
College Readiness in the United Way Service Area

2010 Baseline Report

**The Institute for Urban Policy Research
At The University of Texas at Dallas**

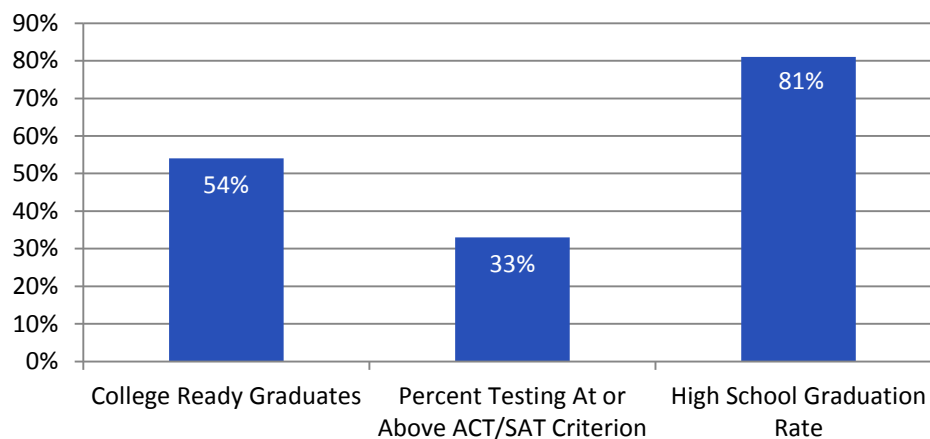


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2010 Baseline Report

This report conveys the key findings of the Institute for Urban Policy Research analyses related to the United 2020 Education goal – to increase the percent of students graduating college or career ready from 40% to 60% by 2020. In addition to college readiness, this report provides baseline numbers for overall graduation rates, as well as a more specific college readiness measure based on ACT and SAT scores. A brief overview of the methodology used to produce the estimates is included at the end.

**Education Outcomes Indicators
United Way Service Area, 2010**

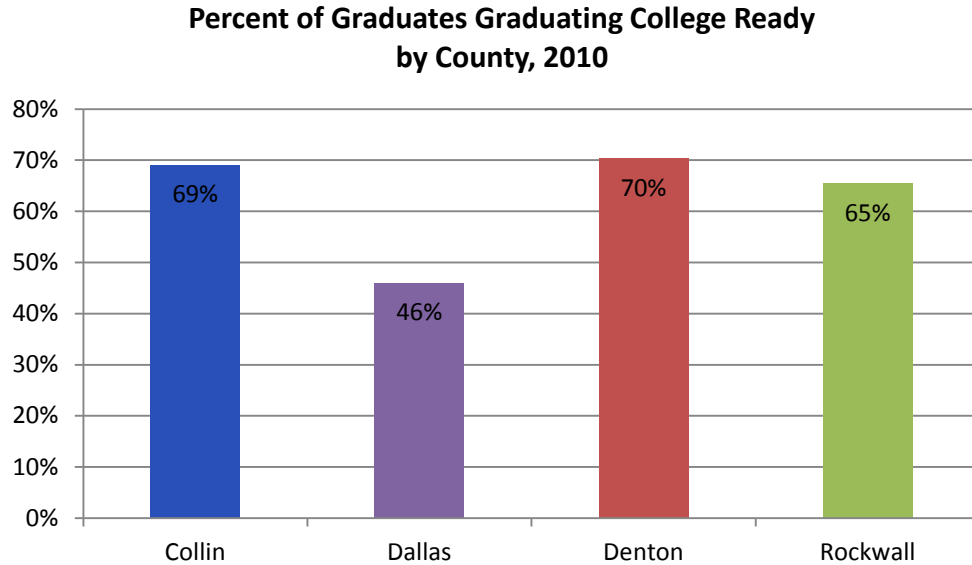


College Readiness

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) defines a high school graduate as college ready in math, English / language arts, or both if he or she scores at or above a criterion score on the ACT, SAT, or the Exit Level TAKS. For the State of Texas standardized test, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) established a scale score of 2,200 or higher in either the mathematics or English / language arts tests as evidence of college readiness. For English / language arts, students must also score a 3 or higher on the essay.

