

**TOPIC:                    PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CCHE ADMISSIONS STANDARDS POLICY**

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**I.        SUMMARY**

State law (§23-1-113 C.R.S.) requires the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (the Commission) to review and revise the admission standards policy (CCHE policy I,F) by December 15, 2013. Statute requires the Commission to align the admissions policy with the state's description of postsecondary and workforce readiness, the Colorado Department of Education's new graduation guidelines and the state's remedial education policy. (Attachment A: §23-1-113 C.R.S.)

The Department of Higher Education (Department) appointed a task force to assist in this endeavor and make recommendations to the Commission. Task force members began their work in May 2012 and over 18 months established preliminary recommendations, vetted those recommendations with stakeholders around the state, and revised the recommendations. Based on the recommendations, the Department is now finalizing a revised admissions standards policy.

This Agenda Item presents for discussion key recommendations from the task force, a summary of proposed changes in policy, and a draft policy (Attachment B: Admission Standards Policy draft). The Commission will consider the policy for formal approval at its next meeting, scheduled for December 5, 2013.

**II.        BACKGROUND**

Colorado's groundbreaking 2008 Preschool to Postsecondary Education Alignment Act, more commonly known as CAP4K, requires that the Commission review and align the admissions standards policy with the postsecondary and workforce readiness description, adopted by the Commission and the State Board of Education in 2009. Subsequent legislation (HB 12-1155) further requires the Commission to ensure that academic admissions standards are aligned with the state's remedial education policy and allows the Commission, in developing new Admissions Standards, to take into account the rigor of a student's high school courses.

In 2012, within this context of increased emphasis on P-20 alignment, the Commission adopted Colorado Competes, the Master Plan for higher education. The Master Plan established four state-wide goals for higher education in Colorado: (1) increase attainment of credentials and degrees; (2) improve student success; (3) enhance access to post-secondary education while reducing attainment gaps among students from underserved communities; and (4) develop resources to allow institutions of higher education to meet enrollment demands while promoting

affordability, accessibility and efficiency. The Master Plan reflects a shift in higher education policy in Colorado from inputs – that is, enrollment – to outputs – student progress and success. With the completion of negotiated performance contracts, institutions are held accountable not just for the number of students they enroll, but more importantly, how students persist and succeed through to a degree.

### **POLICY REVIEW**

To assist in reviewing and updating the admissions policy, the Department appointed a task force in 2012 that includes representatives from all public higher education institutions, K-12, and other education representatives (see Attachment C: Task Force members). The task force was charged with reviewing the existing policy, establishing preliminary recommendations based on current and best practices, vetting those initial recommendations with institutions and other stakeholders, and providing final policy revision recommendations to the Department.

To carry out its work, the Task Force considered a wide array of data and information, including data on enrollment and student success from institutions and the Department; enrollment practices at institutions and how those practices have changed over time; progress on K-12 standards and assessments from the Department of Education; and ACT and College Board research on the validity of their assessments and the predictability of college success.

Department staff has worked closely with the task force throughout its review of the admissions policy. This process was deliberate and transparent (see Attachment D: Policy Review Process). As the task force began to review the current policy, it determined that it would not only make recommendations to adapt the Admissions Standards Policy to the statutory changes in HB12-1155, it also would recommend changes to the Policy that would better reflect current institutional practice.

### **TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Based on the research, data and presentations the task force received, the task force made the following recommendations:

#### **First-time Admission Standards**

1. *Replace the Index:* The Commission Admission Standards Index, created in 1987, should be replaced by a more flexible review of a student's academic background and performance, including the rigor of his or her coursework. The index score does not distinguish between achievement in general high school courses and performance in more advanced work such as higher levels of math or Advanced Placement classes. The new policy should allow for institutions to more accurately evaluate student achievement and preparation.
2. *Replace the HEAR requirements:* Colorado's Higher Education Admissions Requirements, (HEAR) should be replaced by a more flexible approach that includes other means of demonstrating readiness beyond the completion of a particular set of courses ("seat-time"). The task force recommends use of academic performance indicators, including rigor of coursework, grade point average and assessment score results. Rigor can include quality and quantity of courses completed – it is important that

students take the most challenging courses available and take such courses through their senior year.

3. *Incorporate New Assessments*: The policy should incorporate new assessments when available. New tests now being developed to replace Colorado's annual CSAP/TCAP exams should be used as one measure of college readiness when available. Colorado will begin administering the tests in 2014-15 and anticipates validation of testing procedures by 2016-17.

