



The *Texas* eLearning Initiative - 2005

INTRODUCTION: THE TEXAS E-LEARNING INITIATIVE

With the 20th Century now behind us, the State of Texas must create a public educational system to prepare its students to function and compete in the 21st Century – second to none.

Central to such a vision: All students must have the opportunity to achieve Texas' learning standards. Today's students live (and will live out their lives) in a digital age. They must master and learn to apply appropriate tools with which to handle the exponentially growing body of general and specific knowledge in the world. Information and communication technologies are needed for students to learn and be more productive, beginning in the early grades and continuing through high school graduation. Teachers who are skilled in the integration of these 21st Century teaching and learning environments will be needed to ensure student success.

Texas must aggressively move to develop an educational and finance model to support eLearning resources that provide a depth and breadth of quality learning resources for the complete instructional process for all students. Policies need to be rewritten that address learning in the 21st Century, including "seat time" requirements.

We believe that the Texas eLearning Initiative (TeLI) addresses all the pillars of an effective program: Technology, TEKS-aligned digital content and instructional resources, electronic assessment, data management, and analysis. Pivotal to the Initiative's success will be education, training, and professional development for teachers. Finally, every student and teacher in the State of Texas must have access to these tools of the 21st Century to fulfill this vision.

We believe that Texas must embrace a plan that supports wireless, mobile electronic computing for every student and teacher in school districts and state charter schools. By so doing, Texas will be perfectly positioned to provide all appropriate curriculum content in digital format.

Other states (and many school districts in Texas) are presently and successfully implementing this vision with positive results. For continued economic growth and improved employment opportunities (not to mention successful preparation for collegiate, graduate and professional studies) Texas simply cannot afford to fall behind in providing these 21st Century learning tools and environments to its children and youth.

THE STARTING POINT AND TIMELINE

The Texas Education Agency's (TEA) online resource tool, the "Texas School Technology and Readiness Chart" (STAR Chart), was developed around the key areas of the State's Long Range Plan for Technology. Using this instrument, the State tracks the progress of schools toward being prepared to implement the Texas eLearning Initiative.

Districts already are making palpable progress. Today, 30% of Texas' campuses are "READY" to implement such learning initiatives.

Given that 30% of Texas' campuses are "READY," the State is now in a fine position to aggressively move forward on Phase I of the Texas eLearning Initiative. Accordingly, we should set ambitious yet realistic goals for grades 6-12 by 2011.

Beginning in FY 2006 and ending in FY 2012, Texas should phase-in those middle and high schools that are ready and elect to begin implementation at a rate of at least 25% each biennium as schools become "ready". Put another way, such campuses are considered to be TeLI-ready.

Digital classrooms should include digital content for all required courses and selected elective courses; electronic assessment and tutorials; digital research and library resources; teacher and administrator professional development protocols and tools; classroom management and administrative tools; communications tools; and 1-to-1 computer access for students and teachers.

While the initial focus in many of these recommendations centers on grades 6-12, the next step is to establish TeLI for grades K-5 by 2015.

SPECIFIC LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

RESTRUCTURE THE TECHNOLOGY ALLOTMENT

Since the early 1990's, the \$30 per student Technology Allotment has been available to provide for instructional technology needs in our Public and Charter Schools. Specifically, school districts can use the allotment to pay for:

- Electronic instructional materials or technological equipment that contributes to student learning and
- Training educational personnel directly involved in student learning in the appropriate use of electronic instructional materials and providing for access to technological equipment for instructional use.

Due to the changes in electronic resources and technologies currently available (as well as certain to occur advances), it is imperative that the Legislature clarify how and for what the allotment can be used. For example, the allotment uses should clearly include (but not be limited to) the following: Wireless electronic mobile computing devices; productivity software (including writing, calculation, presentation and communication tools); eLearning software aligned to the TEKS; library and other research tools; online assessment tools; eLearning tools to improve communications between and among students, teachers, administrators, parents and the community; teacher professional development to integrate these tools and solutions; and other infrastructure and technologies needed to support and enhance the previous uses.

