What is a Baseline Report?

4 Counties, 1 Community. The Rio Grande Valley (RGV) has been at the forefront of education innovation for many years. In order to ensure that the region has a single voice for sharing our successes and measuring progress, RGV FOCUS is releasing a Baseline Report. The report shows how our students are performing from cradle-to-career and why each step along the way is important. In the coming years, these measures will tell us whether we are doing a good job of ensuring that every child in the Valley eventually has a career they can be proud of.
Our Community

The future of the Rio Grande Valley rests on high quality teaching and excellent career preparation made widely available to a diverse student population. Our students deserve the best possible education, not only because it will give them opportunities for self-discovery and empowerment, but also because it will prepare them for meaningful careers in science, technology, business, government, the arts, education, and many others.

The RGV continues to be one of the most dynamic and fastest growing regions in Texas. Education leaders in the Valley recognized and began to address the challenges our students were facing many years ago. A strong history of innovative and collaborative education strategies has positioned the region to serve as a model for the rest of the country. From career and technical training to dual enrollment and Early College High Schools, leaders in the Valley have worked together to strengthen the pathways to college completion and career readiness.

But we have more work to do. The RGV continues to lag in employment. The region has a median income 14 percent lower than the state average.¹ The link between higher education and employment will be even more critical as the fastest growing sectors in the RGV will soon require a postsecondary degree. We know that collaboration benefits our students – we’ve seen the results firsthand. In order to continue moving forward, we will measure student success from pre-kindergarten to career for the entire Rio Grande Valley. Our goal is to build a strong middle class, based on an even stronger education system that gives every student the chance to succeed, a system we can all be proud of that will serve our community for many years to come.

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Leaders United to Change Lives

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

RGV FOCUS works to strengthen each step of the educational pipeline, better connecting the pipeline, and aligning community resources to provide the supports learners need to succeed throughout 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 two Action Groups and a Data Support Council that have led development of strategies and metrics and will spearhead implementation.
Over 40 Organizations and 100+ Individuals Are Currently Working Together on this RGV FOCUS Collective Impact Effort
Our Region

The RGV’s four counties, Starr, Hidalgo, Willacy and Cameron, are home to 1.3 million people (comparable to San Antonio), about 90 percent of them have Mexican or other Latino heritage, and many are fluent in both Spanish and English, at times blending the two in a remarkable display of verbal invention.

For several years, the RGV has had one of the fastest growing economies in the state and nation and economists predict that trend will continue. Indeed, the area is strikingly young, with an average median age across the four counties of 30, compared with 34 for the state and 37 for the nation.

Despite the area’s growth, however, it continues to lag in many important social indicators. For example, the most recent unemployment data shows a rate of 9.3 percent, higher than the national average, and the area’s inhabitants have lower levels of educational achievement and lower median incomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RGV</th>
<th>Texas</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
<td>$52,000</td>
<td>$53,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our Students

K-12 System
- 39 School Districts
- 343,000 Students
- 19,000 HS Graduates
- 97% Latino
- 86% Economically Disadvantaged
- 33% English Language Learners

Higher Education
- 2 Universities
- 2 Community Colleges
- 1 Technical College
- 67,891 Students
- 91% Hispanic

Annual Awards
- 25 Doctorates
- 988 Master’s
- 3,829 Bachelor’s
- 3,687 Associates
- 3,884 Certificates and other completers

Educational Attainment: Adults 25 and Older

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>RGV</th>
<th>Texas</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 9th grade</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th to 12th Grade, No Diploma</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College, No Diploma</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s Degree</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or Professional Degree</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 – 2012 American Community Survey
Measuring Progress
**Measurement Framework**

**Success from Cradle to Career**

In order to track our progress as a region, our partners developed a set of outcomes to measure going forward.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>2-Year</th>
<th>4-Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher Ed Graduates Employed or Enrolled</td>
<td></td>
<td>⭐⭐⭐⭐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Students Graduating from Institutions of Higher Education</td>
<td>⭐⭐⭐⭐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Graduates Immediately Enrolled in Higher Ed</td>
<td>⭐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Students with Advanced Placement / Dual Credit</td>
<td>⭐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of College Ready Graduates</td>
<td>⭐⭐⭐⭐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of High School Seniors Who Completed FAFSA (Financial Aid)</td>
<td>⭐⭐⭐⭐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year High School Graduation Rate</td>
<td>⭐⭐⭐⭐</td>
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</table>

*Measures with gray bars are not included in this report due to lack of reliable data. RGV FOCUS is committed to gathering and verifying data for these metrics over the coming years.

