

The Blueprint for Educational Change™

Because Graduates are Made. Not Born.™

The Blueprint for Educational Change is our Community's commitment to building the most successful education pipeline in the country.

May 29, 2008



The Blueprint for Educational Change

Because Graduates Are Made. Not Born.

What is The Blueprint for Educational Change?

The Blueprint for Educational Change is Central Texas' commitment to building the most successful educational pipeline in the country.

The community's promise is that all Central Texas children will start school ready to learn, have an equal opportunity to reach their academic potential and be fully prepared upon graduation for college, career and lifelong success.

The Blueprint for Educational Change details the strategies that guide our priorities for 2015:

1. All children enter kindergarten school ready.
2. We eliminate achievement gaps while improving overall student performance.
3. All students graduate college-and-career ready and prepared for a lifetime of learning.
4. Central Texas as a *community* prepares children to succeed.

Why is **The Blueprint for Educational Change** needed?

The quality of our educational system improves every year, yet the competitive pressures of the global economy are intensifying, raising the education bar ever higher. Central Texas must make sure that all of our students reach their highest potential to ensure our economic competitiveness and quality of life as a region.

What role does the E³ Alliance play?

The E³ Alliance and its member organizations spearheaded the development of **The Blueprint for Educational Change™**, and will facilitate the Champion Teams across the region and assist local communities in the ongoing effort to achieve the strategic goals. For real change to occur, change must be owned by the people within our regional and local communities.

The E³ Alliance is a regional collaborative dedicated to developing a comprehensive view of our education landscape to better align educational systems, and to drive higher outcomes for students and help ensure a more efficient allocation of resources to increase our competitiveness as a region. The E³ Alliance acts as a catalyst for change, and is the P-16 Council for the Central Texas region.

Table of Contents

Background	5
Why a Regional Blueprint for Educational Change?	5
How We Got Here: Developing The Blueprint for Educational Change	6
Guiding Principles	9
Goals, Indicators and Action Strategies	11
GOAL 1: Children Enter Kindergarten School Ready	12
GOAL 2: Central Texas eliminates Achievement Gaps for all students while improving overall performance	18
GOAL 3: Students graduate college-and-career ready and prepared for a lifetime of learning	24
GOAL 4: Central Texas, as a community, prepares children to succeed	31
Implementing the Action Strategies	36
Where Do We Go from Here?	38
About the E ³ Alliance	38
Glossary	39

Background

On January 23rd, 2008, over 150 regional leaders representing a cross-section of business, government, community and education came together at the *Blueprint for Change – 2008 Leaders Summit* to explore ways to set education priorities that will drive systemic change over the next decade in Central Texas. Why? In an increasingly globally competitive world where the strength of the U.S. is waning, our public education systems are not preparing us for a future of economic strength and prosperity. The assembled leaders reviewed ground-breaking research that has been undertaken by the E³ Alliance, as well as feedback gained from thousands of hours engaging Central Texas grass roots communities over the last year. Together, this research and the community's voice provided the input in prioritizing goals for a regional strategy to build the best educational pipeline in the country.

The leaders reviewed a continuum of eleven potential goals and, using a process of voting, open dialogue, and consensus– identified and prioritized four strategic goals as the basis for **The Blueprint for Educational Change™**. The Blueprint for Educational Change is the regional strategic plan that defines critical leverage points enabling systemic alignment of our education systems from early childhood to workforce prosperity. The Blueprint defines quantified objectives and action strategies for optimization of resources, needed policy changes, financial opportunities, and the alignment of practices and institutions. **The Blueprint for Educational Change** will provide a way for people at every level to connect into and engage in reaching the regional goal of improved education outcomes for Central Texas.

Why a Regional Blueprint for Educational Change?

If we reflect on the history of education in the United States, only the era of school integration and the space race is likely to arouse the level of attention and political scrutiny that is now focused on our schools. This reality is both boon and bane. It helps schools to raise awareness about the extraordinary complexity needed to educate children to be prepared for life in the 21st century. But it also means that a wide and growing spectrum of government agencies, policy research institutes, foundations, and community-based organizations are all weighing in on how to “solve” this complex problem. As a result, the public expects public schools to adhere to ever higher standards and to serve students with increasingly complex challenges with greater efficiency of resources and with less latitude for failure. Each college, school district and service provider has its own plan to try to balance these needs.

So, why should our regional school districts, higher education institutions, community service organizations pay attention to “one more” voice in the fray? Because we need a common voice.

Here's why:

1. Even with such great attention at the federal and state levels, policy changes move too slowly to drive local education reform in time to help students already in the educational pipeline.
2. Yet, at the local level, school districts, colleges and community programs face limitations in scaling and aligning successful practices across these different, yet overlapping “systems.”
3. Furthermore, students often start in one school or college and end up in another nearby, sharing students means that all Central Texas institutions share the responsibility to help

students reach their potential and share the problems when inconsistent approaches become barriers to students.

4. Economies arise from the unique assets of given communities and regions. What works in El Paso may not be suitable for Central Texas. The unique characteristics of the region should drive the systemic alignment between education and industry.

A **regional** approach that looks across the entire early childhood to workforce ready continuum:

- ◆ allows for the Central Texas community to more efficiently corral and use an array of resources both public and private,
- ◆ acknowledges that students who start in one school may finish in another
- ◆ recognizes that from a child's earliest experiences his/her community's climate and socio-economic opportunity affects her attitude and ability to learn and
- ◆ acknowledges that any fracture in the "pipeline" will result in students lost along the way.

The Blueprint for Educational Change is Central Texas community's commitment building the most successful educational pipeline in the country. Because Graduates are Made. Not Born.™ This Blueprint for Educational Change sets forth a series of strategic goals, identifies a set of leading indicators to improve performance and metrics to mark progress toward those goals, and identifies key action strategies to achieve those goals.

This document represents the initial public launch for community feedback. The Blueprint is a living effort – it will change and grow with our region. As we identify and build an inventory of best practices within and around the region's four priorities, our action strategies, our opportunities for alignment and our efficiency in harnessing our community's talent will change.

How We Got Here: Developing The Blueprint for Educational Change

The Blueprint for Educational Change belongs to the Central Texas Community. It has grown, and continues to grow out of a rigorous process of research, hundreds of interviews with key stakeholders, extensive community dialogues and a focused summit of business, community and education leaders and regional officials.

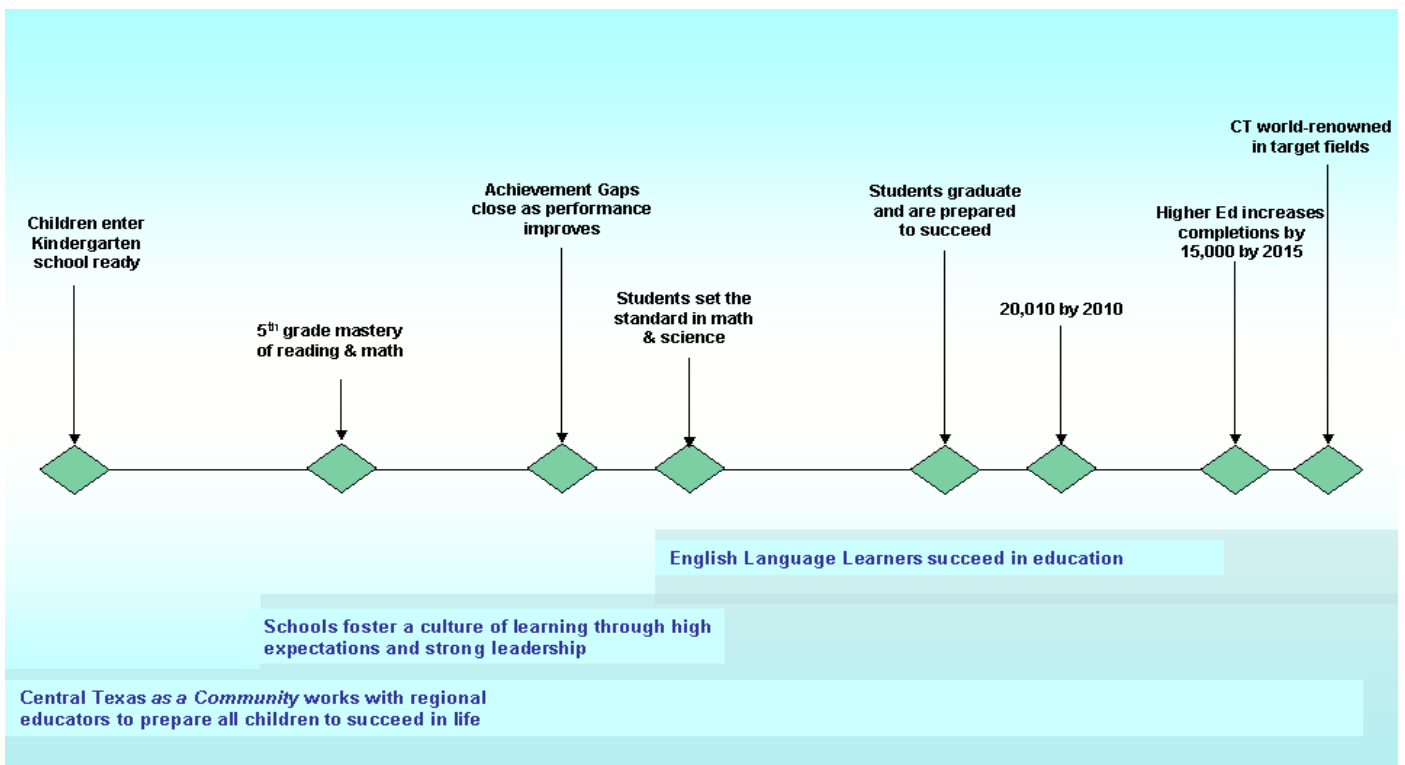
The effort began with the development of the *2007 Central Texas Education Snapshot*, a comprehensive look at the K-16 education system in the region. The Snapshot (subsequently called the Profile) encompasses the five county Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and several outlying districts served by Austin Community College. This region encompasses 35 school districts, 15 charters and seven higher education institutions, totaling over 360,000 students from Kindergarten through post-secondary education. These educational institutions, businesses, early childhood educators, youth service providers and elected officials are all part of the The Blueprint for Educational Change.

The *Snapshot*, in combination with focus groups held across a range of urban, suburban, and rural districts provided the content to drive a series of Achievement Gap Deliberative Dialogues conducted in partnership with *Austin Voices for Education and Youth*, *Texas Forums*, and the *Kettering Foundation*. These dialogues, held in six communities across the region, enabled hundreds of residents – both the usual and unusual suspects – to deliberate on critical issues about education achievement gaps in their communities and develop action plans and recommendations based on those deliberations. Delegates were selected from each community to attend a broader regional forum to identify key themes common across the region. The key themes were:

The Blueprint for Educational Change

1. Prepare our students for success in *real life*.
2. Give yourselves permission to break the rules and be bold – don't be held back by perceived constraints.
3. Relationships between schools, parents, and community organizations are critical for success and need to be the center of any change effort.
4. We can use our resources better than we do now.
5. What we do needs to be measured and communicated through transparent leading indicators so we are all on the same page.

