A Review of Plans and Programs for Specialized High Schools

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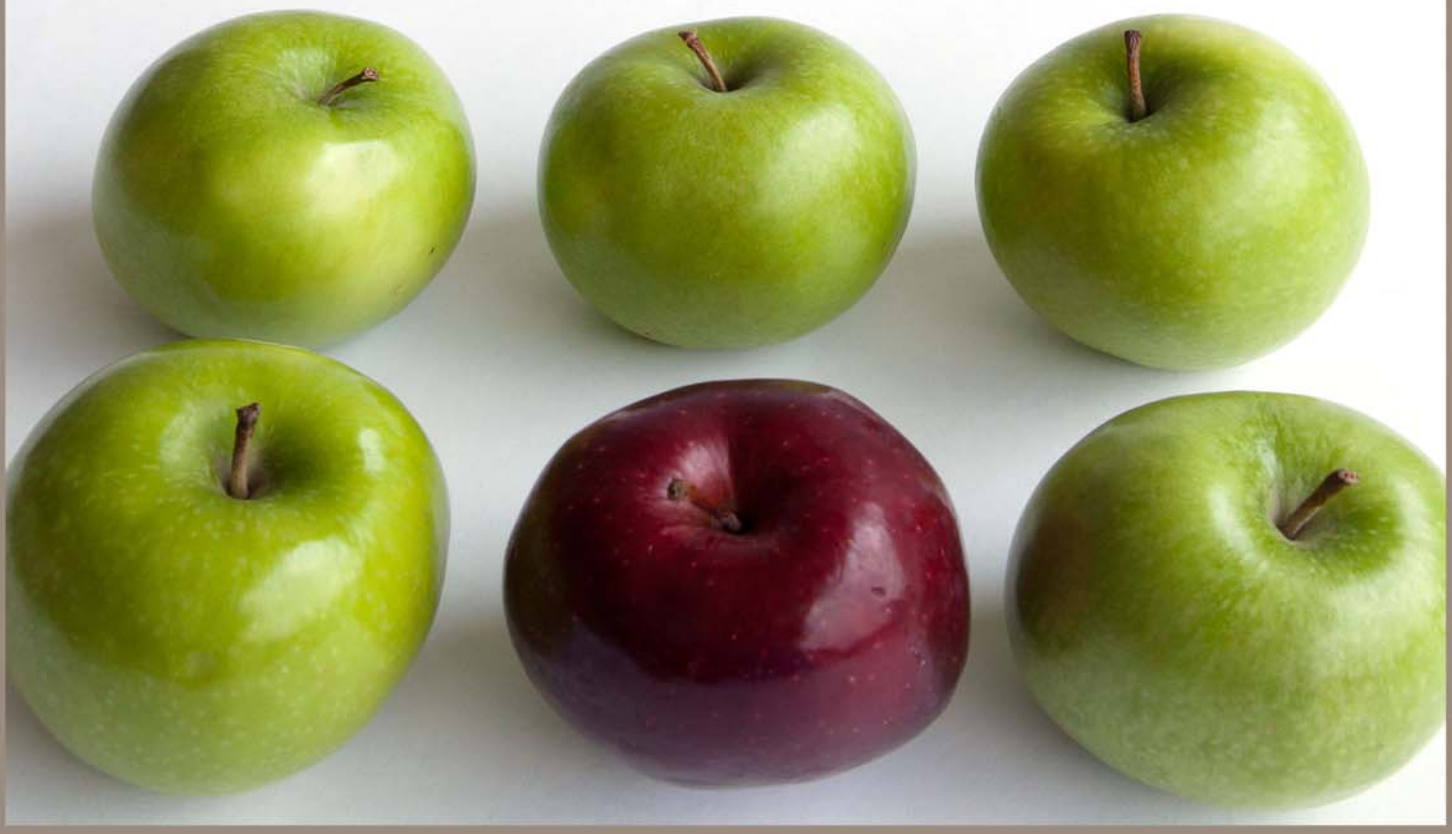

