

House Bill 5: Description of Changes and Policy Implications

Background

In 2013, the 83rd Texas legislature passed HB 5, a bill relating to public school accountability, assessment, and curriculum requirements that many believe may be the most sweeping reform to Texas state education code in 25 years. While rules related to the implications of HB 5 are still being processed, this document outlines the results and policy implications of HB 5 as of January 2015. *E3 Alliance is a nonpartisan, independent 501-(c)(3) nonprofit. This document does not attempt to state a position for or against any portions of HB 5 but rather to provide an objective review of implications.*

The Foundation Program for Graduation

An important education policy shift has transpired in Texas. The new Foundation Program eliminates the "college for all" policy embedded in the "4x4" graduation requirement whereby students were expected to complete four courses in each core subject - including math and science. This new diploma instead prioritizes high school pathways emphasizing both workforce and college readiness.

The **Foundation Program** requires a student to earn 22 credits:

- 4 English (English I, II, III, & 1 advanced);
- 3 Math (Algebra I, Geometry, & 1 advanced);
- 3 Science (Biology, 2 Advanced courses);
- 3 Social Studies (US History, 1 semester in both Economics and Government, 1 World History or Geography or a combination of the two)
- 2 Foreign Languages (can substitute computer programming)
- 1 Physical Education
- 1 Fine Arts
- 5 Electives

Students may graduate under the Foundation Program with an **endorsement** in five broad pathways. Each requires a series of related coursework with an additional advanced mathematics, science course, and 2 electives, increasing earned credits to 26.

- Business & Industry
- Public Services
- STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics)
- Arts & Humanities
- Multi-Disciplinary Studies

Endorsements in Business & Industry, Public Services, and STEM include programs of study that are defined by a series of sequential career-based coursework in a specific field. The multi-disciplinary studies endorsement contains unrelated advanced career and technology education courses and is *required* if schools can only provide coursework in one pathway.

Students may graduate under the Foundation Program with a **distinguished** level of achievement if they earn at least one endorsement and receive credit for Algebra II as one of their advanced math courses. *Only distinguished graduates are eligible for "Top 10%" automatic admission to state public universities and financial aid.* A number of Central Texas school districts have made the distinguished plan the default for graduation because they believe it affords students more postsecondary options.

Performance Acknowledgements

All students may earn performance acknowledgements for earning a nationally or internationally recognized business or industry certification or license. Students are also awarded for outstanding

performance in a dual credit course(s); bilingualism and biliteracy, and college-ready scores on AP, IB, PSAT, ACT-Plan, SAT or ACT exams.

End-of-Course Assessment Requirements

The number of end-of-course (EOC) assessments required for graduation has been reduced from 15 to 5. The 5 EOC assessments required for graduation and the typical grade level of enrollment include:

- English I (9th grade)
- English II (10th grade)
- US History (9th grade)
- Biology (9th grade)
- Algebra I (8th grade)

Reading and writing have been combined within one exam. Scores will be given on a scale of 1-100. Scores are no longer required to count toward 15% of a student's grade in the course. Students are no longer required to earn a certain cumulative score on all assessments in order to graduate. Students may retest to achieve the required passing score. Students performing satisfactory on nationally recognized norm-referenced tests satisfy EOC requirements. School districts may administer no more than 2 district-made benchmark assessments in each content area in order to prepare students for an end-of-course exam. Districts may not remove students from classroom instruction for more than 10% of instructional days for the purposes of test preparation, except with parent consent. Districts must evaluate the effectiveness of the accelerated instruction provided to students who fail EOC assessments. Students must be enrolled in the United States for 60 consecutive days to be considered enrolled in the US for test participation purposes, leaving ELL students who are highly mobile excluded from the accountability system.

