



## Questions and Answers on the Distinguished Achievement Program

### 1. What is the Distinguished Achievement Program?

The Distinguished Achievement Program requires high performance beyond that usually expected of students in high school. In addition to specific course requirements, the Distinguished Achievement Program requires that all students successfully complete any combination of four advanced measures that focus on demonstrated student performance at the college level or work equivalent to that done by professionals in the arts, sciences, business, industry, or in community service. These measures are judged by external sources of evaluation.

### 2. What are advanced measures?

Advanced measures are those items that meet the standards included in 19 TAC §74.13(a)(3). They reflect student performance at a college or professional level and are assessed by external evaluators. The items adopted by the State Board of Education as meeting those standards are as follows:

- Original research and/or project that is:
  - judged by a panel of professionals in the field that is the focus of the project; or
  - conducted under the direction of mentor(s) and reported to an appropriate audience; and
  - related to the required curriculum set forth in §74.1 relating to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).
- Test data where a student receives:
  - a score of three or above on a College Board Advanced Placement examination;
  - a score of four or above on an International Baccalaureate examination; or
  - a score on the PSAT that qualifies a student for recognition as a Commended Scholar or higher by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation, as part of the National Hispanic Scholar Program of the College Board, or as part of the National Achievement Scholarship program for Outstanding Negro Students of the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. The PSAT score may count as only one advanced measure regardless of the number of honors received by the student.

- College courses: college academic courses, advanced technical credit courses, and dual credit courses with a grade of 3.0 or higher.

Students must earn at least four advanced measures and may do so in almost any combination. For example, one student may receive a score of three or higher on four Advanced Placement examinations. Another may have a score of three or higher on two Advanced Placement examinations, complete a project in a mentorship program, and achieve an "A" or "B" in a community college dual enrollment course. A third student could take two college courses for high school credit, produce a portfolio of exemplary work in a specific field, and be recognized as a National Merit Finalist. The only state limitation on acceptable combinations of advanced measures is that no more than two (2) may be earned through original research projects, though local districts may have additional requirements.

**3. Does a district have to offer students all of the options included as the advanced measures?**

No. The list adopted by the State Board of Education reflects all of the possible advanced measures that may be used. Individual districts may determine whether they will offer the Distinguished Achievement Program and which of the advanced measures they will offer students. For example, in some districts, only College Board Advanced Placement courses may be provided. Some districts will offer students the options of Advanced Placement courses, the opportunity to take college courses and receive high school credit and/or college credit, and mentorships. In other districts, all of the advanced measures might be available.

**4. May a district require that certain measures are used or limit the number of times a student can count other measures?**

Yes, in addition to the limit set by the plan itself that allows only two research projects as advanced measures (see TAC §74 Subchapters D, E, or F), local board policy may limit the number of times any option may be used as an advanced measure. For example, a district might develop policies that permit only two college courses. By the same token, a district may require that at least one advanced measure be an Advanced Placement examination score of three or above. Regardless of their policy, districts are encouraged to take into consideration the needs of transfer students who were granted credit for other advanced measures in another district.

**5. Why must students demonstrate that they have completed college-level or professional-level work? Shouldn't the standard for the Distinguished Achievement Program (DAP) be that students are prepared for college-level work?**

All students who successfully complete the Recommended High School Program are prepared for college-level work. The purpose of the Distinguished Achievement Program is to recognize students who have performed at a level clearly beyond that expected of high school students.

**6. Which college courses are eligible to be counted as advanced measures for the Distinguished Achievement Program?**

These courses meet the requirements of lower-division, for-credit academic and advanced technical credit courses at four-year public institutions of higher education in Texas. Each school district may select which disciplines or courses will be available to its students. None of the courses may be remedial in nature. All dual credit courses (courses taken for both high

school and college credit) must provide advanced academic instruction beyond, or in greater depth than, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

**7. In what areas can students complete products of professional quality?**

This decision will be up to the school district. Products can be developed in any academic area, in career and technical education, or in the area of community service. It is suggested that local boards of trustees adopt policies that clearly define which areas will be acceptable and that require prior approval for a project before student work is initiated.

**8. What exactly is meant by "Original research/project conducted under the direction of mentor(s) and reported to an appropriate audience" under the advanced measures section?**

This measure permits students to begin research in an area of interest under the direction of an expert in the field. In some cases, this project may be a joint one in which the mentor and the student work together. In other cases the student might select a project that requires oversight and advice from a professional in the field. This measure is very similar to the one relating to "products of professional quality that are reviewed by a panel of professionals." However, the product of professional quality may be completed through an independent study and not be under the direction of a mentor. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) include courses that students can take to fulfill these options.

**9. Does "external sources of evaluation" mean external to the school district?**

Not necessarily. For example, a teacher who is not the student's teacher of record, but a specialist in the student's area of study may serve on a panel that reviews products or may be a mentor for a student.

**10. Will districts need to retain samples of products of professional quality or original research projects for accreditation visits, or will district policy and guidelines be sufficient?**

Written evaluations of panel members should be retained. Districts may want to keep sample products for community review.

**11. If a student takes a College Board Advanced Placement course, makes an A or B in the course and scores a three or better on the examination, will that count for two measures since AP courses are college-level classes?**

No. Even though Advanced Placement courses are considered college-level classes, a student may count only the score on the exam as a single measure. This is because a score of 3, 4, or 5 on the examination indicates the student is doing college-level work.

**12. Can credit for these measures be earned in middle school?**

Yes. Just as credit for completion of high school courses can be earned in middle school, credit for advanced measures may be as well. This may be noted in the appropriate section of the academic achievement record.

**13. What Tech Prep Courses count for advanced measures?**

There is no such thing as a “Tech Prep course”. A Tech Prep program consists of academic courses based on the Recommended High School Program, a coherent sequence of CTE courses (two or more courses for three or more credits) and at least one opportunity for students to earn college credit while in high school. Tech Prep articulation plans may include dual credit courses, locally articulated courses, or statewide articulated courses.

Districts may offer college credit by articulation through either

- Advanced Technical Credit (ATC) statewide articulated courses;
- locally articulated courses; or
- locally articulated technical courses in a Tech Prep program of study.

The Tech Prep program of study is designed by the school district and the community or technical college. The courses in the Tech Prep plan are to be established by the school district and the community college the student will attend after graduation. For a student to earn an advanced measure through participation in a Tech Prep program, students must have qualified to earn college credit. In some cases, this may require completion of a sequence of two or more high school technical courses. (Reminder: Three hours of college credit with a grade of A or B equals one advanced measure.)