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Enhanced Out-of-School Engagement for Students

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In the last decade, Texas accounted for half of the 2 million children added to the U.S. population.¹ Currently, one-fourth (26.6 percent) of the 6.8 million children in Texas live in poverty² and 60 percent of Texas students are classified as economically disadvantaged (meaning they qualify for free or reduced-price school meals). Many of these students underperform in school relative to their higher-income peers. In the next decade the well-being and achievement levels of all Texas students will be affected by the out-of-school and summer resources available to them.

The 2013 Legislature passed two bills that expand opportunities for out-of-school engagement for students. SB 503 creates the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Council to study ways to offer high-quality out-of-school programs and provide extended school days. HB 742 amends current law relating to a grant program for certain schools to provide summer instruction primarily for economically disadvantaged students.

After School and Summer Challenges

Texas students only spend 21.6 percent of their waking hours in school³ and much of their out-of-school time is unsupervised. According to the After School Alliance, 26 percent (1,167,862) of Texas students take care of themselves after school. These children spend an average of seven unsupervised hours after school each week and are at an increased risk of becoming victims of accidents or crimes.⁴ About 142,000 (6 percent) of Texas teens aged 12-17 abuse drugs or alcohol⁵ and most risky adolescent behavior occurs between the hours of 3:00 pm and 6:00 pm.⁶ Students who are unsupervised during these hours are at a greater risk of substance abuse, gang involvement, teen pregnancy, and dropping out. Access to after-school programming decreases the likelihood of participating in these risky behaviors.⁷

Research shows that most students experience some learning loss over the summer, with low-income students losing more than two months in reading achievement⁸. More than half of the achievement gap between lower and higher-income students can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities⁹. This lack of summer support even affects students who graduate and are accepted to college. Researchers have documented summer attrition rates, commonly known as “summer melt,” as high as 40 percent for low-income college-intending graduating seniors.¹⁰

During the summertime, economically disadvantaged students face an additional set of challenges. When school is in session, close to 3 million (62.4 percent) Texas students receive free or reduced-price lunch.¹¹ However, many children lack regular access to nutritious meals during the summer and about nearly 2 million (28 percent) of Texas children live in households that are food insecure¹² at some point in the year.¹³ Additionally, most children gain weight more rapidly when they are out of school and children at a high risk of obesity are particularly affected by summer break¹⁴. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Seamless Summer Option and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) are the two federal Summer Nutrition Programs that provide funding to serve meals and snacks to children. Economically disadvantaged students benefit from summer instruction by having access to healthy meals.

Expanded Learning Opportunities for After School

The Expanded Learning Opportunities Council created under SB 503 is an interdisciplinary group that will study ways to offer high-quality out-of-school time and extended day programs to students. The Council will provide recommendations to the Governor's Office and Texas Legislature to develop learning systems through an analysis of current research on best practices; program availability and unmet needs; opportunities and incentives for expanding business and charitable support; opportunities to promote experiential STEM learning; and the future workforce needs of Texas businesses.¹⁵ There will be no anticipated cost to the state as participation in the Expanded Learning Opportunities Council will be voluntary.¹⁶

Creating additional learning spaces outside the regular school day will benefit economically disadvantaged students by promoting safety and enhancing student learning. High-quality out-of-school programs lead to higher levels of student engagement, increased academic performance, and has a positive effect on standardized test scores.¹⁷ According to the Afterschool Alliance, 51 percent (1,692,279) of Texas students not in an afterschool program would be likely to participate if such a program were made available in their community, regardless of their current care arrangement. Providing enhanced learning opportunities after school is a net benefit for children, communities, and the state of Texas.

Grants for Summer Teaching and Learning

HB 742 requires that the Commissioner of Education establish and administer a competitive grants process to provide summer instructional programs to students in prekindergarten through eighth grade. This bill also seeks to decrease teacher attrition by providing classroom-based training and development for new teachers and seeks to compensate the best teachers for taking on meaningful additional responsibility while remaining classroom teachers¹⁸.

To encourage the participation of low-income students, school districts need to have at least half of their students qualify as economically disadvantaged in order to qualify.

College Preparation and “Summer Melt”

Although the 2013 Legislature has made progress in enhancing K-12 learning opportunities through establishing the Expanded Learning Opportunities Council and the competitive grant program, more can be done to improve outcomes for graduating seniors.

