

TEXAS EDUCATION TODAY



News from the Texas Education Agency

FEBRUARY 2008

SENATE BILL 7

TEA launches heart screening pilot program

As a Valentine's gift to Texas students, the Texas Education Agency announced that Championship Hearts Foundation has been awarded a contract to begin screening sixth-graders for heart conditions that can cause sudden and unforeseen death.

The \$1 million Early Cardiovascular Detection Pilot Program, created in 2007 by Senate Bill 7, will target about 12,750 sixth-grade students in public schools across Texas. The Foundation will select schools that are geographically and ethnically diverse to participate in the pilot that will begin later this month.

The free screening will be designed to detect signs of hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) and other cardiovascular conditions that can cause sudden death. HCM is the leading cause of sudden cardiac death in young people.

In Texas, on average 50 students die from sudden cardiac arrest each year, according to Parent Heart Watch, a national organization that collects heart-related medical data. Earlier this school year, undiagnosed heart conditions in two student athletes led to fatalities.

"Sudden death due to an undetected heart condition is rare among school children," Commissioner of Education Robert Scott said. "Yet there have been cases – tragic cases in which students died after some kind of strenuous physical activity. We want to do everything possible to protect our young people, and this screening

program is a part of that effort."

The screenings will include a pre-screening questionnaire, an electrocardiogram (EKG), which tests the electrical activity of the heartbeat, and an echocardiogram, an ultrasound that shows the shape and size of the heart. Many heart conditions that can lead to heart failure among adolescents are undetectable without an electrocardiogram or an echocardiogram.

Licensed technicians will administer the tests and board-certified cardiologists will read and interpret the results.

Test results will be provided to the parents of each screened student. Individual test results are confidential and not available to the public. Cumulative findings from the heart screenings will not identify individual students.

Results of the data collected will be reported to the Texas Education Agency by June 2009 to determine the feasibility of a large-scale, statewide screening program.

The contract awarded to Championship Hearts Foundation represents a collaboration between the Foundation, Children's Medical Center of Dallas, Texas Children's Hospital of Houston, Children's Cardiology of Austin and other medical professionals. This partnership of medical entities brings a wealth of knowledge and experience that utilize cutting-edge personnel and cardiovascular screening practices.

Championship Hearts Foundation, led by Dr. George Rodgers, is a non-profit organization based in Austin that has conducted more than 6,000 heart screenings for student athletes over the past seven years.

The cardiovascular screening pilot program will provide TEA and the legislature with the opportunity to gain important information regarding the potential benefit of implementing a more comprehensive screening program for young people.

Curriculum revision update

A public hearing will be held March 26 to take testimony on the proposed revision of the English Language Arts and Reading Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The hearing will be held in room 1-111 of the William B. Travis Building in Austin.

The State Board of Education is expected to take a preliminary vote on the updated TEKS at its March 27-28 meeting, with a final vote expected May 22.

The board adopted the curriculum standards now in use in 1997. Review committee teams of Texas English and reading teachers have been working to revise these TEKS since 2005. As directed by the board, the educator teams have attempted to make the TEKS more grade-level specific, less repetitive and more measurable at the state or local level.

The board considered a draft version of the ELA and Reading TEKS at a Feb. 13 meeting. About two dozen witnesses suggested changes to the proposed standards that ranged from minor tweaks to a complete substitution. The substitute document was based on a proposal originally created more than a decade ago under the leadership of Donna Garner, then a teacher in the Midway ISD.

A four-member subcommittee of the board will select experts to review the document and establish the process for revisions at a February meeting. The subcommittee is to consider the draft reviewed at the Feb. 13 meeting as well as "input from all interested parties including members of the existing work groups to complete the final standards document." They will also be integrating college readiness standards to the document, as required by House Bill 1, passed by the Texas Legislature in 2006.

If the board approves the final standards in May, TEA staff is recommending that the new TEKS be implemented in the 2009-2010 school year. Publishers will have 11 months to prepare new textbooks and other instructional material instead of the traditional 24-month adoption schedule.

Inside this Issue

Outreach Campaign..... 2

Promising Practices..... 3

Online Clearinghouse 4

OWN YOUR OWN FUTURE

Teens empowered to take charge of their lives through education

“Own Your Own Future”—a student outreach campaign to encourage Texas youth to stay in school, graduate, and pursue their passion was launched by the Texas Education Agency through a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The flagship component of the integrated campaign, www.OwnYourOwnFuture.com, is designed to show teens that graduating from high school is the first step toward college and a career.

