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## **Mission & Vision**

The Commit Partnership is a community navigator and connector, working to ensure that all North Texas students receive an excellent and equitable education that prepares them to flourish in college and career.

We work collaboratively to solve the region's biggest systemic challenges alongside a coalition of over 200 partners, including public and private schools, colleges and universities, foundations, businesses, and nonprofits.







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# Dear friends,



#### There's a story my late friend Susan Hull

used to tell that went something like this: Dr. Hull, not yet superintendent of the Grand Prairie Independent School District, was at a meeting of business leaders.

A successful ice cream producer was detailing the key to their success, namely, an insistence on using only the highest quality ingredients. In particular, his blueberries were each handpicked, with only the very best making it into the final product.

At this point, Dr. Hull raised her hand to speak:

"I think that's where we're different in the world of education."

The gentleman stopped, curious to hear more.

"Our blueberries are our kids. We don't throw away those that have been bruised or damaged. We take those and we spend extra time with them because when we look at our blueberries, every single blueberry counts. All means all."

We lost Dr. Hull far too soon, to a tragic accident that occurred last year. But the spirit of her words, a commitment to excellence and equity for all, lives on in the work of educators across our community.

We see it in Dr. Hull's colleagues in Grand Prairie, who're working to ensure all students, including English-language learners, can read on grade level by 3rd grade (Pg. 11). We see it in the Ft. Worth Leadership Academy at Forest Oak, where Principal Seretha Lofton and her team marry high academic standards and social-emotional health in order to increase success for students experiencing poverty. (Pg. 15) And we see it in the work of Iesha Jackson and Taylor Terry, two recent college grads helping their "near-peers" in DeSoto ISD access a postsecondary credential. (Pg. 21)

Most powerfully, we have seen this spirit of equity suffuse the work of the state legislature. The recently passed school finance overhaul **House Bill 3** infuses billions of dollars in new funding into our public education system, and distributes it based on strategic outcome goals and student need. This legislation is already making a profound impact on classrooms across the state, some of which can be seen in the following pages.

Overall, we've seen important gains across our scorecard indicators since Commit's inception in 2012 (Pg. 3). But now is not the time to rest on our laurels. Rather, we need to continue seeking out the classrooms, campuses, and districts doing the best by our students, and elevating their successful strategies to scale across our state.

Our public education system, while improving, is still failing to prepare many students for college, career, and civic life, and those students left behind are disproportionately Black, Latinx, and poor. (Pg. 5) We must redouble our efforts to reach these critical populations if we are to truly honor the legacy of Susan Hull and ensure that all really does mean all.

With gratitude,

#### **Todd Williams**

CEO, The Commit Partnership



#### **Introducing the 2019**

## **Dallas County Scorecard**

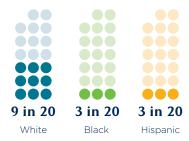
#### Dallas is the least inclusive city in America.1

It's hard to hear. It's also hard to ignore.

In spite of the fact that the Dallas-Ft. Worth region had the fastest rate of job growth of any major metropolitan area from February 2019-2020, only 25% of Dallas County young adults (age 25-34) are currently earning a living wage. For Black and Hispanic young adults, it's just 14%.

This is a situation that has undoubtedly been exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis. But our city's racial inequity was a pre-existing condition that made us uniquely vulnerable.

For eight years, the Commit Partnership has published an annual report that measures eleven key educational indicators in Dallas County, meant to evaluate the overall health of our local cradle-to-career pathway and align community action to address the greatest gaps in opportunities affecting student achievement.



Rate of Dallas County 25-34 year olds with living wage job by race.

But our students don't attend schools in a vacuum, a fact we have been reminded of by the recent uprising against racial injustice. Our city's concentrated areas of poverty, food insecurity, housing instability, toxic stress and trauma all conspire against a child's ability to thrive. Our educational outcomes, upon which our entire economy is reliant, are the result of a constellation of issues that have to be attacked holistically and systemically if we want to succeed.

Moreover, we know that arbitrary distinctions between cities and school districts don't mean nearly as much to our students and parents as the ability to receive an excellent and equitable education that leads to success in college and career.

That's why we've chosen to take a closer look at select educational outcomes by race, socioeconomic status, and English language ability, where data allows us to disaggregate. We've also chosen to highlight the disparate impacts of disciplinary policy, a key contributor to the school-to-prison pipeline.

That's also why, this year, we've broadened the reach of our "Dallas County Scorecard" to include a feature on the Leadership Academy at Forest Oak, a school that has utilized and expanded upon the Accelerating Campus Excellence, or ACE, model first developed in Dallas.

Legendary athlete Kareem Abdul-Jabbar said, "Racism in America is like dust in the air. It seems invisible—even if you're

choking on it—until you let the sun in. Then you see it's everywhere. As long as we keep shining that light, we have a chance of cleaning it wherever it lands." We hope that the data contained herein can act as a ray of light, shining upon the progress we've made and the "cleaning" that still must be done.

