



Achieve

American Diploma Project Network



Taking Root

*Texas' Lessons for Sustaining
the College- and Career-Ready Agenda*



About Achieve

Achieve, created by the nation's governors and business leaders, is a bipartisan, non-profit organization that helps states raise academic standards, improve assessments and strengthen accountability to prepare all young people for postsecondary education, careers and citizenship.

About the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network

In 2005, Achieve launched the ADP Network—a collaboration of states working together to improve their academic standards and provide all students with a high school education that meets the needs of today's workplaces and universities. The ADP Network members—responsible for educating nearly 85 percent of all our nation's public high school students—are committed to taking four college and career readiness action steps:

- Align high school standards with the demands of college and careers.
- Require all students to complete a college- and career-ready curriculum to earn a high school diploma.
- Build assessments into the statewide system that measure students' readiness for college and careers.
- Develop reporting and accountability systems that promote college and career readiness for all students.

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Taking Root: Strategies for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda would not have been possible without the generous support of the GE Foundation.

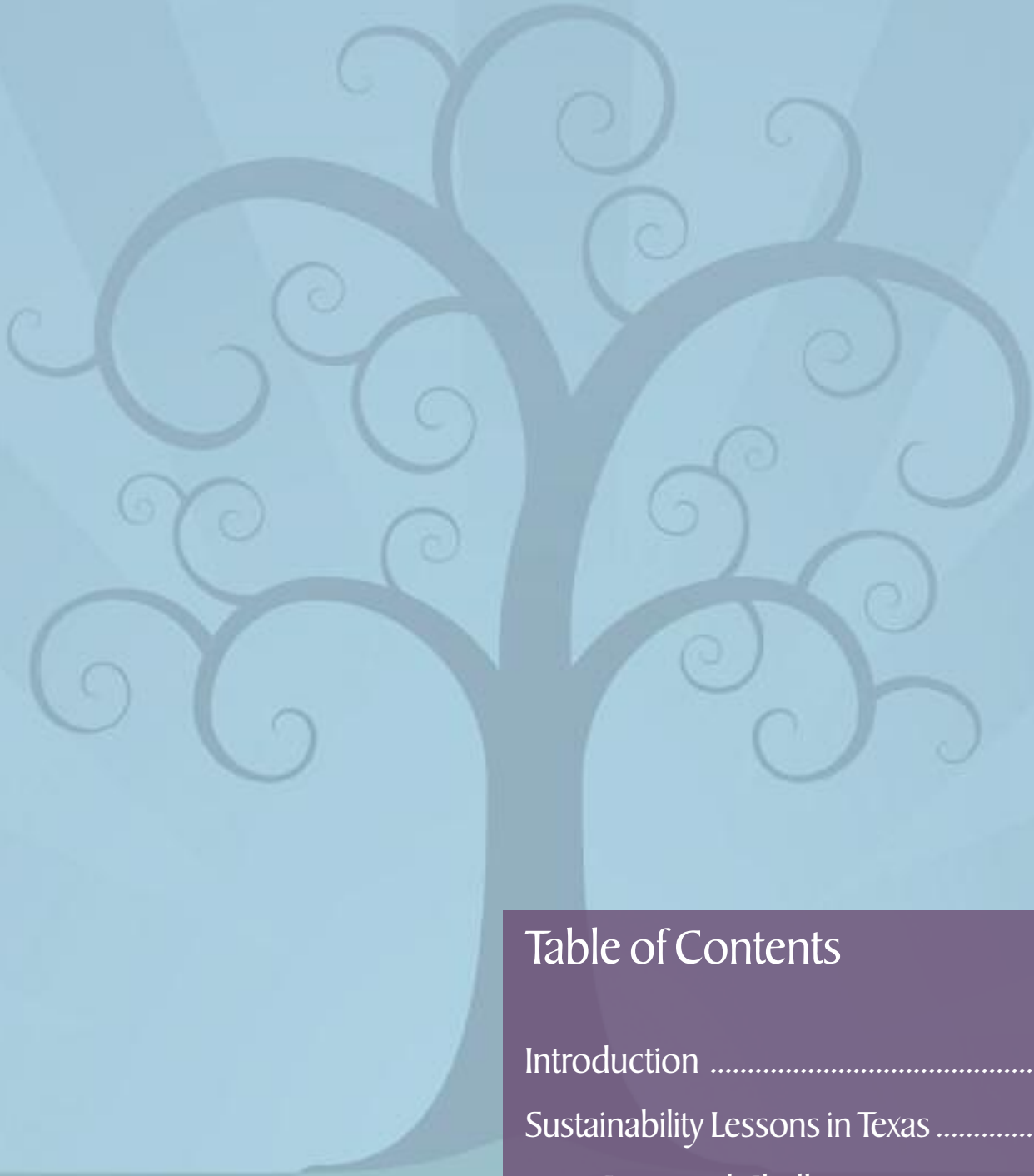


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Education Reform in Texas

Introduction

For much of Texas' long history, districts operated under a system of local control with few statewide mandates regarding what students should learn and be able to do academically. Created in 1949, the primary role of the state education agency was to engage in compliance-based monitoring. In the past 25 years, however, Texas has continually and incrementally worked to strike the right balance between state and local control and re-focus the education system to ensure all students can and are achieving at increasingly higher academic performance levels.

