

TEXAS FOCUS

TEXAS COMPREHENSIVE CENTER

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Five Steps to High School Reform

If the problems are high dropout rates, low academic achievement, and large numbers of graduates who need remedial courses in college, what are the solutions?

The National High School Center recently released a research brief that summarizes a study of four high school reform programs: Career Academies, First Things First, Project Graduation Really Achieves Dreams (Project GRAD), and Talent Development. The brief culls from the study five major challenges that typical low-performing schools face and then outlines policies and interventions the four reform programs employ to address these challenges. These policies and interventions provide the following five steps to help low-performing high schools address the issues they face:

1. Assist students who enter high school with poor academic skills.

Suggestions for assisting these students include providing double-blocked class schedules that allow students to earn more credits per year than other scheduling arrangements and catch-up courses designed to prepare students for college preparatory classes.

Challenges: Simply offering more time in the classroom is not enough. Class time must be used to maximize learning. For example, students in one reform program who, despite assistance provided, were required to repeat ninth grade and were more likely to drop out than their counterparts in other schools.

2. Improve instructional content and instruction.

The report suggests that the use of well-defined curricula, training on that curricula, and collaborative teacher work to align the curricula were helpful. Additionally, academic department support, in addition to the support of the smaller learning community, is important.

Challenges: The content of teacher meetings often drifts away from issues of instructional improvements. Guidelines for teacher meetings are often necessary to ensure that instructional improvement remains the focus of discussion.

3. Create a personalized and orderly learning environment.

Suggestions for personalizing the learning environment include the implementation of smaller learning communities, in which groups of core teachers instruct smaller groups of students. These communities help students feel that their teachers know and care about them. Also, focusing on theme-based learning



A Note from the Director

Welcome to the second issue of the Texas Comprehensive Center's quarterly newsletter. We hope you found the last issue as informative and useful as those who sent us comments and suggestions did.

We are happy to introduce the advisory board of the TXCC in this issue. The board met in Austin on February 22–23, 2007, to discuss several issues vital to the work of the TXCC. Discussion topics included a definition of capacity building; how to measure quality, relevance, and usefulness; and ways to assess the needs of the educators and learners in Texas.

In addition to highlighting the work of the TXCC, the ESCs, and the Content Centers, this issue provides research-based information on improving high schools and increasing the graduation rate. We also discuss the recommendations on the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) proposed by the Bush administration and the bipartisan commission on NCLB. Several other agencies and professional associations have proposed ideas for reauthorization of this important legislation. Space does not allow us to report on all of these, but we encourage our readers to stay informed and offer their own ideas to policymakers as this process moves forward.

One new feature in this issue is a section highlighting links to information related to accountability and NCLB on the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Web site. Each issue of the newsletter will also include a link to a section of the TEA Web site related to the focus of that issue. We hope this will help our readers more easily gain access to information they seek.

Please continue to let us know how to make this newsletter better meet your needs.

Vicki Dimock, PhD
Director, TXCC

communities results in higher attendance and lower dropout rates. Separating ninth graders into "academies" increased the attendance rate and the promotion rate to the next grade. Finally, assigning a faculty advisor to each student proved beneficial to students by giving them an adult to talk to, to help with homework, and to recognize accomplishments.

Challenges: Implementing smaller learning communities is not simple, especially for students in the upper grades, when more

electives are offered. Research suggests that smaller learning communities do help increase student achievement. However, research at this point can't conclude that, alone, they result in higher achievement.

4. Prepare students for the world beyond high school.

The report outlines ways to better prepare students for post-high school success. Career awareness activities and work internships during high school appear to impact earning potential and provide students with experience and job references that boost employability. Structured partnerships with employers increase the likelihood that students will participate in career awareness and work-based learning activities. Providing scholarship opportunities for students who complete a recommended curriculum, graduate on time, and maintain a minimum grade point average proves valuable. Finally, college preparation assistance, including summer institutes, counseling, tutoring, and college admission preparation, may have an impact.

Challenges: Improvement in the academic components of some of the reform programs may be necessary. Research concluded that the core academic courses in the academies were similar to other courses outside the academies and did not result in increased academic achievement, likelihood of graduating, college enrollment, or earning of a secondary credential.

5. Stimulate change in overstressed high schools.

To stimulate change in high schools, skilled reform leaders, whether inside or outside the system, are required to design, implement, and monitor reform efforts. Educational service providers can provide reform assistance if the capacity of the existing staff is insufficient. Strong support at the district level will help ensure effective implementation and sustainability of the reform.

