

education plan



Introduction

An integral part of the structure supporting economic development is education. Not unlike how clustering of industrial capacity is key to economic growth, the clustering of talent in specific locations is one of the fundamental causes of economic growth. Having clusters of talented and educated individuals living in one city or region creates synergy of knowledge that speeds the process of innovation and economic success. The ability to attract and retain highly educated individuals is one of Brownsville's greatest challenges.

In a ranking exercise of major vision themes within the Comprehensive Plan, having an educated community with high graduation rates was rated among the top themes in terms of its importance to the residents of the community. The impact of this Plan, both directly and indirectly, on the other vision themes ranked by the community is presented in Figure 1. For example, because having a strong educational background and/or workforce skills is directly linked to an increased earning potential for an individual, this Plan will have a direct impact on Brownsville's ability to meet the prosperity vision for the community. Additionally, having a more educated workforce will help attract new industries with better paying jobs to the area.

	DIRECT	INDIRECT
PROSPEROUS	●	
EFFICIENT		
FUNCTIONING		
SAFE		
TALENTED	●	
HEALTHY		●
LIVABLE		
VIBRANT		
ENGAGED	●	
COLLABORATIVE	●	
EQUITABLE		●
SUSTAINABLE		●

Figure 1. Vision Themes Related to Education

Due to the importance of education in our community and the direct impact it has on the City's economic development, a sub-committee was formed within the Imagine Brownsville Task Force whose sole focus was educational issues. This sub-committee, in conjunction with the Consultant Team, arrived at five education objectives. These objectives are as follows:

1. Want every high school student to graduate.
2. Want every high school student who graduates to have the necessary skills and attributes to begin a career or to pursue post-secondary education. Want every elementary / middle school student academically prepared for high school.
3. Want every high school graduate to be bilingual, bi-literate, civically engaged, and an employable life-long learner.
4. Want all families to actively participate and to have their participation welcomed through the secondary level of our education system.
5. Want quality schools that are safe, well-maintained, and orderly with professional, trained, and certified teachers utilizing the latest technologies to meet current and future educational demands.

The key issues that must be overcome in meeting these objectives are discussed in the following pages.



Key Issue: Low Graduation Rates and High Drop-Out Rates

Educational attainment is not only a key issue in Brownsville, but also throughout the State of Texas. In fact, Texas comes in last of all states in terms

of high school graduation rates and Brownsville is below the State average. While Brownsville's recent receipt of the prestigious Broad Prize illustrates the significant improvement made by Brownsville public schools in recent years, there is still ground to cover in catching up with State levels and beyond.

