



# **Striving for Academic Excellence**

## ***A Profile of Seven Economically Disadvantaged School Districts***

**Conducted by  
McConnell Jones Lanier & Murphy, LLP  
for the  
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**INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL  
DISTRICT PROFILE**

**PHARR-SAN JUAN-ALAMO**

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# PHARR-SAN JUAN-ALAMO ISD

## BACKGROUND

The Pharr San Juan Alamo (PSJA) Independent School District (ISD) serves three cities/towns: Pharr, San Juan, and Alamo located in Hidalgo County in the Rio Grande Valley on the border with Mexico. The three cities/towns had a population of 87,649, according to the 2000 census. Pharr had a population of 46,660, San Juan had a population of 26,229, and Alamo had a population of 14,760. The Hispanic population in these communities ranged from 78.1 percent in Alamo, 90.6 percent in Pharr, and 95.1 percent in San Juan. The three cities/towns had a high percentage of population below the poverty line. In Pharr, about 31 percent of the families and 35.5 percent of the population were below the poverty line, according to the 2000 census. In San Juan, 32.7 percent of the families and 34.4 percent of the population were below the poverty line. In Alamo, 24.9 percent of the families and 32.4 percent of the population were below the poverty line in 2000.

PSJA ISD has 37 campuses—26 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, 3 high schools, and 3 alternative schools. On average, PSJA ISD elementary schools have 650 students, middle schools have 1,200 students, and high schools have 2,316 students. PSJA ISD is the 36th largest school district in Texas. In 2006–07, PSJA ISD was rated *Academically Acceptable*, with two of the district’s 37 campuses rated *Exemplary* and 14 rated *Recognized*, as shown in **Exhibit 9**. All schools rated *Recognized* or *Exemplary* are elementary

schools. In October 2007, *Texas Monthly Magazine* included nine PSJA ISD schools—all of them elementary schools—in its list of “Best In Texas.” Additionally, while not presented in **Exhibit 9**, in October 2007, the Texas Business and Education Coalition commended five PSJA ISD schools for academic excellence.

In 2006–07, PSJA ISD had 28,833 students as presented in **Exhibit 10**. The district’s student population has been growing. It grew 5.6 percent from 2004–05 and 14.5 percent in the last five years (2002–03). In 2007–08, the student population grew to 30,300 or 5.1 percent from 2006–07. As shown in **Exhibit 10**, nearly all students are Hispanic. The percentage of Hispanic students in PSJA ISD is more than twice the state average and about two percentage points higher than the Region 1 average. PSJA ISD also has a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students, 90 percent in 2006–07. Its percentage of economically disadvantaged students is about five percentage points higher than the Region 1 average but about 35 percentage points higher than the state average.

PSJA ISD has a large population of students identified as English Language Learners (ELL). In 2006–07, 11,942 or 41.4 percent of PSJA ISD’s 28,833 students were ELL. PSJA ISD has a higher percentage of ELL students than Region 1 (38.7 percent) and the state (16.0 percent), as shown in **Exhibit 11**.

## EXHIBIT 9 PSJA ISD SCHOOLS RATED EXEMPLARY, RECOGNIZED, AND “BEST IN TEXAS” 2006–07

### TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY ACCOUNTABILITY RATINGS

#### EXEMPLARY (2 CAMPUSES)

North Alamo Elementary  
North San Juan Elementary

#### RECOGNIZED (14 CAMPUSES)

Bowie Elementary	Franklin Elementary
Carmen Elementary	Garza Pena Elementary
Carnahan Elementary	Palmer Elementary
Cesar Chavez Elementary	Napper Elementary
Clover Elementary	Reed-Mock Elementary
Dr. Long Elementary	Sorensen Elementary
Ford Elementary	Farias Elementary

### TEXAS MONTHLY “BEST IN TEXAS” SCHOOLS (9 CAMPUSES)

Bowie Elementary	Garza-Pena Elementary
Clover Elementary	Garcia Elementary
Ford Elementary	North Alamo Elementary
Franklin Elementary	North San Juan Elementary
	Sorenson Elementary

SOURCE: PSJA News, “Congratulations Exemplary & Recognized 2006–2007 PSJA Schools,” August–September 2007 and “Nine PSJA ISD Schools Named Best in State,” October–December 2007.

