

Assessing Performance

Spending And Learning In Texas Public Schools

By Sanjiv Jaggia and Vidisha Vachharajani

Published March 2004.

Over the last 25 years, Texas public schools have undergone comprehensive reform, and state funding has increased significantly.

Scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate strong gains for Texas elementary students and modest gains for middle school students. To determine what role funding has played in improving student performance and whether resources

really matter, the Texas Public Policy Foundation commissioned the Beacon Hill Institute at Suffolk University (BHI) to provide a model for evaluating spending and achievement, and to use this model for evaluating school districts throughout Texas. The model and results of this study can help guide development of effective education policy and efficient funding decisions.

The BHI Educational Assessment Model was designed to answer the following three questions:

- How is student performance affected by – prior performance demonstrated by the district, teachers’ education, teachers’ experience, teachers’ pay, student-teacher ratio, percentage of student population that is economically-disadvantaged, and percentage of students enrolled in special education?
- How is student performance affected by funding and allocation of funds?
- What school districts are most successful in overcoming the likelihood that student performance will be determined by the economic status of the student population and academic variables including past school performance and the percentage of students requiring special education?

The third question is very important because Texas holds public schools accountable for equipping all student groups with the skills necessary for educational success, and closing the achievement gap between students that is associated with low-income, race and ethnicity. This is also a central requirement of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The BHI model identifies school districts that are closing the achievement gap, adding educational value to compensate for the academic and economic disadvantages and producing higher levels of student performance beyond what the district has accomplished in the past.

BHI’s assessment of the performance of Texas public

school districts revealed the following:

- Prior performance of school districts was the strongest determinant of passing rates for state assessments, SAT/ACT scores, graduation rates and dropout rates.
- The economic status of the student population was the second strongest determinant of district performance on all outcomes measured.
- Increasing total district expenditure had no effect on passing rates for state assessments or, in some cases, worsened performance.
- Increasing total district expenditure worsened both SAT and ACT scores.
- Increasing district expenditure on instruction as a share of total expenditure generally improved student performance (except for grade 5 mathematics).
- Increasing district expenditure on leadership, teacher salaries and class size reduction generally did not improve student performance (the one exception was for grade 5 mathematics).
- Increasing teacher experience never improved student performance.

=====

This publication is available online at:

<http://www.texaspolicy.com/pdf/2004-03-19-BH-Educ.pdf>