

Perspectives

ON TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY

Testimony On Post-Secondary Readiness

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and the
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I. Introduction

Thank you for inviting the Foundation to provide information about post-secondary readiness in Texas public schools. My testimony will:

- summarize the evidence on post-secondary readiness of students today and our progress towards improving the academic proficiency of high school graduates over the past decade,
- identify some of the reasons why graduates lack sufficient readiness for college, vocational training or skilled employment, and
- recommend some approaches proven to improve educational success for high school graduates.

II. Importance of Post-Secondary Readiness

In policy discussions about post-secondary readiness, people frequently dismiss the need for all students to study an academically rigorous curriculum that is described as “college preparatory.” It is common to hear people say, “College is not for everybody.” It is true that a 4-year university degree is not the destination for all students and not needed by all students. However, post-secondary education today is a must for all graduates for Texas public schools today; our schools should be preparing all students to be successful after graduation in skilled vocational training, a community college or a university.

Certification from skilled vocational programs, two and four year degrees are necessary for graduates of Texas public schools to be support themselves and their families. Today,

- 56 % of jobs held by workers age 30-59 require some post-secondary education/training;
- 80 % of the fastest growing jobs require formal education/training;
- The number of jobs requiring a bachelor’s degree is expected to double by 2006;
- College educated workers earn 70 % more than a high school graduate with similar work experience;
- Only workers with college degrees have gained financially over the past decade-

(Continued on following pages.)

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- Hourly income of college graduates climbed 13%,
- Wages of workers with only some college fell by 9 %,
- Wages of high school graduates fell 12 %; and
- Wages of high school dropouts plummeted 26 %

Post-secondary readiness is not only an economic necessity for high school graduates, it is also a statutory requirement for public schools. The express purpose of the curriculum taught in Texas public schools is post-secondary readiness *The essential knowledge and skills shall also prepare and enable all students to continue to learn in post-secondary education, training or employment settings* (Texas Education Code, Section 28.001).

I. Assessment of Texas Public Schools' Success: Post-Secondary Readiness

Over the past decade, Texas public schools have exhibited remarkable success in improving the academic proficiency of elementary and middle school students. Texas has reaped national recognition for gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Despite these gains, despite tripling of funding for public schools, despite the earnest efforts of educators and despite aggressive reforms of state legislators, most public schools are failing in their obligation to prepare students for graduation. Over the past decade, public schools have not demonstrated significant improvement in graduation rates, college readiness scores or closure of the achievement gap on independent measures of high school proficiency.

Tests of college readiness, the ACT and SAT, show that the majority of students are not equipped with the academic skills to succeed in post-secondary education or training.

Graphics, assembled for and distributed with this testimony, show average state scores of college readiness are far below national average. On both the SAT and ACT tests, average scores of Texas graduates rank in the lowest scoring ten states. While ACT and SAT scores have been slowly deteriorating for the past decade, the achievement gap has been growing between student groups. At the same time, the percentage of students taking these tests has been declining, declining proportionally so that the demographic mix has substantively remained unchanged.

II. Reasons for Inadequate Progress Toward Post-Secondary Readiness

There are multiple reasons that could account for the failure of Texas public schools to prepare students for high school graduation.

1. First, there is strong evidence that the college-preparatory high school curriculum, the Recommended High School Program that is based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, is not sufficiently rigorous.

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- A. According to an evaluation published first by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in 1999 and later by Just for the Kids in 2000, approximately 60 % of students in the Recommended High School Program did not demonstrate college readiness by either meeting the TASP exemption standards or passing the TASP. This same report indicates that not all RHSP graduates were equally prepared by their curriculum; Hispanic and African-American students often demonstrated substantially less academic proficiency.
 - B. Analyses developed by the ACT indicate that students in Texas are taking the same core high school courses as their peers in other states but scoring lower.
 - C. A recent analysis of the state curriculum by ACT indicates that the curriculum does not “Articulate a clear sense of increasing complexity and sophistication across courses and grade levels. The lack of specificity, course differentiation, coverage interpretation and qualifying achievement language in TEKS could very likely promote mastering lower-level skills. The acquisition of such skills doesn’t necessarily prepare students for the kind of academic work that they will be expected to produce at college level.”
2. There is strong evidence that the academic achievement of elementary and middle school students is not sufficiently strong enough to prepare students to succeed in college preparatory high school curriculum. There is solid scientific evidence that basic literacy skills both predict and determines the likelihood that students will acquire sufficient academic proficiency to succeed in a high school college preparatory curriculum. More importantly, research indicates that high school completion, college readiness and post-secondary educational success can be determined and predicted by the academic proficiency of students by grade three.
 - A. NAEP scores indicate that only about one out of four students are scoring at grade level proficiency.
 - B. National norm referenced tests, such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Stanford 9, administered by some urban districts indicate that students are generally performing at one to two grades below grade-level proficiency by middle school.
 - C. Basic literacy skills of third grade students, particularly for African-American and Hispanic students, fall below proficiency necessary for academic success. A recent report issued by the Koret Task Force on K-12 Education to the Joint Select Committee on School Finance warns policymakers that the failure to significantly improve elementary school reading skills will undermine efforts to improve public schools.
 3. There is evidence suggesting schools that focus heavily on passing state assessment neglect post-secondary readiness. Many school districts have raised their passing rates on state assessments while participation in advanced courses, SAT/ACT test-taking has declined and college readiness scores fell.

