

Texas Action Plan for the American Diploma Network (ADP)

Overview of State Policy and Programs Supporting High Schools

Texas has a proven record of making the improvement of student outcomes a priority. It was the first state to adopt a college-ready curriculum as its default curriculum for all students. Texas also revised its state assessments to more accurately reflect the knowledge and skills students should have as they progress through school and graduate. The state moved its exit level assessment from 10th grade to 11th grade in order to more fully assess student achievement in the high school grades. During the 78th Texas Legislative Session in 2003, the legislature required individualized graduation plans for all at-risk middle and high school students. In 2005, the state introduced a voluntary end of course exam in Algebra I, which can be taken online. The state also provides support for student access to Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, and PSAT/SAT preparation courses.

Most recently, Governor Rick Perry passed an executive order that provided for the creation of a system of college readiness indicators, including the reporting of education remediation rates among college students and the creation of an electronic academic records system to facilitate the transfer of high school transcripts between school districts and between districts and institutions of higher education. This executive order also calls for the development of a series of voluntary end of course assessments in science, math, and other subjects to measure student performance. In a separate executive order, the Governor directed the TEA to create a \$10 million teacher incentive program to reward teachers who have the most impact on student achievement through objective, quantifiable measures.

Texas also has a comprehensive longitudinal data system with unique student identifiers in place, making high school outcomes and improvement more measurable and ultimately more effective. Currently, the state uses a graduation rate calculation that is similar to the recommended National Governors Association calculation. The TEA has also devoted substantial resources toward disseminating NCLB and AYP data. Information pertaining to campus, district, and state outcomes is readily accessible on the education agency's Web site. This data includes listings of schools in need of improvement as well as AYP information for every campus and district, analysis of the number of Title I districts and campuses that did not make AYP, an overview of appeals results, and a broad look at state results.

The Texas High School Project

In 2003, the state, led by Governor Perry and other elected leaders, invested in a public-private partnership—the Texas High School Project (THSP)—to boost graduation rates and to increase the number of high school students prepared for postsecondary success.

Demonstrating its commitment to the partnership and its goals, the state has dedicated \$148 million in appropriated and federal funding for activities that improve high school completion and success and encourage students toward postsecondary education and training. Based on the strong support of Governor Perry, an alliance of philanthropic organizations, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, the Wallace Foundation, National Instruments, and the Communities Foundation of Texas, added to the partnership, creating a \$260 million joint venture to improve Texas high schools.

To achieve the overarching vision of the project, the partners focus on the following four key goals:

- Increasing high school graduation rates,
- Creating a college-going culture and increasing college readiness,
- Building statewide capacity for supporting high school redesign and reform, and
- Creating systemic and sustainable change.

The resources dedicated to the THSP support new and re-designed high schools, educator training and development, and specific programs designed to help students get ready for college.

Most recently, in response to a number of reports that revealed Texas's education system is not producing enough graduates with strong backgrounds in math, science, technology, and engineering, the Governor issued an executive order to the TEA to begin a Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) Initiative with its partners in the THSP. The STEM initiative will create a network of research and professional development collaboratives and 35 STEM-centered high schools, which will require every student to complete four rather than three years of math and science, throughout the state. Building on state and local efforts, the STEM Initiative will pilot innovative ways of delivering science, engineering, and math education and will focus on increasing the number of students who study and enter science, technology, engineering, and math careers.

The approach used by the THSP creates learning environments where students build relationships with educators, are challenged with rigorous lessons, and excited by subjects made relevant to their lives. (For additional information on Texas High School Project investments, please refer to Attachment A.)

