Academic Performance and Persistence of Texas High School Graduates
2003 – 2008

Key Findings

• The average first-year grade point average for all Texas high school graduates who first entered a Texas college or university did not change significantly from 2003 to 2008.
  ○ The four-year average ranged from 2.56 to 2.59
  ○ The two-year average ranged from 2.23 to 2.29

• The first-year grade point average for Texas high school graduates varied substantially depending on the type of high school diploma students earned and varied slightly by the type of college or university first entered.
  ○ Texas high school graduates who received a Distinguished high school diploma earned relatively high grades their first year in college: 3.0 for those who first entered a Texas public four-year college or university and 2.8 for those who first entered a Texas public two-year college.
  ○ Students who received a Recommended high school diploma earned slightly lower grades than students with the Distinguished diploma: 2.5 for students who first entered a Texas public four-year college or university and 2.3 for those who first entered a Texas public two-year college.
  ○ In 2008, students who received the Minimum high school diploma earned considerably lower grades than students with either the Recommended or Distinguished diploma: 1.8 for students who first entered a four-year institution and 1.9 for those who first entered a two-year institution.

• First year persistence varied considerably for students who graduated with different types of high school diplomas.
  ○ Students with the Distinguished high school diploma persisted at high levels at both four-year and two-year institutions: 95 percent for students who first entered a four-year institution and 83 percent for students who first entered a two-year institution.
Key findings, continued

- Students with the Recommended high school diploma had lower first year persistence rates than students with the Distinguished high school diploma: 88 percent for students who first entered a four-year institution and 69 percent for those who entered a two-year college.

- Students with the Minimum high school diploma had the lowest first year persistence rates: 55 percent for those who first entered a four-year college or university and 52 percent for those who first entered a two-year college.

- Second year persistence also varied greatly for students who earned different types of high school diplomas.
  - The second year persistence rate for students with a Distinguished diploma who first entered a four-year institution was 90 percent and was 67 percent for students who first entered a two-year institution.
  - Students with a Recommended high school diploma who first entered a four-year institution had a second year persistence rate of 78 percent, and those who first entered a two-year institution had a rate of 51 percent.
  - The second year persistence rate for students with a Minimum high school diploma declined for students who first entered a four-year institution (64% to 55%) and declined from 36 percent to 31 percent for students who first entered a two-year institution.
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Background
This report is the third in a series of research briefs designed to monitor the educational progress of students who graduate from Texas public high schools and enter higher education institutions in the state of Texas. The purpose of this report is to identify year-to-year trends in how well Texas high school graduates enrolled in a Texas higher education institution perform academically and how many returned for a second and third year of college.

The research reported here is based on seven cohorts of students who graduated from Texas public high schools between 2003 and 2009. Data from the Texas Education Agency were combined with data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to produce this report. As a result of changes in state policy, the Recommended high school diploma became the standard or ‘default’ curriculum. As a consequence, more students received the Distinguished and Recommended high school diplomas and fewer students received the Minimum high school diploma over the time period of this study.

The first year college grade point average reported here is a cumulative grade point average based on a four-point scale (A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1) and was calculated by summing all the grade points earned across all public institutions attended by the number of semester credit hours completed and summed across all institutions attended. The first and second year persistence rates were calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled in the second and third fall semesters after the initial fall enrollment by the number enrolled the first fall after high school graduation. Persistence was defined as enrollment in any Texas higher education (public or private, two-year or four-year) institution in the second or third fall after initial enrollment. First year grades were reported for Texas public institutions.

Questions

1. How well did Texas high school graduates perform in the first year of college?

2. Did the level of academic performance vary by the type of high school diploma received?

3. What was the persistence rate after the first and second year of enrollment? Did the persistence rate vary by the type of high school diploma received?
Academic performance in Texas public four-year colleges and universities

- The percentage of students who earned less than a 2.0 grade point at a public four-year Texas college changed very little from 2003 to 2009, ranging from 22 percent to 25 percent.

- The percentage of students who earned a 3.0 grade point average or higher at a public four-year Texas college was very stable from 2003 to 2007, but increased by six percentage points in 2008, from 37 to 43 percent.

- The average first year grade point average changed very little from 2003 to 2009.
Academic performance in Texas public four-year colleges by type of high school diploma

- The first year grade point average for Texas high school graduates with a Distinguished and Recommended high school diploma who first entered a four-year institution was 3.0 and 2.5, respectively. Neither average changed from 2003 to 2007.

- The first year grade point average for students with the Minimum high school diploma declined from 2.2 to 1.8 over the same time period.

