THE 2012 HOUSTON EDUCATION SURVEY: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS IN A CRITICAL TIME
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This report presents some of the most important findings from the Houston Education Survey, the second of three focused surveys that are together called the “SHEA” studies (“Surveys of Health, Education, and the Arts”). Supported by a grant from Houston Endowment Inc., this research project was designed to assess the experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of Harris County residents with regard to these three critical areas of life in the Houston area. The separate surveys complement Rice University’s “Kinder Institute Houston Area Survey,” which for 32 years (1982-2013) has been tracking America’s fourth largest city in the midst of fundamental transformation.

In the process of developing the Education Survey, researchers at the Kinder Institute for Urban Research met periodically during 2011 and 2012 with local leaders and national education experts to fashion the questions we would ask in telephone interviews with a sample of 1,200 Harris County residents in an effort to measure their beliefs and attitudes regarding the state of education in the Houston area. The interviews themselves were conducted by the Survey Research Institute at the University of Houston between January 29 and March 17, 2012, with 72 percent of the respondents reached by landline and 28 percent by cell phone.

After the interviews were completed, the final data files were “weighted” to correct for variations in the likelihood of selection due to low response rates and to align the sample more closely with known population characteristics. The weighting procedures enable us to develop a more accurate and reliable reflection of the actual attitudes and experiences to be found within the Harris County population as a whole. The final (weighted) sample distributions slightly overrepresent respondents older than 60 and underrepresent those aged 30 to 44, but they mirror almost perfectly the census figures for Harris County with regard to ethnic background and educational attainment. Unless otherwise indicated, the results presented in this report are based on the weighted data. Appendix A provides additional information about these and other aspects of the survey methodology.

Listed in Appendix B are the advisors who helped the research team develop the survey instrument and offered comments on the preliminary findings and on earlier drafts of this report. The actual questionnaire that was used in conducting the Education Survey and the full distributions of the responses obtained on all the survey questions can be found on the institute’s website at kinder.rice.edu/shea.

Before presenting the central findings of this research, we begin with a review of the remarkable new realities that have led President Obama and so many others to declare that education is now the single most important civil rights issue of our time. In today’s fully global, high-technology, knowledge-based economy, education has become more important than ever before in determining the life chances of individuals and the competitive success of cities.

After assessing the new realities, we explore what the survey findings suggest about the extent of the public’s understanding of the educational challenges facing the region. How willing are Harris County residents to make the sustained investments that will be needed to meet the challenges? What, in sum, do the findings portend for the development of Houston’s workforce competitiveness in the high-tech, knowledge-based, global economy of the 21st century?
THE NEW REALITIES: WHY EDUCATION MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

The Restructured Economy

Houston recovered from the deep recession brought about by the collapse of the oil boom in 1982-1987 to find itself squarely in the midst of the dramatic trends that have been reshaping all of American society. The resource-based, industrial-era economy for which this city and state were so favorably positioned has now receded into history, and with it the traditional “blue collar path” to financial security. The big employers in Houston during the 1970s were Hughes Tool Company and Cameron Iron Works. Those good blue-collar jobs have all but disappeared. Gone are the days when a high school graduate in Houston could go to work in the oil fields or on a manufacturing assembly line and expect to be able to earn a middle-class wage.

The growing income inequalities. In this rapidly globalizing economy—epitomized, as Fareed Zakaria put it, not by “the decline of the West” but by “the rise of the rest”—corporations can produce goods anywhere and sell them everywhere. If Americans are doing jobs that global companies can train third-world workers to do, and if they pay them $10 a day to do that work, they are not going to pay Americans $10 an hour. If jobs are not being outsourced, they are increasingly susceptible to replacement by automation and robotics: In this new high-tech economy, even complicated white-collar work (e.g., that of bank tellers or travel agents) can now be done by intelligent machines. One recent national study has estimated that 90 percent of the fastest-growing jobs, 60 percent of all new jobs, and 40 percent of all manufacturing jobs now require some post-secondary education.

As a result of these trends, a new “hourglass” economy is emerging, one that offers rich opportunities for Americans with high levels of technical expertise and educational credentials. Workers without the requisite education and skills are increasingly left out of the knowledge economy and consigned to poorly paid, dead-end, service-sector jobs, which offer few benefits, low job security, and little opportunity for advancement through on-the-job training. It should come as no surprise that working-class wages have continued to stagnate.

Figure 1 – Two Economic Eras in the United States, 1949-1979 and 1980-2011

![Graph showing income inequality](image-url)

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau. Mean Household Income Received by Each Fifth and Top 5 Percent.
in America, even as the recent economic recovery gathers steam.

Figure 1 documents the striking reversal that has taken place during the past half-century in the fortunes of the poor and the middle class in America, as the national economy transitioned from the broadbased industrial-era prosperity that characterized the 30 years after World War II into the growing inequalities of the most recent 30 years. During the postwar period, as indicated in the figure, the increase in national earnings was widely shared among all income groups: both the poorest 20 percent and the richest 20 percent of American families approximately doubled their incomes across those 30 years.

Since the late 1970s, however, virtually all the income increases have gone to the top 5 percent of income earners. The wages received by the bottom 20 percent of American families actually declined during the past three decades in real dollars. After doubling between 1950 and 1970, the average male salary in America has effectively stagnated since the mid-1970s. Most of the benefits of economic growth during the past three decades have gone to the richest segments of the American population.

The wealth gap. The gap in net worth, or a family’s total assets minus its total debts, is even larger than the gap in earnings. In 2007, the most recent year for which we have reliable data, families in the top 20 percent of the nation’s net worth controlled 85 percent of all of America’s assets, having accumulated an average net worth of $2.3 million. Meanwhile, families in the bottom 40 percent combined owned no more than two-tenths of one percent of the national wealth, for a mean net worth of $2,200. Inequalities of such extremes have profound implications for the ability of those in the bottom half of the hourglass to have the resources they need to access the quality of education that has now become the single most important determinant of a person’s ability to earn enough money to support a family in today’s economy.

Research by Michael Norton and Dan Ariely shows that most Americans greatly underestimate the extent of wealth inequality in America. As seen in Figure 2, the public’s average estimate is that the wealthiest 20 percent of Americans control 59 percent of the national wealth, when in reality they hold 84 percent. Although the bottom 40 percent have no more than 0.2 percent of the national assets, Americans believe that they have close to 10 percent. As we shall see, this discrepancy between the actual and the perceived is characteristic of public beliefs not only about the distributions of income but also of educational opportunities across a variety of dimensions.

Figure 2 – The Actual and Perceived Levels of Wealth Inequality in the United States

![Wealth Inequality Chart]

Access to jobs. Figure 3 illustrates the linear relationship in today’s economy between educational credentials and employment: As academic achievement increases, the rate of unemployment drops and labor force participation grows. Education has always been important for upward mobility; today, however, it is a more powerful predictor than ever before of the ability to find a job that will pay a living wage in this ever-changing, high-tech, knowledge-based economy.

The Demographic Revolution

At the same time as Houston was emerging from the oil-boom collapse into a global, knowledge-based economy, the city found itself at the forefront of the nation’s unfolding demographic revolution. Unprecedented immigration streams, which began in 1965 with repeal of the restrictive National Origins Quota Act of 1924, have brought about a remarkable, irreversible transformation in the ethnic composition of the Houston, and the American, population.

The Houston numbers. Figure 4 presents the census figures for the Harris County population in each of the last six decades. During the oil-boom years of the 1960s and 1970s, Houston’s growth was brought about primarily by the influx of non-Hispanic whites, who were streaming into this booming region from everywhere else in the nation. In sharp contrast, after the collapse of the oil boom in 1982, the Anglo population stopped growing. Virtually all of the population increase in Houston—America’s fastest growing metropolitan region—during the past 30 years has been due to the influx of Asians, Latinos, and blacks.

Figure 3 – Unemployment Rates and Labor Force Participation by Educational Attainment (May 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate (Seasonally Adjusted)</th>
<th>Labor Force Participation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No H.S. diploma</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.S. graduate</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1When referring to racial or ethnic communities, this report uses the following terms: “Anglo” or “white” refers to non-Hispanic persons of European descent; “African American” or “black” refers to non-Hispanic persons of African background, including both African Americans and African immigrants; and “Latino” or “Hispanic” refers to persons of Latin-American or Spanish descent. Because the sample of 1,200 Harris County residents in the Education Survey reached only 45 Asians, a number too small to serve as the basis for reliable conclusions, Asians are generally not included in these analyses of ethnic differences. They are, of course, included in all other assessments of the attitudes and beliefs of Harris County residents. A full report on Harris County’s Asian communities was released in 2012, presenting the findings from three special surveys conducted by the Kinder Institute in 1995, 2002, and 2011, reaching more than 500 Asians in each year, with 24 percent of the interviews conducted in Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Korean. That report is available at www.kinder.rice.edu.
In 1980, Hispanics represented less than 16 percent of Harris County’s population. The most recent (2010) Census found them to be the largest ethnic group in the county, comprising 40.8 percent of the 4.1 million Harris County residents. Only 33 percent of area residents in 2010 were non-Hispanic whites. African Americans comprised 18.4 percent of the population, and all other ethnic groups (primarily Asians) represented 7.7 percent. This traditionally biracial, Anglo-male-dominated Southern city has quite suddenly become the single most ethnically and culturally diverse large metropolitan region in the country, at the forefront of the trends that are rapidly refashioning the social and political landscape across all of urban America.