“*Own Your Own Future* encourages Texas students to take command of their futures by graduating from high school and staying on track to pursue their goals,” said Commissioner of Education Robert Scott. “This is one of many ways that our agency is working to improve the graduation rate.”

To connect with, empower, and support Texas students, OwnYourOwnFuture.com provides at-risk youth with career options tied to their passions and desires, all



while reiterating the need to finish high school to make these achievements a reality. The site takes students through three main sections, including:

- **WANT IT**, an introduction to the overall site, highlighting topics such as the impact of life choices and the earnings potential for certain jobs to motivate teens to stay in school to improve their future;

- **FIND IT**, a searchable database allowing teens to select their interests and hobbies, such as science and painting, and receive suggested education paths and career options based on their selections; and

- **OWN IT**, a question and answer section covering common issues and challenges facing teens today to inspire students to stay strong, focused, and in charge of their futures.

Own Your Own Future will extend beyond the web site to reach Texas youth

where they live, go to school and play. Additional outreach activities include in-person, interactive events at local malls in the Austin, Dallas, Houston and Rio Grande Valley areas throughout the Spring; an opt-in text messaging program for students to receive information about local events and new web site content; online advertisements on social networking sites and viral videos; and, in-school campaign materials.

“Many of the students we teach feel like they’re not part of the decision making process when it comes to school, when in fact it is their decision to stay in school that holds the most weight,” said Hector Rodriguez, director of the Alternative Learning Center in the Austin Independent School District. “We have to show these students that they have the power to decide, and it is their decision that matters above anyone else’s. Once they feel in control of the situation, they are more likely to graduate.”

The *Own Your Own Future* campaign coordinates with other high school completion and success initiatives funded by the TEA, all of which seek to increase high school graduation and college enrollment rates in Texas. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which seeks to ensure that all people have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life, supported this campaign with a grant to the agency.

The overall graduation rate in Texas is 80 percent. However, African American and Hispanic students graduate at lower rates, with only about 75 percent and 72 percent respectively, graduating from high school in four years.

U.S. Census Bureau data indicates that high school dropouts are often unable to support themselves and are three times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates.

For more information about *Own Your Own Future*, please visit www.OwnYourOwnFuture.com.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Robert Scott.....	Commissioner of Education	Chair
Rene Nuñez	El Paso, District 1	Don McLeroy
Mary Helen Berlanga	Corpus Christi, District 2	College Station, District 9
Lawrence Allen, Jr.	Houston, District 4	Vice Chair
Ken Mercer	San Antonio, District 5	David Bradley
Terri Leo	Spring, District 6	Beaumont, District 7
Barbara Cargill	The Woodlands, District 8	Secretary
Cynthia Dunbar.....	Richmond, District 10	Rick Agosto
Patricia Hardy	Fort Worth, District 11	San Antonio, District 3
Geraldine Miller.....	Dallas, District 12	
Mavis B. Knight.....	Dallas, District 13	
Gail Lowe.....	Lampasas, District 14	
Bob Craig.....	Lubbock, District 15	

PROMISING PRACTICES

Schools recognized for exceptional use of High School Allotment funds

Commissioner of Education Robert Scott recognized two school districts and eight high school campuses for offering exceptional high school completion and college readiness programs implemented with High School Allotment funds.

The High School Allotment, a \$320 million annual fund created by the Texas Legislature in 2006 provides every Texas school district with \$275 per student in grades 9-12 to improve high school graduation and college readiness rates.

In May 2007, a High School Allotment Advisory Group, comprised of 14 experts and stakeholders representing Texas' secondary school education system, was appointed by the commissioner to recommend criteria and procedures for identifying exceptional uses of the allotment funds.

Recognition was given for the implementation of exceptional programs or strategies in the following areas:

- Preparing students for college readiness;
- Increasing graduation rates;
- Improving curriculum alignment or preparing students for successful transition from middle school to high school or from high school to college; and
- Implementing innovative high school completion and success programs or strategies.

Of these 22 districts and campuses requesting consideration for recognition, the following nominees representing large, medium and small campuses and districts were selected as examples of exceptional use of the allotment.

