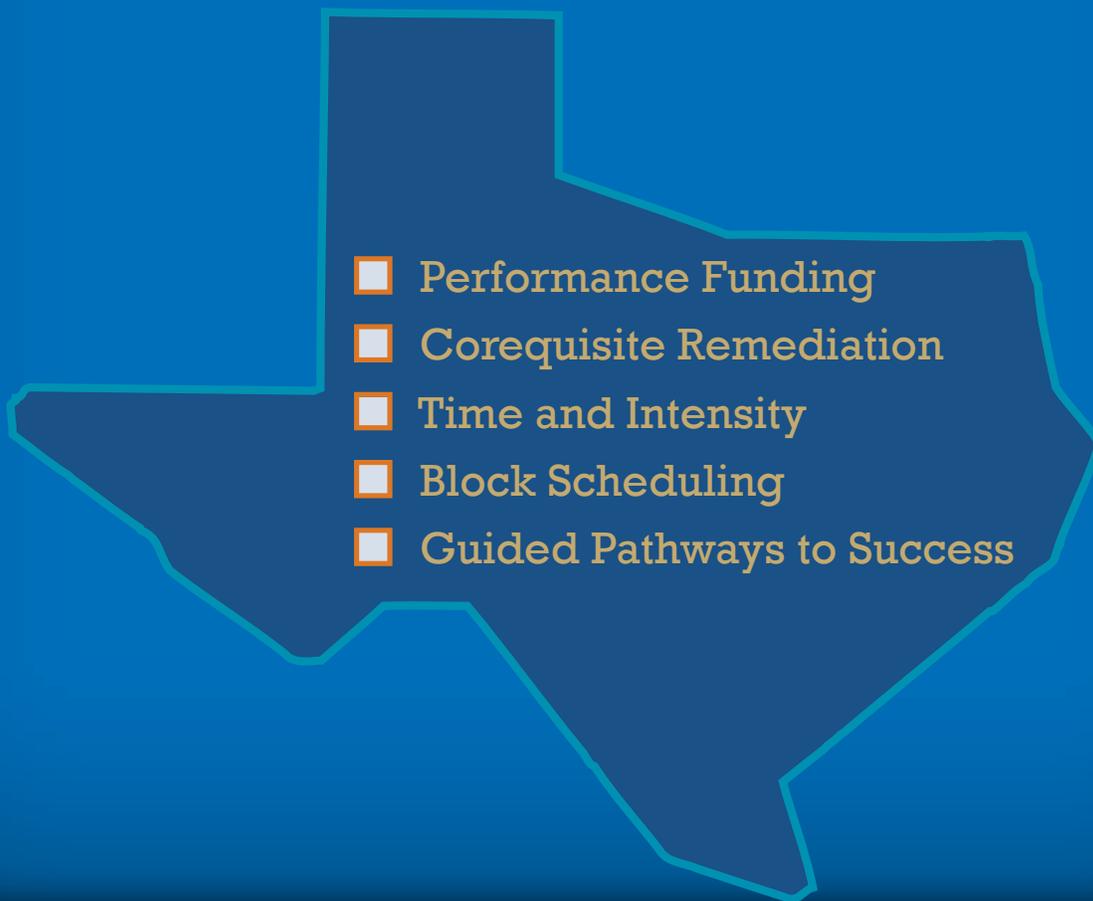




# COMPLETE COLLEGE Texas

Is Texas utilizing **GAME CHANGER** strategies to boost college completion? Not fully.



## TEXAS GETS IT

While some states wait, Texas commits to change.

To interpret the findings of this report as critical of higher education in Texas would be simplistic and require ignoring this fundamental truth: Unlike some states, Texas is deeply committed to boosting college completion and closing critical attainment gaps. Proof is clearly evident across the Lone Star state.

*Closing the Gaps* was a groundbreaking call to action to lift the higher education achievement of all Texans or accept the consequences of a shrinking state economy. This uniquely perceptive analysis established Texas more than a decade ago as a state that could see the future more clearly than others. It is not an exaggeration to say that Texas was one of the first to understand the imperative of higher skills and knowledge amid seismic demographic shifts.

While some may quibble with the speed of progress since then, there's no question that Texas has persistently moved forward. Initiatives to boost college completion can be found on nearly every campus. The Texas Legislature has consistently signaled its interest in increasing the number of Texans with quality certificates and degrees. And key business leaders in Texas have strengthened and unified their calls for reform, establishing their sustained advocacy as a national model for others to follow.

Three years ago, Governor Rick Perry pledged Texas to fulfill the commitments required for membership in the Complete College America Alliance of States — becoming one of the first chief executives in America to do so. These requirements are not for the faint of heart. The governor promised that Texas would apply tough, new measures of student progress and success and move statewide policies and legislation to transform remediation and shorten time to degree.

But let's be honest. The work of college completion is challenging — requiring a no-holds-barred analysis of every facet of higher education structure and delivery. More important, success demands the sober recognition that at the most basic level, what we are intending to accomplish is a reinvention of centuries-old institutions that now must change to help ensure the success of students who have rarely succeeded in the past.

Only the most committed accept this vital challenge. Only the most serious request a pull-no-punches review of progress to date. And only the most constructive will leverage these conclusions toward positive change.

Complete College America is pleased to provide the enclosed findings and recommendations — because we recognize that when it comes to college completion, Texas gets it.



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# THE GAME CHANGERS

## **Performance Funding**

Pay for performance, not just enrollment. Use the Complete College America and National Governors Association metrics to tie state funding to student progression through programs and completion of degrees and certificates. Include financial incentives to encourage the success of low-income students and the production of graduates in high-demand fields.

## **Remediation as a Corequisite, Not a Prerequisite**

Enroll most unprepared students in college-level gateway courses with mandatory, just-in-time instructional support. Combine reading and writing instruction. Align mathematics to programs of study, matching the curriculum to real-world career needs. For the most unprepared students, provide remedial help parallel to highly structured coursework, eliminating remediation as a barrier to entry into college-level study.

## **Time and Intensity**

Cap degree credit requirements (120 for bachelor's and 60 for associate) to ensure degrees can be completed on time. Ensure college credits can be transferred. Incentivize students to attend full-time and ensure that full-time means 15 credits per semester.

## **Block Scheduling**

Help working students balance jobs and school by utilizing block scheduling of classes to add predictability to their busy lives — doing so enables many more students to attend college full-time, shortening their time to completion.

## **Guided Pathways to Success**

Enabled by technology, enroll all students in highly structured degree plans, not individual courses. Map out every semester of study for the entire program, and guarantee courses will be available when needed. Use built-in early warning systems to alert advisors when students fall behind to ensure efficient intervention.

# For more college graduates, it's time for game changers.

Texas knows a thing or two about game changers — those pivotal moments that shake up the status quo and significantly deflect a state's trajectory. Texas history is rich with decisive battles and dramatic discoveries that in single, critical strokes changed everything.

Game changers don't spontaneously happen: They are caused by people who act boldly and decisively in answer to crucial tests. This, too, is the history of Texas.

The challenges facing Texas today are equal to any it has faced in its extraordinary past. Its future will be determined not by the strength of its fortifications or the expansiveness of its natural resources, but instead by the fully realized intellect of its diverse, hard-working people. **The minds of Texans will secure the future of Texas.**

*Closing the Gaps*, the historic prediction of Texas' higher education needs, warned that "only by sharply reversing Texas' declining enrollment and graduation rates ... can the state compete successfully with other states and nations." That groundbreaking call to action in 2000 challenged Texas to close college attainment gaps by 2015.

