

Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce Pathway to Tomorrow Impact Plan

Introduction

The Austin Metropolitan Area is among the most vibrant in the nation economically, intellectually and culturally. Despite our vitality, skill gaps in the Austin region perpetuate income inequity.

We must improve key trends which limit the ability of our young people and unemployed adults to participate in our economy. Among these are three principal roadblocks:

- First, more than half of Austin's 41,000 open jobs require at least an associate's degree; yet nearly two-thirds of our roughly 38,000 unemployed lack at least that credential.
- Second, Austin's 63% direct-to-college enrollment rate lags the national average of 66%.
- Third, many of our students face financial headwinds, with half in our largest school district classified as low-income and one-third as learning English. Poverty rates on multiple campuses approach or exceed 90%.

If we don't act now to remove these barriers, the skills and credentials gap will perpetuate income inequity and widen the economic segregation already evident in the Austin MSA.¹

If we can't figure out how to help more of our people earn a valued credential – in a city with energy, commitment and a strong need for a highly educated workforce – we won't be able to figure it out for the rest of Texas and the rest of the nation.

To help address these challenges, in 2004, the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce launched Opportunity Austin, a five-year, regional economic development initiative designed to foster job-creating investment in our five-county region. We have now launched the fourth iteration – OA 4.0 – in January 2019, designed to accelerate economic diversification and improve education attainment and Opportunity for All in the Austin MSA.

Program Description

A key aspect to Austin's audacious goal of Opportunity for All is to ensure we continue to develop our human capital to meet our economy's changing requirements. To accomplish this, OA 4.0 set a goal and designed strategies to accomplish near universal readiness and placement of area high school graduates - either into postsecondary education or the high-performance workplace.

¹ "Segregated City: The Geography of Economic Segregation in America's Cities," Martin Prosperity Institute,
<http://martinprosperity.org/media/Segregated%20City.pdf>

Key Partners

A key piece of Opportunity Austin is a robust partnership focused on improving the talent development of the Austin Metro area population. In its initial phases, OA focused on increasing the direct to college enrollment of area high school graduates. While the rate in Austin exceeds the Texas average, it lags the national average.

The Chamber led the creation of a partnership of local school districts, institutions of higher education and businesses. Additionally, the Ray Marshall Center at The University of Texas has developed metrics and serves as the evaluator.

The partners came together to develop strategies and tactics to increase the direct to college enrollment rate. All partners signed a compact committing them to common goals and metrics that support postsecondary success. The partners also use the metrics to hold each other accountable to achievement of common goals.

The current partnership consists of five school districts educating 200,000 students: Austin ISD, Hutto ISD, Leander ISD, Pflugerville ISD and Round Rock ISD. Eight institutions of higher education participate: Austin Community College, Concordia University, St. Edward's University, Texas State University, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University, Huston-Tillotson University and the Texas State Technical College. The partnership also includes area Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Realtors. The Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce serves as the backbone organization and fiscal agent.

Local non-profit organizations like Austin Partners in Education (APIE), College Forward, Breakthrough Austin, Foundation Communities and others are also incorporated into various strategies of the effort. APIE is a not-for-profit that seeks to improve student college and career readiness and expand STEM opportunities through community engagement. College Forward, Breakthrough Austin and Foundation Communities are broadly engaged in college access, and Chamber-led FAFSA completion efforts on area campuses they serve. The organizations also work with partner school districts to support completion of college applications, preparation for college, student advising and other support contributing to college enrollment and completion.

Program Elements

OA has a 14-year track record with documented success. It incorporates the following set of integrated, research-based strategies to improve educational attainment:

Direct to College 70% Achievement Plan (DTC70)

Our partnership has designed the nation's first multi-school district, chamber, business compact committed to enroll 70% of our Class of 2019 directly in postsecondary education.

Highlighted components include:

- **Survey Students** – UT-Austin surveys 32,000 high school juniors and seniors to identify their specific college plans and barriers; UT-Austin equips college counselors to use this individual-level information to customize college advising and interventions.
- **Digitally Message Reminders** – Campus partners send customized texts to each high school senior and his/her parents/guardians to remind them of their college admission, financial aid and enrollment deadlines.
- **Custom Help with Financial Aid** – Between October and March, we coordinate 50 events where families receive one-on-one assistance to submit their college financial aid forms.
- **Tutor Students to College Ready Levels** – Every year, we invest \$200,000 so APIE will identify and tutor students who qualify to graduate but need help to become college ready.
- **Support New Graduates through Summer to College Enrollment** – In partnership with school counselors, we work with 10,000 new high school graduates to overcome remaining obstacles to direct fall college enrollment.
- **Track, Report, Improve** – Partners report college application, FAFSA submission, college readiness, postsecondary enrollment, completion, wages and employment outcomes.

