



**Report
Town Hall Meetings
August 5, 2013**

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History

In early May 2012, the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) contracted with The Civic Canopy to assist CDHE with the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) policy review process of the Admission Standards and Remedial Education. After a year of facilitating and assisting with the process, The Civic Canopy conducted a series of stakeholder focus groups and town hall meetings.

Committee Tasks and Process

The process was overseen by two main committees: the Admission and Transfer Committee and the Remedial Education Committee.

At the outset, the Admission and Transfer Committee was charged with:

1. Considering the effect of the current policy on student success;
2. Examining how HEAR (Higher Education Admission Requirements) and the Index calculations are ensuring students are prepared for college;
3. Embedding Colorado Academic Standards & national consortia assessments into the policy;
4. Aligning the statewide Admission Standards and Remedial Education policies;
5. Considering how the rigor of high school curriculum impacts the development of this policy; and
6. Developing admission criteria for the Postsecondary Workforce Ready (PWR) Endorsed Diploma.

The Remedial Education committee was charged with:

1. Embedding Colorado Academic Standards & national consortia assessments into the Remedial Education policy;
2. Considering the effect of current policy on student success in postsecondary education and considering alternatives/improvements to the policy to increase student success;

3. Creating a policy for implementation of Supplemental Academic Instruction (per HB12-1155);
4. Aligning the statewide Admission Standards and Remedial Education policies;
5. Considering how the rigor of high school curriculum may impact the development of this policy;
6. Considering differentiating placement procedures for math based upon declared program of study.

As the meetings took place and the work began, there was consensus among higher education professionals that there was a need to:

- Be more transparent with the policies and to acknowledge the reality of the admission process as being more than just the index and that the information about how the index was being used was just not that accurate; and
- Consider not just what allows a student to be admitted into a school but also what will give him or her the greatest chance of success to complete their higher education journey.

The process was initiated with individual reflection on committee members' own admission process or of students that they work with. The group spent time visioning hopes for what could be created to improve all students' ability to be admitted in to the institution where they could have success and complete their higher education quest. Participants committed to developing a shared understanding of the process and progress at each meeting. To aid in group functioning, and to be able to make decisions when the conversation became difficult, the group came to agreement on a decision making model and on a set of core values that were used to guide the policy revision process. Finally, the groups committed to establishing a list of bold ideas and emerging considerations for both policies.

Both committees spent a substantial amount of time at the beginning of this process exploring and understanding the complete picture of admissions, transfer and remedial education. The Admissions and Transfer committee had speakers that expounded on both the broader perspective of the goal of higher education as well as digging deep into specific admissions processes from various institutions. Topics and speakers included Department of Higher Education's Research (Dr. Beth Bean), Index Recalibration (Dr. Sonia Brandon), Local IHE Admission Selection Processes (presentations by Adams State University, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, the University of Colorado at Boulder), and a session on the national perspective with Torbet McNeil, among others. The Remediation Task Force dove into such topics as overviews of the Colorado Academic Standards, National Assessment Consortia, Colorado Assessment requirements, Graduation Guidelines and PWR Endorsed Diploma Criteria.

Initial agreements

As the two committees began their work, ideas for policy recommendations and questions began to take shape and there was a broad sense of agreement on the following ideas:

Regarding Admissions and Index

- There is more to a student than a GPA and a test score. BUT, the index is a baseline that provides institutions with a way to navigate a huge pool of students and is helpful for some universities.
- Policy should allow for colleges/universities to use criteria they know will reflect the likelihood for success in their particular intuition.
- The index is not necessary; we can do without it and we should find alternative methods.
- The index can be confusing and obscures our efforts to be transparent. This is also true for the “window”.

Regarding Transfer

- The transfer policy needs to be revised. Current statewide transfer policy is hugely out of date and expiration of transfer credits needs attention.
- Policy should be clear on what the admission policy is for transfers.
- We need to facilitate the transfer of associate’s degrees.
- We need to align with the trend toward the PWR endorsed diploma.
- We need to allow for program/major specific requirements and/or institution flexibility.
- We need to examine whether, and how, concurrent enrollment addresses grade forgiveness.
- We need to build a path for those who initially struggle then excel.
- We need to clarify what makes a transfer student.
- We need to address college-readiness via remedial policy.

