



# SREB

## Five Years of Enhanced *HSTW* in Texas

Raising Achievement and Preparing  
Students for College and Careers Through  
Dedicated Implementation of the *HSTW*  
Key Practices

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Southern  
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# Introduction

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)<sup>1</sup> joined hands in 2005 to enhance dramatically implementation of the *High Schools That Work (HSTW)* improvement design in the state. Between 2005 and 2010, nearly 50 high schools in five cohorts joined the Texas Enhanced *HSTW* Network to adopt this intensive improvement design. (See Appendix A for a list of all schools and cohorts participating in the Texas Enhanced *HSTW* Network.)

The new partnership entailed funding from a TEA grant and the assignment of a full-time *HSTW* state coordinator, who works in collaboration with *HSTW* consultants to support schools in implementing the reform design, to the Region XIII Education Service Center in Austin. Schools in the Enhanced *HSTW* Network made a commitment to participate in Technical Assistance Visits (TAVs)<sup>2</sup> and Site Development Workshops, to receive professional development and on-site coaching support from *HSTW* school improvement consultants and to reliably implement the *HSTW* Key Practices for raising student achievement. (See Appendix B for a description of the *HSTW* Key Practices and Goals.) Each year, the state coordinator and *HSTW* consultants review the progress schools are making and develop a work plan for strengthening support and progress in the coming year.

A full-time guidance and advisement specialist also was added to the staff at the Texas Enhanced *HSTW* Network office to meet a critical need of the Enhanced Network schools — improving guidance and advisement to help students plan and complete challenging programs of study and to ensure that more students remain in school until graduation. The schools have participated in statewide guidance workshops and have received support from the guidance specialist as they work to establish guidance and advisory systems with adult mentors to promote the success of every student.

**The primary goal of these intensified services was to elevate *HSTW* schools in Texas to the Recognized and Exemplary levels in the state accountability program — the two highest levels of performance.**

The partnership between SREB and the TEA expanded further in 2009, when the first cohort of middle grades schools joined the Texas Enhanced *Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW)* Network. These middle grades schools, which feed into Texas Enhanced *HSTW* sites, are implementing *MMGW* Key Practices for preparing students to succeed in rigorous academic courses in high school. (See Appendix B for a description of the *MMGW* Key Practices and Goals.)

## Highlights of Improvements in the Texas Enhanced *HSTW* and *MMGW* Networks

As a group, schools in the Enhanced *HSTW* Network are making progress in advancing student achievement. Schools that have been participating in the network since 2005 have made greater gains in the percentage of students meeting standards in English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies than average gains across the state. **Schools that are implementing the *HSTW* and *MMGW* school improvement designs in a reliable way are seeing results and have gained confidence that the designs can and do work.** As a result, they are establishing bolder goals that will enable them to make an even greater impact on student performance in the years ahead.

Many Enhanced Network schools have made advances as a result of outstanding teacher participation and collaboration. It makes a difference when teachers understand and embrace the *HSTW* school improvement model. Teachers need time to meet together and plan together to determine what is best for each student. They need to look at state and *HSTW* data to find patterns of achievement and to build on those successes in ensuring that all students are prepared for the future. A real impact can be made when a school faculty takes ownership, sets targets and improves school and classroom practices.

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1 The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization based in Atlanta, Georgia, that works with member states to improve pre-K-12 and higher education. SREB was created in 1948 by Southern governors and legislatures to help leaders in education and government work cooperatively to advance education and improve the social and economic life of the region. Its many programs and initiatives share a single, powerful mission: to help the region lead the nation in educational progress. SREB has 16 member states: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

2 For more than 20 years, SREB has refined a process that involves an external team of educators and community members conducting a review of school and classroom practices. The Technical Assistance Visit (TAV) and follow-up report give school leaders a clear picture of the school's progress in school reform and recommend strategies for moving forward to implement the *HSTW* Key Practices. The TAV team reviews school data; interviews leaders, teachers and students; and observes classroom instruction before providing a debriefing of its findings.

Several Texas Enhanced *HSTW* schools that deeply implemented the design have been recognized for significant improvements in student achievement and in school and classroom practices.

- **Lubbock-Cooper High School** achieved Blue Ribbon School status from the U.S. Department of Education in 2008. The school has made progress in several areas of the *HSTW* design, including establishing a guidance and advisement program, requiring a senior project for graduation, and using more rigorous classroom assignments and assessments.
- **Mabank High School** increased the percentage of students meeting college-readiness standards in English/language arts and mathematics from 38 to 81 percent and from 43 to 78 percent, respectively, between 2006 and 2008. This school bought into the *HSTW* concept that more students need to complete a college-preparatory academic core. The school stopped using socioeconomic data as an excuse for low performance and moved students into advanced-level courses. Each year, Mabank reduced the number of students taking low-level courses, increased the use of higher-order questioning and shifted from a goal of having students pass state minimum-skills tests to one of having all students meet college- and career-readiness standards. The school culture changed from enabling at-risk students to ensuring that all students are successful. The *HSTW* TAV report became the school's roadmap for improvement.
- The Communities Foundation of Texas and SREB recognized **Los Fresnos High School** for effectively blending academic and career/technical (CT) studies — one of the Key Practices of the *HSTW* design. The school implemented another major feature of the *HSTW* design by increasing the use of authentic problems and projects from CT fields to make learning real in academic courses and to strengthen academic skills in CT courses.
- **South Grand Prairie High School** increased the percentage of students meeting the passing standards on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) by 12 percentage points in English/language arts, 24 points in mathematics, 20 points in science and 13 points in social studies between 2007 and 2010.
- **Diboll High School** increased the percentage of students meeting standards on the TAKS science test by 19 points between 2006 and 2010, compared with a statewide average gain of 13 points.
- **Graham High School** also increased the percentage of students passing the TAKS science test by 19 points between 2007 and 2010.
- **Burton High School's** progress resulted in the school moving from a state rating of Academically Unacceptable when it joined the network to a rating of Recognized just a year later. The percentages of its students passing the TAKS English/language arts and social studies tests were above the state averages in 2010.
- **The Summit High School**, an alternative school, discovered that interdisciplinary project-based learning engaged and motivated students and resulted in improvement in student achievement on state exams.
- **West Orange-Stark High School** discovered that a new principal with a commitment to implementation of the *HSTW* design and the ability to engage the faculty in the process was the key ingredient needed to make greater progress and to receive the Academically Acceptable rating in 2010.

## SREB's School Improvement Initiatives

*High Schools That Work (HSTW)* is the nation's largest school improvement initiative for high schools, working with more than 1,200 sites in 30 states and the District of Columbia to improve achievement, graduation rates, and students' readiness for college and careers. This program is based on the belief that most students can master complex academic and technical concepts if schools create an environment that encourages students to make the effort to succeed. The *HSTW* Goals, Key Practices and Key Conditions provide a framework for whole-school improvement in participating schools and districts.

SREB's middle grades consortium, *Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW)*, works with nearly 500 schools in 22 states to raise the academic achievement of middle grades students and to increase the percentages of students who are prepared for challenging high school studies. Schools implement a comprehensive framework that emphasizes rigorous academic courses and continuous school improvement.

- The principal at **Lubbock-Cooper Middle School**, who was a former assistant principal at Lubbock-Cooper High School, saw the need for middle grades and high schools to work together and believes that the *MMGW* initiative that his school adopted in 2010 will result in more students leaving middle grades prepared for high school studies.
- **Mount Pleasant Junior High School** is requiring students who fail to produce work that meet standards or who fail exams to redo work and to participate in relearning assignments. The school has seen a dramatic decline in the percentage of students failing at least one course.
- **Southmore Intermediate School** leaders and teachers are working with high school teachers who will teach their students in grade nine to ensure students are prepared to succeed in challenging high school studies.
- Leaders and teachers at **Mabank Junior High School** have taken steps to implement several *MMGW* interventions with the goal of increasing dramatically the percentage of students at the Commendable level by 2012. The school was named an Exemplary campus for the first time in 2009-2010.

## Progress at Schools Having the Most Time in the Network

SREB experience has shown that effective whole-school redesign requires at least three to five years of committed effort. Therefore, this report highlights the accomplishments of schools in Cohorts I and II, which joined the Enhanced *HSTW* Network in 2005 and 2007.

The schools in Cohorts I and II have implemented substantial reform efforts. After participating in the network, 20 of 23 schools<sup>3</sup> achieved the level of Academically Acceptable or above in 2009. Thirteen schools met the primary goal of the Enhanced Network by earning a Recognized or an Exemplary rating from the TEA. At the beginning of the Enhanced *HSTW* Network in 2005, lower percentages of schools in Cohort I than in the state as a whole were rated Recognized or Exemplary — the two highest accountability ratings. By the end of 2009, the Enhanced Network schools had caught and outpaced schools in the state as a whole — 57 percent of network schools compared with 55 percent of all Texas schools were rated Recognized or Exemplary. (See Table 1.)

**Table 1:**  
**Accountability Ratings: Texas Enhanced *HSTW* Network Cohorts I and II and All Texas High Schools, 2005 and 2009**

Accountability Rating	<i>HSTW</i> Enhanced Network Schools			All Texas High Schools		
	2005	2009	Change (percentage points)	2005	2009	Change (percentage points)
Academically Unacceptable	1 (4%)	3* (13%)	+9	45 (4%)	74 (6%)	+2
Academically Acceptable	21 (91%)	7 (30%)	-64	961 (83%)	462 (39%)	-44
Recognized or Exemplary (Goal of Enhanced Network Schools)	1 (4%)	13 (57%)	+53	153 (13%)	657 (55%)	+42

\* The three Academically Unacceptable schools are in Cohort II, which has been implementing reform efforts for less time.

