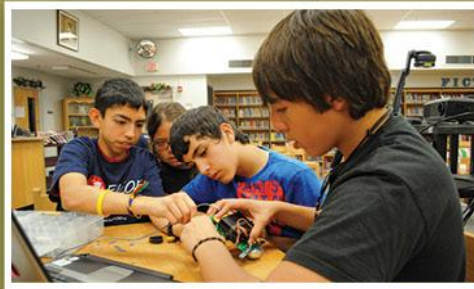




ENCORE

Engaging Communities for College Readiness



WHITEPAPER

Status of Education and College Readiness
in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas

A project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Status of Education and College Readiness in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to capture the essence of educational and college readiness in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas so that decisions regarding policies on improving college readiness levels of the students can be made.

According to data from the Texas Education Agency:

- Almost 320,000 students attend public schools in the Rio Grande Valley.
- Eighty-six percent (86%) of them are economically disadvantaged.
- Thirty-five percent (35%) have limited English proficiency status.
- Sixty-five percent (65%) are at-risk of dropping out of school.

Data on public school districts in the Rio Grande Valley shows that:

- Twelve (12) out of 32, or 38% of school districts, have higher graduation rates than the 79.1% high school graduation rate for the state of Texas.
- Sixteen (16) out of 31, or 52% of school districts, have higher dropout rates than the 10.5% 4-year dropout rate for the state of Texas.
- Three (3) out of 33, or 9% of school districts, have higher college readiness rates than the 44% college readiness rate for the state of Texas.
- Sixteen (16) out of 33, or 48% of school districts, have higher completion rates for AP/Dual Enrollment courses than the 23.1% rate for the state of Texas.
- One (1) out of 28, or 3.5% of school districts, have higher rates than the state of Texas for high school graduates who scored At/Above Criterion on the SAT.

This information calls for targeted programs to promote college readiness in the local school districts. Several programs being spearheaded by ENCORE (Engaging Communities for College Readiness) are already in place, but much more is desired.

Educational challenges in the Rio Grande Valley include:

- Poor socio-economic profile.
- Undocumented students and migrant students lacking proficiency in English.
- Lack of knowledge as to what it takes to complete high school and proceed to college.
- Lack of public transportation for students wanting to access higher education.

Educational potential of the Rio Grande Valley includes:

- Five institutions of higher education, namely The University of Texas-Pan American, The University of Texas at Brownsville/ Texas Southmost College, South Texas College and Texas State Technical College.
- Degrees available in science, engineering, technical fields, health education, teaching, humanities, computer science, behavioral sciences and much more.

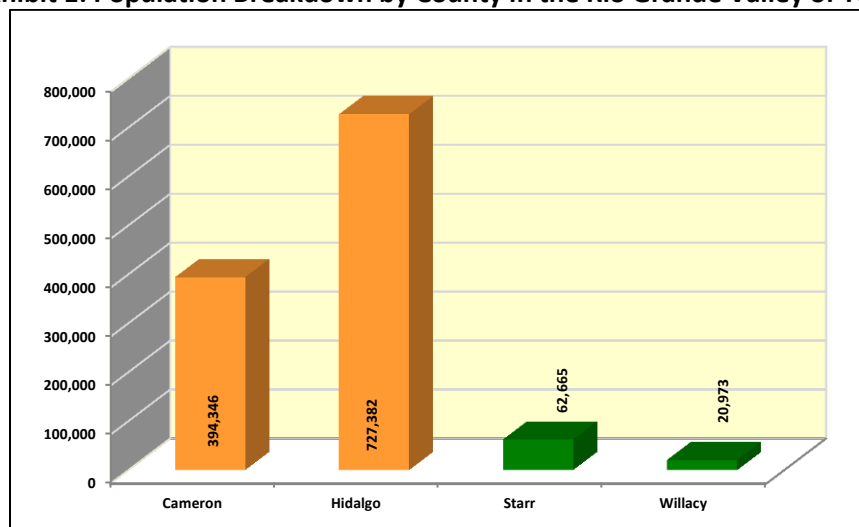
Some recommendations are:

- Get parents involved in the education of their children.
- Educate parents on the importance of college readiness.
- Initiate programs in women's hospitals and ob/gyn clinics so that mothers of new born babies can be educated about the importance of education.

INTRODUCTION

Tucked in the southernmost tip of Texas lies a four county region called the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) of Texas. The four counties comprising this area are Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy. Cameron County is also known as the Brownsville-Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and Hidalgo County is known as the McAllen-Edinburg-Mission MSA. Starr and Willacy counties are both rural in nature with a combined population of less than 85,000 people. According to the Texas State Data Center¹ the 2009 population of the Rio Grande Valley was 1.2 million (see Exhibit 1 for a breakdown of population by county in the RGV).

Exhibit 1: Population Breakdown by County in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas



Note: Rural Counties are shown in Green colored bars.

Source: 2009 Population Estimates by County, Texas State Data Center, UTSA, San Antonio, TX.

In spite of high unemployment and poverty rates in the area, the RGV has shown a growth rate of 23.2% between 2000 and 2009, whereas the state has shown an increase of 17.7% over the same period.

According to the Texas Workforce Commission², the unemployment rate of RGV in July 2010 was 12.4% as compared to 8.2% for the state of Texas. Over 35.5% of the RGV's population lives in poverty as compared to 16.3% in Texas; this is according to the U.S. Census Bureau³.

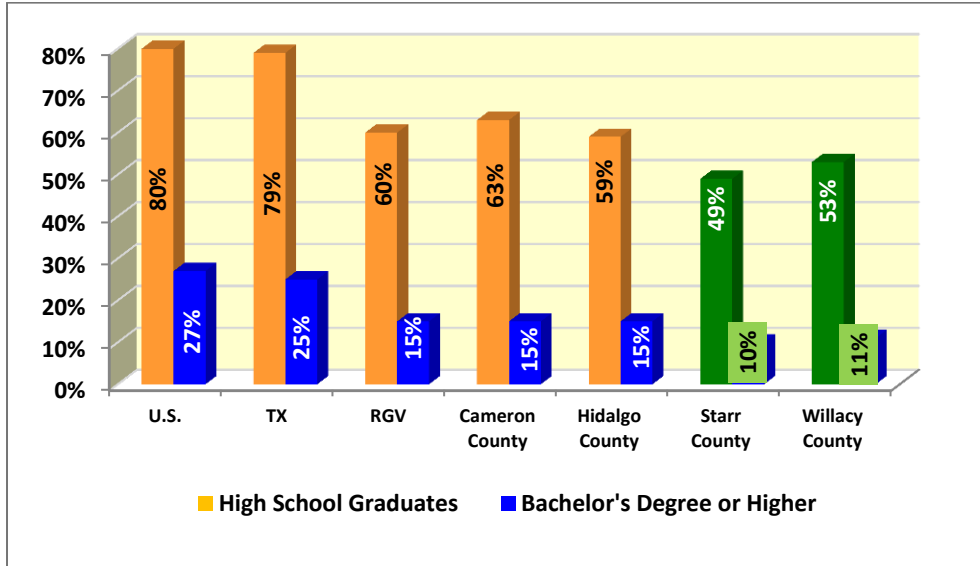
One of the primary factors influencing high unemployment and high poverty rates is lower educational attainment levels of the people living in the RGV. According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2006-2008), only 60% of the people living in the Rio Grande Valley have a high school diploma as compared to 79% in Texas and 85% in the U.S. A look at college graduation rates shows that only 15% of the people 25 years and older, living in the RGV, have a bachelor's degree or higher as compared to 25% in Texas and 27% in the U.S. Exhibit 2 shows the educational attainment levels in the 4 counties of the RGV, Texas and U.S.

¹ 2009 Population Estimates, Texas State Data Center, The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), San Antonio, TX.

² July 2010 Labor Market Information Report, Texas Workforce Commission, Austin, TX.

³ American Community Survey 2006-2008, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC.

Exhibit 2: High School Graduates and Those with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher in the U.S., Texas, RGV and its Individual Counties

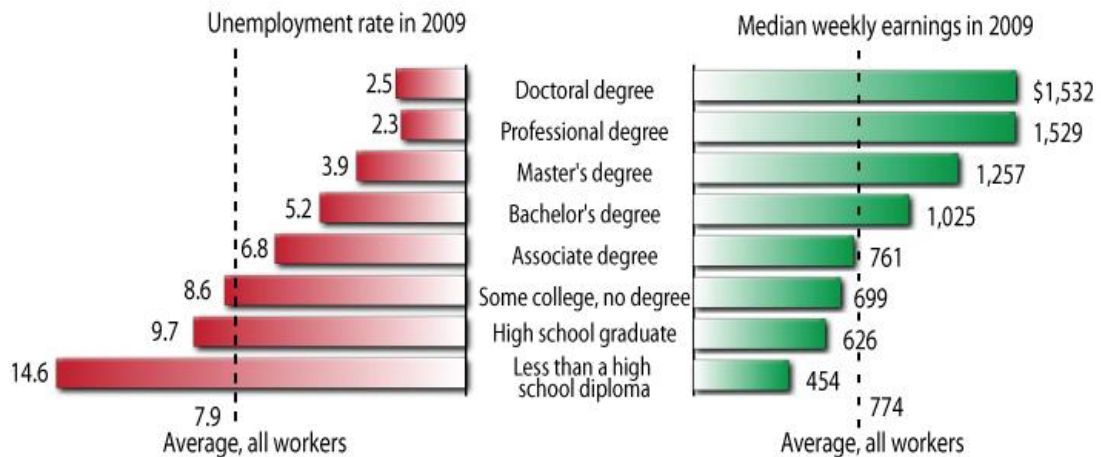


Note: Rural Counties are shown in Green colored bars.

Source: American Community Survey 2006-2008, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics⁴ and the Census Bureau⁵, there is a positive relationship between educational attainment and income (see Exhibit 3). Statistics show that the higher the educational attainment level, the lower the unemployment rate; and the higher the educational level, the greater the earnings.

Exhibit 3: Relationship of Educational Attainment with Unemployment Rate and Earnings in the United States



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey

Note: Data are 2009 annual averages for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.

⁴ Unemployment Rate Report and Earnings Report, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington, DC.

⁵ Educational Attainment Levels, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC.

For any region to progress it is important for its people to be skilled and well educated. President Barack Obama, in an address to the Joint Session of Congress on February 24, 2009, very aptly said,

“In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity – it is a pre-requisite.”

It is important for parents, educators and citizens to instill the importance of education in our youth. We as a society have to contribute to its success by helping our students graduate from high school and then from college in a timely manner without dropping out.

Our students have to be college ready before entering college. Then, one might ask, “What is College Ready?” According to David Conley⁶, “College readiness can be defined as the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in credit-bearing general education courses at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program. “Succeed” is defined as completing entry-level courses at a level of understanding and proficiency that makes it possible to take the next course in the sequence or the next level of course in the subject area.”

College Readiness is important not only for the students but also for institutions of higher education because being college ready not only allows students to achieve their goals, but it also helps postsecondary institutions function more effectively.