Creating an inclusive, equitable and prosperous region where race, place and socioeconomic status no longer predicts educational and economic attainment should be

Together, we can make the least inclusive city in America a model of equity for the world.

With hope for the future!

#### **Dottie Smith**

President, The Commit Partnership



Percentage of Students	Meeting	Standards	in	2019:
DALLAS & TEXAS				

Dallas County Gap from Texas

State of Texas

#### The 11 Indicators:

		, country	• Of Texas	Cup Ironi Texas
Percentage of eligible 3- and 4-year olds enrolled in public Pre-K. Total number of Pre-K eligible students estimated based on number of first graders who were eligible for Pre-K.	PRE-K ENROLLMENT	50%	46%	+4
Percentage of Kindergarteners passing district assessments conducted within the first 60 days of the start of the school year.	KINDERGARTEN READINESS	60%	52%	+8
Percentage of students answering at least 76% of questions correct on STAAR.	3RD GRADE READING	41%	43%	-2
Percentage of students answering at least 74% of questions correct on STAAR.	4TH GRADE MATH	44%	46%	-2
Percentage of students answering at least 69% of questions correct on STAAR.	8TH GRADE SCIENCE	44%	49%	-5
Percentage of students answering at least 63% of questions correct on STAAR.	ALGEBRA I	63%	62%	+1
Percentage of 2018 high school graduates who took and scored at or above 1010 on the SAT or 23 on the ACT.	COLLEGE READINESS*	25%	28%	-3
Percentage of 2014-15 9th grade cohort who started and graduated high school within four years.	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION	88%	90%	-2
Percentage of 2018 high school graduates who enrolled in a higher education institution within one year of graduation.	POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT	62%	no data	n/a
Percentage of 2017 high school graduates who enrolled and then returned for a second year of higher education.	POSTSECONDARY PERSISTENCE	50%	no data	n/a
Percentage of 2013 high school graduates who completed a two- or four-year degree	POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION	29%	no data	n/a

within six years of high school graduation.

Questions? Be sure to check our Appendix: Source and Significance of Each Scorecard Indicator

#### At-a-Glance:

62,114 more students now achieving key benchmarks since 2012!



#### most improved since 2012:

- Algebra I
- 2. 4th Grade Math
- 3. Pre-K Enrollment & 8th Grade Science

#### most improved in gap with Texas:

- **Kindergarten Readiness**
- 2. Pre-K Enrollment
- 3. Algebra I

#### biggest opportunities to close gap with Texas:

- 8th Grade Science
- 2. College Readiness\*

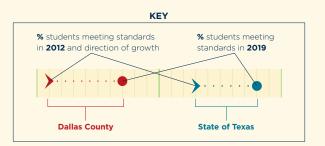
<sup>\*</sup>Previously, College Readiness measured the percentage of students who scored at or above 1180 on the SAT or 24 on the ACT. Now, students who score at or above 1010 on the SAT or 23 on the ACT are considered meeting requirements.