Direct to Work (DTW30): A New Approach

Based on business and community input, postsecondary attainment for each high school graduate is not the only approach. For various reasons, approximately 37% of our high school seniors do not directly enroll in postsecondary education. OA 4.0 will build upon our existing DTC70 technology to assist these students in identifying quality employment options, a high-performance work training program or military enlistment. Our goal is to ensure that one-third of graduates who do not directly matriculate to postsecondary education earn a credential with meaningful labor market value during or after high school graduation. Components of DTW30 will include:

- **New State Data Infrastructure** - Approximately 6,000 industry certifications have been identified by multiple Texas “skills standards” boards. Of those, the Texas Education Commissioner and his team identified in 2018 approximately 70 industry certifications which can be:
 - Earned by a student while enrolled in high school
 - Recognized by multiple employers and are not simply company specific
 - Necessary for certification earners to access jobs paying “middle wages” between \$30,000 - \$65,000
 - A significant advantage over job applicants applying for the same position who lack that certification.

In the last few months, the Texas Education Commissioner has completed public input to inform whether 200+ certifications should be considered designated as college/career/military ready.

The Texas Education Commissioner has tasked staff to map coherent sequences of courses for the initial 70 certifications to expose a student to content by which he or she will be prepared to pass the certification exam.

Currently, there are no consistent definitions for coherent sequences of courses.

- **New Junior Year Survey Questions** – We will identify additional questions for students to request deeper technical and career counselor.
- **Digitally Message** – Using the Commissioner’s work above, we will identify and connect those without college intentions to use their senior year coursework to enroll in ‘coherent sequences’ which will lead to middle wage certification.
- **Career Placement program** – We will convene volunteers to help non-college-bound seniors to prepare resumes, practice interview skills and connect to prescreened job openings which fit their interests and skills.
- **Career readiness and industry certification advocacy** – The region’s career and technical education programs (career academies, P-TECH, career cluster programs, etc.) require upgrade and a greater volume of completers through quality industry-recognized certifications and credentials.
- **Expand dual enrollment completion** - The Chamber has strongly advocated for dual enrollment at the legislative and school board levels, in partnership with our community colleges. We must ensure students master relevant content to earn lucrative industry credentials.

We will use the platform developed for our DTC work to connect high school students directly to the coursework and content that will lead to these certificate programs. And, high school counselors can use the platform to ensure students are accessing the relevant courses. Completion of these certificate programs will ensure that students graduate ready to enter a high-performance workplace.

Real time data analytics

School districts all have large CRMs which have been built to serve a whole series of functions within their enterprise. Counselors and the direct college enrollment function have not necessarily been on the top of their list. To address that, Opportunity Austin worked with our school district leaders, IT directors and counselors to create, pay for and deploy the OneLogos portal, so that survey information can flow into the logic model with a graphic interface that is easy to understand and take action upon.

Most importantly, the portal allows counselors with large caseloads to more efficiently target support to their students in near real-time. Instead of logging into multiple systems counselors are able to access multiple college going milestones in one place and strategically nudge students appropriately.

OA engaged the UT-Austin Ray Marshall Center to help develop the platform. The Ray Marshall Center helped understand the barriers to the data platform, including multiple processes. The platform integrates metrics together across various data sources, including the Texas Education Agency, the Federal Student Aid system and data collected through OA surveys and other sources.

The guiding focus of the real time analytics is to save high school counselors time and effort and allow them to target student support more effectively and efficiently, to ultimately yield greater student success. The integrated platform automates certain counselor responsibilities and allows them to avoid repetitive processes, data collection and reporting.

