



The
Progress
of Education

in
Texas





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in Texas

The Progress of Education

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To make schools more effective and efficient, many school reforms and changes have been introduced at the national, state, and local levels. Teachers making decisions about what and how to teach their students in this new context have more to consider—new policies, new ideas about education, and a multitude of new programs. Also, the new ideas may be unclear, inconsistent, or contradictory. For schooling to improve as a result of these reforms, teachers must be able to make sense of the reform ideas, bring them together in a meaningful way, and construct a coherent practice.

“Instructional coherence” describes the relationship teachers create in fitting together the components of schooling—curriculum, teaching, testing, external rules and requirements, and community needs. In building a coherent practice, the teacher brings these pieces together around some core belief or perspective to provide student learning experiences that are clear, connected to each other, and worthwhile. SEDL is currently researching the problems teachers face in their efforts to make their practices more coherent around student learning. The teaching context in Texas is described in this paper. The view expressed here is that of the author, drawn from documents and interviews with people in the state.

Texas is a state with tremendous geographical, ethnic, and economic diversity. The Texas educational system must address the needs of students who come from both metropolitan and rural areas as well as a growing multicultural population. Technology, manufacturing, and transportation industries also have a strong influence on the state's education system. They find the Texas climate receptive — not only in weather conditions, but also as a non-union state with a rapidly growing young workforce and a tax system that does not assess corporate or personal income tax. These industries and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have accelerated the population growth of the state. Addressing the diverse needs of its growing and changing student population has been a twenty-year effort for the Texas Legislature, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and Texas school districts. As the state has moved through this process, one of the strongest components of the state's efforts has been weaving modifications into existing structures rather than eliminating established measures to make improvements.

The current legislated improvement initiatives began in the early 1980s as a direct and sweeping reaction to industry and business demands to get education “back to the basics.” Business and industry leaders were appalled at the educational skill level of young adults entering the workforce (2). A special commission to address these concerns was appointed with H. Ross Perot, a Texas businessman, as chair. It was on the recommendation of this commission that the Texas Legislature passed legislation mandating accountability and teaching standards. This act has become the cornerstone of continual educational improvement in Texas (2).

This effort has been fruitful; Texas is now ranked among the top most-improved educational systems in the nation (7). The state is also recognized for making significant efforts to bridge the gap between mathematics achievement among ethnic and socioeconomic subgroups (13, 10). Texans take great pride in these achievements and in their long-term efforts to improve education.

The State Context

Defining an effective process to improve achievement for all students has not come easily. At first, it was thought that all school systems could use the same strategies to improve student achievement. However, as state educators began to implement new reform strategies, they found that the size and geographic layout of the state, combined with the growing and changing student population, created diverse needs that could not be met through a one-size-fits-all plan.

Population changes accelerate diversity issues

By 2025, the general population of Texas is projected to have the second fastest growth rate in the United States, with a total population of over 20 million (23). Texas currently has the second-largest student population in the United States with 3.9 million students enrolled K–12 (19; Table 1). In the 1998–99 school year, the student population grew 1.4 percent (19).

PreK–K	427,377
1–5	1,536,905
6–8	903,927
9–12	1,077,158
Total enrollment	3,945,367

Data taken from *Pocket Edition, 1998–1999*, Texas Education Agency Web site (1999).



A projected shift in the cultural diversity of the state accompanies the general population growth (Table 2). The Hispanic population is the largest minority group in the state and is expected to increase to 37.0 percent by the year 2025. The African American population is expected to increase to 12.8 percent. Pacific Islander and Asian populations are expected to increase to 3.3 percent. The white population is expected to drop to 46.0 percent (23).

School demographics reflect this growth in minority populations: 58.5 percent of the K–12 enrollment in the state comes from minority groups (Table 3); prekindergarten and kindergarten grades have the highest percentage of minority students at 67.7 percent of the total student population. In the 1989–90 school year, there were 309,862 students in Texas for whom English was a second language (ESL) in Texas; in the 1998–99 school year, there were 479,040 such students (14). The increase of minority students and ESL students is expected to continue. Helping administrators and teachers develop cultural awareness and maintaining adequate staffing are key elements in meeting the needs of the evolving Texas student population.

Geographic differences create unique diversity issues

Though the student population reflects a wide range of language and cultural influences, the physical attributes of the state also play a major role in the state’s diversity. East to west and north to south, Texas is approximately 900 miles border to border. In some rural communities, it is over 100 miles to the nearest school, doctor, or grocery store, while at the same time each large metropolitan area faces overcrowding and rapid expansion and growth.