In addition, the allotment should be increased for those schools that show readiness. Specifically, the annual allocation per student should remain a minimum of \$30 for students in all districts and should increase to \$300 per student in grades 6-12 on all TeLI-ready campuses.

Allocation of this expanded allotment should be directly tied to readiness to implement a technology-immersed learning environment in middle and high schools. Those schools that are "ready" should be allotted \$300 per student per year in state funds for students in grades 6-12, which would be matched with \$50 per pupil per year in local funds. (Other schools would continue to draw down the \$30 per student technology allotment.) This allotment would be structured to help cover costs of leased or purchased wireless electronic mobile computing devices; electronic instructional and research resources; productivity software; electronic assessment solutions and support and professional development for students and teachers.

Having a set amount of annual, reoccurring funding will help establish and sustain on-going support and replacement cycles. It also helps provide for electronic digital instructional resources, electronic formative assessment of students, and ongoing professional development for teachers, thereby assuring maximum achievement of the eLearning Initiative.

Action: Statutory change to Chapter 32 to restructure the technology allotment

State Cost (annually): \$165 million per year increase for the 2006-07 biennium; with cost increments in each subsequent biennium, up to \$660 million per year by 2011 (adding \$165 million each biennium to add an additional 25% of the 6-12 schools each biennium)

CREATE A FREE STANDING "GROUP FOR TECHNOLOGY and IMPLEMENTATION"

For the TeLI to be productive and effective, **reasonable funding levels must be restored to the Texas Education Agency (TEA)** to accomplish the implementation.

To this end and others, we strongly recommend that a **free-standing Group for Technology and Implementation (Group) be created in statute and placed at the TEA** to oversee the implementation of the TeLI. This small Group should be headed by an individual proficient in general technology development and application as well as being firmly grounded in the world of public education. This individual should report to the Commissioner and be responsible for all personnel, operations, management and accountability for this free-standing "Group".

This Group – under rubrics the Legislature will establish – would have complete responsibility and accountability for the assessment of available technology and its implementation, including teacher technology training, for the state.

We further recommend that the **Legislature, via statute, create a second small group to serve as an Advisory Committee to the Group.** This Advisory Committee should be composed of competent lay people to help the Group stay abreast of cutting-edge technology in business, industry, and the learned professions. The Commissioner, after consulting with legislative leadership and chairs of legislative committees with oversight of TEA, should appoint the Committee.

As part of the duties of the Group and Advisory Committee, all the "stakeholders" in the state should be made aware of not only the TeLI's goals, but the compelling strategies to reach those

goals. A wide variety of communication avenues must be employed to ensure all "stakeholders" are well informed of the goals and objectives, the tools and resources available and needed as well as "stakeholder" roles and responsibilities. These avenues include, but are not limited to: Press releases, websites, electronic distribution lists, presentations, videoconferences, written materials and videos.

Action: Statutory change to Chapter 32 to create a free-standing group at TEA with advisory committee

State Cost (annually): \$750,000 per year to restore funds to TEA to the Group for Technology & Implementation

SUPPORT ELECTRONIC ASSESSMENT

Texas has heavily invested in summative assessment as a means to look at student learning and as a critical component of the state accountability system. Additionally, steps have been taken in recent years to better utilize formative, diagnostic assessment tools such as the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) and Texas Math Diagnostic System (TMDS). Greater use of electronic assessment tools will result in a better understanding of individual student strengths and weaknesses and improved instructional planning and delivery. The Legislature must support efforts to move toward and expand electronic summative and formative assessment.

The Texas Legislature should direct TEA to take all necessary steps to shift the state assessment program from its current administration to an on-line administration while concurrently assuring that privacy and security concerns are identified and addressed. The current RFP for an assessment contractor contains language that encourages such action and the Legislature should encourage TEA to pursue this direction.

