

# The Austin College Access Network

The Austin College Access Network (ACAN) is a **coalition** of community-based organizations (CBOs), local higher education institutions (IHEs), school districts, the region's education service center, and other organizations committed to promoting college-going and completion cultures. Members are committed to helping first generation and traditionally under-represented students successfully complete high school, enroll in higher education, and earn a credential. The coalition is chaired by the nonprofit College Forward and is facilitated by E3 Alliance as one of its **collective impact** initiatives for educational alignment in Central Texas.

## Our Purpose

The purpose of ACAN is to develop and strengthen the network of service providers, district college-readiness personnel, and college student services practitioners with the mission to develop the capacity of member organizations to increase postsecondary success for underserved students - starting as early as middle school - ensuring that all students in Central Texas achieve postsecondary success.

## Members

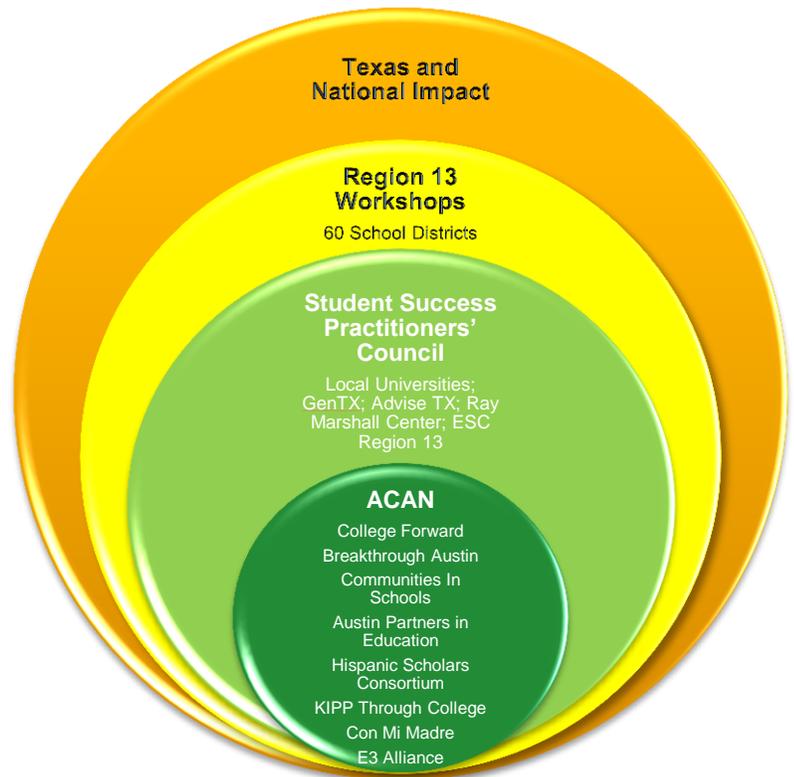
ACAN members include: **Austin Partners in Education, Breakthrough Austin, College Forward, Communities In Schools, Con Mi MADRE, Hispanic Scholarship Consortium, KIPP Austin and E3 Alliance.** Additional organizations that collaborate through the Network include: **The Ray Marshall Center, Education Service Center Region 13, GenTx, Advise Texas, The Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, TG, Austin Community College, Concordia University, Huston-Tillotson University, St. Edwards University, Southwestern University, Texas State University, Texas A&M University, and The University of Texas at Austin.**

## Scope of Impact

ACAN organizations provide direct college access and success services to nearly **7,000 students**, grades 6 through college completion and into career entry. ACAN students are served in **23 high schools** and **24 middle schools** in 9 districts across Central Texas. Direct services include: academic support, college preparation and planning, parental support and outreach, higher education persistence support, and case management.

