

# Central Texas High School Graduate Data Center



## Preliminary Year 1 Findings

January 2006

# Outline

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- **Background**
- **Year 1 Research Activities**
- **Preliminary Findings**
- **Conclusions**
- **Recommendations**
- **Plans for Future Work**



# What is the Central Texas High School Graduate Data Center?

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A research partnership among Skillpoint Alliance, the Ray Marshall Center and Central Texas ISDs to:

- Track Central Texas high school graduates during their first four years out of high school
- Find out *why* graduates are successful or not in their pursuits
- Foster the development of evidence-based best practices to improve student achievement, instruction and performance

# Background

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- **Five-year study phased in over a two-year period; fully implemented by December 2006**
- **Year 1 funding from Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce and Texas Education Agency**
- **Delimited by Hays, Travis and Williamson counties across potentially 22 school districts**
- **Four school districts involved in the first year**

# Major Research Questions

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1. Which graduates are participating in postsecondary education and why?
2. Which graduates are going to work and why?
3. Which graduates are both working and participating in postsecondary education?
4. Which graduates are participating in other activities (e.g., military, prison or welfare) and why?

# Making the Case

*We need to know how well we are preparing our young adults for their lives beyond high school, and here's why:*



# How Regional Stakeholders Will Benefit

Universities & Colleges

Parents

Government

Teachers

Employers

Industry Site Selectors

- Transition paths beyond high school
- Relationship between curriculum & transitions
- Measures of school success in preparing students
- Skill inventory of local students/workers
- Employment pipeline information

Students

School Districts

Chambers & Businesses

Other Researchers

# Major Research Activities

- Partnered with Austin, Del Valle, Pflugerville and Round Rock ISDs for the pilot phase
- Identified success factors from the research literature
- Analyzed publicly available data
- Conducted focus groups and a summer pilot survey of 2005 high school graduates

Limitations of these methods will be resolved once the project is fully implemented in 2006



# Analysis of Public Data

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**Research Question:** How have the factors that affect postsecondary enrollment changed over the past six years?