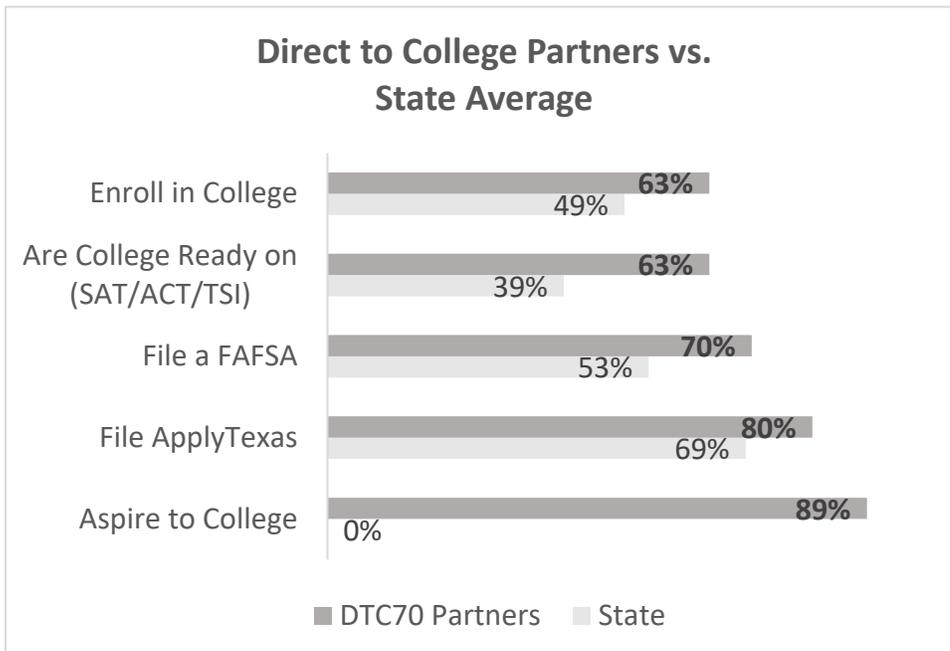
And, ultimately the platform provides counselors with near real-time data that allows them to nudge students and ensure they are aware of impending timelines and deadlines or connect them with help to overcome barriers they encounter in the postsecondary enrollment process.

Summary of Results, 2004-2018

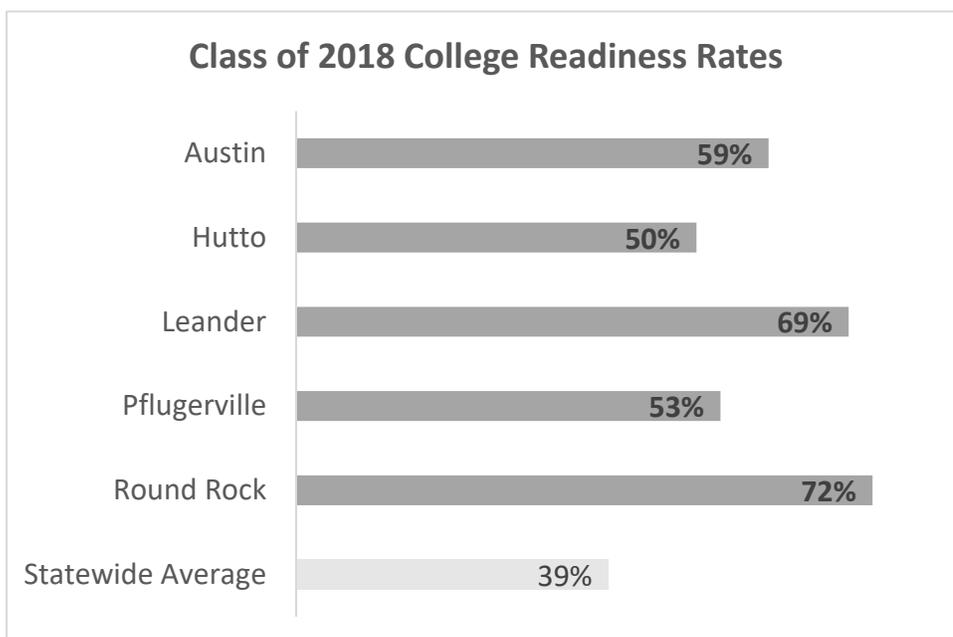
Opportunity Austin integrated multiple proven interventions into one effort. We have built long-standing partnerships with eight institutions of higher education who enroll approximately 200,000 students. We have strong partnerships with five area school districts serving approximately 200,000 students, including 14,000 high school seniors. Our educator leaders have access to and use real-time data and predictive analytics to ensure the right intervention is being targeted to the right student. And, we evaluate our impact as we go.

Since 2007, OA helped drive a 38% increase in local high school students who enroll directly in college. Over 100,000 students and families completed required financial aid forms, which resulted in \$1.2 billion in federal, state and institutional college aid for area students. We have seen meaningful increases in recent student college readiness rates for each of our five partner school districts.

