GREATER TEXAS FOUNDATION

ISSUE BRIEF:
Transitions from High School to College

Nearly 50 percent of Texas high school graduates immediately enroll in higher education following high school graduation.[9] Of all Texas 8th graders, only about half enroll in a college or university following high school, and only about 20 percent complete a credential within six years of high school graduation.[10] Therefore, four of every five 8th graders earn no sort of credential after high school, whether it is a workforce credential, an associate's degree, or any other postsecondary credential.[10] Completion of a postsecondary credential increases individual wages over a lifetime.[13] By 2020, 65 percent of all new jobs in America will require postsecondary education or skills.[3] Completion of postsecondary credentials provides the economy with an educated workforce to meet the 2030 demand outlined in the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's strategic plan *60X30TX*.[20] Therefore, successfully completing the transition from high school to college is a pivotal success point for students to complete a postsecondary credential and for the economy to thrive.

Disaggregated Transition Rates

Since 2011, the state of Texas has enrolled annually between 360,000 and 390,000 8th graders.[5,6] According to state 8th grade cohort data, among the half of Texas 8th graders who transition to higher education, one in five complete a credential.[10] Completion rates vary significantly by race and ethnicity: the rate is 1 in 12 for African American students, 1 in 13 for Hispanic students, and 1 in 14 for American Indian students, compared with 4 in 10 for Asian students and nearly 3 in 10 for White students.

Students classified as economically disadvantaged upon entering 8th grade are less likely to enroll in and complete postsecondary credentials compared to those classified as not disadvantaged.[10] Forty percent of disadvantaged students enroll in higher education, while nearly 66 percent of students who are not disadvantaged enroll in higher education. Overall, just 10 percent of 8th graders classified as economically disadvantaged ultimately complete a credential, compared to 30 percent of their peers.

Female students also enroll in and complete higher education at higher rates than male students. About 57 percent of females enroll in higher education, compared to 49 percent of males, and 24% of females overall complete a credential compared to 17% of males.

Developmental Education

Upon entering higher education, most higher education institutions require students to test in reading, writing, and mathematics to ensure students are prepared for the rigor of the college experience. For students who are deemed unprepared, developmental or remedial education courses are meant to transition them from high school courses to college courses.[16] Developmental education provides students assistance through non-degree-credit courses, tutoring, and other forms of aid to ensure the success of a student in performing freshman-level academic coursework primarily in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics.[16]

Developmental education is an important issue related to the successful transition of students from high school to postsecondary education and on to completion. Nationally, about 60 percent of incoming students are placed in at least one developmental education course.[1] In Texas, 45 percent of the entering Fall 2009 public four-year universities cohort required developmental education.[17] Within this cohort, 30 percent graduated in 2015.[17] At Texas public community colleges, the entering Fall 2009 cohort comprised 37 percent of students entering into community college requiring developmental education.[18] Within this cohort, 10 percent completed a credential within two years.[18]

College Credit in the High School Classroom

Dual credit coursework and early college high school (ECHS)* curriculum can lead students into and prepare students for the rigor of postsecondary education. Students who have the opportunity to earn college credits while in high school are likely to enroll in higher education after high school graduation.[22]

Dual Credit

Dual credit enrollment in Texas increased from 2012 to 2015 from nearly 100,000 students to 133,000 students.[19] Importantly, dual credit is the only entry point to postsecondary that is proportional to the actual student population in Texas. Of students enrolled in dual credit in Fall 2015, 38 percent were White, while the Texas state population is 43 percent White.[19,21] Similarly, 7.1 percent of dual credit students were Black, while the Texas state population is 12 percent Black, and 44 percent were Hispanic, while the Texas state population is 38 percent Hispanic.[19,21]

According to a study specific to Texas, nearly 50 percent of students who complete at least one college course through dual credit programs complete bachelor's degrees within six years of high school graduation.[22] Students who complete at least one dual enrollment course in high school are nearly twice as likely to attend any type of college as well as persist from the first year of college to the second year than students who do not participate in dual credit.[22] Eighty-five percent of the 2010 high school graduates who completed dual credit coursework in high school persisted one year into higher education.[15] Furthermore, dual credit programs more than double the likelihood that economically disadvantaged students will transition from high school to postsecondary education.[22]

