

SUBJECT: Information on public community colleges

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 8 ayes — Rangel, Solis, Bailey, Cuellar, Dunnam, Kamel, Rabuck, E. Reyna

0 nays

1 absent — Rodriguez

WITNESSES: For — None

Against — None

On — Don Brown, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; Rey Garcia, Texas Association of Community Colleges; Lynn Redwine, Texas Performance Review

DIGEST: CSHB 2517 would require the Higher Education Coordinating Board to collect, maintain, and report comparative information for public junior and technical colleges and to provide that information to the public. Schools would have to submit:

- financial information, including revenue sources, tax rates, outstanding district debt, faculty compensation, administrative expenditures, and tuition and fees;
- student body demographics;
- information on quality and types of programs, faculty quality, and libraries; and
- institutional outcomes, such as degree completion rates, placement rates of graduates, student loan default rates, and rates of transfer to public four-year institutions.

The coordinating board would appoint an advisory committee to assist in collecting and developing methods of presenting the information. The board would include representatives of the governor; Texas Workforce Commission; Legislative Budget Board; state auditor; standing legislative

committees with primary jurisdiction over state appropriations and higher education; a public technical institute; a statewide association of junior colleges; and students and members of the general public.

The state auditor would have to provide junior colleges with written information about the independent audit process that explained how representatives of the junior college district could participate in the audit process and how the district could request information on it.

The bill would take effect September 1, 1997. The Higher Education Coordinating Board would be required to begin complying with its provisions by September 1, 1998.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 2517 would impart needed accountability to Texas' public community colleges, which enroll more students than the state's four-year institutions. In its most recent publication, *Disturbing the Peace*, the Texas Performance Review found significant differences in community college program quality, program and administrative costs, and fiscal condition. CSHB 2517 would allow for collecting and presenting information in a way that would be useful for local boards, students, consumers, taxpayers, and elected officials.

The information provided would help students make more informed decisions about how to spend their tuition dollars and match themselves with the schools that best met their individual needs. Informed stakeholders are the best deterrent against poor performance, and CSHB 2517 would help better inform all stakeholders in Texas' community college system.

Furthermore, CSHB 2517 could improve the performance of community colleges. Local boards and administrators could use the information provided under the bill to compare their performance with that of similar institutions, identifying individual school's strengths as well as areas for improvement. The information also could assist school leadership allocate resources among programs. Wide variances that are not consistent with an institution's priorities or costs at similar institutions could alert local boards to address deficiencies and allow them to question local administrators about the costs and benefits of their programs. The tools provided by CSHB 2517

could help boards identify successful and marginal programs, and determine their cost effectiveness.

The information collection required by the bill would not be burdensome either to the schools or to the coordinating board. Most of the data indicated by CSHB 2517 are already being collected the coordinating board, and only need to be presented in an effective manner. While comparative information does not always tell a school's whole story and can sometimes be misinterpreted, the coordinating board has extensive experience in collecting and presenting data on higher education. Their efforts would ensure that the information was presented accurately and distortions of a school's record are minimized.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

CSHB 2517 could lead to the dissemination of information that does not accurately reflect the performance and financial status of Texas' public junior colleges. Although the schools as well as the public would benefit from expanded information options, data presented in a comparative format could be easily misinterpreted. Considering the cost of a program without considering its quality could be misleading. Higher costs for libraries or student services, for example, may be indicators of quality, not mismanagement, especially if they contribute to an improved educational environment. Conversely, consistently low spending in these areas could signal declining program quality.

The differing needs of individual schools could also account for comparative differences. Since priorities and costs vary by institution and region, moderate variances may merely reflect managerial priorities. CSHB 2517 could cause the presentation of information in a way that mischaracterized the performance and financial status of some schools.

NOTES:

The committee substitute deleted a requirement that schools be provided with assistance in preparing for an audit by the coordinating board.