

# Ensuring the Postsecondary Success of Students in South Texas and Beyond

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College of Education

University of Texas at Austin

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**Region One ESC**

College, Career, and Military Readiness Conference

February 27, 2025





Thank you  
Region One  
ESC!

# My Journey

## #Puro956

- Born/raised in the Rio Grande Valley
- Starr County roots (La Grulla, Rio Grande City)
- La Joya High School, Class of 1992
- Father, Husband, Brother, Son

## Professional Journey

- **Educator:** High School Algebra Teacher @ LJHS
- **Researcher:** PhD in Higher Education & Organizational Change (UCLA)
- **Professor:** 18 years at UT-Austin; teach courses in education policy, student success
- **Administrator:** 6 years as department chair; 2 years as Associate Dean
- **Service:** Austin PBS; Texas Lyceum; UT Elementary School; AAHHE; etc.

## Challenges I've faced as an education leader

- Three deans and four provosts (in last 6 years)
- Budget/staffing cuts & re-prioritization due to COVID; SB17
- Faculty hiring & retention
- Curriculum reform
- Re-vamped our student success programs







# Outline of Presentation

## CCR Region One Conference

- Learning Goals for the Conference
- Evidence-based
- Actionable Ideas

## VUCA

- Volatility
- Uncertainty
- Complexity
- Ambiguity

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century America

- Key Population & Demographic Trends
- National, State, and Local data

## RGV/South Texas is Magical!

- Student enrollment and success rates in college & beyond
- El Majico Valle!

## From Research to Action

- Research Work on Male Students
- Promising Practices
- Project MALES

A large crowd of diverse students, mostly of Hispanic and Black descent, are shown from the chest up, cheering enthusiastically with their hands raised in the air. They are wearing various school-related clothing, including t-shirts with text like "OUR SCHOOL OUR FAMILY OUR STRIFE". The background is a soft-focus view of the same crowd, creating a sense of a large gathering.

# Opening Reflection:

1 in 10

Texas public school students is  
enrolled in a  
Region One school


Why are we  
here today and  
tomorrow?



## Learning Objectives

1. Enhance College & Career Readiness (CCR) Initiatives
2. Expand Access & Equity for Postsecondary Success
3. Strengthen Career Pathways & Workforce Alignment
4. Leverage Innovation in Education & Advising
5. Actionable Next Steps

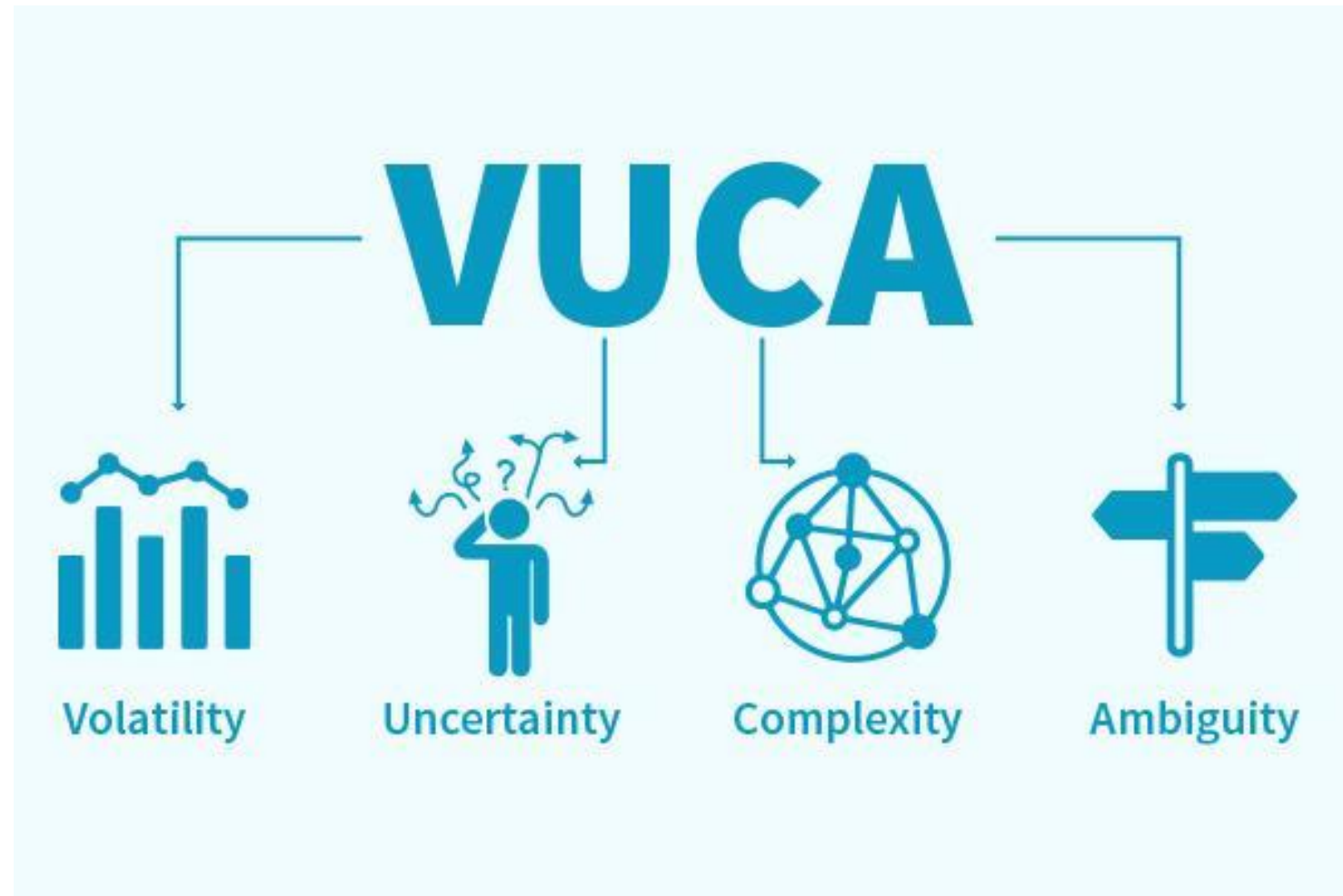
# Challenges & Opportunities in the RGV/South Texas

- RGV students are making progress in college-going and attainment, but challenges remain.
  - How do we ensure every student is ready for postsecondary success?
  - Our work for students must be intentional, data-driven, and future-focused.
  - Preparing all students for success in an **evolving education and workforce landscape.**
- 



# Our Education Reality

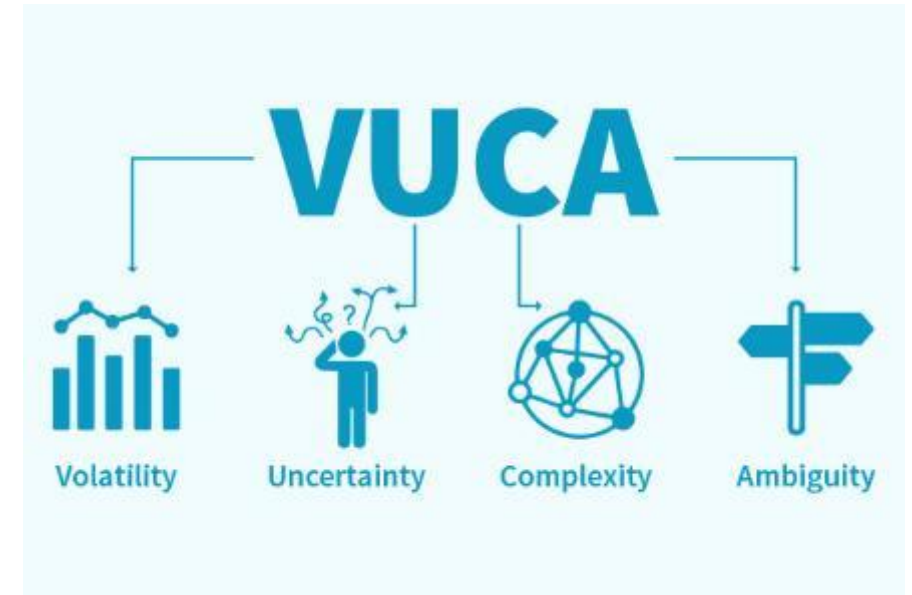
- We live in a VUCA world.





