

SUBJECT: Exempting active-duty servicemen from the TASP test

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — F. Brown, Farabee, J. Jones, Morrison, Uher

0 nays

4 absent — Rangel, Goolsby, E. Reyna, West

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND: Under Education Code, sec. 51.306, most students at Texas' public colleges and universities must take the three-part Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) examination, or a correlated alternative test instrument, to measure their reading, writing, and mathematics skills before enrolling in upper-level classes. 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.

Sec. 51.306(r) exempts six separate categories of students from the TASP requirement. Sec. 51.306(g) exempts deaf students from taking the Stanford Achievement Test if they are enrolled in a certificate program of one year or less.

DIGEST: HB 234 would create a new exemption from the TASP test and from the Stanford Achievement test. Active-duty military personnel serving in the U.S. armed forces, stationed in Texas, and enrolled in a Texas institution of higher education would not have to take the TASP test. Similarly, deaf students on active duty would not have to take the Stanford Achievement Test.

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. It would apply beginning with the fall 2001 semester.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

TASP has become a disincentive to many older prospective students who want to resume or begin their college education. This is especially true of military personnel, who typically are stationed in Texas for two years. The TASP test requirement discourages enrollment, and any subsequent remedial coursework required delays graduation. Military personnel have limited time in Texas and are eligible for in-state tuition while stationed here. However, many are using electronic distance-learning programs and correspondence courses offered by schools in other states that do not require placement tests. This costs Texas schools money, particularly community colleges located near military installations.

HB 234 would help retain skilled workers in Texas after they leave active duty but would apply to a relatively small portion of the statewide student population — only about 2,300, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. According to the bill's fiscal note, it would save the state an estimated \$594,180 a year in developmental education costs for remedial courses that would not have to be taught, and it would save schools their share of developmental education program costs.

Military personnel are tested rigorously and have demonstrated by their enlistment and continued service that they have qualities needed to succeed in college, which standardized tests may not measure. Texas should not be discouraging them from furthering their education while stationed here.

Ending this disservice to the armed forces would not sacrifice the quality of education. So-called "casual" military students only taking a few courses and not seeking degrees still could defer developmental education. Degree candidates still could perform targeted and less time-consuming laboratory or self-paced coursework to satisfy TASP requirements. Schools still would evaluate new students in house, place them accordingly, and provide developmental instruction if necessary.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

TASP testing serves a useful purpose and should not be eroded with additional new exemptions. Two-thirds of the students tested each year fail at least one portion of the three-part test. Many military personnel may not have graduated from high school and may be ill-equipped for higher education. It benefits them and the schools to know in advance where they need remedial help. This information also could be useful to the military because of its emphasis on training and readiness.

HB 234 is unnecessary because TASP is not that heavy a burden. If a student is well-prepared for college, passing the TASP test should not be difficult. Most students spend no more than one semester in TASP-related remediation anyway. They also may have the options available for “casual student” deferral or targeted coursework.

Exempting military personnel from the TASP test would shift all the costs of testing, placing, and remediating those students onto the schools, which already are receiving less tuition from many military students than they otherwise might because of the in-state tuition provision.

Military personnel, while performing laudable and much-needed duties, do not deserve preferential college-placement treatment any more than any other professional or government employee.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

Exempting active-duty military personnel from TASP would not necessarily preclude them from placement testing or remediation. Many schools do so on their own, so HB 234 may not solve all the problems it seeks to address.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 179 by Fraser, which passed the Senate by 30-0 on March 13, was reported favorably as substituted by the House Higher Education Committee on March 27, making it eligible to be considered in lieu of HB 234. As passed by the Senate, SB 179 would exempt military dependents as well from the TASP test.

A related bill, HB 439 by Hupp, which would exempt military personnel with fewer than 10 semester credit hours and their dependents from TASP test requirements, was reported favorably by the House Higher Education Committee on February 20.

HB 2109 by Farrar, which would exempt students from the TASP test if they achieved at least a 3.0 grade-point average in their high school college-prep courses, passed the House on April 11 by 146-0-2.

HB 1645 by Delisi, which would exempt certain transfer students from the TASP test, passed the House on March 22 by 139-0 and has been referred to the Senate Education Committee.