Source: Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System

Schools in the Enhanced *HSTW* Network made substantial gains in student achievement on the TAKS. **On average, the increases in the percentages of students meeting standards on each of the four TAKS tests — as well as the percentage meeting standards on *all* four tests — out-paced the statewide average increases.** (See Tables 2 and 3.)

<sup>3</sup> The two alternative schools do not receive state ratings.

**Table 2:  
Percentages of Students Meeting Standards on Each TAKS Test: Cohorts I and II, 2005 and 2010**

High School	English/Language Arts			Mathematics			Science			Social Studies		
	2005	2010	Change (percentage points)	2005	2010	Change (percentage points)	2005	2010	Change (percentage points)	2005	2010	Change (percentage points)
Barbara Jordan	76%	91%	15	48%	73%	25	50%	78%	28	85%	95%	10
Birdville	83	94	11	70	80	10	76	84	8	94	97	3
Burton	59	94	35	53	80	27	56	81	25	81	96	15
Diboll	84	94	10	63	79	16	59	85	26	81	96	15
Galena Park	71	91	20	53	87	34	53	86	33	85	99	14
Graham	86	96	10	71	86	15	73	93	20	91	95	4
Haltom	80	89	9	61	67	6	68	75	7	91	95	4
Iowa Park	88	95	7	76	77	1	81	82	1	95	99	4
J.M. Hanks	83	94	11	62	80	18	58	81	23	86	97	11
Kermit	60	82	22	49	71	22	44	67	23	72	88	16
La Villa	67	91	24	34	72	38	38	75	37	84	94	10
Law Enforcement/ Criminal Justice	88	99	11	68	82	14	63	95	32	96	99	3
Los Fresnos	79	94	15	66	90	24	60	91	31	79	96	17
Lubbock-Cooper	96	96	0	84	90	6	85	94	9	99	96	-3
Mabank	90	97	7	75	83	8	68	90	22	95	99	4
Memorial	90	95	5	69	81	12	71	82	11	93	97	4
Mount Pleasant	77	92	15	56	77	21	60	83	23	83	96	13
Phyllis Wheatley	65	76	11	31	61	30	38	59	21	73	91	18
Reagan	63	80	17	37	61	24	34	68	34	75	94	19
Richland	85	93	8	70	79	9	75	84	9	94	96	2
Sam Rayburn	74	87	13	56	68	12	60	71	11	88	93	5
South Grand Prairie	75	95	20	66	88	22	62	88	26	86	97	11
West Orange-Stark	83	89	6	52	52	0	58	65	7	91	84	-7
<b>TX Enhanced HSTW Network Average</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>State Average</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>8</b>

Source: Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System



**Table 3:  
Percentages of Students Meeting Standards on All Four TAKS Tests:  
Cohorts I and II, 2005 and 2010**

Network Schools (Ranked by Percentage-Point Gain)	2005 All Tests	2010 All Tests	Change (percentage points)
Galena Park High School*	37%	79%	42
La Villa High School*	21	63	42
Burton High School*	35	73	38
Los Fresnos High School*	47	82	35
Barbara Jordan High School	34	67	33
Memorial High School	43	75	32
South Grand Prairie High School*	48	80	32
Reagan High School	23	54	31
J. M. Hanks High School	44	73	29
Phyllis Wheatley High School	19	48	29
Graham High School ✓	58	84	26
Kermit High School	34	59	25
Sam Rayburn High School ✓	41	61	20
Mount Pleasant High School ✓	52	71	19
Mabank High School ✓	62	80	18
Birdville High School ✓	58	75	17
Richland High School ✓	58	75	17
<b>State High School Average</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>15</b>
West Orange-Stark High School	36	51	15
Lubbock-Cooper High School	75	88	13
Haltom High School	49	60	11
Iowa Park High School	64	71	7
Diboll High School	67	72	5
Law Enforcement/Criminal Justice	79	81	2

\* These schools improved the percentage of students meeting standards on all four TAKS tests by at least 29 points between 2005 and 2010 and participated in both the 2008 and the 2010 *HSTW* Assessments.

✓ These schools improved the percentage of students meeting standards on all four TAKS tests by 16 to 28 points between 2005 and 2010 and participated in both the 2008 and the 2010 *HSTW* Assessments.

Source: Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System

**Nearly three-fourths of the Cohort I and Cohort II schools in the Texas Enhanced *HSTW* Network made greater gains in the percentage of students meeting standards on all four TAKS tests than the statewide average gain.** Furthermore, *HSTW* Assessment data show that Cohort I and Cohort II schools that more deeply implemented the *HSTW* design made greater gains in the percentage of students meeting standards on the TAKS than schools implemented the design to a lesser extent.

Ten schools in Cohorts I and II increased the percentage of students meeting standards on all four TAKS tests by at least 29 points between 2005 and 2010. Of these 10 schools, five participated in both the 2008 and 2010 *HSTW* Assessment. (See schools marked with an asterisk in Table 3.) *HSTW* Assessment results show that this group of schools made considerable progress in implementing the school and classroom practices that *HSTW* advocates — practices that have proven to be highly predictive of student achievement. Between 2008 and 2010, this group improved the percentages of students experiencing an emphasis on literacy across the curriculum, engaging mathematics instruction, reading and writing for learning, high expectations in the classroom, and quality CT courses with embedded academics. Students at these schools also were more likely to perceive high school as important to their future in 2010 than in 2008. (See Table 4.)

**Table 4:**  
**Progress in Implementing Select *HSTW* Indicators of School Improvement:**  
**Burton, Galena Park, La Villa, Los Fresnos and South Grand Prairie High Schools**

	2008 (n=233)	2010 (n=233)
Percentage of students experiencing an intensive emphasis on select <i>HSTW</i> indices:		
High Expectations	12%	18%
Literacy	24	30
Numeracy	36	45
Integrating Academics into CT	14	27
Quality CT Class	13	27
Guidance and Advisement	29	37
Perceived Importance of High School	30	39

Source: 2008 and 2010 *HSTW* Assessments, SREB

Seven schools in Cohorts I and II increased the percentage of students meeting standards on all four TAKS tests by 16 to 28 points between 2005 and 2010. Of these seven schools, six participated in both the 2008 and 2010 *HSTW* Assessment. (See schools marked with a checkmark in Table 3.) Between 2008 and 2010, this group of schools improved the percentages of students experiencing engaging science instruction, quality CT classes, and integration of academic and CT instruction. The schools also increased the percentage of teachers reporting an intensive schoolwide emphasis on continuous improvement. (See Table 5.) While these schools made some progress in implementing key *HSTW* practices, they did not make as much progress as schools that experienced gains of at least 29 points on the TAKS.

**Table 5:**  
**Progress in Implementing Select *HSTW* Indicators of School Improvement:**  
**Birdville, Graham, Mabank, Mount Pleasant, Richland and Sam Rayburn High Schools**

	2008 (n=570)	2010 (n=343)
Percentage of students experiencing an intensive emphasis on the <i>HSTW</i> indices:		
Engaging Science	9%	15%
Integrating Academics into CT	13	25
Quality CT Class	21	32
Continuous Improvement ( <i>percentage of teachers reporting intensive emphasis</i> )	31	39

Source: 2008 and 2010 *HSTW* Assessments, SREB

In addition to having more students meeting state standards, schools in Cohorts I and II of the Texas Enhanced *HSTW* Network also made progress in getting more students to pass the TAKS at the Commended level, which is considerably above the passing standard. (See Table 6.)

**Table 6:  
Percentage of Students Scoring at the Commended Level on the TAKS: Cohorts I and II, 2005 and 2010**

Content Area	2005 Commended	2010 Commended	Percentage-Point Gain
English/Language Arts	12%	22%	10
Mathematics	9	18	9
Science	4	13	9
Social Studies	20	42	22
All Content Areas	1	3	2

Note: Commended performance is considerably above the state passing standard and shows thorough understanding of the knowledge and skills at the grade level tested.

Source: Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System

Texas has developed a college-readiness level on the TAKS as part of the Texas Success Initiative (TSI).<sup>4</sup> Students who score at the college-readiness level in reading and mathematics are prepared for success in college-level courses. Schools in Cohorts I and II of the Texas Enhanced *HSTW* Network are outpacing the state in increasing the percentages of college-ready students. (See Table 7.)

**Table 7:  
Percentages of Students Meeting Texas Success Initiative College-Readiness Standards on the TAKS:  
Cohorts I and II, 2005 and 2010**

	Reading			Mathematics		
	2005	2010	Change (percentage points)	2010	2009	Change (percentage points)
Enhanced Network Cohorts I and II	32%	57%	25	41%	61%	20
All Texas High Schools	39	60	21	48	66	18

Source: Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System

The remainder of this report provides information about specific changes and improvements taking place at schools in the Texas Enhanced *HSTW* and *MMGW* networks.

<sup>4</sup> The Texas Success Initiative (TSI) is required by Texas law to ensure that students enrolled in Texas public colleges have the academic skills needed to perform effectively in college-level coursework. TSI includes a testing component designed to identify and provide diagnostic information about the reading, mathematics and writing skills of each student. Eleventh-graders who achieve a high score on the TAKS can be exempt from the TSI upon entering college.

## A Closer Look at Accomplishments of *HSTW* Enhanced Network Schools

Schools see results when they implement the *HSTW* design in a reliable way. Although they can make some progress by adopting various parts of the model, they can produce truly significant results by using the entire *HSTW* comprehensive design to change the school culture, raise achievement and graduation rates, improve attendance and behavior, and provide guidance and extra help to prepare students for the future.

