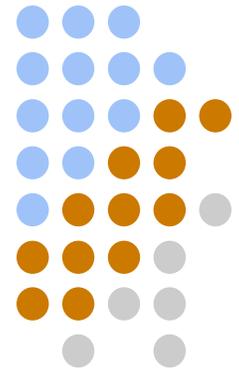# Central Texas High School Graduate Data Center

Year 1 Report Brief

Year 1 Report Highlights

Results from the Central Texas High School Graduate Data Center's (HSGDC) first comprehensive, cross-district report about area high schools suggest that, although some high schools continue to exceed the state's rates on successful transitions to postsecondary education, **certain factors continue to hamper many campuses' efforts to increase the number of their graduates who successfully move into postsecondary.** These factors include:

- **family income,**
- **teacher experience,** and
- **student achievement.**

The Year 1 Final Report also indicated that **less than half of the region's high school graduates could be tracked as enrolling in postsecondary** in the fall semester following graduation. This low percentage suggests a need for a more comprehensive approach to following what happens to graduates after high school, as well as a greater emphasis on ensuring successful transitions to postsecondary.

The Data Center, a partnership project of Skillpoint Alliance and the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, conducts comprehensive, long-term, region-specific research on the paths Central Texas high school graduates take after high school in order to provide information to school districts on practices that would enable greater success for graduates beyond high school.

The HSGDC's inaugural report, published in March 2006, provides:

- A summary of research literature on successful transitions from secondary education,
- Analysis of data available from public sources,
- Results of a pilot survey of the Class of 2005 Central Texas high school graduates, as well as
- Conclusions, recommendations, and plans for future work.[1]

A companion report, representing the results of a 9-month Policy Research Project conducted by graduate students of the LBJ School of Public Affairs, provided in-depth background information that served as the basis for the creation of the Data Center.[2]

[1] Schexnayder, D., et al. (2006, March). *Central Texas High School Graduate Data Center, year one final report.* Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources and Skillpoint Alliance.

[2] King, C.T., Schexnayder, D. T., & Gourgey, H. (Project Directors). *Beyond the numbers: Improving postsecondary success through a Central Texas high school data center* (Policy Research Project Report No. 148). Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs.

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Background on Central Texas
High School Graduate Data Center

Despite the Austin area's strong ranking as a hub of high tech industry, and of economic vitality for the state and the nation, **Austin and the Central Texas region remain vulnerable** to changes in the demographic makeup of their residents as well as to shifts in industry that require an increasingly well-educated and versatile workforce. This combination of factors means that the region will need nearly **40,000 additional students** completing postsecondary degrees or certifications **by 2015** in order to remain the economic powerhouse it is today.[3] The **High School Graduate Data Center** (HSGDC) was formed in 2005 in response to a growing need to determine what regional policies and practices serve our high school graduates best in preparing them for life beyond high school, particularly in making the often difficult transition to postsecondary.

In the fall of 2004, the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin conducted a class designed to study the need for and parameters of a longitudinal research project that would track the paths of Central Texas graduates beyond high school. The results of this study indicated that, **despite a wealth of data available through state agencies, few districts had the capacity to conduct the necessary research that would provide the feedback they needed to improve the rate of successful transitions to postsecondary.** The study further indicated that districts were hungry for this research and were eager to participate in the project.[4]   A review of national literature also revealed a range of factors that could be pared down to determine more specifically which influences were affecting Central Texas graduates. Selected influences associated with family background, student achievement, and college preparation are found to the right.

