HIGHLIGHTS:
The new measures of public school performance reflect a wide disparity in student achievements across areas in South Texas and the state. While socioeconomic factors play a role in determining student performance, the statewide 60x30 educational goal paves the way for local initiatives that aim to boost the competitiveness of the Coastal Bend with a more developed workforce.

In August, each public school and school district in Texas received a letter grade from the state for the first time. As part of a new accountability system for evaluating student performance, Texas replaced the old pass/fail rating system with a scale from A to F.

This initiative aligns with the federal government’s Every Student Succeeds Act, which replaced the No Child Left Behind Act in 2015. The new federal law was intended to give states more freedom to set goals for school districts.

Under the new state rating system, each school district receives a score for each of three categories: (1) student achievement, which reflects how well students perform on the yearly mandated standardized test called the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR); (2) school progress, which evaluates how much students improve on the STAAR tests; and (3) closing the gaps, which measures how much schools improve the STAAR test scores for the groups of students with special needs and English language learners.

The overall grade is calculated based on the weighted average of the better score of the first two categories with a 70% weight, and the third category that makes up the other 30%.

In a nutshell, the new system for assessing Texas public schools still relies mostly on STAAR test scores as measures of student performance.

### Accountability Ratings of Corpus Christi School Districts, 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Calallen</th>
<th>Corpus Christi</th>
<th>Flour Bluff</th>
<th>London</th>
<th>Tuloso-Midway</th>
<th>West OSO</th>
<th>Seashore</th>
<th>Corpus Christi Montessori</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2017-18 Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>4,051</td>
<td>37,910</td>
<td>5,660</td>
<td>1,043</td>
<td>3,878</td>
<td>2,102</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Grade</strong></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>MET STANDARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Category:</strong></td>
<td>Student Achievement</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Progress</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Closing the Gaps</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New Report Cards

Within the city of Corpus Christi, London and Flour Bluff ISDs earned an A (score 90 or above for Exemplary Performance). The other school districts (Corpus Christi ISD, Tuloso-Midway ISD, and West Oso ISD) received a C (score 70-79 for Acceptable Performance).

Even though Corpus Christi ISD received an overall C rating, it was the first time in 13 years that no school was rated as “Improvement Required” or equivalently an F rating for “Unacceptable Performance.” In fact, 10 Corpus Christi ISD schools scored an A.

Overall, schools in Corpus Christi showed some improvement from the past year in the percentage of students passing the STAAR tests at different grades. Those historically high-performing schools continued to do well, but schools that had lagged behind tended to show relatively more improvement.

In addition to 742 traditional school districts, the state has 87 charter districts that operate public schools with more freedom from state regulations. Evidence on the relative performance of these schools is mixed. Over one-third (37%) of charter districts scored an overall A rating, more than doubled the share of 16% for traditional districts. But when As and Bs are combined, the percentages of the two types of school districts were comparable. The percentages of charter districts scoring Ds and Fs were also higher than traditional districts.

Disparity across the charter schools in Corpus Christi is also evident. The Seashore charter schools on North Padre Island received an overall A, while the Corpus Christi Montessori School earned the “Met Standard” rating.

The stated objective of the new school rating system is to identify ways to improve student achievements. The ratings highlight factors that are within a school’s control as well as factors that are beyond the school’s control. For one, a public school does not choose which families and students to serve.

Socioeconomic Factors

In addition to STAAR test scores, the TEA provides data on the socioeconomic profile of each school’s student body. Across the 829 Texas school districts, the influence of family income on student performance is clear. The chart on the last page plots the overall score of each Texas school district against the percentage of Economically Disadvantaged students as a measure of the socioeconomic status. Economically Disadvantaged students are from low-income families and they receive free or reduced-price meals.

Statewide no school district with less than 30% Economically Disadvantaged students received an overall rating of C or below. The majority of Ds and Fs went to districts with relatively high rates of low-income students.

The impact of socioeconomic factors on student performance is also evident in Corpus Christi. The last scatter plot limits the previous results for school districts to the Corpus Christi metro area. The linear trend that best fits the data indicates that socioeconomic profiles of different schools explain 46% of variation in the schools’ overall accountability ratings.

Among traditional school districts in the area, London ISD had the lowest percentage (22%) of low-income students, and it had the highest percentage of students passing the standardized tests at all grades. By contrast, nearly 93% of students in West Oso ISD were classified as Economically Disadvantaged, and the district had the fewest students passing the same tests.

