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H.B. 644
136th General Assembly

Bill Analysis

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Version: As Passed by the House

Primary Sponsor: Rep. Manning

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SUMMARY

- Creates the Higher Education Evidence-based Innovation Fund and Grant Program.
- Requires the Chancellor of Higher Education to award competitive grants from the fund to state institutions of higher education to support student success programs that use evidence-based reforms or practices.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Higher Education Evidence-based Innovation Fund

The bill creates the Higher Education Evidence-based Innovation Fund, consisting of money designated for the fund by the General Assembly and any private contributions. Any money credited to the fund must be used to award competitive grants to state institutions of higher education (state universities, community colleges, state community colleges, university branches, and technical colleges)[1] to support the adoption of evidence-based reforms and practices. Unspent amounts in the fund cannot be transferred to the General Revenue Fund.

Under the bill, an "evidence-based reform or practice" is an activity, strategy, or intervention that either:

1. Demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on:
    a. Strong evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study;

[1] R.C. 3345.011, not in the bill.

b. Moderate evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study; or

c. Promising evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias.

2. Both:

a. Demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes; and

b. Includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention.

Furthermore, the bill separates evidence-based reforms and practices into three different evidence tiers, as follows:

1. An evidence tier-one reform or practice is one which prior research suggests has promise for the purpose of successfully improving student achievement or attainment for low-income students and for which student outcomes can be meaningfully measured;

2. An evidence tier-two reform or practice is one which meets the criteria for evidence tier-one, or similar criteria, and which, through rigorous evaluation, including the use of existing administrative data, has been found to improve student achievement or attainment and for which the impact and cost-effectiveness can be meaningfully measured; and

3. An evidence tier-three reform or practice is one which meets the criteria for evidence tier-two, or similar criteria, and which has been found to produce sizable, important impacts on student achievement or attainment and which can be expected to provide information related to both determining whether those impacts can be successfully reproduced and sustained over time and identifying the conditions in which the reform or practice is most effective.[2]

Grant program

Administration

The bill requires the Chancellor of Higher Education to establish and administer a grant program to distribute money from the fund. The Chancellor must distribute grants on a competitive basis to state institutions of higher education to support the development, piloting, scaling, and assessment of student success programs.

"Student success programs" under the bill include programs established and operated by a state institution to improve postsecondary retention rates, completion rates, or the time

[2] R.C. 3333.1211(A) and (B).

students take to earn a degree, excluding post-baccalaureate programs, with an emphasis on supporting low-income students.

In awarding grants under the program, the Chancellor must give preference to applications that propose tier-three reforms or practices.

Beginning in 2027, the bill requires the Chancellor to open a competitive grant period at least once every two years and gives the Chancellor discretion to open additional grant periods. The award term for a grant may be for more than two years. The Chancellor cannot award grants in excess of the amount held in the fund. Each state institution that receives a grant must use awarded funds to carry out the programs and proposals described in the institution's grant application.[3]

Applications

Under the bill, a state institution's competitive grant application must include:

1. A plan to increase, with respect to all enrolled students, attainment and completion rates or graduation rates, including both:
   a. A description of the evidence-based reform or practice that would be used, including a summary of the most rigorous and relevant studies available regarding the reform or practice and whether it would be an evidence tier-one, two, or three reform or practice;
   b. A focus on serving low-income students through student services and collaboration among two-year programs, four-year programs, and workforce systems.
2. A description of how the institution will, directly or in collaboration with other accredited institutions of higher education or nonprofit organizations, use the grant funds to implement or support the evidence-based reform or practice;
3. Annual benchmarks for student outcomes with respect to the reform or practice, including a description of the availability of relevant data;
4. A plan to evaluate the reform or practice that includes, to the maximum extent feasible, experimental designs using random assignment or other research methodologies that allow for the strongest possible causal inferences when random assignment is not feasible; and
5. A description of how the reform or practice will be sustained once the grant expires.[4]

Criteria

The bill requires the Chancellor, in consultation with the Department of Education and Workforce and the Department of Job and Family Services, to develop criteria for awarding the grants. The criteria must include metrics related to all of the following:

[3] R.C. 3333.1211(A), (C), and (F).

[4] R.C. 3333.1211(D).

1. Student outcomes, including student retention, student completion, economic mobility of students, and student preparation for high-wage or high-need jobs;
2. Student access, including both the net price of higher education for students and support for low-income students;
3. Sustainability and scale including the number of students served, scalability of the program, cost to administer the program, and sustainability of the program once the grant expires; and
4. Evidence and evaluation, including the availability of data to support evaluation and research and the evidence tier of the evidence-based reform or practice that would be used.[5]

HISTORY

Action	Date
Introduced	01-12-26
Reported, H. Workforce and Higher Education	03-25-26
Passed House (81-7)	05-13-26

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[5] R.C. 3333.1211(E).