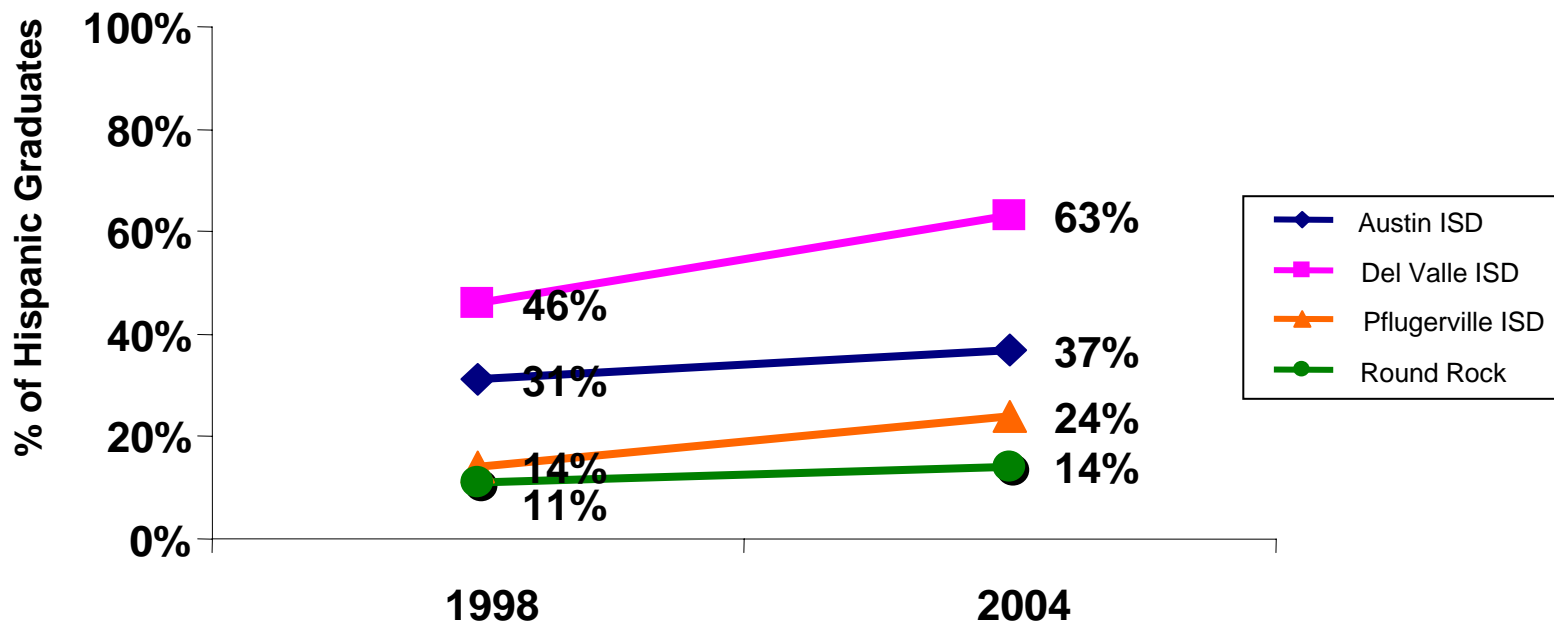
**Key Findings:**

Size and demographics of the study ISDs changed dramatically over the past six years:

- All districts grew; increases ranged from 29% in Austin ISD to 111% in Del Valle ISD
- Shares of Hispanic students and graduates increased in all districts; rates varied greatly by individual school

# Analysis of Public Data

Percent of Hispanic Graduates, Four Central Texas School Districts, 1998 vs. 2004



Source: RMC analysis of TEA AEIS data

# Analysis of Public Data

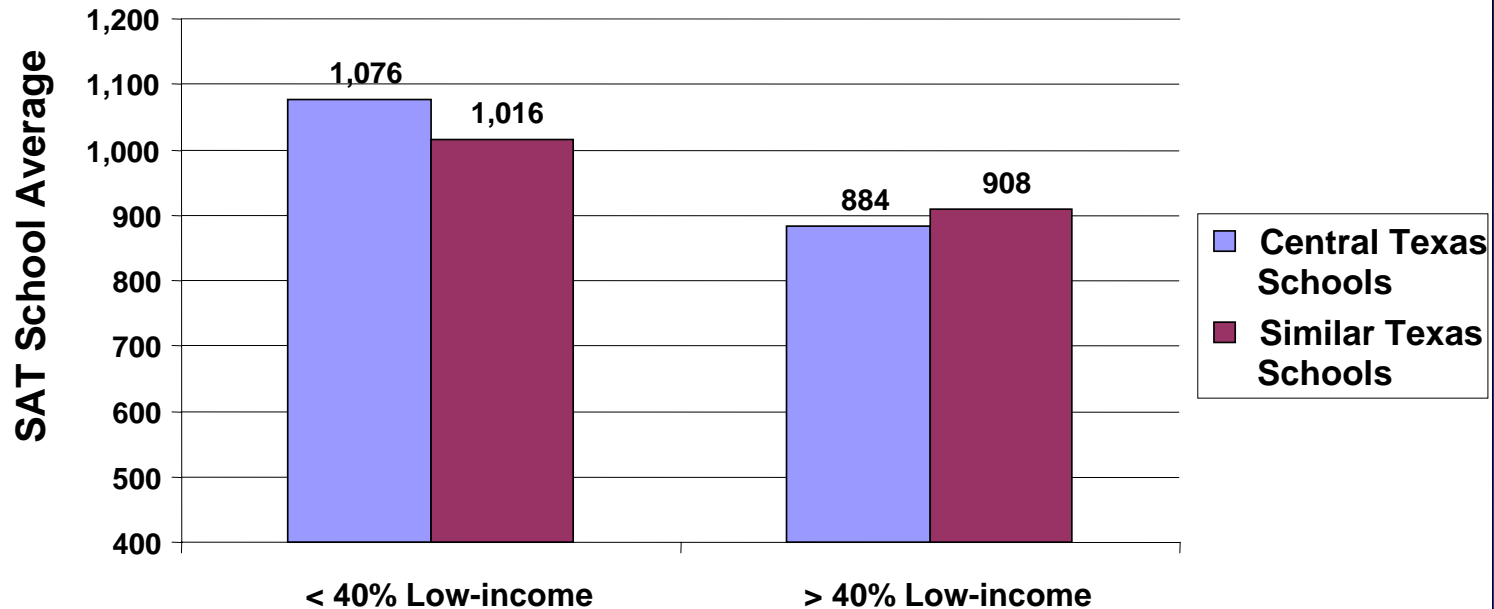
**Research Question: How do Central Texas high schools compare to similar Texas schools on factors influencing future success?**

