

Texas

2016 College- and Career-Readiness Policies and Practices

The Southern Regional Education Board has long emphasized the critical need to strengthen students' readiness to succeed after high school. SREB's recommendations to improve readiness (SREB.org/Readiness) cover standards, assessments, transitional courses, postsecondary placement and remedial education. To support states' efforts, SREB compiled information through interviews of P-16 education agency staff and review of numerous documents to determine state progress as of fall 2016 on the recommendations. This state profile summarizes selected findings for each of the five areas. SREB plans to update this information annually.

Standards

Does the state have statewide college- and career-readiness standards in reading, writing and mathematics? Do K-12 and postsecondary education agree on the same standards?

Legislative action in 2006 directed creation of Texas College and Career Readiness Standards, well ahead of the release of the Common Core Standards. Vertical teams from K-12 and higher education worked collaboratively to develop standards in reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies, as well as cross-disciplinary standards with emphasis on critical thinking. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board approved the standards, which were submitted by the state's commissioner of education to the Texas State Board of Education for integration into the K-12 curriculum beginning in 2008. The standards are embedded into high school end-of-course examinations.

Readiness Assessments

How does the state assess high school students' readiness? What are the options for students who do not meet them?

Texas has no required junior-year readiness assessment. ACT and SAT are options to assess college- and career-readiness. Also, students who meet the college-readiness threshold score on optional junior year end-of-course assessments in Algebra 2 and English 3 may enroll in entry-level college courses. These two assessments with readiness benchmarks were available in spring 2016, but school districts rarely administer them.

Transitional Courses and Interventions

Does the state require transitional readiness courses or other interventions for students who are not ready to succeed in college-level courses?

House Bill 5 (2013) requires school districts to partner with at least one postsecondary institution to develop and provide college preparatory courses designed for high school seniors whose performance does not meet college readiness standards by these measures: end-of-course assessments; college admissions or placement exam —ACT, SAT or Texas Success Initiative Assessment—or coursework. Statute requires that preparatory courses align with college- and career-readiness standards. Successful completion of these courses allows students to be exempt from remedial work when they enter the partnering college. Since local educators develop the courses, there is no statewide uniformity in either the curriculum or in what is considered successful completion. The Texas Education Agency developed rules and regulations concerning transitional courses. The mathematics transitional readiness course counts as a fourth-year high school mathematics credit.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is reviewing the higher education success rates of students exempt from the Texas Success Initiative requirements after they complete college preparatory coursework. Texas data include student-level information from K-12 public education into higher education.

Postsecondary Placement

How do institutions place a student who is not ready for college-level work? Are the same standards, assessments and qualifying score levels applied statewide or systemwide? Are multiple criteria and measures used in placement decisions?

Texas law requires postsecondary institutions to assess entering college students for college readiness in reading, writing and math unless the student qualifies for an exemption or demonstrates readiness through previous successful completion of college-level coursework. Students who are not exempt through the ACT or SAT, or who have not successfully completed a related dual credit or college-level transfer course, must take the Texas Success Initiative Assessment, a college-readiness diagnostic and placement test aligned to the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards, when they enroll in a public postsecondary institution. Before administering the TSIA, the institution must provide students with a pre-assessment activity involving several components, such as the importance of assessment, practice test questions and information on developmental education options.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board evaluates the effectiveness of the TSI. Each year, institutions must analyze and report to THECB on fiscal and instructional impacts of specific student outcomes; Texas Administrative Code specifies the information that institutions must report. Validation studies are underway.

Remedial and Developmental Education

Are there state or system policies for remedial and developmental education in colleges? What curricular and support paths are available for students? Is corequisite instruction—an academic course taken in conjunction with another course—required or optional? How do institutions and the state monitor student progress? What evidence is available on the effectiveness of these interventions?

Individual colleges and universities in Texas determine which at-risk students may enter degree-credit work, the placement criteria, remediation model and methods of monitoring progress. Texas Administrative Code directs institutions to use Texas Success Initiative Assessment results and the diagnostic profile and other factors such as high school GPA and class ranking, prior academic coursework and workplace experiences in determining appropriate interventions. Institutions must provide each non-exempt student with a plan for academic success, which may include developmental education coursework. Before or corequisite with a credit-bearing course, students must enroll in an appropriate developmental intervention in the related content area in which they did not meet state standards.

Institutions may mainstream students who do not meet the college-readiness benchmark into a college-level course and require supplemental assistance. Developmental education interventions may include a short refresher course on concepts, a module to address weaknesses, corequisite courses, boot camps and mainstream opportunities with tutoring. Requirements for math remediation may differ based on the student's degree plan. Although definitive evidence of effectiveness of alternative instructional options is not yet available, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is conducting a randomized control trial with Rand Corporation to determine factors and cut scores optimal for mainstreaming.