

SRI International

December 23, 2008

Evaluation of the Texas High School Project

Study of the State Context for Policy Reform Final Report State Policy Review

SRI Project P18092

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Acknowledgements

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Education is critical to our nation's ability to sustain innovation, and society can do more to prepare the next generation. The Center for Education Policy (CEP) evaluates the impact of a variety of educational programs, especially improvements designed to serve traditionally underrepresented students.

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Research Funded by

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Abbreviations

(ADA) Average daily attendance
(AP) Advanced Placement
(AYP) Adequate yearly progress
(BTIM) Beginning Teacher Induction and Mentoring Program
(CIS) Communities in Schools
(Council) High School Completion and Success Initiative Council
(CRS) College Readiness Standards
(CTE) Career and technical education
(DARS) Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services
(DATE) District Awards for Teacher Excellence
(ECHS) Early College High School
(ELA) English language arts
(EOC) End-of-course
(GED) General Education Development
(GEEAP) Governor's Educator Excellence Award Program
(GEEG) Governor's Educator Excellence Grants
(GPA) grade point average
(HB) House Bill
(HERC) Higher Education Readiness Component
(HSTW) High Schools That Work
(IB) International Baccalaureate
(IHE) Institution of higher education
(ISD) Independent school district
(KIPP) Knowledge Is Power Program
(LEA) Local education agency
(NCLB) No Child Left Behind Act
(PSAT) Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test
(PSF) Permanent School Fund
(SAT) Scholastic Aptitude Test
(SB) Senate Bill
(SBEC) State Board for Educator Certification
(SBOE) State Board of Education
(SREB) Southern Regional Education Board
(TAC) Texas Administrative Code
(TAKS) Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills
(TAP) Teacher Advancement Program
(TEA) Texas Education Agency
(TEC) Texas Education Code
(TEEG) Texas Educator Excellence Grant
(TEKS) Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills
(TEXAS) Toward Excellence, Access and Success
(THEA) Texas Higher Education Assessment

Abbreviations (concluded)

(THECB) Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

(THSP) Texas High School Project

(TSI) Texas Success Initiative

(T-STEM) Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Initiative

(TWC) Texas Workforce Commission

(TxPEP) Texas Principal Excellence Program

State Policy Context for High School Reform in Texas

The evaluation of the Texas High School Project (THSP) is being conducted by SRI International with the overarching goal of discerning the impact of THSP on student outcomes. The evaluation comprises six studies:

1. Study of high school reform initiatives
2. Study of district redesign
3. Study of networks
4. Study of other supports for high school reform (e.g., district leadership, human capital)
5. Study of THSP management and coordination
6. Study of the state context for high school reform

This report describes the process of and findings from the study on the state context for high school reform.

As evident in the THSP theory of change (see Appendix A), the initiatives that interact with district, school, teacher, and student factors to influence student outcomes are embedded within the state policy context. The state policy context can be a key lever for high school reform, especially as it relates to academic standards, assessment, and accountability. During the last 5 years, Governor Rick Perry, the Legislature, and various regulatory agencies, such as the Texas Education Agency (TEA), have made concerted efforts to create a policy environment that supports high school reform in Texas. Hence, the intent of this particular study is to inform the evaluation about the state context that led to the creation of THSP and to examine how policies adopted since the creation of THSP in 2003 affect implementation of the reforms included within the initiative. Specifically, this study examines the following research questions:

- To what extent do state policies support high school reform initiatives?
- What factors aid in effectively translating state policy into local practice?

To answer these research questions, SRI engaged in a two-pronged approach of extensive document review and interviews with state and local respondents who are knowledgeable about education policies. The first step of the process involved ascertaining the policies that are most relevant to high school reform in Texas. To narrow the field of policies, we focused on those that began with the work of the 78th Legislature and coincided with the creation of THSP. (See Appendix B for a timeline of relevant policies, including those that predate THSP but nonetheless influence it.) These policies were identified through interviews with a variety of staff at TEA and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), legislative staff, and representatives from the Governor's office. The salient high school reform policies included in this report are categorized into the following areas:

- Accountability.
- College readiness standards and curriculum.
- P-16 Council.
- Teacher quality and certification.
- At-risk students and dropout prevention.
- Charter schools.

To understand how THSP fits into this policy landscape, this first section of the report relates the history of the creation of THSP, framing it within the state policy context that existed at the time of its inception. It then outlines the governance structure in Texas that supports education policy adoption and implementation. Finally, this section describes the relevant policies adopted since THSP launched in order to understand the extent to which they support high school reform efforts in general and THSP in particular. The descriptions are based on state-level interviews and on a review of statutes, TEA and THECB policies, and other relevant publicly available documentation.¹ Although presenting a comprehensive legislative history that encompasses the debates underlying the adoption of final policies is beyond the intended purposes of this report, this document attempts to describe specific policies as they relate to high school reform in the state and to THSP specifically wherever possible.

To understand the effect of both THSP and other state policy efforts at the district and school levels and how policy translates into practice, the second section of the report discusses local perspectives on policy implementation, including those policies that influence local practice the most. These data were garnered from site visits to a sample of districts and schools implementing THSP models in spring 2008. Some initial findings reveal the prominence of the accountability policy in guiding instruction and the kinds of academic supports provided to students by high schools; significant variance in support for the more rigorous curriculum requirements, such as the “four-by-four” curriculum standards; and challenges in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers. It is important to note that it takes significant time for policies to have an impact at the local level; thus, the findings discussed here and later in the report are preliminary at this point and only begin to touch the surface of the potential, eventual impacts. Further, although the data collection activities provide a local perspective about many of the policies included in this report, it is not possible in this study to link policies directly to student outcomes. The first synthesis report for the overall evaluation, which will be submitted in March 2009, will provide preliminary information about the impact of THSP on student outcomes.

History of THSP

Prior to 2003, the reform lens in Texas had been directed primarily toward K-8 education, with particular interest in reading and math. Only a few initiatives related to high schools were in place, such as the Ninth Grade Success Initiative that was initially funded in 1999 by the 76th Texas Legislature. The intent of that initiative was to reduce dropout rates by providing services for ninth graders who were either at risk of not earning sufficient credits or had not earned sufficient credits to advance to grade 10. In addition, during the 77th Regular Legislative Session (2001), the state criteria used to identify students at risk of dropping out of school were broadened, allowing more students to become eligible for services.

¹ For more information, see <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/>, <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/>, and <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/>.

Despite these efforts, the high school dropout rate in Texas continued to be a problem. During the 2002 gubernatorial election, Governor Perry proposed a plan to reduce the number of students who drop out of school as part of his Education Initiative.² After the election, the Governor's staff worked to address the issue of dropout and high school reform in Texas in collaboration with the 78th Legislature. To support this High School Completion Initiative, the state allocated \$65 million to fund high school reform efforts and dropout prevention programs. The focus on reforming high schools by both Governor Perry and the Texas Legislature garnered interest from private foundations looking to invest in potential solutions to reduce the dropout rate, increase college and workforce readiness, and close achievement gaps between populations of students.

Based on this shared interest and commitment to reforming high schools, THSP was created in 2003. THSP is a joint venture between the Governor, TEA, and private foundations, with the goal of preparing students for postsecondary education and the workforce. Although Texas had a budget shortfall at the time, the state was able to leverage funding from private foundations and provide matching state dollars to support high school reform efforts. The initial investment of \$130 million (\$65 million from the state and \$65 million from the private foundations) provided grants to districts to redesign existing underperforming high schools, to create new small schools, and to provide additional support services for at-risk students. Additional funding from the state and private foundations has increased the breadth of programs included in THSP, including the Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Initiative (T-STEM), which will create 35 T-STEM Academies across Texas. The goal of T-STEM is to prepare students for the STEM fields that are becoming increasingly important in the Texas economy.

Thus far, approximately \$318.42 million has been allocated to THSP, which includes a combination of federal funding, state funding as appropriated by the Legislature, and \$113 million from private foundations, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation. Private funding is overseen primarily by the Communities Foundation of Texas, while state and federal funding is managed by TEA.

Components of THSP

THSP is focused on providing programs and supports to high-need schools and districts statewide, with an emphasis on urban areas and the Texas-Mexico border. Although eligibility differs across programs, many programs are targeted at high schools that have been rated Academically Unacceptable by the state accountability system. THSP is designed to create innovative high school models and programs where best practices can be identified and eventually taken to scale across the state. It includes initiatives to implement new high school models through the redesign of comprehensive high schools or the creation of new small schools, to develop education leadership programs for principals and teachers, and to provide various student programs. See Exhibit 1 for a list of the initiatives funded by THSP.³ These models are designed to offer smaller learning environments, student supports, and a college-going culture that will better prepare students to be successful at postsecondary endeavors and in the

² Governor Perry proposed a five-point plan in 2002 that included establishing after school, summer school and mentoring programs; expanding successful programs that help students remain on track for high school graduation; creating a dropout prevention division within TEA; identifying best practices and course options for students faced with work, childcare or other family responsibilities; and hiring more counselors at schools with high dropout rates. See <http://governor.state.tx.us/news/press-release/4286/>.

³ For more information on these initiatives, see <http://www.thsp.org/initiatives/> and http://www.tea.state.tx.us/ed_init/sec/thsp/.

workplace. The leadership initiatives are intended to build capacity at the schools so that these models can be sustained.

Exhibit 1. Initiatives Funded by THSP

New High Schools	Education Leadership	Student Programs
High School Redesign High Schools That Work (HSTW) Early College High School (ECHS) New Schools and Charter Schools (NSCS) Initiative YES College Preparatory Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) Uplift Education IDEA Public Schools The Asia Society – International Studies School Network T-STEM T-STEM Academies T-STEM Centers T-STEM Network	Pilot High School Principal Certification Program Teacher Training for Advanced Placement Courses UTeach	Tutoring, counseling, and intervention programs

Later sections of this report discuss specific policies that guide the operation of high schools; however, it is important to first understand the process for developing education policy in Texas. To that end, the following section outlines the landscape for determining and implementing policy.

Oversight of Educational Policy in Texas

The education system in Texas involves a number of stakeholders, each with different responsibilities when it comes to changing and implementing state policies. Texas has a bicameral legislature that proposes and adopts new education bills. The House of Representatives and the Senate each have an education committee that monitors the state’s education issues, reviews proposed legislation, and makes recommendations to the Legislature about specific policies to consider adding or modifying. The appropriations committees determine the financial allotments for education programs. In addition to legislation that passes through the Legislature, the Governor can create executive orders that mandate new education programs.

