

Texas Expands Charter Authorization Options

By Evelyn B. Stacey

Texas has taken steps to enhance the quality and quantity of charter schools by expanding the involvement of colleges as an authorizing force.

State Rep. Ryan Guillen (D-Starr County) and state Sen. Florence Shapiro (R-Dallas) cosponsored House Bill 1423, signed by the governor into law on June 19 and effective immediately. It allows the State Board of Education to give community colleges and junior colleges the ability to authorize open-enrollment charter schools.

Schools authorized under HB 1423 will not count toward Texas's statewide cap of 215 charter schools.

"Universities have been able to establish charters for several years, but have not been overly aggressive," said David Dunn, executive director of the Texas Charter School Association and former chief of staff for the U.S. Secretary of Education.

"Rep. Guillen brought the idea forward because junior colleges expressed interest in starting charters to help students [gain] college credits," said Dunn.

"It is good that now charter schools run by both two-year and four-year universities will not count toward the cap."

**BROOKE TERRY
EDUCATION POLICY ANALYST
TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION**

Charters Forming

Four-year universities have been able to authorize charter schools in Texas since 2001. The few that have taken steps to do so include the University of Texas at Austin, University of Houston, Stephen F. Austin State University, and Texas Southern University. Houston Community College has been working on a partnership with the Houston Academy for International Studies, a local independent charter school.

While the new legislation will multiply charters, it also seeks to improve them. For community and junior col-

leges to receive approval as authorizers, their college charter mission must include innovative teaching methods and education programs implemented under teaching or research faculty. The college business office must oversee the charter school's financial operations, and the college's name must be included.

More Bills Offered

Texas legislators made other attempts to boost the prospects of charter schools this session. State Rep. Dan Patrick (R-Houston) sponsored Senate Bill 308, to lift the statewide cap on charters, and Senate Bill 1830, to allow charters to rent space on public school grounds. The measures failed to pass before the legislative session ended July 1. The new session will begin in January 2011.

"Since Texas hit the cap and we were unsuccessful in raising the cap this session, it will be hard, generally speaking, for the charter school movement to continue to expand," said Brooke Terry, an education policy analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a research group in Austin. "It is good that now charter schools run by both two-year

and four-year universities will not count toward the cap."

Dunn hailed the legislation as "a great opportunity to provide additional choice for Texas families."

Approximately 2,500 students enrolled in Texas charter schools in the 1996-97 school year, after the law was created in 1995. Texas charter schools now instruct 110,000 students, with 17,000 waiting to enroll.

"With this new opportunity for community colleges," said Terry, "imagine how many more Texas children can be helped."

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INTERNET INFO


Texas HB 1423: <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=81R&Bill=HB1423>

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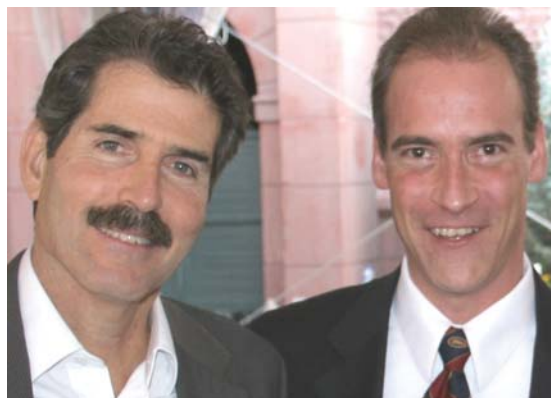
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