**Figure 4 – The Demographic Transformations of Harris County, 1960-2010**

![Bar chart showing population changes by ethnicity from 1960 to 2010.](chart.jpg)

SOURCE: U.S. Census. Classifications based on Texas State Data Center Conventions.
The interactions of ethnicity and age.
The demographic transformation of Houston is particularly dramatic when age is taken into account. As Figure 5 shows, the 2010 U.S. Census found that it is only among Harris County residents who are over the age of 60 that non-Hispanic whites today represent a majority of the population. At each younger age group, the proportion of Anglos plummets and the proportion of Hispanics surges. More than half (51 percent) of all the residents of Harris County who are under the age of 20 are Latinos, and another 19 percent are African Americans. Fewer than 23 percent of these young people in the area are Anglos.

The data paint a striking demographic portrait of Houston's present and future. This city today is at a remarkable hinge in history, a time when 55 percent of everyone in the region who is 60 years old or older is Anglo, and fully 70 percent of everyone under the age of 20 is either black or Latino. These are the two populations that are by far the most likely to be living in poverty and to have been the least well served historically by the region's educational and social service institutions. In all HISD classrooms during the 2012-2013 school year, 87 percent of the 203,354 students were black or Hispanic, and fully 80 percent met the federal criteria for free or reduced-price lunches.11

Demography is destiny: According to the most recent Census projections, by the year 2030 non-Hispanic whites will have seen their share of the Harris County population drop from a third today to about a fifth, while the Latino population will have grown to represent well over half of all area residents, and another sixth will be African Americans.12 Clearly, if Houston's "minority" young people are unprepared to succeed in the knowledge economy of the 21st century, it is difficult to envision a prosperous future for the region as a whole.

Two different immigrant eras. The classic early 20th-century formula for successful immigration envisioned three or four generations as the time required to climb the proverbial ladder of blue-collar mobility from low-wage, entry-level jobs into college and mainstream America. “Peddler, plumber, professional” was the expected generational progression.

The vigorous industrial-era society that greeted the 15.9 million immigrants who came to America between 1890 and 1914 contained many upward steps on the ladder of mobility through an abundance of well-paid blue-collar jobs that required little in the way of formal education. It was a time of broad-based prosperity and upward mobility, buttressed by favorable government policies. This was particularly the case, as we have seen, in the

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**Figure 5 – Percent of the Harris County Population by Age Group and Ethnicity**

![Figure 5](image-url)

**SOURCE:** 2010 U.S. Census.
postwar America of the 1950s and 1960s, when the third-generation descendants of the early 20th-century European immigrants were entering the labor force.

In sharp contrast, the young people in Houston and America today are finding themselves in a world in which education beyond high school is now a virtual prerequisite for any hope of upward mobility. To succeed in the new economy, the children of today’s less educated immigrants will need to achieve in one generation a level of post-secondary education that previous immigrant streams had three or more generations to reach.

**The American future.** Within a few short decades, the entire population of the United States will be “majority-minority,” when the majority of all Americans will trace their ancestry to somewhere else on this planet than to Europe. How Houston navigates these economic and demographic transitions will be significant not only for Houston’s future, but for the American future as well. Figure 6 depicts the census projection for the United States as a whole in the year 2050. It looks very much like Houston’s reality today.14

As Geraldo Rivera has observed, “There is no force on earth that can stop the nation from becoming more Latino, not the Minutemen, not the militias, and neither walls nor the National Guard can reverse this trend. . . . There is no way to turn back the demographic clock.”15 The new realities are more clearly seen in Houston than perhaps anywhere else in the nation. The American future is in Houston now. This is where that future, for better or worse, is going to be worked out.

As we have seen, seven out of ten Harris County children today are black or Hispanic. On almost all measures of academic achievement, black and Hispanic students perform at much lower levels than whites and Asians. Eighty percent of all the 230,000 children in HISD schools are economically disadvantaged, and we know that poverty drastically reduces a child’s ability to succeed in the public schools. The challenges are as daunting as they are consequential for the future of the region.

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**Figure 6 – The Census Projections of the U.S. Population by Age Group and Ethnicity in 2050**

![Graph showing population projections by age group and ethnicity in 2050.](image)

*SOURCE: Hobby Center for the Study of Texas at Rice University. Assuming rates of net migration equal to 2000-2010.*
The Educational Disparities

Figure 7 draws on the combined findings from the last eleven years of the Kinder Institute Houston Area Survey to document the extent to which the educational attainment of Harris County residents varies by ethnic backgrounds and immigrant status. Considering only respondents who are 25 years old or older (who have largely completed their education), the data make it clear that the Asian immigrants have come to America from educational backgrounds that are far superior to those of most U.S.-born Anglos: 66 percent of the Asian immigrants have earned at least a college degree, compared to just 39 percent of all U.S.-born Anglo Houstonians.

At the same time, only 20 percent of the U.S.-born blacks and 17 percent of Hispanics have college degrees. Half of U.S.-born blacks (49 percent) and U.S.-born Hispanics (55 percent) do not have any education beyond high school; more than a fifth of all black Houstonians and more than a fourth of the U.S.-born Hispanics do not have a high school diploma. Strikingly, 60 percent of all the Hispanic immigrants in Harris County who are over the age of 25 have not completed high school, and only 8 percent have college degrees.

If Houston’s “minority” young people continue the pattern of educational attainment seen in their parents’ generation—if too many of them are unprepared to succeed in this high-tech knowledge economy—Houston will have little chance to develop into a prosperous and successful multietnic society. On the other hand, if the education and income gaps can be bridged, this region will be able to capitalize fully on the advantages of having a young, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual workforce and will be well positioned for competitive success as a major international player on the world stage and a model for what all of America could become as the 21st century unfolds.

Distinctions by country of origin matter greatly for the Latinoa immigrants. Figure 8 indicates that the immigrants from Cuba and South America, unlike those from Mexico and Central America, are coming to Houston with considerably higher levels of education and professional credentials than the U.S.-born Hispanics. Only 25 percent of the immigrants from these countries do not have high school diplomas; fully 34 percent have college degrees, compared to 16 percent of the U.S.-born Latinos. These more highly skilled immigrants, however, represent just 7 percent of Houston's Hispanic immigrant population.

According to the Kinder Institute Houston Area Survey, and consistent with the Census, fully 71 percent of all the Latino immigrants in Harris County come from Mexico. Another 12 percent are from El Salvador, and 8 percent from elsewhere in Central America. As indicated in the figure, a clear majority of the adult immigrants from these countries, representing 91 percent of all of Harris County’s Latino immigrants, do not have high school diplomas.

Figure 7 – Educational Attainment in Five Houston Communities (Respondents Aged 25+, 2003-2013)
Figure 8 – Educational Attainment of Hispanics, by Country of Origin (Respondents Aged 25+, 1994-2013)

![Bar graph showing educational attainment of Hispanics by country of origin.](image)

Workforce preparedness in Houston and Texas. These two converging revolutions—a newly restructured, global, high-tech economy coupled with the region’s remarkable ongoing demographic transformations—mean that Houston’s success in the 21st century will be determined to a much a greater extent than ever before by the levels of education and skills it is able to provide to its working population. Recent data from the U.S. Census show just how much this city and state will need to improve if they hope to develop a workforce that is prepared to compete in the new economy.

Figure 9 gives the most recent rankings of the 50 states by the percentage of their populations over the age of 25 with at least a high school diploma. States such as Wyoming and Minnesota have diploma rates of well over 90 percent, but Texas ranks at the very bottom of the 50 states with a rate of just 80.6 percent. Harris County’s proportion of high school graduates—at 78 percent—is even lower than that of Texas. A high school diploma, as we have seen, no longer represents even the bare minimum level of education needed to compete in the new economy.

With so few even graduating from high school, it is not surprising that Texas also ranks in the bottom half of the 50 states in the percentage of adults with college degrees. As seen in Figure 10, only a little more than a quarter (26.1 percent) of all Texas adults have a bachelor’s degree, placing the state in 30th position. In Harris County, the rate is just slightly higher, at 27.6 percent.

Figure 9 – U.S. States Ranked By Percent Aged 25+ with a High School Diploma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming (1)</td>
<td>92.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota (2)</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana (3)</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire (4)</td>
<td>91.5</td>
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<td>Alaska (5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vermont (6)</td>
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<td>Maine (7)</td>
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<td>Iowa (8)</td>
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<td>Utah (9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nebraska (10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harris County</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas (50)</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>85.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the 50 largest metropolitan regions in the country, Houston is 34th in the proportion of its adult population with college degrees. Texas also lags behind countries such as Korea, Canada, Japan, and the United Kingdom in the proportion of its newest group to enter the workforce—those aged 25 to 34—that have obtained an associate's degree or higher.

The Houston region may be creating more jobs than most other large metropolitan areas in the country, but it is producing far too few college graduates. The difference across America between the median annual earnings of people with high school diplomas and those with bachelor's degrees is $21,425; this adds up to an earnings difference of almost $1 million over the course of 45 years in the workforce.

Moreover, it is estimated that 60 percent of all jobs in Texas will require a post-secondary certificate or a college degree by 2018, yet only 34 percent of Harris County's population have any education at all beyond high school. Houston is generating only about half the number of qualified workers needed to fill these jobs. When compared to the 100 largest metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) in the United States, the Baytown-Houston-Sugar Land MSA ranks an alarming 89th in its "education gap," a measure of the extent to which the demand for educated workers outstrips the supply available in the local labor market.