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With continuing low test scores, poor performance, and significant drop-out rates in many Texas high schools, the Legislature of the State of Texas, along with the federal government and several private entities, have recently set about to change the structure of some of the State's high schools. Some of the newly established programs are aimed at altering the focus of the school (to a more science-based curriculum in the case of T-Stem academies,) some are aimed at aiding students in receiving significant numbers of college credits in high school (as in the case of the Early College High School program), while others are aimed at providing additional funding for restructuring curriculum, staffing, and professional development. Overall, districts throughout Texas are finding a demand for more specialized high schools that teach to a child's interest, and which better prepare them for college and/or future vocations.

The Texas High School Project – the umbrella under which many of these initiatives are housed – is now several years old, and it has been yielding good results. The T-Stem Academies, and particularly the Early College High Schools, have been successful at increasing attendance, increasing student belonging, increasing graduation and advancement rates, and increasing TAKS test scores. The difficulty comes in the sustainability of the funding for the projects. Some of them – especially the Early College High Schools – are being largely underwritten by entities such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Such funding sources will be expiring in the next few years, and it is up to the schools, and their partner organizations, to find replacement funding to be able to continue the small, specialized courses of study.

REVIEW OF TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL PROJECTS

School districts have offered non-traditional learning opportunities at the high school for years, but many of the past alternative high school programs centered on vocational training and/or programs aimed at the at-risk student or students with behavioral problems. Recently, however, districts have begun to develop learning initiatives and programs also aimed at college-bound students. The State of Texas has garnered funds from several different entities that can provide funding sources and support for these programs.

GOALS OF THE PROGRAMS

The goals of the districts that implement these alternative high school learning environments are varied. In some cases, the districts are trying to serve at-risk or high-need students, and ensure that they have the greatest opportunity possible to either attend college or to be prepared for a higher paying job directly after high school. Other districts are trying to serve high achieving students that have an interest in a specific area of study. Still other districts use the programs to both help their at-risk population and to attract other students who might be leaving the district either for surrounding public schools in other districts or whose parents might choose private school enrollment over public school systems. Still other districts use these centralized programs to enable the district to buy costly training equipment for only one facility in the district instead of placing it at each high school, and still others might use the new facility to pull students from overburdened high school facilities throughout the District.

The programs themselves are as varied as the goals of each district that implements them. Every funding source that provides grants seem to have their specific set of requirements, and the district must develop a program that (1) will suit the needs of their student base, (2) that will meet the requirements of a program with funding that is currently available, and (3) that will work with their existing high school facilities structure and/or attendance zone configuration.

Some programs encompass both vocational training and college credit courses at the same facility and under the same umbrella. Some campuses provide a full-day course schedule for their students, others provide only specialized classes for use in conjunction with core curriculum at the students' home campus, and still others provide both full-day and part-day options.

Very few, if any, of the recently created or recently revamped programs have been created with the singular goal of centralizing vocational training; instead, a strong emphasis is now being placed on college preparatory coursework, especially for those students who might not otherwise attend college. Virtually all of the newly created programs have a science emphasis (with that being the primary goal of the T-Stem program, as noted below), but many also include some training in the arts.

THE TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT 1

The Texas High School Project (THSP) is a public/private initiative, funded by the Texas Education Agency, State of Texas, Office of the Governor, by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, by the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, and by the Communities Foundation of Texas (WOAI, San Antonio.).

The THSP awards grants under the following different initiatives:

Creating New High School Models – Grants are geared toward redesigning existing high schools and helping large schools break up into small, rigorous, and personalized learning communities. Grants have been given to 56 non-charter school districts for this purpose. The grantees were charged with creating campus-level reform that enabled all children on a campus, including low-income, low-achieving, LEP, and children with disabilities, the chance to succeed and meet challenging academic standards. The program began awarding grants on July 15, 2005, with the final evaluation report due July 31, 2008.

