WHAT IS AN ANNUAL REPORT?

To ensure that the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) has a single voice for sharing our successes and measuring progress, RGV FOCUS releases an Annual Report. This report shows student performance from cradle to career, the importance of each step, and ultimately whether we are doing a good job of ensuring that every child in the RGV eventually has a meaningful career.
Since its founding in 2012, RGV FOCUS has been driven by its vision that all Rio Grande Valley (RGV) learners will achieve a degree or credential that leads to a meaningful career. We have made tremendous progress as a region.

The RGV now matches or exceeds Texas’ performance on seven out of nine key academic indicators, up from six during our baseline year. High school graduation increased to match Texas’ performance at 88 percent, positioning the RGV to outperform the state on all nine indicators.

The Annual Report also includes comparisons between RGV Latinos and Texas Latinos. With 97% Latino students, we wanted to compare our performance to our peers and the reports are heartening – RGV Latinos are mostly outperforming their Latino peers across the State.

That said, there are areas that need more attention. As a region, we will continue to prioritize and collaborate to address college readiness, where the RGV is below the State and our Latino peers. The RGV will also focus on assisting students to graduate college, particularly at four-year universities. The RGV has done a great job encouraging access to college; now we need to ensure that students have the academic foundation and other required supports to successfully complete a degree or credential.

Post-graduation outcomes among our students reinforce the importance of investing in college readiness and completion. Almost all students who completed a degree or certificate, no matter how long it took to graduate, end up employed or enrolled in further schooling. These overwhelmingly positive outcomes are encouraging and remind us that a completed degree or credential is an essential foundation for a meaningful career.

I’m confident that as a region, we will be able to address these fronts and make meaningful progress. I only have to look at the generational shift in our educational attainment to be optimistic about our future progress. Among older adults, 22% have some college education and 38% did not graduate high school. But among young adults, 41% have some college education or an associates degree—almost double the rate of older adults—and only 24% did not graduate high school. Slowly but surely, our work is changing lives and increasing educational attainment across the four-county region. I invite you to join RGV FOCUS in changing lives through collaboration in executing a common vision for the RGV.
LEADERS UNITED TO CHANGE LIVES

Over 40 organizations and 100+ individuals are collaborating in the RGV FOCUS collective impact effort.

DR. ALDA BENAVIDES  
Superintendent  
La Joya ISD

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Region One

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CEO  
IDEA Public Schools

TRACI WICKETT  
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United Way of Southern Cameron County

MIKE SEIFERT  
Network Weaver  
Equal Voice Network

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DR. LILY TERCERO  
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UTRGV

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GONZALO SALAZAR  
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Los Fresnos CISD

EDUARDO INFANTE  
Superintendent  
Lyford CISD

DR. JOSE A. GONZALEZ  
Superintendent  
McAllen ISD

VACANT  
Superintendent  
La Villa ISD

DR. STELLA GARCIA  
Provost  
Texas State Technical College Harlingen

LEADERSHIP TEAM

4 COUNTIES

COMMUNITY
In 2012, the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) Collective Impact Initiative, now RGV FOCUS, launched to transform college readiness, access, and success across our four-county region. Initially founded by a group of district superintendents and higher education presidents, the collaborative has grown to include educators, non-profits, community groups, and funders dedicated to making major, systematic improvements to educational and career attainment in the RGV.

RGV FOCUS works to strengthen, better connect, and align community resources to the educational pipeline to support learners through high school and postsecondary in order to pursue a meaningful career in the RGV and beyond.

Since May 2012 this cross-sector group of leaders - the Leadership Team - has met regularly to identify assets and needs in the RGV, adopt a common vision, and identify shared goals, strategies, and metrics. The Leadership Team also founded three Action Groups and a Data Support Council that have helped develop strategies and spearhead implementation.
OUR COMMUNITY

1.3 million people live in the RGV, in an area of 4,316 square miles.

That's about 73% of the population of San Antonio, in an area 3.4 times the size.

Median age is 29 years, compared to 34 in Texas and 37 in the U.S.

35% live below the poverty line and the median income is $30,000.