Figure 10 – U.S. States Ranked by Percent Aged 25+ with a College Degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts (1)</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado (2)</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland (3)</td>
<td>36.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connecticut (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Jersey (5)</td>
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<td>Virginia (6)</td>
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<td>Texas (30)</td>
<td>26.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In this analysis, the “education gap” is calculated as the years of education required for the average job in the Houston metro area divided by the years of education attained by the average working-age person in the area.
The Acknowledged Importance of Education Beyond High School

The perceived realities. To what degree have area residents come to recognize the vital importance today of education beyond high school? What do they hope for their own children?

The 2012 Education Survey asked this question: “For a person to be successful in today’s world, is it necessary to get an education beyond high school, or are there many ways to succeed without having more than a high school education?” As shown in Figure 11, three out of four respondents now believe that an education beyond high school is a prerequisite for success. Only 22 percent asserted instead that people can still succeed with no more than a high school diploma.

Figure 11 also shows that fully 85 percent of the survey respondents agreed with the suggestion that “the overall American economy would benefit greatly if more young people were able to get a college degree.” In addition, three-fourths were convinced that “even if a student ends up with very high college loans, a college education will still pay off in the long run.” The data are clear and consistent in suggesting that the vast majority of area residents now believe that post-secondary education has become a virtual prerequisite for a decent job in today’s economy.

These beliefs are reinforced by parental aspirations. The 248 survey participants who had children currently attending a K-12 school were asked what level of education they hoped their child will achieve.iii Fully 92 percent of all the respondents, across all ethnicities, said they hoped he or she would obtain at least a college degree. Only five percent of the respondents aspired to no more than a high school diploma for their children, and another three percent hoped for a certificate beyond high school or a two-year degree. In sum, even though no more than a third of Harris County residents themselves have any education beyond high school, more than nine out of ten area parents hope that their children will be able, at a minimum, to graduate from college.

Figure 11 – The Consensus on the Importance of Higher Education

![Figure 11](image)

“Even if a student ends up with very high college loans, a college education will still pay off in the long run.”


iii Parents with more than one child in a K-12 school were asked about their aspirations for their oldest child.
Ethnic differences in the perceived importance of education. These universally high aspirations on the part of the parents with school-aged children who participated in the survey clearly contradict a common explanation for ethnic differences in educational attainment—namely, that blacks and Hispanics simply do not put as high a value on their children’s education compared to Anglos and Asians. This assumption about ethnic differences in educational aspirations is tested further in Figure 12.

Blacks (at 90 percent) and Asians (85 percent) were the most likely to insist on the importance of post-secondary education, followed by Hispanics (at 78 percent). Surprisingly, just 64 percent of the Anglo respondents asserted that a college degree was necessary “for a person to be successful in today’s world.” A third of the Anglos (but only 9 percent of the African Americans) agreed instead that “there are many ways to succeed without having more than a high school education.”

Beliefs about education are often tied to ideological perspectives and reflect the underlying motivations of the perceiver. The data indicate that political party affiliation powerfully predicts Anglo responses on this question: fully 87 percent of Anglo Democrats, but just 57 percent of Anglo Republicans, said that post-secondary education was necessary for success. Since almost two-thirds (62 percent) of all the Anglo respondents were Republicans, this largely explains the Anglo difference on this question.

The 2004 Pew Hispanic Center’s National Survey of Latinos also reported that Hispanics and African Americans (at 95 and 94 percent, respectively) were more likely than Anglos (78 percent) to say that it is important for their children to receive a college education. The evidence clearly suggests that the lower levels of educational attainment among Latinos and blacks have more to do with differences in their access to the critical human resources and social support systems that undergird school achievement than they do with any presumed intergroup differences in values or aspirations.

Figure 12 – The Consensus on the Importance of Higher Education

![Figure 12: The Importance of Post-Secondary Education, by Ethnic Background](image)

"For a person to be successful in today’s world, do you think it is necessary to get an education beyond high school, or do you think there are many ways to succeed without having more than a high school education?"

- **Total sample (N=442)**: 76% said education beyond high school is necessary, 22% said there are many ways to succeed without more than a high school education.
- **Anglos (N=264)**: 90% said education beyond high school is necessary, 9% said there are many ways to succeed without more than a high school education.
- **Blacks (N=409)**: 78% said education beyond high school is necessary, 20% said there are many ways to succeed without more than a high school education.
- **Hispanics (N=45)**: 85% said education beyond high school is necessary, 13% said there are many ways to succeed without more than a high school education.

**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS), 2009-2011 three-year estimates for population aged 25 years and over.
THE PERCEIVED QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN HOUSTON

We have seen that Harris County residents are almost universally aware of the critical importance of post-high school education for success in today’s economy. How, then, do they assess the level and quality of the educational resources available in this city to prepare its young people for college and careers? What are their beliefs about how well the region’s schools are performing, and how Houston and Texas compare with other states and cities?

Whenever the public’s assessments of educational quality can be compared with objective information, a consistent pattern emerges: perceptions are typically more optimistic and evaluations more positive than the objective evidence would appear to justify. It is well known to psychologists that individuals are generally motivated to see the world in ways that corroborate their firmly-held beliefs. When presented with information that challenges their convictions, they have two choices: they can either change their beliefs to incorporate the new (and disturbing) information, or they can seek out alternative explanations for the new evidence that will enable them to hold on to their initial beliefs.25 When they can, most will choose the second path.

People would like to believe that the schools in their city are functioning well. If they have a child in a public school, they generally believe that their child’s school is as good as any other. If they do not have children in school, they are likely to be reluctant to admit that the schools in their district are in need of major improvement because that might also mean that they would have to be willing to spend more tax dollars on the public schools. “Motivated beliefs” of this sort underlie much of the way human beings tend to construe the world they inhabit. And they may produce a level of general satisfaction with the current state of education in this city and state that denies the need for major improvement.

School Funding

Harris County encompasses 26 independent school districts (ISDs).26 The largest of these is Houston ISD (HISD), which educates 203,000 students, making it the seventh-largest school district in the United States and the largest in Texas.27 As indicated in Figure 13, the HISD service area, despite its sizeable number of students, covers only about one-fifth of the geographical area of Harris County, encompassing 301 square miles.
out of a total of 1,703 square miles. Only about a quarter of all the school-aged children in Harris County actually live with the boundaries of HISD.28

Almost all (96 percent) of the survey respondents were able to name a district when asked if they could identify the school district in which they lived. More than a third (35 percent) indicated that they currently live in the area served by HISD. The next three largest proportions of survey participants came from three other large school districts: 11 percent lived in the area serviced by the Cypress-Fairbanks ISD (with 106,000 students), 5 percent in Pasadena ISD (52,000), and 4 percent in Clear Creek ISD (38,000).

The need for more spending. In the 2012 PDK/Gallup Poll, Americans named “lack of financial support” as the biggest problem facing the public schools in their communities.29 In the midst of the recession in 2011, the Texas Legislature cut $5.4 billion from the state’s education budget,30 resulting in a more than $3-billion deficit in education funds for both 2011 and 2012.31 In the 2013 session, the legislature restored $3.4 billion to the education budget, but this still represented a $2 billion reduction from the state’s 2010 spending levels.32

The survey asked respondents whether they thought “the schools have enough money, if it were used wisely, to provide a quality education,” or whether “the schools will need more money to provide a quality education.” As Figure 14 shows, respondents were evenly divided on this critical question, with 48 percent believing that the schools have enough and 46 percent asserting instead that they will need more. Back in 1997, when the same question was asked in the Kinder Institute Houston Area Survey, fully 57 percent of the respondents said the schools had enough money to provide a quality education. The survey data suggest that the public may be gradually coming to the conclusion that additional spending will be needed in order to improve the region’s educational outcomes. Further evidence that this belief may be taking root came in the November 2012 local election, when Houston voters, by a majority of 69 percent, approved an HISD bond initiative that increased property taxes to provide $1.89 billion in additional funding for the purpose of bringing all HISD school buildings up-to-date, whether by upgrade, renovation, or rebuilding.33

As indicated further in Figure 14, the majority (55 percent) of the survey respondents who were living in HISD’s service area said the schools will need more money, but the majority of respondents in the other school districts (54 percent) thought the schools have all the money they need to provide a quality education. Illustrating once again the ideological nature of these debates, 61 percent of the respondents who identified with the Republican Party said the schools have enough money, while Independents were split on the issue and 56 percent of Democrats asserted that the schools will need more funds if they hope to provide a quality education.

Figure 14 – Do the Schools Have Enough Money to Provide a Quality Education? Differences by School District and Party Identification
**How Houston compares.** The survey also asked respondents how they thought Houston compares with other metropolitan areas in terms of the amount it spends per pupil. Figure 15 presents their responses. Almost half (47 percent) of the survey participants thought that Houston's spending was about average, 19 percent believed it was above average, and 20 percent thought Houston was spending less than the average of other metropolitan areas.

Are the survey respondents correct in their belief that Houston's public schools are about average in the amount they spend per pupil compared to most other metropolitan school districts? It is extremely difficult to draw accurate spending comparisons among school districts in different states. The National Center for Education Statistics has delineated a set of standards for reporting educational expenditures, but not all states choose to follow them. There are also important differences in cost of living in different areas that need to be taken into account. Any conclusions about where Houston stands in these comparisons must therefore be read with caution.

Figure 15 – Beliefs about Public School Spending in Houston Compared to Other Metropolitan Areas

That said, the available data clearly suggest that Houston's spending is below the national and citywide averages. In 2011, for example, Texas ranked 40th among the 50 states in instructional expenditures, with an average spending of $5,240 per student. The U.S. average was $6,425. Moreover, Houston area school districts generally spend less than the state average: during the 2010-2011 school year, Houston ISD spent $4,505 per pupil, Fort Bend ISD $4,413 and Cy Fair ISD $4,125.

