

SUBJECT: Limiting funding under the Texas Academic Skills Program

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 8 ayes — Rangel, Solis, Bailey, Cuellar, Dunnam, Kamel, Rabuck, E. Reyna
0 nays

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, March 13 — voice vote (Gallegos, Luna, Truan registered nay)

WITNESSES: For — Marc Nigliazzo, Texas Association of Community Colleges; Jack Strong, National Evaluation System
Against — Tom Cameron; Kelly L. Presser
On — Kenneth Ashworth; Anna L. Harris; Robert Leibman; Scott Nelson, Texas Community College Teachers Association; Faye Thames, Texas Association of College Teachers

BACKGROUND : The 72nd Texas Legislature created the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) test to ensure that students enrolling in institutions of higher education have minimum skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. Students are required to take the test before they complete nine hours of college course work. Students failing all or part of the test are assigned to remedial course work to prepare them for the college curriculum, and then take the TASP again to measure their progress. Students must pass all three parts of the TASP before they can complete more than 60 hours or graduate from a public institution of higher education.

DIGEST: CSSB 729 would eliminate funding to general academic teaching institutions for developmental — renamed from “remedial” — course work taken by a student in excess of 18 semester credit hours, and to junior colleges or technical institutes for developmental course work in excess of 27 hours. The Higher Education Coordinating Board would be required to develop a performance funding formula by which institutions would receive

additional funding for each student successfully completing developmental courses.

CSSB 729 would stipulate that students would have to take the TASP before enrolling in any course work. The coordinating board could prescribe procedures whereby a student who had not been tested could enroll or an alternative test instrument could be used by an institution. Students would be exempt from TASP if they had exceeded exit-level assessment minimums as provided by the coordinating board and enrolled within three years of the assessment.

The coordinating board and Texas Education Agency would work together to encourage, but not require, students who had successfully completed exit-level high school assessments to take the TASP while still in high school. High school students would pay for the test unless funds were appropriated for that purpose. High school students' passing TASP scores would be valid for five years.

Students could proceed past the 60-hour mark without passing a given section of the TASP if they earned a grade of "B" or better in a freshman-level credit course in the relevant subject matter.

The coordinating board would annually summarize students' performance in developmental education to their high schools, and summarize by institution of higher education the progress of students through developmental education programs. Each school district receiving a report on more than five students would include the number as part of their annual performance report.

CSSB 729 would take effect September 1, 1997. The requirement that students be given the TASP before enrolling would be effective beginning with the fall semester of 1998.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSSB 729 would limit the growth of an unwieldy and unsuccessful state program that has become an increasingly expensive proposition for state government to support. In the fiscal 1988-1989 budget cycle, spending on developmental education was \$38.6 million. In the current budget cycle, expenditures have quadrupled, to \$153.4 million. Furthermore, the

increased spending has not improved the program's results: only 42 percent taking the TASP after remedial work pass math, 58 percent pass reading, and 78 percent pass writing.

Although some borderline students have benefitted by developmental education, many students repeat developmental courses without improving their academic performance or ability to pass the TASP. A few semesters of developmental course work cannot compensate for an entire academic career lacking in the basics, and recycling such students continually through the developmental system is a disservice to the students as well as to the taxpayers who are subsidizing the process.

CSSB 729 would provide a financial incentive for schools to succeed in the developmental education they do undertake by increasing formula funding for students passing the TASP after taking developmental courses. Developmental education should be focused where it can do the most good, i.e., on those students who only need a little extra help in college. The bill would ensure that such students were provided with the help they need, while limiting the expense of time and energy on repeating courses that are not achieving the goals they set out to achieve.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSSB 729 would have the effect of responding to a house fire by turning off the fire alarm. The fact that around 40 percent of students arrive unprepared at Texas colleges and universities is certainly cause for action, but the state should be supporting instead of curtailing, efforts to help these students assimilate to college level work. The bill would settle for serving those students who are easiest to educate and abandon those with more severe difficulties and who have the highest probability of dropping out.

Although it is true that developmental course work at some institutions has not been successful, institutions should be encouraged to enhance their programs, not abandon them. Measures such as more comprehensive evaluation, better training for teachers, and collaboration with community colleges could help improve students' success level in developmental courses. CSSB 749 would limit funding to developmental education at a time when it needs even more funding in order to achieve its imperative objective of educating all students in Texas.

NOTES:

The committee substitute changed all references in the bill from “remedial” to “developmental” education. The substitute provided that students could proceed past the 60 hour mark without passing a given section of the TASP if they earned a grade of “B” or better in a freshman-level credit course in the relevant subject matter. The substitute established new reporting requirements for high schools on graduates' participation in developmental education, and replaced caps on subject areas by one overall cap for developmental courses.