The next section presents data on the college readiness levels of students at the Independent School Districts in the Rio Grande Valley. The data presented in this report is from Texas Education Agency⁷ for the 2008-2009 school year and college-readiness and graduation related data are reported for the class of 2008. This is the latest data available at this time. More current data for the 2009-2010 school year and for the class of 2009 will be available in late November, 2010.

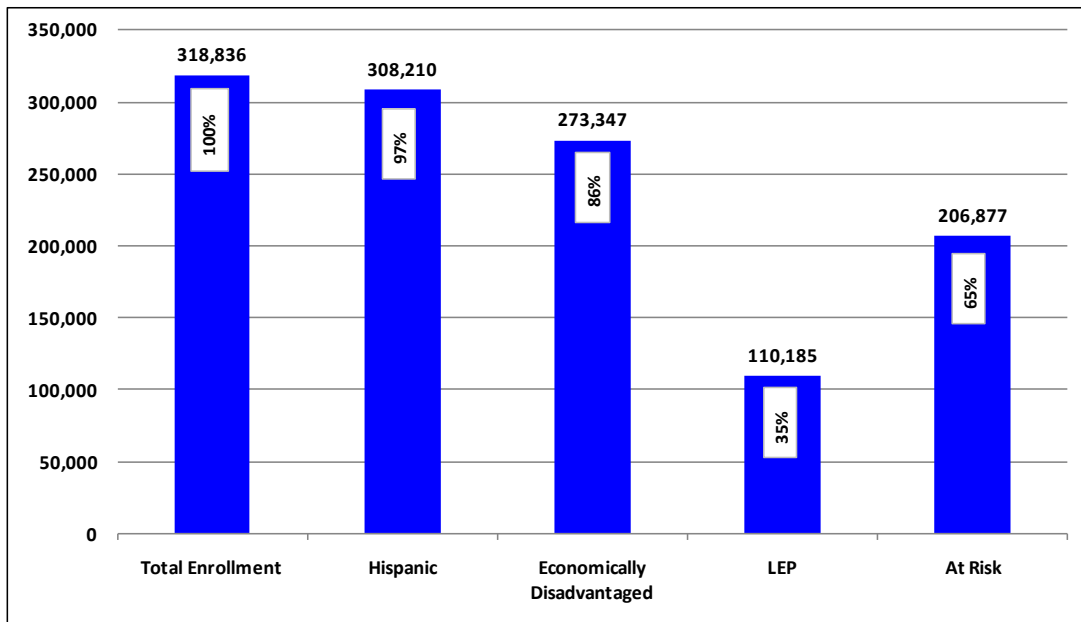
⁶ David Conley is a Professor and Director of the Center for Educational Policy Research (CEPR) at the University of Oregon.

⁷ Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

STATUS OF STUDENTS AND THEIR COLLEGE READINESS LEVELS IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

According to the latest data available from the Texas Education Agency⁸ (TEA), during the 2008-2009 school year, almost 320,000 students were enrolled in RGV public schools. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of all students were of Hispanic origin, 86% were economically disadvantaged, 35% had limited English proficiency (LEP) status and 65% were “at-risk of dropping out of school”⁹ (see Exhibit 4). Out of the total enrollment in public schools, 26% or almost 84,000 students were enrolled in high school (9th to 12th grades). For detailed tables on student characteristics by public school district in the four county region of the Rio Grande Valley.

Exhibit 4: Total Enrollment in Public Schools in the Rio Grande Valley and Selected Student Statistics



Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

Several decades ago if a person graduated from high school, he/she was assured of a satisfactory job, but now with every passing year more and more jobs are requiring at least some postsecondary education beyond high school. If the U.S. is to remain competitive in this global economy, it is important that its future workforce, the students of today, enter college without the need for developmental education. Essentially, it is important that students entering college actually be college ready.

Initiated in 2006 under a legislative mandate, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, (THECB) in collaboration with the Texas Education Agency (TEA), began to oversee the creation of College Readiness Standards (CRS) in Texas. These standards have now been put in place in the important areas of English/language arts, social sciences, mathematics and science. These standards are helping align the curriculum between public schools and institutions of higher education so that students can have a seamless transition from high school to college.

Along with data on graduation rates, dropout rates and other student statistics, the Texas Education Agency’s Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports data on several College Readiness

⁸ 2008-2009 Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

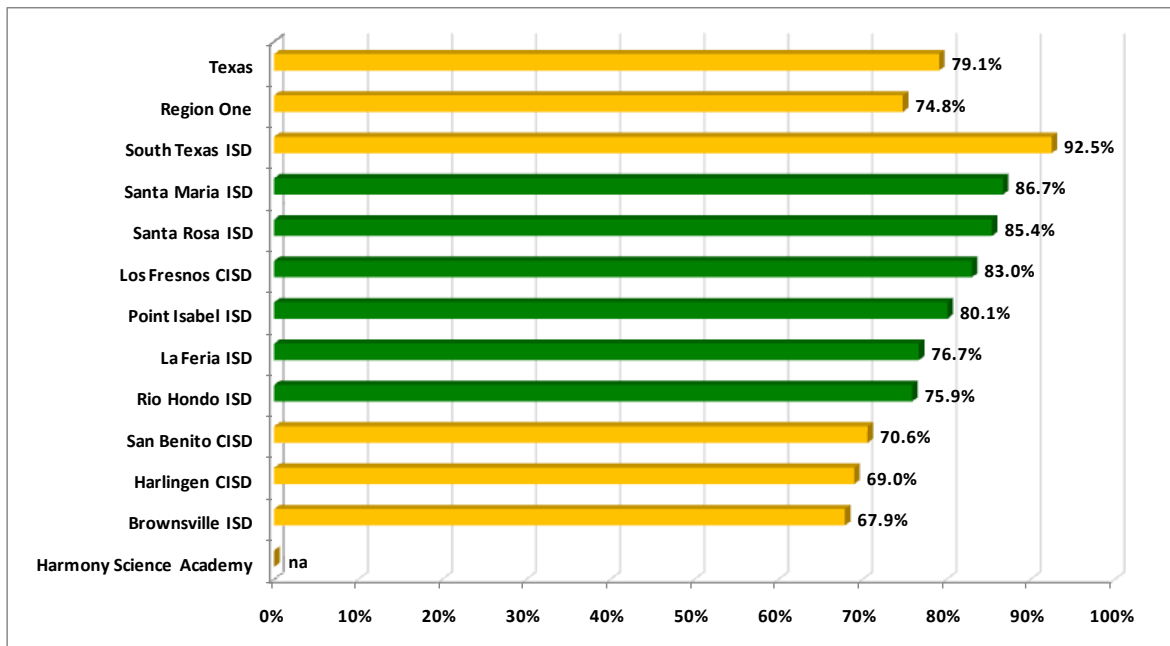
⁹ “At-risk of dropping out of school” criteria are presented in the Glossary section of this report.

variables. In the next few pages, data for public school districts in the RGV counties is shown for Graduation Rates, Dropout rates, College Readiness rates, AP/Dual Enrollment Completion rates and SAT At/Above Criterion rates. Detailed data tables on student statistics and college readiness variables for all the public school districts in the four counties (Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy) of the Rio Grande Valley. For comparison purposes, data on Texas and Region One is also presented in these tables. Region One encompasses seven counties which include the four counties of the Rio Grande Valley (Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy) and an additional three counties, Jim Hogg, Webb and Zapata. Definitions of all the terms used are presented in the Glossary in Appendix A.

A look at the graduation rate for high school students shows that Texas has a graduation rate of 79.1% and 12 out of 32 school districts reporting this data element for school districts in the Rio Grande Valley have a graduation rate higher than that of Texas.

Out of the 10 school districts in Cameron County reporting on the graduation rate of high school students, 5 school districts have higher graduation rates than the state of Texas. These 5 school districts are South Texas ISD, Santa Maria ISD, Santa Rosa ISD, Los Fresnos CISD and Point Isabel ISD (see Exhibits 5-A).

**Exhibit 5-A: Graduation Rate of High School Students
Texas, Region One, and CAMERON COUNTY School Districts – Class of 2008**



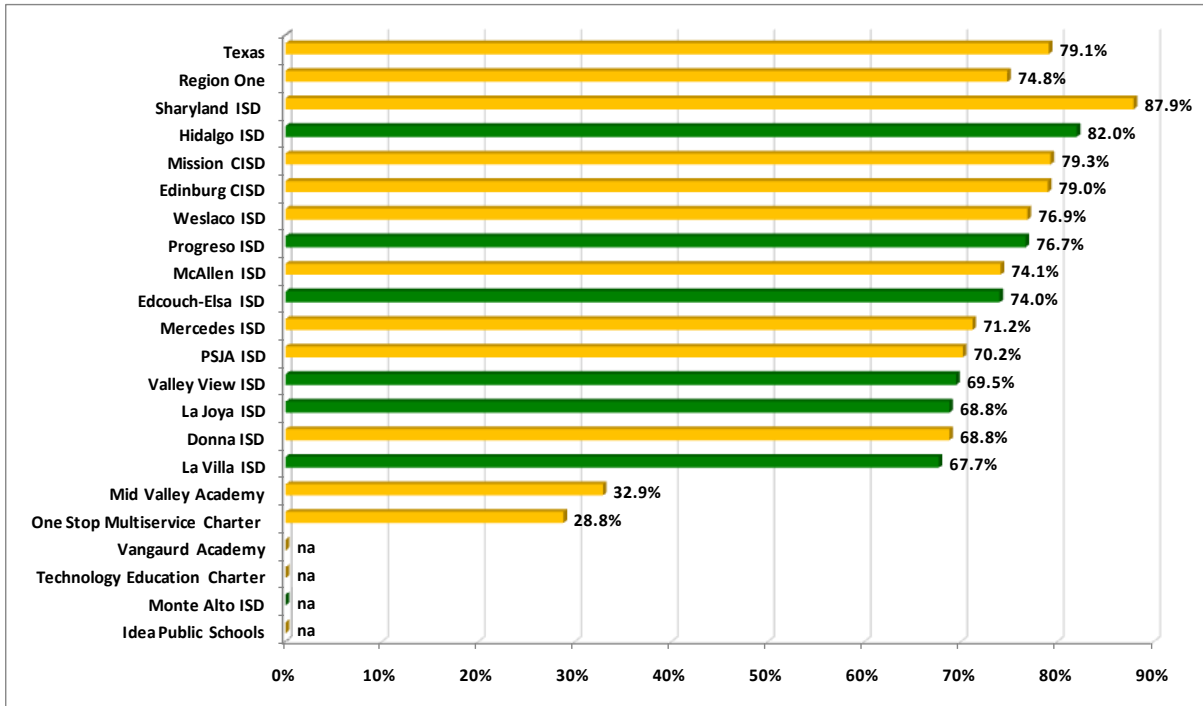
*Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.*

In Hidalgo County 16 school districts reported graduation rates. Out of these 16 school districts, 3 have higher graduation rates than the state of Texas. These school districts are Sharyland ISD, Hidalgo ISD and Mission CISD (see Exhibit 5-B).

