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*Texas' Plan to Address Dropouts and College Readiness:
High School Allotment Funds*

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Abstract

U.S. schools face many obstacles today – two of the greatest are dropout rates and college readiness. Today, in the era of a global economy and technology, a high school diploma represents the minimum requirement for the increased demands of highly-skilled jobs. Yet, high school dropout rates continue to worsen. Students that do not graduate high school become three times more likely to receive welfare, be unemployed, and face poverty. In addition, those that graduate high school are increasingly not considered to be college ready. In 2006, the 79th Texas Legislature responded to concerns about dropout and college readiness by establishing a High School Allotment (HSA) that provided Texas high schools \$275 per student. Texas Education Agency data on the use of HSA funds will be explored.

Texas' Plan to Address Drop Outs and College Readiness: High School Allotment Funds

Two of the more challenging problems U.S. schools face today are dropout rates and college readiness. The importance of a high school education continues to increase. Fifty years ago, high school graduates had an advantage in the work force since only 50% of the population had one. In the late 1970's, about 83% of the population completed high school. Today, in the era of a global economy and technological advances, a high school diploma represents the minimum requirement for the increased demands for highly-skilled workers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Many high school graduates are not sufficiently equipped for the difficulty of college work. Many college courses require students to read eight to ten books in the same time that a high school class may read one or two (Standards for Success, 2003). Many college students write numerous research papers compared to high school students that may write one or two research papers throughout their entire four years of high school (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2003). In 2005, Margaret Spellings, Secretary of U.S. Department of Education informed Congress that the number of high school dropouts caused an impact on the American economy and these students loss of the *American dream* (Wise, 2005).

High School Dropouts

There are tough societal consequences for high school dropouts. Barton (2006) states that the completion of high school increases the potential impact of an individual on society and decreased the possibility of public welfare and incarceration. Statistics show that high school dropouts were three times more

likely to receive welfare, be unemployed, and face poverty. Under the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) definition, a dropout is a student who is enrolled in public school in grades 7-12, does not return to public school the following fall, is not expelled, and does not graduate, receive a General Educational Development (GED) certificate, continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die. In 2000, five out of every 100 high school students were dropouts in the U.S. This represents a shift from the previous 15 years where drop out rates had been decreasing (NCES, 2002).

Completion rate is another data tool used when discussing at risk students. It is different from drop out rates. Completion rate is the percentage of students from a class of beginning ninth graders who complete their high school education by their anticipated graduation date. Statistically speaking, non-completer rates will be higher than dropout rates because students must complete by their expected graduation date (TEA, 2007a). For example, the typical dropout rate for a group of students might be 2.5% while the completion rate could be 6.4% because some of the students took longer than four years to graduate. Completion rates are more consistent with the public's understanding of a dropout rate. It allows school districts more time to encourage dropouts to return to school before being held accountable (TEA, 2007b). Despite the increased importance of a high school education in the past 50 years, the high school completion rate in the U.S. has very minimal gains over this same period. Between 1972 and 1985, high school completion rates increased a total of

2.6 % from 82.8 % to 85.4 %. Since 1985, the rate has been level with no consistent trend – fluctuating between 85 and 87% (NCES, 2002).

Table 1 below shows that in 2000, 94.6% of Asian young adults between the ages of 18-24 had completed high school, compared to 91.8% of White, 83.7% of Black and 64.1% of Hispanic young adults (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000).

TABLE 1 – Percentage of 15-24 year olds who dropped out of grades 10-12 in 2000, percentage of 16-24 year olds who were dropouts, and percentage of 18-24 year olds who had completed high school, by ethnicity

Dropout and completion measures	Total ¹	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander
% of 15-24 year olds who dropped out of grades 10-12, October 1999 to October 2000	4.8	4.1	6.1	7.4	3.5
% of 16-24 year olds who were dropouts in 2000	10.9	6.9	13.1	27.8	3.8
% of 18-24 year olds who were high school completers in 2000 ²	86.5	91.8	83.7	64.1	94.6

¹ Due to small sample sizes, American Indians/Alaska Natives are included in totals but not shown separately

² Excludes those still enrolled in high school

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, October 2000.