Factors Influencing Success in Education and Work

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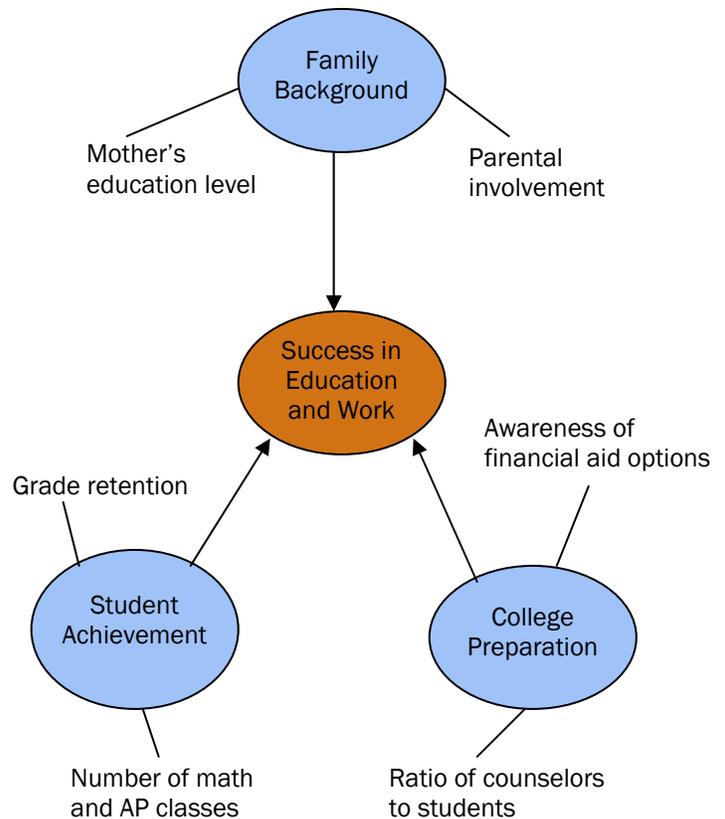
[3] Austin Area Research Organization, "An Investment in the Future of Central Texas: Closing the Gaps in Higher Education." Re-released 2005.

[4] Partner districts for Year 1 included Austin, Del Valle, Pflugerville and Round Rock.
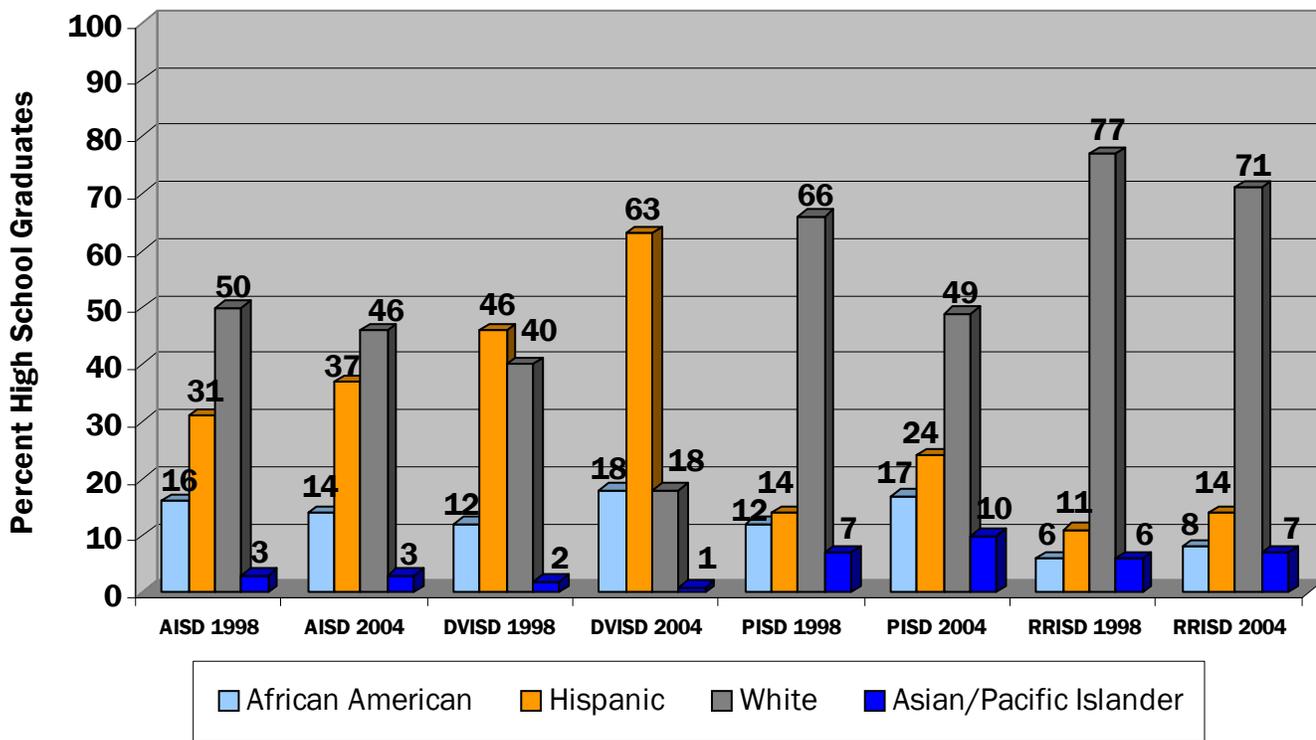
Demographics

