

House Bill 5 Evaluation: Final Report Highlights and Executive Summary

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December 2017

What We Studied

The final report on the evaluation of House Bill (HB) 5 provides (1) an update on changes made to the current policy for graduation, including coursework, testing, and accountability during the 84th and 85th Texas Legislative Sessions; (2) an update on the implementation of HB 5 by school districts since 2014–15; and (3) a preliminary look at the Foundation High School Program that students are pursuing, including the endorsements and distinguished level of achievement. This report also examines student outcomes for the Foundation High School Program cohorts.

In June 2013, the 83rd Texas Legislature passed House Bill (HB) 5, which established a new high school program—the Foundation High School Program. The new high school graduation program was required for all entering Grade 9 students in all Texas public school districts in 2014–15.¹ The Foundation High School Program was designed to give students the flexibility to take more classes focused on their interests. Under the Foundation High School Program, students are required to complete 22 credits, including four credits in English language arts (ELA) and three credits each in science, social studies, and mathematics. In addition, all students are now required to earn two credits in a language other than English. Students also must select one of five endorsements to pursue (i.e., arts and humanities; business and industry; public services; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); or multidisciplinary studies).² Completing an endorsement requires students to earn 26 credits to graduate. The additional credits must include a fourth credit in mathematics and a fourth credit in science and two electives. However, unlike the previous graduation programs, students are not required to complete Algebra II to fulfill the mathematics requirement. Only students opting to earn a distinguished level of achievement or pursue the STEM endorsement continue to be required to complete Algebra II.³

As part of the legislation, HB 5 Section 83(a), the Texas Education Agency (TEA), in collaboration with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), is required to conduct an evaluation that estimates the effects of these changes on several key outcomes.

In response to these requirements, TEA, in collaboration with THECB and TWC, contracted with American Institutes for Research (AIR) in spring 2015 to conduct an initial report on the evaluation of HB 5, which focused on meeting the

¹ The 2014–15 entering Grade 9 cohort is the first cohort required to select an endorsement under the Foundation High School Program. Entering Grade 9 cohorts from 2010–11 to 2013–14 were allowed to opt into the Foundation High School Program.

² Each student, upon entering Grade 9, must indicate in writing which endorsement he or she intends to pursue. However, the student may change the endorsement at any time. In addition, a student may graduate without an endorsement if, after the student's sophomore year, he or she and the student's parent or guardian are advised by a school counselor of the specific benefits of graduating from high school with one or more endorsements and the student's parent or guardian files with a school counselor written permission on a form adopted by the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

³ To earn a distinguished level of achievement, a student must complete a total of four credits in mathematics, including Algebra II, and four credits in science, and must successfully complete requirements for an endorsement.

following two objectives:

1. Evaluate the implementation of HB 5 on curriculum and testing requirements for high school graduation.
2. Estimate the effect of the changes that HB 5 made to curriculum and testing requirements on high school graduation rates, college readiness, college admissions, college completion, obtainment of workforce certificates, employment rates, and earnings.⁴

Once again, TEA, in collaboration with THECB and TWC, contracted with AIR to conduct the final report on the evaluation of HB 5 in response to HB 5 requirements. This report provides (1) an update on changes made to the current policy for graduation, including curriculum, testing, and accountability during the 84th and 85th Texas Legislative Sessions, (2) an update on the implementation of HB 5 by school districts since 2014–15, and (3) a preliminary look at the Foundation High School Program that students are pursuing, including the endorsements and distinguished level of achievement. This report also examines student outcomes for the Foundation High School Program cohorts.

What We Discovered

Updates to Graduation Requirements in Texas

The Texas Legislature continues to provide support and flexibility in how students meet state graduation requirements by passing:

- House Bill 18 (84th Texas Legislature), to strengthen the college and career advising available to students in public middle and high schools in Texas;
- Senate Bill 463 (85th Texas Legislature), to extend the expiration date to September 1, 2019, which allows students who have taken and failed up to two end-of-course (EOC) assessments to meet the graduation requirements through an individual graduation committee decision;
- Senate Bill 826 (85th Texas Legislature), which removes the course sequencing requirements that students needed to adhere to when meeting English and mathematics course requirements, giving students more flexibility to graduate; and
- Senate Bill 1005 (85th Texas Legislature), which allows students graduating under Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills® exit-level assessment requirements to meet state graduation requirements through the SAT, ACT, or the Texas Success Initiative Assessment, in addition to State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness® EOC exams.

