Reinventing the Rural Education Experience

Texas Commission on Virtual Education
June 29, 2022

MY STUDENTS,
YOUR STUDENTS,
OUR STUDENTS.

RURAL SCHOOLS
INNOVATION
ZONE

RSIZ Mission, Vision, and Core Beliefs

Our mission is to provide rural students high-quality opportunities for post-secondary success.

Our vision is reinventing the rural education experience.

Core Beliefs

- Students from rural communities should have *every* opportunity for access to challenging career paths to achieve high levels of postsecondary success.
- Rural students should be exposed to the best teachers in America.
- Rural schools are stronger through collaboration.
- Rural communities nurture big dreams through innovation.

The Rural Schools Innovation Zone is a collaborative partnership between districts, higher education and workforce partners that serves over 1200 students in South Texas.

RSIZ

Brooks County ISD Board of Trustees

Freer ISD Board of Trustees

Premont ISD Board of Trustees

PERFORMANCE CONTRACT

RURAL SCHOOLS INNOVATION ZONE

FALFURRIAS HS
Ignite Technical Institute
Citizen's Battalion Naval JROTC

FREER HS
Next Generation Medical Academy

PREMONT HS
Grow Your Own Educator Academy
Will Zelaya STEM Discovery Zone

The RSIZ includes 3 districts, 3 higher education institutions, and numerous workforce partners and provides students with access to more opportunities to gain work-related skills and earn college credits in high school and helps meet the regional workforce needs in South Texas.

Districts
Brooks County ISD
Freer ISD
Premont ISD

Higher Education Partners

Coastal Bend COLLEGE

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY KINGSVILLE

DEL MAR COLLEGE
Dreams. Delivered.

Virtual Model

- The RSIZ currently utilizes virtual capacities in a number of different ways to support the rural collaborative work in the region.

  - **Online courses/concurrent enrollment**
    - Given the hands on nature of many of the CTE pathways, not all coursework is able to be offered solely online, however several courses in the STEM and Next Generation Medical Academy are available for students to take online through the IHE partner.
    - This is an area the RSIZ would like to explore more, especially within pathways that are more conducive to virtual learning!
  - **Virtual Professional Development and Staff Sharing**
    - The RSIZ has leveraged virtual capabilities to support staff professional development across each of the three districts, including through the Teacher Incentive Allotment. Additionally the RSIZ, small scale, has developed ways to share teachers across the region through virtual capabilities.
  - **Wifi Equipped Buses**
    - Students within the RSIZ are able to travel out of their home district to access the academies in any of the districts. Transportation is provided for students through a WiFi equipped bus, allowing students to not have to lose learning time throughout the day.
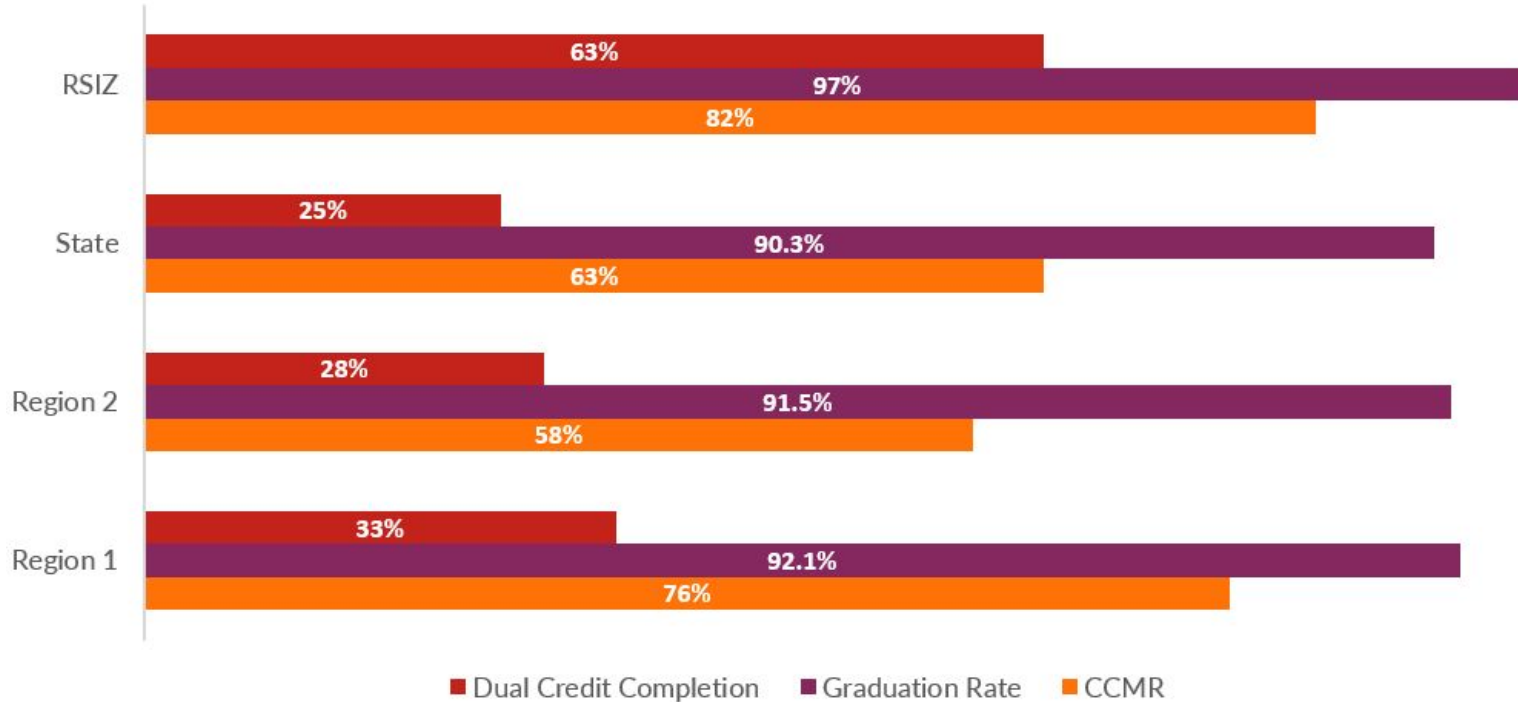
RSIZ Funding

