



**TSI Operational Plan for  
Serving Lower-Skilled  
Learners**

**Submitted to the  
Texas Higher Education  
Coordinating Board**

**April 2014**



## Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

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## Executive Summary

With their open admissions policies, Texas public community and technical colleges enroll many underprepared students who require developmental education. Data show that the manner in which these students are being served—through multiple levels of developmental education courses—has not been effective. Fewer than 35 percent of students not college ready in reading and writing successfully complete their first college-level course; fewer than 16 percent not college ready in mathematics do so. Moreover, data show that students placing into the lowest levels of developmental education are less likely to progress than their higher-placed peers.

With the advent of the newly developed Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA), public institutions of higher education are now able to distinguish between students whose skill levels are within secondary school ranges (referred to as Developmental Education students assessed at Levels 5-6 on the TSIA Adult Basic Education (ABE) Diagnostic) and students whose skill levels fall below high school (referred to as Adult Basic Education students scoring within Levels 1-4 on the TSIA ABE Diagnostic). ABE students require a different degree of remediation than Developmental Education students and according to research, ABE students are more likely to succeed with a tailored set of interventions.

This TSI Operational Plan provides a series of recommendations for Texas and its public institutions of higher education to more effectively serve students assessed at Levels 1-4 on the TSIA ABE Diagnostic.

- **Recommendation 1: Phase-in the implementation of the TSI Operational Plan between fall 2014 and fall 2015.** For Phase I (fall 2014), the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) will identify and select qualified colleges to spearhead regional professional development supporting best and promising practices for serving students assessed at ABE skill levels. During this first phase, institutions will be expected to continue to serve this population using available course/intervention structures and funding options. For Phase II (fall 2015), all institutions will be required to implement at least one initiative addressing the academic and workforce needs of their students assessing at the ABE skill levels. The selected institutions from Phase I will continue their mentor role. Professional development and training opportunities will also continue during this second phase.
- **Recommendation 2: Refer students who do not have a high school diploma (or its equivalent) to GED or other high school completion programs.** Rather than using the TSIA to test students that lack a high school diploma or its equivalent, institutions will refer these students to continuing education programs on campus or an appropriate agency/organization to complete their high school credential so that they may transition to the workplace or postsecondary education.
- **Recommendation 3: Define key terms.** The THECB will define key terms. Developmental Education includes courses/interventions that address students who are assessed by the Developmental Education Diagnostic or who are assessed at Levels 5-6 on the TSIA ABE Diagnostic. Basic Academic Skills Education (BASE) is the newly

developed non-course competency-based options (NCBOs) that address students with a high school diploma who assess within Levels 3-4 on the TSIA ABE Diagnostic.

- **Recommendation 4: Develop and identify BASE NCBOs.** Faculty content experts will identify and develop non-course competency-based options (NCBOs) for inclusion in the *Lower-Division Academic Course Guide Manual (ACGM)*. These options will be designed to address the needs of students assessing at Levels 3-4. These particular NCBOs would be labeled "BASE (Basic Academic Skills Education) NCBOs" to distinguish them from NCBOs currently in use by higher education for developmental education interventions.
- **Recommendation 5: Advise students to consider options such as higher level course(s)/intervention(s) with accelerated interventions based on their demonstrated areas of strength in each content area of the TSIA.** Institutions will advise students assessed at skill levels that vary across content areas (reading, writing and mathematics) to consider options supporting their strengths and be placed in higher level course(s)/intervention(s) with appropriate, accelerated interventions to ensure academic progress and success in all content areas.
- **Recommendation 6: Advise and refer students assessed in Levels 1-2 in all three content areas.** Institutions will refer students who are assessed at Levels 1-2 in all three subject areas of the TSIA ABE Diagnostic to appropriate options, including continuing education on campus or an appropriate agency/organization serving this population (e.g., Texas Workforce Commission [TWC], Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, community-based organizations). Outside of the limited English proficient population, the disabled and learning disabled are some of the largest groups testing at these levels, who are better served through evaluation or vocational rehabilitation offered outside the college or through continuing education.
- **Recommendation 7: Develop a statewide referral system.** In collaboration with partnering agencies, the THECB will review and build on existing resources to establish a statewide online resource and referral system for use by institutions of higher education, adult education providers and other appropriate organizations to optimize the services provided to students assessed in Levels 1-2 in all three subject areas of the TSI ABE Diagnostic.
- **Recommendation 8: Recommend that the Texas Legislature increase funding for ABE interventions.** The THECB, partnering agencies and other stakeholders will recommend that the Texas Legislature increase funding options for institutions that serve ABE students.
- **Recommendation 9: Provide professional development for faculty to more effectively serve ABE students.** Beginning in summer 2014, the THECB will develop and implement a comprehensive multi-agency professional development program with a focus on providing the necessary tools and resources to serve ABE students.