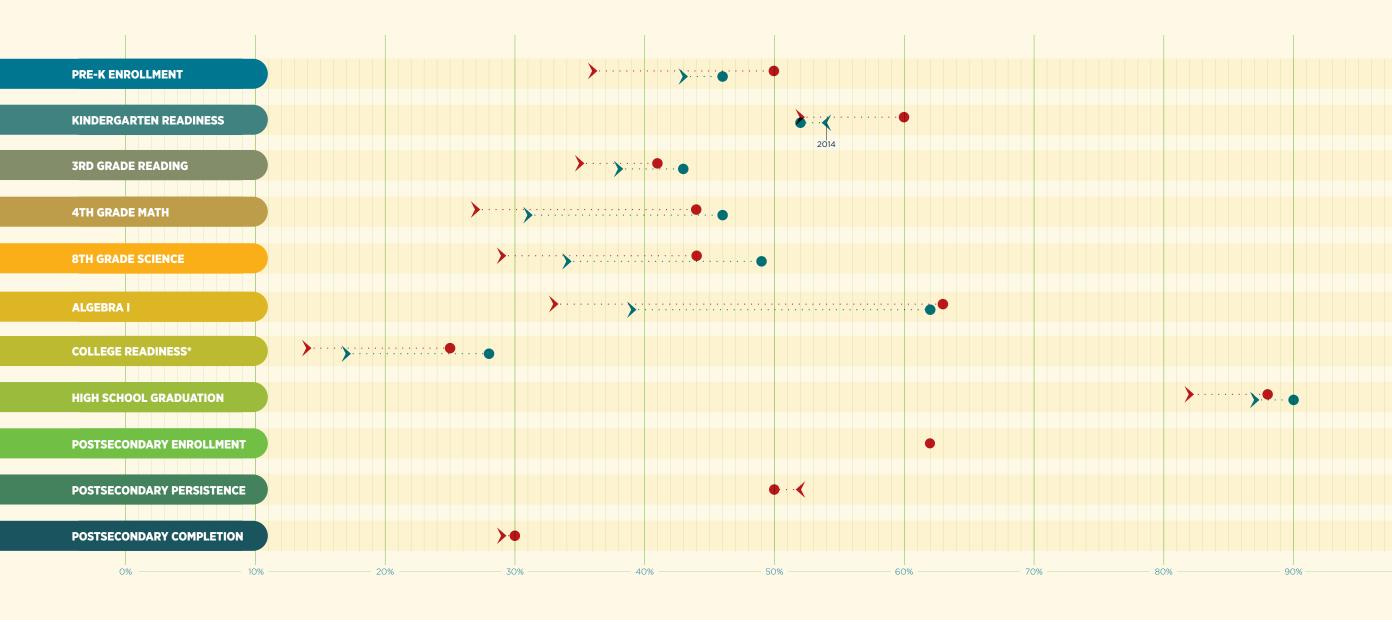
# **Dallas County Scorecard**

aka the Cradle-to-Career Pipeline

#### **How the Data is Calculated:**

All Scorecard data reported is provided by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), with the exception of Postsecondary Enrollment, Postsecondary Persistence, and Postsecondary Completion, which are provided to Commit by each school district.





#### The 2019

## **Dallas County Scorecard:**

#### 3rd Grade Reading, Algebra I, & Suspension Rates—

Disaggregated by Race, Economic Status, & Language Speakers<sup>†</sup>

A consistent refrain in the Commit offices is "you can't manage what you don't measure." It is our goal to help create an educational landscape in Dallas County in which your race, socioeconomic status, and language ability do not predict your likelihood of success. Unfortunately, we are far from that being the case today.

The ability to read by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and pass Algebra by the end of 8th grade are two of the educational indicators most likely to predict success in college and career. That's why we want to ensure that students of all backgrounds are being served equitably in these classes.

Postsecondary attainment is likewise incredibly important to future economic prosperity. Unfortunately, it is not yet possible to disaggregate postsecondary data. But recent research out the University of Texas demonstrates that harsher disciplinary policies lead to lower high school graduation rates and college enrollment<sup>2</sup>. So we have chosen to likewise demonstrate the current disparities in treatment experienced by students of color, in the hopes these trends can be reversed.

Dallas County Students Meeting Standards in 3RD GRADE READING in 2019\*: Disaggregated by Economic Status

Financially insecure and proficient. Financially insecure and proficient. Financially insecure and proficient. Financially insecure and proficient. Financially insecure proficient. Financially insecure and proficient. Financially insecure and proficient. insecure and proficient. Financially insecure and proficient.

of students living in privilege need more support to meet standards in 3rd Grade Reading. That's 3,884 students.

In 2014, when these 3<sup>rd</sup> graders were 4 years old, only 37% of eligible students were able to access high-quality Pre-Kindergarten. Pre-K enrollment has increased, and funding from the state's Early Education Allotment will help to perpetuate the growth.

of students living in poverty 65% need more support to meet standards in 3rd Grade Reading. That's 17.831 students.

Dallas County Students Meeting Standards in 3RD GRADE READING in 2019\*; Disaggregated by Language Speakers

Korean speakers learning to read English. Somali speakers learning to read English. Lao speakers learning to read English. Yoruba speakers learning to read English. German speakers learning to read English.

of students Non-ELL† students **57%** need more support to meet standards in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading. That's 12.283 students.

Over 40% of Dallas County residents speak a language other than English at home, and over forty different languages are spoken by Dallas County families. We must ensure all early educators are trained in the science of language acquisition, as House Bill 3 aims to do (see pg. 11).

of students ELL<sup>†</sup> students 62% need more support to meet standards in 3rd Grade Reading. need more support to meet That's 9.373 students.

- \* One sentence = One percent of students tested in 3rd Grade Reading. A paragraph break and color shift indicates a change in demographic.
- † English language learners (ELL)/Non-English language learners (Non-ELL) data only presented for 3rd Grade Reading.



#### Dallas County Students Meeting Standards in 3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE READING in 2019\*: Disaggregated by Race

of White students 40% need more support to meet standards in 3rd Grade Reading. That's 1,803 students.

of Black students 70% need more support to meet standards in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading. That's 6,019 students.

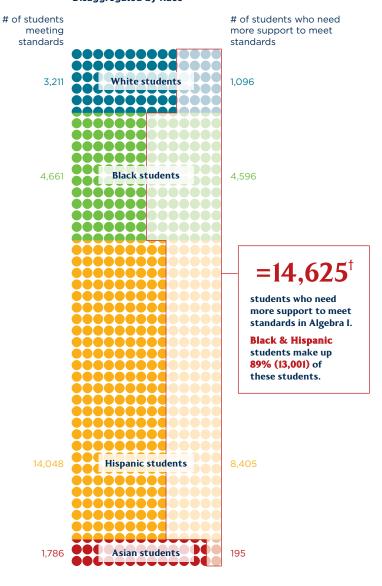
of **Hispanic students** need more support to meet standards in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading. That's 12,750 students.

of **Asian students** 

need more support to meet standards in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading. That's 608 students.