The following vignettes from high schools in Cohorts I and II illustrate the promising work being done across the Enhanced *HSTW* Network. The descriptions are designed to shed light on gains already made and progress to be expected as these schools continue to implement their *HSTW* school improvement plans. **As they continue to change the school culture, the schools will see additional increases in student achievement and graduation rates.** Students will be more dedicated to their high school studies and will take more responsibility for acquiring the academic, technical and personal skills needed for the workplace and further education.

These schools have made progress by shifting the focus from simply doing well enough to pass state assessments to using the *HSTW* Key Practices, the recommended actions in *HSTW* TAV reports and the support of *HSTW* school improvement consultants to implement programs and practices that will prepare students for success after high school graduation.

### Galena Park High School

#### *Galena Park, Texas*

Since joining the Enhanced *HSTW* Network in 2005, **Galena Park High School** (GPHS) has concentrated on applying the *HSTW* Key Practices in grade nine to help freshmen make the transition to challenging high school studies. The school's actions have included:

- organizing interdisciplinary teams of teachers to work together to plan curriculum, instruction in ways that support students to meet grade-level standards. Teachers for the ninth grade were selected for their skills in working with at-risk students.
- holding students to standards and making expectations clear. Students at GPHS who do not meet the standards are re-taught and must redo the work until it meets standards. Zeros are not permitted.
- aligning classroom learning, assignments and assessments to grade-level work and college-readiness standards. GPHS teachers analyze the quality of assignments and assessments. They also share work to integrate academic and career instruction and to ensure rigor across disciplines. Posters are displayed in the classrooms to help students understand connections between their subjects.
- participating in professional development, delivered by an *HSTW* school improvement consultant, on interdisciplinary teaming and standards-based grading.

The school discovered what several hundred *HSTW* sites have found: If adults at the school expect students to learn and if they do a better job of planning instruction, engaging students in their studies, holding students to standards, offering extra help and giving students reasons to stay in school, the outcome will be higher achievement.

GPHS showed increases in TAKS achievement, including a 13 percentage-point gain in mathematics, between 2007-2008 and 2009-2010. The passing rate in core courses also increased between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, and attendance remained high at 95 percent. The school showed a substantial decline in discipline referrals (from 1,269 in 2007-2008 to 467 in 2008-2009). More than 30 percent of ninth-graders were recognized on the A/B honor roll, a list of students making all A's and B's. (See Table 8.)

**Table 8:  
Ninth-Grade Student Achievement at Galena Park High School: 2008 to 2010**

	2008	2009	2010
Passing Rate in Core Courses	82%	90%	NA*
Attendance	94	97	95%
Passing TAKS Reading Test	84	88	87
Passing TAKS Mathematics Test	66	77	79

\* Data not available

Source: Galena Park High School Data

The Texas Success Initiative, a statewide measure of college readiness, showed improvement at GPHS from 2008 to 2010. This measure is reported on the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), the state report card for schools, and is derived from the TAKS exam for 11th-graders. (See Table 9.)

**Table 9:  
Percentages of Students Meeting Texas Success Initiative College-Readiness Standards  
on the TAKS: 2008 to 2010**

	2008	2009	2010	Change (percentage points)
Reading	45%	53%	61%	16
Mathematics	52	57	71	19

Source: Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System

Teacher teams from grade nine are seeking to expand this success by working with the feeder middle grades schools and by sharing their experiences with new 10th-grade teams. The school plans to improve orientation activities by conducting a summer camp for freshmen. Orientation for new ninth-graders takes place the week before students return from summer vacation. The school also hosts meetings for parents from feeder middle grades schools to acquaint them with credits, classes, end-of-course testing, the ICU (Intensive Care Unit) extra- help program, attendance, the bell schedule, ID badges and the dress code.

By giving students a stronger send-off in the first year of high school, the school is working toward the *HSTW* goals to increase the percentages of students who are college- and career-ready in reading, mathematics and science; the percentages of students completing the *HSTW*-recommended curriculum; and the percentages of students graduating four years after entering grade nine.

## South Grand Prairie High School

### *Grand Prairie, Texas*

**South Grand Prairie High School** (SGPHS) began systematic school reform in 2007 after receiving funding to implement the *HSTW* framework of Key Practices. Principal **Vicki Bridges** used a TAV in 2007 to create a sense of urgency to improve school practices. The day after the TAV, Bridges and her assistant principals increased the number of walkthrough observations aimed at enhancing the quality of classroom instruction. They encouraged teachers to post daily learning objectives in the classroom and to include higher-level questioning techniques, tougher assignments and active student engagement in learning.

SGPHS established focus teams to address challenges and recommendations in the TAV report. One team focused on revitalizing the school advisory program, including writing an advisory curriculum to address the academic and social needs of students. To meet another challenge, the principal changed the master schedule to provide common planning time for department chairs. Teacher leaders meet weekly with the principal to plan professional development and other ways to improve instruction. The new master schedule makes it possible for mathematics and science teachers to work together daily to upgrade classroom activities and to take additional ownership of the improvement process. The result has been large gains in mathematics and science on the state assessment.

The school launched a program to improve literacy across the curriculum, beginning with a grade-level book study to increase literacy skills and to instill the love of reading in students. Students who admitted that they had not read an entire book in years were telling teachers, “Don’t tell me what happens next. I want to read and find out for myself.” All sophomores read the book *Claws* by Will Weaver and completed assignments from teachers across discipline areas. The author visited SGPHS for a day of activities and interviews with students. Each year, SGPHS has added another grade level to the book study. The literacy focus team built on the success of the book study by implementing reading and writing strategies for learning, including the Cornell note-taking technique and Socratic seminars.

SGPHS has become serious about implementing the *HSTW* model in a highly reliable manner. It has had success in raising achievement in English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies on the TAKS since 2007. (See Table 10.)

	English/Language Arts		Mathematics		Science		Social Studies	
	SGPHS	State Average	SGPHS	State Average	SGPHS	State Average	SGPHS	State Average
<b>2007</b>	83%	88%	64%	77%	59%	66%	84%	87%
<b>2008</b>	91	91	74	80	74	74	93	91
<b>2009</b>	95	88	78	80	82	78	96	93
<b>2010</b>	95	90	88	84	88	83	97	95

Source: Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System

The *HSTW* Assessment showed increases between 2008 and 2010 in the percentages of SGPHS students who experienced intensive implementation of selected *HSTW* indices. The areas of greatest improvement were literacy, numeracy, integrating reading and mathematics into CT studies, guidance and advisement, and quality CT classes.

South Grand Prairie Independent School District opened a third high school in 2009 that is focusing on CT programs. Most of the SGPHS CT programs moved to the new high school. However, SGPHS still operates several quality CT programs. With these changes, SGPHS leaders want to do a more effective job of using data to assist students and parents with college and career choices. They will make better use of a comprehensive guidance software system to help students review their choices annually. They also plan to step up efforts to inform students, parents and staff of the many programs and opportunities available to students in school and after graduation.

Principal **Donna Grant**, who came on board in 2009-2010, will continue to increase the rigor and relevance of high school studies. “*High Schools That Work* is instrumental in bringing best practices to the campus,” she said. The school will implement project-based learning across the curriculum. School departments operating as professional learning communities will examine assignments, assessments and student work for ways to make learning more challenging. The principal has set a goal to use these strategies to prepare students to meet standards on the TAKS and to pass the new, more rigorous end-of-course exams that will go into effect in Texas in 2011-2012.

## Diboll High School

### *Diboll, Texas*

When **Diboll High School** (DHS) joined the Texas Enhanced *HSTW* Network in 2005, teachers were weary of implementing multiple reform strategies. In the past, before one strategy could be fully implemented or yield results, faculty and staff were asked to switch to another curriculum, initiative or improvement program. No longer trying to work together, teachers simply sought to weather the newest change. The opportunity to focus on the *HSTW* Key Practices proved to be the answer to building relationships with students and among teachers.

A new superintendent and principal used the *HSTW* framework as the basis for improving the school culture to advance student learning. To overcome “initiative burnout” among teachers, the principal asked SREB to provide on-site professional development on how to organize and operate teacher-led teams. Teacher collaboration is one of the *HSTW* Key Practices for raising achievement in academic and CT studies and integrating academic skills into CT classrooms. School departments at DHS worked together to implement CSCOPE, an online curriculum developed by the Texas Education Service Center Collaborative to improve classroom instruction and learning. CSCOPE incorporates research-based practices and state standards.

Teachers learned to use tuning protocols and Standards in Practice (SIP) protocols to determine the amount of rigor in assignments, assessments and student work. They review the information at least weekly. The school plans to use performance-based and authentic assessments rather than relying completely on traditional assessment methods.

DHS revised its CT program to include modern programs of study. One *HSTW* Key Practice is to provide more students with access to intellectually challenging CT studies in high-demand fields that emphasize the higher-level literacy, mathematics, science and problem-solving skills needed in the workplace and further education. Leaders from DHS and the school district based their program choices on workforce data showing the jobs needed in the local economy. The school added a health science technology program and upgraded the traditional business and family and consumer sciences programs. CT teachers began to revise course syllabi to embed academic concepts and to raise the level of technical concepts to prepare students for education and careers.

The DHS administration underwent another change in 2010 with the arrival of a new principal and a new assistant principal. Principal **Kevin Moran** immediately set a goal to have more than 90 percent of students pass the TAKS exams in math and science. “Since math is the subject with the greatest need for improvement, we plan to adjust the master schedule to allow for more individual instruction and differentiated instruction and to provide more professional development on research-based instructional practices,” Moran said. A catch-up class for ninth-graders lacking the skills for success in Algebra I will be taught during the school day. The catch-up class will accelerate instruction so that students will receive Algebra I credit by the end of freshman year. The new master schedule also will allow time for students struggling in other subjects to receive extra help. “We plan to expand our math and science offerings to prepare students for fields such as biotechnology and health careers,” Moran said.