- **Recommendation 10: Review and revise the TSI Operational Plan.** Following the first four years after implementation of the TSI Operational Plan, the THECB will utilize stakeholder input to assess the effectiveness of the plan.

## Background

The need to improve the academic preparedness of students enrolling in Texas public institutions of higher education is one of the greatest challenges facing Texas colleges and universities – and institutions throughout the nation. An initial effort to address the lack of adequate preparation of incoming college students was taken by the Texas Legislature in 1987, with the implementation of the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP). The TASP established both an assessment to determine readiness for enrolling in college-level coursework as well as the requirement that public institutions of higher education provide developmental education coursework and interventions for those students not meeting college readiness standards. TASP legislation was replaced in 2003 with the Texas Success Initiative (TSI), which allowed for the use of four college readiness assessments.

To directly address the gap between college readiness expectations and student preparedness, the Texas Legislature focused on public education and its role in providing students with the requisite knowledge and skills to be successful in college or the workplace. In 2006, the 79th Texas Legislature, Third Called Special Session, directed the THECB and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to establish vertical teams of Texas higher education faculty and high school teachers with expertise in the four foundation areas (mathematics, science, English, and social studies) to identify the critical elements in each subject area that students must master to be ready for life after high school. The resulting Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) were approved by the THECB in January 2008 and were integrated into the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), the statewide curriculum for Texas public education.

To further reduce the gaps in the P-20 education system, the 81st Texas Legislature addressed the inadequacies apparent in developmental education at Texas colleges and universities. In its General Appropriations Act, House Bill 1, Section 50, the Legislature directed the THECB to develop a Statewide Developmental Education Plan. The THECB adopted the state's first Developmental Education Plan in 2009. This plan identified goals devised from research-based best practices and designed to improve the success of academically vulnerable students within and beyond developmental education.

In response to the 2009 Developmental Education Plan, the THECB has since funded various developmental education initiatives, including research and evaluation efforts, to help Texas public institutions of higher education provide more effective programs and services to underprepared students. Evaluation of the various initiatives coupled with institutional data show that institutions have made progress in improving student advising, diversifying instructional strategies and opportunities for students, and accelerating student progress through the curriculum by targeting student needs within intensive programs.

In 2012, based on the direction of the Texas Legislature and the input of numerous stakeholders, the THECB established the following vision statement for developmental education:

*By fall 2017, Texas will significantly improve the success of underprepared students by addressing their individualized needs through reliable diagnostic assessment, comprehensive support services and non-traditional interventions, to include modular, mainstreaming, non-course competency-based, technologically-based, and integrated instructional models.<sup>1</sup>*

A crucial component of the developmental education reform and educational alignment efforts was the establishment of a college readiness measure based on CCRS-articulated expectations. A college readiness assessment measure that meets Texas higher education faculty expectations could be integrated into the curriculum and instruction of Texas public high schools. In 2011, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill (HB) 1244, directing the THECB to develop such an assessment and to set a single threshold for college readiness applicable at all Texas public institutions of higher education, providing coordinated standards across institutions of higher education for entry into college-level courses.

After passage of HB 1244, the THECB worked quickly to begin the process of developing a new TSI assessment aligned with the CCRS, working in collaboration and consultation with Texas higher education faculty and public school teachers. Content development and field testing started in summer 2012. In April 2013 the THECB adopted the new assessment and its thresholds for performance.

