Moving the Needle:

Creating Better Career Opportunities and Workforce Readiness

Leander ISD Progress Report 2013
A Letter to the Community

More than 150 people move to the Austin area each day because of its dynamic economy, low crime, healthy housing market and quality school options, not to mention the overall great quality of life. That quality of life is reflected in the businesses that grow here, from Whole Foods and Seton Family of Hospitals to Samsung and Hanger Orthopedics to a slew of new entrepreneurial ventures.

But our workforce opportunities can be no stronger than our existing pool of talent. For almost a decade, the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce has partnered with business groups and school districts to encourage more Central Texas graduates to directly enroll in post-secondary education.

Our region has had years of improving scores and higher graduation rates, but direct-to-college enrollment has stalled. That’s a challenge we must address.

Now we’re taking that discussion one step further. Even as we see gains in college readiness in Central Texas, we also see the number of high-demand, high-pay jobs rise in the region. As of mid-January, we had 33,000 Central Texas job openings, in areas like IT and healthcare. One in five jobs were in computer science, even though few students indicate an interest in the field.

The time has come to talk to our students not only about pursuing post-secondary education, but also about choosing fields that can give them life-long careers.

We’ve included two charts in our report that capture the mismatch: One chart shows our regional job openings. The other shows graduating senior aspirations. Our job is to minimize the gap between openings and aspirations.

Catherine Morse
General Counsel and Director of Public Affairs, Samsung
Education Progress Report Task Force Chair

Source: The Conference Board Help Wanted Online

Source: Ray Marshall Center’s Student Futures Project
THE LEANDER ISD PATH TO COLLEGE

90% of ISD seniors say they're going to college.

80% applied via APPLY TEXAS.

77% took the SAT or ACT.

70% of students are college ready.

52% completed financial aid.

68% of the students in the class of 2012 directly enrolled in college by the fall after graduation.

Sources: Available at http://austinchamber.com/edureports
The Road to High School

Initial passing standards on the new State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, STAAR, were set to “meet the students where they were” three years ago but will continue to rise to a final passing standard aligned with a path to career- and college-readiness.

After two years under the new test, Leander ISD is closer to all students meeting current passing standards, especially in both reading and math on the fifth- and eighth-grade levels.

The final STAAR passing standard, which will not arrive before 2016, is considered aligned to post-secondary readiness. The goal of the Austin Chamber and its business partners, however, is to look to the Advanced performance level on STAAR, which is a standard considered best prepared for college and career. This standard is beyond both the current and final STAAR passing standards for the state, but it is best aligned to Central Texas workforce needs.

Leander ISD’s performance on both the fifth grade and eighth grade tests show that most students have met current performance standards and a healthy percentage of the students are on the path to career and college readiness. To further reflect Leander ISD’s focus on college and career readiness, approximately 34 percent of fifth grade students and 40 percent of eighth grade students took an accelerated math exam, which is not reported by the state in the grade level chart information.

For instance, in the first administration of the STAAR eighth grade level last year, a quarter of the students in social studies, a third of the students in science and almost half the students in reading were performing at a level that would be considered best prepared for the path to college and career readiness.

Even more impressive is Leander ISD’s commitment to increase the percentage of students performing at the final passing rate and Advanced level on STAAR, which both indicate the path for college and career readiness. While other school districts strive for passing rates, Leander ISD’s own goals are to increase the percentage of students performing at the advanced level by 7.5 percentage points.

Leander also sets specific goals to close the gaps between all students and those who are English language learners and economically disadvantaged. The district uses multiple assessment measures to focus on early intervention, especially in early literacy. The district has established a goal that 80 percent of the district’s second-grade students will read at or above grade level.

2009
Initiated HOPE Committees to identify at-risk students

From 2008-2013, high school completion rates for students identified as economically disadvantaged rose from 70% to 98%, effectively closing the gap

2010
Began use of PSAT and ReadiStep data to identify AP students

Percentage of high school students enrolled in at least one Pre-AP, AP, Pre-IB or IB course has increased from 59% in 2010 to 64% today

2011
Expanded dual credit opportunities

2011 saw a 43% increase in the number of students earning dual credit
Were 8th Grade Students on the Path to Being Career and College Ready?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Passed the Test</th>
<th>Met Final Passing Standard (College &amp; Career Ready)</th>
<th>Met Advanced Level (Well Prepared for College &amp; Career)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>64%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>46%</td>
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Note: Students were allowed two opportunities to pass the 8th grade math and reading assessments for the passing rate. All other levels based on first administration. 40% of 8th grade students took either the Algebra I or Geometry end-of-course exams, which are not included in this chart.

