

- SUBJECT:** Replacing the TASP test with a higher education remedial program
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Rangel, F. Brown, Farabee, Goolsby, J. Jones, Morrison, E. Reyna, West
0 nays
1 absent — Uher
- WITNESSES:** For — Dr. Robert Aguero, Dr. J. William Wenrich, Dallas County Community College District; Dr. Ramon H. Dovalina, Robert Ochoa, Jesse Porras, Laredo Community College

Against — Chuck Hempstead, Texas Association of College Teachers; Dr. John Huber

On — Dr. Vance Gipson, Odessa College; Rene Lara, Texas Federation of Teachers; Jack Strong, National Evaluation Systems, Inc.
- BACKGROUND:** Under Education Code, sec. 51.306, students at Texas' public colleges and universities who perform below certain standards on high school exit-level exams, the American College Test (ACT), or the Scholastic Assessment Texas (SAT) must take the three-part Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) examination or a correlated alternative test instrument. TASP is intended to measure students' reading, writing, and mathematics skills before enrolling in college level classes. Those who fail any portion of the test must take a remedial class in that area.

TASP is intended to measure whether potential undergraduates are capable of doing college-level course work and whether developmental or remedial courses must be taken in conjunction with regular courses. The corresponding exam for deaf students is the Stanford Achievement Test, nationally normed on the hearing-impaired population by Gallaudet University.

Students may not enroll in any upper-division course (one that would cause them to accumulate 60 or more semester credit hours upon its completion) until their TASP results equal or exceed the minimum standards in each skill area for which developmental education is required, or until they earn a grade of “B” or better in a freshman-level credit course in the subject matter in which they fell short on the test.

Education Code, ch. 39.023(c) requires public schools to administer an exit-level Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) exam to 11th grade students to assess their essential knowledge and skills in mathematics, English language arts, social studies, and science. In 1999, the 76th Legislature enacted SB 103 by Bivins, which revised the standards upward for the TAAS exit-level exam to expand the covered subject matter and increase the difficulty of the exam starting in the Spring of 2003. In addition to basic subject matter, the 2003 exit-level exam will test students in Algebra I, geometry, English III, biology, and integrated chemistry and physics. Students must pass the exit-level TAAS exam in order to graduate from high school. They are given multiple opportunities to pass it.

TAAS testing begins when students are in 3rd grade and continues throughout their public school career. Students are assessed by TAAS in:

- ! mathematics every year in grades 3 through 7, without the aid of technology;
- ! mathematics every year in grades 8 through 11, with the aid of technology on tests that include algebra;
- ! reading every year in grades 3 through 9;
- ! writing every year, including spelling and grammar, in grades 4 through 7;
- ! English language arts every year in grade 10;
- ! social studies every year in grades 8 and 10; and
- ! science every year in grades 5 and 10.

Students who may be exempted from the TAAS include students in special education programs, students with limited English proficiency, or students with dyslexia.

DIGEST: CSHB 125 would rename the TASP test as the “higher education remedial program” and would replace the TASP test instrument with the English language arts and mathematics portions of the exit-level TAAS exam to be instituted in 2003. In addition, it would add testing on some components of Algebra II. It would delete all language relating to the TASP and replace it with references to the exit-level TAAS exam required under Education Code, sec. 39.023(c).

If a higher education institution allowed a student to enroll without taking the mathematics and English language arts portions of test administered to students in the 11th grade, the student would have to take the test no later than the end of the first semester of enrollment.

CSHB 125 would remove the authority of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to prescribe an alternative correlated test and would strike the provision that the higher education remedial program would not apply to a student who had accumulated three or more college level semester credit hours prior to the 1989 fall semester.

The bill would strike language exempting students who had passed the exit-level assessment from taking the TASP test, unless their ACT or SAT scores would otherwise exempt them from the TASP.

The bill would take effect June 1, 2004, and would apply beginning with the 2004 fall semester.

SUPPORTERS SAY: The TASP test no longer is needed because of new mandatory exit testing in public high schools. In 2003, TAAS standards will rise, and high school juniors will be required to pass a more difficult exit exam that will include testing in physics and geometry. This will require a strengthened curriculum in lower grades, and therefore, students should come to college better prepared with the abilities they need. Making the exit-level 11th grade TAAS test and the higher education remedial program essentially the same test would be a much more efficient way to test a student’s college readiness and measure a student’s achievement.

Most colleges and universities have their own departmental diagnostic and placement tests that they currently can use in conjunction with the TASP, and

many do. If the TASP were abolished, there still would be testing and developmental education; those would not go away. If they desired, schools simply could go back to the departmental testing and evaluation they were performing before TASP was instituted and do their evaluations in conjunction with the new remedial program.

TASP was intended to ensure that students were prepared for college, but it has resulted in significant educational delays for some students. In certain cases, students are spending two years taking remedial classes to pass the TASP test. This is expensive for students and for the state.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

TASP testing serves a useful purpose by ensuring that students are prepared sufficiently to succeed in college, and it should not be abolished. Two-thirds of the students tested each year fail at least one portion of the three-part test. These students obviously need remedial course work. Continuing to require a statewide, uniform assessment rather than a lower-level test that is used locally would ensure that all graduates of Texas public colleges and universities would possess minimum levels of basic skills and help identify those who may need remedial help.

Before the TASP was instituted, the success rate for students taking college math was 20 percent less than it is now. The TASP is doing what it was designed to do, which is to help place students in the proper course level so they can succeed. Some students who pass a 10th grade or even an 11th grade level test are very often not ready for college. Upgrading the TAAS is a good idea, but the measures outlined in CSHB 125 would not ensure college readiness.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

Since CSHB 125 would delete the “grandfather clause,” or the exemption for students who had at least three college level semester credit hours prior to 1989, it is unclear whether returning, non-traditional students would have to take the 11th grade exit-level test. Non-traditional students are first time students who have not gone to college, older students, or students returning to college after an extended absence.

Also, the bill would not address the administration of the new higher education remedial program. Currently, the TASP is administered by a private testing company at 125 locations throughout the state. This company

is responsible for all aspects of administering the test, including collecting the \$29 fee from students, providing for courier services to collect the tests from around the state, paying the room proctors, scoring the tests, and reporting the scores to the coordinating board. It also offers a test administrator conference once a year. By removing the administrative supports of the current TASP testing system, the bill could place more responsibility and possible financial burdens on each institution.

The start date for the implementation of the higher education remedial program should be delayed until 2006. The 11th grade exit-level TAAS test will have been administered only twice by the time CSHB 152 would take effect. Teachers need additional time to teach critical math skills to students so they can pass the harder TAAS. More time is needed to measure the impact of the new TAAS before administering it to higher education students.

Adding components of algebra II to the exit-level TAAS exam has not been discussed at this time.

NOTES:

The committee substitute modified the original bill by replacing the TASP test with specific portions of the 11th grade exit-level TAAS test, rather than eliminating TASP and eliminating the Stanford Achievement Test for students who are deaf. The substitute added the provision relating to the summary report.

About 15 bills have been introduced this session relating to the TASP test, including but not limited to HB 2109 by Farrar, HB 439 by Hupp, HB 234 by Hawley, HB 1645 by Delisi, all of which have passed the House and would exempt certain individuals from taking the TASP.