Replacing the previously approved college readiness assessments, the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA) was launched in fall 2013. The TSIA classifies student performance into three different skill levels: college ready, developmental education and adult basic education. In addition, the assessment includes a diagnostic component that helps clarify the student's specific strengths and weaknesses, enabling institutions to accelerate students through appropriate remediation options designed to effectively help them meet their academic and workforce goals.

Testing instruments previously approved for TSI purposes (i.e., ACCUPLACER, THEA, Compass, Asset) were designed to classify students as "college ready" or "not college ready." They did not, however, provide meaningful information to educators by specifying areas of weakness to be targeted by remediation efforts or define the true scope of needed remediation. The result was that higher education institutions served all underprepared students, regardless of their level of preparation, through a rather blunt instrument for placement and with a series of courses and interventions defined by developmental education practices, structures and funding mechanisms. This last point regarding the operations of remediation in higher education is important, given that the TSIA provides new information on the nature and degree of student remediation needs. The TSIA shows that not all students who are "not college ready" would be appropriately placed in developmental education, which is designed to remediate students with knowledge and skills at the secondary school level. Students testing below secondary school levels (and thus classified through the assessment as Adult Basic Education)

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<sup>1</sup> See "2012-2017 Statewide Developmental Education Plan" at [www.thecb.state.tx.us/tsi](http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/tsi)

demonstrate knowledge and skills significantly below those required for success in college-level courses and require a different degree and type of assistance.

When it approved the new TSIA and its performance thresholds in April 2013, the THECB directed staff to prepare recommendations for appropriately serving this newly identified population of students that is least prepared for postsecondary success. The resulting TSI Operational Plan was developed by the THECB in consultation with the TWC, Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC), and TEA. Once a final draft plan was developed, the THECB vetted the plan with stakeholders across the state via a series of webinars and nine regional meetings. Additionally, the plan and the presentation used to vet the plan statewide were posted to the THECB's website with an accompanying online tool to solicit comments on the recommendations outlined in the plan. Taking into consideration feedback provided from the field, staff refined the recommendations and revised the details of the plan resulting in this document.

## **Framing Questions and Critical Factors**

In responding to the THECB's directive at the April 2013 Board meeting, THECB staff, in consultation with its agency partners, considered the following questions that led to the development of the recommendations in this plan:

- 1) Which population is appropriately served by the resources available to institutions of higher education?
- 2) How should this population be served?
- 3) Which part of this population would be better served by partner organizations and agencies?

The THECB staff considered several factors to answer these questions:

1. Data prognostications provided by the College Board (the contractor responsible for developing the TSIA) prior to the TSIA launch suggested that between four and 40 percent of test-takers might be diagnosed as ABE students, presumably in need of Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) programs.
2. The TWC governed and federally-funded AEL programs designed to serve ABE students are already stretched thin, with funding sufficient to provide services to only 4.2 percent of the estimated four million Texans who either lack a high school diploma or have a limited English proficiency. The AEL programs are working in collaboration with community and technical colleges to improve the number of ABE students transitioning into higher education through programs such as Accelerate Texas (a THECB/TWC initiative), but numbers are low and resources are limited. Even with their commitment to postsecondary transition, federally-funded AEL programs prioritize services aimed at serving the population most in need—adults without a high school credential (diploma or

GED)—and thus are not a feasible alternative service provider for ABE students who have a high school diploma or its equivalent.

