

The Quorum Report

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SENATE PASSES TOP 10 PERCENT COMPROMISE

New plan comes complete with tuition scholarship program.

Sen. Florence Shapiro (R-Plano) passed her **10 Percent Rule Compromise** this afternoon, along with an amendment by **Sen. Royce West** (D-Dallas) to sunset the program in 2015.

West admitted on the floor today he knew how to count the votes, and he knew this was the best compromise he could get on the bill, which is intended to address the growing lack of flexibility for universities that have no option but to accept students in the Top 10 percent of their class.

The one university under serious constraints right now is the **University of Texas**. As Shapiro noted, the percentage of Top 10 percent students at the University of Texas in 1996 was 42 percent. This year, the proportion had risen to 71 percent, giving UT little or no discretion in admissions. By comparison, **Texas A&M University** sits at 44 percent.

The revised 10 Percent Rule would work like this: A qualified university would be required to accept its first 50 percent from the Top 10 percent. Given the size of the class, that could mean a much higher cut off, possibly the top 7 or 8 percent of high school classes. Then the next 10 percent of admissions would come from the Top 10 percent, but university acceptance could be based on holistic measures. The bill also guarantees a student will get his or her second choice, if not the first choice.

Sen. Leticia Van De Putte (D-San Antonio) said the new compromise came with safeguards at the behest of **Senate Democrats**, including an additional \$4 million in financial aid to universities that use the plan; vigorous reporting and accountability measures to ensure broad inclusion; appropriate notification to qualified high school students; and increased outreach efforts for state universities.

The other major compromise passed on the bill was a tuition scholarship program passed by **Sen. Steve Ogden** (R-Bryan). The scholarship program would provide reduced in-state tuition to all students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their class.

A decade into the Top 10 percent rule, lawmakers agree universities are more diverse than they've ever been, both geographically and ethnically. But it also means that high achievers at larger high schools -- in some high schools, even a 4.0 GPA and a strong SAT score does not

guarantee Top 10 percent -- are left behind their peers, simply because they come from a competitive school.

Sen. Jane Nelson (R-Lewisville) told the chamber she recognized the goals of the Top 10 percent law, but she also recognized the unintended consequences it had in some of her district's high schools. Parents call Nelson's office -- some irate, some crying -- who don't understand why their child can't get into the university of his or her choice.

"It's killing me to try to explain to those parents why I voted for legislation that put their child in that position," Nelson told West, later adding, "I'm going to ask you -- while we meet the needs of a certain segment of our students -- that you also consider the concerns of the students and parents who have to send their children to an out-of-state university instead of one of our fine schools."

Other amendments failed passage, including two amendments to abolish the Top 10 percent rule: one by **Sen. Kel Seliger** (R-Amarillo) and the other by **Sen. Dan Patrick** (R-Houston.) An amendment filed by Patrick to cut the acceptance of out-of-state students in half failed, along with an amendment by Nelson to sunset the Top 10 percent in two years in order to consider a full review of college admissions.

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