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Texas alone at the top; only state to meet all college and career readiness measures

AUSTIN – Texas is the first, and so far, only state to meet all the American Diploma Project's five key college and career readiness measures, Achieve, a national bipartisan organization, announced today.

In a report called *Closing the Expectations Gap*, Achieve said "Texas has the most comprehensive approach to college and career ready accountability."

"With the passage of HB 3 in June 2009, Texas became the only state that meets the minimum criteria Achieve believes necessary to measure and provide incentives for college and career readiness," the report says.

Texas Commissioner of Education Robert Scott said, "Texas has worked strategically and comprehensively to adopt college and career readiness curriculum standards, increase graduation standards, develop end-of-course exams, enhance our data collection systems and expand our accountability system to report college preparation information. By aligning all of these elements, Texas is clearly leading the race to prepare its students for a successful life after high school graduation."

Texas was one of the 13 charter member states to form the America Diploma Project Network, which Achieve oversees, in February 2005. Today, the network includes 35 states which educate nearly 85 percent of all U.S. public school students. As part of this project, Achieve, a bipartisan, non-profit organization created by the nation's governors and business leaders to help states raise education standards, conducts an annual survey of all 50 states and the District of Columbia on key college and career readiness policies.

This year's survey found that Texas was the only state that met all the accountability measures that were determined as necessary to assess college and career readiness. Those include publicly reporting the percentage of students who graduate from high school with a college and career ready diploma, which in Texas means graduating on the Recommended High School Program or Distinguished Achievement Program.

It also looked at whether states report student performance on state high school tests anchored to college and career ready standards. Texas students who earn a score of 2200 on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) meet the Higher Education Readiness Component (HERC), which indicates their readiness for college courses. Texas' new testing system, now under development, will also address this by linking the grades 3-8 State of Texas

Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tests in reading and mathematics to performance expectations for English III and Algebra II end-of-course assessments.

Texas also allows students to earn college credit while still in high school through Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and dual enrollment programs.

The study also evaluated whether states had high school English language arts and mathematics curriculum standards aligned to college readiness standards. Texas adopted such standards in 2008.

Texas is one of 21 states that have increased graduation requirements to better prepare students. Achieve's research shows that for high school graduates to be prepared for success in college and careers, they need to take four years of challenging mathematics – including content typically taught in an Algebra II course or its equivalent – and four years of grade-level English aligned with college and career ready standards.

Today's high school juniors will be the first group of Texas students who will graduate under the state's "four-by-four" program, which means they are required to earn four credits in each core content area – English, math, science and social studies.

Critical to the success of a college and career ready agenda is the ability of states and school districts to monitor how they are doing. Texas has long had one of the most extensive education data collection systems in the United States. Projects are under way now to make data available in real time to help district officials make timely instructional decisions.

Texas' strong showing in the Achieve evaluation comes on top of its grade of "A" for its curriculum standards, assessment and accountability system in *Education Week's* annual evaluation called *Quality Counts*.

Last fall, the National Governors Association in a report called *Achieving Graduation for All* noted that Texas has implemented many of the necessary steps recommending for tackling the dropout problem, including providing a variety of support systems to students who are at risk of dropping out.

This multi-faceted approach is paying off. A recent Texas Education Agency analysis found that Texas had the fourth highest graduation rate for the Class of 2008 among the 16 states that reported rates based on the methodology endorsed by the National Governors Association. In 2005, the governors of all 50 states agreed to begin calculating on-time graduation rates using this methodology. Eventually, all states will report graduation rates using this methodology, making accurate comparisons readily available.

"Texas has taken concrete steps to ensure that more students graduate, and that those graduates will be successful after high school. These recent reports confirm that strong progress is being made," Scott said.

To view a full copy of the Achieve report, go to www.achieve.org/ClosingtheExpectationsGap2010.