The results of these research and community engagement efforts led to the development of a continuum of student outcomes and regional milestones identified below:



The 2008 Leaders Summit – Central Texas Blueprint for Change was held in January and included over 150 business, community, education leaders and public officials. The Summit was a “roll up your sleeves” forum aimed at identifying the three to four regional priorities in education based on this goals continuum that would ultimately serve as the foundation for The Blueprint for Educational Change in Central Texas. The selected education priorities for the region for the next five years are:

1. Children Enter Kindergarten School Ready
2. Central Texas Eliminates the Achievement Gap while Improving Overall Student Performance
3. Students Graduate College-and-Career Ready and Prepared for Lifetime of Learning
4. Central Texas, as a Community, Prepares Children to Succeed

Leaders at the Summit signed up to “champion” one or more goals. These Champion Teams form the basis of the coalition for The Blueprint for Educational Change. Together, they will:

The Blueprint for Educational Change

- *articulate* the need and the common priorities
- *align* and leverage public and private resources
- *accelerate* progress in student and community outcomes

Since January, the E³ Alliance has continued to meet with school districts, community organizations and regional leaders to identify priority action strategies, develop the indicators used to mark progress toward our four goals and refine our interim objectives.

The Blueprint for Educational Change is a *living document* designed to provide the framework for building the finest education system in the world and grounded in the reality of the everchanging demographics and enormous assets of the Central Texas community. The Blueprint does not replace the strategic plans, activities, and services of member districts, colleges, or service providers. The purpose of this effort is to *coordinate* these assets – be they the outstanding programs provided by our many community-based and faith-based organizations, the innovations underway within our education institutions, the resources available in the business community, or the boundless creativity of the people in the region. Too long we have had many wonderful activities underway that are independent of one another, redundant or even working at cross purposes. By planning together we can create a whole that is much greater than the sum of the parts.

What follows are the guiding principles and action strategies identified by the community as the highest priority actions to undertake. The community delegates and leaders believe these actions are critical to advancing systemic change, facilitating regional alignment, leveraging public and private resources more effectively and providing the critical standards by which we chart our course toward achievement for all.

Guiding Principles

The Blueprint for Educational Change™ is our community's commitment to building the most successful educational pipeline in the country. The goals and strategies detailed in **The Blueprint for Educational Change** grew out of three guiding principles that motivated our work and shaped our efforts.

These principles arise from a theory of change, recognizing that to affect change at the systemic level requires that all stages of the education continuum be included and that data and research are critical to identifying the strengths and weaknesses across that continuum. Change without public will has little chance to endure. Active participation of the entire community as well as key stakeholders is necessary to create sufficient momentum. Finally, this theory of change acknowledges that there are important and longstanding efforts already underway to improve our education outcomes and that one of the most important charges of any systemic effort must be to both acknowledge and take advantage of those efforts. Toward these ends our guiding principles are to:

- I. **Be Data Driven for Positive Change**– compile and apply objective data and key indicators to improve performance rather than drive accountability and compliance. **The Blueprint for Educational Change** will:
 - a. *Articulate* the regional educational landscape, identifying needs and priorities across traditional boundaries.
 - b. Measure and chart progress and best practices toward our common goals.
 - c. Amplify the region's voice in relation to key statewide and national legislative efforts.

- II. **Harness Our Talents** - the region's greatest asset is the vast talent of educational institutions, teachers, community based organizations and parents committed to improving educational outcomes for our students. **The Blueprint for Educational Change** will:
 - a. *Align* priorities, policies and resources among the institutions and constituencies.
 - b. Expand the scale and reach of their successes across traditional boundaries.

- III. **Engage the Community** - the level of community involvement in our region's educational institutions, community based organizations and citizens will directly affect the success of our children and our region's economy. **The Blueprint for Educational Change** will:
 - a. *Accelerate* progress by identifying opportunities to leverage resources, remove or reduce barriers and build consensus.
 - b. Improve the level of communication between institutions and the people they serve (students and parents).
 - c. Increase the level of citizen and community involvement in education and promote a culture of learning in our region.

The Blueprint for Educational Change™ Action Strategies

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Goal 1 – Children Enter Kindergarten School Ready

1. Define and adopt school readiness standards for the region
2. Create and promote a parent-family school readiness checklist
3. Increase enrollment in public Pre-K programs through family outreach and promotion
4. Work with regional early childhood education programs to increase accreditation rates
5. Develop an inventory of best practices in early childhood education programs
6. Support state policy efforts to scale accessibility and quality of Pre-K programs

Goal 2 – Central Texas Eliminates the Achievement Gap while Improving Overall Student Performance

1. Align curriculum across grades, focusing on critical transition years
2. Develop English Language Learner program standards across the region
3. Create incentive programs for teacher assignment and outcomes to ensure an equitable distribution of experienced and high quality teachers in high needs schools
4. Identify and promote best practice interventions
5. Promote and expand programs and reforms that increase student achievement
6. Support and promote programs that foster a youth culture of learning
7. Promote and advocate the *Piercing the Cultural Bubble* Campaign

Goal 3 – Students Graduate College-and-Career Ready and Prepared for a Lifetime of Learning

1. Define and adopt college and career readiness standards
2. Develop and expand programs to simplify high school to college transitions
3. Expand higher education capacity in the Central Texas Region
4. Develop/promote industry collaboration to link core subjects and skills to careers
5. Identify and promote business skills and high need occupations to students
6. Review and systematize emerging best practices in high school redesign

Goal 4 – Central Texas, as a Community, Prepares Children to Succeed

1. Identify and promote best practices in corporate citizenship in education
2. Expand volunteer programs to increase recruitment, develop tracking and easily match individuals to volunteer opportunities
3. Assist school districts and communities in creating integrated communication strategies
4. Identify and leverage existing measures of community engagement
5. Advance community action plans generated from the Achievement Gaps Deliberative Dialogues and expand the dialogues process

Goals, Indicators and Action Strategies

Identifying the Central Texas Community's educational priorities marked the first step in a comprehensive process for developing The Blueprint for Educational Change™. As a "blueprint" the purpose of both process and product was to create a framework for achieving these priorities by 2015.

The process of The Blueprint for Educational Change hinges on building consensus and developing a regional way of thinking about our P-16 education system. Such a process is naturally iterative, requiring multiple meetings with key stakeholders, institutions and leaders. The process to select and refine measures and indicators began with the 2007 Central Texas Education Snapshot – a comprehensive report on the state of education in Central Texas from Kindergarten through Higher Education. In addition to the Snapshot findings, the E³ Alliance conducted interviews with 6 school district superintendents and administrators and held focus groups of teachers and counselors in those same districts to identify the "essential student influences" affecting student achievement.

After the January 2008 Summit, the E³ Alliance held dozens of meetings with partner school districts, colleges and community coalitions such as Austin Area Research Organization, Ready by 21, Community Action Network and United Way Success by Six, and met with regional experts around our four goals. The purpose of these meetings was to gain feedback on the current high priority action strategies to achieve the regional goals and to share measures and indicators that would be used to mark progress toward those goals. As measures and indicators around each Blueprint for Educational Change goal began to emerge, the E³ Alliance asked regional experts (including those listed below) to review and respond to the soundness of the plan for change.

- ◆ Austin Community Collaborative Ensuring Student Success (ACCESS)
- ◆ Cathy Doggett and Dr. Ervin Knezek at the Region XIII Education Service Center
- ◆ Dr. Aletha Huston at the College of Natural Sciences, The University of Texas at Austin
- ◆ Deanna Schexnayder at the Ray Marshall Center
- ◆ Dr. Ed Fuller, Dr. Jeff Wayman and Dr. Claire Ellen Weinstein at the College of Education, The University of Texas at Austin
- ◆ Dr. Susan Millea at Children's Optimal Health
- ◆ Suzanne Hershey and the Ready by 21 Coalition
- ◆ Jim Walker of the Sustainability Indicators Project
- ◆ Sue Carpenter at Success by 6
- ◆ Texas High School Project at the Texas Education Agency
- ◆ P-16 Division of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Moving forward, these measures and indicators will continue to be defined and refined through partner input. Refinements will include specifying subpopulations, sources and calculation methods, as well as targets for each indicator.

GOAL 1:

Children Enter Kindergarten School Ready

Blueprint Objective: *70% of children enter kindergarten school ready by 2015. 95% of children enter kindergarten school ready by 2020.*

Background:

The foundation for success in education and in life is laid in early childhood. Unfortunately, research shows that many children are not given opportunities to develop a solid foundation for learning. Children enter Kindergarten with vastly different levels of academic, social and emotional readiness. Some children enter Kindergarten not knowing a single color or letter, while others are writing, counting and talking in complete sentences.

According to an analysis by Success by 6, 40% of all Central Texas children enter Kindergarten with up to an 18 month delay in skills expected for their age. The students who are least prepared are often part of a vulnerable population, such as English Language Learners or children of low-income households. Some students who begin school behind will catch up and maybe even surpass their peers. However, national child development expert, Aletha Huston of the University of Texas at Austin states, “Decades of research and practice tell us the longer we wait to remediate the dimmer the future will be for those children who enter behind.”¹

The wide variation is in part because students are exposed to such a broad array of early childhood environments, many of which are subpar, and Texas does not offer Pre-K for all children. Many cultures and families believe that a child's education begins when she walks through the doors of a school building, so they don't provide “learning activities” in the first years of the child's life. Other families are not aware of appropriate interactions as simple as reading and talking to young children. Hart & Risley found that a child of professionals is likely to hear 45 million more words than a child of low-income parents before he is 4 years old.²

From birth through age 4, a child may stay at home with a parent or relative or in a structured program in a childcare care center, Head Start center or public school Pre-K program. These early environments differ vastly in quality. While Texas childcare centers must meet basic health and safety standards, learning opportunities may be quite limited. It can be difficult for parents to assess child care center quality. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) provides national accreditation for early childhood programs of the highest quality, based on items such as staff ratio, stimulation in the environment, and curriculum, etc. Few parents know about NAEYC and very few centers in the Central Texas region have earned this accreditation. The Texas/Austin Rising Star Rating System is another tool that provides centers with a four step process to improve and recognize quality over time. Yet fewer than 20% of Central Texas centers carry this or any other quality accreditation.³

A quality scale developed by The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) rates state Pre-K initiatives across a range of measures that center primarily on program quality. Texas public Pre-Kindergarten rates a low 4 out of 10.⁴ Student/teacher ratios, class size and monitoring are

¹ Personal communication, May 14, 2008.

