Rethinking Readiness:
Understanding Texas's Pathways to Postsecondary Success

Postsecondary Pathways for the Future of Texas

Event name

Date

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Agenda

1. **Who we are**
   LONESTA**RP3** and our research team
2. **Why this research**
   The problem, why it matters, and how we studied it
3. **What we learned**
   Key findings from the evidence
4. **What it means**
   What is at stake and what to do about it
5. **Questions**
   Your questions and discussion

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01 Who we are

LONESTARP3 and the research collaborative behind this work

1 **Who we are**

2 Why this research

3 What we learned

4 What it means

5 Questions

About LONESTARP3

LONESTA**RP3** is a statewide network that brings multiple perspectives together—connecting **researchers, practitioners, and policy advocates** in pursuit of shared solutions.



Researchers



Practitioners



Policy advocates

LONESTA**RP3**

Our research collaborative



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02 Why this research

We examined nine of Texas's college and career readiness indicators. They earn the same credit but do not tell us the same story.

What is the problem?

70%

of Texas jobs are projected to require a postsecondary credential by 2036

1. **Texas needs more credential earners**
   The state's goal: 60% of Texans ages 25–64 with a credential of value by 2030
2. **Readiness earns schools credit**
   College, career, and military readiness (CCMR) counts toward A–F ratings and district funding
3. **Each indicator earns the same credit**
   Yet the indicators reflect very different kinds of preparation

Our question: How can Texas better measure whether a student is ready to earn a postsecondary credential?

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Why does it matter?

Texas is deciding what each readiness indicator is worth

2017	HB 22 puts CCMR in A–F ratings
2025	HB 8 requires new weights
2027	TEA plans to adopt weights in rule
2030	First class under the new weights
2031	Proposed new weights in ratings

Most evidence focuses on enrollment. Texas's goal is credential completion.

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What did we want to know?

Three questions guided our research

1. **Trends**
   How has participation in readiness pathways changed, and for which students?

2. **Profiles**
   What combinations of readiness experiences do students complete, and who completes them?

3. **Predictions**
   How well do readiness measures predict college enrollment, persistence, and completion?

Together, they ask how participation has changed, what combinations students complete, and which measures predict success.

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What did we do?

2.4 million

graduates in the trends analysis, 2016–2024

1. **Trends**
   Tracked participation in 15 readiness measures across graduating classes and student groups
2. **Profiles**
   Identified groups of graduates with similar combinations of coursework and credentials
3. **Predictions**
   Examined which measures best predicted college enrollment, persistence, and completion

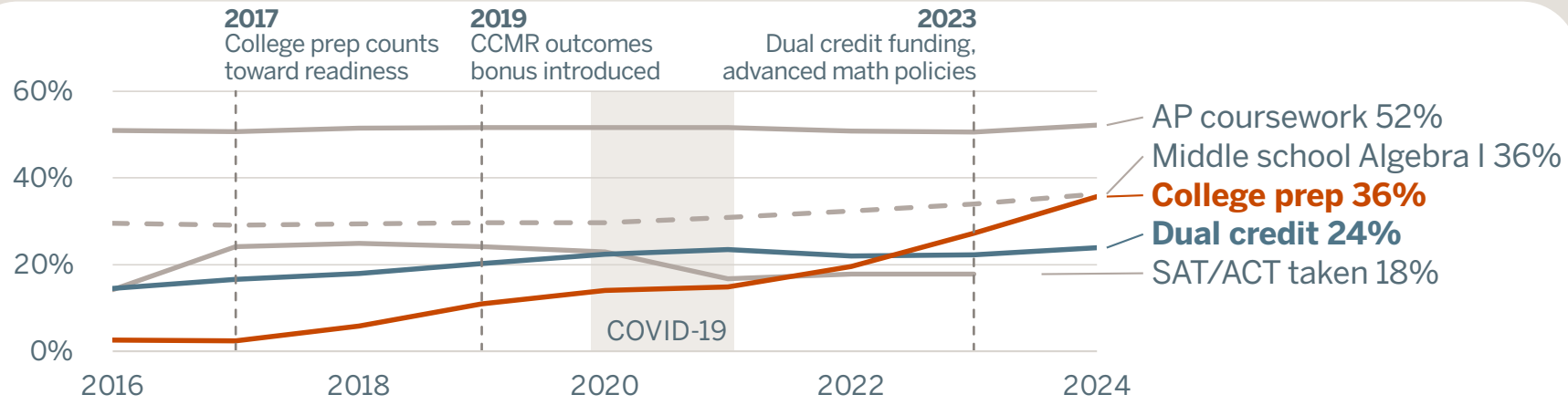
Three complementary analyses using statewide education records.