Texas has six major metropolitan centers: Houston, San Antonio, Dallas, El Paso, Austin, and Fort Worth. Three of these cities are among the 10 most populated cities in the United States: Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas (24). Districts with student populations with more than 25,000 students serve 43.1 percent of the state’s students, while districts of less than a 1,000 students serve 6.3 percent. Yet, there are 17 districts of 1,000 students or less to every one district of 25,000 or more students (Table 4). The educational context and needs of a student who graduates in a class as small as one student are not the same as those for a student who graduates in a class with more than a thousand. Meeting the needs of both the urban and rural students is a major undertaking.

Population Group	1995 Percentage	2025 Percentage
Hispanic	27.6	37.0
African American	11.7	12.8
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.2	3.3
White	58.2	46.0

Data taken from *Projections of the Total Population of State: 1995–2025*, United States Census Bureau Web site (2000).

Group	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
African American	567,998	14.4
Hispanic	1,523,769	38.6
White	1,741,690	44.1
Other	111,910	6.0

Data taken from *Pocket Edition, 1998–1999*, Texas Education Agency Web site (1999).

TABLE 4

District Sizes

Number of Students	Number of Districts	Number of Students	Percentage of State's Student Population						
			0	5	10	15	20	25	
Over 50,000	9	817,405							21.0
25,000-49,999	24	860,794							22.1
10,000-24,999	47	749,838							19.3
5,000-9,999	68	447,769							11.5
3,000-4,999	84	325,305							8.4
1,600-2,999	131	285,305							7.3
1,000-1,599	122	156,150							4.0
500-999	212	155,484							3.9
Less than 500	364	93,439							2.4
Totals	1061	3,891,489							

Data taken from *Snapshot '98*, Texas Education Agency Web site (1999).

State legislature addresses funding and finance issues

Since the 1980s, the state has reduced its funding by 15 percent, causing districts to rely more heavily on local taxes based on property value: ad valorem taxes. This shift has widened the gap between property-rich districts and property-poor districts since local districts have had to either raise taxes to fund existing programs and services or cut those programs and services. In 1985–86, the wealthiest district in Texas had more than \$14,000,000 of assessed valuation per child, while the poorest district had only \$20,000 (1). This inequity meant that a property-poor district had to increase taxes in an attempt to make up for the state funding drop by raising the amount of money collected through ad valorem taxes, while a property-rich district could continue to tax its population at a much lower rate. For example, some property-poor districts collected \$1.25 per 100-dollar valuation, while in a wealthier district the rate might be 75 cents per 100-dollar valuation. Even though the property-poor district collected 50 cents more per 100-dollar valuation, it still might not generate equal tax revenue to the property-rich district. Some districts were capable of buying their students almost anything they needed, while others had to count the number of pieces of paper a student was given to use.

In Texas, the disparity between rich and poor schools districts has been the driving

force behind multiple lawsuits. Each of these lawsuits was followed by a legislative attempt to make funding more equitable. In the current effort to equalize funding, the state has created ranges of funding. If a district falls higher on the scale, that property-rich district chooses from five options, designed to insure that each Texas district creates a per student property value of no more than \$280,000 per student (Table 5). The options that the districts have chosen have created a situation where the state is taking from the rich and giving to the poor—a “Robin Hood” plan. While the Robin Hood plan may eventually create equitable funding, the cost will be very high to schools in the normal and moderate range in loss of programs, lack of funding for facility repair, and loss of staffing.

TABLE 5

Tax Revenue Equalization Options in Texas

- **Voluntary Consolidation.** Two districts agree to consolidate. *No districts have chosen this option.*
- **Voluntary Detachment and Annexation of Property.** The board of trustees for two districts agree to detach property from one district and annex it to the other. *No districts have chosen this option.*
- **Purchase of Attendance Credits from the State.** A district purchases attendance credits to reduce its per weighted student ratio. *Sixty-six districts chose this option in 1997–1998.*
- **Education of Students in Other Districts.** A district agrees to pay to educate students in another district. *Twenty districts chose this option in 1997–98.*
- **Tax Base Consolidation.** The board of trustees for two or more districts agree to conduct an election to create a consolidated taxing district. *No districts have chosen this option.*

Data taken from *Snapshot '98*, Texas Education Agency Web site (1999).

Educational Reform Initiatives in Texas

The Texas legislature and TEA have taken two approaches to improve schools, one at the local level and one at the state level. Mandated site-based decision making has given local educators the autonomy and responsibility to design curriculum and instruction that will improve student performance, and a comprehensive system of accountability created by the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) holds districts, campuses, teachers, and students responsible for student achievement. Both of these efforts encourage significant and continual improvement.