The Year 1 Final Report included an analysis of publicly available data in lieu of the administrative data (student-level data from schools and government agencies) the project will obtain as it moves forward. This historical perspective highlights the kinds of changes Central Texas school districts have faced over recent years. For example:

- All districts grew significantly over the past 6 years, mirroring the general growth in the region due to in-migration.
- The ethnic diversity of the student population changed across all districts.

  ✓ All districts experienced strong growth in their Hispanic student populations.
  ✓ All districts experienced declines in their White student populations.
  ✓ Del Valle ISD represents the most dramatic example of these trends, with a growth from 46% to 63% in its Hispanic population and a drop of 22 percentage points in its white population.
  ✓ Austin ISD was the only partnering school district to experience a decline in its African American student population.

These findings suggest that the profound changes in growth and demographics may pose challenges to curriculum, to transitions, and to standardized testing measures of Central Texas schools seeking to promote best practices leading to student success upon graduation.

Percent of High School Graduates by Racial/Ethnic Group, 1998 to 2004

	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian/Pacific Islander
AISD 1998	16	31	50	3
AISD 2004	14	37	46	3
DVISD 1998	12	46	40	2
DVISD 2004	18	63	18	1
PISD 1998	12	14	66	7
PISD 2004	17	24	49	10
RRISD 1998	6	11	77	6
RRISD 2004	8	14	71	7

AISD: Austin Independent School District
DVISD: Del Valle Independent School District
PISD: Pflugerville Independent School District
RRISD: Round Rock Independent School District

Data source: AEIS 2003-05 and from individual school districts

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Factors Influencing Future Success

Several factors that influence the future success of Texas students have been identified from data publicly available from state agencies. These factors include, but are not limited to:

- Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) performance,
- Enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and
- Teacher experience.

For these factors, schools participating in the study compared to the rest of the State as follows:

- Central Texas low-income schools had lower passing rates on TAKS than did other low-income Texas schools.[5]
- Although more low-income schools in Central Texas enrolled students in AP classes, fewer passed the end-of-year exams.
- Low-income schools participating in the study also tended to have higher rates of teachers with less experience than other *Central Texas* schools.