2012
Project Lead the Way expanded
Increased from 165 to 1,060 participating students across all 5 high school and 3 middle school campuses

2012
Loss of State Funding for ReadiStep for all students in 8th to 11th grades
Leander ISD, in support with community partners, continued to fund to ensure access for all students in 8th to 11th grades

2013
Formed partnership to provide 20+ financial aid workshops
As of October 2013, FAFSA submission rate up to 64 percent
Were 5th Grade Students on the Path to Being Career and College Ready?

![Bar chart showing reading, math, and science test results for 5th grade students.]

**Source:** Texas Academic Performance Report and Pearson Assessment

**Note:** Students were allowed two opportunities to pass the 5th grade math and reading assessment for the passing rate. All other levels are based on first administration. 34% of 5th grade students took the 6th grade math test.

**Task Force Recommendations**

- Continue to focus efforts to increase college- and career-readiness rates that meet, or even exceed, goals for direct-to-college enrollment rates.

- Continue the strong partnership with Austin Community College in the area of career and technical education and Early College Start, with a goal of creating opportunities for high-demand certifications.

- Continue to develop strategies to decrease gaps for economically disadvantaged students, as well as students in special education and English as a Second Language programs.

- Set the Advanced level of the STAAR, in addition to the state final passing standard, as the goal for student achievement on STAAR and end of course tests.

- Continue to support the use of technology and data as tools for innovative teaching and learning practices to improve student engagement and close the achievement gap.

- Continue to develop strategies to maximize school facilities, given the growing school population and the limits underneath the current cap for debt service.

- Deploy resources to prepare students for high school and college options, with an emphasis on advising and the completion of the FAFSA and Apply Texas applications.

- Support the decision to explore and assess additional avenues for funding, through either a tax ratification election or a future bond election.
**College, Career, and Beyond**

Leander ISD, given its strong performance in the early grades, is ideally prepared to send the majority of its students to post-secondary opportunities.

We laud Leander ISD for its candor that being “college eligible” does not necessarily equate to being “college ready.” We, like the school district, define college and career readiness as being able to enter credit-bearing courses for a degree or certificate without the need for remediation. Not every graduate will attend a four-year college, but all should be prepared for that option.

We applaud LISD’s willingness to revisit recent graduates to hone the district’s own approach to college and career readiness, recognizing that study skills, advanced courses and a broad exposure to writing are as important for those pursuing a four-year degree as it is for those pursuing a high-demand certification.

The chamber sees FAFSA, college readiness and Apply Texas rates as the three pillars of direct college enrollment in most school districts. With regard to FAFSA, 49 percent of the Class of 2013 submitted applications last year. Leander has set a goal of 65 percent FAFSA completion rate this year, and the district has worked closely with the community and chamber to offer free financial aid application workshops through “Own It,” an innovative partnership with area churches to offer free financial aid application workshops throughout the Leander and Cedar Park communities. LISD has also continued to support the Austin Chamber’s Financial Aid Saturdays.

A key indicator of college readiness is the state’s College Ready Graduate indicator. For this indicator, students are considered ready for success for higher education or the high-performance workplace if they meet or exceed performance standards on SAT, ACT or TAKS. In Leander ISD, the college ready rate, for both English/Language Arts and math, has increased from 50 percent to 70 percent between 2007 and 2011 and has remained at 70 percent.

College enrollment in Leander ISD has been stable, hovering just below or above 70 percent since 2007. After a one-year dip for the Class of 2011, direct-to-college enrollment was 72 percent for the Class of 2012, and we would encourage the district to set even higher goals, given that 77 percent of Leander’s seniors took the SAT and ACT, indicating a strong interest in attending college.

Over the last five years, Leander ISD has increased high school graduation rates by 10 percentage points and, more importantly, has closed the gap for students who are identified as economically disadvantaged, from 70 percent to 98 percent.

