



Origins of the Student Futures Project

The Student Futures Project originally began in 2004 as a policy research project at the LBJ School of Public Affairs, demonstrating the Ray Marshall Center's commitment to providing a training ground for future researchers and policy-makers. Policy research projects serve as a two-semester, interdisciplinary course in which faculty members direct a team of graduate students researching a policy issue of concern to a paying client.

To learn more about the policy research project's findings, see: C.T. King, D. Schexnayder, & H. Gourgey (2006), *Beyond the Numbers: Improving Postsecondary Success through a Central Texas High School Data Center*.



CENTRAL TEXAS Student Futures PROJECT

Overview

The Central Texas Student Futures Project is a multi-year initiative that assists the region in fostering sustained and balanced economic growth through improved postsecondary education and labor market outcomes for high school graduates. The project is led by the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources at The University of Texas at Austin. It is conducted in partnership with Central Texas independent school districts (ISDs).



The Student Futures Project provides regional stakeholders with information they need to better prepare students for the demands of postsecondary education and success in the workplace. The project combines surveys of high school seniors with administrative records (e.g., high school transcripts, National Student Clearinghouse data, Unemployment Insurance wage records) to track the progress of high school graduates as they make the critical transition to postsecondary education and the workforce. Its purpose is two-fold:

- To provide Central Texas educators, employers and community stakeholders with comprehensive, longitudinal research on what high school students are doing after high school, and how educational, personal and financial factors affect graduates' success in higher education and the labor market.
- To foster best practices through workshops, seminars and applied research, assisting the region's ISDs and postsecondary institutions to increase the number of youth who obtain the academic and workforce credentials required by area employers.

The Student Futures Project has grown from four participating pilot ISDs in 2005 to eleven in 2010, indicative of the project's ability to promote meaningful outcomes for school districts. As a group, these ISDs have very diverse student populations, including significant numbers of low-income and minority students, as well as students who would be the first in their families to go to college. These ISDs account for over 80% of the region's high school seniors.

Each year the project issues two reports that provide ISDs with information they would not have access to otherwise. The first report, based on surveys of high school seniors, details seniors' family background, high school experiences, and preparation for life after high school. The second report traces graduates for up to four years as they move through postsecondary education, work, training, and other options. Periodically, the project also prepares reports that analyze factors linked to successful education and work outcomes.



Half of graduating seniors from low-income high schools reported not knowing about the financial aid process.

To learn more about the senior survey results, see: T.C. Smith & G. Cumpton (December 2009), *Findings from the 2009 Senior Surveys*.

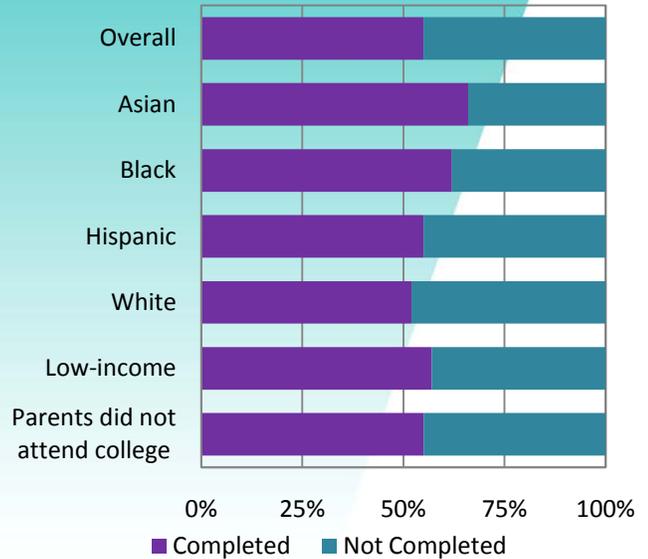
**Survey respondents have the option of selecting more than one answer resulting in categories exceeding 100%.*

Key Findings from the 2009 High School Senior Surveys

Family Background and Involvement

- More than 33% of seniors reported at least one parent had a bachelor’s degree or higher. An almost equal share reported at least one parent had a high school diploma/GED or less.
- Overall, seniors reported that their families were most helpful in the college application and financial aid processes. Low-income students, however, were more likely to respond that school counselors and teachers were most helpful.
- Senior responses varied about family completion of financial aid applications (see Chart 1 for details).