Leadership Innovations – Awarded grants to three institutions of higher education to increase the pool of high school principals and other professionals that are equipped to address the needs of leading high school reform. The project period was May 1, 2006 – May 31, 2008.

Student Programs – Created grants in three different cycles to create programs to target at-risk students and increase graduation rates and college readiness. The last grant cycle ended February 29, 2008.

Texas Science Technology Engineering and Math Initiative (T-STEM) – A $71 million project designed to build on the current local and state initiative, the goal of the T-STEM project is to increase the number of students who enter science, technology, engineering, and mathematics careers. The goals were (1) to establish 35 T-Stem Academies across the state, with hopes of producing

3,500 students well prepared to pursue students in STEM related fields, (2) to establish 7 T-Stem Centers, designed to train teachers in teaching methods and instruction of STEM fields, (3) establish a T-STEM Network to promote information sharing in promising teaching practices, (4) promote quality leadership to support these changes, and (5) to "align high school, postsecondary education, and economic development activities throughout the state of Texas." The goals also included improving instruction and academic performance at high schools throughout the state of Texas, as well as to align the high school curricula with the entrance requirements for competitive colleges and to give the students the qualifications to compete for high-paying math and science jobs.

Additionally, through the **Early College High Schools (ECHS) Initiative**, the THSP supports the creation of innovative educational models designed to allow traditionally underserved or at-risk students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and 60 credit hours that can be applied to an associate's degree and/or baccalaureate degree at participating institutions of higher learning. These 60 hours of college credit would be available to the students at no cost.

THSP's private monies are managed by the Communities Foundation of Texas, while the state and federal grants are handled by TEA.

T-STEM ACADEMIES

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T-Stem grants were initially created to open 35 new T-Stem academies that housed either 9th-12th graders or 6th-12th graders and enrolled no more than 100 students per grade. The academies were to open over a five year span, starting in 2006, but as of February, 2008, 37 were either open or in the planning stages. Focus in these programs is on the at-risk students, but is open to all students. Each academy is designed to provide rigorous education in science and math, with technology integrated throughout the curriculum. If the academy is 9th-12th, it typically works closely with a feeder middle school. Besides just retraining teachers and adjusting curricula, the T-Stem centers will look for private and business partnerships to aid the T-Stem schools in creating a hands-on learning environment.

Requirements of T-STEM Academies are as follows:

1. Provide a rigorous, well-rounded education

   Require 4 years of high school math and science

   Encourage participation in extra-curricular activities that are science and math based

   Require all students to complete an internship and/or a senior project or capstone project, presentation, and defense

2. Establish a personalized, college- and work-ready culture

   Create university or college partnerships

   Implement a college-going culture with the goal that all students graduate with 12 to 30 college credits

Create partnerships with employers

3. Provide teacher and leadership development

Some of the monies from the T-Stem grants were used to develop entirely new programs, while some schools, like the YES College Preparatory School in Houston used the money to convert an existing facility to a T-Stem academy.

A December, 2010 report submitted to the 82nd Texas Legislature assessed the success of various education reform initiatives that were funded by House Bill 2237. This included the T-Stem academies. The report assessed the performance – primarily on the TAKS test – of those students exposed to T-Stem activities to those who were not exposed to T-Stem. The report found that T-Stem students showed significant gains on TAKS-Math and TAKS-Science, and that T-Stem students had significant improvements in attendance. Due to the reporting cycles, the cost effectiveness was not evaluated for the academies.

A November, 2010 report prepared by SRI International evaluated the Texas High School Project, including T-Stem Academies. It found that student achievement seemed to improve as the T-Stem program matured. The report found, however, that the 11th graders in 2008-09 scored no better than their peers in traditional schools on the TAKS test. The report posits that this could be the result of a smaller number of 11th graders being in the measured cohort, or that it could be the case that as the individual academy matures, and also as the T-Stem program statewide matures, that each subsequent cohort will see better results and will be better served.

