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Proposed Project:
Rio Grande Valley Linking Economic and Academic Development
(RGV LEAD)

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Abstract

RGV LEAD would like the researchers at the Texas ERC to explore the outcomes of their private-sector education partnership. The proposed study looks at the progress of RGV LEAD in its goal of fostering postsecondary enrollment and completion. It proposes to track Tech Prep students through high school and into higher education considering enrollment, persistence, and degree completion (certificates as well as Associate's and Bachelor's degrees). Additionally it will explore what fields or jobs Tech Prep students enter once they complete high school and/or higher education. By comparing Tech Prep students against other students from the Rio Grande Valley area and the state as a whole, the study will explore the ways in which Tech Prep courses and clusters, bolstered by RGV LEAD partnerships and practices, impact students' choices and outcomes in achieving job skills and credentials.

Reader's Guide

RGV LEAD is an intermediary organization which works to partner public education service providers, institutions of higher education, and local businesses in the south of Texas. Its mission is to leverage regional resources to facilitate college and career focused learning opportunities for students, preparing individuals for educated, skilled positions in today's workforce. RGV LEAD specifically works with Tech Prep students and programs; these include high school courses and course clusters matching certain career trajectories defined by state and federal Departments of Education. The RGV LEAD partnership includes 32 local school districts, one charter school network, 5 regional universities and community colleges, the K-12 Education Service Center (ESC), and a number of business and professional organizations representing the economic needs of the Texas Valley area. The collaborative provides resources and programming to high schools, hosts scholarships for graduating students, and creates opportunities for mentoring and early exposure in career pathways.

Research Questions

RGV LEAD has identified a set of performance metrics, or outcomes, to be used to evaluate the impact of its partnership and programming in the Valley region of Texas. The intent of all performance metrics is to provide the Board with objective measures that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and to make necessary adjustments as the organization moves forward toward accomplishment of its mission. The following are the goals:

- 1) Increase the number and percentage of high school students, including Tech Prep and other career-focused students, who graduate and transition into higher education and/or the workforce.
- 2) Increase the number and percentage of college and university students, including Tech Prep and other career-focused students, who earn certificates, degrees and/or industry- or state-recognized licenses or certifications and transition into the workforce.

Data Elements from ERC Database

This project will require the following variables from ERC data for the years 2009-2010; 2010-2011; 2011-2012; 2012-2013, 2013-2014; 2014-2015; 2015-2016:

TEA – Enrollment

TEA – Attendance

TEA – Course completion

TEA – Assessment

THECB – Student Enrollment Report (CBM001)

THECB – TASP/TSI Report (CBM002)

THECB – CTC Graduation Report (CBM009)

THECB – Students in Continuing Education Courses Report (CBM00A)

THECB – Admissions Report (CBM00B)

TWC – UI Wage data

(Specific variables for each data set and descriptions of those variables may be found of pages 9 and 11 of the full proposal.)

Research Methods

Using information from high school data as far back as 2009, researchers will create comparison groups of Tech Prep students according to detailed data coding decisions. Tech Prep students will then be compared to other students in the same area as well as students in the entire state on a number of outcomes which span from progress through high school, higher education, and

workforce entry. Outcomes include attendance, achievement, and graduation in high school; they also include higher education enrollment, persistence, the need for developmental education, and degree/certificate completion. Lastly outcomes from workforce data include those who receive licensure in a field or who are placed in certain jobs. All outcomes will be assessed in their relation to Tech Prep courses/clusters and RGV goals. Analysis for the data will include descriptive information at all levels as well as regression modeling of outcomes. *(A full description of the project methodology may be found in the proposal on pages 4-9; these pages cover in-depth the project goals, performance metrics and definitions to be used, sampling procedures, data definitions and coding decisions, and a list of variables/years of data needed.)*

Researcher's Qualifications

RGV LEAD has contracted with researchers at the Texas ERC to conduct an evaluation of their programming (University of Texas Contract No. 14156). As such, a number of highly qualified researchers experienced working with quantitative data sets, and ERC data in particular, will be on hand for analysis. Dr. Celeste Alexander will supervise and lead the research team. She will also employ qualified graduate researchers from relevant doctoral programs at The University of Texas at Austin to aid in the study.

Benefit to Texas

The utilization of these data sets, combined together through common identifiers and a longitudinal structure, provides an ideal setting to utilize the full capacity of a wide spectrum State Longitudinal Data System such as the ERC as well as the study of long term educational outcomes. This study has been created by Texas education and business partners interested in growing and refining their practices to create a better educated workforce. Contributions to the academic realm include the expansion of research connecting high school course content in technical and vocational education to graduation outcomes. More importantly, this research will provide useful and meaningful information as to the long-term impacts of high school courses and course clusters on higher education preparation as well as workforce development and placement.

These findings will help inform not only the Rio Grande Valley region in which this effort is taking place, but the whole of Texas and other areas. Benefits will include a detailed program evaluation of efforts to foster better high school and higher education outcomes which may be used for further scale efforts. Further, implications for practice and policy in educational reform and in related economic planning will be substantial. *(For a more in-depth look at the reasoning behind the project and the current and potential policy responses to the project, please see the full report on pages 1-4.)*

Related Policy

The complexity of outcomes is related to three levels—high school, higher education, and workforce—allowing for a multitude of conversations and policy considerations to take place that better align education with the changing economic needs and demographic changes of the state. There will be implications at the practitioner level in refining high school curricula and programming as well as policy recommendations for both higher education and workforce outreach.

Dissemination Strategy

The research team for RGV LEAD will work to complete a policy brief with its findings that discusses the implications of long term student outcomes in terms of changes to potential legislative policy in aligning workforce demands and higher education outreach. In addition, analysis will be shared with the RGV LEAD consortium as well as participating high schools and higher education settings in an effort to modify and change curricular practices. Broader academic connections including presentations at conferences and potential for peer review journal submission will be conducted by the ERC researchers in coordination with the RGV LEAD group when sufficient results have been obtained.

Financial Resources

This study is a funded, four year project with RGV LEAD to compile data and analysis for evaluation. Monetary funding for the project for the term includes stipends for researchers as well as costs for data access and security/technology upkeep over the entirety of the project. Should the partnership be fruitful, RGV LEAD would like the possibility to continue analysis with existing and new Tech Prep cohorts with either a new or extended data agreement.

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