III. Recommendations

- Strengthen the state curriculum standards – by establishing explicit, specific grade-level expectations -- to ensure all students in all schools are provided a uniform college preparatory education;
- Couple state assessments for grades one through seven with a standardized national norm-referenced test, such as the ITBS, to evaluate grade-level proficiency (as is administered by most states);
- Administer the ACT program (Explore, Plan and ACT) - an independent test of post-secondary preparedness that is aligned with state curriculum – at grades 8, 10 and 12 to assess post-secondary readiness. This assessment can serve as a diagnostic tool for schools to improve student performance.
- Focus grades one through three solely on reading and mathematics, increase time on task, and train teachers in building fundamental phonics, vocabulary and computational skills;
- Use scientifically-proven instructional methods that have demonstrated effectiveness;
- Close the achievement gap by placing under-performing students with qualified teachers (who demonstrate subject-area knowledge, good communication skills, and raise student test scores) in an academically focused classes that rely on proven effective instructional methods;
- Increase time on academic tasks, focus the school day on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, scheduling extracurricular and athletic activities outside the school day;
- Redirect more education dollars to the classroom;
- Pair school districts with local community colleges and universities for curricular and instructional assistance
- Retain effective teachers and dismiss ineffective teachers;
- Hold schools accountable for post-secondary readiness and closing the achievement gap– strengthen the accountability system to require a 90 % passing rate for all students in regular instruction and closure of gaps between student groups; and
- Integrate post-secondary readiness into the state school finance system – establish readiness as a standard for the Constitutional requirement of “diffusion of knowledge”—as a performance expectation for Texas public schools and part of the core foundation curriculum that the state makes provision to fund. .

IV. Conclusion

Post-secondary readiness is a standard that must be established for and achieved by Texas public schools. This standard must be established as a key component of the state school finance system and incorporated in the educational accountability system for school accreditation.

As shown by the Foundation's recent research examining the relationships between student performance and school spending, improving post-secondary readiness (or any level of student performance) is an effort that can be accomplished without additional or significant increases in educational funding. What is required is setting new priorities and reallocating funds to these priorities. School districts must be discouraged from dismissing reading teachers while continuing to pay Junior Golf Association dues and laying permanent tennis courts.

Until Texas public schools spend smart instead of spending more, student achievement will languish. The failure of additional funds to improve student achievement in Texas was strongly demonstrated by recent studies commissioned by the Texas Public Policy Foundation. Findings of this research mirrored results of scientific studies conducted by national and international experts over the past 50 years. Scientific research shows that more money does not mean better schools.

In fact schools have no incentive to improve student performance if Texans continue to increase funding. More money will simply mean that public schools will continue to invest their first and sometimes last dollar on things that do not improve student learning. Until schools are required to prioritize resources, there is no incentive for schools to use money more wisely in ways necessary to bring more students to graduation ceremonies, ready students for post-secondary experiences and close the achievement gap.

Post-secondary readiness and higher achievement of all students can be achieved by a school finance system that focuses public schools on how money is spent and a school accountability system that holds schools accountable for the results that count.