Several education agencies oversee K-12 and higher education across the state and help local education agencies (LEAs) translate policy into practice. The State Board of Education (SBOE) provides leadership for the public K-12 school system and oversees the writing and approval of

curriculum standards, approves instructional materials, sets passing scores on the state assessments, and manages the Permanent School Fund (PSF). It consists of 15 elected members representing different regions of the state, with one member appointed as the chair by the Governor. TEA, which is led by a Governor-appointed Commissioner of Education, helps schools implement education programs and holds them accountable for their performance. TEA cannot advocate for policy changes, but it can provide feedback from schools to the Legislature. The State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) within TEA regulates and oversees all issues related to teacher preparation, certification, continuing education, and conduct. SBEC must submit all proposed rules to the SBOE before adopting them, and the SBOE can reject a proposed rule but cannot modify it. These entities oversee a public school system comprising 1,227 school districts and charter school districts and more than 4.5 million K-12 students.⁴

Because many of the high school reform initiatives seek to promote college attendance and persistence rates, TEA often works in conjunction with the THECB, the entity that oversees and sets rules for higher education. The Texas Legislature can also call for the departments to collaborate to address issues related to the transition to college. In addition to TEA, the THECB works with the Legislature, the Governor, and institutions of higher education and their governing boards to increase student access to high-quality postsecondary education in the state. To coordinate the efforts of all the education agencies, the state instituted a P-16 Council made up of representatives from TEA, the THECB, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), and the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS).

Because of the state's specific focus on high school reform and to enable all stakeholders to have input into the reform programs, the Legislature created the High School Completion and Success Initiative Council (Council) (House Bill [HB] 2237, 80th Legislature, Regular Session, 2007). The Council is composed of the Commissioner of Education, the Commissioner of Higher Education, and seven members appointed by the Commissioner of Education from a list of Texas residents nominated by the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Lieutenant Governor. The Commissioner of Education presides over the Council, with TEA providing administrative support. In the legislation, the members were charged with creating a strategic plan to set priorities and make recommendations "to improve the effectiveness, coordination, and alignment of high school completion and college and workforce readiness efforts." More specifically, the plan had to identify strategies to improve high school completion and success and college and workforce readiness, and establish measurable goals for those strategies. It also had to specify strategies for aligning and coordinating funding sources for high school reform, including federal dollars, and outline objectives for research and program evaluation. A plan was completed in March 2008, and TEA must submit a report to the Legislature every 6 months describing its progress toward implementing sections outlined in HB 2237 (2007), such as identifying best practices for dropout prevention and minimum standards for graduation plans, establishing grants and programs to foster high school success and college and workforce readiness, and aligning those grants and programs to the strategic plan. In addition, TEA must submit a report to the Legislature by December 1 of every even-numbered year that recommends statutory changes related to high school completion and success.

⁴ For more information on these entities, see <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/> and <http://www.sbec.state.tx.us/SBECOnline/default.asp>.

Policy Issues

In the following sections, we describe the policy context in which THSP schools are being implemented. We discuss the specific policies that affect high schools and, where appropriate, THSP. The Texas Legislature passed a number of bills in the last several years that directly influence high schools. Most notably, HB 1 (79th Legislature, Third Called Session, 2006), which primarily sought to reform the school finance system by reducing property tax rates, also included many provisions related to high school reform (see Exhibit 2 for an outline of the initiatives and programs mandated by HB 1 that relate to high schools).

HB 1 (2006) certainly has the potential for great impact at the high school level. Additionally, Texas passed other significant policies that, along with HB 1 (2006), have changed the landscape for high schools and provided more opportunities for schools and students. These pieces of legislation, as well as elements of HB 1 (2006) and any related funding policies, are described in turn below in the relevant policy sections.

Exhibit 2. House Bill 1 (2006) Provisions Related to High Schools

HB 1 (2006) included the following provisions and programs. This list does not include all aspects of the legislation; rather, it reflects those policies most pertinent to high schools.

Data Sharing

Made school district financial data accessible to the public and established an electronic student records system to allow for the rapid transfer of records among public schools and higher education institutions.

“Four-by-four” Curriculum

Required students to take 4 years of each of four core content areas (English, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) as part of the Recommended and Advanced high school program.

College Readiness: Vertical Teams and Curriculum Development

Created “vertical teams” composed of K-12 and higher education faculty to recommend college readiness standards, evaluate the effectiveness of current standards and curriculum requirements in preparing students for college, recommend strategies for aligning secondary and postsecondary curricula, and develop instructional materials, professional development, and online support materials.

Dual-Credit Opportunities

Mandated that every district provide the opportunity for students to earn at least 12 semester credit hours of college credit in high school.

High School Allotment

Provides each district with \$275 per student in grades 9-12. The funding is to be spent in grades 6-12 on initiatives to decrease dropout rates, promote graduation, prepare students for postsecondary education, encourage students to take advanced coursework, increase the rigor of academic coursework, and align secondary and postsecondary curricula.

Optional Flexible School Day

Provides flexible hours and days of attendance for students in grades 9-12 who are at risk of not graduating or are participating in an approved innovative high school program or redesign, like those included in THSP. Hours and days aggregate over the course of the school year, and state funding for a student is proportional to the number of days the student attends compared with the required number of attendance hours.

Teacher Pay Raise

Increased salaries at least equal to \$2,000 per year for each classroom teacher, full-time librarian, full-time counselor certified under Subchapter B, Chapter 21, and full-time school nurse.

Teacher Preparation and Incentive Programs

Created mentoring programs for new teachers and incentive programs to reward educators for improved student achievement.

Beginning Teacher Induction and Mentoring (BTIM) Program

Provides grants to school districts and open-enrollment charter schools to implement a mentoring program for beginning teachers or to enhance an existing mentoring program at campuses that meet established criteria and assign mentor teachers to classroom teachers who have less than 2 years of teaching experience.

Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG)

Establishes a grant program that provides \$100 million annually to high-poverty schools with high levels of achievement and improvement. Seventy-five percent of the total grant award must be used to provide incentives to classroom teachers who meet criteria, based on quantifiable measures, in the areas of impact on student achievement and collaboration with other faculty and staff. Schools may also include two optional criteria: (a) teacher initiative, commitment, personalization, professionalism and campus involvement and (b) teacher assignment to hard-to-staff or high-turnover subject areas. The remaining 25% of the grant award may be used to fund other activities, which can include rewards for other staff, recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers, teacher mentoring, professional development, or program evaluation.

District Awards for Teacher Excellence (DATE)

Provides \$147.5 million for districts that want to establish local incentive programs. Districts must use 60% of funds to reward staff; 40% may be used for additional programs like teacher stipends, principal rewards, teacher mentoring, and implementation of the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP).⁵

⁵ The Teacher Advancement Program is a comprehensive strategy to attract, train, and retain highly qualified teachers. Teachers are held accountable based on their instruction and receive professional development, salary increases based on their duties, and bonuses based on teacher and student performance. For more information, see <http://www.talentedteachers.org/tap.taf/>.

Accountability

Statutes:

- SB 1031 (80th Legislature, Regular session, 2007): Defined new accountability measures for Texas high school students and created a committee to study the current public accountability system.

Texas has long used its accountability system,⁶ first created in the early 1990s, to identify schools that need improvement. For example, Texas used longitudinal results from its accountability system to identify some of the schools that were included in THSP. Of particular note is the Texas High School Redesign and Restructuring Grant Program, which targets academically unacceptable schools. Like THSP, which seeks to increase college readiness, the accountability system has been undergoing revisions to improve schools' preparation of students for college.

Since 2004, the primary component of the Texas accountability system has been the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills⁷ (TAKS) test, which is administered to high school students in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies. Districts and schools receive accountability ratings (i.e., Exemplary, Recognized, Academically Acceptable, and Academically Unacceptable) on the basis of TAKS results. The TAKS assessment is also used to measure state progress towards meeting the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001). At the high school level, the TAKS assessments in ELA and mathematics in 10th grade and graduation rates are used to calculate adequate yearly progress⁸ (AYP) under NCLB.

Although the TAKS is the assessment used in the current state public school accountability system, the system will undergo a number of significant changes in the coming years to better assess high school achievement and measure college readiness. These changes include the following:

- Raising the passing standards for each school rating category through 2010.
- Adding end-of-course (EOC) assessments for selected high school courses in the four core subject areas.
- Adding a performance measure for districts and schools on student progress toward readiness for college.

Under the current state accountability system, students in 11th grade must pass all four subject-area TAKS tests (ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies) to be eligible to graduate from a Texas public high school. Under Senate Bill (SB) 1031 (80th Legislature, Regular Session, 2007), TAKS tests taken at the high school level will be phased out and replaced with EOC assessments in the core subjects (other aspects of the graduation requirements are discussed later in the report). Executive Order RP53 first mandated the

⁶ Background information on TEA's accountability system can be found at www.tea.state.tx.us/data.html. The Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) includes all data requested and received by TEA about public education, including student demographic and academic performance, personnel, financial, and organizational information. Other data sources include the Academic Excellence Indicator System which contain information on students' performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, attendance, dropout rates, completion rates, and SAT/ACT results. For more information, see <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/> and <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/>.

⁷ The TAKS is a criterion-referenced assessment designed to measure students' knowledge of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, the state content standards.

⁸ Schools that do not demonstrate AYP for 2 years in a row are identified as "schools in need of improvement" and are subject to immediate intervention by TEA. See the AYP guide for more information, <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/ayp/2008/guide.pdf>.

development of a voluntary series of EOC assessments in 2005. Then through SB 1031 (2007), the Legislature mandated the phasing out of the TAKS and the adoption of EOC assessments. According to multiple interviewed individuals, the EOC assessments were adopted to better align high school assessments with college entrance exams and the content required for students to be college ready.

The freshman class of 2011-12 will be the first group of students required to pass all 12 EOC assessments in order to graduate.⁹ EOC assessments are being phased in for secondary-level courses in Algebra I, Algebra II, geometry, biology, chemistry, physics, English I, English II, English III, world geography, world history, and United States history. Students who do not pass an assessment will be provided with accelerated instruction and multiple opportunities to retake it. Students will receive a cumulative score in each subject area. For example, students will take an EOC assessment in Algebra I, Algebra II, and geometry and will need an overall score of 210 to pass, with a minimum score of 60 on any one of the tests. Satisfactory performance on an Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT), or another instrument determined to be at least as rigorous as the EOC assessment may be used to determine whether students meet the EOC assessment requirement. The score on the EOC assessment will count for 15% of a student's final grade for the course. EOC assessments in lower-level courses will contain questions to determine readiness for advanced courses (Texas Education Code [TEC]¹⁰ § 39.023).

To further assess college readiness and encourage college attendance, SB 1031 (2007) requires school districts to select and administer a college readiness diagnostic assessment (such as the ACT-designed EXPLORE) in grade 8 to diagnose student strengths and deficiencies before entering high school. They must also administer the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) in grade 10 to measure a student's progress toward readiness for college and the workplace.

