Gov. Perry Announces $2 Million Grant to Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD to Expand Early College Program

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

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Thank you Dr. [Daniel] King [superintendent, PSJA ISD], for the remarkable job you and your team do here in the district.

We’re here today to celebrate success success of the teachers, administrators and most of all the students of Pharr-San Juan and Alamo.

Here in this community, folks understand what it takes to succeed in life: a good education, hard work, and a strong community.

As technology shrinks our world, it brings us into closer competition with people all over the world who want the same jobs we do.

If students like the ones here today are going to experience a successful, prosperous career they need an education that will equip them to compete in the global marketplace.

You can tell by looking around this brand new school that this school district…and this community understand that reality.

Their embrace of that challenge is a key reason that students in this district are in a much more competitive position today than they were just a few short years ago.

A growing number of them are focusing on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math the STEM subjects that our students…and our state…will need to succeed.

I was very impressed to learn that PSJA’s T-STEM academy attained exemplary status in its very first year of existence.

Well done.

The early college program at the academy which allows students to earn college credit by taking advanced classes on campus is opening doors to college for young Texans who might never have considered that option before.

You’ve put together an impressive list of accomplishments but more, of course, needs to be done …and done right here. In recognition of your efforts, PSJA Independent School District has been awarded the “All Students: College-Ready, College-Connected” grant from the Texas Education Agency.

I’m here to announce that…over the next two years PSJA will be receiving $2 million to expand the early college high school program district-wide.
This grant will enable 60 percent of the district’s 8,000 high school students to experience college-accelerated programs and help place at least 30 percent of the districts middle schoolers in accelerated programs.

Early college programs may not be flashy but they work.

When high school students take courses for college credit they can earn up to two years’ worth of college credit or even an associate’s degree before walking the stage at their high school graduation. That equals two less years of tuition payments which represents a tremendous savings for any family.

I congratulate everyone involved with the district both for this grant and for all the good you’ve been doing for your community and your state.

You’re part of a larger effort across Texas to continue improving the quality of a Texas education to the point that every student graduates ready for college or career.

We’re moving closer to that goal by improving accountability emphasizing the basics and providing incentives to attract and retain the best teachers.

Our goals got a big boost last year, when I signed House Bill 3 which ensures our standards, curricula and textbooks are college-ready while giving students more flexibility to choose courses that interest and motivate them.

These are the latest in a series of education improvements that have led to improved TAKS scores in every subject and every grade for the 2008-2009 school year and recognition for Texas as one of only four states closing the achievement gap in math.

One indicator of our continued success can be found in Advanced Placement testing where student participation is up 170% over the last nine years and the number of passing scores went up 140%.

We have made significant progress but we have more work to do.

Since I announced the T-STEM initiative four years ago we have funded 46 of these remarkable schools in Texas and watched them change the lives of at-risk high school students.

Already, 86 percent of these schools are exemplary or recognized and all are meeting state standards.

On average, T-STEM campuses outperformed their peers by 18 percentage points in the 2008 Math TAKS and 19 percentage points in the 2008 Science TAKS.

This is remarkable given the challenges the average student in these academies face…and the relative newness of the schools themselves.

The program is making a difference, so we need to increase its reach by doubling the number of STEM academies across Texas.

I have also challenged the Legislature to create a $100 million STEM Challenge Scholarship fund for students seeking degrees or certificates in STEM fields.

Not only will such scholarships give students an incentive to continue their high-tech studies they’ll encourage them to stay in Texas so our state can benefit from their brainpower and work ethic and grow even stronger.

Let me congratulate everyone again and thank you for your hard work on behalf of these students.

As a result of your tireless efforts, Texas is an even better place to live, work, raise a family and get an education.
May God bless you and, through you, may He continue to bless the great state of Texas.