

- SUBJECT:** Assessing school students for college readiness
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 6 ayes — Branch, Castro, Alonzo, Brown, Lewis, Patrick
0 nays
3 absent — Bonnen, D. Howard, Johnson
- WITNESSES:** For — Cynthia Ferrell, Texas Association of Community Colleges;
(*Registered, but did not testify:* Nelson Salinas, The Texas Association of Business; Justin Yancy, Governor’s Business Council)

Against — None

On — Tamara Clunis, David Gardner, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
- BACKGROUND:** The Texas Success Initiative, which became law in 2003, seeks to ensure that students enrolled in Texas public colleges have the academic skills to perform effectively in college-level coursework. It includes assessment, advising, developmental education, and student support services designed to ensure that students have skills to succeed in college.

In 2006, the Texas Legislature implemented college readiness initiatives to ensure that every Texas student was college-ready when leaving high school and had the skills to compete successfully in a global economy. It is a comprehensive system in which students progress from one level to another, prekindergarten through college. The initial step and foundation for creating a P-16 system is the development of college readiness standards.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 3468 would require a study of early college readiness assessments and a review of adult education assessments, make changes to developmental education offerings, authorize additional coursework for the Texas Success Initiative, and address formula funding recommendations for developmental education.

The bill would require the Texas Education Agency (TEA), in coordination with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, to study best practices and existing programs that offer early assessments of high school students to determine college readiness and provide intervention to address deficiencies before high school graduation.

TEA, in consultation with the coordinating board, public higher education institutions, and school districts, would submit a report to the state leadership, including the appropriate legislative committees, by December 1, 2012. The report would contain recommendations for promoting and implementing early assessments of college readiness that were diagnostic and early intervention models for preparing high school students for college coursework for which course credit could be earned. This section would expire January 1, 2013.

TEA, in consultation with the coordinating board, would have to review:

- various assessments, including certain end-of-course assessment instruments and any assessment proposed as a statewide model by the coordinating board under the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) for identifying students needing additional help preparing for college;
- various early intervention models, including summer bridge programs, college preparatory courses for high school credit, developmental education programs, including college readiness programs funded by the high school allotment, college study skills courses, and dual credit courses;
- the costs associated with different assessments and early intervention models; and
- the effectiveness of different assessments and early intervention models in preparing students for college coursework for which course credit could be earned.

Adult education assessment. TEA, in consultation with the coordinating board, would have to review the required adult education standardized assessment mechanism and recommend necessary changes to align it with TSI assessments to allow for proper placement of a student in an adult basic education course or to provide the student with proper developmental or English as a second language coursework.

Texas Success Initiative. The coordinating board would have to allow higher education institutions to offer various types of developmental

coursework that addressed various levels of deficiency in college readiness, as determined by a diagnostic assessment of a student's readiness to perform freshman-level academic coursework. The coursework could include:

- course-based programs;
- non-course-based programs, such as advising programs;
- module format programs;
- competency-based education programs; and
- concurrent developmental education courses and credit-bearing courses in the same subject area.

The coordinating board, in consultation with higher education institutions, would have to use evidence-based studies and existing data to study and analyze:

- assessment instruments that currently are or could be used by institutions to comply with the TSI, including the diagnostic reliability and cost-effectiveness of those assessment instruments;
- differentiated placements for developmental coursework based on a student's proficiencies or deficiencies in readiness to perform credit-bearing college coursework, as determined by a diagnostic assessment of readiness to perform freshman-level coursework, including the extent to which various types of placements resulted in or served efficient, cost-effective, and successful developmental education;
- whether the funding formulas as applied to developmental coursework resulted in efficient and cost-effective implementation of successful developmental education; and
- whether any exemptions for particular categories of students should be retained.

The bill would require the coordinating board to submit the results of the evidence-based study to the state leadership, including higher education or state appropriations committees, by December 1, 2012. The study would have to include recommendations for, to the extent practicable, a statewide diagnostic standard assessment instrument under the TSI that allowed for:

- accurate diagnosis and targeted intervention for students needing developmental coursework;

- appropriate placement for the type and level of developmental coursework that allowed a student to receive developmental education in the most efficient, cost-effective, and successful manner; and
- the most effective use of formula funding for developmental coursework targeted to students' needs.