**EXHIBIT 10  
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS  
PSJA ISD, REGION 1, AND STATE  
2004–05 THROUGH 2006–07**

ENTITY	STUDENT ENROLLMENT	RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGE				PERCENTAGE ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED
		AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE	OTHER	
<b>2004–05</b>						
<b>PSJA</b>	<b>27,306</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>98.6%</b>	<b>1.1%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>90.1%</b>
Region 1	351,837	0.2%	96.5%	2.8%	0.4%	85.1%
State	4,383,871	14.2%	44.7%	37.7%	3.3%	54.6%
<b>2005–06</b>						
<b>PSJA</b>	<b>28,061</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>98.6%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>90.0%</b>
Region 1	362,407	0.2%	96.6%	2.7%	0.5%	85.5%
State	4,505,572	14.7%	45.3%	36.5%	3.4%	55.6%
<b>2006–07</b>						
<b>PSJA</b>	<b>28,833</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>98.7%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>90.0%</b>
Region 1	371,893	0.2%	96.8%	2.5%	0.5%	85.1%
State	4,576,933	14.4%	46.3%	35.7%	3.6%	55.5%

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), 2004–05 through 2006–07.

**EXHIBIT 11  
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP) STUDENTS\*  
PSJA ISD, REGION 1, AND THE STATE  
2006–07**

ENTITY	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	NUMBER OF LEP STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF LEP STUDENTS
<b>PSJA</b>	<b>28,833</b>	<b>11,942</b>	<b>41.4%</b>
Region 1	371,893	143,834	38.7%
State	4,576,933	731,304	16.0%

\*NOTE: Limited English Proficient students are designated English Language Learners in this report unless otherwise indicated by another source.  
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, AEIS, 2006–07.

As presented in **Exhibit 12**, in 2006–07, 75.9 percent of PSJA ISD students were classified at-risk; a higher percentage than Region 1 (67.6 percent) or the state (48.3 percent).

**EXHIBIT 12  
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF AT-RISK STUDENTS  
PSJA ISD, REGION 1, AND THE STATE  
2006–07**

ENTITY	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	NUMBER OF AT-RISK STUDENTS	PERCENT OF AT-RISK STUDENTS
PSJA	28,833	21,876	75.9%
Region 1	371,893	251,315	67.6%
State	4,576,933	2,209,538	48.3%

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, AEIS, 2006–07.

During 2006–07, PSJA ISD had 3,873.6 full-time-equivalent (FTE) staff of which 1,760 or 45.4 percent were teachers. The percentage of PSJA ISD minority staff (95.5 percent) was more than twice that of the state (42.3 percent). Its

percentage of Hispanic teachers (90.4 percent) was 4.5 times the state’s percentage (20.8 percent). PSJA ISD teachers had, on average, 0.6 years less experience than the state average as shown in **Exhibit 13**.

As shown in **Exhibit 14**, PSJA ISD had a smaller percentage of beginning teachers and of teachers with 11 to 20 years of experience than Region 1 or the state. It had a larger percentage of teachers with one to five years of experience and 20+ years of experience.

As presented in **Exhibit 15**, in 2006–07, PSJA ISD had a larger percentage of teachers without a degree and with a bachelor’s degree than Region 1 or the state. Its percentage of teachers with graduate degrees was lower than Region 1 or the state. PSJA ISD lagged by more than 10 percentage points behind the state in the percentage of teachers with Master’s degrees.

As shown in **Exhibit 16**, in 2006–07, PSJA ISD had a higher percentage of students enrolled in bilingual/ESL and in

**EXHIBIT 13  
PSJA ISD AND STATE STAFF  
2006–07**

CATEGORY	DISTRICT TOTAL	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL STAFF	STATE TOTAL	STATE PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL STAFF
Teachers	1,760.0	45.4%	311,466.3	50.7%
Professional Support	309.6	8.0%	50,333.9	8.2%
Campus Administration	90.4	2.3%	17,098.1	2.8%
Central Administration	39.1	1.0%	6,202.1	1.0%
Educational Aides	535.9	13.8%	61,344.6	10.0%
Auxiliary Staff	1,138.6	29.4%	167,469.2	27.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,873.6</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>613,914.2</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Total minority staff	3,699.0	95.5%	259,842.5	42.3%
Race/ethnicity of teachers:				
African American	5.8	0.3%	29,062.2	9.3%
Hispanic	1,591.3	90.4%	64,759.7	20.8%
Anglo	126.4	7.2%	213,201.3	68.5%
Other	36.5	2.1%	4,443.1	1.5%
<b>TOTAL*</b>	<b>1,760.0</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>311,466.3</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Average years of experience	10.7 years		11.3 years	
Number of students per teacher	16.4		14.7	

\*Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, AEIS, 2006–07.