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03 What we learned

The CCMR indicators are not interchangeable, and what each one tells us depends on the outcome

Readiness grew fastest where the rules changed, not where the evidence is strongest



Dashed: not a CCMR indicator. SAT/ACT not available for 2024.

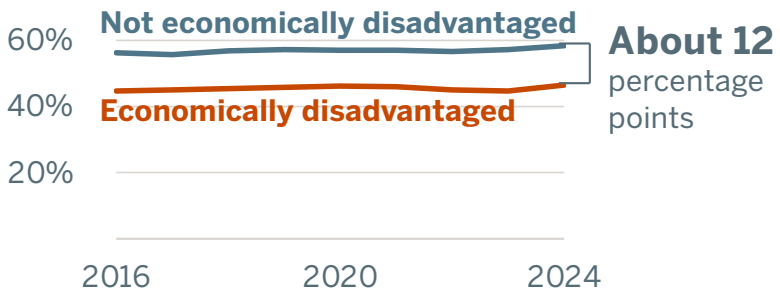
Why it matters: College prep rose by 33 percentage points among graduates, more than any other measure, yet it added little to predicting who enrolls in college or earns a degree.

Source: Freeman et al. (2026), using Education Research Center (ERC) data, classes of 2016–2024.

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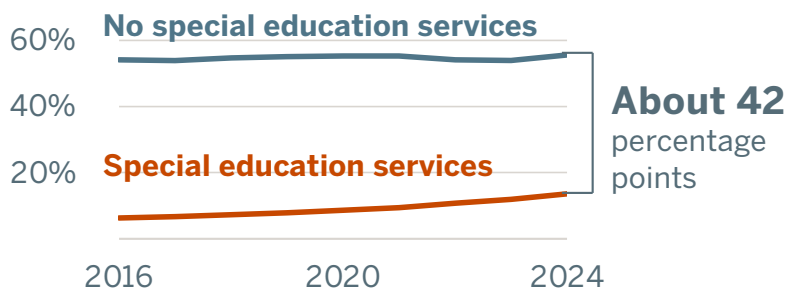
Expanded participation did not consistently narrow gaps

AP coursework, by economic disadvantage



The gap by economic disadvantage stayed about the same

AP coursework, by special education status



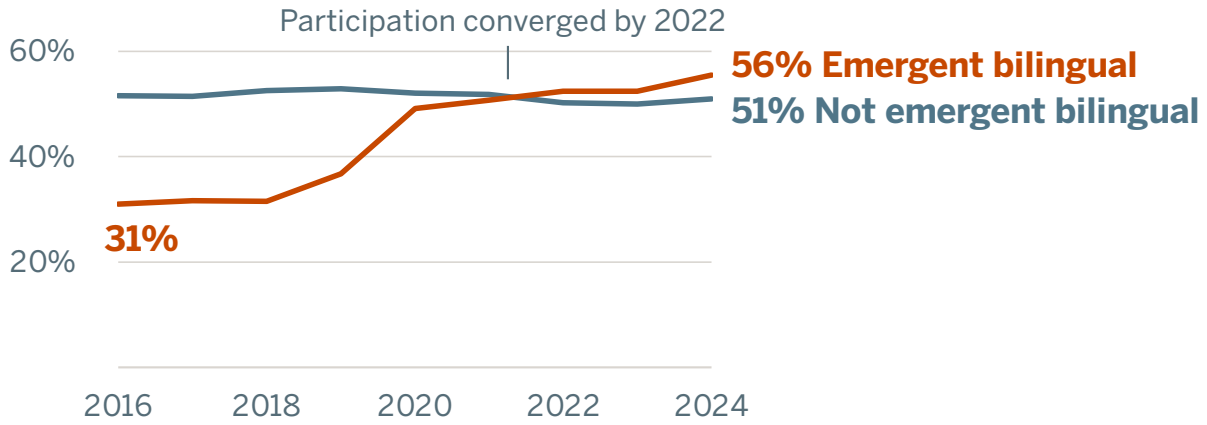
Special education participation rose, but a large gap remained

Source: Freeman et al. (2026), using Education Research Center (ERC) data, classes of 2016–2024.