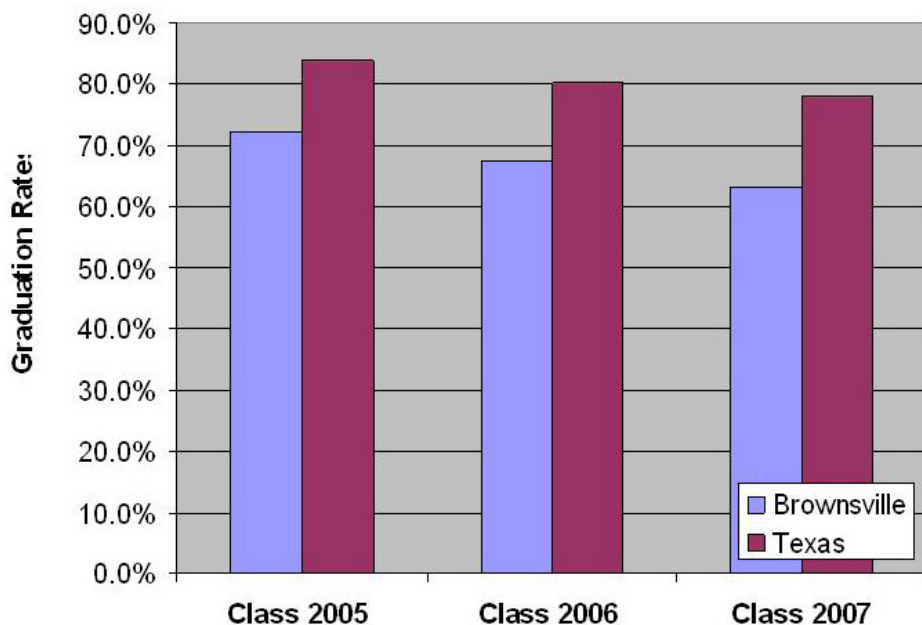


Figure 2. High School Graduation Rates. Source: Texas Education Agency

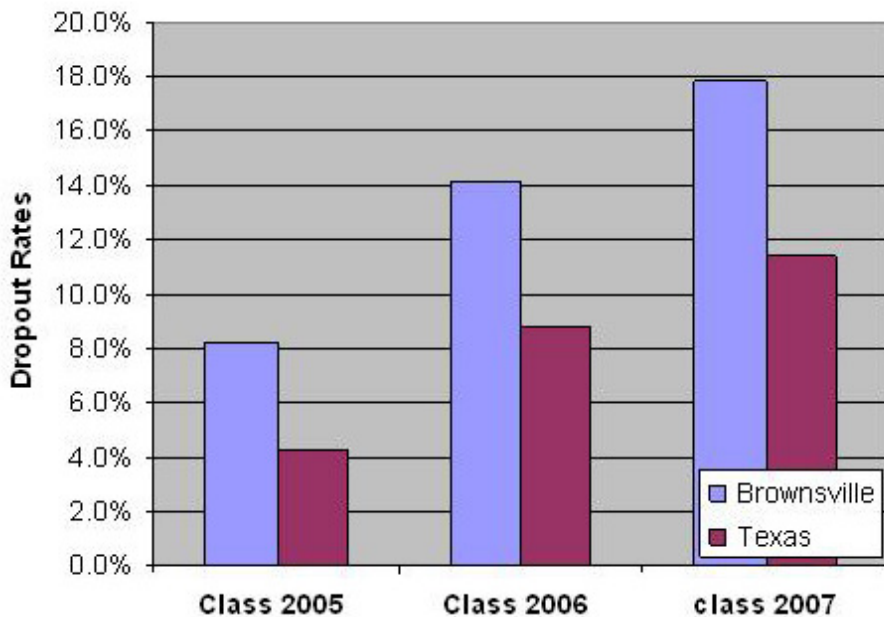


Figure 3. High School Drop-Out Rates. Source: Texas Education Agency

Key Issue: Lower Percentage of College Ready High School Graduates than State

In addition to having lower than State average graduation rates and higher than average high school dropout rates, Brownsville students who are graduate are found to perform below the average of all Texas students on SAT/ACT entrance exams. Of the nearly 50% of graduating Brownsville students that took either the SAT or ACT exam in 2006 (68% in Texas), less than 8% received scores at or above the criterion (1110 for SAT, 24 for ACT). The average combined SAT score was over 100 points below that of the State average (871 vs. 991).

Another area of concern in regards to college readiness is the percentage of students that are required to take remedial courses in college. At the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB), approximately 64% of entering students are required to take remedial courses. This is compared to 48% of students at the State level and 28% of students nationally. Furthermore, a study of students at UTB between 1998 and 2003 revealed that after 6 years of study, approximately 13% had obtained a baccalaureate degree, 5% an associates degree, 7% a certificate, and 17% were still enrolled, leaving 58% that left the University without receiving a degree. When compared to a national study completed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) between 1996 and 2001, the statistics at UTB were below the results found nationally. The NCES study revealed that after 6 years, approximately 29% of students received a baccalaureate degree, 10% an associates degree, 12% a certificate, 14% were still enrolled, and 35% left prior to obtaining a degree.

Key Issue: Lack of Coordinated School Placement

The placement of new schools throughout the community has largely been determined by the availability of land in regions of increased demand (i.e. sectors of the community with growing number of residents under the age of 18). While this is an effective approach to meeting the

educational demands of the City, it is not the most efficient or desirable. With a lack of coordinated planning of school locations, comes increased infrastructure costs, increased safety concerns, decreased “walkability” and sense of place, and incompatible/inappropriate land use mixing. In some instances, it can also result in duplicated efforts where financial burdens could be shared amongst entities to provide greater benefit to a larger segment of the community.

