Education in Texas
The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly
Below is a survey of the state of education in Texas:

**The Good**

**Standards** – In 2010, Texas’s English language arts (ELA) and math standards received an A- and C, respectively, from the national Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Texas has not adopted the rigorous Common Core State Standards in ELA and math for grades K–12.

**Data System** – Texas’s state longitudinal data system contains nine of the ten core elements that the Data Quality Campaign deems essential. The state still must work to develop a teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students. Texas must also work to maximize use of data capacity in driving effective decision making to improve system and student performance.

**Return on Investment** – Student achievement in Texas is strong relative to state spending on education according to the 2007 national Leaders and Laggards report. Texas received a B and ranked 13th among all states for its return on investment, which was measured by its students’ performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—an independent national testing program also known as the Nation’s Report Card—relative to its per-pupil spending ($5,971, after controlling for student poverty, the percentage of students with special needs, and cost of living).

**The Bad**

**Teacher Policies** – In its 2009 State Teacher Policy Yearbook, the National Council on Teacher Quality gave the state of Texas an overall C- for state policies focused on teachers.

Specifically, the state received grades on its ability to perform in the following areas:

- Delivering well-prepared teachers: C
- Expanding the pool of teachers: B+
- Identifying effective teachers: D
- Retaining effective teachers: C-
- Exiting ineffective teachers: D

**Charter School Laws** – According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools’ 2011 ranking of state charter school laws, Texas’s public charter school law is ranked 21st in the nation. Although Texas law has a cap of 215 state-authorized open-enrollment charter schools, it does not have a cap on state-authorized university charter schools, state-authorized junior college charter schools, or school district-authorized charter schools. Texas law allows for a variety of public charter school options, including new start-ups, public school conversions, and virtual schools. Texas must remove restrictions on charter school growth, ensure equitable funding and access to facilities, ensure authorizer accountability, and provide adequate authorizer funding. For the 2010-11 school year, Texas has 166,000 students attending public charter schools, which provide needed educational options for families.
Student Achievement – Like many other states, Texas paints a misleading picture of how well its students are performing. While the state reports proficiency rates of 83% or higher for 4th and 8th graders in math, NAEP reveals a 38% or lower proficiency rate for both grades.7

Achievement Gap – Not only is the state performing insufficiently overall, but some groups of students are faring even worse. There is a 20-point gap in scores between Texas’s black and Hispanic students compared to white students on 4th grade math tests, and close to a 25-point gap between the state’s black and Hispanic students compared to white students on 8th grade math tests.8 This is morally unacceptable and a significant threat to continued prosperity and economic competitiveness in Texas and the nation.

Graduation Rate – Texas reports a 78% graduation rate,9 but the national Diplomas Count report calculates a rate of 65%.10 Below is the percentage of students graduating in 2007 in Texas as compared to the United States.
Dropouts’ Effect on the Economy – The Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that the lost lifetime earnings in Texas for the 2010 class of dropouts alone would total over $35 billion. If Texas graduated all students ready for college, the state would save as much as $282 million a year in community college remediation costs and lost earnings. In addition, if the state increased its male high school graduation rate just 5%, Texas's economy would see a combination of crime-related savings and additional revenue of about $691 million each year.11 Significantly reducing dropouts each year would multiply these positive outcomes.

Endnotes

3 Data Quality Campaign, 2010-11 Survey Results, 2011. (http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/survey/states)
7 New America Foundation, Federal Education Budget Project, September 2010. (http://lebp.newamerica.net/)

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