

# Greater Waco Community Education Alliance

## MISSION, PURPOSE, AND GOALS

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The Mission of the Greater Waco Community Education Alliance is to develop an understanding that the entire community shares responsibility for educating every citizen.

*We believe that developing a community expectation of higher education for all students will maximize our quality of life and enhance our economic future. We will engage the education, business, parent, student, and community leadership to create, lead, and implement a plan of action for ensuring all students' educational achievement.*

To that end, we make the following assumptions:

1. The most valuable and cost-effective time to invest in education is between birth and the age of five.
2. Reading on grade level by Grade 3 is critical to future education success.
3. Mastering mathematics fundamentals through Algebra I is a minimal requirement for high school graduation and post-secondary success.
4. All students must be prepared for post-secondary success by the time of their graduation from high school.
5. All youth must graduate from high school, overcoming challenges that discourage academic engagement.
6. Parents and students should be aware of available high school-to-post-secondary paths and financial aid options.
7. Financial resources should not be a barrier to post-secondary success.
8. The Community should understand the region's secondary and post-secondary success rates and develop support programs to encourage the highest rates of successful completion.

## ASSUMPTIONS

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### Assumption 1, Ages 0–4

*The most valuable and cost-effective time to invest in education is between birth and the age of five.*

**Community Goal:** All children reach age five with experiences they need to develop learning readiness and social skills critical to success in school and in life itself.

Research shows that most human brain development occurs in the years between birth and age three, making this the most cost-effective time to invest in each child's future ability and education.(1) Children who participate at age four in a full-day pre-kindergarten experience, that includes school readiness, come to the first grade ready to learn.(2)

Because the area of early childhood encompasses so many sectors and has such a great potential effect on postsecondary success, the Waco Foundation recently commissioned an audit of the early childhood development and financing study, to be conducted by the Texas Early Childhood Education Consortium. The report on the study, which will be shared with the public, is meant to provide a picture of current programs and services and pinpoint priority needs.

However, more coordination of effort, increased services access, and knowledge of the available programs is essential to ensuring that all children reach age five with the experiences they need to develop learning readiness and social skills critical to success in school and in life itself.

*Examples of what we can do*

- *Increase the knowledge of all residents concerning issues of child development and proper infant and child healthcare*
- *Seek improved and increased services for children and childcare*
- *Support strong existing programs for children; create sustainable new ones*

**Critical Statistics:** 85% of a child's brain development occurs before the child reaches 3 years of age. Children who participate in quality early child development in early years test higher through age 21.

**Notes:** (1) The Abecedarian Project by Craig and Sharon Ramey. One of the most widely known and respected longitudinal studies, it showed that children who received a quality early childhood experience had reading and math scores higher in primary grades through high school, completed more years of education, and were more likely to attend a 4-year college than a control group of students.

(2) Bush School of Government: Cost Analysis of the Benefits of Universal Accessible Full Day Pre-K in Texas, 2006.

## **Assumption 2, Ages 5–8**

*Reading on grade level by Grade 3 is critical to future education success.*

**Community Goal:** All children will read at grade level or above by the 3rd grade.

Widely based education research supports the assertion that being able to read on grade level by the third grade is particularly critical. When reading remediation is needed in later grades, students have more difficulty learning and comprehending important course content, thus negatively impacting overall learning.

Although it is distressing that some of our children cannot read on grade level, statistics show that McLennan County is making good progress. There are many examples of intensive reading programs within our schools.

*Examples of what we can do*

- *Increase the knowledge of all residents concerning the importance of reading-readiness development*
- *Support school reading programs*
- *Strengthen out-of-school reading-readiness and reading programs*

**Critical Statistics:** Studies show that when children practice reading aloud to adults or better readers for 30 minutes five days a week (using texts at or slightly above their ability levels), their comprehension, fluency, and word recognition improve.(1)

**Notes:** (1) Effectiveness of Supplemental Reading Instruction for Second Grade English Language Learners with Reading Difficulties, Sylvia Linan-Thompson, Sharon Vaughn, Peggy Hickman-Davis, and Kamiar Kouzekanani, The Elementary School Journal, Vol. 103, No. 3 (Jan., 2003) pp. 221–238. Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children, Catherine E. Snow, M. Susan Burns, and Peg Griffin, Editors, Chapter 4: Predictors of Success and Failure in Reading, National Research Council,

Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, National Academy Press, Washington, DC, 1998.