Texas stresses site-based decision making

Even though Texas has a long history of centralized control of education with a powerful state school board and state education agency, in 1990 the state legislature began to shift much of this control to districts through local school boards, administrators, and site-based decision-making teams. As of 1998, the State Board of Education has allowed 55 percent of the rules that once applied to districts to lapse and the board is expected to continue this practice (7). The state maintains authority over campus charters, accountability, curriculum standards, graduation standards, textbook adoption, special populations, school funding, research to improve education, and compliance with federal and state law. They have transferred power over teaching methodology, curriculum design and implementation, budgeting, structure of the school day, staffing, and professional development to the district (15).

Each district has two levels of site-based decision-making teams — one for each campus

in the district and one for the district as a whole — consisting of teachers, administrators, other district staff members, parents, and community members. Individual campuses or districts may redesign the school day, apportion teaching units, hire more teachers and fewer aids by using parent volunteers, develop cross-curricular integration through teaming, or solicit community involvement to meet any of their goals and performance objectives. These approaches would have required special approval from the state before 1990. The new system takes advantage of teachers' experience and ground-level relationships with students and moves them into a prime decision-making role.

TEA provides support for districts, schools, and teachers

Since 1990, TEA has restructured its efforts to assist schools on day-to-day issues. Each district is assigned a field service agent as a liaison who is housed at one of 20 education service centers (ESCs) and is responsible for helping the district staff negotiate the state-level bureaucracy. Many programs that directly assist administrators and teachers on standards, professional development, and innovative classroom practices have also been moved from TEA to the ESCs since these agencies are geographically closer to the district and more aware of the district and community needs.

TEA has also created Centers for Educational Development (CED) to assist districts in using the state standards. Each of these centers addresses a specific content area (Table 6). They offer resources to assist teachers in implementing the state standards,

provide teachers with opportunities to increase their knowledge about the instructional principles that underlie the state standards, coordinate professional development experiences in the content area, and provide models for quality instruction.

In 1991, TEA launched the Texas Education Network (TENET), a statewide telecommunications system to advance education in Texas through an electronic medium. The system was one of the first in the nation for educators. For a nominal fee, approximately 60,000 users had access to electronic mail, bulletin boards, news services, Internet access, legislative updates, and computer conferencing as well as a direct link to the TEA website. The network was a key strategy in simplifying communication among school entities, TEA, and educators. The agency utilized an aggressive training and recruiting effort to make the project a success.

Though TENET was an integral element in assisting teachers to have electronic access to educational assistance, it was developed at a time when there was little readily available electronic access for educators. As the Internet has grown, TENET is no longer the sole access teachers have to information on the World Wide Web. In the 1997–98 school year, the TEA relinquished control of TENET to the Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Under its control, TENET has evolved into a Web site for educators and a local area network (LAN) system hub for educational institutions. Additional changes are planned for the future.

To further assist teachers and administrators to meet the curriculum needs of individual campuses and districts, the state has changed its textbook selection process. In the past, schools had to choose from a list of textbooks approved by a statewide textbook selection committee. Districts may still choose state-adopted texts which are provided at no cost to the district. However, campuses may also elect

TABLE 6

Centers for Educational Development in Texas

Agricultural Science and Technology,
Texas A & M University, College
Station

Business Education, University of
Houston/College of Technology,
Houston

English, Language Arts and Reading,
University of Texas, Austin &
Education Service Center,
Region XIII, Austin

Health Science Technology, University of
North Texas, Denton

Home Economics Education,
Texas Tech University, Lubbock

Languages Other Than English,
Southwest Educational Development
Laboratory, Austin

Marketing Education, Division of
Continuing and Extended Education,
University of Texas, Austin

Mathematics and Science, Texas SSI, Dana
Center, University of Texas, Austin

Social Studies, Texas A&M University,
College Station & Education Service
Center, Region VI, Huntsville,

Technology Applications, Texas Center for
Educational Technology, Denton

Technology Education/Industrial
Technology Education, University of
Houston, Houston

Trade & Industrial Education, Texas A&M
University, College Station

Data taken from *Statewide Curriculum Centers*,
Texas Education Agency Web site (2000).



to use textbooks not on the state adopted list if another resource or text can better meet the needs of the student population. The school district will be reimbursed for up to 70 percent of the cost for these alternative texts. To supplement classroom technology resources, districts also receive \$30 per student for electronic textbooks or equipment and may also choose to use totally electronic texts rather than bound books (15). Both of these changes give the teacher, the campus, or the district more control of the content and methodology that they use in the classroom.

Ed-Flex assists districts in developing site-based plans

The Ed-Flex program allows a state agency or individual district or campus to meet the needs of specific student groups by using federal funds in a more flexible manner. Rather than the traditional per pupil distribution of Title I funds among all qualified students, an institution may submit a waiver to use other configurations (such as targeting a larger portion of the Title I funds to a specific group as part of an early intervention plan instead of spreading the funds evenly across all grade levels). In essence, Ed-Flex gives the state, district, or school more control of the federal dollars and fits well with the site-based management policy practiced by Texas districts. Texas was one of the first 12 states to receive this status (25).