Key Issue: Large number of students with limited English proficiency

A major issue that Brownsville educators must deal with is the large number of students that have limited English proficiency. A 2006-2007 study completed by the Texas Educators Administration (TEA) developed an Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) that includes a measure of students with limited English proficiency. This study revealed that an overwhelming 43% of Brownsville students had limited proficiency in English as compared to the State level of 16%. This is likely due to the large number of homes in the region where the primary language spoken is Spanish. This poses a significant challenge to both educators and students that is unique to border regions. This challenge must be addressed in order to achieve many other educational goals established both in this Plan and in the Brownsville Independent School District’s Strategic Plan. In addition to English proficiency, the TEA AEIS also lists students classified as economically disadvantaged as an important indicator. The estimate for Brownsville students is 95% as opposed to 56% for the State. While this issue cannot be addressed strictly by the educational community in the short-term, it is an issue that Brownsville as a community needs to address holistically.



Key Issue: Brain Drain

Throughout the course of the Task Force meetings, a key trend repeatedly brought up by the education subcommittee members was the concept of “Brain Drain”. Brain drain is a term that describes the phenomenon of the young, college-graduate community of Brownsville moving away from the region, either to attend college or to find a job after college. This is predominantly attributed to the lack of professional, well-paying jobs in the region (elaborated upon in the Economic Section) and further affected by the lack of entertainment institutions that young professionals seek (i.e. fine dining, theatre, bars, museums, concert venues, etc.). Currently, this phenomenon is observed in a very qualitative manner. There is no indicator or statistic that tracks the number of young, educated individuals that leave the region to attend college and never return. The closest statistic that can be currently examined is the level of educational

attainment in the population that is 25 years or older (Figure 4).

While this phenomenon is not directly related to education objectives or strategies in Brownsville, educational attainment does have an indirect impact in terms of local job demand. To create high skilled, high paying jobs in the region by attracting new firms, it is first necessary to increase the overall educational attainment of the community. By producing more educated, trained, and highly skilled workers, new industry will be attracted to the region. This will provide more opportunities for the young, educated sector of the community. While the lack of entertainment venues also plays a role in the brain drain phenomenon, simply increasing the number of such venues will not be sustainable until the region can supply better, higher paying jobs that support an educated workforce.

Educational Attainment	Estimate	Percent	Margin of Error
Population 25 years and over	90,733	100%	N/A
Less than 9th Grade	24,629	27.1%	+/- 1.3%
9th Grade to 12 Grade, No Diploma	13,543	14.9%	+/- 1.4%
High School Graduate (includes equivalency)	19,324	21.3%	+/- 1.2%
Some College, No Degree	14,789	16.3%	+/- 1.3%
Associate's Degree	4,625	5.1%	+/- 0.7%
Bachelor's Degree	9,225	10.2%	+/- 1.0%
Graduate or Professional Degree	4,598	5.1%	+/- 0.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 4. Summary of educational attainment amongst Brownsville residents.

