



## Cooper rates high in math education

By Celinda Emison

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Cooper High School in Abilene is one of 28 Texas high schools that a research institute says teaches math well.

The Texas Public Policy Foundation, a nonprofit research institute that generates data on state issues and makes recommendations to lawmakers, calls Cooper a "best practices school." That means the school's methods for achieving high math scores on tests could be used as a model for other schools.

"We are very pleased to be included," said Cooper Principal Gail Gregg. "I attribute this to a very strong math department and strong leadership in that department."

TPPF representatives Wednesday presented results from a survey that highlights schools across the state as "best performance models" in math and science.

TPPF, however, also is urging schools to make reforms in the way they teach math and science after less-than-stellar test performances by high school students.

The survey included data from Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills standardized test scores from 2004 through 2006, and college entrance exams from 2003 and 2004 from the Texas Education Agency. In addition, schools and teachers were interviewed and TPPF officials visited campuses to gather additional data about each school, including scheduling, teacher characteristics and parental involvement.

All of the high or best performing schools were compared with schools across the state.

Jana Watson, head of the math department at Cooper High, pointed to these items as helping Cooper land on the list: high test scores, incentives that encourage students to take Advance Placement classes and posting grades online so that parents may keep track of their child's progress.

"I think the best thing we do in the math department at Cooper High School is that we work together using consistent policies, communicating with each other about content and methods and helping each other do better jobs of teaching math to our students," Watson said. "We are a team."

As a result of the survey results, the TPPF has come up with a reform plan to attract more math and science teachers from the private sector, increase pay, raise student performance and prepare students for college.

One of the most significant reforms the TPPF is calling for is in teacher certification.

"We have found out that there are many retired professionals who have worked in various industries specializing in math and science. But right now, there are too many barriers to become certified," said TPPF Education Policy Analyst Brooke Dollens Terry.

Currently, it costs a professional with a bachelor's degree around \$4,000 to become certified.

"We recommend a cheaper way to get professionals certified and get them in the classroom," Terry said.

Pay for math and science teachers also is an issue for professionals entering the teaching field for the first time from private sector positions in accounting or engineering. The TPPF is encouraging districts to increase pay for math and science teachers and to offer bonuses or incentives based on student performance.

Pay increases can go hand-in-hand with larger class sizes.

"In high schools, larger class sizes allow the district to hire fewer and better teachers," said TPPF Education Policy Analyst Jamie Story. "These schools have decided that larger classes and higher pay are a good trade off."

The Texas Public Policy Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute that is funded by hundreds of individuals, foundations and corporations. The TPPF does not accept government funds or contributions to influence the outcomes of its research.



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