



Brought to you by Prime Time Newspapers

- [Automotive](#)
- [Employment](#)
- [Garage Sales](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Shop Here Now!](#)
- [EZ- Nav - Links](#)

[ClickitSA.com - Main Page](#)

[CLICKITSA.COM NEWS](#)

[Bulverde Community News](#)

[The Herald - Northeast](#)

[Hill Country View](#)

[Northwest Weekly](#)

[North San Antonio Times](#)

[North Central News](#)

[News](#)

[Web Exclusive](#)

[Your News](#)

[Sports](#)

[Education](#)

[Lifestyles](#)

[Entertainment](#)

[Opinion](#)

[Calendar](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Crime](#)

[Pet of the week](#)

[Southside Reporter](#)

[Medical Patriot](#)

[Web Exclusives](#)

[SPECIALTY PUBLICATIONS](#)

[Daily Commercial Recorder](#)

[Recorder Bargain Book](#)

[Military Newspapers](#)

[SHOPPING](#)

[Coupons](#)

[SA Business On Line](#)

[Dining & Entertainment](#)

[Directories/Guides](#)

[Place an Online Ad](#)

[Place a Newspaper only Ad](#)

[SPECIAL SECTIONS](#)

[Movies](#)

[Corporate Information](#)

[Sitemap](#)

Submit News Here!

FREE MOVIES

[North Central News - North Central News](#)

Teaching kids math, science: not rocket science

Thursday, 03 April 2008



Jamie Story
Guest Commentary

Math and science are critical skills in the 21st century economy. Given our current shortcomings in these areas, Texans should be alarmed.

In 2007, Texas students ranked 38th in the nation on the math section of the SAT, gaining only two points on the national average during the last 10 years. Only 41 percent of ACT-tested students in Texas are ready for college-level algebra, while a mere 24 percent are prepared for college-level biology. It is no surprise, then, that more than one-third of freshmen entering Texas public colleges and universities require remedial education.

But not all the news is bad about Texas public schools when it comes to math and science performance. A new report from the Texas Public Policy Foundation identifies dozens of high schools from across the state that are markedly improving math and science test scores for a diverse group of students.

After selecting the schools through standardized test and college entrance exam data, researchers conducted surveys, interviews, and site visits to identify best practices that can be implemented in all Texas high schools.

Contrary to the teacher associations' rhetoric, improved student performance does not require increased taxpayer dollars and across-the-board teacher pay hikes. In fact, schools identified in the report spend 16 percent less per student than the state average. At the same time, they pay their teachers more than the typical Texas teacher.

How is this possible? First, these best practice schools commit 68 percent of resources to classroom instruction, compared to 58 percent statewide. The most successful schools also have slightly larger math and science classes, which enable them to pay teachers more while spending less money overall. With prior research showing much greater results from increasing teacher quality than from decreasing class sizes, these schools are making a logical tradeoff.

Teachers must agree, as average teacher experience at these schools is higher than in other Texas high schools. Forty percent of the surveyed schools provide stipends to recruit and retain math and science teachers. And the science coordinator at the school producing the greatest improvement in science, Kerr High School in Houston, cited low turnover as one of the reasons for the program's success.

Differences for these schools extend beyond spending practices. In a finding that teacher associations may celebrate, the best practice schools give TAKS benchmarks – or practice tests – fewer than three times per year, compared to six times per year in the typical Texas school. Successful schools place an emphasis on teaching the curriculum well; TAKS preparation is focused on the students who need it most.

One of the most important, if less tangible, findings is that best practice schools foster high parental involvement, largely through frequent communication with parents. Several of the schools have implemented online systems through which parents can check their child's progress in real time.

At Health Careers High School in San Antonio, students and parents can even set e-mail or text

COMMUNITY CALENDAR



message alerts to trigger when the student's grade falls below a certain level.

Schools of choice fared especially well in the study. One-third of the schools include magnet programs, in which students choose to enroll in a school other than the one to which they're assigned. These schools reported that school choice results in particularly high parental involvement, fewer discipline problems, and greater student motivation.

Among the report's dozens of observations and recommendations, perhaps the most astonishing finding is that none of the best practices require any changes in law by the legislature or Texas Education Agency. These innovative public schools are working within existing budgetary and legal guidelines to implement strategies that provide greater support to teachers and result in greater achievement for students.

Texas high schools don't have to wait two years for the Texas Legislature to fix math and science education. These best practice schools have shown how they can do it today.

Jamie Story is an education policy analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a non-profit, free-market research institute based in Austin. Her e-mail is jstory@texaspolicy.com.

[Close Window](#)

Directories Plus

place an ad
24/7
build an online only
ad with photos

Find a HOME
Find a REALTOR®
R SAVOR
SAN ANTONIO
BOARD OF REALTORS®

Get Your 'E' On!
•Domain Name
•Email & Webmail
•Virus Protection
•Blogging & More
All for only \$0.50/Day!

Rent Movies
From
Netflix
✓ Only \$8.99/mo.
Click here

FREE!
PRINT YOUR OWN
COUPONS!