Accountability

In Texas the driving force for school improvement is accountability. Districts, campuses, administrators, teachers, and students are each answerable for student achievement in some measure. The system uses standards, statewide testing, student achievement reports, and educator certification requirements and evaluation.

Texas develops new state standards

The first state standards were an attempt to ensure that all students had an appropriate educational foundation. In 1981, the legislature mandated that TEA create a standard, or back-to-the basics, list of teaching topics for each grade level in each discipline, Essential Elements (EEs) (2), which teachers were to present in a state-adapted Madeline Hunter lesson cycle. These EEs established a baseline of knowledge for each student, and teaching the EEs in the prescribed format was to be the key to student success. TEA has evaluated and modified these standards periodically since their inception.

The most significant modification of the standards occurred between 1996 and 1998. TEA wrote, piloted, and instituted a revised set of standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards. There were 15 writing teams — 400 individuals including teachers, curriculum specialists, university professors, businesspeople, representatives of professional associations, and parents — involved in the writing of the TEKS (16). The original back-to-the basics approach, established through the EEs, evolved into a drive to develop a well-rounded student who has a solid foundation of knowledge and problem-solving skills and is ready to continue to learn after high school graduation.

Unlike the EEs that were presented in an adapted Madeline Hunter mastery model, the TEKS were designed to reflect an inquiry model of instruction. They focus on what the student should know and do, not what the teacher should do, establishing learning standards rather than content to be presented (16). The new standards have not been in place long enough to determine the impact they will have on student achievement.

Governor and legislature create a special emphasis on reading

Educators now realize that reading is a skill that transcends all disciplines, for the child who reads well is capable of succeeding in all fields. The Governor's Reading Initiative is part of a plan to eliminate social promotion by ensuring that all students read on grade level (9) by the end of the third grade and that all students continue reading on or above grade level throughout their school career (4). To promote this effort, TEA has developed a multifaceted approach to improving reading scores:

- an informal assessment for students in kindergarten and grades 1 and 2 created by the Center for Reading and Language Arts Professional Development at the University of Texas at Austin from Academics 2000 funds;
- a reading Mentor School Network program emphasizing promising practices in reading, broadcast by T-Star network and funded through the U. S. Department of Education;
- documents for teachers and administrators such as *Good Practice: Implications for Reading Instruction* for dissemination throughout the state; and



- grants and loans to schools and universities to purchase telecommunications equipment, computer networks, and computer equipment to support reading instruction (22).

In tandem with the Governor's Reading Initiative, multiple volunteer and national programs promote reading in Texas. The national America Reads Challenge has a pilot site in Houston, Houston Reads to Lead. This project uses federal work-study money to place university and college students as reading tutors for local school children in an effort to insure that all students are reading on grade level by grade three. The Corporation for National Service, a federal agency, supports AmeriCorps members, Senior Corps volunteers, and service-learning students who tutor children in reading and recruit other volunteer tutors. The Texas Children's Literacy Corps, sponsored by the Mental Health Association, also selects and trains AmeriCorps members who provide literacy assistance to children in nine locations in Texas. AmeriCorps members earn college tuition vouchers for their service. Though the reading emphasis has only begun in Texas, the governor's backing, public interest, and nationally funded projects are quickly propelling this movement into the forefront of Texas education reform.

Initiatives emphasize math and science

Scores on standardized tests and the interest of business and industry have created a focus on math and science in Texas. The National Science Foundation (NSF) and other national associations have coordinated with TEA to support statewide urban and rural projects to assist districts in implementing standards-based, inquiry-centered science and mathematics programs.

The Texas Statewide Systemic Initiative for Reform in Mathematics and Science Education (SSI), located at the Dana Center in Austin, has played an important role in shaping the state's math and science standards (EEs and TEKS) by committing resources and energy to these projects. The SSI has also identified and studied schools and districts that exemplify the characteristics of effective improvement and achievement. Based on these findings, the SSI has created a statewide network of professional developers who specialize in teaching pedagogy and content knowledge—Texas Teachers Empowered for Achievement in Math and Science program (TEXTEAMS).

