



EDUCATE TEXAS
at COMMUNITIES FOUNDATION of TEXAS

ONE POWERFUL VOICE

DESIGNING SYSTEMIC SUPPORTS *for* STUDENT IMPROVEMENT
on the TEXAS SUCCESS INITIATIVE ASSESSMENT



Participation in dual-credit courses, those in which students receive both high school and college credit, increases the likelihood that students will complete high school and enroll in and persist through college. College persistence leads to higher graduation rates and affords students greater access to gainful employment opportunities across their lifetime. To enroll in coursework at Texas public institutions of higher education, students must be assessed for college readiness in reading, writing and mathematics, most easily assessed through Texas Success Initiative assessments. So, when districts strive to ensure that all students become college connected, how can they best support students successfully navigate these assessments?



WHEN OFFERING a DISTRICTWIDE EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL MODEL, *how do* SCHOOLS SUPPORT STUDENTS *in* SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING *the* TEXAS SUCCESS INITIATIVE ASSESSMENT?





INTRODUCTION

In 2012, Educate Texas, in partnership with Jobs for the Future (JFF), committed in earnest to a five-year, multi-district Investing in Innovation Early College Expansion Partnership (i3 ECEP) grant. This effort strove to increase the number of early college high school students who successfully complete at least one advanced course to 90 percent. This would not only enhance the high school experience for students, but also impact college readiness, graduation rates, college success and student lifetime earning potential.

To make progress towards increasing the number of students taking advanced courses—specifically dual-credit courses—many students complete the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) assessment by the end of 10th grade. The TSI assessment is designed to assess student readiness to engage in college-level courses and includes tests in reading, writing and mathematics.

LOOKING BACK

More than a decade of legislative progress has created and expanded dual-credit opportunities for students in Texas. The 79th Texas Legislature established the Early College High School program in 2005 which allowed students to earn an associate degree or up to 60 college credits before graduating from high school. Legislation passed in 2006 added provisions that allowed students to earn up to 12 hours of college credit while in high school (Texas Education Code Sec 28.009).

In 2015, House Bill 18 prohibited limitations on the number of dual-credit courses or semester credit hours in which a high school student may enroll each semester or academic year. This aggressive expansion of dual-credit opportunities for Texas high school students called for equally aggressive steps to ensure students can access these opportunities.

WHY TSI?

Scaling the early college model to all students increased the need to carefully track TSI pass rates. TSI remains a key contributing indicator of whether students complete at least one college course. TSI Reading, in particular, serves as a gateway test for students, and a focus on TSI Reading is essential to unlock most initial dual-credit course opportunities. Furthermore, each institution of higher education (IHE) determines which TSI exams need to be mastered for each course. For these reasons, high school counselors needed to be aware of requirements for each institution to effectively advise students about course registration.

To increase student success on the TSI assessments, districts needed a coherent system to collect and access data, test additional students, provide necessary supports, and create opportunities to share and discuss student TSI data at the campus and district levels.

SOLUTIONS

Implementing a strong support system for students required improved communication and tools to ensure that students, counselors and teachers on high school campuses, and partners at colleges were working together to support successful completion of the TSI assessments.



DATA DASHBOARDS

Data such as high school attendance, earned college hours, scores on end-of-course and college readiness tests were found in a variety of systems. One district put the creativity and technical skills of its Information Technology team to work to create a data dashboard that housed student information in one place. The dashboard was designed to pull the most up-to-date college readiness data from a variety of sources and place it in the hands of high school counselors. The counselors were then able to review that compilation of information—attendance, earned college hours and scores for ACT, SAT, AP, State of Texas assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and end-of-course tests—as a whole to determine a student’s needs. Additional data included each student’s TSI dates of

testing, how many times they had attempted each TSI assessment and when the assessment was successfully completed, creating a complete picture of each student’s progress.

With student TSI data at their fingertips, high school counselors could identify those students who had successfully completed TSI assessments but who had not enrolled in any dual-credit courses. This insight, enabled by the data dashboard, led to focused conversations with students and eventually increased enrollment into dual-credit courses at the high school and at IHEs.

