

**An Analysis of Extant Data that Addresses Sociological, Curricular, Instructional,
and Academic Assessment Issues That Affect Hispanic Students'
College Readiness in South Texas**

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Introduction

The changing demographics in Texas and the southwest have created concern for educators in public schools and higher education. As Texas becomes a minority majority population, the challenges associated with diversity, the growing need to accelerate acculturation, the dilemma of English as a Second Language (ESL), and low socio-economic status are but a few of the many factors involved in educating a changing population.

The challenge for educators is daunting. Public schools must prepare more students for college. Universities and colleges must accept the students, retain them, accelerate their learning and graduate them. The reality is somber though, because not enough Hispanics students are graduating college ready. The number of students entering higher education and dropping out is considerable. Research shows that in Texas as many as one-third of high school students leave without graduating (Intercultural Development Research Association, 2005). The Hispanic population is expected to grow significantly in the Texas border region. Almost 45% of students in Texas public schools today are members of a minority population.

Of the students that can overcome obstacles and barriers and are able to graduate from high school, only one in five actually enrolls in a Texas public university in the fall, four enroll in a 2-year college and more than half do not enroll at all (IDRA, 2005). Of the high school students that are able to access a college education, one of four is economically disadvantaged, for Latinos, it is one of two (IDRA, 2005).

Yet, according to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, in Texas "low and middle income students have to bear 40% of their family's income for a public four-year college and 30% of the annual family income for a community college." In contrast, tuition has increased 29% for 2-year institutions and 63% for 4-year institutions.

This study will reflect on social, academic, and college readiness issues pertaining to Hispanic students in the South Texas region. Additionally, the study focused on comparing extant data to regional, state, and national levels.

It will be the intent of this study to identify areas and issues that may help public schools and higher education institutions to better serve the Hispanic community of South Texas by presenting existing data that is relevant and applicable.

Sociological Issues

The sociological factors that influence college readiness for Hispanic high school students in South Texas will be explored in this section. There are many great schools, administrators and teachers in our country, but we all know that many barriers impede the Hispanic children in receiving the quality of education they need to succeed. The results have been that Hispanics now have the highest dropout rates, some of the highest teen pregnancy rates and live in predominately economically depressed and low property wealth areas (Galvan, 1993). Consequently, many are not prepared to enter institutions of higher learning. Ironically, since the Brown v. Board of Education decision, African Americans and Latinos have had a backward movement towards segregation and poverty.

The sociopolitical practices that have driven our educational reforms since the 1960's have failed to focus on the outcome of school policies and practices specifically curriculum, pedagogy, tracking, testing, discipline, and hiring (Nieto, 2004). Society needs to review the current state of education since the continuing segregation of students based on race and ethnicity has been escalating for the last twenty years. Most of the progress made toward desegregating schools in two decades prior to 1988 has been lost in the last fifteen years. Ironically, since the Brown v. Board of Education decision, African Americans and Latinos have had a backward movement towards segregation and poverty (Orfield, 2001).

Hispanic students continue to lag behind in their attainment of higher education and have higher high-school dropout rates in South Texas. An analysis of the 2003-2004 Texas Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) was utilized to desegregate Hispanic dropout data in Southwest Texas, as indicated on Table 1.

Table 1

Longitudinal Rate Analysis of Student Group Dropouts (Grades 9 – 12)

County	Low SES	Drop-Out Number	Total Students	Hispanics
Webb	0.90%	227	22,077	1.10%
Brooks	0.00%	0	864	0.00%
Cameron	0.90%	419	39,537	1.10%
Duval	0.70%	12	1,451	0.80%
Hidalgo	0.90%	752	66,866	1.20%
Jim Hogg	0.00%	6	549	.10%
Karnes	0.00%	10	1,274	1.10%
Starr	2.10%	173	6,609	2.60%
Willacy	1.10%	30	2,250	1.30%
Zapata	1.80%	31	1,357	2.30%

Note. Information extracted from the TEA secondary school completion and dropouts in Texas public schools 2002-2003.

Vera (1989) states that any educational policy must recognize certain realities for the following reasons. First, access to higher education for minority students is tied to educational barriers that begin in the elementary and secondary schools. Second, the efforts being proposed must be realistic. Texas needs not only to create a pool of students, but also to provide financial aid to those students that need to attend school. Third, the program must be funded, and those monies, as in state-mandated programs, must be set aside and budgeted by Texas Legislature. Fourth, any educational effort, including the Texas plan must be evaluated in light of how it will increase the quality, not just the quantity, of minority access to higher education (Galvan, 1993).

