

Schools work to improve academics in Brownsville

By KEVIN GARCIA
THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

July 24, 2004 — Brownsville students have no excuse for failure, said UTB-TSC President Juliet Garcia.

Despite socioeconomic factors that force many here to work and attend classes, she said there is no reason why 52 percent of freshmen at her school must take remedial courses — usually in math and English — to teach them what they should have learned in high school.

Then who's to blame for the students' lack of preparation?

Public schools? The students themselves?

According to Porter High School counselor Eddie Noriega, parents must shoulder the responsibility. "Basically education starts at the home," he said. "My father didn't graduate and my mom got a GED, but they pushed an education for me."

Students who struggle with academics are usually the ones that needed more support at home, he added.

"That 50 percent (UTB-TSC is) talking about, we don't meet the parents until it's too late," Noriega said. "You get a progress report every three weeks; why weren't you meeting with the teachers then? ... The bottom line is every student can succeed. I know they can."

Terry Jay Phillips, UTB-TSC dean of developmental and general education, noted that UTB-TSC is one of only two universities in Texas that has an open enrollment policy. Others have strict entrance requirements.

As a result, students take longer than the traditional four years to obtain a bachelor's degree, he said.

"Our students generally are part-timers, and they just take longer to finish," Phillips said.

Rivera High School counselor Brenda Wilburn said all students have their own reasons for success or failure. The best strategy for success is encouraging the students and motivating them to succeed, she said.

"I just tell them that they have to be self-sufficient," Wilburn said. "Do something with your life, don't just say, 'I finished high school, let's hang out.'"

Mary Salinas, the Brownsville school district administrator for guidance and counseling, said the percentage of high school graduates that pursue a college education increases annually.

According to a survey of high school seniors, 1,363 of the 1,914 Brownsville high school graduates last year planned to attend a university; 161 planned to attend a two-year college; 127 hoped to go to a vocational school; and 66 wanted to join the military. Only 198 were undecided.

The number of college-bound students is rising due partially to increased graduation requirements and public initiatives, Salinas said.

"I think we are preparing our students a lot better than before," Salinas said. "We have been told by a lot of the universities that are not in the area ... that we have been very aggressive in helping our students seek higher education."

The district has also formed partnerships with several universities in recent years. Each university sends officials to make presentations to students and parents and to provide more information about college applications and financial aid.

Once they get to college, students are tested so that advisors know their level of education.

“We actually place the students in classes based on their current competency,” said Linda Fossen, associate vice president for enrollment planning at the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College. “The students who start in (remedial classes) actually complete their goals at about the same rate as our general student population. It just takes them a little longer.”

kgarcialink.freedom.com

Posted by: [Gilbert Zarate](#) on Jul 24, 04 | 12:06 am | [Profile](#)

Copyright © 2003 The Brownsville Herald