The Current State of High School Education in Texas

Fueling the investments and policy initiatives outlined above is an understanding by state leaders that Texas's current student outcomes are not good enough. Governor Perry, state legislators, and leaders from the business and education community recognize the importance of improving student achievement and increasing the graduation rate so that every Texas student graduates prepared to compete in the 21st century economy

While still not at acceptable levels for all student groups, a number of initiatives targeted at high schools over the last decade have helped raise achievement levels in Texas high schools. Graduation rates in Texas have risen steadily over the last five years from 79.5 percent of high school students graduating within four years of entering ninth grade in 1999 to 84.6 percent of students graduating within four years of entering ninth grade in 2004.ⁱ Statewide passing rates on the Grade 11 exit-level TAKS have increased from 49 percent in 2003 to 68 percent in 2005.ⁱⁱ Over the past seventeen years, growth in Advanced Placement participation among Texas high school students has outpaced growth in AP participation in the nation as a whole, with eleven times as many examinees in Texas in 2004 as in 1987, while nationally there were only about four times as many examinees in 2004 as in 1987.ⁱⁱⁱ Greater percentages of students are also matriculating to higher education. According to a Texas High Education Coordinating

Board study, more than half of all public school graduates from 1999-2000 enrolled in Texas public higher education.^{iv}

Although the state continues to make strides in raising achievement levels in its high schools, a persistent achievement gap exists among high school students. Although graduation rates have risen,^v stark differences emerge between individual student subgroups. Almost 90 percent of White students graduated from high school within four years of entering ninth grade, yet only 78 percent of Hispanic students, 83 percent of African American students, and 79 percent of economically disadvantaged students graduated on time. While statewide passing rates on the Grade 11 exit-level Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) show improvement,^{vi} differences also exist between various student groups. Some 82 percent of White students obtained passing scores on the spring 2005 Grade 11 exit-level TAKS, while only 52 percent of African-American students, 56 percent of Hispanic students, and 53 percent of economically disadvantaged students passed.

Further, the majority of Texas high school students do not graduate prepared for postsecondary education or training. Beginning in spring 2004, the Grade 11 exit-level Mathematics and English Language Arts tests were used to assess students' readiness to enroll in an institution of higher education. Statewide in 2005 only 39 percent of students demonstrated college readiness in English Language Arts, while 47 percent demonstrated preparedness for college level mathematics. Economically disadvantaged students, African American students, and Hispanic students achieved even lower college readiness rates.^{vii} These low rates and the disparities in student achievement in Texas high schools signal that Texas must do more to ensure that all students graduate from high school college-ready.

Next Steps

Governor Perry is committed to improving academic outcomes for every student in the state of Texas—it was this same commitment that led the Governor to make Texas one of the first states to be a part of the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network of States. In order to maintain the momentum created by state leaders, the Governor's office and the Texas Education Agency will work with partners from the K-12 and postsecondary education communities, the legislature, the business community, and the civic community to take the following steps:

- Foster multiple pathways for learning and postsecondary success by expanding models and strategies that are promising or proven to be effective in serving the state's most at-risk and underserved student populations.
- Further refine standards and expand assessment options to better meet the expectations for college and workplace success so that all students are ready to meet the demands of the 21st century global economy.
- Improve accountability at the high school level by expanding the state's data capabilities to more accurately track high school students who graduate or transfer schools and to better measure college-readiness.

- Build institutional knowledge and leadership capacity for high school reform within districts and institutions of higher education as well as with key strategic partners throughout the state.

Texas ADP Action Plan

Fostering multiple pathways to student success

Under the leadership of Governor Perry and the state legislature, Texas will continue to dedicate significant resources to support new and re-designed high schools and specific programs designed to ensure students graduate and are prepared for postsecondary success. The state is focused on creating learning environments where high school students are challenged with rigorous coursework, build relationships with educators, and are engaged by subjects made relevant to their lives. The outcomes of these investments not only impact specific grantees but also provide broad-reaching demonstration sites that foster knowledge and momentum across the state. Moving forward with this vision, the state will:

- Continue to fund and expand successful demonstration sites through the Texas High School Project, which provide research and data on improving outcomes in high poverty campuses and districts statewide. (For additional information on Texas High School Project investments, please refer to Attachment A.) *Ongoing*
- Open 35 STEM academies across the state. *Spring 2006 – Fall 2010*
- Continue to fund student-centered programs that promote high school completion and success and college-readiness. *Ongoing*
- Continue to expand dual credit, International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, PSAT/SAT training, and Early College High School programs. *Fall 2006 - Ongoing*
- Continue to expand effective, proven charter middle and high school models. *Ongoing*

