Educational Profile of Central Texas

E3 Alliance
July 2020

Introduction

E3 Alliance is a regional, data-driven education collaborative based in Austin, Texas. We are helping to build the strongest educational pipeline in the country to drive regional economic prosperity. Founded in 2006, E3 Alliance acts as a catalyst for change, working to break down barriers and build better alignment across the education continuum. Our name tells our story: Education Equals Economics. We believe that children's educational achievement is the key to realizing economic prosperity and high quality of life for our Central Texas community. Such achievement requires systemic change from cradle to career. E3 Alliance is committed to bringing about this change in our community.

In pursuit of systemic change, E3 Alliance is guided by *The Blueprint for Educational Change*, Central Texas' strategic plan for improving the educational pipeline from 'cradle to career'. Our approach to supporting educational improvement is fundamentally 'data driven.' We use the most up-to-date and comprehensive data to drive our work. We also make this same data available to institutions and individuals working to improve education in Central Texas.

Additionally, as the P16 Council for Central Texas, E3 Alliance has a formal responsibility to our contractual partners (15 school districts in the five county Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos MSA, seven institutions of higher education in the region, and dozens of social services, early childhood, nonprofit, business and philanthropic partners) to provide data and analytics for decision-making with the goal of aligning policy and practice. We provide increasingly sophisticated data and analytics to drive such policy and practice decisions based on ERC data sets since the first acceptance of ERC research proposals over a decade ago.

"We invest in communities all over the world, and in every place we work our investments are driven by objective data. But our most effective education data comes from E3 Alliance, through Texas's Education Research Centers. We use this information for our own investment decision-making, for guiding the work of our grantees, and for making collective decisions with partners in Texas. ERC data analyzed by E3 is truly invaluable to us."

- Virginia Potter, Grant Officer - Central Texas, The Michael & Susan Dell Foundation

Research Questions

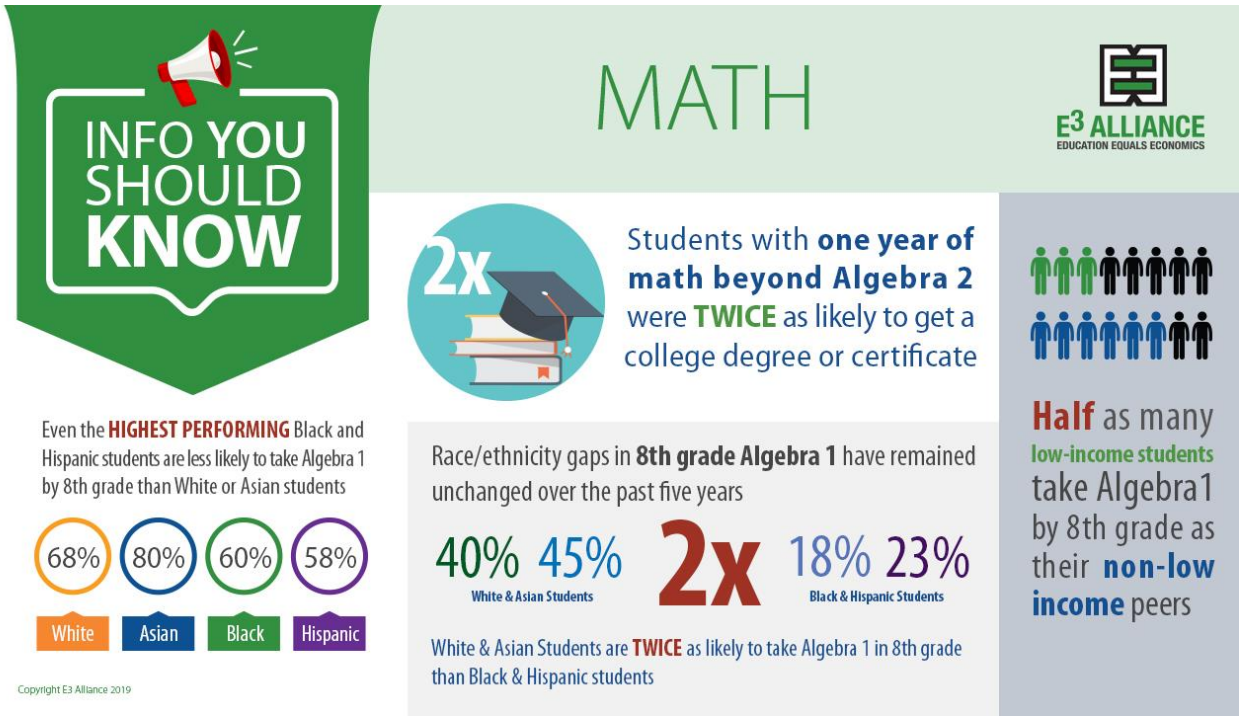
E3 Alliance has developed a comprehensive set of education and related workforce statistics over the past decade that provide our region with critical information necessary to understand the education and related workforce issues facing our region, to develop well-grounded strategies in response, to change instructional policies and practices, and to allow the assessment of progress over time. Our research questions are not designed to narrowly evaluate a specific policy or program. Rather, they elicit the key descriptive statistics regional education stakeholders must know to improve instruction and educational practices. The questions can be summarized as:

