



HOUSE BILL 849

By Haston

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49,
Chapter 6, relative to education.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. This act is known and may be cited as the "Rural Schools Innovation Act."

SECTION 2. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 6, Part 3, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

(a) As used in this section:

(1) "Department" means the department of education;

(2) "Rural area" means a geographic area that is not an urban area;

(3) "Rural district" means an LEA that serves students residing in a rural area; and

(4) "Urban area" means a geographic area delineated as an urban area by the United States census bureau following the 2020 decennial census.

(b) The department shall establish a two-year pilot program for rural districts to partner together to expand access to high-quality, robust college and career pathways.

(c) The department shall select at least six (6) rural districts to participate in the program. Each rural district selected to participate in the program must partner with at least one (1) other rural district participating in the program to establish a partnership.

(d)

(1) Each partnership must be evidenced by a written partnership agreement that includes, at a minimum, the following:

(A) The roles and responsibilities of each partnering rural district;

(B) The partnership's goals, which must include, at a minimum:

(i) Improving student outcomes and sustaining any improvements for the long term; and

(ii) Expanding access to high-quality, robust college and career pathways that are aligned with regional labor market projections for high-wage, high-demand careers and that are supported by partnerships with regional higher education and workforce organizations to align systems, smooth transitions, and facilitate early college credit and work-based learning opportunities for students;

(C) How the partnership intends to achieve each of the goals identified in the partnership agreement; and

(D) Ambitious and measurable performance goals that are aligned with college and career readiness measures, as well as longitudinal postsecondary participation and employment outcomes. The performance goals established in the partnership agreement must allow for a coordinating intermediary to optimize the value of each college or career pathway by initiating and encouraging collaboration in matters related to scheduling, the addition or removal of certain pathways, and the hiring or budgeting required for advancement of certain pathways.

(2) Each partnership must be overseen by an intermediary organization that is authorized to contract and employ staff in this state. The governing body of the intermediary organization selected by the department to oversee a partnership for purposes of the pilot program must include members representing

kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) education, higher education, and workforce leaders in this state to encourage collaboration across systems.

(e) Subject to appropriation, the department shall award competitive grants to partnerships. The department shall determine the amount of grant funds awarded to a partnership based, in part, on the strength of the partnership agreement, the resources available to each partnering rural district, and the needs of the student population served by each partnering rural district to ensure grant funds are awarded to partnerships in a manner that allows each partnership to achieve the goals of the pilot program and of its partnership agreement in the most cost-effective and efficient manner possible.

(f) Each partnership must submit its written partnership agreement to the department along with the partnership's application to receive grant funding. The department shall begin accepting grant applications no later than September 1, 2023, and shall distribute grants to partnerships no later than December 1, 2023.

(g) Grant applications must outline the partnership's goals and how grant funds will be used to increase the number of high school graduates on track to achieve their college or career goals.

(h)

(1) Partnerships shall not use more than seventy percent (70%) of the grant funds it receives to implement its partnership agreement for purposes of the pilot program, which includes making the preparations necessary to increase student opportunities, establishing a coordinating intermediary, and executing the terms of the partnership agreement to allow the partnering rural districts to share resources and best practices to improve student outcomes.

(2) Partnerships shall use at least thirty percent (30%) of the grant funds it receives to provide the technical assistance necessary to enable the design

and launch of effective partnerships, which includes project management, support in convening stakeholders, planning and facilitating key meetings, analyzing local labor market conditions, and increasing capacity to ensure teams are aligned and focused on a vision for the partnership. Technical assistance must be provided by a nonprofit experienced with similar programs in other states.

(i) By December 1, 2025, the department shall submit a report to the chairs of the education committee of the senate, the education administration committee of the house of representatives, and the education instruction committee of the house of representatives evaluating the successes and challenges of the pilot program.

(j) This section is repealed on December 1, 2025.

SECTION 3. This act is not an appropriation of funds, and funds must not be obligated or expended pursuant to this act unless the funds are specifically appropriated by the general appropriations act.

SECTION 4. This act takes effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.

Amendment No. _____

Signature of Sponsor

FILED
Date _____
Time _____
Clerk _____
Comm. Amdt. _____

AMEND Senate Bill No. 999

House Bill No. 849*

by deleting all language after the enacting clause and substituting:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 6, Part 3, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

(a) This section is known and may be cited as the "Rural Schools Innovation Act."

(b) As used in this section:

(1) "Department" means the department of education;

(2) "Rural area" means a geographic area that is not an urban area;

(3) "Rural district" means an LEA in a rural area that serves students in any of the grades nine through twelve (9-12);

(4) "Rural pathway partnership" or "partnership" means a cooperative between at least two (2) rural districts, at least one (1) institution of higher education partner; and at least one (1) workforce-focused entity; and

(5) "Urban area" means a geographic area delineated as an urban area by the United States census bureau following the 2020 decennial census.