In conclusion, the findings of this brief suggest that the implementation of the described combination of instructional improvements and structural changes might be the foundation for a “solution” for the problems that low-performing high schools face. However, the authors of this brief offer this caution to readers

Because each program is more than the sum of its components, conclusions about particular aspects of the initiatives can never be as solid as conclusions about the effects of the programs as a whole. Indeed, all the lessons in this brief should be viewed as judgments, not facts—albeit judgments grounded in evidence (p. 8).

For more information about this brief, school reform, and other topics for high school improvement, visit the National High School Center's Web site at www.betterhighschools.org.

The What Works Clearinghouse has reviewed studies of five interventions for dropout prevention. Those reports, as well as a complete dropout prevention abstract, are available to review and print at www.w-w-c.org.



ESC Notables

Holly Fields, the leadership school improvement specialist at Region 19, is diligently working to provide assistance and support not only to schools in her region labeled as “potential,” but also to those schools that are proactively avoiding the “potential school” label.

Fields facilitates the Region 19 Core Accountability Team, which is composed of nine representatives of various service center departments. The team meets regularly to plan activities and strategies to support potential schools by addressing the following three specific service center goals:

1. Create and implement innovative professional development.
2. Assist priority campuses in meeting both state and federal accountability.
3. Increase student achievement.

As the school improvement specialist, Fields has taken several steps to provide tailored services to assist school staff, Education Service Center (ESC) staff, and superintendents. She has personally conducted site visits to all potential schools in the region and has provided customized professional development, technical assistance, and resources to these schools. Fields says the visits “provided opportunities for campus leaders to get to know a ‘contact’ for support in any area of need.”

Fields worked with her Region 19 colleagues to compile 2005–2006 student achievement data from all campuses in the region. The federal standards for 2006–2007 were applied to determine which schools would be identified as potential schools 1 year in advance. This information has been shared with district superintendents.

Finally, Fields is helping plan a potential schools conference for April 27, 2007. Region 19 is planning the conference along with the NCLB division at TEA, School Improvement Resource Center (SIRC) at Region 13, and two campuses in the region. The conference will provide strategies and resources to assist campuses entering the School Improvement Program (SIP) in 2007–2008. The two campuses, which have successfully met AYP after having participated in SIP, are presenting those strategies that they implemented that they feel contributed to their success. It is anticipated that 80 campuses will attend the conference. All potential schools and all schools that would have missed AYP using the 2007 standard are invited.

Fields' wide-ranging efforts and proactive planning will certainly afford struggling schools in Region 19 the boost they need in their improvement efforts.



Meet the TXCC Advisory Board!

The first meeting of the Texas Comprehensive Center Advisory Board was held in Austin on February 22–23, 2007. The advisory board members were selected to represent the interests of a variety of organizations across all regions of the state. The board’s role is to provide advice to the TXCC on

1. employing strategies for monitoring and addressing the educational needs of the region on an ongoing basis;
2. maintaining a high standard of quality in the performance of the TXCC’s activities; and
3. carrying out the TXCC’s duties in a manner that promotes progress toward improving student academic achievement.



TXCC Advisory Board members

Front Row (left to right)

- Kris Olson**, Parents for Public Schools
- Renee King**, Fabens High School
- Beth Abernethy**, Region VII Education Service Center
- Vicki Dimock**, PhD, Texas Comprehensive Center

Back Row (left to right)

- Cory Green**, Texas Education Agency*
- Jean Rutherford**, PhD, National Center for Educational Accountability
- George McShan**, Harlingen ISD
- Elizabeth Powers**, PhD, Charles A. Dana Center
- Xandra Earlie**, Aldine ISD
- Richard Saucedo**, Hereford High School

Not pictured:

- Lisa Brady Gill**, Texas Instruments
- Mark Keahey**, Sulphur Bluff ISD
- Rafael Lara-Alecio**, PhD, Texas A&M University
- Ann Smisko**, PhD, Austin ISD

**designee for Dr. Shirley J. Neeley, Commissioner of Education*



Texas CC Quarterly Highlights

TXCC’s recent events and activities

★ In January, the TXCC provided a professional development session to introduce Education Service Center (ESC) staff to coaching techniques. *Coaching for Success for Technical Assistance (TA) Providers* offered models and strategies for reflective practice that promote continuous learning and development of the school staff that the ESCs assist. Additionally, the connections between reflective practice, effective leadership, and school improvement were emphasized. Participants were provided an opportunity to learn and practice skills for two types of reflection: reflective planning and reflecting on action.