# The Texas version of VUCA:

- Growing/changing population
  - Aging in some ways; younger in others
  - Majority Hispanic (especially in our public schools)
- Energy and water futures are uncertain
- Aging infrastructure; deferred maintenance
- Teacher/staff turnover; uncertified educators
- Contentious political climate
  - SB17; vouchers; book bans, etc.
- College, Career, Military Readiness (TEA)
- Building a Talent Strong Texas (THECB)
  - Business-friendly
  - Focus on CTE, workforce & “credentials of value”
- Irregular enrollment patterns; competition
- Shifting opinions of public education
- Texas public higher education is still a great value compared to most states
- Oh yeah, budget deficits, COVID-19, executive orders, what else?!





# So, now what?

As an educator, counselor, and school leader, working through this volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity...

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- We must keep **focused** on our:
  - academic goals and mission
  - training as educators and professionals
- We must BEAR WITNESS!
  - Recognize that the landscape is changing
  - e.g., political, demographic, educational, etc.
- Remain committed to the college/career/military readiness and success of ALL students
- Draw strength from the bright spot that is Region One (i.e., the Rio Grande Valley & South Texas)!



# 21<sup>st</sup> Century America

Changing demographic landscape (Texas and US)

Educational Attainment trends

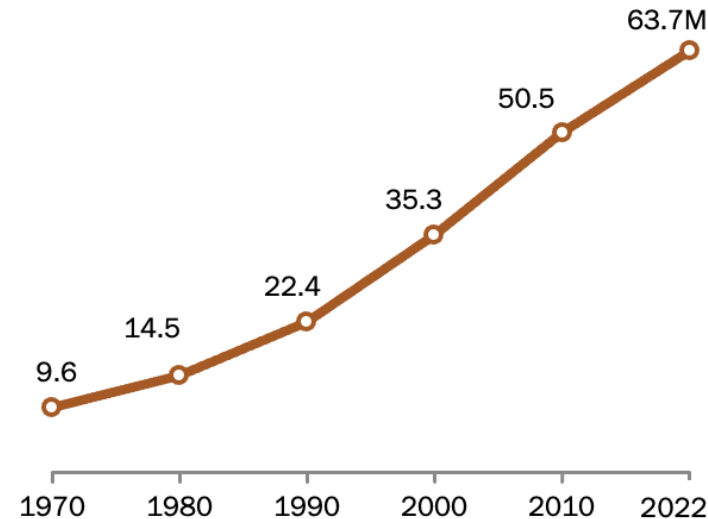




# Statistical Portrait of the United States

## U.S. Hispanic population reached nearly 64 million in 2022

*Population of Hispanics in the United States, 1970-2022, in millions*



Note: Population totals are as of April 1 for 1970-2010 and July 1 for 2022. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 1970-1980 estimates based on decennial censuses (see 2008 report "U.S. Population Projections: 2005-2050"), 1990-2010 PL94-171 census data, Vintage 2022 estimates.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Hispanics made up more than half of total U.S. population growth from 2010 to 2021

*U.S. population change by race and ethnicity, 2010-21*

	2021 population	Change, 2010-21	Share of total increase
Hispanic	62,530,000	12,050,000	52%
Asian	18,890,000	4,420,000	19%
Black	39,270,000	1,580,000	7%
White	192,750,000	-4,060,000	<0%
Two or more races	14,300,000	8,330,000	36%
<hr/>			
Total	331,890,000	23,150,000	

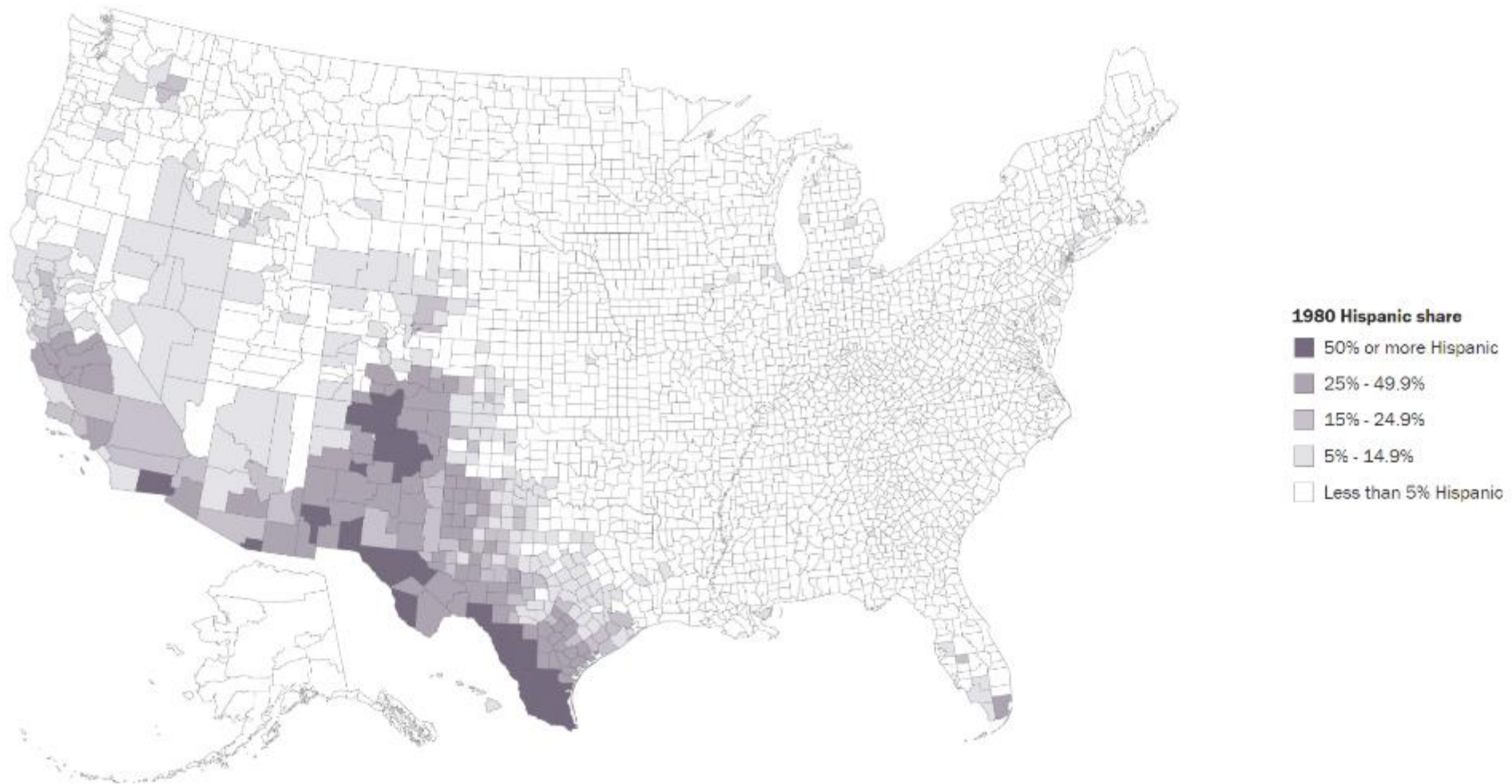
Note: White, Black and Asian individuals include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; individuals of two or more races include only those who are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Total includes all racial and ethnic groups; some not shown separately. Population figures rounded to nearest 10,000. Change and percent change computed from unrounded figures.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of PL94-171 census data for 2010 and additional data from the 2021 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

