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TEXAS SCHOOLS THAT SERVE HISPANIC AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

3/25/99 On February 17, six major Texas universities told the Texas Senate Finance Committee that the Texas public education system is shockingly failing minority populations, primarily Hispanic and African American. Their research revealed that only 6.3 percent of Hispanic 18 year olds were prepared for college, judging by their SAT scores, and only 50% even graduate from high school. That said—it is indeed a sad state of affairs. But in a look at other models of public education proves that minority children need not be poorly served:

KIPP Inc., a charter school in Houston, serves at-risk Hispanic and African American students. Their TASS scores easily measure the students' academic achievement. KIPP students attend school six days a week and during the summer. The results are clear: These students have had the best TASS scores in Houston for three years in a row. The school's commitment to help these 5-8th grade students break the cycle of poverty around them is paying off.

Since Texas passed the charter school law in 1995, 114 charter schools have opened and an additional 66 are ready to open in Fall 1999. A significant number of these charter schools serve at-risk and dropout students including minorities. The picture painted by the university officials is born out by the high number of new charters opening whose mission it is to educate the remedial students who were failed by the public school system.

National educational institutions such as La Raza, Aspira, and LULAC are tackling education reform through the vehicle of charter schools. Many local groups also consider charters a viable option for their children like Mexican American Unity Counsel which sponsors two charters, and the Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans which also sponsors charters. Additionally the Tehana Center sponsors The Raul Yzaguirre School for Success in Houston which seeks to address the issue of failing minorities with an emphasis on reading but also by augmenting the daily curriculum with after-school programs and community mentoring.

Blessed Sacrament Charter School in Houston is another charter school that serves 100% at risk students. Many have dropped out of traditional public schools or have substance abuse issues to address. Blessed Sacrament's mission is to intervene in these at risk students' lives and educate them both academically and socially. Many of their students serve in the military or attend a junior or technical college after graduating from the school.

Waco Charter School was chartered by a Community Action Agency in an enterprise district of Waco. The school serves K-4th graders and 97% of the students receive free or reduced lunches through federal programs. The school tests the students three times a year to chart their progress.

In Texas unlike other states that have not passed a charter law, there are options available to minority children to level the playing field of education. These individual and group efforts to address failing academic scores, dropout rates and an ill served at risk community are nothing short of Herculean and deserve their day in the sun and the continued attention of Texas lawmakers.

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The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization founded in 1993 to provide support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools. For further information on CER, charter schools and other issues relating to education reform, please call (202) 822-9000. Please visit our website at www.edreform.com.