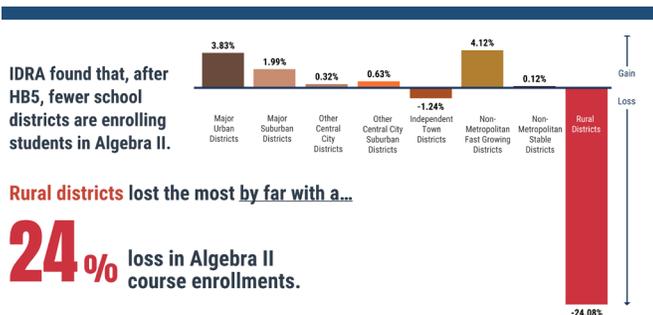


College Preparation and Access that Expands Opportunities

All students should be prepared for success in college so they can determine their own futures. Research on the 21st Century workforce indicates most jobs require some level of education beyond high school. Yet students of color and students from families with limited incomes continue to face barriers to rigorous college preparation, access and success.

Many Texas students Face Barriers to Higher Education

Texas students face numerous preparing for and accessing higher education.



College Preparation Barriers – Black students and Latino students face barriers to college readiness in high school and access to college. They are twice as likely as their White peers to be pushed out of high school without obtaining a diploma due to disproportionate discipline, unfair curricular tracking, and low and inequitable funding (Johnson, 2020).

Many students also do not have access to the advanced courses they need to enroll in college. In 2013, Texas weakened high school graduation requirements with House Bill 5. Immediately, the percentage of rural Texas students enrolled in Algebra II – a crucial course for college readiness – dropped compared to suburban and urban students (Bojorquez, 2018).



College Access Barriers – Texas deregulated public university tuition in 2003, which increased already high financial barriers to college, especially for students in families with low incomes and students of color. Policies and

practices that overly punish, push out, and track students of color, English learners, and students from families with limited incomes put them at a severe disadvantage for post-secondary readiness, job prospects and lifetime earnings.

Higher Education Matters for Texas Students

Texas has stagnated in its progress toward the state's ambitious plan to graduate 60% of the Texas population with a postsecondary credential by 2030, or TX 60x30. For the state to get on track, it must expand opportunities for high school graduation and higher education for students of color, English learners and students from families with limited incomes (IDRA, 2019a, 2019b).

When people have access to higher education, they have better health outcomes, can be more financially stable and are more civically engaged. They also make the state economy more robust with higher earnings and tax contributions.

6 Policies that Lead to Higher Dropout Rates

Exclusionary Discipline

There is no research to support that exclusionary discipline makes schools any safer. Suspension and other exclusionary discipline practices have been linked to a higher likelihood of dropping out or not graduating on time. Minority students, particularly Black students, are disproportionately subject to exclusionary discipline practices. Keeping students out of the classroom only halts their learning.

See article: <https://www.idra.org/2018/05/20/Exclusionary-Discipline-Practices-Linked-to-Higher-Risk-of-Dropping-Out-or-Not-Graduating-on-Time/>

In-grade Retention

Retained students have a 14 percent to 50 percent higher risk of dropping out, and the risk increases to 80 percent for those who have been retained twice. Young children who are expelled or suspended are up to 10 times more likely to drop out, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration.

See in-grade retention article: <https://www.idra.org/2018/05/20/In-Grade-Retention-Linked-to-Higher-Risk-of-Dropping-Out-or-Not-Graduating-on-Time/>

Low Funding & Insufficient Support for ELs

English learners are among the most likely to drop out. They are the fastest-growing segment of students, but they are one of the lowest academically performing, and the achievement gap widens as students progress through school. Texas is significantly underfunding EL education, and only two of five teachers of ELs are fully certified. Only one out of 10 ELs is prepared to go to college.

See IDRA EL report: <https://www.idra.org/2018/05/20/EL-Report/>

Unfair & Insufficient Funding

To be effective, schools must have quality teaching and rigorous, up-to-date curricula. Schools depend on fair funding to serve all of their students each school day. Equitable funding makes a difference. In Texas, poor school districts have had attrition rates that were more than double those of high-wealth districts.

See Fair Funding for the Common Good: <https://www.idra.org/2018/05/20/Fair-Funding-for-the-Common-Good/>

Watered-Down, Non-College Prep Curricula

Research shows that expectations of students' abilities to succeed are "vital" to their education. For example, students whose parents had not gone to college were 1.6 times more likely to enroll in a university if the parent reported higher math courses in high school. One district took high expectations district-wide by considering all students college material and reaching them accordingly. They cut dropout rates in half and increased college-going rates.

See College Bound report: <https://www.idra.org/2018/05/20/College-Bound-Report/>

Testing that is High-Stakes

A large body of research says that one test should never be used as a sole criterion for high-stakes decisions about students. Balance on a single measure fails to consider multiple factors that impact achievement. In 2017, 10,622 Texas seniors who failed at least one exam were able to graduate when a temporary policy let school officials consider their course grades and other factors.

See Institute Committee on a National Testing Strategy: <https://www.idra.org/2018/05/20/Testing-that-is-High-Stakes/>

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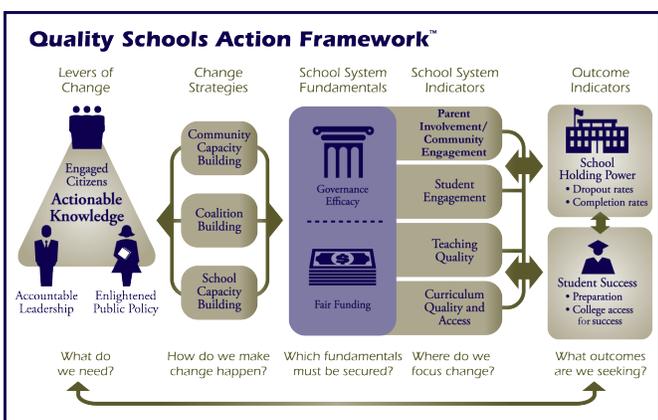
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Everyone benefits from expanding students' preparation and access to higher education.

Policy Recommendations for Texas

The Texas Legislature should...

- Revise high school graduation pathways and requirements to ensure all students receive rigorous curriculum, including Algebra II, for college readiness.
- Develop data monitoring systems for TEA to collect and report high school endorsement data.
- Promote policies that provide additional supports for counselor-student ratios, counselor compensation and required training.
- Continue to graduate students who prove their well-rounded academic qualifications to independent graduation committees (IGCs).
- Protect funding public colleges and universities and college grant programs, including the TEXAS Grant and Texas Educational Opportunity Grant programs.
- Maintain the Top Ten Percent Plan without changes. The Top Ten Percent Plan enables Texas students graduating in the top 10% of their class to gain automatic admission to public colleges. The plan has increased postsecondary access significantly to Black and Latino students across Texas.
- Protect and expand access to higher education for undocumented and DACA-recipient students by keeping in-state tuition eligibility and increasing their access to state and institutional financial aid.



- Require institutional faculty diversity plans that are connected to funding.
- Allocate federal and state funding for college student emergencies and crises.
- Provide accelerated learning opportunities and other support to ensure that all COVID-19-era students are college-ready.

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