In 1981, after a 30-month investigation, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) of the U.S. Department of Education found the state of Texas to be in violation of the civil rights laws. In its investigation of Hispanics in higher education, OCR found that Hispanics were significantly underrepresented in several major state educational institutions such as the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A & M University. It found that the Mexican Americans attending college were concentrated in four places: Laredo State University, Pan American University, Texas A & I University, and the University of Texas at El Paso. The state voluntarily agreed to submit a 5-year plan to increase the number of minority undergraduate and graduate students, increase the number of minorities graduating, encourage racial balance among the colleges and universities, and increase the presence of minorities of the faculty, staff, and governing boards of its post-secondary institutions (Galvan, 1993).

Texas developed a 5-year plan; however, none of the objectives of the plan were met. The enrollment of Mexican Americans increased in colleges and universities but it was not sufficient to meet the goals. At the same time, the number of Mexican Americans graduating from high schools increased. The OCR's objectives were based on the number of students graduating from high school. The enrollment of Hispanics in Texas' higher education institutions was less than half the number of new Hispanic undergraduates needed to reach the goal (Galvan, 1993).

The next area researched as a possible detrimental sociological factor impeding the Hispanic students' higher level of education is teen pregnancy. Historically, teen pregnancy has adversely affected Hispanic students. As indicated on Tables 2 and 3, the number of Hispanic teenage girls getting pregnant in South Texas is staggering.

Table 2
 Births for Webb County 2001-2002

Race	Unkown ages	Ages 10 to 14	Ages 15 to 17	Ages 18 to 19	Ages 20 to 24	Ages 25 to 29	Ages 30 to 34	Ages 35 plus	All Ages
White	0	0	6	6	26	47	51	20	156
Black	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	2	6
Hispanic	0	36	781	1,144	3,301	3,244	2,159	1,014	11,679
Other	1	0	0	1	4	9	11	9	35
All Races	1	36	787	1,152	3,332	3,302	2,221	1,045	11,876

Note. From Texas Department of Health. Compiled data includes the following counties: Brooks, Cameron, Duval, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Karnes, Starr, Webb, Willacy, and Zapata.

Table 3
Births for Multiple South Texas Counties 2001-2002

Race	Unkown ages	Ages 10 to 14	Ages 15 to 17	Ages 18 to 19	Ages 20 to 24	Ages 25 to 29	Ages 30 to 34	Ages 35 plus	All Ages
White	0	6	104	230	702	818	754	395	3,010
Black	0	0	6	7	16	16	13	11	69
Hispanic	3	225	4,133	6,336	18,356	16,743	10,681	5,075	61,552
Other	1	0	13	33	94	92	148	79	460
All Races	5	231	4,256	6,606	19,168	14,669	11,596	5,560	65,091

Note. From Texas Department of Health. Compiled data includes the following counties: Brooks, Cameron, Duval, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Karnes, Starr, Webb, Willacy, and Zapata.

To compound the situation many school districts across Texas have ignored the problem and have not set up programs to continue the students' education during pregnancy. In 2002, a battle was being fought in a little Texas town, called Luling, about 45 miles southeast of Austin. Two students filed a discrimination suit against the local school district under Title IX for banning them from attending classes during their pregnancies (Proctor, 2002).

Mandated by federal requirements, Texas school districts that receive federal monies are required to establish programs to meet the needs of pregnant students so that their education is not interrupted. The Pregnancy, Education, and Parenting (PEP) Program has been established in many school districts to meet the requirements of federal guidelines. Ms. Nina Jackson, a counselor for the Fort Worth Independent School District, which has a very comprehensive program in place, says that many of the urban school districts have programs in place because of the large number of pregnancies that impact the district, but the problem is in the rural districts where there are many inconsistencies and schools tend to push the students out once they get pregnant (Proctor, 2002).

The third sociological factor impeding Hispanic students access to higher education is their concentration in predominately economically depressed areas and their low-median household income. According to Steve H. Murdock, State Demographer, in 1999, the average family income for Anglos was \$47,162 compared to \$29,873 for Hispanics. The per-pupil allocation for the school districts in Texas is correlated to the size and value of its tax base.

Demetrío Rodríguez, a parent in San Antonio's Edgewood Independent School District, one of the state's poorest districts, filed a lawsuit (Edgewood v. Kirby) in 1971 in response to the inequities of the Texas school funding system. Many Mexican Americans in Texas live in low wealth school districts such as Edgewood ISD in San Antonio and a very large number attend public schools. The disparity in resources between Texas' low wealth school districts and school districts with a high property tax base has provided many

Texas children with a substandard education. Many of these children are not prepared to participate in higher education (Cardenas, 1990).

