

What's working across the Cradle to Career Network

Outcome: Middle Grade Math



Essential Question: Are students meeting reading and math benchmarks in grades 3 and 8?

Indicator: Teacher experience, effective program and school leadership, Institutions' contributions to student outcomes, Successful completion of Algebra I by 9th grade, Equitable placement in gifted programs and rigorous coursework

The Factors

Middle grade mathematics is a critical milestone on the path to postsecondary success, yet access to advanced math opportunities has historically been uneven. Research shows that completing Algebra I by eighth grade is a key predictor of future academic achievement. Two StriveTogether Cradle to Career network members, E3 Alliance in Central Texas and The Commit Partnership in Dallas County, have been leading efforts to change this trajectory. For more than a decade, they have worked with school districts and community partners to identify disparities, strengthen placement practices and expand equitable access to advanced math coursework. Their strategies are designed to address systemic barriers, ensuring that more students are on track for college and career readiness.

E3 Alliance's analysis in Central Texas found that fewer than one-third of high-performing Black and Latine students were completing Algebra I by eighth grade, despite scoring in the top quintile on fifth grade state assessments. In contrast, white and Asian students were accessing and completing advanced coursework at

significantly higher rates. Meanwhile in Dallas County, Commit's Opportunity 2040 plan emphasized math proficiency in grades 4 through 8 as a primary indicator of postsecondary and workforce readiness. These regional insights informed state-level advocacy efforts, laying the groundwork for the passage of SB 2124.

Informed by these local efforts, the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 2124 in 2023. The bill mandates that all school districts in Texas automatically enroll students who score in the top 40% on the fifth grade STAAR math assessment into advanced coursework. This policy marked a major shift away from traditional opt-in placement systems that often relied on teacher recommendation or parent request. Research by Commit and E3 showed that these systems disproportionately excluded Black, Latine, economically disadvantaged and emergent bilingual students from early access to advanced math courses.

The Strategies

To translate policy into improved practice, both Commit and E3 launched targeted initiatives to support school districts with SB 2124 implementation. These efforts

focused on aligning systems, building educator capacity and using continuous improvement processes to ensure more equitable student outcomes.

In Central Texas, E3 Alliance embedded middle grade math strategy into its broader cradle-to-career continuum. As part of its implementation strategy, E3 convenes Peer Learning Networks (PLNs) and Steering Committees with district partners including Del Valle Independent School District (ISD), Lake Travis ISD, Leander ISD, Austin ISD, Hays ISD, Pflugerville ISD and Seguin ISD. These networks facilitate shared learning, data review and problem-solving among school leaders. District teams participate in empathy interviews with students, use rapid-cycle testing to refine math interventions and build cross-campus collaboration to improve instruction.

Several Central Texas districts have already adopted reforms aligned with SB 2124. Del Valle ISD updated its honors math placement policy and trained counselors and teachers to proactively support eligible students. Lake Travis ISD offered targeted summer coursework and expanded sixth grade honors math enrollment using STAAR data. Leander ISD implemented structured planning time for teachers and used feedback loops to refine instructional strategies.

In Dallas County, The Commit Partnership launched a Policy Workshop in the summer of 2024 to support 10 independent school districts and one major charter network, collectively serving over 87% of the county's student population, as they transitioned from planning to implementation of advanced math pathways aligned with SB 2124. This full-day session focuses on identifying eligible students, crafting effective family communication plans and establishing data monitoring practices to ensure the policy was implemented with fidelity.

Building on this foundation, The Commit Partnership launched the Math Learning Series, a year-long professional development opportunity that convened educators and administrators across the same 10 ISDs and charter network. The series delivers math-specific professional development and implementation support to instructional coaches and district leaders, aiming to deepen educators' content knowledge and instructional quality.

By 2024, 10,877 low-income students across Dallas County met or exceeded math proficiency benchmarks, indicating broader gains in both access and achievement.

To expand this strategy beyond Dallas, Commit launched a statewide Math Pathways Toolkit. The

toolkit provides step-by-step support for local education collaboratives supporting districts to start or scale advanced math pathways. The toolkit provides step-by-step guidance on shifting math mindsets, setting student-centered goals, engaging families and aligning with SB 2124. Currently in use across at least three regions beyond Dallas County, the toolkit codifies the policy-aligned strategies that emerged from the initial workshop and professional learning series in Dallas.

The Impact

The regional impact of these strategies is evident in student outcome data. Before the policy change, only 33% of high-performing Black students and 42% of high-performing Hispanic students in Central Texas completed Algebra I by eighth grade, compared to 75% of white students. Since implementation, the gap in Algebra I completion between high-performing Black and white students has narrowed by 91%, and the gap between Latine and white students has decreased by 76%. In the 2023–2024 academic year, 40.4% of middle grade students in Central Texas completed Algebra I or other advanced coursework (16,678 of 41,267 students). Of these students, 56.6% were Latine (9,439) and 16.1% were Black (2,683).

Dallas County is also seeing gains. Comparing the 2023–24 school year to 2024–25, participating districts in the county saw a 4% increase in the share of students enrolled in Algebra I by 8th grade, rising from 45% to 49%. Importantly, this year-over-year increase in access did not come at the expense of quality. Student performance in 8th grade Algebra I remained stable, reinforcing that students who earned qualifying scores were fully capable of succeeding when given the opportunity. Notably, the increase in Black student enrollment in 8th grade Algebra I outpaced the overall county average (rising from 31.3% in 2024 to 36.7% in 2025), narrowing gaps that had previously persisted under opt-in models. These outcomes reflect not only improvements in access but also in instructional quality and student support.

Texas continues to expand its policy commitment to educational opportunity. In 2025, the state legislature passed House Bill 2, which expands the Teacher Incentive Allotment, strengthens educator preparation pathways and allocates targeted support for underperforming campuses. Commit and E3 were each major advocates for this legislation and are now coordinating with local and state partners to ensure these investments are implemented effectively.