Out of the 3 school districts in Starr County, 2 school districts, San Isidro ISD and Rio Grande City CISD, have higher graduation rates than the state of Texas (see Exhibit 5-C).

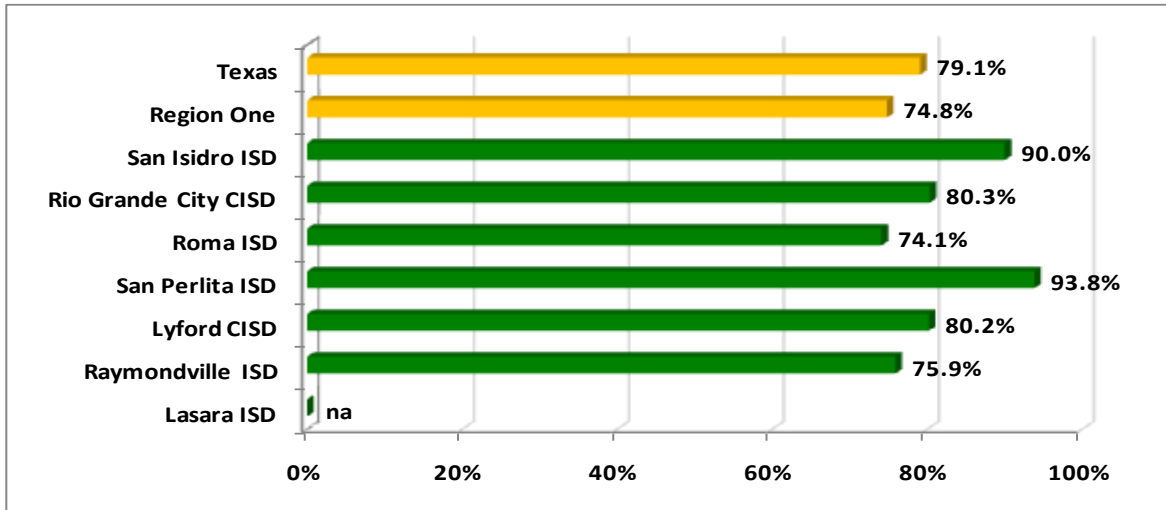
In Willacy County, out of the 3 school districts reporting graduation rates, 2 have a graduation rate higher than that of the state of Texas. These school districts are San Perlita ISD and Lyford CISD (see Exhibit 5-C).

**Exhibit 5-B: Graduation Rate of High School Students
Texas, Region One and HIDALGO COUNTY School Districts – Class of 2008**



Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

**Exhibit 5-C: Graduation Rate of High School Students
Texas, Region One, STARR & WILLACY COUNTY School Districts – Class of 2008**

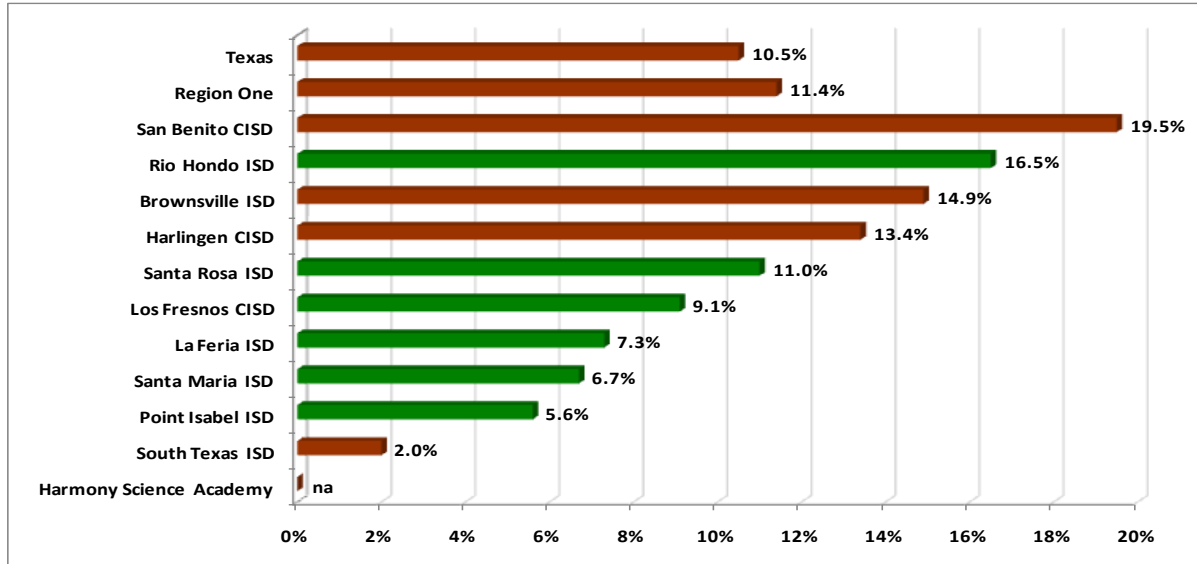


Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

Data on the 4-year dropout rate for high school students shows that Texas has a dropout rate of 10.5%, and 16 out of 31 school districts reporting this data element for school districts in the Rio Grande Valley have a dropout rate higher than that of Texas.

In Cameron County, out of the 10 school districts reporting on this data element, 5 school districts have lower dropout rates than the state of Texas. These 5 school districts are South Texas ISD, Point Isabel ISD, Santa Maria ISD, La Feria ISD and Los Fresnos CISD (see Exhibit 6-A).

**Exhibit 6-A: 4-Year Dropout Rate of High School Students
Texas, Region One, and CAMERON COUNTY School Districts – Class of 2008**



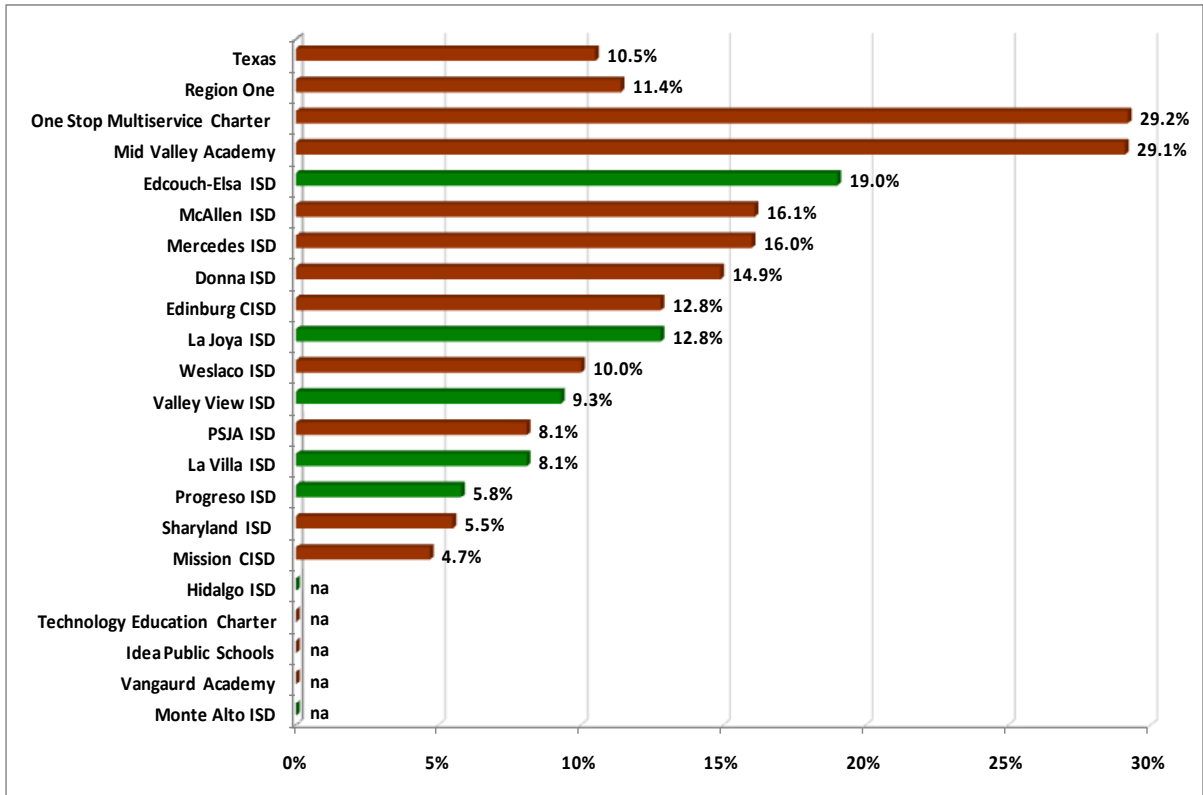
*Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.*

In Hidalgo County 15 school districts reported 4-year high school dropout rates. Out of these 15 school districts, 7 have lower dropout rates than the state of Texas. These 7 school districts are Mission CISD, Sharyland ISD, Progreso ISD, La Villa ISD, PSJA ISD, Valley View ISD and Weslaco ISD (see Exhibit 6-B).

Out of the 3 school districts in Starr County, 2 school districts, San Isidro ISD and Rio Grande City CISD reported lower 4-year high school dropout rates than the state of Texas (see Exhibit 6-C).

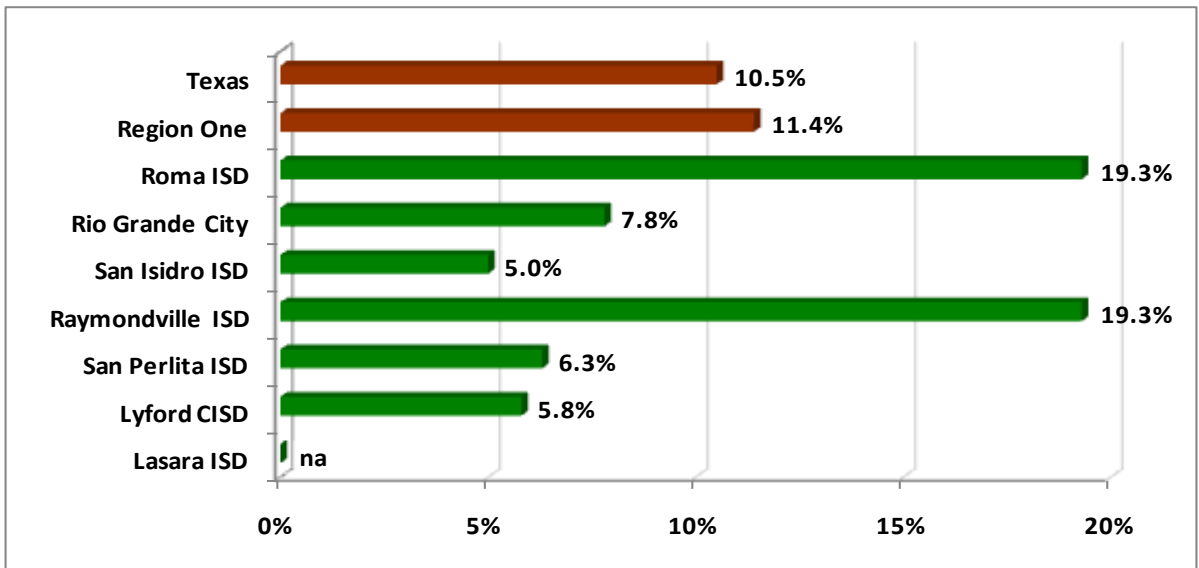
In Willacy County, out of the 3 school districts reporting 4-year high school dropout rates, 2 school districts, Lyford CISD and San Perlita ISD have lower dropout rates than the state of Texas (see Exhibit 6-C).