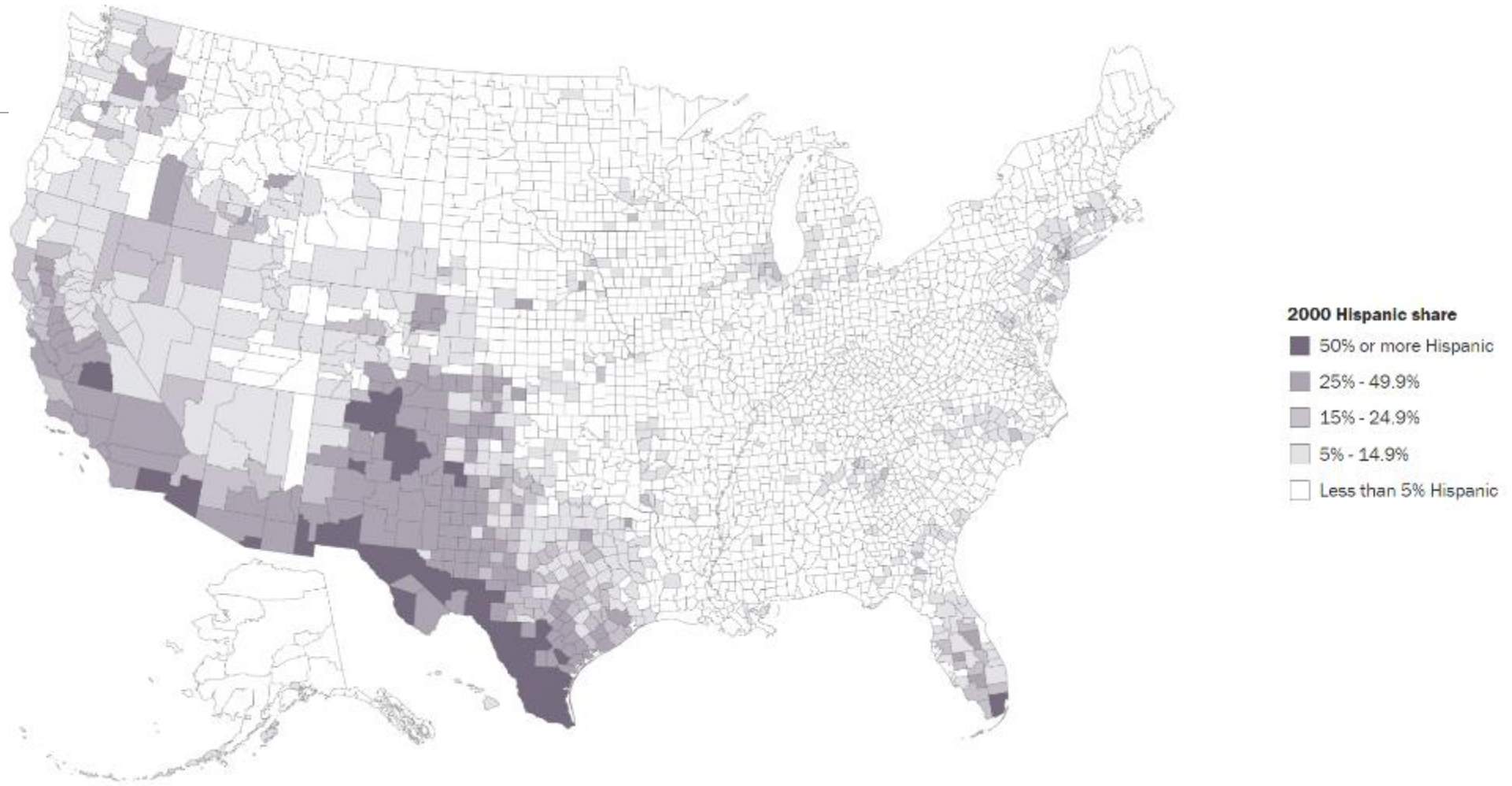


## U.S. Hispanic share of population by county, 1980



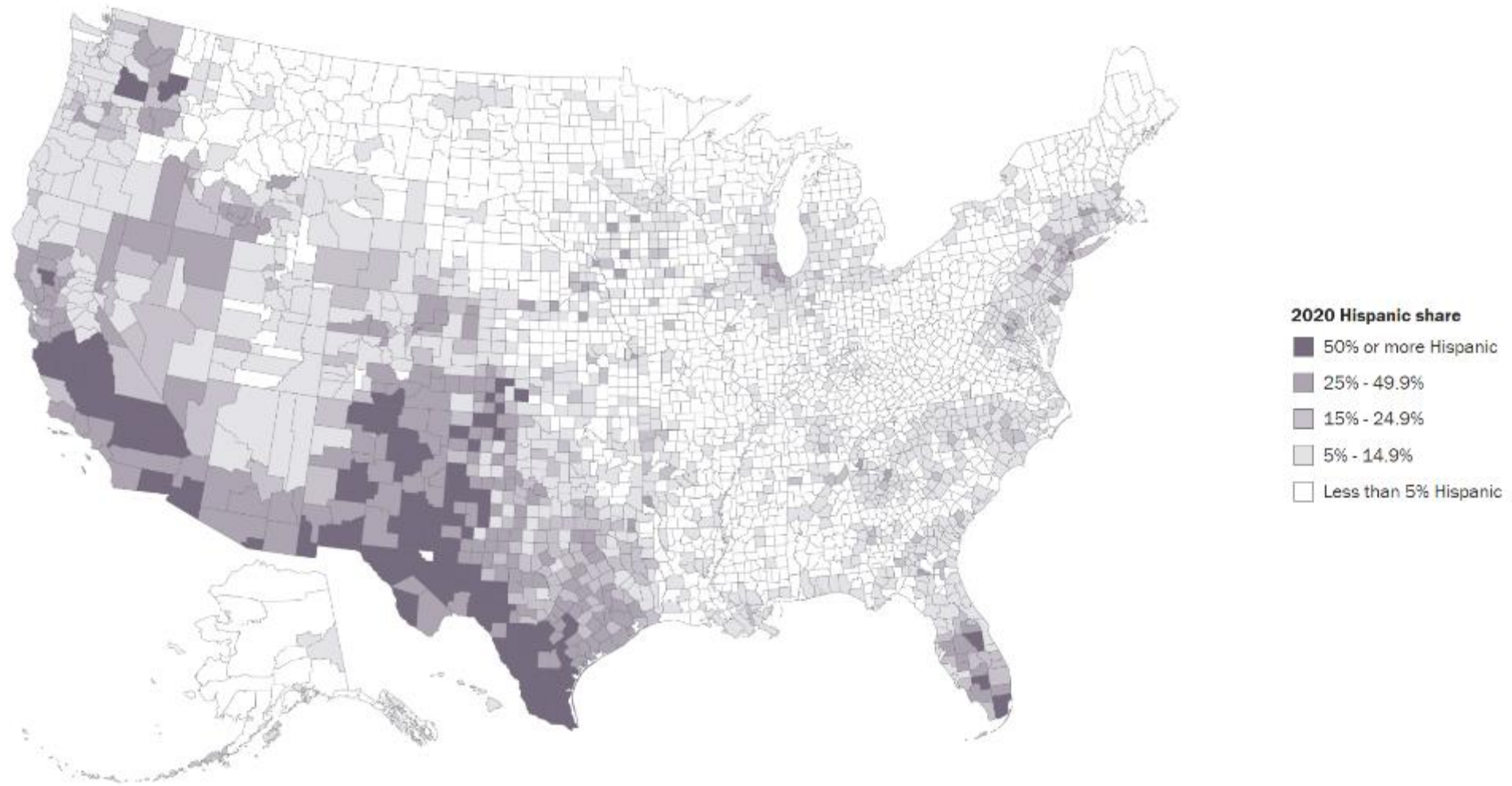
Source: Pew Research Center tabulation of decennial census data: P.L.94-171 data for 1990, 2000, 2010 and 2020; STF-1a data for 1980.