Additionally, the Texas Legislature has called for EOC assessments to be developed in such a way that they could be used to determine course placement for entering college freshmen. The most likely assessments to be modified initially to include a "college readiness" measure are English III and Algebra II. The scores from these assessments will help identify students who are in need of additional support during their senior year of high school to decrease the need for remediation in college.

Although TAKS scores have been the primary measure of academic achievement, TEA is also required by statute to group additional indicators together to show high school students' college readiness. The college readiness indicators are generally reported at the district level and school level where the TAKS was administered and include the following: advanced-course/dual-enrollment completion, Recommended High School Program/Distinguished Achievement Program graduates, AP/IB results, SAT/ACT results, Texas Success Initiative (TSI), Higher Education Readiness Component (HERC), and number of college-ready graduates.

⁹ For more information about EOC assessments, see <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/admin/eoc/>.

¹⁰ The TEC is the set of state statutes governing public education in Texas. It applies to all educational institutions supported in whole or in part by state tax funds, unless specifically excluded by the code. The TEC directs the goals and framework of public education in Texas. It is established by the Texas Legislature and published by the Office of the Secretary of State.

The TSI indicator shows the percentage of 11th-grade students who met the HERC standard on the exit-level TAKS tests in mathematics and ELA. The standards, as set by the THECB, are a score of 2200 on the mathematics test and a score of 2200 on the ELA test with a score of 3 or higher on the essay (see Exhibit 3 for an explanation of the scores). Performance on these tests is used to assess a student’s readiness to enroll in an institution of higher education (IHE). A student who meets these standards is exempt from the TSI requirement that students must take an approved basic skills test, such as COMPASS or ACCUPLACER, before the first semester of college to determine the most appropriate individualized academic program (TEC § 51.3062).

A new measure of college readiness—college-ready graduates—was added in SB 1031 in 2007 as a measure of a school’s or district’s progress in preparing students for postsecondary success. To be considered college ready, high school graduates must meet the criteria outlined in Exhibit 3. This indicator is different from the TSI indicator because, along with an overall measure of TAKS ELA and mathematics scores, it also includes school performance on the SAT or ACT. In addition, the measure of college readiness is based on the prior year’s graduates, rather than current 11th graders, and provides an overall measure combining ELA and mathematics scores. The number of college-ready graduates is also tied to the campus and district where the student graduated versus where the TAKS was administered.

Exhibit 3. Defining College-Ready Graduates

Subject	Exit-Level TAKS*		SAT**		ACT***
ELA	>=2200 scale score on ELA test AND a 3 or higher on essay	or	>=500 on Critical Reading AND >=1070 total	or	>=19 on English AND >=23 on Composite
Math	>=2200 scale score on math test	or	>=500 on Math AND >=1070 total	or	>=19 on Math AND >=23 on Composite

*TAKS: The maximum scale score for the TAKS differs by year and subject. The minimum scale score for a student to be Academically Acceptable is 2100. For college-ready graduates, a 2200 scale score is required, which typically indicates approximately 80% of questions were answered correctly; for the writing portion, the maximum score is 4. To receive Commended Performance status, a TAKS scale score of 2400 is required.

**SAT: The maximum score for Critical Reading and Math is 800; the combined score (total) is 1600 for this purpose (the typical maximum score for the SAT is 2400, including the writing portion, which is not included here).

***ACT: The maximum score is 36 for each content area as well as for the composite score.

SB 1031 (2007) also created a Select Committee on Public School Accountability that includes 4 legislators and 11 members appointed by Governor Perry, Lt. Governor Dewhurst, and House Speaker Craddick. The committee was tasked with conducting a comprehensive review of the existing accountability system and is required to report its findings and recommendations to the Legislature by December 2008. The Legislature will use these findings to consider revamping the state accountability system.

College Readiness Standards and Curriculum

Statutes:

- HB 1 (79th Legislature, Third Called Session, 2006): Required students to take 4 years of each of four core content areas (English, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) as part of the Recommended and Advanced high school program; mandated new dual-credit requirements; created “vertical teams” to evaluate the effectiveness of current standards and curriculum requirements in preparing students for college; called for the incorporation of college readiness standards and expectations into the state content standards; provided funding for the High School Allotment; and mandated the THECB to create programs to enhance student success in college.
- HB 2237 (80th Legislature, Regular Session, 2007): Called for the SBOE to incorporate the college readiness standards into the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for courses in which students in grades 9-12 typically enroll.
- HB 3826 (80th Legislature, Regular Session, 2007): Revised requirements for admission to the states’s higher education institutions.

To ensure that students can meet the standards of the new accountability system, the state has increased the rigor of the high school curriculum. HB 1 (2006) mandated that the Recommended and Advanced high school program must include the new “four-by-four” curriculum standards, which increase the math and science requirements such that students must take 4 years of courses in each of the four core subjects (ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies). The requirements of each type of high school curriculum are outlined in further detail in Exhibit 4. This new “four-by-four” curriculum was implemented with the freshman class of 2007-08.¹¹ It has sparked discussions about how career and technical education (CTE) classes can meet the requirements and how schools can offer enough courses to satisfy the requirements. TEA is in the process of designing some CTE courses that can count for the fourth year of mathematics or science. Some of the THSP models, such as T-STEM, lend themselves to fitting this curricular model and can potentially serve as a model for how schools can infuse more mathematics and science courses into the curriculum.

¹¹ Although all students beginning ninth grade in 2007-08 are encouraged to follow the Recommended and Advanced High School program, students may opt out of it with parental permission. In addition, students who entered high school prior to 2007-08 can still graduate under the Minimum Graduation Plan.

Exhibit 4. High School Program Requirements

Minimum Graduation Plan	Recommended High School Program	Advanced High School Program
ELA: 4 credits Mathematics: 3 credits Science: 2 credits Social Studies/Economics: 3 credits Academic Elective: 1 credit Electives: 5.5 credits Physical Education: 1.5 credits Health: 0.5 credits Speech: 0.5 credits Technology Applications: 1 credit	ELA: 4 credits* Mathematics: 4 credits* Science: 4 credits* Social Studies/Economics: 4 credits* Electives: 3.5 credits Physical Education: 1.5 credits Languages Other Than English: 2 credits Health: 0.5 credits Speech: 0.5 credits Technology Applications: 1 credit Fine Arts: 1 credit	ELA: 4 credits* Mathematics: 4 credits* Science: 4 credits* Social Studies/Economics: 4 credits* Electives: 2.5 credits Physical Education: 1.5 credits Languages Other Than English: 3 credits Health: 0.5 credits Speech: 0.5 credits Technology Applications: 1 credit Fine Arts: 1 credit Complete a combination of four "Advanced Measures"***
Total: 22 credits	Total: 26 credits	Total: 26 credits

*Reflects new "four-by-four" requirements passed under HB 1 (2006).

**These "Advanced Measures" include (1) completing an original research/project that is related to the required curriculum and judged by a panel of professionals in the field of the project's focus; (2) achieving: (a) a score of three or above on AP exams; (b) a score of four or above on an International Baccalaureate examination; or (c) a score on the PSAT that qualifies a student for honors recognition; or (3) completing college academic courses, advanced technical credit courses, and dual-credit courses with a grade of 3.0 or higher.

Through HB 1 (2006), the state has provided funding for schools to be able to integrate more rigorous programming. The bill called for the High School Allotment, a distribution to districts of \$275 per student (grades 9-12), as determined by average daily attendance (ADA), that amounts to more than \$300 million statewide per year. The funds may be used for students in grades 6-12. Schools are expected to use the funds to implement a variety of programs that can prepare underachieving students for college, encourage students to take advanced academic courses, offer students the opportunity for rigorous coursework, and align the grade 6-12 curriculum with the postsecondary curriculum. Districts can also implement other initiatives approved by the Commissioner of Education that encourage high school completion and success. In May 2007, a High School Allotment Advisory Group was appointed by the commissioner to identify best practices, as self-nominated by districts, for the use of the High School Allotment funds. Schools were recognized for using the funds, for example, to implement innovative high school completion and success programs.

Another provision of HB 1 (2006) intended to increase the rigor of the high school curriculum is the requirement for all school districts to offer the equivalent of at least 12 semester credit hours of college credit by fall 2008. As of the 2007-08 school year, 65% of school districts offered students the option of receiving dual-credit, in which students can earn both high school and college credit for a college-level class. Districts can fulfill this requirement

of 12 semester hours of college credit through dual-credit classes or the AP or IB programs.¹² The Early College High School (ECHS) model within THSP, which specifies that students have the opportunity to earn up to 60 hours of college credit, serves as an example of how schools can integrate more college coursework into the curriculum.

Although the option to earn dual credits must be *available* for every student, not every high school student will qualify for dual-credit courses. Most dual-credit students are high school juniors or seniors who meet all of the college's regular prerequisite requirements designated for a given course. In addition, students wishing to enroll in dual-credit courses must satisfy TSI requirements by meeting a minimum passing standard on college placement exams (i.e., the Texas Higher Education Assessment [THEA], ASSET, COMPASS, or ACCUPLACER) or by performing at or above standards set on the TAKS, ACT, and/or SAT tests. Students can then take courses for dual credit only in areas related to the subjects in which they passed the exams (e.g., government courses require passing the reading test).

A number of issues are associated with administering dual credit. Most notably, the cost of these classes can be prohibitive. Until 2005-06, either the school district or the college received state funding for a student's attendance in a college course. Since then, both entities receive state funding, and there is, therefore, more incentive for school districts and colleges to engage in these types of courses¹³. However, the cost of college tuition and textbooks still remains a challenge. Currently, there is no earmarked funding for those expenses, but schools may use their High School Allotment funds to offset some of these costs. In addition, the THECB encourages colleges not to pass tuition on to students, but that decision is left to the college. The 12-credit requirement also raises concerns over the quality of the college courses across the state. The THECB will be looking at the consistency of course quality across the state during the 2008-09 school year.

To further increase the rigor of the high school curriculum and better prepare students for college, Texas is revising its state content standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). HB 1 (2006) mandated the creation of vertical teams by TEA and the THECB to develop college readiness standards to be incorporated into the TEKS for the four content areas of ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies.¹⁴ The CRS are meant to address what students should know in order to succeed—without remediation—in entry-level courses offered at Texas colleges. The vertical teams are organized by discipline and are composed of public school and higher education faculty who are asked to do the following:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the TEKS in preparing students for college.
- Recommend college readiness standards and expectations that address what students must know and be able to do in order to have a reasonable probability of success in entry-level college courses without first taking remedial/developmental courses.
- Recommend strategies for aligning current curricula to these new standards.
- Develop instructional strategies, professional development, and online support materials.

¹² For more information on dual credit, see <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/PDF/1514.PDF>.