OA partner school districts out-perform the state average across a variety of measures. The chart below looks at regional outcomes on key college going metrics for the year 2018. The Chamber releases these data to the public, trustees, superintendents, administrators, counselors and the media. This public reporting of data can create a real focus on critical college enrollment milestones. We draw attention to the high performers and hope that the right management questions get answered on the relatively lower performers.



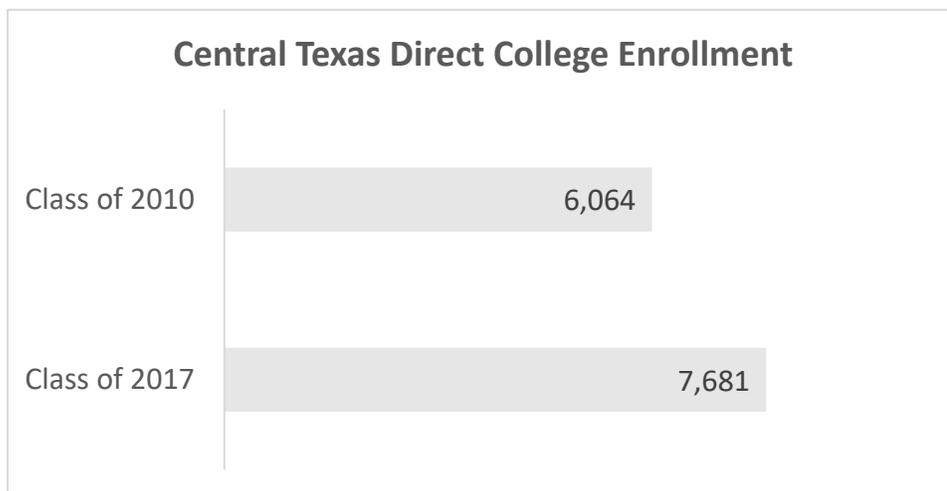
OA also focuses on improved results in college/career readiness. The chart below indicates college readiness for each participating school district for the Class of 2018 compared to the state average. As you can see, each school district exceeded the state average, by **at least** 11 percentage points. It is important to remember that because of the real time analytics, these students had just graduated 30 days earlier. The most recent available data for the rest of the state was from the Class of 2016.



Finally, if you look at the overall number of high school graduates directly enrolling in some form of postsecondary education from 2010 – the best available data – you will find that these rates have increased dramatically. While this does reflect population growth, it also reflects a higher graduation rate and maintaining the direct to college enrollment rate with strong persistence and completion outcomes.

Specifically:

- The direct-to-college enrollment rate for partner school districts stands at 63% with college persistence rates for direct-to-college enrollees ranging from 86% for students overall to 79% for low-income students.
- 61% of students from partner ISDs who directly enroll in college complete a degree within six years, compared to 23% of students who delay enrollment.
- 66% of students who complete a FAFSA and meet state college-readiness benchmarks complete a college degree in six years compared to only 39% who are not college ready.
- Low-income students, who are college-ready and submit a FAFSA, complete degrees at a rate of 49% —a rate over three times the rate of low-income students who do not complete a FAFSA and who are not college-ready—only 15% of these students complete degrees.



Unique, but Replicable

Opportunity Austin initiatives are research-based and have been proven effective. Several elements have been implemented in other regions. But in Austin we have built and fostered long-standing partnerships between the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, multiple institutions of higher education and five area school districts. We have integrated multiple proven interventions together into one effort. We provide Austin area education leaders with access to real-time data and predictive analytics to ensure the right intervention is being targeted at the right student. And, we have long-standing partnerships in place with the Ray Marshall Center at UT-Austin to evaluate our impact. That's one reason by we market this region to the world as Austin: The Human Capital.

As other communities look to ensure all students have the opportunity to enroll directly into college, or high-performing employment, they might look to our work as a model. Interested communities should:

- Engage the business community – putting business leaders in direct partnership with those educating their future workforce;
- Engage school districts – ensuring that school leaders focus on college or career readiness and have direct support for their students as they make decisions about their next endeavors;
- Engage institutions of higher education – providing direct connections and knowledge of the workforce needs and economic demands of the communities they serve, as well as capacity to evaluate outcomes;
- Engage other partners – like counselors, and non-profit organizations to ensure students have access to appropriate support; and
- Identify data platform to provide real time information. Communities can either use ours or replicate and adapt to local demands.

Our work can serve as a proving ground for efforts elsewhere. We are already seeing other metropolitan areas in Texas looking to replicate our efforts. We believe the combination of the interventions is critical to overall success proves so effective.