Students who take the SAT are qualified as college ready in math or English / language arts by scoring at least a 500 on the critical reading or math section and a 1070 combined; students who meet the criteria in both subject areas are considered college ready in both subjects. Students who take the ACT are qualified as college ready in math or English / language arts by scoring a 19 or higher on the English or math sections and a 23 composite score. Again, students who meet both criteria are considered college ready in both subjects. A student is considered

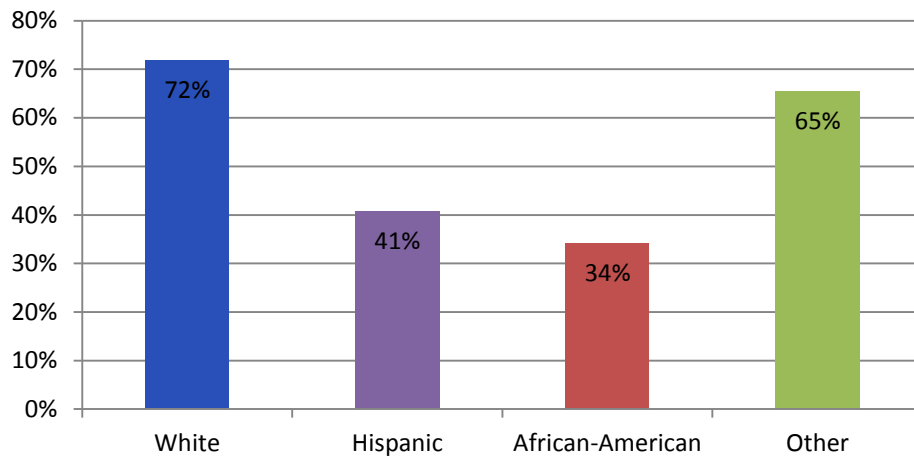
college ready as long as he or she meets the aforementioned criteria for at least one of the three exams. Analysis of TEA's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) data for campuses in the UWMD service area indicates that **54% of graduates in the class of 2010 graduated college ready by TEA standards**, up from 40% of graduates from the class of 2006.



Although college readiness rates are up across the service area, a substantial disparity exists between Dallas County and the suburban counties. In Collin, Denton¹, and Rockwall counties 65% to 70% of graduates in the class of 2010 graduated college ready; this compares to just 46% in Dallas County for the same year. Due to the fact that Dallas County accounts for greater than half of all graduates in the service area, its comparatively low college ready rate noticeably lowers the rate for the service area as a whole.