ACHIEVE TEXAS

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Achieve Texas is an education initiative designed to prepare students for success by preparing them for secondary and postsecondary opportunities, career preparation and advancement, meaningful work, and active citizenship. The program is designed to help students (and their parents) make wise education choices. According to the Achieve Texas website, the program is "based on the belief that the curricula of the 21st century should combine *rigorous* academics with *relevant* career education. When schools integrate academic and technical education, students can see the "usefulness" of what they are learning." The program is also designed to provide a seamless transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

This initiative is based on the sixteen federally defined Career Clusters of the States' Career Clusters initiative. The sixteen Career Clusters provide an organizing tool for schools, small learning communities, academies, and magnet schools. Programs of Study have been developed for each of the Career Clusters.

A central theme in the program is career exploration and planning. Career awareness begins in the elementary school grades, and is followed by career exploration in the middle school grades. At the end of middle school, students devise a specialized graduation plan that may even extend beyond the 12th grade, and this plan leads them to the appropriate training for their chosen career. The idea behind this planning is to show students the utility of what they learn in the classroom and to help them understand how that relates to their chosen field. Currently, school districts are required to implement training in at least three of the clusters.

Implementation of Achieve Texas requires a restructuring of course offerings and curriculum. During the initial redesign, Achieve Texas recommends putting in

place committee chairs from business and education so that the community will have bought in to the redesigned program.

Career Clusters for Achieve Texas include the following:

Agriculture, Food, & Natural Resources

Architecture and Construction

Arts, A/V Technology and Communication

Business, Management & Administration

Education & Training

Finance

Government & Public Administration

Health Science

Hospitality & Tourism

Human Services

Information Technology

Law, Public Safety, Corrections, & Security

Manufacturing

Marketing, Sales & Service

Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics

Transportation, Distribution & Logistics

EARLY HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT 4

Since 2002, several partner organizations of the *Early College High School Initiative* have begun or redesigned hundreds of high schools in more than 28 states and the District of Columbia. The emphasis in this redesign is to create schools so that low-income students, those who are the first in their families to attend college, and others can finish high school while simultaneously earning up to 60 hours of college credit. Some programs allow completion of this in 5 years, causing students to be enrolled for a "13th year" before completion of the 60 hours of credit. Start-up funding for the schools comes from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Lumina Foundation for Education. In the first few years of the project, more than $130 million in start-up costs were awarded.

Start-up requires a partnership between a school, a post-secondary entity, and an intermediary partner or school developer. The intermediaries are typically responsible for partnership development, grand distribution, technical assistance, ECHS network development, policy and advocacy support, and grant oversight or accountability. One study places the costs of implementing and running an Early College Campus at between 4.5 and 12% higher than a traditional high school, although this estimate has limitations due to the wide variation of school structures and funding sources.

The schools themselves are designed to breach the "20 credit threshold" that seems to be the dividing line between those who complete college and those who do not. It is thought that if those students for whom the transition to college would otherwise be problematic, can graduate high school with up to 60 hours of college credit at no cost to them, then they will be much more likely to complete their college studies.

The schools are designed with small learning communities, with no more than 100 students in most cohorts. This allows for more student/teacher interaction, and the teachers can demand a high quality, more rigorous work product from the students. Time for collaboration between staff members, and collaboration between staff, parents, and the community is also deemed as important.

Some schools are finding that outreach in the middle grades is becoming more important to help the students and parents begin to develop the attitudes that encourage them to take advantage of the opportunities.

The August, 2009 report to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation regarding the success of the Early College High Schools found that, nationally, students in Early College High Schools scored 7 percentage points higher than other students in their home districts on state assessment tests in English and math. They also found that the average grade point average was a 3.0, that attendance was high, and the progressions rates between 9th-10th and 10th-11th were high.