¹³ The rules adopted by the SBOE and the Commissioner of Education are part of a larger body of state agency rules that are collected and published by the Office of the Secretary of State as the Texas Administrative Code (TAC). The SBOE's and Commissioner's rules are codified under Title 19, Part II, of the TAC. Title 19 is Education, and Part II is TEA. The SBOE and the Commissioner of Education may adopt new rules or amendments to existing rules.

¹⁴ For more information on the CRS, see <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/PDF/1513.PDF>.

The first phase of the work, developing the standards, was completed by committees composed of 60% higher education representatives and 40% K-12 representatives. On October 25, 2007, the THECB released draft College Readiness Standards (CRS) for public review, and the standards were presented to the SBOE on November 14, 2007. A final version incorporating comments received was submitted to the THECB and the Commissioner of Education in January 2008. Because the SBOE oversees all K-12 curriculum, it has the authority to incorporate the standards into the TEKS once the CRS have been approved by the Commissioner of Education and the THECB and to write specific grade-level curriculum standards that will put students on track to be college ready when they graduate. For the second phase of the work, the vertical teams will be reconvened to conduct a gap analysis between the TEKS and the CRS; for this work, the committees will be composed of 60% K-12 representatives and 40% higher education representatives. The third phase will involve creating support materials and training to help teachers implement the new standards in the classroom. HB 2237 (2007) states that the SBOE shall incorporate the CRS into the TEKS for courses in which students in grades 9-12 typically enroll.

The adoption of these new curriculum standards will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the textbooks that are selected in the future under the state's textbook adoption policy (TEC § 31), which was designed to provide equal access to high-quality materials for all students. Currently, a key selection criterion used by the review panels of K-12 and college academic content experts is the amount of material in the textbook that covers the TEKS elements. The books on the "conforming list" must contain material covering every element of the standards, and those on the "nonconforming" list must have material covering at least half, but not all, of the TEKS elements. New textbooks, therefore, will have to reflect the new emphasis on college readiness in the standards once the CRS are reflected in the TEKS. With few exceptions, only textbooks on these two approved lists will be paid for by the state. Districts that elect to purchase materials not approved by the state will be only partially compensated for the expense, limiting districts' ability to exercise this option.

Better preparing high school students for college is necessary, given the various changes in state policies related to admission into a Texas public college or university. Under the new requirements of HB 3826 (80th Legislature, Regular Session, 2007), beginning in the 2008-09 school year, to qualify for admission to a general academic teaching institution of higher education in Texas, the high school student must

- graduate under the Recommended or Advanced high school curriculum or its equivalent,
- satisfy ACT's college readiness benchmarks, or
- score at least 1500 (out of 2400) on the SAT exam.

This bill also requires that students graduating with a grade point average (GPA) in the top 10% of their high school class complete the Recommended or Advanced high school curriculum, or its equivalent, to qualify for automatic admission to a Texas public university. By requiring that students complete a particular curricular program to qualify for admissions, HB 3826 (2007) builds on a previous bill that was designed to broaden access to public higher education institutions by promoting greater geographic, socioeconomic, and racial/ethnic representation without using race as a criterion.

The state's College Readiness and Success Strategic Plan (created by the P-16 State Council) requires the THECB to develop programs that support students in transitioning to college and help ensure the success of students who have been accepted into a college or university (HB 1, 2006). HB 2237 also requires the THECB to create summer bridge programs in mathematics, science, and ELA for students entering college; incentive programs that implement research-based, innovative education initiatives; financial assistance programs; and professional development programs on the College Readiness Standards for higher education faculty.

Further support for students to attend college comes from state funding. Texas provides more than \$4 billion of funding every year to increase college access for its students. The Legislature established the TEXAS (Toward Excellence, Access and Success) Grant Program that high school graduates with financial need can apply for and use toward any public college in the state. Applicants must demonstrate financial need and must have completed the Recommended High School Program or Advanced High School Program. Once in college, students must meet the program's academic standards (e.g., maintain a certain grade point average and complete a certain percentage of credit hours) to receive funding for up to 150 credit hours. The state also provides tuition exemptions for both need-based and merit-based reasons for some Texas residents attending Texas public IHEs. Examples of individuals eligible for exemptions are students who were in foster care, were adopted, were the highest ranked in their high schools, graduated from high school early, or are blind or deaf.¹⁵ Undocumented students qualify for in-state tuition and can receive state-based financial aid.¹⁶

P-16 Council

Statutes:

- SB 286 (78th Legislature, Regular Session, 2003): Created the P-16 Council.
- HB 2808 (79th Legislature, Regular Session, 2005): Established statutory membership of the P-16 State Council, outlining its collaborative and advisory roles in coordinating the Texas public education system and strategizing for the state's college readiness plan.
- HB 1 (79th Legislature, Third Called Session, 2006): Required the creation of a P-16 College Readiness and Success Strategic Action Plan.

Efforts to increase students' college readiness have been supported by the P-16 State Council. Spanning the education system from pre-kindergarten to college, the P-16 State Council aims to align the skills students need to transition successfully from secondary to postsecondary education and the workforce. Although Texas had an informal P-16 network as early as 1998, the P-16 State Council was formalized by the Texas Legislature in 2003 through SB 286 (78th Legislature, Regular Session). In 2005, the P-16 statute was modified and strengthened by HB 2808 (79th Legislature, Regular Session), which established statutory membership of the P-16 State Council. Membership is composed of representatives from TEA, the THECB, TWC, and DARS, as well as other public and higher education stakeholders. The council has recently been expanded to include representatives from school districts, community colleges, and business. All members serve 2-year terms. The leadership of the P-16 State Council alternates every 2 years between the Commissioner of Education and the Commissioner of Higher Education.

¹⁵ For a complete list of eligible persons, see <http://www.collegefortexans.com/cfbinc/tofa.cfm?Kind=E>.

¹⁶ For additional information about undocumented students, see <http://www.e4fc.org/images/FactSheet.pdf>.

According to HB 2808 (2005) and the Texas Education Code, the P-16 State Council works in conjunction with other agencies, as appropriate, to “ensure that long-range plans and educational programs for the state complement the functioning of the entire system of public education, extending from early childhood education through postgraduate study” (TEC § 61.076). The council looks at the alignment of secondary and postsecondary curricula and assessments, and can make suggestions but cannot set standards. It also advises the THECB and the SBOE on the articulation between postsecondary and secondary Career and Technical Education (CTE). The SBOE, however, maintains authority over the required K-12 curriculum in Texas. Overall, the P-16 State Council’s main role is to serve as an advisor to TEA, the THECB, and the SBOE.

Ultimately, the P-16 State Council goals are to significantly increase the number of high school graduates who pursue postsecondary educational opportunities, to increase college completion rates, and to prepare students for success in the workforce and the community. Other statutory responsibilities of the council include the coordination of plans and programs of the THECB and TEA for curriculum, instructional programs, research, and other functions in the following areas:

- Equal educational opportunity for all Texans.
- College recruitment, with particular emphasis on recruiting minority students.
- Preparation of high school students for further study at colleges and universities.
- Reduction of dropout rates and dropout retention.
- Teacher education, recruitment, and retention.
- Testing and assessment.
- Adult education programs.

Most recently, the P-16 State Council has engaged in several major projects related to high school reform. First, subcommittees of the P-16 State Council were charged with reviewing teacher quality, developmental or remedial education, and existing school district programs that provide opportunities for dual-credit, concurrent, or advanced course enrollment. The council also reviewed the Recommended High School Program and explored the feasibility of a revision that would allow students to obtain a minimum of 12 advanced or college-level semester credit hours. The council delivered its report on dual-credit programs in Texas to the Legislature in January 2007. Per HB 1 (2006), the council was also charged with developing a College Readiness and Success Strategic Action Plan, which is focused on increasing student success and decreasing student enrollment in colleges’ developmental coursework. Several key objectives of the plan include defining standards for college readiness that specify what students must know and be able to do to succeed in entry-level college/university courses and in the skilled workforce; aligning high school exit-level assessments with entry-level expectations of higher education; and increasing the rigor of the pre-K to high school curricula to prepare students for academic success in higher education. The Commissioner of Education and the THECB adopted the P-16 College Readiness and Success Strategic Action Plan in February 2007.

In addition to the P-16 State Council, the THECB is overseeing the development of 20 regional P-16 councils across the state. These councils include colleges, school districts, businesses, and civic organizations within a region. They are meant to address the issues in their local education systems and to help move the state toward closing the achievement gaps for all students.

Through its Office of P-16 Initiatives, the THECB conducts outreach and hosts institutes to build college-going culture in communities. One such summer institute in 2008 brought together members from the regional P-16 councils to discuss promising practices around the collection and analysis of common data elements and the establishment of effective P-16 councils.

Teacher Quality and Certification

Statutes:

- HB 1 (79th Legislature, Third Called Session, 2006): Mandated a teacher pay raise and created teacher incentive programs, including the Educator Excellence Awards Program, and teacher mentoring programs, such as the Beginning Teacher Induction and Mentoring Program.

To provide students with a rigorous curriculum, high schools need to have trained and qualified teachers, and Texas has sought to increase its supply and retention of qualified teachers. The state developed teacher certification requirements that vary based on the type of certification individuals seek but generally require a bachelor's degree in an academic major, completion of an approved teacher training program, and passing the appropriate teacher certification tests (TEC § 21.050). Different certification opportunities are offered in an effort to increase the pool of qualified teaching applicants at both state and local levels.¹⁷ Currently, in some geographic areas targeted by THSP initiatives, districts are experiencing significant teacher shortages, especially in mathematics and science. One solution for these districts is hiring alternatively certified teachers. Since the mid-1990s, the number of individuals who have entered teaching without completing a traditional educator preparation program has increased significantly (TEC § 21.049). Despite these efforts, concerns remain about out-of-field teachers at the secondary level, particularly in math and science.

Through HB 1 (2006), the Texas Legislature has also implemented major pay-for-performance and mentoring programs to encourage high teacher quality and improved student achievement (see Exhibit 5).¹⁸ The legislation included a mandated across-the-board pay raise for teachers, which is intended to help attract qualified candidates to the field, as well as to help retain current teachers (see Exhibit 5 for funding details). In addition, HB 1 (2006) created the Governor's Educator Excellence Award program (GEEAP). GEEAP includes the Awards for Student Achievement program, commonly referred to as the Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG), and the District Awards for Teacher Excellence (DATE). GEEAP builds on the Governor's Educator Excellence Grants (GEEG), a teacher incentive program in Texas that was federally funded and implemented in 2006. The state has since funded both TEEG and DATE. TEEG provides approximately \$100 million annually to more than 1,000 high-performing high-poverty schools. DATE is the last of the GEEAP initiatives to be implemented. DATE is the last of the GEEAP initiatives to be implemented. GEEAP is the largest domestic incentives investment in the nation, and when fully funded it reach \$320 million annually.¹⁹

¹⁷ See the SREB website for more information on approved educator preparation programs: <http://www.sbec.state.tx.us/SBECOnline/edprep/region.asp>.