## U.S. Hispanic share of population by county, 2000



Source: Pew Research Center tabulation of decennial census data: P.L.94-171 data for 1990, 2000, 2010 and 2020; STF-1a data for 1980.

## U.S. Hispanic share of population by county, 2020



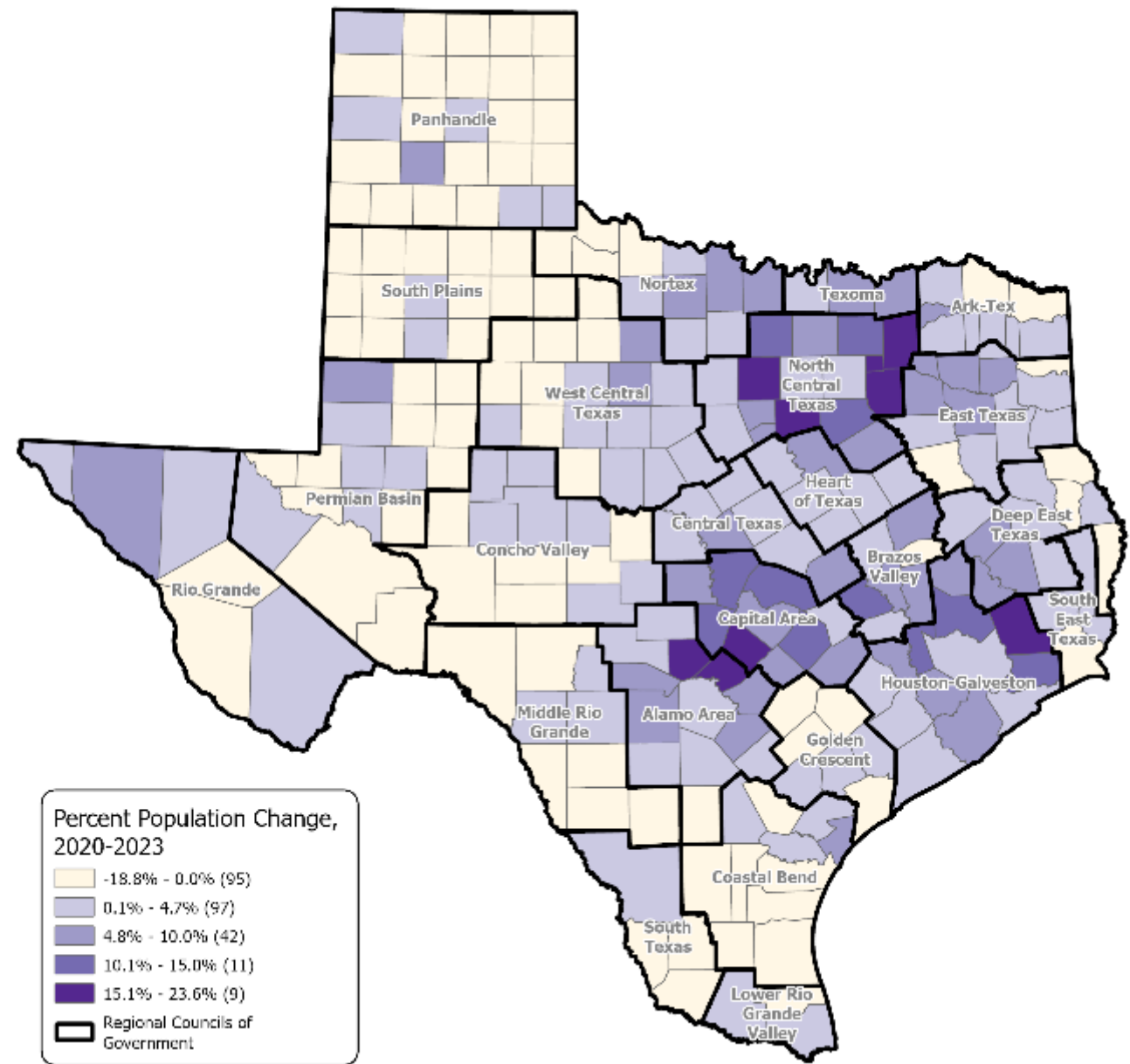
Source: Pew Research Center tabulation of decennial census data: P.L.94-171 data for 1990, 2000, 2010 and 2020; STF-1a data for 1980.

# COUNTY TOTAL

## By COG

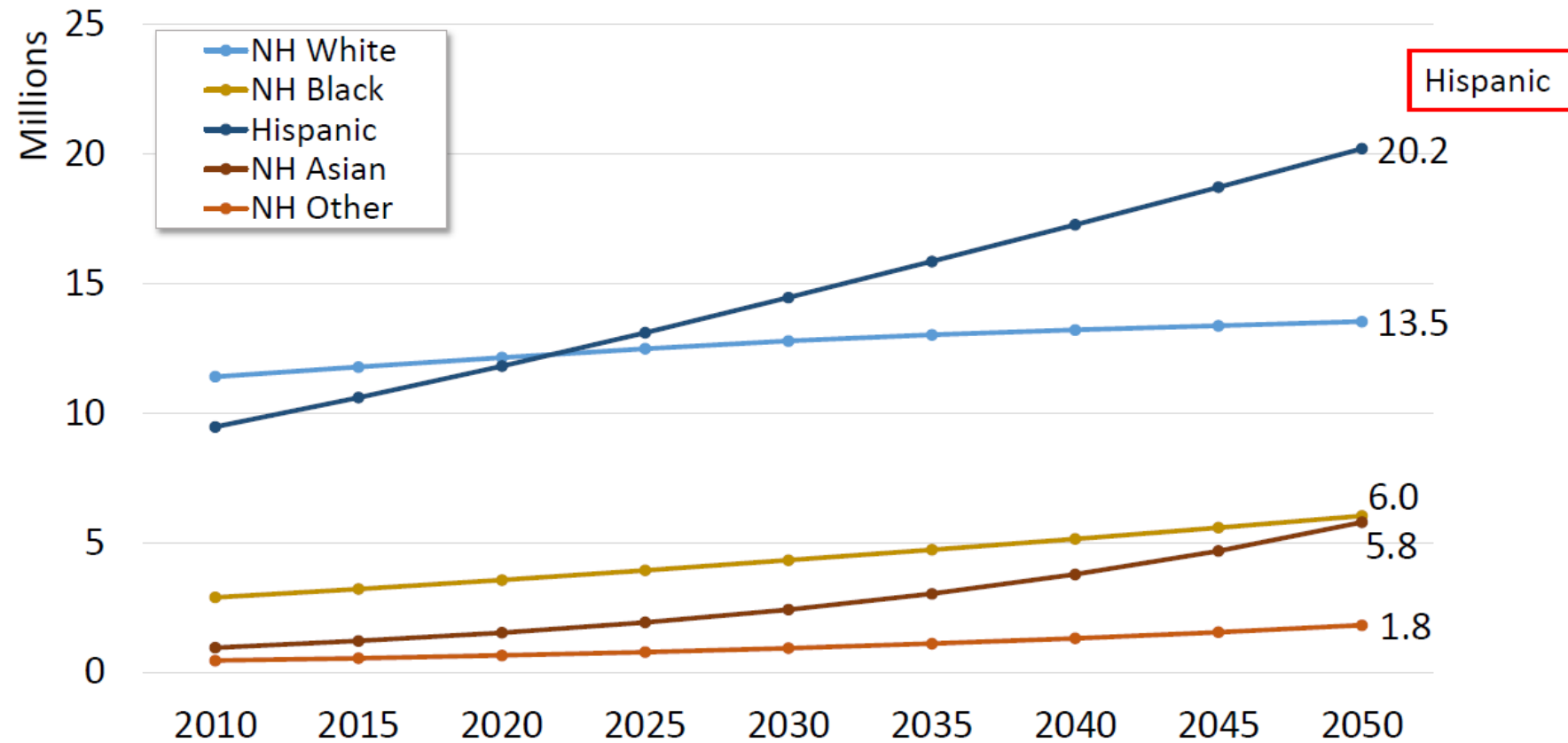
### Estimated Percent Population Change, 2020-2023

