

Implementing HB 5: Lessons Learned for Promoting Effective and Equitable Pathways in High School Education

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In 2013, Texas House Bill 5 (HB 5) introduced a new system of graduation requirements into the state secondary education environment. The goal of the legislation was to promote college and career readiness by providing a system of endorsement tracks that allow students to choose a specific educational pathway to pursue during their high school tenure, based on future college or career aspirations. The bill was designed to promote a decentralized process across the state, allowing individual districts autonomy and creativity in their implementation strategies, and as such, did not include specific state-level guidance on independent school district implementation, nor resources for implementation. As a result, school districts have adopted a wide range of approaches to implementing the requirements of HB 5, experiencing a variety of obstacles to its success, as well as generating a diverse range of best practices.

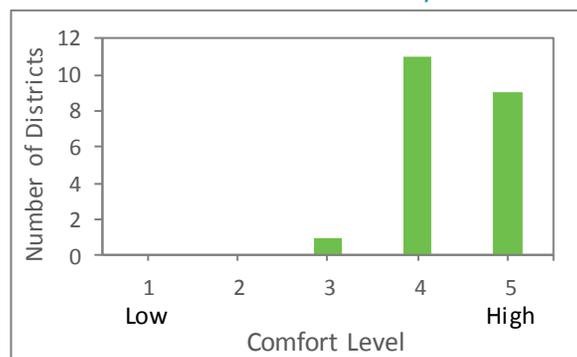
A recent study¹ sheds light on these obstacles while highlighting emerging best practices. It also explores the perceptions of the HB 5 implementation process across more than 20 districts, through in-depth interviews with 21 district and school administrators and 23 frontline

counseling staff. We highlight key findings from the interviews and those best practices here.

Benefits and Challenges

The vast majority of district administrators and counselors agree with the intent of HB 5 legislation (see Figure 1). When asked on a scale of 1 to 5 how comfortable they are with the implementation and policy of HB 5, district representatives responded with an average 4.2 for all districts. Overall, a majority of counselors indicated that they feel that the HB 5 endorsement process is preparing students for both college and career pathways and are supportive of the continuation the HB 5 program. Findings also

Figure 1: District Administrators' Self-Reported Comfort Level with Guided Pathways



indicate strong district support for educational pathways for students; widespread training of counselors; and experimentation with counseling team functions to accommodate HB 5 activities.

Despite being generally satisfied with the intent of HB 5, many districts are frustrated by what they perceive as failures on the part of the state in their leadership and support of HB 5 implementation. They believe that the state has not provided adequate guidance for implementation decisions and, in particular, are frustrated that they cannot identify one centralized resource at the state level to which to address their implementation questions. In addition, many districts express concerns about the short timeline given by legislators for the implementation of the HB 5 policy.

Many counselors report exceptional support by their regional Education Service Centers (ESCs), but a significant number also complain of no training or access to information. Many report being confused by the TEA website and materials. Further, multiple counselors describe a

sense of disconnect from career technical education (CTE), career, and college counselling functions, unsure of how their role in HB 5 endorsement selections specifically interconnects to these programming areas.

A consistent finding across districts is that implementing HB 5 places an extra workload on counselors and administrators who were already overburdened before the legislation. Counselors report students receiving insufficient attention and guidance in the selection and supervision of their pathways as a result. Specifically, counselors report the need for increased opportunities for one-on-one meetings with students to discuss specific issues around HB 5 selection.

Respondents also note significant challenges in the implementation process, arising in the following areas: administration (at the state, district, and school levels); capacity and resource limitations related to curriculum development and delivery; counseling functions and teacher availability; developing industry partnerships; vertical integration between middle and high school; and alignment with higher education. This research also shows that poorer and rural districts may not have access to resources and personnel that wealthier and urban districts have at their disposal.

Best Practices in HB 5 Implementation

Despite these obstacles, districts have provided many examples of innovative workarounds and more permanent solutions that could be replicated by other districts across the state of Texas. We highlight a number of these best practice examples below.

Using technology

One district, where all students have iPads, uses technology extensively during the HB 5

Key District Findings

48% of districts perceived a lack of state guidance with HB 5 implementation decisions.

48% of districts felt the HB 5 policy implementation timeline was too short and did not align with the school calendar.