Further Refine State Standards and Assessments

Texas was one of the first states in the nation to introduce a college-preparatory curriculum as the default curriculum for all high school students. The state will further refine its standards and assessments to ensure that every student graduates prepared for the full range of post-secondary opportunities. This work will include:

- Further defining college readiness measures to be more comprehensive and accurately reflect post-secondary expectations. *Spring 2006 – Fall 2006*
- Making legislative recommendations to align high school curriculum with college and workforce expectations. *Spring 2006 – Spring 2007*

- Developing a series of optional end of course exams in math, science, and additional subject areas to provide additional measures of student performance at the high school level.
Spring 2006 (begin developing) - Ongoing
- Expanding the required courses to four years of math and four years of science in STEM academies as a demonstration project for the entire state and to evaluate the impact of this expanded coursework on college-readiness indicators. *Spring 2006*
- Reviewing Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for alignment and refinement on a revolving eight year schedule.
Secondary English Language Arts in Spring 2007
Science in Spring 2008
- Revising the TAKS to ensure that any alignment and refinement of the TEKS is reflected.
Ongoing

Data and Accountability

The TEA's data system is already robust and has since 1982 supported a longitudinal data system with unique student identifiers for every student. As part of a mandate from Governor Perry, Texas will continue to expand its systems of accountability and reporting to more accurately hold high schools accountable for graduating students who are prepared for college and work. This work will include:

- Improving accountability at the high school level by expanding the state's data capabilities to more accurately track high school students who transfer schools, ensuring that they re-enroll rather than dropout. *Spring 2006*
- Developing and reporting college-readiness measures, including the reporting of higher education remediation rates on high school report cards. *Fall 2006*

Building Institutional Knowledge and Leadership Capacity

Reform efforts, improved standards and increased accountability measures are only useful when district administrators and school leaders find them meaningful and instructional. Further, the sustainability of the \$260 million devoted to THSP high school reform efforts and the ability of that investment to create statewide impacts depend upon the quality of the state's educational leaders. To that end, Texas, with the support of the Governor, will continue to work with educational leaders to build institutional knowledge and leadership capacity for supporting high school reform by:

- Continuing funding for master reading and math teachers and the creation of a master science teacher program. *Ongoing*
- Providing funding to schools and districts with low completion rates and low student achievement to improve teaching strategies, use assessment data effectively, deliver

remediation, offer course recovery services, and create engaging coursework using research-proven methods. *Spring 2006 and Ongoing*

- Creating expertise within the regional education service centers to provide assistance to high schools and districts in addressing low achievement, creating engaging curriculum, increasing graduation rates, and creating sustainability for high school reform efforts. *Ongoing*
- Creating between five to seven STEM centers to work in partnership with institutions of higher education to develop instructional materials in math and science that incorporate practical real world elements, demonstrate how science and math are relevant and ensure success in career and post-secondary education, and disseminate promising practices on integrating math, science, technology, and engineering curriculums. *Spring 2006 – Fall 2007*
- Requiring the five to seven STEM centers to collaborate with higher education institutions to recruit and train pre-service teachers in the integration of science, technology, engineering, and math. *Fall 2007- Ongoing*
- Developing a statewide teacher incentive grant program to reward and encourage the most effective teachers to remain in the teaching profession. *Spring 2006*
- Developing coordinated efforts within the Texas Education Agency to ensure increased teacher quality. *Fall 2006*

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Attachment A: Texas High School Project Initiatives

The Texas High School Project (THSP) is a \$221 million public-private initiative committed to increasing graduation rates and college enrollment rates in every Texas community. The THSP's partners include the Texas Education Agency, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, Wallace Foundation, educators, and others. The philanthropic investments are managed by Communities Foundation of Texas and the public resources by the Texas Education Agency.

