

Addendum: How the 81st Legislature Addressed the Identified Barriers to College Readiness

Barriers to Teaching and Learning.

Barrier: Lack of Qualified Math and Science Teachers: The new 4x4 curriculum requirements are forcing many high schools to hire additional math and science teachers. Most states, including Texas, are struggling to recruit and retain well-qualified mathematics and science teachers for middle and high school.

Recommended Solution(s): Improvements in pre-service preparation, as well as professional development for certified teachers will help ease the shortage. Data showing the impact of stipends for hard-to-teach schools and for teachers who work in shortage areas are critical to expanding the pool of highly qualified math and science teachers.

Legislative Response: The 81st Legislature addressed this barrier with two bills:

- **SB 174** enhances accountability for educator preparation programs, including requiring State Board for Educator Certification to include achievement results of students taught by newly certified teachers among the accountability measures for educator preparation programs.
- **HB 3646** collapses the TEEG program into the DATE program to create a single, state-funded educator incentive pay program, which districts can use to provide stipends to attract teachers into hard-to-staff subjects (like math and science) or schools.

Barrier: Disparate access to advanced and dual credit courses: Schools can infuse rigor into the curriculum through higher standards in existing classes, implementation of Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate curricula, and through partnerships with higher education institutions to offer dual credit courses. However, schools without a college nearby are at a disadvantage with respect to offering dual credit courses, and even those with a potential partner institution struggle with the mechanics of enrollment and course scheduling.

Recommended Solution(s): Implementation of the Texas virtual school network will make it easier for many school districts to offer more rigorous courses and dual-credit opportunities. Additionally, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB)

should consider creating a model articulation agreement so that school districts and community colleges do not have to create a unique agreement for each dual credit course.

Legislative Response: The 81st Legislature addressed this barrier by doing the following:

- **HB 3646** and **SB 1** provide more state funding for the virtual school network and greater district access to virtual classes;
- **HB 3** requires the commissioners of education and higher education to study the feasibility of substituting passage of a dual credit course for an end-of-course exam;
- **HB 3** authorizes the commissioner of higher education to develop a single college placement exam; and
- **HB 2480** authorizes a public junior to enter into an agreement with a school district, organization or other person that operates a high school to offer high school students the opportunity to take a dual credit course, regardless of whether the high school is located within the junior college's service area.

Barrier: Limited course options for graduation: The Recommended High School Program (RHSP) specifies 26 course credits students must have in order to graduate. The 26-credit requirement for the RHSP generally fills a student's high school schedule, potentially pushing career and technology education out of the curriculum for many students.

Recommended Solution(s): The TEA should identify and/or develop curricula for career and technology education (CTE) courses that simultaneously satisfy the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for core curriculum courses and meet the state's workforce needs. Implementing these courses successfully may necessitate an investment in additional teacher professional development and an adjustment in the certification rules for CTE teachers. Districts should consider offering "blended" courses that fulfill the TEKS of two core courses simultaneously, thus allowing students more time in their schedule to take additional courses.

Legislative Response: The 81st Legislature addressed this barrier by passing **HB 3**, which accomplishes the following:

- Revises the RHSP and Advanced High School Program to eliminate some of the state-required courses for graduation, thus increasing the number of elective credits available to students under the RHSP (from 3.5 to six elective credits) and the Advanced Program (from 2.5 to five elective credits);
- Requires the State Board of Education (SBOE) to approve applied math and science courses that could substitute for traditional courses under the RHSP after a student completes Algebra II or Physics;
- Requires the State Board of Education to allow certain, rigorous CTE courses to fulfill the fourth math and science credits under the RHSP;

- Authorizes the commissioners of education and higher education, in consultation with the comptroller and Texas Workforce Commission, to award grants valued at up to \$1 million (for a program total of \$10 million per year) to a university to develop advanced math and science courses that prepare high school students for employment in a high-demand occupation. To be eligible for the grant, the institution of higher education must partner with at least one school district and business entity in developing a course.

P-16 Alignment Barriers.

Barrier: Variable College Admission and Placement Standards: Community colleges and universities require different college placement exams and are free to set the scores required for admission on those placement exams. Many more students would be able to avoid having to take remedial courses in college if they had a clear understanding about what they need to learn in high school to enroll directly into credit-bearing college courses.

Recommended Solution(s): Higher education needs to create clear, uniform policies about course requirements and the knowledge needed to enter and succeed in credit-bearing freshman courses. A uniform college placement exam and required admission score on that exam would allow high school students to more appropriately plan their high school course schedules and avoid the expense and time lost to remedial course work in college.