Leander ISD is now targeting the more rigorous four-year graduation rate for the district measure. Other goals Leander ISD is setting that we would support include goals to increase AP/IB participation by 3 percentage points and increase passing and credit standards on AP/IB tests. The latest state statistics indicate that 68 percent of the students taking these tests scored above the criterion, a strong indication of the strength of the teaching in the classroom.

How Many Graduates Went Directly to College Upon Graduation?

![Bar chart showing percentage of graduates going directly to college from 2007 to 2012.]

Source: National Clearinghouse Data, UT Ray Marshall Center

Percentages indicate students who have enrolled in at least one credit-bearing course at a community college or degree-granting institution for the first time in the fall following graduation, in Texas or out of state.
How Many Graduates Were Ready for College or a Career?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
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<th>2008</th>
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<th>2010</th>
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Source: Texas Academic Performance Report

Career- and college-readiness is measured by the SAT, ACT or the exit-level Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. Students who fail to meet set standards must enter college taking remedial classes.
How Many Graduated in Four Years?

- All Students
- African American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic
- White
- Econ. Disadvantaged

2007: 20% 2008: 40% 2009: 60% 2010: 80%

Source: Texas Academic Performance Report

How Did Students Perform on EOC Tests?

- ELA II Writing: 6% 2007, 50% 2009, 75% 2010
- ELA II Reading: 7% 2007, 42% 2009, 75% 2010
- ELA I Writing: 28% 2009, 56% 2009, 75% 2010
- ELA I Reading: 27% 2009, 75% 2009, 95% 2010
- Biology: 33% 2009, 57% 2009, 90% 2010
- Algebra I: 100% 2009, 20% 2009, 40% 2009

Source: Texas Academic Performance Report

How Many Graduated in Five Years?

- 2009: 2009 (Graduated in 4 yrs), 2009 (Add'l graduates in 5 yrs)
- 2010: 2010 (Graduated in 4 yrs), 2010 (Add'l graduates in 5 yrs)
- 2011: 2011 (Graduated in 4 yrs), 2011 (Add'l graduates in 5 yrs)

Source: Texas Academic Performance Report
In addition to the actions on the Road to College, the UT-Austin Ray Marshall Center has identified a combination of six student actions which, if completed, indicate that a high school senior has the “best odds” for direct enrollment in some form of postsecondary education. This is not a multiple choice exercise: to ensure the vast majority of Leander ISD graduates directly enroll in college, we encourage completion of all six actions by seniors before graduation.

The higher the percentage on these activities, the more likely we will move the needle on college enrollment.

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**Parents filled out FAFSA**

Parents filled out FAFSA

**Thought aid process was easy**

Thought aid process was easy

**Visited college or technical school**

Visited college or technical school

**Took a prep course for the SAT or ACT**

Took a prep course for the SAT or ACT

**Plan to pay with loans**

Plan to pay with loans

**Discussed college plans with school staff**

Discussed college plans with school staff

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Source: Leander ISD Class of 2013 Senior Survey
This is ninth year the Austin Chamber of Commerce has produced the education progress reports. The chair of this year’s task force effort is Catherine Morse, General Counsel and Director of Public Affairs at Samsung. Dawn L Jones, external affairs manager, Intel-Texas, serves as vice chair of the task force and chair of the launch event.

**LEANDER ISD**
Bret Champion, Superintendent of Schools
Sarah Martinez, Senior Director of Information Technology-Decision Support
Brenda Cruz, Director of Student Information, Assessment, and Accountability
Veronica Sopher, Senior Executive Director of School and Community Relations
Jennifer Bailey, Communications Specialist
Camille Clay, Director of Career Education
Lisa Brittain, Director of College and Career Readiness

**LEANDER & CEDAR PARK CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE**
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Don Tracy, Cedar Park Mayor Pro Tem and Austin Community College
Tony Moline, President and CEO, Cedar Park Chamber of Commerce
Bridget Brandt, President and CEO, Leander Chamber of Commerce
Rafael Valiente, Wells Fargo Bank

For more information about Leander ISD: www.leanderisd.org
For more information on the Leander Chamber of Commerce: www.leandercc.org
For more information on the Cedar Park Chamber of Commerce: www.cedarparkchamber.org
To learn about the Austin chamber’s progress reports and download electronic versions of each report, visit www.austinchamber.com/edureports or call Senior Vice President of Federal/State Advocacy and Education/Talent Development Drew Scheberle at 512.322.5628.