Regarding HEAR (Higher Education Admission Requirements)

- Recognition that seat time does not equal mastery
- Need to explore and define “mastery”? There should be multiple measures for what mastery is, including a good mix of cognitive and non-cognitive. Keep in mind that mastery is expensive to measure for admissions offices.
- Recommendation to move away from HEAR, which does not equal college success
- Decisions around measuring mastery are important because recognizing that there are different ways for a student to learn course content in high school to become successful post-secondary opens up the door for education reform

Town Hall Meeting Structure

After meeting from May 2012 through March 2013 and crafting a set of policy recommendations, Town Hall meetings held town halls in eight different cities across Colorado:

- May 8 – Aurora Public Schools, Hinkley High School, 5-7 pm
- May 20 – Denver Public Schools, North High School, 5-7 pm
- June 3 – Sterling, Sterling High School, 3-5 p.m. and 5-7 pm
- June 4 – Colorado Springs, Education and Administration Center, 6-8 pm
- June 17 – Fort Collins, Colorado State University, Lory Student center, 1-3 pm, campus, and 5-7 p.m., community
- June 18 – Denver/Littleton, Arapahoe Community College, 4-6 pm
- June 24 – Durango, Durango 9-R Administration building, 5-7 pm (hosted by Fort Lewis College)
- June 26 – Grand Junction, Colorado Mesa University, University Center, 5-7 pm

Other focus groups included:

- Army
- BOCES
- CACTE
- CASE
- CCHE
- CCS VP of Student Services
- CESDA
- COCEAL
- Colorado Council
- Colorado PTA
- Concurrent Enrollment Advisory Board
- Department of Higher Education
- Education Leadership Council
- Southern Superintendents
- Statewide economic meeting

Meetings ranged from 10 – 40 participants and included diverse stakeholders including parents, community members, professionals in higher education and elected officials. Each meeting was unique, but all brought a different blend of perspectives. For example, the first meeting in Denver consisted of higher education administrators and high school counselors, while the Sterling town hall included two board members, a retired educator, an elementary principal who also worked with middle school and high school students, a manager of a lumber yard in town, four teachers, four counselors, four administrators, and parents.

The town halls meetings began with introductions, usually with a general “who is in the room?” question and individual introductions. Tamara White, Director of Admission and Access Policy, Colorado Department of Higher Education, presented the policy recommendations using a PowerPoint, followed by time for questions to clarify any questions on content. At that point, feedback was obtained through a large group question and answer session, and then the facilitators asked participants to break into small groups in order to obtain as much feedback as possible from each individual in the room.

Town Hall Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions*
2. Presentation – PowerPoint presentation delivered by Tamara White
3. Questions and Answer - Time for questions to clarify and check for understanding
4. Small group/pair conversations – Participants worked in small groups of 2 – 5 people and recorded their ideas and comments on the positive, challenges of the proposed recommendations.
5. Next steps – how can the community stay informed
**About midway through the Town Hall meeting process, facilitators added a reflection on personal or professional admissions process, to help set the framework.*

It is important to note that most participants were learning about the proposed changes for the first time, and were hearing it all over the course of a single two hour meeting as opposed to having the extensive conversations and debates that the two committees had to grapple with the content and develop recommendations. As the town hall meetings progressed, it was clear that the more participants knew about the proposed recommendations, the more substantial the conversations and feedback became.

Feedback from the Town Hall Meetings

Common Positive Comments

Admission Standards Policy Recommendations

1. Frequent mentions of the positive work in aligning with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). One meeting had a burst of applause because of the positive outcome of both CDE and CDHE working hand in hand, especially given that the graduation guidelines were being developed at the same time. There were requests “to keep it up.” The reciprocal working relationship could be attributed to the intentional effort to have representatives from K12 (counselor, CDE staff) on both the Task Force and the Advisory Committee for both committees.
2. Affirmation, at times a sense of relief in some meetings, around the idea that policy had to align with existing practice.
3. Holistic student focus - The idea that a student will be looked at with a more holistic approach and that institutions can look at a variety of indicators was greeted with positive feedback but it also generated a great deal of questions about implementation. The

consensus was that institutions of higher education would have more freedom to “look at a lot of things, the GPA, PARCC, rigor of classes.” The proposed changes “gives a student more of an opportunity to get into higher education because we are looking at more than one or two things.” Other feedback was that this policy will define “what is already happening.” But for some, the questions were critical of the proposed policy as it presents “too many options” for students to choose from, will be able to “talk their way in” and then not do well once there. There was also questions about “what to tell parents who are used to getting one number” with the Index.

4. Flexibility of new approach - Focus on competency demonstration, including HEAR
5. Modernization of outdated practices
6. Student-centered

Common Positive Comments

Remedial Education Policy Recommendations

Overall very positive -

1. Consensus that increase/add more assessments is a good idea.
2. Review data in reference to placement scores a good decision and a good practice.
3. Assess student ability based on the “whole student” not just test scores, like the “holistic” approach.
4. Determination of need for math based on student’s career choice aligns with ICAP.
5. Test scores - Accuplacer (Agreement that cut scores should not be the same for each subject).