- The fastest-growing areas continue to be the Texas Triangle, especially those surrounding the central urban counties.
- In other parts of Texas, the central counties drive the main growth.





## TEXAS: Population Projections by Race/Ethnicity, 2010-2050



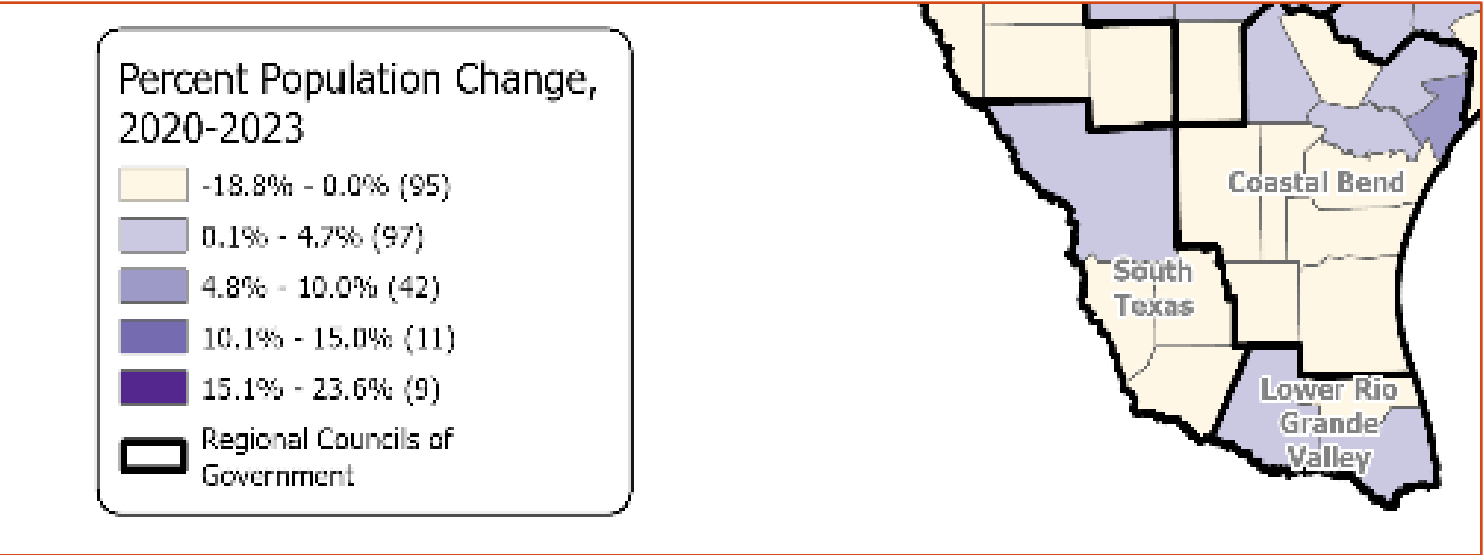
SOURCE: Texas Demographic Center, 2018 Vintage Population Projections, 2010-2015 Migration Scenario

The logo for Puro 95.6, featuring the text "puro 95.6" in a stylized, white, flame-like font on a dark red rectangular background.

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There is an emerging  
demographic narrative...  
which is why  
**Region One**  
is leading the way for Texas!

# Population Change, 2020-2023, RGV & South Texas



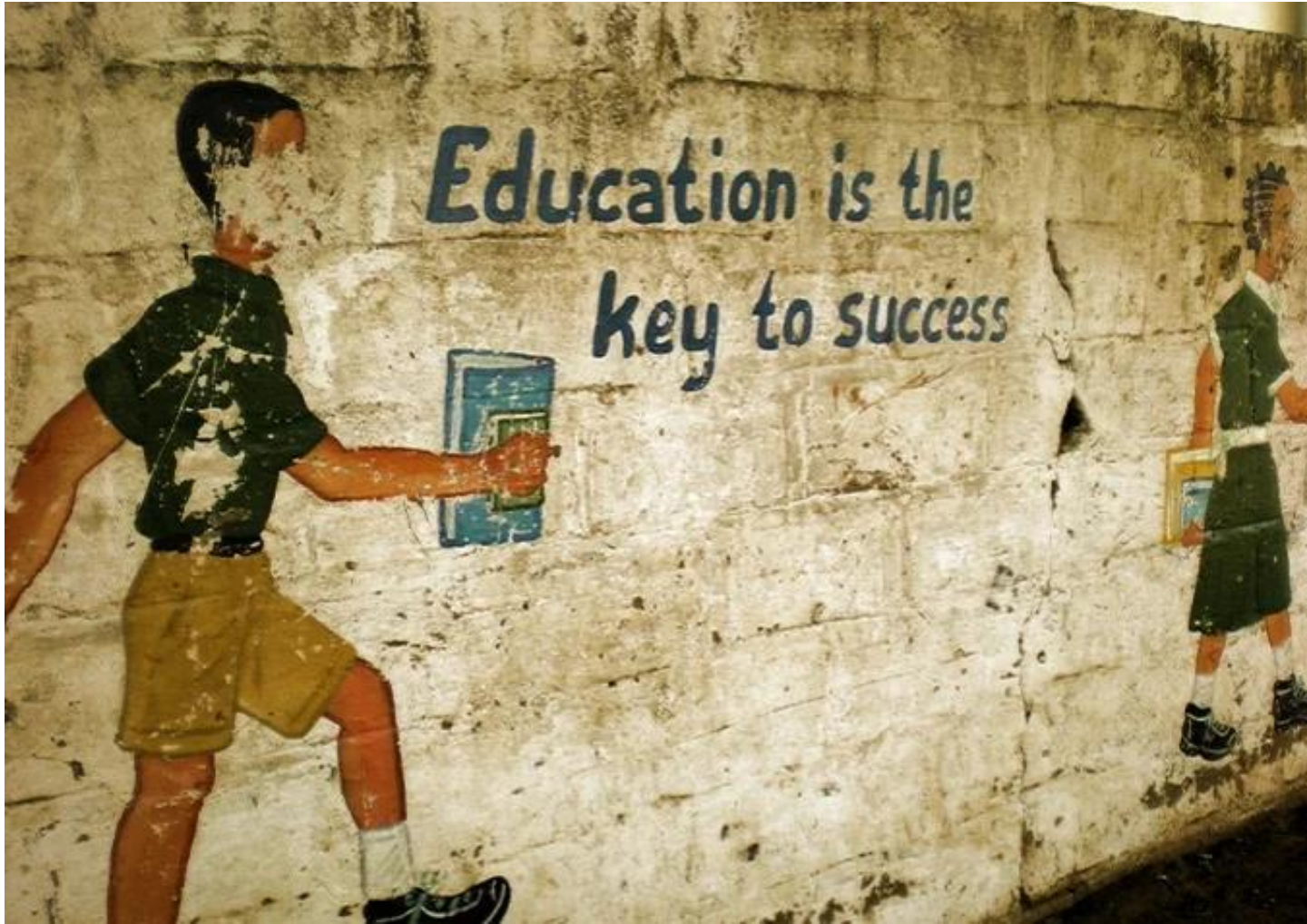
# Region One Enrollment Trends (1997-2024)