A December, 2010 report submitted to the 82nd Texas Legislature assessed the success of various education reform initiatives that were funded by House Bill 2237. This included the Early College High Schools. The report assessed the performance – primarily on the TAKS test – of those students exposed to Early College High School activities to those who were not exposed to Early College schools. The report found that Early College High School students showed significant gains on TAKS-Math, TAKS-Reading/English, TAKS-Sciences, and TAKS-Social Studies. Early College High Schools were the only program schools that showed such increases in all 4 areas of measure. Early College High School students had significant improvements in attendance, they showed significant improvement in the likelihood of being promotes to 10th grade, and showed a significant increase in 11th graders participating in accelerated learning courses. Due to the reporting cycles, the cost effectiveness was not evaluated for the Early College High Schools.

CASE STUDIES 5

Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD –

ECHS (Early College High School Program) – Part of the Texas High School Project

This program targets those students who are the first in their families to pursue a college degree, those who are "motivated and ready to meet the challenge of a rigorous, innovative curriculum," those who are interested in being in a small learning environment, and those interested in earning tuition-free classes that will earn an Associate's Degree. The school is located on the Brookhaven College campus. Students are recruited into the program from 4 district middle schools, and enter the program in the 9th grade. The program is designed to give students 2 years of college credit at the same time they are earning a high school diploma.

Denton ISD –

ATC (Advanced Technology Complex) –

The mission of the program is to "prepare students to succeed in high demand occupations within the 21st century's competitive global economy." Denton I.S.D. allows students to received college credit by any of four ways: (1) AP Examination, (2) Dual Credit by concurrent college enrollment, (3) Credit by Examination, or (4) College Credit by Articulation (Tech Prep).

The fields of study include:

Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources

Architecture and Construction

Arts, Audiovisual Technology and Communication

Business Management and Administration

Education and Training

Finance

Health Science

Hospitality and Tourism

Human Services

Information Techonology

Law, Public Safety and Security

Manufacturing

Marketing, Sales and Services

Science, Technology, Engineering and Math

Transportation, Distribution and Logistics

The course offerings read much like a college catalog, with numerous course offerings for each field of study. Each field of study lists both degreed and non-degreed professions for which the student would prepare (i.e., Architecture and Construction lists future professions as including Architect, Industrial Designer, Tile Mason, and Painter, among others.)

The website for the complex advertises for Computer Repair Services, Cosmetology, Automotive Technology Services (oil changes, tire rotations, etc.), and a Mystery Dinner Theatre held by the Criminal Justice and Culinary Arts groups.

Mansfield ISD –

Ben Barber Career Tech Academy (BBCTA)

The fields of study include:

Agricultural Science and Technology

Architecture and Construction

Automotive Technology and Transportation

Banking and Finance

Business, Management, and Administration

Culinary Arts

Education

Health Science Technology Education

Information Technology

Law, Public Safety, Corrections, and Security

Manufacturing Technology

Marketing

Science, Technology, and Engineering

Electronics

Visual Communications

Additionally, the District offers Diversified Career Preparation (DCP) courses, or work based training programs. These are offered in all career and technology career clusters. Students attend class for 90 minutes per day, and then work as interns in a career related job a minimum of 15 hours per week. Some of the programs provide paid work, while others are non-paid. Students must be 16 years old and must provide their own transportation to the internships.

Northside ISD –

John Jay Science and Engineering Academy

Comprehensive curriculum designed to develop critical thinking, ensure technological competence, and promote academic achievement. The mission of the school is to provide students with a rigorous curriculum in science, engineering, math, and technology, with a goal of preparing then for further study and for careers in science and engineering.

