THECB could approve no more than five public junior colleges to participate in the program.

THECB would review and approve a junior college's application to participate in the program if THECB determined that the college's proposed program would provide instruction and assessments appropriate to ensure that a student who completed the program would demonstrate sufficient knowledge to be prepared for post secondary or workforce education. THECB could coordinate with TEA as necessary to make such a determination.

An approved public junior college could:

- enter into an agreement with one or more public junior colleges, general academic teaching institutions, school districts, or nonprofit organizations to offer the program; and
- offer the program at any campus of the college or an entity with which the college had entered into an agreement.

Award of high school diploma. The bill would allow a participating public junior college to award a high school diploma to a student enrolled in the program offered by the college if the student performed satisfactorily on assessment instruments prescribed by THECB rule. Such a diploma would be equivalent to a high school diploma awarded by a high school.

Funding. The bill would require THECB and TWC to coordinate to jointly identify funding mechanisms available to public junior colleges and students to encourage and facilitate participation in the program. A public junior college participating in the program would be entitled to receive appropriated funding for the program in the manner provided by THECB rule.

Report. By December 1, 2026, THECB would be required to submit a

progress report on the effectiveness of the program and any recommendations for legislative or other actions to the Legislature.

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, 2023.