

Texas High Performance Schools Consortium

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Frequently Asked Questions

Question 1: What is the purpose of the Consortium?

The purpose of the Consortium is to transform education so that all Texas students are future ready. Students should be given the power to create and innovate, and teachers should be given the opportunity to use feedback and assessments to design learning that is both relevant and rigorous. Parents, members of the local business community, and individuals from higher education agree that they are looking for students who are critical thinkers, innovators, problem solvers, collaborators, and good communicators. Unfortunately, our current system lends itself to teaching to the high-stakes tests, not fostering the skills needed to be future ready; therefore, it is critical that we transform our public schools.

Question 2: How did the Consortium get started?

In 2011, the 82nd Legislature passed Senate Bill 155 which added §7.0561 to the Texas Education Code, establishing the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium. This body of 23 high-performing school districts was created to inform the governor, legislature, and commissioner of education on methods for transforming Texas public schools by improving student learning through the implementation of Consortium principles: 1) Digital learning; 2) Learning standards; 3) Multiple assessments; Local control. The commissioner of education was charged to create an application process for school districts and open-enrollment charter schools interested in serving in the Consortium. Statutory requirements specify that the commissioner select a range of districts to represent diversity of Texas public schools in terms of district types, sizes, and student populations. It limits the number of students who may participate in the Consortium to no more than five percent of the total Texas public school student population (approximately 250,000 students).

Question 3: What is the expected outcome of the work of the Consortium?

The result will be an educational system designed to empower students to innovate, collaborate, communicate, create, synthesize, analyze, and problem solve – all skills needed in order to be future ready.

Question 4: What are high-priority learning standards?

High-priority learning standards prioritize the critical competencies, content knowledge, and skills essential for student success in a globally competitive environment. The standards currently in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) are a mile wide and an inch deep, requiring teachers to cover a large quantity of objectives in a short period of time, as opposed to teaching key standards to an appropriate depth and complexity.

Question 5: Why change the current accountability system in Texas?

The current accountability system leaves out a critically important component, the local community. The Consortium will propose an accountability system that clearly defines the state's role in educational quality and the local community's role in accountability for student learning. This approach to accountability empowers the local school district to design their own internal systems of assessment, while meeting general standards set by the state. The Consortium also believes that it's important to move away from a system that:

- Penalizes districts with a diverse student population;
- Rates schools on its lowest scores which is often not representative of a schools overall performance;
- Fails to honor local control;
- Doesn't represent a comprehensive overview of student performance; and
- Ignores future-ready learning skills needed for success.

Question 6: How different will the Consortium's proposed accountability system really be from the Texas systems from prior decades like TABS, TEAMS, TAAS, TAKS, and STAAR?

The Consortium will propose an accountability system reflecting the state's role in educational quality and the local community's role in accountability for student learning. This new accountability system will have a strong local influence portraying a more comprehensive picture of the whole child.

A community-based assessment and accountability system will:

- Engage the community in the education of its youth by establishing rigorous standards that meet the unique needs of that community;
- Be more rigorous than the standards currently determined by the state;
- Eliminate an overreliance on standardized testing;
- Renew the focus on the most important person, the student.

Three components of the assessment and accountability design work include:

1. Assurance of educational quality and equity through a state system of accreditation;
2. Accounting for student learning through a rigorous community-based accountability system that supports high priority learning standards;
3. Developing a system of assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning that incorporates the use of existing valid and reliable measures, and develops new measures and collections of evidence of student learning.

Question 7: What are the four consortium principles?

The Consortium was created to inform the governor, legislature, and commissioner of education on methods for transforming Texas public schools by improving student learning through the implementation of four Consortium principles:

1. **Digital learning** – Engagement of students in digital learning, including, but not limited to, engagement through the use of electronic textbooks and instructional materials, and courses offered through the Texas Virtual School Network;
2. **Learning standards** – Standards that a student must master to be successful in a competitive post-secondary environment;
3. **Multiple assessments** – Various methods of determining student progress capable of being used to inform students, parents, school districts, and open-enrollment charter schools, on an ongoing basis, concerning the extent to which learning is occurring and the actions Consortium participants are taking to improve learning; and
4. **Local control** – Ways in which reliance on local input and decision-making enable communities and parents to be involved in the important decisions regarding the education of their children.

Question 8: How will the Consortium’s work and its future recommendation to the Commissioner affect my K-12 student?

A clear set of high priority learning standards grounded in future-ready learning skills that include academically rigorous content, critical thinking practices, and digital citizenship will guide educators as they design learning experiences for students. Learning experiences will be relevant and meaningful for students in order to prepare them for their future beyond K-12, whether that means college, a certification program, or the workforce. There will be a shift from memorization learning to critical thinking, problem solving, and creative learning. School will look different for students compared to the traditional model that today’s moms and dads experienced as students.