In 2001, the 77th Texas Legislature decided to revise the criteria used by the state to identify at risk students by amending the Texas Education Code (TEC) so more students became eligible for services. The definition of a student at risk of dropping out of school (TEC §29.081) is a student who is under 21 years of age and:

- was not advanced from one grade level to the next for one or more school years;
- is in Grade 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, or 12 and did not maintain an average equivalent to at least 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum during a semester in the preceding or current school

- year or is not maintaining such an average in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum in the current semester;
- did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered under TEC Chapter 39, Subchapter B, and has not in the previous or current school year subsequently performed on that instrument or another appropriate instrument at a level equal to at least 110 percent of the level of satisfactory performance on that instrument;
 - is in prekindergarten, kindergarten, or Grade 1, 2, or 3 and did not perform satisfactorily on a readiness test or assessment instrument administered during the current school year;
 - is pregnant or is a parent;
 - has been placed in an alternative education program in accordance with TEC §37.006 during the preceding or current school year;
 - has been expelled in accordance with TEC §37.007 during the preceding or current school year;
 - is currently on parole, probation, deferred prosecution, or other conditional release;
 - was previously reported through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) to have dropped out of school;
 - is a student of limited English proficiency, as defined by TEC §29.052;
 - is in the custody or care of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services or has, during the current school year, been referred to the department by a school official, officer of the juvenile court, or law enforcement official;
 - is homeless, as defined by Title 42 of the United States Code, §11302, and its subsequent amendments; or
 - resided in the preceding school year or resides in the current school year in a residential placement facility in the district, including a detention facility, substance abuse treatment facility, emergency shelter, psychiatric hospital, halfway house, or foster group home (Texas Education Agency, 2007a).

In 2003, as a follow-up to these changes, the 78th Texas Legislature adopted the NCES dropout definition to begin in the 2005-06 school year (TEC §39.051, 2004). This required numerous Texas Education Agency (TEA) accountability changes to be implemented before 2005-06. In 2006, there were over two million students in grades 7-12 at Texas public schools with the annual dropout rate for the class of 2006 equaling 2.6% with 51,841 dropouts. Using the new, more stringent NCES standards of a four-year longitudinal dropout rate for

the class of 2006 is 8.8%, an increase from 4.3% for the class of 2005. Texas law targets reduction in the annual and longitudinal dropout rates to 5% or less by the 2007-08 school year (TEC §39.182). A longitudinal dropout rate, as dictated by the NCES standards, is the percentage of students from the same class who drop out before completing their high school education. Students who enter the Texas public school system over the years are added to the original class as it progresses through the grade levels and students who leave the system are subtracted from the class (TEA, 2007a).

College Readiness

College readiness is defined as the level of preparation a student needs to earn credit, without remediation, in a regular course at a post-secondary institution (Conley, Aspengren, Gallagher, & Nies, 2006). College is different from high school because young people are expected to be adults instead of large children. The student-teacher rapport also transforms as well as work ethic, work quality, drive, and intellectual growth (Conley, 2003). One of the most common ways to establish college readiness is to scrutinize courses taken in high school. Adelman's (2006) study to analyze transcripts concluded that completion of a rigorous high school curriculum is the best pre-collegiate indicator of a bachelor's degree completion. Klopfenstein and Thomas (2005) determined that high school students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses performed better early in college than students that did not take AP courses. However, students can also gain the same positive impact, in lieu of taking AP courses, by taking a rigorous course load of non-AP courses in math and science in high school.

After No Child Left Behind (NCLB), all states created some form of high school examination in English, math, and science. Yet, there seems to be no clear connection between achievement on most state standards-based tests and college readiness. Additional data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows a lack of correlation between test scores and college readiness (Cavanaugh, 2006). Test scores alone are not good indicators about college readiness. Students can make up for low test scores by taking a rigorous high school curriculum with strong math and science courses. Historically states including Texas, have required course-based developmental education program to provide remediation for lack of college readiness (Miller, 2007).

In 1989, all entry-level college students in Texas were required to be tested for academic deficiencies in mathematics, reading, and writing before undertaking college-level coursework. If students did not score high enough on a placement exam, they were required to take remedial coursework in the deficient subject (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2001). Texas colleges and universities could use any of four exams to determine college-readiness: Asset, Accuplacer, Compass, and TASP. Colleges across the nation widely used Asset, Accuplacer, and Compass exams to place students in math, English, and writing courses. The TASP exam was a placement exam developed for Texas by National Evaluation Systems, specifically to determine readiness for college-level math, English, and writing courses. Most Texas students chose the TASP, later renamed the Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA) but the content remained unchanged. THEA placement exam cutoff scores are set for each

section – math, English, and writing. If students do not score high enough on a placement exam, they are required to take remedial coursework in the deficient subject. Some Texas students are exempted by scoring high enough on the SAT or ACT, and in recent years, on the state’s Exit-Level TAKS exam. The THEA cutoff score is 230 – unchanged since the creation of the TASP (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2004).