Percent Low-income Students and Texas Postsecondary Transition Rates, by High School
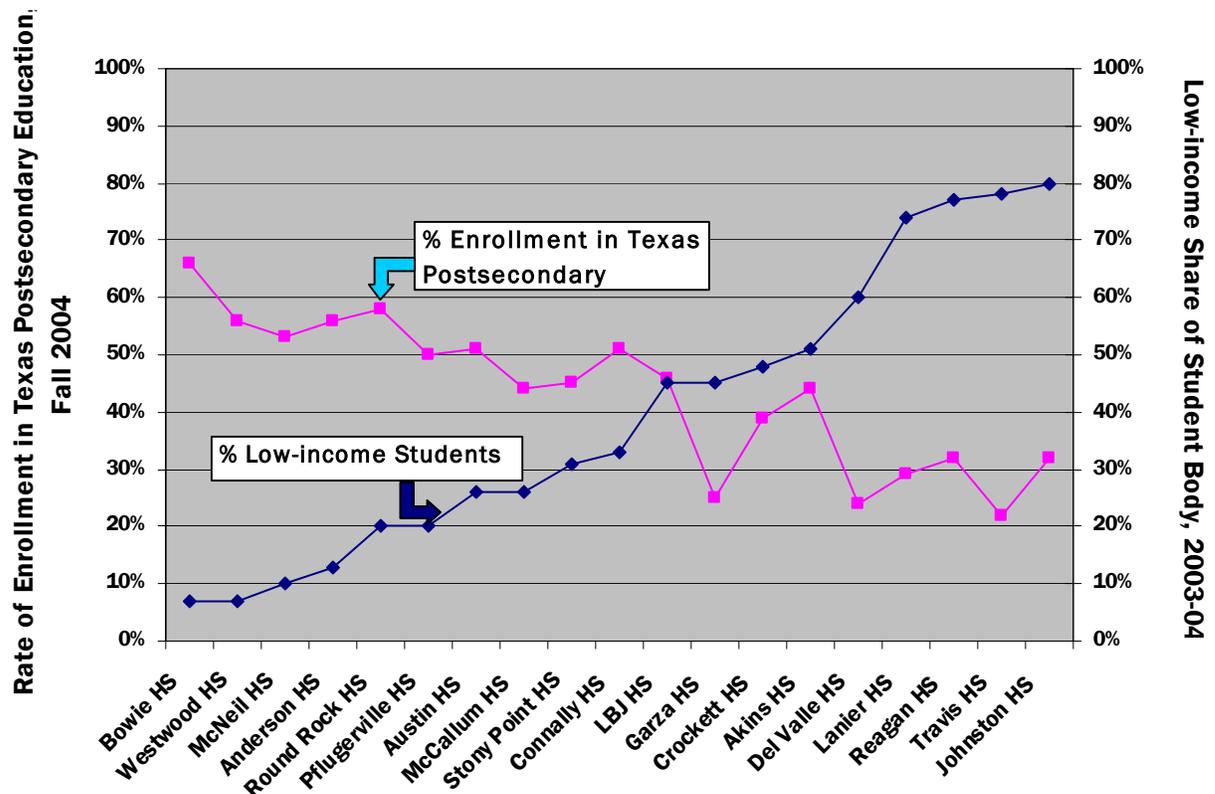
Data source: AEIS 2003-05, THECB 2005

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[5]A *low-income* school is defined as one in which 40% or more of student body qualifies for free and reduced-price lunch or is eligible for other public assistance.
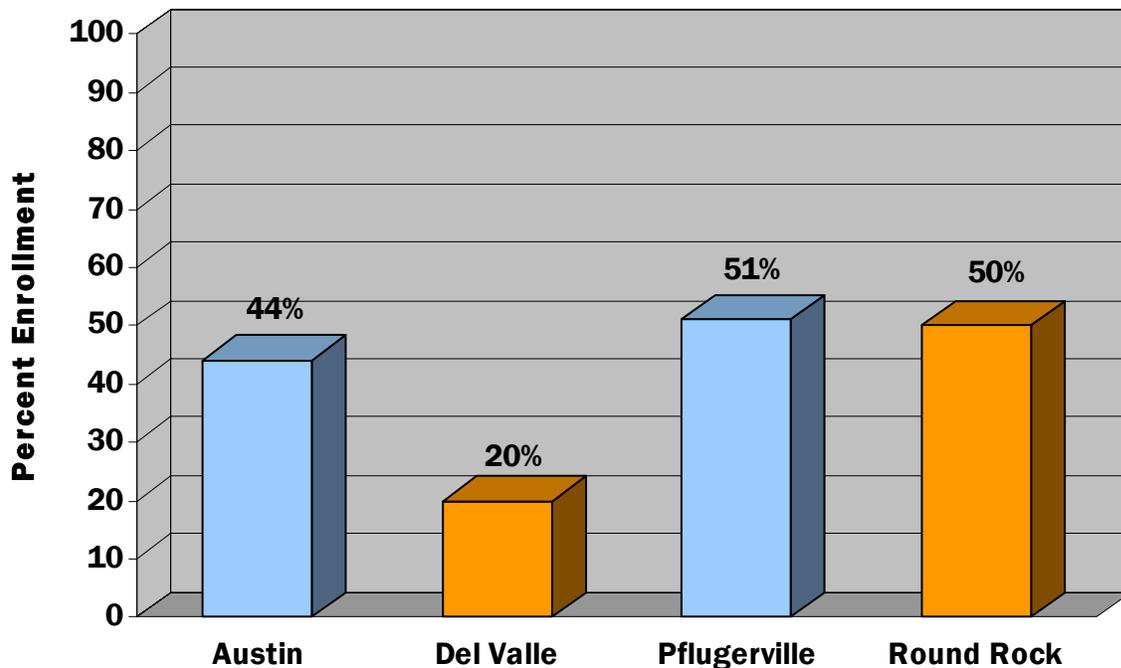
Rate of Postsecondary Enrollment

