

The Student Futures Project: Meeting the Need for Locally-Based Education Research

The Need for Local Education Research

Community leaders seeking to increase high school to college transitions are in need of local education research:

1. Much education research on college transitions focuses on nationally-representative samples or uses samples with too few individuals to identify factors for specific localities or populations of students.
2. Many factors associated with successful college transitions, such as intentions to go to college and parental college experience, are not available in school-district collected administrative data.
3. Some districts in Central Texas send many of their high school graduates to out-of-state colleges, where traditional means of finding them using Texas state data will not work.

Solutions to these issues:

- 1) Collect data from all Central Texas high school graduates, allowing local and population-specific analyses.
- 2) Utilize data from several sources including high school records and surveys taken during students' senior year to capture key factors not available from any other source.
- 3) Link data to postsecondary enrollment outcomes using National Student Clearinghouse data and Texas state employment records.



Student Futures Project Background

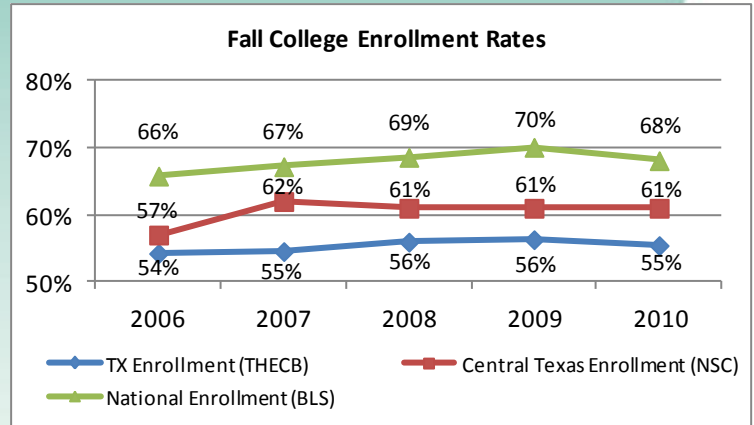
The Student Futures Project is a research partnership between the Ray Marshall Center and a growing number Central Texas independent school districts to identify and analyze the pathways and factors influencing how high school graduates transition from high school to postsecondary education and the labor market.

Student Futures Project Research

- Examines postsecondary enrollment and employment outcomes for Central Texas high school graduates beginning in 2006, enabling educators and community leaders to better see persistent transition trends.
- Surveys approximately 12,000 high school seniors each year to collect relevant information on college intentions, counselor and other school staff interactions, background and extracurricular activities. The surveys are conducted online and take approximately 20 minutes to complete.
- Obtains administrative data from participating school districts including student characteristics, high school coursework and graduation rank.
- Performs research using all of these linked data to determine which factors are most strongly associated with postsecondary enrollment and employment outcomes in Central Texas. Research looks at regional results and also, specifically for Hispanic, low-income and potentially first-generation college-going students.

Central Texas College Transitions in Context

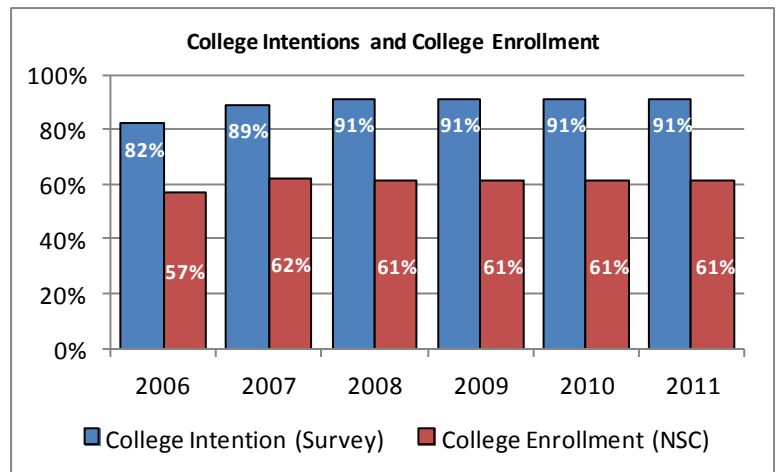
- A larger share of Central Texas high school graduates enroll in college compared to the state as a whole, while nationally a higher share of high school graduates enroll in college.
- While national and Texas shares of high school students enrolling in college decreased from 2009 to 2010, Central Texas direct to college enrollment remained steady.
- The number of Central Texas high school graduates has increased 22% from 2006 to 2010. One of the participating districts, Leander ISD, was cited as being one of the fastest-growing districts in the country in 2009.
- Central Texas faces a number of challenges in the pursuit of increasing postsecondary enrollment, including a growing population and a growing share of students who have traditionally been less likely to transition to college. Survey reports show that the share of would-be first-generation college goers increased from 23% in 2007 to 25% in 2011, while the share of Hispanic students increased from 33% in 2007 to 39% in 2011.



Central Texas Students Want to Go to College

By providing high school survey results to participating schools and districts in the summer following the survey, the Student Futures Project enables district and campus leaders to develop and set locally-based goals for their senior classes.

