

SUBJECT: Exempting certain out-of-state transfer students from the TASP test

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Rangel, F. Brown, Farabee, Morrison, Uher, West
0 nays
3 absent — Goolsby, J. Jones, E. Reyna

WITNESSES: For — Genevieve Chancey Burnett
Against — None
On — Dr. Philip Uri Treisman, University of Texas at Austin

BACKGROUND: Under Education Code, sec. 51.306, most students at Texas' public colleges and universities must take the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) examination. Students may not enroll in any upper-division course until they pass the TASP if completing that course would cause them to accumulate 60 or more semester hours of credit. Sec. 51.306(r) exempts six separate categories of students from this requirement.

DIGEST: HB 1645 would add an exemption from the TASP test for transfer students who have accumulated 60 or more semester hours of credit at an accredited out-of-state college or university that awards baccalaureate degrees. The exemption would apply only to transfer students who enrolled at a public college or university for a semester or summer session beginning on or after the bill's effective date.

This bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2001.

SUPPORTERS SAY: The TASP is intended to insure that students are sufficiently prepared to succeed in college. Students who have been successful enough in their first two years at an accredited out-of-state college or university to gain admission to a Texas institution have demonstrated their ability to succeed in college and should not have to take the TASP.

Current law thwarts the goals of having students graduate in four years and of recruiting out-of-state students who might become skilled members of Texas' labor force. HB 1645 would help eliminate these problems.

Transfer students who already have completed 60 hours of course work often need only upper-division courses to complete their degrees. Under current law, if these students happen not to pass a section of the TASP — for instance, because they have not had a math class since high school or because English is not their first language — they cannot take any courses they need for their degrees until they pass the TASP or retake the equivalent freshman-level course and earn a grade of “B” or better. As a result, these students are unable to work on their degrees for a semester or a year. This is costly and discourages students from transferring to Texas' public colleges and universities.

Other students, such as those who already hold a degree or who receive high scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test or the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills exit exam, are exempt from the TASP because of their past academic performance. Transferring from an out-of-state school typically is difficult because Texas institutions must reserve most enrollment slots for Texas residents. A student who has completed 60 or more hours at an out-of-state four-year college or university and who has gained admission to a Texas public college or university is likely to have done well. Like other students exempted on the basis of academic performance, these transfer students should be exempt from the TASP. In fact, many already are exempt because they have earned a “B” or better in the relevant freshman-level courses.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

If transfer students are well prepared for college, the TASP test should be no problem for them, and they should pass it. If they have earned a “B” or better in the relevant courses, they will be exempt anyway. If they do not pass the TASP, they obviously need remedial course work. Requiring the TASP of all transfer students ensures that all graduates of Texas' public colleges and universities will possess minimum levels of basic skills and helps identify those who may need remedial help.

HB 1645 would favor out-of-state transfer students over students who transfer to a Texas institution from a private college or university in Texas. For example, a transfer student from Mississippi State University would not

have to meet TASP requirements, while a transfer student from Baylor University or Southern Methodist University would have to do so.

NOTES:

HB 1648 by Delisi and SB 1141 by West, which would eliminate the TASP altogether, are pending before the House Higher Education Committee and the Senate Education Committee, respectively. HB 3620 by Delisi, which would replace the TASP with a new Developmental Education Program test, also is pending before the House Higher Education Committee.