Texas Public School Outcomes

Texas Students Who Scored At Or Above Proficient Level On NAEP In 2003				
	<u>Texas Average</u>	<u>African-American</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>White</u>
Grade 4 Reading	27 %	13 %	14 %	30 %
Grade 4 Math	33 %	15 %	20 %	43 %
Grade 8 Reading	26 %	13 %	14 %	36 %
Grade 8 Math	25 %	8 %	12 %	31 %

NAEP SUMMARY: AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT MOST RECENT TESTS ADMINISTERED 2000-2004			
<u>Assessment</u>	<u>Texas</u>	<u>Nation</u>	<u>Comment</u>
Reading – Grade 4	27 %	30 %	3 Points Below Nation
Reading – Grade 8	26 %	30 %	4 Points Below Nation
Math – Grade 4	33 %	31 %	2 Points Above Nation
Math – Grade 8	25 %	27 %	2 Points Below Nation
Writing – Grade 4	29 %	27 %	2 Points Above Nation
Writing – Grade 8	31 %	30 %	1 Point Above Nation
Science – Grade 4	24 %	26 %	2 Points Below Nation
Science – Grade 8	23 %	28 %	5 Points Below Nation

Texas Grade 4 Reading: National Assessment Of Educational Progress				
	<u>1992 Scale Points</u>		<u>2003 Scale Points</u>	
	Texas	Nation	Texas	Nation
African American	199	191	202	198
Hispanic	200	194	205	200
White	223	223	227	229

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Texas Grade 8 Math Gains: National Assessment Of Educational Progress

	<u>Gain 1990-2003</u>	<u>Gap Remaining</u>	<u>Gap Equivalent</u>
African American	+ 24 Points	30 Points	3 Years of Schooling
Hispanic	+ 22 Points	22 Points	2 Years of Schooling
White	+ 17 Points		

Dropout Rates: Texas Public Schools

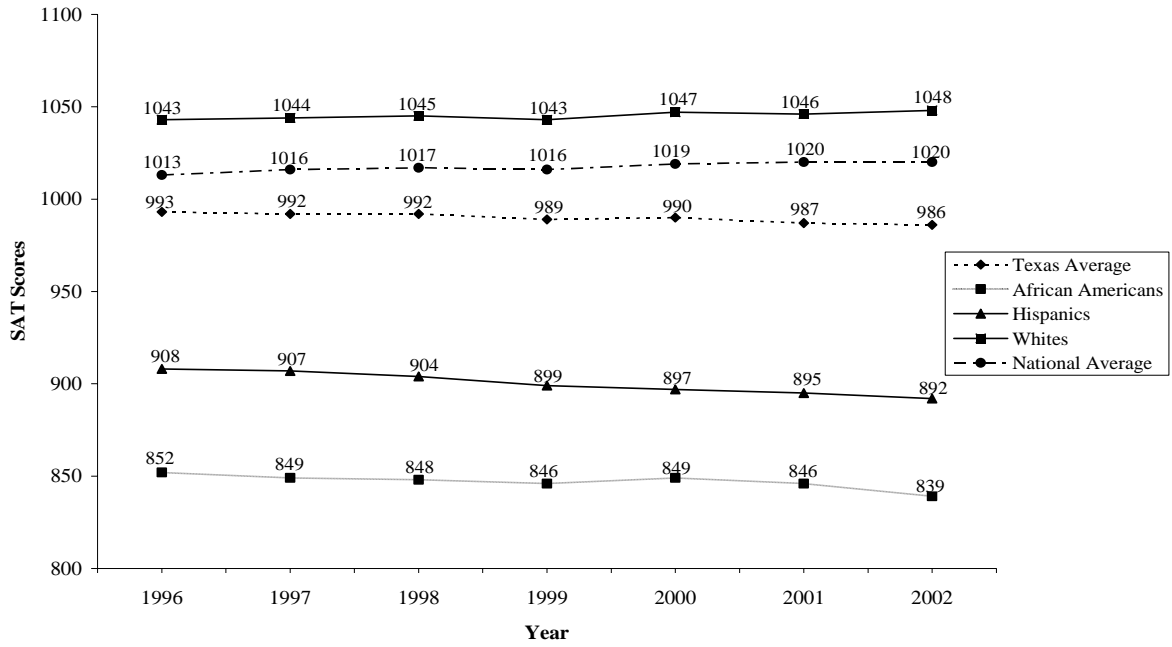
	<u>IDRA Attrition</u>	<u>TEA 6 Year Dropout</u>	<u>TEA 4-Year Dropout</u>
1987-88	33 %	34.0 %	6.7 %
1988-89	31 %	31.3 %	6.1 %
1889-90	31 %	27.2 %	5.1 %
1990-91	no calculation	21.4 %	3.9 %
1991-92	34 %	20.7 %	3.8 %
1992-93	36 %	15.8 %	2.8 %
1993-94	no calculation	14.4 %	2.6 %
1994-95	40 %	10.6 %	1.8 %
1995-96	42 %	10.1 %	1.8 %
1996-97	43 %	9.1 %	1.6 %
1997-98	42 %	14.7 %	1.6 %
1998-99	42 %	9.0 %	1.6 %
1999-00	40 %	7.7 %	1.3 %
2000-01	40 %	6.8 %	1.0 %
2001-02	39 %	not available	1.0 %