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AP participation increased among emergent bilingual graduates

Participation caught up with other graduates



Share of Texas graduates with AP coursework, 2016–2024 graduating classes

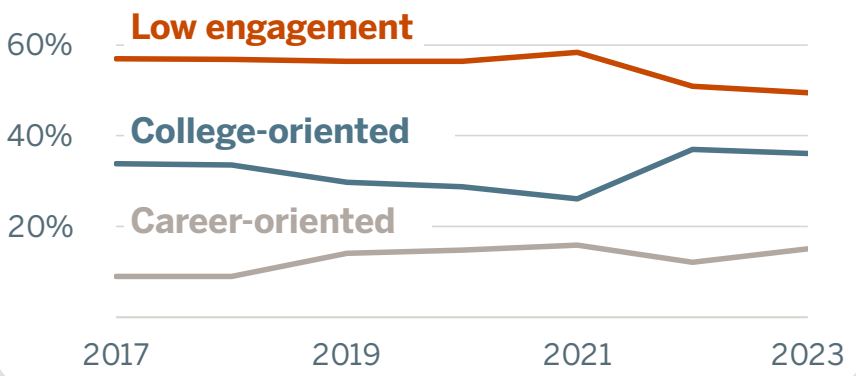
Source: Freeman et al. (2026), using Education Research Center (ERC) data, classes of 2016–2024.

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A single CCMR rate hides different patterns of preparation

About 1 in 2	**Low engagement** College prep, with low participation in other measures
About 1 in 3	**College-oriented** Algebra I before high school and AP coursework
9% → 15%	**Career-oriented** CTE programs of study and aligned industry certifications

Share of graduates in each profile



Why it matters: college-oriented graduates enrolled in four-year colleges at about three times the rate of career-oriented graduates, and far more often than low-engagement graduates.

Source: Freeman et al. (2026), using Education Research Center (ERC) data, classes of 2017–2023.

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Three of the nine CCMR indicators we examined stood out for college enrollment

The nine indicators

TSI	College
Dual credit	College
AP/IB	College
Associate degree	College
OnRamps	College
Advanced diploma (SpEd)	College
Aligned IBC	Career
Level I/II certificate	Career
Workforce-ready IEP	Career

Gray: much less predictive of who enrolled

TSI (Texas Success Initiative)
Meets reading and math benchmarks through the SAT/ACT, TSIA, or a college prep course

Dual credit
Earns 3+ college hours in English or math, or 9+ hours in any subject

AP/IB
CCMR counts qualifying AP/IB exam scores; our data show AP/IB coursework

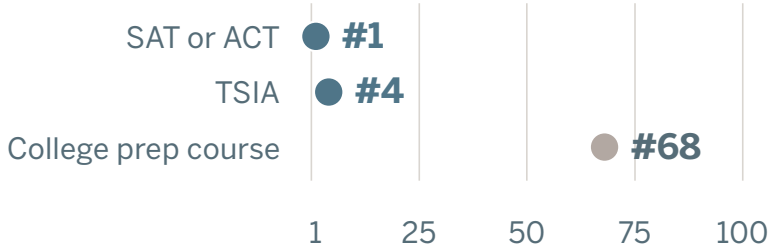
These three ranked #1–#3 of 39 measures for predicting four-year enrollment; the other six ranked #28–#36.

Source: Freeman et al. (2026), using Education Research Center (ERC) data, classes of 2016–2023.

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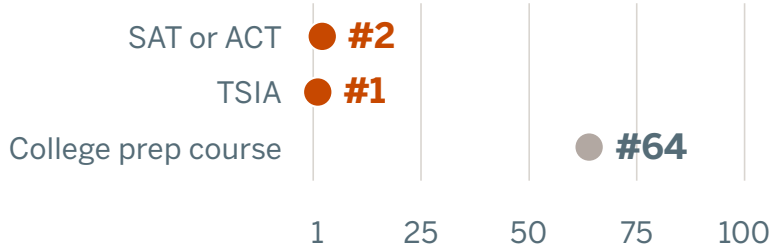
How students meet TSI criteria matters: test scores tell us more than college prep courses