Region One Student Enrollment	#	% change
1997-98	284,614	
2003-04	341,813	20.1%
2013-14	422,509	23.6%
2023-24	438,318	3.7%

Source: Texas Demographic Center, Vintage 2023 Population Estimates. U. S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census..

Source: TEA Enrollment in Public Schools, 1998. 2005, 2014, 2024; not including public charter school enrollment

**About 1 in 10**  
public school students in Texas is enrolled in a Region One school district (or charter)

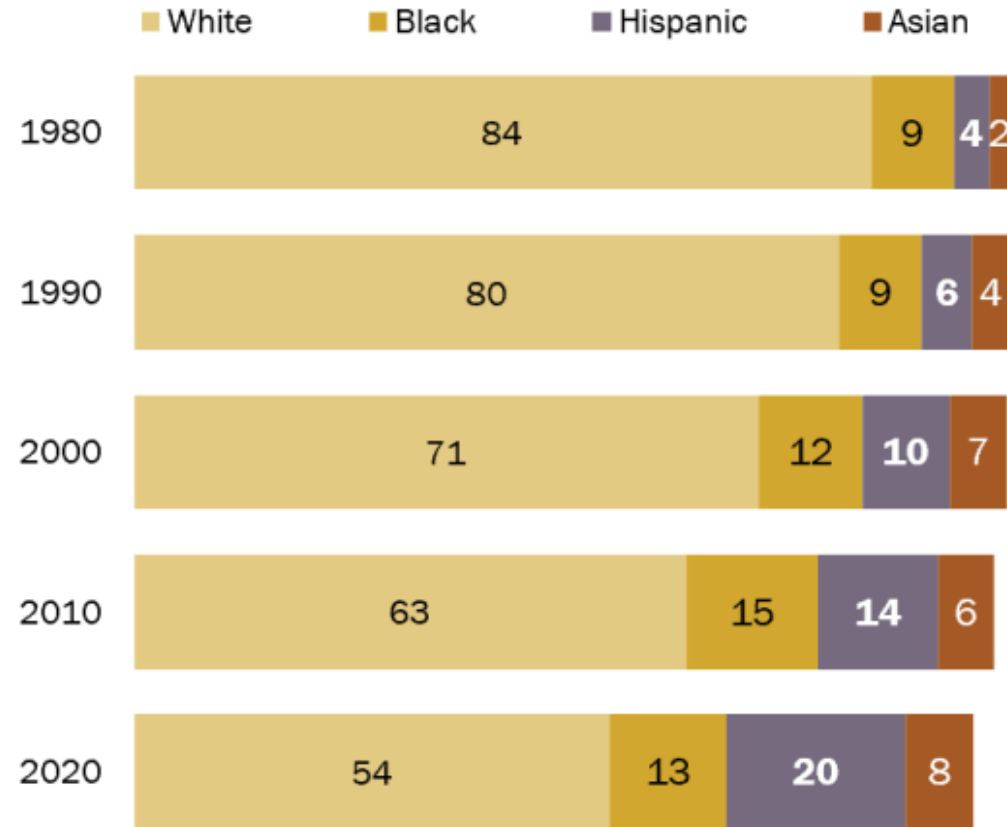


What about  
the Higher  
Education  
Narrative for  
our Students?