² Betty Hart and Todd Risley, *American Educator*

³ Success by 6 *2007 Report Card on Child Well-Being for Austin/Travis County*

⁴ Barnett, Steve et.al. 2007 NIEER State of Preschool 2007. Rutgers Graduate School of Education: New Brunswick, NJ.

examples of measures for which Texas did not meet the standard. Some districts choose to put these measures into practice, creating higher quality programming at local cost. Additionally, the state's learning guidelines for Pre-K are not required like the TEKS, so some districts follow the Guidelines more closely than others. Thus, Pre-K quality varies widely in our state and region.

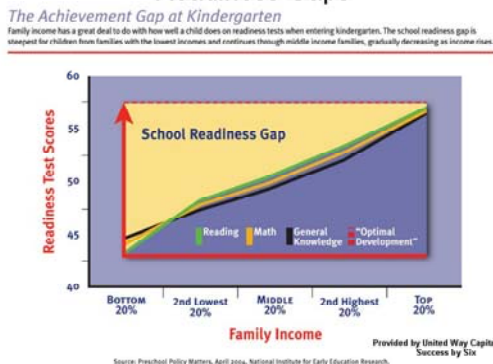
In our region, over 3000 eligible children do not attend public Pre-K, either because parents don't understand the value of Pre-K, or have difficulty addressing the varying logistics.⁵ School districts are required to provide free, public Pre-Kindergarten if they have 15 or more qualifying students. Eligible students are those who live in low income households (families at or below 185% of the federal poverty line), speak a language other than English at home, have a parent who is active military, have identified disabilities or have ever been in the foster care system.

Public Pre-K is optional for qualifying families, and schools have significant leeway in the programs they offer. In Central Texas, some programs are full day and some are half day. Some districts offering half-day Pre-K coordinate with childcare centers or Head Start to provide care for another half-day. Other districts "outsource" Pre-K by contracting with a center to hire their own teachers. Some districts provide bus transportation to and from school and others do not. State learning standards are not yet available for Pre-Kindergarten teachers and students, unlike the TEKS, which exist for grades Kindergarten through 12th.

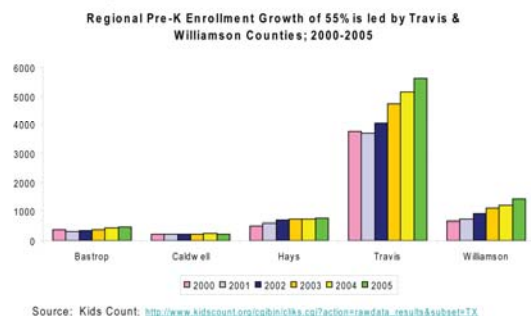
While teachers agree that there is wide variation in "readiness" when students enter Kindergarten, Texas does not have a common measurement for school readiness. The state mandates that the TPRI (Texas Primary Reading Inventory) or its equivalent be used to inventory literacy skills of incoming Kindergartners. However, the TPRI measures letter and sound recognition, reading comprehension and phonological awareness. It is designed to provide information to tailor instruction, not to evaluate the success of earlier programs in preparing children for school.

To implement Goal 1, schools and early childhood experts agree that we need to adopt a common way to measure of school readiness to include areas such as numeracy, problem solving and self-regulation. Educators could measure a child's school readiness with a menu of agreed-upon assessments applied in a consistent manner. We have good reason to invest resources in preparing students early rather than intervening later. A 2005 MIT study showed that every \$1.00 invested in quality early care and education saves taxpayers up to \$13.00 in future costs.⁶ Investments must be made to increase parental awareness and improve the accessibility and quality of all early childhood programs.

Low Income Kids Face Larger School Readiness Gaps



Despite Growth in All Pre-K Programs, Over 3000 Eligible Children are not in Public Pre-K



⁵ E3 Alliance Central Texas Education Profile 2008, based on TEA enrollment data.

⁶ Calman, Leslie and Linda Tarr-Whelan. 2005 Early Childhood Education for All: A Wise Investment. Legal Momentum; New York, NY.

Some Key Organizations Working in this Area:

Any Baby Can- Austin-based services provider for more than 5,000 of our community's youngest, sickest, and poorest children and their families.

Born Learning – National organization supporting ways to enhance learning as part of the everyday life of a child.

Communities in Schools - Places trained social workers in schools to support students who are struggling, primarily with social and non-academic issues that block their education success.

Family Connections – Local service organization providing resources for early childhood education and positive parenting to Austin families.

Reading is Fundamental of Austin and Capital Area Reach Out and Read have recently merged to together provide free books and literacy services to disadvantaged children and families throughout the region.

Rural Capital Area Workforce Board - Provides financial assistance for childcare services to working and training adults in counties surrounding Travis.

Success by 6 – Program of the United Way Capital Area, Success by 6 is a collaboration of 30 groups working to ensure that at six-years-old every child in Central Texas is prepared to become a healthy, happy, and smart student.

Success by 6 will initially lead the Change Champion Team for Goal 1.

TEEM – Texas Early Education Model – Public/private model of enhanced Pre-K programming developed by the State Center for Early Childhood Development and based on defined curriculum, professional development, and assessment tools. Various state grants have supported the expansion of TEEM, which is found in some Central Texas Pre-K programs.

Texas Early Childhood Education Center (TECEC) – Statewide policy body focused on building a system of quality early care.

WorkSource – Primary provider of financial assistance for childcare services to working and training adults to support child care for over 3000 children each day in Travis County.

Please contact info@theblueprintforeducationalchange.org if an organization driving Goal 1 outcomes has been inadvertently left out.

Goal 1 Indicators

Children Enter Kindergarten School Ready

Blueprint Objective: *70% of children enter Kindergarten school ready by 2015. 95% enter kindergarten school ready by 2020.*

Below is a list of proposed measures and indicators for Goal 1. We will work with our community and education partners to solidify these measures, establish our 2008 baseline and develop our interim and long term targets. Unless noted, all indicators will be broken out by region, district and (where possible) by campus. Subpopulations specified in column B.

G = Gender, E =Ethnicity, S = Socio-Economic Status, L = ELL

Measures & Indicators	Recommended sub-population
% Eligible Pre-K (4 year old) enrolled in public Pre-K	
% 3 + 4 year-olds enrolled in Head Start, Pre-K, Subsidized Childcare	E, S, L
% ECE centers adopting and measuring school readiness outcomes	
% Rising Star or NAEYC-accredited ECE Centers	
% Children entering KG school ready	G, E, S, L
% of same district public Pre-K children entering Kindergarten school ready	G, E, S, L
% Kindergartners on grade level by end of school year	

Goal 1 Action Strategies

1. *Work with United Way Capital Area Success by 6 and other key regional organizations to define and adopt school readiness standards for the region.*

Since 2003, a national initiative for early childhood services and development has been underway through United Way under the auspices of the Success by 6 Campaign. Success by 6 has made extraordinary strides for Central Texas by working with partner organizations and districts and creating community-wide support for environments in which children thrive. This effort is maturing into an effort to build a minimum school readiness standard that will align and focus early childhood activities as well as guide Pre-K programs in improving and focusing on practices that help ensure children are “ready to learn” when they enter Kindergarten. Several local school districts, educational researchers, community-based organizations and Region XIII have already come together with Success by 6 to launch the effort to develop and establish a school readiness standard for Central Texas.

2. *Create and promote a parent-family school ready checklist.*

A critical dimension to ensuring that children are “school ready” is to make sure parents have the information and resources they need to create a positive learning environment in the home. Often parents may not know that their children’s earliest years “wire” them for learning. To help spread the word, the School Readiness Taskforce will create a parent family school readiness checklist equipped with important developmental and cognitive milestones and strategies to encourage healthy development. This checklist will be made available in multiple languages and be distributed through several outlets including social service agencies, medical facilities, churches, childcare centers and neighborhood associations.

3. *Increase enrollment in public Pre-K programs through family outreach and promotion campaigns.*

Research on early childhood education in Central Texas shows that between half to a third of all eligible 4 year-olds are not enrolled in public Pre-K programs. Some of these children may be enrolled in private Pre-K efforts (whose quality is not guaranteed), but often parents opt not to enroll their children because they need full-day childcare solutions that may not be offered or are not aware of the benefits of a curriculum-based early childhood education environment. A strong outreach program designed to educate parents about Pre-K options and to enroll more eligible children in public Pre-K programs is critical to increasing the number of children who enter Kindergarten school ready. In addition, both quality programming and capacity at the Pre-K level must be in place to handle additional children.

4. *Work with regional early childhood education programs to increase accreditation rates through Rising Star and NAEYC certifications.*

Today parents have few ways to assess the quality of early childhood programs, however accreditation through Rising Star or NAEYC help ensure high quality of both instruction and facilities. Today fewer than 20% of regional childcare and early childhood education centers are accredited through Rising Star or NAEYC. Working with licensed centers to increase accreditation will improve outcomes for child development across these providers.

5. *Through current state, national and local research efforts, develop an inventory of best practices in early childhood education programs.*

Every child is unique, and our daycare, Pre-K and early childhood education programs must be able to retain flexibility in their curriculum and approaches to address the many ways that children grow and learn. Identifying the practices (instruction, play, program quality, operations management) that provide the highest quality care and learning opportunities for Central Texas children is critical to ensuring that our service providers have access to the kinds of resources they need to be successful. E³ Alliance will work with and through existing research efforts to identify best practices in early childhood education. The initial focus of the best practice research will be on the successes of public Pre-K programs offered in school districts. Second phase work will address a much broader range of service providers.

6. *Support state policy efforts to scale the accessibility and quality of Pre-K programs.*

The next Texas legislative session is likely to take on the issue of school readiness as it continues to review and revamp education in the state. Blueprint partners will work with leading experts to provide critical information about early childhood education practices, findings and return on investment to policy makers as they work through this effort.

GOAL 2:

Central Texas eliminates Achievement Gaps for all students while improving overall performance

Blueprint Objective: *By 2015, 8th graders across all subpopulations achieve 20% higher outcomes, respectively, on state assessments in both meeting standard and commended performance.*

Background:

Although Central Texas enjoys high performance rates in many districts on many indicators of student achievement, large gaps among ethnic and socioeconomic groups remain and are closing only at very slow rates. The demographic and economic projections tell us that we simply will not be globally competitive if only our economically-advantaged Anglo students succeed. All students must reach their potential and demonstrate that they can work at least at grade level. Many more students need to complete post-secondary education to meet job needs in Central Texas. Yet today, far too many of our students are falling behind, and once they stumble, they rarely catch up. Hispanic and Black students are often 30 percentage points behind the average of all students when measuring academic outcomes. English Language Learners and low-income students traditionally have the lowest performance rates in the region and are among the fastest growing student populations. Falling behind adversely affects each child's future – not only in earnings potential, but the greater likelihood of being incarcerated, higher smoking rates and other poor health habits and higher divorce rates along with other negative social outcomes. Further, the cost to our region is huge; each cohort year of high school dropouts costs Central Texas a minimum of \$425 Million in increased social services and lost income.⁷ In an extensive community-dialogue process held in 2007 and led by the E³ Alliance in partnership with Austin Voices for Education and Youth, Texas Forums, and Kettering Foundation, 96% of participants reported that education achievement gaps are “a very important issue” to the entire community.