**Key Findings:**

- Low-income study schools performed worse than similar Texas schools in preparing students for college, based on SAT and TAKS results
- More affluent study schools performed better than similar Texas schools on the same indicators
- Low-income study schools had a higher share of beginning teachers than more affluent study schools

# Analysis of Public Data

Central Texas Schools vs. Similar Texas Schools on Proxy Postsecondary Success Variable (SAT School Average)



Source: RMC analysis of TEA AEIS data

# Analysis of Public Data

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**Research Question:** How do transition rates to colleges and universities for Central Texas students compare to similar students across Texas?

**Key Findings:**

- 49% of 2004 Central Texas high school graduates enrolled in Texas postsecondary institutions in the fall semester following graduation
- College transition rates varied greatly by high school
- Low-income study schools lagged behind other Central Texas schools and similar Texas schools

# Analysis of Public Data

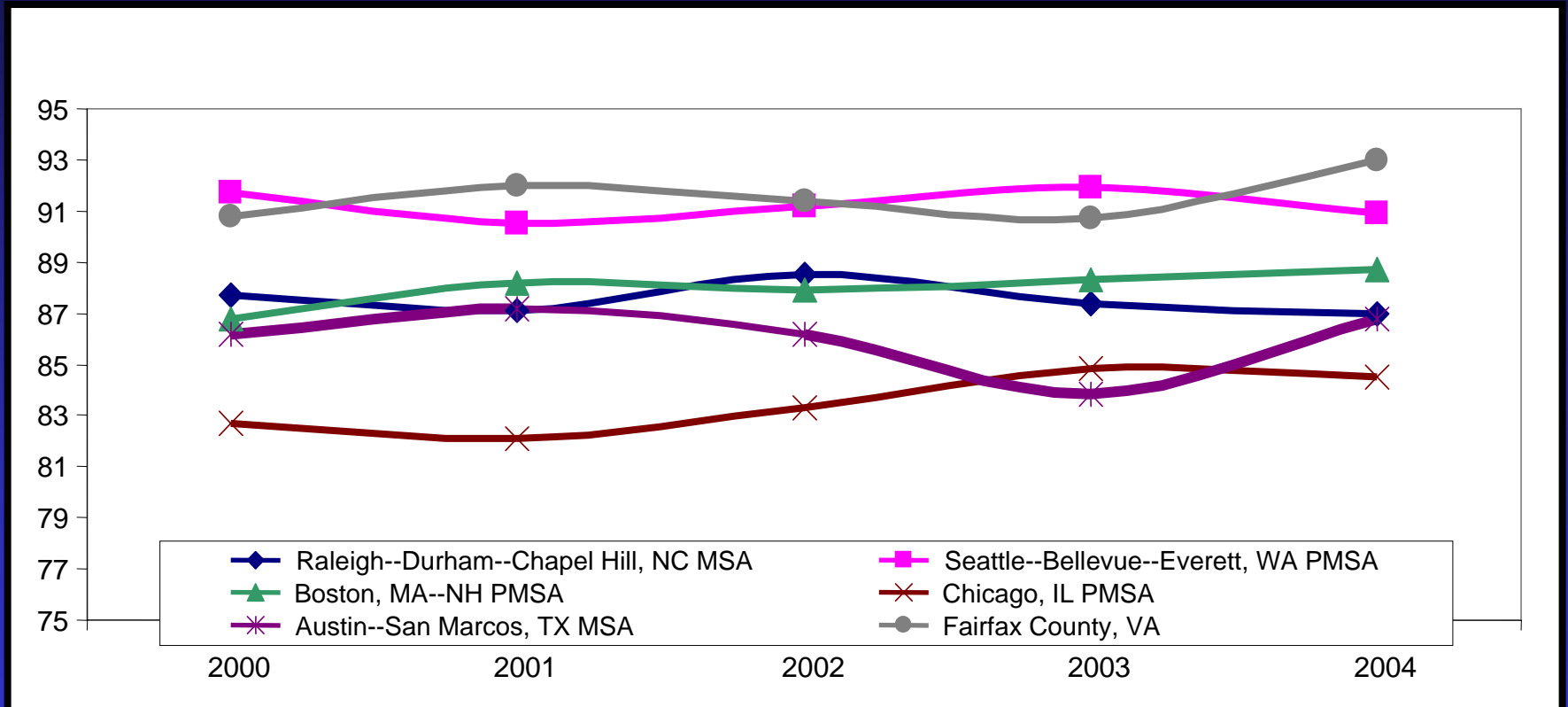
**Research Question: How do educational attainment levels and trends in the Austin MSA compare with competing MSAs?**