3. While it is unclear how many students without a high school credential are enrolled in higher education, the status of high school completion has clear implications for policy and practice. Most importantly, students who have a high school diploma or its equivalent, regardless of their skill level, are eligible for federal financial aid (e.g., Pell grants, work study, direct loans, etc.) and are able to pay for services provided by the college and more likely to demand them. Students who have not completed a high school credential are ineligible for federal financial aid. These students are, however, included in the population prioritized by federally-funded AEL programs that with adequate funding would be able to provide appropriate services at no- or low-cost to the student.
4. Job growth in Texas is estimated to increase by 26 percent by 2018, with 56 percent of these jobs requiring a postsecondary credential or occupational certificate (Carnevale and Smith, 2012). Given the need to increase the number of postsecondary credentials to meet workforce needs in the state, higher education should avoid turning away interested students if it can appropriately serve them.
5. Public community colleges have legislative mandates that explicitly direct them to provide “adult literacy and other basic skills programs for adults” [Texas Education Code, Section 130.003(e) (8)]. This directive is of particular importance because the majority of the state’s academically underprepared population is served by public community colleges. Additionally, there are programs available at some community college campuses designed to address the needs of this population. These programs are not typically found on university campuses.
6. There is no dedicated state funding stream for adult basic skills services in higher education. However, community colleges are currently serving ABE students through developmental education, certificate programs and continuing education, all of which are supported through state appropriations. Because it is unclear how many students ultimately will be identified as having skill levels below developmental education, it is difficult to ascertain the necessity of a dedicated funding stream. If a sizable portion of the entering student population is in need of ABE skills support and the community college mission remains unchanged, then a more robust funding structure becomes crucial. Dedicated funding streams could take into account progressive funding models (competency or completion models), but such funding streams would require legislative action. Limited funding options made possible within given structures could be implemented relatively easily and quickly and would have the benefit of providing some degree of services in the near term.
7. Higher education institutions have been accustomed to a “one size fits all” approach in terms of assessment and instruction. With the reform efforts underway since 2010, including the employment of non-course competency-based options (NCBOs) and other acceleration efforts, institutions of higher education have become more nuanced in their placement practices and choice of remediation methods. Given what has been learned from Accelerate Texas and other programs that have successfully addressed the needs

of lower-skilled students, there is an opportunity for higher education to better serve ABE students.

8. With previous assessment practices in place since 2003, institutions of higher education have developed an efficient system of placing all students based on cut scores. New practices in assessment, placement and instruction that include considerations for holistic factors add complexity to what was previously a rather straightforward process, requiring time and technical assistance to properly employ.
9. It is likely that there will be a large percentage of ABE students who cannot obtain any kind of postsecondary credential unless the State is willing to provide funding for a variety of support services such as tuition assistance, day care, and other needed resources. These students cannot afford the amount of time and money necessary to achieve a high school diploma or GED, much less a college-level program, without State support.

The purpose of the TSI Operational Plan is to provide recommendations based on the above considerations to Texas and public institutions of higher education for better serving ABE students. While the recommendations that follow are based on current understanding of practice in the field as well as factors that affect those practices, it must be noted that institutions of higher education have not formally identified the lowest skilled students. Therefore, it is imperative that the recommendations be closely monitored for both intended and unintended effects, with adjustments informed by both data and feasibility in practice.

The next section delineates the limits to the information available to inform the scope of the plan. Given that the recommendations put forth in this plan are thereby affected, it is recommended that the plan be appropriately reviewed and revised following the first four years of implementation (see recommendation 10).

## **Qualifying Issues and Plan Limitations**

### **Data Limitations**

There are data limitations to supporting the recommendations that follow. First, the new TSI Assessment has not undergone validity studies that determine the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretation of the test scores. Validity studies require both a reasonable sample size of test takers and course grades of assessed students; these data will not begin to be available until after fall 2014. Some initial performance data will be available sooner than fall 2014, but it cannot take the place of a formal validity study. Once the formal study is completed, the data may suggest a need to revisit the approved thresholds in the placement and diagnostic assessments. The study is expected to be completed by the College Board by March 2015.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the THECB does not have complete data on the numbers and nature of the lower-skilled student population at community colleges. As

noted above, initial estimates provided by the College Board suggested that between four and 40 percent of test takers might be diagnosed at ABE levels. Since the TSIA went operational, between seven and 17 percent of test-takers are estimated to be at ABE levels in at least one content area. These data should also be considered preliminary, because a full and typical cohort of entering students has not yet been tested. Sufficient data to inform the scope of the ABE population in higher education will not be available prior to fall 2014.

### **English as a Second Language/English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESL/ESOL)**

Often identified within the ABE student population are students not proficient in English who require varying degrees or types of ESL/ESOL or literacy instruction. While students who require ESL/ESOL in Texas may well have very low academic skill levels and require basic literacy instruction, others may be college ready but not skilled in English. The policy and curriculum considerations regarding ESL/ESOL do overlap in certain cases with those needing ABE remediation but they are also distinct.

