The COMPASS Reading and Writing tests, the bane of all unprepared college applicants, are no more.

For years, high school graduates, Running Start, international students and English Language Learners took the COMPASS test to determine their eligibility on placement classes at Highline.

But before anyone starts rejoicing about the COMPASS tests’ demise, they’ve been replaced with the Directed Self Placement Assessment for high school graduates and the Accuplacer Reading Test for Running Start, international students and English Language Learners.

Shannon Waits, director of Academic Assessment and Placement, said high school graduates may continue to use other measures of class placement such as high school transcripts, GED transcripts and the transfer of placement test scores from a previous college, but the testing option is no longer the COMPASS tests.

“For some students, their transcripts are a better way to see if they’re ready to be placed in a specific class. If they have a GED, why have them take another test?” Waits asked.

Waits said the Directed Self Placement assessment will be much more interactive than the COMPASS in that it lets students explain how they feel about their own English skills.

“We don’t want to call it a test,” Waits said. “Anytime you use a one-shot standardized test, you can't see the the depth of a student’s abilities.”

She said the Directed Self Placement Assessment not only promotes self-reflection on their reading and writing skills, students also learn more about Highline’s expectations.

“With the COMPASS score, they didn't learn anything about the classes. They didn’t give their own insight into their strengths and weaknesses,” Waits said. “But with the Directed Self Placement, they're much more of an active participant in the placement process,” Waits said.

She said the Directed Self Placement assessment offers much more of an educational process for students.

“For example, students are given sample assignments similar to the ones they’d expect to see in their future English class, so what class they’re placed into is more of an informed decision,” Waits said.

She said the new test is not something to be afraid of and students shouldn’t worry that they'll pass or fail.

“We heard that so much from students and I don't want students to start out their college experience thinking they're going to fail,” Waits said.

Running Start, international students and English Language Learners, on the other hand, will take the Accuplacer Reading Test. These students will still have to reach a specific score on the Accuplacer test in order to determine what class they can get in, so high schoolers can’t enroll with a third grade reading level.

“Because they are students who have yet to graduate, they need to get a specific score on the test because being at college level is one of the requirements to get into the program,” Waits said.

She described the Accuplacer as similar to the COMPASS tests.

“It's multiple choice and untimed but different from the COMPASS because it’s a bit shorter.”

In the COMPASS, students read three to five passages with three to five paragraphs per passage. Students then answered four to seven questions per passage.

In the Accuplacer, there are only 20 questions throughout the whole test with only one question per passage.

The passages, in contrast to the three to five paragraph format of the COMPASS, will only be around a couple sentences long.

Waits said the COMPASS was inconsistent in determining the English capabilities of students and often left students unprepared for the classes they were placed in.

“There's been a lot of data over the last 10 years showing the COMPASS has been

[placing] students into development classes that they didn't need,” Waits said.

She said the COMPASS writing score did not have any predictive ability on the students’ classroom performance.

“It just [kept] students out of the class,” Waits said.

“I think that most importantly, it's not just that the test itself was not doing its job. I think the community colleges were not using it properly,” Waits said.

The departments would set a minimum score to say that someone could get in; but they weren't seeing if that score meant one student would perform better in the classroom over another with a different score, she said.

“They weren’t analyzing the test scores with the classroom grades so we couldn’t tell if one score meant that a student would do better in that class than a student with a different score,” Waits said.

To fix this problem, Waits said the Directed Self Placement and Accuplacer test will be monitored from now on, in an attempt to find a correlation between the scores and the students’ classroom performance.

“Highline is a leader in the way we do placement and assessment. We've been recognized for our work,” Waits said. “The state is looking to us as an example for how you provide multiple measures to students for placement and how you implement that on campus.”