
College Readiness in the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas Service Area

Year 4 Update - 2014

The Institute for Urban Policy Research
At The University of Texas at Dallas



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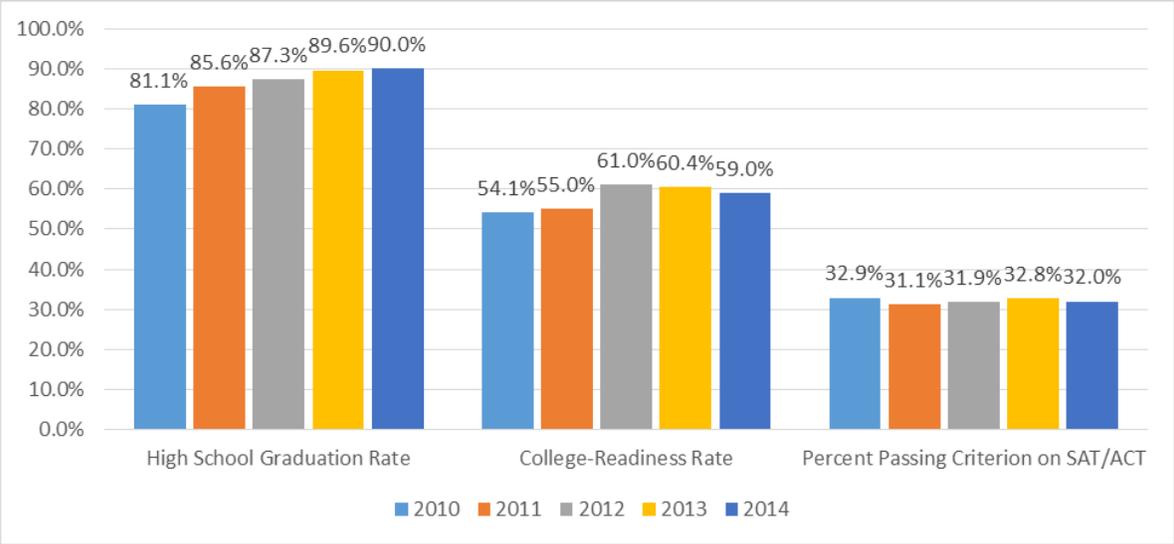
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Introduction

This report presents the Institute for Urban Policy Research’s (IUPR’s) analysis of progress in community-wide education goals set by the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas. It uses publicly available data on education to produce estimates for Collin, Dallas, southern Denton and Rockwall Counties. This report will refer to this area collectively as the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas service area.

The indicators analyzed include college-readiness rate, percent at or above criteria on the SAT/ACT tests, and graduation rate. Each indicator is further divided into three racial or ethnic sub-categories: White, Hispanic and African-American. The cross-racial examination reveals disparities in attaining crucial education goals. Figure 1 summarizes the education outcome indicators for the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas service area, presenting data from 2010 through 2014.

Figure 1. Education Outcome Indicators, 2010 –2014, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas Service Area.