Compare this to Texas, where 18% live below poverty and the median income is $52,000.

Or the U.S., where 16% live below poverty and the median income is $53,000.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>UNITED STATES</th>
<th>TEXAS</th>
<th>RGV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 9th grade</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th to 12th grade, no diploma</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate (includes equivalency)</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates degree</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

K-12 SYSTEM

- School Districts: 39
- Students: 347,337
- High School Graduates: 20,383
- Latino: 97.3%
- Economically Disadvantaged: 86.7%
- English Language Learners: 33.5%

HIGHER ED

- Universities: 1*
- Community Colleges: 2
- Technical Colleges: 1
- Students: 68,993
- Latino: 91%

ANNUAL AWARDS

- Doctorates: 20
- Master’s: 1,016
- Bachelor’s: 3,999
- Associates: 3,796
- Certificates: 2,432

Starting in fall 2015, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley was created, bringing together the resources and assets of The University of Texas at Brownsville and The University of Texas-Pan American.
How well is the RGV preparing students for college?

The RGV has successfully encouraged a culture of graduating high school and attending college, a significant feat considering that 38% of adults 25 years and older do not have a high school diploma or equivalency. However, we struggle to ensure that students graduate college-ready. In this area, the RGV is substantially below the Texas average.
One-third of all high school students successfully complete at least one Advanced Placement (AP) or Dual Credit course...

... and most of our high school students graduate within four years.

59% of high school seniors completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for college...

... and 59% of high school graduates enrolled at a Texas college or university in the year following graduation.

However, only 48% of these high school graduates were deemed college-ready.

Footnote: The graphics above suggest that the same students fulfilled multiple requirements (e.g. took AP courses and graduated high school) which is likely but unconfirmed, since RGV FOCUS does not work with student-level data.
ONE-THIRD of all high school students successfully finish at least one Advanced Placement (AP) or Dual Credit course, and most of our high school students GRADUATE WITHIN FOUR YEARS.

Students in AP or Dual Credit courses take college-level courses and gain college credit, many times graduating with an associates degree in hand. 38% of RGV students completed at least one AP or Dual Credit course compared to 33% of Texas students.
The RGV’s high school graduation rate increased by one percentage point, or 506 students, matching the state average. For the third consecutive year, a higher rate of RGV Latinos graduated high school in four years compared to Texas Latinos.

This achievement is more pronounced when we compare the course completion rate of RGV Latinos (37%) to Texas Latinos (30%). The higher rates could be due to early college strategies, in which high schools partner with a local college to provide college courses as early as freshman or sophomore year. The RGV is home to 37 of Texas’ 107 Early College High Schools. Two public school districts, Brownsville Independent School District and Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) Independent School District, have even designated all of their high schools as ECHS.

To engage students who do not graduate, eight school districts and two colleges are collaborating through the Dropout Prevention and Recovery Action group to better reengage off-track and out-of-school youth and encourage them to continue their studies. One partner, PSJA Independent School District, combines intensive community outreach with data analysis to recruit, enroll, and graduate out-of-school youth. These youth attend PSJA’s College, Career, and Technology Academy, which gives high school non-completers the opportunity to “experience themselves as college students” by offering students the prospect of completing their high school diploma while participating in dual enrollment.
59% of high school seniors completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for college, and 59% of high school graduates enrolled at a Texas college or university in the year following graduation.

In an area where 87% of the K-12 student population is economically disadvantaged, completing a FAFSA is essential to affording college. However, many students and parents need a financial aid advisor to guide them through the process. RGV FOCUS collaborates with local colleges and universities to meet this need through an annual FAFSA/TASFA Super Saturday event, which provides students and families with one-on-one help. In February 2015, 1,700 families in the RGV attended the Super Saturday event, representing a 133% increase in attendance from 2014.
For the third consecutive year, the RGV had a higher share of high school graduates immediately enrolling in a Texas college or university compared to the state.

One obstacle to increasing this rate is “summer melt,” which describes college-intending high school seniors’ failure to enroll in a college or university in the fall. To combat this phenomenon, Los Fresnos Consolidated Independent School District hires Adviser Texas personnel during the summer to ensure graduates complete the necessary steps to enroll in college.