The most obvious and readily reported way to measure gaps is through grade level passing rates on standardized TAKS tests. However, large gaps also exist for such indicators as SAT/ACT test taking and proficiency rates, students taking Advanced Placement classes, and high school graduation rates. On all of these indicators, TEA reports outcomes for all students based on different ethnic groups and students who are economically disadvantaged or are English Language Learners. While these disaggregated data are useful in revealing the results of different subpopulations rather than obscuring them in the overall average, they tend to over generalize characteristics of inherently diverse student groups and often mask real drivers of outcomes such as home life, parent education level, etc.

Is the disparity in outcomes driven primarily by ethnicity and culture, or by socioeconomic status?

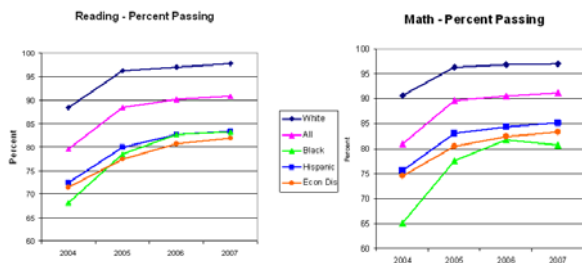
Preliminary analysis by the E³ Alliance indicates that the story is mixed. On some key indicators (e.g. those retained in 9th grade), white students who are economically disadvantaged have a far greater

⁷ E³ Alliance *The Problem with Too Many Names: Defining and Identifying Central Texas Drop Outs* 2008. Conservative estimate based on number of students in a 9th grade cohort listed as a drop out by TEA within 4 years, multiplied by a \$260,000 lifetime cost of a drop out based on "Labor Market Consequences of an Inadequate Education" by Rouse, Cecilia E. (2005) Paper prepared for the symposium on The Social Costs of Inadequate Education, Teachers College Columbia University, Oct. 2005.

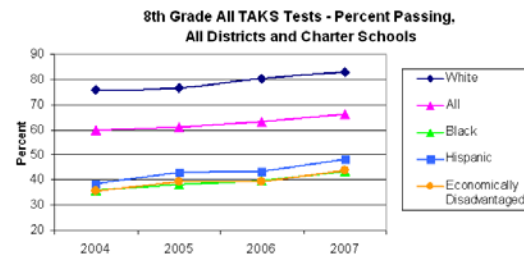
likelihood of showing poor outcomes indicating that such factors as not needing to work during high school, resources for tutoring, books and computers at home, extra-curricular activities, etc. appear to matter a great deal. However, Black and Hispanic students who are economically well-off also have a far greater likelihood of being retained in 9th grade. This finding suggests that low expectations of teachers, peer pressure, cultural norms, racial bias, or other social factors appear to be more important than lack of money.

In Central Texas, data show that TAKS passing rates of different subpopulations are relatively close in 3rd grade but widen by 5th grade. By 8th grade there are large disparities with Hispanic, Black and low income (all ethnicities) students passing at rates 30-40 percentage points lower than white students. At all levels, the gaps are more pronounced in math than in reading/ELA.

5th Grade TAKS: Passing Rates Higher and Gaps Closing

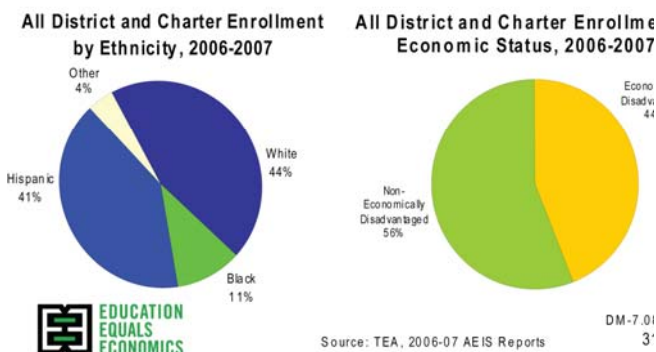


8th Grade TAKS Passing Rate Improving, but Gaps Unchanged

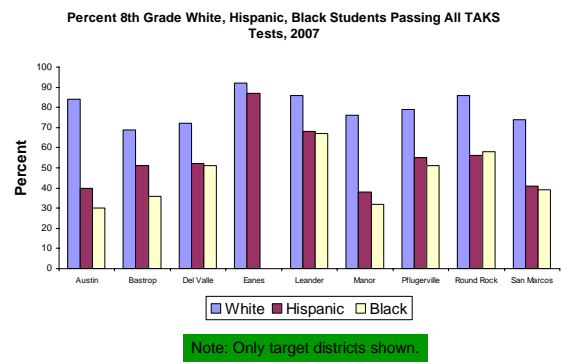


A student's academic achievement in 8th grade is critical as a predictor for success in high school and beyond and as a measure of all cumulative learning up to that point. Those who do poorly or have low attendance in 8th grade often are the same students who drop out later, incurring tremendous cost to the region. While achievement gaps must be addressed at all levels, we have chosen the 8th grade as the critical year and strategic focal point for measuring overall progress in eliminating gaps between different groups. However, the focus cannot be only on the challenged students, ignoring the needs of those who are performing well. We must accelerate the closing of gaps while raising achievement for students of every population and at all income levels.

Enrollment by Ethnicity and Economic Status



Achievement Gaps in 8th Grade TAKS Persist



Some Key Organizations Working in this Area:

Austin Area Urban League – Life skills, youth empowerment and youth employment partnership programs are designed to provide channels to success for students from traditionally challenged backgrounds.

Austin Partners in Education –The “In Classroom Coach”™ program brings the business and local community into the classroom in a proven model that accelerates student achievement on a systemic scale through engaged, small group learning. As the largest educational non-profit organization in the region, Austin Partners reaches thousands of Austin ISD students every week and leads thousands of volunteers in helping teacher and students.

Breakthrough - Partners middle-school students with college and high school students who serve as teachers, role models and mentors, providing real-life examples that it’s ‘cool to be smart’.

Communities in Schools – Places trained social workers in schools to support students who are struggling, primarily with social and non-academic issues that block their education success.

Ready by 21 Coalition – A coalition of youth services providers aligning collective services and metrics to support youth who face challenges to achieve self-sufficiency by 21.

River City Youth Foundation – A model of comprehensive neighborhood-based youth services that maximizes every child's potential and improves communities. The Foundation focuses on the community of Dove Springs.

The Austin Project – A local non-profit dedicated to helping children overcome barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential. Their academic program works closely with Austin ISD on several initiatives across a range of grades.

United Way Capital Area – Youth Leadership Council has adopted closing the 8th grade achievement gap as its primary council goal.

Please contact info@theblueprintforeducationalchange.org if an organization driving Goal 2 outcomes has been inadvertently left out.

Goal 2 Indicators

Central Texas eliminates Achievement Gaps for all students while improving overall performance

Blueprint Objective: *By 2015, 8th graders across all subpopulations achieve 20% higher outcomes, respectively, on state assessments in both meeting standard and commended performance.*

Below is a list of proposed measures and indicators for Goal 2. We will work with our community and education partners to solidify these measures, establish our 2008 baseline and develop our interim and long term targets. Unless noted, all indicators will be broken out by region, district and (where possible) by campus. Subpopulations specified in column B.

G = Gender, E =Ethnicity, S = Socio-Economic Status, L = ELL

Measures & Indicators	Recommended sub-population
% meeting criteria on state assessments in 8th grade	G,E,S,L
% achieving commended on state assessments in 8th grade	G,E,S,L
% in rigorous coursework	G,E,S,L
% of students who fail TAKS or class who are participating in a school intervention during middle school	
% of students who fail TAKS or class who are participating in a partner intervention during middle school	
% who failed consecutively in reading 4th & 5th grades who then passed any TAKS exam in 8th grade	G,E,S,L
% enrolled in extra-curricular activities	G,E,S,L
Student mobility rates (internal to district & cross-district)	
Attendance rates for 6th, 7th, 8th grades	G,E,S,L
In School Suspension (ISS) rates for 6th, 7th, 8th grades	G,E,S,L
District distribution of qualified and experienced teachers	
Teacher Mobility Rates	

Goal 2 Action Strategies

1. *Align curriculum across grades for critical transition years: Kindergarten – 1st Grade, 5th grade – 6th grade, 8th grade-9th grade, high school – college/career.*

Districts have undertaken much of this alignment work as part of their education innovations, and to help support this effort, the focus will be to target transition grades in critical subject areas such as Math, Science and English Language Arts. College Readiness Standards initiatives by the state and the region are already well underway in the region focusing on all core subject areas. Additional gap analysis work in curriculum alignment will drive these reforms.

2. *Develop ELL program standards across the region to create common interventions and content for this highly mobile population.*

English Language Learners (ELL) are the fastest growing student sub-population in Central Texas. Currently, district practices and approaches toward ELLs vary widely, often arising out of reaction to swift growth in this student population rather than through strategic planning efforts. The result for this highly mobile community is a lack of consistency in instruction, program practices and assessments across district and even campus lines. Several districts have developed strong programs for specific age groups or needs of this population while others still struggle with how best to serve them. The first step in addressing this challenge is to evaluate and identify best practices and approaches and then work to develop a common set of intervention and support strategies.

3. *Create incentive programs for teacher assignment and outcomes to ensure an equitable distribution of experienced and high quality teachers in high needs schools.*

A difficult reality for the state of Texas and for the region is that, for the most part, teachers with the least amount of experience and qualification are found in our highest need schools. The consequence of this practice is a high turnover rate, low morale and a difficult teaching and learning environment on the very campuses that need the most attention and care. Several districts have developed incentives to encourage more experienced teachers and teachers with certifications in core subjects (such as mathematics and science) to move to these high need schools. Shifting this balance increases the chances that students in struggling schools can receive higher quality of instruction, a critical factor in improving student achievement. Of course, in the longer term, the region must work toward increasing the capacity and retention of well-qualified teachers, especially in areas critical to student achievement of special populations and in subject areas that directly support a highly-skill workforce.