Another critical factor in determining student success bears special scrutiny given the purpose of this study: *rate of postsecondary enrollment of Central Texas high school graduates.* (See chart below.) This rate includes enrollment in 2-year and 4-year public institutions tracked by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

The Data Center found that, for the Class of 2004, **fewer than 50% of Central Texas graduates in four study districts enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year institution in the fall semester following graduation.** (Note: The state agencies classified substantial percentages of students as "not found," which would include students who chose to enroll in private or out-of-state institutions as well as students who did not enroll in postsecondary education.)

2004 Central Texas Postsecondary Enrollment Rates

Data source: THECB 2005

Postsecondary enrollment rates varied greatly by school, and one key correlation related status as a low-income school to rates of graduation. (See chart opposite page.) The higher the percentage of low-income students at a school, the lower the transition rates to college for that school. In general, low-income schools participating in the study lagged behind similar schools across the State of Texas. However, study schools that were not low-income performed better than other similar schools across the State.

Austin and Competitors

Austin and Central Texas continue to enjoy a reputation for an educated and versatile workforce. This reputation helps to attract new businesses and new jobs to the area and contributes to the overall economic vitality of the region.

Comparisons with regions across the nation that are considered to be Austin's economic competitors found that there was little to no difference in the education rates among these cities.

The percentage of metropolitan statistical area (MSA) residents in Austin/San Marcos who have a high school diploma or higher-level degree fell almost exactly in the middle when compared to Denver, Seattle, and Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill. (See chart below.) The region remained a few percentage points higher than rates for Phoenix (AZ) and the entire nation.

Percent of MSA Residents with a High School Diploma or Higher Level Education
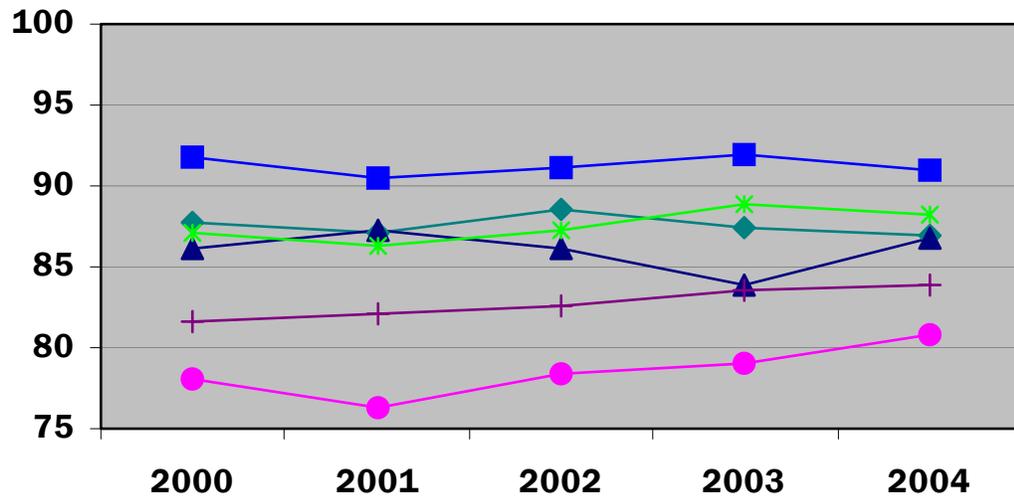
Legend:
- Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC MSA
- Seattle--Bellevue--Everett, WA PMSA
- Austin--San Marcos, TX MSA
- Entire US
- Denver, CO PMSA
- Phoenix, AZ

Data source: U.S. Census Bureau
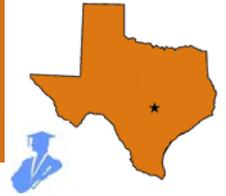
2005 Pilot Survey of Graduating High School Seniors

Based on an extensive review of the literature regarding key factors influencing graduate behavior after high school, the Data Center developed a survey that included three major categories of variables: *Family Background*, *Student Experience and Achievement*, and *Preparation for Higher Education and Work*.