Despite the relatively low spending in Texas schools overall and the even lower spending in Houston schools, we have seen that 66 percent of the survey respondents think that Houston is spending either the same amount as or more than most other metropolitan school districts. This perception may be motivated, once again, by resistance on the part of some to the idea that more money will be needed in order to bring Houston's public schools up to national standards. In February 2013, a Texas district court in Travis County declared that the state's school finance system was unconstitutional due to levels of inadequate funding and unequal distribution that violated the

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“The guidelines to be used in calculating instructional funding are delineated by the National Center for Education Statistics in its "Financial Accounting for Local and State School Systems, 2009." Instructional expenditures should include expenditures for regular, special, and vocational programs, both for the regular school year and in required summer school. Not all states follow these guidelines, however. For example, some districts include their fixed costs for employee benefits, retirement, and unemployment compensation, whereas others do not.
requirements for adequate and equitable education in the Texas public schools, as set forth in Article 7 Section 1 of the Texas Constitution. Although causality is difficult to establish, the evidence clearly shows that spending is correlated with educational outcomes. In 2011, the Texas school districts that had “Exemplary” ratings spent an average of about $1,000 more per pupil than districts with “Academically Unacceptable” ratings.

When asked in the survey if they were in favor of or opposed to “requiring the Texas legislature to do more to equalize per-pupil expenditures across the state,” 73 percent of the respondents said they were in favor. Most area residents would be surprised to learn how far reality departs from their call for equal spending.

Assessments of School Quality

Are the schools improving? As shown in Figure 16, one-third (33 percent) of the respondents in the Education Survey said the public schools in the Houston area have been getting worse in the past few years. Only 25 percent believed they were getting better. Not surprisingly, the survey participants who had a child in a Houston-area public school were much less likely to believe that the schools were getting worse (at 28 percent) than respondents with no children in a K-12 school (42 percent).

The responses depicted in Figure 16 suggest that perceptions have actually been improving in recent years. When the identical question was asked four years earlier, in the 2008 Kinder Institute Houston Area Survey, almost half (48 percent) of all Harris County residents thought that the schools in the Houston area were getting worse.

Figure 16 – Changes in the Quality of the Public Schools, in the Total Sample and by Being the Parent of a Child in the Public Schools

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1 The Education Survey reached 248 parents who said they currently had a child in a K-12 school. Fully 90 percent of all these parents (223) had children in the public schools. For the data analyses that assess the perceived quality of the public schools or that compare the parents of public school children with the respondents who do not have children in school, we do not include the 10 percent of parents who have children in private or parochial schools.
Grading the schools. The survey participants were asked to give the schools in their district a grade from A to F based on the quality of their performance. Figure 17 shows the grades they felt their district schools deserved, with the respondents grouped by whether or not they had a child in a K-12 public school.

Of the total sample, 61 percent awarded the schools in their district a grade of A or B, and 23 percent gave them a grade of C. Again, it is not surprising to learn that the respondents with children in the public schools thought their district schools deserved much higher grades than did area residents without school-aged children: 74 percent of the parents awarded an A or B, compared to only 57 percent of the survey participants without school-aged children. When compared to the three other large school districts with the highest numbers of survey respondents, HISD residents gave the lowest ratings to their district schools: Only 51 percent thought the HISD schools deserved an A or B, compared to 88 percent in Clear Creek ISD, 69 percent in Cy-Fair ISD, and 74 percent in Pasadena ISD. These differences in the school grades the respondents awarded correspond to the actual state accountability ratings of academic quality.

During the 2010-2011 school year, HISD was rated as “academically acceptable,” whereas Clear Creek, Cy-Fair, and Pasadena ISDs all received the higher rating of “recognized.”

The 223 respondents who had children currently enrolled in a K-12 public school in the Houston area were asked to grade the particular school their oldest child is attending. As Figure 18 shows, fully 85 percent gave their child’s school an A or B. These are higher than the ratings the same respondents gave to their districts’ schools in general and higher than the grades given by the survey participants who did not have school-aged children. Individuals, we know, are motivated to believe that their district’s schools are good, especially if their own children are attending them, because they want to believe that their child’s school is at least as good as the available alternatives, even when it is not.

The data suggest further that Harris County residents may be more likely than most other Americans to see the world through rose-colored glasses. They tend to give higher grades to their own district’s schools than the average respondent to national polls. A 2012 PDK/Gallup Poll found that, when asked to grade the

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Figure 17 – The Overall Grade Given to the District Schools, in the Total Sample and by Being the Parent of a Child in the Public Schools

"Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and Fail to denote the quality of their performance. Suppose the public schools in your school district were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools in your district?"
schools in their communities, only 48 percent of all Americans gave grades of A or B, but this was the case for 61 percent of Houstonians.

Harris County parents also give higher grades than other Americans to the schools their children attend: 85 percent in the Education Survey gave As or Bs to their children’s schools, but this was true for just 77 percent of the parents in the national poll. In sum, although there is no reason to believe that Houston’s schools are better than schools nationally—and many reasons to think otherwise—Houston area residents nevertheless express higher approval of their schools than do Americans in general.

Such relatively positive perceptions of Houston’s schools are striking in light of their actual performance in international and national comparisons. Among the 33 OECD countries analyzed by the National Center for Education Statistics, American 15-year-olds in general rank 14th in reading, 25th in math, and 17th in science. Texas students score lower than the U.S. average in most subjects: Compared with students from the other 49 states in 2011, the Texas 8th graders who took the NAEP ranked 37th in reading, 34th in writing, and 10th in math. Houston’s 8th grade students averaged 279 on the math NAEP and 252 in reading, compared to the national averages of 283 and 264, respectively. Thus, in a country whose overall school performance is middling at best, Texas and Houston students perform below the national average on most measures.

The question in the 2012 PDK/Gallup Poll was worded slightly differently from the Education Survey: the PDK/Gallup Poll asked the national sample to grade the schools “in your community” instead of “in your district.” As a result, the findings may not be fully comparable, but it does seem relevant to note that Houstonians give significantly higher ratings to their local schools than do other Americans.
On almost every indicator of academic performance, ethnic differences prevail among American students. The Children’s Defense Fund refers to what it terms “The Four Americas,” the striking differences in educational outcomes among Asian, white, Hispanic, and black students. Although the United States ranked 17th in 2009 among 66 industrialized nations in reading proficiency, for example, this ranking obscures vast disparities across ethnic groups. When compared to students in the 65 other industrialized nations, Asian Americans ranked 2nd, and Anglos were in 7th place. In sharp contrast, Hispanics ranked 43rd, and African Americans were 49th.43

Closing the Achievement Gap

The Education Survey asked this question to measure the perceived importance of reducing the ethnic differences in educational achievement: “As you may know, white and Asian students generally out-perform black and Hispanic students on tests of academic achievement. How important do you think it is to close this achievement gap?” Almost nine out of ten (86 percent) survey respondents said it was “very important” or “somewhat important” to close the gap. Among the four ethnic groups, blacks were the most likely to say that closing the gap is “very important” (74 percent), followed by Hispanics (67 percent), and then by Anglos (58 percent) and Asians (51 percent).

Respondents were also asked about the importance of a number of different factors “in contributing to the achievement gap.” Figure 19 shows that the two factors receiving the highest percentage of “very important” answers were “the family’s involvement in their children’s education” (90 percent) and “the interest, discipline, and motivation on the part of the students themselves” (85 percent).

The survey participants think family involvement and student effort are more important than teaching quality and urban poverty in effecting educational outcomes. All four of these factors are important, but it is interesting to note that it was only after naming the two “dispositional” factors—parental involvement and student effort—did the respondents refer to the “structural” forces that might require more public spending to be addressed successfully.

Four-fifths (80 percent) said that “the quality of teaching in the schools that the students attend” is a very important factor in contributing to the achievement gap. Almost three-fourths (72 percent)
indicated that they thought exposure to “the poverty, crime, and instability in the communities where the students live” was a very important contributor to ethnic differences in educational outcomes. A great deal of educational research has indeed shown that the very strong correlation of poverty with race and ethnicity is one of the most critical driving forces in generating the achievement gap.44

### The Importance of Poverty

According to the 2012 Current Population Survey, 10 percent of all non-Hispanic whites across the country and 12 percent of all Asian Americans were living below the poverty line in 2011, but this was the case for 27 percent of all Hispanics and African Americans.45 Since 2000, the United States’ overall child poverty rate has increased to 23 percent and is currently the second highest among 35 economically advanced countries.46

In Texas, the child poverty rate in 2010 was 26 percent: one-tenth (11 percent) of all white children were living in poverty, but this was the case for more than a third of all black (34 percent) and Hispanic children (36 percent).47 Moreover, Hispanic and African American children are more likely than white children to be poor for longer periods of time, and they are more likely to live in concentrated poverty – in neighborhoods where more than 40 percent of all the residents are poor.48 These differences in poverty levels have profound effects on minority children’s chances for success: Poverty has been shown to be strongly associated with less schooling, lower graduation rates, and lower wages as an adult.49

**How poverty affects achievement.** Parents who struggle to meet their family’s most basic needs are unable to offer their children educational activities over the long summer months or to provide tutors to help them catch up with their peers. The 2011 Consumer Expenditure Survey found that Anglos and Asians spent 2.2 percent ($1,075) and 3.8 percent ($2,267), respectively, of their total household incomes on resources and activities designed to enhance their children’s educations. Blacks spent 1.3 percent ($479), and Hispanics, 1.5 percent ($624).50

As education researchers Jennifer Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick concluded in their review of the research literature, “Inequalities in family wealth are a major cause of inequalities in schooling, and inequalities of schooling do much to reinforce inequalities of wealth among families in the next generation.”51 Without intervention, the disadvantages of poverty create a vicious cycle that is difficult to break.

