



## Getting Texans To and Through College and the Importance of House Bill 18

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### What We Studied

In 2015, the Texas legislature passed House Bill 18 to bolster the college and career advising available to students in middle and high schools across the state. The Bill calls for multi-agency efforts to help counselors and other school personnel prepare students for postsecondary enrollment and entry into the workforce.

Housed at the University of Texas at Austin, Texas OnCourse is responsible for identifying the needs of Texas students and developing technologically advanced mechanisms for communicating information to advisers, students, and families.

Resources such as training modules and vast support networks are poised to make an impact on the postsecondary paths of young Texans. This report presents findings from research that was conducted as a part of the Texas OnCourse initiative. Specifically, this research explored how high school students' academic coursework and educational expectations influenced postsecondary educational outcomes.

### How We Analyzed the Data

Attending college is a major transition that influences paths and opportunities across the rest of the life course, ultimately shaping individuals' health and well-being<sup>1</sup>. Past research has identified that an individual's expectation for how far he or she will go in school is associated with actual educational attainment<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, there is strong evidence that shows that academic coursework in high school is associated with entry into and persistence through college<sup>3</sup>. Understanding whether these national trends hold true for Texans in particular is an important goal of the OnCourse initiative. As such, this brief communicates the findings from a longitudinal study of young Texans that utilized data from the P- 20/workforce data repository.

Participants were 118,299 students who graduated high school in the state of Texas in the spring of 2006 and enrolled in a postsecondary program by the fall of 2007. The research questions examined whether students' expectations of earning a bachelor's degree and their high school course history (dual credit and history of course failure) were associated with the type of college they attended and whether or not they completed their degree in a timely manner.

### What We Discovered

High school coursework is key for timely college completion:

- Students who enroll in at least one dual credit course (for which they receive both high school and college credit) are 87% more likely to complete their postsecondary degree in a timely manner.

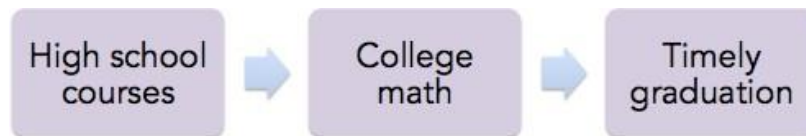
- Students who fail at least one course in high school are 66% less likely to complete their postsecondary degree in a timely manner.

Educational expectations are accurate predictors of actual attainment Students who expect they will obtain a bachelor’s degree or higher are more likely to:

- Attend four-year colleges over two-year colleges
- Attend private four-year colleges over public four-year colleges
- Complete their postsecondary degree in a timely manner

Readiness for college- level math helps explain college graduation rates

- High school coursework and educational expectations are predictive of remedial math coursework, which is, in turn, predictive of timely college completion.



### Policy Recommendations

House Bill 18 provides support for resources that can promote positive postsecondary pathways for young Texans. The findings from this research suggest three meaningful implications for academic and college advising. First, students should be informed about dual credit coursework options, and encouraged to participate in them. Second, teachers, counselors, and other school personnel should clearly communicate the importance of course grades and math competency early on in high school.

Finally, the consistent positive impact that educational expectations have on ultimate attainment illustrates the importance of helping youth realize their academic potential. As such, it may be particularly beneficial to devote resources to helping students visualize themselves in a college environment. Initiatives such as Texas OnCourse can emphasize development in these areas to potentially affect positive change in getting Texans to and through postsecondary education.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> McMahon (2009). *Higher learning, greater good: The private and social benefits of higher education*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, M. K. & Reynolds, J. R. (2013). Educational expectation trajectories and attainment in the transition to adulthood. *Social Science Research*, 42(3), 818-835.

<sup>3</sup> Jackson, J., & Kurlaender M. (2014). College readiness and college completion at broad access four-year institutions. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58(8), 947-971.

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The University of Texas at Austin ERC is a research center and P-20/Workforce Repository site which provides access to longitudinal, student-level data for scientific inquiry and policymaking purposes. Since its inception in 2008, the Texas ERC’s goal is to bridge the gap between theory and policy by providing a cooperative research environment for study by both scholars and policy makers. As part of its mission, the ERC works with researchers, practitioners, state and federal agencies, and other policymakers to help inform upon critical issues relating to education today.

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