The resources dedicated to the THSP support new and re-designed high schools, educator training and development, and specific programs designed to help students get ready for college. The approach used by the THSP creates learning environments where students build relationships with educators, are challenged with rigorous lessons, and excited by subjects made relevant to their lives.

In addition to the initiatives outlined below, the THSP recently launched the Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Initiative with \$221 million in funding from the following sources:

- State (TEA)—\$30 million total: \$20 million in existing state funding and \$10 million in federal funding
- Michael & Susan Dell Foundation—\$20 million
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—\$20 million
- National Instruments—\$1 million
- Communities Foundation of Texas—Commitment to raise \$10 million from leading businesses, foundations, and individuals who understand the significance of high-quality science, technology, engineering, and math education

Initiatives managed by the Texas Education Agency

Through the legislative appropriations, Texas has dedicated \$120 million to increasing graduation rates and improving college-readiness of its students. This funding has been dedicated to the STEM initiative and to the activities outlined below,

- *Texas High School Completion and Success Grants, Cycles 1 and 2*: TEA has awarded \$37,271,859 in grants to more than 220 school districts for high school completion and success intervention strategies, including credit recovery programs, tutoring, acceleration programs, other supplemental services for students at risk of not graduating from high school, and programs to help prepare traditionally underrepresented students for postsecondary studies.
- *Comprehensive School Reform—Texas High School Initiative*: TEA has awarded \$20,618,000 in federal grant funds to 84 school districts to support high schools in the implementation of schoolwide reform using methods and strategies for student learning,

teaching, and school management that are based on reliable research and effective practices and that have been replicated successfully in schools with diverse characteristics.

- *Texas High School Redesign and Restructuring Grant, Cycle 1 and 2:* TEA has awarded \$3,897,164 in grants to 12 school districts with Academically Unacceptable high school campuses to build capacity for implementing schoolwide improvement strategies and to create a demonstration project that will supply case studies in successful practices for turning around low-performing campuses. TEA has preliminarily awarded \$4,485,510 in grant funding to support 17 campuses in a second round of redesign grants targeted at high school campuses rated Academically Unacceptable in 2005.
- *Middle College/Early College High School Expansion Grants:* TEA has awarded \$2,098,695 in grants to 10 school districts to expand or enhance existing middle college or early college high school programs and to disseminate resources and lessons learned to other entities interested in establishing middle college or early college high schools.
- *Postsecondary Success Initiative Pilot Program:* TEA has awarded \$2,694,620 in grants to 6 school districts to create effective models for increasing the overall college-going rate of Texas high school students by providing postsecondary advisory services, including college counseling, SAT and ACT preparation, and online advising.
- *Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Academy Initiative:* TEA has awarded \$700,000 in grants to 3 school districts to establish Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Academies for the purpose of creating innovative small high schools with integrated, applied math and science teaching and learning and for providing math and science demonstration sites to improve math and science performance statewide.
- *Research and Evaluation:* TEA has awarded contracts to two external evaluators to conduct evaluations to determine the effectiveness of intervention strategies funded through the Texas High School Completion and Success Grants, Cycles 1 and 2. TEA has also awarded a contract to a third-party evaluator to conduct a qualitative evaluation of the Comprehensive School Reform—Texas High School Initiative grant program.

Initiatives Managed by Communities Foundation of Texas

The privately-funded side of the Texas High School Project has investments across four major initiatives: High School Redesign, Early College High Schools, New Schools, and Education Leadership.

- *High School Redesign:* THSP/CFT has committed \$7,297,150 to high school redesign to date. Through this initiative, high schools will redesign their educational program around the principles of rigor, relevance, and relationship. These large high schools will break up into smaller, more personalized learning communities that will facilitate deeper relationships between students and adults. Real-world connections and rigor will be amplified within the curriculum through an intensive one-year planning and preparation year and significant implementation support for three years.