We envision highlighting the success of our model in various forums both locally and nationally. We hope others can learn from the success of our work and can build programs to scale. We will present the models at conferences such as;

- The US Chamber of Commerce
- American Chamber of Commerce Executives
- US Conference of Mayors

Also, the Opportunity Austin work will be included in America Succeeds' upcoming Agility Resource Bank which will leverage the broader impact of our success.

Lessons Learned to Date

Opportunity Austin now has a 14-year track record of success. This has been an iterative effort. We recently launched OA 4.0 to continue to build on and extend the success of previous efforts. We set a 2023 goal to accomplish near universal readiness and placement of area high school graduates - either into postsecondary education or the high-performance workplace.

We have learned some things along the way. Below are some key aspects that communities seeking to launch similar efforts should consider.

Partnership matters – Business must work with local school districts and higher education institutions and be willing to push hard on outcomes and metrics. But, business can bring some key resources to the table. OA was able to raise significant dollars to launch these efforts and provided key leadership and business insight on solving management problems hamstrung by inadequate, timely, individual-level data. As importantly, business can offer critical support of school district bond

packages and other community development efforts. But, districts must commit to certain actions and outcomes.

Leadership matters – Partners must be willing to engage in the policy process, likely across all governmental sectors, as well as hire key actors that know the terrain. One of the keys to success in Austin involved a Senior Vice President and Vice President with past legislative and institutional experience. This experience was critical in navigating the complex political, institutional and economic landscape to engage key school district, higher education, policymakers, and key business leaders in the effort.

Set goals and action steps – A key component of success is to lay out specific goals and tasks that each partner will commit to accomplish. Convene gatherings of a broad base of community leaders to establish general community support. But, then lay out a clear set of assignments for all partners. Specific tasks and timelines should be established for school district superintendents, leaders of higher education institutions and business leaders. These actions should have clear agreed upon metrics so that each partner is willing and able to hold each other accountable.

Commit to the long haul – Partnerships seeking to impact public outcomes take time. This is particularly true in education, where the life cycles of student involvement in the system can exceed 16 years. Successful efforts often entail iterative processes. There must be a willingness to evaluate outcomes and adapt tactics based on objective analyses of what is working and what is not. There must also be a willingness across partners to change, extend and improve program implementation.

Clear incentive to participate – One area where the OA partnership could have been strengthened is the creation of concrete incentives for families and students to participate. For example, communities like Dallas have raised private dollars to establish last dollar scholarships for all high school graduates. These scholarships are on top of Pell grants and other state and federal programs. These incentives can bring families to the table to participate. And, greater family and student participation will ensure school district and higher education institution participation.

Anticipated Outcomes

Future Outcomes in Austin – Since 2007, OA helped drive a 38% increase in the number of local high school students who enroll directly in college. Over 100,000 students and families complete required financial aid forms which resulted in \$1.2 billion in potential federal, state and institutional college aid for Austin area students. Our most recent data shows meaningful increases in students' college readiness rates for each of our five partner school districts.

However, we have much more to do. OA 4.0 has set the goal that by 2023, 56.6% of our area population will attain an associate degree or higher. We are also setting

out to collect and share more of the data that students, employers and policymakers want and need, such as: local labor market demand, CTE/dual enrollment and certification opportunities, in addition to college going rates; college retention and persistence; college completion; percentage of population with postsecondary credentials and degrees; and job placement rates.

Anticipated Outcomes in Other Communities – As other cities examine these efforts and seek to replicate in their own community, there are a number of outcomes they could expect to see. If replicated faithfully, and using the kind of integrated approach used here in Austin, we would expect:

- Stronger relationship between schools, colleges, and the business community;
- Improvement across key metrics influencing postsecondary and career outcomes:
 - Increase in college application rates;
 - Increases in college readiness rates;
 - Increases in college going rates;
 - Increases in FAFSA completion rates and amount of financial aid received by area students; and
 - Increases in the number of those who actually complete college.
- Improved economic opportunities for those who complete degrees and credentials that are in demand;
- Improved ability to evaluate outcomes at K12, postsecondary and labor market outcomes (employment/UI wages);
- Improved ability to advocate for key policies, issue areas, that support educational and economic priorities for a region.

Additionally, the partnerships created here can enhance the ways in which various sectors of the community interact and come together to address mutual challenges. Ultimately these efforts will increase the share of citizens with a credential of value to allow more residents to participate in the economy, reduce economic inequities by improving earning power, and also improve the overall quality of labor force.