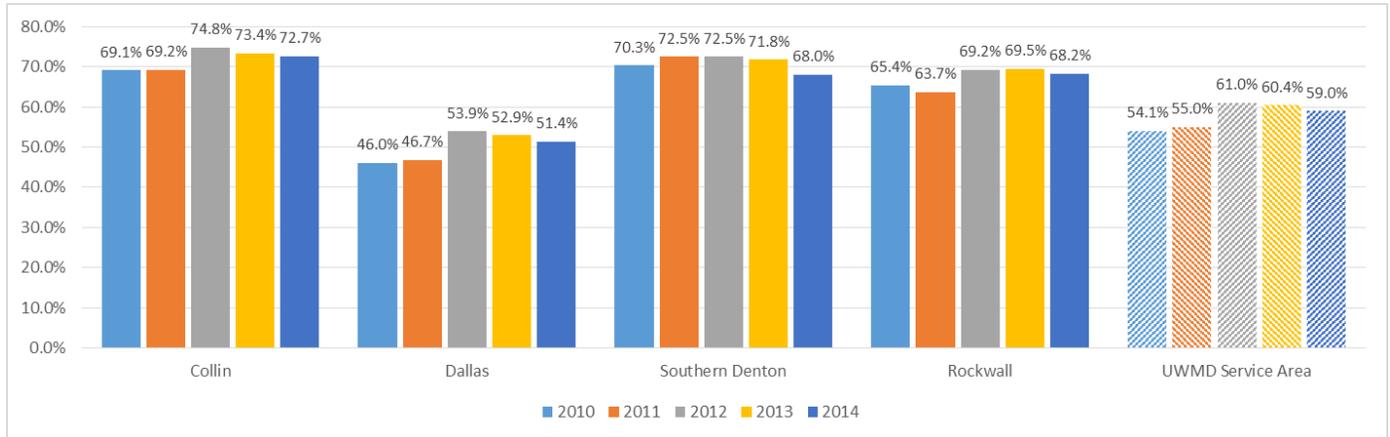
College Readiness

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) defines a student as college ready if he or she meets or exceeds the college-readiness criteria in (a) English/language arts and mathematics on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) or the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR); (b) critical reading and mathematics on the SAT; or (c) English or mathematics on the American College Test (ACT). For the SAT, the criteria includes a score of 500 or higher in critical reading or math and a 1070 combined score; for the ACT, the criteria is 19 or higher in English or math and a combined score of 23. The TEA’s Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) and Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR)

group together indicators of college readiness to provide summaries of outcomes of disparate indicators.

Figure 2 uses AEIS and TAPR data to examine college-ready status based on the criteria outlined above for both math and reading for the years 2010 to 2014 in counties within the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas service area. Analysis indicates that 59% of high school graduates in the class of 2014 were college ready by TEA standards, down from 60.4% the previous year and 61.0% in 2012.

Figure 2. College-Ready Graduates, 2010–2014, by County, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas Service Area.



All counties witnessed a slight drop in college-readiness rates from 2013 to 2014. One possible explanation for the decline in college readiness is the gradual replacement of the TAKS test with the STAAR, which is significantly more rigorous than its predecessor. The 2010–2011 academic year was the final year in which the TEA held students to TAKS-based accountability standards; beginning in the 2011–2012 school year, students transitioned to the STAAR-based testing system, which was not implemented for all grades until the 2015–2016 academic year.

Despite the differences across counties, some disparity exists among the suburban counties, which includes Collin, Denton and Rockwall Counties, where college-readiness rates range from 68% to 73% for the class of 2014. Dallas County, on the other hand, has a significantly lower rate of college-readiness, with only half of the total high school graduates from the class of 2014 categorized as college-ready.

Figure 3 examines college readiness across a five-year period to determine the extent to which the academic achievement gap has increased, decreased or stayed the same among White, Hispanic and African-American graduates. The college-readiness rates for White graduates steadily rose over the five-year period, reaching 84.1% in 2014. This is in contrast to a much lower college-readiness rate for Hispanic and African-American minorities. In 2014, only 48.9% Hispanic and 40.9% African-American graduates were categorized as college ready.

Figure 3. College-Ready Graduates, 2010–2014, by Race or Ethnicity, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas Service Area.