Five districts are involved in urban systemic programs funded by NSF. San Antonio Independent School District will complete its final year as a Texas Urban System Initiative (TUSI) site during the 2000–2001 school year. The San Antonio project focuses on implementing rigorous content, professional development, systemwide improvement, and alignment of resources. The Houston Independent School District project, Houston Urban Learning Initiatives in a Networked Community (HU-LINC), plans to establish a network of community coalitions to raise achievement in math, science, and technology for the district's traditionally underrepresented minority students. Beginning in the fall of 2000, the USI projects will be replaced by the Urban Systemic Programs for Reform in Mathematics and Science (USP). These new programs will

continue to focus on improving student achievement in mathematics and science by encouraging schools to establish collaboratives with two-year colleges to promote exemplary improvement in technical education or with four-year colleges and universities to assist teacher preparation programs to develop a more standards-based model of teaching and learning. The USP projects are located in Brownsville, Dallas, and El Paso. Brownsville plans to develop a comprehensive standards-based, inquiry-centered mathematics and science curriculum that infuses new technology and includes professional development and technical assistance for teachers. Dallas will develop a mentoring program to improve mathematics and science educational practice and encourage an increase in the number of teachers entering the profession. El Paso will work to create a seamless pathway from kindergarten to college (K–16) in mathematics, science and technology, and learning.

The Texas Rural Systemic Initiative (TRSI) works with 60 districts located across the state in counties that have at least 30 percent of their school-age children living in poverty and a population of less than 20,000. The TRSI sites seek to improve student achievement in mathematics and science through district and community forums, systemic leadership institutes, teacher partner academies, and administrative partner academies. In its third year of a five-year contract, the TRSI intends to involve additional districts in the 2000–2001 school year.

The National Science Foundation also funds a collaborative effort with Rice University and two University of Houston campuses that enable graduate and upper-level undergraduates to mentor students in mathematics and science in the Houston Independent School District. This program fulfills two needs: providing role models for students and preparing graduate and undergraduate university students for future

educational careers.

The National Science Teachers Association and American Association for the Advancement of Science have also sponsored work in Texas that correlates to NSF projects described above. Houston was a pilot site for the development of a model curriculum for the Scope, Sequence, and Coordination of Secondary School Science program that involved teachers, administrators, parents, students, and community leaders in the decision-making process. This project stressed the need to increase the depth of scientific understanding and experiences that all students should have. While the funding for the project has ended, Houston continues to use and disseminate this material. The San Antonio Project 2061 currently works with four San Antonio districts with large Hispanic populations to advance K–12 science reform and science literacy. Project 2061 describes what students in grades 2, 5, 8, and 12 should know or be able to do in science, mathematics, and technology and focuses on assessment, curriculum development, equity, professional development, standards, and a systematic approach to teaching science.

Texas develops statewide testing

In order to insure that all students meet the state's goals for student achievement, Texas has developed grade-level and exit-level (high school graduation) tests for students. The testing program has undergone two redesigns and multiple modifications before arriving at the current version, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). This criterion-referenced test has three sections: reading, writing, and mathematics. Students at grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 are required to take the test. The reading and mathematics sections are multiple choice, the writing section uses both multiple

TABLE 7

TAAS Passing Percentages

All students / All levels

Year	Passing
1994	54.0
1995	60.0
1996	66.0
1997	73.0
1998	77.0
1999	80.0

Data taken from *Statewide Results — Grades 3–8, 10* Texas Education Agency Web site (2000).

choice and performance assessment. Data from these tests are collected through the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) and correlated to data about district’s students provided through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS).

As part of its efforts to improve practice, TEA has provided teachers and administrators longitudinal data from AEIS and PEIMS since 1990. Unlike other states, the data are disaggregated by subgroups:

low socioeconomic status, at-risk, dropout, and ethnic group. Individual student, grade level, or subgroup success is tracked test year to test year. These data can be used to help teachers and administrators assess their programs. For example, “if the district finds that fourth-grade students consistently have low scores on the fact and opinion section of the reading portion of the TAAS, teachers know that their curriculum is not meeting the needs of the students in this skill area.

The cumulative test data from 1994 to 1999 show that the percentage of students passing at all required grade levels (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10) on the TAAS has increased significantly during the past six years — an average increase

of 26.0 percent (Table 7) — but the most telling numbers are in the percentage of minority and economically disadvantaged students passing the tests (Table 8). For the same range of grades on all tests, African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students have each improved scores by 32.0 percent with an average passing percentage of 80.0 since 1994. These scores reflect the efforts of Texas educators to improve practice to meet the needs of all students. The goal of the state is to have every district achieve 90.0 passing percentage for all population groups at all levels on the TAAS.

While it is true that the passing percentage for white students of 90.0 percent is the highest of any subgroup, it also has the lowest long-term improvement percentage — 22.0 percent (21). If the white subgroup was taken from the pool, the total passing percentage would be 69.0 percent rather than 80.0 percent. Although minority and economically disadvantaged students are making greater strides than white students, school districts will have to work diligently to bridge the achievement gap between white students and minority and economically disadvantaged students.