Common Challenges

Admission Standards Policy Recommendations

1. At a fundamental level, a question heard several times was “why is there a problem” or “what is broken that needs to be fixed?”
2. Though there was some agreement on the elimination of the INDEX, there was pushback on the strong wording of the recommendations, “Eliminate the admissions index.” For some there was a fear – “now this is loopy goosey.” Parents like a clear, short list.
3. Incorporate new state assessments when available and validated. Communicating the importance of PARCC balanced with a concern about the “newness” of PARCC. The test itself is “untested.”
4. Consider the impact of concurrent enrollment with new policy.
5. Proposed changes will be a burden on high school counselors and a burden on admissions staff in higher education. Coupled with a fear that these positions are “the first to go” in a tough economy that demands cuts in staff.
6. Impact on changes to adult learners need to be considered
7. Communicating changes to first-time college students will be a challenge
8. Costs to rural districts due to changes, e.g., the capacity to offer more courses that provide increased rigor.
9. “Freaking out” over creating the new tool that will replace the Index
10. Concern that this will mean less accountability in the admissions process.

Other less often heard challenges

Admissions Standards Policy Recommendations

1. Recommendations are not specifically for adults. Specific populations were a repeat question in town hall meetings: returning students, out of state students, veterans, vocational students, non traditional students.
2. Need to review impact on standards.
3. Need to hold institutions accountable. Index is a first level screening tool and the process already has to “look deeper at each student.”
4. Impact on proposed changes on students applying to Community College.
5. Lots of questions about concurrent enrollment and transfer students.
6. Possibility of discouraging student if the admission criterion is not clear.
7. If communication is not clear the challenge is that the already existing divide between the “haves” and the “have not’s” in regards to information and access will continue to grow if the communication around the proposed recommendations was not clear
8. Communication needs to start early and most suggested middle school and some suggested elementary school.

Common Challenges

Remediation Education Policy Recommendations

1. How will this effect 8th graders once the plan begins.
2. Impact on bilingual students and students with special needs
3. Possible loss of efficiency when using a “holistic” approach.
4. Issues concerning credit retrieval.
5. Disconnect between good grades and low test scores.
6. Would like to see Remediation BEFORE high school.
7. Determine grading factors.
8. Work on college readiness.
9. Remediation discourages students.
10. Will address students who do not test well but get good grades overall

Common Questions

Admission Standards Policy Recommendations

1. When will the PARCC assessments be administered?
2. Has PARCC been used in other states?
3. How will competency demonstration be determined?
4. Would this be labor intensive? Admissions officers noted that they were not saying you can’t use sorting mechanisms. But are trying to give more tools to utilize. The Index is not the only tool, and what is known about the student can be used to demonstrate future student success. Also, for those students that are in the middle based on sorting tools, there are additional indicators to be considered.
5. What are the benchmarks? What are the tools?
6. Students coming to Colorado from non-PARCC states?
7. NCAA – is anyone looking at this from that perspective?

8. PARC and SPAC test – will they be administered at HS? College?

Overall Reaction

- Predominantly positive for both policy recommendations.
- As we went across the state some consistent questions regarding the Index.
 - Concerns about eliminating the index and suggestions to keep the Index as one measurement among other tools. There were questions about impact, implementation and consequences. The “elephant in the room” came up in particular in discussion regarding the Index. How do we hold institutions accountable? How to control for institutions reaching up or reaching down for students who under the current system are led to certain institutions? Will students be set up to fail? Will institutions have a higher failure rate because those students are not able to succeed because it is not a good fit?
 - Concerns about what to say to students and teachers about what colleges are looking for.
 - A “bracing” for how to implement change
- A call for the Department of Higher Education to hold institutions accountable
- A call to address the elephant in the room as Institutions of Higher Education are competitive and that drives too much policy. The focus needs to be student centered with “successful admission leading to successful completion” being the goal.
- Questions about concurrent enrollment and the details around the policy.

There was a perception that in the move to become more transparent, the proposed changes were also making it less transparent (removing the number and expanding the variables) while at the same time it was cheered as more transparent for the same reasons.

Evaluation of the town hall meetings

Positives

- Clear presentation, advance input
- Informalness was great and chance to talk to and hear from others present
- Community based and engaging
- Comfortable setting = honest dialogues, very nice and approachable facilitators
- Very interactive
- The open discussion was great
- The open forum, small group feel
- Getting to hear other's concerns/ questions and hearing answers
- Very clearly presented

Suggestions for improving sessions

- More people need to hear this stuff! How to advertise more widely?
- Send us updates as they come. This felt like a snapshot of what's to come. Would be good to know what happens next.
- Need representatives from each area – PARCC, 4/2 year institutions, etc. to bring all their thoughts to the table.
- Need for training on the implementation with cross functioning teams.
- Keep doing what you are doing!! Great Job! (smiley faces)