- *Early College High Schools (ECHS)*: THSP/CFT has committed \$7,800,000 to early college high schools to date. Through this initiative, institutions of higher education establish small high schools in partnership with the local school district or through a public charter. While attending these schools (which are typically located on the college campus), students earn their high school diploma and either an associate degree or two years of college credit. THSP/CFT made grants to four organizations to fund the establishment of 13 Early College High Schools.
- *New Schools*: THSP/CFT has committed \$6,957,500 to the scaling of new school networks. Through this initiative, high performing charter schools will replicate their school models by establishing additional campuses. Funded schools have a track record of success in achieving strong student outcomes and clean financial audits.
- *Education Leadership*: This initiative strengthens links among leadership development, a focused learning environment, and increased student performance through the retooling of university principal preparation programs and the development of meaningful leadership training for principals and teacher leaders in struggling schools. Decisions related to these grant awards will be made in early 2006.

Initiatives Managed by the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation

The Michael & Susan Dell Foundation has committed more than \$34,000,000 to improve high school graduation rates and college readiness and access for underserved Texas students through 5 primary initiatives:

- *Advanced Placement Strategies (AP Strategies)*: MSDF has committed \$14,000,000 to launch district-wide implementations of this pre-AP teacher training and AP incentive program in Austin, Houston, Pasadena and Ysleta school districts. With the goal of increasing minority and low-income student success in AP coursework and exams, AP Strategies provides intensive professional development for pre-AP teachers and AP teacher and student incentives based on AP test passing.
- *Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID)*: MSDF has invested \$5,600,000 to fund a significant expansion of the AVID program in Texas school districts. AVID is a national program to prepare students in the academic middle for four-year college eligibility and success. The structured elective class builds study skills, fosters motivation and provides tutor support to improve student's success in rigorous pre-AP and AP level coursework. In addition, AVID teachers coach students and parents through the college application process.
- *Austin ISD - Project ADVANCE and Project SMART*: These MSDF-funded programs provide college guidance through dedicated college facilitators on all twelve Austin ISD high school campuses and support intensive math interventions for near-passing Algebra 1 ninth graders. Commitments to these programs total \$8,100,000.

- *New Schools*: MSDF has committed \$6,300,000 to expand high performing charter school networks in key areas of Texas. Selected schools have a demonstrated record of student achievement with some of Texas' most underserved and low-income students.
- *Dell Scholars*: In its first two cohorts of recipients, MSDF has awarded \$20,000 need-based scholarships to 45 Texas high school students pursuing their college dreams. More than 90% of the current 249 Dell Scholars are the first in their family to go to college and 100% are low-income. MSDF anticipates an 85% graduation rate (6-year) compared to the national average of 26% for low income students.

ⁱ Department of Accountability and Data Quality, Division of Accountability Research, Texas Education Agency, *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools 2003-04*, (Austin, Texas, August 2005), p. viii.

ⁱⁱ TAKS Statewide Performance Results, Student Assessment Division, Texas Education Agency Web site, Online. Available: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/reporting/results/swresults/taks/2005/gr11_05.pdf. Accessed: October 18 2005.

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Accountability and Data Quality, Division of Accountability Research, Texas Education Agency, *Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Examination Results in Texas 2003-04*, (Austin, Texas, August 2005), p. vii.

^{iv} Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Division of Planning and Information Resources, “Student Performance and the Recommended High School Program,” report prepared in accordance with Texas Education Code, Chapter 56, Subchapter M, Austin, Texas, February 2003, p. 4.

^v Department of Accountability and Data Quality, Division of Accountability Research, Texas Education Agency, *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools 2003-04*, (Austin, Texas, August 2005), p. vii.

^{vi} TAKS Statewide Performance Results, Student Assessment Division, Texas Education Agency Web site. Online. Available: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/reporting/results/swresults/taks/2005/gr11_05.pdf. Accessed: October 18, 2005.

^{vii} “Percent Met THECB Standard for Higher Education Readiness, Student Assessment Division, Texas Education Agency Web site. Online. Available: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/sboe/schedule/0705/instruction/attachment/5_herc_a2.xls. Accessed: October 18, 2005.