### **Transfer Admission Standards**

4. *Guarantee Admission for Community College Completers*: Students who successfully complete a two-year associate of arts or sciences degree at an accredited in-state institution should be guaranteed admission to a four-year Colorado college or university, provided they meet the receiving institution's minimum grade point average and have completed all community college courses with a grade of C- or better. Admission would not guarantee placement in a specific program.
5. *Update the Definition of a Transfer Student*: Transfer students should be defined as an applicant who has successfully completed college-level coursework at another regionally accredited institution after completion of high school or after earning a high school equivalency degree.

### **Communication Tool**

A successor tool to the Index would provide information on college-readiness in a transparent and clear way to high school students so they can better understand what they need to accomplish to gain admission to their institution of choice.

## **III. STAFF ANALYSIS**

Staff has distilled the recommendations provided by the task force into key proposed policy changes. The changes described below directly support the shift in focus from enrollment to student success. The changes seek to align postsecondary admissions expectations with high school graduation guidelines. Further, the policy increases flexibility for institutions to determine their own specific admissions requirements and increases the number of tools they may use to do so. The policy presupposes that institutions will develop admissions requirements and admit students whom they are best able to serve reflecting their statutory role and mission.

### **Staff Recommended Admission Standards Policy Changes**

#### **First-time Admission Standards**

##### *Academic Performance Indicators*

- Institutions will be required to establish and submit to the Commission for approval minimum admissions standards, using at least assessment scores (SAT and ACT; PARCC and Smarter Balance when they are validated), GPA and rigor. The following example is for illustrative purposes only:

Institution X

GPA 3.2

ACT: 27

Rigor: Student completed four years of college preparatory English; four years of mathematics with Calculus in the senior year; three years of science with two years of labs; two years of social sciences; 1 year of world languages; and 2 academic electives in his/her chosen career path.

- The Commission will review all standards and ensure they reflect institutions' role and mission and that institutions with the same selectivity have comparable standards, taking into account service areas and students served at different institutions.

Institutions may enroll up to 20% of students below their minimum academic standards, as allowed in Colorado statute. This is commonly referred to as "the window". *Assessment score standards must meet or exceed college-ready standards*, unless an institution is able to support the student adequately through SAI.

- If Institutions enroll students below college-ready standards and those students are not served through Supplemental Academic Instruction (SAI), they must report to the Commission by December 31st of that year explaining how the institution is supporting those students and how enrolling those students is consistent with the institution's role and mission.

### **Transfer Admission Standards**

*Academic Performance Indicators:* Institutions are required to establish and submit to the Commission for approval a minimum transfer grade point average (GPA). Transfer students must further have completed 24 credit hours and all required basic skills courses.

*Guaranteed Admission:* Students who achieve an Associate of Arts or Sciences with a minimum GPA will be guaranteed admission.

### **Communication Tool**

With the removal of the index, a new communication tool will help students understand which institution(s) would be the best academic fit. The Department will develop a tool, to be managed by College In Colorado, that will show each institution's mid-50 percent range of admitted students for GPA and assessment scores. This detailed information will help students better determine at which institution they could be most successful. Each institution will also be required to communicate their definition of rigor.

### **Next Steps**

The detailed policy, to be formally considered by the commission at its December meeting, provides more details on these policy directions. Department staff, in consultation with the task

force, has identified some areas that will require further consideration and Commission action after the December meeting:

- Policy development on how to implement “priority consideration” alignment with the postsecondary workforce readiness (PWR) endorsed diploma. Statute establishes that students graduating from high school with a PWR endorsed diploma will receive priority consideration from selective and highly selective institutions of higher education. Institutions have not yet come to agreement on what the term “priority consideration” means in the admissions process; staff continue to work with institutions to establish policy guidelines and clarity.
- Once the new policy is approved, Department staff will propose and ask the Commission to approve a timeline and process for implementation.
- Using the Colorado Department of Education’s (CDE) implementation timeline, the Commission will need to determine when institutions will begin to accept of PARCC and Smarter Balanced<sup>1</sup> scores as a college-ready indicator.

#### **IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**This is a discussion item intended to provide the Commission with the key proposed policy directions. The Commission will formally consider the proposed new policy in December.**

#### **V. STATUTORY AUTHORITY**

C.R.S. §22-1-113

#### **VI. ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: §23-1-113 C.R.S  
Attachment B: Draft policy  
Attachment C: Task Force Members  
Attachment D: Policy Review Process

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- <sup>1</sup> *\*Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced instruments are being field-tested nationally and by the Colorado Department of Education in an effort to implement and assess statewide college and career readiness standards for students. The research and validation studies will be available by 2016-17, at which point Colorado institutions of higher education will begin to use the approved college-readiness scores.*