

Texas High Performance Schools Consortium Model



Executive Summary

In 2011, Texas created the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium (THPSC), a group of up to 30 public schools and school districts (K-12) that develop and test new learning standards, assessments, and accountability systems. The consortium is also tasked with reporting their findings to the Texas executive and legislative branches. Since the consortium's formation, new Texas legislation has changed the standards for student assessments. In addition, public school performance in Texas is now judged based on a greater diversity of factors, including career, military, and higher education readiness.

Highlights

- The THPSC addresses four main educational topic areas: 1) digital learning, 2) learning standards, 3) multiple assessments, and 4) local control.
- A progress report is produced by THPSC every two years and presented to the Texas executive and legislative branches. This report includes examples of successful programs implemented by school districts and legislative recommendations.
- Texas reduced the number of end-of-course exams high schoolers need to graduate from 15 to 5 by 2014 and expanded accountability standards to take into account metrics including college, career, and military readiness.
 - Relative school academic standing or school progress are also taken into account, in addition to educational achievement gaps between various groups.

Limitations

- While Texas has significantly changed its school standards and accountability measures, it is difficult to assess what influence the THPSC has had on these changes.
- The student demographics of the THPSC over-represent White students and under-represent socioeconomically disadvantaged students compared to statewide student demographics.
- No urban or charter schools applied to be part of THPSC and, therefore, are not included in the two-year progress reports.

Research Background

Consortium Goals and Responsibilities

Texas has the second largest school system in the U.S., with over 5.6 million public elementary and secondary school students.¹ The Texas High Performance Schools Consortium (THPSC) was

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created in 2011 by Texas legislation (Texas Education Code [§ 7.0561](#)) with the purpose of creating a group of schools and K-12 school districts that would develop and test new learning standards, assessments, and accountability systems. Though the school districts in the THPSC do not receive any additional funding, districts do receive support such as consulting, training, and networking opportunities with other members. Additionally, participants have an opportunity to provide input regarding changes to the state-wide educational system.

The THPSC addresses four main areas:

1. Digital learning: Leveraging new technologies for classroom instruction. This is especially relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, as more student education has shifted to remote [online education](#).
2. Learning standards: The set of subject masteries students need to demonstrate in order to be competitive career or higher education candidates after graduation.
3. Multiple assessments: Expansion of how student progress and achievement are measured.
4. Local control: Providing local communities and parents opportunities to influence school decision-making.

The THPSC is required to produce a [progress report](#) every two years to the Texas executive and legislative branches and includes legislative recommendations.² The report involves a description of the program and program principles, examples of new technological integrations, and examples of new programs, which historically includes many examples of new career and technical education (CTE) programs (see Science Note on [Career and Technical Education in Missouri](#)).

While it is difficult to quantify the impact of the THPSC on legislation, legislation passed in Texas has been in line with the recommendations of the THPSC several times. This includes [HB 2804](#), which expanded accountability standards for schools beyond only test results as was recommended in the THPSC's [2014 report](#).

Testing New School Accountability Standards

One of the primary purposes of THPSC was to evaluate new school assessments and accountability systems. At the time the THPSC was established in 2012, Texas was using the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) assessments, which tested students on basic skills in various subject areas. This model of school assessments was widely described by parent groups, school officials, and researchers as creating a “high stakes” environment of teaching specifically for the test, while other forms of education, such as career preparedness, were not valued by the accountability system.³

The TAKS assessments were phased out between 2012 to 2014 and replaced by [STAAR](#) assessments. The new STAAR tests are end-of-course (EOC) exams which account for 15% of the total grade of the relevant class. The number of exams needed to graduate was also reduced

from 15 to 5. For a Texas public high schooler to graduate, they must pass EOC exams in English I, English II, Algebra, Biology, and U.S. History. Additionally, for the 2022-2023 school year, these tests will be given online as required by Texas Education Code [§ 39.02341](#).

The STAAR assessment is part of the way that schools are evaluated in Texas. The Texas school accountability system has three components:⁴

1. **Student Achievement**: Evaluation based upon STAAR scores, dropout rates, and college/career/military readiness. This allows schools to be assessed for programs in career and technical education (CTE), industry-based certifications, military enlistment, associate's degrees earned in high school, and other relevant criteria.
2. **School Progress**: Assessment of performance relative to other schools *or* academic growth within the school.
3. **Closing the Gaps**: Measurement of the differences in achievement at schools based on various demographic information including race, ethnic background, socio-economic status, and other factors (see Science Note on [Education Opportunity Gaps](#)).

Missouri School Accountability Standards

In 2008, Missouri began administering EOC exams, and high school students are required to pass EOC exams in Algebra I, Biology, English II, and Government. Missouri public schools are evaluated using the Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP 5) codified in Missouri [5 CSR § 20-100.125](#).⁵ These regulations establish the standards for everything in the educational process for students preschool through 12th grade.⁶ The current version of the MSIP 5 began in 2013 and covers everything from the establishment of school boards, to teacher qualifications, to school safety. The newest iteration, [MSIP 6](#), will be implemented in February 2022 and includes measures to be used for the [Continuous Improvement System](#) which is a collaborative system to implement evidence-based practices in Missouri Schools. MSIP 6 also includes a few changes such as maximum ratios of students to school counselors, librarians, and other special teachers such as arts, music, physical education, etc.

Similar to the Texas school accountability system, high schools in Missouri are assessed using several different measures including areas like career readiness and military enlistment. Core standards for curriculums are set by the state board of education ([HB 1490](#)). Local school boards govern schools and can add additional standards if they do not conflict with the standards set by the State Board of Education. Charter schools in Missouri are not governed by local school boards (see Science Note on [Charter School Accountability](#)).

Composition of the THPSC

The THPSC includes up to 30 qualifying public school districts and charter schools that represent no more than 10% of the public school students in Texas. Members are required to represent a diversity of school types and student populations. The characteristics required to be represented include: 1) district type (urban, suburban, non-metropolitan, rural); 2) district

student population (999 or less; 1,000 to 9,999; and 10,000 or greater); and 3) student demographics (ethnicity and race, economic status, English language learners, special educational needs, and gifted and talented).

Of the 33 school districts that applied in 2012, 23 school districts were selected for inclusion by the Texas Education Agency. No applications were received from urban or charter schools. The members otherwise meet all of the required characteristics, although their demographics tend to under-represent economically disadvantaged (35% vs. 60% statewide) and Hispanic students (34% vs. 51% statewide), and over-represent White students (45% vs. 31% statewide). In 2013, a [Consortium Associates program](#) was created that has allowed 84 school districts in Texas to participate in THPSC events in order to gain more research and data, including data from urban school districts. Consortium Associates receive in-district support and can participate in THPSC events and programs.

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