Prior to 1983, the Texas' courts already had called the state's education finance system into question and the then-governor had promised a teacher pay raise. In light of these challenges and the 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk*, Governor Mark White and the Texas Legislature commissioned a study of the state's education system and school finance that was led by the Select Committee on Public Education (SCOPE), chaired by the formidable business leader, H. Ross Perot. Driven by a commitment from the business community and strong political and education leadership, the study was a ground-breaking and substantive report that helped launch a two-decade long commitment to data-driven, standards-based education reform.

Since the first major reform bill was passed in 1984, Texas has continually moved the bar for students, schools, districts and the state by incrementally raising the rigor of its standards and assessments and the level of expectations for all stakeholders in the education community. With subsequent reform bills passed in 1993, 1995, 1999 and 2006, Texas continued to tweak—and when necessary re-invent—its education system to improve equity and build in new levels of accountability. Striving toward the “Texas Miracle” of raised achievement through higher standards and accountability wasn't always easy, but for at least twenty-five years, it has been a consistent road to improvement. Among Texas' most notable accomplishments:

- Texas was the first state to adopt an accountability system that required schools to disaggregate student achievement data based on race/ethnicity and income-level.
- Between 1992 and 2005, the percentage of Texas 4th graders scoring proficient or above on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in mathematics increased by 25 percentage points (from 15% to 40%), whereas nationally, the percentage of students proficient or above in 4th grade math increased by 17 percentage points (from 18% to 35%).
- In 2005, Texas' Hispanic students outperformed the national average for Hispanic 4th graders by nine percentage points and Hispanic 8th graders by five percentage points.
- Between 1984 and 2000, the percentage of Advanced Placement candidates in Texas increased more than three times the national growth, by nearly 1300%.

Today, Texas just passed an accountability bill that seeks to further clarify what schools are expected to do to prepare students for academic and lifelong success, building on and further refining the reforms of the past twenty-five years.

Striving toward the “Texas Miracle” of raised achievement through higher standards and accountability wasn't always easy, but for at least twenty-five years, it has been a consistent road to improvement.

Strategies for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda

To give states the information they need to sustain hard-fought education reform policy changes effectively, Achieve conducted research on state education reforms that have been sustained successfully for over a decade or more. Funded by the GE Foundation, Achieve hopes this work will help other state leaders, wherever they may be on their road to reform, replicate successful strategies and accelerate systemic reform in their own states, particularly around the college- and career-ready agenda.

The project includes:

- Four case studies that examine both governmental and non-governmental strategies that were effective in making reform last in Indiana, Massachusetts, South Carolina and Texas.
- A paper that draws on and synthesizes the case studies' overarching lessons and states' strategies for sustainability.
- A tool that states can use in their own planning.

The four states were chosen because they were able to pass and sustain significant education reforms over time, for at least a decade. The focus of the case studies is not on the specific policies passed, but rather the process and strategies the states employed to make significant change last.

The Texas story is remarkable in its continuity. The state's standards-based reforms have evolved over the past 25 years, as Texas has consistently and incrementally ratcheted up the expectations for students, teachers and schools alike. How did this come to be? What pieces needed to be in place for the standards-based reforms to take root in Texas? What type of leadership drove and sustained these reforms? Achieve hopes the answers to these questions can help other state leaders, wherever they may be on their road to reform, replicate successful strategies and accelerate school-system reform on their home turf.



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Lessons for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda



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Timeline of Major Events

- 1983** — Governor Mark White enters office and convenes the Select Committee on Public Education (SCOPE)
- 1984** — HB72 passes
- 1985** — Texas Education Assessment for Minimal Skills introduced
— The Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) comes online
- 1987** — Governor Bill Clements enters office
- 1990** — Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) introduced
- 1991** — Legislature conducts a study of accountability in Texas public schools
— Governor Ann Richards enters office
- 1992** — Final of three state Supreme Court cases deems the finance system unconstitutional
- 1993** — SB7 passes (new accountability and rating system introduced)
- 1995** — SB1 passes (the Texas Education Code is rewritten)
— Governor George W. Bush enters office
- 1998–99** — Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills implemented
- 1999** — SB103 passes (replaces TAAS with TAKS);
— SB1 passes (ends social promotion in grades 3, 5, and 8)
- 2001** — Governor Rick Perry enters office
- 2003** — Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) introduced
— The Recommended High School Plan is adopted as the default graduation requirement for the graduating class of 2008
- 2006** — HB1 passes
- 2007** — SB1031 passes (replaces TAKS with end-of-course assessments for 2011-12)
- 2009** — HB3 passes (accountability system overhaul)

Sustainability Lessons in Texas

Every state—and every reform effort—has its own unique elements, history and political context. While these often make for interesting observations, they are of limited utility for other states trying to create their own education reform plans and manage their own reform efforts. Of more value are lessons and strategies—both political and substantive—that speak directly to what makes a public-policy change successful and what helps it “stick” in the system to make a difference. The following lessons were gleaned from interviews with individuals who have played a role in Texas’ education reform efforts. They include conversations with political, education, and business leaders and their staff.

Strong and consistent political and education leadership is vital to sustain reform

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from Texas is that leadership can, and should, come from a variety of people across the state. Throughout the history of Texas’ standards-based reform efforts, there has been ongoing shared leadership from leaders across the various branches of government, providing a consistency of commitment from the statehouse and department of education to the governor’s mansion.