23% of districts wished for a state-level central resource to address implementation questions.

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endorsement process. Students select their courses online during group meetings and copy their digital signatures (as well as take iPads home to share information with parents), helping the school to overcome the common challenge of obtaining paper signatures. The school also connects with parents using PowerPoint presentations, Google Classroom, and YouTube videos.

Connecting with middle school students

Many districts emphasize the importance of preparing students for the HB 5 process before they enter high school. One medium-sized central Texas city uses a comprehensive process to engage middle school students. It includes showing a video, prepared by the district, illustrating the five different endorsements in their homeroom advisory in October, and later sending it out on Twitter. In November, they hold a career fair for students to ask industry representatives about their jobs. They also offer a tour of the high school, rotating students through 10 different stations to learn about electives. In February, high school counselors visit the middle school and share options for endorsements. The final event is a parent night, which is also live-streamed on the school website for parents unable to attend in person. From February to May, high school counselors meet students one on one to answer their questions before finalizing their high school plans.

Industry mentors and job shadowing

A number of districts express the value of mentors, who can complement the HB 5 process by sharing real-life experiences, as well as serving as possible role models. At least one school has also offered job shadowing for students to witness career roles firsthand.

Cross-functional counseling teams

Approximately one third of the counselors interviewed implement HB 5 within a team-based structure. The composition of these teams varies and tends to form organically, based on district and student needs. At one school, teams consisted of an endorsement selection expert, a technology expert, a career interest expert, and an administrator. At another school, each student worked with a team made up of his or her content teachers.

Online teaching, distance learning, and transport to remote locations

Several schools do not have the funding, resources, or student base to offer the full course range required by all five HB 5 pathways. At least one school has turned to webinars and online classes to fill this gap, allowing students to meet their endorsement requirements. Other districts are bussing students to nearby community college campuses and other high school campuses to expand offerings, although administrators must consider the implications of significant student travel time before adopting wider-spread bussing options.

Integration of career inventories

More than 93% of respondents use career assessments with their students before or during the endorsement process. However, many describe the lost opportunities due to a lack of integration of career inventories into the endorsement selection process. A number of

schools (39%) have addressed this by incorporating the online career guidance tool “Career Cruising,” and at least one school says it uses state-developed websites that match students to career clusters.

Conclusion

Although many stakeholders still have reservations about HB 5, districts overall appear to be comfortable and proactive in its implementation. Autonomy in how districts enact HB 5 has led to a number of innovative best practices at the school level, but at the same time, it has also led to disparity in the quality and effectiveness amongst schools across the state. In all districts, counseling teams are overburdened with the administration of HB 5 endorsement and struggle to offer students adequate one-on-one time. While this research recommends maintaining autonomy in HB 5 implementation, it also emphasizes the need for the state to provide greater and improved resources to support the districts—sharing consistent training and support resources, as well as leading the effort to further disseminate and discuss best practices across all districts—to help all Texas students reach their full potential in their careers.

About the Author

Jenny Knowles Morrison is an international development and education specialist, dedicated to rigorous qualitative research design that generates holistic narratives of policy implementation experiences. Dr. Morrison holds concurrent appointments as an online lecturer at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University and a Research Fellow at the University of Texas. Her current research, supported by the National Science Foundation, focuses on curricular design that facilitates student generation of innovative, socially impactful solutions for the public and nonprofit sector. Dr. Morrison holds a doctorate from the Wagner School of Public Service, New York University.

Note:

1. The HB 5 research study was funded by the Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium and included 21 Texas school districts.

The complete report can be found at <http://tegac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/TEGAC-HB-5-Final-Report-12012016.pdf>

About TXSmartSchools.org

TXSmartSchools.org is an online resource which allows anyone to access Texas school and district-level data and “Smart Scores” free of charge. It uses comprehensive academic, financial, and demographic data to create the fairest, most apples-to-apples comparisons available. The goal is to improve education by identifying Smart Schools that are both effective and efficient and then highlighting their successful practices.

TXSmartSchools.org is built on the foundational work of the Financial Allocation Study for Texas (FAST) launched by Susan Combs during her tenure as Texas Comptroller. It is supported by Susan Combs through Texans for Positive Economic Policy and administered by Texas A&M University.

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