

RURAL STUDENT ACCESS INITIATIVE

BACKGROUND

An existing student access program at Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service harnesses the network of agents to help meet the state goal of getting more students successfully into Texas' higher education system.

County Extension agents are trusted members of the rural communities and are involved in youth education and leadership activities such as Texas 4-H, making them a well-positioned asset to employ student access strategies.

THIS RURAL STUDENT ACCESS INITIATIVE WILL

- > Expand the competencies of rural school district staff to deliver best-in-class, non-academic support for isolated rural students.
- > Ensure continued educational program delivery through the AgriLife Extension network of agents to help deliver a train-the-trainer model as a pathway to achieve cost-efficient scalability.

STATEWIDE COORDINATION

Due to the large geographic spread of these districts, AgriLife Extension has developed a mutually beneficial partnership with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Agency staff work in tandem with the board staff to deploy the board's Ask ADVi Virtual Advising technology platform (consisting of text prompts, an artificial intelligence bot and timely financial aid/college resources) across the program network to address direct-to-college loss.

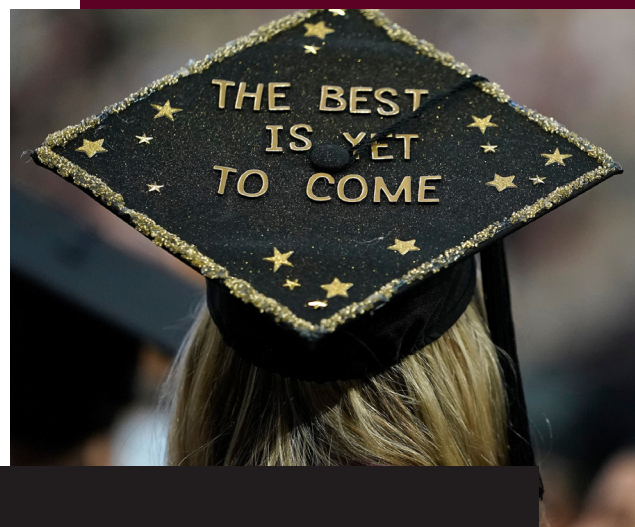


EXCEPTIONAL ITEM REQUEST

\$6.5 MILLION BIENNIUM

OBJECTIVE

Provide funding for new positions and for the expansion of participating rural school districts, allowing Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service agents and specialists to deliver the information, tools and strategies essential to improving post-secondary access in underserved rural communities in Texas.

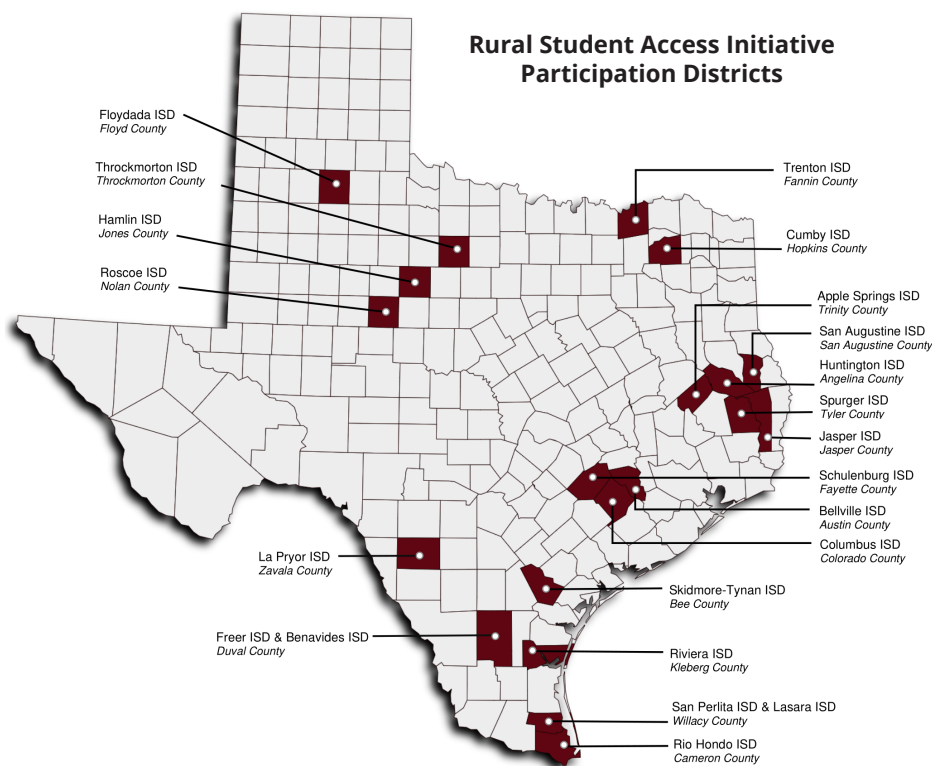




PROVEN SUCCESS IN STUDENT ACCESS STRATEGIES

Launched in 2018, with an initial cohort of nine rural school districts, programming has since expanded to 21 rural districts with 5,687 students in grades 8-12. Leadership in each school district was trained on topics relating to college access planning. Out of 3,305 seniors in participating districts, 2,348 have applied for college and 2,016 have completed financial aid applications.

Relative to neighboring rural districts, the program increased FAFSA completion by 6.1 percentage points. Despite declining post-secondary matriculation rates across the state and nation during the pandemic, participating districts experienced a slight increase of 1%. Additionally, enrollments for participating Hispanic students increased by 2.7%.



DESIRED FUNDING OUTCOMES

To expand the scale and scope of the existing student access program, requested funds would be used to:

- > Sustain the 21 currently participating rural school districts.
- > Add another 24 rural school districts into the network, for a total of 45 participating districts by FY24.
- > Provide 33 new full-time employees, plus funding for travel, data collection and educational materials.
- > Include program specialists with experience in student success and college access.

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