The negative effects of poverty are concentrated and compounded because of residential segregation by race and income.52 Academic outcomes are strongly correlated with the percentage of impoverished students in any given school.53 High-poverty, predominantly minority schools are generally of lower quality on a number of important dimensions that affect student achievement, including school discipline, the availability of high school algebra in middle school, and the number of teachers with strong backgrounds in the subject areas they are teaching.54 The overall socioeconomic composition of a school has been found to be as strong a predictor of student outcomes as a student’s own socioeconomic status.55

Because they tend to be concentrated in high-poverty areas, children from low-income families typically attend schools that have the fewest resources, are often in a state of disrepair,56 and are staffed with less-qualified teachers.57 North Forest ISD, for example, is a Harris County school district with 7,500 children that was closed because of consistently poor performance and has now been annexed by HISD under direct orders from the State Education Commission. In 2010, North Forest had a student body that was 68.2 percent African American, 30.9 percent Hispanic, and 99.9 percent economically disadvantaged.58 Several classrooms in the North Forest schools were reported to be flooded, to have broken windows, to smell of mildew, and to be infested with cockroaches. Some district buses had worn-out brakes and tires.59

Poor conditions have also been found in HISD schools more generally. As noted earlier, voters in 2012 approved a bond measure that will update facilities across the board, completely rebuild 20 high schools, and renovate eight others.60 This is very good news for the district. The quality of a school’s facilities has been shown to impact academic achievement. Good facilities can increase student productivity and improve test scores while also attracting better teachers.61

More generally, the National Education Longitudinal Survey identified four school-based factors that are significantly related to student achievement: teachers’ beliefs about their students’ ability to learn, the average hours of homework students complete each week, the average number of advanced courses taken by students in the school, and the percentage of students who report feeling unsafe at school.62 High-poverty, minority schools score lower on all four of these factors when compared to more affluent white schools.
Perceptions of “minority” schools. The survey respondents were asked to compare the schools attended by black and Hispanic children with those that white and Asian children usually attend. Despite the demonstrated disparities in the quality of these schools, Figure 20 shows that 50 percent of all the Harris County residents who participated in the survey said that African-American and Hispanic students generally attend schools that are just as good as or better than those attended primarily by white and Asian students. Interestingly, this was the view of 58 percent of the Hispanic respondents, compared to 47 percent of Anglos and Asians and 44 percent of blacks. Almost half (48 percent) of the African Americans said that the schools black and Hispanic students attend are worse than those attended by whites and Asians, a view expressed by just 35 percent of the Hispanics. On the other hand, fully 17 percent of the African Americans (more than in any of the other groups) also thought the “minority” schools were better than those attended by whites and Asians.

The perception on the part of most area residents that Houston’s “minority” public schools are of similar quality to “white” schools may qualify as another motivated belief. For all respondents, but perhaps particularly for Anglos and Asians, to recognize that the schools that are primarily attended by blacks and Latinos are worse than other schools challenges the belief that America is a land of equal educational opportunity. Note, however, that the survey item asked about the schools themselves; on this score—apart from stark differences in academic performance—it is not obvious that Houston’s “minority” schools are inferior in the facilities and amenities they have to offer.

Educational Aspirations

As indicated earlier, the 248 respondents in the Education Survey who had children attending a K-12 school were asked to indicate the highest educational level they hoped their child would achieve. As shown in Figure 21, answers differed by ethnicity, but in ways that do not at all align with the actual rates of educational attainment among Harris County’s ethnic communities. Note that the very small number of parents from each of the ethnic backgrounds who participated in the survey means that these data should be treated as suggestive only, but they do reveal some interesting intergroup differences that will need to be explored in further research.

Figure 20 – Perceived Differences between the Schools Attended by Blacks and Hispanics and Those Attended by Whites and Asians

“Do you think black and Hispanic children in Houston generally go to schools that are much better, somewhat better, just as good, somewhat worse, or much worse than the schools that white and Asian children usually attend?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total sample</th>
<th>Anglos (N=442)</th>
<th>Blacks (N=264)</th>
<th>Hispanics (N=409)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat better/Much better</td>
<td>41 40</td>
<td>44 41</td>
<td>48 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just as good</td>
<td>9 3</td>
<td>17 27</td>
<td>12 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat worse/Much worse</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Importantly, only two percent of all the parents said they had as yet not thought much about their aspirations for their child’s educational achievement. This is clearly not an issue that parents can readily ignore. The proportion who said they hoped their child would obtain at least a college degree was 98 percent for Latinos, 96 percent for Anglos, and just 66 percent for blacks. One-third of the black parents said they thought their child would obtain no more than a year or two of education beyond high school. Strikingly, 25 percent of all the African-American parents hoped for no more than a high school diploma. Only three percent of the Latino parents expressed such low expectations.

If confirmed in further research, the differences between black and Hispanic parents in their aspirations for their children, despite similar levels of income and educational attainment, are not altogether surprising. Blacks have a long history of struggling with a segregated public school system that has offered them far fewer educational resources than Anglos, and they have had to respond to unequal opportunities over a much longer period of time than Latinos.63

Other research has confirmed that, although blacks value education as much as other groups, their extensive experience with restricted opportunities has lowered their expectations for achievement.64 Most Latinos are newer to America; their greater faith in the public schools and their shorter experience with discrimination may have done less to dampen their aspirations for their children’s education.65

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**Figure 21 – Aspirations for One’s Child, by Ethnicity (Parents of K-12 Students)**

![Bar chart showing aspirations for one's child by ethnicity](image)

“Thinking about your child’s future education, what do you hope will be the highest grade level that your child will achieve; or have you not thought much about this yet?”

- **Total sample**:
  - HS Diploma, certificate, or 2-year degree: 8%
  - 4-year college degree: 52%
  - Graduate or professional degree: 39%

- **Anglos (N=86)**:
  - HS Diploma, certificate, or 2-year degree: 4%
  - 4-year college degree: 59%
  - Graduate or professional degree: 37%

- **Blacks (N=57)**:
  - HS Diploma, certificate, or 2-year degree: 33%
  - 4-year college degree: 33%
  - Graduate or professional degree: 39%

- **Hispanics (N=86)**:
  - HS Diploma, certificate, or 2-year degree: 3%
  - 4-year college degree: 62%
  - Graduate or professional degree: 36%
**Confidence levels.** The survey respondents were also asked how confident they were that they have the resources and information needed to enable their child to reach the level of educational attainment they envision. As Figure 22 illustrates, all ethnic groups expressed high confidence that they had the needed resources, although blacks and, to a lesser extent, Hispanics were more likely than Anglos to indicate that they were “not very” or “not at all” confident that they have the resources and information their children will need to attain those high levels of education.

Despite concerns about having the needed resources, black and Hispanic parents still express high confidence overall: 84 percent of black parents and 91 percent of Latino parents were at least “somewhat confident” that their aspirations for their children will be realized. The actual levels of academic achievement in these two groups, however, suggest that they are likely to face a disappointing reality.

According to Children at Risk, only 59 percent of black students and 62 percent of Hispanic students who were high school freshmen in HISD during 2004-2005 actually graduated four years later. Indeed, in some HISD high schools, such as Sharpstown and Lee, in which at least 90 percent of the population is black or Hispanic, fewer than 40 percent of the students who were freshmen in 2004 had graduated by 2010. In all the Harris County public schools, three of every ten students who began high school in 2006-2007 failed to graduate four years later.

**The gap between aspiration and attainment.** The disjuncture between the educational aspirations expressed by black and Hispanic parents and their children’s actual attainment has been well documented. One study reported that black and Hispanic parents’ educational aspirations for their children were less predictive of their children’s actual achievements than were the aspirations of Anglo and Asian parents.

Because “minority” parents are likely to have fewer financial resources and less experience with the post-secondary education system, their aspirations for their children are less likely to translate into achievement.

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**Figure 22 – Confidence that the Aspirations Can Be Realized, by Ethnicity (Parents of K-12 Students)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnity</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
<th>Somewhat confident</th>
<th>Not very/Not at all confident</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanics (N=85)</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Children at Risk uses a slightly different methodology than the state to calculate graduation rates. (For more information on their methodology, which they believe more accurately measures the number of students who drop out of high school, please visit http://tinyurl.com/carmethod.) According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), 68 percent of all the African-American students and 63 percent of the Hispanics who were freshmen in the 2004-2005 school year actually graduated four years later. For Sharpstown and Lee high schools, TEA reports graduation rates of 54 and 41 percent, respectively. Whichever estimates one might choose, the figures paint a sobering picture of the degree to which these young people are being prepared for the jobs of the 21st century.*
Although black and Latino parents highly value education, as we have seen, these added barriers create a gap between their aspirations and their children’s attainment that can only be bridged through more sustained and effective support on the part of the wider Houston community.

As Bob Sanborn, president of Children at Risk, has said, “If we truly believe that public education is the way to raise all ships, we can’t keep seeing this gap between those that are economically disadvantaged and those that aren’t.” If the Houston community cannot find a way to ensure more equal educational opportunities, the region’s poor and minority students will continue to perform at levels that seriously impair their life prospects. The many students who drop out of high school or who are unable to obtain any meaningful post-secondary education will be unprepared for the jobs of the new economy. Without adequate workforce preparedness, the region’s ability to compete with other U.S. and world cities will be in serious jeopardy.

