

SUBJECT: Extending alternative methods for high school graduation requirements

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 12 ayes — Huberty, Bernal, Allison, Ashby, K. Bell, Dutton, M.
González, K. King, Meyer, Sanford, Talarico, VanDeaver

0 nays

1 absent — Allen

WITNESSES: For — Fatima Menendez, MALDEF; Sheri Hicks, Texans Advocating For Meaningful Student Assessments; Morgan Craven, Texas Latino Education Coalition; Gina Edens; Jennifer Rosenboom; (*Registered, but did not testify*: HD Chambers, Alief ISD, Texas School Alliance; David Anderson, Arlington ISD Board of Trustees; Andrea Chevalier, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Jacquie Benestante, Autism Society of Texas; Chris Masey, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities; Molley Perry, College Station ISD; Priscilla Camacho, Dallas Regional Chamber; Steven Aleman, Disability Rights Texas; Jodi Duron, Elgin ISD; Jane McFarland, League of Women Voters of Texas; Sophie Torres, San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Richard Webster, Spring Branch ISD Board of Trustees; Christi Morgan, Sunnyvale ISD; Kristi Hassett and Theresa Trevino, TAMSA; Dwight Harris, Texas American Federation of Teachers; Barry Haenisch, Texas Association of Community Schools; Amy Beneski, Texas Association of School Administrators; Paige Williams, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Velma Ybarra, Texas HOPE; Chloe Sikes, Texas Latino Education Coalition; Jerod Patterson, Texas Rural Education Association; Dee Carney, Texas School Alliance; Lisa Dawn-Fisher, Texas State Teachers Association; Michelle Cavazos, Texas Urban Council, Texas Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents; Sheri Doss, Texas PTA; and 10 individuals)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Drew Scheberle, Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce)

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Monica Martinez, Texas Education Agency)

BACKGROUND: The 84th Legislature in 2015 enacted SB 149 by Seliger, which established an alternative method to satisfy graduation requirements for high school students who have completed their curriculum but failed to pass up to two STAAR end-of-course exams. The 85th Legislature in 2017 enacted SB 463 by Seliger, which continued the alternative method until September 1, 2019.

DIGEST: HB 851 would repeal the September 1, 2019, expiration date of statutory provisions that allow high school students who had failed to pass one or two required end-of-course (EOC) exams to be considered for graduation by an individual graduation committee. The bill would continue the requirements that districts and charter schools establish individual graduation committees at the end of or after a student's junior year to recommend additional requirements and to decide whether the student should be allowed to graduate and receive a high school diploma.

The bill also would repeal the September 1, 2019, expiration date for statutory provisions that allow 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 to graduate and receive a high school diploma. It would continue requirements that the commissioner of education establish criteria regarding alternatives such as work or military experience that could allow such a student to qualify to receive a high school diploma.

The bill would repeal the September 1, 2019, expiration date of a statutory provision that allows a student who has failed to pass the Algebra I or English II EOC exam to use a proficient score on the Texas Success Initiative college readiness exam for the corresponding EOC exam. It would repeal the September 1, 2019, expiration date for certain reporting requirements related to the individual graduation committees.

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, 2019.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 851 would make permanent the individual graduation committee process that has allowed a number of students who failed one or two EOC exams but were otherwise qualified to graduate to receive their high school diplomas. Texas should continue providing this path to high school graduation for students who can demonstrate through portfolios or other means that they have mastered the curriculum. This path is especially important for students with learning disabilities or facing language barriers.

The alternative process contains appropriate safeguards to protect the integrity of state graduation requirements and has not been abused. In 2017, fewer than 4 percent of all high school graduates were qualified to receive their diplomas by permission of individual graduation committees.

Many states do not require students to pass any standardized tests as a graduation requirement. The federal government requires states to test high school students in certain subjects but does not tie those tests to graduation.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 851 would continue a process that awards high school diplomas to students who may not be ready for college or the workforce. Texas has seen a reduction in college readiness of high school graduates, and the individual graduation committee process could be a contributing factor. Allowing students who have not met their testing requirements to receive their diplomas devalues the diplomas of students who did pass their end-of-course exams. It also reduces incentives for schools to provide additional instruction to get students ready to pass all of their end-of-course exams.