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Texas College Bridge Retrospective

Five years and counting: building bridges to postsecondary success
for students across the state of Texas



A good time for reflection

As we step into 2026, it feels like this is a good moment to reflect on the [Texas College Bridge \(TCB\)](#) program: its origins, purpose, challenges, successes, and future plans. The TCB program has come to embody much of what [The NROC Project \(NROC\)](#) has striven to accomplish over the last twenty-plus years, and we remain optimistic that TCB can provide a model for us to achieve similar positive impacts in other parts of the country. In service to our nonprofit mission, and to our many strategic partners, we hope this retrospective can provide some insight into the journey we have taken and may spark new ideas and opportunities for the broader community that has committed itself to improving student success in college and career.

About NROC and EdReady

NROC is an established, national, 501(c)3 nonprofit organization whose mission is focused on student success, with an emphasis on changing the way college and career readiness is approached and supported. For the last 22 years, NROC has been analyzing the challenges faced by students seeking postsecondary credentials and collaborating with educators to build better solutions. In particular, NROC has focused on the myriad problems with high-stakes testing and placement exams as measures of math and English readiness.

In the course of pursuing this work, NROC built a technical solution that is different and superior: [EdReady](#). This personalized learning platform takes an inventory of a student's knowledge and skills, and then offers a custom course of study to effectively improve a student's readiness and put them on a path to college success. Since its release in 2014, EdReady has been adopted by schools, systems, and states nationwide, and has been used by millions of students. Dozens of [case studies and research projects](#) have verified that thoughtful and committed EdReady-based interventions usually result in dramatic improvements in student performance and college success.

Critically, EdReady is a bridge to success. Placement tests inevitably mis-classify large numbers of students, resulting in qualified students being held back or excluded from higher education, and unqualified students failing classes and dropping out. EdReady is different. In EdReady, the aspiration is for every student to get the highest possible score, meaning we want them to be as prepared as possible. EdReady offers the opportunity for students to go well beyond base expectations; indeed, many students achieve a level of capability and confidence that opens up their horizons to pursue college studies and careers in areas that had previously felt out of reach.

The EdReady platform is highly flexible, and we have adapted it for a variety of institutional contexts so that it can meet the specific needs of each institutional partner and their students. NROC has also developed considerable expertise for launching and supporting student-success initiatives at scale. By combining our technological tools and our expertise, NROC is well positioned to collaborate with systems, states, or other nonprofit organizations to launch, grow, and sustain innovative programs that have the potential to improve college and career readiness of as many students as possible.

The inception of Texas College Bridge

In 2019, we became involved in discussions with Dallas County Promise, a program of [Commit!2Dallas \(Commit\)](#), a nonprofit organization, about the possibility of utilizing EdReady to better prepare program participants for their college-level studies. These discussions mirrored others we have had over the years with other 'Promise' programs, many of which seek to include additional academic supports to complement the social and financial supports that are at the heart of the programs. In contrast to other types of academic interventions, EdReady offers the opportunity to ensure that students are adequately prepared in a manner that can adapt to individual students as well as programmatic needs, and it works at scale.

The pandemic of 2020 upended those discussions but revealed a new opportunity; specifically, our colleagues in Texas saw that EdReady could provide a measure of academic support and assurance for pandemic-affected students across the state, not just in the Dallas County area. In collaboration with the [Texas Education Agency](#) (TEA), which had some federal funding for pandemic relief, and Commit, we were able to launch '[Texas College Bridge](#)' as a statewide program. Commit served as the initial program sponsor, and other project partners (including NROC) served as contractors to define the program, provide any support needed for both students and teachers, and reinvest in program improvement as we learned what was working well and what needed to change.

Initially, NROC charged a per-course fee for each student accessing the program, at a deeply discounted rate. The grant from TEA allowed us to provide the program at no charge for students (or districts) for up to 120,000 students. In addition to providing the platform and managing the resulting loads, NROC took the lead in pulling together experts and contributors from Texas institutions of higher education to establish the learning framework, working up the legal basis and data-sharing agreements for program participants (both secondary and higher

education), and resolving many other logistical challenges that are typical (in our experience) for programs of this scale. We were able to launch the program on schedule, and we were prepared for the expected demand. Students who successfully completed the program (for math, English, or both) were given a certificate that exempted them from remedial studies at any participating postsecondary institution in the state. Districts also received a 'College, Career, and Military Readiness' (CCMR) point for each completing student that helped in their state accountability metrics.