\* One sentence = One percent of students tested in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading. A paragraph break and color shift indicates a change in demographic.

**Dallas County Students Meeting** Standards in ALGEBRA I in 2019: Disaggregated by Race



Research demonstrates that students benefit when they have even one teacher whose racial identity matches their own. But despite making up 56% of the Dallas County student body, only 21% of teachers identify as Hispanic. Asian students are even less likely to have a teacher that looks like them.

**Dallas County Students Meeting** Standards in ALGEBRA I in 2019: **Disaggregated by Economic Status** 

= 100 students = 100 students **NOT** meeting standards meeting standards

students living in privilege need more support to meet standards in Algebra I.

students living in economic instability need more support to meet standards in Algebra I.



Recent data released by Dallas ISD shows that proficient sixth graders living in privilege are twice as likely to access pre-AP courses as proficient sixth graders living in poverty. Students in both groups have passed all preceding coursework, but the former group is more likely to benefit from greater time and ability to advocate for a college-ready schedule.

#### Dallas County Student SUSPENSION RATES in 2018-19 School Year: Disaggregated by Race\*

Schools suspend **Black students** in-school at almost

the rate of White students.







































the rate of White students.





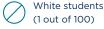














\* Data for Asian students unavailable

Research demonstrates Black and Hispanic students are more likely to receive exclusionary discipline than their white peers, "even for the same or similar **problem behavior.** 3" Studies also suggest the reduction of suspensions can lead to greater student achievement, higher attendance, and an improved school climate4.



<sup>†</sup> Includes Native American, Mixed Race, and Pacific Islander students, a sum of 333 students, that are not visualized here.

# Bright Spot: 3rd Grade Reading

an earlymattersdallas effort

Percentage of Students Meeting Standards in 2019: 3RD GRADE READING

All Grand Prairie ISD Students 44%

>> ELL Students 42%

All State of Texas Students 43%

>> ELL Students 35%

All Dallas County Students 41%

>> ELL Students 38%

ELL: English Language Learners

"It's always about the kids," Bowman summarized. "And the cool thing was, the more we focused on the kids and getting them ready, all of a sudden we look up and the data is there."

That wasn't always the case. When Bowman arrived at the district in 2012, different grade levels used different literacy assessments, making it difficult to track students' progress. It was MJ's job to bring everyone into alignment. The results, after a year of working toward that goal, were discouraging.

"The data indicated that we were losing students in kindergarten and first grade. I said, 'I think what we need to do, based on our data, is create a literacy academy for our early education teachers."

So, with support from her superintendent and Region 10 of the Texas Education Agency<sup>7</sup>, that is exactly what Bowman did, and has continued to do for the past six years. "We're very intentional about professional development," Bowman continued. "We all share the belief that our greatest resource is our classroom teachers, and if we treat and provide them with the support that they need to do their job, then I think we have a

#### "All means all' is a cliche in education,"

says MJ Bowman, Director of Literacy, Dyslexia, and PK-12 Interventions in the Grand Prairie Independent School District. "But oftentimes I want to stop people and say, 'what does that mean?' Because I think if you asked anybody in <code>[GPISD]</code> what is our number one goal? Student achievement. For all students."

As we enter a new year, Texas state and local leadership will be hard at work implementing. House Bill 3, a massive school finance reform bill that promises to put over \$6 billion towards initiatives aimed at increasing student achievement, and in particular early literacy. And Grand Prairie ISD, which currently outperforms the state in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading for its low income and English-learning students, is serving as a model for that work.

Your zip code doesn't determine your ability to learn.



#### Closing the Gap in Cohort Early Literacy: KINDERGARTEN READINESS vs 3RD GRADE READING

Same cohort

2015-16 Kindergarten Readiness

2018-19 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading

Texas Students 60%

GISPD Students 30%

GISPD Students 44%

greater chance of holding onto them. So we're always trying to figure out effective ways to empower teachers."

And not just teachers. Bowman also seeks to empower her principals. "Every year, no matter how long they've been a principal, at the very beginning of the year, I walk them through the components of reading and the science of teaching reading, because they are the instructional leaders on their campus."

Perhaps most importantly, this responsibility extended all the way to the very top: "[Superintendent Susan] Hull was held accountable to K-2 literacy goals, and had to be presented every January to the school board. That became a part of her evaluation, so that we send the message that we're willing to do the work from the top down. Everything we did in terms of expectations and training had to be able to support that model or that belief."

Doing this transformative work from the top down also meant breaking down barriers between different departments. "I've collaborated very closely with our counseling department, our special ed department, our 504 department, our assessment, our bilingual. We're trying to break down the silos."

This collaboration extends throughout the district and across the entire community. Bowman and GPISD have been working with **Early Matters Dallas**—a broad-based coalition of advocates for high quality early education—to prepare for the implementation of HB3, alongside the literacy specialists and early childhood directors of nearly every school district in Dallas County.

But it's Grand Prairie ISD that is uniquely prepared for what's to come.