4. *Identify and promote best practice interventions for specific student sub-populations and for key transition years.*

There are dozens and dozens of community-based organizations and district initiatives that have been underway for years to close achievement gaps across ethnic and socioeconomic groups. What is less clear is which of these many efforts offer the greatest success for the most number of students. As part of the research agenda for 2008-09, E³ Alliance and partner organizations will undertake a best practice evaluation and inventory. This effort will include a range of evaluation levels that will be consistent with the type of data available to determine program success. The purpose of these evaluations will not be to sanction one program or another, but to identify the common characteristics of the most successful programs, such that districts,

providers or funders looking to address achievement gaps can tailor investments to meet their specific needs.

5. *Promote and expand academic programs and reforms that increase student achievement.*

As we look at the inventory of best practices in closing achievement gaps, we know that there are certain academic programs and reforms that are already proven to increase student achievement. Tutoring, team learning, smaller learning communities and college and career planning have resulted in improving student performance for specific populations. In addition, it is important to support programs outside of the school that promote positive race identity for children particularly in promoting educational achievement. So that our children who are currently in the education pipeline are given the best available opportunities to learn, we will work to identify measurable best practice programs and expand and promote those programs demonstrating success in improving student academic achievement across ethnicities, English Language Learners and our economically disadvantaged students.

6. *Support and promote programs that foster a youth culture of learning.*

Thus far, most of the attention has focused on school environments that can foster a culture of learning, but teachers and youth service providers will explain that often youth culture inhibits would-be high achievers because they want to “fit in.” It is important to recognize that our children’s peers are deeply influential in the choices that they make. Several programs that are peer-to-peer or near-to-peer (such as Breakthrough, College Forward and Austin Voices) take this reality head on and turn it to a positive. Adolescents and young adults fostering a culture of high expectations for themselves can have a profound impact on performance.

7. *Promote and advocate the Piercing the Cultural Bubble “Para Una Buena Vida” Campaign*

- a. Graduate high school to earn \$1 million more over your lifetime.
- b. Complete a college degree to earn another million over your lifetime.
- c. Speak two languages and enjoy more opportunity and higher salary.

We learned from our Achievement Gap Deliberative Dialogues that broadcasting messages about education is very important for keeping education as a community and family issue high on the public agenda. Toward that end, the “*Para Una Buena Vida*” campaign is meant to persuade families to keep their children in school. The message focuses on earning power, and targets those who struggle economically to link education to prosperity. Sylvia Acevedo, and AISD have partnered with E³ Alliance and Univision/Spanish language media to market this message widely throughout Central Texas.

GOAL 3:

Students graduate college-and-career ready and prepared for a lifetime of learning

Blueprint Objective: *Central Texas graduation rates reach 95% or higher by 2015. 20,010 more students enroll in college by 2010. By 2015, the number of Central Texas students who are college-and-career ready has doubled.*

Background:

We no longer live in our parents' world, when a decent job was obtainable with a simple diploma or not even that. Today in the United States, 90% of the fastest growing jobs require some post-secondary education, and 80% of the new careers created over the next decade will require at least a Baccalaureate degree.⁸ To have a world-class economy, we must have the best-prepared graduates – those who have the academic skills, creativity, and job and life skills to succeed in the 21st century. Too few of our students graduate high school, too few go on to college or succeed there, and too few are prepared for career or life.

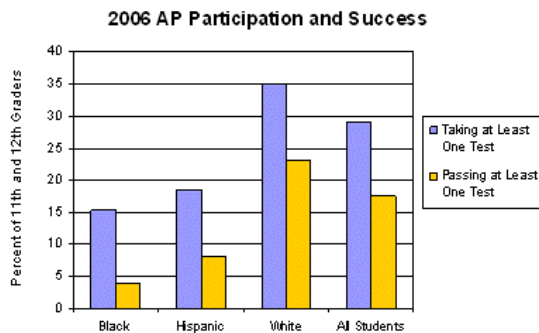
TEA has just adopted the NCES standard for computing high school graduation rates consistently with other states. As high school campuses begin using this standard, students who formerly would not be included in the accountability system drop out measure will be reclassified and included. At the same time, exit level passing standards are increasing. Thus, the graduation rates reported by schools are likely to drop even if student outcomes do not change. The new method is still more forgiving than most attrition-based graduation models. Simply taking the number of Central Texas graduates, and comparing those to the number of 9th graders in schools 4 years earlier, only about 2/3 of our 9th graders graduate. In Central Texas, almost 7,000 9th graders from 2003-04 did not graduate with their class 4 years later. No matter which measure is used, we must increase the number of students successfully graduating and moving on to post-secondary education.

The *Silent Epidemic*⁹ study found that most dropouts don't leave because of academic reasons, but because they feel economic and social pressures or because they don't see classes as relevant to their future. To address these concerns, many more high schools throughout the region are offering defined Career and Technology Education (CTE) or specialty course pathways such as health care, business, engineering, computer technology, culinary arts and automotive mechanics and technology training at middle school. CTE courses provide important job and life skills in addition to a relevant course sequence. Of about 265,000 K-12 students across the region, CTE classes report an enrollment of over 50,000, often providing credit into ACC certificate or degree programs. Many of these programs have shown success in keeping students excited about school and providing more students paths to college and career success. Some are concerned that the historical precedence of channeling low income and minority students into lower quality vocational courses can limit opportunities for students. Today CTE classes that are of high quality can help students to transfer academic skills into real life, cultivate career skills and gain certifications that can jump start careers or career exploration for students who might see more traditional high school coursework as less relevant to their future.

⁸ U.S. Department of Education 2007 http://education.yahoo.net/degrees/articles/featured_7_great_careers.html

⁹ *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*, Bridgeland, DiLulio and Morison, in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 2006

Many Students Not Passing AP Tests

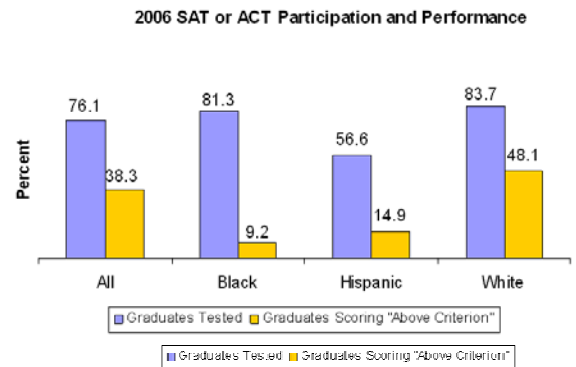


Source: TEA Division of Performance Reporting, Ad-Hoc Report

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97

Few Meet Criterion on College Entrance Exams



The Recommend High School Plan (RHSP) represents the curriculum credits that TEA recommends that a student completes for a high school diploma and to prepare for college. By law, students must take the RHSP unless they ‘opt out’ to a minimum plan through a waiver process. Students taking the RHSP have steadily increased; today almost 75% of Central Texas graduates take the RHSP or the more challenging Distinguished Academic Plan (DAP), versus 60% just 4 years ago. With the recently legislated “4X4” plan (4 years math, 4 years science), the RHSP requirements have become even more rigorous to better align with global competition and college preparation. Some experts believe that the higher standards may unintentionally encourage more students to take the minimum plan and that the resources to meet these higher standards are not being provided to schools. Some educators fear that the higher expectation could even encourage more students to drop out if they don’t fully understand their options.

Only about 43% of Central Texas graduates are shown to be “college ready” or able to take college entry courses without any developmental (remedial) work. The state determines a student’s readiness for college based on scores from the TAKS, ACT, or SAT tests.¹⁰ The number of college-ready students in Central Texas has increased in the 2 years that it has been collected.

However, college readiness is *not* currently an accountability measure for high schools, and changing their “end goal” from the granting of a diploma to readiness for the post-secondary education represents a significant change in the charge that we now give our school districts. The state has only recently started implementing a college readiness standard for coursework. Furthermore, measuring career and life readiness involves more than just academic preparation. Businesses and communities are concerned that graduates lack the skills required to be successful *in real life*. Leading researcher Claire-Ellen Weinstein has created a college ready assessment instrument (LASSI) that assesses such critical non-academic skills as time management, study habits, team work, critical thinking, etc. The coalition for The Blueprint for Educational Change has reviewed this tool, and many districts believe that it could be valuable, but until “college readiness” work at the state level has progressed, we will not yet include it as a core indicator.

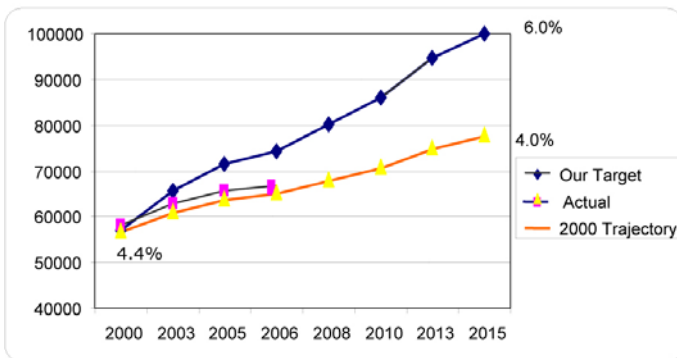
Most high schools offer Advanced Placement (AP), Gifted and Talented (GT), International Baccalaureate (IB), Early College Start (dual credit, co-enrollment & articulated credit) or other specialty classes to challenge students by providing post-secondary preparation and/or credits while in high school. Central Texas has a strong record of granting students college credit in high school. Direct to college enrollment is growing about 2% a year, but the region is lagging behind our Texas

¹⁰ Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce for 2007. Weighted average of 10 districts including about 75% of Central Texas students.

Higher Education Coordinating Board Closing the Gaps goals for college access and success, especially with Hispanic students.

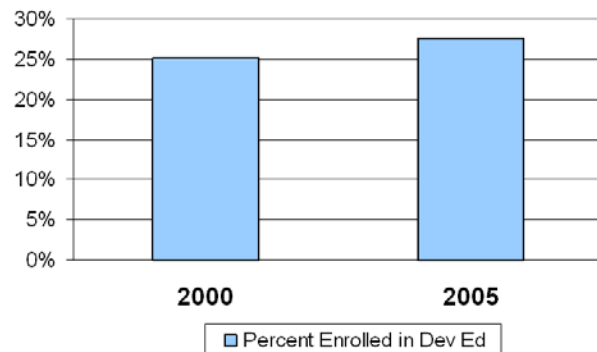
Unfortunately, the statistics don't get much better for those who are successfully making the transition into higher education; only about 54% of first-time, full-time college goers from Central Texas are able to obtain any degree within 6 years of starting college. Those who are non-traditional students (start later or attend part time) have only a 41% success rate.

Residents in Austin MSA Enrolled in Higher Education



Source: Greater Austin Chamber, 2007

Percent Degree-seeking CT Students in Developmental Courses Increasing



Some Key Organizations Working in this Area:

Austin Partners in Education - The "In Classroom Coach"™ program brings the business and local community into the classroom to accelerate student achievement through engaged, small group learning. Coach role-models also help seniors master specific challenge objectives and gain College Ready skills while in high school.

AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) - An in-school program that helps ensure that students in the middle of their class succeed in a rigorous curriculum and outside activities and helps increase post-secondary enrollment.

Breakthrough - Partners middle school students with college and high school students who serve as teachers, role models and mentors, providing examples that it's 'cool to be smart'.

College Connection - A program of Austin Community College that has now become a state model. ACC staff visit high school campuses to take all students through the enrollment process including counseling services.

Early College Start - A program of Austin Community College that provides high school students with dual credit, co-enrollment and articulation options. These courses may be held on a high school campus or at an ACC location.

College Forward - Provides "near peer" college preparatory services to motivated, economically-disadvantaged students, in order to facilitate their transition to college and make the process exciting and rewarding.

Communities in Schools – Places trained social workers in schools to support students who are struggling, primarily with social and non-academic issues that block their education success.

Greater Austin Chamber - Focuses its business-driven education and talent efforts on getting more students ready for college and transitioning into post-secondary education. Efforts include various efforts to make the transition to college easier for students (financial aide planning, common college applications, etc.).

Ready by 21 – a coalition of youth services providers in Travis County aligning services and metrics to support youth who face challenges to achieve self-sufficiency by 21. Ready by 21 sponsors a Go To College sub-committee.

Student Futures Project – A joint project of the Ray Marshall Center and Skillpoint Alliance in 9 Central Texas districts that combines survey and administrative data to track graduates beyond high school and determine why they made the decisions that they did.

Texas High School Project - Dedicated to all Texas students graduating high school ready for college and career success. Working in partnership with the TEA, THSP supports high school redesign, model charter schools, T-STEM and early college start programs in Texas high schools.

Please contact info@theblueprintforeducationalchange.org if an organization driving Goal 3 outcomes has been inadvertently left out.

Goal 3 Indicators

Students graduate college and career-ready and prepared for a lifetime of learning

Blueprint Objective: *Central Texas graduation rates achieve 95% or higher by 2015. 2010 more students enroll in college by 2010. By 2015, the number of students who are college and career ready has doubled.*

Below is a list of proposed measures and indicators for Goal 3. We will work with our community and education partners to solidify these measures, establish our 2008 baseline and develop our interim and long term targets. Unless noted, all indicators will be broken out by region, district and (where possible) by campus. Subpopulations specified in column B.

G = Gender, E =Ethnicity, S = Socio-Economic Status, L = ELL

Measures & Indicators	Recommended sub-population
% taking Algebra I in 8th Grade	G
% passing Algebra I by end of 9th grade	G
% retained in 9th grade	G,E,S,L
% drop out in 9th grade	E,S,L
% taking rigorous curricula in senior year	
% of students opting for minimum high school plan	
% enrolled in credit-bearing CTE, IB, ECS, AP programs & meeting relevant credit criteria or exam	G,E,S,L
% College Ready	E,S,L
Drop out rate (4-yr cumulative)	G,E,S,L, Spec Ed.
High School Graduation rate	G,E,S,L, Spec Ed.
Graduation rate of students who persist in school (former non-graduate completers)	
% enrolling direct to college	G,E,S
% completing higher education goals within 6 years of enrolling (including transfers)	G,E,S

Other indicators such as the LASSI study skills inventory and developmental education participation at post-secondary have been discussed and may be added later, but cannot be accurately measured at this time.

Goal 3 Action Strategies

1. *Define and adopt college and career readiness standards for the Central Texas Community.*

The 21st Century requires a different mandate for K-12 education born of the dramatic changes in our global, information-based and service-oriented economy. High school graduation no longer marks the predominant entry-point into the workforce, and a majority of the fastest growing jobs over the next decade require at least some post secondary education. Consequently, high school education, once an end point, now serves as a gateway to higher education, which, in turn, serves as a platform to pursue a career. State and local efforts are underway to ensure that standards for college readiness are in place and that secondary education curriculum aligns with the earlier years of post-secondary education. Less clear are the skills necessary to ensure “career success.” Regionally, the College Access and Success Taskforce is developing a college readiness standard and working to incorporate career readiness into that definition.

2. *Develop and expand programs to simplify high school to college transitions and develop stronger articulation with higher education.*

For many students the prospect of going to college is mysterious. They may be first generation college-goers and have little exposure to the planning process needed to successfully transition into higher education. Many outstanding programs, including APIE College Readiness, Early College Start, College Connection, College Forward, etc. are underway in the region to attempt to simplify a family’s effort, but gaps remain. Stronger articulation between high school and post-secondary institutions is critically important to increasing the numbers and success rates of those enrolling in higher education. Examples of better articulation include students entering college with college-level course credit, greater support for the FAFSA process, and streamlined process to go from a 2-year institution to a 4-year institution.

3. *Expand higher education capacity in the Central Texas Region.*

As we strive to increase the number of students entering college by 40,000 by 2015, we need to focus attention on the capacity of higher education to absorb these new additions. In the region, the two higher education institutions with the potential for the greatest increases in capacity are Austin Community College and Texas State – Round Rock Campus. As a result, this strategy will focus on supporting ACC expansion through increasing its taxing district. We will also work with Texas State to support their efforts at expansion.

4. *Develop and promote industry collaboration to provide career relevance to core subjects and to develop skills critical to success in both college and career.*

Students often struggle with high school and middle school courses because they fail to see the relevance of that work in their lives, not understanding that, for example, understanding ratios are critical to a nurse when dispensing medication properly. Industry collaboration “Business Labs” are a way to bring industry to the classroom so students learn about real-world applications for core subjects while gaining important career awareness. Many efforts in this arena are underway, such as the Skillpoint Alliance’s College and Career Fair and Educator Institutes, the Health Industry Steering Committee sponsored Nursing Academies where students practice real life job skills. In the fall, plans are underway to hold an Engineering Academy. These are valuable programs. However, systemic integration of these industry applications in curriculum is needed to meet the academic need.

5. *Identify and promote business skills and high-need occupations to students while they are in secondary and higher education.*

Education in Central Texas is the foundation for economic development, and, as such, high schools and higher education need to be tied more closely to the current and emerging industries in the region. The fastest growing occupations face challenges locally because higher education can not meet their growth projections. Furthermore, students in high schools and higher education may not understand critical job skills or may not receive guidance towards fields of study and degrees needed to fill high-need occupations. The focus of this strategy will be to strengthen the articulation between higher education and industry and to increase our colleges' and universities' capacity to educate students in fields of study appropriate to the workforce needs of Central Texas.

6. *Review and systematize emerging best practices in high school redesign to significantly reduce dropout rates.*

Over the last several years, national efforts by public and private agencies and foundations have focused attention on high schools. In the State of Texas, the Texas High School Project is a multi-million, multi-year initiative geared toward reforming the high school experience to better prepare students for college and career. E³ Alliance will coordinate with these statewide efforts make sure best practices documented through THSP are made available to Central Texas high schools.

GOAL 4:

Central Texas as a community prepares children to succeed

Blueprint Objective: *Community-based organizations, parents, local industry and education institutions work together to create successful conditions for learning and achievement.*

Background:

There is a natural tendency, when talking about education issues – as well as many social conditions – to play the blame game. Frustrated parents and leaders point the finger at public schools, and educators do the same to families and society and also to practitioners earlier in the pipeline to take the responsibility for struggling students. The reality is that it should never be “us versus them.” Educating children to succeed in life can only be a “we” proposition. When we don’t all work together to put education first, our students lose.

Indeed, many of the conditions that lead to student success in education occur outside of classroom walls. Socioeconomic conditions, parent education level and cultural expectations all influence student attitude and performance. Some studies have shown that over 50% of a student’s performance is driven by factors outside of schools.¹¹ When a child comes to school hungry or from a broken home or after having worked all night at an 8 hour shift, achieving success in the classroom is challenging or irrelevant or both. Therefore, any effort to create systemic change must incorporate factors and players outside the classroom. Yet systemic, scalable intervention takes advantage of existing infrastructure and builds a community of volunteers to provide academic supports to schools and classrooms and help create a culture of learning throughout the community.

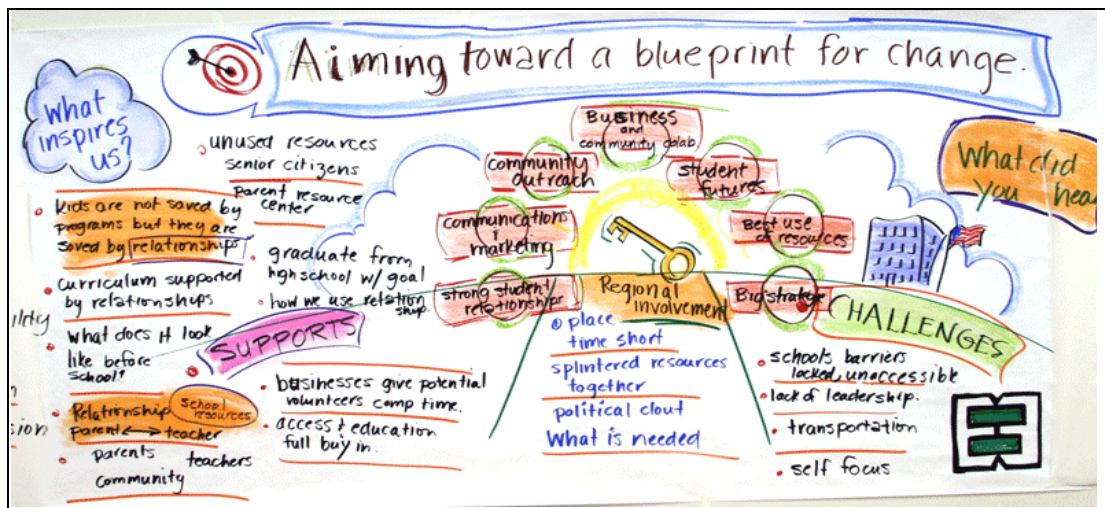
Further, when communities work together in a supportive effort with their schools, students are much more successful.¹² Close involvement by neighborhoods, parents, and businesses helps children, helps to pass much-needed school bonds (especially in areas where demographics are shifting and fewer taxpaying families have students in school), and helps to provide the support for inevitable difficult decisions, such as boundary changes for schools or tuition increases for colleges. Communities that support education both inside *and* outside the classroom create a culture of learning that raises the performance level of all students and strengthens the system of education.