Legislative Response: The 81st Legislature addressed this barrier by passing **HB 3**, which:

- Provides that a student who has completed the RHSP or Advanced Program and met the “college readiness” standards on the Algebra II and English III end-of-course (EOC) exams is automatically exempt from the taking remedial courses in those subjects for the period of time determined by the commissioner; and
- Authorizes the commissioner of higher education to require institutions of higher education to adopt uniform course placement standards.

Barrier: Lack of Uniformity in Awarding Dual Credit: In too many circumstances, students who earn dual credit (credit for a high school course and credit for a college course simultaneously) are served well only if they attend the college that awarded the dual credit. Students may be unable to transfer dual credit earned at a local community college to another community college or a Texas public four-year institution.

Recommended Solution(s): THECB should create a list of courses for which all community colleges and public universities in Texas will award college credit.

Legislative Response: The 81st Legislature addressed this barrier by passing **HB 3**, which:

- Provides that the commissioners of education and higher education must study the feasibility of allowing students to substitute successful completion of a dual credit course

for passage of an EOC exam and make recommendations to the next legislature based on that study; and

- Prioritizes funding for grants under the newly created grant program for university/school district/workforce partnerships that develop an advanced math or science course that may be transferred as college credit to multiple institutions of higher education.

Student Support Barriers.

Barrier: Insufficient College Counseling: High school students typically believe that meeting high school graduation requirements will prepare them for college, but higher education faculty and officials identify this as a misconception. Many students lack information on course requirements, placement examinations, admission criteria, the role of extracurricular activities, and tuition costs. One of the major reasons for this lack of knowledge is that middle and high school students lack sufficient access to appropriately trained college and career counselors. Counselors are so busy with scheduling and test administration duties that they have insufficient time to guide students in course selection and through the quagmire of college admission and financial aid requirements. Furthermore, the 65 Percent Rule impedes school districts from hiring additional guidance counselors, since counselors' salaries are not included in the calculation of districts' "instructional expenditures." Lastly, teachers who do not teach honors or advanced classes are ill-prepared to help their students learn about college requirements.

Recommended Solution(s): High school counselors should obtain regular training in college admission and financial aid requirements so they can effectively help students prepare for higher education. Policymakers should revise the 65 Percent Rule to allow districts' expenditures on counselors to be included within the calculation of "instructional expenditures," so that districts have greater budgetary flexibility to hire more counselors. And, districts should implement strategies aimed to increase the accessibility of guidance counselors, including: reducing the administrative burdens on guidance counselors; training middle and high school teachers to provide some college and career guidance; and partnering with community colleges to provide students with greater access to knowledgeable college and financial aid counselors.

Legislative Response: The 81st Legislature addressed this barrier by passing:

- **HB 3**, which eliminated the 65 Percent Rule from the financial accountability system;
- **HB 3646**, which provides a pay raise for full-time counselors;
- **SB 175**, which amends the state's "Top 10 Percent" college admissions rule and requires:
 - School districts to provide written notification of the substance of the automatic admission law to each student who registers for a class required for high school graduation;
 - The THECB to develop, based on best practices, an outreach program help all general academic teaching institutions reach out to high school seniors who are likely to be eligible for automatic admission, with information about the automatic admission law and other admissions opportunities, and the availability of financial aid; and

- THECB to publish an annual report on the impact on state's the goal of closing college and achievement gaps of the new 75 percent cap on the percentage of students admitted to The University of Texas under the Top 10 Percent Rule. The report must analyze the admitted students, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographic region, size of high school attended, along with the rank of high school as far as number of graduates attending college.

Barrier: Insufficient Support for Minority Students: The lack of available, appropriately trained guidance counselors is a particularly acute problem for students who have been historically under-represented in higher education. These students may not know what questions to ask and seem to be more reluctant than other students to seek the assistance of busy guidance counselors. Additionally, the parents of these students are less familiar with college admissions and financial aid processes, and thus need guidance and support, as well.

Recommended Solution(s): The state can gain an understanding of what works to increase the college-going rates of under-served students by examining results of the federal Gear-Up program and other programs with the goal of increasing college admission and completion for minority and low-income students. Such information should be publicized to school districts through the TEA's Best Practices Clearinghouse.

Legislative Response: The 81st Legislature addressed this barrier by passing:

- **SB 175**, which requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to develop, based on best practices, an outreach program help all general academic teaching institutions reach out to high school seniors who are likely to be eligible for automatic admission, with information about the automatic admission law and other admissions opportunities, and the availability of financial aid.