Texas’ Key Strategies for Sustainability

- Strong and consistent political and education leadership is vital to sustain reform
- External champions, particularly the business community, are key to building momentum and making the case for education reform over time
- Build on—and build up—reforms over time
- Finance should be linked to reform efforts
- Data-driven reform can make the case over time better than any individual or organization

Just as critical has been the relationship between political and education leadership in their shared visions and goals for the state’s education system. The Texas reforms were in large part successful because both political and education leaders played a major role in shepherding, implementing and protecting the reforms over time. From 1984 on, governors, lieutenant governors, state legislators and commissioners of education often supported each other in those responsibilities. The flip side to this is that many of these leaders also felt shared ownership over the reforms and their successes. Leaders from across the government were proud of the reforms and were happy to share the credit for them.

Gubernatorial Leadership

In Texas, governors have not historically been empowered to affect education significantly as the state Legislature has control over the Education Code and governors lacked authority over the Texas Education Agency. Governor White did commission the SCOPE study, which led to HB72 in 1984, but ultimately lost reelection because of an ill-developed teacher career ladder program that left him without the support of teachers—and their friends and families—during the 1986 election.

Probably the biggest boost in gubernatorial authority over the education system occurred in the early 1990s when the governor gained power of appointment of the state commissioner of education. Governor Ann Richards (D) was the first governor with this authority and used it to appoint Lionel “Skip” Meno, an outsider with a vision for change and an ability to facilitate reform, who was popular throughout the state.

While many of the pieces were already in place by the time he was elected, Governor George Bush was a strong supporter of Texas’ early standards-based reforms. Even before he was elected, he used the bully pulpit to support education reform and push for more change. His support for reform coincided with the 1995 bill SB1, which completely rewrote the Texas Education



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Code, and provided additional coverage for the Legislature as they undertook this major endeavor. Once elected, as described by a former legislative staff member, “He was a good education governor. He set broad goals and didn’t try to micro-manage. He had good relations with legislative leaders and really great policy people.” His primary education advisor, Margaret Spellings, was a widely respected voice on education reform.

For the last eight years, Governor Rick Perry has been committed to education reform, with a particular focus on early childhood education, teacher performance pay, and educational and financial accountability. In 2006, he was one of the strongest proponents of anchoring the HB1 finance bill in the goal of college and career readiness for all students. Despite the differences the Governor has had in the past with the Legislature around some education issues, he has wielded his inherent powers, such as executive orders, at times to keep his education priorities moving forward.

Legislative Leadership

Legislative leadership around education reform has been incredibly strong in Texas. Among the notable leaders were Representative Paul Sadler (D), chair of the House Public Education Committee, Senator Bill Ratliff (R), chair of the Senate Education Committee and Lt. Governor Bob Bullock (D), president of the Senate. Together they crafted, adopted and protected the reforms of 1993 and 1995 through the early 2000’s. Their grit, determination, collaboration and deliberation were key to these reforms being passed and sustained over time. They also had the support of the speakers of the house and worked well with other state leaders, including governors and commissioners of education.

A 1991 legislative study into the state’s accountability system set off a chain of events that ultimately led to Texas’ standards-based accountability model. While Texas had been sharing student data with schools since the mid-1980s, driven by HB72, there were concerns that this just wasn’t enough to affect change. In addition, HB72 had shifted a great deal of power to the state

—to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in particular—and there was uncertainty that the balance struck between state and local control was appropriate.

Motivated by these concerns, the legislative study and a state Supreme Court mandate to improve the state’s finance system, the Legislature passed SB7 in 1993, ushering in a new accountability and ratings system. SB7 required districts and schools to report disaggregated achievement data as part of the new statewide-integrated accountability system. Never before had academics and achievement driven accountability like this; it represented a major step away from the compliance-based accountability, based primarily on non-academic measures, which had long been the tradition in Texas.

Right before the passage of SB7, Rep. Sadler—at that time a member but not the chair of the Public Education Committee—was charged by the Speaker of the House to investigate any “unfunded mandates” that existed in the Texas Education Code. Sadler quickly found that the Code was wrought with unfunded and ill-defined mandates and proposed a complete rewrite of the Code—which was first written in the 1920s—to better reflect the new realities of Texas. To that end, SB7 effectively put a “gun to the Legislature’s head” as it sunsetted the Education Code, forcing a rewrite of the Code by 1995.

The run up to and development and passage of SB1 in 1995 likely represents the strongest collaboration between education and political leadership in the history of Texas’ education reforms. As one observer noted, “the collaboration was incredible. Teachers, administrators, business, political leaders were all at the table at the hearings and committee meetings. There was a lack of silos.” To begin, the legislature launched a Joint Select Committee, chaired by Sen. Ratliff and Rep. Libby Linebarger, the then-Chair of the Public Education Committee, to travel the state and host hearings on the different pieces, or chapters, of the Education Code. In addition to the Select Committee, Commissioner Lionel “Skip” Meno was charged with developing a complete revision of the Education Code, and he brought in stakeholders and legislative staff to discuss key parts of

the Code, which helped jumpstart the dialogue among policymakers and educator groups

Both Sen. Ratliff and Rep. Sadler, who assumed the Chairmanship of the Public Education Committee in 1995, were very hands-on throughout the process. Sen. Ratliff took a unique approach to determining what should be preserved, eliminated or reworked in the Code. A former systems engineer, Sen. Ratliff used his background to “create a large matrix of every ‘duty’ in the Code and had the Committee members fill it out with who they believed should be the decisionmaker (students, parents, teachers, TEA, all the way up to the governor, etc.). [This exercise] was essentially a survey, but also it was a way to get the members familiar with the intimate details of the Code,” as described by Ellen Williams, his general counsel at the time. Sen. Ratliff used these responses as he personally marked up the Code and wrote a new draft, from which the Senate worked. As each chapter passed through the Senate Education Committee, it was put online for transparency and ease of access.

