



ISSUE BRIEF: Guided Pathways for Texas Students

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The Context

We live in an era in which education has never been more important to economic success for individuals, families, communities, and our country. Though Texas has the second highest high school graduation rate in the country, it ranks last for the percent of adults, age 25 or older, with at least a high school diploma. This means that Texas has the least educated adult-age population in the country. Currently, only 52 percent of Texas 8th grade students go on to enroll in higher education, and only one in five complete some form of postsecondary credential, such as a certificate, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree. For low-income Hispanic and African-American students, that number drops to one in ten.ⁱ Finally, about two percent of students in Texas receive only a postsecondary certificate.ⁱⁱ

Community colleges are the postsecondary entry point for most Texas students. In fact, 70 percent of Texas Hispanic students who enroll in postsecondary education do so at community colleges.ⁱⁱⁱ (52 percent of Texas K-12 students are Hispanic, and this number is growing.) Community colleges are designed to provide a college education to students at a low cost; however, many community college students never complete a credential. About 50 percent of students who enroll in community colleges following high school graduation are placed into developmental education, compared to about 20 percent of students who enroll in a four-year institution. Almost half of students placed into developmental education never complete a postsecondary credential.^{iv} Further, although 80 percent of community college students indicate intent to transfer to a four-year institution, less than 20 percent actually do.^v

The Economic Impact

By 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the United States and 59 percent of all jobs in Texas will require some form of postsecondary credential.^{vi} By 2050, Hispanics will outnumber non-Hispanic Whites nearly three to one in the state's workforce, and the median income of Texas households will actually decline, as many Hispanics are currently projected to lack postsecondary credentials or degrees and will be unqualified for high-skill, high-wage jobs. If the present education attainment gaps between White and minority incomes persist until 2050, per capita income in Texas in 2050 will be reduced by nearly \$3,400 compared to figures in 2010. Further, Texans can expect slower rates of growth in consumer expenditures, higher rates of poverty, and a significant reduction in Texas's projected tax revenues. Without further income closure between minority and White households, Texas will receive \$72 billion in tax revenues in 2050. Comparatively, if gaps between White and minority earnings fully closed, Texas would receive \$148 billion in tax revenues.^{vii}

Texans have a choice: how do we prepare all students to be productive members of the Texas workforce?

To help more students be successful and ensure students stay on paths to meaningful employment and careers, we must provide clear pathways for students to pursue their educational and career goals.

Pathways Defined

According to the Texas Success Center, the Texas Pathways model is “an integrated, system-wide approach to student success based on intentionally designed, clear, coherent, and structured educational experiences. These experiences are informed by evidence that guide students effectively and efficiently from the selection of a high school degree program to a point of postsecondary entry through attainment of high quality credentials, allowing students to pursue a valuable career.” For example, Texas House Bill 5 empowers students to make decisions about their path as early as 8th grade.^{viii}

The following is from the Texas Success Center:

Essential Practices include:

1. Clarify paths to student end goals
2. Help students choose and enter a pathway
3. Help students stay on selected path
4. Ensure students are learning

Essential Capacities include:

1. Leadership demonstrating skills for managing and sustaining transformational change
2. Broad and authentic engagement of college faculty and staff
3. Institutional will and capacity to use data and evidence
4. Technological tools and infrastructure appropriate to support student progress through guided pathways
5. Commitment to strategically targeted professional development that will be required to develop and implement pathways
6. State policy conditions that provide incentives, structures and supports for pathway design and implementation
7. Continuing action research agenda that examines the efficacy of guided pathways^{ix}

Figure 1 is an example of a guided pathway structure community colleges may implement to enhance student performance.