### **Assumption 3, Ages 9–14**

***Mastering mathematics fundamentals through Algebra I is a minimal requirement for high school graduation and postsecondary success.***

**Community Goal:** All children will be proficient in math through Algebra I by their graduation from high school.

At a minimum, students must master math fundamentals (whole numbers, fractions, decimals, and percentages), pre-Algebra, and Algebra I to graduate from high school and succeed in postsecondary education. At this level, students will have a wide array of career options available to them. Many career choices will require higher levels of mathematics mastery.(1)

*Examples of what we can do*

- *Increase the knowledge of all residents concerning the relationship between mathematics proficiency and postsecondary learning and career choices*
- *Increase math instruction tutoring in after-school programs*
- *Develop out-of-school programs that combine the use of mathematics with other activities, such as sports*

**Critical Statistics:** A strong grounding in high school mathematics through Algebra II and higher correlates powerfully with access to postsecondary education, graduation from college, and earning wages in the top quartile of income from employment.(2) The National Science Board indicates that the growth of jobs in the mathematics-intensive science and engineering workforce is outpacing overall job growth by 3 to 1.

Nationally, there have been positive trends in math scores for grades 4 and 8 (grades tested) but proficiency decreases by grade 12.

**Notes:** (1) The recommended skills needed are cited from several sources, including The Standards and Curriculum Focal Points of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics at [www.nctm.org](http://www.nctm.org), which advise that the skills needed for postsecondary success include math mastery of whole numbers, fractions, decimals, percents, pre-Algebra, and Algebra I.

(2) National Education Agency, National Math Advisory Panel, 2008.

### **Assumption 4, Ages 14–18**

***All students must be prepared for postsecondary success by the time of their graduation from high school.***

**Community Goal:** All students will be prepared for postsecondary education while in high school.

The majority of jobs available today and into the future require more than a high school diploma, but less than a four-year college degree. As the need for a skilled workforce increases, the need for education beyond high school increases. Students must have the education to advance to postsecondary education without the delay caused by the need to remediate skills not learned in high school. Students must also have the ability to reenter postsecondary education whenever there is a need to gain further skills. This is referred to as equipping students to be “lifelong” learners.

One’s education level is directly tied to one’s ability to earn greater levels of income and to enjoy a rewarding career. There are many wonderful jobs requiring postsecondary certifications, one-year programs, two-year

associate degrees, and four-year bachelor's degrees. Being prepared to smoothly enter a postsecondary experience is vital to both individuals and the ultimate economic vitality of the community.(1)

*Examples of what we can do*

- *Increase the knowledge of all residents to the entry-level requirements of area jobs*
- *Support the addition of programs and services, in area education institutions, businesses, and the community, that prepare students for rewarding careers*
- *Increase the number of opportunities for students to research and experience jobs that may be in their future*

**Critical Statistics:** In 2008, 26% (577) of all McLennan County graduates enrolled at McLennan Community College and 44% of those students required at least one remedial course. 71% required developmental mathematics, 54% required developmental reading, and 22% required developmental writing.(2)

**Notes:** (1) U.S. Department of Education, College Preparation Checklist indicates that participation in AP classes, taking "hard" classes correlates to scoring well on the SAT and ACT.

(2) McLennan Community College Performance Report on 2008 High School Graduates Attending MCC, October 2009.

## **Assumption 5, Ages 14–18**

***All youth must graduate from high school, overcoming challenges that discourage academic engagement.***

**Community Goal:** All students must be supported and encouraged to stay in school through successful high school graduation.

Nearly one in three high school students in the nation will drop out of school before graduation. There are currently over 6 million high school dropouts in the nation.

A national study of students reported many of the reasons for dropping out of school, including being bored, not seeing the relevance of classroom learning to career aspirations, lack of motivation, and personal issues. Many faced growing academic deficits from grade to grade that discouraged them.

Certainly, addressing assumptions 1 through 4 would impact this issue, but assistance must be given to those in the vulnerable years of grades 8 through 12, in which the dropping out occurs.

*Examples of what we can do*

- *Increase the knowledge of all residents about the graduation rates of area students*
- *Increase the knowledge of all residents about the individual and community economic impact of low graduation rates*
- *Support dropout prevention programs and develop new ones*

**Critical Statistics:** Whereas a high school dropout earns an average of \$449 per week and has an average unemployment rate of 8.3%, a college graduate has an average earning of \$1,105 per week and a 2.3% average unemployment rate.(1) Methods of reporting high school graduation rates vary greatly.

**Notes:** (1) U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, July 2008.

## **Assumption 6, Ages 14–18**

*Parents and students should be aware of available high-school-to-postsecondary paths and financial aid options.*

**Community Goal:** All parents and youth will know about, plan for, and seek access to postsecondary options and to financial aid if needed.

Parents of high school students should be equipped with the knowledge that postsecondary options are available for their children. They need to be aware of the choices and opportunities that lay the groundwork for success in school and beyond.

