

## Too Many Children Left Behind



Closing the Education Gaps in Central Texas

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **1. How is the E<sup>3</sup> Alliance achievement gap initiative different from all the other initiatives already done?**

The Achievement Gap Dialogs have been designed to create broad and deep community engagement around change, to help people develop common understanding around such questions as:

- How do these gaps really impact me, my pocketbook and my future?
- If my child is doing ok, do I really need to care about a child in Bastrop or San Marcos?
- Are we just talking about giving more money/time/resources to schools and kids who are challenged? How can we concentrate on closing these gaps *and* benefit all students?
- If we continue as we have been, with small incremental changes, what will the future look like? Can we really change that future?

Using the national model developed by the [Kettering Foundation](#) and supported through the local partners involved in this effort, we intend to develop deeper understanding and a real tipping point for change that can in turn support important work such as 20,010 by 2010, the high school redesign effort, and other initiatives.

### **2. What is in the strategic plan for our district regarding the achievement gap, and will the plan be altered based on the conclusions of the Deliberative Discussions?**

The “simplified version” of the current strategic plan is to close achievement gaps between all groups by 2010. All districts have made significant progress in almost all areas in closing gaps, but remains far from having the gaps completely closed. [More detail on this can be found in the [E<sup>3</sup> Alliance Snapshot](#).

Based on input from the Achievement Gaps Deliberative Dialogs process, recommendations could be made to adjust or update items in the strategic plan, the District Improvement Plan, or other guidance materials. If so, such recommendations would be given to district staff and the board for consideration. That is why the superintendent, other administrators, and school board members have been actively involved in this process.

### **3. What are the strategic plans regarding the achievement gap in the other districts and do they coincide with our district, and if not who will change?**

Almost all districts in the region have some form of strategic plan, but they are not consistent, and some of them do not contain concrete goals regarding achievement gaps. One purpose of this process is to create measurable, region-wide goals through better understanding of what and where the gaps really are and the impact of those gaps to the community. It is not enough just to talk; we need to drive real change, and doing so will likely mean some changes to strategic planning across most institutions.

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### 4. Do we have the ear of the legislature in case policy change is needed?

Some significant changes - such as true sharing of best practices and business efficiencies across districts in Central Texas - can be accomplished without the need for state policy change. However, other changes will no doubt require changes to state (and possibly federal) policy. For this reason, politicians and leaders who influence policy throughout the region have been involved in the work of the E<sup>3</sup> Alliance – some of them closely. Policy change is *much* more likely when traditionally disparate groups – educators, administrators, parents, business and community leaders – all come together with a common voice for their desired outcomes. That is a critical element of the work of these dialogs – creating common understanding and plans for change so that, when policy changes are required, we can make it happen through the power of a strong, single voice.

### 5. What outcomes can participants expect for their districts from E3?

The E3 Alliance is a regional collaborative to create a research-based “blueprint” that will allow us to *align our education systems* to better fulfill the potential of every citizen and in turn, increase economic outcomes and *build a stronger economic future* for our region.

The quantified goals for educational outcomes are being defined in part through this Deliberative Dialogues process, but will include:

- increasing school readiness of students coming into pre-K and kindergarten
- increasing student success rates at elementary, middle, high school, and post-secondary levels *and in the transitions* between those levels, when we often “lose” students, intellectually or physically
- decreasing middle and high school drop out rates
- increasing the number of students who are college and career ready coming out of high school – in academic preparedness as well as other skills and habits (like problem solving, team work, etc.) that contribute to college and career success and high earnings potential
- increasing the number of students who go to college, while reducing the need for remedial coursework in higher education
- increasing college success rates
- Helping students understand where career opportunities are and what business needs are so that they can plan and take programs of study that will contribute to career success
- Closing achievement gaps between all ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender groups
- Increasing the overall family income of the region and building a stronger, sustainable, globally competitive economy for the region

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### 6. Who is organizing these conversations?

The E3 Alliance is organizing these conversations, in conjunction with local and national partners. In each community around the Central Texas region, local community champions' teams are providing the planning and outreach to ensure that the dialogues represent the dynamics and needs of their communities. The partner organizations are:

The E<sup>3</sup> Alliance is a regional collaborative working to increase global competitiveness, economic vitality and overall quality of life of Central Texas by aligning our education systems to better fulfill the potential of every citizen. As part of their Data Analysis and Research mission, the E<sup>3</sup> Alliance has developed the most comprehensive set of achievement gap data for Central Texas that is available anywhere in the state of Texas.

Austin Voices for Education and Youth mobilizes young people, parents, and community members to strengthen public schools and expand opportunities for youth. Over the past four years Austin Voices has convened hundreds of people to weigh in on the education issues that affect them—from the neighborhood level with public housing “community conferences” to the national level with hearings on No Child Left Behind. Austin Voices’ youth and community engagement work was recognized with an Austin Chronicle 2005 “Best of Austin” award for their “Out-of-the-Box Public School Philosophy.”

Through deliberation, Texas Forums, an initiative of the LBJ Presidential Library helps people in communities broaden their understanding of complex public issues, find common ground for action, and imagine new and creative ways to solve public problems. Texas Forums maintains a network of over 400 people in Central Texas and around the country who are trained deliberative democracy moderators, skilled issue framers, innovative community organizers, and respected scholars and researchers of public deliberation.

Community Partners will include the United Way – Capital Area, who is hosting forums on systemic community change in May and September of 2007, youth services groups and other community-based organizations, as well as target communities around the seven regional institutions of higher education and the following school districts: Austin, Bastrop, Eanes, Manor, Round Rock and San Marcos.