**The Valley is outperforming the State of Texas on 6 of 9 Metrics**

Let’s build the best Rio Grande Valley possible.

**State and federal data for 2012 indicate that the Rio Grande Valley outperformed or matched the state of Texas on 6 of the 9 metrics.**
Despite rapid population growth, the RGV continues to maintain strong graduation rates. From 2011 to 2012, Texas Education Agency (TEA) data shows that 87 percent of high school students in the class of 2012 completed high school in four years. That still means, however, that around 2,700 students are failing to graduate on time each year.

**Why It Matters**
Graduation pays off. High school graduates earn $179 more per week than high school dropouts (on average) – a difference of over $9,000 per year!

**Spotlight on Innovation**
Students from La Joya High School proudly show off their new diplomas. La Joya ISD is committed to ensuring that students graduate in four years. One example is their College and Career Center with South Texas College, a dropout recovery program that helped nearly 800 students graduate from 2008 to 2012.
FAFSA Completion

RGV Status
From 2012 to 2013, FAFSA completion rates increased from 59 to 63 percent. In 2012, Cameron County had some of the highest completion rates in Texas. Much more needs to be done, however, given the unusually high percentage of low-income families in the RGV, and the low rate of college enrollment among the Valley’s residents.

Why It Matters
The U.S. government awards about $150 billion in the form of grants, low-interest loans, and work-study funds to help students pay for college.

Spotlight on Innovation
Volunteers help students fill out financial aid forms at FAFSA Super Saturday in February 2014. The event, held at local institutions of higher education, helped hundreds of students and their families apply for financial aid to pay for college.

2011 – 2012 RGV FAFSA Completion Rate: 59%
2011 – 2012 Texas FAFSA Completion Rate: 51%
College Readiness

RGV Status
Although accelerated efforts are now underway to improve college readiness in the RGV, the region still trails the state. In 2012, 47 percent of high school students in Region One were identified as college ready in language arts and math, compared to 57 percent for the state average. The challenge here is to leverage various institutional programs to improve and strengthen the complex range of qualities that prepare students for college-level study.

Why It Matters
The State deems a student college ready if he or she achieves certain scores on state exams, or the SAT or ACT, for English Language Arts and math. A college ready student is more likely to be prepared for the rigors of higher education.

Spotlight on Innovation
HB5 College Prep Course
Texas House Bill 5 asked that every school district partner with a local college or university to develop College Prep Courses in math and English Language Arts. Twenty-six school districts are implementing these courses; successful completion of the courses will be accepted by all local institutions of higher education as evidence of college readiness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011 – 2012 RGV Percentage of Grads that are College Ready</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011 – 2012 Texas Percentage of Grads that are College Ready</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>57%</td>
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</table>
Advanced Placement
and Dual Credit

RGV Status

The RGV is already at the forefront of creating interlocking advanced placement, dual enrollment, and early college high school programs. Recent data indicates a slight uptick from 2011-2012 in high school students completing such courses, from 31 to 32 percent, which edges out the state average increase from 30 to 31 percent during the same period. Yet the need is still great as the region trails the state in the number of adults with bachelor’s degrees or higher with 15 percent, compared to 26 percent in the state, and 29 percent in the nation.

Why It Matters

High school diplomas and other credentials don’t guarantee success in college. For every 100 ninth grade students in Texas, 35 will enter college and only 5 will earn a Bachelor’s degree in four years.

Spotlight on Innovation

Early College High Schools blend high school and college curricula to give students the opportunity to earn up to two years of college credit while they finish high school. Hidalgo Independent School District opened the first Early College High School in the Valley in 2006. Since then, 30 additional schools have opened in the four-county region to provide an easier, cheaper pathway to and through college.
Higher Education Enrollment

RGV Status
From 2011 to 2012, the rate of immediate postsecondary enrollment among RGV students actually dropped, from 60 percent to 56 percent.\(^6\) Statewide statistics compiled by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) indicate that in 2013 only 16.7 percent of Latino students enrolled in four-year programs in the fall following high school graduation, compared to 24.3 of White students.\(^13\) The essential, and striking, point here is that students who do not immediately enroll in college have about a 1 percent chance of earning an advanced degree.\(^14\)

Why It Matters
Students who enroll immediately in higher education programs are five times more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree within 6 years.