**Key Findings:**

- Many communities with which Austin competes economically have:
  - higher shares of residents with bachelor's degrees
  - lower shares of residents without high school diplomas
- Austin's competitors outperformed the Austin MSA on both of these measures in most recent years

# Analysis of Public Data

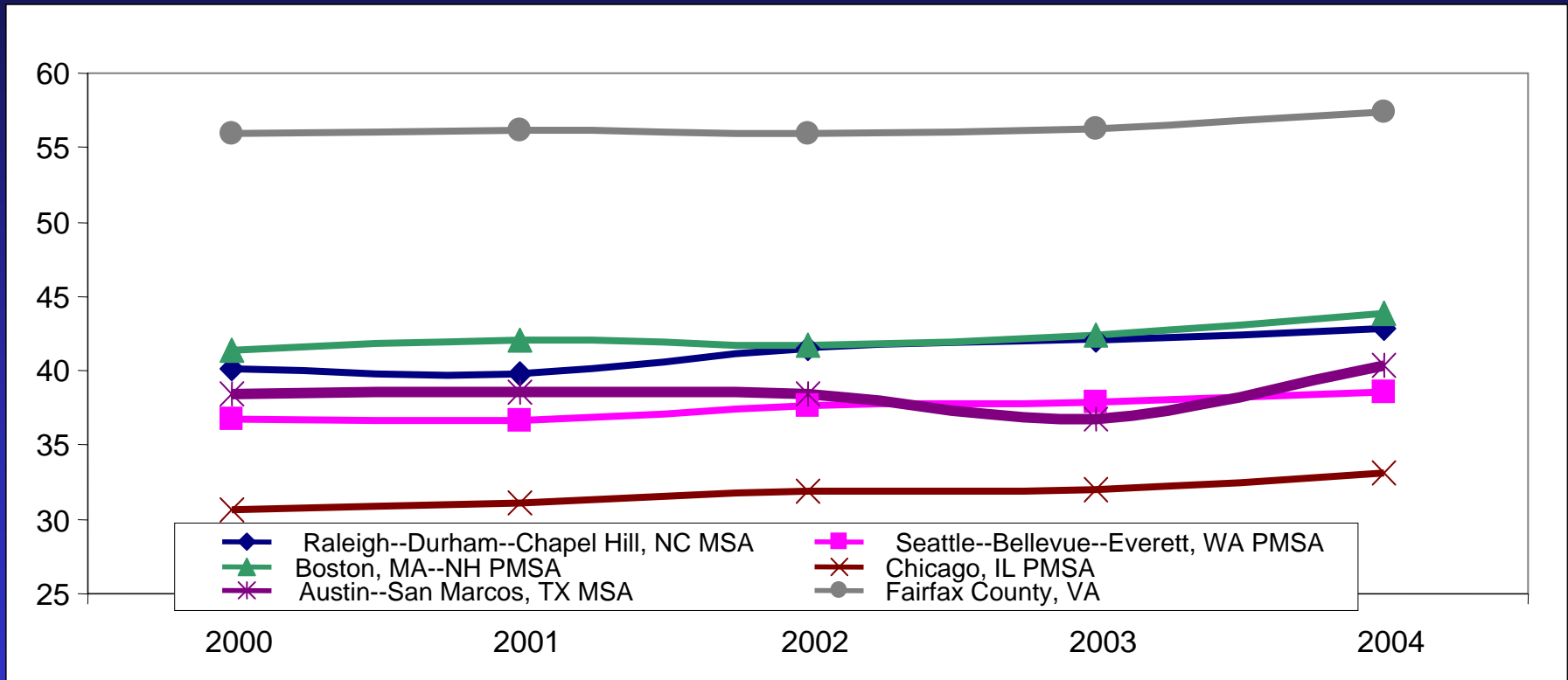
## Percent of Residents with a High School Diploma or Higher