Chart 1: Completion of Financial Aid Application



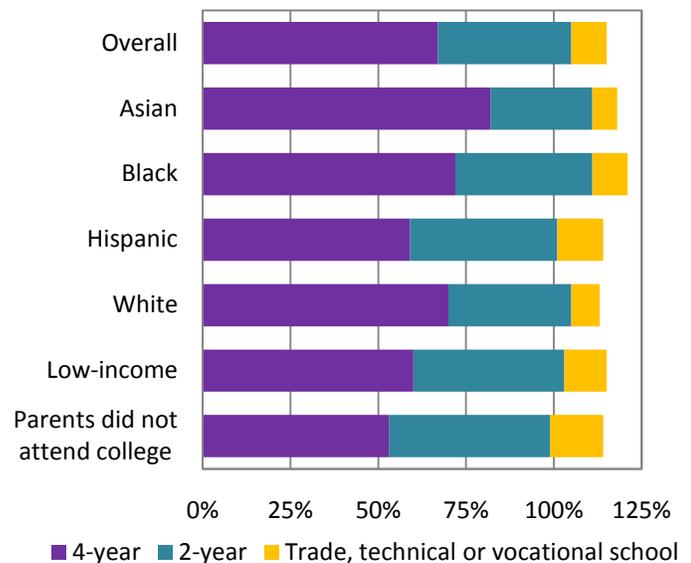
High School Experiences

- The majority of black, Hispanic, and white respondents reported that they only spent one to five hours per week studying outside of class. Most Asian respondents studied over six hours per week.
- 90% of seniors reported participating in at least one school-based extracurricular activity, and 82% participated in at least one community-based activity. Those who would be first-generation college students were more likely to report not participating in any extracurricular activities.
- Over 60% of respondents reported that they worked during their senior year. Of the seniors who did work, nearly half of them reported working 16 or more hours per week.

Preparation for Life after High School

- 91% of surveyed seniors said they planned to attend a postsecondary school. Half of all students indicated that they would work part-time while attending school.
- 40% of students who did not apply for financial aid reported not knowing about the financial aid process.
- The share of students who applied for further education varied by demographic group (see Chart 2 for details).

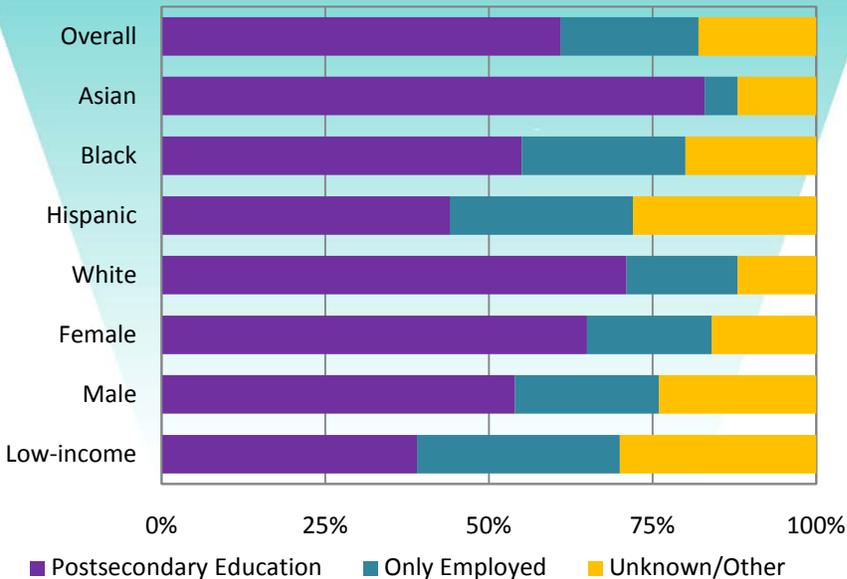
Chart 2: Student Applications to Postsecondary Education*



Key Postsecondary Outcomes for 2008 Graduates

- Initial postsecondary enrollment and employment rates for all graduates varied widely by graduates' demographics (see Charts 3 for details).