Four-year enrollment



SAT/ACT ranked first for four-year enrollment

Two-year enrollment



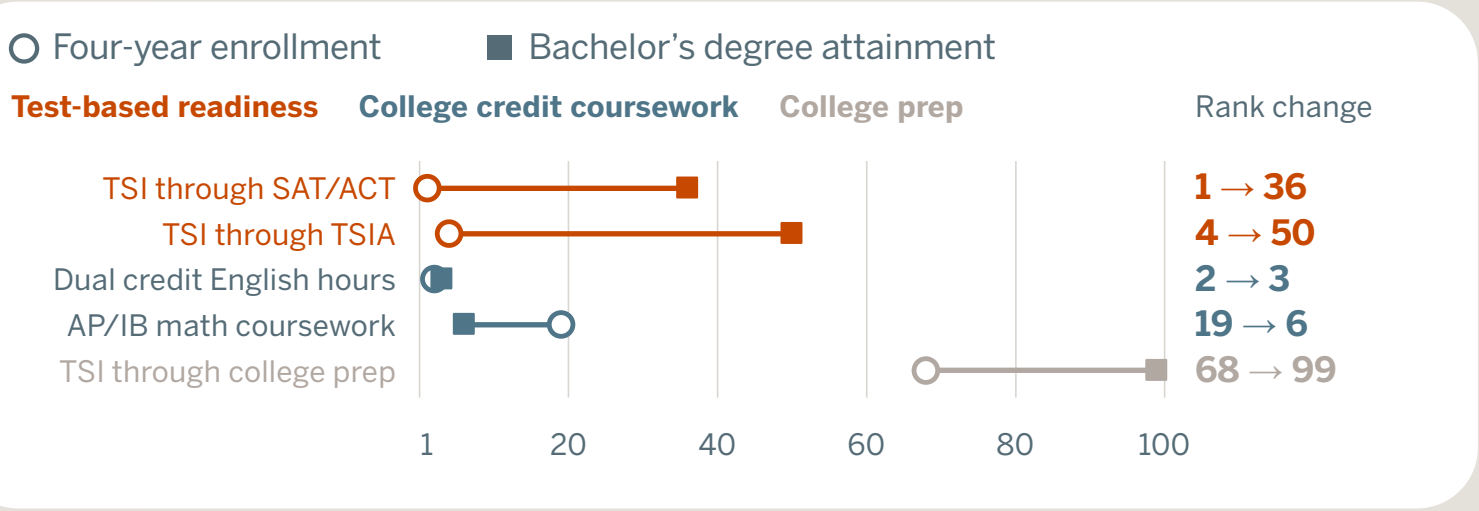
The TSIA ranked first for two-year enrollment

Rank among about 100 measures for predicting enrollment; rank 1 is the most predictive.

Source: Freeman et al. (2026), using Education Research Center (ERC) data, classes of 2016–2023.

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What gets students to college is not what gets them through



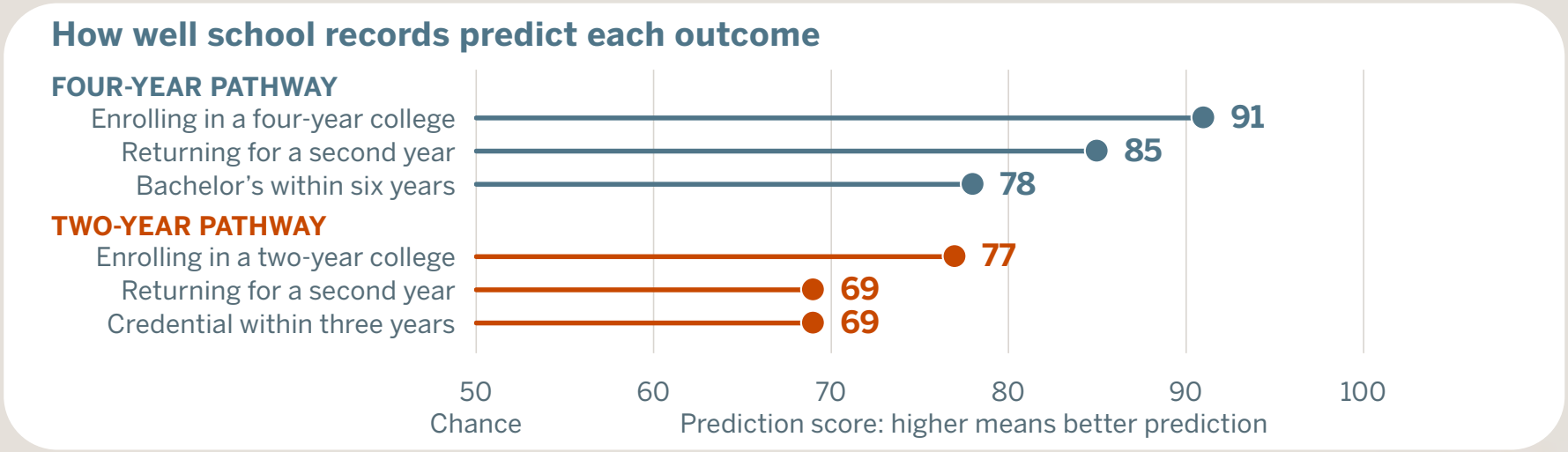
Test scores predicted who enrolled far better than who finished.