Strategic Elements

1. Create a highly visible (pro-active, non-adversarial, enlightened, and convening) organization whose mission is to authorize and organize business-educational programs to achieve and target the best educational and workforce skill levels possible. The organization should work closely with UTB/TSC and industrial cluster leaders to identify those skills most needed to fulfill existing gaps and help attract additional industry to the area. General education and workforce skills that have been identified to enhance the vitality and development of the selected regional clusters include: Accounting, Human Resource Management, Computer Science, Marketing, Finance, General Management, Tax Services, and Consulting Services. Additionally, specific skill needs that were identified within each of the five selected clusters (Heavy Manufacturing, Light Manufacturing, Logistics, Healthcare, and Tourism/Hospitality) are further described under Strategy 6 of the Economic Plan.
2. Develop a mechanism to track local high school graduates that leave the region to attend college and actively work with local industry to attract students back to the region. This could be accomplished by offering internship programs, providing financial incentives, and developing a job information network to notify locals residing outside of the region of available employment opportunities. This effort should occur in conjunction with major elements of the downtown revitalization plan to create a sense of place and improve the offerings of entertainment, recreation, and dining venues that are critical to the retention of the talent class. This strategy is discussed in more detail in the Economic Section.
3. Coordinate future BISD schools and facility locations with the City of Brownsville Land Use and Utility Infrastructure Plans to minimize overall development and transportation costs and maximize quality of life, safety, and efficiency. For further details see the *Land Use and Urban Design Element Sections*.
4. Develop multi-use facilities (e.g. parks, events center, etc.) that are shared with other public entities (e.g. UTB, BISD, City, BEDC, etc.) to improve inter-institutional cooperation and the efficiency of public entities to meet their own needs and those of the community.
5. Develop and support internship programs between local businesses and UTB/TSC to foster career development opportunities and real-world experience for upcoming graduates.
6. Expand the TSC / BISD Dual Enrollment Program and develop a mentorship program between UTB students and BISD students to provide guidance and support. Top UTB students should be selected to serve as role models for soon to be high school graduates to encourage further educational development and attainment.
7. Explore the City's main library potential to bridge the digital divide by pursuing education empowerment grants (e.g. Microsoft and Dell) for broadening the community's computer ownership and access. The library could also host seminars that emphasize basic working knowledge of computers, in addition to courses that teach specific mainstream software use, such as Microsoft Word and Excel.
8. Develop a program through the City library to provide summer book access to people in economically disadvantaged areas that do not have easy access to the City library locations. Possible mechanisms to provide book access include bi-monthly book mobiles in designated locations, opening school libraries in key locations during summer school hours, and/or the development of lending libraries at local churches, public buildings, and community outreach locations. The program should be developed in cooperation with UTB/TSC, BISD, local non-profit agencies, and other educational entities and should explore external funding sources through grant programs.



9. Investigate the reacquisition of the Port of Brownsville district from Port Isabel ISD.
10. Develop broader cooperation with the Universidad de Tamaulipas, Monterrey TEC, and other regional universities to enhance UTB's international influence and reach.
11. Design community college career programs that provide mid-level technical degrees in conjunction with the community's economic development strategies (e.g. bookkeeper degree within CPA program, CAD draftsman within architectural program, topographer within the civil engineer program, etc.).

recommended "Target" values at 2 years and at 5 years after initiation of the Plan, based on standards of comparison and an evaluation of what seems reasonable over the short-run. However, these target values are simply recommendations, and the feasibility of the target values may be subject to scrutiny by those experts in the field responsible for enacting and monitoring the Plan.

Education Indicators

To evaluate Brownsville's current status in meeting the stated objectives and to track future progress as strategies are initiated, the following set of indicators (Figure 5) should be monitored and evaluated. The indicator table includes

Implementation

Implementation of the recommended education strategies should be initiated by the education technical group, with representation from BISD, UTB/TSC, and other local educational groups and facilities. Implementation will also require representation from the private sector to identify critical skills required to fill local employment needs, as further described in the Economic Section, and to initiate internship and/or mentorship programs between UTB/TSC and the business community.

Indicator	Current	Standard of Comparison	5-yr Target
Graduation Rate	63%	78% (TX)	75%
Drop-Out Rate	18%	11% (TX)	11%
% Students that take SAT	48%	68%	60%
Average SAT Score of Students Tested	871	991 (TX)	950
% College Students Receiving a Bachelor's Degree within 6 years of Study	13%	29%	20%
% of Population with Associate's Degree	5%	5% (McAllen)	6%
% of Population with Bachelor's Degree	10.2%	17.7% (McAllen)	14%
% of Population with Graduate or Professional Degree	5.1%	8.5% (McAllen)	7.50%
% High School Graduates or Higher	57.9%	73% (McAllen)	65%
% Bachelor's Degree or Higher	15.2%	26.2% (McAllen)	20%
% of Students with Limited English Proficiency	43%	16% (TX)	31%
% of Bilingual/ESL Education Students	39%	N/A	44%

Figure 5. Education Indicators.