Additionally, the state should set aside \$20 million for all districts and state charter schools to provide on-going, electronic, interactive formative, diagnostic assessment and prescriptive instructional programs for their students. The state must establish specifications so that data are handled according to legal privacy requirements and appropriate data are easily exchanged among schools and the state. Follow-up costs will be built into the \$300 expanded technology allotment.

Action: Statutory change to effect greater use of electronic assessment tools.

State Cost (one time): \$20 million for formative, diagnostic assessments

State Cost (annually): Amount to cover annual subscription-based electronic assessment costs is included in the expanded technology allotment amount.

FUND TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS AND OTHER INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS ADOPTION SO THAT THESE MATERIALS WILL BE IN CLASSROOMS IN TIME FOR THE 2005-06 SCHOOL YEAR

Subscription-based instructional materials for the Technology Applications curriculum were called for in Proclamation 2001 and adopted by the State Board of Education in November 2003. These materials provide electronic instructional materials for every classroom K-8 and the eight Technology Applications high school courses. The Technology Applications materials will provide all students and teachers at the K-8 level with the resources needed to gain digital technology knowledge and skills while improving learning in English language arts/reading, mathematics, science and social studies.

These instructional materials have been through the state review and approval process, and districts have been encouraged to proceed with their local selection process. Appropriating the funding necessary to complete the current TEKS-based cycle established by the State Board of Education (materials called for in Proclamation 2001 and 2002) would allow any new materials process to begin unencumbered by prior commitment.

Action: Full funding of TEA's Legislative Appropriation Request

Note: For more information, see Addendum 2.

SUPPORT ELECTRONIC, DIGITAL INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Texas' constitutionally dedicated state textbook fund provides instructional materials for every student in a school district or state charter school on a regular cycle at no cost to the local schools or students. As discussed in greater length in Addendum 2, instructional materials are adopted and funded in all formats, not just traditional printed textbooks. With each passing year, more submissions for the state review process have been in electronic and web-based formats for school district selection.

Not all of the subjects for which there are TEKS-based materials, however, have been offered in an electronic format. As Texas public schools transition into meeting the TeLI goals, schools should have access to electronic instructional materials that cover the state's TEKS curriculum and prepare students to pass the TAKS tests. The Legislature should direct the State Board of Education and the Texas Education Agency to review the courses and subjects for which no electronic textbooks are currently available on the state adoption.

Based on that review, the State Board of Education should revise its adoption and funding cycle and give priority in its cycles to those major core subject areas for which no electronic instructional materials are on the state adoption list. The Legislature should also give publishers an option to offer electronic instructional materials on a subscription-based funding method, as they are doing now in Technology Applications. That would give school districts the flexibility – and the materials – for a successful transition into an electronic era.

The new **Group for Technology and Implementation** should create procedures that accelerate the development and implementation of electronic instructional materials aligned with the TEKS so that schools in the first phases of implementation of the restructured technology allotment will have such resources readily available. These materials would be reviewed for alignment with the TEKS and be immediately available to districts upon their successful review.

In addition, the Texas Education Agency should encourage alignment of supplemental electronic educational resources to the state's curriculum. The broad array of supplemental materials, prescriptive and intervention materials, and other technology-based resources for increasing student learning offer exciting possibilities in their promise to leverage technology to improve student performance and learning. With a greatly enhanced technology allotment and clarification on how the allotment can be used (see "Restructure the Technology Allotment"), school districts will be able to choose these additional electronic resources and solutions they need for their diverse populations of students.

Action: Statutory change to effect greater use of eLearning instructional materials.

State Cost (one time): \$20 million to accelerate the availability of eLearning materials.

State Cost (annually): Amount to cover annual subscription-based ~~on-line~~ **eLearning** instructional materials costs is included in the expanded technology allotment amount.