Rank among about 100 measures (smaller = more predictive). Bachelor's degree attainment is for four-year entrants.

Source: Freeman et al. (2026), using Education Research Center (ERC) data, classes of 2016–2023.

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High school records tell us less about progress after entering a two-year college



Records from sixth grade through graduation tell us less about who persists and completes after starting at a two-year college

Source: Freeman et al. (2026), using Education Research Center (ERC) data, classes of 2016–2023.

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Four-year enrollment differed even among graduates considered CCMR ready

Enrolled in a four-year college within one year



25
percentage point gap

Share of graduates without AP/IB or dual credit (economically disadvantaged vs. not)

No AP/IB coursework **55%** vs. **37%**

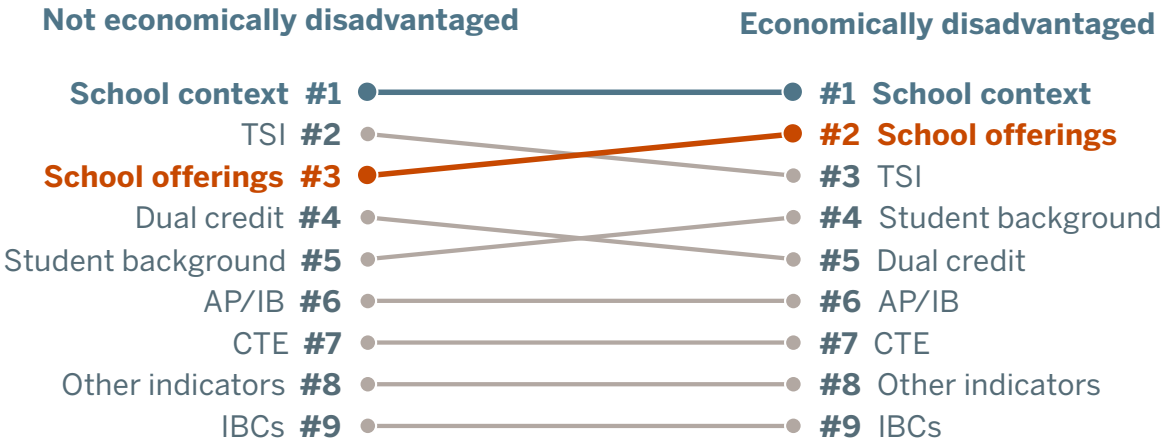
No dual credit **74%** vs. **62%**

Source: Freeman et al. (2026), using Education Research Center (ERC) data, classes of 2016–2023.

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The high schools that students attend tell us more than their readiness pathways

School context ranked first for both groups



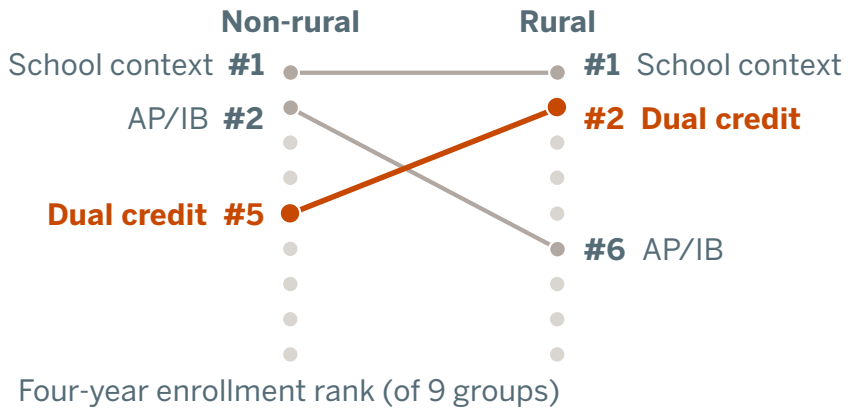
Two-year college enrollment: rank of each group of measures.
School context: campus characteristics, student composition, region, and urbanicity.
School offerings: AP/IB, dual credit, and CTE programs of study at the campus, distance to the nearest college.