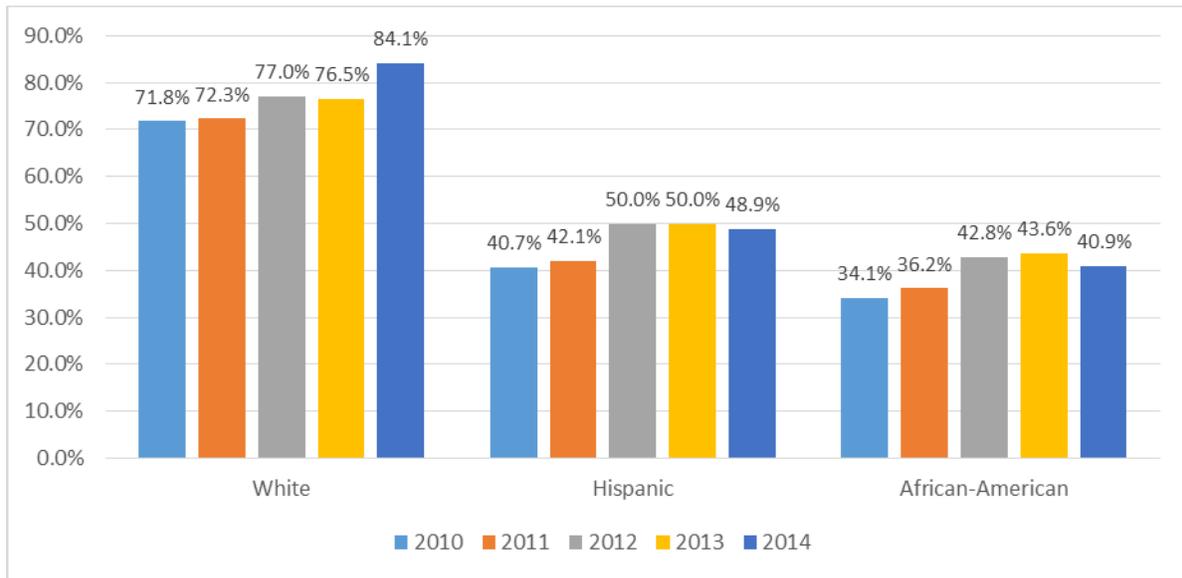
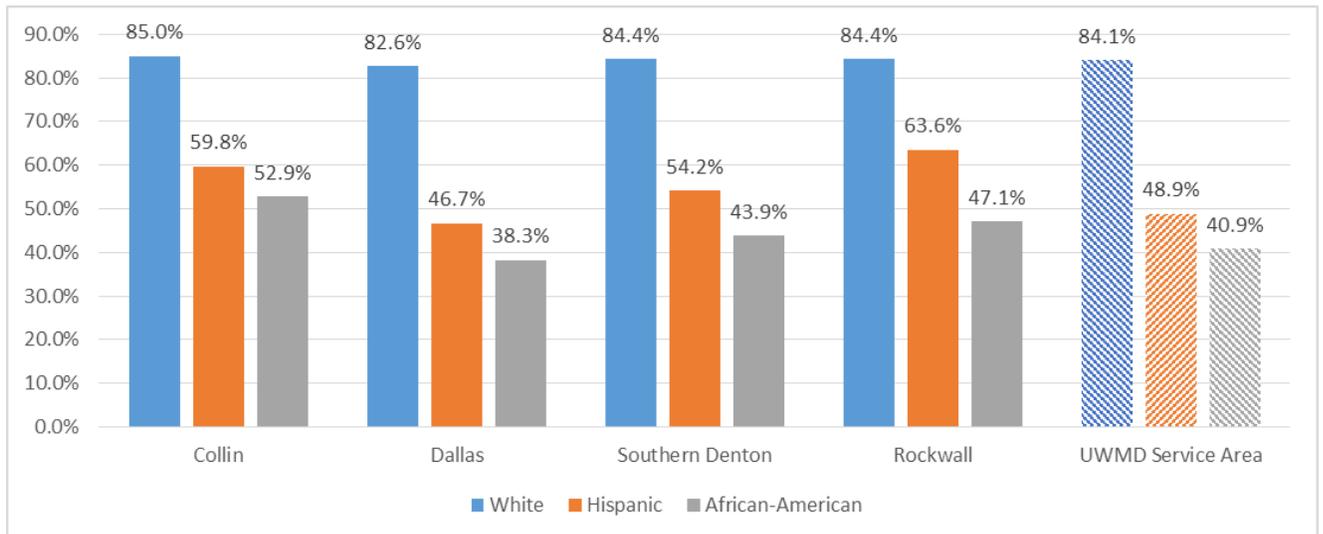


Figure 4 examines college readiness according to county and race. The racial disparities examined in Figure 3 are persistent in each county in the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas service area. Collin County had the highest rate of college readiness among White students in 2014. For Hispanic and African-American graduates, the highest college-readiness rates occurred in Rockwall and Collin Counties, respectively. On the other hand, Dallas County had the lowest rate of college readiness in all three ethnic categories.

Figure 4. College-Ready Graduates, 2014, by County and Ethnicity, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas Service Area.