Sample variables from each category included:
- ✓ Household income level, race/ethnicity,
- ✓ Amount of time spent on homework,
- ✓ Parent/guardian & sibling education levels,
- ✓ Amount of time spent on work,

- ✓ Parent/guardian occupation,
- ✓ Counselor interaction,
- ✓ Coursework taken,
- ✓ Financial aid preparation

Although any findings from 2005 will require future verification due to limited response rates, a successful pilot of the survey for the Class of 2005 was conducted in the following four ISDs: Austin, Del Valle, Pflugerville, and Round Rock. Greater response rates in subsequent years are expected.

The survey enables researchers to learn directly from the students about their family background, their school experience, and their preparation for higher education in a way that will help districts and partnering agencies determine which programs, school activities, or possible early interventions would best keep students on a path toward success in higher education, work, or other future endeavors.

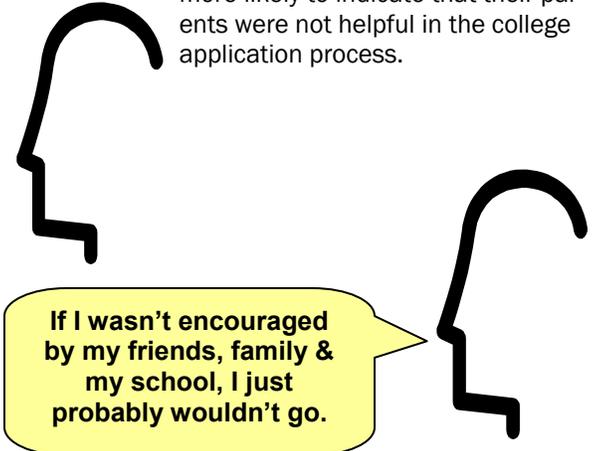## Three tentative survey findings worth further scrutiny

① Hispanic and Asian families found the FAFSA process difficult to understand.
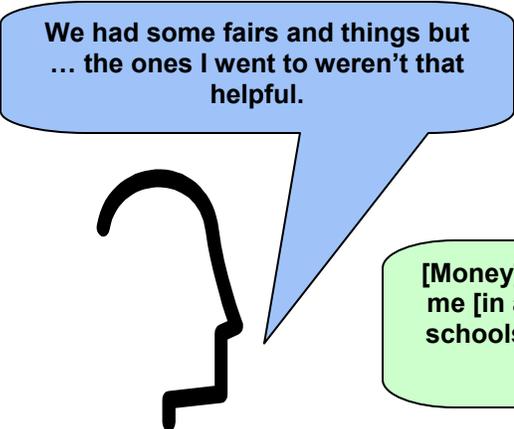
② Hispanic students were most likely to work outside of school and were second to Asian students in the amount of time outside of school spent studying.
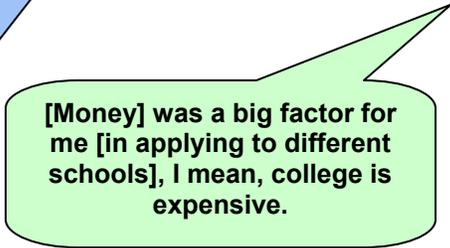
③ Almost all students stated that their parents emphasized the importance of higher education; however, students who were <u>not</u> planning to enroll in higher education courses were more likely to indicate that their parents were not helpful in the college application process.

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

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

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

Recommendations

Schools should:
- ✓ Continue to develop and expand initiatives that improve college readiness.
- ✓ Gather better data on the education background of students' families to support those initiatives.
- ✓ Eliminate high proportions of beginning teachers and offer more professional development.

Businesses should continue to support the education system through:
- ✓ Volunteerism,
- ✓ Financial and in-kind support,
- ✓ Work-based learning experiences, and
- ✓ Job shadowing.

Families should:
- ✓ Actively work with schools to learn more about higher education opportunities and processes.
- ✓ Spend time with their children addressing higher education opportunities.
- ✓ Seek assistance early in addressing how to finance their children's high education.

The Community should:
- ✓ Foster greater support for and collaboration among community-based organizations that serve low-income students or offer college readiness programs.
- ✓ Target financial aid and other college readiness activities to families with special needs.
- ✓ Support additional research to document and analyze the student experience in education.

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