One of the most influential factors that will aid Hispanics to join the mainstream is higher education. Higher education will not solve all the problems that Hispanics encounter, but without it, it is almost impossible to join the mainstream and become productive citizens (Galvan, 1993). Programs, like the federally funded Upward Bound Program at Laredo Community College (LCC), have made an important impact to the Laredo economy, as indicated on Table 4.

Table 4

Longitudinal Study: Laredo Community College Upward Program 1972 – 2000 (Totals of Upward Bound Alumni)

Degree	Total
Associate's	149
Bachelor's	403
Technical	223
Master's & Doctorate's	25

Note. Total number of students impacted was 800. Most of these students are first generation Hispanic college students.

It will take a deliberate plan to solve the inequity, limited access, and social injustice that currently prevail in education. The root of the disparity is the fact that language minority students lack the reading, math, and social skills that are required for students to be able to attend college. Currently, only 17% of Hispanic fourth graders read at their grade level, and the percentage is even lower in mathematics (Hernandez, 2004). Another reason that makes this a greater challenge is the fact that compared to 12% of white students who are enrolled in calculus at the high school level only 6.6% of Latinos are enrolled. The number of students enrolled in physics is 30.7% for whites and 18.9% for Hispanics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) play a critical role in America's higher education system, particularly in their capacity to serve underrepresented populations, said witnesses before the U.S. House of Subcommittee on Select Education on October 6, 2003. Not only do HSI improve access to higher education for Hispanic Americans, but they also are committed to providing academic excellence to low-income and disadvantaged students.

Dr. Juliet García, president of the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) states that the mission at UTB is to provide accessible and affordable post-secondary educations of high quality, to conduct research that expands knowledge and to present programs of continuing education, public service, and cultural value to meet the needs of the community. More than 80% of UTB students have received a form of financial assistance. They are students who are predominately first-generation college students. About 93% of the students are Hispanic, and for many, Spanish is their preferred language at home.

The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act by Congress has expanded the educational opportunities for Hispanic students. Funding for HSI has increased by more than 35% since President Bush took office, growing from \$68.5 million in fiscal year 2001, to \$92.4 million in fiscal year 2003. The fiscal year funding level for HSI in the education spending bill, passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in July 2003, increased funding by \$1.2 million, to an all-time high of \$93.6 million.

In the year 2040, it is projected that 70% of the Hispanic population in Texas will be under the age of five. Projections for Anglos in Texas are that 40% will be 40 years old or older. Texas cannot afford to have this growing Hispanic population undereducated, and if it does not provide an adequate work force by the year 2040, then it will not be able to compete in a world economy.

It is recommended that to decrease the Hispanic dropout rates, Texas needs to invest in preparing a better-educated work force. Hispanic high school students need to be motivated and placed in the most appropriate high school graduation completion plan through proper counseling and monitoring for academic progress. Teen pregnancy rates can be decreased if students are allowed to receive sex education and abstinence information in middle school and high school.

Curricular Issues

Education is an evolutionary system. Curricular expectations, test scores, and educational programs drive the different institutions. Educational institutions adapt their classes according to the areas of need of their future students. Some of the factors that affect these decisions are Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores, Advanced Placement (AP) test results, and graduation plans. Students are neither critical thinkers nor problem solvers thus resulting in the need to offer remedial courses at Texas public colleges and universities.

Historically, public education has been a complex system with a multi-dimensional purpose. It is ironic that in the United States, one-dimensional standardized tests have become such a widely adapted, and often the sole measure to determine a school's educational success or failure. In 1983, the United States educational system was exposed to general criticism at a national level. Commissioned by the Reagan Administration, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published the report "A Nation at Risk," which criticized the overall performance of American public schools. The report lamented the decline of the American economy and placed fault with the public schools. The article goes on to report to the American people that "while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people." Texas was the first state to counteract the failed educational enterprise described by "A Nation at Risk" as it launched a major educational reform effort (Luce, 1995). An example of Hispanic scores within the Texas Region One Education Service Center (hereafter referred to as "Region One") is the Laredo high school test scores wherein 98% Hispanics have shown to be improving to meet and surpass the state standards as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