REVISE THE REFERENCES IN TEXAS EDUCATION CODE CHAPTER 31

The Texas Legislature should change the title of Texas Education Code Chapter 31 from "Textbooks" to "Instructional Materials." The definitions found in Section 31.002, including "electronic textbooks" being a "textbook" – are consistent with the vision expressed in this document. To further clarify intent, **all references to "textbooks" in Chapter 31 should be edited to read "instructional materials"** consistent with the definitions in Section 31.002.

Action: Statutory change to replace the term "textbook" with "instructional material"

State Cost: \$0

REVISE STATE GRANT AND INITIATIVE PROGRAMS TO ENSURE TECHNOLOGY INCENTIVES

The State provides additional financial support to school districts and state charter schools through various grants and incentives such as "The High School Completion and Success Grant", "The Optional Extended Year Program", and "The Reading Initiative".

The Legislature should direct the TEA to undertake a review of these programs (and appropriate others) so as to ensure that all eligible school districts and charter schools are informed of and encouraged to use the funds so as to promote greater use of appropriate educational technology. Examples include (but are not limited to) greater use of electronic diagnostic

assessment tools, individual technology devices for students and teachers (such as laptops for students or PDA's for teachers and administrators for classroom data collection), and electronic resources for classrooms and libraries that would be accessible on a 24/7 basis for students.

Action: Direct TEA to review grants and programs to ensure encouragement of use of funds for appropriate educational technology

State Cost: \$0

THE REALITY AS WE GO FORWARD

By any measure, the State of Texas' technology educational efforts for its children have slipped woefully behind contemporary society. Put another way: Business, Industry and the Learned Professions function at a technology level substantially above what is available for the education of our children and support of the teaching profession. To focus the matter even more acutely, other states and many school districts are already implementing the very vision described earlier.

If we are to bring Texas to the forefront of technology and pedagogical leadership in K-12 Public Education, we must now take **BOLD** steps to ensure that resources and facilities are in place to allow all campuses to reach first a fundamental level of acquisition of knowledge and function and improved student results. These steps must consider how technologies can be leveraged in the areas of:

- Web based content and Instructional Delivery
- Online Assessment
- Professional Development (pre-service, in-service and certification)
- Administration and support (planning, classroom and records management)
- Communication (between and among teachers, students, parents, administrators, community)
- Infrastructure needs (computers and devices, networks, telecommunications, support)

AND IN CONCLUSION...

Texas has a rightfully deserved reputation for excellence in many diverse fields ranging from farming, ranching, oil & gas exploration and production to space exploration, higher education, medicine, civil engineering (as embodied in its magnificent highway system) and many, many more.

The principal underpinning to all this is the vision of Mr. Jefferson who foresaw the importance of an educated electorate to the democratic experiment in government. Later, one of the founders of Texas, Mirabeau B. Lamar remarked, "The cultivated (we would say educated) mind is the guardian genius of Democracy."

It is now our task, as leaders in educational technology in the 21st Century, to seize the moment and advance this most critical cause of our children's present and future. How we meet this opportunity

and challenge will in large and no uncertain measure(s) determine how Texas will or will not continue in its enviable position of leadership in our nation and the world.

The path will be steep, long and expensive. As we set out, it will be well to remember Sam Houston's clear and simple advice: "Do right and trust (the) consequences."

We sincerely solicit your further input and response.

This Update Respectfully Submitted by the Steering Committee:

David D. Anderson

Tom Burnett

Jon H. Fleming

January 31, 2005

NOTE: This document is an updated version that is the platform for suggestions submitted, at his request, to Chairman Grusendorf in January 2005. This document reflects refinements developed through a broader and inclusive committee process during 2004-05. Although Texas Education Agency staff were involved and have been supportive to the process, please note that this is not a document originated by or certified in any way by the TEA nor does it bear the *imprimatur* of same.