Making It through College

A predictable consequence of these disparities in K-12 educational outcomes is the even larger gap among ethnic groups in their chances of obtaining a college degree. A 2011 study conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research reported that half of the disparity in college entry among ethnic communities is due to differences in high school graduation rates. The lower quality of education that minority students receive in elementary and secondary school sets them on a path in which success at each next step is progressively more difficult to achieve.

College acceptance, enrollment, and completion. The importance that Harris County residents in general place on obtaining education beyond high school is evident in the growing enrollment numbers throughout the area’s community and four-year colleges. In every year since 2000, the enrollment in Texas institutions of higher education has increased over the previous year by an average of approximately 47,000 students. Most of this growth has occurred in the community colleges. In 2010, fully half of all the state’s college students, numbering more than 700,000, were attending community colleges, a 30 percent increase since 2005. Students from the Greater Houston area account for about a quarter of the state’s community college enrollment; their numbers have increased by 36 percent since 2005, reaching a total of 175,854 students in 2010. When asked to evaluate the Houston area’s community colleges, 83 percent of the respondents in the Education Survey said they were “good” or “excellent”; only 2 percent rated them as “poor.”

Applications to four-year universities in the Greater Houston area have greatly increased as well. In 2010, 12,000 more students applied and 7,000 more were accepted into four-year colleges than was the case ten years earlier. Despite this increase, only 2,000 more students in the region were actually enrolled in four-year colleges in 2010 than in 2000. Part of the discrepancy may be due to what is termed the “summer melt,” which occurs when college-intending students fail to enroll in college following their high-school graduation.

In the southwestern United States, the summer melt is estimated to be as high as 44 percent. Not surprisingly, low-income students disproportionately make up this statistic. Many different factors are implicated, such as unanticipated costs or problems in completing the many required forms. Studies have shown that providing low-income students with college counseling sessions during the summer before college can decrease the attrition rate by 22 percent.

Since the late 1990s, despite the increased importance of a college education, no more than half of high school graduates in Texas have enrolled in any kind of college. In 2009, only 58 percent of high school graduates in Harris County went on to any further education at all. Since almost 30 percent of Houston’s children fail to graduate from high school, and only a little more than half of those who do graduate go on to any additional education, this means that approximately 60 percent of the local workforce will be looking for jobs in the new skill-based economy with a high school diploma or less.

Gaps exist in the types of institutions of higher education that students from the different ethnic communities attend. In 2011, 51 percent of all African-American and 58 percent of all Latino students who enrolled in any institution of higher education attended a public two-year college. A large percentage of Anglo students also enrolled in a two-year college (46 percent), but 41 percent were enrolled in a public four-year college.

The evidence makes it clear that a high school diploma offers no guarantee of college readiness. In 2010, only 23.1 percent of all the juniors and seniors in the greater Houston area took an AP or IB exam, and, of these,
only 57 percent passed at least one of the exams.\textsuperscript{81}

Figure 23 shows what is perhaps the most devastating statistic of all: In 2011, only 6.5 percent of all African-American seniors in HISD (8.1 percent of all those who actually took the tests) and 6.4 percent of all Hispanic seniors (9.8 percent of the test-takers) scored at or above the level that indicates college readiness on the SAT or ACT, compared to 60.1 percent of all Anglo students and 62.3 percent of the Asians.\textsuperscript{82}

As a result, almost half of all college freshmen in the Greater Houston region today are required to take at least one remedial course in which high school material is re-taught and for which college credit is not granted.\textsuperscript{85} Too many of the students who do enroll in local colleges and universities are simply unprepared by their high school educations to do even minimal college-level work, and this surely contributes to the very high attrition rates among Houston-area college students.

Strikingly, only 3.1 percent of all the students who were enrolled full-time in a Texas two-year college in 2004 actually graduated with any kind of certificate two years later; 7.8 percent graduated by the third year, and a total of just 11.2 percent graduated with any certificate within four years.\textsuperscript{86} In sum, almost nine of every ten students who enroll in a two-year college will never complete any kind of degree. Among all the students who were enrolled full-time in a four-year public college in 2004, a total of 57 percent graduated six years later. For students who were enrolled part-time, only 30 percent had graduated in the six years after matriculation.\textsuperscript{87}

**Financial barriers.** A common explanation for such low college entrance and completion rates is the high cost of tuition. Indeed, the price of a four-year college education in Texas doubled between 2003 and 2010, reaching an annual average of $14,000 for community colleges and $23,000 for four-year institutions.\textsuperscript{88} Not surprisingly, tuition costs are inversely related to the probability of enrolling in or completing college.\textsuperscript{89}

In 2003, even before the cost of a college education doubled, a national study found that 76 percent of African Americans, 67 percent of Hispanics, and 51 percent of whites agreed that many qualified people do not have the opportunity to attend college.\textsuperscript{90} In a 2004 Pew Hispanic Center survey, 77 percent of Latinos said that the cost of tuition is a major reason why people do not go to college or fail to finish college if they start.\textsuperscript{91}

The Education Survey asked several questions about the impact of college costs. As indicated in Figure 24, the vast majority of the respondents from all ethnic backgrounds agreed with the suggestion that “the costs of a college education keep too many qualified students from being able to go to college.” Hispanics (84 percent) were the most likely to agree.

The survey also asked the respondents if, as a way to deal with state budget shortfalls, they would favor or oppose “increasing the tuition and fees that students have to pay in order to attend the state’s public universities.” Respondents from all ethnic groups were opposed to that suggestion, by majorities ranging from 68 to 71 percent. Given the high value that Harris County residents universally place on a college degree, it is not surprising to find that they are firmly against adding any more barriers to attendance, even if that were thought to be necessary as a way to deal with state budget shortfalls.

Financial aid nationwide has not kept pace with tuition increases. Back in 1986, federal Pell Grants for low-income students paid for 98 percent of the tuition costs

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**Figure 23 – The Proportions of HISD Students That Are College Ready, By Ethnicity**

| SAT/ACT Scores by Ethnicity (HISD Class of 2011) |
|------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| **Ethnicity**              | **% At or Above Criterion** | **% Tested** | **SAT Mean** | **ACT Mean** |
| African American           | 8.1               | 80.2           | 834          | 17.3          |
| Asian                      | 62.3              | n/a            | 1157         | 26.3          |
| Hispanic                   | 9.8               | 64.6           | 866          | 18.0          |
| White                      | 60.2              | 99.8           | 1134         | 25.0          |

*The criterion is 1110 on the SAT critical reading and mathematics combined and 24 on the ACT composite. The national averages for the class of 2011 were 1011 for the SAT and 21 for the ACT. 83, 84

The 2012 Houston Education Survey

Figure 24 – Beliefs about Access to Higher Education, by Ethnicity

![Bar chart showing beliefs about access to higher education by ethnicity.]

at public four-year universities, but, in 2002, Pell Grants covered only 57 percent of the costs.\(^{92}\) Texas ranks 4th lowest among the states in the share of income that the poorest families need to pay for tuition at the lowest-priced colleges.\(^{93}\) At the same time, local government’s contributions to higher education have been decreasing: between 2000 and 2008, Texas dropped 15 places to 26th in the state rankings of the amount of support provided per full-time equivalent student by the state and local governments.\(^{94}\)

The survey respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that “almost anyone who needs financial help to go to college can get the loans or scholarships they need.” As indicated in Figure 24, among all ethnic groups, approximately 40 percent disagreed with that suggestion. For many Houstonians, cost is indeed a real barrier to a college degree.
Spanish in the Schools

Two of the survey questions addressed the use of Spanish in the public schools. The answers reflect the ambiguity and complexity of navigating the region’s ongoing demographic transformations. The first question, as indicated in Figure 25, asked about “requiring all English-speaking students in Houston-area public schools to be able to speak at least some Spanish before they graduate.” By 56 percent, a majority favored that proposal.

Younger respondents (aged 18-29) were more supportive (at 68 percent) than any other age group. Anglos and Asians (44 and 49 percent) were less inclined than were blacks and Hispanics (60 and 64 percent) to support requiring all high school students to speak some Spanish. Harris County residents may be coming to see the importance of ensuring that young people are able to speak at least some Spanish as they prepare for competitive success in this major port city and one of the nation’s prime gateways to all of Latin America.

The survey also asked about the best way to educate non-English speaking children. Figure 25 shows that 72 percent of the respondents agreed that “the schools should teach [such students] English as quickly as possible, even if they fall behind in other subjects.” While only 54 percent of the younger respondents (aged 18 to 29) favored such rapid English instruction, support reached 84 percent among those aged 60 and older. The stronger call among the older respondents for teaching English as quickly as possible may be fueled by concern about the possible decline of the English language, despite evidence that Hispanic immigrants and their children are learning English today at least as rapidly as did the earlier streams of European immigrants.

Of all Texas students in 2011, approximately 838,000 (or 17 percent) were classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). The proportion is substantially higher (30 percent) in HISD. Although area residents seem to favor an approach to educating LEP students that focuses on rapid immersion in English-only instruction, research has consistently shown that such students do better academically when they are instructed in the first few years at least partially in their native language as they work to acquire English proficiency.

Figure 25 – Two Proposals on Spanish in the Public Schools, in the Total Sample and by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total sample</th>
<th>18-29 (N=175)</th>
<th>30-44 (N=217)</th>
<th>45-59 (N=332)</th>
<th>60-94 (N=440)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favor: “Requiring all English-speaking students in Houston-area public schools to be able to speak at least some Spanish before they graduate.”</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree: “The schools should teach English to students who are not native English speakers as quickly as possible, even if they fall behind in other subjects.”</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The minimum time required to reach grade-level performance in a second language is generally estimated at four years. This may help to explain why so many LEP students end up dropping out of school in frustration, particularly if they have been instructed only in English from the very beginning of their time in a U.S. school.99

Some Key Proposals
We have seen that Harris County residents, despite their “motivated beliefs” that the schools are generally doing well, are increasingly coming to recognize that the region’s young people, especially blacks and Hispanics, need to be better prepared if they hope to succeed in today’s high-tech knowledge-based economy. The Education Survey asked area residents about a variety of proposals for school reform that have been gaining momentum in the public sphere. Figure 26 presents the levels of their support for these initiatives.