The data dashboard
GAVE ACADEMIC COUNSELORS
ACCESS TO



ATTENDANCE
data

+



COLLEGE
HOURS
earned

+



SCORES
*for ACT, SAT, AP,
STAAR tests*

Data dashboards include information at the district, school and student levels. Reports can be generated that provide up-to-date information based on what district leaders, principals or high school counselors needed to know. Moreover, the data dashboard refines the accuracy of reporting, providing stakeholders with important information about progress toward the i3 ECEP goals.



FREE TSI TESTING

To support increased access to TSI testing, district and college partnerships allowed free testing for students in grades 8–12. Additionally, districts provided students with one free testing opportunity after high school. The districts' ability to offer free TSI testing provided access for those students who would be unable to take the tests without financial support. Furthermore, a plan for preparing students as early as possible included extending the TSI reading assessment to 8th grade, thus providing more students with the opportunity to enroll in dual-credit courses during their freshman year of high school. Earlier enrollment extended opportunities for earned dual-credit hours throughout the high school years.

In one district, 8th-grade students are being prepared to enter college courses through a program focused on developing college readiness skills. This course utilizes Apex Learning's adaptive software that includes TSI pre-assessment support, diagnostic reports and differentiated tutorials to target individual student needs as they progressed throughout the course.



SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS ON TSI

Increased numbers of students TSI testing necessitated additional support systems. During the summer between students' 8th- and 9th-grade years, those who had not successfully completed the TSI reading assessment could attend a TSI Summer Bridge program where tutoring was offered to build the college readiness skills students needed in mathematics, reading and writing. Attempting the TSI test—even without a successful score—was advantageous to students, as the computer-mediated assessment generated a testing report. This report provided individual information about areas of growth for the student that would help them to be successful on their next attempt. Additionally, students who attempted a TSI assessment but were unsuccessful, had opportunities to enroll in TSI Prep courses offered through the district.

So that students did not become “sprinters” in retaking tests before they were ready, one district instituted a ticketing system. This was a systematic process that required students to complete at least 8 hours of tutoring based on their TSI improvement report prior to retaking the test. Once a student completed his or her 8 hours of tutoring, a teacher had to log

on to verify tutoring completion. When students were eligible to retest, they were automatically scheduled for an available TSI testing date.

Institutions of higher education also provided opportunities that supported students in becoming college-ready. For example, a six-week academy taught by a math professor and a reading professor from a partnering college was offered to high school students. This course provided flexible entry and exit to those students who needed additional support, allowing students who did not need the entire six weeks of preparation to exit early after developing the necessary skills.

*As a result of the TSI ticketing system,
10TH GRADE
TSI READING SUCCESS DOUBLED*



FOR ONE DISTRICT.



SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

Transformation of governance structures helped to build the capacity of administrators and high school counselors in collecting, analyzing and using TSI data. Governance meetings were designed utilizing data to discuss change. Strategies and action steps were rooted in TSI success rate data, dual-credit enrollment, dual-credit grades and course completion, all of which were aligned metrics of the i3 ECEP grant. Furthermore, work groups were created to develop and sustain support for this increased attention to TSI. Examples of workgroups that formed were:



A CABINET WORKGROUP

was established to revise and design systems and supports for TSI, some of which are mentioned above.



A COUNSELING AND ADVISORY WORKGROUP

bolstered the expanding role of the counselor in advising students on dual-credit course options based on TSI data.



A CROSSWALK WORKGROUP

designed frameworks for degree plans based on college and high school campus course offerings.



AN ACADEMIC SUPPORT WORKGROUP

developed the role of the College Transition Specialist and discussed and reviewed TSI data and dual-credit processes and procedures for enrollment.

High school campus teams of counselors and teachers attended multi-day academies designed to help them understand the TSI assessment, state core curriculum, TSI exemptions and academic course content alignment. During these academies, educators also completed gap analyses to determine if there were any skills tested on the TSI assessments that were not explicitly taught in the academic courses.

