

## Summit's goal: more college graduates

Alliance meets today to discuss ways to increase rates locally

By Laura Heinauer  
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

College-level chemistry, high school algebra, second-grade reading — there are plenty of areas where students can get tripped up on their way to college graduation.

That's why, with the goal of creating a highly educated work force in Central Texas, local business leaders, elected officials and educators are teaming up to form the E3 Alliance to identify problem spots in the region's education system from kindergarten through college and to help funnel resources in a way that addresses them.

"It's really about figuring out where should our resources and our money and our time go," said Susan Dawson, executive director of the organization, which is hosting a summit today at Austin Community College's Eastview Campus.

The summit is the first formal kickoff to the community engagement portion of the project, which was launched earlier this year. Summit invitees include officials from area school districts, universities and businesses who will help decide what research needs to be conducted to create a set of benchmarks and goals for the 10-year program.

The information will be used to develop a plan or blueprint that will spell out specific ways in which Central Texas' work force needs can be aligned with educational priorities. One such

Continued from B1

initiative might involve a program aimed at encouraging students with two-year degrees to attend a four-year institution, Dawson said.

Allyson Peerman, the global community affairs director for Advanced Micro Devices, which has invested \$20,000 in the project, said that what her company found attractive about the E-3 Alliance is its regional approach to change and its emphasis on systematic change. The three Es stand for Education Equals Economics.

"What we've seen in the different programs we participated in was that we were able to make a huge difference in the lives of individual students, but what's not showing up is just a whole scale progression or change," Peerman said. "What

### The E3 Alliance

The alliance — a partnership of the Austin Community College, the Austin Area Research Organization, the University of Texas, local business leaders, elected officials and educators — was formed to help identify and solve the biggest problems facing education in Central Texas.

The group estimates that Texas is losing millions of dollars in potential tax revenue every year because of students who fail to graduate from high school. Only about 58 percent of the students who were seventh graders in 1992 had graduated high school within six years, and only about 14 percent had attained a bachelor's or associate's degree in Texas within the decade.

Learn more about the alliance or today's summit at Austin Community College's Eastview Campus at [www.e3alliance.org](http://www.e3alliance.org).

Source: E3 Alliance

we're looking for is areas, where if we were to apply a lot more pressure, we might be able to move the needle."

The hope, she said, is that the alliance can bring a kind of

business-model approach to improving education.

"What we want to see is, if one school has a fabulous program, how can we take those best practices and export them to

these other districts," Peerman said.

According to the research already available, the challenge will be great. Although the number of students attending area schools has grown rapidly in Central Texas, the increase in the number of economically disadvantaged students has grown faster. These students, studies indicate, don't graduate at the same rates and perform worse than their peers on standardized tests.

"This is about reaching everyone from the Dell-ianaires, to the West Austin dads to the Westlake mom and asking, 'How do we truly get on the same page with a common set of measurable goals for the region?'" Dawson said.

[lheinauer@statesman.com](mailto:lheinauer@statesman.com); 445-3694

See GRADS, B3

Learn more about the E3 Alliance in Central Texas, B3.