1. To what extent has the region achieved the goals set forth in the Central Texas Region's *Blueprint for Educational Change*?
2. What is the educational and workforce profile of Central Texas and how does this compare to other regions and the State as a whole?
3. How have academic outcomes changed over time for different populations of students?
4. To what degree have Central Texas students shown academic growth and how does this growth vary over time?

These research questions drove the annual update of data analyses and visualizations supporting the Central Texas Educational Profile on https://data.e3alliance.org/. In addition to updating and expanding the interactive visualizations available on our website, eight interactive "Data Digs" were held with different groups of partners to expand data sharing. These events repeated the Data Dive and Discuss model used the last two years across multiple audiences and events including UT faculty and grad students, the McCombs Leadership Program, Leadership Austin, Central Texas Education Funders, UT System leadership, and legislative staffers at the capitol. This year, in addition to generating progress metrics related to the goals detailed in *The Blueprint for Educational Change*, we added a new chapter to the Profile that describes mathematics pathways in the region over the last 10 years, and made significant updates to our English Learner (EL) chapter reflecting changes that are underway in K-12 English Learner programming. We recently completed a new chapter on transitions to careers.

Aid in Driving a Data-Driven Culture in the Community

E3 Alliance continues to advance data availability, user capability to utilize data, and a data driven culture as the three dimensions for building a data driven region. Throughout the project period, E3 Alliance hosted a variety of data focused events including E3-3D (Data Driven Decision-making) events, Data Digs, and summits to convene regional stakeholders around a range of education topics including Attendance, Math Pathways, HB5, and College & Career Entry. For over a decade, we have published the "Slide of the Month", a quick, easy to understand data chart for key stakeholders (e.g. regular superintendents, college presidents, and the E3 Alliance Board) that shows what data means for our region. This year we updated the format of the Slide of the Month to be an "Info You Should Know" infographic where we can include multiple data points about a topic in a single image.



We continued to enhance user capability by enhancing data-driven services for our district partners. We incorporated data-driven decision-making into training through **3D Growth**, E3 ExcELL, ***RAISE^{up} Texas***, Pathways of Promise, and other Blueprint initiatives. School districts across the region regularly report to us that they are changing policies, such as teacher assignment and math course-taking requirements, based on E3 Alliance's data. Twelve districts have already made substantive changes to mathematics course-taking policies and practices based on E3 Alliance's Math Pathways work (funded by Greater Texas Foundation), and at the November Math Summit (funded by MSDF), thirteen districts and five IHE's committed to change policy/practice going forward.

Our previous research on attendance led to the creation of our annual Attendance Summits. The third Summit, in August 2019, brought together individuals from schools and districts around the region for a full day of panels and workshops discussing factors associated with chronic absence and low student attendance. Campus teams who participated were provided with attendance data to use throughout the day. Demand for the annual Attendance Summit was so great that in 2018-19 we launched a year-long Attendance Peer Learning Network (PLN) of eleven schools, with a second Attendance PLN launching in 2019-20. Campus teams sign up for a year of regular meetings and check-ins where they use attendance data that is specific to their own school to identify gaps and develop continuous improvement strategies. Teams implement these strategies over the course of the year and then regularly convene to review progress and any challenges they may face. Results from these PLNs have been strong, with schools demonstrating 1-3 percentage point improvements in chronic absence over a year (or a 15-40% improvement rate!). In addition to the attendance PLNs, a PLN focusing on school readiness was launched in 2019-20 and a college success PLN will begin in fall 2020.

