
Higher Education Committee

HB 1559

Brief Description: Requiring development of a college mathematics placement examination.

Sponsors: Representatives Curtis, Fromhold, Haler, Newhouse, Walsh, Quall, Anderson, Priest, Moeller, Lantz and O'Brien.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the development of a common mathematics placement exam, with common cut-scores, to be used by all institutions of higher education.

Hearing Date: 2/22/07

Staff: Andrew Colvin (786-7304).

Background:

The institutions of higher education in Washington use a variety of tests and criteria to determine the appropriate mathematics course for entering students. The public baccalaureate (four-year) institutions, with the exception of The Evergreen State College, primarily use the Math Placement Test (MPT). Jointly developed by the four-year institutions in 1984, the MPT has two levels, Intermediate (pre-calculus), and Advanced (calculus). Specific placement and testing requirements vary by institution. For example, at the University of Washington, a student does not have to take the MPT if he or she took the Advanced Placement (AP) Calculus test and received a score of two or higher, while at Western Washington University and Eastern Washington University, a student needs a score of three or higher on the AP Calculus test. In addition, students are placed using advising, previous coursework, and other standardized test scores such as the SAT and the ACT.

Most community and technical colleges (CTCs) use placement tests as opposed to previous coursework, or AP tests, or other test scores to determine course placement. The CTCs generally use one of three nationally available placement tests. Most of the colleges use either the ASSET or the COMPASS, while some use the ACCUPLACER. The ASSET is a conventional multiple choice, paper-pencil test distributed by American College Testing, Inc. The COMPASS, issued

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by American College Testing, Inc., and the ACCUPLACER, developed by The College Board, are computer adaptive tests. Institutions that use the same placement test might still have different scores for determining student placement due to different course offerings and different program or academic requirements.

The Transition Math Project (TMP) was started in 2004 to address issues surrounding college readiness standards in math, including placement testing. It is a collaborative venture involving educators from K-12 schools, community and technical colleges, and baccalaureate institutions. The TMP is designed to help students successfully progress from high school math to college-level math. The TMP identified the math skills and knowledge high school graduates need to complete college-level work, meet minimum admission requirements, and avoid remediation upon enrolling in college. The TMP has completed work on the College Readiness Standards (CRS) in math, and current work involves aligning the MPT to the CRS.

Summary of Bill:

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, in consultation with the public four-year institutions, shall develop a common placement exam for college mathematics. The boards shall also establish common scores for determining placement in college mathematics courses. The exam and scores shall be implemented by the beginning of the 2008-09 academic year, and shall be used by all institutions of higher education when determining qualifications for college mathematics courses.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 22, 2007.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.