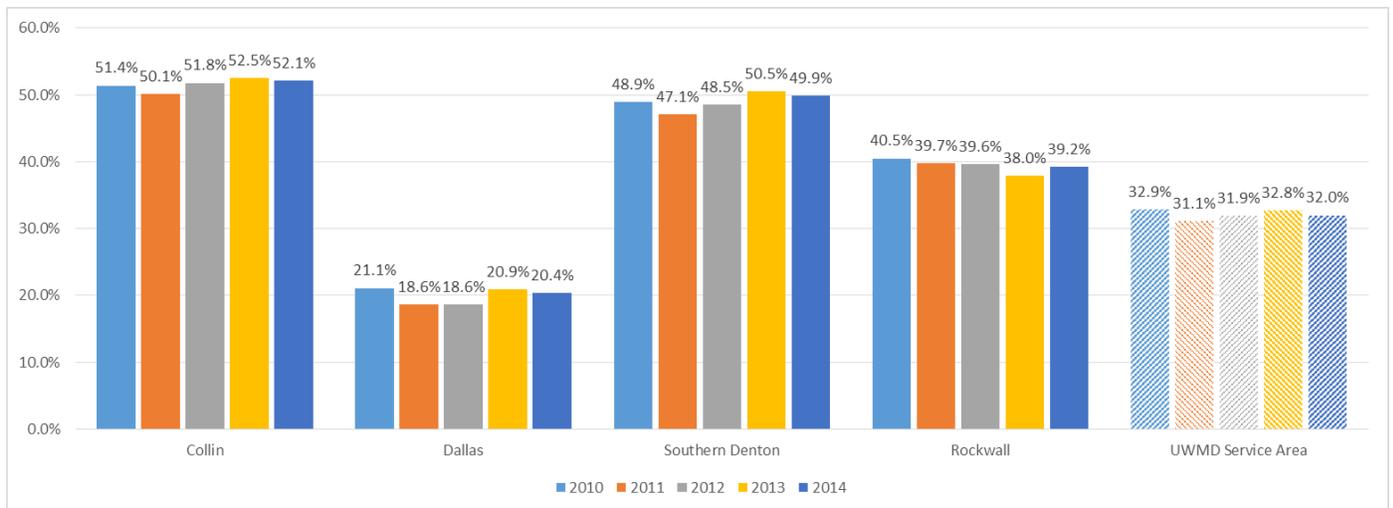
SAT and ACT Scores

While the TEA’s measure of college readiness is an unstable reflection of student preparedness due to changing standardized tests and achievement requirements, SAT and ACT test scores provide a more reliable assessment of the skills and knowledge students need to be successful in postsecondary

education. SAT and ACT tests are both nationally normed and are required by most colleges and universities during the admissions process.

The TEA reports performance on the SAT/ACT tests as a percentage of test takers who scored at or above certain criteria on at least one of the tests. The criterion for the SAT is a combined score of 1110 on the mathematics and critical reading sections, and the criterion for the ACT is a score of 24 or higher. According to IUPR’s analysis of TAPR, 32.0% of graduates who took the SAT, ACT, or both tests scored at or above criterion on at least one of the two tests. This is slightly below the performance of the class of 2013, in which 32.8% passed the criterion, and nearly even with the performance of the class of 2012, in which 31.9% passed. Overall, the proportion of test-takers who have passed the criterion has remained largely stable over the past five years, fluctuating between a minimum of 31.1% in 2011 and a maximum of 32.9% in 2010.

Figure 5. Percent of SAT/ACT Test-Takers Scoring at or Above Criteria, 2010–2014, by County, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas Service Area.



Comparing Figures 2 and 5, the percentage of graduates meeting the minimum SAT/ACT criteria has been relatively more stable than college readiness. For example, from 2010 to 2014, the college-readiness rate of the entire service area changed by 5%, whereas the rate of SAT/ACT criteria achievement changed by 0.1% only. This demonstrates that SAT/ACT test scores are more stable indicators than college readiness. The changing standards of college-readiness computation due to the transition from the TAKS to STAAR testing system introduce unreliability, which weakens comparability across years. The curricula of SAT and ACT tests, on the other hand, have been largely unchanged and can be compared with greater reliability.

Figure 6. Percent of SAT/ACT Test-Takers Scoring At or Above Criteria, 2014, by County and Ethnicity, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas Service Area.