Accountability System

A new and expanded school accountability system includes: student performance, community and student engagement, and financial solvency. High schools will now be evaluated on at least 3 postsecondary indicators of student success, blurring the line between high school and college in unprecedented ways. These may include: the new Texas Success Initiative (TSI) benchmarks scores, students earning at least 12 or 30 hours of college credit, and students earning an Associate's degree or industry certifications. Beyond academic achievement, schools earn new distinctions for academic growth defined as top 25% relative to their comparison schools, making progress in eliminating achievement gaps, achievement in core content areas, and advanced achievement in middle/junior high schools. HB 5 also attempts to increase transparency in the quality of education delivered by districts and campuses. While districts and campuses will still receive exemplary, recognized, and unacceptable ratings, a new A-F system will be created to improve public understanding. A new website, Texas School Accountability Dashboard, will be designed to allow comparisons in accountability ratings among districts and campuses. New reports which include the percentage of graduating seniors who earn endorsements and distinguished diplomas at each district may hold districts accountable for guiding students towards rigorous pathways.

Opportunity to Strengthen Career Pathways

Districts are encouraged to partner with local higher education institutions to develop advanced coursework which lead to employment certifications and align with postsecondary programs of study. Interaction with business and higher education is encouraged in the development of new TEKS-aligned courses so that students are prepared in high-wage, high-demand career fields. *Institutions are encouraged to develop these courses as dual enrollment courses, broadening the opportunity to develop strong career pathways and stackable credentials.*

College and Career Counseling

The success of this new high school model with career pathways will rely on the expertise of counseling departments and their knowledge of local workforce needs and postsecondary career pathways. The middle school years are crucial for identifying career interests by the end of 8th grade. Students must commit to their area of endorsement *in writing* upon enrolling in high school via **Personal graduation plans** identifying a commitment to sequential coursework along an endorsement pathway. A student's parent may file written permission to opt out of an endorsement pathway no earlier than the sophomore year. Counselors must provide information regarding preparing for postsecondary education and financial aid availability as early as the elementary years. In high school, parents and students must be advised annually of the specific benefits of graduating with an endorsement, the benefits of graduating with a distinguished diploma, and financial planning.

Implications for the TSI Assessment

While it was part of separate education code and not HB 5, the state is currently implementing a new college readiness assessment for students – the Texas Success Initiative Assessment – that replaces prior college readiness assessments used to identify readiness for college credit-bearing coursework (Accuplacer, Compass, and THEA). Students must meet CCR thresholds in mathematics and English in order to register in credit-bearing coursework in high school and college. These thresholds are now standardized for all institutions of higher education across the state.

College Preparatory Course

Districts are required partner with IHEs to offer college preparatory courses in mathematics and English for students not identified as college-ready by the end of their junior year, effectively pushing content remediation that underprepared college students take down into the senior year of high school. Passing a College Prep course

would exclude students from having to take the TSI assessment for the institution awarding the credit. The Commissioner will decide the transferability of this credit; meanwhile, any student earning a 2-year degree would satisfy TSI for 4-year institutions. College-ready scores on Algebra II and English III optional exams eliminate the need for a student to take the TSI Assessment, however, these end-of-course exams have been discontinued through 2016.

The advanced mathematics and English course may be satisfied by the College Prep course exempting students from developmental coursework upon entering college. Districts may use their Instructional Materials Allotment to purchase instructional materials for these courses. Students may receive college credit from the institution of higher education providing them as dual credit college preparatory courses.

Notable Policy Implications for Career Readiness

- Algebra II, a course highly correlated with college success, is now only required for students opting into STEM.
- The core science foundation (chemistry and physics) is no longer required.
- While 4 years of English Language Arts are required under all pathways, the class traditionally offered as English IV and also, World Literature are optional.
- Students who make changes to their program of study may not be able to fulfill the complete sequence of coursework, forcing students to graduate with the less focused multi-disciplinary endorsement.
- Districts and campuses that are smaller and rural may have limited ability to offer the four endorsements with sequential coursework.
- In approving CTE courses, the State Board of Education must ensure that at least 50% of them are cost effective. Institutions and business should work together to develop cost-effective advanced CTE course.