★ Days 1 and 2 of *Strategies for English Language Learners in Secondary Science* also occurred in January. In this session, participants learned about strategies for incorporating research-based and promising practices for English language learners in secondary science courses. A follow-up session on this topic occurred April 11–13, 2007.



★ February 15 marked our first live Webcast featuring our very own Bill Sommers, who led our session on *Coaching for Success for TA Providers* in January. “Coaching Conversations Using States of Mind” included an overview of the states of mind and modeling of a coaching conversation. A debriefing of the conversation and a question-and-answer period followed. Visit our Web site (<http://txcc.sedl.org>) for future live Webcasts and to download archived presentations.

★ Also in February, the TXCC partnered with the New York Comprehensive Center and the Center on Innovation and Improvement to host a technical assistance retreat for state education agencies. Retreat participants had an opportunity to learn the research that supports the optimal restructuring options for schools, to clarify the roles of the State Education Agency (SEA) staff in supporting restructuring, to develop technical procedures for helping districts manage restructuring with a focus on improving student learning, and to develop plans to move forward.

Supporting 21st Century High Schools

We must make our high schools more rigorous and encourage students to take more advanced math and science classes. Employers today need workers with “pocket protector” skills—creative problem-solvers with strong math and science backgrounds. Whether children want to be auto mechanics or cancer researchers, they must have these skills.
U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings

The U.S. Department of Education has created a fact sheet that delineates those aspects of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reauthorization recommendations that relate directly to high schools (see “NCLB National Buzz,” below). The six factors proposed in *Building on Results: Strengthening High Schools for the 21st Century* will challenge schools and students to succeed and provide students with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in college and the workplace.

First, federal Title I funds available to low-income high schools will be increased. In addition, course-level academic standards for English and mathematics will be developed by 2010–2011, and by 2012–2013, aligned assessments in English and mathematics will be administered and the results publicly reported. Additionally, by 2011–2012 disaggregated school-level data related to graduation rates will be included in accountability calculations. This effort will result in more accurate reporting and tracking of graduation rates. Another recommendation involves reading achievement. The Striving Readers program will be expanded to help more adolescent students reach grade-level reading goals. Also, an Adjunct Teacher Corps will be developed in an effort to encourage qualified professionals from the math, science, and technology fields to teach middle and high school courses. Finally, more teachers will be trained to teach advanced placement and international baccalaureate classes. Students will be encouraged to take these rigorous courses of study in high school and college through financial incentives.

This fact sheet can be accessed at the U.S. Department of Education’s Web site at www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/nclb/factsheets/highschools.html.



Upcoming Events

Upcoming TXCC events

May 16–18

Leadership Skills for Resolving Conflict

ESC leadership and school improvement specialists are meeting for 3 days to brush up on their coaching skills and to learn what they can do to assist principals in their quest to resolve conflict.

June 20–21

TXCC Forum - Working Systemically: The District’s Role in School Improvement

For more information and updates on these professional development sessions, visit our Web site at <http://txcc.sedl.org>.



NCLB The National Buzz

The 5-year reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is scheduled for 2007, although some speculate that actual reauthorization won’t occur until after a new administration has been elected. Nevertheless, the Bush administration as well as the Commission on No Child Left Behind have recently presented their proposals.

In January 2007, the Bush administration released its recommendations for the reauthorization of NCLB. The report, *Building On Results: A Blueprint for Strengthening the No Child Left Behind Act*, highlights the following:

- **Accountability:** States will report their National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores on their state report cards.
- **Growth models:** States with a robust data system and well-established assessments will be permitted to use growth models to measure individual student progress toward grade-level proficiency.
- **Flexibility:** States may prioritize their school improvement activities based on the specific needs and successes of the school. Additionally, 100% of specified federal funds may be moved among programs.
- **Rigorous coursework:** Course-level academic standards for English and mathematics must be developed by 2010–2011.
- **Teacher Incentive Fund:** States and districts can reward teachers and principals who make progress in raising student achievement and provide incentives to educators who choose to serve in needy

schools through this fund.

- Science achievement: Starting in 2008–2009, disaggregated results from state science assessments will be factored into accountability calculations. Grade-level proficiency in science is expected by 2019–2020.