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Rep. Sadler also drafted his own version of the Code, with guidance from the Senate’s and Education Commissioner Skip Meno’s proposals. Once the House version was complete, Sadler held weekly hearings and votes on each chapter of the Code and looked to strike compromises and broker deals with other stakeholders, such as the teacher organizations, to ensure full support during its passage. His persistence and style paid off:

Lonnie Hollingsworth, director of legal services and governmental relations for the Texas Classroom Teachers Association, noted, “[Sadler] is the best negotiator I ever encountered.”

SB1 was a revolutionary reform: It created the first charter schools in Texas; addressed discipline issues; created new diploma options, including the Minimum and Distinguished High School Programs; called for a new curriculum (ultimately the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills); created a self-governed State Board of Educator Certification; and refined the school improvement plan process. It did not, however, address finance or accountability, as those had just been altered by SB7 two years prior.

Between 1997 and 1999, the Legislature passed only about a dozen education bills because Rep. Sadler and Sen. Ratliff were committed to giving the new accountability system and Education Code time to work their way through the system. According to Sadler, “it was imperative we let school leaders get it in place and work the bugs out.” This protection, driven in part by the shared ownership and pride over the reforms, was critical to the reforms’ sustainability through the early 2000s.

Finally, Lt. Governor Bob Bullock, who served as the president of the Senate, was also a key champion of the reforms in the 1990s. He was strongly committed to the 1993 reforms, which gave way to the 1995 reforms, and was strategic in his approach. As Rep. Sadler noted, he was “the whole package...He would empower the Senate to act because he was more interested in results than party mechanisms.”

Education Leadership

Texas’ commissioners of education have been particularly strong champions for education reform. Lionel “Skip” Meno was appointed in 1991 by Gov. Ann Richards. He was a classic “change agent” from out of state with a vision for how to improve Texas’ education



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system. Faced with court orders to improve the finance system and armed with a strong data system that could generate vital student-level information, Meno was a strong proponent for a new system of accountability that restored balance between state and local control. His driving theory was the state should decide the “what” (the expectations for achievement) and local districts and schools should decide the “how” (the delivery of instruction that would allow students to reach the state expectations).

One of the first things Meno did upon entering office was establish the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) to report student achievement and dropout data, expanding upon Texas’ reporting system. After the new accountability system was put into place, Meno played a major role in the rewriting of the Texas Education Code, working arm-in-arm with the Legislature. Meno wrote an initial draft of the new Code and was purposeful in working with teachers, business leaders and other stakeholders.

If Meno was the out-of-towner who could “shake up the establishment” and “turn the system on its head,” Mike Moses was the venerable insider with real on-the-ground credibility who could “build the system.” A Texas educator, principal and superintendent of multiple districts, Moses was brought in by Gov. Bush to implement the new Education Code. Moses had participated on the Joint Select Committee that reviewed the previous Education Code and understood the need for improvement and the necessary steps to bring about real change. He was comfortable implementing a new system that was adopted under his predecessor.

In addition, Moses paid attention to the supports necessary for such a major change to take place and was strategic in the decisions he made about the structure of the Texas Education Agency. He appointed a deputy commissioner for standards and programs in 1995 to oversee the assessment, curriculum and textbook divisions and facilitate the coordinated development and implementation of the Texas Essential Knowledge and

Skills, the state’s curriculum guidelines. He also used his discretionary funds to support professional development and teacher resources, largely housed in the Regional Education Service Centers.

Following Moses, the next commissioner was Jim Nelson, appointed in 1999 by Gov. Bush. The transition from Moses to Nelson represented a continuity of commitment, in particular to standards-based reform. He kept a steady hand on the till and even retained many of Moses’ TEA staff. Nelson was a strong leader who provided continuity. He kept the Texas Education Agency running smoothly, in part to allow the reforms to take root, but also because Gov. Bush had begun his presidential run and the nation was looking to Texas for leadership on education reform.

Robert Scott, the current commissioner, briefly served as an interim commissioner in 2003, when he helped streamline the TEA. Today, Scott remains a proponent of standards-based reform and accountability, seeing through the adoption and eventual implementation of Texas’ new assessment system—a series of end-of-course exams that will be required beginning in the 2011-12 school year—and new college- and career-ready standards. Commissioner Scott consistently has provided leadership around putting the teacher and students resources in place that are necessary to support these new policies.

External champions, particularly the business community, are key to building momentum and making the case for education reform over time

Both business leaders and business-education organizations—in particular the Texas Business Education Coalition (TBEC)—played an important role in drawing attention to education reform and pushing for more change. External leadership is often critical, particularly in times of political turnover or economic upheaval.

In 1983-84, H. Ross Perot was a force to be reckoned with on education reform as chairman of the Select Committee on Public Education (SCOPE). What began

as a project of interest to the CEO of Perot Systems became a passion. Perot used his charismatic personality, time and resources to drive major reforms that shifted the focus of the education system onto academics and away from “everything else.”

To that end, the original SCOPE report proposed (and HB72 ultimately included) the “no pass, no play” rule, barring students who were failing from participating in activities such as sports and marching band until they brought their grades up; a new high-stakes assessment that measured “minimum” rather than “basic” skills; restrictions on absences; annual district report cards, with a statewide data system to support those efforts; and a number of teacher-specific reforms, including a pay raise, a set teacher-to-student ratio of 22:1 for grades K-4, a career ladder program, and a required competency exam for both current and prospective teachers.