Preschool for all. The survey asked respondents about “paying for universal preschool education to ensure that all low-income children are ready for kindergarten.” Fully 70 percent, more than for any other suggestion, said they favored that proposal. Support for public spending on preschool programs varied by ethnicity, with 85 percent of blacks, 71 percent of Hispanics, and just 60 percent of Anglos in support of the measure.

Research has consistently shown that investment in early childhood education reaches children at a critical point in the development of the achievement gap and results in long-term gains. Poverty during the first five years of life is far more harmful to educational outcomes than poverty later in a child’s schooling, because it so powerfully affects school readiness and foundational learning.100 The U.S. Department of Education’s Early Childhood Longitudinal Study found that, by the beginning of kindergarten, children in the wealthiest families scored 60 percent higher than children in the poorest families on tests of cognitive ability.101

High-quality early childhood education can substantially decrease this gap. Children who have been exposed to quality preschools are better prepared for school, less likely to repeat a grade, more likely to graduate from high school and college, and less likely to be sentenced to prison.102 Indeed, investing in quality pre-school programs has been shown to yield a 7 to 10 percent return on investment annually.103

Despite these documented benefits, only 47 percent of Texas four-year olds were enrolled in a public pre-school in 2012.104 Participation in early childhood education is strongly associated with income and education: children from wealthier families thus have disproportionate access to early childhood education programs.105 While the greater Houston metropolitan region offers Head Start for low-income children, underfunding has meant that the program reaches only 11 percent of the 600,000 poor children who are eligible.106

During the 82nd legislative session in 2011, $223 million was cut from the budgets of Texas pre-K programs.107

Figure 26 – Support for Various Proposals to Improve the Public Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal</th>
<th>Strongly or somewhat favor</th>
<th>Strongly or somewhat oppose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paying for universal preschool education</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to ensure that all low-income children are</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ready for kindergarten</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying for more after-school academic</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>programs for public school students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the amount of time the U.S. students</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spend in school each year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing more public charter schools in</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>your community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
Texas school districts are required to offer half-day pre-K for at-risk four-year olds, but too many of the programs fail to meet the national standards set by the National Institute for Early Education Research. Indeed, of the ten quality standards set by the institute, Texas meets only two. Access clearly does not ensure quality. If early childhood education is to contribute significantly to decreasing the achievement gap between poor and middle-class students, it must provide low-income students with programs of high quality.

Because the achievement gap begins so early in life, universal access to high-quality early childhood education programs could be one of the most effective ways to narrow the achievement gap and to put all of Houston’s children on the path to a successful future. Houston’s first major campaign on this matter took place in 2013. More than 80,000 valid signatures from Harris County registered voters petitioned for a one-cent property tax increase to be placed on the November ballot in order to achieve high quality preschool education for all children throughout Harris County.

The effort failed a court test, so the proposed tax increase will not be on the ballot in November 2013. The findings from the Education Survey, in conjunction with last year’s voter approval (by 69 percent) of the $1.89 billion HISD bond measure, suggest that most area residents have come to understand the critical importance of expanding access to quality preschool and may be willing to pay for it. It seems likely that a more carefully constructed initiative along these same lines will be on the ballot in an upcoming election.

Two other large Texas cities, San Antonio and Dallas, have also been developing creative strategies to garner more funding for quality preschool. In November 2012, the city of San Antonio passed a measure to increase its sales tax by 1/8 of a cent in order to pay for pre-kindergarten for its 22,000 four-year-olds. The Dallas Independent School District recently received permission from the state legislature to use the money saved from students who opt to graduate from high school in three years to fund its preschool programs. The money saved from one student graduating early is enough to fund a full day pre-K program for two children.

**Expanding time on task.** The Education Survey also asked about increasing the sheer amount of schooling that students receive. As indicated in Figure 26, 66 percent of the respondents favored “paying for more after-school programs for public school students.” By 63 percent, they were in support of “increasing the amount of time that U.S. students spend in school each year.” Evidence suggests that more instructional time can indeed create positive changes in students’ achievement. Massachusetts added 300 hours of instructional time to its school year in 2008-2009 and saw an increase in the number of students reaching proficiency on state tests in all subjects.

In HISD, eleven elementary schools, five middle schools, and four high schools that had been designated as low-performing were selected in 2010-2011 to be part of the “Apollo 20” program. Among other key elements, the program includes additional instructional time (30 minutes more per day for elementary schools, 50 minutes more per day for secondary schools). Preliminary signs suggest that the initiative has achieved some improvement in students’ learning, though any definitive assessment of the program’s success must await further data. Increased instruction time is surely a strategy worth pursuing in the effort to reduce the achievement gaps, both within the United States and between the U.S. and other industrialized countries.

By 63 to 31 percent, the survey respondents were also in favor of “establishing more public charter schools in their community.” Hispanics (70 percent) and Asians (79 percent) were more likely to favor this initiative than were blacks (63 percent) and Anglos (53 percent). Younger adults were also more strongly in favor of charter school expansion: 74 percent of the respondents aged 18 to 29 favored establishing more such schools, compared to just 60 percent of the respondents who were 60 or older.

Currently, 37,000 students in Harris County attend a charter school. HISD alone has 23 such schools. The best charter systems have achieved consistently positive results. Unfortunately, there is great variability in quality and effectiveness across charter schools. One national study found that only 17 percent of charter schools achieve educational outcomes that are demonstrably superior to those of the regular public schools. Two of the nation’s largest and most successful charter school networks, KIPP and YES Prep, were founded in Houston and have a strong presence in Harris County. The students at YES Prep schools achieve higher average scores on all standardized tests and experience lower dropout rates than do students in HISD overall. Charter schools can also serve as healthy competition, challenging the regular public schools to improve the education they provide, and they are often the first to try new and innovative learning models. Indeed, HISD’s Apollo 20 program was in large part modeled after the effective charter school programs.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Why education matters more than ever. The coming together of globalization and automation has created a fundamentally new kind of economy in America, one in which the income inequalities are growing dramatically, predicated above all else on the attainment of high-quality education. Access to good schools has always been important for upward mobility; today, educational attainment is a more powerful predictor than ever before of the ability to find a job that will pay a living wage in this fully globalized, high-technology, knowledge-based economy. It is no wonder that access to quality education is now widely perceived to be the single most important civil rights issue of our time.

At the same moment that Houston was emerging from the recession caused by the oil-boom collapse in the mid-1980s, this city found itself at the forefront of the nation's unfolding demographic revolution. During the 1960s and 1970s, almost all the growth of the Harris County population was brought about by the influx of Anglos, the non-Hispanic whites who were streaming into this thriving region from everywhere else in the nation. In stark contrast, after the collapse of the oil boom in 1982, virtually all of the region's rapid population increase has been due to the influx of Asians, Hispanics, and blacks. By the time of the 2010 census, Harris County was 41 percent Hispanic and just 33 percent Anglo. The census projects that by 2030 Hispanics will comprise a majority of the county's population, another sixth will be African Americans, and the Anglo share will have dropped to 20 percent.

Houston's ongoing transformation is particularly dramatic when age is taken into account. Among all the young people (aged less than 20) who were residing in Harris County in 2010, more than half were Latinos and another fifth were African-Americans. Fully 70 percent of everyone in Harris County under the age of 20 is either black or Latino, the two populations that are by far the most likely to be living in poverty, and we know the powerful impact that poverty can have on a child's ability to succeed in school.

The new demographic realities make it clear that, if Houston's African-American and Latino young people are unprepared to succeed in today's knowledge economy, it is difficult to envision a prosperous future for the region as a whole. On the other hand, if the education and income gaps can be bridged, the region will be able to capitalize fully on the advantages of having a young, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual workforce and will be well positioned for competitive success as a major international player on the world stage and a model for what all of America could become as the 21st century unfolds. The region's ability to dramatically improve access to quality education will be the single most critical determinant of the kind of multiethnic society Houston will develop in the years ahead.

Supported by a grant from Houston Endowment Inc. and aided by an advisory panel composed of leading national and local experts, researchers at Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research conducted a systematic survey exploring these issues with 1,200 Harris County residents. Between January and March 2012, the survey participants were asked about the importance of post-secondary education and their aspirations for their children, about their overall evaluations of the public schools in the Houston area and the extent of the need for additional spending, about their explanations for the disparities in educational achievement and their support for a variety of proposals that seek to improve educational outcomes.

The perceived quality of education in Houston. The survey indicates that 76 percent of all area residents now believe that success in today's world requires education beyond high school; only a fifth of the respondents asserted instead that there are many ways to succeed with no more than a high school diploma. The surveys provide no evidence whatsoever to support the belief that black or Latino parents value education less than Anglos or Asians. Indeed, the African-American respondents (at 90 percent) were the most likely to insist on the importance of post-secondary education, and Anglos (by 33 percent) were the most likely to claim instead that people can readily succeed with no more than a high school diploma.

The respondents were evenly divided (by 48 to 46 percent) on the question of whether or not the Houston public schools have enough money, if it were
used wisely, to provide a quality education. The survey participants who were living in the HISD service areas were more likely than those from other districts to assert that the schools will need more money, as were Democrats compared to Republicans, and younger compared to older respondents.