Barrier: Insufficient and Confusing Financial Aid Programs: The system by which students and their families may apply for financial aid is confusing and complex. Multiple state and federal financial aid programs are available to students in Texas, and the differences among aid options are unclear. Financial aid resources have not kept pace with tuition increases. Further, many high school students do not receive notice of financial aid awards until the spring of their senior year, which makes college planning difficult. Financial aid has become more critical for students as the cost of college has increased significantly.

Recommended Solution(s): Financial aid to Texas students could be improved by consolidating some aid programs, increasing the resources for higher education as well as technical training aid, and making award notification at a time what is most helpful to students.

Legislative Response: In SB 1, the 81st legislature funded college financial aid programs at \$1 billion, which is a 35 percent funding increase over the prior biennium, allocated as follows:

- The appropriation for TEXAS Grants program was increased by \$186 million for a total appropriation of \$615 million for the biennium. This program serves low-income students who complete the RHSP and the additional appropriation will increase eligibility to 104,000 students (up from 83,000 during the 2008-09 biennium);
- The appropriation for the B-on-Time Loan program for community college students increased by 82 percent to \$140 million for the biennium;
- The appropriation for the community college grant program increased by 71 percent to \$24 million; and
- State funding for students attending private colleges and universities in Texas remained flat at \$212 million and funding for work-study programs remained unchanged at \$15 million.

Governance Barriers.

Barrier: Separate Public and Higher Education Systems: The separate governance structures for public and higher education contribute to the lack of curricular alignment, inefficient flow of information, and incomplete and incompatible data systems. Typically, policymakers’ efforts to align the two systems have focused on improving high schools. This may be politically expedient since high school curricula and graduation standards are within legislative reach, but such initiatives address only half of the alignment process and foster systemic mistrust between public and higher education faculty.

Recommended Solution(s): The state P-16 Council as well as the vertical teams and the Commission for a College Ready Texas have set the stage for better alignment between the public and higher education systems. More collaborative staff activity through dual credit courses, regular information sharing, and more accurate (and timely) feedback will help ameliorate existing problems. Development of a higher education accountability system that is detailed, transparent and aligned with the public education accountability systems will help Texas policymakers identify the initiatives that are working to promote college and workforce readiness.

Legislative Response: The 81st Legislature addressed this barrier by passing **HB 3**, which promotes the coordination of higher education and P-12 standards in the following ways:

- Establishes a 10-year goal of being among the top 10 states in the nation in terms of the number of students who meet college readiness standards in high school;
- Requires the commissioners of education and higher education to collaborate in the development of “college readiness” performance standards on the Algebra II and English III end-of-course exams, considering the need for remedial course work in developing those performance standards (Algebra II and English III are considered to be reliable predictors of a student’s ability to succeed in college);
- Requires the TEA in concert with the THECB to study the feasibility of implementing “college readiness” standards for the science and social studies end-of-course exams;

- Requires TEA to vertically align passing standards on all English/Language Arts or Math state assessments with the passing and college readiness standard on the English III and Algebra II end-of-course exams;
- Prohibits districts from administering required “college readiness” questions in a separate section of the end-of-course exams and allows a student’s performance on those questions to count towards the student’s exam score;
- Factors into the determination of campus/district accountability ratings the percentage of students who meet “college readiness” performance standards on the Algebra II and English III end-of-course exams and the percentage of students who make the required amount of annual improvement towards achieving those college readiness standards;
- Provides to new grant program to encourage universities to partner with school districts and local businesses to develop advanced math and science courses that prepare students for high-demand occupations; and
- Requires school districts to report data for a new set of quality learning indicators, including the following P-16 indicators: ACT, SAT results and results of articulated postsecondary degree programs and certified workforce training programs; the percent of students who enroll and begin college during the year following high school graduation; and the percent of students who complete their first year of college without remedial instruction.

Barrier: Lack of Workforce’s Involvement in Education Reforms: At the core of efforts to improve academic preparedness of Texas students is the understanding that the state’s economic health depends on the ability of young workers to meet labor market demands. Workforce representatives worry that our public and higher education systems are not adequately preparing students with the knowledge and skills required for important jobs in the trades and in manufacturing. Policymakers have made strides to include workforce representatives on councils to address P-16 alignment issues. But, their involvement to date has generally been tertiary.

Recommended Solution(s): The TEA should involve industry representatives early in the development of TEKS for courses designed to teach students workforce skills. Also, school districts, community colleges and universities should align their course offerings more closely with the needs of the local workforce.