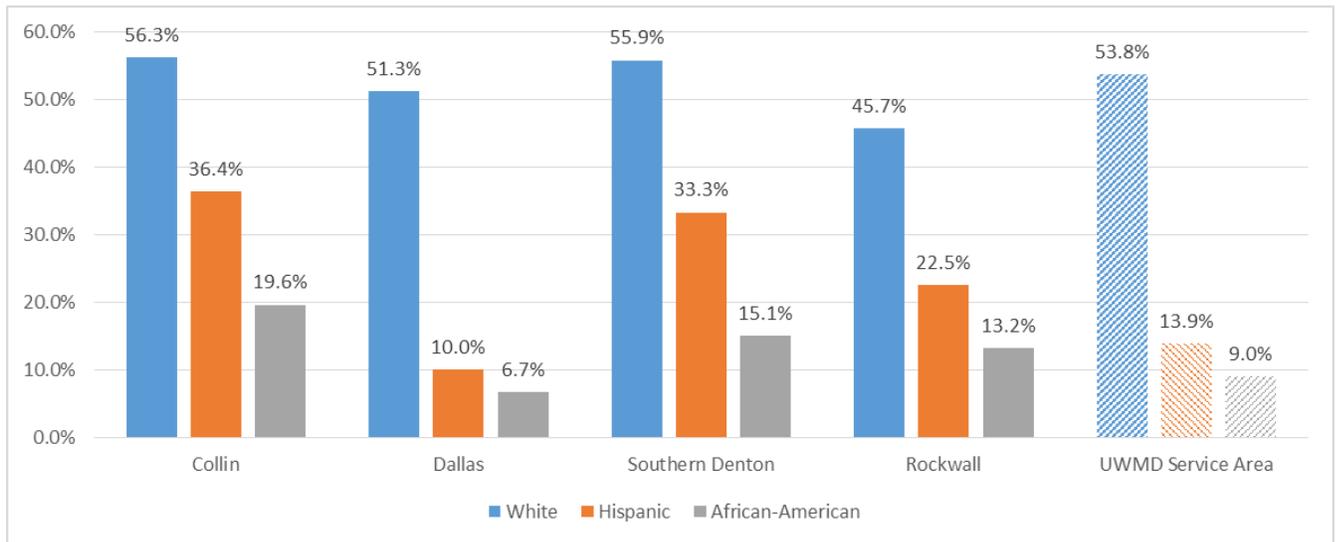


Figure 6 indicates the percentage of graduates scoring at or above criteria, according to county and ethnicity. Across all counties, White test takers had the highest passing rate, scoring 20% higher than their Hispanic counterparts and 30% higher than their African-American counterparts. Dallas County contained a 40% racial disparity between White students and minorities. Across the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas service area, racial disparity in passing rates between White and Hispanic graduates was 40%; between White and African-American graduates, it was 44.8%.

Figure 7. Percent of High School Graduates Taking SAT or ACT, 2014, by County and Ethnicity, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas Service Area.