When using placement tests to demonstrate college readiness, students not making the cutoff scores must take remediation or developmental courses. Miller (2007) believes that while Texas has given considerable freedom to institutions for alleviating the academic deficiencies of incoming students, it seems very few have changed their placement policies. In Texas, developmental courses help many students but are not beneficial to students scoring near the 230 cutoff score so there should be consideration on lowering the current cutoff score. No matter where the cutoff score for THEA and other placement tests is set, there is still a legitimate concern about college readiness. While 90% of students enrolling at the University of Texas and Texas A&M University are THEA exempt, only 20% of those enrolling in the state’s community colleges are. Using data from 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, and 2005, there were 570,766 enrollees in Texas institutions of higher education. Of those, 245,896 (43%) were exempt from taking the THEA tests. Out of the 140,161 high school graduates during these five years, 67.05% (93,978) of them had to take some type of developmental or remediation course at their college.

Texas' Answer to Dropouts and College Readiness:

High School Allotment

TEA has implemented many comprehensive programs and initiatives to reduce the dropout rate. In the early grades, the Texas Early Education Model is designed to improve the school readiness of children entering kindergarten and to increase access to early childhood education by streamlining Pre-K, Head Start, and child care resources. In the elementary and middle grades, Texas spends more than \$150 million annually on the Student Success Initiative (SSI), which enables schools to develop programs that help students meet performance standards in reading and mathematics — assisting with students not falling behind and increasing the likelihood that they drop out of school.

The distribution of state education funds to local school districts is based on each district's property wealth per student. Since local revenues at similar tax rates vary across the state since property values vary widely, the state provides equalization funds through the Foundation School Program (FSP). Districts with excellent property values that can generate all basic education costs on their own receive no state funds, while districts that cannot generate the entire amount receive FSP state funds to make up the difference. The higher the property wealth of a district, the less state funding received. In 2006, the 79th Texas Legislature established a High School Allotment (HSA) funding program that provided each Texas school district and open-enrollment charter school with \$275 for every student in Grades 9-12 (TEC §§39.114 and 42.2516). This additional funding totaled \$322 million in 2006-07 and could be used at middle

and high school levels for programs that promote underachieving students to enter an institution of higher education; to encourage students to pursue academically rigorous course work; and to align grades 6-12 curriculum with post-secondary expectations. Allotment funds may be used to create entirely new programs, support or expand existing programs or supplant other funds as long as it focuses on high school completion and college readiness programs.

In 2007, the 80th Texas Legislature expanded state efforts to reduce the dropout rate by adding \$50 million in new funding for other dropout prevention initiatives. Teams were put in place by TEA and THECB that composed of public school and higher education staff to examine college readiness expectations; evaluate the effectiveness of the TEKS in preparing students for college; examine curricula alignment; and develop instructional strategies, professional development and online support materials (TEA, 2007b). Texas leaders recognize that over 90% of the jobs available to students in the 21st century require some post-secondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Recent Study by Texas Education Agency

In September 2008, TEA published its *Report on High School Allotment: Review of Uses of High School Allotment Funds during the 2006-07 School Year*. The TEA Office for Planning, Grants, and Evaluation must provide a report to the Texas Legislature. It used quantitative methods to research questions such as the specific uses of HSA funds; factors districts considered in distributing funds to campuses; campus characteristics that expended HSA funds in 2006-07; and determination of impact of HSA funds during the 2006-07 school year. District

surveys were administered to collect information on factors districts considered to determine how to distribute funds, what district programs were supported with HSA funds, and the extent HSA funds supplanted other available funds. In addition, campus surveys were administered to gather information on activities supported with HSA dollars. Surveys were administered online between September 5, 2007 and April 23, 2008. Every school district (1,089) with high school students in 2006-07 was invited to participate with 975 districts responding (90% response rate). A stratified, random sample of 419 regular, instructional high school campuses was selected for the campus survey with 303 campuses responding (72% response rate). The report from TEA used analyses from the survey of 975 school districts, survey of 303 high schools, and the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS).

Uses of HSA Funds

TEA (2008) gathered important data on whether expended HSA funds were used to create new programs and activities to improve high school completion and college readiness, or whether the funds were used to support existing programs, or even supplant other local funds supporting such programs, which could then be freed up for other district purposes. Evidence of a high rate of supplanting among allotment schools would indicate that HSA funds were used mainly to meet the financial needs of existing programs, rather than to support the creation of new programs. Results indicate the majority of HSA funds went to high school completion and college readiness activities and programs as intended. During 2006-07, while most campuses used HSA funds to supplant

other funding, the majority of funds were used to support personnel costs, instructional materials, and technology. TEA determined these to be common costs associated with activities or programs designed to increase the rigor and quality of instruction.