Although student achievement at DHS was fairly high when the school joined the Enhanced *HSTW* Network, the efforts of leaders and teachers paid dividends in higher percentages of students passing the TAKS tests between 2006 and 2010. (See Table 11.) TEA raised the school’s accountability rating from Acceptable to Recognized.



**Table 11:  
Percentages of DHS Students Meeting Standards on the TAKS: 2006 to 2010**

	English/Language Arts		Mathematics		Science		Social Studies	
	SGPHS	State Average	SGPHS	State Average	SGPHS	State Average	SGPHS	State Average
<b>2006</b>	91%	87%	71%	75%	66%	70%	87%	87%
<b>2007</b>	85	88	74	77	63	66	87	87
<b>2008</b>	92	91	77	80	71	74	96	91
<b>2009</b>	93	88	77	80	74	78	97	93
<b>2010</b>	94	90	79	84	85	83	96	95

Source: Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System

## Graham High School

### *Graham, Texas*

An *HSTW* site for more than a decade, **Graham High School** (GHS) began deep implementation of the Key Practices in 2007, when school leaders and teachers accelerated their improvement efforts. To demonstrate the need for action, the superintendent of Graham Independent School District shared the recommendations from a TAV report with the local school board. With community support and a new sense of urgency, GHS was able to take the steps necessary to raise its state rating from Academically Acceptable to Recognized.

The principal appointed a group of teacher leaders to head a task force that developed plans and prioritized actions based on the TAV recommendations. The school revitalized its CT programs by reviewing workforce data and eliminating outdated programs that failed to match employers' needs and students' interests. It also used a comprehensive guidance and advisement system to guide students into programs of study and to determine students' interests in order to develop new courses. CT teachers participated in professional development to learn to develop modern courses and programs and to embed literacy, mathematics and science into their lessons. The school also entered into partnerships with community businesses and organizations to offer paid and unpaid internships for upperclassmen.

Since low science scores were keeping the school from moving to the next accountability rating, leaders and teachers took action to improve science instruction. Science teachers attended statewide workshops on effective ways to engage students in learning science concepts. A team consisting of CT teachers, a science teacher and a mathematics teacher attended *HSTW* workshops to learn how to integrate science and math into CT studies. Between 2007 and 2010, GHS increased the percentage of students passing the TAKS science test by 19 percentage points. (See Table 12.)

**Table 12:  
Percentages of GHS Students Meeting Standards on the TAKS: 2007 to 2010**

	2007	2008	2009	2010	Change (percentage points)
<b>English/Language Arts</b>	92%	93%	94%	96%	4
<b>Math</b>	78	83	81	86	8
<b>Science</b>	74	87	88	93	19
<b>Social Studies</b>	92	98	98	95	3

Source: Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System



GHS is 90 miles from the nearest postsecondary institution. Therefore, school leaders decided to use distance learning to establish partnerships with colleges and universities. Students enroll in dual credit courses at Texas institutions and take online courses at a location shared by the Graham Independent School District and the area workforce education collaborative. Students can earn 36 credit hours in both academic and technical courses through this arrangement. From fall 2005 to fall 2010, the number of students taking dual credit courses increased from 255 to 310. A total of 288 students received dual credit in fall 2010. GHS students can take college courses in algebra, economics, English, American history, psychology, sociology, trigonometry and statistics.

Students make the most of the senior year by completing rigorous senior projects and participating in internship experiences. Each senior project includes research, a written report, a product and a presentation to a panel of judges. Students who serve internships are guided by a business mentor and a CT instructor in fields such as health and medicine, journalism, teaching and manufacturing.

More than half of GHS seniors participating in the 2010 *HSTW* Assessment said they completed a senior project that included “researching a topic, creating a product or performing a service and presenting it to the class or others.” This total exceeded the percentage of students reporting that they completed a senior project at high-performing *HSTW* sites with similar demographics. Nearly one-third of GHS seniors reported that they completed “an internship that helped me explore a career option,” compared with 24 percent of seniors at similar high-performing *HSTW* sites.

## Burton High School

### *Burton, Texas*

**Burton High School** (BHS) is a small rural school located between Houston and Austin. BHS joined the Enhanced *HSTW* Network in 2007 and **Burton Secondary School** joined the first *MMGW* cohort in 2009.

When BHS adopted the *HSTW* improvement framework, the school was rated Acceptable by the TEA. The district’s rating of Academically Unacceptable, however, alerted schools that they were failing to meet the needs of all groups of students, particularly minority students. Two things concerned the BHS faculty members: failure to meet state accountability and feedback from an *HSTW* TAV.

The TAV report identified specific challenges with recommended actions to focus school leaders and teachers on: 1) raising expectations and having students meet college- and career-readiness standards, 2) providing updated CT programs to prepare graduates for successful careers, 3) using research-based teaching methods to engage all students in challenging assignments, 4) creating a guidance and advisement system involving teachers and parents, and 5) engaging all stakeholders in school improvement and implementation of the *HSTW* Key Practices.

BHS hosted an *HSTW* Site Development Workshop **to engage all staff members** in school improvement and implementation of the *HSTW* Key Practices. The school organized focus teams for guidance and advisement, quality CT programs of study and literacy across the curriculum. These teams have worked diligently to change the climate of the school. Multiple teams of teachers have attended state workshops, counselors’ meetings and state and national conferences. Interviews revealed that teachers are pleased with their progress and would like to continue with the *HSTW* model.

Motivated by the Site Development Workshop and TAV, the high school began an intensive effort to raise students’ academic and technical achievement. Teachers attended statewide *HSTW* workshops to learn how to design integrated projects in CT, math and science courses. Teams of math and science teachers also attended *HSTW* workshops on how to make instruction more engaging. Teachers learned to write units of study and lesson plans aligned to state standards and to use lesson plan formats to produce better lessons and instruction. The *HSTW* coach attended the sessions with the teachers and followed up on subsequent coaching visits.

The school instituted benchmark tests to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses and began providing instruction to help students gain needed skills. It began offering tutorials, computer software catch-up programs, Saturday extra help and SAT preparation programs. Determined that the school would not fail on her watch, the principal monitored instruction and worked with teachers who needed additional support to make learning meaningful for students. The principal and the *HSTW* coach worked together to use classroom walkthrough observations to support instruction, assistance for struggling students and continuous planning and improvement.

The counselor led the effort to establish an advisory program that would meet the needs of every student by providing an adviser and mentor to help plan a high school program of study in preparation for college and careers. The advisory focus team used teacher and student surveys and interviews to identify the skills students needed to be successful in school and life. The things that students sought the most were study skills, organizational skills, goal-setting skills, knowledge of financial aid, and parental involvement in college and career planning.

A campus focus team refined the advisory program to include a system for helping students write SMART goals — **S**trategic, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**esults-oriented and **T**ime-bound. Students complete interest inventories and set career and personal goals. They monitor their success on benchmark tests and set new targets each grading period. Large numbers of parents participate in student-led conferences each spring to review their child's program of study and plans for the future.

The school's next step was to revise the CT program. School leaders and CT teachers reviewed area workforce data and projections for employment through the year 2016. With the help of a bond issue, the school upgraded the agriculture department to include equipment for veterinary medicine program technicians. It also added welding certification. The other CT departments changed from traditional vocational offerings to modern pathways with end points such as employment, an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree and advanced degrees.

The principal worked with the superintendent to eliminate early release for seniors. Based on TAV recommendations, the school stopped the practice of allowing students who passed the TAKS to leave school early during the year. The policy was changed to allow early release only for dual credit courses or work-based learning. All students take a full course load.

In keeping with a goal to increase reading and writing for learning across the curriculum, the school established a literacy focus team to develop a three-year plan. The team began by planning a summer reading program in which all students were required to read the book *October Sky* by Homer Hickman. Teachers designed back-to-school activities based on the book to engage students further in reading and discussing books.

BHS also launched a book study for teachers with the book *Rigor is NOT a Four-Letter Word* by Barbara Blackburn. The *HSTW* school improvement consultant worked with the principal to develop faculty meetings focusing on the theme of the book and to create a system of classroom walkthrough observations to determine rigor.

In 2009, BHS implemented a senior project that required students to write a research paper, develop a project or product or perform a community service, document the efforts in a journal or an electronic portfolio, and present the project to an outside panel of community members. All BHS students participated in 2010-2011. The school hosts a parent night to showcase students' work.

When an *HSTW* Technical Review Visit (TRV) team visited BHS in 2010, it found the following progress had been made in carrying out the actions for improving student achievement:

- BHS has taken many steps to **raise expectations** and help students meet higher standards. A philosophy of trust, extra help and support from teachers is evident throughout the school. All seniors are required to take a full course load and to complete a culminating project consisting of a research paper, a product or a performance, and a presentation to an outside audience. More students are taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses and the SAT. Zeros are not permitted. Students who do not complete homework attend a lunchtime program to complete the work. Extra help is available in an extended school day and on Saturdays. Tutoring in the form of a study skills lab, computer programs, teachers and college students is available to assist students. Walkthrough observations by the TRV team showed "a remarkable increase in depth and complexity of instruction" between 2008 and 2010.
- With the help of an *HSTW* school improvement consultant, BHS evaluated local, regional, state and national workforce data to create **programs of study** in several career clusters aligned to labor market demands in careers in high-wage, high-skill fields. Outdated courses were eliminated. CT teachers wrote syllabi to create more rigorous courses and embedded literacy, math and science into courses such as business and family and consumer sciences. The school created multiple partnerships with Blinn College to provide dual credit and articulated credit opportunities for juniors and seniors. Students who take a computer certification course offered in the business department have had a 100 percent success rate on the certification exam. Some students learn principles of

marketing, business and accounting by operating a school-based enterprise to sell coffee and other beverages before and after school. Students who are interested in the teaching profession serve as apprentices to BHS teachers. To prepare students for good jobs in the local agricultural economy, the school built a new agriculture facility with modern equipment as part of a school remodeling project. All students interviewed during the *HSTW* TRV could articulate a career goal and knew the education necessary to pursue that career and the requirements, salary and benefits of the profession.

