

Achieve Texas In Action

How a school district can support its fine arts programs and foster student success through Achieve Texas

by Charles Aguillon and Gwen Davis

Achieve Texas. Do these words send your heart racing, cause your palms to sweat, or make it difficult for you to breathe? Unfortunately they seem to be common reactions to hearing them. Both Career and Technical Education and Fine Arts Directors across the state are consumed with fear and anxiety at the thought of the Achieve Texas program. The negative connotation and myths about the program have made it difficult for districts to understand its true intent.

Achieve Texas is a Texas Education Agency initiative, *not mandate*, based on the national Career Clusters model (www.careerclusters.org). This basic model has been around for years and has had great success in states across the country. The Achieve Texas initiative was designed to be a *tool* to assist districts in high school reform, redesign, and restructuring efforts. Let's face it; we live in a changing world. With the global economy and rapid technological advances, our students will face a different world from ours upon graduation. These Generation Y students will have, on average, four to five different careers in their lifetimes, most of which have yet to be created.

Our twentieth-century definitions of "educated" and "literate" may not apply the same way in the twenty-first. Other skills needed for our students to assume their adult roles may be quite different too. We need to look closely today at how and what we teach, and we must be prepared to recognize how that mix needs to change. The question is: "How will schools accomplish this?" As Willard Daggett of the International Center for Leadership in Education said, "There is no easy fix or pat answer to this question, but we must pursue it—honestly and courageously—to prepare our students for the world of tomorrow."

The Achieve Texas initiative was designed to assist schools in rethinking their roles in preparing students for the world they will face. How are we preparing students for their adult roles? Are we filling their toolboxes with the knowledge and skills needed for success in this changing world? Achieve Texas provides districts with the structure and resources to begin asking these questions: What courses should we be teaching? How should we be teaching them? What knowledge and skills should be emphasized?

What is the Achieve Texas program? Achieve Texas provides

the structure for districts to start answering the questions above. While this initiative was created through the Career and Technical Education department, a successful development and implementation of the program involves all curriculum areas. The new initiative allows all students to achieve success by preparing them for secondary and postsecondary opportunities, career preparation and advancement, meaningful work, and active citizenship.

What Are the Achieve Texas Goals and How Do We As Music Educators Fit Our Programs Into Them?

- *Career Clusters and Programs of Study (POS) are an integral part of the Texas education system.* There is an Arts and Communications cluster that covers a wide variety of programs.
- *Every student prepares a personalized graduation plan in middle school to plan for grades 9–16 and beyond. The student chooses a Career Cluster and POS to guide his or her learning in the context of personal career interests. Plans are evaluated and updated annually.* This is an opportunity to help students develop a plan to stay in a music program for four years. This, in addition to guidance in the 4×4 articles published in *SOUTHWESTERN MUSICIAN* (in November 2007 and on page 53 of this issue), can provide a meaningful course of study for our students.
- *Clusters span all grades (P–16+).* Career awareness begins in elementary school and transitions into career exploration in middle school. Career concentrations in high school help students transition into career preparation in their postsecondary studies. All participants may experience career advancement in employment. For our future music educators, this can initiate more opportunities to explore necessary courses and experiences. Consider starting a Texas Future Music Educators (TFME) chapter at your school to facilitate this.
- *The education system is seamless between high school and postsecondary institutions. Students have opportunities in POS to earn dual credit and articulated credit that flows seamlessly into postsecondary education or training.* This is another vehicle to assist students in planning their schedules, thereby possibly freeing up more time to take elective courses.

- *Partnerships are in place throughout the system. Partnerships are established statewide and locally between business and education. Educational institutions form meaningful partnerships. Develop more ties with local and statewide arts groups. The arts are a business and in Texas, a thriving one.*
- *Academics are interwoven throughout the P-16+ curriculum. There is an integration of academic and technical knowledge and skills within the curriculum. How many of you have attended a Fine Arts Summit? The Center for Educator Development in Fine Arts (CEDFA) has spent the last four years in dialogue about interdisciplinary teaching and learning. This year covers music and science. Make plans to attend!*
- *Interdisciplinary teaching takes place and academics are taught in context. This is another reason to attend a Fine Arts Summit!*
- *Curriculum alignment occurs between secondary and postsecondary education. Career guidance is dramatically enhanced. TMEA and TMAC created a music curriculum that vertically and horizontally aligns with the TEKS (available on the TMEA website).*
- *All students have access to quality assessment and career information resources. Career counseling is provided with a strong emphasis on career and college readiness. Use the resources that TMEA and all our state music organizations have prepared for us. Share this with students, parents, and community members.*
- *All students take part in extended learning opportunities. Every student chooses extended learning experiences such as service learning, internships, apprenticeships, and work-based learning. So many of these experiences we provide our students daily as part of our programs. Advertise these benefits for preparing students for postsecondary advancement.*
- *Professional development supports the cluster system. Professional development is a critical part of the teacher's career. Schools of education train teachers for the cluster system. We are fortunate to have wonderful professional development opportunities for music educators in this state.*