Provisions requiring the study of assessment instruments and the resulting report and recommendations would expire January 1, 2013.

The coordinating board would have to include in its periodic formula review recommendations for changes in funding formulas for developmental education based on the results of the study and the report submitted. This would apply beginning with periodic reviews submitted on or after December 1, 2012. This provision would expire January 1, 2015.

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, 2011.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 3468 would enhance adult education and developmental education in Texas by improving the timeliness of student completion in a cost-effective and meaningful way. This would help ensure that students were in a system that facilitated their success.

To compete in a global economy and to better prepare students for the future job market, the state needs to ensure that more high school students complete post-secondary education. Currently, across the country, 41 percent of students who start college are not ready for credit-bearing college level work. Accurate assessment and placement of underprepared students is critical to their chances for success in remediation coursework. Texas is losing too many students between high school graduation and the completion of developmental education.

A close examination of existing assessment and developmental education programs, successful early assessment pilot programs around the state, and best practices around the country would help the state to design a more responsive, cost-effective program for students and higher education institutions.

For example, El Paso Community College (EPCC) has implemented a comprehensive strategy to reduce the need for developmental education by collaborating with local school districts and the University of Texas at El Paso. This collaboration has aligned standards and expectations, provided early assessment and retesting options, and differentiated intervention such as summer bridge programs. Between 2006 and 2008, EPCC reported a 24 percent decrease in the need for developmental reading and a 37 percent decrease in the need for developmental writing. These kinds of statistics could be replicated across the state.

According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, about 50 percent of first-year community college students and 22 percent of first-year university students have enrolled in at least one developmental education course. Of those students, only 20 percent go on to earn a bachelor's degree. The 80 percent who do not graduate often are students who are strapped with debt and no real return on their investment. These numbers also reflect a waste of taxpayer money.

Given these staggering figures, it is imperative that students be appropriately identified and remediated in a timely, cost-effective manner. Mastering college readiness standards before postsecondary education would allow students to not only seek dual-credit opportunities while still in high school and gain the confidence to proceed into higher education, but also save them and the state time and money.

A review of the assessment for adult basic adult education (ABE) and alignment with the college readiness assessment required by the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) would more accurately identify students who should be placed in ABE. Currently, they often are misplaced in the developmental education system when they should be in ABE courses. Proper alignment would not only relieve the developmental education demand on postsecondary institutions but also prevent students from investing time and money in a course they would struggle to master. Recognizing that there are federal guidelines regarding adult education, the bill simply would require a review of potential coordination between adult education and TSI to ensure that students were appropriately placed.

In an effort to make developmental education programs more efficient and successful, the bill would require the coordinating board to use evidence-based studies and existing data to analyze college readiness assessments

that do or would comply with TSI in diagnostic reliability and cost-effectiveness.

The examination would include a review of differentiated placement for developmental coursework and whether or not the funding formulas for the coursework were efficient and cost-effective. Differentiated placement is for students who need limited remediation. The review would investigate the effectiveness of placing students in course-based or non-course based options that take into account work and life responsibilities in order to remediate as quickly as possible.

The success of existing programs and research done by Complete College America, an alliance of states working to advance higher education, shows that non-semester length courses or online refresher courses help in completion and in the retention of students in developmental education. These courses reflect the differing levels of deficiency.

Based on the study required by the bill, the coordinating board would have to submit a report recommending a statewide diagnostic standard assessment instrument that accurately identified students needing developmental education and appropriately placed those students in the level that was most efficient, cost-effective, and successful. The recommendations also would address the most effective use of formula funding for the corresponding developmental courses that target students' needs.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The adult basic education assessment instrument is based on federal requirements. There may be issues with attempting to align this test with the higher education assessment for entering undergraduates, which may not allow for a single adult basic education assessment instrument.

Other proposed legislation would reduce the amount of reporting required of state agencies, and the provisions of this bill would go in the opposite direction. At a time of limited state funding when agencies are being required to do more with less staff and less funding, including the possibility of further reductions in force, the reporting requirements in the bill would be burdensome and costly.