- BHS has worked to make the school and classroom experience more **engaging, challenging and meaningful** for students. A literacy focus team developed a three-year plan to improve reading and writing for learning across the curriculum. The plan includes many reading and writing activities as recommended by *HSTW*, including reading 25 books per year and writing research papers in all classes. All teachers have participated in professional development to improve how they incorporate reading and writing into their daily instruction. Eighty-six percent of seniors taking the 2010 *HSTW* Assessment reported a moderate or intensive emphasis on literacy at BHS. Other changes have included an increased use of technology (with professional development for teachers in how to incorporate technology into their classes), a curriculum that provides opportunities for investigation and discovery, more hands-on science labs and more integration of science into CT courses.
- The school’s **guidance and advisement** system has become a model for other schools. Each student is assigned to a teacher-mentor from grade seven through graduation. The teachers use grade-level curricula created by the guidance team to help students gain organizational skills, goal-setting skills, and college and career information. The program also includes an on-campus career fair, field trips to college campuses, and exploration of job skills. Every six weeks, students set SMART goals based on personal, academic and career goals. They chart their progress on personal and career goals and use benchmark and TAKS data to monitor academic progress. Each spring, BHS students lead their parents and teacher-mentors in a conference to share progress so far and new goals for the coming year.

The hard work is paying off. In 2008, the TEA named BHS a Recognized school. The district also met its goal to reach all groups of students. BHS received an award from SREB in 2009 for outstanding implementation of the *HSTW* design. The TRV team wrote in late 2010 that Burton High School has “transformed from a campus in need of assistance from the state to a school that should be a demonstration or model site for other schools.” Both the state of Texas and *HSTW* have honored BHS for academic achievement and improved implementation of the *HSTW* design. More students than ever before are experiencing success on the state assessment. (See Table 13.)

**Table 13:  
Percentages of BHS Students Meeting Standards on the TAKS: 2007 to 2010**

	2007	2008	2009	2010	Change (percentage points)
English/Language Arts	85%	95%	94%	94%	9
Math	73	82	83	80	7
Science	65	74	73	81	16
Social Studies	77	99	91	96	19

Source: Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System

## The Summit High School Alternative Program of Excellence (APEX)

### *Pasadena, Texas*

**The Summit High School**, an alternative school for students who have disciplinary problems or fail to achieve in their regular high schools, enrolls fewer than 100 students. The school temporarily closed in fall 2008, after Hurricane Ike hit the Texas Gulf Coast region. When The Summit reopened, students were eager to talk about their experiences and their hurricane survival tactics.

Two teachers at the school seized the opportunity to design an interdisciplinary lesson involving science, engineering and technology for 55 credit-recovery students. The planning was aligned with the *HSTW* recommendations for integrating learning and using hands-on assignments to make school more meaningful.

In the project for credit-recovery students at The Summit High School, students in science classes learned about mass, force, velocity and engineering principles to evaluate the structure of their own and neighboring homes. Next, the students built model houses designed to withstand hurricane-force winds. Students in computer classes created portfolios of their work, including narratives of how Hurricane Ike affected their lives. They included research on hurricane survival, data charts and graphs, drawings of model homes and detailed descriptions of how they designed the homes to withstand the elements.

As students became more involved in the integrated project, teachers noticed that attendance, behavior and attention to learning began to improve. Seventy-three percent of credit-recovery students showed improved attendance. Discipline referrals declined by 14 percentage points. Seventeen students increased one grade level; 38 students increased two grade levels.

The remaining students at The Summit, from grades seven through 11, carried out their own interdisciplinary thematic units with similar results. In a unit on entertainment, students designed roller coasters and theme parks. They tested the roller coasters for speed and safety with competitions and prizes. In each unit, students and teachers collaborated across the curriculum to connect learning in the four core subject areas and technology.

Teachers have created additional projects, including whole-school fairs focusing on literacy, numeracy, science and social studies. Students gain knowledge and experience as they polish their presentation skills, demonstrate their creations to real audiences and receive academic rewards for jobs well done. Principal **Robert DeWolfe** says the practice of having students work together in solving problems and answering essential questions is a “hit out of the ballpark.”

Students’ scores on state tests at The Summit High School in 2009 increased at every grade level and in every subject except mathematics (where scores remained stable). The largest gain was in science.

Teachers now believe interdisciplinary learning develops students’ ownership of education and shows them that English, mathematics and science are real-world subjects that can help them succeed in school and life. They recognize that when students engage in authentic, intellectually challenging learning, they see how their studies relate to their own lives and develop the discipline to stay on task in learning new knowledge and skills. As a result of the hurricane project and other activities, the school has moved toward an integrated, project-based learning approach to be implemented schoolwide.

## West Orange-Stark High School

### *Orange, Texas*

Sometimes a school needs time to embrace a comprehensive school improvement model. Often it takes new leadership at the local level to put the school on the right track.

**West Orange-Stark High School** (WO-SHS) enrolls 694 students in grades nine through 12. The student population is 67 percent black, 26 percent white, 6 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent and Native American and Asian/Pacific Islander. Sixty-two percent of students are considered economically disadvantaged.

When the school joined the Enhanced *HSTW* Network in 2007, it had been rated Academically Unacceptable by the TEA and had not met the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*. An *HSTW* TAV team that visited the school in 2007 identified six specific challenges with recommended actions to address each challenge.

During the 2007-2008 school year, the school began to send teams of teachers to state workshops on science and on integrating science and mathematics into CT studies. These teachers reported enthusiastically on what they learned and on the similarities between the *HSTW* Key Practices and what the state wanted to accomplish. With the support of an *HSTW* school improvement consultant in 2008-2009, the school started to create modern CT programs to replace outdated vocational courses. *HSTW* consultants conducted workshops for teachers on how to teach in a block schedule and how to promote reading and writing for learning across the curriculum. The foundation was laid to implement these improvement practices, but school leaders did not follow through with implementation.

In 2009, the superintendent assigned a new principal who had a vision of long-term improvement at WO-SHS. While the state team continued to work on strategies to improve the school's TAKS scores, the *HSTW* consultant worked with the principal to institute schoolwide reforms aimed at improving attendance and reducing the dropout rate.

The school used the recommended actions in the 2007 TAV report to make the following improvements by fall 2010:

- The *HSTW* consultant and the *HSTW* state coordinator worked with the staff to develop and implement programs of study to better meet the needs of students in a modern economy.
- CT teachers received professional development on how to write course syllabi and how to embed academic concepts into modern CT courses.
- The school purchased guidance software to determine students' interests and aspirations and to help students select a program of study aligned with those interests.
- In spring 2010, the school developed a plan to redesign the ninth grade for the 2010-2011 school year to ease the transition of middle grades students into high school. It also began offering an upgraded CT program to strengthen students' determination to graduate and to succeed in college and careers.
- To address the challenge of using research-based instructional strategies to engage students in completing challenging assignments, the faculty received professional development on how to teach in a block schedule, write course syllabi and teach reading and writing skills across the curriculum.
- The school addressed a need for high-quality CT programs and work-based learning experiences to add value to academic success and to prepare students for postsecondary studies. CT teachers participated in professional development on how to integrate math and science concepts into modern CT courses. Programs such as welding and machining are using certifications and advisory groups to help ensure that students will find employment after graduation.
- District and school leaders are focusing on raising expectations to increase student achievement. The new principal met with staff in October 2010 to revise the school vision statement. The staff created "We will" statements that tell what teachers will do to provide students with an education that includes rigor, relevance, consistency and respect. School leaders created a data room where they meet with a state-appointed Campus Improvement Team to disaggregate and analyze student data to determine next steps for raising student achievement.

WO-SHS showed improvement in every area of the TAKS between 2007 and 2010. (See Table 14.) By 2010, the school had improved sufficiently to receive a state rating of Academically Acceptable.

**Hutcherson Hill**, principal of West Orange-Stark High School, plans to establish a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Academy that he envisions as a "flagship" program for schools in Texas and Louisiana. He is developing partnerships with local industries such as DuPont and the local chamber of commerce. "With the recent disasters in the Gulf region, including hurricanes and a major oil spill, we need a workforce that can solve problems and find new and creative ways to address structural and environmental issues," Hill said. "I want the STEM Academy to produce a pipeline of scientists, engineers and technical workers from our high school to the workforce or from our high school to college and then to the workforce."



**Table 14:  
Percentages of WO-SHS Students Meeting Standards on the TAKS: 2007 to 2010**

	2007	2008	2009	2010	Change (percentage points)
English/Language Arts	83%	89%	87%	89%	6
Math	45	50	49	52	7
Science	45	53	64	65	20
Social Studies	80	86	89	84	4

Source: Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System

## Middle Grades Schools in the Texas Enhanced Network

SREB and other research have shown that students benefit when middle grades schools and high schools work together to smooth the transition from the eighth grade to freshman year. Therefore, SREB and the TEA worked together to involve feeder middle schools of several of the Enhanced *HSTW* sites in coordinating and accelerating efforts to prepare students for college and careers. The middle grades schools in this Enhanced *Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW)* Network are focusing on five key areas to develop a culture of college- and career-readiness among their students:

- Align the English/language arts and mathematics curricula to college-readiness standards.
- Move the standards into the classroom.
- Implement redo and re-learning practices.
- Strengthen guidance practices to create a college-going culture.
- Develop district and school leaders to create a college-going culture.