¹⁸ HB 1 (2006) also provided funding for various leadership programs, including the Texas Principal Excellence Program (TxPEP). TxPEP is a professional development program for principals at schools that were rated Academically Unacceptable by the accountability system.

¹⁹ The Institute for Public School Initiatives at the University of Texas System, in partnership with TEA, provides statewide technical assistance to districts or schools implementing the EEAP teacher incentive programs.

Exhibit 5. Teacher Programs Authorized in House Bill 1 (2006)

Program	Funding
Teacher Pay Raise	\$2,000 annually for employees subject to the minimum salary schedule (classroom teachers, full-time librarians, full-time counselors, and full-time nurses). \$500 for full-time and \$250 for part-time employees not subject to the minimum salary schedule. Open-enrollment charter school employees are eligible for the \$2,000 raise if the school participated in the ActiveCare health benefits program and opened prior to January 1, 2006.
TEEG	\$100 million annually with high levels of achievement and improvement. 75% goes to teachers who meet criteria in the areas of impact on student achievement and collaboration, and optionally in the areas of (a) teacher initiative, commitment, personalization, professionalism, and campus involvement and (b) teacher assignment to hard-to-staff or high-turnover subject areas; remaining 25% can be used to reward other staff, or for teacher mentoring, professional development, or program evaluation.
DATE	\$147.5 million for districts that want to establish local incentive programs (recommended amount is \$3,000 bonus per teacher). Districts must use 60% of funds to reward staff; 40% may be used for additional programs like teacher stipends, principal rewards, teacher mentoring, and implementation of the Teacher Advancement Program elements. ²⁰ Districts must provide a case or in-kind 15% match of the funding in each year of implementation. According to the TEA's final count Cycle 1 of the DATE program, beginning in the 2008-09 school year include 203 school districts. The participating school districts make up 50% of the students in Texas and employee approximately 50% of all Texas teachers.
BTIM	\$15 million for participating districts. Will fund about 7,000 mentor teachers.

TEEG is available to a targeted group of K-12 schools that fall in the top half of economically disadvantaged campuses and demonstrate the highest levels of student achievement or comparable improvement in math, reading, or both content areas or receive an Exemplary or Recognized accountability rating. The statute mandated five planned cycles; TEA awarded cycle 1 grants during 2006-07 and cycle 2 in 2007-08, and has additional funding available for cycle 3 during 2008-09. Funding for future grants will depend on appropriations from the 81st Legislature. Each cycle was funded at approximately \$100 million and included more than 1,100 campuses. Eligibility is determined by TEA annually, and schools can be eligible in consecutive years.²¹

²⁰ Developed in 1999 by the Milken Family Foundation, TAP has four major components: (a) multiple career paths, (b) ongoing applied professional growth, (c) instructionally focused accountability, and (d) performance-related compensation. TAP is now operated by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching. Districts that implement TAP are supported by a variety of funding sources, including private foundation grants, state appropriations, revenue from state and/or local budgets or taxes, and federal dollars.

²¹ TEA commissioned an evaluation of the first year of the TEEG program that provides specific information on the use of the funds. See http://www.tea.state.tx.us/opge/progeval/TeacherIncentive/TEEG_020808.pdf.

In addition to funding the TEEG grant, under HB 1 (2006), the Texas Legislature appropriated \$147.5 million for year 1 of the DATE program (2008-09). Unlike TEEG, which provides campus-level grants, DATE grants provide start-up funding to allow districts to create or continue a system of awards for educators who have demonstrated success in improving student achievement, improvement, or growth. These awards can apply either districtwide or to a certain subset of campuses. However, districts that choose to implement the program in a subset of campuses are required to target their campuses with the greatest need. All districts across the state are eligible to apply provided that they have (1) submitted a mandatory Notice of Intent to Apply; (2) agreed to participate in the required technical assistance activities; (3) agreed to participate for at least two consecutive grant cycles, including providing matching funds for the program for both cycles; and (4) agreed to complete required activities. The size of the grant is based on the ADA for the 2007-08 school year calculated for the number of districts opting into the grant program.²²

HB 1 (2006) also established the Beginning Teacher Induction and Mentoring (BTIM) Program to improve instruction and increase new-teacher retention. Grant funds are available for school districts to implement a mentoring program modeled after a research-based mentoring program or to enhance existing programs that have demonstrated success in improving new-teacher quality through an external evaluation. The BTIM program funds may be used by school districts or open-enrollment charter schools for the following activities:

1. Stipends for mentor teachers.
2. Scheduled time for mentor teachers to provide mentoring to assigned classroom teachers.
3. Mentoring support through providers of mentor training.

TEA provides a list of commissioner-approved providers from which districts can choose. Mentor teachers will be assigned to each classroom teacher with less than 2 years of teaching experience. Mentors must complete a research-based mentoring and induction training program, have at least 3 years of teaching experience, and have a superior history of improving student performance. It is anticipated that 85 districts will be awarded grants to a maximum of \$1 million each.

²² TEA is beginning an evaluation of the DATE program. Thus, final information on the specifics of the DATE programs, including how districts are matching funds, how they are distributing awards to teachers, and what the impacts of the rewards are, has yet to be determined. DATE provides district-level grants, so schools that participated in GEEG and TEEG, which provide campus-level grants, are still eligible to participate in DATE. These schools can use DATE funding to continue the systems of awards they started through the previous grants.

At-Risk Students and Dropout Prevention

Statutes:

- SB 976 (78th Legislature, Regular Session, 2003): Required districts and schools to analyze and use information related to dropout prevention in developing district or campus improvement plans.
- HB 400 (78th Legislature, Regular Session, 2003): Required districts with high dropout rates to form partnerships with local institutions of higher education.
- SB 1108 (78th Legislature, Regular Session, 2003): Required development of personal graduation plans.
- HB 1 (79th Legislature, Third Called Session, 2006): Created the Optional Flexible School Day Program, which allows for alternate ways to calculate attendance.
- HB 1609 (80th Legislature, Regular Session, 2007): Increased accountability of Communities in Schools.
- HB 2237 (80th Legislature, Regular Session, 2007): Added new programs to address dropout prevention and established additional district accountability measures regarding the dropout issue.

Along with the efforts to provide a rigorous high school experience, Texas has been trying to ensure that students stay in school. Concern about this issue was a primary driver in creating THSP, according to individuals familiar with the initiative's origins. With the creation of the new small schools under THSP and the significant resources dedicated to student supports, the intent is to provide a college-going culture and increase student engagement. Many policymakers believe that students are less likely to drop out if they are engaged and challenged in school. In addition to the funds through THSP, the Texas Legislature has also provided significant funding specifically for students at risk of dropping out of high school.²³

The 78th Texas Legislature provided \$29 million in each year of the biennium to establish and implement the High School Completion and Success Initiative by providing additional supports to students identified as at risk of dropping out. One aspect of SB 1108 (78th Legislature, Regular Session, 2003) was the requirement of a personal graduation plan for any middle school, junior high, or high school student who did not perform satisfactorily on the TAKS or who was not likely to graduate from high school within 5 years of entering ninth grade. The bill also requested that each district create an intensive program of instruction to help students to graduate from high school.

Additionally, in 2003, with SB 976 (78th Legislature, Regular Session), the Texas Legislature required districts and schools to analyze and use information related to dropout prevention in developing district or campus improvement plans. Districts can be sanctioned if they are rated as Academically Unacceptable because of high dropout rates. The bill created a pilot Middle College Program to help students in at-risk situations earn a high school diploma and an Associate degree through a junior college offering more flexible scheduling than a traditional high school. This program helped inform the creation of the Early College High School model, one of the models within THSP.

To support more flexible scheduling, HB 1 (2006) provided alternate ways to account for the attendance of high school students at risk of not graduating or who attend innovative high school programs such as those included in THSP. School funding is typically based on average daily

²³ See *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2006-07*, for more information about the dropout policy in Texas and how dropout rates are determined. See http://www.tea.state.tx.us/research/pdfs/dropcomp_2006-07.pdf.

attendance (ADA) calculations, is based on students' being in school 240 minutes a day for 180 days a year, and is prorated only based on half-time or full-time status. In contrast, the bill authorized the Optional Flexible School Day Program (effective July 2007), which allows districts to apply for flexible hours and days of attendance for those eligible students. With the Optional Flexible School Day Program, the commissioner calculates the ADA, and funding is determined by the number of instructional days in the school district calendar, using a 7-hour school day. Attendance is generated by the number of minutes of instruction over a school year, including any summer or vacation session. Funding is proportionately reduced for students who have less than the required number of attendance hours.

In 2007, the 80th Legislative Session allocated an additional \$50 million, on top of the \$57.42 million allocated for THSP programs, through HB 2237 (2007) to provide additional support to high schools and reduce dropouts. The statute specifically added several programs to address dropout prevention and established additional district accountability measures related to the dropout issue. One new program is the Collaborative Dropout Reduction Pilot Program (TEC § 29.096), which funds districts to reach out to community organizations and local government entities and to develop coalitions that will address the issues faced by at-risk students. Districts that exhibit characteristics that strongly correlate with high dropout rates for the three prior years (as outlined in TEC § 39.358) are eligible to receive funding for this program.

The statute also included Grants for Student Clubs, a pilot program to provide grants for school districts to create clubs for students at risk of dropping out. According to the statute, school districts must provide matching funds from other federal, state, or local sources and are directed to seek donations from local businesses or community groups in an amount equal to the grant funding for the clubs. A student club may use funds to support academic or co-curricular club activities, other than athletics, and at least 50% of the participating students must have been identified as students at risk of dropping out of school.

HB 2237 (2007) also directed the Commissioner of Education to contract with one of the state's Education Research Centers or another research organization to identify exemplary dropout prevention programs that could be replicated successfully in Texas (see TEC § 7.031). Additionally, the statute mandated that dropout prevention be included as a main topic on the Best Practices Clearinghouse website established by HB 1 (2006). Other dropout prevention programs specified in HB 2237 (2007) include intensive technology-based academic intervention, intensive summer programs, and the Mathematics Instructional Coaches Pilot Program.

Districts with high dropout rates, including open-enrollment charters, are also required to submit a plan detailing how resources from the compensatory education allotment²⁴ and the High School Allotment will be used as part of a districtwide dropout prevention strategy. Districts already submit two other plans mandated in previous legislation (school improvement plan [TEC § 39.1323] and a plan to increase college enrollment [TEC § 29.904]); these three plans can be coordinated to design a cohesive dropout prevention strategy for a district.