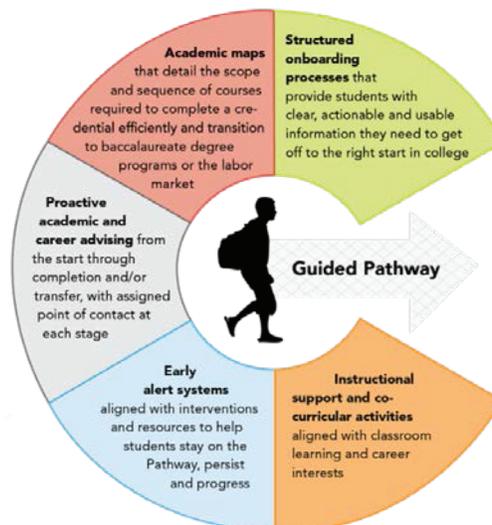


Figure 1: Guided Pathways



The Research Behind Pathways

Behavioral Science

According to behavioral psychology experts, students fail to make steady progress when faced with too many complex choices. Students experience indecision, procrastination, self-doubt, and paralysis.^{xi} People are better equipped to make complex decisions when thinking through options in a hierarchical fashion. Thus, to facilitate decision-making, it is crucial to provide students with a simplified set of options that contains clear information on costs and benefits to the students. A technique known as “active choice” may be utilized in which complex choices are broken down into manageable sets, requiring the individual to choose from among the sets.^{xii} By applying this decision-making model to community colleges, colleges will achieve better outcomes by streamlining bureaucratic procedures and creating clear plans for students outlining sequences and milestones which students should follow. Behavioral economics also indicates that students’ persistence in school can be positively influenced by feedback. Short reminders for first-year college students to fill out financial aid information has been linked to improved persistence.^{xiii}

Cognitive Science

Psychologists studying learning have demonstrated the importance of setting clear learning goals and providing students with concrete measures to demonstrate progression towards these goals.^{xiv} Furthermore, providing students with a holistic picture of the key topics within a specific course and how these topics interact helps improve learning.^{xv} Feedback also significantly improves student learning outcomes but only when feedback is appropriate, timely, and actionable.^{xvi}

Organizational Science

According to higher education organizational effectiveness literature, innovative organization practices have the greatest effect on student performance when implemented in conjunction with one another and in alignment with established organizational goals.^{xvii} Organizational goals, if not clearly defined, may lead to fragmentation of resources, hampering institutional performance. In community colleges, clearly defining programs with a consistent and coherent set of learning outcomes aligned with four-year institution and career advancement requirements helps ensure faculty and staff efforts pay off for students. Furthermore, high performing organizations should utilize measurement to improve their processes and further align their organizational goals. Tracking student’s progress towards achieving outcomes will enable colleges to gauge their programs’ effectiveness, and their students’ success, thereby allowing them to identify programs and support services in need of refinement.^{xviii}

Pathways for Texas Students

There are several emerging or existing state policies, as well as state and national initiatives focused on creating *guided pathways* for Texas students to guide students from K-12 through postsecondary education and into the workforce.

At the state level, policies, such as House Bill 5, create an opportunity for the pathways work. For example, Texas recently shifted from a 4x4 high school graduation model to the House Bill 5 Foundations Plan with Endorsements.^{xix} Additionally, Texas House Bill 18 is intended to ensure students receive college and career counseling to select the appropriate pathway (i.e. endorsement) for their individual needs.^{xx}



In conjunction with state policies, there are further pathways initiatives specifically targeting Texas students and institutions, such as the Texas Association of Community College and Texas Success Center Texas Pathways initiative.^{xxi} Finally, regional pathways efforts are underway to smooth transitions at the local level, including South Texas College Career Pathway Framework,^{xxii} the Charles A. Dana Center at UT Austin's New Mathways Project Transfer Champion Initiative, and E3 Alliance's Pathways of Promise initiative, which promotes HB5 success in Central Texas.