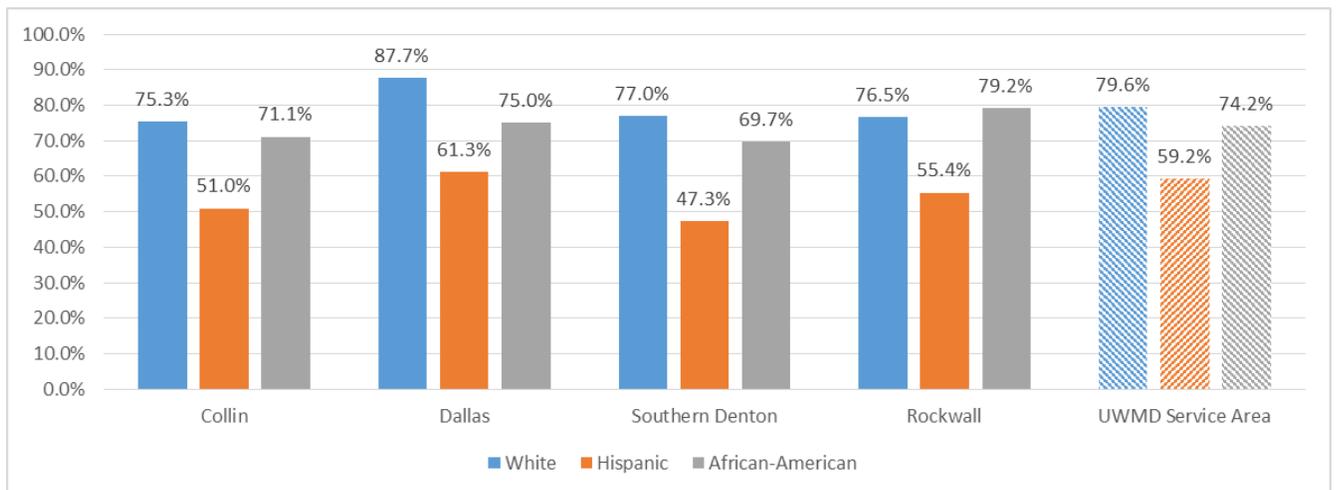
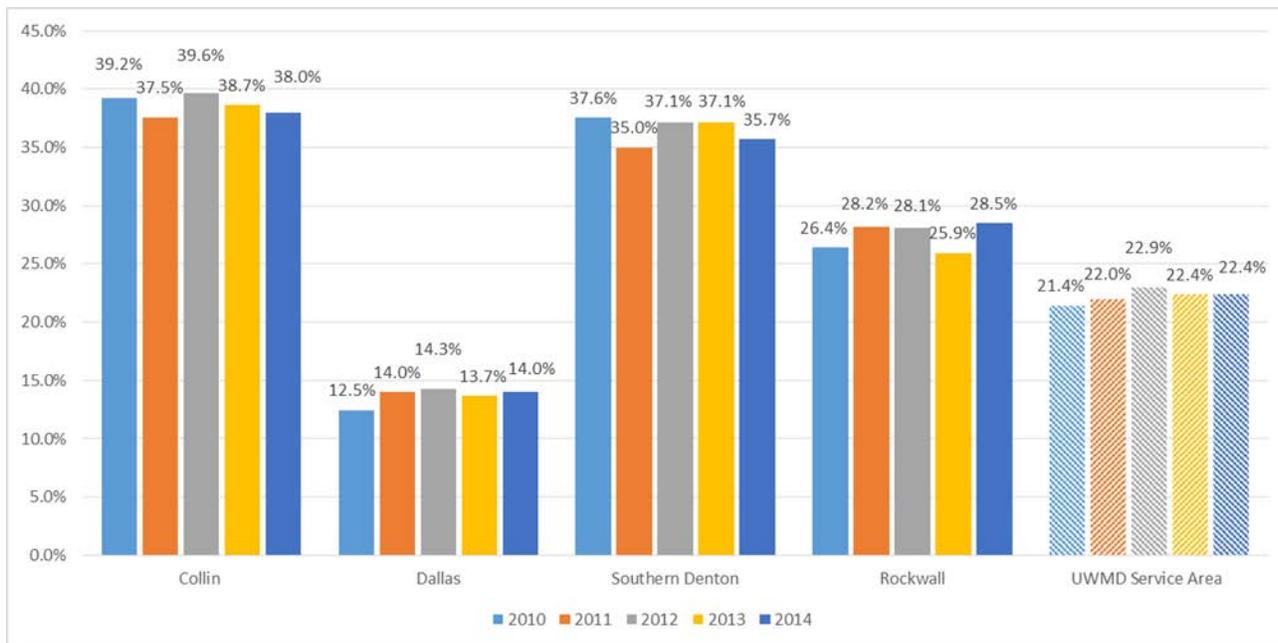


Figure 7 indicates the percentage of high school graduates taking the SAT or ACT, according to county and ethnicity. Across the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas service area, one in five White graduates do not get the opportunity to take either the SAT or ACT. The ratio is much higher among African-American and Hispanic graduates, of whom one in four and one in three, respectively, do not take either test. While there is considerably less disparity among White and African-American students when it comes to

taking either the SAT or ACT, the gap increases when comparing test performance. Figure 6 demonstrates that across the service area, a 40% gap in White and African-American student performance exists. The gap in White and Hispanic student performance is similarly wide. This demonstrates that a significant number of African-American and Hispanic students have the opportunity to take the test but are not adequately prepared to meet the passing criteria.

Figure 8. Percent of Graduates Scoring At or above criterion on the SAT or ACT tests, 2010 - 2014, by county, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas service area.¹



Like Figure 5, Figure 8 focuses solely on college entrance exams; however, instead of showing the proportion of test takers who scored at or above criteria, it shows the proportion of graduates. As a result, the numbers are lower than those reported in Figure 5. While 32% of SAT or ACT test-taking graduates of the class of 2014 in the service area scored at or above criteria, that number represents only 22.4% of all graduates for that year. The difference between these two numbers lies in the difference between the number of total graduates and the number of graduates taking one of the college entrance exams.

While Figures 5 and 8 demonstrate a more stable picture of college readiness than does Figure 2, care should be taken when considering college readiness only through the two College Board exams—the SAT and ACT. While they may more adequately or stably measure college readiness when compared to the STAAR, Figure 7 indicates that a fair number of students do not take these exams; those students, therefore, are left out of the calculation in Figure 5 and are assumed not to be college ready in Figure 8. This is important because it remains possible for some students who do not take one of these exams to attend college. For example, many two-year institutions do not require SAT or ACT scores, and some

¹ This indicator corresponds to “Percentage of High School Graduates College Ready” in the Commit! Scorecard.

four-year institutions eventually will accept these students as transfers without having taken either exam.