Still there are exceptions. The majority of school districts in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas educate mostly low-income students but they received overall ratings of As and Bs. As explained in a recent Economic Pulse newsletter, widespread broadband access particularly for students at home might have made up for the lack of learning resources among low-income families in that
region. But in the Permian Basin region of West Texas, most school districts received no higher than a C, despite relatively few low-income students.

In Corpus Christi, Port Aransas ISD achieved the highest score of 94 within the metro area, but nearly 80% of its students belonged to the low-income group, higher than Corpus Christi ISD and Tuloso-Midway ISD.

The overall poverty rate of a school affects student performance perhaps because lower-income families have fewer resources for their children. However, some schools with low-income neighborhoods have succeeded in implementing economic-oriented policy measures to improve their ratings.

For instance, Dallas ISD and Fort Worth ISD raised the scores of some struggling schools by giving stipends as much as $12,000 to top performers who chose to teach in those schools. This strategy is now under consideration of state officials for statewide adoption.

Economic Mobility

The relationship between family income and the children’s academic performance reflects a well-documented phenomenon known as intergenerational mobility, which refers to the change in socioeconomic outcomes from parents to their children as adults in the future.

It is also well known that education is a key determinant of income earnings. Therefore, a strong link between the economic status of parents and their children’s academic performance is a sign of low intergenerational mobility. This also means that children born to less advantaged families or less educated parents will be less advantaged as students and eventually more likely to have lower educational attainment.

There are, however, different possible explanations for the intergenerational relationship in socioeconomic outcomes and education. First, it is possible that more educated parents, who typically earn more incomes, have more skills and abilities to be transmitted to their children.

If this so-called genetic bias is the case, then more able parents will raise more able children, who will be more likely to perform better in school and get more education. Higher-income households may also provide more financial resources for developing their children’s skills. They may be more able to move to neighborhoods with better public schools or send their children to private schools.

Parental Time

However, it is also well documented that more educated parents tend to spend more time with their children. This amount of parental time is allocated to the care of children as one of the factors that determine the development of children’s skills.

In a recent study with U.S. household data of more than 423,000 observations, researchers at the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis found strong evidence that time spent with children from each of both parents, especially during the children’s early childhood, increased the probability of a child graduating from high school or college.

The effects of parental time with children are statistically significant even after controlling for other parental characteristics, including race, gender, income and educational attainment. Given the extent of disparity in local school performance that is not well understood, it is likely that more parental time investment in children can improve the children’s educational outcomes.

Despite the fact that schools or even the state government have no direct control over various socioeconomic factors that play a role in student achievements, there are simple policy measures that may overcome existing educational challenges with a level playing field for our future workforce.

60x30 Goal

A skilled workforce is the primary driver behind regional economic development. To better position Texas for the increasingly competitive workplace, the state has adopted the 60X30TX initiative, which aims to ensure at least 60 percent of Texans ages 25 to 34 hold some type of postsecondary credential by the year 2030.

The city of Corpus Christi has followed suit through a partnership with community stakeholders, including the Workforce Solutions of the Coastal Bend, Citizens for Educational Excellence, the United Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce, local school districts, and postsecondary education institutions.

In the past year, this consortium of workforce development stakeholders has taken numerous actions toward the 60x30 goal. The Lumina Foundation has recognized Corpus Christi as one of the nation’s 24 Talent Hubs with a grant to assist those with some college training but without a degree. Within the first year, this program has helped 22 local residents return to school.

Meanwhile, Corpus Christi ISD has initiated the Footsteps2Brilliance program has helped 22 local residents return to school. Willis ISD has created a website that informs the public with data and resources on fast-growing industries and high-demand jobs in the Coastal Bend.

Above all, local experiences in line with the state-level educational goal highlight that it is in fact possible to fill existing educational gaps. Yet to the extent that human capital is an investment, most successful programs typically involve external financial resources if not from the state.

REFERENCE:


NOTES:

The author is a member of the City of Corpus Christi Mayor’s Education/Workforce Policy Board. This article is adapted from the Corpus Christi Education Report: August 2018 Update. The author acknowledges support and assistance from Dr. Janet Cunningham of Citizens for Educational Excellence, and Dr. Gilda Ramirez of United Corpus Christi Chamber of Chamber.
Texas District TEA Scores vs. Socio-Economic Status

Lower-poverty school districts tended to score higher.

Source: Texas Education Agency
Credit: Darla Cameron

Local TEA Score vs. Socio-Economic Status