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E³ ALLIANCE AND CENTRAL TEXAS COMMUNITY LAUNCH FIRST STRATEGIC PLAN TO IMPROVE REGION'S EDUCATION, ECONOMY

The Blueprint for Educational Change™ Identifies Four Critical Goals, Proposes Action Strategies to Improve Educational Pipeline

AUSTIN, Texas – May 29, 2008 – The E³ Alliance and Central Texas community announce the development of a first of its kind comprehensive regional strategic plan for strengthening the education pipeline called The Blueprint for Educational Change™ (The Blueprint). The Blueprint is based on two years of ground-breaking research and unprecedented dialog and outreach with well over 1000 parents, students, educators, community and business leaders and elected officials throughout the Central Texas region.

“The Blueprint offers an unparalleled opportunity to improve our education pipeline to power a world-class economy,” said Senator Kirk Watson. “Our students and our schools are showing higher outcomes than ever before, but the globally competitive economy around us is changing even faster. Our efforts to continue thriving as a region absolutely depend on having a well-educated, globally competitive employee base. The Blueprint outlines our shared goals and strategies to achieve this vital vision.”

The Blueprint is the strategic plan for Central Texas that defines critical leverage points to enable systemic alignment from early childhood to workforce prosperity. Throughout 2007, key stakeholders participated in a series of dialogues to identify the most critical issues and opportunities. Based on the voice of the community, as well as detailed research on regional outcomes and trends, E³ Alliance led the development of The Blueprint for Educational Change, which identifies four strategic goals, action strategies to achieve those goals, and a process for developing consensus on indicators and interim targets to improve performance. The Blueprint launch marks the start of regional campaign of engagement around education:

Graduates Are Made. Not Born.

Goal 1: Children Enter Kindergarten School Ready

According to Success by 6, up to 40 percent of all Central Texas children enter Kindergarten 18 months behind developmentally. Among its action steps, The Blueprint recommends defining regional school readiness standards, developing a school-ready checklist to help families, increasing the number of early childhood centers that are accredited and increasing attendance in district pre-K programs.

“The earliest years lay the foundation for educational – and life – success,” said Sam Bryant, Chair of Success by 6. “Too many students are already playing catch-up when they enter school significantly behind where they should be. We, as an entire community, can do something about this; we can take real steps that will prepare children at the earliest stage for educational and career success.”

Goal 2: Central TX Eliminate the Achievement Gap while Improving Overall Student Performance

Large gaps among socioeconomic and ethnic groups remain and are closing only at very slow rates. Hispanic and Black students are often 30 points behind the average of all students when measuring academic outcomes. English Language Learners and low-income students of all ethnicities traditionally have the lowest performance rates in Central Texas, and the region’s highest population growth is in our lowest achieving student groups. Many of those who are struggling drop out of school, and each year’s group of high school dropouts costs Central Texas a minimum of \$425 million in increased social services and lost income.

“Even with all the great things we are doing, too many students struggle in math and science, and too many of them never get their diploma.” said Dr. Jesus Chavez, Superintendent of Round Rock ISD. “For the region to succeed, all of our students need to reach their highest potential.”

To address our education achievement gaps, The Blueprint calls for aligning curriculum, especially across critical transition years, creating regional standards for English Language Learner programs, developing incentives for more experienced educators to teach in higher-needs schools and increasing the number of student supports and tutors in schools.

Goal 3: Students Graduate College-and-Career Ready and Prepared for a Lifetime of Learning

Based on Central Texas TAKS, SAT and ACT test scores, only about 43 percent of the region’s high school graduates are considered “college ready,” and about half of those who do go on to

higher education will not receive a degree or certificate. Yet 90 percent of the fastest growing jobs require some post secondary education.

“The economic implications of so many students graduating without being ready for college or a career are staggering,” said Gary Farmer, Founding Chair of Opportunity Austin. “We’re supposed to be The Human Capital. To have a world-class economy, we must have the best prepared graduates.”

To improve graduation rates and readiness, The Blueprint proposes multiple actions, including defining region-wide college and career readiness standards, expanding programs to support transitions into college, expanding the Austin Community College tax district area to increase opportunities for high school students to gain access to more affordable higher education, developing “Business Labs” where industry workers help students apply core academic skills in a business setting, promoting high-need occupations to high school and college students, and systematizing high school redesign.

Goal 4: Central Texas, as a Community, Prepares Children to Succeed

Many of the conditions that lead to student success in education occur outside of classroom walls. Socioeconomic conditions, parent education level and cultural expectations all influence student attitude and performance. Some studies have shown that more than 50 percent of a student’s performance is driven by factors outside of schools. Any effort to create systemic change must involve the entire community — business, political, social services, parents and families as well as schools.

“Graduates are made, not born, and improving the education pipeline is not the responsibility of one parent, one teacher or one school district — we all have a personal stake in aligning every available resource to sustained educational improvement,” said David Balch, president of the United Way Capital Area. “There are excellent people in our community doing excellent work when it comes to educational prosperity. With The Blueprint in place, we have the ability to concentrate our collective efforts. All it takes is corralling the right resources.”

The Blueprint proposes to identify and promote best practices that will tap into the deep reservoir of volunteer ethics that exists in Central Texas, identify best practices for collaboration

among educators, nonprofit organizations, parents and businesses, help to expand volunteer programs and recruitment efforts, and assist the region in measuring community accountability.

“The wealth of useful data we’ve collected, combined with the active engagement of so many impassioned people from the community, was crucial in developing The Blueprint. Still, that process was only a first step,” said E³ Alliance Executive Director Susan Dawson. “Over the next several months, we’ll convene Champion Teams to drive the action strategies, and work with education and community stakeholders to set targets for improvement based on the foundation of The Blueprint. We need all of the community to be part of it. Because Graduates Are Made. Not Born.”

The new blueprint can be found at: www.theblueprintforeducationalchange.org

About E³ Alliance (www.e3alliance.org): E³ Alliance is a regional collaborative dedicated to developing an objective data map to better align educational systems and practices to drive higher outcomes for students and ensure a more efficient allocation of resources to increase our competitiveness as a region. Founded in 2006 by partners the Austin Area Research Organization, The University of Texas at Austin and Austin Community College District, E³ Alliance acts as a catalyst for change, and is the P-16 Council for the Central Texas region. E³ Alliance and its member organizations led the development of The Blueprint for Educational Change™ and will facilitate Champion Teams across the community in the ongoing effort toward the achievement of its goals.

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