Note: The number of students who first entered a Texas public four-year institution dropped sharply from 4,568 to 812 for the Minimum high school diploma, increased from 35,217 to 39,192 for the Recommended high school diploma and increased from 8,310 to 14,491 for the Distinguished high school diploma.
Academic performance in Texas public two-year colleges and universities

- Prior to 2008, the percentage of students who earned less than a 2.0 grade point average increased slightly, from 31 to 34 percent; however, in 2008, the percentage dropped to 28 percent.

- The percentage of students who earned a 3.0 grade point average or higher was stable from 2003 to 2007, about 27 percent, but increased to 33 percent in 2008.

- The average grade point average declined slightly from 2003 to 2007, but increased in 2008.
Academic performance in Texas public two-year colleges by type of high school diploma

- In 2008, the first year grade point average for Texas high school graduates with a Distinguished, Recommended, and Minimum high school diploma who first entered a four-year institution was 2.8, 2.3, and 1.9 respectively. None of the first year grade point averages changed significantly from 2003 to 2008.

Note: The number of students who first entered a Texas public two-year institution decreased from 18,203 to 9,270 for the Minimum high school diploma, increased from 36,654 to 55,085 for the Recommended high school diploma and increased from 2,543 to 4,930 for the Distinguished high school diploma.
First year persistence of students who first enrolled in a Texas public two-year college

- The first year persistence of students who earned a Distinguished high school diploma and entered a Texas public two-year college remained high (83%), but unchanged.

- The first year persistence rate for students with a Recommended high school diploma declined from 72 percent to 69 percent between 2003 and 2009.

- The first year persistence rate for students with a Minimum high school diploma also declined, from 57 percent to 52 percent.
Second year persistence of students who first enrolled in a Texas public two-year college

- The second year persistence rate for students with all three types of high school diplomas declined from 2003 to 2009.

- By 2007, approximately two-thirds of the students with a Distinguished high school diploma, half of those with a Recommended high school diploma, and less than one-third of those with the Minimum high school diploma persisted to the start of the third year after initial enrollment in a Texas public two-year college.
First year persistence of students who first enrolled in a Texas public four-year college

- The first year persistence rate for students with the Distinguished and the Recommended high school diploma remained high and unchanged from 2003 to 2007 (95% and 88%, respectively).

- The persistence rate for students with the Minimum high school diploma declined from 79 percent to 73 percent from 2003 to 2007.
Second year persistence of students who first enrolled in a Texas public four-year college

- The second year persistence rate remained high and unchanged (90%) for students who graduated with the Distinguished high school diploma.

- The second year persistence rate for students with the Recommended high school diploma did not change from 2003 to 2007, but was lower (78%) than the rate for students with the Distinguished high school diploma.

- The second year persistence rate for students with the Minimum high school diploma dropped dramatically from 64 percent to 55 percent from 2003 to 2007.
Summary

Overall, the first year grade performance and the first and second year persistence rates changed very little for students who graduated with the Distinguished or Recommended high school diploma. In general, students with the Distinguished high school diploma earned slightly higher grades and had higher first and second year persistence rates than students who graduated with the Recommended high school diploma. In addition, students who first entered a Texas public four-year institution earned slightly higher first-year grades and had higher first and second year persistence rates than students who first entered a Texas public two-year college.

The largest change in the academic performance and persistence rates from 2003 to 2008 was found for the students who received the Minimum high school diploma. The number of students with this type of diploma who entered a Texas public college or university the first fall after high school graduation declined 22,771 in 2003 to 10,082 in 2008. In general, each entering cohort of students with the Minimum high school diploma performed less well than the year before. The first year grade point average for Minimum diploma students declined from 2.2 to 1.8 for those who first entered a Texas public four-year college or university and declined from 1.9 to 1.7 and then rose to 1.9 by 2008 for those who first entered a Texas public two-year college. The first and second year persistence rates also declined for each entering cohort of students with the Minimum diploma. The first year persistence rate for Minimum diploma students declined from 79 percent to 73 percent for those who first entered a Texas public four-year institution and declined from 57 percent to 52 percent for those who first entered a Texas public two-year college. The second year persistence rate showed similar changes. For those Minimum diploma students who first started a Texas public four-year college or university the rate dropped from 64 percent to 55 percent and dropped from 36 percent to 31 percent for those who first started in a Texas public two-year college.

As a result of changes in state policy, the Recommended high school diploma became the standard or ‘default’ curriculum. As a consequence, more students received the Distinguished and Recommended high school diplomas and fewer students received the Minimum high school diploma over the time period of this study. The academic performance and persistence in college was largely unchanged from 2003 to 2008 for students receiving the Recommended and Distinguished high school diplomas. Students who graduated with the Minimum high school diploma had lower grade point averages and lower persistence rates in 2007 and 2008 than students who graduated with that type of high school diploma in 2003.