That's because one of the largest requirements of **House Bill 3** is the creation of reading academies to serve the early educators of every school district across the state of Texas. And the curriculum is one Bowman and her team have already been using

in their training sessions for several years. As Bowman put it: "There's power for our teachers to be able to say, 'we've been doing this."

In the 2015–16 school year, only 30% of incoming GPISD students were considered "kindergarten ready," compared with nearly 60% of the state. After three years of instruction under early educators trained in GPISD's reading academies, this same exact cohort of students surpassed the state in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading scores, despite a disproportionate share of low-income students and English language learners.





"This reading thing hasn't changed," Bowman concluded. "And I know teaching reading is rocket science<sup>8</sup>, as [literacy expert] Louisa Moats said, but I think we also have to bring it to a level of practicality and application. We really only get one chance within each grade level to make a difference in the child. And literacy should be a right. It's not something that belongs to only a certain group of people. Your zip code doesn't determine your ability to learn."

Or, to put it another way: In Grand Prairie and, increasingly, the state of Texas, all really does mean all.

Want to learn more about Grand Prairie's success? Visit: commitpartnership.org/ blog/all-means-all for the whole story



#### www.strongreaders.org

to learn how you can help implement best practices in your school district

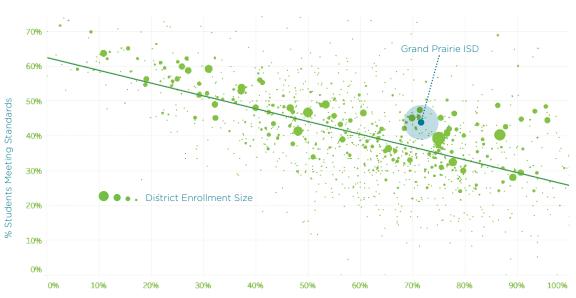




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need to download QR reader.

#### Hope Chart by District—2019 STAAR Proficiency vs. Students Experiencing Poverty: **3RD GRADE READING**



% Economically Disadvantage Student Enrollment

### **Bright Spot:**

# Algebra I a Best In Class effort

#### Like most middle schools, mornings at

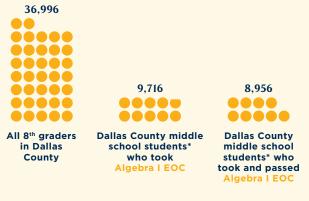
the Leadership Academy at Forest Oak begin with the announcements. But what's said in those announcements is indicative of a mindset that makes this campus special.

"Every day on the announcements, I say, 'if no one's told you that they love you today, remember that I do," said Principal Seretha Lofton. "And I always will.' Yes, we are an institution of learning, but we have to embrace the whole child. Before we can even attempt to educate our students, we have got to address where they need to be socially and emotionally. Especially when you're in this type of environment."

Forest Oak serves the historically underserved community of southeast Fort Worth. 90% of its students qualify for free and reduced lunch, compared with under 80% of the district and about 60% for the state as a whole. And for years, Forest Oak and its surrounding community was a victim of serious neglect, with only 16% of its students meeting state academic standards.

"When we had those first meetings with parents,"
Principal Lofton continued, "I had several come up to
me and say, 'We do not feel safe with our children here
at this school. We did not know what was even going
on at the campus.' I asked the parents to give us an
opportunity, give us a chance. We're going to make
things different."

Total 8th graders and ALGEBRA I EOC students comparison for the 2018-19 school year



= 1000 students

\*this number may include 6th & 7th graders

Forest Oak and State Comparison of Students Meeting Standards in 2019: ALGEBRA I

All State of Texas 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Students 90%

All State of Texas 8<sup>th</sup> Grade EcoDis Students 83%

《《

Leadership Academy at Forest Oak<sup>†</sup>, EcoDis Students **97**%

†Forest Oak enrollment was 96% EcoDis

EcoDis: Economically Disadvantaged





And that's exactly what Principal Lofton and her team did, implementing a strategy known (in Fort Worth) as the Leadership Academy, with the assistance of Texas Wesleyan University and guidance from **Best in Class**—a collaborative initiative between Commit and Communities Foundation of Texas that seeks to attract, prepare, develop, and retain a diverse corps of effective educators.

When Principal Lofton took on her position nearly three years ago, she reconstituted the entire campus and had increased autonomy to build a team of experienced educators and support staff attuned to the specific needs of her new school community. Those staff members who demonstrated excellence in their field were offered increased pay to come to the formerly underresourced campus—and expected to earn it through increased hours and responsibility.

The whole community feels embraced, the children feel loved and empowered.

"You've got to work," Lofton summarized. "The expectation is very clear."

These high expectations extend to the students. The campus motto—which is invoked repeatedly over the course of a school day—reads "Only Excellence Will Do." Lofton explains: "That's excellence in your coursework. That's excellence in your behavior. Everything that you do and everything that you touch should be touched with a spirit of excellence. And so that's the message that we are making sure that all of our students embrace."

