



SCHOOL DISTRICT SURVIVAL GUIDE
for the
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Rep. R. Green, Rep. P. King, Rep. G. Morrison & Rep. A. Wohlgemuth**

***IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:
SUPPLEMENTAL CURRICULUM***

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I. The Problems Facing Texas Public Schools:

Over the next biennium, Texas public schools are challenged to raise student achievement at the same time as the state budget suffers a critical shortfall. Schools will have to develop creative and cost-effective ways to meet new and more rigorous academic requirements because –

- ✓ The student population is rapidly growing and straining present capacity.
- ✓ New state assessments raise the bar higher for student achievement.
- ✓ Student promotion is now linked to passing state tests.
- ✓ Most or all students must be enrolled in the Recommended High School Program.
- ✓ The high school drop out rate must decrease, particularly for Hispanic students.
- ✓ More students must be prepared to enter college or post-secondary vocational training.
- ✓ The achievement gap between different student groups must be decreased or eliminated.
- ✓ The shortage of qualified teachers in some subject areas is growing while teacher retention is declining.

II. Improving Student Achievement - Identifying The Problems:

More and faster academic progress is required if public schools are to meet state goals for public education.

A variety of educational measures indicates that public schools fail to prepare many students for post-secondary experience – employment or college – and also fail to close the achievement gap between different student groups in high school; this failure is graphically depicted in the Texas Public Policy Foundation’s report, *State Goals for Student Achievement*. Independent analyses of curriculum and student performance suggest that insufficiently rigorous state curriculum undermines the efforts of public schools to meet the state goals for public education – academic excellence and equity.

The root cause for under-performance in Texas high schools can be found in elementary and middle schools, according to new information from the National Center for Educational accountability. *Relationship Between Early Grade Achievement & Student Success*, graphically demonstrates that the key to improving high school performance lies in establishing significantly higher goals for instruction and achievement in elementary and middle schools.

Examining student progress on 3rd, 5th, and 8th grade assessments, the Center’s report reveals that academically-intense instruction in early grades allows African-American and Hispanic students in Texas to close the achievement gap but that closing the gap, as well as achieving college readiness, is only possible if classroom instruction prepares students to attain the highest possible score on state assessments. Minimal differences noted between students enrolled in the college preparatory high school academics and the minimum program study suggest that the Recommended High School curriculum must be enriched if students are to be prepared for college and equipped to close the gap between racial/ethnic groups.

- *State Goals for Student Achievement*, Chris Patterson, Texas Public Policy Foundation, Summer Legislative Policy Conference, Texas Public Policy Foundation, Austin, TX, 2002. <http://www.tppf.org>
- *Relationship Between Early Grade Achievement & Student Success*, Omar Lopez, National Center for Educational Accountability, Summer Legislative Policy Conference, Texas Public Policy Foundation, Austin, TX, 2002. <http://www.tppf.org>

III. What does the Research Say About Curriculum & Achievement?

Research shows that high levels of student achievement are directly linked to an organized, detailed and intense academic curriculum.

Project Follow Through, a 20-year study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education to determine the most effective instruction for under-performing elementary students, reveals that high-poverty, low-performing students can perform at grade-level when students are given an academically intense curriculum coupled with organized, direct instruction. This research also reveals that affective curriculum, curriculum that seeks to change student behaviors, and constructivist curriculum, curriculum that is based on student-directed learning, have an adverse impact on the academic performance of high-poverty students.

Answers in the Toolbox, research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education to determine the strongest predictors of educational success for college students, revealed that high school curriculum exerts the greatest impact on student outcomes, an impact that far exceeds socio-economic factors (including family income and parents' education). The research also revealed that the impact of curriculum is far more pronounced for African-American and Latino students than for Anglo students; students from the lowest socio-economic groups who took academically intense academic instruction demonstrated better educational outcomes than a majority of students from most advantaged groups.

Research shows that the relationship between curriculum and achievement is powerful. Curriculum is the key for improving student achievement, particularly for Hispanic and African-American students, and for closing the achievement gap between student groups.

- *A Common Coherent Curriculum*, American Educator (American Federation of Teachers), 2002.
http://www.aft.org/american_educators/summer2002/curriculum.pdf
- *Overview: The Story Behind Project Follow Through*, effective school practices, Vol. 15, No.1, Winter 1995-96. <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adiiep/esp.htm>
- *Answers in the Toolbox*, U.S. Department of Education, 2000.
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Toolbox/toolbox.html>
- *You Can Always Look it up or Can You?* Core Knowledge, Vol. 13, #2/3, Spring/Summer 2002.
<http://www.coreknowledge.org/CKproto2/about/articles/lookItUp.htm>

IV. What does the Research Say about Closing the Achievement Gap?

Research shows that Hispanic and African-American students can rapidly close the achievement gap when given an organized, detailed and intense academic curriculum.

- *New Frontiers for a New Century: A National Overview*, The Education Trust, 2001. http://www.edtrust.org/main/documents/k16_spring01.pdf
- *Curriculum Equity in the Classroom*, Comprehensive Progress Report on Public Education Reform in Texas, The Lone Star Foundation, 2000.
http://www.educationnews.org/lsf_manuel_p.htm

V. What Resources are Available to Raise Student Achievement & Close the Gap?

Academic supplements are available at no or small cost and can be accessed through the Internet. Texas public schools can raise academic achievement in a time of dwindling resources and increased challenge.

A. Early Reading Instruction:

- *Foundations of the Texas Reading Initiative*, Texas Education Agency. <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/reading/practices/practices.html>
- *Put Reading First: Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*, Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (National Institute for Literacy), 2001: <http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/Cierra.pdf>
- *Hooked on Phonics: Learn to Read Program*. <http://www.hookedonphonics.com>

B. Mathematics Instruction:

- *Saxon Math*. <http://www.saxonpub.com>
- *Mathematics Content Standards for California Public Schools*, California State Board of Education. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/board/pdf/math.pdf>

C. Supplemental Core Curriculum for K-Grade 8:

- *Core Knowledge Sequence and a Report on its Alignment with the Texas Essential Knowledge & Skills*. <http://www.coreknowledge.org>

D. Supplemental Mathematics and Science for Middle and High School Students:

- TexPREP (Texas Prefreshman Engineering Program). <http://www.texprep.org>
- AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination). <http://www.utdanacenter.org/avid/intro.html>
- GEARUP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs). <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/gearup>

E. K-12 Distance Learning:

- United States Distance Learning Association. <http://www.usdla.org>
- Distance Learning Resource Network. <http://www.dlrn.org>
- American Distance Education Consortium, <http://www.adec.edu>
- TARGET Grants (*No Child Left Behind*) for Texas public schools, <http://www.tea.state.us/technology/target/nclb.html>.