TAKS Scores among Laredo High Schools, Region One, and State
 Spring 2003

Subject	Cigarroa	Martin	Nixon	Alexander	Johnson	United	United South	Region One	State
ELA	40	51	59	76	56	67	51	66	70
SS	57	68	70	88	64	74	69	86	90
Math	36	39	39	65	29	47	34	60	68
Science	31	31	38	60	14	46	37	57	68

Spring 2004

Subject	Cigarroa	Martin	Nixon	Alexander	Johnson	United	United South	Region One	State
ELA	62	53	69	83	70	80	75	84	87
SS	81	77	79	91	80	90	85	96	97
Math	49	45	47	74	45	62	54	82	85
Science	52	44	48	69	45	65	58	76	85

According to the 2005 College Board AP Report, the College Board collaborated with colleges and universities to create AP exams in 34 subject areas. The College Board supports secondary schools by training teachers and developing a curriculum of high academic intensity and quality that will enable students to meet the standards for college-level learning in these subjects. As a result, most colleges and universities in the United States, as well as in more than 30 other countries, recognize AP exam results in the admission process as an indicator of a student's ability to succeed in rigorous curricula. The college credit will allow college students to be placed into a higher-level college course or be placed directly into the courses that match their level of academic preparation. As part of Region One, Laredo high schools are promoting the AP test and the successful results among the students as indicated in Table 6.

Table 6

Percentage of Local Students who took and passed the AP Exam for the 2003 – 2004 School Year

Status	Cigarroa	Martin	Nixon	Alexander	Johnson	United	United South	Region One	State
Tested	13	14	6	10	N/A	11	30	17	16
Passed	53	43	28	55	N/A	68	72	36	51

The table reflects the students who graduated from high school under the three most common types of high school diplomas granted: Minimum High School Plan (MHSP), Recommended High School Plan (RHSP), and Distinguished Achievement Plan (DAP). Under the MHSP, a student is required to obtain a minimum of 22 credits to graduate. The RHSP requires a student to obtain 24 credits, including AP courses, to graduate. Under

the DAP, a student is required to obtain 24 credits, including AP courses, and earn four measures. Table 7 indicates the number of students who graduated with a RHSP or DAP.

Table 7
Percentage of Students in Laredo who graduated with RHSP and DAP in the State for the 2003 – 2004 School Year

Type	Cigarroa	Martin	Nixon	Alexander	Johnson	United	United South	Region One	State
RHSP/DAP	85	94	93	88	N/A	86	77	78	64

A student’s academic preparedness, as indicated by the type of high school diploma received, is a critical characteristic for predicting the student’s future success in higher education. Increasing the graduation rate would have the greatest impact on achieving the state’s goal of increasing the number of students that are better prepared for college. According to Table 8, Laredo high school completion rates have exceeded state rates.

Table 8
Percentage Comparison of the 2002 – 2003 Completion Rates among Laredo High Schools, Region One, and State

Year	Cigarroa	Martin	Nixon	Alexander	Johnson	United	United South	Region One	State
2002	92.1	94.1	94.6	99.3	N/A	98.6	94.4	78.4	82.8
2003	96.2	92.4	92.4	98.8	N/A	98.6	97.0	79.9	84.2

In post-secondary education, there has been an ongoing debate on student remediation among educators, policy makers, and the public. Central to this debate is the question of whether remedial course offerings are appropriate at the college level and whether those courses should be offered at all 4-year higher education institutions or restricted to 2-year colleges.

The two Laredo higher education institutions show that the percentage of freshmen enrolled in remedial courses are similar to the national statistics provided by National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) as indicated in Table 9.

Table 9
Percentages of First Time College Students at Texas A & M International University (TAMIU) and LCC taking Remedial Courses since the 2001 School Year

Institution	2001	2002	2003	2004
TAMIU	38	34	26	35
LCC	68	58	62	59

The 2000 survey determined that the most common strategy to assess students was to administer national assessment tests to all incoming students, such as the American

College Testing (ACT) or Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Between 57% and 61% of all institutions used this approach. The second most common approach was to administer placement tests to incoming students who met various criteria (i.e., low SAT/ACT scores). Most institutions have some kind of restriction on the extent to which remedial students can participate in regular courses and the type of credit awarded for remedial coursework. The survey results indicate that 82% to 88% of institutions placed some restrictions on the regular courses that students could take while they were enrolled in remedial reading, writing, or mathematics courses. Fewer institutions, 12% to 18%, reported they did not impose any restrictions on regular academic courses for students enrolled in remedial reading, writing, or mathematics courses. In addition, 1% or less of the institutions did not allow students to take any regular academic courses while they were enrolled in remedial courses. Institution credit was given 73% to 78% of the time for remedial courses. Fewer institutions, 2% to 4%, reported giving either elective degree credit or subject degree credit. Furthermore, 9% to 10% of institutions did not give any credit for remedial reading, writing, or mathematics courses.