TCB Expansion

As expected, the program saw immediate and substantial usage. Our partners in the state helped to spread the word and continued to recruit more colleges and universities (IHEs) to the program, which meant that students could choose to attend any of a growing number of IHEs that would accept the TCB-derived exemption. We began evaluating the program immediately after launch, and based on early observations of student behaviors, we adjusted the program so that students were required to master more material and also so that there were more checkpoints on their progress. We also recruited a third-party research firm, [Cicero](#), to gather data from both districts and higher educational institutions so that they could start to evaluate longer term impacts on student success.

Even before the end of 2021, it became apparent that the initial tranche of TEA-purchased licenses was going to be insufficient to meet demand. Furthermore, one of the project partners asked NROC to take on handling everything related to student accounts. NROC agreed to assume additional obligations for the program and TCB was approved for a follow-on grant from TEA. The additional funding meant that we could continue to try to reach every student across the state and that the program would remain free for students and districts through the 2022-23 academic year.

The program continued to grow apace. As a result, TEA realized it either had to start limiting access to the program (by some criteria or other) or it had to find a way to pay for the program at a statewide scale. TEA indicated that they did not want to restrict access to the program, so NROC, Commit, and TEA agreed to a fixed, statewide grant that was decoupled from actual usage. At the rate of growth we saw at that time, on a path to eclipse 100K students before the end of the 2022-23 academic year, the fixed-price grant was a very good deal for the state. Importantly, the grant also gave NROC and project partners sufficient budgetary stability to invest in some long-needed improvements to the EdReady platform, particularly in the hosting infrastructure, in order to optimize for the significant load brought on by the TCB program.

TCB Maturation

[Initial analyses by Cicero](#) clearly supported the claim that the TCB program was improving student success in college studies. The TCB program is explicitly promoted to students who had not otherwise met the CCMR expectations in some other way, meaning that TCB students, as a whole, would otherwise have been measurably less prepared and therefore more likely to fail

college-level courses and drop out without a credential. Cicero's research showed that students who complete the TCB program do just as well, if not better, than students who were more clearly on the 'college matriculation' track. Of course there is variation from place to place, with some districts producing stronger TCB completers than others, and some colleges seeming to be a better fit for TCB completers than others. One of NROC's priorities for 2026 is to dig more deeply into different aspects of program implementation to better understand which practices might be most effective, and which practices should be avoided.

Based on the evidence and the clear demand to that point, it was clear that TCB was a program that deserved to be maintained, improved upon, and expanded as much as possible. Unfortunately, there was no viable pathway to maintaining direct funding from TEA, so we overhauled the way the program was managed and financed, starting with the 2024-25 academic year. In collaboration with all of the project partners, NROC assumed fiscal responsibility for the program and directly contracted with participating districts who agreed to pay for the program. The program fees are scaled by district enrollments (size) but otherwise entitle participating districts to utilize the program with as many of their students as they wish, all at no cost to students. It's important to note that the initial grant funding from TEA meant that the program already had 2-3 years of time to demonstrate its value to the districts, in students served and CCMR points earned; thus, for districts, there was little risk to paying since they could already see the benefit.

With this new program structure in place, the TCB program has essentially fledged from its initial incubation period with Commit and is now operating mostly independently. Key personnel at Commit, as well as other program partners, continue to be involved, and NROC has been able to direct all excess program revenues back into TCB improvements. Most of those improvements focus on the EdReady platform and associated technologies. However, NROC is also pursuing improvements in program administration, refreshed content, and various requests that have come from our district partners. Furthermore, NROC is now able to expand the value of the TCB program to include TSIA2 test prep, building bridges to dual enrollment and early college programs for more students at all grade levels. NROC is looking forward to bringing even more districts into the TCB program this year, and to expanding the value of the program to even more colleges and universities around the state. We are also in discussions with potential partners who would like to utilize TCB to support expedited pathways to job-ready credentials.

Look for more updates in this space as 2026 unfolds!