According to the College Board, approximately 65,000 undocumented students (DREAMers) graduate from U.S. high schools every year. These youth face many challenges when applying to college, including how to finance higher education. Confusion also persists among college access professionals on how to counsel undocumented students through the college application and financial aid processes. In response to these concerns RGV FOCUS partnered with local school districts, colleges, universities, and community-based organizations to publish the Resource Guide for College Access: Advising DREAMers in the Rio Grande Valley. This guide helps high school counselors advise DREAMers by providing step-by-step guidance on pertinent forms and answers to frequently asked questions.
However, only 48% of these high school graduates were deemed college-ready.

![College Readiness Chart](chart1)

**College Readiness Among RGV Latinos Lower Than Texas Latinos**

Although we are sending more RGV students to college, regionally we are falling short in preparing them to succeed. Just less than half of our students were college-ready, compared with the college-readiness rate of Texas (54%). Latinos in the RGV were also less college-ready compared to Latinos in Texas (46% RGV, 47% Texas).
House Bill 5, passed by the Texas legislature in 2013, mandated partnerships between school districts and colleges/universities to create college prep courses for high school seniors who were not college-ready. In an unprecedented collaboration, faculty from local colleges and universities worked with school district faculty to develop a low-cost, widely-available curriculum. This includes a mathematics course which emphasizes practice and mastery via WebWork, a free online homework software system. The English and Language Arts (ELA) course is designed as an integrated reading, research, and writing course. ELA teachers and students use College Transitions, a free, locally-developed ebook. 26 of the 39 school districts are implementing these courses, and an additional seven have signed a Memorandum of Understanding signifying their intent to implement.
How well are students succeeding in RGV colleges and universities?

Almost all students who graduate with a degree or certificate are employed or enrolled in further schooling by the fall after graduation. However, our students struggle with graduating. 16% of college students graduate within three years (on par with the state average). Only half of university students graduate within six years – 11 percentage points below the state average.
For every ten first-time, full-time credential-seeking students that started at an RGV college in 2011...

... two students graduated with a degree or certificate by 2014.

For every ten students that graduated in 2013 from a college, nine were employed or enrolled in further schooling by the fall after graduation.

2-YEAR IHEs HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATION RATE

RGV: 16%  TEXAS: 15%

RGV  TEXAS

2-YEAR IHEs GRADUATES EMPLOYED OR ENROLLED

RGV: 89%  TEXAS: 88%

RGV  TEXAS

The University of Texas at Brownsville
The University of Texas—Pan American

For every ten first-time, full-time credential-seeking students that started at an RGV university in 2008...

... five students graduated with a degree by 2014.

For every ten students that graduated in 2013 from a university, eight were employed or enrolled in further schooling by the fall after graduation.

4-YEAR IHEs HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATION RATE

RGV: 49%  TEXAS: 60%

RGV  TEXAS

4-YEAR IHEs GRADUATES EMPLOYED OR ENROLLED

RGV: 79%  TEXAS: 78%

RGV  TEXAS
At RGV colleges, 16% of first-time, full-time credential-seeking students successfully GRADUATE WITHIN THREE YEARS.

Although only one in six students graduate from RGV colleges within three years, this rate is slightly higher than the state average. This graduation rate does not include dual credit students, students who start in the spring, and part-time students.
The Texas Tribune’s Eighth Grade Cohort Study tracks eighth graders over 11 years to determine college degree or certificate attainment within six years of students’ expected high school graduation. For RGV students starting eighth grade in 2003, 18% had their degree or certificate by 2014 compared to 20% of Texas students.

The higher four-year and six-year graduation rates for these institutions shows that students do graduate, but need more time. This reinforces the need for greater college readiness, since it would reduce time spent in developmental education and accelerate students’ time to degree completion.

RGV females were 1.5 times more likely than RGV males to complete, reflecting a state-wide trend. These differences could indicate a need to understand why males have more difficulty completing on-time.