Local higher education institutions use placement tests for those students with low SAT/ACT scores or low grade point averages (GPA). These students are allowed to take other regular classes while enrolled in remedial courses. Furthermore, these students do not receive any credit for the remedial courses.

In conclusion, the development of high-stakes testing has become a global movement in the United States. In Texas, these tests measure specific student knowledge but should not be the absolute and sole measure to determine a school's educational success or failure because they do not address the multi-dimensional purposes of public education. In Laredo, students have fared well in TAKS, AP testing and graduation rates. The local completion rates have exceeded the state rates. However, there are high percentages of college freshmen enrolled in remedial courses at higher educational institutions in Laredo. To cope with this current situation, we must continue to encourage all high school students to follow the DAP, which is the most rigorous graduation plan. It will help them reduce the risk of having to enroll in college remedial courses.

Instructional Issues

The purpose of the following analysis is to explore Alternative Certification Programs (ACP) and the impact such programs have had on student success. The focus of Texas education policy has switched from ensuring competency in basic skills to a more rigorous curriculum focusing on problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills (Texas Education Agency, 1995). With this in mind, and the emerging need of a population of students that is increasingly more diverse, state education officials began to focus their efforts on teacher education programs and the changing of these programs in order to meet current federal legislation, namely that all students can succeed. Subsequently, there has been a big change in preparation routes many teachers end up taking in order to comply with certification standards.

According to information released from the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC), demographics of first-year teachers have stayed consistent over a period of 4 years from 1999 to 2003. The ratio of females to males also remained stable. Ethnic

groups stayed pretty much on level although there was an increase in Hispanic teachers from 22% to 26%. Overall, first-year teachers in Texas were predominately female and white. Where there was a big change was the preparation routes many teachers wound up taking in order to comply with teacher certification standards. Between 1999 and 2003, there was a steady shift from the traditional undergraduate preparation programs to more post-baccalaureate, alternative certification routes. According to Herbert (2003), this route appears to be on track to become the primary source of new teachers in Texas within the next ten years. To answer the question of whether alternative certification is working, we need to first research the ACP and what it has to offer to prospective teachers and whether the alternative education route has an impact on teacher success.

Program distribution indicates a slow decline from 66% of teachers going the traditional university route in 1999 to 45% in 2003. Subsequently, the percentage of teachers going through alternative certification increased from 17% to 34%. On Table 10, information taken from SBEC shows this increase.

Table 10
Percentage of Beginning Teachers by Year of Initial Certification

Degree Route	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Undergraduate	66%	70%	65%	54%	46%
Post-Baccalaureate	17%	8%	10%	19%	19%
Alternative	17%	22%	25%	27%	35%

Furthermore, percentages of Hispanics in alternative education routes rose significantly from 20% in 1999 to 35% as indicated in Table 11.

Table 11
Percentage of Hispanics by Year of Initial Certification

Degree Route	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Undergraduate	69%	71%	65%	57%	51%
Post-Baccalaureate	11%	5%	7%	14%	14%
Alternative	20%	24%	28%	29%	35%

This increase is significant given that the ethnic composition of the state continues to show an increase in the Hispanics population. These teachers continue to fill high need specialization subjects, such as bilingual education and special education positions. According to a study done in the National Center for Alternative Certification, large inner cities have huge school districts that oversee many very large schools enroll high proportions of students from many racial/ethnic groups and from high poverty areas. One-fourth of the students in this country are enrolled in inner city schools (Feistritzer, Haar, Hobar, & Scullian, 2005).

As stated, the impact these teachers have on student learning is profound. Students are in need of specialized instruction in the areas of bilingual education, special

education, math, and science. Teachers that go through the alternative certification route are more likely to begin their teaching careers in these areas. The effects they have on student learning are also very significant, given the high stakes of the testing accountability system in place in Texas. Research suggests that teachers who come through the ACP have success because of the fact that most of them have been successful in their previous occupations and bring with them a wealth of practical knowledge and positive experiences that can be utilized in the classroom and everyday teaching (Cimusz, Coudt, Stevens, & Calderon, 1993).