This explains how we can encourage our future music educators through Achieve Texas. However, one of the major concerns about implementing Achieve Texas deals with students on other career pathways, especially our students who are trying to go into the medical field, for example. By Fine Arts and CTE working together, we developed four-year plans to ensure students have the choice to continue in these programs. If we had not begun to dialogue about potential problems, we could have found ourselves in conflict with each other's programs.

How Did We Make This a Smooth Transition?

- Educated administrators, teachers, the community, and, most importantly, counselors.
- Formed committees to examine what we offered and what we may need to offer in the future (e.g., Music Theory was elevated to an Advanced Placement designation and an instrumental ensemble class was formed specifically to teach brass, woodwind, and percussion methods for future music educators).
- Worked together (Fine Arts and CTE) to determine which courses in each area might be recommended for students in a four-year plan (e.g., we recommended future music educators take "Ready, Set, Teach," a CTE course).

- Met with all eighth graders to develop a four-year plan with an emphasis placed on having students choose an interest or program *first*, such as band, choir, or orchestra, and then built their plans based on keeping them active in that program for four years. *This will require placing counselor education about Achieve Texas at the top of the list.*

What Are We Doing in Georgetown ISD to Keep All Fine Arts Students Involved for Four Years?

- During the four-year planning and subsequent yearly review of the student's plan, we schedule the activity *first* and work around it. Communicate the importance and value of being involved in a sequential activity to any career pathway.
- We present a united front to district administration about the importance of making schedules flexible and offering alternatives easily to gain credit (summer school, distance learning, etc.).
- We work with counselors to assist them with communicating options to students versus creating conflicts in choosing one course over another.
- We are planning joint district-wide inservices for Fine Arts and CTE staff to alleviate concerns about losing students to each other's programs.
- We are reviewing opportunities for students to earn additional credits to manage the 4x4 plan and possibly gain college credit.
- Most importantly, we are communicating consistently with each other to ensure that we are not creating potential conflicts.

Achieve Texas will not look the same for every district across the state. In fact, *it should not*. Each school district should use the tools offered to create programs specific to the needs of their community and students. How do you use this tool to prepare students for the global workforce? This program provides the perfect opportunity for community awareness and involvement in your programs. Your local Chamber of Commerce and workforce boards are great places to start. Your local workforce board can provide you with workforce data and trends. They can offer a wealth of information on both growing and declining occupations now and in the future. They may even be able to provide this information to you by career cluster and career pathway.

Most chambers have education committees with tremendous resources to assist you. The Georgetown Chamber of Commerce played a vital role in creating a committee of business professionals and community members to evaluate each career cluster area. These committees gave us guidance on everything from which Career Clusters to offer (you are not expected to offer each of the 16), what career pathways we should have for each cluster, and what knowledge and skills students should have at the completion of a career pathway. This helps identify courses for the sequence. You may need to look at courses in different areas to meet the knowledge and skills recommended by business/community members. In Georgetown, we found that most of the course sequences included courses from other cluster areas. All of this was accomplished without putting Fine Arts or CTE programs above one another.

We are trying to do our part in educating members in both our professions. We have presented at CTE conferences, for the Texas Music Administrators Conference, and are slated to appear in February at the TMEA convention.

One of the things that has kept us grounded throughout this process is our personal and district-wide commitment to educating the whole child. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has kicked off a great campaign supporting this effort (www.wholechildeducation.org). Spend some time reading the goals of this program. You will be amazed at how clearly we are called to work together to make children successful, not only in our programs, but in life.

Charles Aguillon is Director of Fine Arts and Gwen Davis is Director of Career and Technical Education at Georgetown ISD. For more information on Achieve Texas, go to www.achievetexas.org.