Economically disadvantaged students also fared better in the RGV compared to the state. Those in the RGV were 1.5 times more likely to have a degree or certificate compared to economically disadvantaged students statewide, indicating that poverty was less of an obstacle to degree or certificate completion.
At RGV universities, 49% of first-time, full-time credential-seeking students successfully GRADUATE WITHIN SIX YEARS.

More students are graduating within six years from RGV 4-year institutions, with 49% representing the highest proportion of students since our baseline year (2012). However, the RGV is still 11 percentage points below the state average, suggesting room for improvement.

Unlike colleges, RGV universities see little change between the six-year graduation rate and the 10-year graduation rate, indicating that students who do not graduate within six years tend not to graduate at all. This is supported by the average time to bachelor’s degree -- 5.5 years at The University of Texas at Brownsville and 5.2 years at The University of Texas Pan American.
89% of 2013 graduates from RGV colleges were employed, in the military, or enrolled in further education at a Texas college or university by the fall after graduation.

79% of 2013 graduates from RGV universities were employed, in the military, or enrolled in graduate education at a Texas college or university by the fall after graduation.

Those who graduate, no matter how long it takes, tend to be employed or enrolled. This suggests that a certificate or degree is worth the effort.
We are seeing a generational shift in educational attainment.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, more education is correlated with higher wages and lower unemployment rates. Historically, the RGV has had significantly lower levels of educational attainment compared to the state and country, making it difficult to achieve high wages and employment. This legacy is clear when we look at educational attainment of adults 25 years and older in the RGV—38% of all adults 25 and older do not have a high school diploma, twice the state average and 2.7 times the national average.
But efforts to encourage high school graduation and college enrollment appear to be paying off. Among young adults 18-24 years old in the RGV, only 24% do not have a high school diploma. 31% are high school graduates and 41% have completed some college or an associates degree, similar to the state and national trend. These young adults can expect to make higher wages and be more steadily employed than their older peers; their progress only reinforces the importance and impact of educational policy change.
### 4-Year HS Graduation Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
<th>FAFSA Completion</th>
<th>College Ready Graduates</th>
<th>AP / Dual Credit Completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>89% (↑2%)</td>
<td>59% (no change)</td>
<td>47% (no change)</td>
<td>38% (↑6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>88% (↑1%)</td>
<td>62% (↑3%)</td>
<td>48% (↑1%)</td>
<td>34% (↑2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012 Baseline</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Data (Most Recent Year Available)</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RGV Comparison against Texas</td>
<td>(↑1%)</td>
<td>(↑6%)</td>
<td>(↓7%)</td>
<td>(↑5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Match or Exceed the State**

- Green star indicates RGV matched or exceeded Texas’ performance.
- Gray star indicates RGV did not match or exceed Texas’ performance.


Note: When increases, decreases, or differences are described with percent signs, this indicates percentage point changes rather than percent change based on the original level.
### 4-Year HS Graduation Rate
This indicator shows the longitudinal rate of a 9th grade cohort followed through their expected graduation. The rates reported are for the class of 2012 (entering cohort in 2008), class of 2013 (entering cohort in 2009), and class of 2014 (entering cohort in 2010).

### % College Ready Graduates
The percent of high school graduates that met or exceeded college-ready criteria on the TAKS exit-level test, the SAT test, or the ACT test.

### Higher Ed Immediate Enrollment Rate
The percent of students who enroll and begin instruction at an institution of higher education (IHE) in Texas for the school year following high school graduation.

### Higher Ed Graduation Rate - 2-Year IHE
The percentage of first-time, full-time, credential-seeking undergraduates who graduate within three years. Degrees and certificates are included.

### Higher Ed Graduation Rate - 4-Year IHE
The percentage of first-time entering, full-time, degree-seeking students who graduated with a bachelor’s degree or higher from the same institution or another Texas public or independent institution after six years.

### % FAFSA Completion
The percent of seniors who have completed FAFSA as of December 2012, December 2013, and December 2014.

### % AP / Dual Credit Completion
The percentage of high school students who complete and receive credit for at least one advanced course.

### Higher Ed Graduates Employed or Enrolled - 2-Year IHE
The percentage of academic or technical graduates employed or placed in military service in the fourth quarter of the calendar year after graduation and/or enrolled in a Texas two- or four-year institution in the following fall after graduation.

