

SUBJECT: Eliminating use of standardized test scores for certain disabled students

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: *(After recommitted):*
6 ayes — Rangel, Solis, Bailey, Cuellar, Dunnam, Kamel

1 nay — Rabuck

1 present not voting — E. Reyna

WITNESSES: For — Jerry Hassell, Texas School for the Deaf Alumni Association; Tony McGregor; Oscar de la Torre

Against — None

DIGEST: CSHB 2725 would prohibit institutions of higher education from requiring applicants for admission to an institution or to a degree program, school, or college within the institution to report, submit, or disclose the results of standardized assessment, achievement, or admissions test if the student had a handicap that was reasonably likely to impair or interfere with performance on a standardized test.

The student would have to submit a signed statement from a licensed physician or other licensed health care provider that the handicap was reasonably likely to have that effect. A physician signing a false, misleading, or inaccurate statement would be subject to disciplinary action by the appropriate licensing agency.

These provisions also would apply to an institution of higher education, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, or any person acting on behalf of those organizations in disbursing scholarships or other financial aid.

The bill would take effect September 1, 1997, and apply beginning with admissions or awards of financial aid for the 1998 fall semester.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

CSHB 2725 would provide increased access to higher education to disabled students whose abilities cannot be measured accurately by standardized tests. For example, tests that depend on the use of verbal language to measure intelligence or vocabulary knowledge almost invariably measure the language difficulties experienced by deaf students rather than their intelligence or aptitude. This can have serious consequences for these students, as graduate school admissions committees are permitted to and sometimes do reject candidates solely on the basis of their standardized test scores.

Many institutions of higher education already recognize the inadequacy of this system. UT acknowledges in its *Graduate Catalog* that “Students who . . . because of a physical disability have not participated in traditional educational experiences may find that their performances on standard tests like the GRE do not adequately reflect their ability for graduate study. Applicants who feel that their . . . scores are not valid indicators of ability should explain their concerns in a letter to the graduate adviser of the program to which they are applying.”

CSHB 2725 would save applicants and universities this step by simply allowing persons with disabilities the option of not submitting their scores. Many schools, including the University of Texas Graduate School, automatically reject candidates with low standardized test scores without even considering their academic record or taking into account other considerations of talent and ability. CSHB 2725 would ensure that Texas schools would allow certain candidates to better demonstrate their abilities by grades, recommendations, a portfolio, or special project.

The bill would require that licensed physicians make the determination whether the “handicap” would impair performance. Licensed, trained professionals are competent to make these decisions and would have no incentive to make them dishonestly. A physician who is lying or misleading about a disability could face license revocation.

The provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act for “non-standard administration” do not make standardized tests fair for all disabled individuals. Although the extra time given disabled students helps some, it does not eradicate the basic unfairness of the test. In addition, the non-

standard testing is only held once a year, and this may exclude many individuals from taking advantage of it.

Access to higher education should not be dependent on standardized test scores that are not accurate predictors of an individual's ability. CSHB 2725 would be an important step in ensuring that all individuals, regardless of disability, received equal opportunity for an education in a Texas institution of public education.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

CSHB 2725 would create unnecessary hurdles for admissions officers. Under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, disabled individuals may be tested through a process called “non-standard administration” that compensates for their disabilities. This process allows disabled people to receive extra consideration while still providing some objective measure against which to judge their abilities.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

CSHB 2725 would not go far enough in curtailing the use of standardized test scores. Disabled students are not the only ones whose performance is not adequately measured by standardized test scores. Educators are increasingly recognizing the inadequacy of such scores to predict students' intelligence or performance in a university. A variety of private colleges and universities and the Harvard Business School do not use standardized tests for any students, whether disabled or not. Johns Hopkins medical school, one of the most prestigious in the country, does not consider students' scores on the MCAT as a factor in admissions decisions.

Although the goal of CSHB 2725 is admirable, the bill would not adequately provide for fair evaluation of disabled candidates for university admissions. There are several assessment methods that accurately predict the success of disabled individuals, and the bill should indicate one of these to ensure that some adequate and fair method of assessment is followed.

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NOTES:

The original version of HB 2725 would have prohibited the use of standardized test scores for any admissions decisions at public universities. The committee substitute limited the prohibition to admissions decisions involving disabled students.

HB 2725 was recommitted on a point of order on May 1. The committee substitute reported after recommitment is identical to the version reported earlier.