²⁴ The compensatory education allotment is funding from the state for students who are educationally disadvantaged or who do not have a disability but reside in a residential placement facility in a district in which the students' parents or legal guardians do not reside (TEC § 42.152).

The state also has sponsored the Communities in Schools (CIS) program since 1979. CIS is a case management model designed to prevent dropouts and help students stay in school, learn successfully, and prepare for life after graduation. There are 28 local CIS programs in Texas that provide services to more than 100 school districts and more than 600 schools. In 2007, HB 1609 (80th Legislature, Regular Session) transferred the directorship of CIS to the Commissioner of Education and increased the accountability of local CIS programs, including the provision that state funding can be suspended if programs do not meet the established performance measures.

Charter Schools

Statutes²⁵:

- SB 1 (74th Legislature, Regular Session, 1995): Established charter schools in Texas.
- HB 6 (77th Legislature, Regular Session, 2001): Instituted additional accountability measures for charter schools to align with those required of traditional public schools and limited the number of open-enrollment charters.

In addition to policies aimed specifically at high school reform, Texas has provided more choice to parents and students through charter schools. SB 1 (74th Legislature, Regular Session) authorized charter schools in 1995 to provide state and local officials more flexibility in adopting innovative education models to improve student learning, increase the choice of learning opportunities within the public education system, create professional opportunities that would attract new teachers to the public school system, and establish a new form of accountability for public schools. Charter schools are public schools that have a contract with a chartering agency, such as the SBOE or the board of trustees of an independent school district.²⁶

Under Texas statute (SB 1, 1995, and HB 6, 2001), the state has established four types of charters: (1) home-rule school district charter; (2) campus or campus program charter; (3) open-enrollment charter; and (4) college or university charter (see Exhibit 6 for an explanation of these types of charters). Most common is the open-enrollment charter, in which the SBOE, after applications are reviewed and scored by TEA, approves the creation of a new independent school district that can include multiple schools across the state. Open-enrollment charters can be granted to an IHE, a government entity, or a nonprofit corporation. HB 6 (2001) allows for a maximum of 215 open-enrollment charters to be granted; as of September 2007, there were 211 open-enrollment charters. According to an interviewee, for the 2008-09 school year, TEA received 39 applications for the remaining 4 open-enrollment charter spaces.²⁷

²⁵ Although we planned to focus on policies passed in 2003 and later, we found that most of the charter school policies were passed in earlier years and have not changed substantially since then.

²⁶ For more information on charter schools, see <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/charter/>.

²⁷ Charter networks have been able to grow despite this cap by opening multiple campuses under one charter.

Exhibit 6. Types of Charter Schools

Charter Type	Definition
Home-rule school district charter	An entire school district chooses to convert to charter status. There are currently no home-rule charter schools in Texas.
Campus or campus program charter	An individual district school converts to charter status by request of the parents of the majority of students at the school and the majority of teachers at the school. Also, a charter for a school or program can be granted to an entity that has entered into a contract with the district to provide educational services. The school remains the responsibility of the district and receives state and local funding. As of 2006-07, there were 56 campus charters in Texas (Texas Center for Educational Research, 2008). ²⁸
Open-enrollment charter	New public schools started by external groups, such as nonprofit organizations, universities, or local government groups. They are approved by the SBOE for 5 years, after which they must apply for reauthorization. These types of charters are the most prevalent in Texas, with 211 in the state as of the 2007-08 school year.
College or university charter	Open-enrollment charter schools established by 4-year public colleges and universities. They can be operated on the college or university campus or in the same county in which the college or university is located. They are approved by the SBOE. As of September 2007, there were 2 college or university charters.

Open-enrollment charters are typically granted for 5 years and are subject to federal and state laws and rules governing public schools and to municipal zoning ordinances governing public schools. As such, these charter schools are monitored and accredited under the statewide testing and accountability system. They must follow the same graduation requirement guidelines and are subject to the same statewide assessment program as other school districts. Open-enrollment charter schools are evaluated annually on the state Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), and their results are reported in comparison with the performance of local school districts. An open-enrollment charter school is entitled to the same level of services provided to school districts by regional education service centers.

In addition to the charters granted by the state, districts can authorize charter schools as approved by the local superintendent. These charters are not considered part of the open-enrollment charter school cap. The boards of trustees of several independent school districts (ISDs) have granted campus or campus program charters. For example, as of spring 2008, Houston ISD had 30 LEA-authorized charters to allow parents and students to choose from a wider variety of school types within the district. These local charter schools include several high schools that have adopted THSP models. For example, some of the schools are within the YES College Preparatory charter network; other schools implement the ECHS model.

²⁸ Texas Center for Educational Research. (2008). Texas Charter Schools: 2006-07 Evaluation. See http://www.tcer.org/research/charter_schools/docuemtns/y11_report.pdf.

Although charter schools are still held fiscally and academically accountable, they have more autonomy around instructional and pedagogical practices than traditional public schools. Several charter schools have been awarded grants through THSP because the flexibility of charters allows them to implement these more innovative models. The New Schools and Charter Schools (NSCS) Initiative has provided grants for new schools in the YES College Preparatory, Uplift, IDEA, Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), and Asia Society model networks.

In 2001, the Legislature passed HB 6 (77th Legislature, Regular Session), a charter reform bill that converted at-risk charter schools (charters serving at-risk populations) to open-enrollment charter schools and strengthened the accountability of charter schools to the state. The Legislature required charter schools to perform criminal background checks on employees and volunteers and to hire teachers with at least a high school diploma. The law also required charters to comply with state laws regarding open meetings, public information, and conflict of interest and nepotism.

Charter schools have increased in popularity within the state and enrollment in charter schools continues to grow, but it is still small in comparison with enrollment in traditional school districts (less than 3% of statewide enrollment in 2005-06). Charter schools are typically located in urban communities and tend to be small schools that serve a high proportion of low-income and at-risk students, compared with traditional district schools. In 2005-06, half of the open-enrollment charters in Texas were classified as alternative education campuses and offered programs to support students at risk of failing or dropping out.

Open-enrollment charter schools are funded slightly differently from traditional public schools. They receive only state funding and cannot access local tax-base funding. Charter schools operating on or before September 1, 2001, are in the process of an incremental transition from the resident district formula²⁹ to the state average formula³⁰ (e.g., in 2007-08, funding was based on 50% of the resident district formula and 50% on the state average formula). Charter schools that began after September 1, 2001, are funded solely on the basis of the state average formula. A small proportion of their funds come from the federal government, grants, and donations. Public charter schools do not receive the state facilities allotment or the existing debt allotment.³¹ In 2007, SB 4 was proposed in the 80th Legislature's Regular Session and would have provided facilities funding for high-performing charters, but it did not pass.

²⁹ The resident district formula is based on the average daily attendance of students and is adjusted to reflect the tax effort available in a district and the variation in the known resource costs and costs of education due to factors beyond the control of the district (TEC § 42.001).

³⁰ The state average formula is computed by dividing the state total cost for the regular education program by the number of students in the state counted in attendance in a regular education program, taking into account the cost of education index and the small, mid-size, and sparsity adjustments specified. Charters also receive an allocation based on the statewide average enrichment tax rate (TAC, Title 19, Part II, Chapter 100).

³¹ Charter schools can issue bonds through the Texas Public Finance Authority or other bonding agencies, but very few actually do.

Perspectives on Policy Implementation

The previous sections highlight specific policies that Texas has adopted to improve the performance of its high schools. In this final section, we shift the focus from the specific policies to a discussion of what researchers learned about how the various policies influenced implementation of the THSP initiatives at the local level. Where possible, factors that either facilitated or inhibited implementation of the policies are identified.

This section was informed by interviews with district and high school leaders, guidance counselors, and teachers who possessed varying degrees of knowledge about state high school reform policies. The variation in knowledge level may not be surprising, given that some of the policies were adopted by the Legislature in spring 2007, and in some cases, rules were still being written by TEA during spring 2008. Hence, it is important to note that the findings in this section are preliminary. Given the nascent stage of implementation of THSP initiatives, our ability to make broad generalizations with these data is limited, especially regarding the policies that are having the most influence on student outcomes. At this point, accountability, the “four-by-four” curriculum, and associated staffing issues are at the forefront of practitioners’ minds. In the March 2009 synthesis report, broader implications of these policies and other findings will be discussed.

Shifting Focus of Accountability

In spring 2008, the Texas accountability system was the most salient policy issue for district and school personnel. Given the high-stakes nature of the TAKS, the prominence of the accountability policy is not surprising. District leaders, principals, and teachers often agreed that TAKS defines what is taught in the classroom. The dominant focus on the TAKS led districts and schools to dedicate significant financial and human resources to ensuring student success on that assessment. The specific supports designed to assist students included offering double doses of math classes for students, providing afterschool tutoring programs, pulling struggling students from elective classes to receive TAKS support, and offering computer-based remediation programs. With the extensive resources focused on TAKS supports, there were limited funds to support other strategies intended to prepare students to be college ready.

Although teachers clearly understand that increasing rigor is a central component of the high school reform efforts, at several schools, rigor was narrowly defined as ensuring the students are prepared to pass the TAKS at the Academically Acceptable level. The goal of increasing the number of students who reach a higher level on the TAKS, such as achieving the HERC standard or Commended Performance, was rarely mentioned. With the adoption of EOC assessments, which may be better aligned with the content required for students to be college ready, state and district leaders believe that the rigor of classes will increase.

At the local level, response to the new EOC assessments was mixed. On the positive side, district and school staff noted that the EOC assessments will provide more coherence between what is taught and what is tested each year. The EOC assessment program also covers more high school courses than the TAKS and will allow schools and districts to hold teachers in some content areas, such as specific history classes (e.g., world geography, U.S. history), accountable for the first time. Yet local officials also voiced concerns about the EOC assessments. One concern is the expectation that a disparity will exist between the grades students earn at the end of the academic course and their scores on the associated EOC assessment. Local officials also

expressed concerns about the number of EOC assessments and the pace of their implementation. There are 12 separate EOC assessments, unlike the TAKS, which requires students to pass 4 tests to be able to graduate. The freshman class of 2011-12 will be the first class required to pass all EOC assessments. As of spring 2008, only 3 of the 12 were operational. As the remaining EOC assessments are phased in, it will be important to seek more feedback about these assessments in subsequent field visits.

State assessments are not the only accountability requirement for districts and schools. Several school leaders discussed the challenge of managing several—and, in some ways, conflicting—accountability requirements. For example, several district leaders mentioned how the difference in federal and state accountability requirements may mean that some schools could be acceptable under Texas standards yet not meet the federal standards guided by NCLB. The lack of alignment between state and federal accountability systems not only confuses the public, who must reconcile contrasting ratings, but also can be a challenge for school leaders. One district superintendent discussed coaching principals on how to balance the multiple accountability requirements and the need for a coherent system to align the requirements.