### Higher Ed Graduates Employed or Enrolled - 4-Year IHE
The percentage of graduates employed or placed in military service in the fourth quarter of the calendar year after graduation and/or enrolled in a graduate program at a Texas institution in the following fall after graduation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Higher Ed Graduation Rate - 2-Year IHE</th>
<th>Higher Ed Graduation Rate - 4-Year IHE</th>
<th>Higher Ed Graduates Employed or Enrolled - 2-Year IHE</th>
<th>Higher Ed Graduates Employed or Enrolled - 4-Year IHE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher Ed Immediate Enrollment Rate</td>
<td>59% (↑3%)</td>
<td>49% (↑5%)</td>
<td>89% (↑3%)</td>
<td>79% (↑1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Ed Graduation Rate - 2-Year IHE</td>
<td>16% (↓1%)</td>
<td>45% (↑1%)</td>
<td>89% (↑3%)</td>
<td>79% (↑1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Ed Graduation Rate - 4-Year IHE</td>
<td>49% (↑5%)</td>
<td>89% (↑3%)</td>
<td>79% (↑1%)</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% FAFSA Completion</td>
<td>57% (↑1%)</td>
<td>44% (↓11%)</td>
<td>59% (↑3%)</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% AP / Dual Credit Completion</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Ed Graduates Employed or Enrolled - 2-Year IHE</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Ed Graduates Employed or Enrolled - 4-Year IHE</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% College Ready Graduates</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The data includes the following symbols:
- **↑** Increase
- **↓** Decrease
- **(%)** Percentage Change
OUR COMMUNITY (P. 7)
U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American Community Survey
- RGV and San Antonio population and geographic area
- Median age of RGV, Texas, and U.S.
- Percent of population living below the poverty line for RGV, Texas, U.S.
- Median household income of RGV, Texas, and U.S.
- Educational Attainment

Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR), 2014-15
- K-12 System

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Higher Education Accountability System
- Higher Ed
- Annual Awards

COLLEGE READINESS (P. 8 & 9)
Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR), 2012-2015
- AP or Dual Credit Course Completion
- High School Graduation
- Higher Education Enrollment
- College Readiness

Department of Education, Federal Student Aid, FAFSA Completion by High School
- FAFSA Completion

FAFSA COMPLETION (P. 12)
Department of Education, Federal Student Aid, FAFSA Completion by High School
- FAFSA Completion

HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLLMENT (P. 13)
Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR), 2012-2015
- Higher Education Enrollment
- While this count does not include students who enroll at out-of-state schools, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems assumes that this would increase by about 10% if these students were included. See http://www.texastribune.org/education/public-education/8th-grade-cohorts/about/
- Students who stay in the RGV

- Number of undocumented students in the U.S.

COLLEGE READINESS (P. 14)
Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR), 2012-2015
- College Readiness
- College Readiness, RGV Latinos vs. Texas Latinos

- Graduation rates: four years, six years
- Average time to bachelor’s degree

EMPLOYED OR ENROLLED OUTCOMES (P. 21)
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Higher Education Accountability System
- Employed or enrolled outcomes for college graduates
- Employed or enrolled outcomes for university graduates

UNIVERSITY GRADUATION (P. 20)
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Higher Education Accountability System
- Six-year graduate rates for four-year universities

- Graduation rates: four years, six years, ten years

SOURCES
OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM
We thank Rio Grande Valley school district superintendents, higher education presidents, CEOs for our workforce boards, nonprofits, and community-based organizations, for their leadership in RGV FOCUS and their authentic engagement in this collective impact work. Thank you for sharing the photos included in this Annual Report.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS
We recognize Alexandria Rivera, an RGV native and talented graphic designer, for her creative vision and success in transforming our ideas into a well-designed report that tells the story of our region.

We also appreciate the support we received from our Educate Texas colleagues from the Insights and Analytics team for their commitment to building a data model that supports our ability to measure progress towards our goals.

SPECIAL THANKS

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OUR PARTNERS

Over 40 organizations
and 100+ individuals
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