The state has modified the mandate that students pass the exit-level exam (TAAS), a prerequisite for high school graduation, by allowing students to pass either the TAAS or a combination of the end-of-year content exams that have been developed by the state. These exams are given to students during the spring of the school year in which they take the relevant course. If a student passes both the English II and Algebra I end-of-year exams, and either the Biology I or United States history exams, that student does not have to pass the TAAS. These tests are also a means of insuring that all Texas students acquire the same level of content knowledge and skills in like courses.

TABLE 8

Improved TASS Passing Percentages by Subgroup 1994–99

Subgroup	Passing in 1999	Change since 1994
African American	65.0	32.0
Hispanic	72.0	32.0
Economically Disadvantaged	70.0	32.0
White	90.0	22.0

Data taken from *Statewide Results — Grades 3–8, 10*, Texas Education Agency Web site (2000).

TABLE 9

AEIS Indicators

- TAAS pass rate*
- end-of-year exam pass rate
- graduation rate
- student attendance percentage
- dropout rate*
- advanced course enrollment percentage
- college admissions tests and TAAS/TASP equivalency rate
- Campus Comparable Improvement in reading and mathematics
- College Board Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) tests results
- retention rate
- advanced course completion rate

* Indicator counts for accreditation
Data taken from *1998 Accountability Manual*,
Texas Education Agency (1998).

Communicating campus progress toward academic excellence

District and individual campuses are graded by the TEA on a system called the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS; Table 9). Each district is given a “report card” that contains its AEIS data, and that information must be published and disseminated by the district. The publication of test results intimidates many teachers and administrators; however, it is the publication of that information in community newspapers and school report documents that many believe has spurred continual efforts for improvement. No campus or district wants to project an unsuccessful image to the public. It creates an intense pressure to produce continual gains. PEIMS and AEIS data are carefully examined by district and campus site-based decision-making teams with an eye toward improving instruction, classroom arrangement, and other curriculum issues as intended by the state’s legislation.

A district or campus that has poor ratings in the TAAS pass rate or dropout rate in either the entire student population or in any of the special population subgroups—ethnic groups, low economic status, dropout students, and at-risk students—faces the possibility of TEA sanction. The sanctions that they face are dependent upon the circumstances at the site. The state does not have a single action plan for districts or campuses with low performance. Each case is determined by the needs of the site and the students at that site.

First, the district or campus is warned of the low performance score, and a team of educators, designated by TEA, visits the district or campus to assist them in making plans to improve student achievement. The district or campus is given a year to improve student achievement. If there is not an acceptable improvement, the agency reviews the district or campus improvement plan and helps the school make modifications that will assist the school in meeting both district and state goals. Though the agency expects the school to make marked improvements, there is not a predetermined amount of time for an improvement plan to take full effect. It is also possible that the improvement plan will be modified over a series of years if the district or campus is making appropriate progress. However, when the agency decides that the district or campus cannot direct changes that will improve ratings, a TEA monitor or master is placed in the site. This appointment transfers the decision-making processes for the school district or campus directly to the monitor or master. The monitor or master will frame a new improvement plan with assistance from district or campus educators, including the site-based decision-making teams. As a last resort, a district or campus may lose its accreditation or be reconstituted. Though the last two steps are seldom taken, school administrators pay close attention to their AEIS results to avoid these sanctions. Currently,

TABLE 10

AEIS District Ratings		
Rating	Number of Districts	Percentage of Districts
Exemplary	122	11.7
Recognized	383	36.8
Academically Acceptable	524	50.3
Academically Unacceptable	7	0.7
Unacceptable: insufficient data to evaluate	3	0.3
Unacceptable: data quality	3	0.3

Data taken from *Pocket Edition, 1998–99*, Texas Education Agency Web site (1999).

there is not a published list of schools that have been sanctioned.

Though the possibility of sanction by TEA concerns educators across the state, there is also a reward system that motivates schools to continuously strive to raise their achievement percentages. Campuses are given monetary awards and recognition for both score and performance gain. Individual students are also given recognition for high achievement scores. Of Texas districts, 11.7 percent received an exemplary rating, the highest rating, for the 1998–99 school year (14, Table 10).

Texas makes efforts to keep students in class

Student attendance is central to insuring that students receive an effective education. In 1989, the Texas Joint Special Interim Committee on High School Dropouts revealed that high school dropouts cost the state 17 billion dollars annually in “lost tax revenues plus increased expenditures for welfare, adult basic training and job skills training, unemployment insurance, and remedial education” (2, p. 24). The task force also revealed that 90.0 percent of Texas prison inmates were high school

dropouts (2). These two statistics raised the policymakers’ concern about dropouts. According to TEA, the dropout rate for minority and economically disadvantaged students is significantly higher than that for the white and non-economically disadvantaged students. Nearly 35 percent of all dropouts are identified as economically disadvantaged, and 80.6 percent are overage for their grade. More males than females drop out (19).