Once the SCOPE report was issued, Perot traveled across the state to advocate on behalf of the agenda, building support for these proposals, many of which were very controversial. But Perot was successful. He was able to say things about the education system that elected officials could or would not. He had a larger-than-life-personality and wasn’t afraid to use it to drive his point home. He also paid out of pocket for a swarm of lobbyists to build support for the bill among the public and the Legislature. Given the major shift in ideology—that even included a perceived threat to Texas’ high school football—few believe HB72 would have passed without such a strong push from the outside.

Towards the end of the 1980s, the larger business community began to unite around education reform. The most notable group was the Texas Business Education Coalition (TBEC), of which a number of its members had been involved in the earlier reform efforts, such as Tom Luce, former chief of staff for SCOPE and founder of National Center for Educational Accountability. Formed

in 1989, TBEC was a major force in education policy throughout the 1990s, keeping the pressure on.

Improving Texas’ standards and assessment and accountability systems was at the heart of TBEC’s agenda. TBEC strongly supported the reforms of 1993 and 1995 and was a fierce advocate in the early 2000’s for making the Recommended High School Program (RHSP) the default graduation requirement for all students—which the State Board of Education ultimately adopted in 2003. With that move, which first impacted the graduating class of 2008, Texas became the first state in the nation with graduation requirements set at the college- and career-ready level.

Perhaps most important, TBEC provided a forum for business and education leaders to come together and share perspectives. The strength of this partnership, according to Sandi Borden, the executive director of the Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association and former TBEC coordinating board member, was that TBEC “provided educators with the opportunity to show business that they were willing to be held accountable, while the business representatives gained a better understanding of the challenges and reality educators faced on a daily basis.” This collaboration improved not only TBEC’s credibility, but also its ability to make informed and reasonable recommendations. The organization purposefully always had a business and education co-chair to demonstrate the partnership between these two stakeholder groups.

In 1994, the Governor’s Business Council (GBC) was established as a non-profit organization to assist the governor with any issues related to economic development, including education. The GBC gained strength under Gov. Bush and provided support on a number of his initiatives, most notably the Reading Initiative, introduced by the Governor in 1996 to ensure all children learned to read by 3rd grade.

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Build on—and build up—reforms over time

While each of Texas' major reform bills had a significant impact on the state's education system, there is no question that they represent a set of interrelated reforms that continually, but incrementally, raised the bar. Each reform built on the last and tried to improve the balance between state and local control and between finance and accountability. This steady-as-it-goes process has been key to the reforms' sustainability; the progression of policies and philosophies on accountability was deliberate and reasonable.

At its core, the Texas strategy has been about measuring results for all students and holding schools and students accountable for them—common features of standards-based reform. The state has repeatedly chosen to set out expectations for students that do not appear on their face to be very difficult to reach or altogether unreachable.

The most straightforward way to demonstrate the incremental changes Texas made over time is by looking at the evolution of their assessment systems:

- The Texas Assessment of *Basic Skills* (1979-1985),
- The Texas Education Assessment for *Minimal Skills* (1985-1990),
- The Texas Assessment of *Academic Skills* (TAAS) (1990-2003) and,
- The Texas Assessment of *Knowledge and Skills* (TAKS) (2003-present).
- *PLANNED: End-of-course assessments* (2011-12)

As the new tests came online, each had greater alignment to the curriculum and measured more rigorous content. In addition, once the TAAS was introduced, the proficiency bar for school ratings was readjusted and then raised incrementally, by about five percent, each year. The goal was to keep the bar one step above where the system—or average school or district—was. The state consciously made the decision to do it in

“baby steps,” especially once the 1993 new accountability system came online, which upped the stakes for districts, schools and students. Leaders knew that getting too far ahead of students and schools could lead to a revolt and threaten the reforms' sustainability in the long run. Equally important was that this strategy was articulated broadly and often.

So, when the TAAS “counted” for school accountability in 1994, only 26 percent of students had to pass the exam for the school to be deemed “acceptable.” Most schools were able to meet this bar, but they were also informed that the bar would not stay at this level. By 2002-03, 55 percent of students had to pass the TAAS to earn a school an “acceptable” rating. By the time the TAKS was set to come online, more than half of Texas schools were rated “recognized” (80 percent of students proficient) or “exemplary” (90 percent of students proficient) based on TAAS scores, despite the fact that the criteria for earning those ratings had grown more demanding over the previous eight years.

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Similarly, when the TAKS was introduced, its original passing score intentionally was set lower than the level recommended by the assessment panels to give students and schools time to adjust to the new requirement. The TAKS' passing cut scores were then raised gradually, reaching the level initially recommended just last year.

Just as the assessments and their proficiency expectations were ratcheted up over time, the philosophy of accountability also has evolved from 1984 to today. HB72 was a “shining the light” type of reform, requiring achievement data to be collected and shared, based on the belief that public reporting would drive improvement. One result of HB72 was the creation of the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) in the Texas Education Agency to collect and analyze student-level data, a system still in place today.

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There was a sense in the early 1990s that the “shining the light” strategy was not systematic enough to have a real impact on student achievement. According to Sandy Kress, a former TBEC member and advisor to President Bush, “It was very top-down and episodic; scores weren’t improving. We became conscious that improvement wasn’t happening and that something else needed to happen.” In 1991, the Legislature conducted a study of accountability to determine what could be improved. In 1993, Texas passed SB7, a finance bill that introduced a new accountability system.