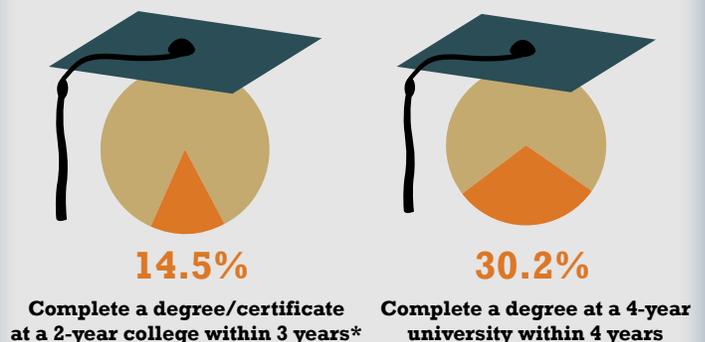
Since then, incremental steps have been taken and some progress has been made. As the Chairman of the Texas House Higher Education Committee, Representative Dan Branch, has often said, **"Texas is getting better — just not fast enough."**

Texas, like many states, needs a breakthrough in higher education. The times demand game changer strategies that will permanently bend college completion rates upward and finally close the gaps — strategies that will produce positive results double or triple ordinary outcomes.

There's much reason for optimism: Evidence can be found from the State House to campuses across the state that proves Texans are ready to move boldly to boost college completion. Pilot programs and localized reforms are under way from border to border.

But strategies can only be game changers if they are deployed at scale: Every college campus and classroom must experience their impact. All of the higher education reform efforts since *Closing the Gaps* have prepared Texas for this moment, and now it's time to make the big moves.

## ■ A Texas-sized problem.



This analysis — commissioned by the College for All Texans Foundation — asks a single vital question: Is Texas utilizing the key game changer strategies to boost college completion? The answer in short: Not fully.

The game changer strategies necessary for success are proven. The way forward to closing the gaps in Texas is clear. All that remains is a question of will.

\* Texas does not record graduation rates for on-time completion at two-year colleges.

# GAME CHANGER

## Performance Funding

**\$0.00**

Today, **not one dime** from Texas taxpayers creates incentives for student progress and success. This must change.

Like in most states in the past, Texas taxpayers have supported higher education based on one headcount: the number of students enrolled on campus on the 12th day of the semester. That's not entirely unusual, but what is unique is that Texas has taken that enrollment snapshot **only once every two years!**

To suggest that Texas colleges and universities no longer care about student attendance during the other 729 days wouldn't be fair. But it's certainly reasonable to charge that there were few financial incentives to do so.

As one higher education leader, from another state, publicly admitted, "All we really cared about is whether our students showed up on day 10." His state — like more than a dozen others — is implementing performance-based funding for higher education. And so must Texas.

Paying for desired outcomes isn't a new concept — and it's exactly what Texas has always done. But Texans have only paid for one result: enrollment. To achieve the highly educated

population Texas needs to ensure a strong economy, more is needed than student posteriors in seats. It has been said that doing so means focusing on the wrong end of the student!

Texas students must make steady progress through college and must graduate in a reasonable amount of time. And these additional desired results must be tied to higher education funding in Texas.

As soon as practicable, institutions should receive state funding — built into their base budgets — based on factors such as credit accumulation and degree completion. But colleges and universities must also be rewarded for maintaining a commitment to student enrollment — ensuring that the mutually important objectives of access, progress, and success are equally valued.

Performance-based funding on its own will not guarantee more college graduates. But it is an essential game changer strategy to ensure the necessary conditions exist for other reforms to succeed. Simply put, money focuses minds.

■ **The cost of dropouts: Taxpayers lose more than half a billion dollars at 4-year universities.**



**\$441 million**

in state appropriations and student grants



**\$66 million**

in federal student grants

*Source: American Institutes of Research, Finishing the First Lap: The Cost of First Year Attrition in America's Four-Year Colleges and Universities, October 2010. Numbers are cumulative cost of first-year dropouts over five years.*

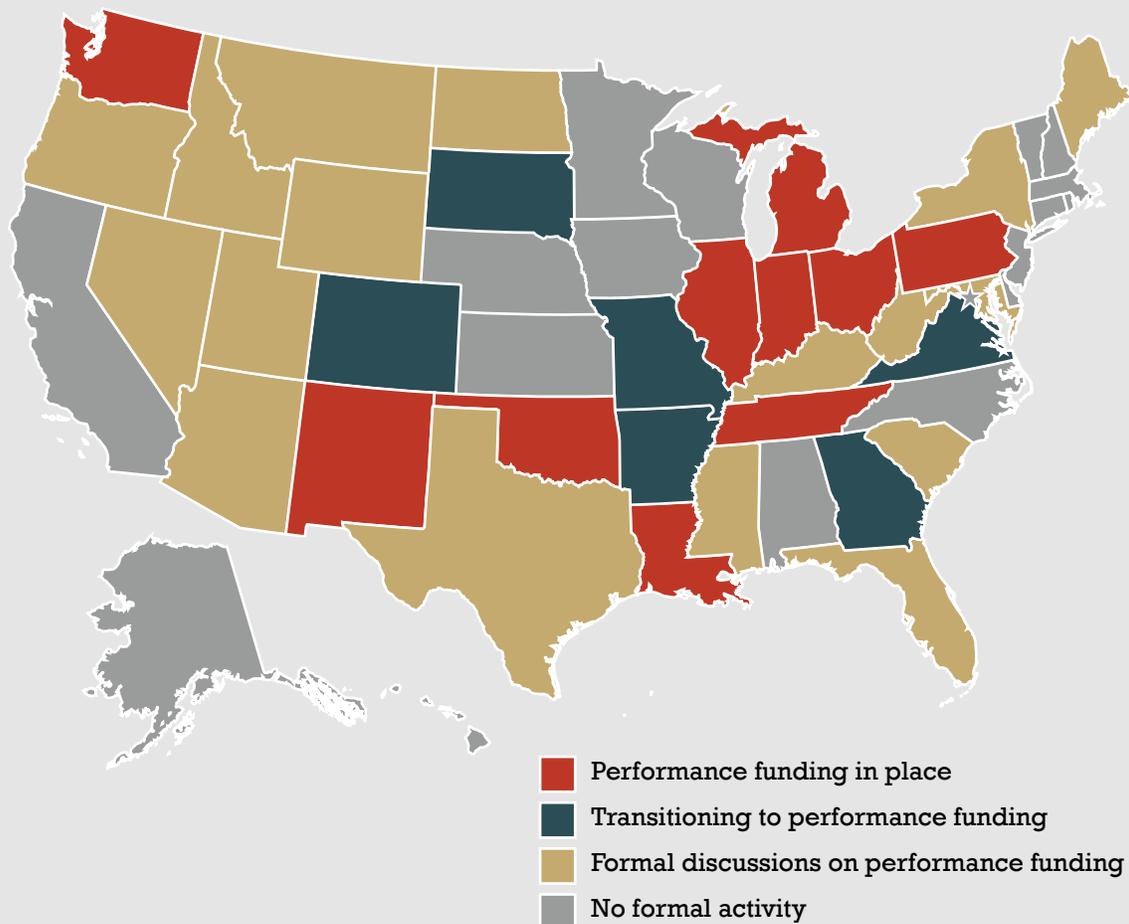
■ Taxpayers lose almost as much at 2-year colleges — dropouts cost more than \$350 million.

 **\$302 million** in state appropriations and student grants

 **\$59 million** in federal student grants

Source: American Institutes of Research, *The Hidden Costs of Community Colleges*, October 2011. Numbers are cumulative cost of first-year dropouts over five years.

■ Texas is just starting to move on performance funding.



Source: National Conference of State Legislatures, "Performance-Based Funding for Higher Education," *State Activity Details*, [www.ncsl.org/issues-research/educ/performance-funding.aspx](http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/educ/performance-funding.aspx).

## DO THIS: Performance Funding

**! STATUS** The 83rd Texas Legislature is currently considering performance funding for its public colleges and universities. **It is vitally important that this game changer strategy be immediately implemented** to signal the high priority the state places on achieving increased student progress and success — and to create incentives for the statewide deployment of other strategies to boost college completion.

