

The Texas High School Project: An Innovative Partnership to Reinvent High Schools

Overview: A national model for transforming high schools

Across the nation, government leaders, education agencies, and philanthropic organizations are striving to reinvent the American high school to better meet the needs of our students and economy. In 2003, the U.S. Department of Education stated that American high schools are "based on a model established when the expectations of high school education were far different. The model assumed that most students would not go on to postsecondary education or training, and that the majority had little need for rigorous academic preparation. Today's world demands a higher level of expectations and academic achievement."ⁱ

Transforming the American high school to meet the demands of today's world will require the committed and coordinated efforts of a broad range of education stakeholders. Building on our state's nationally recognized high school curriculum standards, the Texas High School Project stands out as a model of what can be accomplished when public and private entities join together to raise academic achievement levels in high schools.

The Texas High School Project (THSP) is a \$260 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.

The achievement gap in Texas has serious consequences

Although Texas has made strides in raising achievement levels in its high schools, a persistent achievement gap exists among ethnic and economic student groups. While graduation rates have risen,ⁱⁱ stark differences emerge when these figures are examined by group. Almost 90% of White students graduated from high school within four years of entering ninth grade, yet only 78% of Hispanic students, 83% of African American students, and 79% 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,ⁱⁱⁱ differences also exist between various student groups. Some 82% of White students obtained passing scores on the spring 2005 Grade 11 exit-level TAKS, while only 52% of African-American students, 56% of Hispanic students, and 53% of economically disadvantaged students passed.

Increasing the graduation rate and raising the academic achievement expectations for *all* high school students may be the most important challenge facing this country and this state. In today's knowledge-based economy, dropping out of high school or failing to earn a postsecondary degree limits students' employment options and reduces the living they can earn. A high school graduate in 2000 earned about 25 percent more a year than a student who dropped out of high school, and a college graduate made more than twice as much as a student who did not complete high school.^{iv}

Major Privately-Funded THSP Initiatives

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.

Major Publicly-Funded THSP Initiatives

Initiatives managed by the Texas Education Agency

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 83 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

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create a demonstration project that will supply case studies in successful practices for turning around low-performing campuses. TEA has allocated \$5,000,000 in grant funding to support a second round of redesign grants targeted at high school campuses rated Academically Unacceptable in 2005. Grant awards to 12-15 high schools will be made by the end of December 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 Math, Science, and Technology 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.

ⁱ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Adult and Vocational Education, "From There to Here: The Road to Reform of American High Schools," in *The High School Leadership Summit, Issue Papers*, (Washington D.C., 2003), p. 1,

ⁱⁱ 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.

ⁱⁱⁱ 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.

^{iv} National Governor's Association, *Ready for Tomorrow: Helping All Students Achieve Secondary and Postsecondary Success, A Guide for Governors* (Washington D.C., 2003), p.

Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Initiative Summary

Economic Development Context

Texas has made economic development, especially growth in high-tech fields and the innovation economy, one of the key focuses of his administration. While economic development efforts have become more dependent on workers with greater scientific and technological expertise, a number of reports have revealed that our education system is not producing enough graduates with strong backgrounds in math, science, technology, and engineering to sustain job growth in these key businesses of the future. To ensure that Texas will continue to grow its economy, land more job expansions than any other state, and remain at the forefront in the battle for 21st century jobs, Texas is launching a bold and forward-thinking education program—the Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Initiative.

The Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Initiative will build on state and local efforts to improve math and science achievement among Texas students. The Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math 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.

Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Initiative and Texas High School Project

This initiative is a central new component of the Texas High School Project (THSP), a \$180 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, Communities Foundation of Texas, educators, and others. 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.

The partners in the Texas High School Project recognize the urgency around maintaining our competitiveness in the 21st century and the vital role that high schools play in preparing students for postsecondary opportunities. By aligning its high school redesign efforts with the goals of the state's economic development activities, the THSP will help Texas transform science, technology, engineering, and math education and thus lead the nation in tackling this issue.

Funding for the Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Initiative

The Texas High School Project is launching the Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Initiative with \$20 million in state funds, \$50 million in new contributions from the three major philanthropic donors, and \$10 million in federal revenue.

Funding for the Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Initiative comes from the following sources:

- State (TEA)—\$20 million in existing state funding and \$10 million in federal funding
- Michael & Susan Dell Foundation—\$20 million
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—\$20 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

Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Initiative Goals and Outcomes

- To develop the nation's leading innovation economy workforce by aligning high school, postsecondary education, and economic development activities
- To establish 35 Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Academies in areas of high need across the state, each year producing 3,500 Texas high school graduates from diverse backgrounds, with the preparation to pursue study and careers in science, technology, engineering, and math related fields
- To create 5-6 Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Centers across the state that will support the transformation of teaching methods, teacher preparation, and instruction in the science, technology, engineering, and math fields
- To establish a statewide best practices network for science, technology, engineering, and math education to promote broad dissemination and adoption of promising practices from the initiative and to improve math and science performance for students across Texas

Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Academies

The academies will be small (approximately 100 students per class), nonselective secondary schools serving high need students. Every academy will provide a rigorous, well-rounded education with innovative math and science teaching and learning. The curriculum and instruction will reflect today's work environment by integrating technology in every class, utilizing collaborative and applied learning strategies, and exposing students to careers in science, technology, engineering, and math fields. The schools will offer students a culture of respect, community, and high expectations for all. Over five years, these 35 new academies will serve 25,000 students statewide. Three high schools in the state—Carver High School for Applied Technology/Engineering/Arts, The Academy of Irving ISD, and AJ. Moore Academy—have received grants to become the first academy demonstration sites.

Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Centers

The Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Centers, which will be located at universities, regional service centers, and other non-profit organizations, will support the academies by developing innovative science, technology, engineering, and math instructional materials, delivering teacher professional development, and creating partnerships among businesses, higher education entities, and school districts to support the effective implementation of the initiative. The Centers will ensure national best practices are utilized in Texas and will identify and document best practices at a local and state level. As programs prove effective, the Centers will lead in driving broad dissemination of best practice programs to teachers and school and district leadership across the state.

Statewide Best Practices Network for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Education

The network will serve as a conduit for sharing best practices and lessons learned from the Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Academies and Centers with all Texas middle and high schools. Through the network, schools across the state will have access to relevant professional development, rigorous math and science curriculum, lessons plans infused with real-world activities in math and science, and expert and peer advice.