Through a contract with The University of Texas-Pan American, the THECB is pursuing research on ESL/ESOL practices and populations in Texas public higher education as a first step to examining this issue and ultimately developing recommendations that also will have implications for how higher education institutions serve ABE students. Policy considerations regarding ESL/ESOL as it pertains to this population will not be revised until research has been conducted and results are known.

It must also be noted that students entering higher education who have been identified through the campus intake process (advising, etc.) as having limited English proficiency may be granted a temporary waiver from TSIA testing. This ESL/ESOL waiver allows the institution to test the students' English language skills on appropriate diagnostics for this purpose and enroll the students in up to 15 credit hours of developmental education ESL/ESOL coursework. The purpose is to improve these students' English skill levels and increase the likelihood of the students meeting the college readiness standard on the TSIA.

### **Universities**

Although several regional universities have liberal admissions policies and may function as the de facto community college for their area, the TSI Operational Plan focuses solely on the role of community colleges, because community colleges have the highest percentage (and number) of students testing at or below developmental education levels. However, the THECB recognizes that ABE students may be in need of remediation at regional universities. The best course of action for universities with ABE students is to:

- 1) Refer students to community colleges that explicitly serve ABE students;
- 2) Provide services and curriculum options for ABE students similar to those found at and recommended for community colleges; or

3) Refer students to Adult Education and Literacy or other postsecondary transition programs, both internal and external to higher education.

Given the mission of universities, resource limitations, the distinguishing markers of university-going populations (i.e., high school complete) and the likely low numbers of individuals making up this subgroup, it is expected that universities would find the first option to be the most feasible and appropriate.

Finally, and as noted above, data are not clear on the numbers, nature and location of ABE students in higher education. This is especially relevant with regard to planning for university preparedness for these students. The expectation is that universities will not have significant numbers of ABE students given their admissions policies. As TSI testing that includes the ABE diagnostic assessment continues over the next academic year, data may reveal that a TSI Operational Plan specific to universities also may be needed.

## **TSI Operational Plan Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1: Phase-in the implementation of the TSI Operational Plan between fall 2014 and fall 2015.**

**Phase I, starting fall 2014**, the THECB will identify and select qualified colleges that will implement various initiatives that serve students assessing at the ABE basic skill levels. These colleges will also inform statewide ongoing professional development efforts on all aspects of their initiatives, providing guidance as other institutions determine which initiatives best address the needs of their students and determine how to implement the plan on their own campuses. During Phase I, institutions are expected to continue to serve ABE students using available course/intervention structures and funding options.

**Phase II, starting fall 2015**, all institutions will be required to implement at least one initiative addressing the academic and workforce needs of their students assessing at the ABE basic skill levels. The specially identified colleges from Phase I will continue their mentor role in Phase II. Professional development and training opportunities will continue during this phase.

### Rationale

Four reasons govern this recommendation.

- 1) Validated data are required before the THECB and institutions of higher education can make reasonable data-based decisions regarding placements and interventions; these data will not be available until late spring 2014. Institutions of higher education were required by statute to implement the new Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA) beginning on the first class day of fall 2013. Ninety percent of the students taking a college readiness assessment for fall 2013 took one of four previously approved TSI assessments (ACCUPLACER, THEA, Compass, Asset). The

sample size needed to conduct various analyses such as validation studies will not be representative until a full fall semester of students has been tested on the TSIA, fall 2014.

- 2) The professional development needs of faculty, staff and administrators for serving ABE students is extensive. In the previous assessment process, placement decisions were simple and efficient, based on a single cut-score that relegated students into courses that comprised a pre-set number of learning outcomes that all students addressed, regardless of the knowledge and skills they entered with. New reforms in this system focusing on effectiveness as well as efficiency now require a holistic protocol that includes a number of factors that consider individual academic strengths and weaknesses as demonstrated through the diagnostic component of the new TSIA. Placement recommendations are more complex and therefore better address the needs of students. In addition, changing the system of requiring multiple, stand-alone courses requires extensive professional development and training in best practices in curriculum and acceleration models. Reform efforts undertaken since 2010 in developmental education and adult education transition programs may serve as a foundation to addressing the needs of this population.
- 3) Not requiring full implementation until fall 2015 would allow for any changes in the area of funding to be in effect and available for institutions. Since federal financial aid cannot be used by students to fund courses/interventions below the high school level, the THECB and institutions will be looking to study and propose funding options to the Texas Legislature that will support institutions serving ABE students.
- 4) Given the complexities of tri-agency (THECB, TWC, TEA) collaboration necessary to align and implement a coherent and feasible statewide action plan, feedback provided by stakeholders was overwhelming in its recommendation to extend implementation an additional year to support effective and efficient institutional changes.