All signs indicate students have, in fact, embraced that message. Discipline referrals are down significantly, with fewer "repeat offenders." Conflict is dealt with through restorative justice9—a discipline practice that keeps students in the classroom. And achievement is up—over 50% more students met standards on the state exam in Forest Oak's first year as a Leadership Academy.

"When STAAR comes, it's truly a different environment here as opposed to previous campuses I've been on," says Assistant Principal Danny Fracassi. "In the spirit of our motto, our kids are prepped for excellence. They know what's coming. We've started that from day one. This is where our expectation is. This is where you can meet it, and we're going to put you there."

This mindset shift shows up in subtler ways as well. Passing the state's Algebra I exam in 8<sup>th</sup> grade is essential in order to stay on a college-ready mathematics track. Both before and after its reconstitution, nearly all Forest Oak students taking the exam passed. The difference is, under new leadership, more than twice as many students were given the opportunity to sit for it and they still had resounding success.

Under the recently passed Texas House Bill 3, school districts across the state will have the opportunity to access greater additional funding by replicating the Leadership Academy model. The new Teacher Incentive Allotment allows districts to draw down funds for employing the state's most effective teachers, and districts are financially rewarded for incentivizing those educators to work on the campuses they're needed most, equitably distributing talent.

"It's all about the expectations that you set, and the follow through." Principal Lofton concluded. "The kids really feel good about themselves. The whole community feels embraced, the children feel loved and empowered, and the teachers are more motivated as well because we give them the autonomy to do what needs to be done in that classroom. It's been a very blessed opportunity and fulfilling journey, to say the least." \(\begin{align\*}
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#### Total Number of Students Meeting Standards at the Leadership Academy at Forest Oak by Year



Forest Oak becomes a Leadership Academy

#### Total Number of students taking ALGEBRA I at the Leadership Academy at Forest Oak by Year



Android users may need to download QR reader.

Want to learn more about Fort Worth's success? Read the whole story at: commitpartnership.org/ only-excellence-will-do

Inspired to become a teacher?
Visit dallasftworth.teach.org
to explore your options and
live chat with current educators.



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#### **Bright Spot:**

## **College Enrollment**

a PROMISE effort

#### "The first day I had two students who

asked 'Okay miss, are you the new college advisor? And I was like, 'Yeah, I guess that's me.'"

Iesha Jackson hadn't planned on becoming an educator, but she knew she wanted to help others. So when the opportunity arose to serve as the college advisor to DeSoto High School's three thousand students, she immediately threw herself into the work.

"Instantly I had to figure out a system of how to advise these students and explain to them what their options were based on their given circumstances. So I quickly pulled transcripts, looked at their test scores, and consulted an assured admissions list. I created a system."

Despite a lack of direct professional experience, Jackson knew exactly what these students needed for one simple, but consequential, reason: just four years earlier, she had been in their shoes.

"I told them, 'Hey, you have someone who literally just went through the process. So trust the process. We know what we're talking about and I'm not going to have you do anything that's a detriment to your success.' So I think it definitely has helped being a near peer."

The benefits of this proximity are twofold. Jackson has a deep personal understanding of the modern college-going process and its attendant complexities. This also allows her to develop trusting relationships with the students she serves, a necessary element to embarking upon a postsecondary journey.

"Building those relationships is key," Jackson elaborated. "Once a student sees that you're invested in what they're trying to do and you're there to help them, they're willing to do anything that you ask them to do. I have students whose teacher will say 'they're a terrible student,' but I have no problems out of them. It's that relationship piece that's missing."

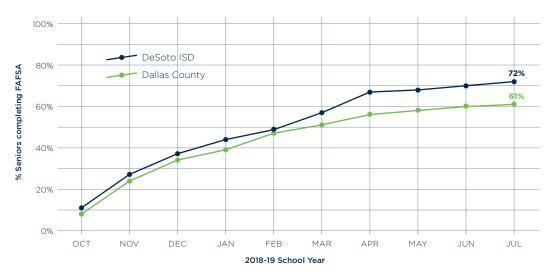
The power of this relationship is perhaps demonstrated best by DeSoto's financial aid completion rate. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid is an essential step to attending college. It's also a tedious and invasive mountain of paperwork no student is excited about undertaking. In her first year as DeSoto High School's college advisor, completed forms increased by 7%. And that was before the district's college advising staff doubled this school year, with the addition of Taylor Terry, another recent college grad.

"At first it was a little overwhelming because I'm like, how did you do this with 800 [graduating seniors]?"

Terry described. "But if you sit down and think about the different ways that you can reach them, and just be patient with it, then you'll be able to do it. I have that scope to where I can see the end goal, because I was there. We literally tell our students, we were here, we've done this. We know, so please listen to us."

Jackson and Terry credit these authentic, trusting relationships with DeSoto's continued success in encouraging students to participate in the college application process generally, and in the Dallas County Promise specifically.

High School Class of 2019 FAFSA Completion Run Chart: DeSoto ISD vs Dallas County



The Dallas County Promise is a tuition-free pathway to a postsecondary credential from the Dallas County Community College District and a number of local university partners, including the University of North Texas at Dallas and Texas A&M at Commerce, available to all seniors in participating Dallas County high schools across eleven traditional public school districts.