Graduation Rate

One important measure of college readiness is the graduation rate. TEA defines graduation rate as the percentage of students from a class of beginning ninth graders who earn high school diplomas by their anticipated graduation date or within four years of beginning ninth grade. The graduation rate is based on four years of longitudinal campus-level data. For example, the four-year longitudinal rate for the class of 2013 is the percentage of students who first attended ninth grade in 2009–2010 and graduated by August 31, 2013.

Figure 9. Graduation Rate, 2010–2014, by County, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas Service Area.

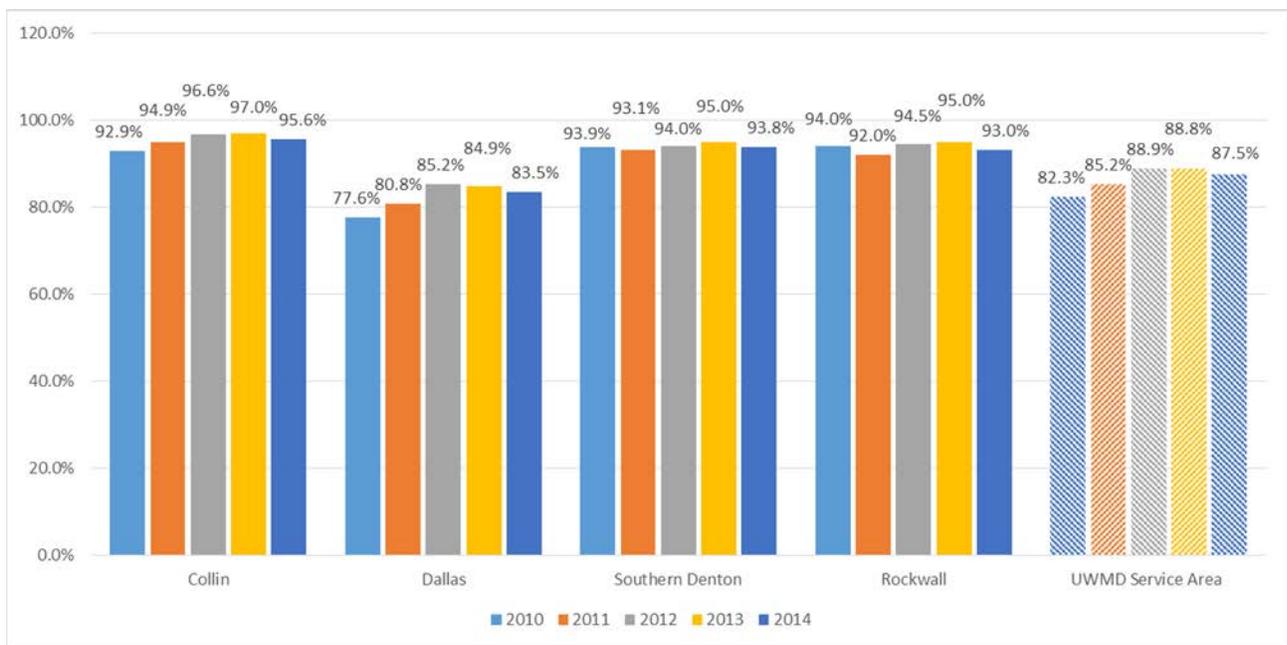
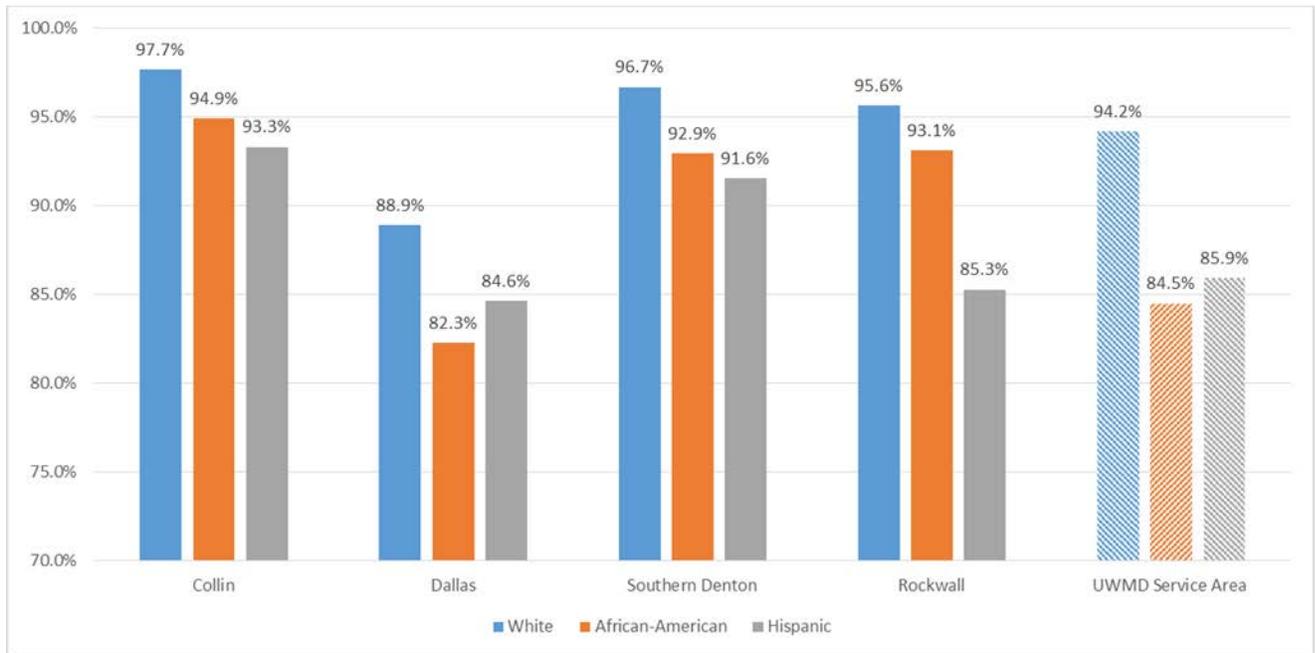