With accountability and shared decision-making diffused throughout the districts, responsibility for TSI data did not rest on the shoulders of one department or with one individual. The flow of communication helped to promote cost-effective academic supports for students aimed at reaching the goal of 90 percent of students enrolled in advanced courses.



EDUCATE TEXAS

As a partner with these districts, Educate Texas played a role in the collection, organization and analysis of data (see [One Powerful Voice: Using Data and Evidence to Drive Strategy for Student Success](#)). Educate Texas assisted the districts in developing revision and improvement processes and procedures to ensure a laser-like focus on targeted action for student success. Additionally, to reach the goals set out in the i3 ECEP, it was of critical importance that all stakeholders share the same vision for college-connected students. This meant that additional stakeholders, such as early college high school principals and representatives from the partnering college, needed to join cabinet meetings with the assistant superintendents and other district-level directors to review college readiness indicators like TSI. Educate Texas also helped districts identify key personnel and the need for additional workgroups and role-alike meetings. Moreover, Educate Texas provided classroom-embedded instructional coaches to support teachers with increasing demands of rigor through the Common Instructional Framework. The framework, created by Jobs for the Future (JFF), is a set of instructional practices that support students in engaging with academic content. These direct supports for teachers established the necessary culture for students to continue to develop and apply college-going skills across courses to facilitate success on TSI assessments.

Educate Texas recognized the importance of a systematic approach to helping students succeed on the TSI tests and provided embedded support directly to teachers through instructional coaching to enhance high quality instruction.

IMPACT

By the 2015-2016 school year, participating i3 ECEP campuses saw a 21 percent increase in TSI readiness in math, ten points higher than state increases during the same period of time.

The same campuses saw a 28 percent increase in TSI readiness for English Language Arts (ELA), 16 points higher than state increases for the same period. Students in participating schools demonstrated increases in TSI success that exceeded the state by 10 points for both ELA and math from 2015-2016, a 300% increase in the number of students who could access college courses. Although the i3 ECEP grant focused on the class of 2017, students from the two preceding classes benefitted from gains resulting from the systemic changes that were implemented.

Conversations about TSI data at cabinet meetings and within workgroups led to the development of intervention

systems that improved the monitoring of student growth and progress, student engagement, college course registration and enrollment and TSI pass rates. Improved registration and enrollment procedures followed, enabled by the use of data dashboards, to identify students eligible for college courses and enroll them during their freshmen year. Districts made significant strides toward reaching the i3 ECEP goal by unlocking systematic supports for student improvement on the Texas Success Initiative assessment.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER



How are TSI test data being tracked and communicated in your school or district?



Is there a comprehensive and integrated system of support for student success on TSI tests?



What role does the partnering college have in the district's system of support for TSI?



How are layers of governance within the district contributing to increased student pass rates?



What tools are already available to improve the clarity and visibility of student TSI data?



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at COMMUNITIES FOUNDATION of TEXAS

Educate Texas is a public-private initiative of Communities Foundation of Texas that works to strengthen the public and higher education system in Texas so that every student is prepared for and succeeds in school, in the workforce and in life. For over a decade, Educate Texas has helped guide schools, districts and higher education institutions through the process of designing early college schools, implementing effective governance structures and strengthening instruction and student support. Educate Texas has supported the districtwide implementation of early college in Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District (PSJA ISD) since 2008. As part of the Early College Expansion Partnership, Educate Texas has played a central role in technical assistance and instructional coaching in PSJA ISD and Brownsville ISD.



Jobs for the Future (JFF) has played a leading role in launching and shaping early colleges nationwide since 2002, when it became coordinator of the Early College High School Initiative, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. More recently, JFF and partners have focused on adapting early college designs to new contexts and on informing state and federal policies to bring high-quality dual enrollment and early college opportunities to more students. In the ECEP districts, JFF has provided strategic advising to central office staff along with leadership coaching for principals and instructional coaching for teachers.

This topic briefing is the third of a four-part series created by Educate Texas to disseminate lessons learned from the Early College Expansion Partnership. For more information, visit edtx.org.

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