Source: Freeman et al. (2026), using Education Research Center (ERC) data, classes of 2016–2023.

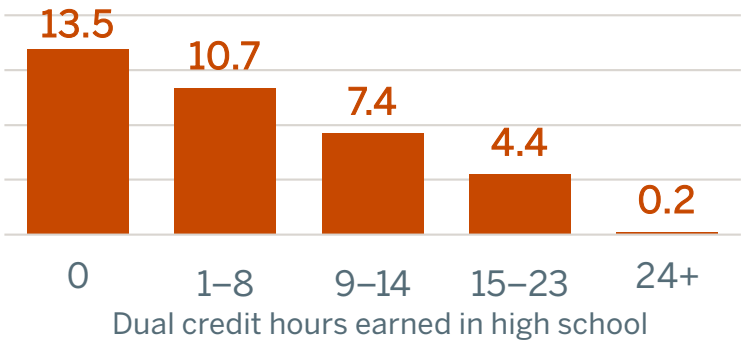
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Among grads with the most dual credit the rural gap in four-year enrollment was nearly zero

Dual credit ranked higher in rural districts



Four-year enrollment gap, non-rural minus rural (percentage points)



Enrolled with no dual credit: 19% rural vs. 33% non-rural. With 24+ hours: 74% vs. 75%. Each level compares different graduates.

Source: Freeman et al. (2026), using Education Research Center (ERC) data.

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Readiness has grown, but being counted as ready doesn't tell the full story

1. Policy reshaped readiness pathways, and half of graduates showed low engagement with them
2. Expanded pathways did not consistently close gaps for economically disadvantaged students
3. Being considered "college ready" predicts less than knowing which indicators a student met and how
4. Evidence about who enrolls in college does not always extend to who earns a degree
5. Where students attend school predicts who enrolls; in rural districts, dual credit stood out

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04 What it means

Putting the findings to work

What's at stake?

WITHOUT CHANGE	WITH CHANGE
Rising readiness rates can mask differences in preparation	Accountability reflects persistence and completion
Incentives may favor weaker-evidence pathways	Schools have incentives and support to expand coursework
Gaps in access to college-level coursework can persist	More students reach pathways tied to a credential

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Policy recommendations

For state policymakers and the Texas Education Agency

1 Value indicators by completion

TEA: weight indicators using this evidence

2 Track outcomes through completion

TEA: report how students meet indicators

3 Build pathways from middle school

Connect early math to college-level coursework

4 Expand access where it is limited

State leaders: prioritize rural and underserved districts

What the state rewards shapes what schools prioritize.

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Practice recommendations

For district leaders, counselors, and college partners

1

Direct students to pathways tied to completion

Look beyond whether a student met a standard

2

Expand access where it is limited

Compare campus offerings with who participates

3

Start before high school

Plan early so students can reach college-level courses in high school

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05 Questions

What would you like to know more about?