**Exhibit 6-B: 4-Year Dropout Rate of High School Students
Texas, Region One and HIDALGO COUNTY School Districts – Class of 2008**



Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

**Exhibit 6-C: 4-Year Dropout Rate of High School Students
Texas, Region One, STARR & WILLACY COUNTY School Districts – Class of 2008**

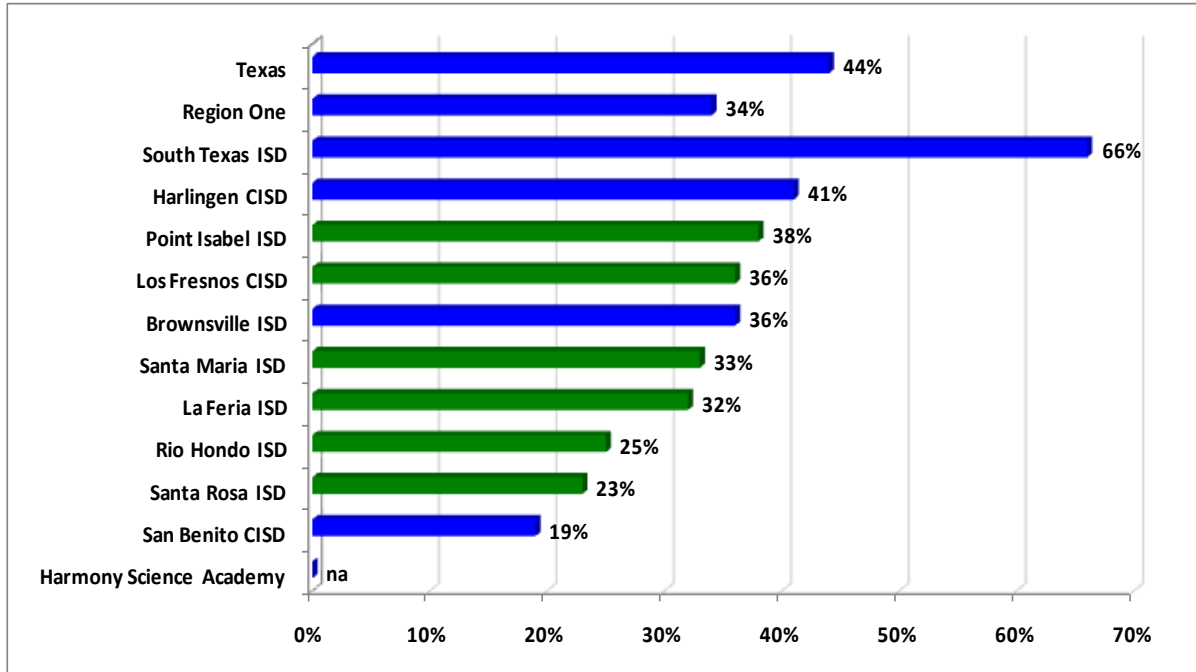


Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

For the class of 2008, in Texas only 44% of the high school graduates were college ready. A look at individual school districts in Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy counties shows that out of 33 school districts in the Rio Grande Valley for which college readiness data is reported, only 3 school districts are above Texas in college readiness.

In Cameron County, out of 10 school districts reporting on college ready graduates, only South Texas ISD has a higher percentage of high school students who are college ready. All the other 9 school districts are below the state rate for college ready high school graduates (see Exhibit 7-A).

Exhibit 7-A: Percentage of High School Graduates who are College Ready Texas, Region One, and CAMERON COUNTY School Districts – Class of 2008

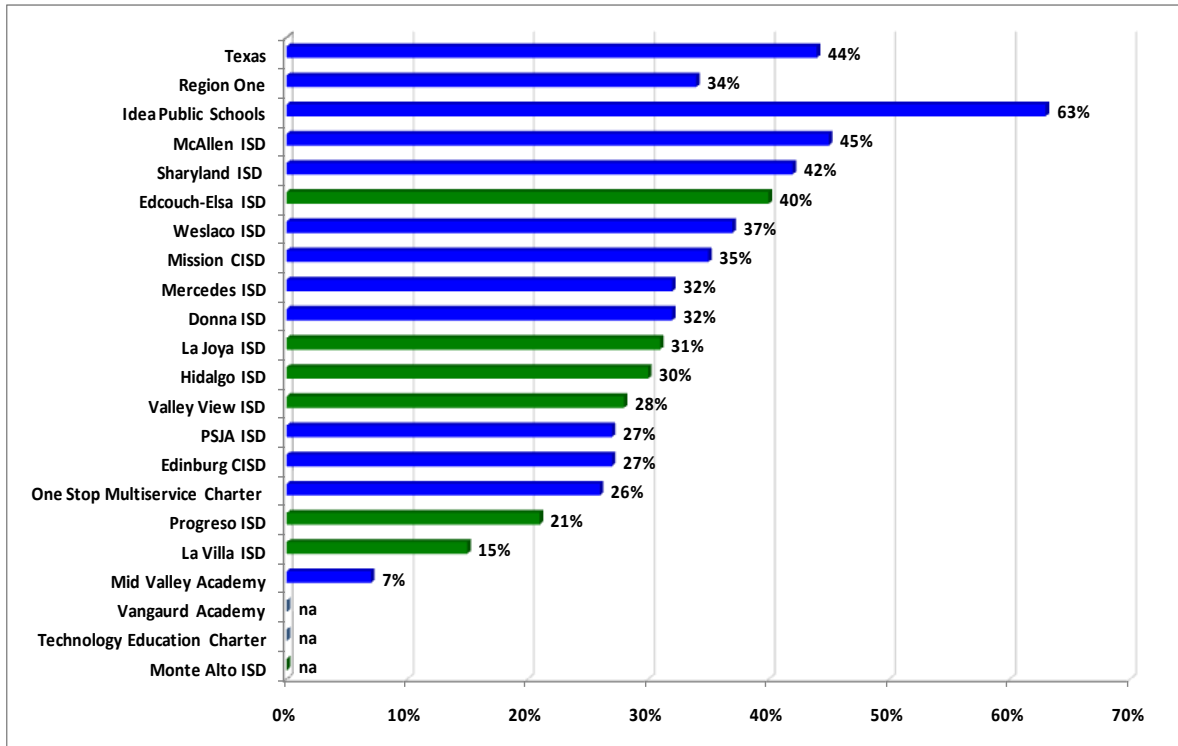


*Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.*

In Hidalgo County, out of 17 school districts reporting on the college ready status of high school graduates, 2 school districts, Idea Public Schools and McAllen ISD have a higher percentage of college ready graduates than Texas (see Exhibit 7-B).

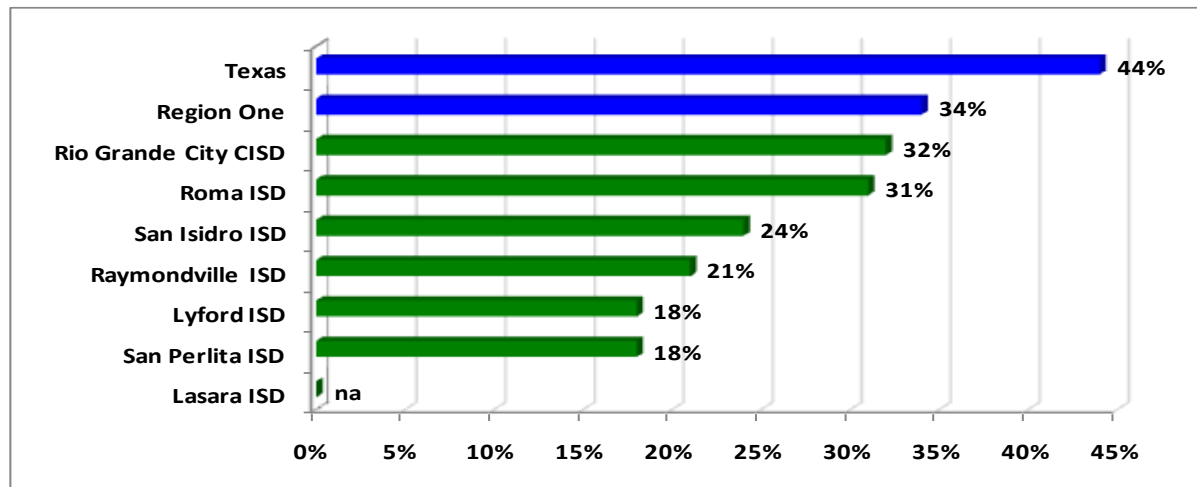
In Starr and Willacy Counties, the college readiness rates for all school districts are lower than the state's college readiness rate (see Exhibit 7-C).

**Exhibit 7-B: Percentage of High School Graduates who are College Ready
Texas, Region One and HIDALGO COUNTY School Districts – Class of 2008**



Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

**Exhibit 7-C: Percentage of High School Graduates who are College Ready
Texas, Region One, STARR & WILLACY COUNTY School Districts – Class of 2008**

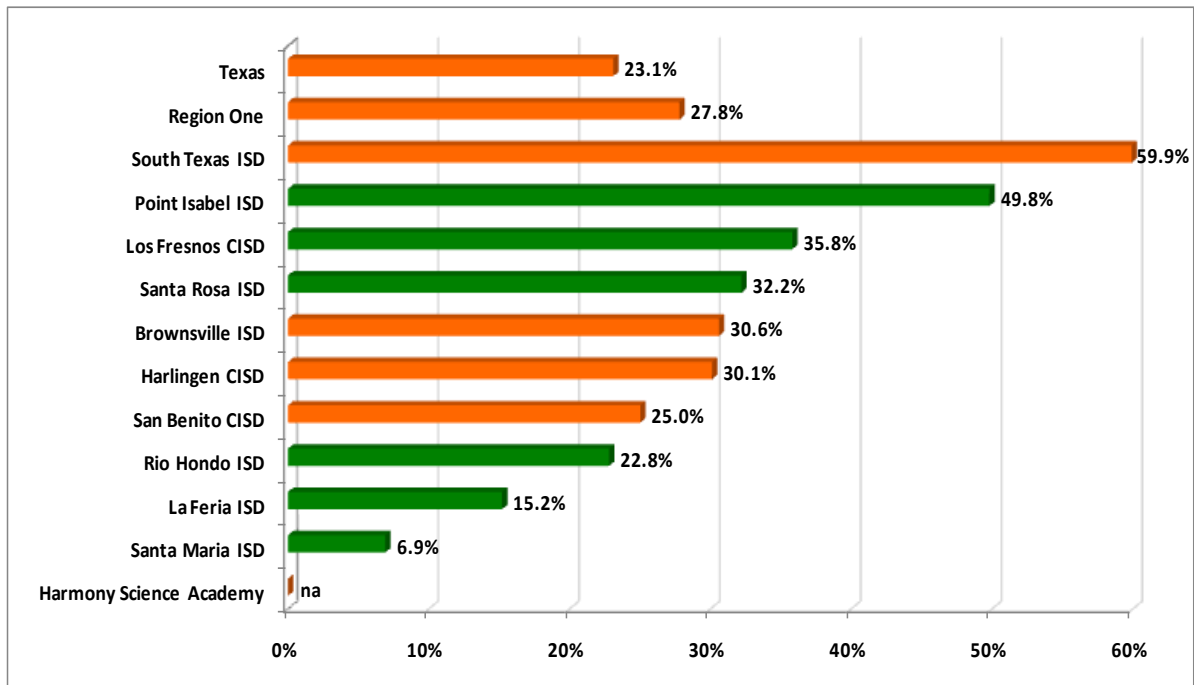


Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

Looking at completion rates of high school students for AP/Dual enrollment courses in Texas, we see that 23.1% of high school students taking AP/Dual enrollment courses successfully completed at least one such course during the 2007-2008 school year. Out of 33 public school districts reporting data on this variable, 16 school districts have higher completion rates than Texas.