Manhattan Institute: Texas 2001 Graduating Class - High School Dropouts

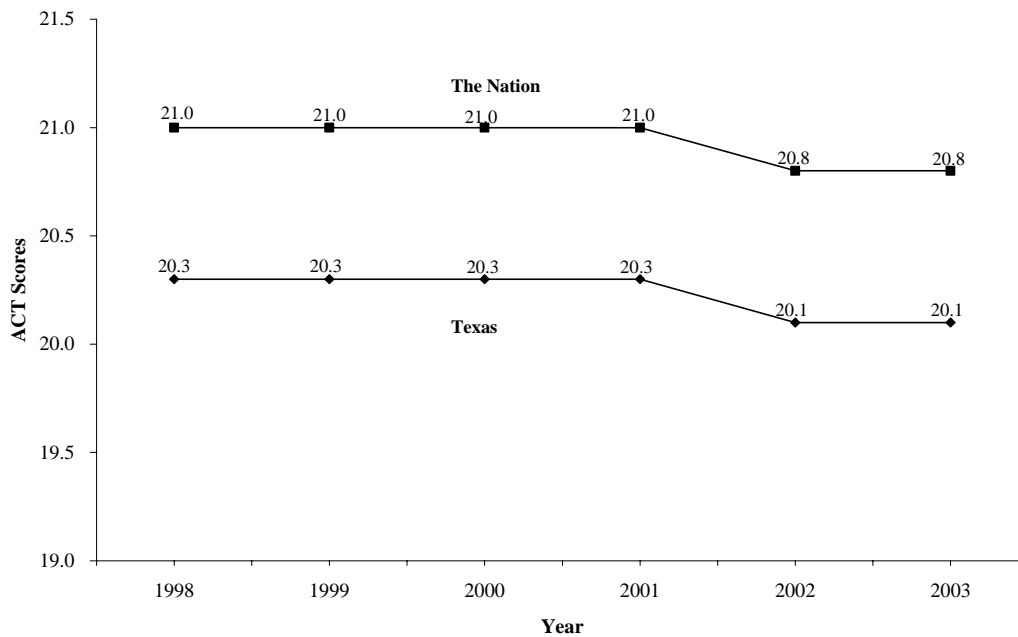
African-American Students	38 %
American Indian Students	39 %
Asian Students	17 %
Hispanic Students	43 %
White Students	23%
Texas Average	33 %

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Mean SAT Scores of Texas Students



Average ACT Composite Scores



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Percent Of Texas Public School Students Taking SAT Or ACT Tests

	<u>1993</u>	<u>2002</u>
African-American	58.8 %	58.5 %
Hispanic	49.5 %	45.2 %
White	69.4 %	67.9 %
Total Texas	64.2 %	61.9 %

Resource Documents

1. *College Readiness of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) Compared to ACT's Standards for Transition*, ACT, 2004
2. *The Relationship of the Texas High School Curriculum to College Readiness* by Omar S. Lopez, Just for the Kids, 2000
3. *Effective, Efficient, Fair – Paying for Public Education in Texas* by Richard Vedder and Josh Hall, Texas Public Policy Foundation, 2004
4. *Assessing Performance – Spending and Learning in Texas Public Schools* by Snajiv Jaggia and Vidisha Vachharajani, Texas Public Policy Foundation, 2004
5. *Paying for Education – What is the True Cost?* by Chris Patterson, Texas Public Policy Foundation, 2004
6. *Report to the Texas Joint Select Committee on Public School Finance* by the Koret Task Force on K-12 Education, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 2004.
7. *Losing the Race: The SAT and College Admission* by Chris Patterson, Texas Public Policy Foundation, 2001
8. *From TAAS to TAKS: A Progress Report on New Assessments for Texas Public Schools* by Chris Patterson, Texas Public Policy Foundation, 2002

Student Performance Data Sources

1. *AEIS State Performance Reports*, Texas Education Agency
2. *National Assessment of Educational Progress*, National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education
3. *ACT Assessment Results 2003*, ACT
4. *Self-Renewing Schools...School Holding Power*, IDRA Newsletter, October 2002
5. *Public High School Graduation and College Readiness in the United States*, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research