Spotlight on Innovation
IDEA Public Schools is a network of tuition-free K-12 public charter schools founded in Donna, TX in 1998 that has since grown to 12 schools in the RGV and many more across Texas. IDEA reports that 99.7% of its students have enrolled in college.
Higher Education Graduates

RGV Status

Although the RGV continues to be one of the most dynamic, fastest growing regions of Texas, it continues to lag in employment, and it has an average median income 14 percent lower than the state average. Nevertheless, THECB data shows that college graduates in the RGV secure employment at about the same rate in 2012, 78 percent, as the state average, also 78 percent. The link between higher education and employment will become even more critical. A recent FSG report noted that by 2016, the fastest growing economic sectors will require a postsecondary degree.

Why It Matters

Earning a high school diploma improves lifetime earnings but a college degree is even better! Associate degree holders earn roughly $6,500 more annually than those with a high school diploma and no college experience. Bachelor’s degree holders fare better – they earn nearly $24,000 more per year on average.

Spotlight on Innovation

The Valley Scholars Program at South Texas College was started as a way to highlight and encourage educational excellence. The program has assisted 630 students financially and academically since it was established.
Graduates Employed or Enrolled

RGV Status
In 2011 – 2012, the RGV outperformed the state in percentage of graduates from 4-year institutions of higher education who were employed or enrolled in a graduate education program in Texas after earning their undergraduate degrees (78% RGV; 77% Texas). Among graduates of 2-year institutions, a staggering 92 percent were employed or enrolled in more school.5

Why It Matters
The unemployment rate for young workers is typically double that of older workers in the U.S. The RGV has higher unemployment rates than the U.S. overall. It is essential that graduates move into the workforce quickly to benefit from the investment they have made in education and to build the Valley’s economy.

Portrait of Success
South Texas College alum Leo Lopez III is an inspiring leader who cared for his younger brothers while his mother underwent treatment for cancer, survived two traumatic brain injuries, one of which resulted in emergency brain surgery. Despite the adversity, Mr. Lopez obtained his Bachelor’s degree in Biomedical Science from Texas A&M University and is currently a fourth year medical student at the University of Texas School of Medicine in San Antonio. He’s served as the National Vice President of the American Medical Student Association outside Washington D.C., led public health initiatives to Guatemala, was a featured speaker at TEDx San Antonio 2014, has been published as an investigative journalist, and recently returned from Israel and the West Bank where he directed his first documentary film.
### RGV FOCUS Baseline Scorecard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rio Grande Valley</th>
<th>State of Texas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-year High School Graduation Rate</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Seniors Who Completed FAFSA</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Ready Graduates</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Advanced Placement/Dual Credit</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates Immediately Enrolled in Higher Ed</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Graduating from Institutions of Higher Ed</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Ed Graduates Employed or Enrolled</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2-year Institution**

**4-year Institution**

*Higher Ed Graduates Employed or Enrolled, 4-year IHE and 2-year IHE: Percent of graduates who are employed or placed in military service in the fourth quarter of the calendar year in which the program (fiscal) year ends or enrolled in a Texas senior institution (for graduates of 2-year colleges) or a graduate program professional school (for graduates of 4-year universities) in the fall semester of the next fiscal year. The rates are based on 2012 and 2011 graduates, respectively.*
Sources

1. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2008-2012
8. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid, 2012; Texas FAFSA completion rate from My Degree Counts based on data from TG, 2012
9. Texas Education Agency, Completion, Graduation, and Dropouts Data Reports, 2011-2012
13. Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. High School Graduates Enrolled in Texas Higher Education the Following Fall: State Summary by Ethnicity and Higher Education Sector, Fall 2000 to Fall 2013
15. FSG Social Impact Consultants, South Texas Regional Overview, 2011
16. South Texas College, About the Valley Scholars Program, n.d.
Special Thanks To:

Our Leadership Team
Rio Grande Valley school district superintendents, higher education presidents, and 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 Baseline Report.

Our Contributors
We recognize and appreciate the creative vision of Ruben Capuchino, UT—Pan American student, for taking our ideas and designing a report that tells the story of our region.

We also acknowledge the commitment of Dr. Javier Rodriguez, a native of the Rio Grande Valley and Assistant Professor at the University of North Texas, for building a report narrative that honors the visionary leadership of our region.