The schools in *MMGW* Cohort I have been implementing the school improvement framework for only a short time. Although data are limited, the following vignettes on four of the schools illustrate the progress being made to raise the achievement of middle grades students.

### Lubbock-Cooper Middle School

#### *Lubbock, Texas*

**Lubbock-Cooper Middle School** (L-CMS) is preparing students for success in high school by using the *MMGW* Key Practices to increase classroom rigor, to fortify students with the academic skills to make the transition to the ninth grade, and to support students with extra help and encouragement for good performance. “We are raising the rafters with the improvements we are making at our school,” Principal **Dave Paschall** said.

Paschall is in a unique position to advance the achievement of middle grades students. An educator for 25 years, he served five years as associate principal and two years as assistant principal of Lubbock-Cooper High School, which joined the Enhanced *HSTW* Network in 2005. He knows what it takes for freshmen to succeed in high school courses such as algebra and English/language arts. He also knows how to implement the *HSTW* and *MMGW* Key Practices for raising achievement and how to work with others to produce results-oriented students.

The school district has made it possible for L-CMS to use a curriculum aligned both horizontally and vertically, reaching below and beyond grades six through eight. This seamless progression provides solid and consistent preparation as students move from one set of objectives to another. The same unit exams are given across the board, allowing constant benchmarking of students’ progress. “We receive early data on every student, so that we can adjust the instruction or provide remediation to meet students’ needs,” Paschall said.

Beginning at the end of the 2010-2011 school year, L-CMS seventh-graders will take an algebra readiness exam to determine if they have the cognitive skills to master Algebra I in high school. “We want to build every student’s confidence that they can do math,” Paschall said. “Students should be able to take calculus and to go as far as possible with math in high school.”

L-CMS is making major inroads in implementing the *MMGW* school improvement model:

- **Increasing the rigor of school and classroom practices** — Teachers participated in professional development to learn strategies for implementing high-level questioning and for aligning assignments and assessments to readiness for high school and beyond. L-CMS students participating in SREB’s 2010 Middle Grades Assessment outpaced students at all Enhanced *MMGW* Network schools in the percentage of students completing the rigorous *MMGW*-recommended curriculum in English and science.
- **Introducing classroom practices that engage all students in learning** — Teams of teachers develop interdisciplinary projects that incorporate language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. Mathematics teachers assist other core teachers in using math strategies in the classroom. Through a program to emphasize literacy across the curriculum, all teachers have used at least two literacy strategies (e.g., Cornell note-taking, word walls, foldables, summarizing) in their classrooms. The literacy committee introduces a new strategy each month.
- **Guiding and supporting students for success** — The school has implemented a daily advisory and extra-help program. All students receive lessons on goal-setting, study skills, social skills and school and career planning twice a week. The other three days are used for mandatory tutoring (redo and re-teach). A mentoring program was established for about 80 of the most at-risk students. Each of these students has an adult mentor (teacher) who checks on the student’s progress at least daily. Students at L-CMS exceeded the *MMGW* Enhanced Network average in percentage reporting an intensive emphasis on high expectations and extra help.

Paschall tells how SREB helped the school gear up to increase the amount of extra help available to students. “One of our assistant principals attended an SREB workshop on how to implement an ICU extra-help program and a no zeros policy,” Paschall said. “Teachers regularly receive a list of students who need to be pulled from athletics or other activities to attend study hall.” The principal says the program is responsible for raising the passing rate at L-CMS and will be continued and expanded in the future.

L-CMS has set a goal to promote habits of success among its students through a new incentive program. “Students will wear badges imprinted with their student ID numbers,” Paschall explained. “When they exhibit positive behaviors, they will receive points toward participation in special school events and field trips.” He expects the program to build responsibility and raise the awareness of students, especially economically disadvantaged students, of how to access rewards through better performance as students and as citizens.

L-CMS teachers have benefitted from visits by *MMGW* school improvement consultants, who have met with school teams on topics such as easing student transitions, grading and redoing work, guidance and advisement, extra help and instructional rigor. “We welcome the visits by consultants and look forward to more of them in the future,” Paschall said. “These visits give us a different lens to look at what we are doing. Teachers are more receptive to suggestions about instructional strategies if they get to know the consultants who provide the input.”

## Mount Pleasant Junior High School

### *Mount Pleasant, Texas*

In 2009, **Mount Pleasant Junior High School** (MPJHS) began its journey to higher student achievement by focusing on the *MMGW* Key Practice of setting high expectations and offering a system of extra help and time to support students in meeting higher standards. “By focusing on the Key Practices and using site-based coaching and administrative support, we have seen dramatic gains in academic achievement and in preparing students with study skills and habits of success for school and beyond,” said **Dustin Cook**, assistant principal and *MMGW* site coordinator.

Following a Site Development Workshop in August 2009, six focus teams were organized to address the topics of high expectations, grading practices and extra help; rigorous instruction; literacy; numeracy; transitions and parent involvement; and guidance and advisement. These teams are continuing to work with the assistant principal and the *MMGW* school improvement coordinator to implement action plans that will prepare students for challenging courses in high school.

Eleven teachers took the lead in piloting a new school policy that does not allow failure as an option, which requires students to redo work until it meets standards. The policy has resulted in significant achievement gains with their students.

- One reading teacher reported seeing changes in student performance as a result of the policy. “During the fourth six-week period, only two of my special-needs students were failing,” she said. “Special education students’ averages increased by two to three points in one grading period. Many other students’ scores rose by at least one letter grade. Students have gained confidence because they have been given an opportunity to be successful.” The teacher’s first benchmark assessment showed 69 percent of her students passing; that percentage rose to 86 percent on the second benchmark test. English-language learners and special education students showed the largest increases in scores.
- Another teacher reported that the redo policy has led to substantial increases in the number of students passing the class and the benchmark assessments. Previously, the teacher had from three to five students who failed each six weeks. After using the redo policy for six weeks, the teacher reported that no students had failed. Benchmark scores have increased, particularly for the seven lowest-performing students. These students showed an average gain of almost 24 points between the first and second benchmark tests.
- After three weeks of implementing the redo policy, one mathematics teacher saw a large increase in the number of students improving their grades to B or C. This teacher expressed the belief that the policy would greatly increase the number of students meeting the state passing standard on the TAKS.

The decline in failures after the school implemented the redo policy proved to be dramatic. A total of 246 students failed at least one course at the end of the first semester of 2008-2009. The following year, 124 students failed a course by the end of the first semester.

“We believe students should have more than one opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned,” Cook said. “With this in mind, we require students who score below 80 on any assignment or assessment — including tests, reports and projects — to redo the work until it earns a minimum score of 80.”

The MPJHS redo policy includes these guidelines:

- Students are responsible for reviewing the standards, objectives and instructional materials necessary to achieve success on the redo assignment or assessment.
- The teacher will decide the type of redo work, depending on the original assignment or assessment.
- Students will have multiple opportunities to redo work with teacher assistance. The times will include before, during and after school and on Saturday as necessary.
- Students will receive the highest grade attained on redo assignments and assessments.

Cook sees the challenges for MPJHS as 1) working with teachers to increase rigor in assignments and assessments and 2) improving the use of standards-based grading practices. The plan is for teachers to use more formative and fewer but better-designed summative assessments to support the move toward standards-based grading. “We will continue to revise our work during the coming year, keeping in mind our philosophy that the focus should be on student learning,” Cook said.

On SREB’s 2010 Middle Grades Assessment, almost twice as many students at MPJHS, compared with all *MMGW* sites, said that they experienced an intensive emphasis extra help. The percentages were 20 percent at MPJHS and 11 percent at all *MMGW* sites.



## Southmore Intermediate School

### Pasadena, Texas

**Southmore Intermediate School** is serious about the *MMGW* goal to increase the percentages of middle grades students entering high school prepared to succeed in college-preparatory courses. The school is working with Sam Rayburn High School from Cohort II of the Texas Enhanced *HSTW* Network and the Pasadena Independent School District to improve transition between the two schools.

SREB research shows that effective transition from the middle grades to high school is a key factor in improving student achievement. Eighth-graders go from being the oldest and smartest students in their schools to being the youngest and least experienced in high school. They are expected to take courses taught at a higher level than ever before.

Following a joint transitions planning workshop facilitated by SREB in January 2010, representatives of Southmore Intermediate School and Sam Rayburn High School convened in May 2010 to share what was happening as a result of the initial action. The intermediate school incorporated more note-taking skills and pre-biology concepts into science classes; eliminated multiple-choice questions and added more higher-order thinking questions to language arts tests; assigned daily homework and upgraded the level of assignments in mathematics classes; and assigned more writing and PowerPoint presentations in social studies classes. Eighth-graders complete a Rites of Passage project consisting of five essays about personal goals as well as a speech presented to an adult audience at the end of the school year. A rubric was designed to measure performance on the project.

The principals of both schools, the district's two assistant superintendents and *MMGW* consultants are collaborating to make a difference for students entering the ninth grade. The planning group's actions have included:

- **having core and elective teachers observe classroom instruction** using protocols based on *MMGW* and *HSTW* best practices. The planning group uses feedback from the teacher observations to create agendas for articulation meetings. The topics are homework, study skills, organizational skills, technology, rigor and high expectations, and grading practices.
- **making it possible for middle grades and high school counselors to meet** to analyze the critical needs of students in transitioning from the middle grades to high school and to create an action plan to address the needs. Topics include career interest inventories, programs of study/pathways, guidance and mentoring, extra help, parent involvement and pre-orientation activities.
- **using data and information** from the intermediate school to help the high school guide and advise freshmen and using data and information from the ninth-grade faculty to support students moving from the middle grades to high school.
- **paying special attention to English/language arts and mathematics transitions.** Nationwide, ninth-grade English and Algebra I are the two freshman courses with the highest failure rates as well as the greatest potential for predicting high school success.