- In its first two years, the RSIZ was fully funded through the School Action Fund/School Redesign Fund grants awarded by TEA to each of the three districts. These grants, combined with the Perkins funds awarded to the partnering districts were sufficient to fund individual academy improvements and collaborative investments.

- The RSIZ has developed a sustainable funding model through a payment structure that combines two incremental and proportional funding sources: per-pupil, cost-based tuition covered by CTE funding, and CCMR outcomes bonuses tied to the students who generate them.

Early Impact Data

Since the launch of the RSIZ in 2019, and despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been significant growth in student outcomes resulting in:

- An 4x increase in the percent of students completing a dual credit course, from 15% in 2018-2019 to 63% in 2020-2021.

- The RSIZ has outperformed the state and surrounding regions in CCMR score, graduation rate, and dual credit completion.

- The RSIZ has closed gaps against the state in almost all categories, with 78% eco-dis students, compared to the state average of 52% of students being eco-dis.

RSIZ

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020-2021, the RSIZ outperformed the state, Region 1, and Region 2 in CCMR score, graduation rate, and dual credit completion.

	Dual Credit Completion	Graduation Rate	CCMR
RSIZ	63%	97%	82%
State	25%	90.3%	63%
Region 2	28%	91.5%	58%
Region 1	33%	92.1%	76%

■ Dual Credit Completion   ■ Graduation Rate   ■ CCMR

Lessons Learned

- The RSIZ has shown what is possible when districts, higher education, and industry partners come together to expand options available to students while intentionally building opportunities that lead increased job creation and higher education access through a variety of learning models.

- Alignment of pathways and coursework across multiple districts and IHEs can be challenging but it can be done (especially through a combination of virtual and in-person options).

- It is possible for each district within a collaborative to maintain their identity even while partnering with others. Collaboration should not be equated with consolidation.

Testimonials

RSIZ

"The experiences with the RSIZ cannot be found anywhere else. We get that one-to-one learning with teachers and get to explore different certifications and careers. The academies open your eyes to things you never thought about in your career path."
- Premont ISD student

"The RSIZ has provided an opportunity for our program to thrive. Without the RSIZ, our district would not have sufficient student enrollment numbers to make the courses that are needed to complete our pathway."
- Brooks County ISD Teacher

"The RSIZ is raising expectations for our students, taking them from a place of low expectations to high expectations and giving opportunities that they may never have had."
- Freer ISD Teacher

Considerations

- Small scale investments in virtual capabilities for rural students can have large scale impact on student opportunities! Rural regions have the ability to scale programming and pathways through enhanced virtual capabilities.

- Given the growing teacher shortage across the state and country, creative staffing models utilizing virtual capabilities can be a way for rural districts to provide a high-quality education to students and more efficiently budget resources.

- Expansion of high-quality virtual education -- both virtual delivery of some content and the flexibility that comes with fewer restrictions on time and space/scheduling -- could help partnerships like the RSIZ flourish even more.

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