All educators on a campus are mandated by legislative act to meet the needs of students at risk of dropping out. Meeting these needs might involve teachers, other staff members, business representatives, and parents in after-school planning sessions, teacher-as-counselor approaches, changes in curriculum design, development of new courses, or flexible scheduling. Districts are encouraged to use site-based management teams to address issues regarding students who are at risk of dropping out of school.

As an incentive to keep students in school, the justice system holds parents legally accountable for a student’s attendance if that student is under 18 years of age. For students to be awarded credit for course work, they must be in attendance 90 percent of each semester, and extracurricular absences are limited to 10 per year. As a final, and attention-getting incentive, a student loses driver’s license privileges unless in compliance with attendance laws.

Data on student dropouts have been collected by TEA and the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA). TEA uses dropout rates as part of the district and campus accountability system. IDRA collected its data as part of its efforts to advocate for the rights and needs of minority students. Each institution reports dropout rates that differ significantly.

TEA counts students as dropouts if they are not attending a public or private institution (including home school), enrolled in a General

TABLE 11		
TEA AEIS Dropout Report for 1998		
Student Reporting Groups	1994	1998
All Students	2.8	1.6
African American	3.6	2.0
Hispanic	4.2	2.3
White	1.7	1.0
Economically Disadvantaged	2.9	1.6
Data taken from <i>Statewide result —grade 3–8, 10</i> , Texas Education Agency Web site (1999).		

Education Development (GED) program, or enrolled in another recognized alternative graduation program. Students are also excluded from dropout designation if they have completed all high school course requirements, but have not passed the TAAS, or are foreign exchange students (21). TEA reports that in the 1997–98 school year there was a 1.6 percent student dropout rate (21; Table 11).

IDRA uses a different process for calculating the school dropout rate. It records the number of students enrolled during the 9th-grade year and in the 12th-grade year. The percentage of difference between the two, adjusted for the growth and decline of the district, is the attrition rate—IDRA’s percentage of dropouts. According to IDRA, 4 of every 10 students (or 42.0 percent) enrolled in the 9th grade in Texas during the 1994–95 school year, did not reach the 12th grade in 1997–98 (Table 12). IDRA also states that 100,000 Texas students were not counted as dropouts by TEA, yet these students did not receive a high school diploma in 1998 (3).

The TEA and IDRA calculation formulas and criteria for designating dropouts differ; it is therefore not surprising that they arrive at significantly different final numbers. Since the numbers that a district reports to TEA are tied to the AEIS report, the pressure on districts to

TABLE 12	
IDRA Dropout Report for 1998	
Student Reporting Groups	1998
All Students	42.0
African American	49.0
Hispanic	53.0
White	31.0
Males	45.0
Females	38.0
Data taken from <i>IDRA Newsletter</i> (October, 1998 & May, 1999).	

carefully classify each potential dropout student increases. School dropout coordinators work diligently to enroll a student who could be a dropout in alternative educational program rather than have that student classified as a dropout statistic. In contrast, IRDA reports the state enrollment numbers in its reports with the goal of reporting a more accurate reflection of student attendance in Texas. In 1999, TEA began to reevaluate its methodology for reporting dropout rates. The accounting process to be used in the future has not yet been determined.



Efforts to Maintain Quality Staff

Like many other states, Texas has made strong efforts to improve teaching practice in the state. As described earlier, TEA has used the ESCs and the CEDs to provide models of effective schools, text book information, school organizational strategies, and professional development and assistance to districts and campuses to improve student achievement. Texas is one of the few states in the nation that has a separate education agency solely responsible for the educator certification process—the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC). This agency supports efforts to improve practice by ensuring that all teachers are qualified and meet instructional expectations. One of the first steps in the certification process is the Examination for Certification of Educators in Texas (ExCET). SBEC’s effort is accompanied by TEA’s statewide teacher appraisal system.

Teachers must meet certification requirements

All educators in Texas must complete specified course work and pass the ExCET that tests both pedagogy and content knowledge. Although SBEC currently issues almost 90 different certifications, the teacher certification program is being revamped, and the new program will streamline the number of certificates. It is expected to move toward certifications that cover a broader range of content knowledge. For example, a secondary teacher is currently certified in a specific science content area: chemistry, physics, or physical science. The new framework would classify all of these specific subjects as one content area: physical science. At the elementary level, an increasing emphasis on literacy is expected.



The new framework is scheduled for completion during the 2003–2004 school year (12).

In addition to the traditional pathway, prospective teachers who have completed a bachelor’s degree may obtain certification through universities and the ESCs. This process typically requires university course work, professional development experiences, mentoring, and supervision. This process should increase the number of teachers who have a broader range of lifetime experience.