In 2006-07, a total of \$322 million in allotment funding was allocated to school districts. Schools that received an allotment from the district spent only 38% (\$123 million) of these funds during the first year. The remaining balance (\$199 million) may be accounted for by the fact that districts could hold HSA funds until the next year since there is no restriction on when these funds must be spent. The most commonly HSA-supported programs, according to the district surveys were: (1) expanded participation in dual or concurrent enrollment courses (62%); (2) increased student completion of the Recommended or Distinguished Achievement High School Program (60%); and (3) increased rigorous curricula, effective instruction, and formative assessment (59%). School districts most often expended allotment funds on “personnel costs” (77%), followed by the “purchase of textbooks and other instructional materials” (60%), and “technology” (56%). Campus surveys show the most frequent expenditure was technology for credit recovery (30%), tutoring to help students earn a high school diploma (28%), and books/materials for dual/concurrent enrollment courses (25%). *Factors Used by Districts to Determine HSA Funding to Campuses*

Of districts with more than one secondary campus, most (60%) used only one or two factors to determine the amount of HSA funds to give to each

individual campus though the factors varied. The most common factor used (70%) was the “need for resources at a campus” followed by the “number of students at a campus” (48%) and the “presence of a promising program at a campus” (39%). Surprisingly, indicators such as the proportion of TAKS failers, the percentage of at-risk students, and the percentage of economically-disadvantaged students, were used only 29%, 23%, and 18%, respectively, to determine the amount of HSA funds for individual campuses. Factors considered by districts to allocate the allotment also varied by district size, as measured by the number of students in each district. “Need for resources at a campus” was the most frequently cited factor among districts of all sizes (ranging between 60% and 83% of districts), followed by “number of students at a campus” (ranging between 46% and 50% of districts). Results suggest that districts considered the financial needs of a campus first for allocation of HSA funds (TEA, 2008).

TABLE 2. Factors Used by Districts with More Than One Secondary Campus to Calculate High School Allotment Amounts, by District Size

Factor	District Size		
	Small	Medium	Large
Need for Resources at a Campus	59.8%	83.3%	71.1%
Number of Students at a Campus	46.0%	47.0%	50.4%
Promising Program at a Campus	19.5%	47.0%	48.8%
Proportion of TAKS Failers at a Campus	27.6%	36.4%	24.8%
Percentage of At-Risk Students at a Campus	23.0%	28.8%	19.8%
Equitable Distribution of Allotment Funds Among Campuses	14.9%	12.1%	33.1%
Percent of Economically Disadvantaged Students at a Campus	23.0%	15.2%	14.9%

Source: High School Allotment District-Level Survey and PEIMS data, Texas Education Agency, 2008. Note: District size is based on the number of students per district in average daily attendance (ADA): small (fewer than 1600 students), medium (between 1,600 and 4,999 students), and large (5,000 or more students). Percents do not equal 100% because districts with more than one secondary campus could consider multiple factors to calculate the amount of allotment funds to send to schools.

HSA Uses by Lewisville ISD – Focus on a large suburban district

Lewisville Independent School District (LISD) is a large suburban school district located 30 miles north of Dallas with a student enrollment of 50,000+. In 2006-07, LISD received \$3.54 million in HSA funds monitored by Dr. Penny Reddell, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. In LISD, these funds were used to create credit recovery courses at all five high school campuses. The district was also able to hire four full-time credit recovery teachers per high school campus to help at-risk students regain credit in courses previously failed. The district also purchased Plato© instructional online software and classroom computers to provide differentiated credit recovery instruction. Credit recovery courses were highly successful in addressing at-risk students early in high school to alleviate high numbers of juniors and senior needing placement into an accelerated program at the Lewisville Learning Center (LLC). Additional personnel expenditures included overtime and extra-duty pay for credit recovery teachers working before and after regular school hours (Penny Reddell, personal communication, September 10, 2008).

HSA funds were used for additional personnel units such as a LLC counselor to assist with college preparation and a math teacher-on-assignment to provide assistance to secondary teachers across the district. LISD used HSA funds to partially supplant LISD resources to provide tutorial programs for the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) at the middle and high school levels; to pay student test fees for the PSAT and ACT; to institute an additional summer school site to help more students take remediation courses

and stay on grade level; and provide after-school bus transportation for students to attend TAKS tutorials. Among districts with more than one secondary campus, the most common factor (70%) considered for allocation of HSA funds was the need for resources at a campus. Most campuses (70%) that used HSA funds in 2006-07 were high schools and districts expended only 38% of funds allocated to them during the 2006-07 school year (TEA, 2008). Lewisville ISD, a multiple secondary school district, mirrored many of the same results.

