

SUBJECT: Temporarily expanding alternative method for high school graduation

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 12 ayes — Dutton, Lozano, Allen, Allison, K. Bell, Bernal, Buckley,
Huberty, K. King, Meza, Talarico, VanDeaver

0 nays

1 absent — M. González

WITNESSES: For — Eduardo Hernandez, Bexar County Education Coalition and Edgewood ISD; Theresa Trevino, Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment; Michael Lee, Texas Association of Rural Schools; Kevin Brown, Texas Association of School Administrators; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Andrea Chevalier, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Dennis Borel, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities; Steven Aleman, Disability Rights Texas; Chloe Latham Sikes, Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA); Grover Campbell, TASB; Dena Donaldson, Texas AFT; Barry Haenisch, Texas Association of Community Schools; Pamela McPeters, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Kristin McGuire, Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education; Ana Ramon, Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition; Suzi Kennon, Texas PTA; Dee Carney, Texas School Alliance; Carrie Griffith, Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA); Ashley Ford, The Arc of Texas; Greg Gibson, Texas Association of Midsize Schools)

Against — None

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

BACKGROUND: Education Code sec. 28.0258 requires school districts and charter schools to establish an individual graduation committee for students in grades 11 or 12 who have failed to pass one or two of the five end-of-course exams required for graduation. A student must successfully complete the

required curriculum and additional requirements established by the committee to be recommended for graduation.

DIGEST: CSHB 999 would authorize all 12th grade students for the 2020-2021, 2021-2022, and 2022-2023 school years who had failed to pass one or more end-of-course exams required for graduation to be awarded a high school diploma by an individual graduation committee review. A committee, in determining whether a student was qualified to graduate, would not be required to consider criteria related to the student's performance on an end-of-course exam on which the student failed to perform satisfactorily.

The bill's provisions would expire September 1, 2023.

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, 2021.

SUPPORTERS SAY: CSHB 999 would provide a path to graduation for high school students whose efforts to pass the end-of-course exams required for graduation have been impacted by the pandemic. It would expand the individual graduation committee alternative for the current school year and the next two school years for students who failed to pass one or more of their exams.

The bill would recognize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the ability of some students to return to in-person learning. This has resulted in lost opportunities for students to try to re-take and pass their required exams. In addition, many high school students are dealing with stress and trauma, with some juggling jobs and caring for siblings. The bill would apply to this year's sophomores and juniors as well as seniors to account for missed re-testing opportunities for students at each of those levels.

Some students, especially those with language barriers, testing anxiety, or learning disabilities, may have completed their coursework and should have an opportunity to demonstrate they have mastered a subject for

which they failed to pass the end-of-course exam. Graduation committees have been proven to be an effective method for considering the entirety of a student's work by assigning additional remediation as well as the completion of a project or portfolio in the relevant course.

The commissioner of education has removed the high stakes attached to STAAR for students in grades 5 and 8 by waiving grade promotion requirements related to their test scores, but the commissioner was unable to waive statutory graduation requirements for high school students. CSHB 999 would ensure that students of all grade levels are treated equally regarding STAAR requirements.

The graduation committee process is designed to ensure that students have obtained the requisite knowledge in the basic subjects covered by end-of-course exams. This allows them to receive their diploma and move on to college or the workforce.

**CRITICS
SAY:**

CSHB 999 would result in STAAR exams being less important to graduating high school without having data to show that students who graduate using the individual graduation committee alternative are doing as well as their peers after high school. It is unclear whether allowing students to graduate without having passed exams in basic subjects could leave them unprepared to compete in an economy that increasingly requires a postsecondary degree or credential.