"Making sure you talk about transferring to a university is really, really big," Terry explained. "Because I'll have students who know they have lower GPAs or test scores and they think 'I don't even know if I can get into a university.' I'm like, well, as soon as you graduate and go into any postsecondary institution, you get a fresh start. I've had that conversation with a lot of students."

Jackson continued: "The Promise isn't for everyone. The way we pitch it is: this may not be your first plan. This may not even be your second plan, but it's better to have options than to just bank on one thing. Because what happens is, students get accepted and we celebrate and then they get those award letters and it's a different story. 'Oh miss, I didn't know it costs \$25,000 a year and they only gave me \$2000.' And so we start doing the math and, 'Oh, miss, is it too late to do that Dallas County Promise?' I'm like, aren't you glad that we made you do it?"

In her two years serving as DeSoto High School's college advisor, Jackson was able to secure 100% participation on the Promise Pledge, the agreement that kicks off the scholarship process. Last year, 72% of DeSoto seniors completed their financial aid forms, a rate comparable to the state's despite having a larger population of students experiencing economic instability.

Once a student sees that you're invested, they're willing to do anything.

Meanwhile, Jackson is now serving as the district's first ever To and Through Coordinator. That means she'll be working with students of all ages and grade levels to ensure college, career, and military readiness across the entire district. "The expectations have amped up by a thousand. I'm still trying to figure out what that even means. How do you get kindergarteners excited about their future? What does that look like?"

It is a role unique to DeSoto ISD, with little precedent in other school districts, but one we may begin to see more of in the future. Under **House Bill 3**, Texas school districts are now financially rewarded for every student who both graduates from high school ready for college, career, or the military and completes a successful postsecondary transition. And as Jackson can tell you, that takes commitment from the entire school community.

"This is important work. It's a necessity. It has to be done and there has to be buy-in from the top down, from those in charge to your teachers, your students, your parents, your community. Everyone has to be on the same page. If you don't have those people invested in the work, it's meaningless. It's not sustainable. It's more than college banners up on the walls. It's more than acceptance letters. It's more than getting the FAFSA completed. It should be a culture across the board. At the end of the day, our students have endless opportunities and there's no reason they shouldn't be successful if everyone does their part." §

Want to learn more about DeSoto's success? Read the whole story at: commitpartnership.org/ ive-been-you-before

Excited about college and career readiness? Sign up to mentor a Dallas County Promise student at: dallascountypromise.org/champions





iOS users: aim camera at QR code to activate. Android users may need to download QR reader.



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The Commit Partnership would like to thank the following districts for providing data for various indicators and other metrics to assist the community in understanding where all of our students are academically:

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Dallas ISD

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## **Appendix**

Source and Significance of Each Scorecard Indicator

#### 1. Pre-K Enrollment

#### Source

Texas Public Education Information Resource

#### Significance

90% of the brain is developed by the time a person is five years old. Research shows a strong correlation between quality early learning and regional prosperity. For every \$1 invested in early childhood, a community saves \$7 in long-term costs such as educational remediation, criminal justice, and welfare. And quality Pre-K programming has been shown to close achievement gaps for low-income students and students of color.

Quality early learning for all children can change the economic outcome of our community in one generation. When we ensure that all students receive the best education, from the very beginning, we set them up for success for the rest of their lives.

#### 2. Kindergarten Readiness

#### Source

Texas Public Education Information Resource

Currently, individual districts choose their own assessment to determine kindergarten readiness. A standardized and age-appropriate measure to be used by all districts across Texas is currently in development, as mandated by House Bill 3. Kindergarten Readiness report provided by the Texas Education Agency (TEA)

#### Significance

Kindergarten readiness is closely linked to future academic achievement and life success, though indicators for this outcome area often differ across school districts and states. The Texas Education Agency does not mandate a single kindergarten readiness standard across school districts, but it does mandate that districts assess literacy among incoming Kindergarteners.

Kindergarten literacy levels, in turn, predict reading ability throughout a child's educational career. Across states, school-entry academic and attention skills are highly correlated with later academic achievement in elementary school. And in DISD, children who were Kindergarten Ready in the fall of 2011 were 3.2 times more likely to meet the postsecondary readiness benchmark four years later on the 3rd grade reading STAAR assessment.

#### 3. 3rd Grade Reading

#### Source

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) data provided by TEA

#### Significance

In the early grades, children begin to transition from learning to read to reading to learn. At these grade levels, the reading curriculum becomes more complex in both meaning and vocabulary.

Data shows that disparities in literacy during the early grades are linked to persistent achievement gaps. If children are behind by third grade, they generally stay behind throughout school. One longitudinal study found that students who do not read at grade level by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers. Conversely, students at or above grade level reading in earlier grades graduate from high school and attend college at higher rates than peers reading below grade level.

#### 4. 4th Grade Math

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) provided by TEA

#### Significance

Elementary math lays the foundation for all future mathematics, as students need a stronger understanding of arithmetic and finite number sets to effectively tackle more complex concepts, such as algebra and infinite number sets.