According to Marianne Yarbrough (personal communication, September 18, 2006), special revenue accountant for LISD, the HSA expenditures for 2006-07 was \$648,047 (18.26%) out of the \$3.54 million received from the state. This expenditure compares to districts across the state that spent only 38% of their funds in the first year. Both LISD and other districts could not spend their HSA funds during the first year due to late implementation of the statewide initiative, legal bid processes for services, and districts' ability to carryover funds until the next year with no restrictions. Of the amount expended by LISD, \$356,068 (54.94%) went to salaries, either hiring new staff or paying for overtime and extra-duty. The next highest HSA expenditure was \$244,629 (37.75%) for supplies such as computers, software packages including Plato© and Gizmos©, and materials for summer school.

Programs implemented by LISD that utilized HSA funds have been successful. For example, after the first full year of credit recovery classes, 247 credits were regained by 345 students in math, 153 credits regained by 219 students in science, 152 credits regained by 239 students in English, and 100.5

credits regained by 157 students in social studies. Additional data shows that 524 students at the five high schools attended TAKS tutorials during the school year. In subsequent years, programs have been expanded into providing a college access scholarship counselor to assist with first-time college entry; purchasing instructional materials for after-school middle school programs; hiring data coaches at all secondary schools to scan, score, disaggregate, and discuss curriculum-based assessments; purchasing more technology to expand credit recovery course offerings; and adding AVID classes at four secondary schools. Dr. Reddell states, "High School Allotment funding has allowed us to create significant initiatives to benefit a wide variety of students which would have never been possible with this funding. Our results show that we are vastly impacting a lot of students across secondary settings."

Conclusion

There is no doubt that a high school diploma represents the minimum requirement for the increased demands for highly-skilled workers. The State of Texas is struggling with maintaining annual and longitudinal dropout rates below the state-mandated 5% requirement. In addition, students that are graduating from high school need more and more remediation to earn credit in a regular course at a post-secondary institution. Experts suggest students should take rigorous math and science coursework or take AP courses to strengthen college readiness skills. This must not be occurring. During a recent five-year span, over two-thirds of Texas high school graduates took some type of developmental or remediation course at college. For these reasons, the 79th Texas Legislature

provided schools with \$275 per high school student to address concerns about dropout rates and college readiness, known as the High School Allotment funding program.

According to the TEA study, the most common HSA programs expanded dual or concurrent enrollment courses, increased student completion of more stringent graduation plans, and improved rigorous curricula – all goals of the Texas Legislature. A district's intended use of HSA funds and the kinds of programs and activities implemented by schools were sometimes different. While central office may make the decision about allocation, the program impacts occur at the campus-level, where the programs are implemented. Among schools that spent HSA funds, TEA (2008) found that a majority of students were Hispanic (44%) and economically disadvantaged (48%), similar to statewide percentages. A total of 1,020 schools expended allotment funds in 2006-07 with the vast majority (93%) expended by high schools. On a per-pupil basis, only one-fourth of the expenditures in per-pupil allotment funds was new money being used to support new programming. The remainder was used to support existing programs, expand existing programs, or supplant other funds. Districts reported that 84% of schools used allotment funds to supplant other funds, either fully or partially.

In 2006-07, the initial expenditure of \$322 million for this statewide initiative was vast. Yet, it was the first step in addressing these enormous tasks. It also represented the continuing concern of state legislators about dropouts and college readiness. The costs for not addressing these issues will be much

greater in the future. Of course, critics want to know if providing more money tackles the problems and if the state is getting its “money’s worth.” The final answer is difficult to determine. TEA did find that the majority of HSA funds went to high school completion and college readiness activities and programs as intended. There was the development of new programs such as credit recovery, expansion of TAKS tutorials, the purchase of technology, and the overall influx of new funds to supplant the stretched dollars being used with existing dropout and college readiness programs. Yet statistical analysis by TEA, after adjusting for demographic characteristics and previous academic ability, did not detect any statistically significant relationship between allotment expenditures and student TAKS performance in reading and mathematics. The overall effects of HSA funding cannot be determined since the study has only looked at the initial implementation year of 2006-07 so the following surveys and studies by TEA will be critical for future HSA funding.

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