### **✓ RECOMMENDATIONS**

To ensure that paying for performance is sustained over time, desired outcome metrics must be built into the institutions' base funding formulas. When only so-called new money is used for performance funding, financial accountability for student progress and success disappears in tough economic times. No more new money means no more performance funding. Make paying for performance the way business is done — not a fleeting moment in time.

### **🔍 PROOF POINT**

**Ten states have performance funding programs in place. Six states are transitioning to performance funding. And 17 states, including Texas, are having formal discussions about adopting performance funding.**

Representatives from state universities and community colleges — under legislative directive — have collaborated to create an outcomes-based funding model that the Texas Legislature is currently reviewing. The model, if adopted, calls for 10 percent of undergraduate institutional funding to be allocated based on a rolling three-year average of postsecondary completions and other measurable student outcome metrics.

### ■ **Texas universities agreed to be funded on the following outcomes:**

1. Total bachelor's degrees awarded at the institution
2. Time to degree: Bachelor's degrees awarded times the institution's six-year graduation rate
3. Bachelor's degrees awarded in fields identified as critical workforce needs
4. Bachelor's degrees awarded per 100 full-time student equivalents (accounts for part-time and transfer students)
5. Students who complete their 30th, 60th, or 90th credit hour at the institution (addresses student persistence)
6. Bachelor's degrees awarded adjusted for instructional costs (accounts for students graduating in high-cost degree programs)
7. Bachelor's degrees awarded to students who meet federal criteria for being at high risk of dropping out (accounts for graduating students requiring additional support to complete)

### ■ **Texas community colleges agreed to these student success metrics:**

1. Completion of developmental education in math and English
2. Completion of first college-level math or English course
3. Completion of first 15 college credits and first 30 college credits
4. Completion of an associate degree, certificate, or bachelor's degree (where offered)
5. Transfer to a general academic institution after having completed 15 hours of coursework



### PERFORMANCE FUNDING AT WORK

Ten states currently incorporate performance-based funding in their higher education systems. These are some of the best approaches:



**Tennessee** has implemented the most aggressive performance-based funding model — with 100 percent of state higher education funding allocation. The state introduced performance funding with the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010. Performance measures include student retention, degree attainment, and completion of remedial courses. Tennessee weights adults older than 25 and low-income students more heavily, and funding formulas are adjusted to address differences between community colleges and universities.



**Ohio** has utilized performance funding since 2008, and this year it is highly likely to implement changes to strengthen it. Governor John Kasich and the Ohio Higher Education Funding Commission have outlined plans to tie 100 percent of state appropriations to student progress and success by 2015, thus ending all allocations based on enrollment. Under the proposal for four-year institutions, funding will be equally portioned between course and degree completions with special weighting for the progress and success of at-risk and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) students. Starting in 2015, community colleges will no longer receive state support based on student headcounts and will shift all funding to a mixture of course completions, degree and certificate attainment, and identified success points, one of them being the successful transfer of students to universities. Community colleges will also be studying at-risk student factors, which will also receive additional weighting in the formula as an incentive for their success. So-called stop-loss protections against funding cuts for inadequate institutional performance will be removed for universities and branch campuses in 2015 and for community colleges the same year, thereby ensuring that high-performing universities and community colleges reap the full financial benefits of their successful reforms.



**Indiana's** performance-funding formula has evolved since 2003 to prioritize overall degree completion, on-time completion, the success of at-risk students, and the production of credentials that support Indiana's economy. The current performance metrics fall into three main categories: completion, progress, and productivity. (1) The completion metrics include overall degree completion, degrees earned by low-income students, and high-impact degrees in STEM-related fields that are aligned to state needs. (2) The progress metrics include remediation success and persistence incentives as students successfully pass key gateway college-level courses and reach set credit completion milestones. (3) The productivity metrics reward increases in on-time graduation rates and improvements on a metric defined by each college. Indiana allocated 5 percent (about \$61 million annually) of overall state support for institutions to performance funding in the 2011–13 biennial budget. It is anticipated that Indiana will increase the percentage of performance dollars to 6 percent and 7 percent in 2014 and 2015.

*Sources: Center for American Progress, Performance-Based Funding of Higher Education: A Detailed Look at Best Practices in Six States, 2012; National Conference of State Legislatures, "Performance-Based Funding for Higher Education," State Activity Details, [www.ncsl.org/issues-research/educ/performance-funding.aspx](http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/educ/performance-funding.aspx).*

# GAME CHANGER



## Corequisite Remediation

**62%**  
drop out

**For more than half of Texas community college students, college begins — and far too often ends — in remediation. Sixty-two percent drop out.**

These dismal results have been the norm for decades. That's an unsustainable level of costly and persistent failure. And the 77,000 Texas students each year condemned to this broken system aren't the only ones harmed: In 2012 alone, **Texas taxpayers spent more than \$72 million on remedial courses.**

If ever there was a need for a game changing strategy in higher education, transforming remediation is surely it. Straight-faced defenses of the status quo should be dismissed out of hand.

Clearly, more Texans need to come to college prepared to do the work — and high school “college prep” graduation standards must align with the skills required for college-level courses. But it's simplistic to place all the blame on high schools ... or to hope for the day when higher high school graduation standards ensure all students are college ready.

Coordinated statewide action is required now. Too many are being lost each year in traditional remediation approaches that simply do not work.

But, to be crystal clear, improving remediation outcomes cannot come at the expense of access to higher education. To attain the numbers of college graduates Texas needs to compete, the doors of its colleges and universities must remain open to all. Universal access to the

opportunity to build a better life is not only a societal value; it's an economic imperative.

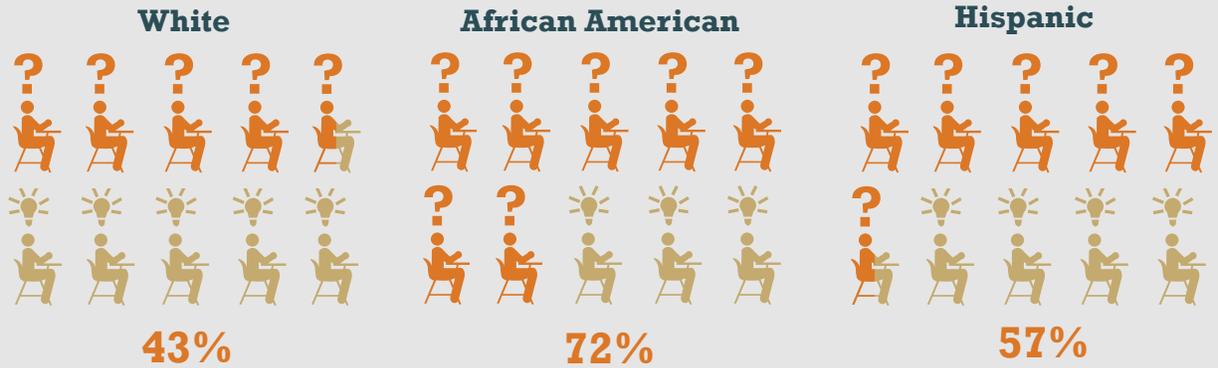
Fundamental to the success of any remediation reform is this: Just as colleges and universities gladly accept tuition from students — and the taxpayer support that subsidizes them — they must equally accept an obligation to help students succeed in college. For too many years, higher education has considered its job finished when new students are enrolled. After all, it professed, college students are adults who should be capable of finding their way to graduation day.

It is that attitude that allowed unconscionable failure rates to persist for remedial students — and a blind eye to be turned to the indisputable fact that most students who start in remediation never graduate. Thankfully, not all adopted this mindset, and as a result, a game changer strategy has emerged that has produced remarkable, proven benefits.

