

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 1668
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Higher Education
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

In 2011, the legislature created the Texas T-STEM Challenge Scholarship Program to provide opportunities for undergraduates to engage in applied learning experiences in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Grants awarded under the T-STEM program allow community and technical colleges to provide merit-based scholarships to qualifying, high-achieving students pursuing careers in STEM and other related fields. Participating colleges partner with local businesses and industry to identify local employment needs in STEM occupations and to develop part-time employment opportunities for scholarship recipients.

Student eligibility for T-STEM participation is based on grade point average and successful completion of courses that lead to degrees and careers in specified STEM fields while enrolled in a public community or technical institution. Students who have been accepted into the program, however, cannot continue their participation if they transfer to a four-year college or university. Allowing these students to maintain their eligibility after they transfer would enable more students to participate in field-based experience in STEM careers and increase the number of students who graduate with degrees in STEM.

S.B. 1668 modifies the criteria for student eligibility in the T-STEM scholarship program to allow students who previously participated in a STEM program at a public junior college or public technical institute to continue in the program after transferring to a university and after completing at least 45 semester credit hours. Enacting these modifications will allow students who progress to advanced academic environments to continue participation in a program that is directly tied to their degree plan and career interests.

As proposed, S.B. 1668 amends current law relating to the institutions of higher education eligible to participate in the Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (T-STEM) Challenge Scholarship Program.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 1 (Section 61.9792, Education Code) and SECTION 4 of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 61.9792, Education Code, to require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to establish and administer, in accordance with this subchapter and THECB rules, the Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (T-STEM) Challenge Scholarship program under which THECB provides a grant to an eligible institution for the purpose of providing a scholarship to a student who meets the eligibility criteria prescribed by Section 61.9793 (Eligible Student).

SECTION 2. Amends Section 61.9794, Education Code, as follows:

Sec. 61.9794. ELIGIBLE INSTITUTION. (a) Requires an institution, to qualify as an eligible institution under this subchapter, to:

(1) be one of the following:

(A) a public junior college, public junior college district, or public technical institute that admits at least 50 eligible students into a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Program (STEM) program each academic year; or

(B) a general academic teaching institution that admits into a STEM program each academic year eligible students who previously participated in a STEM program at a public junior college or public technical institute and completed at least 45 semester credit hours at the college or institute before enrolling in the general academic teaching institution; and

(2) Creates this subdivision from existing text. Makes no further change to this subdivision.

(b) Requires an institution, to maintain eligibility, beginning with the second year following implementation of a scholarship program under this subchapter, to demonstrate to THECB that at least 70 percent of the institution's STEM program graduates, rather than T-STEM Challenge Scholarship graduates, within three months after graduation, are employed by a business in a STEM field or, for STEM program graduates from a two-year institution, enrolled in upper-division courses leading to a baccalaureate degree in a STEM field.

SECTION 3. Amends Section 61.9795, Education Code, as follows:

Sec. 61.9795. AMOUNT; FUNDING. (a) Makes no change to this subsection.

(b) Authorizes an eligible student, except as provided by Subsection (b-1), to receive a scholarship awarded under this subchapter for not more than two academic years.

(b-1) Authorizes an eligible student who enrolls in a STEM program at a general academic teaching institution under this subchapter to receive a scholarship awarded under this subchapter for two additional academic years.

(c) Makes no change to this subsection.

SECTION 4. Requires THECB to award scholarships under Subchapter GG (Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (T-STEM) Challenge Scholarship Program), Chapter 61 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board), Education Code, as amended by this Act, beginning with the 2013-2014 academic year. Requires THECB to adopt the rules required by that subchapter as soon as practicable after this Act takes effect.

SECTION 5. Effective date: September 1, 2013.