



La Frontera: student achievement in Texas border and nonborder districts



Institute of Education Sciences
U.S. Department of Education



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Summary

September 2007

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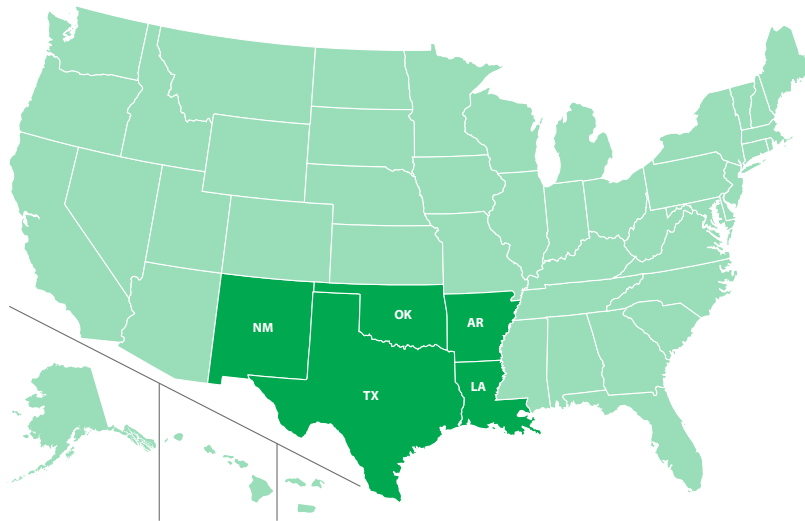
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Summary

La Frontera: student achievement in Texas border and nonborder districts

This study provides policymakers with a data-driven profile of the education environment along the U.S.–Mexico border in Texas, an area known as La Frontera.

The report contrasts the characteristics of border and nonborder districts in Texas from both a demographic and student achievement standpoint. The information in this report should also inform and strengthen border initiatives, such as those emphasized at the 2006 U.S.–Mexico Border Governors Conference.

The study sought to answer three questions. First, how do Texas border and nonborder districts differ in location and size, student demographics, teacher data, and community economics? Second, where significant differences exist between border and nonborder districts, what does the recent literature say about the relationship between these variables and student achievement? And third, how does student performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) differ between border and nonborder districts?

The results:

- District location and size.* A higher proportion of border districts are in urban or urban fringe settings. The La Frontera region also tends to have more schools per district and higher student enrollments than do the nonborder regions. Coupled with La Frontera's lower socioeconomic status, these factors may contribute to the region's lower achievement.
- Student demographics.* Border districts enroll higher proportions of Hispanic, limited English proficiency, and bilingual students. The La Frontera student population also has higher concentrations of at-risk and economically disadvantaged students and higher dropout rates at grades 7–12. These characteristics, along with the region's lower family socioeconomic status levels, may contribute to lower achievement.
- Teacher data.* Border districts employ higher proportions of Hispanic teachers, and the region's teaching force is slightly less experienced than the teaching forces of districts in other parts of the state. Although research suggests that a match between teacher and student ethnic background may bolster achievement, these positive effects may be offset by the relative inexperience of teachers in the border region.
- Community economic data.* An economic disparity is evident between Texas's border and nonborder regions. Border districts

tend to have much lower family socioeconomic status levels, a category that includes such factors as per capita and family income, educational attainment, and poverty level. Research suggests that districts with lower family socioeconomic status levels tend to have lower student achievement.

- *TAKS pass rates.* At each of the grade levels examined, students in the border region have lower pass rates on the reading or English language arts and mathematics TAKS than students in other regions. This is not surprising considering the unique regional characteristics summarized in this study and existing knowledge about factors related to student achievement. Academic achievement is a cumulative function of family, community, and school experiences. Research suggests that larger

districts with lower family socioeconomic status levels and less experienced teachers—the profile associated with the La Frontera region—tend to have lower student achievement.

Further insight could be gained by exploring border and nonborder associations for their explanatory power related to student outcomes. Data reduction techniques—such as factor analysis and principal components analysis—would be a logical choice for this next step. In addition, new primary data collection (perhaps through surveys or targeted interviews) could offer more nuanced insight on how the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has directly affected students, teachers, and principals along the border.

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