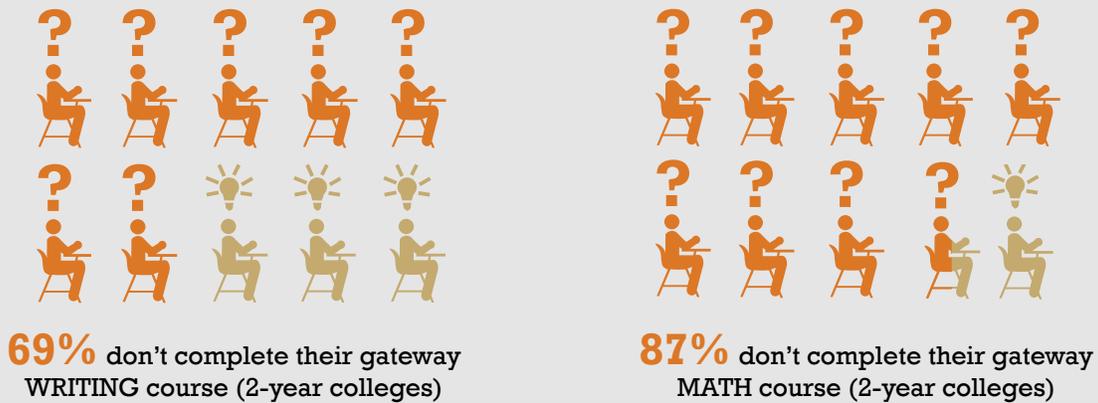
Even better, key architects of this transformative strategy are Texans — and they are hard at work deploying this change across the state and nation. Now is the time to double down on this game changer in Texas. We call it **corequisite remediation.**

■ Remediation rates in Texas are troubling at community colleges.

Percentage of students enrolling at a public 2-year college who require remediation



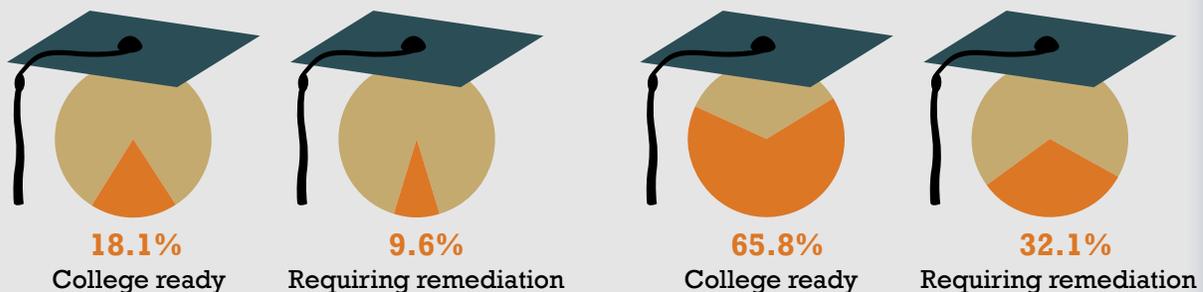
■ Too few Texas remedial students make it through college-level gateway courses at 2-year colleges.



■ Texas remedial students graduate at about half the rate of their college-ready peers — rates that are already far too low.

Degree/certificate completion in 3 years (2-year colleges)

Degree completion in 6 years (4-year universities)



# DO THIS: Remediation as a Corequisite, Not a Prerequisite

**! STATUS** Fortunately for Texas, efforts are under way to significantly increase the success of students who have traditionally been considered unprepared for college. In 2011, Texas was one of 10 states to win Complete College America's Completion Innovation Challenge, which provided a \$1 million implementation grant to deploy innovative remediation reforms. And in 2012, the Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin joined Complete College America, Jobs for the Future, and the Education Commission of the States to jointly call for the immediate adoption of the following proven remediation game changers.

## **✓ RECOMMENDATIONS**

It's time these approaches become required practices on every campus in Texas.

■ **Enrollment in college-level courses should be the default.** Research has shown that many, many more students can succeed in college-level gateway courses than are currently placed into them. By making college-level courses the default placement, traditional remediation is turned on its head. Colleges are left to determine why students shouldn't start in college-level courses instead of why they should be blocked from them.

■ **Use multiple measures to determine placement of students.** High-stakes placement exams for which students have not prepared have been proven to be poor predictors of college readiness. In a swift stroke based on a single test score, thousands of students in Texas each year are unnecessarily sent to remedial classes — often multiple-layer sequences that burn precious time and money and provide no college credit.

Instead, multiple measures should be used to provide a complete understanding of student ability — and fully honor hard work in high

school. These measures can include high school grade point averages in key skill areas such as English and math, class ranking, and noncognitive measures like student goals and motivation. Students should also be given the opportunity to prepare for placement exams with practice tests and test-prep sessions.

■ **Integrate needed support in college-level gateway courses.** Start college students in college courses, not more high school. Deliver any needed remediation as a corequisite alongside full-credit, college-level courses, not as a prerequisite to them. Depending on the needs of students, three methods are most effective:

■ **Single-semester corequisite** approaches deliver remediation to students enrolled in traditional single-semester, college-level gateway courses. Needed academic help can be provided by **mandatory** attendance in tutoring sessions or computer labs — or by simply adding more time on task by extending ordinary three-hour gateway classes to four or five hours instead.

## **PROOF POINT**

**Students in single-semester corequisite gateway courses succeed at two to three times the rate of students in traditional remedial sequences.**

■ **One-course pathways** stretch common single-semester gateway courses over two semesters instead, benefitting students in need of more academic help while ensuring them full credit that counts toward degrees. Remedial help is delivered in a just-in-time manner throughout the year.

## PROOF POINT

Year-long math course pathways have enabled two to four times the number of students to succeed in gateway courses compared with those who started in traditional remediation one or two levels below college level.

- **Parallel remediation** is effective for students enrolled in career technical or applied degree programs. Any academic shortcomings are addressed in connection to the program of study, so needed English and math remediation do not become obstacles to beginning coursework. This

approach is proven to work for those with the greatest remedial needs.

## PROOF POINT

The very successful Tennessee Technology Centers — which regularly produce graduation rates of 75 percent or more — utilize ACT WorkKeys to pinpoint students' academic shortcomings. Mandatory computer labs run parallel with the highly structured curriculum to remediate students to meet the foundational skills needs of their programs of study. In this way, even unprepared students graduate on time.

## STRATEGIES IN ACTION

### INNOVATING REMEDIATION



In 2008, Texas State University (TSU)–San Marcos' math department began piloting a state-

funded math bridge program known as “Fundamentals of Conceptual Understanding and Success” (FOCUS). The approach is straightforward: Students who need extra help in math are enrolled in concurrent remedial- and college-level algebra courses that require additional weekly tutoring.

Already, FOCUS is becoming a national model for scrapping traditional prerequisite remediation and replacing it with the corequisite approach. **During 2012, nearly 500 remedial community college students participated in the pilot — and they actually performed better than students considered college ready.** Sixty-one percent of FOCUS students completed algebra with a “C” or better versus 52 percent of college-ready students. Now, with a \$1 million grant from Complete College America, FOCUS is being expanded to seven community colleges and six universities across the state.



The New Mathways Project, a joint initiative of the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin and the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC), is a statewide approach to improving student success and completion by reforming developmental education. The initiative includes the development and implementation of a set of accelerated mathematics courses — matching the appropriate kind of math to modern programs of study. Built-in support systems help students more quickly earn college-level credits in rigorous mathematics in comparison to traditional remediation approaches.

The 10-year partnership between the Dana Center and TACC offers the opportunity to work directly with the state's 50 community colleges, which have agreed to provide seed money to develop the initiative, and it enables collaboration on articulation, placement, and accreditation policies.