Students are required to take two science and math courses each of their four years of high school, which allows them to graduate with a cumulative total of 30-32 credits. Students are encouraged to explore the variety of learning modes within the curriculum. Options include Independent Study, Research, Seminars, and the Internship program. The focus on science and engineering is enhanced by the availability of computers, laboratory facilities, independent research, mentors, field trips, summer internships, and opportunities for special projects. The school has been an affiliate member of the National Consortium for Specialized Secondary Schools of Mathematics, Science and Technology since 1997.

Students are also required to take part in at least one extra-curricular activity relating to research, engineering or social sciences. These activities include the Science Fair Research Team, History Fair Research Team, Academic Decathlon, UIL competitions, and the like. Additionally, the school is also home to an award winning fine arts program, with strong bands and orchestras.

Austin ISD –

Liberal Arts and Science Academy

The Liberal Arts and Science Academy (LASA) of Austin was created in 2002 from the merger of two separate magnet programs: the Science Academy at Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) High School and the Liberal Arts Academy, founded at Johnston High School. As of the 2006-2007 school year LBJ received a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to support implementation of an

educational enrichment program called First Things First, and the receipt of the grant caused AISD officials to desire splitting LASA from LBJ high school. Even though housed in the same facility, LASA has a separate principal, yearbook, sports teams, etc.

Conroe ISD –

The Conroe Independent School District Academy of Science and Technology, in Conroe, Texas is a specialized magnet school in science and technology; also a member of NCSSSMST. It was founded at Oak Ridge High School with the first graduates in 1991. The AST relocated to The Woodlands College Park High School in stages from 2005 to 2007.

Math, science, and electives in these areas are taught by the AST faculty, with most of these classes including students only from the Academy. All other courses are taken with students who are not in the magnet program.

Admission requires an application, essay, and interview. For each class, 65 students are initially accepted, and ten are wait listed. The size of each class at a given time is between 65 and 77 students. There are approximately 270 students in the Academy.

Katy ISD –

Miller Career and Technology Center

Katy I.S.D.'s program was in existence prior to 2006-07, but with bond monies approved in 2006, the Center received a major renovation and expansion. The MCTC also offers basic English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, making it possible for students to either be full-time students at the MCTC, or to split their coursework between MCTC and their home campuses.

The program is built around the Achieve Texas initiative developed by TEA.

The fields of study include:

Arts, A/V Technology & Communications Academy

Business, Management & Administration Academy

Education & Training Academy

Health Science Academy

Hospitality & Tourism Academy

Human Services Academy (Cosmetology Services)

Information Technology Academy

Law, Public Safety, Corrections and Security Academy

Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics Academy

Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics Academy

Students may receive college credit by Advanced Technical Credit (ATC) for courses that are part of an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree plan offered by public two-year colleges. Some courses qualify for Local Articulate Credit, whereby a local post-secondary institution as an agreement to grant credit upon the student attending that institution within 15 months of graduation.

Frisco ISD –

Frisco ISD's Career and Technical Education (CTE) Center opened in the Fall, 2008, in partnership with Achieve Texas. The Center provides 13 areas of study, allowing students to "form business partnerships, internships, vocational certifications, licensures, (and) college credit" all under one roof (CTE Website.) FISD's CTE Center provides part-day classes. Students take core classes at their home campuses and then take their specialized classes at the Center, and transportation is provided to and from the center by district busses. The CTE Center allows students the chance to graduate with real-world experience and college credits, while at the same time allowing them to experience a portion of their chosen career fields before graduation.

Students are encouraged to take introductory classes in their area of interest at their home campuses as early as the 8th grade. The campus can house 1,100 10th-12th grade students.

FISD areas of study are derived from the clusters utilized in Achieve Texas, and include the following:

Agriculture Sciences – Animal Science: Emphasis on Veterinary Technology

Agriculture Sciences – Horticulture and Landscape Design

Agriculture Sciences -- Mechanics

Business Administration

Childcare and Education

Computer Graphics and Animation

Computer Technology

Culinary Arts and Hospitality Services

Entrepreneurship and Marketing

Financial Systems

Health Science Technology

Legal Studies

Media Technology and Broadcast

Pre-Engineering and Architecture

Lewisville ISD –

The Dale Jackson Career Center at Lewisville ISD opened in 1985. Students spend a portion of the day at the center, and bus transportation is provided. Enrollment is allowed by application, and each high school has a certain number of slots available in each course. Approximately 600 students are enrolled per term, in grades 9 through 12, with the 11th and 12th grade classes having well over 200 students each.