## Hispanics now make up one-in-five students enrolled at postsecondary institutions in the U.S.

*% of enrolled students at U.S. higher education institutions who are ...*

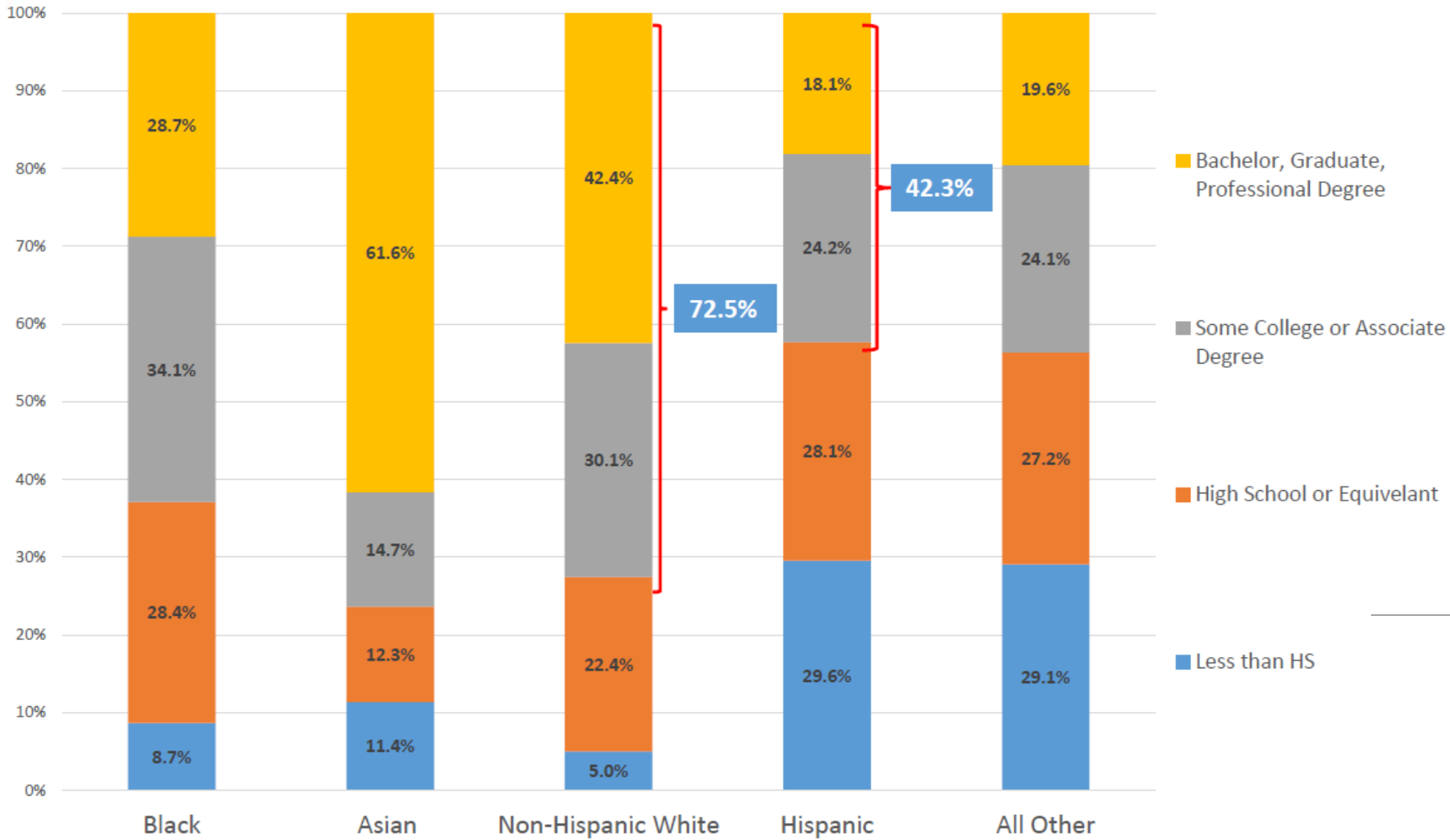


Note: Enrollment includes students of all ages. Asians include Pacific Islanders. Other races (not shown) include American Indian/Alaska Native and students with two or more races. White, Black and Asian students are single-race and not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Nonresident students are not included in this analysis.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

College-going  
Rates are Up  
(1980 - 2020)



# TEXAS: Educational Attainment by Racial/Ethnic Group (25+)

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS  
BUREAU, AMERICAN  
COMMUNITY SURVEY, 2021

# 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Cohort Data by ESC, 2013 – 2024

Region	8th Graders	HS Graduate	Enrolled in HE (in state/out of state)	Earned HE degree/cert in TX	Earned Bachelor's degree
<b>State (2013-2024)</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>18%</b>
Female	100%	84%	67%	30%	22%
Male	100%	80%	55%	20%	14%
<b>Edinburg (Region 1)</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>18%</b>
Houston (4)	100%	80%	64%	25%	19%
Richardson (Region 10)	100%	81%	62%	24%	18%
Ft. Worth (Region 11)	100%	81%	63%	25%	20%
Austin (Region 13)	100%	82%	62%	26%	23%
El Paso (Region 19)	100%	77%	57%	25%	17%
San Antonio (Region 20)	100%	79%	63%	22%	15%

## ✓ Strengths:

- High **high school graduation rate**
  - 85%—above state average
- Strong **HE credential completion rate** (26%).
- On par with the state for **postsecondary enrollment** and **bachelor's degree attainment**.

## 📌 Areas for Growth:

- **Improve bachelor's degree completion** by ensuring students persist beyond two-year credentials.
- **Address gender gaps**, particularly male enrollment and degree completion.
- **Boost postsecondary enrollment** beyond 61% by expanding dual credit, college advising, and financial aid support.

# JUNTOS PODEMOS MÁS

## 2023 EXPANDED SCORECARD



**RGV FOCUS**  
a COLLABORATION with EDUCATE TEXAS

RGV FOCUS SCORECARD	Kindergarten Ready	STAAR 3rd Grade Reading	STAAR 8th Grade Mathematics	4-Year High School Graduation Rate	FAFSA Completion	College-Ready Graduates	AP/Dual Credit Completion	Higher Education Immediate Enrollment Rate	Public Higher Education Graduation Rate		Higher Education Graduates Employed or Enrolled	
									2-year	4-year	2-year	4-year
2022-2023	42%	47%	44%	94%	77%	42%	52%	53%	28%	35%	89%	80%
2011-2012 Baseline	-	31%	31%	87%	59%	-	32%	56%	17%	-	92%	78%
Difference from Baseline	-	▲ 16%	▲ 13%	▲ 7%	▲ 18%	-	▲ 20%	▼ 3%	▲ 11%	-	-	-

RIO GRANDE VALLEY/ TEXAS COMPARISON	Kindergarten Ready	STAAR 3rd Grade Reading	STAAR 8th Grade Mathematics	4-Year High School Graduation Rate	FAFSA Completion	College-Ready Graduates	AP/Dual Credit Completion	Higher Education Immediate Enrollment Rate	Public Higher Education Graduation Rate		Higher Education Graduates Employed or Enrolled	
									2-year	4-year	2-year	4-year
RGV 2022-2023	42%	47%	44%	94%	77%	42%	52%	53%	28%	35%	89%	80%
Texas	49%	48%	44%	90%	68%	42%	44%	47%	28%	45%	88%	75%
Matches or Exceeds State			★	★	★	★	★	★	★		★	★

Increases, decreases or differences described with percent signs indicate percentage point changes rather than percent change based on the original level.

\* The information presented in this scorecard is the last reported data. Visit our website below for information on dates used for this year's scorecard data.

\* Due to the consolidation of 4-year institutions of higher education in the RGV, a 4-year standard baseline is not applicable.



# Region One is Defying the Odds!

## What we are learning through our research

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Region One School Districts have built and sustained a strong college-going culture



This region has given rise to transformative school models: ECHS, T-STEM, P-TECH, etc.



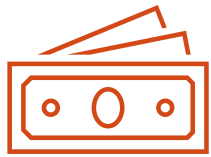
Competition with public charters is driving (or catalyzing) innovation



Growth of Higher Ed :  
UT-RGV, TAMU-RGV,  
TAMU, STC, TSTC, TSC,  
Laredo College, Med  
School, and more to  
come!

# Region One is Defying the Odds! BUT, Challenges Remain

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Financial Challenges  
persist



Push/Pull of the  
Border Region



Brain Drain; workforce  
opportunities are not  
plentiful across all  
industries



Still need to build  
post-baccalaureate,  
graduate, and  
professional programs

# What else do we know from research about factors that promote college student Success?

First-gen status;  
undocumented status

Financial aid literacy

Work during college  
(part-time to full-  
time)

Challenges with  
transition to college

Academic  
preparation/  
integration

“College Knowledge”

Standardized tests  
(i.e., SAT and ACT)

Year to year retention

More likely to enroll  
part-time; attend 2-  
year institutions

More likely to enroll  
in college closer to  
home

Higher expectations  
and pressure from  
their families to do  
well

Responsibilities to  
their families

Campus Climate &  
Belonging

# In a VUCA world, what can we do to ensure success for ALL Students in Region One?

Keep pace with the changing demographic, educational, and political landscape

Understand the research; evidence-based best practices

Better-defined pathways into postsecondary and career/workforce

Our work for students must be intentional, data-driven, and future-focused

We must prepare all students for success in an **evolving education and workforce landscape**

