

TO: Board of Directors,  
Brownsville Chamber of Commerce  
FROM: David Merrill,  
Education Reform Task Force  
RE: Update for Board  
DATE: 7-8-2004

The Education Reform Task Force was formed by Board resolution in July, 2003. Over the last year, the primary work has been on two fronts:

- Bringing education issues and the need for reform to the attention of business and civic leaders. This has taken place in public meetings (as in the recent Cameron Works event), at service clubs, and through informal discussions. The level of discontent with education is evident, but there is still no sense of urgency about the crisis.
- Seeking financial support to establish The Brownsville Education Leadership Institute (the operating title). Through the Institute, people could take a certificate program on issues of education --- everything from school finance to special education to curriculum. The belief is that better-informed citizens will make better decisions about education. Also, it is believed that the business community could insist that candidates for school board go through this program before standing for election.

The Brownsville Foundation for Health and Education provided a grant of \$10,000 and a firm of consultants has been retained to begin the work of forming the Institute. By the end of this year, we expect a detailed action plan.

In the meantime, I have been asked to serve on the board of Texas Public Education Reform Caucus and Texas Education Reform Foundation. This is the very broadest collection of education reform advocates in Texas, meeting quarterly. There's a good bit of overlap with the better known Texas Business and Education Coalition.

**“Texas last in graduates”** is the headline in today's Brownsville Herald. The Rio Grande Valley is at the bottom of the bottom, and the trend is for things to get worse. Your Education Reform Task Force hopes to influence the local debate about education to heighten the sense of urgency required to change the outlook.