TABLE 13**PDAS Domains**

1. student participation and involvement,
2. learner-centered instruction,
3. assessment and evaluation,
4. organization of the instruction including discipline and resources,
5. professional communication,
6. professional development,
7. compliance with policy and procedures, and
8. participation in campus improvement.

Data taken from *Professional Development and Appraisal System*, Texas Education Agency.

TEA uses teacher evaluations to promote student achievement

Starting with the 1998–99 school year, the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) replaced the Texas Teacher Appraisal System (TTAS). TTAS emphasized the teacher’s instruction using the state-adapted Hunter model; PDAS reflects a strong emphasis on local control, professional development, and learner-centered instruction through the use of eight domains for evaluation (Table 13). The new PDAS seeks to reap the benefits of a systems approach to improvement, stressing the importance of every teacher and staff member in campus success. Efforts to solve campus problems collaboratively are now a key factor in each teacher’s appraisal. Teachers are expected to become more self-reflective about their own practice and more involved in collaborative efforts for campus- and district-wide student improvement (17). Teachers cannot isolate themselves from overall improvement of their school and still receive high evaluation scores.

SBEC mandates continuing education

To promote lifelong learning for education professionals, SBEC has developed guidelines for Continuing Professional Education (CPE) for Texas educators certified after September 1, 1999. All teachers, counselors, diagnosticians, librarians, and aides are required to clock 150 hours of either graduate study or additional training every five years to keep their certification; principals and superintendents must have 200 hours. These hours must be offered by institutions or agencies that have met SBEC’s requirements. Educators who received their certificates prior to September 1, 1999, will not be required to clock continuing education, though they may choose to change their Provisional Certification to the new Standard Certification that requires CPE credits.

Texas addresses teacher shortages

Texas, like many other states, faces a teacher shortage. This shortage is created by population shifts as more people move into Texas, but this is not the only cause. Only one in four of the teachers who receive their certification through the higher education system enters the profession within two years. After five years, just over one-third of the group who received their certification are still in the classroom (9). These new teachers find that they can earn more money in fields other than education and that transition from university to the business world is much easier than transition from university to classroom practice. Texas has approached this problem by providing support to new teachers through the newly funded Texas Beginning Educator Support System (TxBESS), increasing teacher salaries, and implementing alternative certification programs.

Other Support from Federal Initiatives



The School to Work and Tech Prep efforts have also had an effect on Texas schools. Local, state, and federal agencies spend in excess of \$360 million each year on career programs. Students taking career and technology education classes comprise 17.8 percent of all students in secondary schools (14). Schools are given flexibility in the methods they use to promote the SCANS report (Secretary's Committee on Necessary Skills) for all students. Some schools have chosen to integrate the skills from the report in an across-the-curriculum design, other have redesigned the curriculum in specific classes, and others have created mini-academies within their school's systems. These programs are the driving force in developing curricular content that can be used by the student in either real-world employment or as college or university credit through articulation agreements. The involvement in career programs led to Texas's selection as one of the first states to receive federal grant funds to facilitate school-to-work curriculum.

Conclusion

Geographical variations and population demographics in the state complicate school improvement. There are no easy solutions to solving the state's educational needs. However, Texas has worked steadily for the last 20 years to facilitate continual improvement for all students through site-based decision making, a strong accountability system, and professional development resources. Nevertheless, critical education issues remain.

The accountability system, including the TAAS test, will continue to drive important education issues in the state. Although minority and poverty population gains on the TAAS test are laudable, even stronger efforts will be needed to reach the state's goal of having all students achieve at the 90th percentile level. The state is also in the process of aligning the TAAS to the new TEKS. When the new test is launched, teachers will have to align their curriculum and instructional practice to meet the higher standards of the new test. Teachers are also expected to meet other academic needs not addressed on the TAAS, such as higher-order thinking skills and problem solving. These three expectations will challenge Texas teachers, campuses, and districts in the next few years.

If Texas is to meet the needs of its future students, the trend of losing one-third of its

teachers cannot continue. The success of salary increases and alternative certification is still unknown. However, there are other factors that contribute to their loss. Many teachers leave the field because they are not adequately prepared for the rigor of classroom practice or because they become disillusioned. Though Texas has begun an initiative to assist new teachers transition into the classroom, no efforts have yet been made to address general teacher satisfaction.

Future decisions regarding funding will also greatly influence the success of education in Texas. The Robin Hood plan, created to equalize funding, resurfaces each legislative year. At some point, Texas will have to revisit the continuing inequity between property-rich and property-poor districts.

The most important education issue in Texas today is increasing achievement for all students regardless of their geographic, cultural, or economic differences. While Texas has received national recognition for its efforts in addressing the needs of its diverse population, educators still have a long road ahead to meet the state's goal for all students. This work will require that educators, parents, students, and community and business members continue to actively contribute to the school improvement process.

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