**Recommendation 2: Refer students who do not have a high school diploma (or its equivalent) to GED or other high school completion programs.** Institutions shall not use the TSI Assessment to test students without a high school diploma or its equivalent. Rather, institutions will advise and refer these students to GED programs or other high school completion programs, both internal and external to the institution, including community or school-based dropout recovery programs for students under the age of 26. This recommendation does not pertain to high school students pursuing college credit through dual credit or dual enrollment.

#### Rationale

Given the open admissions policies at many public two-year institutions, community colleges serve students who are not high school complete. These students may be academically eligible to enter credit-bearing courses. They may also enter through workforce training programs or through developmental education. Prior to 2011, the federal "ability to benefit" (AtB) policy allowed colleges to admit academically qualified

students who did not have a secondary credential. After successfully completing six college credit hours, these students were eligible to receive federal financial aid (PELL grants). In 2011, changes in PELL eligibility eliminated the AtB policy; as a result, students entering colleges without a secondary credential have only the option to self-pay for services received. Students without a high school credential are eligible to receive instructional services at no cost through Adult Education and Literacy programs (*Workforce Investment Act, Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act*). However, any referrals would also have to consider program capacity and other student qualifications and requirements.

**Recommendation 3: Define key terms.** The THECB will define key terms. Developmental Education includes courses/interventions that address students who are assessed by the Developmental Education Diagnostic or who are assessed at Levels 5-6 on the TSIA ABE Diagnostic. Basic Academic Skills Education (BASE) is the newly developed non-course competency-based options (NCBOs) that address students with a high school diploma who assess within Levels 3-4 on the TSIA ABE Diagnostic.

#### Rationale

House Bill 3468 of the 81st Texas Legislature directed the THECB to align adult education and college readiness standards and assessments to better identify and place incoming college students in courses and interventions that best meet their academic skill levels. The TSI Assessment was designed to align developmental education and adult basic education skill levels using the National Reporting Standards (NRS) and the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards. The term "BASE" is used here to distinguish interventions addressing Levels 3-4, as determined by the diagnostic results of the TSIA, from interventions addressing developmental education/adult secondary skill levels (Levels 5-6).

**Recommendation 4: Develop and identify BASE NCBOs.** Faculty content experts will identify and develop non-course competency-based options (NCBOs) for inclusion in the *Lower-Division Academic Course Guide Manual (ACGM)*. These options will be designed to address the needs of students assessing at Levels 3-4. These particular NCBOs would be labeled "BASE (Basic Academic Skills Education) NCBOs" to distinguish them from NCBOs currently in use by higher education for developmental education interventions.

#### Rationale

There is no current state funding allocated to higher education for interventions to remediate students below developmental education levels. This recommendation—the inclusion in the Lower Division ACGM of NCBOs directed to remediate students at ABE skill Levels 3-4—provides for contact hour funding to the colleges. While this would not cover the entire cost of providing services, it would hold the costs of interventions for institutions to a minimal level. Unfortunately, hours used to remediate below the

Developmental Education skill Level 5 cannot be counted toward federal financial aid eligibility requirements. So, while students who are high school complete are eligible to receive federal financial aid (e.g. Pell), only the college-level and developmental education coursework they are enrolled in would be counted for federal financial aid allocations; the NCBOs for levels below Developmental Education skill Level 5 would not.

