

- SUBJECT:** Replacement of the TASP test for undergraduate students
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Rangel, F. Brown, Farabee, Goolsby, Morrison, E. Reyna, Wohlgemuth
- 0 nays
- 2 absent — Cuellar, J. Jones
- WITNESSES:** For — Ray Arellano; Norma Cisneros; Eva T. Garcia; Rolando P. Garza, LULAC Council No. 1; Charles Johnson, Tyler Junior College; Chuck McKinny; Marc Nigliazzo, Texas Association of Community Colleges; Margarita Viveros
- Against — Dolores Segura.
- On — Brian Dille and Patsy Goss, Texas Community College Teachers Association.
- BACKGROUND:** In 1986, the Texas Legislature created the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) to test entering undergraduate students for deficits in basic math, writing, and reading skills. The program required students who did not pass the test to take remedial developmental courses and to pass the TASP before taking upper-division college courses.
- In 1997, the Legislature created the core curriculum — at least 42 hours of basic college courses transferable to other institutions. Students who failed a portion of the TASP but completed a freshman-level core course in that area with a B-average are TASP-certified. However, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board rules do not allow students to take core courses in areas students have failed unless they complete developmental courses first.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 2591 would replace the Texas Academic Skills Program with assessment plans developed by individual colleges and universities for entering freshmen students. The plans would include testing and placement programs for students, plus developmental education courses to help students

with their individual needs for improving basic skills. The plans would have to be approved and the tests prescribed by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board no later than September 1, 1999. The board could not adopt criteria for degree programs at proprietary schools that were more stringent than those for degree programs at the same level offered by institutions of higher education.

The board would determine whether each university's plan involved effective delivery of, and accountability in, developmental education, including appropriate performance measures. The board would have to prescribe more than one test instrument.

The bill would direct the coordinating board to adopt rules to ensure quality and effectiveness of developmental programs, consulting with an advisory committee. The majority of committee members would have to be college and university faculty. Board reporting requirements would be amended to include information on students entering and completing developmental education programs and satisfying the requirements of their institution's plan.

Unless exempted, a student would be tested in reading, writing, and math prior to enrolling in core college curriculum. If a student had completed one semester of developmental education in any area identified as a problem area for the student, the student would be allowed to enroll in core classes. A student only would be allowed to enter upper-division courses after completing the plan's requirements or completing core curriculum courses with a 2.25 grade point average.

Newly exempted from testing would be students who passed high-school exit exams as long as they enrolled in college within five years, instead of three years as now, or passed national college tests with a score determined by the board. Other new exemptions would include enrolling at an independent or out-of-state college or university, being 35-years-old or older, or being on active duty in the military.

A public junior college or public technical college could award a certificate to a person who did not complete the assessment and placement requirements if the student enrolled and completed all other academic or other requirements for completion of the certificate program before the effective date of the bill and paid all required fees.

CSHB 2591 would leave in place other non-conflicting exemptions from the test, but would eliminate the exemption for non-degree or certificate seeking students who are 55-years-old or older.

CSHB 2591 would take effect with the 1999 fall semester. However, this bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

TASP has become more of an obstacle for students than an educational tool. The intent of TASP was to make sure students were better prepared for college and to prevent them from getting in over their heads, leading to the risk of failing courses or quitting school entirely. Instead of helping to assess student needs, TASP requirements have prevented many students from continuing their educations. They have been blocked because of deficits in one or more basic skills, even when they have been successful in other educational areas. Enrollment in some colleges has dropped due to TASP requirements.

The cost of developmental education has skyrocketed. When TASP first began, the state spent about \$39 million on developmental education. Now, the state spends more than \$170 million.

CSHB 2591 would provide a much more flexible way of achieving the original goals of the TASP program. It would allow colleges to develop their own programs to tailor developmental education to students' needs. At the same time, the coordinating board would have the power to enforce program quality.

The bill would provide exemptions for students who prove their preparedness in other ways or who would be unfairly penalized by assessment and placement programs. For example, military members on rotation might not have the time to complete testing and meet standards before being reassigned to another base. This bill would help open more educational doors to military personnel.

TASP has created problems for people successfully completing requirements for certificate programs. For example, an individual could pass curriculum requirements in cosmetology, only to be unable to receive a certificate due to

the TASP test. This prevents people who lack certificates from making higher salaries. Some students have given up on the idea of enrolling in certificate and technical programs due to TASP requirements.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

Studies show that students with a mastery of basic skills are more likely to succeed in college. TASP has provided a high quality, universal standard for all schools to meet. Before the TASP was implemented, officials at many colleges felt it was up to students themselves to make sure they were prepared for higher education. If students lacked basic skills, it was their responsibility to seek out the remedial education they needed.

TASP was effective in turning that philosophy around. Today, higher education officials are actively working with students to make sure they know that developmental education opportunities are there, and to ensure that students have the basic skills to succeed before they go forward with the core curriculum. The state and taxpayers benefit from a statewide developmental education requirement.

Last session, the Legislature made several changes to the TASP law. Two years is not enough time to implement and evaluate those changes. This sweeping change in the TASP program is premature.

NOTES:

The committee substitute changed the original bill by:

- ! requiring each plan to be reviewed and approved by coordinating board and mandating that performance measures must meet coordinating board standards;
- ! adding that a student could start taking curriculum courses after completing one semester of course work in any developmental education area in which the student had failed;
- ! exempting 35-year-old students rather than 30-year-olds;
- ! leaving funding formulas for developmental education as current law prescribes instead of implementing a full-scale version of the incentive program prescribed by the general appropriations bill;
- ! adding the regulatory provisions for proprietary schools; and
- ! exempting certificate-seeking students.

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According to the fiscal note, the CSHB 2591 exemptions for students seeking certificates, students over age 35, and students on active military duty would save \$1.4 million each fiscal year in developmental education costs.