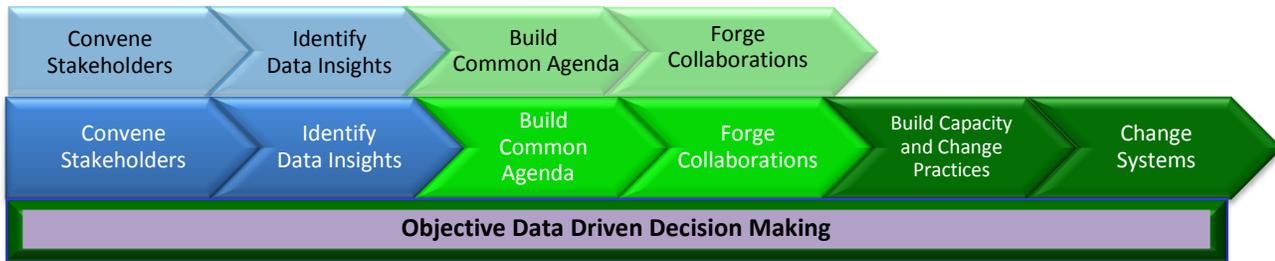
This collaborative effort leverages a regional approach to improve students' education attainment by building cross-sector/cross-institution partnerships among colleges and universities, school districts and community-based organizations to broadly share best practices, optimize resources and improve communication. These partnerships, in turn,

***build systemic capacity to increase student access to, persistence, and success in higher education.***



## Educational Alignment

ACAN's **Theory of Change** begins with **data insights** used to identify key issues, create a **common agenda** and point to practices that will raise achievement and outcomes for all students regardless of whether they are program participants. These change practices both generate and are generated by relationships that build both inter-organizational trust and communication that can lead to long-term **systems change** through **policy change that occurs at the institutional and community levels**. The illustration below of our collective impact model shows how collaboration has led to both tactical accomplishments and systems change across the region. We have entered a second cycle of collective impact, which has enabled the deeper focus on capacity building.



Since launching in 2008, ACAN partners have:

1. Added over **5,500 low income and first generation students** to their programs
2. Helped to cultivate critical **community partnerships** to leverage resources
3. Developed the state's first **regional strategic plan to increase college student persistence**
4. Launched the first cross-sector student support service coalition of regional higher education institutions and community organizations; Membership to the **Student Success Practitioner's Council** is open to all organizations
5. Developed the state's first **College Guide to Advising Immigrant Students** and conducted workshops with participants from 23 high schools, 8 school districts and 22 community organizations
6. Established the first **student tracking protocol** that identified **common definitions of access and persistence** with matched cohorts to monitor results and conduct longitudinal evaluations to improve program effectiveness
7. An independent program evaluation of ACAN participant outcomes, as compared to demographically and academically similar students not receiving ACAN services, focused on college access rates and first-year persistence rates. **This matched-cohort study is one of only a handful of studies with this level of rigor in the nation.** Study findings led to renewed emphasis on improving persistence and transfer success.
8. Developed **three professional development workshops** that are free to high school and college counselors: Advising Immigrant Students; Fresh Start: Successfully Transitioning from High School to College; & TSI Assessment
9. Developed state's first **regional college access charter** to support capacity-building efforts
10. Created a regional common agenda through a **shared commitment and shared strategic priorities** with a commitment to report out **common student performance measures** as a single ACAN entity for students directly served by ACAN member organizations
11. Developed the state's first **FERPA-compliant data release protocol** enabling community organizations and institutions of higher education to communicate with one another about the students they share

## What's Next for ACAN?

1. The ACAN Student Success Practitioners' Council will continue to develop **new professional development workshops** for high school counselors. They will launch a new career pathways workshop in the fall of 2015.
2. The Student Success Practitioner's Council will **implement one of the first near-to-peer networks across institutions in the country** - helping students successfully transfer from ACC to Texas State University.
3. ACAN member organizations will work with Austin Community College and Texas State University to **develop a system of real-time supports**.
4. Austin Community College hires a **Student Support Lead** for 2014-15 to deepen services for ACAN students.
5. ACAN seeks to incorporate other institutions of higher education in **developing a common regional FERPA release**.

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