In Cameron County, out of 10 school districts reporting on completion rates for AP/Dual Enrollment Courses, 7 school districts have higher rates than the state of Texas. These 7 school districts are South Texas ISD, Point Isabel ISD, Los Fresnos CISD, Santa Rosa ISD, Brownsville ISD, Harlingen CISD and San Benito CISD (see Exhibit 8-A).

Exhibit 8-A: Percentage of High School Students Completing AP/Dual Enrollment Courses Texas, Region One, and CAMERON COUNTY School Districts – 2007-2008 School Year

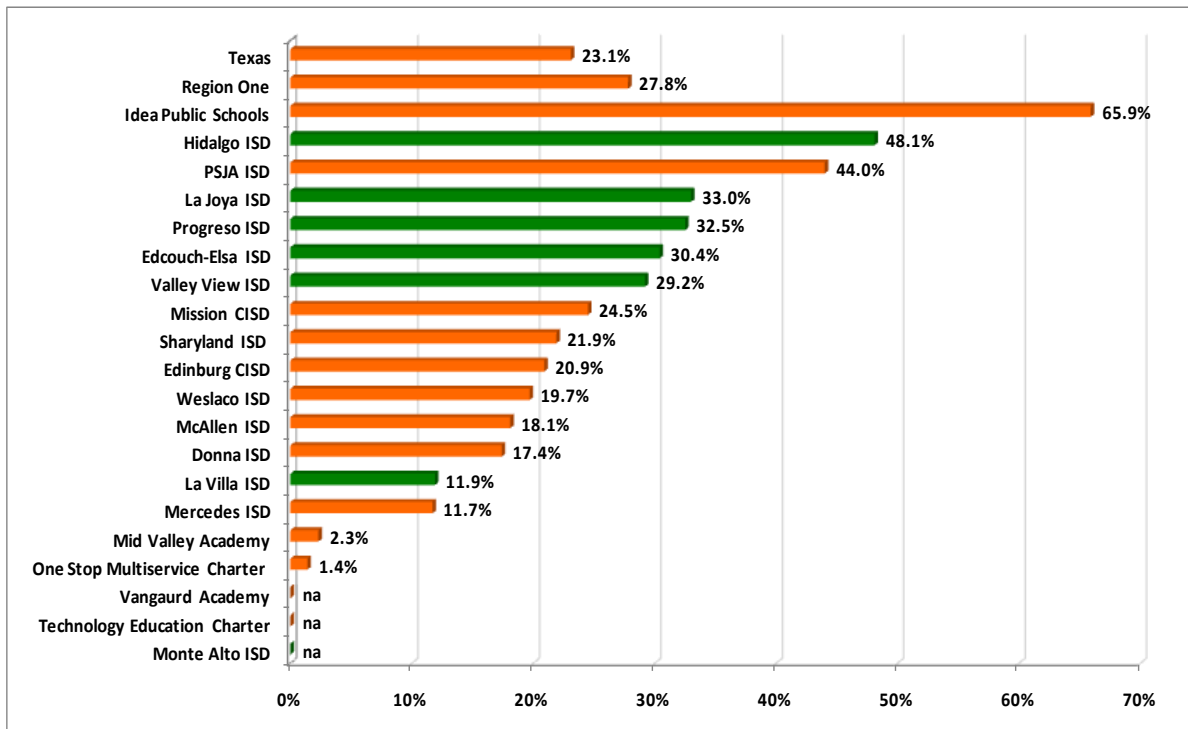


*Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.*

Out of 17 school districts reporting on high school students completing AP/Dual Enrollment Courses, 8 school districts have higher rates than the state of Texas. These school districts are, Idea Public Schools, Hidalgo ISD, PSJA ISD, La Joya ISD, Progreso ISD, Edcouch-Elsa ISD, Valley View ISD and Mission CISD (see Exhibit 8-B).

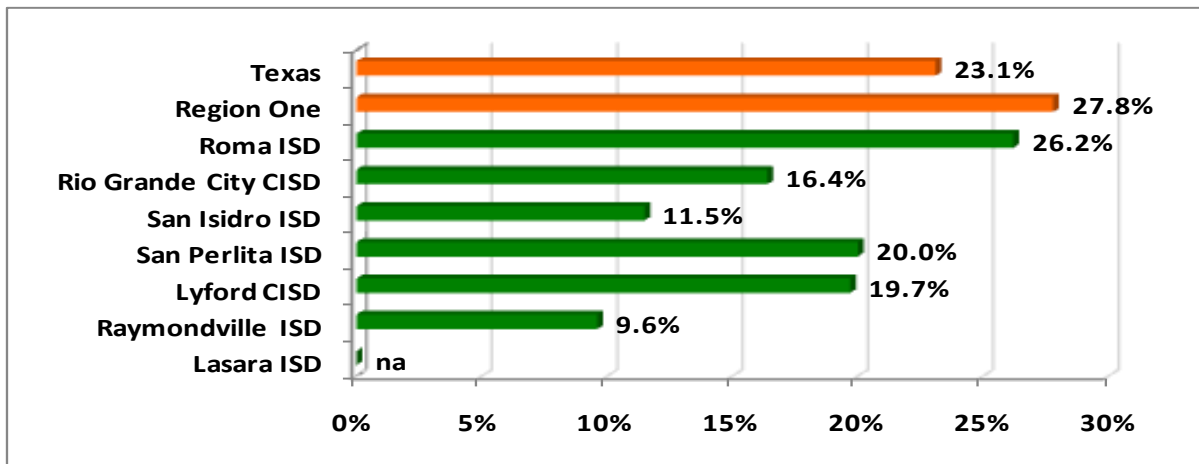
Out of the 6 school districts in Starr and Willacy counties reporting on high school students completing AP/Dual Enrollment Courses, only Roma ISD in Starr County has a higher completion rate than the state of Texas (see Exhibit 8-C).

**Exhibit 8-B: Percentage of High School Students Completing AP/Dual Enrollment Courses
Texas, Region One and HIDALGO COUNTY School Districts – 2007-2008 School Year**



Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

**Exhibit 8-C: Percentage of High School Students Completing AP/Dual Enrollment Courses
Texas, Region One, STARR & WILLACY COUNTY County School Districts – 2007-2008 School Year**

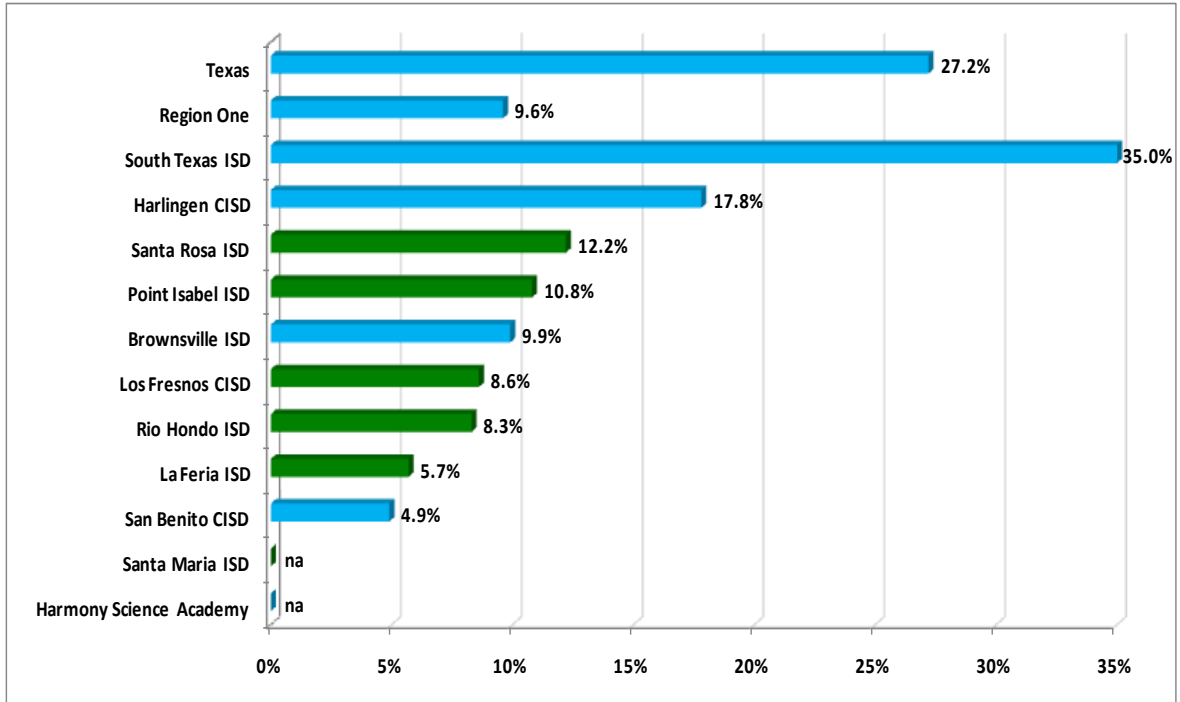


Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

Of all high school graduates in Texas taking the SAT, 27.2% scored At/Above the Criterion (a score of 1110 is considered “At Criterion”). Out of 28 school districts in the Rio Grande Valley reporting this statistic, only 1 school district (South Texas ISD) has a higher percentage (35%) of graduates who scored At/Above Criterion on the SAT.

Out of 9 school districts in Cameron County reporting on the percentage of high school graduates who scored At/Above Criteria on the SAT, only South Texas ISD has a higher percentage than the state of Texas (see Exhibit 9-A).

