

2009 Innovations Awards Program APPLICATION

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 09-S-26TX

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: _Texas

Assign Program Category (applicant): _Human Resources/Education

1. **Program Name:** Parallel Pathways to Success
2. **Administering Agency:** Texas Department of Agriculture
3. **Contact Person (Name and Title):** Bryan Black, Assistant Commissioner for Communications
4. **Address:** 1700 N. Congress Avenue, 11th floor
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7. **E-mail Address:** bryan.black@TexasAgriculture.gov
8. **Web site Address:** www.texasagriculture.gov

9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

This initiative promotes an alternative education plan for students who are interested in following a career and technology track. By providing students who are unable to enter college with such opportunities, more students will be trained to enter the workforce upon graduation and support economic development for the state of Texas.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 2, 2009 to be considered.

This initiative has been promoted since Commissioner Staples took office in January 2007.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

This program meets two needs: to increase academic success and high school completion, and to promote economic development for the state. Texas has a considerable dropout rate, with approximately 11 percent of students not completing

high school. By 2015, students wishing to graduate high school in Texas will have to complete the Recommended High School curriculum, complete four years of each of the core subject areas, and demonstrate proficiency on 12 end-of-course exams. A March 2006 Gates Foundation report, *The Silent Epidemic*, found that the top reason students drop out of school is because “classes were not interesting.” The same report also recommended the best way to help these students stay in school would be to “improve teaching and curricula to make school more relevant and engaging, and enhance the connection between work and school.”

Texas also has a great need to align workforce preparations and education with economic needs in a way that will increase economic development for the entire state. The need is especially great in rural areas of the state. By increasing opportunities for students to complete a career and technology track, more students can graduate ready to enter the workforce and support industries in their communities. A 2008 report by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts indicates that at least 80 percent of the jobs in Texas do not require a four-year college degree, but they do require significant career preparation.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

Commissioner Staples has been promoting this concept since taking office in January 2007. Over the past two years, he has held a series of stakeholder meetings to ensure all issues are addressed in recommending a change from the traditional high school graduation plan. In Spring 2009, legislation was introduced for the Texas legislative session to bring this issue to fruition. To date, approximately 10 bills have been filed changing the required graduation requirements for students in Texas, and providing more flexibility to follow a career and technical track. Of those bills, legislation creating a grant program under the Texas Department of Agriculture for partnerships in rural areas of the state was also introduced.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

For many years, education policy in Texas has mandated all students follow the same curriculum requirements. As mentioned above, this has not been successful in increasing the graduation rate. This program emphasizes that all coursework be rigorous and relevant while allowing students flexibility to choose a graduation path that fits their talents. This approach is a deviation from the “one-size-fits-all” approach to public education.

14. What were the program’s start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

Commissioner Staples has one primary staff member working on this initiative, and many departments throughout the agency assist, including the Rural Economic Development Division and Communications Division. Promotion of this initiative has been accomplished with existing resources.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

There are not specific costs attributed to this initiative. Any costs are assumed by existing resources and staff.

16. How is the program funded?

This program uses existing resources funded through state general revenue appropriated to TDA.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

No.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

Existing equipment and technology are used to administer the program.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Yes, this initiative was created by Commissioner Todd Staples, Texas Department of Agriculture, 1700 N. Congress, 11th floor, Austin, Texas 78701, (512) 463-7476; todd.staples@texasagriculture.gov

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

No, we are not aware of similar programs in other states.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

No, the program is an ongoing effort. Legislation passed during the 2009 legislative session, and related action by the State Board of Education, will fully implement this initiative.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

Pros: The initiative has gained much support from the education and business communities as well as parents. Many parties recognize that our state's approach to education has not benefited our economy, and that this type of initiative will benefit students, educators, businesses, and Texas taxpayers.

Cons: Adding flexibility to the high school curriculum is only one piece of solving the dropout issue and the economic development issue.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

At its inception, the Parallel Pathways for Success program was an effort to increase the workforce for rural areas of the state. However, the concept has caught on, and many in state leadership see its potential to positively affect all areas of the state.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

Some in the educational establishment still hold fast to the idea that all students must follow the same academic path.