Thank you

Postsecondary Pathways for the Future of Texas

Questions? Contact

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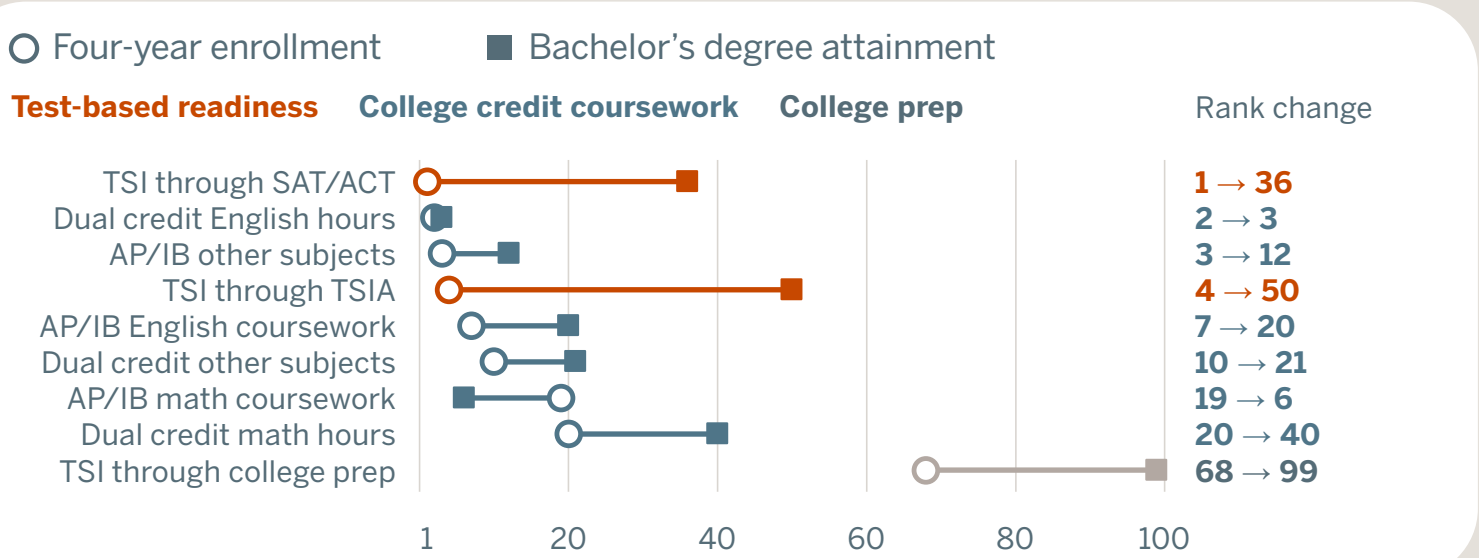
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Test-based measures fell in rank from enrollment to completion



Test-based ranks fell while coursework measures held

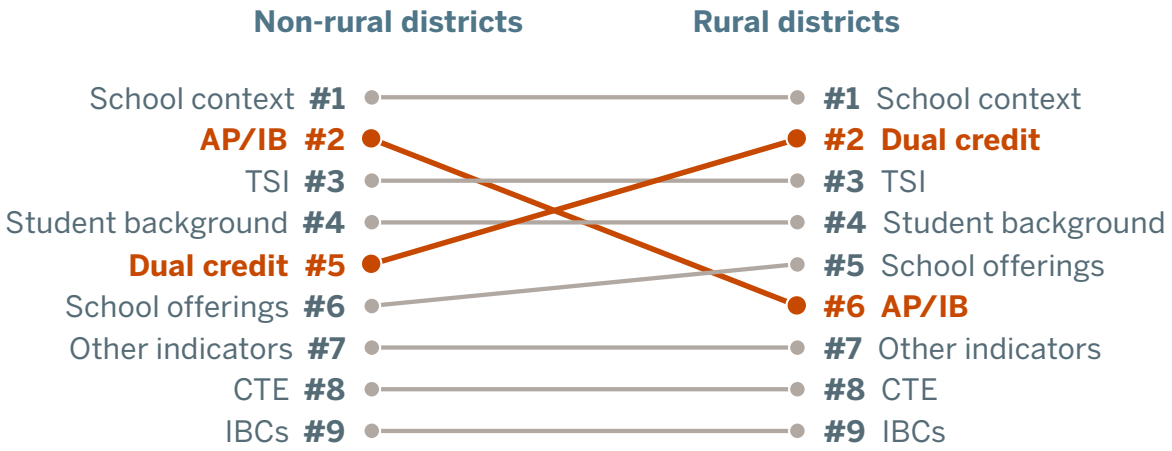
Rank among about 100 measures (smaller = more predictive); bachelor's attainment is for four-year entrants

Source: Freeman et al. (2026), using Education Research Center (ERC) data.

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Dual credit ranked higher in rural districts; AP/IB ranked higher in non-rural districts

School context stayed first; dual credit and AP/IB traded places



Four-year enrollment: rank of each group of measures. School offerings: AP/IB, dual credit, and CTE programs of study at the campus, distance to the nearest college.

Source: Freeman et al. (2026), using Education Research Center (ERC) data.

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