Southmore Intermediate School had taken many actions by fall 2010:

- *MMGW* consultants developed observation forms, lists of best practices and lists of debriefing questions to guide teachers. They asked for input from other members of the planning group.
- Core content teachers from Southmore (eighth grade) and Sam Rayburn (ninth grade) participated in four two-day observation and debriefing meetings.
- The planning team, along with district content specialists, met to plan professional development to focus on transitions. The professional development day included discussions and reflection on classroom expectations; classroom structure and procedures; instructional strategies; student motivation; student accountability and homework; extra help for struggling students; and rigor, relevance and relationships.

All three intermediate schools feeding into Sam Rayburn High School are participating in exchange visits to observe classrooms and are taking part in other transitional activities as the Southmore program has become mandatory in the district. These schools and SREB believe that continuing and strengthening the transition plan will drive up the graduation rate at the high school.

New data from Sam Rayburn High School indicate that the transition plan is making its mark on freshman attendance and behavior. Average attendance for ninth-graders rose from 92.9 percent in 2009-2010 to 93.47 percent in August 2010 through January 2011. Discipline referrals dropped from 731 in fall 2009 to 397 in fall 2010, indicating that behavior has improved now that students are more engrossed in their studies and more aware of how performance will affect their futures.

The percentages of Southmore Intermediate School students achieving at the Proficient level on the TAKS increased in writing and science and remained about the same with slight declines in reading, mathematics and social studies between 2009 and 2010. The substantial increase in science achievement is attributed to a two-year focused effort by the school to improve the rigor and relevance of science instruction. (See Table 15.)

**Table 15:  
Percentages of Southmore Intermediate Students Meeting Standards on the TAKS: 2009 and 2010**

	2009	2010
Reading	90%	88%
Writing	94	98
Mathematics	91	90
Social Studies	97	96
Science	68	75

Source: Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System

## Mabank Junior High School

### *Mabank, Texas*

After joining the Texas Enhanced *MMGW* Network in 2009, **Mabank Junior High School** (MJHS), a rural school with 525 students in grades seven and eight, immediately embarked on implementing the *MMGW* framework of Goals and Key Practices. At the same time, the district began working closely with the school to align improvement efforts with those of Mabank High School, a member of Cohort I of the Texas Enhanced *HSTW* Network. As a result, MJHS has taken the following actions in keeping with the *MMGW* Key Practices:

- The school is creating a culture of **high expectations**, tolerance and respect. Using the Rachel’s Challenge national initiative as a planning device, teachers are instilling in students the need for positive behavior and higher achievement. All teachers are expected to use literacy strategies in their classrooms to promote reading and writing for learning across the curriculum. Teachers from the mathematics department introduced rigorous, hands-on math instruction through the Connected Math Program (CMP) curriculum and received ongoing professional development on using projects and problems to increase math achievement.
- **Extra help** is provided to support students in meeting higher standards. A schoolwide “no zeros” policy requires students to redo any work that falls below a grade of 70. The school’s extra-help strategies include before- and after-school tutoring, a targeted intervention known as *Encore!*, and Morning Bunch and Lunch Bunch redo sessions. The school launched a mentoring program that provides teacher-mentors for at-risk students. A new master schedule was created to provide seven 54-minute instructional periods on Monday and Friday and seven 48-minute instructional periods and one 40-minute intervention and enrichment period on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Principal **Darin Jolly** says the enrichment schedule was inspired by information the school obtained at an *HSTW* conference in Atlanta in 2008.

The enrichment schedule is based on the school’s belief that students needing remediation and intervention should not have to limit their elective experiences. “We believe students who are struggling are the very ones who need electives and extracurricular activities as reasons to attend high school,” Jolly said.

- **Teachers work in teams** to look at student achievement data. Teams from the school have participated in **professional development** on standardized grading practices, literacy across the curriculum, mathematics curriculum and instruction, and data analysis. Math and science teachers work with other core content teachers to help them use math and science strategies in their classrooms. A new collaboration and instructional coaching approach uses videotapes of master and new teachers for follow-up self-reflection and discussion. This approach has helped teachers develop professional relationships that focus on best practices in teaching and learning by experienced teachers and more effective instruction by new teachers.
- A focus group of teachers developed a plan to increase **parental involvement** in helping students plan and complete challenging programs of study.
- The school addresses **transition** from the middle grades to high school by conducting meetings of middle grades and high school teachers to share information that will help freshman students be more successful in rigorous high school courses.

MJHS experienced increases in the percentages of students meeting the passing standard for mathematics, science and social studies on the TAKS from 2009 to 2010. The percentages meeting the passing standard for reading and writing declined slightly in the same time period. The percentages of students performing at the Commended level grew between 2009 and 2010 in reading, mathematics and science but dropped slightly in social studies and writing. (See Table 16.)

**Table 16:  
Percentages of MJHS Students Meeting Standards and Performing  
at the Commended Level on the TAKS: 2009 and 2010**

	Meeting the Passing Standard		Commended Performance	
	2009	2010	2009	2010
<b>Reading</b>	97%	95%	45%	48%
<b>Writing</b>	98	97	55	53
<b>Mathematics</b>	88	93	26	30
<b>Science</b>	88	94	42	54
<b>Social Studies</b>	95	98	47	45

\* Commended performance is considerably above the state passing standard and shows thorough understanding of the knowledge and skills at the grade level tested.

Source: Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System

The TEA named MJHS an Exemplary campus for the first time in the school’s history in 2009-2010. It is important to note that MJH eighth-graders exceeded the state average in 2010 both in meeting the state passing standard and in achieving the Commended level in reading, math, science and social studies. Similarly, MJH seventh-graders exceeded the state average in meeting the state passing standard and in performing at the Commended level in reading, mathematics and writing.

MJH substantially outperformed the average for all *MMGW* schools in the percentages of students meeting the high school readiness goals in reading, mathematics and science on SREB’s 2010 Middle Grades Assessment. Mabank students’ achievement scores in reading, mathematics and science also exceeded the average of students’ scores from all *MMGW* sites in 2010. (See Table 17.)

**Table 17:  
Student Achievement on SREB's Middle Grades Assessment: MJHS and All *MMGW* Schools**

	Mabank Junior High School	All <i>MMGW</i> Schools
Percentage Meeting High School Readiness Goals		
<b>Reading</b>	65%	44%
<b>Mathematics</b>	81	46
<b>Science</b>	74	38
Achievement Scores		
<b>Reading (goal = 160)</b>	163	153
<b>Mathematics (goal = 160)</b>	176	153
<b>Science (goal = 161)</b>	175	147

Source: 2010 Middle Grades Assessment, SREB

According to the 2010 Middle Grades Assessment, the percentage of MJHS students experiencing an intensive emphasis on extra help was almost double the percentage at all *MMGW* sites. Similarly, the percentage of teachers reporting an intensive emphasis on continuous improvement at MJHS on the Teacher Survey was nearly double the percentage at all *MMGW* sites.

## Continuing to Improve the Enhanced *HSTW* and *MMGW* Networks in Texas

SREB is continuing to provide services to Texas high schools and feeder middle grades schools as they implement the Key Practices to prepare students for rigorous high school studies, to graduate more students and to graduate them prepared for a range of postsecondary options. Encouraged by gains in achievement and other indicators of success, these schools are setting goals to make even more progress in the future. Administrators and teachers are working together to focus on what is best for students.

The state of Texas is supporting the schools' efforts by conducting professional development workshops on school improvement topics and by continuing to offer the statewide Texas State *HSTW/MMGW* Conference.

## Appendix A: Schools in the Texas Enhanced *HSTW* and *MMGW* Networks

Since 2005, 48 high schools and nine middle grades schools have joined the Texas Enhanced Networks to improve school and classroom practices in ways that motivate more students to succeed.

### *Cohort I:*

Fourteen high schools — receiving grants of \$34,000 each — constituted Cohort I of the Texas Enhanced *HSTW* Network in 2005. All of the schools had been members of the state *HSTW* network, but some had made little or no progress in implementing the *HSTW* improvement strategies as a result of limited assistance and a lack of clear expectations from the state and district for participating schools. Despite the efforts of SREB and the TEA, some schools viewed the new grant as funding for limited involvement. Others saw the funding as a way to increase resources without modifying school practices to the extent necessary to make a difference in student achievement. A few schools, such as Lubbock-Cooper High School and Los Fresnos High School, welcomed the grant as a way to jump-start school improvement efforts.

### *Cohort II:*

Two years later in 2007, the Enhanced *HSTW* Network added Cohort II consisting of 11 high schools, including two alternative education schools. Cohort II schools received funding at a greatly increased level (\$82,000 per school), which allowed them to obtain increased on-site support for school improvement strategies. Nine of the 11 schools in Cohort II were new to the *HSTW* initiative. The 14 schools in Cohort I had the opportunity to apply for continuation grants; 12 submitted proposals to remain in the network.

### *Cohort III:*

Ten grant-funded schools and one self-funded<sup>5</sup> school joined the Enhanced *HSTW* Network in 2009 as Cohort III. In addition, all schools in Cohorts I and II were allowed to apply for continuation grants. The high schools applying for continuation grants had the opportunity for their feeder middle grades schools to apply with them to form the first *Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW)* cohort. Nine middle grades schools were approved for grant funding in conjunction with continuing support at the high schools (**MMGW Cohort I**). The middle grades schools are implementing Key Practices for preparing students to succeed in rigorous academic courses in high school. SREB and the TEA used lessons learned from Cohorts I and II and from the Texas High School Project, a public-private alliance aimed at graduating more students ready for college and careers, to improve services to the new schools.