Legislative Response: The 81st Legislature addressed this barrier by passing **HB 3**, which requires:

- The SBOE to revise the essential knowledge and skills of the career and technical education curriculum when the THECB revises the database of statewide inventory of workforce education courses;
- The TEA and the THECB must gather data and conduct research to substantiate a correlation between a certain level of student performance on the end-of-course exams and success in military service or workforce training, certification or other credential programs community college;
- The commissioner of education to include 21st Century Workforce Development as a basis for awarding campus distinctions;

- School districts to report data for a new set of quality learning indicators, including: ACT, SAT results and results of articulated postsecondary degree programs and certified workforce training programs; the percent of students who enroll and begin college during the year following high school graduation; and the percent of students who complete their first year of college without remedial instruction;
- The commissioners of education and higher education, in consultation with the comptroller and Texas Workforce Commission, to award grants valued at up to \$1 million (for a program total of \$10 million per year) to a university that partners with a school district and local business to develop advanced math and science courses that prepare high school students for employment in a high-demand occupation;
- The comptroller to develop the Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) Grant Program to provide grants to public junior colleges, technical institutes, and eligible nonprofits to: (1) develop or expand programs that prepare low-income students for careers in high-demand occupations; (2) defray the start-up costs of new CTE programs (including dual credit courses) at public junior colleges and public technical institutes that meet certain characteristics, and (3) provide need-based scholarships to students in junior colleges or technical institutes enrolled in a training program for high-demand occupations; and
- Requires school districts to report data for a new set of quality learning indicators, including the following P-16 indicators: ACT, SAT results and results of articulated postsecondary degree programs and certified workforce training programs.

The only identified barriers that were not addressed during the 81st legislative session were:

Barrier: Effect of the Uniform School Start Date: The late-August uniform school start date is force teachers in many school districts to spend the first week of January reviewing fall semester material and administering the fall semester exams. This limits the number of instructional days available during the spring semester prior to the administration of the state TAKS exams.

Recommended Solution(s): The Legislature should repeal legislation requiring a uniform school start date for public schools so that districts can begin the school year earlier in August in order to maximize the number of days of instruction available to students prior to the state tests.

Legislative Response: A legislator offered an amendment to HB 3 which would have moved the uniform school start date one week earlier in August and required districts to end the school year by June 1. The amendment was not ultimately considered by the full House. Prior to “pulling” the amendment, the sponsor publicly encouraged the Speaker of the House to create an interim charge for a legislative committee to study the uniform school start date and recommend changes to the 82nd Legislature.

Barrier: Absence of a Longitudinal P-16 Database to Track Students: Once students graduate from high school, school personnel and policymakers lack the means to track individual students' postsecondary outcomes. Some school administrators have relationships with regional colleges or universities that allow them to determine which of their high school graduates have enrolled, require remedial instruction, and what programs of study those students choose. But, such data are not available to most districts. Policymakers seeking to improve students' postsecondary outcomes experience similar challenges because it is difficult to assess policy or program effectiveness when it is not possible to track individual students as they move from high school into higher education or the workforce.

Creation of a longitudinal database to track the characteristics, courses taken and academic performance of individual students is a challenging task in and of itself. It is made more difficult, however, by a disagreement over the effect of the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The intent of FERPA is to limit educators' ability to disclose student records collected by public schools or institutions of higher education without parental consent; however, the law allows for data to be disclosed to specified officials without parental consent if it is to be used "in conjunction with an audit or evaluation of Federal or State supported education programs, or for the enforcement of or compliance with Federal legal requirements which relate to those programs." Officials at TEA and THECB maintain that FERPA prohibits the linking of the two data systems, but other policymakers interviewed for this report say that that interpretation is too conservative.

Recommended Solution(s): TEA and THECB have extensive data on educational characteristics, choices, and outcomes of individual students, which, if linked, would enable districts to track graduates into public colleges and universities and allow evaluators to assess the effectiveness of policies designed to improve students' college readiness. In addition, the Texas Workforce Commission has employment data, which could provide information on students' workforce outcomes and help measure the effectiveness of educational programs if linked to THECB and TEA databases. The development and maintenance of a statewide P-16 data system will require ongoing investment by the state.

Legislative Response: A legislator attempted to address this barrier by filing **HB 3740**, which would have created a statewide data management system. That bill did not pass, however, just as a similar bill did not pass during the prior legislative session. It is nevertheless possible that TEA and THECB could use federal stimulus funds to create a P-16 data system.