

# Rural Student Success Initiative (RSSI)

89th Legislature: Priority Request

TEXAS A&M  
**AGRI LIFE**  
EXTENSION

## Background

RSSI is a large-scale, proof-of-concept project that leverages the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's place-based network of county agents to provide rural school districts, students and their families with the information, tools, and strategies essential to improving postsecondary access, matriculation, and completion outcomes in underserved rural communities in Texas.

## Helping Students, Helping Families

RSSI is not intended to steer students towards any specific four-year institution, but rather aims to help students and parents make an informed decision about their individual college choice. The project seeks to provide the non-academic supports students (and their families) need to elevate and act upon their post-high school academic aspirations, be that a valid postsecondary certificate program with marketable skills or a traditional degree program

## Statewide Coordination

In partnership with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), RSSI piloted the state's ADVi Virtual Advising technology platform (consisting of text prompts, artificial intelligence bot, and timely financial aid/college resources) across a wide geographic area with rural student populations.

RSSI's subject matter expertise and curriculum informed the development and deployment of over 50 statewide text-messaging campaigns to students not previously served by the state.

THECB is now extending virtual advising outreach earlier in a high school student's college planning, and to students residing across urban and rural regions.

## STRENGTHEN TEXAS COMMUNITIES

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service provides training, resources, and educational programs to bring Texans the latest research in agriculture, natural resources, and life sciences. A member of The Texas A&M University System, AgriLife Extension advances the land-grant mission of research, teaching and extension.*

# \$2.5 million

Over the biennium



## Benefits to Texans

Anticipated Outcomes: Next Two Years



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.



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# Proven Success in Student Access Strategies



Launched in 2018, with an initial cohort of nine (9) 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.

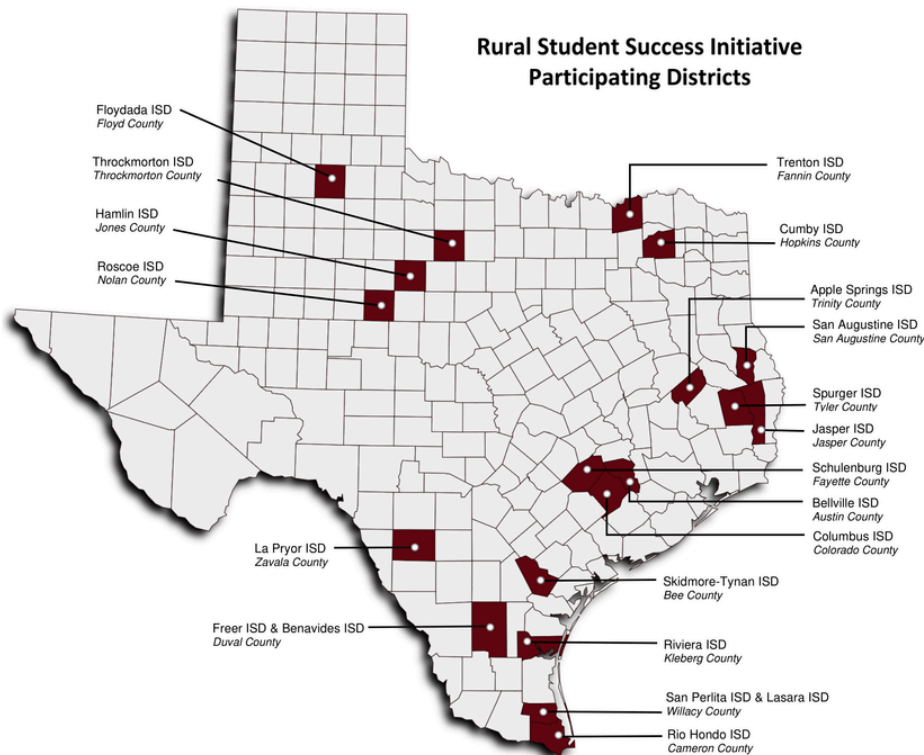
Relative to neighboring rural districts, the program increased Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) completion by 6.1 percentage points. Despite declining post-secondary matriculation rates across the state and nation during the pandemic, participating districts experienced a slight increase of 1%.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

## Continued Programming For Long-Term Growth

This Exceptional Item request is to continue this program that has been supplemented by philanthropy. Funding would be used to sustain the current roster of RSSI school districts, and to fund growth. Since its inception, RSSI has been exclusively funded in the aggregate of ~\$6.1 million by four premier higher education philanthropies:

(Greater Texas Foundation, TLL Temple Foundation, Meadows Foundation and Trellis Foundation). The final grant award was provided in 2024 with the explicit knowledge that philanthropy will have served its proper role by providing the risk capital to fund RSSI through FY25.

Rural Student Success Initiative  
Participating Districts



## Desired Funding Outcomes

During the next biennium, RSSI plans to expand programming and bring new rural school districts into its current network.

This would increase RSSI's total participation to a total of sixty (60) rural district participants by FY27.

To expand outreach to its target number of rural district partnerships during the upcoming biennium, RSSI will need to expand the current FTE count to ten (10).

- 6 full-time extension specialists
- 2 team leads
- 1 administrative support
- 2 part-time student/graduate assistants

## CONTACT

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