National research supports the pathways model. For example, the recent book by Thomas Bailey, Shanna Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins *Redesigning America's Community Colleges* outlines strategies for restructuring universities and community colleges using guided pathways.^{xxv} These strategies have been implemented in national pathways initiatives, such as Jobs for the *Future Pathways to Prosperity Initiative*,^{xxvi} American Association of Community Colleges *Pathways Project*, and Achieving the Dream *Structured Pathways Initiative*.^{xxviii}

Recommendations

Enhance Linkages between K-12 and Postsecondary Education

Expand partnerships between independent school districts and institutions of higher education

These partnerships may include offering joint professional development opportunities for high school and college faculty, counselors, and advisors to enhance collaboration and support common counseling and advising practices. Additionally, expanding college prep course partnerships between independent school districts and institutions of higher education and examining high school endorsements offered by districts and programs and fields of study offered at neighboring institutions can facilitate students as they continue along their chosen pathway. For example, House Bill 5's current College Prep math course is designed to help underprepared high school seniors become college ready in key areas, like math. However, this content could be expanded to align with higher education institutions' decisions to cover multiple math pathways. Projects like the University of Texas Dana Center's New Mathways Project aims to improve the student success and completion rates of those placed into developmental or beginning level math courses through accelerated mathematics pathways and a supportive student success course.^{xxix}

Develop and foster knowledge about transfer early and at important milestones in students' academic career

Increased efforts to enhance transfer college knowledge must be incorporated into community college orientations, first-year student courses, and individualized advising sessions. To further advance efforts to facilitate transfer, a deeper and more embedded relationship between community colleges and four-year institutions is necessary.^{xxx}

Increase Credits and Credential Portability

Improve existing policies to direct students onto a pathway

This can be done in multiple ways, including implementing policies that require advisors to support students in selecting a path early on and creating partnerships between two-year and four-year institutions to develop transfer pathways at community colleges that lead to multiple bachelor's degree programs at four-year universities.^{xxx}

Increase access to student-level data on a timely basis and conduct research on credit mobility

While data on student transfer exists, it is not easily accessible. To address questions of credit mobility, data accessibility must be increased to create better systems that link community college and university data.^{xxx}



*Improve Education and Workforce Alignment
Incentivize workforce engagement at regional level*

For example, school districts and community partners can work together at the regional level to offer internships, externships, job shadowing, and apprenticeships for course credit.

Allocate funds to support the scaling of proactive transition advising, ongoing orientation, and academic and career exploration

Proactive transition advising, ongoing orientation, and academic and career exploration are all necessary to promote pathways to college and career readiness and require financial support for successful implementation.

- ⁱ <https://www.texastribune.org/education/public-education/8th-grade-cohorts/state/texas/#ethnic>
- ⁱⁱ THECB, TEA, and NSC, 10/19/2015
- ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.greatertexasfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/GTF-Latino-Transfer-Infographic.pdf>
- ^{iv} THECB: Developmental Education Accountability Measures Data
- ^v Jenkins, D. (2013). Policy brief: Texas would benefit by improving its community college to bachelor's transfer system. Community College Research Center.
Retrieved from: http://www.edtx.org/uploads/general/EDTX_CCRTPolicyBrief.pdf
- ^{vi} Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
- ^{vii} Murdock: Changing Texas: Implications of Addressing or Ignoring the Texas Challenge
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- ^{ix} Texas Pathways Summit, Texas Success Center
- ^x http://completionbydesign.org/sites/default/files/resources/building_guided_pathways_toolkit_web.pdf
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- ^{xxii} <http://academicaffairs.southtexascollege.edu/highschool/pdf/D2D%20-%20Booklet%20-%20HB5%20Career%20Pathway%20Framework.pdf>
- ^{xxiii} <http://www.utdanacenter.org/higher-education/new-mathways-project/>
- ^{xxiv} <http://e3alliance.org/pathways-of-promise-promoting-hb-5-success/>
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- ^{xxvii} <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Resources/aaccprograms/pathways/Pages/default.aspx>
- ^{xxviii} <http://achievingthedream.org/intervention/13094/structured-pathways-initiative>
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- ^{xxx} <http://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/resources/improving-credit-mobility-508.pdf>