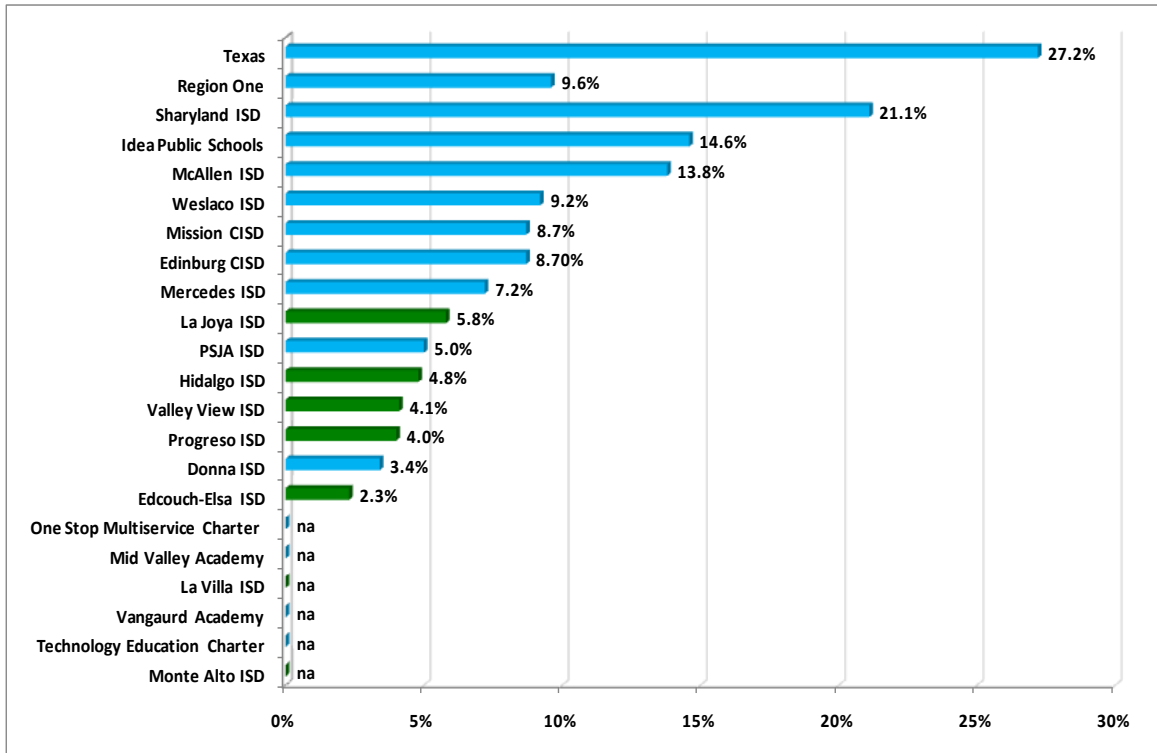
Exhibit 9-A: Percentage of High School Graduates who Scored At/Above Criterion on the SAT Texas, Region One, and CAMERON COUNTY School Districts – Class of 2008



Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
 Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

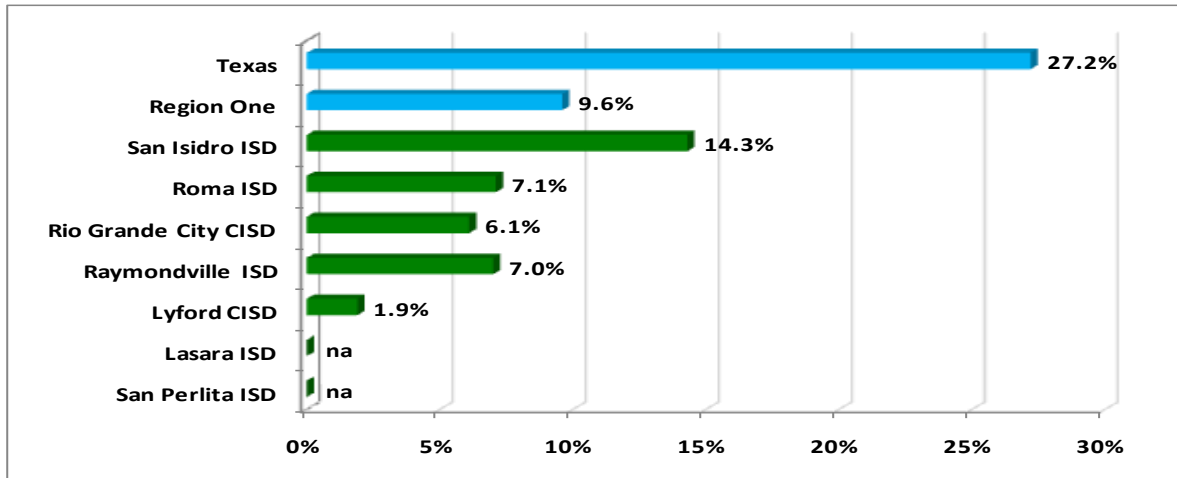
Out of 14 school districts in Hidalgo County reporting on the percentage of high school graduates who scored At/Above Criteria on the SAT, none of the school districts has a higher rate than the state of Texas (see Exhibit 9-B). The same is true for school districts in Starr and Willacy Counties (see Exhibit 9-C).

**Exhibit 9-B: Percentage of High School Graduates who Scored At/Above Criterion on the SAT
Texas, Region One and HIDALGO COUNTY School Districts – Class of 2008**



Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

**Exhibit 9-C: Percentage of High School Graduates who Scored At/Above Criterion on the SAT
Texas, Region One, STARR & WILLACY COUNTY School Districts – Class of 2008**



Note: All ISDs in small towns/rural areas are shown in Green colored bars.
Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.

Data in the previous pages shows that dropout rates in Texas schools are in double digits and college readiness levels of high school students are below 50%. The situation in the Rio Grande Valley shows that students in this area lag behind state levels. On all college readiness variables, more than 50% of RGV public school districts are trailing behind Texas' college readiness levels. Much work is needed to bring students of the Rio Grande Valley to Texas' level and then beyond.

It is important to note that a significantly high number of undocumented families live along the Texas-Mexico border. In public education, federal guidelines prohibit questions of legal status; hence states may not deny access to public education to immigrant children residing within their boundaries. English is not the first language of a majority of these immigrant children, making it that much more difficult for them to cope with their classes and resulting in higher dropout rates for RGV schools and/or not being college ready if they do graduate from high school. Being college ready is the vanguard of our students' success in the 21st century.

Research shows that a major contributor toward college readiness is the involvement of parents in the education of their children. With this in mind, a local non-profit organization, the Texas Valley Communities Foundation, has created the ENCORE (Engaging Communities for College Readiness) initiative to involve parents and communities in the education of their children. The next section looks at the various efforts of ENCORE to improving college readiness levels in the RGV.

ENCORE'S EFFORTS TOWARD COLLEGE READINESS IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY OF TEXAS

Corporations, community organizations and educational institutions are well aware of the consequences of not having college ready high school graduates. It is for this reason that several programs have been put into place to assure that students not only graduate from high school, but are also ready to go to college and graduate in a timely manner. Only then can the RGV be prepared to compete successfully in this global economy.

A major player in promoting College Readiness in the Rio Grande Valley is Texas Valley Communities Foundation (TVCOF). TVCOF has started a program called ENCORE (Engaging Communities for College Readiness) which has provided substantial funding to eleven different school districts and community based organizations to promote College Readiness. The goal of each of these grantee organizations is to work with parents and local communities to help prepare children for school and/or a college education, as all these grantee organizations realize that the only effective way out of poverty is a good high school and college education.

What follows are brief descriptions of how each of the grantee programs are giving back to the communities in the Rio Grande Valley and working to promote College Readiness among students.

1. Valley Interfaith is working with schools in the Rio Grande Valley to increase the number of students on a pathway to college. Valley Interfaith is focusing on developing a community of parents and educators at the elementary, middle and high school levels in the Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District (ECISD) that will work to improve student achievement, high school readiness, improved high school graduation rates and college readiness. Their overall goal is to improve educational outcomes for Rio Grande Valley children and their families.
2. Another community based organization, HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters), is geared at working in the rural communities of San Carlos, La Blanca, Hargill, and La Hielera. As part of their grant, HIPPY's focus is to provide parent involvement and school readiness intervention in order to break the cycle of poverty by empowering parents to prepare their children for school success.

HIPPY's goal as an organization is to work with the Promotoras and Edinburg CISD to apply prevention services to the children who are most likely to struggle in school. The HIPPY Rio Grande Valley staff developed CAMP HIPPY, implemented to help those residing in the Edinburg CISD service area. CAMPS are held at parish halls and community centers in order to remove some of the anxiety, allusions, and misconceptions surrounding the act of attending or volunteering at one's child's school. All parents attending develop an action plan on how to get more involved in their child's school and get an understanding of what it means to be college ready.

3. Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District (ECISD) in partnership with ENCORE have implemented college readiness initiatives for students and parents. ECISD is implementing the "ENCORE College Readiness Family Sessions" a strong and dynamic parental involvement and family literacy component to promote awareness and prepare parents with the knowledge and tools they need to guide and improve their children's academic success for an effective college preparation. Parents with their children participate in hands-on college readiness activities conducted concurrently, in English and Spanish, where they explore the ultimate benefits of a college education.

ECISD along with ENCORE, South Texas Promotores Association (STPA), and HIPPIY-RGV, is providing training to approximately 550 students and parents from local colonias surrounding Edinburg. Colonias are residential areas along the Texas-Mexico border that lack some of the most basic living necessities, such as potable water and sewer systems, electricity, paved roads, and safe and sanitary housing. ECISD is implementing an array of services that will assist in providing academic success, parental involvement, providing highly effective teachers with continued staff development, forming partnership with universities and community involvement. This program is assisting in providing the tools necessary for students to successfully graduate from high school and continue into post-secondary education of their choice.

The ECISD parents consult with STPA and HIPPIY-RGV, community based organization groups to coordinate community walks and orientations to the citizens of Edinburg on the importance of acquiring a high school diploma and continuing their post-secondary education. ECISD and STPA are implementing college readiness family sessions on the importance of the high school recommended and distinguished graduation plans and stressing the importance of continuing with a post-secondary education.

4. The Ninth Grade Transition and Intervention Program developed and implemented by the Rio Grande City CISD is designed to serve at minimum one hundred eighth graders transitioning to the ninth grade. All students that participated are identified as being “at-risk of dropping out of school”¹⁰.

The goals of the proposed Summer Transition and Intervention Program are to:

- Decrease the number of students in need of remedial and developmental interventions and coursework during their ninth grade year in high school.
- Increase the number of students promoted to the next grade on time and on grade level.
- Increase student planning and preparation for transition to high school.
- Increase student and parental knowledge of rigorous high school and college standards, available programs and activities, school policies and procedures, postsecondary academic and career opportunities, and other activities designed to increase student completion and success.

During a proposed four week period in the summer, selected students received six hours of daily instruction in the areas of mathematics and reading.

The district is ready to enhance parental and community presentations to target migrants; provide an ACT and SAT preparation course specifically aimed at migrant students; and promote high quality universities and post secondary institutions to migrant students and their parents via printed and other material.

