CSSB 1455
Testimony Before the Texas House Public Education Committee

by Emily Sass, Policy Analyst

Texas' approach to virtual learning is in need of modernization to allow students and schools to benefit from the innovations of the 21st century. CSSB 1455 attempts to update that approach.

CSSB 1455 includes several positive reforms:

- It ends the 2013 moratorium on new full-time virtual programs, allowing ISDs to create their own full-time virtual programs. Currently, unless a student attends one of four ISDs, they must transfer to another school district to take advantage of the full-time virtual format.

- It allows students enrolled in public schools to take more than three virtual courses funded by the state, if that approach fits with their graduation plans.

- It provides that a student request to take a virtual course may not be denied simply because their home district offers a "substantially similar course." Currently, this denial can occur regardless of whether such a course is actually accessible to the student.

- It simplifies student eligibility requirements and removes the requirement that students be enrolled in a public school the year prior. This allows students more flexibility in choosing the environment that is best suited to their needs, especially students who have recently moved to Texas.

Unfortunately, CSSB 1455 includes enrollment caps that could hamper future growth and make these programs less practical for districts to offer in the future. It also retains a prohibition on full-time enrollment of students in grades lower than third grade; Texas is the only state that has this restriction.

The bill also significantly alters accountability requirements for virtual school providers. Virtual schools are often the school of last resort for struggling students; it is possible that the wrong set of incentives could push schools to limit the scope of their services rather than expand and improve them.

According to one analysis, [students attending virtual schools tend to fit the following profiles](#):

- *Academically advanced students*
- *Academically struggling students*
- *Students experiencing health problems*
- *New students experiencing bullying*
- *Returning students who originally enrolled with numerous challenges, including those captured in the previous clusters*
- *Students new to Connections Academy schools or returning, both of which were seeking flexibility and choice*

All of these student profiles stand to benefit from the flexibility that virtual learning provides. In attempting to lift limits on digital learning, Texas should ensure that in so doing it does not permanently choke the supply—especially for students who need options the most. ⭐

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Sass is a policy analyst with the Texas Public Policy Foundation's Center for Education Innovation.

Before coming to the Foundation, Emily was on Sen. Ted Cruz's state staff as deputy regional director for North Texas, serving as the senator's liaison on all policy topics to a 14-county region. Previously, she has worked as staff in the Texas House of Representatives and on multiple campaigns.

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