Research indicates that an early understanding of math concepts is the most powerful predictor of later school success. Knowledge of fractions and division uniquely predicts subsequent knowledge of Algebra and overall math achievement more than four years later. And students in the lowest quartile of math achievement at ages 6, 8, and 10 are less likely to attend college than students who struggle in other subjects.

#### 5. 8th Grade Science

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) provided by TEA

#### **Significance**

A strong foundation in math and science at the middle school level can dramatically impact future workforce opportunity.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, STEM occupations are growing at 17%, while others are growing at 9.8%, and 10 of the fastest growing occupations require science and math. Projections estimate the need for 8.65 million workers in STEM-related jobs. At all levels of education attainment, STEM job holders earn 11% higher wages compared with their counterparts in other jobs.

#### Source

6. Algebra I

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) provided by TEA

#### **Significance**

Basic algebra has been referred to as the "gatekeeper subject" because of its correlation to both college and career success. Taking algebra in middle school opens the gateway to completing advanced mathematics courses in high school which, in turn, is highly valued for admission to many four-year colleges and universities.

Students who leave high school without adequate mathematics preparation and skills require post-secondary remediation coursework later on. Approximately 23% of entering college freshmen fail placement tests for college level math courses and are placed in non-credit-bearing remedial courses. Economists estimate that if the U.S. could raise math proficiency to Canadian levels, economic growth would improve by 1.5% annual and over the long run add \$75

COLLING LIVES THROUGH

OLLEGE COMPLETION

trillion to the U.S. GDP.

#### 7. College Readiness

#### Source

Texas Academic Performance Reports

#### Significance

SAT/ACT exams administered in the 11th and 12th grade help us determine if a student has developed the academic foundation necessary for a successful transition from secondary to higher education. As nationally normed tests, these indicators allow our community to compare the progress of our school systems against those from around the country.

58% of students who do not require remediation upon entering college ultimately earn a bachelor's degree, compared to only 17% of students enrolled in remedial reading and 27% of students enrolled in remedial math. A strong correlation exists between SAT/ACT scores and first year college GPA and retention rates; SAT/ACT scores also help identify the need for remedial work. The three year graduation rate at Texas community colleges for full time students requiring remedial work is only 10%.

#### 8. High School Graduation

#### Source

Texas Academic Performance Reports

#### Significance

High school graduation is not only a precursor to college enrollment; it is also a major indicator for earnings throughout adulthood. On average, high school graduates make at least \$10,000 more annually than individuals who did not complete high school. Over a lifetime, high school graduates earn 33% more over their lifetime than those who drop out.

If the number of high school dropouts in the 50 largest U.S. cities were cut in half, the extra earnings of those high school graduates would add up to \$4.1 billion per year. High school graduation has been shown to predict health, mortality, teen childbearing, marital outcomes, and crime. Increasing the educational attainment of one generation improves the next generation's academic and social outcomes.



## Appendix cont.

#### 9. Postsecondary Enrollment

#### Source

National Student Clearinghouse Reports provided by individual school districts

#### Significance

Post-secondary enrollment marks one of the critical transitions in the cradle to career pipeline. By 2020, 65% of jobs nationally will require some form of postsecondary education. Post-secondary credentials are not limited to four year universities; two-year programs and technical certifications are also valuable in this knowledge-based economy.

Research has shown that "low income students, even those with high academic performance levels, are less likely to enroll in college, more likely to attend two year colleges when they do enroll, and less likely to apply to more selective institutions compared to their more advantaged peers with similar academic preparation." Students from lower income schools enrolled in college at an average rate of 56%, compared to 71% of students from higher income schools.

## 10. Postsecondary Persistence

#### Source

National Student Clearinghouse Reports provided by individual school districts

#### Significance

Often students begin higher education with strong ideals but the transition proves very difficult. Supporting students during this critical period is essential for improving degree attainment.

As many as 1 in 3 students nationally do not return for their second year of college. Just over 1.2 million first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students began their undergraduate careers at public four-year colleges and universities in the fall of 2010. Six in ten (62.4%) completed their degrees within six years. Of the 1 million first-time students who enrolled at two-year public institutions in fall 2010, only one in four (39.3%) completed degrees or certificates from their starting institution within six years.

## 11. Postsecondary Completion

#### Source

National Student Clearinghouse Reports provided by individual school districts

#### **Significance**

The benefits of post-secondary education span across social and economic domains. An associate or bachelor's degree holder earns on average \$442,000-\$1,051,000 more over a 40-year career than a high school graduate.

According to the Lumina Foundation, the number of jobs requiring an associate degree has grown by 1.6 million and the number of jobs requiring a bachelor's degree has grown by 2 million since the end of the recession. Society benefits from a more educated population, as well, through lower instances of child abuse, lower rates of criminal behavior, and fewer teen pregnancies among children of college-educated parents.

Misc. Sources with hyperlinks (for digital readers) & QR codes (for print readers):

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