Keep building a college-going culture in Region One



# Sessions to seek out in the next two days



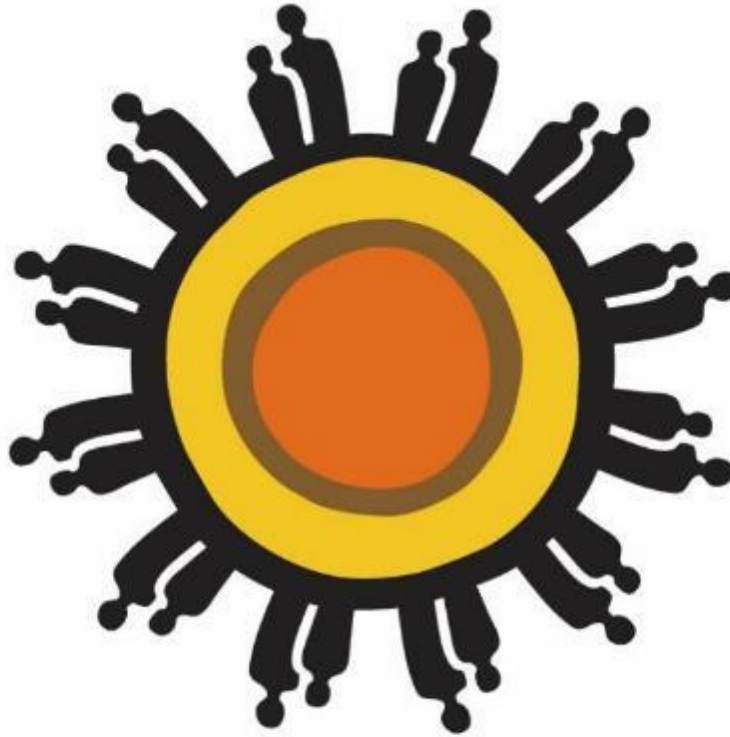
- 1. Enhance College & Career Readiness (CCR) Initiatives**
  - ✓ Scaling CCRSM programs & understanding CCMR indicators
  - ✓ Maximizing TSI, SAT, and ACT success strategies
- 2. Expand Access & Equity for Postsecondary Success**
  - ✓ Eliminating barriers to higher education
  - ✓ Increasing Dual Credit, AP, and ECHS pathways
- 3. Strengthen Career Pathways & Workforce Alignment**
  - ✓ Stronger CTE pathways and emerging career fields
  - ✓ Soft skills, financial literacy, & work-based learning
- 4. Leverage Innovation in Education & Advising**
  - ✓ AI, AR, and VR for career exploration
  - ✓ Effective advising frameworks & student success tracking

# So, now what?

- We must keep focused
- We must BEAR WITNESS!
- Remain committed to CCMR goals
- Draw strength from the bright spot that is Region One!



# Finally...from Research to Action

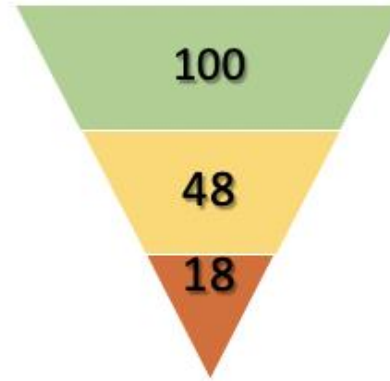


Project **MALES**

Mentoring to Achieve Latino Educational Success

# The Texas Context

All Male 8<sup>th</sup> Graders (2009)

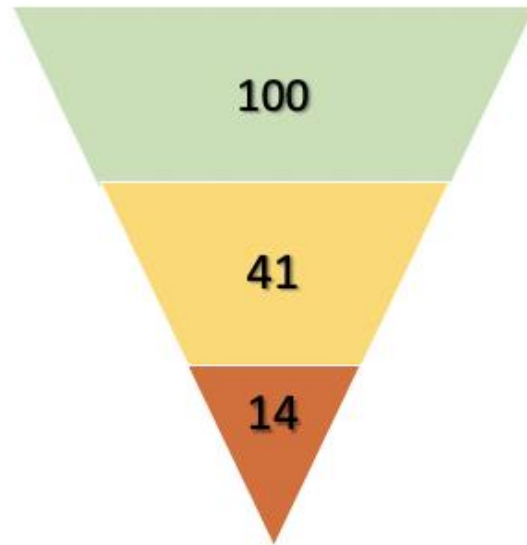


Starting cohort

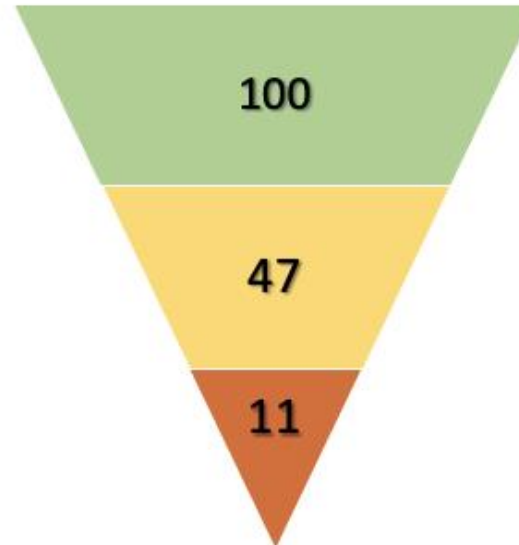
Enrolled in postsecondary ed.  
within 11 years

Earned a postsecondary education  
credential within 11 years

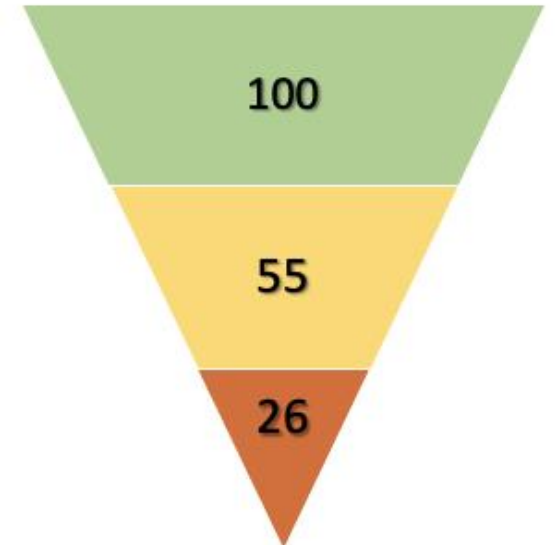
Latino Male 8<sup>th</sup> Graders  
(2009)



Black Male 8<sup>th</sup> Graders  
(2009)



White Male 8<sup>th</sup> Graders  
(2009)





# What is Happening to our Boys?



# Project MALES Overview

- Founded in 2010
- Research focused Evidence-based practices
- Multi-sector institutional partners across the State of Texas
- Thought Partners including philanthropic and community-based organizations
- Based in the College of Education @ UT Austin

## Texas Education Research Consortium

- School district, community college, and university partners
- Affiliated community partners
- Services, Tools & Activities
- Research Institutes

## Research Institute

- Ongoing research projects
- Webinars
- Faculty/Research Affiliates
- Research Briefs
- Published Articles

## Student Mentoring Program

- Asset-based, near-peer mentoring philosophy
- Middle and High School male students
- UT Student Mentors
- K-12 School Partners



# SAVE THE DATE!

## 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Texas Student Leadership Summit

### August 7-8, 2025 @ UT-Austin

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THE TEXAS STUDENT LEADERSHIP SUMMIT (THE SUMMIT) BRINGS OVER 400 STUDENT LEADERS AND PROFESSIONALS, REPRESENTING SCHOOL DISTRICTS, COMMUNITY COLLEGES, AND UNIVERSITIES FROM ACROSS THE STATE



THE SUMMIT ENGAGES STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF ON A VARIETY OF TOPICS RELATED TO COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS, IDENTITY, BROTHERHOOD/SISTERHOOD, HEALTH AND WELLNESS AND MORE

**August 7-8, 2025**

**UT AUSTIN CAMPUS  
AUSTIN, TX**

**FEATURED SPEAKERS**

**ERNESTO MEJIA** **DR. CÉSAR CRUZ** **SAUL PAUL**

**KEYNOTE & PLENARY SPEAKERS, WORKSHOPS, NETWORKING, AND CAREER/COLLEGE FAIR**

**BROTHERHOOD - LEADERSHIP - IDENTITY - COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS - HEALTH & WELLNESS**



# THANK YOU!

## Q&A

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