Source: RMC analysis of Census Bureau data

# Analysis of Public Data

## Percent of Residents with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher



Source: RMC analysis of Census Bureau data



# Pilot Survey of Central Texas 2005 High School Graduates

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## Purposes:

- To ask questions on key topics not included in school databases
- To pilot test questions and survey administration to be used in future in-school surveys
- To obtain contact information for future follow-up surveys

# Pilot Survey of Central Texas 2005 High School Graduates

## Three Part Survey:

1. Family background and influences
2. High school experiences
3. Preparation for life after high school



# Family Background/ Influences

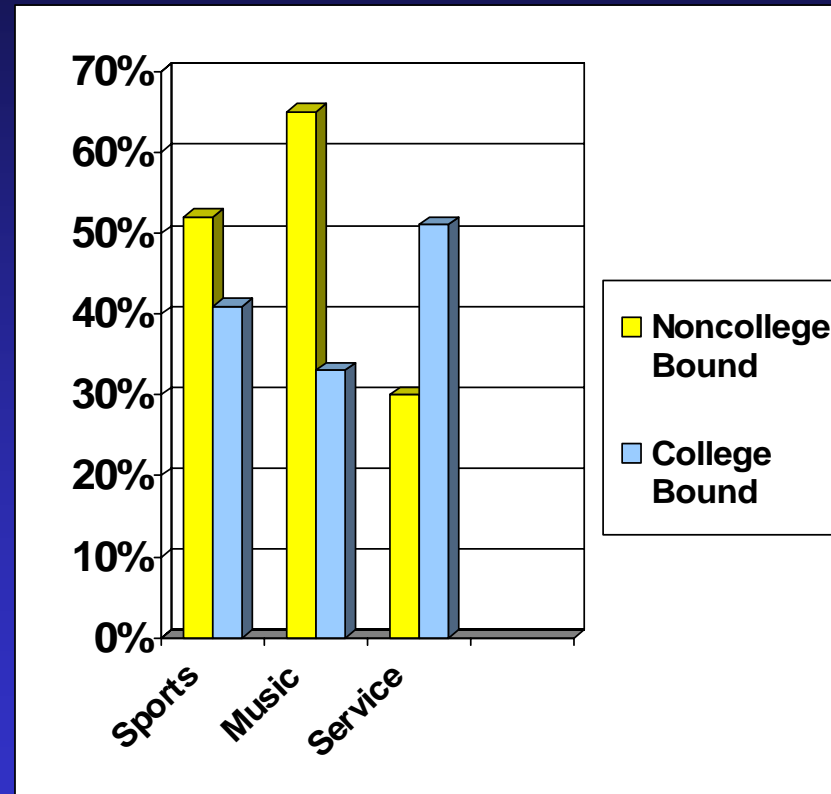
- Respondents came from a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds
- Respondents' future decisions are based mostly on their own ideas, then parents and grandparents; teachers' suggestions ranked fairly low
- Most parents encouraged children to go to college; parents of students going to college were more involved in children's education