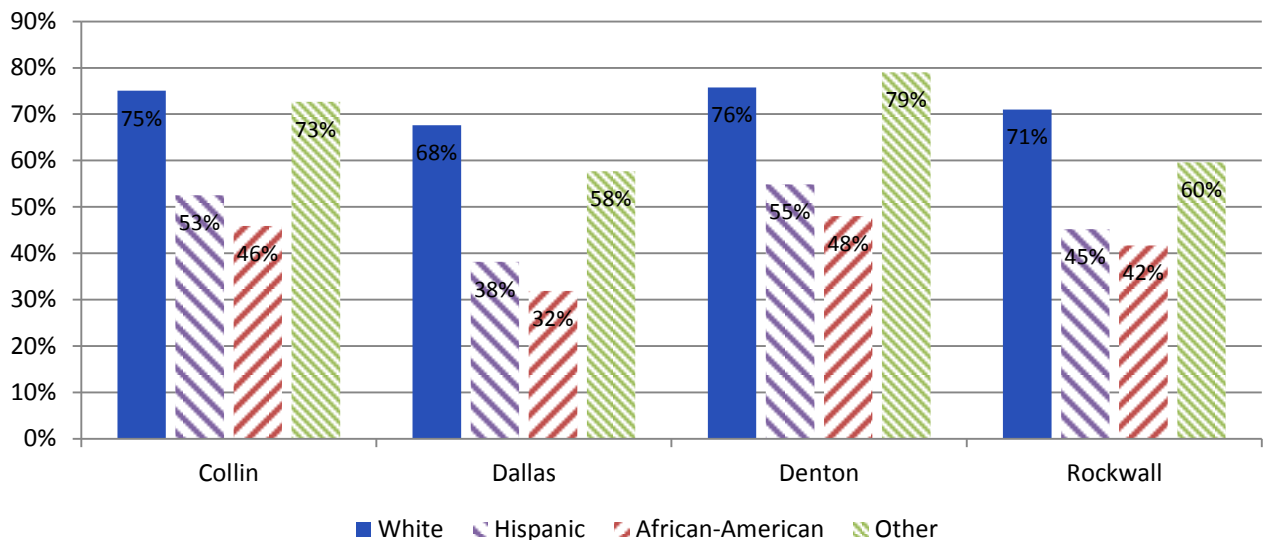
¹ Numbers attributed to Denton County only account for the portion of southern Denton County that lies within the UWMD service area and do not represent Denton County as whole.

**Percent of Graduates Graduating College Ready
by Race / Ethnicity, 2010**



Across the service area, substantial disparities exist among racial and ethnic groups, and while the suburban counties, overall, outperformed Dallas County, racial and ethnic disparities exist among graduates across all counties in a fairly uniform manner. In every county, graduates classified as white or other race had the highest college readiness rates, while African-American students exhibited the lowest rates with Hispanic graduates performing slightly better. So, while some counties perform better overall, all counties within the service area can benefit from programs that specifically address achievement disparities affecting racial and ethnic minorities.

**Percent of Graduates Graduating College Ready
by County by Race and Ethnicity, 2010**



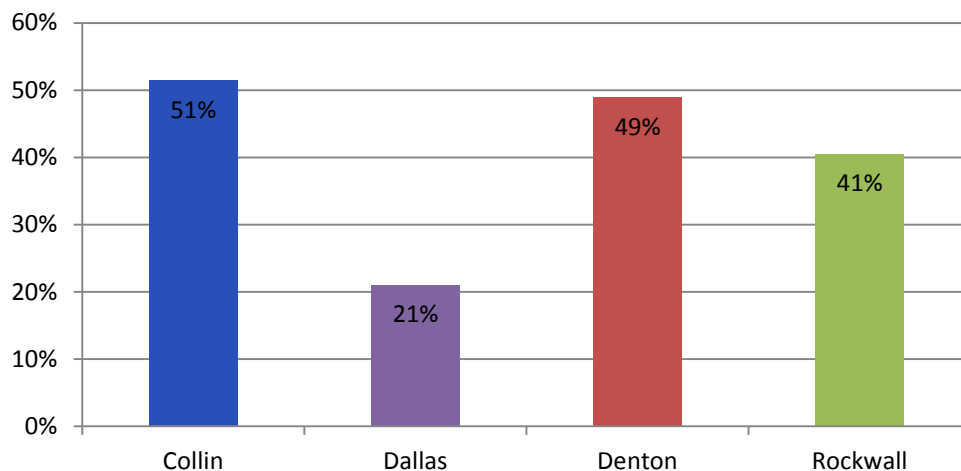
ACT and SAT Scores

The TEA reported college readiness indicator can be an unstable measure of student success due to the frequent changes that occur to both the state standardized test and the achievement requirements of that test. Consequently, one way to find a more stable measure is to exclude the TAKS test from the indicator and simply measure student achievement on the nationally normed ACT and SAT exams.