ADDENDUM 1: BEGINNINGS AND THE CHARGE

In November 2003, Representative Kent Grusendorf, Chair of the House Committee on Public Education, called together a small group to discuss several seminal issues in Public Education. Specifically, the Chairman's concern with the present and future status of technology in education became the essence of the meeting, resulting in the creation of **The Texas eLearning Initiative** (TeLI). Chairman Grusendorf appointed a Steering Committee composed of David Anderson, Susan Barnes, Tom Burnett and Jon Fleming.

A first "large" public meeting was held in December 2003, and the charge to our group was laid out. Specifically, **TeLI** was formed to investigate the existing and "in-development" products, processes, services, and technologies that can improve public school effectiveness and efficiencies that result in improved student learning, including those related to:

- The planning and delivery of curriculum, instruction and extended enrichment materials;
- Assessment, including diagnostic tools, ongoing formative assessment, and classroom-, campus-, and district-based assessment;
- Professional development for all educators;
- The management and dissemination of information, including homework and record-keeping systems;
- Communication among all interested parties, including but not necessarily limited to teacher-to-student; student-to-teacher, school-to-parents, campus-to-district, and district-to-state;
- Infrastructure necessary to integrate technology into the teaching and learning process;
- Any other topics that may be identified as significant.

All content and delivery options – existing and in development – are open for review and consideration during this process.

As a result of this process:

- Possible changes and additions to the Texas Education Code to encourage and enable these efficiencies will be identified;
- The financial resources to encourage and enable these efficiencies will be identified; and
- Other potential supports (and hindrances) that would affect the implementation of the efficiencies will be identified, including incentives to schools that embrace efforts to use effective technologies.

ADDENDUM 2: HISTORY OF “ELECTRONIC TEXTBOOKS” AND THE MOVE TOWARD GREATER USE OF ELECTRONIC INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

In 1995, the Legislature created the first-in-the-nation definition for "electronic textbooks" and made them part of the textbook adoption and funding process. Publishers responding to the State Board of Education's textbook adoption cycle have for years now been submitting choices to the market - print or online formats, or both - and school districts can select materials in the format they choose, as they are ready for it. Since fall 2001, there have been 17 courses, including science and social studies, offered in an online format in Texas.

The upcoming 2005-06 school year is a watershed year for online textbooks in Texas. At least 75 programs are being offered in 57 different courses with online access, and these programs are scheduled to go into classrooms in fall 2005. Originally, they were slated to go into classrooms in fall 2004, but due to the state's \$10 billion shortfall in the 78th Texas legislative session, materials for three subject areas, including Technology Applications and Career and Technology (the subjects with online materials), were deferred into the next biennium and delayed one year into classrooms.

Prime among these online textbooks are instructional materials for Technology Applications, which is a subject area that will accelerate e-learning in Texas. These materials provide eLearning instructional materials for every classroom in K-8 and the eight Technology Applications high school courses. The Technology Applications materials will provide all students and teachers at the K-8 level with the resources needed to gain digital technology knowledge and skills, while improving learning in English language arts/reading, mathematics, science, and social studies. It is also significant in that, for the first time, the State Board of Education requested (and adopted in November 2003) subscription-based instructional materials for a course, meaning the materials are purchased on a yearly basis rather than in the first year.

These instructional materials have been through the state review and approval process, and districts have already selected them or are selecting them now. Funding Technology Applications materials, along with the six other subject areas that also are scheduled to go into classrooms in 2005-06, will ensure students have instructional materials that meet the state-approved curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, in each of these required subjects. Paying for this biennium's (and last biennium's) commitments would also ensure that any new materials process in the next biennium is unencumbered by prior commitments.

Star-Telegram

Texas education needs a thorough rethinking

By Kent Grusendorf and Vilma Luna

Special to the Star-Telegram

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Sometime after January, the Texas Legislature will meet in special session to tackle a major overhaul of Texas' public education system.

