

SUBJECT: Replacing the Texas Academic Skills Program with the Success Initiative

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Morrison, F. Brown, Chavez, Giddings, Goolsby, Mercer, Nixon

0 nays

2 absent — J. Jones, Smithee

WITNESSES: For — Robert Aguero, Dallas County Community College District; Cissy Ellis, Career Colleges and Schools of Texas; Patricia Hodges

Against — William Gorth, National Evaluation Systems; Chuck Hempstead, Texas Association of College Teachers; Mary Leonard; Dorothy Martinez; Sibyl Noack; Tobin Quereau; Dolores Segura

On — Teri Flack, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; Cherry Ross Gooden and Gayla B. Thomas, Texas Southern University

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 an equivalent test to measure their reading, writing, and mathematics skills before enrolling in upper-level courses. 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 maximum 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. Students who have achieved a minimum score on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the American College Test (ACT), or on high school exit-level assessment tests need not take the TASP.

Education Code, sec. 51.3061 requires deaf students enrolled at higher education institutions to take the Stanford Achievement Test for assessment purposes, except for students enrolled in certificate programs of less than one year or those serving on active duty in the armed forces.

DIGEST: CSHB 796 would repeal Education Code, secs. 51.306 and 51.3061, and would establish the Success Initiative to assess the readiness of entering college students and to provide advising and educational support for students who are not ready to enroll in college coursework.

Higher education institutions would have to assess the academic skills of each entering undergraduate student to determine the student's readiness to enroll in freshman-level academic coursework. An institution could not use the assessment or the results of the assessment as a condition of admission.

Students who had achieved scores designated by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) on the SAT or the ACT within the previous five years, or on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) for the previous three years, would be exempt from the Success Initiative requirements. Institutions could exempt non-degree-seeking or non-certificate-seeking students from the requirements.

THECB would have to designate assessment instruments for use by higher education institutions. If practical and feasible, the board would have to designate the TAKS as the primary assessment instrument by September 1, 2005. This requirement would expire on September 1, 2006. The assessment instruments would have to be diagnostic and designed to assess a student's readiness to perform freshman-level academic course work. Individual institutions could adopt more stringent assessment standards with respect to student readiness.

If a student did not meet assessment standards, the institution would have to work with the student to develop an individual plan to help the student become ready to complete freshman-level academic course work. The student could be referred to developmental course work as considered necessary, but the institution could not require developmental education for a student that had been determined to be college-ready by another institution.

Each higher education institution would have to establish advising programs and other means by which students could develop the academic skills needed to complete college-level work successfully. A student could retake an assessment instrument at any time to determine readiness to perform freshman-level course work.

Each institution would have to determine when a student was ready to perform freshman-level course work. The determination could include retaking the assessment test or other means of evaluating student readiness. The institution would have to make its determination based on the student's individual needs.

CSHB 796 would require the Legislature to appropriate money for approved developmental courses, except that these appropriations could not be used for developmental course work in excess of 18 semester credit hours for a general academic institution and 27 semester credit hours for a public junior college, technical institute, or state college. THECB could develop additional formulas to supplement funding for developmental course work, including formulas for students who completed the Success Initiative.

CSHB 796 would not apply to students who held an associate or bachelor's degree, transfer students from private or independent colleges who had completed college-level course work satisfactorily, students enrolled in certificate programs of one year or less at a public junior college, technical institute, or state college, or students serving on active duty as members of the armed forces.

Each higher institution would have to report annually to THECB on the effectiveness of the Success Initiative. THECB would have to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative on a statewide basis and with respect to each higher education institution. THECB would have to adopt rules for the administration of the Success Initiative as soon as practicable after the bill's effective date and could adopt emergency rules as necessary.

The 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, 2003.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 796 would eliminate an obstacle to higher education for thousands of Texas students by replacing the TASP test with a more appropriate and individualized assessment method. The bill would give higher education institutions more responsibility and flexibility in determining the appropriate levels of student assessment and would give students the level of help they need.

In the 12 years since the TASP was adopted, changes in the state's system of testing and accountability have reframed the education debate and have made the TASP redundant and duplicative. Next year, high school students will be required to pass the TAKS to graduate from high school. This will provide sufficient information about students' readiness for college-level courses. The bill would not prevent institutions from using the TASP as an assessment tool, and many might choose to do so for nontraditional students.

CSHB 796 would replace the one-size-fits-all approach of the TASP test with a program that would meet each student's individual needs, whether it be a student who needed a basic review of geometry or one who needed intensive assistance with college-level reading and writing. The bill would not eliminate the need for developmental courses, but it would ensure that these courses were more customized and directed. By limiting appropriations for developmental education courses, the bill would ensure that institutions would not make excessive use of developmental education for funding purposes. The bill would not eliminate developmental education because this component is an accreditation requirement for most institutions.

The bill would ensure that a student who had been deemed college-ready by one institution would not have the burden of proving this again as part of a transfer to another institution.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 796 would dismantle more than a decade of progress in preparing students to succeed in higher education by replacing an effective standardized method of identifying students who need developmental education with a patchwork system that could cause many students to fall through the cracks.

The TASP has proven effective in identifying students, particularly nontraditional students who have been out of school for some time, who may need academic support in particular subjects. Developmental education in these areas is critical to the student's ultimate success.

CSHB 796 would eliminate this assessment tool and many of the support systems that go along with it. Decisions about developmental education would be left to individual institutions, which would be likely to provide more limited resources because of the bill's limits on appropriations.

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NOTES: As filed, HB 796 would have repealed Education Code, secs. 51.306 and 51.3061, and eliminated references to the TASP in other sections of the Education Code.