While HB72 laid the groundwork, SB7 took the state’s accountability system to the next level. It changed the state’s accreditation system and tied it directly to academic achievement, rather than compliance with primarily non-academic requirements. SB7 also required schools and districts to report disaggregated data and

be accountable for raising the achievement of all subgroups, which was revolutionary at the time, yet underscored the need for reachable proficiency bars. As one former educator noted, “The ratcheting up was reasonable, which it needed to be so it wasn’t demoralizing. It caused us to be more focused. Either we were all going to swim together or sink together. One group, one subject could pull us down. It [meant we] had to build a collaborative culture across schools.”

While there is little question that SB1 of 1995, which rewrote the entire Texas Education Code, was a major undertaking, it is viewed across the state as being tied rather closely to earlier reforms. In fact, to many it is considered a bill that sought to bring a balance back between state and local control, as the state’s control over education grew considerably under HB72 and SB7. HB72 gave the TEA broad rule-making and SB1 attempted to draw a clearer line between state and local responsibilities—as well as eliminate truly unfunded mandates.

After SB1 passed in 1995, the next major area of focus was on curriculum and improving learning—in particular in reading. The Reading Initiative was launched to ensure every child could read by grade 3 and eventually was extended into higher grades. In 1997, the state also approved the new mandated curriculum guidelines—the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills—to provide more specificity and focus for instruction, which ultimately were aligned with the next-generation assessment.

In 2006, in a special session, the Legislature passed HB1, a far-reaching finance bill that added more accountability for Texas’ high schools. Just as previous bills had shifted the focus onto academics and increasing rigor, HB1 took the next step and shifted the focus from academic achievement towards the goal of graduating all students ready for college and careers. HB1 requires all students in the Recommended High School Program to complete the “4x4,” or four courses in each



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of the core subject areas; the state to align their standards to college readiness expectations through the development of vertical alignment teams; and creates and expands upon a host of dropout prevention programs. In 2007, the Legislature moved to replace the TAKS with a series of end-of-course exams. And in 2009, the Legislature sought to build college and career readiness into the state's accountability system.

Throughout it all, there was a consistency of efforts and goals. Texas found great success and sustainability by incrementally increasing the rigor of its assessments, standards of proficiency and accountability thresholds and by being careful not to leave too many behind throughout the constant change.

Finance should be linked with reform efforts

It is often the case that states pass finance reform or open new funding streams to pass major standards-based reforms, the theory being, if the state is going to expect more, it must provide the appropriate resources and supports. However, in Texas it actually came about the other way. Texas has long struggled with an inequitable funding system, which the Texas Supreme Court has ruled against on a number of occasions. Many of Texas' major bills passed between 1984 and 2006 were actually finance bills that also included standards-based reforms and accountability requirements. Either way, this type of "trade-off" or "quid pro quo" was vital in order to garner support and real results. As one interviewee asked, "How can you separate the 'Texas Miracle' from the funding?"

The 1984 reforms were driven by the need to study and improve the state's finance system. Ultimately, HB72 could not have been passed without an increase in taxes to equalize funding. HB72 modified the previous finance system and transformed Texas' funding formula into a weighted formula. As a result, in part, funding for education was increased by 26 percent between 1984 and 1985. In the short term, this change did increase equalization and improve equity somewhat, but unfortunately it didn't last. Once a recession hit in the mid-1980s, the governor backed away, which led to a number of significant court cases that drove education reform through the early 1990s.

On three separate occasions, in 1989, 1991 and 1992, the Texas Supreme Court found the state's finance system to be inequitable, forcing the Legislature into action. Yet rather than just address the funding issue in a vacuum, Texas leaders used these opportunities to pass major reforms that increased expectations and rigor. Additionally, these court decisions weighed heavily on stakeholders throughout the state. Both the public and leaders lost confidence in the education system and did not want to put more money into it unless it was invested wisely and would have positive returns.

In fact, Governor Ann Richards paid the price of trying to improve the funding system without tying it to reform. Her Save Our Schools initiative, commonly known as the "Robin Hood plan," would have switched the finance system to a county district model, a more equitable system that redistributed funding to lower-income campuses. However, in 1993, the plan was voted down in a referendum, forcing the Legislature to scramble to pass something before the year ended. Gov. Richards' failed Robin Hood plan is often cited as one major reason she lost her reelection in 1994.

According to Rep. Sadler, there were four things they felt they needed to do with the 1993 finance reform that ultimately introduced the new accountability system: "relieve our school districts of unfunded mandates, pass school finance that gets us out of Courthouse, rewrite the entire education code to develop new con-

tract with the public to re-establish confidence and local control, and figure out a new way to pay for our schools.” In 1995, the state Supreme Court finally ruled that the education system was constitutional and the accountability system laid out remains the foundation for the present-day system.

Data-driven reform can make the case better than any individual or organization

From the beginning, data were at the heart of Texas’ reforms. The state developed a data system, the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), capable of disaggregating data—even before they had any specific intention of requiring districts or schools to collect and share that type of data—allowing room for the reporting and accountability systems to mature. A number of key TEA staff had a vision for where the data system could go and built it with that vision in mind. It was ultimately their decision to release public data in 1985, which was both difficult and empowering for educators.

Once the initial data were released, stakeholders very quickly understood the value and necessity of the reforms as the data showed the weaknesses of the system. The data forced schools to be more focused, and to look at what was happening in and across classrooms, even though the data couldn’t go very deep at the time.