It's a gigantic undertaking with huge implications for schoolchildren, taxpayers and the state. Our educational resources are limited, but by using them wisely and making some bold changes, we can provide a better education and relieve the burdens of overtaxed property owners.

We have to get rid of the top-heavy, one-size-fits-all bureaucratic culture that we have today and replace it with one that allows educators to focus on kids rather than rules.

We envision a new system that centers on learning systems rather than school systems, that ties funding to educational results, that provides equity for every Texas student, and that gives teachers and administrators greater control in the classroom.

We envision the kind of system that, in the long run, will renew the desire to teach in the heart of every teacher and the desire to learn in the heart of every child -- a system that will foster educational excellence in every classroom across Texas.

We can provide property tax reductions. In fact, we believe that it's reasonable to expect that we can cut those taxes significantly -- by 50 percent to 80 percent, we hope.

We can shift the tax burden away from property owners in a way that promotes economic development and creates jobs.

We can use all of our education funding more effectively, making sure that every dollar spent is geared toward student results, primarily through learning incentives.

We can give Texas teachers a better quality of life.

We can provide the best, globally competitive educational opportunities for all students, with access to the resources and facilities necessary for an excellent education.

How can we accomplish all this?

First, the sorely needed property tax reductions can be offset by mixed revenue sources -- including restructuring the franchise tax -- all phased in over six years.

Second, we can take the state's accountability system to the next level. Classrooms, campuses and school districts must be evaluated not just on raw scores but on a value-added basis.

Testing should be interactive and online. Online testing will allow educators to test on a much broader curriculum and use testing methods beyond the standard multiple-choice test.

Interactive online testing will allow for immediate feedback to teachers, which will improve students' learning curves and help eliminate the criticism of "teaching to the test" by enabling educators to fine-tune their assessment of each child's progress and needs.

Third, we can create strong incentives for educators.

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We envision establishing an Educational Excellence Fund for enhancing the academic success of public school students. Anchored by a dedicated revenue source, money from this fund would be available to outstanding educators, or teams of educators, at the campus level -- teachers who go the extra mile to improve their students academically.

A part of this fund would be set aside for grants to find innovative ways to drive student success.

Finally, the most important component in a student's success at school is the quality of the teacher.

Every day, Texas loses many of its best teachers -- men and women whose intrinsic gift and calling is teaching, whose talents our children need desperately. Some take their genius from the classroom and into school administration for more money; others leave the profession altogether.

If we are to achieve real educational excellence in Texas, we must find a way to recruit and retain the very best teachers.

We believe that it is not unreasonable that the best of the best teachers should earn \$80,000, \$100,000 or more. Why not? The future of Texas quite literally depends on them.

We must find a way to pay teachers what they are worth and to free school districts from red tape and distractions. We must allow teachers to teach, and we must allow school administrators to manage the affairs of the district.

Realizing this vision for the future of Texas public education will require the courage to implement sweeping changes to a somewhat stagnant, rule-driven system.

We must be willing to look at alternative approaches to education finance; at revamping district, campus and classroom structures; at changing our systems of delivery and accountability; and at making sure that our teachers are among the best in the nation.

Granted, there always will be market, economic and budget realities that keep us from doing all we want to do in public school education.

Granted, the state probably will never have sufficient funds to pay every teacher at the rates indicated above. However, if we focus on quality of service rather than years of service, we can pay our best teachers much closer to what they deserve.

We can open our minds to possibilities that we've never considered before. We can allow for greater efficiency in the allocation of scarce educational resources. We can achieve greater equity for every Texas student, greater equity for Texas taxpayers, and greater equity for our best teachers.

To do so, we must have the courage to take the next steps toward educational excellence.

State Rep. Kent Grusendorf, R-Arlington, and Rep. Vilma Luna, D-Corpus Christi, are the chairman and vice chairwoman of the House Select Committee on Public School Finance.