Progress of Students Graduating Under the Minimum, Recommended, and Distinguished Graduation Programs

- The Texas Success Initiative (TSI) readiness performance in reading, mathematics, and writing increased for all subject areas for students in the 2002–03 through 2010–11 cohorts.
- The 2011–12 incoming Grade 9 cohort was the first cohort that did not have the option to meet TSI readiness standards by achieving at or above the readiness cut score on the exit-level Grade 11 assessment. The measured TSI readiness rates for 2011–12 cohort cannot be directly compared to rates of earlier cohorts for the purpose of describing trends in true college readiness because of these significant changes in testing requirements.
- Gaps in on-time high school graduation rates between students from different racial/ethnic groups narrowed considerably over time for the cohorts required to meet the 4X4 (four credits each in English language arts, math, science and social studies) graduation requirements.
- The percentages of students who enrolled in a Texas two-year college or four-year public or independent college or university continued to remain relatively stable across the last seven years.

⁴ This first evaluation report can be found on TEA’s website at

http://tea.texas.gov/Reports_and_Data/Program_Evaluations/Research_Reports/Program_Evaluation_Research_Reports/

- Of students who enrolled in a Texas four-year college within one year of high school graduation, the percentage of students graduating from or persisting a fifth year in a four-year college increased by 4 percentage points from the 2001–02 cohort to the 2007–08 cohort.
- Across all entering Grade 9 cohorts, those students who graduated under the Distinguished Achievement Program consistently earned a higher income than those graduating under the Recommended High School Program and Minimum High School Program, respectively.

District Implementation of the Curriculum and Graduation Requirements Under the Foundation High School Program Since 2014–15

- More than half of responding districts (56%) offer all five endorsements, which is an increase of 3 percentage points from 2015.
- Staffing concerns around teacher qualifications and staff capacity and a lack of resources (funding, curriculum, facilities, equipment, etc.) were the top existing barriers to offering certain endorsements reported by districts.
- Expressed student interest and career interest inventories were the top considerations reported by districts when recommending particular endorsements to students.
- Less than a quarter of districts reported they had transfer students who were unable to complete the endorsement they previously were pursuing in another district.
- Speech/professional communications, health, four social studies credits, and Algebra II were the most often cited additional local criteria required by districts in addition to the state graduation requirements.

Student Outcomes for Foundation High School Program Cohorts

- The probability of enrolling in a Texas four-year college was higher for students graduating under the Minimum High School Program, Recommended High School Program, or Distinguished Achievement Program than for students who opted to graduate under the Foundation High School Program. The probability of enrolling in a Texas two-year college was higher for students who opted to graduate under the Foundation High School Program. These results should be interpreted with caution as students from these cohorts opted into the program may not be comparable to later cohorts who must graduate under the Foundation High School Program.
- The percentage of students selecting the Foundation High School Program plus endorsement and distinguished level of achievement increased from the 2014–15 to the 2015–16 cohort.
- Results showed that students were pursuing each endorsement with the highest percentage pursuing the multidisciplinary endorsement.
- Of the students in the 2014–15 cohort who took EOC assessments, around 50% met Level II at the final standard on their first attempt.

Limitations of the Findings/Next Steps

The most significant limitation of the evaluation of HB 5 is the length of time that students have progressed since the Foundation High School Program was implemented. The first cohort of Grade 9 students required to complete the requirements under the Foundation High School Program will not graduate until spring 2018. Although an estimate of the effect of HB 5 on student outcomes was conducted using a cohort of graduates who had the option of graduating under the Foundation High School Program, these estimates are limited and preliminary given that this option was made retroactively and students were able to plan their coursework under the Foundation High School Program only during their senior year.

Another limitation concerns the comparisons conducted between students who graduated under the Minimum, Recommended, and Distinguished high school diplomas and the students who opted to graduate under the Foundation High School Program. Students in the 2011–12 and 2012–13 cohorts who opted to graduate under the Foundation High School Program chose to do so in the last two years of high school. These students may not be comparable to later cohorts who began the Foundation High School Program in Grade 9 or those students in the 2011–12 and 2012–13

cohorts who graduated under the Distinguished Achievement Program, or the Recommended or Minimum High School Programs.

An additional evaluation report completed in August 2020, after these students have graduated from high school (spring 2018), would be beneficial to the Texas Legislature because impacts to high school graduation and college enrollment will be measurable. In addition, more cohorts will be entering high school under the Foundation High School Program, giving the Texas Legislature more opportunities to see trends in these outcomes.

A copy of the full 241-page comprehensive report can be found at:

<https://tea.texas.gov/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID=51539618631&libID=51539618631>

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