NORTHSIDE ISD in San Antonio received recognition for exceptional use of its allotment for a strategy that designates a "graduation coach" at every high school to work one-on-one with 9th graders who are at risk of failing English, math, science or social studies courses. In addition, Northside ISD entered into a partnership with San Antonio College to establish a program for students who were

in the process of dropping out.

High School Allotment funds have allowed **PATTON SPRINGS ISD**, a small rural district, to pay tuition each semester for high school seniors who might otherwise not be able to take college courses while in high school. In addition, allotment funds have paid salary expenses for local teachers to provide instruction for dual credit courses. This has enabled a majority of Patton ISD seniors to graduate from high school with some college credit.

FRIENDSWOOD HIGH SCHOOL in Friendswood ISD created a Student Success Program (SSP) that provides intervention services to any freshmen experiencing difficulty passing an English, mathematics, science or social studies class and to any at-risk high school student regardless of grade classification experiencing difficulty in a math or science course.

GOODRICH HIGH SCHOOL, located in a small rural community, uses its allotment to encourage its students to attend college by funding a variety of strategies, including providing students opportunities to visit surrounding colleges and universities; offering parents and students training on how to complete financial aid documents; and providing access to computers to submit online college applications. In addition, each classroom adopted a university and a monthly "alumni day" was introduced during which teachers and staff members wear college paraphernalia.

IDEA COLLEGE PREPARATORY HIGH SCHOOL in Donna has employed its allotment to prepare its predominantly Hispanic and economically disadvantaged student population for success in postsecondary education by adopting the International Baccalaureate (IB) model that builds a culture of academic excellence. All students from grades 9-12 were enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement (AP) course and are expected to take the national AP test.

GATESVILLE HIGH SCHOOL in

Gatesville ISD is being recognized for its efforts to increase the number of students taking advanced academic courses. Allotment funds have been used to employ additional AP teachers and equipment to improve AP instruction. Online AP courses were purchased and AP exam fees were paid using allotment funds.

In order to increase the number of students enrolled in Pre-AP, AP and dual credit courses, San Antonio's **EAST CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL** used the allotment to partially fund the salaries of teachers hired to teach advanced courses. These courses, begun under the Early College High School project, were expanded and offered to all students.

WHITNEY HIGH SCHOOL in Whitney ISD was able to decrease the number of students at risk of dropping out of high school by providing students who had consistently failed in the traditional classroom with the opportunity to complete courses in the Credit Recovery Program. As a result, a majority of the high school seniors enrolled in the program were able to graduate.

At **NEW DEAL HIGH SCHOOL** in New Deal ISD, faculty teams representing the four core content areas meet on a routine basis to review and discuss student performance data and classroom performance. This approach has enabled New Deal High School to develop a plan of action to close achievement gaps with teachers making decisions on instructional interventions.

COMANCHE HIGH SCHOOL in Comanche ISD is taking steps to better prepare its students for successful transition from high school to college. Allotment funds have been used to pay high school seniors' tuition and books for college Algebra and dual credit college English. Funds also have been used to implement the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Program for high school students who may be the first in their family to attend college.

HOUSE BILL 1

TEA unveils online clearinghouse for best practices in schools

Texas schools now have access to a Texas Education Agency-hosted website providing information on best practices in classroom instruction, dropout prevention, district business, resource allocation, and financial issues.

Launched under a directive from House Bill 1, passed by the Texas Legislature in 2006, the new Best Practices Clearinghouse will be available not only to schools but to the general public.

Campuses, districts and charter schools rated Exemplary or Recognized by the state are eligible to submit best practices to the clearinghouse. Additional suggestions may be submitted by the Legislative Budget Board and Texas Centers for Education Research.

“Part of our mission at TEA is to provide the

resources to help schools meet the educational needs of all students,” said Robert Scott, TEA

Commissioner. “This new clearinghouse will allow teachers, administrators, parents and the general public access to what works best as we all seek to provide an excellent education to our school kids.”

Ertha Patrick, director of special projects at TEA, said for the purposes of the clearinghouse a best practice will be defined as “a tech-

nique, methodology, program, or other intervention that through action research or empirical research demonstrates a positive result.”

Individuals interested in submitting a best practice can do so by visiting the clearinghouse website at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/bestprac/>