It is likely that there will be a large percentage of ABE students who cannot obtain any kind of postsecondary credential unless the State is willing to provide funding for a variety of support services such as tuition assistance, day care, and other needed resources. These students cannot afford the amount of time and money necessary to achieve a high school diploma or GED, much less a college-level program, without State support. These students would benefit from being placed in BASE NCBOs so that they may acquire skills at an accelerated pace in order to enter the workforce as quickly as possible and earn a living wage. While the community college cannot address the needs of every student, Texas Education Code, Section 130.30 permits and encourages colleges to provide services to lower-skilled students regardless of their prior educational experiences. To properly serve them, however, the instructional strategies utilized to support students who assess below ninth grade skill levels in reading, writing or mathematics should be academically intensive and contextualized to specific academic or career pathways, so that the coursework is not merely an extension of lower-level developmental education. The implications of students not being eligible for financial aid will need to be considered as part of any funding recommendations that might be made in the future. NCBOs currently in practice that would likely serve this population of students should also be identified. Examples include three-week intensive ABE "boot camps," one- to three-hour weekly tutorials provided concurrently with Workforce Education Course Manual (WECM) or ACGM courses, and support for academic skills delivered within existing contextualized courses.

**Recommendation 5: Advise students to consider options such as higher level course(s)/intervention(s) with accelerated interventions based on their demonstrated areas of strength in each content area of the TSIA.** Institutions will advise students assessed at skill levels that vary across content areas (reading, writing and mathematics) to consider options supporting their strengths and be placed in higher level course(s)/intervention(s) with appropriate, accelerated interventions to ensure academic progress and success in all content areas.

#### Rationale

Students who enroll in community colleges test into a variety of skill levels. Under the current TSI Statute (Texas Education Code, Section 51.3062), institutions are required to work with students to develop college/career readiness academic plans that may include mainstreaming the student in freshmen-level coursework while providing academic interventions to support academic deficiencies. Within this statute, it is the current practice that students are remediated based on their performance in a single

subject area. Therefore, this practice should continue for those students who may test at the BASE level (Levels 3-4) in a single subject area.

**Recommendation 6: Advise and refer students assessed in Levels 1-2 in all three content areas.** Institutions will refer students who are assessed at Levels 1-2 in all three subject areas of the TSIA ABE Diagnostic to appropriate options, including continuing education on campus or an appropriate agency/organization serving this population (e.g., TWC, Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, community-based organizations).

#### Rationale

Students functioning at Levels 1-2, or roughly at first-third grades, in all three skill areas (writing, reading and mathematics) require more intrusive holistic advising that may reveal English language proficiency issues that the TSI Assessment is not designed to test. Referral to the campus ESL program would likely benefit such students. Other students may be advised to enroll in vocational education/vocational rehabilitation programs on campus or in partnership with employers or social service agencies located on campus or in the community.

**Recommendation 7: Develop a statewide referral system.** In collaboration with partnering agencies, the THECB will review and build on existing resources to establish a statewide online resource and referral system for use by institutions of higher education, adult education providers and other appropriate organizations to optimize the services provided to students assessed in Levels 1-2 in all three subject areas of the TSI ABE Diagnostic.

#### Rationale

Texas faces serious challenges in developing the human capital of its lower-skilled citizens. Currently, weak partnerships exist between community/faith-based adult education programs and higher education to promote the referral of students between the two systems. Faculty and staff in higher education are unaware of the services available in adult education programs and vice versa. This system will increase the capacity of public schools, colleges, workforce solution centers and employers to better serve the lower-skilled population.

**Recommendation 8: Recommend that the Texas Legislature increase funding for ABE interventions.** The THECB, partnering agencies and other stakeholders will recommend that the Texas Legislature increase funding options that support institutions that serving ABE students.

#### Rationale

Extending the planning period to fall 2015 would allow for changes in the area of funding to be in effect and available for use by institutions of higher education. Additionally, federal financial aid policy prohibits the use of Pell grants and federal loans to be used for courses/interventions that address skill levels *below* high school. The

THECB proposes that students testing at Levels 3-4 be served through BASE NCBOs specially designed to address this population of students. A concurrent model may allow for students to use their financial aid to partially fund their interventions; however, these funds still may not be adequate. One potential funding option is for those students taking BASE NCBOs who are not eligible for federal financial aid, to be provided tuition waivers while reimbursing institutions of higher education through the funding formulas in order to encourage institutions to provide these options. Another potential funding option is to increase funding for Accelerate Texas which integrates basic skills with career and technical pathways to help adult students transition from AEL programs to higher education and acquire skills and certificates in high-demand occupations.