### *Cohort IV:*

This cohort was created in spring 2010. It consists of 10 grant-funded high schools and one self-funded high school. These schools began their improvement efforts by participating in the Texas State *HSTW/MMGW* Conference in June 2010. They also hosted Site Development Workshops in August 2010. All of the Cohort IV schools have hosted Technical Assistance Visits and have started implementing improvement efforts.

The higher level of funding made it possible for SREB to conduct a two-day whole-school Site Development Workshop — a requirement at each new school — for all faculty members, not just a team of administrators and teachers as in the past. This change ensured that all teachers became members of school focus teams, where they could buy into the process and participate more actively in raising student achievement.

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<sup>5</sup> Self-funded schools use local funds to participate in the network. They receive the same level of support and have similar expectations from the network.

***HSTW Cohort I (joined in 2005)***

Barbara Jordan High School for Careers  
Birdville High School  
Diboll High School  
Galena Park High School  
Haltom High School  
Iowa Park High School  
High School for Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice  
Los Fresnos High School  
Lubbock-Cooper High School  
Mabank High School  
Mount Pleasant High School  
Phyllis Wheatley High School  
Reagan High School  
Richland High School

***HSTW Cohort II (joined in 2007)***

Burton High School  
Graham High School  
J. M. Hanks High School  
Kermit High School  
LaVilla High School  
Memorial High School  
Sam Rayburn High School  
South Grand Prairie High School  
West Orange-Stark High School  
STARS High School (alternative school)  
The Summit High School (alternative school)

***HSTW Cohort III (joined in 2009)***

Austin High School  
Bowie High School  
Burgess High School  
Irvin High School  
Jefferson High School  
Cigarroa High School  
Paducah High School  
Poteet High School  
South Houston High School  
Victoria Memorial High School  
West Oso High School (self-funded)

***HSTW Cohort IV (joined in 2010)***

Cypress Creek High School  
Goodrich High School  
Booker T. Washington High School  
Robert E. Lee High School  
Midland High School  
O'Donnell High School  
Tornillo High School  
Americas High School  
El Dorado High School  
Socorro High School  
Irving High School (self-funded)

***MMGW Cohort I (joined in 2009)***

Burton Secondary School  
La Villa Middle School  
Lubbock-Cooper Middle School  
Mabank Junior High School  
Mount Pleasant Junior High School  
North Ridge Middle School  
Truman Middle School  
Watauga Middle School  
Southmore Intermediate School

# Appendix B: *HSTW* and *MMGW* Key Practices and Goals for Continuous Improvement

## *HSTW* Key Practices for Improving Student Achievement

*HSTW* has identified the following Key Practices to boost student achievement and provide direction and meaning to comprehensive school improvement and student learning:

- **High expectations** — Motivate more students to meet high expectations by integrating high expectations into classroom practices and giving students frequent feedback.
- **Program of study** — Require each student to complete an upgraded academic core and an academic or career concentration.
- **Academic studies** — Teach more students the essential concepts of the college-preparatory curriculum by encouraging them to apply academic content and skills to real-world problems and projects.
- **Career/technical studies** — Provide more students with access to intellectually challenging career/technical studies in high-demand fields that emphasize the higher-level mathematics, science, literacy and problem-solving skills needed in the workplace and in further education.
- **Work-based learning** — Enable students and their parents to choose from programs that integrate challenging high school studies and work-based learning and are planned by educators, employers and students.
- **Teachers working together** — Provide cross-disciplinary teams of teachers with time and support to work together to help students succeed in challenging academic and career/technical studies. Integrate reading, writing and speaking as strategies for learning into all parts of the curriculum and integrate mathematics into science and career/technical classrooms.
- **Students actively engaged** — Engage students in academic and career/technical classrooms in rigorous and challenging Proficient-level assignments, using research-based instructional strategies and technology.
- **Guidance** — Involve students and their parents in a guidance and advisement system that develops positive relationships and ensures completion of an accelerated program of study with an academic or a career/technical concentration. Provide each student with the same mentor throughout high school to assist with understanding postsecondary options, setting goals, selecting courses, reviewing progress and suggesting appropriate interventions as necessary.
- **Extra help** — Provide a structured system of extra help to assist students in completing accelerated programs of study with high-level academic and technical content.
- **Culture of continuous improvement** — Use student assessment and program evaluation data to continuously improve school culture, organization, management, curriculum and instruction to advance student learning.

## *HSTW* Goals for Continuous Improvement

The mission of *HSTW* is to create a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement in high school and the middle grades. To achieve this mission, *HSTW* has several goals:

- Increase to 85 percent the percentages of high school students who meet the *HSTW* reading, mathematics and science performance goals on the *HSTW* Assessment.
- Increase the percentages of all high school students who perform at the proficient level to at least 50 percent in reading, mathematics and science, as measured by the *HSTW* Assessment.
- Increase to 85 percent the percentages of high school graduates who complete *HSTW*-recommended curriculum and a concentration in an academic area, a career/technical area or a blend of the two.



- Increase to 90 percent the percentage of high school students who enter grade nine and complete high school four years later.
- Advance state and local policies and leadership initiatives that sustain a continuous school improvement effort.
- Have all students leave high school with postsecondary credit or having met standards for postsecondary studies to avoid remedial courses.
- Work in the middle grades to increase annually the percentage of students entering high school prepared to succeed in college-preparatory courses.

## *MMGW* Key Practices for Improving Student Achievement

School and classroom practices are more likely to impact student achievement if they are aligned to a framework of key practices and conditions that facilitate and encourage comprehensive school improvement. The *MMGW* Key Practices provide direction and meaning to comprehensive improvement for increased student achievement.

- **Aligned academic core:** Provide rigorous content in all middle grades academic core classes, and align core classes with performance standards that clearly state what students must know, understand and be able to do to succeed in college-preparatory English, mathematics and science courses in high school. Enroll middle grades students in core curricula that accelerate their learning, challenge them and appeal to their interests.
- **Engaging classroom practices:** Design classroom practices and instructional strategies to engage students intellectually, emotionally, behaviorally and socially in learning rigorous academic content. Young adolescents need varied learning activities linked to challenging academic content and opportunities to use newly acquired skills and concepts in hands-on, real-world applications so that they can understand and explain their interests, talents and aspirations.
- **Literacy across the curriculum:** Embed reading and writing standards and strategies for learning into all courses to advance academic and reading achievement and to help students become independent learners. Provide reading instruction in all academic curricula through grade eight and utilize research-based literacy strategies across content areas.
- **High expectations and a system of extra help and time:** Hold students to grade-level standards aligned to readiness standards for high school, college and careers. Organize time and resources to ensure students receive the extra help needed to meet high standards and expectations. The complete middle grades curriculum should be focused on accelerating achievement for all students using several strategies.
- **Intervention program for at-risk students:** Identify at-risk students in grades six, seven and eight who need accelerated instruction in mathematics, language arts and reading to be prepared for college-preparatory high school course work, and implement strategies and programs that target their needs.
- **Comprehensive system of guidance and advisement that involves parents:** Engage teachers, students and parents in a comprehensive guidance and advisement system — including academic advisement, career exploration and educational planning — that leads to a successful transition to high school. Involve parents in the school improvement process by informing them of the school’s mission and assisting them to understand the higher standards of performance now required of middle grades students and to support students to make greater effort and work hard.
- **Teachers working together:** Provide teams of teachers with time and support to work together — within and across disciplines — to integrate STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and literacy concepts across the curriculum, analyze teacher assignments and student work, and help students succeed in challenging academic and exploratory studies.
- **Quality professional development to support teachers:** Provide teachers with extensive, ongoing professional development on research-based instructional practices aligned with the school’s mission and school improvement plan, including research-based teaching strategies to incorporate rigorous, engaging assignments, activities, and formative and summative assessments into their instruction.



- **Use of technology for learning:** Middle grades classrooms in all subject areas should view technology as a tool for learning. Schools can support teachers to plan units of instruction that allow students to conduct research, write papers, communicate globally, prepare presentations using electronic tools and resources, and explore the use of technology to address an array of contemporary problems and projects linked to a range of broad career areas.
- **Continuous improvement through strong leadership:** Develop strong instructional leaders who take an active role in engaging teachers in continuous improvement of school and classroom practices. Middle grades schools need effective principals who encourage, support and actively participate with teachers in planning and implementing research-based school improvement strategies. Schools must continuously gather and use data on student, school and teacher performance to review and revise school and classroom practices as needed.

## *MMGW* Goals for Continuous Improvement

The primary mission of *MMGW* is to create a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement that prepares middle grades students for challenging high school studies. The *MMGW* Goals were established to meet this mission.

- Increase to 85 percent the percentages of students who meet the *MMGW* performance goals in reading, mathematics and science on SREB's Middle Grades Assessment.
- Increase the percentages of all students who perform at the Proficient level to at least 50 percent in reading, mathematics and science, as measured by the Middle Grades Assessment.
- Increase annually the percentage of students entering high school prepared to succeed in college-preparatory courses.
- Increase to 90 percent the percentage of students who transition into grade nine and complete high school four years later.
- Reduce the failure rate in grade nine by ensuring middle grades students receive the preparation they need to succeed in rigorous ninth-grade courses such as Algebra I and college-preparatory English and science.
- Advance state and local policies and leadership initiatives that sustain a continuous school improvement effort.



# SREB and State Support for Texas Enhanced *HSTW* and *MMGW* Schools

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