One area where state and federal accountability systems are now aligned is the definition of high school dropout. In 2003, Texas adopted the definition used by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES),³² the 2005-06 school year was the first year that Texas used it to report dropouts. Under the new definition, the number of dropouts increased in part because students who are in a General Educational Development (GED) program are now counted as dropouts (unless the degree is earned in the typical 4-year high school sequence); therefore, the Legislature and TEA have increased their focus on dropout prevention. According to some state interview respondents, an effective strategy for dropout prevention is to focus on college readiness since a significant number of students drop out of school because they are not engaged or challenged. A few urban districts have adopted strategies to address dropout prevention, such as visiting homes of students who have dropped out to “recover” them. One district changed its grading policy to ensure that no grade lower than a 50 appears on students’ report cards, and students who fail major tests can retake them within 5 days.

The adoption of new strategies by districts to decrease the number of dropouts might become more widespread in the coming years. With the new statute adopted by the 80th Texas Legislature, districts with a high dropout rate must submit a plan detailing the manner in which the compensatory education allotment and the High School Allotment are used as part of a dropout prevention strategy. TEA continues to refine the dropout prevention plan by providing districts with suggestions for ways to address dropout issues locally. Some local respondents who raised concerns that the state plan has limited strategies are likely to welcome this assistance.

³² For more information about the federal definition of dropouts, see http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/account/2007/manual/app_i.pdf.

Increasing Curricular Requirements

To better prepare students for the new accountability measures and for college, the state has implemented several curricular policies, including the “four-by-four” curriculum and the requirement for all districts to offer students the opportunity to earn 12 college credits. The “four-by-four” curriculum policy requires all high schools to offer a fourth year of math and science, so that students take 4 years of the four core subject areas—ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies. This policy has elicited two camps of thought at the local level. The first camp believes this is a positive change that increases the rigor and expectations for all students. In two districts, for example, the superintendents have adapted their programs to comply with this policy. In one case, the district urges all students to pursue the Recommended high school program and often does not tell students there is another option unless they cannot manage the Recommended curriculum. The other district, where the superintendent is very excited about the curriculum, changed the high school schedule to an eight-period day to accommodate the additional coursework. Other districts reported already offering such a curriculum to students.

Although no respondent disputed the need for rigorous course offerings, the second camp of respondents reported concerns related to providing enough options to students. With the requirement to offer more core classes, schools fear they will have to eliminate some elective courses, athletics, and work study or internship programs. Some find the lack of electives or such programs particularly troubling for students who may stay in school only to participate in those courses or activities; the staff worry that these students will lose motivation and drop out. In addition, some respondents felt that the new curriculum did not take into account those students for whom college is not the right goal—for example, those who might prefer the performing arts, technical careers, or other avenues rather than attending a 4-year college or university after high school. One district has instituted a Pathways program to get all students to participate in the new curriculum, because the program is designed to engage students in more challenging math and science curricula with linkages to career goals.

Offering dual-credit courses is one method districts are using to provide more rigorous coursework, increase college access, and comply with the policy to provide opportunities for students to earn up to 12 college credits. District and school personnel reported that more students are attempting higher-level academic classes, such as dual-credit or AP. An increase in student participation in dual enrollment was more apparent in schools that have adopted either T-STEM, HSTW, or ECHS models. At these schools, staff also noted that more students are pursuing postsecondary degrees upon graduation than in prior years. Yet access to and enrollment in accelerated academic classes is not a consistent finding. Not surprisingly, staff at schools located in impoverished communities where students have not historically attended postsecondary education reported more difficulty in instilling a college mind-set than staff at schools in other geographic areas. To educate families about the growing opportunities for their children, staff at one school visited families to solicit support for students’ enrolling in advanced academic classes.

Although enrollment in dual-credit classes is increasingly common, entry and access to college classes are not a reality for all interested high school students. As discussed earlier, Texas statute requires students to either receive a certain score on the TAKS or SAT or pass a screening test before enrolling in dual-credit classes. The state allows community colleges to select from one of four screening tests. Personnel at several schools mentioned that ACCUPLACER, in particular, is more challenging than the COMPASS or ASSET college

placement tests³³ and is commonly used by many community colleges. According to staff at several schools, the standards for passing ACCUPLACER are more difficult to reach than those of the other college entrance exams. Respondents also reported that students have trouble with the format of ACCUPLACER because, unlike other assessments they take, it builds on students' cumulative knowledge.

The High School Allotment fund is one mechanism by which schools are attempting to better support students in their pursuit of college. Quite consistently, district and school staff responded positively to the High School Allotment, which provides districts with additional funding to support college access and dropout prevention. One district is working to build student participation in dual credit by setting aside money for tuition assistance and thinking of alternative methods, such as distance learning. At one school, the High School Allotment was used to fund college-related activities, including giving students opportunities to visit nearby colleges and universities and providing training on completing financial aid applications. Although TEA has collected information on promising practices related to the use of the High School Allotment funds, several state policymakers felt districts and schools should be held more accountable for how they use the funds.

Staffing with High-Quality Teachers

Curricular policy requirements such as “four-by-four” have implications for staffing, since districts will need to attract and retain high-quality teachers for the additional core classes and for dual-enrollment offerings in cases where high school teachers must teach them. Six of the 13 visited districts lamented the difficulty of finding and retaining qualified teachers, particularly in science and math. One district representative believed the state’s emphasis on the “four-by-four” curriculum will increase the district’s development of math and science teachers. But as yet, most districts, especially small districts, are concerned about being able to staff higher-level courses, given the shortage of qualified teachers. For dual-enrollment courses, the challenge is the lack of certified teachers who have master’s degrees in the necessary content areas, a licensing requirement to teach college-level courses.

Although alternative teacher preparation programs can help, one district is having difficulty hiring teachers from alternative pathways because state policy requires teachers to have 24 hours of coursework in a core subject area. Teachers cannot count other courses toward the requirements; in other words, a teacher could not count an engineering or statistics class toward the math credits. Other districts are finding the ability to attract teachers to be a paradoxical problem. As one representative explained, the district cannot attract high-quality teachers because the schools’ ratings are low and resources are few; however, the schools’ ratings are low because they cannot attract high-quality teachers.

As described earlier in the policy section, Texas has taken steps to attract and reward qualified teachers through its teacher incentive programs (TEEG and DATE). These programs are meant to help districts that cannot attract teachers because of low salaries or geography. At least three district representatives reported having difficulty attracting teachers because of their districts’ compensation models. One large urban district that participates in these compensation reforms and can offer incentives to attract and retain teachers has seen some positive outcomes.

³³ The Coordinating Board shall designate one or more instruments for use by institutions of higher education in assessing students under this section (TEC § 51.3062(c)). There are four assessments that are approved, see <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/facts/cd/Page8.htm>.

This district received funding from all state incentive programs, as well as from a federal teacher incentive program, and has experienced improvement in recruiting teachers. In 2007-08, the district reported no vacancies at its high-need campuses, and by May 2008, it had already staffed its high-need math departments for the following school year. Because it had mostly been rewarding its teachers in core subject areas, the district is using one of its more recent state grants to implement a team approach in which core teachers partner with non-core teachers to work across subjects. The teachers will split the monetary rewards if the students score well. This approach may demonstrate a possible solution for another district that has found that TEEG is very divisive among the staff because it rewards teachers on the basis of student test data, and thus teachers who do not teach in the tested areas cannot be rewarded. Another district is using the state funds to attract bilingual teachers in response to shortages in that area.

Other Concerns

As the state rolls out more initiatives to support schools in implementing changes to coincide with new policies, it is becoming more apparent how the funding mechanisms and the multitude of initiatives are affecting districts and schools. One concern that was reported by several respondents is a perception that the state has moved toward discretionary grants over formula grants. Although all grants require an application, formula grants are awarded to all interested parties. Discretionary grants, on the other hand, require districts to write proposals in order to receive the grants and are awarded to the most qualified proposals. Smaller districts that often do not have the staff, resources, or time to write the grant proposals worried that they would be overlooked for new funding and therefore would have limited capacity and resources to implement new reforms.

In addition, the variety of initiatives that districts and schools are attempting to implement can lead to competing priorities and inconsistencies at the local level. Large districts, in particular, tend to seek state money for initiatives that already fit with their reform plans, such as improving literacy instruction. Yet if the state policies and district-adopted practices differ, the districts may not emphasize the state-sponsored initiatives as much, which can lead to inconsistent practices within a school. One example that a principal and several teachers described related to instructional rubrics. The HSTW provider, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), had given teachers a rubric to use for their instruction. Then an external organization hired by the district provided a different rubric that was essentially supposed to serve the same purpose but was structured differently. This incident understandably caused some confusion for teachers. It is a specific example of how multiple programs and initiatives may not work together smoothly and can create confusion or incoherence unless efforts are made to explain how the initiatives can complement each other (if, in fact, they do).

Conclusion

This policy review has outlined the legislative policies in Texas that are related to high school reform efforts enacted since the creation of THSP. We learned from TEA and other stakeholders what outcomes these policies are intended to accomplish. Understanding the Texas policy landscape provided context for the implementation of local programs within THSP. Data from site visits to a sample of THSP districts and schools provided glimpses into how the policies are actually influencing practice at the local level.

Because many of the policies are relatively new and because it takes several years before the full impacts of the policies can be detected in school and student outcomes, the data from this study are preliminary. However, the policies that state and local practitioners discussed were those that they perceived to be having the most effect on daily operations and programming to this point. It is important to note that the first year of qualitative data collected provided little information about the factors that aided in effectively translating state policy into local practice.

Even though there is typically a lag between when policies are adopted and when their impact is felt at the local level, district and school respondents reported both facilitating and impeding factors to implementing these policies. Practitioners appreciated the focus on increasing rigor and encouraging college attainment in the state accountability and curricular policies. State policymakers viewed the requirement for all students to have the opportunity to earn 12 college credits in high school as leading to an increase in the enrollment of students in dual-enrollment courses; this finding was also reported by several of the THSP model schools. However, these policies also required more staffing and resources to support their implementation. Both state and local respondents reported that districts do not have enough qualified staff to teach the advanced math and science courses or the dual-enrollment courses. Students also need more academic support to be successful in these courses, which requires more human and financial resources. Several district and school staff worried that the increased rigor will overburden students who do not choose enrollment in a 4-year college or university as a postsecondary goal. Offering more core academic and dual-enrollment courses will necessarily eliminate some elective courses, which are often the only courses keeping students interested in school.