To read more about *Building On Results: A Blueprint for Strengthening the No Child Left Behind Act*, go to www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/nclb/factsheets/blueprint.html.



The bipartisan commission on NCLB released its recommendations for reauthorization on February 13, 2007. Recommendations include the following:

Effective teachers for all students, effective principals for all communities

- Require teachers not only to be highly qualified, but also to meet the requirements for being a Highly Qualified and Effective Teacher (HQET).
- Require principals working at Title I schools to meet the requirements of a Highly Effective Principal (HEP).
- Provide guaranteed professional development to teachers and principals in need.
- Require schools and districts with high rates of turnover to develop plans to recruit and retain effective teachers.

Accelerating progress and closing achievement gaps through improved accountability

- Allow states to include achievement growth in adequate yearly progress (AYP) calculations.
- Require states to include the results of science assessments in AYP calculations.
- Maintain the U.S. Department of Education’s 1% policy to allow students with severe disabilities to be measured according to alternate standards using alternate assessments, and reduce the proposed 2% policy, which allows students with disabilities to be assessed against “modified achievement standards,” to 1%.
- Extend the amount of time English language learners who have achieved proficiency can be included in that subgroup from 2 to 3 years.

Moving beyond the status quo to effective school improvement and student options

- Increase accessibility to public school choice by requiring adequately performing schools to reserve seats for transferring students.
- Require schools and districts to offer supplemental educational services (SES) for students who don’t have transfer options.
- Provide multiple enrollment periods and increased communication to parents.
- Require states to evaluate SES providers.
- Require the U.S. Department of Education to provide guidance on restructuring.



On TEA’s Web site

Links to Important Information on TEA’s Web Site

NCLB E-mail List

www.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/list.html

If you haven’t already, visit this page to subscribe to TEA’s NCLB e-mail list. Get the latest information as soon as it is released! Published weekly by Cory Green, senior director, NCLB.

Due Dates and Deadlines

www.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/deadlines.html

Don’t be late! You’ll find the deadlines for NCLB forms and reports on this page.

Student Assessment Data

www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/reporting/

Here you can view and/or download results for the state, regions, districts, and campuses.

2006–2007 Schools in Need of Improvement

www.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/titleia/sip/sip.html

Available here is the final list of campuses in Title I School Improvement for the 2006–2007 school year. Additional information regarding requirements for schools at the different stages of school improvement and a sample parent notification letter may also be found on this page.

Distinguished Performance Schools

www.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/titleia/distingschools.html

Access information about the 129 schools in Texas that earned the Distinguished Performance Award and the 13 campuses that earned the Distinguished Progress Award.

NCLB Staff Contacts by Region

www.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/contacts.html

Need help? You can find the e-mail address for your NCLB program contact on this page.

- Increase funds available for school improvement and provide time for schools to implement interventions.
- Double the national research budget and focus funds on research to assist schools in meeting NCLB requirements.

Fair and accurate assessments of student progress

- Improve the quality of assessments.
- Allow Title 1 funds to be used to align assessments to state standards.
- Require states to align grade-level tests to allow tracking of student progress from year to year.

High standards for every student in every state

- Require states to assess their standards against college requirements.
- Develop a national model of content and performance standards and assessments based on the NAEP framework.

Ensuring high schools prepare students for college and the workplace

- Require districts in need to develop and implement districtwide improvement plans.
- Require states to administer grade 12 assessments in order to track high school effectiveness, extend the growth calculations, and track the HQET/HEP measurements for high school teachers and principals.

Driving progress through reliable, accurate data

- Require all states to design and implement longitudinal data systems and provide support for and monitoring of these systems.

Additional elements of a high-achieving system

- Insist that states develop and implement English language proficiency standards, assessments, and annual measurable achievement objectives.
- Require the U.S. Department of Education to develop a common scale across states for measuring English proficiency.
- Increase professional development for teachers who provide instruction to English language learners.

To download or order a copy of this report, go to the Aspen Institute's Web site at www.aspeninstitute.org/.



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The Texas Comprehensive Center (TXCC) is one of 16 regional centers established by the U.S. Department of Education. The primary goal of the regional centers is to build the capacity of the state education agencies and statewide systems of support to implement NCLB. Links to the other regional centers, the content centers, and the U.S. Department of Education may be found on the TXCC Web site (<http://txcc.sedl.org/>).

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