Choices include the knowledge of the academic preparation needed for career options so that parents can assist with guiding their children in selection of academic courses. Opportunities include being aware of community activities and resources that reinforce learning and academic success.

Parents and students should be aware of local opportunities for assistance with postsecondary education. Services are readily available, both in schools and in various organizations, to assist with access to tuition and other support while attending school.

*Examples of what we can do*

- *Increase the knowledge of parents and students about postsecondary programs and available career options*
- *Increase the knowledge of parents and students about local, state, and national financial aid options*
- *Support career counseling programs and services and develop new ones as needed*

**Critical Statistics:** A national survey of parents indicates 70% of people believe that the cost of a college education is beyond the income of the average family and 47% believe that many people do not have the opportunity to attend college.(1)

**Notes:** (1) Measuring Up 2000: Losing Ground - Public Concerns about the Price of College. The National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education. State Profiles.

## **Assumption 7, Ages 18 and Above**

*Financial resources should not be a barrier to postsecondary success.*

**Community Goal:** The community will ensure that scholarship opportunities are known and supported.

Many students begin a postsecondary experience but drop out before completing a certificate or degree or other credential needed for a well-paying job. Often, students and/or their parents run out of money to support continued education.

The local MAC Scholarship Program assists over 1000 families in McLennan County in applying for federal financial aid. As a result, over \$2.5M is received each year to support low-income students in attending postsecondary institutions. In addition, MAC will pay tuition and fees for any low-income student who does not receive full federal Pell Grants, to attend McLennan Community College or Texas State Technical College, providing about \$160,000 each year. Also, several local donors provide \$5,000 scholarships for every MAC student who makes a 3.0 grade point average, to assist them toward completion of a bachelor's degree.

The national Pell Grant program assists students of low-income families with grants of up to \$5,350 annually. Those dollars, which can be applied to both tuition and living expenses, make attendance at McLennan Community College and Texas State Technical College within reach of all students.

*Examples of what we can do*

- *Increase the knowledge of parents and students about scholarship opportunities available from local, state, and national sources*
- *Develop a gap-analysis of financial barriers to postsecondary enrollment and identify programs and services that address them*
- *Establish or realign programs and services to remove financial barriers to postsecondary enrollment*

**Critical Statistics:** State rates of affordability indicate that the poorest families in Texas must pay 10% of their income to support tuition at the lowest-priced colleges.(1)

**Notes:** (1) Measuring Up 2000: The State-by-State Report Card for Higher Education. Texas State Profile. The National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education.

### **Assumption 8, Ages 18 and Above**

***The Community should understand the region's secondary and postsecondary success rate and develop support programs to encourage the highest rates of successful completion.***

**Community Goal:** All youth will complete postsecondary education leading to a chosen career opportunity.

There are many statistics available concerning the rates of area high school graduates attending postsecondary education and how well they do once they enter higher education. There are additional statistics concerning how many stay in school to attain requisite certificates, degrees, or other credentials or leave too early.

Higher rates of completion of postsecondary education assist both the individual and the community. Just as a good career and a solid living wage help the worker to provide for her or his family and enjoy a higher quality of life, the community itself prospers when businesses can hire well-qualified workers. Good jobs, good wages, prosperous businesses—these are the ingredients of a strong and vibrant community.

When the community understands the issues around postsecondary success and how to both strengthen available programs and services and remove barriers from those who would enroll in them, everyone—the whole community—benefits greatly.

*Examples of what we can do*

- *Increase the knowledge of all residents about the enrollment of high school graduates in postsecondary education programs*
- *Increase the knowledge of all residents about the success rates (satisfactory completion) of students who enroll in postsecondary education programs*
- *Increase the knowledge of all residents about the economic impact on the community of a well-educated workforce*

**Critical Statistics:** In Texas, in 1998, tracking a cohort of 1992 public school 7th-grade students, 57.9 students graduated from high school, 44.7% enrolled in higher education, and 13.4% completed a degree or certificate by year 2004.(1)

**Notes:** (1) Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 7th Grade Cohort Tracked through FY 2006 High Education.

## OUR CALL TO ACTION

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- Ensure enriched learning environments from birth to five
- Ensure reading at grade level by third grade
- Ensure student mastery of math concepts from early grades into high school
- Ensure students' early exposure to a range of postsecondary education options
- Ensure students stay in school and graduate fully prepared for postsecondary success
- Ensure parents and students make academic and financial plans that provide for postsecondary options
- Ensure money is no barrier to student post secondary success
- Ensure students reach their post secondary goals, and
- Identify benchmarks for community progress to guide decisions in reaching these goals