In 2007, the E³ Alliance led a series of deliberative dialogues on the impacts of education achievement gaps on communities throughout the Central Texas region. Over 600 people participated in these dialogues, which provided opportunity for grass roots inputs from parents, students, teachers, and community members; started a new platform for understanding *regional* solutions; and stirred hope for public schools to better serve our students and our economy. A key theme from the deliberative dialogues was that: “*Relationships between schools, parents, and community entities are critical for success and need to be the center of any change effort, rather than on the margins. We also need more robust measures of parent and community involvement.*” Putting community/business/school interaction at the forefront rather than an afterthought will make us better able to address issues at the root of our students’ preparation for higher education and the workforce.

¹¹ *Applying Organizational Research to Public School Reform: The Effects of Teacher Human and Social Capital on Student Performance.* Frits Pil & Carrie Leana, University of Pittsburgh, September, 2007

¹² *Organized Communities, Strong Schools.* Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, 2008.

However, measurement of community, parent and business involvement has been anecdotal and inconsistent at best. To achieve this goal, we need to better measure what a culture of learning is, whether and how organizations collaborate, what resources are used efficiently across entities, and the extent to which all stakeholders in our community feel responsible for the outcomes of our students. Several organizations have been developing indicators that identify critical community conditions that engender a strong learning environment, for example, the Ready by 21 model of Thriving, Connecting, Leading, Working and Learning. The E³ Alliance will coordinate these efforts to help identify and document how community ownership brings about improved student achievement and the kinds of social capital needed to build an unparalleled educational pipeline.



Community Voices:

“We need to not wait for permission anymore. We always assume constraints bind us. Instead, we need to break some rules.”

“The excitement in the room is amazing. I’ve never seen broad segments of the community and educators working together like this before.”

“We are not trying to build another program; we are trying to build a culture.”

“I’ve been in this district and this community for 30 years, and never seen excitement like this. I think we finally have the opportunity to make the changes we need to make.”

Some Key Organizations Working in this Area:

Austin Area Urban League – Life skills, youth empowerment, and youth employment partnership programs are designed to provide channels to success for students from traditionally challenged backgrounds.

Austin Partners in Education – The “In Classroom Coach”™ program brings the business and local community into the classroom to accelerate student achievement through engaged, small group learning. Coach role-models also help seniors master specific challenge objectives and gain College Ready skills while in high school.

Austin Voices for Education and Youth – Provides a voice to communities, especially students and youth, in improving our public schools.

Children’s Optimal Health – A regional collaborative using data mapping to address the holistic needs of children, to help them be healthy and self-sustaining.

Communities in Schools – Places trained social workers in schools to support students who are struggling, primarily with social and non-academic issues that block their education success.

Faith communities - Including the multi-denominational Austin Interfaith have often led the effort to involve neighborhoods and communities in schools.

Ready by 21 – A coalition of youth services providers in Travis County aligning services and metrics to support youth who face challenges to achieve self-sufficiency by 21.

United Way Capital Area – The UWCA launched its Community Agenda campaign 3 years ago to understand and focus on the root causes of community need rather than just addressing the symptoms. One of three root cause platforms is education.

Please contact info@theblueprintforeducationalchange.org if an organization driving Goal 4 outcomes has been inadvertently left out.

Goal 4 Indicators

Central Texas as a community prepares children to succeed

Blueprint Objective: *Community-based organizations, parents, local industry and education work together to create successful conditions for learning and achievement.*

Below is a list of proposed measures and indicators for Goal 4. We will work with our community and education partners to solidify these measures, establish our 2008 baseline and develop our interim and long term targets. Unless noted, all indicators will be broken out by region, district and (where possible) by campus. Subpopulations specified in column B.

G = Gender, E = Ethnicity, S = Socio-Economic Status, L = ELL

Indicator	Recommended sub-population
Region XIII District Complexity Index	
% participation of non-district personnel in district planning committees	
% growth in parental involvement	G, E, S, L
Volunteer hours	G, E, Bilingual
Volunteer hours devoted to academic student support (tutoring, coaching, career planning)	
# students participating in youth support services and activities (mentoring, coaching, after school programs)	
Business volunteer hours in schools by employer	
Rate of community responsiveness to district requests for support and participation (length of time to respond, match of response to request, duration of support)	
Total non-school funds allocated to public education and higher education	
Efficiency in community/district resource use	
% organizations meeting collaboration standards	

Goal 4 Action Strategies

1. *Identify and promote best practices in corporate citizenship in education including volunteerism, sponsorship, career awareness, industry skills alignment and financial support.*

Central Texas enjoys a strong volunteer ethic both from individual citizens and from business. However, very often these efforts cannot be fully realized because volunteers lack sufficient information about how best to “plug in”, and businesses lack a process for encouraging volunteerism, sponsorship and support. Working with some of our region’s best organizations that promote volunteerism and support volunteers, we will develop or expand the best models of corporate volunteerism and volunteer recruitment and management.

2. *Expand volunteer programs to increase recruitment, easily match individuals to volunteer opportunities, and track volunteer activities to student outcomes.*

In addition to identifying best practices, we will work with existing organizations to expand and strengthen volunteer programs as well as help programs more directly support student achievement and college and workforce readiness. Where appropriate within school districts, we will work to develop a process for recruiting, matching and documenting volunteer support. This effort is a critical preliminary step to understanding how to measure “community responsiveness.”

3. *Assist school districts, higher education and communities in creating an integrated communication strategy and engagement plan.*

Consistent across every community during the Achievement Gaps Deliberative Dialogues was a sense that school communities need both greater focus for communication at the “retail level” (meaning families and students) as well as integrated and broader messages about education. The strategy will be to develop a series of communication workshops for interested districts as well as develop a broader education marketing strategy for Central Texas.

4. *Identify pre-existing measures such as school climate surveys and ACCESS initiative to determine the common factors already collected by districts (parent involvement, volunteer counts & hours)*

Measuring community accountability toward education is ambitious and will need a combination of new and pre-existing measures. Austin ISD has recently been awarded a promising and visionary ACCESS grant that is designed to develop a resource mapping model that can identify where needs are and match community resources to those needs. In addition, some district surveys on school climate captures community impressions of local school issues. The priority will be to work on both initiatives to determine what and how to bring community resources to scale for the region.

5. *Advance community action plans generated from the Achievement Gaps Deliberative Dialogues and expand the dialogues process to other parts of the Central Texas region.*

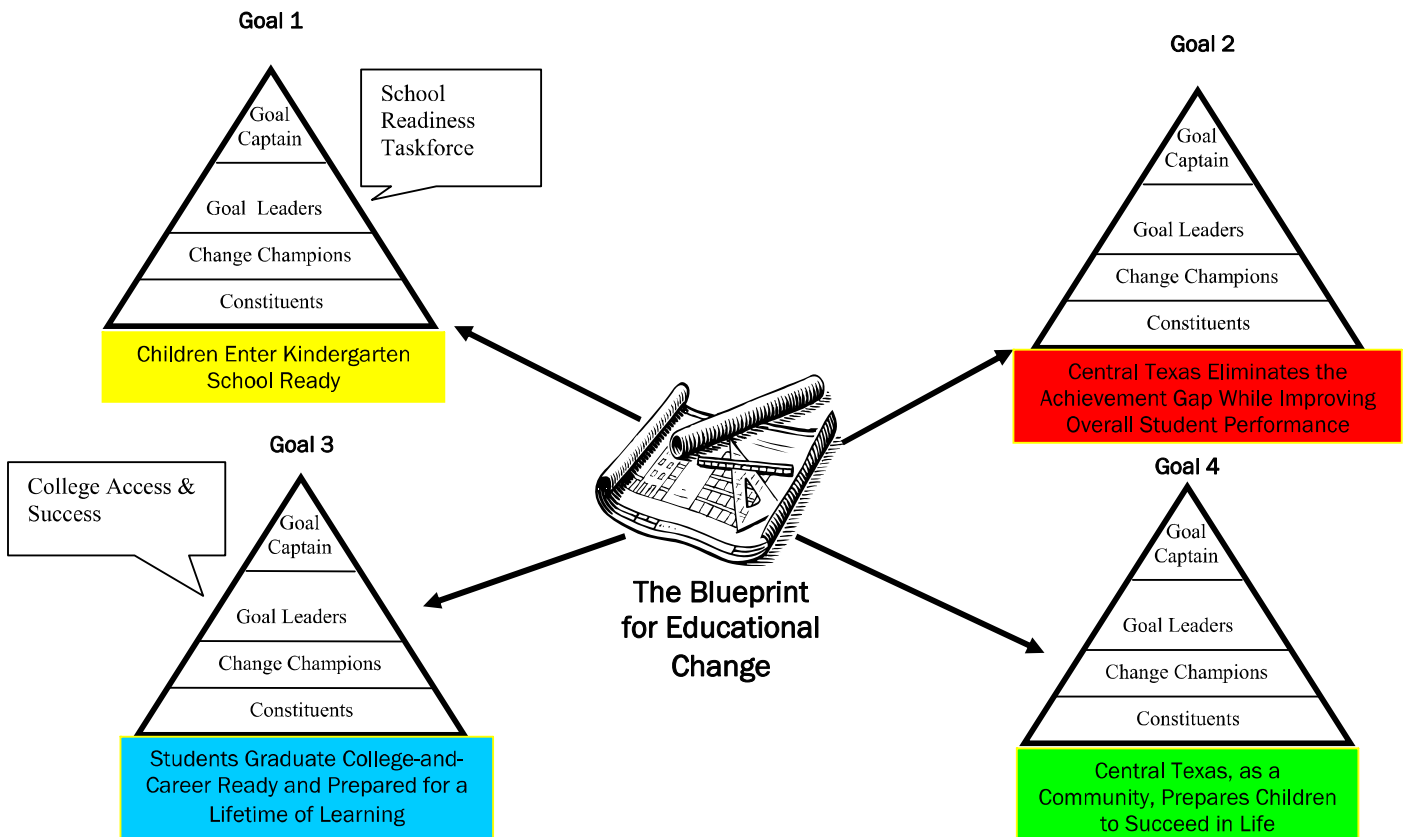
During the fall of 2007, many communities participating in the Achievement Gaps Deliberative Dialogues developed Action Plans that were tailored specifically to their issues and needs. To respect this hard work and the unique challenges and solutions expressed in these communities, one key strategy will help to support continued progress on these action plans. The most common recommendation coming from communities across the region was to expand the dialogues process to actively engage many more people. The Goal 4 Champion Team will promote continued dialogues to sustain momentum.

Implementing the Action Strategies

In Central Texas, literally hundreds of organizations are dedicated to education services and outcomes across the P-16 continuum. The purpose of The Blueprint for Educational Change™ is to help focus and coordinate these efforts to improve education outcomes for, not hundreds of students, but for tens of thousands of students, aligning initiatives and leveraging resources to scale the pipeline across districts, higher education institutions and community organizations. Working together, the coalition for The Blueprint for Educational Change will:

- *articulate* the need and the common priorities,
- *align* and leverage public and private resources and
- *accelerate* progress in student and community outcomes.