The demand for ESL, bilingual and special education teachers continues to be high. As mentioned, these are high need teaching areas where the bulk of teachers who go through the alternative certification route are trained and prepared. Research suggests that teachers of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students must receive continuous professional development in order to meet federal mandates. ACP have been structured in a way as to gear college coursework and best practices in the teaching of LEP students that will result in effective and successful teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

Part of what has made ACP successful in these areas is the strong mentoring and support the teachers receive while completing their first year. The mentors are required to go through a certain amount of professional development hours yearly and must observe the mentoring teacher at least three times a year (Paige, Reese, Petrilli, & Gore, 2004). In addition, mentees are able to observe their mentor teacher as well as other teachers during the school year. Recently, the use of the Internet and mentor e-mail conferencing has begun to be utilized by ACP. This further reinforces the support that is so critical in teacher success and retention.

Teachers who go through alternative education routes are more likely to continue their teaching careers. In a SBEC study done over a 3-year period from 1998 to 2000, it was noted that the number of teachers in undergraduate programs who quit teaching after their first year was higher than attrition rates from post-baccalaureate programs and ACP.

In summary, the non-traditional routes to teacher certification will continue to be the trend in years to come in Texas. The changing demographic make-up demands there be more qualified teachers to meet the ever-changing ethnic composition. ACP can provide specialized training for future teachers to meet these demands, especially in the areas of special education, ESL, and bilingual education. Student success will depend on how we are able to meet the demand for highly qualified teachers in these areas. The federal government will continue to gather and disseminate data to the states in the form of standardized tests in order for state universities to continuously evaluate teacher ACP and their effectiveness on student success. The success of ACP lies in continuous teacher training and professional development. Collaboration and cooperation with school districts will further strengthen ACP as education continues to evolve in the era of accountability. In conclusion, the ACP achieve three goals: effective and successful teachers, student success, and meeting the state's need for qualified teachers.

For years, professional development has played an essential role in the success of educational reform. Professional development has served as the link between where prospective and experienced educators have been, are now, and where they will need to

be to meet new instructional challenges (Kent, 2004). The overall mission of professional development is to prepare and support educators to guide and assist Hispanic students in order to achieve higher standards of learning and development. Moreover, professional development works best when it is part of a systems-thinking effort to improve and integrate the recruitment, selection, preparation, and advanced certification of highly-qualified educators in South Texas.

If teachers are not given adequate opportunities to learn through sustained professional development experiences, they will have little chance of meeting the ever-increasing demands of our technological society. For this reason, professional development for teachers is a critical component of improving schools, Hispanic students, and teachers in South Texas school districts.

With regards to student college readiness, professional development opportunities for educators in school districts that comprise Region One have recently revolved around a program offered exclusively through the College Board Web site. SpringBoard is a teacher-based program that prepares students in grades 6-12 with the critical thinking, reasoning and writing skills they need to be successful in college. SpringBoard is a unique program designed around the rigorous College Board Standards for College Success (College Board, 2005).

The opportunities for teachers to prepare Hispanic students for college readiness are available through the state-of-the-art SpringBoard training system. The problem arises when the goals and objectives of the program conflict with the low number of students participating in the school's AP program. Another problem arises when students' perceptions of college readiness differs with teachers' perceptions of college readiness for their students. Beginning in the Fall of 2002, Region One began a research project relating to the national educational initiative, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). The research population consists of over 6,000 freshmen students from 22 low socio-economic status high schools between Laredo and Brownsville, and the population's educational progress from school year to school year will continue to be noted up to their graduation dates. Preliminary data provided through Region One indicates that although 96% of the research population think that they will attend college and 89% feel that they will graduate from a post-secondary educational institution, between 20% and 25% of the teachers from these sample schools feel that these students are prepared to succeed at the college level. Educational opportunities to prepare students for college readiness are available through the AP program, yet low numbers of students enrolled in such programs exist throughout the region. And as indicated in an aforementioned statement, student and teacher perceptions of college readiness differ from one another (Leal, personal interview, 2005).

The opportunity for Hispanic students to involve themselves in college readiness courses (e.g., AP classes) is available as part of the Texas public school system. Students in South Texas schools can enroll in such courses with encouragement and support from their counselors and teachers. Ultimately school administrators are held accountable for their students' performance rates and should therefore fulfill their commitment of providing high-quality professional development. The direct relationship between low student participation

in AP classes and low teacher belief that students are prepared for college is attributed to effective staff development training necessary to strengthen teachers' instructional strategies to meet learners' needs.