**Recommendation 9: Provide professional development for faculty to more effectively serve ABE students.** Beginning in the summer 2014, the THECB will develop and implement a comprehensive multi-agency professional development program with focus on providing the necessary tools and resources to serve ABE students.

#### Rationale

Many institutions of higher education currently administer grants that fund federal programs serving lower-skilled students. These programs must follow federal and TWC (formerly overseen by TEA) policies, rules and guidelines that govern requirements such as student qualifications, instructional models and curriculum. There are significant differences between federal and state parameters that affect how institutions can serve students assessed at the ABE basic skill levels. Thus, the THECB must provide a comprehensive professional development/training program that addresses the *differences* among the various programs, including student eligibility/skill levels and instructional models/curricula, so institutions can serve this population directly or through informed referrals to best meet academic and workforce needs. In addition, institutions without federally-funded programs have not formally identified and addressed students testing below high school levels (first-eighth grades) any differently than those testing within the high school level (ninth-12<sup>th</sup> grades), except to require the former group to complete as many as five or six levels of developmental education coursework, resulting in a less than five percent completion rate. To support institutional change, the THECB must provide professional development that addresses best practices in curriculum and instructional models designed to support academic and workforce goals for this population of students.

**Recommendation 10: Review and revise the TSI Operational Plan.** Through summer 2018, the THECB will analyze data and institutional utilization of BASE NCBOs and other interventions serving students assessed below TSIA Level 5. If data show that targeted interventions are not being utilized significantly by institutions of higher education or that they are of limited effectiveness at such a scale, suggesting that higher education institutions do not have the capacity (e.g., financial and labor resources, operational structures) to serve the

lowest academically-skilled population, the THECB will utilize stakeholder input to appropriately review and revise the recommendations of the TSI Operational Plan.

### Rationale

Based on feedback received throughout the stakeholder vetting period, concern was voiced that students would not enroll in BASE NCBOs if those interventions could not count toward the student's federal financial aid eligibility. In the absence of any other intervention subsidies such as waived tuition, this option may not be viable for students. This option also depends on institutional mission and commitment toward serving lower-skilled students and may divert internal resources away from interventions for better prepared students enrolled in developmental education coursework. The THECB will analyze both enrollment and completion data to determine if the plan is adequately addressing its intended purpose.

## **Agency Collaboration**

The development of the TSI Operational Plan involved months of internal and external planning and collaboration. Representatives from TWC, TWIC and TEA participated in biweekly discussions with the THECB staff during the formulation of the plan to align efforts and ensure optimal use of resources and eliminate unnecessary duplication of services, especially given the limited funding dedicated to ABE. THECB staff also held nine regional meetings in Amarillo, Tyler, Midland, Dallas, Houston, McAllen, El Paso, San Antonio and Killeen with more than 1,000 stakeholders participating. During January and February 2014, an online survey was available for stakeholders to contribute feedback regarding the plan's recommendations as well as general comments related to developmental education reform efforts. The THECB staff received 38 comments through the survey. The final version of the recommendations along with responses to the feedback was provided during two follow-up webinars in early April. Recordings of these events and all supporting documents are available on the THECB website at <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/tsi>.

## **Conclusion**

Texas has taken on the considerable challenge of addressing reform efforts that promote the transition of adult basic education students into and through postsecondary training and education, with an emphasis on programs that support academic and workforce success. Similarly, Texas higher education has committed itself to better and more efficiently remediate academically underprepared students through a developmental education system that is more nuanced in its delivery of curriculum and instruction. During the next few years, both the Texas postsecondary system and TWC's Adult Education and Literacy system will undergo significant changes. Among the changes will be the validation of the Texas Success Initiative Assessment, procurement of new Adult Education and Literacy service providers, development of a new statewide professional development system, and the implementation of more varied non-course-based remediation services in higher education. Throughout the implementation of these changes and in collaboration with TEA, TWC and TWIC, the THECB will

work to identify and coordinate systems to support the transition and success of underprepared students in postsecondary institutions.