The respondents who had children in the public schools were more inclined than those without school-aged children to believe that the schools in their district have been getting better; they gave higher grades to their local schools, especially to the schools their children were attending. Overall, the respondents generally awarded higher grades to the Houston public schools than the objective evidence would warrant, and two-thirds believed (incorrectly) that Houston schools are spending the same as or more than other metropolitan school districts in addressing the educational needs of students.

**Explanations for the educational disparities.** On almost every indicator of academic performance, ethnic differences loom large. Among the respondents aged 25 and older who were interviewed in the past 10 years of the Kinder Institute Houston Area Survey, 66 percent of the Asian immigrants in Harris County have at least a college degree, compared to just 39 percent of all U.S.-born Anglos. Meanwhile, the comparable figures for the U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics are just 20 percent and 17 percent. Half of all the U.S.-born blacks (49 percent) and U.S.-born Hispanics (55 percent) have not obtained any education beyond high school; more than a fifth of all black Houstonians and more than a fourth of the U.S.-born Latinos do not have high school diplomas. Strikingly, 60 percent of all the Latino immigrants in Harris County who are over the age of 25 have not completed high school, and only 8 percent have college degrees.

Respondents were asked about the importance of a number of different factors in contributing to such educational achievement gaps. Family involvement and student effort were viewed as more important than teaching quality and urban poverty in affecting educational outcomes. Still, 80 percent cited the quality of the teaching in the schools and 72 percent thought that “the poverty, crime, and instability in the communities where the students live” were very important contributors to ethnic differences in educational outcomes. A great deal of educational research confirms that the very strong correlation of poverty with race and ethnicity is one of the most critical driving forces in generating the achievement gap.23

In Texas in 2010, the overall child poverty rate was 26 percent: Just 11 percent of white children, but 34 percent of black children and 36 percent of Hispanic children were living in poverty. The negative effects of individual poverty are compounded by the pervasive patterns of residential segregation based on race and income. Poor black and Latino children are far more likely than poor Anglo children to be living in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty and to be going to schools with fewer resources and worse facilities.

No more than 60 percent of all the black and Hispanic high school freshmen in the Houston area schools will actually graduate four years later. Of those who do obtain a high school diploma, fewer than half will go on to any kind of further education. In 2011, only 6.5 percent of all African-American seniors in HISD and 6.4 percent of Hispanic seniors scored at or above the level that indicates college readiness on the SAT or ACT tests. As a result, almost half of all college freshmen in the Houston region are required to take remedial courses for which they get no college credit. Because of inadequate preparation for college work, because so many also need to work while enrolled in classes, and because of the continually increasing tuition costs coupled with inadequate financial aid, far too few of Houston’s young people are able to go to college or to make it through to graduation.

**Support for educational initiatives.** The survey asked about a variety of proposals for school reform. More than 60 percent of the respondents favored spending more for after-school programs, for expanding the school day and year, and for establishing more charter schools. The survey participants gave their strongest support (at 70 percent) to “paying for universal preschool education to ensure that all low-income children are ready for kindergarten.”

Because the achievement gap begins so early in life, ensuring access to quality preschool is widely recognized to be one of the most effective ways to reduce it. An effort in 2013 to put a proposed property tax increase on the November 2013 ballot that would fund universal access to quality early childhood education failed a court test. A more carefully constructed initiative along these same lines seems likely to be on the ballot in an upcoming election.

**Conclusion.** Many Harris County residents continue to believe that Houston’s educational resources are adequate and its students are well equipped to prosper in today’s economy. Many others, however,
are increasingly coming to recognize the critical importance of education for Houston's prospects. They know that this region is still far from putting into place the educational resources that will give Houston's young people, who are majority black and Latino and mostly poor, the tools they will need to succeed in today's economy. Figure 27 summarizes some of the current realities that define the education crisis.

Human resources are now more important than natural resources in building the foundations for prosperity.

**Figure 27 - The Education Crisis: Some Current Realities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Need for Education Beyond High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The “blue-collar” path has disappeared: It is estimated that 90 percent of the fastest-growing jobs, 60 percent of all new jobs, and 40 percent of manufacturing jobs now require some kind of post-secondary education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texas’ and Houston’s Standing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Texas ranks at the very bottom of the 50 states in the percentage of residents over the age of 25 with a high school diploma (80.6 percent).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Texas students score lower than the U.S. average in most subjects: In comparisons with the other 49 states in 2011, Texas 8th graders who took the NAEP ranked 37th in reading, 34th in writing, and 10th in math. |

| In 2009, only 58 percent of all high school graduates in Harris County went on to any further education; 11 percent of those who enrolled in a Texas two-year college actually graduated with any kind of certificate after four years. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Achievement Gap: Race and Poverty Intertwined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70 percent of all Harris County residents under the age of 20 are black or Hispanic, and on almost every measure of academic achievement, black and Hispanic students perform at much lower levels than whites and Asians.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| In Texas, the overall child poverty rate in 2010 was 26 percent: 10.7 percent of white children were living in poverty that year, but this was the case for 33.5 percent of all black children, and 35.6 percent of Hispanic children. |

| By the beginning of kindergarten, after exposure to quality early childhood education, children in the wealthiest families score 60 percent higher than children in the poorest families on tests of cognitive ability. |

| Only 59 percent of black children and 62 percent of the Hispanic children who were high school freshmen in HISD schools during the year 2004-2005 actually graduated with a high school diploma four years later. |

| In HISD in 2011, just 6.5 percent of African-American seniors and 6.4 percent of Hispanic seniors scored at or above the level that indicates college readiness on the SAT or ACT, but this was the case for 60 percent of Anglo seniors. |
APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Survey Research Institute (SRI) at the University of Houston’s Hobby Center for Public Policy administered the telephone interviews. Using “back translation” and the reconciliation of discrepancies, the questionnaire was translated into Spanish, and bilingual supervisors and interviewers were assigned to the project at all times. A list of all the survey items included in the questionnaire and the distribution of responses given for each question can be found on the institute’s website at kinder.rice.edu/sheu.

The SRI conducted the interviews between January 29 and March 17, 2012. Using random digit dialing (RDD), households were sampled in the Harris County area until the goal of 1,200 telephone interviews was reached, with 862 (72 percent) of the respondents interviewed by landline and 338 (28 percent) by cell phone. In each household contacted by RDD, a household member aged 18 or over was randomly designated as the eligible respondent, with initial preference given to an adult male.

The response rate (indicating the number of completed interviews in relation to all potentially eligible phone numbers) was 20 percent for landlines and 15 percent for cell phones, representing an overall response rate of only 18 percent. Social Science Research Solutions (SSRS), the Philadelphia-based research firm, conducted the weighting process, utilizing the 2010 three-year ACS estimates to correct for nonresponse and coverage biases in the sample, and assigning weights to each case in order to ensure that the final distributions are in close agreement with the actual Harris County distributions with respect to such known population parameters as race and ethnicity, age, gender, education level, home ownership, county population and density.

The chart to the left shows the way the weights given to the survey responses result in changes that bring the sample figures into closer alignment with the actual distributions as reported by the 2008-2010 ACS Three-Year Estimates. The chart makes it clear that, despite the relatively low response rate, the demographic distributions in the survey sample are very close to the ACS figures for Harris County. With the exception of a slight overrepresentation of respondents over 60 and an underrepresentation of those aged 30 to 44, the proportions in the sample of males and females, of Anglos, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians, and of various levels of educational attainment are almost identical to the figures recorded in the census. This alignment offers reassurance that the survey data are providing a representative picture of the Harris County population as a whole.

*Note: The ACS statistics for educational attainment include only members of the Harris County population who are aged 25 years and over; the margin of error is +/- 0.2 to 0.3.
APPENDIX B: THE EDUCATION ADVISORS

Listed here, with deep gratitude, are the advisors and colleagues who helped the research team during 2011-2012 to develop the survey instrument and to assess the preliminary findings. We are especially grateful to Jenifer Bratter, Rosemary Coffey, Mike Feinberg, Scott Hochberg, Don McAdams, Carol Shattuck, Carla Stevens, Ruth Lopez Turley, and Scott Van Beck for their helpful suggestions on earlier drafts of this report.

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Robert K. Wimpelberg, Ph.D.  Executive Director, All Kids Alliance
Sarah Winkler  Immediate Past President, Alief ISD Board
REFERENCES

1. Publications and descriptions of the survey findings are available on the Kinder Institute Houston Area Survey website at http://has.rice.edu.


14. For more information on the methodology and assumptions used in the national population projections, visit http://www.census.gov/population/projections/files/methodstatement.pdf.


16. For the Education Survey, respondents were asked, “Are you Anglo (or non-Hispanic white), Black (or African American), Hispanic (or Latino), Asian, or of some other ethnic background?” If the respondent answered one of the four groups named, he or she was categorized into the named group. If the respondent answered that he or she identifies with more than one of the main groups, the interviewer then asked, “Which ethnic group do you generally identify with?” If the respondent answered this question with only one ethnic group, he or she was categorized as being in that group. If the respondent answered that he or she identifies with several groups, the respondent was recorded as “Other” on this question, and was not included in analyses of ethnic group differences.

17. Ibid.


31. State Representative Scott Hochberg. 2013. Analysis based on HB 1, HB 3, HB 4, and HB 5, from the 2006 79th Texas Legislative Session.


36. State Representative Scott Hochberg. 2013. Analysis based on TEA district accountability ratings for 2011 and financial data by district provided to him by TEA.


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64. Ibid.


66. Ibid.


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