The ability of data to make the case for reform only increased in 1993 when the state began releasing disaggregated data, causing many “painful conversations about who was learning and who wasn’t. It acted as a spear tip,” as one interviewee noted. Many principals of low-income and/or high-minority schools opposed the new assessments and accountability measures, until they saw how their students were faring in comparison to more advantaged students. Once they understood the depth of the inequity and realized the accountability system would shift resource allocation, they then became some of the strongest advocates for the reforms.

In a 2002 survey of “border-county” and “non-border-county” principals on the state accountability and TAAS, only the latter group, which typically educated fewer minority students, noted the “unfairness of the system because of sub-group ratings.”

Once the reforms took hold, the data were a source of pride for Texans, allowing more reforms to come online as their faith in their ability to meet new proficiency bars was confirmed. Starting in the late 1990s, test scores for all students continued to rise in Texas, drawing national attention and statewide pride. Thus the “Texas Miracle” was born.

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Texas was one of the first states to develop a longitudinal data system capable of tracking individual-level data from pre-K through college graduation. Even today, Texas is one of only 12 states that matches records across K-12 and postsecondary systems on a regular basis. This vision has kept the state ahead of the nation.



Education Reform in Texas



Next Steps and Challenges for Texas

Texas has long been at the forefront of education reform and many of the education stakeholders have welcomed new challenges and expectations, as long as they were reasonable and well-articulated. Yet challenges remain. Texas is now on the cusp of the next stage of its standards-based reform. In June 2009, the state Legislature passed and the governor signed an omnibus accountability bill (HB3) that both reinforces and keeps certain pieces of the reform efforts moving—such as a stronger focus on students’ college and career readiness—while also seeking to address concerns with the current system.

For example, as the state moved from the TAAS to the TAKS, there was a common sentiment among educators and policymakers alike that the curriculum had become too narrow and the accountability system too punitive. With so many “trip wires” that can lead to a negative rating, both friends and foes of the standards-based movement agreed that the accountability system needed a reform. The new accountability bill seeks to address those issues, with provisions around the new end-of-course exams (students will need to earn a composite score in the main academic areas based on at least three exams in each subject) and school accountability (each school must meet at least 85% of the 45 performance categories in one year, but may average three years of performance data or pass otherwise, under the commissioner’s discretion).

In addition, and perhaps most importantly, the new bill calls for exams given in grades 3-8 to be aligned with lower-level end-of-course exams—in subjects like English II and Algebra I—to ensure a progression of learning. The English II and Algebra I exams must be in alignment with the English III and Algebra II exams, so that success on the lower-level exams correlates with

success on the more advanced exams. This progression of college and career readiness expectations, starting in the elementary grades, helps clarify what it means for a student to be on track to graduating ready for college and careers.

When the accountability bill was first introduced in March 2009, it was a very different bill with a very different focus that was not particularly aligned with reforms of the past. Yet many of the leaders highlighted in this case study and many other individuals who played a key role behind the scenes during the earlier reforms continued to advocate for rigor and moving the ball forward.

As Texas continues to raise the bar of expectations—now anchored to the college- and career-ready bar—the state must continue to focus heavily on student and teacher supports and move at a pace that allows the students who are struggling to meet today’s expectations to excel. Many students are struggling to complete the Recommended High School Program and many of those students who do complete these requirements are still placed in remedial courses upon enrolling in college. As the Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board collaborate to set a college-ready standard on the new end-of-course exams in English III and Algebra II, they intend to focus on issues such as the high statewide remediation rate, but the process will be difficult and will have major implications for students and schools alike.

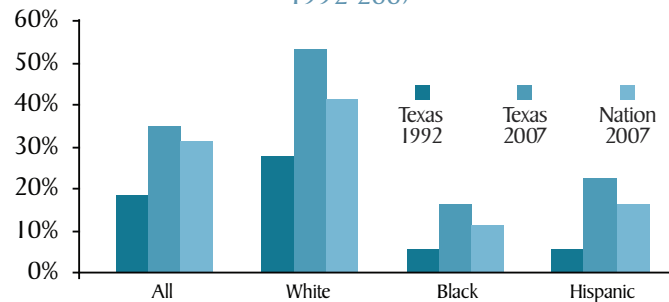
Conclusion

The Texas story is filled with lessons on how to build and implement a sustainable reform over time. One can draw a direct line from the 1984 reforms all the way to HB3, in their vision and commitment to standards-based reform. Over the course of 25 years, the state has added a number of major components to its system—statewide tests of increasing rigor, reports on student achievement by ethnic group and socioeconomic status, and standards for student promotion—but did so gradually and within the context of the broader school improvement agenda. Along the way, Texas improved upon its funding system; while still imperfect it is more equitable and efficient than it was before the 1990s reforms.

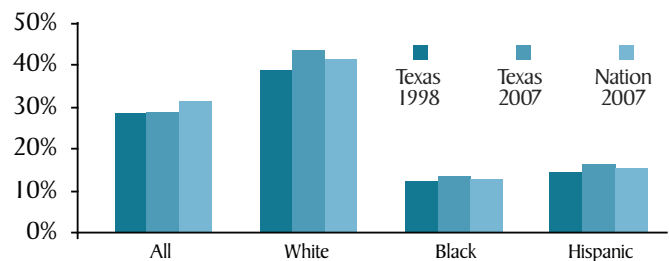
The Texas story is one defined by strong, cross-sector leadership and a commitment to continuous improvement. Texas’ strong and dedicated political, education and business leaders drove the effort to focus more explicitly on student achievement and a series of legislative bills and a number of decisions made within TEA built the system around this goal. Many of these leaders took a long view and were purposeful in the decisions they made throughout the reform era, providing support and coverage for the reform agenda so that it would be able to take root and have an impact. This type of leadership—and the fact that it came from legislators, governors and K-12 commissioners, as well as external champions—demonstrates how vital leadership truly is in building and implementing a sustainable reform.