Question 9: What skills are needed for a student to be future ready?

Our world has drastically changed. New technologies like smart phones, mobile apps, and social media have brought about hundreds of new industries and careers that were once unimaginable. The changes in our world have created a demand for skills that continue to evolve. Skills that are needed include, but are not limited to: 1) Innovation; 2) Creativity; 3) Critical thinking; 4) Collaboration with peers; 5) Digital Citizenship; 6) Communication; and 7) Problem solving.

Question 10: What research has influenced the work of the Consortium?

The work of the Consortium is based on works from various leaders and researchers who have influenced, and at times guided, school transformation. Some of these resources include the document *Creating a New Vision for Public Education in Texas* (TASA 2008), The Visioning Institute, The TASA Principals Institute, The Schlechty Center, Sir Ken Robinson, Daniel Pink, James Popham, Rick Stiggins, Dylan Wiliams, Stephen Covey, National Institute for School Leadership, and Project Based Learning.

Question 11: Who are members of the Consortium?

The Texas High Performance Schools Consortium consists of 23 participating districts. Each participating member is represented by the district’s Superintendent of Schools. The diversity of districts, campuses, and students participating in the Consortium increases the likelihood that proposals and recommendations developed by the Consortium will address the varied circumstances, diversity, and issues facing all Texas schools, and consequently will result in solutions that are relevant and transferable among the many different districts across the state. When districts applied, they were given the option to include all or some campuses. Member districts can be found at <http://texashpsc.org/consortium-members/>. To expand this work statewide and to learn with districts across the state that are engaged in similar transformation work, the THPSC invited other districts to join in the transformation work as Consortium Associates and partner with the Consortium members in statewide efforts. Consortium associate districts, including Denton ISD can be found at <http://www.tasanet.org/Page/450>.

Question 12: What are the waivers from state and federal law requested by the Consortium?

The Consortium requires waivers that will provide the participating schools the freedom to innovate. Without the waivers, the schools will be bound by pre-existing conditions of how schools were designed to function during the industrial revolution. This would limit the Consortium’s ability to design a system or systems that meet the evolving needs of next-generation learners. To date, the Consortium has identified the following regulations that need to be addressed:

1. Empower Local Accountability: Replace the state’s “test every year” system with assessment of high priority learning standards at certain grade levels and provide local choice in the assessment process.
2. Respond to Student Interests and Needs: Scale back the number of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and test High Priority Learning Standards instead.
3. Improve Educational Quality Reporting: Allow Consortium participants to design quality reporting systems that best meet the needs of their communities.
4. Eliminate Double Testing: Allow districts to waive End of Course Exams for students who demonstrate achievement on PSAT, SAT, ACT, AP, or IB courses.
5. Provide Meaningful Flexibility in Graduation Plans: Allow students to have flexibility in graduation requirements by establishing multiple pathways to allow specializations in areas.
6. Allow for Online and Blended Learning Opportunities: Allow Consortium participants to vary class time from subject to subject and to have flexibility in seat time (amount of time a student spends in a class).
7. Flexibility in School Calendar: Allow Consortium districts to decide, with their parents, on school calendars that are appropriate for their own communities.
8. Student Mobility Between Districts: Allow flexibility in graduation requirements between Consortium and non-Consortium schools.
9. Consortium Participation: Allow flexibility to apply waivers to additional campuses within Consortium districts.
10. AYP/NCLB Exemption: Allow Consortium districts to be exempt from requirements associated with AYP and NCLB.

Question 13: What will the educational system look like in the future?

The preferred future for Texas schools includes an educational system that is built around:

- High priority learning standards in each content area;
- A variety of assessment alternatives that are not limited to paper and pencil tests;
- Integrating the use of technology into the learning for students;
- Capitalizing on student interests;
- Involving local communities in determining the accountability features that are important to that community; and
- A variety of pathways to graduation.
- Having such a system will prepare students for post-secondary education, the workforce and to be productive citizens.

Question 14: Do the Consortium districts receive additional funds for being members of the Consortium?

No.

Question 15: What is the timeline for the work of the Consortium?

Senate Bill 1557 gives the Consortium until January 1, 2018 to complete its work. The Consortium is currently working on:

- Identifying High Priority Learning Standards;
- Designing an assessment and accountability system; and
- Resolving potential issues with transitioning from the current system to the transformed system.
- A Legislative Bill will be submitted to the 83rd Legislature, outlining the flexibility school districts and schools participating in the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium seek. The Bill serves as a foundation to give districts and schools the ability to design a new Texas system that isn’t reliant on high-stakes testing, but focuses on the whole child and ensuring students are future ready.