Early College High Schools

In the 2016-2017 school year, Texas will have 164 early college high schools (ECHS).[12] ECHSs, like dual credit programs, aim to provide students the opportunity to earn college credit while in high school- sometimes leading to an associate's degree.[14] In a national study, 22 percent of an ECHS student cohort received an associate's degree compared to 2 percent of non-ECHS students.[2] Additionally, 77 percent of early college students enrolled in higher education after high school, compared to 67 percent of non-early college students.[2] Being a relatively recent model of education, large-scale data for Texas is needed to analyze and report upon ECHS graduates' postsecondary completion rates. Greater Texas Foundation has, however, analyzed postsecondary outcomes of student cohorts from its GTF Scholars program,+ which supports ECHS graduates, providing some data and insight on higher education persistence of ECHS students.

** Early college high schools aim to allow students least likely to attend college an opportunity to earn up to 60 college credit hours while completing a high school diploma.*

+ GTF Scholars is a scholarship program for Texas ECHS graduates. This program was developed and is funded by Greater Texas Foundation. It is the first scholarship program that specifically targets ECHS graduates, intending for these students to successfully transition to and complete a baccalaureate degree.+

According to the evaluation of the GTF Scholars program, about two-thirds of the two cohorts of scholars earned their associates degree upon completion of high school.[7] Additionally, persistence rates at universities are high for both cohorts: at least 95 percent of scholars persist through the first year, and at least 87 percent return for the second year.[7] On average, 73 percent of college credits that were earned during the high school experience are successfully applied to degree programs at students' respective universities.[7] These figures suggest that the ECHS model may help students transition successfully from high school to universities, particularly when combined with financial, academic, and social supports at the postsecondary level.

Barriers to Transition

For the 50 percent of students who choose to transition immediately from high school to college, the transition may not be streamlined.[9] There are barriers to access into postsecondary education that can hinder students from successfully transitioning. Nationally, a conservative estimate of 10 to 20 percent of students eligible to go to college "melt" away during the summer between high school graduation and fall enrollment into higher education institutions.[4] Two Texas organizations committed to addressing issues causing summer melt - Commit! and RGV Focus - have identified that some college-intending students do not always matriculate into higher education due to barriers like inadequate information about higher education and confusion about enrollment and financial aid processes.[11] For low-income students, even something like bacterial meningitis vaccines can be major barriers resulting in summer melt.[11] When examining hindrances to transitions from high school to college, these are examples of barriers that must also be overcome to prepare students for the postsecondary experience.

Conclusion

The transition from high school to higher education is not successful for nearly half of Texas students.[9] Although pathways such as dual credit opportunities and early high school colleges exist, only about 20 percent of what is already half of Texas high school graduates complete postsecondary degrees within six years of high school graduation.[10] To increase the number of students successfully transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education, pathways to transition from high school to higher education must be examined and issues must be mitigated.

Recommendations

To address transition issues, Greater Texas Foundation offers three recommendations to improve transition rates of students from high school graduation into higher education. The Texas Legislature, the Texas State Board of Education, the Texas Education Agency, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board should make collaborative efforts to ensure all students graduating high school have the academic preparation necessary to succeed in postsecondary education.

1. To reduce the number of students requiring developmental education upon entry to higher education institutions, students should be on a mathematics track to complete Algebra II (at a minimum) during high school, as it is shown to significantly increase likelihood of success in college.[8]

2. Continue to provide dual enrollment opportunities through early college high schools and other models to allow students to earn college credit in high school and prepare for the rigor of the postsecondary experience.
3. Increased and consistent efforts should be made to address additional barriers to student access to higher education. Data gathering, analyses, and sharing among and across institutions, i.e. school districts and colleges/universities, should continue to inform and deepen the evidence surrounding summer melt and additional barriers to student access into higher education.
4. Career and Technical Education Early College High Schools, Innovation Academies, and P-TECH High Schools are models of secondary education that expose students to opportunities to gain valuable work force credentials before completion of high school, in turn acting as a catalyst into the workforce or into higher education. These models should continue to be piloted then scaled across Texas based on success in student outcomes.

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