(c) The department shall create and implement a two-year pilot program that awards grants to rural pathway partnerships to expand access to high-quality college and career pathways for students in grades nine through twelve (9-12). The department shall begin accepting grant applications for the pilot program no later than September 1, 2023, and shall distribute grants to partnerships no later than December 1, 2023.

(d) To be eligible to receive a grant pursuant to this section, a partnership must:



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(1) Be evidenced by a memorandum of understanding that must, at a minimum:

(A) Be an agreement between:

(i) At least two (2) rural districts, but not more than three (3) rural districts;

(ii) At least one (1) institution of higher education partner; and

(iii) At least one (1) workforce-focused entity;

(B) Specify the roles and responsibilities of each signatory;

(C) Include the rural pathway partnership's goals that include, at a minimum:

(i) Ambitious and measurable performance goals for students enrolled in the partnership's rural districts in grades nine through twelve (9-12) that are aligned with college and career readiness measures and longitudinal postsecondary participation and employment outcomes; and

(ii) Expanding access for the students enrolled in the partnership's rural districts in grades nine through twelve (9-12) to high-quality, robust college and career pathways that are aligned with regional labor market projections for high-wage, high-demand careers, and that are supported by partnerships with regional higher education and workforce organizations to align systems, smooth transitions, and facilitate early college credit and work-based learning opportunities for students; and

(D) Include the resources each signatory agrees to contribute in the interest of achieving the goals identified in the rural pathway partnership's agreement;

(2) Explain how grant funds will be used to achieve the goals specified in the memorandum of understanding;

(3) Identify the nonprofit organization that will provide technical assistance to the partnership for the design and launch of the partnership;

(4) Explain how the college and career pathways the partnership plans to implement are aligned with the regional labor market projections for high-wage, high-demand careers; and

(5) Identify the LEA that will serve as the fiscal agent for the partnership for purposes of the grant.

(e) Subject to appropriations, the total amount of grants provided to partnerships pursuant to this section is three million dollars (\$3,000,000). The department shall award a grant pursuant to this section to one (1) partnership from each grand division that meets the requirements of subsection (d). If multiple partnerships from one (1) grand division apply and qualify for a grant pursuant to this section, then the department shall award the grant to the partnership that has submitted the strongest partnership agreement, as determined by the department, that is best aligned with regional workforce needs, and has presented evidence of the partnership's preparedness to meet the needs of the students enrolled in the partnership's rural districts. For purposes of this subsection (e), a partnership's location is determined by the domicile of the partnership's fiscal agent identified pursuant to subdivision (d)(5).

(f) If a partnership receives a grant pursuant to this section, then the partnership shall:

(1) Be governed by a coordinating intermediary organization that:

(A) Is constituted as a legal entity authorized to contract and employ staff in this state;

(B) Establishes a governing body that is made up of members representing kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) education, higher

education, and workforce leaders in this state to encourage collaboration across systems;

(C) Employs at least one (1) person with knowledge and skills necessary to lead the development and implementation of a rural pathway partnership;

(D) Operationalizes the partnership;

(E) Creates college and career pathways for the students enrolled in grades nine through twelve (9-12) in a rural district of the partnership; and

(F) Establishes the budget for the partnership;

(2) Not use more than seventy percent (70%) of the grant funds it receives to implement its partnership agreement;

(3) Ensure that the partnership's coordinating intermediary organization receives a sufficient portion of the seventy percent (70%) allocation to enable it to effectively fulfill its responsibilities, as provided in subdivision (f)(1); and

(4) Use at least thirty percent (30%) of the grant funds it receives to contract with a nonprofit organization with the ability to provide the technical assistance necessary to enable the design and launch of an effective partnership that includes, but that is not limited to, project management, support in convening stakeholders, planning and facilitating key meetings, analyzing local labor market conditions, and increasing capacity to ensure teams are aligned and focused on a vision for the partnership. Technical assistance must be provided by a nonprofit experienced with similar programs in other states.

(g) The department shall:

(1) Study and evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot program; and

(2) Submit a report, by December 1, 2025, to the chairs of the education committee of the senate, the education administration committee of the house of

representatives, and the education instruction committee of the house of representatives on the department's evaluation of the pilot program.

(h) This section is repealed on December 1, 2025.

SECTION 2. This act is not an appropriation of funds, and funds must not be obligated or expended pursuant to this act unless the funds are specifically appropriated by the general appropriations act.

SECTION 3. This act takes effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.