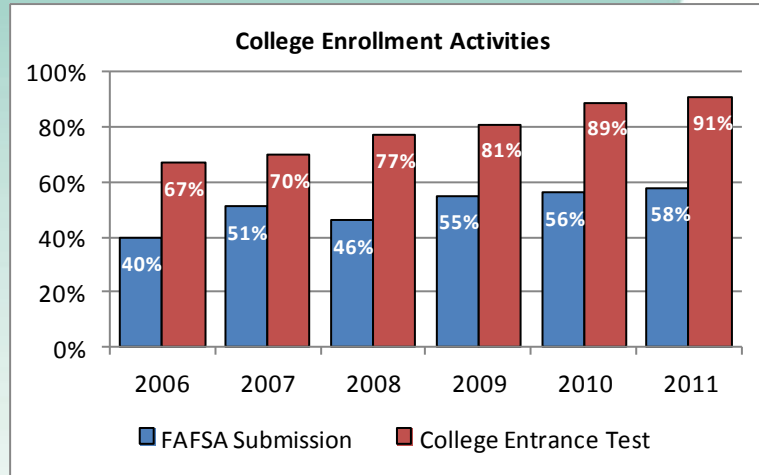
- Despite a quickly growing population, with increasing shares of students who have been traditionally less likely to go to college, an overwhelming majority of seniors indicate that they plan to go to college after high school graduation.
- However, the share of students who actually enroll in the fall does not match the aspirations of high school seniors. Financial uncertainty appears to play a role.
- For several years, this gap between the intentions of students and their enrollment outcomes has been the focus of work designed to increase the share of students who engage in activities directly associated with college enrollment, including taking college entrance exams and completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).



Activities Associated with College Enrollment

- Efforts aimed at increasing participation in key college transitions activities has shown noticeable improvement since 2006.

- The share of students reporting they had submitted a FAFSA increased by 18 percentage points from 2006 to 2011. The share of students reporting they took a college entrance exam increased 24% points over the same period, now matching the percent of students who indicate they intend to go to college.



- These increasing shares of participation are particularly impressive in light of the fast growth the region has experienced and the increasing shares of students whose parents have never gone to college.
- However, despite increasing participation in these activities among high school seniors, the overall enrollment rate remains flat, further evidence that additional research into the key levers associated with increasing postsecondary enrollment is still needed.

Iterative Research Leading to New Ideas and Interventions

- Recent research has shown that because of an increasing population, changing demographics, and new attitudes about college, some of the factors associated with increasing postsecondary enrollment in Central Texas *change over time*.
- This means that efforts designed to increase college enrollment from year to year need to focus on activities that are *consistently* associated with postsecondary enrollment, while constantly re-assessing where these activities fit into the broader picture.
- Districts and community leaders use the survey report to develop and assess the progress on specific metrics and utilize additional research reports from the Student Futures Project to determine the changing role of these activities on college enrollment.
- They also use the information collected and analyzed in the Student Futures Project to develop additional questions and design new interventions. These additional questions spur academic and practical research at the Ray Marshall Center. This is the *iterative process* needed by local communities to improve high school outcomes.
- For example, district and community leaders are looking for factors inside and outside the classroom to increase college enrollment for students. The Ray Marshall Center is now proposing to examine how specific course-taking activities in the junior and senior year are associated with college enrollment and one-year college persistence.



Some Key College Preparation Activities

- Taking the PSAT
- Taking AP or IB courses in high school
- Visiting a college
- Meeting with a college counselor
- Attending a college fair
- Meeting with a college representative
- Taking a college entrance exam
- Applying for college
- Applying for financial aid
- Enrolling in college

How Student Futures Project Research Feeds into Local Efforts

Work at the Ray Marshall Center is a critical part of increasing Central Texas college enrollment and persistence by establishing context, enhancing existing efforts, collecting metrics, and investigating district and community questions using academic-quality research.

Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce

- Employs Student Futures Project survey and outcomes data to drive district conversations about successful student transitions to college, including developing yearly district-level progress reports presented to the community at an annual lunch, and convening a monthly group of district leaders that focus on regional efforts to increase college transitions.
- Works to improve Student Futures Project data and research by obtaining and distributing administrative data relating to submission of FAFSA and completion of ApplyTexas applications.
- Leverages Student Futures Project work to encourage the state of Texas to shorten the timeline for release of high school graduation and college enrollment data.

School Districts

- Use Student Futures project senior survey data to perform year-to-year comparisons between campuses, the district and within-year comparisons with other districts.
- Utilize the data collected by the Student Futures Project to request additional reports or information from the Ray Marshall Center for use in presentations with district superintendents and school boards.
- Develop activities and interventions designed to increase college enrollment based on Student Futures Project factors reports.

Special Thanks to Student Future Project Partners

TG
Greater Austin
Chamber of Commerce
Texas Education Agency
The University of Texas at Austin

Austin ISD
Bastrop ISD
Del Valle ISD
Eanes ISD
Hays CISD
Hutto ISD

Lake Travis ISD
Leander ISD
Manor ISD
Pflugerville ISD
Round Rock ISD
San Marcos ISD



Survey reports produced for the entire region allow community and district stakeholders the opportunity to compare senior responses across districts and set regional metrics designed to improve activities associated with successful college and career transitions.



www.raymarshallcenter.org
3001 Lake Austin Blvd., Suite 3.200
Austin, TX 78703
(512) 471-7891