Figure 9 demonstrates four-year longitudinal graduation rates from 2010 to 2014 for counties in the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas service area. The overall graduation rate for the entire service area was 87.5% in 2014, down from 88.8% in 2013 and 88.9% in 2012. The overall graduation rose steadily from 2010 through 2013, but for the class of 2014, the graduation rate fell in every county in the service area.

Figure 10 demonstrates four-year longitudinal graduation rates for the class of 2014 according to race or ethnicity. There is a degree of comparability in graduation rates across ethnicities, in particular in the Collin and Denton Counties, where differences between White and African-American students are only 3 to 4 percentage points. The stark racial disparities prevalent in the earlier analysis of college readiness and SAT/ACT test scores are not similarly visible in case of graduation rates. But this does not suggest that such disparities do not exist. It is possible, however, that the comparability in graduation rates across racial or ethnic groups masks real deficiencies that impede students from all races and ethnicities to achieve post-secondary success.

Figure 10. Graduation rate, 2014, by county and race or ethnicity, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas service area.



Brief Overview of Methodology

The data used to compute indicators in this report derive from TEA’s Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) and TAPR databases. For all indicators and all years, IUPR utilized the Advanced TAPR data files; as a result, computations may vary from those calculated using TAPR data in Excel (rates only) files.

College readiness, as specified by TEA, is defined on page 2 of this report, ACT/SAT criteria are defined on page 5, and graduation rate is defined on page 7. In all cases, the naming convention of the data files provided by TEA specifies the numerators and denominators intended to be used in conjunction with one another for the calculation of each indicator.

Conclusion

The changing standards of measurement due to the ongoing transition from the TAKS to the STAAR testing system reduce comparability of the college-readiness indicator across years. While the college-readiness rate for the entire service area peaked in 2012, it declined thereafter as more students transitioned to the more difficult STAAR system. The percent of students scoring above criteria on either the SAT or ACT remained stable over the years, with minor fluctuations only; this is the case both when measured as a proportion of test-takers and as a proportion of graduates. Graduation rates increased 2010 to 2013, peaking at 88.8% in 2013 for the entire service area. Furthermore, analysis showed that racial disparities were more widespread in the measurement of college-readiness rates and percent at or above criteria on the SAT/ACT tests, compared to percent graduating within the anticipated time frame.



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