The following departments are included in the Career Center:

Advertising Design

American Sign Language

Animation

Auto Collision Repair

Auto Technology

Content Mastery

Cosmetology

Criminal Justice

Electronics and Internetworking

Health Science Technology

Hospitality

Media Technology

Mill and Cabinetmaking

Welding

Northeast ISD –

Northeast I.S.D. has also opened a T-Stem Academy with success. Their program is all inclusive, and the only time a student is not being taught by a T-stem teacher is in an elective course like Band or PE. Otherwise, STEM ideas are even brought into the study or English or Social Studies. The goal of the programs is to provide an emphasis in one area for students interested in a certain career path, while not duplicating the expensive equipment and training facilities needed at all of the campuses throughout the district. The program is funded through 2009 with T-Stem grants, but there are no funding guarantees beyond that.

Richardson ISD –

Richardson ISD has an extensive magnet program that includes even the elementary school campuses. Junior High School campuses have emphases such as Technology & Visual Arts or Math, Science, and Leadership.

Richardson High School includes an Arts, Law, and Science Magnet program that is open to students by application. The Science Magnet offers regular, Pre-AP, and AP options in Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. Additionally, the magnet includes the Living Materials Center, the Health Science Technology Program, and Scientific Research & Design in Chemistry, as well as rotations and interships with area hospitals.

The program also allows non-magnet program enrollees to take magnet electives with teacher approval.

Dallas ISD –

Dallas ISD offers courses in eight areas of study, including Agriculture Science and Technology, Business Education, Career Orientation, Family and Consumer Sciences, Health Science Technology, Marketing Education, Technology Education, and Trade and Industrial Education. Courses are aoffered at all middle and high schools, as well as the magent school campuses. A separate Careet and Technology Education center provides cooperative education internships, dual-credit college courses, and Tech Prep classes.

Dallas ISD also has developed a partnership with Mountain View College to provide Early College High School at Mountain View College. This is a 5 year program that allows students to graduate from high school with 2 years of college credit that can be applied towards an associates degree from Mountain View College.

Dallas ISD has a magnet program within 10 of its high schools that offer courses from arts and communications to science, engineering, and the health professions. These are designed to foster career preparedness. These are coupled with seven middle school academies and four elementary school programs that provide students earlier opportunities for career exploration and provide continuity through the program.

Manor ISD –

Manor ISD's academy is called Manor New Tech High School. It opened in the Fall, 2007 and boasts academic successes and the highest attendance rate in the district, at 97.3%. Additionally, 100% of the teachers returned to teach in the 2008-09 school year.

The students accepted to this program are accepted based on a blind lottery

Northside ISD –

Northside ISD's Science and Engineering Academy accepts students by application, with the requirements being a 75 or higher average in core subjects, good attendance, no discipline problems, passing TAKS scores, and an application and essay. The academy offers unique classes in science, engineering and technology, as well as 18 advanced placement courses.

Corpus Christi ISD –

CCISD has opened Collegiate High School in conjunction with the Del Mar College System. The school is housed on the Del Mar College campus, and is designed to allow for a seamless transition to college work by way of completing some of that coursework in high school. Towards the end of the program, students are enrolled in college coursework exclusively, and are still provided assistance by the high school system. Upon completion of the program, students should have 60 hours of college credit to be applied to the college of their choice.

The CCISD program places 25-30 students, along with a faculty advisor, in an advisory group that meets several times a week for academic and personal support. Almost every staff member in the school takes on an advisory group.

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