# GAME CHANGER

## Time and Intensity

**< 30%  
graduate  
on time**

**For every 100 Texas university students, less than 30 graduate on time. At community colleges, almost no one graduates on time.**

The consequences are clear when so few students finish college on schedule. For starters, the longer it takes to graduate, the more it costs students and the taxpayers who subsidize them. In Texas, an extra *semester* of college costs the typical university student \$3,500 and a student at a two-year college \$1,100 — which is often tacked on top of student loans.

Wasting money isn't the only consequence of running the clock. The longer it takes to graduate, the more life gets in the way. As the calendar turns, students find their lives increasingly taken over by jobs, relationships, marriages, children, and mortgages. These happy circumstances incrementally rob more and more time and attention from studying and progress toward academic goals. So, the more life gets in the way, the less likely graduation becomes.

For too many Texans, the end results are a few years of courses, no degree, and often crushing debts: It is estimated that college dropouts in

Texas today carry somewhere between \$6,500 and \$12,000 in student loans, depending on whether they attended a two- or four-year institution. The lasting financial burdens of their failure become suffocating obstacles to success as dropouts discover they cannot qualify for good wages and rewarding careers.

For Texas, the corrosive effects of lengthy time to degree cascade across the economy: Fewer Texans earn the incomes necessary to buy homes, cars, and other necessities or even cover the basic costs of educating their children or providing their health care. Critical skill gaps widen, employers resist creating new jobs or relocate altogether — and Texas falls behind.

Time is the enemy of college completion in Texas. The state simply cannot attain the college graduates it needs to be competitive without adopting policies to significantly cut time to degree and increase full-time enrollment at a minimum of 15 credits per semester. Consider these sobering facts:

### ■ Texans are taking too much time to earn a degree.

#### Associate

Should take  
**2 years** 

Full-time students take **4.7 years**



Part-time students take **5.2 years**



#### Bachelor's

Should take  
**4 years** 

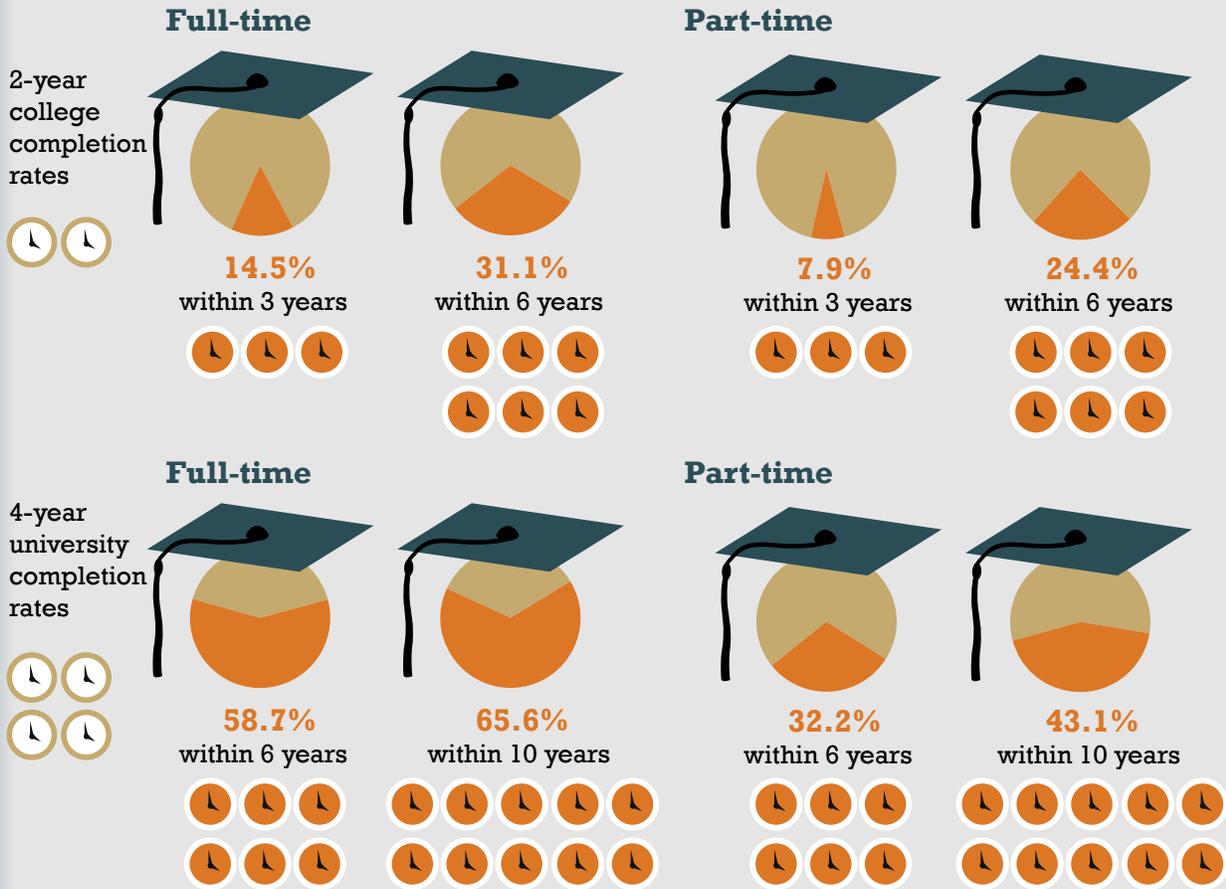
Full-time students take **5.3 years**



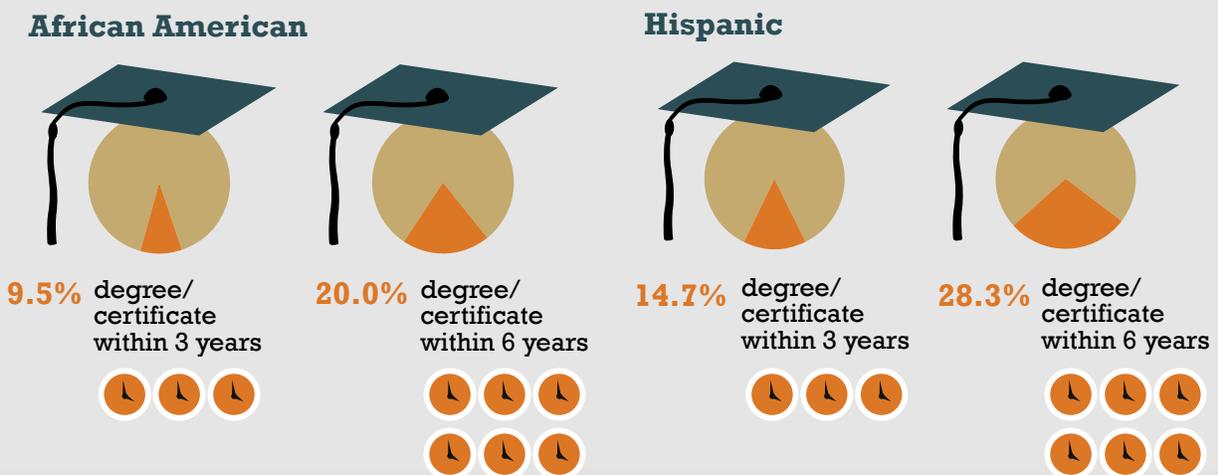
Part-time students take **6.0 years**



■ Even when given twice as much time or more, too few Texans graduate.



■ Most Hispanic and African American Texans start at 2-year colleges, and few graduate even when given three times longer.



# DO THIS: Reduce Time to Degree, Increase Intensity

**! STATUS** Texas isn't new to this issue. Back in the mid-1990s, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) published a groundbreaking report flagging the problem and itemizing practical strategies for shortening time to degree. Heading into the 83rd Texas Legislature, THECB is calling attention to the fact that the excess hours earned by the university graduates of the 2011 class alone **cost Texas taxpayers an estimated \$15 million.**

Over time, policymakers have listened and change is happening. Texas is working to accelerate time to degree and reduce excess credit hours through a shared responsibility model between the state, institutions, and students. To reduce the likelihood of unnecessary credits, universities lose their state subsidy when students exceed 30 credit hours beyond their credit requirements. Additionally, students can be charged out-of-state tuition if they take classes with content similar or identical to ones they already have completed or attempted.