There is confidence throughout the state today that the new policy will continue to build on and refine the reforms of the past, in its commitment to data-driven accountability; incremental, but continual, improvement; and an increasing alignment between standards, curriculum, and assessments, in large part because of the ongoing dedication of Texas’ education, political and business leadership to education reform.

8th Grade Math NAEP Scores, at or above proficient: 1992-2007



8th Grade Reading NAEP Scores, at or above proficient: 1998-2007





Education Reform in Texas

Texas' Major Education Bills

House Bill 72 (1984): HB72 was a sweeping reform of Texas' education system, focusing accountability on academic achievement, rather than compliance-based measures.

- Key provisions include: A new high-stakes assessment measuring “minimum” rather than “basic” skills; the “no pass, no play” rule, barring students who were failing from participating in extra-curricular activities until they brought their grades up; restrictions on absences; annual district report cards; a statewide data system, the Public Education Information Management System; a teacher pay raise; a set teacher-to-student ratio of 22:1 for grades K-4; a career ladder program; and a required competency exam for current and prospective teachers.

Senate Bill 7 (1993): SB7, an education appropriations bill, created a new school accountability system to accredit school districts and rate schools, based on student achievement.

- Key provisions include: A basic framework with a complex system of formulas, adjustments and weights to equalize school funding; an accountability system that integrated the statewide curriculum and assessment, district and campus ratings, recognition for high performance and significant increases in performance, sanctions for poor performance, and school, district, and state-level reports; and a sunset of the existing Texas Education Code.

Senate Bill 1 (1995): As mandated by SB7, SB1 revised the Texas Education Code in order to find a better balance between state and local control.

- Key provisions include: State Board of Education authority over the establishment of charter schools; new diploma options; a new statewide curriculum; a self-governed State Board of Educator Certification; refinements to the school improvement plan process; and new disciplinary measures and provisions.

Senate Bill 103 (1999): SB103 called for a new state assessment system that was aligned with the newly developed statewide curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.

- Key provisions include: The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is replaced with the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), which must be aligned with the new statewide curriculum and include a component that could be used to assess students' readiness for college.

The Committee Substitute Senate Bill 1 (1999): CSSB 1 sought to end social promotion practices and provide programs to help at-risk students reach grade-level.

- Key provisions include: Students in grades 3, 5 and 8 are required to pass assessments in mathematics and read-

ing to be promoted to the following grade; accelerated reading programs for students in K-2 identified as below grade level; and accelerated reading and/or math programs for students in grades 3, 5, and 8 not meeting assessment standards.

House Bill 1 (2006): HB1 addressed public school finance, property tax relief, public school accountability and high school reform.

- Key provisions include: College readiness standards developed by vertical alignment teams; the addition of 4x4 requirements (four courses in each of the core subject areas) to the Recommended High School Program; an electronic student record system; the creation of state Education Research Centers; a dual enrollment (or “college credit”) program requirement; and a high school allotment fund to be used by schools to provide programs and support to promote college and career readiness.

Senate Bill 1031 (2007): SB1031 replaced the TAKS with a series of end-of-course assessments.

- Key provisions include: The TAKS is replaced with end-of-course assessments in English I-III, Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, World Geography, World History and U.S. History by 2011-12. These exams will be used for student and school accountability and will count towards 15% of the student's overall grade for the related course. The higher-level exams are expected to include a separate series of questions to measure college readiness and the need for developmental coursework in higher education, while exams in a lower-level courses should have questions to determine student readiness for advanced coursework.

House Bill 3 (2009): HB3 is an omnibus accountability that sought to bring Texas' curriculum, accountability and promotion requirements into alignment with each other and with college and career readiness.

- Key provisions include: Retained the social promotion restrictions for grades 5 and 8, but rolled them back for grade 3; TEA and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board are to ensure the Algebra II and English III end-of-course exams (and, in the future, science and social studies exams) are capable of measuring college readiness; exams given in grade 3-8 and Algebra I and English II exams are to be aligned, with the Algebra II and English III exams as anchor assessments; refinement of school accreditation and performance standards requirements; a pilot program for institutions of higher education to award diplomas to students who demonstrate early readiness for college; and an assessment data portal, accessible to students, parents, teachers, administrators and public institutions of higher education.

Interviews

David D. Anderson—*Hilco Partners; former Managing Director, Division of Curriculum & Profession Development, Texas Education Agency*

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Daniel Casey—*Partner, Moak, Casey & Associates*

Harley Eckhart—*Associate Executive Director, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association*

Lonnie Hollingsworth—*Director of Legal Services and Governmental Relations, Texas Classroom Teachers Association*

Harrison Keller—*Vice Provost, the University of Texas at Austin, former Director of Research, Texas House of Representatives*

Sandy Kress—*Partner, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, LLP*

Lynn Moak—*Partner, Moak, Casey & Associates, former Deputy Commissioner of Education*

Paul Sadler—*Executive Director, the Wind Coalition, former Chair of Public Education Committee, Texas House of Representatives*

Robert Scott—*Texas Commissioner of Education*

Ellen Williams—*Attorney at Law, former general counsel for Senator Bill Ratliff*

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