TEA reports the percentage of students who meet a criterion score for the SAT and ACT exams, but uses a slightly different standard than that used in their reporting of overall college readiness. The criterion scores are at least 1110 for the SAT (critical reading and mathematics combined, 10 points higher than the criterion score used in the definition of college readiness) or a minimum 24 composite score on the ACT. IUPR analysis of TEA's AEIS data for campuses in the UWMD service area indicates that **33% of graduates in the class of 2010 who took the ACT, SAT, or both scored at or above criterion on at least one of the two tests**, up from 29% of test-taking graduates in the classes of 2007, 2008, and 2009.

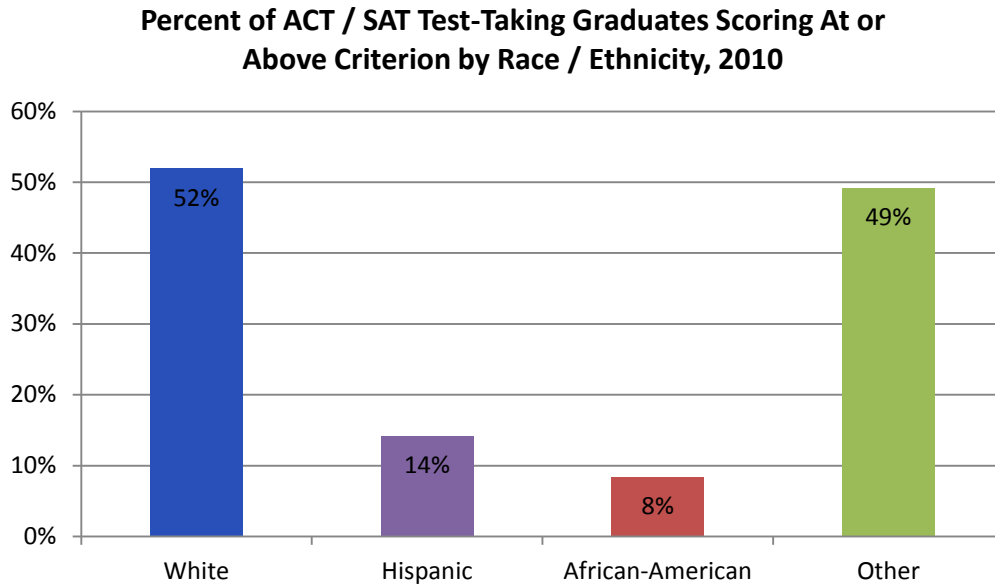
The main drawback of using only these tests is that virtually every student in Texas takes the TAKS, while only about 65% of the class of 2010 high school graduates in the service area took either the ACT, SAT, or both. Although measuring the percentage of test takers who scored at or above criterion on these two tests provides a more stable measure of academic readiness, it leaves out the 35% of graduates who take neither of these tests.

Percent of ACT / SAT Test-Taking Graduates Scoring At or Above Criterion by County, 2010