Academic Assessment Issues

Nearly half of the 2004 high school graduates (e.g., approximately 2.9 million) took a national assessment as reported by the College Board. There is a select group of students who take the College Board tests; thus, the results of these tests should not be applied to a specific subgroup, school, district, region or state (Using Aggregate ACT Scores, 2002). Only the most recent examination results are used by the College Board in preparation of their reports whenever a student takes a national assessment such as the ACT or SAT more than once.

Even though there was a 0.1 score increase on the ACT for Hispanics in Region One, Hispanics obtained lower ACT score when compared to Hispanics in Texas and in the United States. There are more Hispanics in Region One and in Texas who are electing to take the ACT or SAT and are showing a 0.4% increase in At/Above Criterion standard.

Table 12
 SAT Mean Score

SAT results	Texas-Hispanics	Region One Hispanics	Texas wide	Region One	National - Hispanics	Nation wide
2004	-	-	992	-	909	1026
2003	891	887	989/993	903	-	-
2002	893	889	986	904	-	-

Note. From Texas Education Agency AEIS Region One Performance Report & 2004 College Bound Seniors: A Profile of SAT Program Test-Takers.

As reflected in Table 12, from 2002 to 2003 there was a decrease in the SAT mean score for Hispanics in Texas and in Region One. The data in the table above clearly shows that Hispanics in Texas and in Region One are scoring approximately 20 to 22 points lower than Hispanics in the United States.

Table 13
 Percentage of Students Enrolled in Advanced Courses

Advanced Courses	Texas - Hispanics	Region One - Hispanics	Texas wide	Region One
2002-2003	15.2	20.7	19.7	21.4
2001-2002	14.9	19.7	19.4	20.4

Note. From Texas Education Agency AEIS Region One Performance Report. In Table 13, there is evidence that more Hispanics in Texas and in Region One are enrolling in advanced courses.

Table 14

Percentage of Students in Grades 11 and 12 who took at least one AP/IB Exam

AP/IB Results	Texas - Hispanics	Region One - Hispanics	Texas wide	Region One
2003	12.2	16.5	16.1	17.5
2002	11.4	16.3	15.0	17.2

Note. From Texas Education Agency AEIS Region One Performance Report.

As a result of more Hispanic students taking advanced courses, which is denoted in Table 14, the State of Texas and Region One, has seen an increase in the percentage of Hispanic students who took at least one AP and/or International Baccalaureate Organizations (IB) exam. Across Texas, there was a drop in the percentage of examinees who have at least one AP/IB score At/Above the Criterion (3_AP or 4_IB); however, there was an increase in the percentage of Hispanics in Texas and in Region One who scored At/Above Criterion.

Table 15

Percentage of Students who Graduated under RHSP or DAP

RHSP/DAP Graduates	Texas - Hispanics	Region One - Hispanics	Texas wide	Region One
2003	63.3	77.5	63.7	78.0
2002	58.1	73.4	58.2	74.0

Note. From Texas Education Agency AEIS Region One Performance Report.

Table 15 data reveals that Texas has seen an increase across the state in the percentage of students who are graduating under the RHSP or the DAP.

Table 16

Percentage of Students who achieved College Readiness in Math and English Language Arts as per the Texas Success Initiative (TSI)

College Readiness - TSI	Texas - Hispanics	Region One - Hispanics	Texas wide	Region One
Math 2004	29.0	31.0	43.0	33.0
ELA 2004	20.0	22.0	29.0	24.0

Note. From Texas Education Agency AEIS Region One Performance Report.

As reflected in Table 16, the percentage of students who achieved “College Readiness” in math and English Language Arts as per the TSI has increased by at least 9% for Hispanics in Texas and in Region One; however, Texas-wide there was a significant increase of 14%. The TSI began in 2003, after the 77th Legislature replaced the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) with the Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA) to assess and in order to improve college readiness in reading, writing, and mathematics among high school graduates. Students’ TAKS scores may be used to determine if a student is ready for

college. In addition, colleges and universities may use different examinations to determine if a student is college ready (Glossary for the AEIS, 2004).

With reference to the TAAS/TASP data, not only was there an increase in the percentage of Hispanics from 2002 to 2003, but also a greater percentage of Hispanic students in Region One met college readiness criteria on the TAAS/TASP when compared to Hispanics in Texas. However, Hispanics are still lagging behind students in Texas who met college readiness criteria on the TAAS/TASP.

TAKS 2004 data reveals that the percentage of Hispanics in Region One in the area of math, social studies, and language arts who met the TAKS standard in Grade 11 are higher than Hispanics in Texas. In science, the percentage of Hispanics in Region One and in Texas who met the Grade 11 TAKS standard is the same.