Chart 3: Outcomes by Graduate Demographics

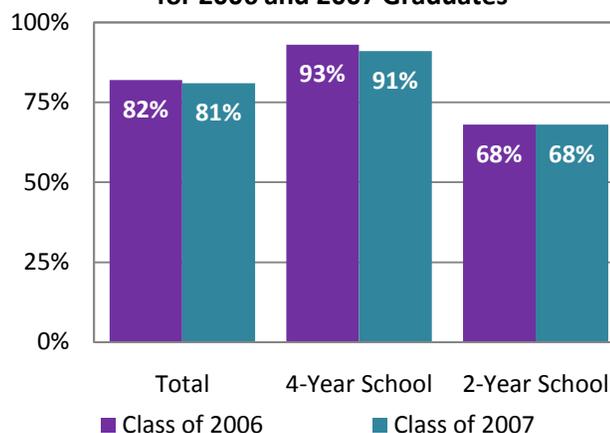


Longer-Term Outcomes for 2006 and 2007 Graduates

Analysis of longitudinal postsecondary education and employment outcomes through the fall of 2008 reveal the following patterns for 2006 and 2007 graduates:

- The highest rates of enrollment in postsecondary education occurred in the fall immediately following graduation for each cohort. The largest declines in enrollment occurred between the spring semester and the following fall semester.
- Of those graduates that did enroll during the first year after high school graduation, over 80% persisted and enrolled again the following fall (see Chart 4 for details).
- Graduates who were continuously employed and never enrolled in postsecondary school had the highest earnings. These graduates from the 2006 cohort, however, only earned a median annualized salary of \$19,752 after two years of continuous employment.
- The employment and earnings of 2007 and 2008 graduates were lower than for previous cohorts and appear to have been adversely affected by the economic recession.

Chart 4: Postsecondary Persistence Rates for 2006 and 2007 Graduates



93% of 2008 graduates said that they planned to enroll in further education within a year after high school graduation. Only 72% actually did enroll by the fall of 2008.

To learn more about graduates' outcomes, see: G. Cumpton, D. Schexnayder, & C.T. King (September 2009), *Education and Work After High School: Central Texas Outcomes through December 2008*.



Actions Resulting from the Project

School districts and other stakeholders have used research provided by the Student Futures Project to make meaningful improvements to their work. For example:

- The Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce now offers free financial aid sessions in the spring that target students who are low-income or would be first-generation college students.
- Participating ISDs use project data to assess their current college preparation efforts, identify effective services to add to their continuum, and prioritize their future efforts.
- Some ISDs have added college counselors to their staff to better focus their efforts on preparation for postsecondary education.
- One participating ISD created partnerships with college access programs and area colleges to increase postsecondary enrollment rates for their graduates.

Plans for the Future

A national shift is underway towards data-driven decision-making in education through the use of longitudinal data. The Student Futures Project has been a pioneer in this work for over five years by enhancing its region's understanding of not only what happens to students when they are in school, but also the more challenging research of what happens after they graduate and the reasons for student success in further education and the workforce. The project strives to remain at the forefront of longitudinal research in education by building on its existing work in two important ways:

- **Research-based enhancements.** In the continuous effort to improve its research, the Student Futures Project plans to expand its research focus to increase understanding of the factors behind postsecondary persistence and to better analyze education and work pathways after high school graduation.
- **Making research more useful to people on the ground.** Research needs to be both high-quality and useful. The Student Futures Project plans to improve the dissemination of its research to ensure it gets into the hands of those who need it quickly and in a manner that they can readily use. For example, the project is working with the Chamber and ISDs to create user-friendly reports that alert educators to critical information that can help them to improve students' postsecondary outcomes.

To download project reports or for additional information about the Central Texas Student Futures Project, please visit www.centexstudentfutures.org.



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TG

Greater Austin
Chamber of Commerce
Texas Education Agency
The University of Texas
at Austin

Austin ISD (since 2005)
Bastrop ISD (since 2006)
Del Valle ISD (since 2005)
Eanes ISD (since 2007)
Hays CISD (since 2008)
Hutto ISD (since 2010)
Leander ISD (since 2006)
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