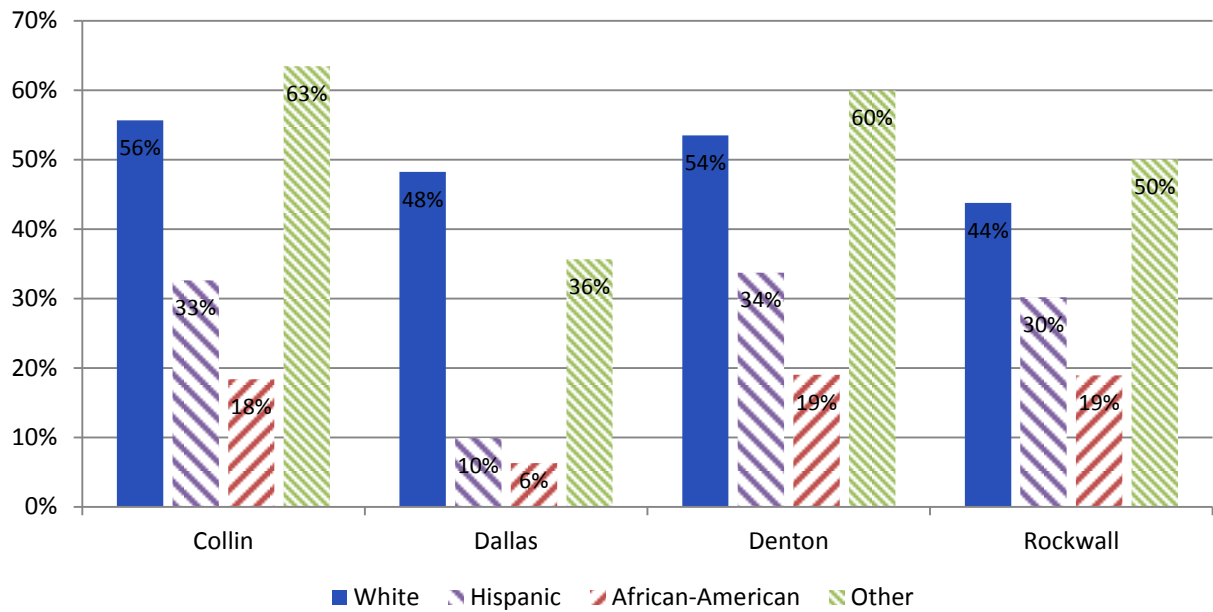
As with overall college readiness, noticeable disparities exist across the various counties with regards to test-taking graduates who score at or above criterion on the ACT, SAT, or both. Although Rockwall County trails Collin and Denton counties by about 10%, the three suburban counties all perform considerably better than Dallas County and have shown improvement over the previous three years. Conversely, the percent of test-taking Dallas County graduates scoring at or above criterion has steadily decreased from 25% for the class of 2006 to 21% for the class of 2010. Moreover, when looking only at ACT and SAT scores, the percentage of graduates

scoring at or above criterion has remained far more stable over time than college readiness rates that include the TAKS.



When evaluating ACT and SAT performance by race and ethnicity, extraordinary disparities are evident across the region as a whole; furthermore, racial and ethnic minorities experience the greatest county-level disparities. For example, the largest achievement gap among Caucasian students in different counties is 12 percentage points (between Collin and Rockwall counties), while the largest achievement gap among Hispanic students is 24 percentage points (between Denton and Dallas counties). Not only are there achievement differences across racial and ethnic groups, but the differences across counties are accentuated by racial and ethnic differences.

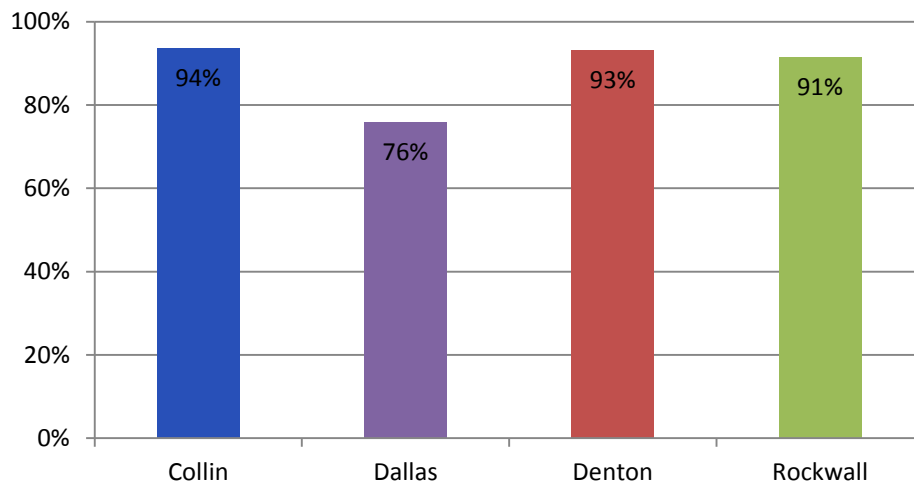
**Percent of ACT / SAT Test-Taking Graduates Scoring At or Above Criterion
by County and Race / Ethnicity, 2010**



