

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

Senate Research Center  
84R3329 JRJ-F

S.B. 271  
By: Ellis  
Higher Education  
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As Filed

### **AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT**

Higher education is more important than ever. While a high school degree once sufficed in previous generations, a baccalaureate degree is often a prerequisite for jobs in today's 21st century economy. In addition, attending a public four-year college or university in Texas has gotten much more expensive over past dozen years. In fact, the average cost of full-time attendance at a public university increased 104 percent from 2003 to 2013—more than doubling.

S.B. 271 will carefully implement an alternative pathway for students to obtain a four-year degree in an effort to address the ongoing need for a skilled workforce and the spike in the cost of higher education.

This bill provides the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) with the authority to allow public junior colleges that meet certain criteria to offer baccalaureate degrees in either applied science or nursing—provided the schools use a measured, phased-in approach, and meet other safeguards included in the legislation.

The bill also directs THECB each biennium, in consultation with the Texas Workforce Commission, institutions of higher education, and local workforce development boards, to identify and study three to five applied science disciplines for which baccalaureate degree programs may be offered by a public junior college.

Proposed public junior college baccalaureate degrees would be reviewed according to the same standards used for baccalaureate program approvals at universities. This would include demonstrating short-term and long-term workforce needs in the field, adequate faculty, library resources to meet accreditation standards, sufficient funding to support the program without harming existing programs, and regular review processes to ensure quality and effectiveness.

S.B. 271 offers another avenue for students and working adults that want a more affordable higher education experience to complete a four-year degree. Seventeen states, including Texas, allow some public junior colleges to offer four-year degrees. Currently, three Texas public junior colleges are authorized to offer a maximum of five baccalaureate degree programs in applied technology.

As proposed, S.B. 271 amends current law relating to authorization by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for certain public junior colleges to offer baccalaureate degree programs.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 1 (130.0012, Education Code) of this bill.

### **SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS**

SECTION 1. Amends Section 130.0012, Education Code, by amending Subsections (a), (b), (d), (e), (g), and (h) and adding Subsections (a-1), (g-1), (k), and (l), as follows:

(a) Authorizes the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to authorize public junior colleges to offer baccalaureate degree programs in the fields of applied science, applied technology, and nursing under this section, rather than requires THECB to authorize public junior colleges to offer baccalaureate degree programs in the fields of applied science and applied technology. Provides that offering a baccalaureate degree program under this section does not otherwise alter the role and mission of a public junior college.

(a-1) Requires THECB in consultation with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), institutions of higher education, and local workforce development board, each biennium, to identify at least three but no more than five applied science disciplines for which a baccalaureate degree program may be offered by a public junior college under this section.

(b) Provides that THECB:

(1) Creates this subdivision from existing text and makes a nonsubstantive change;

(2) may authorize baccalaureate degree programs at one or more public junior colleges that offer a degree program in the field of applied science or the field of nursing and have demonstrated a workforce need.

(d) Provides that baccalaureate degree programs offered under this section are subject to the continuing approval of THECB. Deletes existing text prohibiting a public junior college offering a baccalaureate degree program under this section from offering more than five baccalaureate degree programs at any time. Makes a nonsubstantive change.

(e) Requires THECB, in determining what baccalaureate degree programs are to be offered, to:

(1) apply the same criteria and standards THECB uses to approve baccalaureate degree programs at general academic teaching institutions; and

(2) consider the following factors:

(A) the workforce need for the degree programs in the region served by the junior college;

(B) how those degree programs would complement the other programs and course offerings of the junior college and whether the associate degree program offered by the junior college in the same field has been successful;

(C) whether those degree programs would unnecessarily duplicate the degree programs offered by other institutions of higher education or whether partnership with other institutions of higher education is possible;

(D) the ability of the junior college to support the program with student enrollment and the adequacy of the junior college's facilities, faculty, administration, libraries, and other resources; and

(E) whether the junior college meets the taxable property valuation amount established in Section 130.032 (Restrictions).

(g) Requires THECB, except as provided by Subsection (g-1), in its recommendations to the legislature relating to state funding for public junior colleges, to recommend that a public junior college receive substantially the same state support for junior-level and senior-level courses offered under this section as that provided to a general academic teaching institution for substantially similar courses.

(g-1) Authorizes the degree program, for the first two years in which a degree program created under Subsection (b)(2) is offered, to be funded solely by a public junior college's proportionate share of state appropriations under Section 130.003 (State Appropriations for Public Junior Colleges), local funds, and private sources. Provides that this subsection does not require the legislature to appropriate state funds to support a degree program created under Subsection (b)(2) for the first two years in which the degree program is offered. Prohibits state appropriations under Section 130.003 for this degree program, for the third, fourth, and fifth years in which a degree program created under Subsection (b)(2) is offered, from providing more than 50 percent of the total amount of funds required to support the degree program.

(h) Requires each public junior college offering a baccalaureate degree program under this section, each biennium, to conduct a review of each baccalaureate degree program offered and prepare a report on the operation, quality, and effectiveness of those degree programs. Requires that a copy of the report be delivered to THECB in the form and at the time determined by THECB. Deletes existing text requiring each public junior college offering a baccalaureate degree program under this section to prepare a biennial report on the operation and effectiveness of the junior college's baccalaureate degree programs and to deliver a copy of the report to THECB in the form and at the time determined by THECB.

(k) Requires THECB to adopt rules as necessary for the administration of this section.

(l) Defines "general academic teaching institution" and "institution of higher education" for the purposes of this section.

SECTION 2. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2015.