Each goal will consist of a series of teams built with existing organizations and platforms. The Champion Teams will organize around the four goals:



This model allows each Change Champion Team to capitalize on existing leadership and expertise and harness the creativity of those within the region. The model also enables people and organizations to engage at the level they choose. Central to the set of activities for each Blueprint goal are the action strategies, priorities and indicators that help chart progress toward strengthening the overall pipeline.

Goal Captain(s) - Spearhead the initiatives developed for each goal. These individuals are community, business or education leaders who commit to leading efforts for that specific goal for a period of time. In some cases, it may make sense to use a “two-in-the-box” business/educator model.

Goal Leaders - Represent a small cross section of business, community, education, and policy leaders from across the region who will work with the Captain to convene champions, prioritize action strategies, and define critical standards, and track indicators to mark progress toward that goal.

Goal Taskforce(s) - Solve particular issues or set standards for their respective goals. Depending on need, the Goal Leaders may convene one or more taskforces of experts from the community and from education institutions. Each task force would be temporary and defined around a particular area of need. For instance, there are two Taskforces already defined:

- The School Readiness Taskforce consists of one expert from each target district, as well as Success by 6, Region 13 Education Service Center, and academic experts who are tasked with defining a common standard and assessment tools for measuring readiness for school at a kindergarten level. This task force is being led by Success by 6 and San Marcos Consolidated ISD.
- The College Access and Success Taskforce consist of leaders of community based organizations who are focused on the transitions between high school and college, and helping students to be successful in college. Their charge is to review service patterns, unique organizational strengths, and existing partnerships to better align resources for students in this critical transition period. It includes College Forward, Breakthrough, the Ready by 21 College Access team, and others.

Champion Teams represent community and business leaders, as well as those working directly in and with our schools, who can align and coordinate programs and resources (financial resources, volunteerism, expertise, policy) around the action strategies. The Champion Teams will grow and change over time as key stakeholders in local communities become involved and interests and strategies evolve. These teams will generally meet quarterly and will track efforts through regular “report cards” to the community.

Constituents represent those “on the ground” who are charged with implementing programs. Their voice is critical to the success of this effort as they see the effects these programmatic changes have on their students and their children everyday. The Champion Teams will continue to work with partner organizations to solicit feedback and recommendations from this group.

Where Do We Go from Here?

During late spring of 2008, Champion Teams will recruit participants to join the effort through a series of forums around each goal. The Champion Teams will continue to develop, refine and measure their goals over time and show progress from interim targets and objectives.

E³ Alliance's Action Steps moving forward will be to:

1. Work with education and community partners to refine the Indicators and Outcomes and set the 2008 Baseline for each goal.
2. Work with education institutions and community based organizations to set targets derived from baseline data.
3. Develop a web-based model of The Blueprint for Educational Change that will allow different stakeholders to "log on" and "plug in" to the effort.
4. Support Goal Captains in building Champion teams and convening forums to drive action strategies.
5. Continue community engagement and systemic alignment efforts that support the Blueprint.
6. Continue comprehensive data analysis and research into:
 - a. Best practices around each goal
 - b. Defining and operationalizing key critical terms
 - c. Mapping the Central Texas Education Landscape across the P-16+Workforce Continuum
 - d. Target specific research questions around key student populations.

The Blueprint for Educational Change is our community's strategic plan for building the strongest education pipeline in the country. This inaugural version lays the foundation for systemic change in how we go about this effort.

About the E³ Alliance

The E³ Alliance is a regional collaborative dedicated to developing an objective data map to better align educational systems and practices to drive higher outcomes for students and ensure a more efficient allocation of resources to increase our competitiveness as a region.

Founded in 2006 by partners the Austin Area Research Organization, The University of Texas at Austin and Austin Community College District, the E³ Alliance acts as a catalyst for change, and is the P-16 Council for the Central Texas region.

The E³ Alliance and its member organizations spearheaded the development of **The Blueprint for Educational Change** and will facilitate and support the Champion Teams across the community in the ongoing effort toward the achievement of its goals.

Glossary

ACC – Austin Community College; the open enrollment public education entity serving an 8 county region in Central Texas.

ACCESS - Austin Community Collaborative Ensuring Student Success; a collaboration of Austin ISD, local service providers and the juvenile justice system to integrate and build comprehensive support programs promoting and sustaining positive mental health and behavior among students.

Achievement Gap(s) – the difference between the education performance outcomes of one group of students and another group in our community.

ACT – assessments developed by American College Testing to indicate a student’s readiness for college coursework and used by college admission boards to evaluate applicants to college.

AP – Advanced Placement; a national program through the National College Board that enables high school students to learn college-level knowledge and skills and, through examinations, earn college credit in popular college courses such as calculus or macro-economics.

AVID – Advancement Via Individual Determination; a program with its own curriculum and instructional strategies for students grades 4 through 12 that assists low-income students to take rigorous high school courses, apply, and enter four-year colleges and universities.

College and Career Ready – refers to the level of preparation needed in knowledge and life skills for a graduate (of high school or higher education) to successfully enter higher education or the workforce.

College Readiness Standards – standards established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board that define the knowledge and skills high school graduates should have to succeed in entry-level coursework and the workforce.

Commended – a scale score on a TAKS test of 2400 or above. A commended score is significantly higher than the score used to evaluate college readiness or the “met standard” score.

CTE – Career and Technology Education, formerly known as “CATE”; specific coursework undertaken at the high school and community college level to prepare the student for work in career areas, such as computer technology, health sciences, or culinary arts.

DAP – Distinguished Achievement Program; the set of coursework that, when completed, earns a high school diploma and shows superior academic preparation for entry and completion of post-secondary education.

Dual credit - High school courses that, upon completion, count for high school and college credit.

Early College Start – a program through Austin Community College that enables high school juniors and seniors to take up to two ACC courses per semester.

ELA – English Language Arts; the study of the English language to include writing, speaking, listening, and reading.

ELL – English Language Learners; students who, because of home language or immigrant status, do not have proficiency in the English language. Formerly known as LEP, or Limited English Proficient.

ESC – Education Service Center; regional support centers under the auspices of Texas Education Agency that provide assistance and resources directly to school districts, campuses, administrators and teachers for a specific geographic region. Region XIII Service Center is the ESC that serves the Austin area.

FAFSA – Free Application for Federal Student Aid; a nationwide application that enables a college applicant to find out how much federally-funded or federally-guaranteed financial assistance is available to pay for post-secondary education.

GACC – Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce.

GT – Gifted and Talented; a federal designation for public school students that provides qualified teachers and curriculum to address their potential for academic study.

IB - International Baccalaureate; the set of coursework over and above a Recommended or Distinguished Plan that prepares students for a global society, earns a Diploma, and shows academic preparation for entry into leading national and international universities.

ISD – Independent School District; the education entity that is independent from municipal and county government agencies and generally includes at least one high school and the middle and elementary schools that serve the same geographic or municipal area. CISD refers to consolidated independent school district.

K-12 – the educational system spanning from Kindergarten (around five years of age) through high school graduation (grade 12).

LASSI – Learning and Study Skills Inventory; an assessment tool to help measure a student’s awareness of and use of learning and study strategies thought crucial to success in college.

Low income students - students who live in households that have income less than 85 % above the poverty level and therefore qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. “Economically disadvantaged” is an alternative label.

Met Standard – a student’s performance on a TAKS test that is equal to or greater than a scale score of 2100. A score of 2100 or better shows that the student has met the state’s standard for learning a particular subject area at a particular grade level.

MHP – Minimum High School Plan; the set of coursework that, when completed, earns a high school diploma with minimum academic preparation for education after high school. Under current state law, a student may not graduate on an MHP unless the parent waives the student’s right to graduate on the Recommended High School Plan.

MSA - Municipal Statistical Area – a geographic area that encompasses a large population center that is integrated socially and economically. The Austin MSA, as designated by the federal Office of Management and Budget, includes Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis and Williamson Counties.

NAEYC – National Association for the Education of Young Children; an organization that has established standards for quality and provides accreditation for early childhood programs and providers.

NCES – National Center for Educational Statistics; a federal institution that collects, analyzes and reports data on elementary, secondary and post-secondary education in the United States. NCES is a part of the United States Department of Education.

NSC - National Student Clearinghouse; a non-profit, non-governmental institution that collects and analyzes data on secondary and post-secondary enrollment and degrees conferred.

P-16 – the educational system spanning from Pre-Kindergarten (around four years of age) through college graduation (grade 12 and four years of college).

Pre-K – Pre-Kindergarten; students in the year preceding Kindergarten (around 4 years of age).

Region XIII (also known as “Region 13”) – The local Education Service Center that provides assistance and resources directly to Austin area school districts.

RHSP – Recommended High School Plan; the set of coursework that, when completed, earns a high school diploma and shows academic preparation likely to support entry and completion of post-secondary education.

SAT – Scholastic Aptitude Test; assessments developed by the National College Board that indicate a student’s potential for college success and are often used by college admission boards to evaluate applicants to college.

School Ready – a child of four or five years old who shows sufficient emotional and cognitive development to be ready to learn Kindergarten level knowledge and skills. As of 2008, no common assessment tool exists to help measure and determine interventions to help ensure a child’s readiness for Kindergarten.

TAKS – Texas Assessment for Knowledge and Skills; the statewide assessment that helps measure student academic achievement in four core subject areas (Mathematics, English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies). A student’s first TAKS assessment occurs in 3rd grade, and the last (exit level) TAKS occurs in 11th grade with the option to retake until graduation.

TEA – Texas Education Agency; the state agency that develops and oversees policy and procedures for public, private, and charter elementary and secondary schools in the state of Texas.

TEKS – Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills; the learning standards established by the Texas Education Agency that defines the content and skills that students should master. These standards are organized by subject area (e.g., Mathematics, Science) and by grade level.

THECB – Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; the state agency that approves new programs and reports data and plans for post-secondary education institutions in the state of Texas.

THSP – Texas High School Project; a program of the Texas Education Agency and private philanthropies to increase high school graduation rates and better prepare high school graduates for work in the 21st century economy through high school redesign and other high school models.

TPRI – Texas Primary Reading Inventory – an assessment tool to help determine a student’s reading skills. This tool, developed by the Texas Education Agency and the University of Texas System, is used for students in Kindergarten through 3rd grade.

TSI – Texas Success Initiative; a program by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board that determines, through several different mechanisms, whether a Texas high school student is ready for college-level coursework in mathematics and English language arts at University of Texas system institutions .

T-STEM – Texas Science Technology Engineering, & Mathematics Initiative; a program from the Texas Education Agency to increase the number of students entering careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

The Blueprint for Educational Change™
Because Graduates are Made. Not Born.™