

TOPIC: PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CCHE REMEDIAL EDUCATION POLICY

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I. SUMMARY

State law (§23-1-113 C.R.S.) requires the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (Commission) to review and revise the remedial education policy (Commission policy I, E) by December 15, 2013. Statute requires the Commission to align the remedial policy with the state's description of postsecondary and workforce readiness, the Colorado Department of Education's new graduation guidelines and the state's admission standards 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. The task force began its 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 remedial education 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: Remedial Education Policy draft). The Commission will consider the policy for formal approval at its next meeting, scheduled for December 5, 2013.

II. BACKGROUND

Colorado's remedial education policy provides criteria to be used by all public higher education institutions in the state in identifying students who need remedial courses in English and mathematics. The policy also lays out standards whereby institutions may offer remedial courses.

In reviewing the remedial education policy, the Department had three primary considerations: 1) aligning it with other state-wide policies (such as Supplemental Academic Instruction, now permitted at four-year institutions); 2) recalibrating the "cut scores;" and 3) considering differentiated placement in mathematics. The key component of Colorado's remedial education policy is the "cut score" – the level of performance at which a student is deemed to be ready for a college-level course in English or mathematics. The current cut score for English is 18, meaning a student scoring below 18 on ACT English would need a secondary evaluation to determine if he/she should be enrolled in remedial education. A student scoring 18 or above can be placed into a college-level English course. The policy review sought to recalibrate the existing cut scores against Colorado-specific data to determine whether the scores are an accurate predictor of a student's performance in college.

To assist in reviewing the remedial 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 information and data from the Department on state-wide remedial needs; best practices in remedial education from national organizations; a thorough review of related K-12 education reform efforts; and reports from experts on the validity of CSAP, ACT and other assessment scores and their predictability of college success.

Task Force Recommendations

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

1. *Increase the number of assessments that can be used to determine a student's placement:* Colorado colleges and universities have typically relied on ACT or SAT college entrance exam scores and the Accuplacer test to determine whether a student needs remedial classes. Results of PARCC state tests, which will replace the state CSAP/TCAP annual exams in 2014-15, could be used as well as results from Compass and Smarter Balanced tests.
2. *Provide for the use of SAI as an alternative to traditional remediation:* Students scoring at or above the cut score should continue to be considered ready for college-level courses. For some students scoring just below the cut score, colleges may determine through the use of a secondary evaluation process that a student may enter a college-level course with the use of co-requisite Supplemental Academic Instruction, such as a tutoring lab.
3. *Update testing timeline:* Currently a student's assessment test scores can be used for up to five years since he/she took the assessment. Consider using the test scores for three years after the assessment was taken.

III. STAFF ANALYSIS

Department staff has distilled the recommendations provided by the task force into the following key proposed policy changes and directions:

1. Increase the number of assessment options from ACT or SAT college entrance exam scores and the Accuplacer test to include Compass, PARCC and Smarter Balanced¹.
2. Maintain the same English and math cut scores. Task Force members and the Department data team reviewed Colorado-specific data and determined that the scores currently in use remain appropriate for determining student success. Students scoring at or above the cut score are ready for a college-level course. Colleges may determine through the use of a secondary evaluation that some students scoring below the cut score can be placed in a college-level course if accompanied by SAI.
3. Update the testing timeline: Currently a student's assessment test scores can be used for up to five years since he/she took the assessment. The proposed policy will allow institutions to use the test scores for three years after the assessment was taken.

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:

- The task force and Department staff focused to date on the ACT cut score (the most widely used cut score). During this same time that the policy review was taking place, the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) has revised its remedial education program and recalibrated corresponding Accuplacer scores. The Department's data team will evaluate the corresponding scores recommended by the CCCS and confirm that those should be adopted for use in the remedial education policy. The Department's data team will also establish corresponding cut scores for Compass.
- 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 Balanced² scores as a college-ready indicator.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

¹ *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.*

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.

VI. STATUTORY AUTHORITY

C.R.S. §22-1-113

VII. ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: §23-1-113 C.R.S.

Attachment B: Draft Policy

Attachment B: Task force membership

Attachment C: Policy Review Process