If I wasn't encouraged by my friends, family & my school, I just probably wouldn't go.

# Participation in High School Activities and Work

- 89% participated in some type of extracurricular activity
- Six out of every 10 respondents worked while attending high school
- Typically, students who worked more reported studying less; however, Hispanics reported higher levels of both than either Whites or African-Americans

## Extracurricular Activities

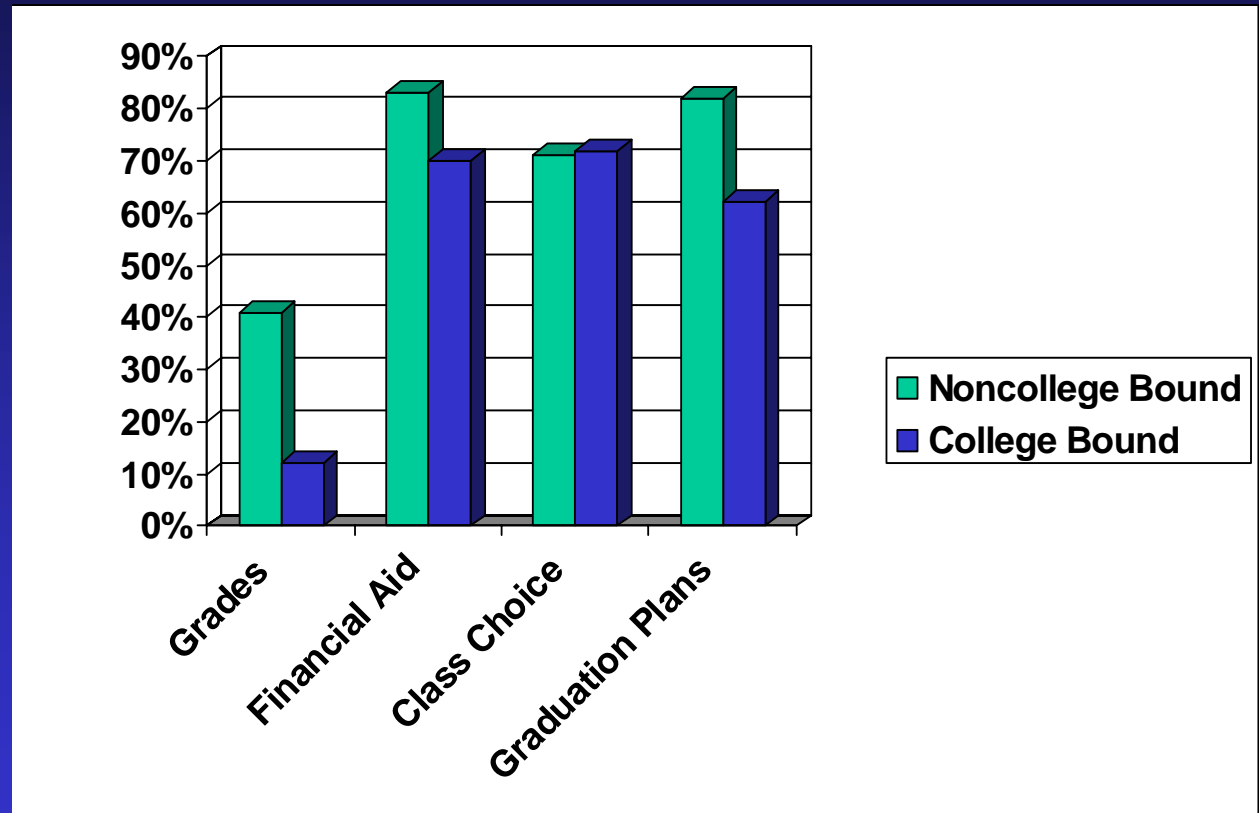


Source: RMC analysis of survey data

# Preparation for Life After High School

## Reasons to Meet with Counselor

93% met with a school counselor



Source: RMC analysis of survey data

# Preparation for Life After High School

- 84% took college entrance tests
- Respondents felt differently about how well they were prepared for life after high school
  - African Americans felt less prepared than other graduates
  - Females felt less prepared in social studies, science and math than males
  - Respondents from better-educated families felt they had better technology skills and participated in more college preparation activities

# In Their Own Words...

There should be a class to explain the steps that you should take to prepare for college.


My teachers hardly had time to teach anything ... but TAKS

Raise awareness of GPA importance in 9th grade not 11th.

Know more about the graduation plan.

# Preparation for Life After High School

- Most students (70%) applied for some sort of financial aid and 59% completed FAFSA
  - Asian and Hispanic respondents reported difficulty understanding the process
  - Students attending low-income schools took more advantage of help with the financial aid process than students from other schools
  - Graduates not planning to attend college cited insufficient financial resources as the primary reason



It's so much money, I'm just stressed out over everything.



# In Their Own Words...

[Money] was a big factor for me [in applying to different schools], I mean, college is expensive.

I need money for college.

We had some fairs and things but ... the ones I went to weren't that helpful.

# Preliminary Conclusions

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- School districts studied are experiencing rapid growth and significant demographic shifts that have important implications for postsecondary success
- Low-income high schools studied lag behind other schools in preparing their students for and enrolling graduates in postsecondary education
- Students' perceptions of their readiness for college vary by gender and race/ethnicity