## **✓ RECOMMENDATIONS**

However, there's still plenty of room to do more — and lawmakers can play a key role. Consider the following policies for improving student success and holding down costs for taxpayers:

■ **Limit the amount of credits required to earn an associate degree.** Texas has already capped bachelor's degree programs at 120 credits, except when accreditation or licensure requirements demand more. That's not the case with two-year degrees — and the nearly 100 credits being earned on average by associate degree graduates proves the need for a cap. In nearly all instances, quality associate degrees can be accomplished in a maximum of 60 hours — and that reasonable limit should be implemented in Texas this year.

## **📍 PROOF POINT**

**20 states now have credit caps for associate and bachelor's degrees, and three states are in the process of adding them.**

■ **Cut taxpayer subsidy in half for excess credits.** Texas taxpayers now subsidize up to 30 extra credits beyond bachelor's degree program requirements. That's a whole additional year on campus underwritten by taxpayers! It's no wonder that bachelor's degree graduates are leaving college with nearly 150 credits on average when 120 is almost always enough. Legislators should cut this support in half, signaling to students that excess time on campus will be at their own expense. The same should be done for associate degree programs.

■ **Create incentives for Texans to take "15 to Finish."** The math is pretty obvious: There's no chance of graduating on time without accomplishing at least 15 credits each semester, or 30 over each academic year. Yet federal financial aid policies only require that students be enrolled in 12 credits each semester to be considered eligible for assistance. Most damaging, this standard has become known as "full-time" attendance. Sadly, the situation in Texas is actually worse: The premier state financial aid program, TEXAS Grants, only requires 9 credits each semester for eligibility. To shorten time to degree, financial aid policies must create incentives for on-time completion. Full-time should mean "15 to Finish."

## **📍 PROOF POINT**

**In the first year of its "15 to Finish" initiative, student enrollment in 15 credits or more increased by one-third on Hawai'i's four-year campuses.**

## ACCELERATED, AFFORDABLE DEGREES

The Texas Affordable Baccalaureate Project — a new collaboration among the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, South Texas College, and Texas A&M University–Commerce — is stepping up to Governor Rick Perry’s challenge to offer a low-cost, high-quality degree program.



The two institutions — with support from a \$1 million Next Generation Learning Challenges grant from EDUCAUSE — are blending cutting-edge technology with an innovative competency-based model to create a new bachelor’s degree in organizational leadership. Launching in fall 2013, the program will boost college access and completion by improving time-to-degree and reducing costs.

The program focuses on leadership skills applicable in business, government, nonprofit, or educational settings. The degree’s first 90 credit hours will be available through online modules. The final 30 hours will consist of upper-division, problem-based coursework offered in both face-to-face and online formats. Most important, the program turns the seat-bound, semester-based higher education model on its head by allowing students to demonstrate course competency as soon as they are ready, accelerating time to degree and reducing costs. The curriculum will examine finance, team building, conflict resolution, and other management skills.

South Texas College and Texas A&M–Commerce are among 10 institutions responding to Governor Perry’s call for more affordable degree alternatives. “Imagine the potential impact on affordability and graduation rates, and the number of skilled workers it would send into our economy,” Perry said when announcing the initiative in 2011.

Even skeptics acknowledge the push for more affordable bachelor’s degrees is causing colleges and universities to rethink their approach. The idea has “spurred continued innovation, I would say, more in terms of program delivery ... rather than how can we simply cut costs at every corner,” Daniel Hurley, director of state relations and policy analysis at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, recently told *The Atlantic* magazine.

# GAME CHANGER

## Block Scheduling

**50%**  
**part-time**

**Half of Texas students attend college part-time to work the jobs they need to have the education they desire. Most will never graduate.**

We think we're doing them a favor. And we congratulate ourselves for allowing students to take as long as they want to finish a certificate or degree. But the data prove the opposite is true: Our good intentions have enabled their failure and the misery that follows. Most part-time students will never graduate.

It doesn't have to be this way. Most students begin college going full-time. They're eager to start, and they imagine the joy they will know in their caps and gowns.

But quickly the cold realities hit them. Broken remediation classes block their entrance into college-level work. The courses necessary to stay on track aren't available when they're needed or when everyday life demands will allow. Many become worn down by exhausting efforts semester after semester to balance the jobs they must work to afford the college they desire.

Full-time becomes part-time as courses are shaved off schedules little by little to work more hours to pay the bills. Fifteen credit hours get cut to 12 ... then to nine ... and then to six. Finally, the hours on campus get cut to zero.

After years of efforts, most part-time students drop out. They will suffer the worst of all worlds: high school graduates burdened with college debts but no degree.

Denying students part-time enrollment is NOT the answer. There will always be those who will insist on going to college part-time. Instead, we must help more students go full-time, and we can.

Begin by accepting that many students will need to work to help pay for college. In fact, data show that they're working more hours today than ever before. That's not a surprise given the high costs of higher education.

The greatest help we can provide is straightforward: predictability. Block schedules — for example, going to school every day from 8:00 a.m. to noon or from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. — provide the daily certainty that allows easier job scheduling. Gone are the every semester negotiations with employers and child care providers.

For many students, going full-time now becomes manageable. And full-time attendance can mean that graduation is twice as likely or more.

Wherever block scheduling has been implemented, it has been extraordinarily successful for students. In Tennessee, it has regularly produced graduation rates of 75 percent or higher for career certificates. In New York, block scheduling has enabled associate degree students to graduate at double the rate of their peers trapped in traditional schedules.

Simply put, block scheduling is a game changer.

Texas should leverage the good intentions that led institutions to accept limitless part-time enrollment and redirect that generosity to make the changes necessary to deploy block scheduling across the state.

■ **Half of Texas' college students struggle under exhausting demands.**



**50% of students are part-time, often juggling families, jobs, and school.**

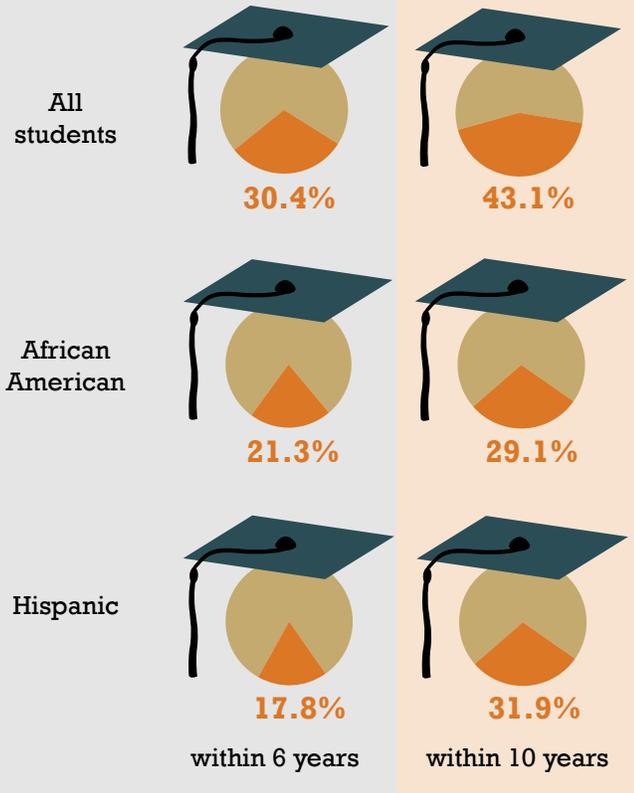
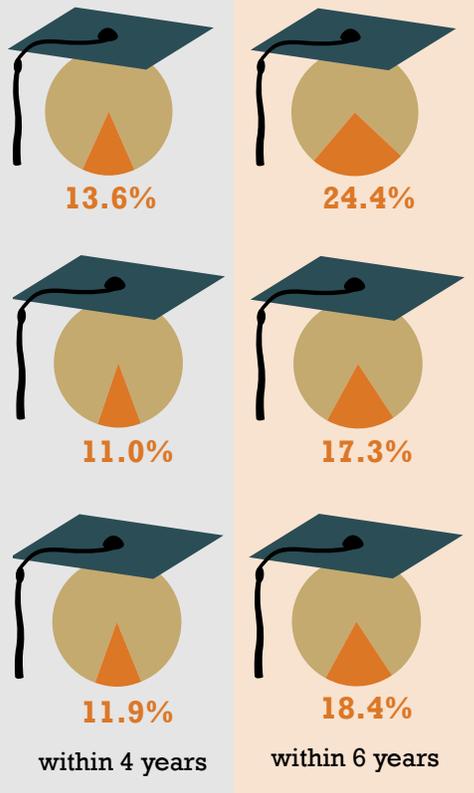