Many respondents appreciated the ability to receive state funds to support the implementation of these policies, particularly the High School Allotment funds. State-level respondents saw the High School Allotment as an enabler for districts and schools to provide additional supports to better prepare students for postsecondary education and the workplace. From a monitoring standpoint, however, the state policymakers felt that more accountability was needed in how districts and schools are spending those funds. Other state funding mechanisms were sometimes inhibiting to districts or schools. The local perception about the state's move to discretionary funds had smaller districts concerned about their abilities to apply for the funds. In addition, some districts were concerned that the funding for teacher incentive programs that is aimed at attracting and retaining qualified teachers and increasing the rigor in the classroom can cause competition and division among teachers.

Although data on the local perspective allow us to understand more fully the influence of state policies on THSP and what factors have aided the translation of policies into practice, this report should be viewed as the first step of an ongoing process. For example, we have just begun to understand how High School Allotment funds might be used to address local goals or how districts are responding to increased accountability requirements about preventing students from dropping out of high school.

At this point, the feedback about implementing state policies was fairly consistent across THSP models, and we hypothesize that this was true partly because many of the relevant policies were so new. In spring 2009, we will again conduct site visits to a sample of schools implementing THSP models. Given that the policies will have had one more year to be implemented, we intend to learn more about their effects at the local level and across THSP models by continuing to ask questions that build on what we have learned to this point. We expect that there will be variation across the THSP models in how policies affect reform efforts. T-STEM Academies and Early College High Schools, for example, may consider the “four-by-four” curriculum to be central to their identity. In comparison, comprehensive high schools in both urban and rural areas may struggle with the “four-by-four” curriculum because of capacity and philosophical issues. We consider a continued effort to track the influence of state policies on local implementation to be central to understanding what the THSP efforts will accomplish over the long term.

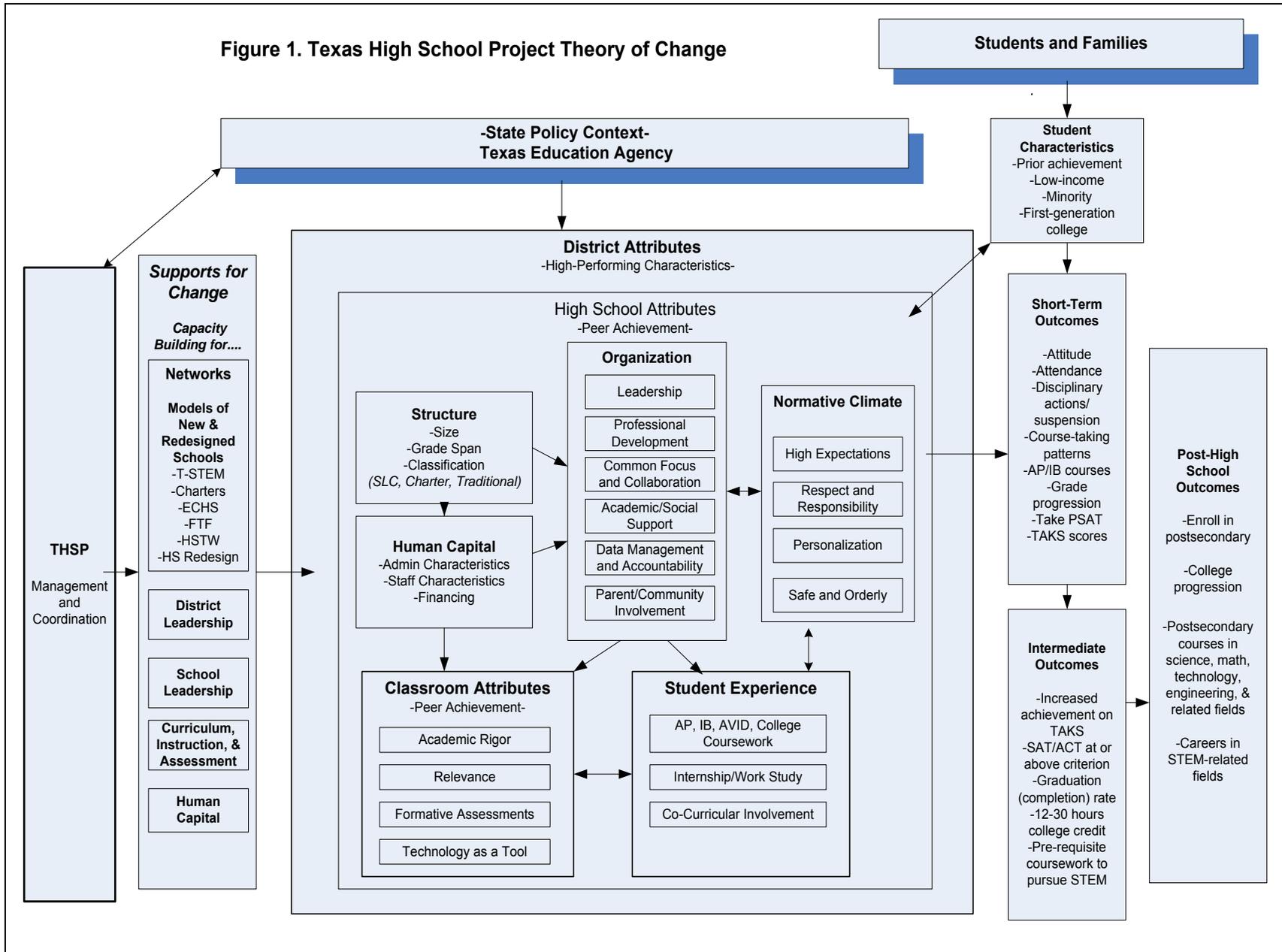
Appendices

Appendix A
THSP Theory of Change

Appendix B
Texas High School Reform Policy Timeline

Appendix A THSP Theory of Change

Figure 1. Texas High School Project Theory of Change



Appendix B

Texas High School Reform Policy Timeline

1990s:

- Senate Bill 7 (73rd Legislature, Regular Session, 1993): Created new school funding distribution plan, called the “Robin Hood” plan, that redistributed funding from wealthier districts to less wealthy districts.
- Senate Bill 1 (74th Legislature, Regular Session, 1995): Established charter schools in Texas.
- House Bill 588 (75th Legislature, Regular Session, 1997): Guaranteed admission to a state institution of higher education for students who finish in the top 10% of their senior class.

2000-04:

- House Bill 6 (77th Legislature, Regular Session, 2001): Changed the structure and operation of open-enrollment charter schools. New provisions included the strengthening of governance and financial regulations, increased accountability to align with those required of traditional public schools, and limited the number of open-enrollment charters.
- Senate Bill 286 (78th Legislature, Regular Session, 2003): Created the Texas Success Initiative; required assessments of students entering a Texas institution of higher education for course placement prior to enrollment; and created the P-16 State Council.
- House Bill 400 (78th Legislature, Regular Session, 2003): Required districts with high dropout rates to form partnerships with institutions of higher education.
- Senate Bill 976 (78th Legislature, Regular Session, 2003):
 - Amended the Texas Education Code to require each district-level and middle, junior high, or high school campus-level planning and decision-making committee to analyze specific items of information related to dropout prevention and to use that information in developing district or campus improvement plans. If a district is rated Academically Unacceptable for 2 years or more because of its dropout rates, the bill requires the Commissioner of Education to impose specific sanctions designed to improve high school completion rates.
 - Created a pilot Middle College Program to help students in at-risk situations earn a high school diploma and an Associate degree through a junior college offering more flexible scheduling than a traditional high school.
- Senate Bill 1108 (78th Legislature, Regular Session, 2003): Established the High School Completion Initiative; Required personal graduation plans for all students at risk of dropping out of school and provided a comprehensive program of intensive instruction in support of high school graduation.

2005-07:

- Executive Order RP53 (2005): Directed TEA to work with the THECB to enhance college readiness standards and programs for Texas public schools. Called for the creation of STEM academies throughout the state; a system of college readiness indicators, including the reporting of higher education remediation rates on public high school report cards; an electronic academic records system to facilitate the transfer of high school transcripts between school districts and institutions of higher education; a series of voluntary end-of-course assessments in science, mathematics, and other

subjects, currently assessed by the grade 11 TAKS, to measure student performance; a pilot financial assistance program for economically disadvantaged students taking college entrance exams; and a summer residential program at Texas institutions of higher education for gifted and talented high school students to provide enhanced learning opportunities.

- House Bill 2808 (79th Legislature, Regular Session, 2005): Established statutory membership of the P-16 State Council, outlining its collaborative and advisory roles in coordinating the Texas public education system and strategizing for the state's college readiness plan.
- House Bill 1 (79th Legislature, Third Called Session, 2006):
 - Reduced local property taxes, mandating a one-third reduction in school district maintenance and operations taxes by the year 2007, and provided school districts with meaningful discretion through access to local enrichment.
 - Included several provisions related to teacher compensation and quality, such as \$2,000 salary increases for all teachers, school nurses, counselors, and librarians, and the conversion of the \$500 health insurance supplement to salary. Created new performance pay incentive programs intended to reward educators for improved student achievement (e.g., Governor's Educator Excellence Awards Program) and mentoring programs for teachers.
 - Established the High School Allotment funded at the rate of \$275 per student in grades 9-12. The funding is to be spent on initiatives to decrease dropout rates, promote graduation, and prepare for postsecondary education. High school students will also now have to complete 4 years of math and science to graduate from high school.
 - Included provisions to make school district financial data accessible to the public and to establish an electronic student records system to allow for the rapid transfer of records among public schools and higher education institutions.
 - Defined a new "four-by-four" curriculum for the Recommended and Advanced high school program.
 - Mandated new dual-credit requirements, such that every student must have the opportunity to earn at least 12 semester hours of college credit.
 - Created "vertical teams" to evaluate the effectiveness of current standards and curriculum requirements in preparing students for college.
 - Established the Optional Flexible School Day Program, which provides for alternate ways to calculate student attendance.
- Senate Bill 1031 (80th Legislature, Regular Session, 2007): Defined new accountability measures for Texas high school students.
- House Bill 1609 (80th Legislature, Regular Session, 2007): Established standards for the Communities in Schools program, a case management model designed to prevent dropouts and help students stay in school, successfully learn, and prepare for life after graduation.
- House Bill 2237 (80th Legislature, Regular Session, 2007):
 - Mandated that, beginning in 2007-08, the SBOE will incorporate college readiness standards and expectations into the essential knowledge and skills of the foundation curriculum for courses in which 12th-grade students generally enroll.
 - Created the High School Completion and Success Initiative, which provides grants to school districts to support the establishment and implementation of sustainable and comprehensive high school completion and success initiatives and support, directly or through a contract with a private entity, for the restructuring and reform of high school

- campuses considered academically unacceptable that are participating in an innovative redesign of the campus to improve campus performance. To receive a grant, schools must develop an individual graduation plan for each student enrolled.
- Added new programs to address dropout prevention and established district accountability measures regarding the dropout issue.
 - House Bill 3826 (80th Legislature, Regular Session, 2007): Revised requirements for admission to the state's higher education institutions.