

SUBJECT: Administration of the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP)

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 8 ayes — Rangel, Cuellar, F. Brown, Farabee, Goolsby, J. Jones, Morrison, E. Reyna

0 nays

1 absent — Wohlgemuth

WITNESSES: For — Cecilia May Moreno; Minerva Rodriquez

Against — None

BACKGROUND: In 1986, the Texas Legislature created the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) to test entering undergraduate students for deficits in basic math, writing, and reading skills. The program required students who did not pass the test to take developmental courses and pass the TASP before taking upper-division college courses. Students must pay at least \$29 for each time they take the test. However, the law provides that if appropriations are made, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) will adopt a payment mechanism for the TASP test.

DIGEST: CSHB 2011 would give priority to students with financial need to have tests financed under criteria established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, in the event that the Legislature appropriated money to pay student costs for the TASP test.

The bill would require that the test be administered in a way that would allow students to work at their own pace. The coordinating board would prescribe the time period for administering the test. The bill also would require that school administrators have student permission to obtain test results.

CSHB 2011 would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 2011 is needed to reduce some of the burden that the TASP test imposes on students it was designed to help. The intent of TASP was to help make sure that students were prepared for college, to diagnose areas where skills needed improvement, and to prevent students from getting in over their heads in college courses, potentially leading to failure.

Instead, the TASP requirements have imposed a financial burden on some students. Although the test is not supposed to be a timed test, a TASP administration session is limited to five hours. This forces students who need to take more time for the test to pay for it twice just to complete the whole test. Establishing in law that the test must accommodate these students would solve this problem.

CSHB 2011 would lay additional ground work for assisting students by requiring that any state funds appropriated for paying the TASP fee must first go to students with financial need. The SAT and ACT tests both provide fee waivers for financially needy students. The TASP should follow suit. The average colonia family earns \$8,000 a year. To them and many other poor families, \$29 is significant.

Both the House- and Senate-passed versions of HB 1 by Junell, the general appropriations bill for fiscal 2000-01, includes \$98,720 in each fiscal year of the biennium for TASP test fee waivers. CSHB 2011 would ensure that the first waivers go to those most in need.

CSHB 2011 also would protect student privacy. The TASP is aimed at helping with college preparation. It is not to be used to measure high school success. School administrators should not be given access to TASP test results without a student's permission.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 2011 should mandate funding for TASP fee waivers. The SAT and ACT tests both provide fee waivers for needy students. By requiring students to pay fees before entering college, the TASP test discriminates against low-income students. The state should make the financial commitment to ensure equal access to all its citizens.

NOTES:

The original bill would have mandated that the coordinating board pay test costs for low-income students, and did not include the provision requiring student permission before test results could be released to administrators.

HB 2591 by Rangel et al., which would replace the TASP with an assessment and placement plan developed by each higher education institution, passed the House by 134-0 on April 23 and was referred to the Senate Education Committee.