**50% of students attend full-time.**

■ **Graduation rates for part-time students in Texas are tragic.**

**2-year college completion rate**

**4-year university completion rate\***



\*Fall 2002 cohort, through FY 2012.

## DO THIS: Block Scheduling

**! STATUS** To its credit, the Texas State Technical College (TSTC) system is moving to implement block scheduling on a limited basis in fall 2013. Twenty-plus years of data at the Tennessee Technology Centers — where graduation rates soared to 75 percent and higher in similar career certificate programs— strongly suggest that the TSTC should quickly scale block scheduling across all its campuses. Community colleges in Texas should do the same — and block scheduling can also help students at four-year schools with large numbers of working and part-time students.

### **✓ RECOMMENDATIONS**

To be successful, block scheduling utilizes these key elements:

- **Full-time enrollment should be emphasized.** Full-time students are much more likely to graduate. Use block schedules to enable more students to go full-time by designing five-day-a-week structures in morning or afternoon blocks — for example, 8:00 a.m. to noon or 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. This level of predictability makes life easier to manage for working students and students with children.
- **Combine block scheduling with whole program choices.** Block scheduling is easiest to accomplish when it is utilized in whole programs of study. Students should make one choice of their program of study — for example, computer networking — and then colleges should make all the other decisions about the necessary sequence of courses. In this way, students choose

majors, not individual courses. The colleges then block the required course sequences in coherent, connected schedules. This approach has the added benefit of eliminating common course choosing errors by students.

And institutions benefit when they can predict with near certainty — often semesters or even years in advance — the timing and capacity of required courses needed to complete chosen programs on schedule. Accurately forecasting future faculty and classroom space demands boosts institutional productivity and ensures a more cost effective use of resources.

- **15 credit blocks are best.** To finish on time, full-time enrollment should mean 15 credits per semester. Block schedules within programs of study should be constructed to contain at least 15 credits. The five-day structure of well-designed block schedules makes accomplishing this much more possible.
- **Student cohorts boost success.** A natural — and very beneficial — consequence of block scheduling is the formation of student cohorts. When students in the same program of study move from course to course on the same schedule five days a week, working groups and learning communities of students commonly form. These informal alliances provide vital student-to-student support and a strong sense of connectedness to faculty and institutions. Studies have proven that students are more likely to succeed when they don't feel alone.

## BLOCK SCHEDULING AT TEXAS STATE TECHNICAL COLLEGE

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Texas State Technical College (TSTC) will implement a form of block scheduling at two locations beginning in the fall 2013 semester. The TSTC approach is intended to reduce fragmentation, allowing for more collaboration and teamwork to boost skill attainment and content mastery.



In this connected learning approach, students still attend the same number of semester credit hours but in larger, less interrupted segments. Skills are sequenced in a logical order based on real-world applications, linking work and learning with direct input from business and industry. This allows students greater opportunity to collaborate in authentic, project-based experiences that emphasize teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills in addition to learning essential technical knowledge, skills, and abilities — all vital to sustained employability.

As one employer stated, “We hire for hard skills. We fire for soft skills.” Adding the cohort model develops a strong sense of community, encouraging students to support each other and to interact regularly with faculty and staff. These are the skills business and industry want and students need to succeed in the classroom, in a career, and in life.

# GAME CHANGER

## Guided Pathways to Success

**30+**  
excess  
credits

**Texans graduate with a full year or more of unnecessary credits. Taxpayers waste millions. So do students.**

Nearly 100 credits are earned on average for an associate degree when only 60 is the standard. Bachelor's degree graduates are leaving campus with nearly 150 credits instead of the customary 120. And these astronomical excess credit counts don't even include the time Texans spent in remediation.

If awards were given for time and money wasted on unnecessary college credits, Texas would truly be the "lone star." According to data collected by Complete College America, no other state matches the magnitude of Texas' excess college credit problem.

Excess credits are those earned beyond what is necessary to complete a chosen program of study. They are often the result of poor choices made when students mistakenly enroll in courses that don't count toward chosen majors. Broken transfer policies can also force students to retake previously earned credits on new campuses. Excessive credit requirements for degrees can cause credit counts to creep skyward as faculty pile on more and more compulsory courses without removing others.

And excess credits can also be the remnants of extraneous courses taken when students can't get mandatory courses needed for majors. To maintain financial aid, these students often engage in an expensive "swirling in place" as they burn time and money on campus waiting for needed courses to appear again.

Of course, exorbitant credits can also represent directionless wandering of the course catalog in aimless odysseys of self-discovery. There's nothing wrong with finding one's future on a college campus, but it would be difficult to choose a more expensive method or venue.

Regardless of the causes, there's no disputing that Texas has a Texas-sized excess credit problem. Thankfully, the state need look no farther than Arizona, Florida, or Tennessee to find a game changer solution: guided pathways to success.

By building highly structured degree plans as default pathways to on-time graduation, Texas can place every college student on roads to success. No longer will students be considered "unclassified" or "undeclared." All will know the way forward to graduation day — and semester by semester plans will be laid out before every student. As important, students have no choice but to remain on their chosen degree pathway: They must ask permission to deviate from it.

Consider this game changer a mutual guarantee between students and colleges. Students pledge to stick to their degree plans, maintain at least 15 credits every semester to finish on time, and accomplish all milestone courses along the way. Colleges promise to watch student progress closely, using technology-enabled alert systems to target "intrusive advising" when it's most needed — and guarantee that students will always have access to essential courses whenever they are needed along the students' chosen degree plans.

Colleges and universities in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, New York, and Tennessee have demonstrated the effectiveness of this game changer: Graduation rates have soared and attainment gaps have virtually disappeared. Texas can be among the first states to reap the benefits of scaling guided pathways to success.

- **Texans are taking too many credits, and these overages don't even include remediation courses.**

**98 credits attempted**



**Associate**

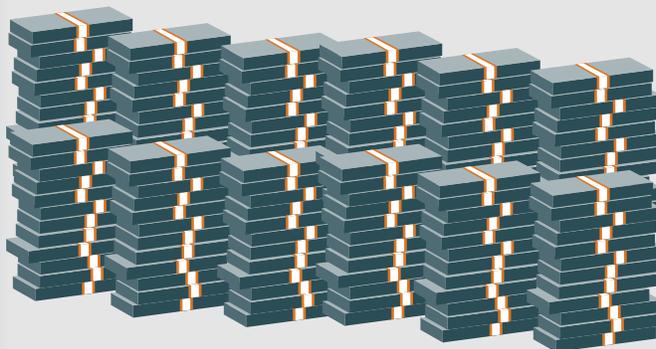
**147 credits attempted**



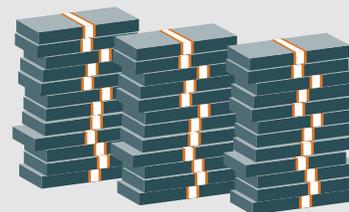
**Bachelor's**

- **Every year, Texans waste millions of dollars and thousands of hours on unnecessary courses.**

**\$57 million**  
spent on excess credits\*



**\$42 million**  
for 2-year colleges



**\$15 million**  
for 4-year universities

*\*The cost to taxpayers of excess credits for 2011 graduates alone.*

# DO THIS: Guided Pathways to Success (GPS)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementing a successful GPS strategy requires an “all in” commitment to several essential components.