In November 2019, E3 Alliance partnered with the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas to hold an all-day Math Summit. This event was the culmination of work done by the Central Texas Math Alignment Task Force (CTXMAT) and brought together leaders in STEM education from K-12 districts and higher ed across the region and state. The event drew on nearly six years of research conducted at the ERC as part of our Pathways of Promise work, as well as data sharing strategies developed as part of the Attendance Summit and Learning Networks. Analysis on regional math course taking patterns between 5th and 12th grade was presented and each of the 16 school districts in attendance received data specific to their school districts. The presentation included activities that walked participants through how to understand and make meaning of their data, then time for each district team to collaborate on an action plan. District teams then presented their action plan to district leadership and shared plans with the rest of the attendees. Changes to local policy and practice supported Pathways of Promise data have driven tremendous improvements in outcomes across the region. For instance, just in the last few years, the gap in 8th grade Algebra I course-taking, a strong predictor of college success, between high performing students from households with different income levels has been cut in half. Remarkably, the Black-White student gap has been reduced by 75%!

Policy Recommendations

Since the inception of the CTXMAT in 2018, there continues to be ongoing momentum across K-12 districts, community colleges, and universities in aligning their efforts toward greater mathematics achievement for all students. While the Math Summit inspired public commitments by both K-12 and IHE's that reflect the movement toward more equitable practices and policies within these organizations, parallel efforts to further advance this collective impact work are being undertaken. Through mutually reinforcing activities such as the Pathways of Promise (PoP) Steering Committee, the Launch Years Initiative, and the Teaching and Learning Work Group, we expect to see improved student success outcomes across the P-16 education pipeline. This collaborative approach has gained the attention of the Texas Education Agency who is currently developing a statewide guide of promising practices based on the adoption of Central Texas policy recommendations created by the PoP Steering Committee to be disseminated statewide with the goal of increasing math acceleration in middle schools. On the other end of the spectrum, the CTXMAT has made significant gains working with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) on the revision of the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) assessment to broaden the scope of what it means to be college ready.

Such a cohesive platform for forging collaborations around a shared common agenda are indeed prompting results such as more equitable structures, policies, and practices leading to increased opportunities for students to learn and achieve in school in a way that aligns with their career aspirations. For further information, read Emerging Solutions, It Takes a Village: Central Texas Mathematics Alignment Taskforce.

During the second half of 2019 data became available at the ERC about the graduating class of 2018 – the first to graduate under the fully implemented graduation requirements laid out in HB5. Research undertaken based on this data showing the first emerging patterns about high school endorsements and the foundation school program was shared with stakeholders from around the region at an E3-3D in December 2019. This research, as well as content related to the recently passed HB3 was also shared with legislative staffers at an event at the State Capitol in February 2020.

During 2019, E3 Alliance partnered with collective impact organizations across the State to use data to help inform the state's School Finance Committee that was convened to make recommendations on education finance reform in advance of the 2019 legislative session. In addition, E3 Alliance worked with partners to create a legislative agenda, focusing on key factors associated with better educational outcomes for all students. Key components of HB 3 legislation, the largest increase in state funding for public education ever passed, were in part based on E3 Alliance analysis. These analyses include:

- Analysis of factors associated with Kindergarten readiness, and the correlation between Kindergarten readiness and third grade reading and math. This analysis drew on ERC data, as well as *Ready, Set, K!*, which taken together represent the most comprehensive longitudinal data in the state. The findings from this analysis supported the full day Pre-K and early literacy components of HB 3
- Inequities in college enrollment, persistence, and success by income, race, and gender supporting the College Career Military Readiness (CCMR) outcomes component of HB 3.

In summary, E3 Alliance has worked with partners from across the region to enhance our progress toward being a truly data driven community. A key component of that work is the Central Texas Education Profile, which allows our partners access to data about the progress of all Central Texas students from cradle to career. Using ERC data in our work with our education partners is showing tremendous return in enhancing our region's access, capability, and culture of data use to improve student outcomes.