Graduation Rate

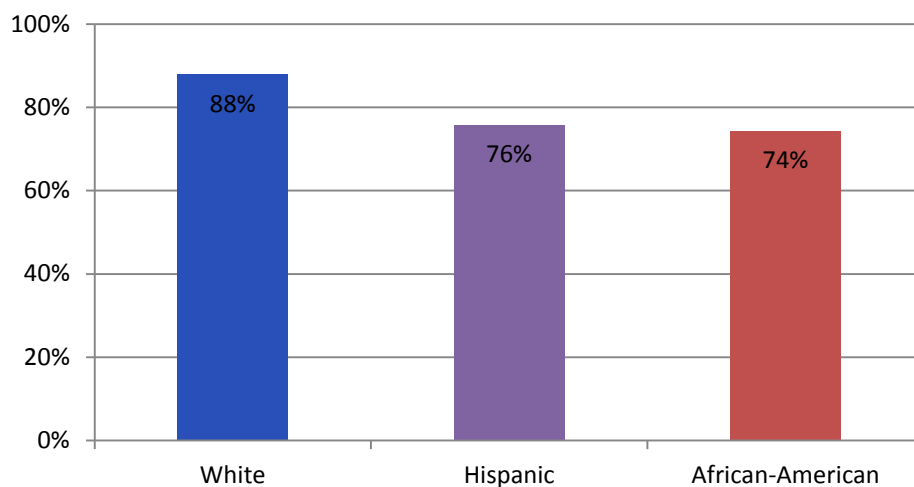
One of the more basic measures of academic performance remains the graduation rate. For the purpose of this report, the graduation rate is calculated based on the completion rate reported by TEA. TEA reports for each campus a “graduates” component of the completion rate that indicates the percentage of the members of a cohort who successfully graduated (completed the requisite number of credits, etc.) by August 31 of the preceding year. A cohort is defined as those students who first attended the ninth grade 4 years prior. For example, the Class of 2010 graduation rate is reported for the cohort of students who first attended the ninth grade in the 2006-2007 school year, and were reported to have graduated by August 31, 2010. IUPR analysis of TEA’s AEIS data for campuses in the UWMD service area indicates that students graduating in 2010 represented an **81% graduation rate**, up from 78% for the class of 2006.