5. Donna ISD is utilizing funds under the ENCORE Grant Program to implement programs that will provide students and parents of the 3-D Academy with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to inform and prepare students to be college ready.

Students attending the Donna 3-D Academy are recovered drop-outs identified as “at-risk of dropping out of school”. Because of this, the Donna 3-D Academy has implemented a college readiness program which provides students with the skills and resources necessary

¹⁰ “At-risk of dropping out of school” criteria are presented in the Glossary in Appendix A.

to begin their post secondary education. Students are enrolled in a College Success class that assists students with the skills needed to thrive in a college setting. While attending the 3-D Academy students are also enrolled in dual credit courses at South Texas College providing students the college experience and ability to explore a variety of college career courses. The Donna 3-D Academy is a Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA) test site that offers students the opportunity to take the required college entrance exam as well as providing a Quick THEA camp to prepare for mastery of the assessment. Students and parents of the 3-D Academy are assisted in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA) as well as on-line enrollment applications to the college or university of their choice.

6. The South Texas Promotores Association (STPA) strives to expand educational opportunities available to promotores (grassroots community promoters) to strengthen their practice and to enhance the development and well-being of the communities served by promotores. STPA has an existing membership of more than 140 promotores and a prospective membership of more than 200 promotores.

STPA has a long and strong history of working with communities, reaching out to the hard-to-reach population, linking them to available resources and support services, bringing services to the communities, organizing health fairs, disseminating education, and advocating to build individual and community capacity by increasing knowledge and self-sufficiency. STPA is building on existing capacity to develop and support the ABC initiative to successfully mobilize ENCORE's college-readiness efforts in the Rio Grande Valley through outreach, awareness, and promotion of postsecondary education.

The Adelante, Bienvenidos al Colegio (ABC) initiative is providing outreach, awareness, and promotion on the importance of increasing interest in postsecondary education among Colonia residents who are parents of students attending middle and high school. Through these activities ABC is helping increase interest in parents of middle and high school children to help their children be college-ready to pursue post secondary education. This initiative will also increase the number of Hidalgo County Colonias' residents who will become knowledgeable on college careers.

ABC's targeted actions include 1) Outreach to Colonia residents, 2) Raising Awareness to help people understand that post-secondary education is reachable and convenient, and 3) Promote education and availability of post-secondary programs.

The goals of this program are to promote greater interest in post-secondary education and make it more accessible, affordable, and connected among middle and high school-aged Hispanic students and their parents. To that end, the ABC initiative is encouraging and supporting economically disadvantaged parents to instill in their middle and high school children the desire and drive to acquire the essential readiness skills/preparation to successfully pursue post-secondary education.

7. La Union del Pueblo Entero (LUPE) is widely recognized throughout the Rio Grande Valley as a leader and advocate for low-income communities. Through the Al Colegio: Si Se Puede! Initiative and with the support of ENCORE, LUPE is utilizing its public presence to disseminate college readiness information to the community in support of students pursuing post-secondary education. LUPE's Outreach Specialists will work with approximately 11,000 low-income community members a year with the message of support for student college preparation. Serving as a resource for informative materials and trainings, LUPE expects to accomplish its objectives and its mission.

Additionally, the Al Colegio: Si Se Puede! initiative, sustains a series of activities to enhance the community's awareness in regards to college readiness. LUPE devotes a segment of each of its monthly General Membership meetings to issues associated with public education, where LUPE provides informative materials on college readiness to attending participants.

El Vuelo del Aguila, LUPE's monthly newsletter, features an article in each issue discussing the topic on education presented at its General Monthly meetings. Furthermore, LUPE also sponsors a financial aid fair at the San Juan office, where ENCORE and local representatives participate and reinforce the message that post-secondary education is a realistic goal for all students who finish high school, and that it is a critical first step to a satisfying career.

8. In an effort to relay the importance of post-secondary education to families across the Rio Grande Valley, ENCORE is coordinating marketing efforts with another community-based program, VAMOS (Valley Alliance of Mentors for Opportunities and Scholarships). The Valley Alliance of Mentor for Opportunities & Scholarships (VAMOS) is a nonprofit organization run primarily by devoted volunteers. In March of 1996, 62 local business and community leaders assembled to improve and broaden the educational opportunities for Hispanic students in South Texas. Its main function is to raise money for academically accomplished Hispanic students. Every year, VAMOS sponsors four-year scholarships to deserving high school graduates from various backgrounds for enrollment at a university of their choice. In addition, VAMOS not only supports students by paying for tuition & books but helps with motivation and encouragement through its Mentoring Program which monitors students throughout their college careers to ensure their success.

Through an earned media strategy, VAMOS' goal is to increase the public awareness regarding the importance of college readiness by means of grassroots marketing efforts.

With a strong network of leaders in education, business and community, VAMOS serves as a powerhouse in disseminating critical information to numerous audiences throughout the Rio Grande Valley.

9. ENCORE, in partnership with UTPA Valley Outreach Center (VOC), is increasing parental involvement and enhancing peer mentorship to better prepare middle and high school students for a post-secondary education. UTPA Valley Outreach Center is carrying out its efforts throughout two great programs; the Mother Daughter Program, and the Go Center/Collegiate G-Force.

The Mother Daughter Program (MDP) of The University of Texas-Pan American is a unique intervention program for young girls who are currently in the seventh or eighth grade and their mothers. The program helps MDP "teams" (mothers and daughters) recognize the benefits of higher education through a support network of school counselors, community leaders and members, and professional role models. During the Summer of 2009, MDP implemented a residential summer camp, GAMES (Girls Adventuring in Math, Engineering, and Science), which allowed participants to experience college life while learning about STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) career opportunities. Funds from ENCORE allowed the GAMES camp to be extended for an additional day and helped implement activities that promote 21st century skills in the daughters and their mothers.

The Go Center program is being implemented in communities across the state to help recruit students into higher education. Go Centers foster a college going culture through

the promotion of college access resources to aid students in continuing their education and encouraging an attitude of succeeding in post-secondary education.

The Collegiate G-Force (CGF), a key element of the Go Center, is a group of college students who are committed to achieving a college-going culture by supporting the Go Center's efforts. They serve as mentors to middle and high school students by raising awareness of the value of a higher education and by showing students and parents how to better prepare academically and financially for a college education. ENCORE's partnership with VOC enhances the availability of a well-trained and educated High School G-Force that is able to mentor their peers, friends and family members.

10. The Llano Grande Center for Research and Development's college readiness program, College Access for Parents and Students (CAPS), is a character development program that instills leadership skills emphasizing on students' intellectual and social development through an exploration of self and community along with mentorship support.

Through the ENCORE and Llano Grande Center partnership, students are provided the resources to focus on the four major pillars of the CAPS program: academic support, understanding the application process, leadership development, and identity building. CAPS integrates these four pillars into a family learning environment where every one of the 1,500+ high school students and their parents are invited to prepare for college matriculation, and more importantly, college graduation. The mastery of these pillars is congruent to the overarching goal of college readiness that ENCORE strives to accomplish in the community.

ENCORE'S support helps to increase the number of mentors that provide tutoring and college mentoring available to students after school. These mentors work directly with students and parents to ensure that they are well equipped with the knowledge and resources to get them prepared for postsecondary education.

11. ENCORE is also supporting the T-STEM Early College High School (ECHS) Academy at Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) ISD to promote the importance of completing a rigorous curriculum in order for students to achieve college success. In partnership with South Texas College (STC), PSJA provides underserved students an opportunity to achieve, at no cost, as much as two years of college credit or an associate's degree at the same time they are earning a high school diploma. STC administers the ACCUPLACER to determine college readiness. Students who do not meet the college readiness standards are assessed again in the summer.

Students at the Early College High School Academy utilize the KUDER-Education and Career Portfolio to allow students to plan coursework and track educational progress, guide education and career planning, explore careers by clusters, explore college major and college searches, financial aid and scholarship searches, and build resumes. Students in the T-STEM ECHS Academy requirements include taking rigorous courses in mathematics, science, and general education liberal arts courses.

12. ENCORE has partnered with South Texas Arising Stars of South Texas (STARS) Program to promote college readiness. STARS was established in October 2002 as a grass-roots organization. It was founded with the goal of making higher education accessible to the students of South Texas. Since its beginnings, the STARS Scholarship Foundation of South Texas has helped local students obtain higher education at the college or university of their choice. However, L&F Distributors has been awarding scholarships for 16 years. STARS has

awarded close to \$14 million dollars in scholarships to those qualified South Texas students. STARS receives between 2500 to 3000 applications every year of which about 1100 students are selected to receive scholarships awards. The success of STARS is in large part due to the generous individuals, businesses, and organizations that support our organization. STARS works diligently, year around, to ensure that each dollar raised is awarded to deserving students of South Texas to attend the college of their choice. STARS believes that education is essential to the growth and enhancement of our community and our endeavor is to assist the students of South Texas in fulfilling their dreams.

13. ENCORE joint in partnership with the Internal Referral Resource Assistance (IRRA) to prepare all students to become college and career ready. IRRA was founded in 1987, the main objective of this program was to assist dropout adults and youth to earn a high school diploma along with training in job search job seek and employability skills so that they may be marketable in the workforce. Though the years, IRRA have served many youth who dropped out of public schools to obtain their GED. IRRA have served as the Alternative School for nine (9) public schools. IRRA established a partnership with Texas Valley Communities Foundation to implement the ENCORE Career Awareness and Mentorship Program (CAMP) for all learners in the six IRRA centers. The ENCORE CAMP is an inquiry-based initiative offering a broad array of enrichment academic activities to provide students and parents a significant college and career readiness experience. The mission of the ENCORE CAMP is for students and their parents to understand the importance of higher education and college readiness, exposing them to the benefits of a college education and exploring different careers paths in the areas of math, science, engineering and business. Students are mentored by professional Hispanic role models from across different industries who conduct interactive presentations throughout the ENCORE CAMP experience.

All the above mentioned programs involve both students and their parents in promoting college readiness so that parents can realize the value of a college education and they can then encourage their children to perform better in school and continue to pursue a college degree and complete it successfully.

CONCLUSION

This section looks at the educational challenges and potential of the Rio Grande Valley and then presents recommendations for improving college readiness in this economically depressed area.

Educational Challenges

One of the biggest educational challenges in the Rio Grande Valley is its socio-economic profile. As stated in an earlier section, 86% of the students in the Rio Grande Valley public schools are economically disadvantaged. This also means that they come from homes where parents may not have even completed a high school diploma, let alone a college degree. The involvement of these parents in their children's education is critical. Only when parents realize the importance of education can they instill the same in their children.

Other challenges that add to the burden are undocumented students in local public schools, migrant students, those lacking proficiency in English and the lack of knowledge as to what it takes to complete a high school diploma and then proceed to college.

Lack of resources in the Rio Grande Valley hinders access to higher education; the lack of a transportation infrastructure being the primary hindrance. The RGV is vastly spread out and offers five institutions of higher education but access to these institutions is not possible without personal transportation. If students in this economically depressed area do not have access to transportation, then it becomes difficult for them to pursue higher education and be well educated. Building a proper public transportation infrastructure may contribute to higher educational levels in the RGV.