# Preliminary Conclusions

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- All four districts are already working to inform students about postsecondary educational opportunities but use differing approaches
- Family background matters in key ways:
  - Students from low-income families and those with less-educated parents are less likely to attend college
  - Diversity of family backgrounds in some districts makes it difficult for schools to satisfy all parents and students with educational services offered

# Recommendations

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## What Schools Can Do:

- Develop or expand initiatives aimed at improving the college readiness of low-income students and those from less-educated families
- Provide more professional development to schools with a greater proportion of less-experienced teachers
- Gather better information on students and their family backgrounds

# Recommendations

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## What Business/Industry Can Do:

- Give families help in preparing students for college by hosting college preparation day for their parent-workers
- Create incentives, such as earned comp time or free lunches, for participation in school-related activities
- Spearhead efforts to help more students afford to go to college

# Recommendations

## What the Community Can Do:

- Foster greater collaboration among CBOs serving low-income students
- Create school, neighborhood association and CBO collaboration on college preparation nights
- Target financial aid sessions specifically to families (e.g., Asian and Hispanic) who may have difficulty understanding this information as it is usually presented
- Support additional research on this topic

# Recommendations

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## What Parents Can Do:

- Attend and actively participate in college nights and related events
- Learn more and talk to their children about postsecondary educational opportunities – especially important for parents who have not attended college
- Expose their children as early as possible to area postsecondary options

# Plans for Future Work

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- Add more school districts
- Add components to fully implement Data Center:
  - Track student outcomes through administrative databases
  - Survey graduates on postsecondary experiences one year after graduation
- Assess importance of high school experiences on future postsecondary education and employment
- Engage policymakers and stakeholders in improvements to education policy and practice