

Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium

### ***Why did TEGAC Commission the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M to Research HB 5/Pathways Implementation?***

The goal of House Bill 5 was and remains admirable: to create “pathways” for all students toward the education and/or career of their choice. However, implementation of HB 5 and the new high school endorsements has brought real challenges to school districts and the communities that support them.

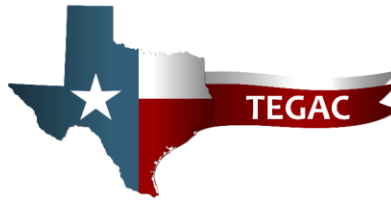
In order to get a better sense of how school districts are implementing the legislation, TEGAC commissioned the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M to a ground-level analysis of exactly how HB 5 is rolling out across Texas. With three years of implementation on the books, now is the time to examine how well House Bill 5 is helping prepare students and their parents for the choices ahead. The Bush School interviewed parents, counselors, students, business people, trade associations, school administrators, and others to get as complete a picture as possible about how school districts are implementing HB 5. Research questions included:

- How are school districts in Texas implementing HB 5/Pathways/Endorsements? How were implementation strategies selected within the districts?
- What implementation practices show promise for success, and how can they be replicated by other districts?
- How do counselor workload and job functions relate to supporting student choice around their endorsement paths?
- How do communication flows between districts and schools to parents and students support the quality of HB 5 implementation and endorsement selection process?

### ***What Were the Key Findings of the Bush School’s Research?***

The findings from the Bush School highlighted the need for the state and TEA to examine two primary areas: (1) higher quality and more advising time with students and their families beginning in middle school; and (2) better K-12 and industry alignment that will create strong partnerships with industry.

- The research found that the student-to-counselor ratio increased substantially across the state after the 2011 budget cuts adding more than 30 students per counselor case load, and even with district budget adjustments continues to be at higher levels than prior to 2012 (current state average is 470 students per counselor in Texas). At the same time that counselor positions were cut, implementation of House Bill 5 increased the amount of work counselors are required to perform beginning in middle school.
- Half of all parents surveyed as part of the research reported that they are unsure if their students are prepared for entry into a community college, 4-year university, or career path. 37% of parents surveyed reported that they are receiving limited or no information about endorsements.
- The successful implementation of guided pathways will require a clear understanding about what skills students need to learn for success in the future. This knowledge can only come from



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business – the state’s future employers. Despite this critical and statutory linkage, TEGAC’s research found that very few communities have created meaningful partnerships between business and public schools to date. Moreover, school districts reported difficulty in attracting counselors with the deeper knowledge of local workforce trends required by law.

### ***What Policy Recommendations Were Included in the Report?***

The study’s key recommendations are to allow districts to continue to have autonomy in their implementation process and to encourage the Legislature and state agencies to provide state level resources and coordination that will enhance counseling programs and align the K-12, higher education and workforce systems at the state and regional level.

#### Middle and High School Counseling/Advising Recommendations:

- The Texas Education Agency and the Legislature should continue to prioritize new funding for school districts to expand and improve counselor training statewide.
- The Texas Education Agency and school districts should create higher quality and more advising time with students and their families beginning in middle school. For example, TEA should offer micro-credentials for separate college and career counselors and districts should strengthen career exploration activities for middle and high school students that connect directly to HB 5.
- The Texas Education Agency and school districts should enhance parent communication strategies in line with parent preferences, including access to additional communication platforms and providing a consistent conversation with families around career exploration and pathways from earliest grades through high school. TEA, TWC, THECB and school districts should also continue to provide additional resources for course selection and graduation templates aligned to success in college and career.

#### K-12 and Industry Alignment Recommendations:

- The Legislature should expand employer incentives for work based learning opportunities (internships, externships, job shadowing, apprenticeships) for K-12/post-secondary students.
- The Texas Education Agency should develop and refine rigorous criteria for state designation and support of innovative career-focus high school designs aligned to regional labor market demand.
- The Legislature should remove liability and insurance barriers to work-based learning opportunities by expanding insurance coverage options and limiting industry partners’ liability.
- The Legislature should leverage TWC Skills Development Fund and JET Program Grants by carving out funding for regional intermediary coordination and/or technical assistance to grantees.
- The Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board should consider using Perkins reserve funds to support new and innovative Pathways efforts in Texas.

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