Researchers have coined the term “summer melt” to refer to the decrease in the number of graduating high school students who says they are planning to attend college in the fall and the number of students who actually make it there. It is estimated that 20 percent of students who says they are going to college in the fall don’t make it. For low-income students, particularly those who intend to enroll in community college, the “summer melt” rate is closer to 40 percent.¹⁹

Recently, several trial interventions have made progress in decreasing “summer melt” in the period between high school and college and have established some “best practices” in this arena.

One pilot study that included Dallas ISD found that peer mentoring and a text messaging campaign to remind students of required college tasks increased fall enrollment. The effects of the text intervention were most pronounced among students residing in communities with low levels of educational attainment and few college-going supports; students who qualified for free- or reduced-price lunch; and students whose college plans were less defined at the end of high school. At a cost of \$7 per participant, the text message campaign is an inexpensive way to increase college entry for students who are underrepresented in higher education.²⁰

Conclusion

The new Expanded Learning Opportunity Council and competitive grant program for summer teaching and learning provide enhanced learning opportunities for children and are a step forward for the state. By establishing innovative methods to decrease “summer melt” among graduating seniors, Texas can further enhance existing supports for economically disadvantaged students, narrow the achievement gap, and improve college access.

Endnotes

¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013). *Kids Count Data Center-Texas Indicators* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#TX/2/0>

² Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013). *Kids Count Data Center-Texas Indicators* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#TX/2/0>

³ Texas Partnership for Out of School Time (2013). *The Texas Expanded Opportunities Council*. Retrieved from <http://txpost.org/sites/txpost.org/files/www/tx-elo-council-final.pdf>

⁴ Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013). *Kids Count Data Center-Texas Indicators* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#TX/2/0>

⁵ Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013). *Kids Count Data Center-Texas Indicators* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#TX/2/0>

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- ⁶ Texas State Senate Research Center (2013). *SB 503 Senate Committee Report—Analysis*. Retrieved from <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlodocs/83R/analysis/pdf/SB00503S.pdf#navpanes=0>
- ⁷ After School Alliance (2009). *America after 3pm: The most in-depth study of how America's children spend their afternoons*. Retrieved from http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3_Full_Report.pdf
- ⁸ Cooper, H., Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, J., & Greathouse, S. (1996). The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A Narrative and Meta-Analytic Review. *Review of Educational Research*, 66(3), 227–268. doi:10.3102/00346543066003227
- ⁹ Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Olson, L. S. (2007). Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap. *American Sociological Review*, 72(2), 167–180. doi:10.1177/000312240707200202
- ¹⁰ Castleman, B.L., Page, L. C. (2013). Summer Nudging: Can Personalized Text Messages and Peer Mentor Outreach Increase College Going Among Low-Income High School Graduates?. Retrieved from http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/bencastleman/files/castleman_page_-_summer_nudging_-_april_2013.pdf
- ¹¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013). *Kids Count Data Center-Texas Indicators* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#TX/2/0>
- ¹² The USDA defines food insecurity as meaning “consistent access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources at times during the year.”
- ¹³ Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013). *Kids Count Data Center-Texas Indicators* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#TX/2/0>
- ¹⁴ Von Hippel, P. T., Powell, B., Downey, D. B., & Rowland, N. J. (2007). The effect of school on overweight in childhood: gain in body mass index during the school year and during summer vacation. *American Journal of Public Health*, 97(4), 696–702.
- ¹⁵ Texas Partnership for Out of School Time (2013). *The Texas Expanded Opportunities Council* Retrieved from <http://txpost.org/sites/txpost.org/files/www/tx-elo-council-final.pdf>
- ¹⁶ Texas State Legislative Budget Board (2013). *SB 503 Fiscal Note*. Retrieved from <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlodocs/83R/fiscalnotes/pdf/SB00503H.pdf#navpanes=0>
- ¹⁷ After School Alliance (2009). *America after 3pm: The most in-depth study of how America's children spend their afternoons*. Retrieved from http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3_Full_Report.pdf
- ¹⁸ Texas State Senate Research Center (2013). *HB 743 Senate Committee Report—Analysis*. Retrieved from <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlodocs/83R/analysis/pdf/HB00742S.pdf#navpanes=0>
- ¹⁹ *Why Poor Students' College Plans 'Melt' Over the Summer*. Morning Addition – NPR. July 16, 2013.
- ²⁰ Castleman, B.L., Page, L. C. (2013). Summer Nudging: Can Personalized Text Messages and Peer Mentor Outreach Increase College Going Among Low-Income High School Graduates?. Retrieved from http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/bencastleman/files/castleman_page_-_summer_nudging_-_april_2013.pdf

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