Table 17
 Percentage of Dropout/Completion/Student Status Rate

Dropout, Completion, Student Status Rate (Gr. 9 - 12)	Texas - Hispanics	Region One - Hispanics	Texas wide	Region One
Graduated 2003	77.3	79.9	84.2	80.5
Graduated 2002	75.7	78.4	82.8	79.1
Received GED 2003	2.9	1.7	3.3	1.8
Received GED 2002	3.7	2.0	4.1	2.1
Continued HS 2003	12.6	12.2	7.9	11.8
Continued HS 2002	12.8	12.8	8.0	12.4
Dropped out (4-yr) 2003	7.1	6.2	4.5	5.9
Dropped out (4-yr) 2002	7.8	6.8	5.0	6.5

Note. From Texas Education Agency AEIS Region One Performance Report. Table 17 shows that more Hispanics in Texas and in Region One are graduating from high school and fewer Hispanics are dropping out. This data contradicts longitudinal dropout rates referenced in Table 1.

Finally, there is an inverse relationship between a family’s income and students’ average ACT composite score and SAT combined score. For example if the family income is less than \$18,000, the average ACT score is 18.0; however, if the family income is more than \$100,000, the average ACT composite score is 23.5. If the family income is less than \$10,000, the average SAT score is 872; however, if the family income is more than \$100,000, the average SAT composite score is 1115.

Similarly, other correlations were found in the “2004 College-Bound Seniors: A Profile of SAT Program Test-Takers” report prepared by the College Board SAT Summary Reporting Service (SRS). For example, parental education may also impact a student’s SAT combined score. Students with parents who have no high school diploma will obtain a combined SAT score of 860; wherein students whose parents have a graduate degree obtain a combined SAT score of 1122. Furthermore, students who use a calculator almost every day obtain a combined SAT score of 1063, which is higher than students who use a

calculator once or twice weekly or less and scored a 963 combined score. Also, students who took the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) and/or National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQST) as a junior, sophomore, or younger obtained a higher SAT combined score of 1047 compared to students who did not take the PSAT and scored 948. Finally, students from large cities scored 1000, which is lower than students from suburban towns who scored 1066.

It is important to note there has been an increase from 2002-2003 of more Hispanics in Texas and in Region One enrolling in rigorous courses and taking national and AP/IB assessments. Furthermore, in most evaluation and assessment instruments, Hispanics in Texas and in Region One have shown an increase in scores except on the SAT. More Hispanics are enrolled in advanced courses and passing At/Above the Criterion score in Region One when compared to Hispanics in Texas and all students in Texas. However, Hispanics in Texas and in Region One are still lagging behind the Texas-wide percentage of students who achieved “college readiness” on math and English language arts as well as on national (i.e., ACT/SAT) and state (i.e., TAKS) assessments. When there is an increase in the number of students in a subgroup (i.e., Hispanics) testing, there may be an initial decrease or stagnation on the overall success of a particular subgroup. Comparing 2003 and 2004 SAT scores, the two fastest-growing groups of SAT takers were Mexican American and Other Hispanic students (SAT Scores Hold Steady, 2005). The key to college success is taking challenging courses in high school and studying hard (Average National ACT Score Rises, 2004). Overall, the study of advanced math has increased, yet the study of English composition and grammar has decreased. Moreover, enrollment in advanced courses that affects SAT scores varies by race or ethnicity. There is data that indicates an average SAT score will rise as parents are more educated, as family income rises, when students take challenging courses and finally that rising GPA's/grades and falling test scores may signal grade inflation in the United States. The school location may also impact a student's average SAT score (2004 College Bound Seniors, 2004).

Texas should follow the lead set by other states in the United States that require all high school students who are juniors to take a national assessment such as the ACT or SAT. At a minimum, high school students should be required to take a college or pre-college entrance exam such as the THEA, ASSET, Accuplacer, COMPASS, PLAN, EXPLORE, or the PSAT. School districts in Texas can use this data to review and revise curriculum and instruction, to predict success in the advanced placement program, or to identify students' college readiness (Camara & Millsap, 1998).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the results of this study affirm the belief, that Hispanic students in south Texas, as a group, are not where they need to be academically. All stakeholders need to work together to make sure Hispanic students are ready for college. Although there are areas such as AP course participation that seem to show improvement, there are formidable gaps that may be lessened by addressing the sociological, curricular, instructional and academic assessment issues that play a vital role in students' college readiness.

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