Due to these challenges most students and their parents in the RGV cannot even think that college is a possibility.

Educational Potential

There are five institutions of higher education in the Rio Grande Valley. These institutions are: The University of Texas-Pan American, The University of Texas at Brownsville, South Texas College, Texas Southmost College and the Texas State Technical College. The combined student enrollment at these institutions was 70,597 in Fall 2009. These institutions have seen a growth of 72% in enrollment since Fall 2000. In FY2009, there were 8,540 graduates from these institutions, a 94% increase since Fall 2000.

The institutions of higher education provide degrees in several areas of engineering (electrical, mechanical, civil and manufacturing), nursing, teaching, business, computer science, criminal justice, physicians assistant studies, liberal arts and humanities, sciences, education, social and behavioral sciences, and health and human services. All five institutions of higher education stress the importance of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and these institutions have seen a rise in STEM majors over the past decade. Even though the RGV is currently lacking a medical school and a law school, local leaders are working with legislators to bring these two schools to the Valley in the coming years.

Recommendations

One very important way in which students' readiness for college can be enhanced, and their prospects for completing college improved, is by getting the parents involved. Someone said it very succinctly,

"Nothing helps a child succeed like an involved parent. A little willingness from a child's parents can work wonders in the classroom." ~ Anonymous.

With the national focus on college readiness, the Texas Education Agency, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, local public school districts and institutions of higher education are doing their part by aligning curricula across high schools and colleges, by putting college readiness standards into place and by implementing standardized tests for college readiness. These institutions and agencies can use all the help they can get from local citizens and community based organizations in helping educate parents on the need for college readiness. With 40% of the RGV population 25 years and over, not having a high school diploma and with 85% of its population 25 years and over, not having a bachelor's degree or higher, it is crucial to educate parents about the importance of education.

Organizations like ENCORE are taking bold steps in a direction of involving parents and communities in the education of their children. However, more resources along with a continuous flow of resources are needed to continue this work. Parents of new borns need to be educated in the importance of education. Programs in women's hospitals and ob/gyn clinics need to be implemented where the seeds of the importance of education can be planted in the minds of new mothers. More and more parents of elementary and middle school students need to be targeted and these programs need to be institutionalized. Once the parents are convinced of the importance of education, they can instill its importance in their children.

APPENDIX A

Glossary of Terms

Advanced Course/Dual Enrollment Completion

This indicator is based on a count of students who complete and receive credit for at least one advanced course in grades 9-12. Advanced courses include dual enrollment courses. Dual enrollment courses are those for which a student gets both high school and college credit.

College Readiness Indicators

These indicators are grouped together to help provide a picture of college preparedness at a given ISD. They can be used by educators as they work to ensure that students are able to perform college-level course work at institutions of higher education.

The indicators include:

- Advanced Course/Dual Enrollment Completion;
- Recommended High School Program/Distinguished Achievement Program Graduates;
- AP/IB Results;
- Texas Success Initiative (TSI) Higher Education Readiness Component;
- SAT/ACT Results; and
- College-Ready Graduates.

College-Ready Graduates

To be considered college-ready as defined by this indicator, a graduate must have met or exceeded the college-ready criteria on the TAKS exit-level test, or the SAT test, or the ACT test. The criteria for each are:

Subject	Exit-level TAKS		SAT		ACT
ELA	>= 2200 scale score on ELA test AND a "3"; or higher on essay	OR	>=500 on Critical Reading AND >=1070 Total	OR	>= 19 on English AND >= 23 Composite
Math	>= 2200 scale score on math test	OR	>=500 on Math AND >=1070 Total	OR	>= 19 on Math AND >= 23 Composite

Different values are calculated for this indicator:

(1) *Eng Lang Arts*. This shows the percent of graduates who scored at or above the criterion score on the TAKS, SAT, or ACT English language arts tests.

$$\frac{\text{number of graduates who scored at or above the } \textit{College-Ready} \textit{ criterion for ELA}}{\text{number of graduates (class of 2008) with ELA results to evaluate}}$$

(2) *Mathematics*. This shows the percent of graduates who scored at or above the criterion score on the TAKS, SAT, or ACT mathematics tests.

number of graduates who scored at or above the *College-Ready* criterion for mathematics
divided by
number of graduates (class of 2008) with mathematics results to evaluate

Completion Rate

This indicator shows the status of a group (cohort) of students after four years in high school. The cohort consists of students who first attended ninth grade in 2004-05. They are followed through their expected graduation as the class of 2008. Any student who transferred into the 2004-05 cohort is added to it, and any student who transfers out of the 2004-05 cohort is subtracted from it.

- A student who transfers into the cohort is one who, for example, moves into the cohort from another high school in Texas or from out of state.
- A student who transfers out of the cohort is one who, for example, moves to another public high school in Texas; note that these students are then transferred into the cohort of the receiving high school and district. There are also students who move out of the state or out of the country, or students who transfer to private schools or who are home-schooled. These types of transfers cannot be tracked, and students who leave for these reasons are not included in completion rate calculations.
- Students do not change cohorts even if they repeat a grade or skip a grade. If they begin with the 2004-05 ninth grade cohort, they remain with that cohort. This means, for example, that a student who started the ninth grade in 2004-05, but takes 6 years to graduate (i.e., in May 2010) is still part of the 2004-05 cohort; they are not switched to the 2006-07 cohort. This student would be considered a continuing student, and counted as part of the Continued HS number for the class of 2008.

The four student outcomes used in computing the longitudinal rates are:

(1) *Graduated*. Based on the 2004-05 cohort, this shows the percent who received their high school diploma on time or earlier - by August 31, 2008. It is calculated as follows:

number of students from the cohort who received a high school diploma by August 31, 2008
divided by
number of students in the 2004-05 cohort

(2) *Received GED*. Based on the 2004-05 cohort, this shows the percentage who received a General Educational Development certificate by August 31, 2008. It is calculated as follows:

number of students from the cohort who received a GED
divided by
number of students in the 2004-05 cohort

(3) *Continued High School*. Based on the 2004-05 cohort, this shows the percentage still enrolled as students in the fall of the 2008-09 school year. It is calculated as follows:

number of students from the cohort who were enrolled for the 2008-09 school year
divided by
number of students in the 2004-05 cohort

(4) *Dropped Out (4-yr)*. Based on the 2004-05 cohort, this shows the percentage who dropped out and did not return by the fall of the 2008-09 school year. It is calculated as follows:

number of students from the cohort who dropped out before the fall of the 2008-09 school year
divided by
number of students in the 2004-05 cohort

Criteria for students “at-risk of dropping out of school”

According to the Texas Education Code 29.081(d)(1)

Student “at risk of dropping out of school” includes each student who is under 21 years of age and who:

- (1) was not advanced from one grade level to the next for one or more school years;
- (2) if the student is in grade 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, or 12, did not maintain an average equivalent to 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum during a semester in the preceding or current school year or is not maintaining such an average in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum in the current semester;
- (3) did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered to the student under Subchapter B, Chapter 39, and who has not in the previous or current school year subsequently performed on that instrument or another appropriate instrument at a level equal to at least 110 percent of the level of satisfactory performance on that instrument;
- (4) if the student is in prekindergarten, kindergarten, or grade 1, 2, or 3, did not perform satisfactorily on a readiness test or assessment instrument administered during the current school year;
- (5) is pregnant or is a parent;
- (6) has been placed in an alternative education program in accordance with Section 37.006 during the preceding or current school year;
- (7) has been expelled in accordance with Section 37.007 during the preceding or current school year;
- (8) is currently on parole, probation, deferred prosecution, or other conditional release;
- (9) was previously reported through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) to have dropped out of school;
- (10) is a student of limited English proficiency, as defined by Section 29.052;
- (11) is in the custody or care of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services or has, during the current school year, been referred to the department by a school official, officer of the juvenile court, or law enforcement official;
- (12) is homeless, as defined by 42 U.S.C. Section 11302, and its subsequent amendments; or
- (13) resided in the preceding school year or resides in the current school year in a residential placement facility in the district, including a detention facility, substance abuse treatment facility, emergency shelter, psychiatric hospital, halfway house, or foster group home.

Economically Disadvantaged

The percent of economically disadvantaged students is calculated as the sum of the students coded as eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or eligible for other public assistance, divided by the total number of students:

$$\frac{\text{number of students coded as eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or other public assistance}}{\text{total number of students}}$$

RHSP/DAP Graduates

This indicator shows the percent of graduates who were reported as having satisfied the course requirements for the Texas State Board of Education Recommended High School Program or Distinguished Achievement Program. It is calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{number of graduates reported with graduation codes for Recommended High School Program or Distinguished Achievement Program}}{\text{number of graduates}}$$

SAT/ACT Results

These include the College Board's SAT Reasoning Test and ACT, Inc.'s ACT Assessment. Both testing companies annually provide the agency with testing information on the most recent test participation and performance of graduating seniors from all Texas public schools. Only one record is sent per student. If a student takes an ACT or SAT test more than once, the agency receives the record for the most recent examination taken.

Three values are calculated for this indicator:

(1) *Tested*. This shows the percent of graduates who took either college admissions test:

$$\frac{\text{number of graduates who took either the SAT or the ACT}}{\text{number of non-special education graduates}}$$

Note that "graduates" in the denominator of equation (1) does not include special education graduates; however, special education graduates who took either the SAT or ACT are included in the numerator.

(2) *At/Above Criterion*. This shows the percent of examinees who scored at or above the criterion score on either test (1110 on the SAT, or 24 on the ACT)

$$\frac{\text{number of examinees who scored at or above criterion}}{\text{number of examinees}}$$

(3) *Average Score*. This shows the average score for the SAT total and the average score for the ACT composite, calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{total score (mathematics plus critical reading) for all students who took the SAT}}{\text{number of students who took the SAT}}$$

and

$$\frac{\text{total composite score for all students who took the ACT}}{\text{number of students who took the ACT}}$$

Despite the addition of the writing portion of the SAT, the criterion score continues to be based on mathematics and critical reading only.

TAKS (Accommodated)

This is the same as the general TAKS assessment with certain format accommodations, such as larger font and fewer items per page.

Texas Success Initiative (TSI) - Higher Education Readiness Component

The Texas Success Initiative (TSI) is a program designed to improve student success in college. It requires students to be assessed in reading, writing and mathematics skills prior to enrolling in college, and to be advised based on the results of that assessment.

Students may be exempted from taking a test for the Texas Success Initiative if they have a high enough score on their exit-level TAKS tests for mathematics and English language arts, as set by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The qualifying scores are scale scores of 2200 on their TAKS mathematics and English language arts with a written composition score of 3 or higher on the writing component. This indicator shows the percent of students who achieved this level of proficiency by subject (English language arts and mathematics). Performance on exit-level TAKS (Accommodated) tests is included in determining TSI.

*Sources: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency, Austin, TX.
Texas Education Code, Texas legislature, Austin, TX.*