Graduation Rate by County, 2010



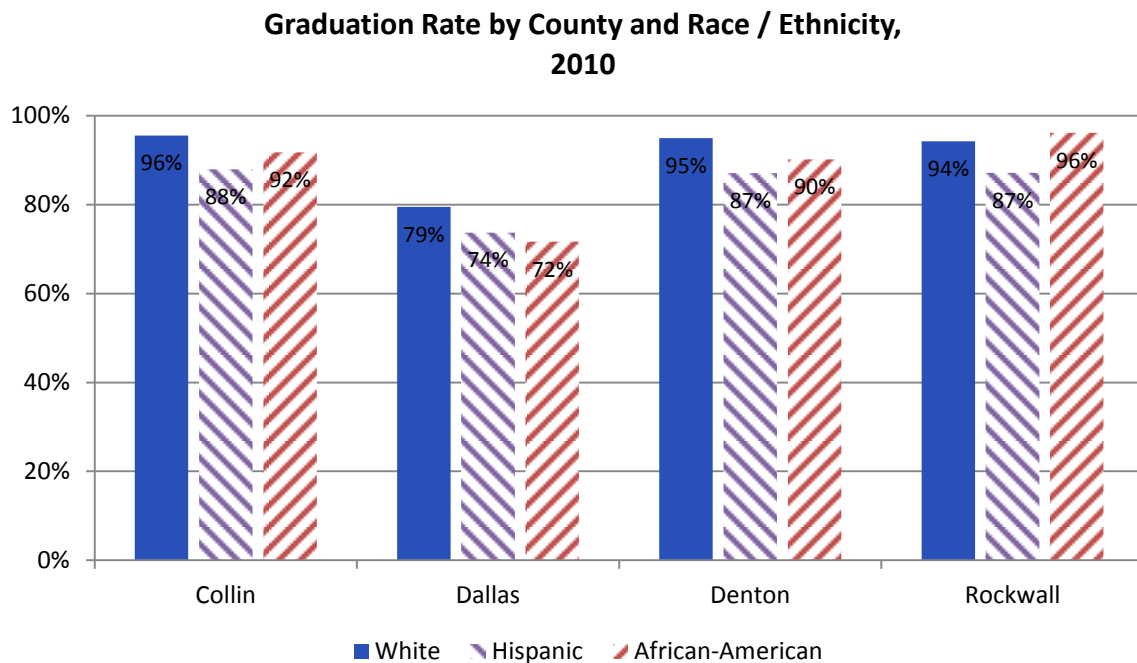
As with other indicators, the suburban counties again outperform Dallas County with regards to overall graduation rates. However, Dallas County has experienced a sizeable gain since 2007, when its graduation rate was just 69%. This is the largest three-year gain for any of the four counties.

Graduation Rate by Race / Ethnicity, 2010



Unlike the college ready indicators, there is considerably less racial and ethnic disparity among graduation rates. The gap among racial and ethnic groups is less than 10 percentage points in every county, and while Caucasian and students classified as other exhibit the greatest achievement levels in previous indicators, African-American students in Rockwall County graduate at a higher rate than any other student group in any county for 2010. Graduation rates from 2010 suggest that minority students graduate at reasonably comparable levels to Caucasian students across the service area. Still, the college ready indicators suggest that high school graduation is not sufficient for college readiness and parity among graduation rates belies considerable disparity on college ready indicators. Note that while, for the other

education indicators, rates are presented for White, Hispanic, African-American, and Other race / ethnicity categories, the Other category is omitted for the graduation rate reports. Because graduation rates are a cohort-based measure, they rely on data provided over 4 successive school years. During that timeframe, TEA introduced additional racial categories, complicating the direct comparison of AEIS data from prior years to the current year.



Brief Overview of Methodology

To aggregate the percentages for each indicator reported for the campuses in the United Way service area, the number of graduates reported for the cohort year was used to derive an estimate of the initial cohort size. The aggregated numbers of graduates and cohort members are then used to produce aggregate estimates for the college ready graduation rate and overall graduation rate. While, following TEA's methodology, special education graduates are removed from the denominator when computing estimates for ACT / SAT test-takers scoring at or above criterion, this was not possible for the racial / ethnic breakdowns of the ACT / SAT criterion analysis. The impact of the omission should be within tolerance for each racial and ethnic group, rendering group comparisons reliable.

Conclusion

Initially, the baseline data for 2010 suggests that college readiness levels have nearly reached the 2020 goal; however, this belies some important underlying facts. Criterion scores on the SAT and ACT suggest that a significant portion of those graduates deemed college ready by TEA standards qualify by TAKS scores rather than SAT or ACT scores. This is important to note because of recent changes to standardized testing. With the state phasing out the TAKS and replacing it with the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), TEA-computed college ready rates are sure to fluctuate in coming years. Achievement levels on standardized

tests dropped dramatically when the TAKS first replaced the TAAS in 2003, and a similar effect has already been documented in initial statewide reports of STAAR results. Moreover, the TEA has not yet set a college readiness criterion on the new test making the ultimate impact on college readiness unclear. So, the substantial gains shown in this baseline number may precede a looming decrease while students and teachers acclimate themselves with the new test and achievement standards, leaving more room for improvement than the baseline might indicate at first look.