 **Whole programs of study.** Students choose coherent academic majors or programs, not random, individual courses. In this way, a clear path to on-time completion is prepared for students, semester by semester, all the way to graduation day.

 **Informed choice and meta majors.** Colleges utilize a range of information such as past performance in high school to provide recommendations to students about programs of study that match their skills and interests. With this information, students can make more informed choices among a set of initial broad academic pathways that ultimately lead to academic programs. For example, first year students would choose a “meta major” in a broad area such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); health care; business; liberal arts; education; or social science. As students progress, the pathways narrow into more specific majors such as chemistry, accounting, psychology, and nursing.

### PROOF POINT

Since starting degree maps, Florida State University has cut in half the number of students graduating with excess credits. And the graduation rates for African American, Hispanic, and Pell students now exceed 70 percent.

 **Default pathways.** Students remain on their chosen path unless given approval to change by an advisor. Students can change their pathway or major but not without permission. Exploration outside one’s major is still allowed and enabled as intentional investigation, replacing aimless wandering. Students stay on track for graduation — and fully understand the time and money consequences of making a change.

### PROOF POINT

At Arizona State University, 91 percent of students are now considered “on track” in their programs, up from just 22 percent three years before.

 **Milestone courses.** Degree pathways contain critical milestone courses that must be completed each semester to certify students are on track. Not only do these courses provide realistic assessments of student progress; milestones give students early signals about their prospects for success in a given field of study. This eliminates the problem of students putting off challenging courses until the consequences of changing majors become too damaging and costly.

### PROOF POINT

At the City University of New York, structured degree plans have produced graduation rates three times higher than the national average for urban community colleges.

■ **Intrusive, just-in-time advising.** Innovations in technology now allow student support to be targeted and customized to meet the needs of individual students as colleges can more effectively monitor student progress. Early warning systems make it easy for institutions to track student performance in required courses and target interventions when they are most needed. Academic advisors can focus attention

almost exclusively on students most in need of services instead of spreading themselves thinly over burdensome caseloads.

### **PROOF POINT**

**Pell, African American, and Hispanic students now graduate at higher rates than the overall student body at Georgia State University.**

## **STRATEGIES IN ACTION**

### **INNOVATING GUIDED PATHWAYS**



Accelerate TEXAS — a fast-track initiative spearheaded by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board — has helped more than 2,500 adult basic education students earn certificates in high-demand sectors, including health care, manufacturing, construction, and transportation. The goal: Get ahead of economic and workforce-development projections, which indicate at least 60 percent of Texas' jobs will require a certificate or college degree by 2020.

This highly structured program targets adult learners who lack the reading or math skills, and often a GED or high school diploma, necessary to enroll in a typical career and technical education (CTE) program. It offers students a one-and-a-half- or two-year option for completion, and students know from day one what courses they will be taking and when.

The program co-enrolls students in basic skills support classes and/or GED (if needed) with the CTE course, bringing students into CTE courses faster and giving them the necessary academic, career, and case management advising support to get them through the program and into jobs faster. So far, 19 community colleges across Texas are participating in Accelerate TEXAS.



To address the acute physician shortage in the Rio Grande Valley, in fall 2012 the University of Texas (UT) at Brownsville launched a new biomedical degree. The degree is part of the University of Texas System's Transformation In Medical Education program, which enables students to complete the first three years of their undergraduate degree at UT Brownsville and the last three years of the program at medical schools in the UT system.

This innovative program eliminates traditional lecture courses; is modular and competency-based; features intensive mentoring and problem-based learning; and compresses students' time to graduation from the traditional four years to three, propelling them rapidly toward medical and professional schools. Entering freshmen are assigned to a five-student learning community cohort, which is supported by a faculty mentor throughout the program.

Although only in its second semester, UT Brownsville's innovative degree shows promise as a model for increasing student achievement. Students in the program are earning higher grade point averages (2.61) than the general UT Brownsville freshman population (2.12), have higher course completion rates (83 vs. 74 percent), and are enrolled in more hours per semester (15.9 vs. 11.7).

# DO THIS! Implement the game changers, Texas.

## 1. Create the conditions for change by measuring and paying for performance.

Texas already has performance-based funding for higher education, but it rewards only one outcome: student headcounts. It's time to add metrics to funding formulas for colleges and universities that tie student achievement outcomes to state taxpayer investments. Doing so will ensure that student access, progress, and success are equally valued on campus — creating the conditions for change that add urgency to the successful implementation of the other essential game changers.



## 2. Provide remediation as a corequisite, not a prerequisite.

Sixty-two percent of Texas students who start in remediation drop out of college — an unsustainable level of failure if Texas is to have the workforce it needs to thrive in the global economy. Starting many more unprepared students in college-level classes with mandatory, built-in academic support will double or triple their success. Students who need more help can also start in college-level gateway classes that spread content over two semesters. Provide parallel remediation in quality technical certificate programs for the most unprepared.



## 3. Reduce time and increase intensity.

Only 27 of every 100 university students and nine of every 100 community college students graduate on time. Texas cannot significantly boost college completion unless it substantially reduces the time it takes students to graduate — because the longer it takes the more life gets in the way. Associate degrees should be capped at 60 credits with few exceptions. Taxpayer subsidies of extra credits should be cut in half. Many more Texans must attend college full-time — and full-time means “15 to Finish.”



## 4. Use block scheduling to help working students.

Half of all Texas college students attend part-time — a level of attendance that almost always predicts failure. Most part-time students will never graduate. Block scheduling has been proven to make the difference between graduating and dropping out. It adds much needed predictability to the busy lives of students who are delicately balancing jobs and school. It often makes full-time attendance possible, significantly increasing the likelihood of completion. Cohorts of students naturally form in block scheduling, adding valuable peer-to-peer support and strengthening connectedness to faculty.



## 5. Place all students on Guided Pathways to Success.

On average, Texans graduate college with 30 excess credits or more — equivalent to an *extra full year* on campus! This extraordinary level of unnecessary credits dearly costs students and taxpayers and dangerously lengthens time to degree. By placing all students on highly structured, default degree pathways, excess credits are eliminated and on-time completions become the norm. Enabled by technology, academic advising is intrusive and efficient, targeting students with just-in-time support when they most need help.



## METHODOLOGY & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ABOUT COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

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It's really about the states ... we're just here to help.

Established in 2009, Complete College America is a national nonprofit with a single mission: to work with states to significantly increase the number of Americans with quality career certificates or college degrees and to close attainment gaps for traditionally under-represented populations.

The need for this work is compelling. Between 1970 and 2009, undergraduate enrollment in the United States more than doubled, while the completion rate has been virtually unchanged. We've made progress in giving students from all backgrounds access to college — but we haven't finished the all-important job of helping them achieve a degree. Counting the success of all students is an essential first step. And then we must move with urgency to reinvent American higher education to meet the needs of the new majority of students on our campuses, delicately balancing the jobs they need with the education they desire.

Complete College America believes there is great reason for optimism ... and a clear path forward. With a little more support — and a lot of common sense — we can ensure that many more get the high-quality college education that will help them live productive and fulfilling lives. All Americans will share in the benefits of their success.

**COMPLETE COLLEGE** AMERICA

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