

Date of Hearing: April 17, 2012

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
Marty Block, Chair
AB 2497 (Solorio) – As Introduced: February 24, 2012

SUBJECT: California State University: Early Start Program.

SUMMARY: Prohibits the California State University (CSU) from implementing the Early Start Program unless funding is provided in the annual Budget Act and specified actions are taken. Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Prohibits CSU from implementing the Early Start Program effective January 1, 2014, unless a specific appropriation is made for its implementation in the annual Budget Act.
- 2) Requires the CSU Chancellor and Trustees to submit an annual report to the Legislature every five years, as specified, beginning January 1, 2014, detailing the impact of the CSU Early Start Program on student mathematics and English proficiency, that may also include a budget appropriation request for the implementation of the Early Start Program.
- 3) Requires the Legislature, as part of its annual budget deliberations, to review the report and request for inclusion in the annual Budget Act.
- 4) Sunsets these provisions effective January 1, 2018.

EXISTING LAW establishes CSU, under the administration of the CSU Board of Trustees and expresses legislative intent with respect to the determination of standards and criteria for admission to CSU. (Education Code § 66600, 66205)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: Background. According to a March 2011 issues brief by the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), of regularly admitted CSU freshmen in 2009, about 58% were unprepared for college-level writing or math or both. In 1996, CSU set a goal to reduce the percentage of unprepared freshmen to 10% in math and English by 2007. That goal was not met, and CSU has now implemented its Early Assessment Program to improve student preparation, enabling students to test their academic readiness by taking a voluntary exam offered to students in the 11th grade as part of the California Standards Test.

Previous remediation requirements. CSU students who do not demonstrate proficiency must pass the appropriate precollegiate (commonly called "remedial") courses within one year of admission. According to information provided by CSU, this policy exposed two issues: 1) students who tested in the lowest quartile of the CSU placement exams were required to do all of their remediation while taking college-level courses, and 2) many students were not completing remediation by the end of the spring term but were enrolling or re-enrolling in remedial courses in the summer at great expense to themselves and to CSU.

What is the Early Start Program? To address these concerns, Executive Order 1048 was issued in 2010, creating the Early Start Program. Beginning in Fall 2012, entering freshmen who are

not proficient in math or “at risk” in English will need to start the remediation process before their first term. By fall of 2014, students will need to have started their work on becoming ready for college-level English. Students will be given a menu of options to determine the best approach for them to start their remedial instruction, including such things as senior year high school courses, courses offered in the summer at any one of their local California Community College (CCC) or CSU campuses and online courses, to name a few. According to CSU, three pilots were conducted in order to understand the program's impacts, and all resulted in success for students with a minimum 80% success rate to move on from remedial education. On October 28, 2009, CSU staff provided a briefing of the Early Start Program for legislative staff, cosponsored by the Assembly Higher Education and Senate Education Committees.

Cost to students. The Early Start Program is self-supported; thus, students who take courses during the summer would pay \$46 per unit at CCC or \$182 per unit plus \$2 per campus at CSU. Financial aid will be offered to eligible students (those with a family contribution of less than \$5,000 per year) in order to cover the cost of their enrollment in the program.

Need for this bill. According to the author, "There is no evidence that a mandatory summer program will solve the issue of high remediation rates, particularly when one of the processes to satisfy the program is through 15 hours of unsupervised instruction online." Further, the author notes, "The Early Start Program was developed entirely at an administrative level, without the support from the very professionals that will be teaching these remedial courses. These faculty members have expressed concerns that an investment in a new program without the input of all the stakeholders involved, including the Legislature, is a risky experiment."

Would a report suffice? This bill sets a precedent by requiring a self-supporting program, initiated by the CSU administration to cease operation unless state funding is provided and reporting requirements are met. CSU operates other remediation-related programs that have not been subject to these conditions, including the Early Assessment Program and Summer Bridge and Foster Youth programs for at-risk youth. Further, this budget environment makes it unlikely the Budget Act would include funding for this purpose.

If the goal is to determine whether the Early Start Program is improving students' academic success without disadvantaging them, perhaps the LAO can study the efficacy of the Early Start Program as part of its ongoing review of remediation needs in higher education?

Related legislation. AB 1237 (Nestande), which failed in this Committee in January, declared that state General Funds that do not count toward the Proposition 98 minimum guarantee shall not be appropriated for remedial instruction at the University of California (UC) and CSU and authorized the appropriation of Proposition 98 funds from K-12 instruction to CCC for the purposes of remedial instruction for UC and CSU students.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Faculty Association (sponsor)
California Labor Federation

Opposition

California State University

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