**EXHIBIT 14  
PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE  
PSJA ISD, REGION 1, AND STATE  
2006–07**

ENTITY	BEGINNING	1–5 YEARS	6–10 YEARS	11–20 YEARS	20+ YEARS
<b>PSJA</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>36.8%</b>	<b>17.4%</b>	<b>19.5%</b>	<b>19.9%</b>
Region 1	6.8%	33.1%	17.8%	22.7%	19.6%
State	8.1%	29.1%	19.6%	23.6%	19.7%

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, AEIS, 2006–07.

**EXHIBIT 15  
DEGREE STATUS OF TEACHERS  
PSJA ISD, REGION 1, AND STATE  
2006–07**

ENTITY	PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WITH DEGREE				TOTAL*
	NO DEGREE	BACHELORS	MASTERS	DOCTORATE	
<b>PSJA</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>87.4%</b>	<b>10.0%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Region 1	1.2%	85.7%	12.9%	0.2%	100.0%
State	0.8%	77.6%	21.1%	0.5%	100.0%

\*Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, AEIS, 2006–07.

Gifted and Talented (G/T) programs than Region 1 or the state. It had a lower percentage of students in Career and Technology Education (CATE) and in special education programs than Region 1 and the state (**Exhibit 16**).

PSJA ISD graduation rates decreased from 80.6 percent for the Class of 2004 to 68.0 percent for the Class of 2006. PSJA ISD graduation rates were below the Region 1 and state rates for 2004 through 2006. (**Exhibit 17**).

## COMMENDABLE PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES

### MENTOR PRINCIPAL PROGRAM

PSJA ISD has implemented a Principal Mentorship program that helps principals improve their management and instructional leadership skills. This, in turn, assists principals in guiding their schools to higher academic performance. The program has also created close communication, information and idea sharing, and collaboration among principals.

The goal of the Principal Mentorship program is to build interpersonal and supportive relationships between administrators at PSJA ISD. With 26 elementary campuses

**EXHIBIT 16  
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND TEACHERS BY PROGRAM  
PSJA ISD, REGION 1, AND STATE  
2006–07**

ENTITY	BILINGUAL/ ESL	CAREER AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION	GIFTED AND TALENTED	SPECIAL EDUCATION	REGULAR EDUCATION
<b>PSJA</b>					
Students	39.0%	13.0%	9.1%	7.9%	*
Teachers	24.4%	2.6%	5.2%	7.2%	59.4%
<b>Region 1</b>					
Students	36.8%	21.8%	8.0%	9.3%	*
Teachers	23.6%	4.3%	4.4%	8.8%	56.2%
<b>State</b>					
Students	14.8%	20.6%	7.5%	10.6%	*
Teachers	7.6%	3.9%	2.0%	10.0%	70.6%

\* AEIS does not provide number of students in regular education.  
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, AEIS, 2006–07.

**EXHIBIT 17  
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS GRADUATING, RECEIVING A GED, CONTINUING HIGH SCHOOL, OR DROPPING OUT  
PSJA ISD, REGION 1, AND STATE  
CLASS OF 2004 THROUGH CLASS OF 2006**

GRADUATING CLASS	PSJA	REGION 1	STATE
<b>CLASS OF 2006</b>			
Graduated	68.0%	73.5%	80.4%
Received GED	0.5%	1.3%	2.3%
Continued HS	12.8%	13.1%	8.6%
Dropped Out (4-year)	18.7%	12.1%	8.8%
<b>CLASS OF 2005</b>			
Graduated	78.3%	79.6%	84.0%
Received GED	1.9%	2.6%	3.8%
Continued HS	16.0%	11.5%	7.9%
Dropped Out	3.8%	6.2%	4.3%
<b>CLASS OF 2004</b>			
Graduated	80.6%	81.2%	84.6%
Received GED	1.8%	2.6%	4.2%
Continued HS	14.9%	10.9%	7.3%
Dropped Out	2.8%	5.3%	3.9%

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, AEIS, 2004–05 through 2006–07.

and 11 secondary campuses, district administrators believed that the most efficient way of developing close communications and collaboration among principals is to place these administrators into small workgroups.

PSJA ISD formed seven teams of elementary principals. Each team consists of a principal mentor and two to three team member principals. The seven mentor principals were selected from the two *Exemplary* rated schools and from five *Recognized*

schools. The mentor principals head schools that have shown consistent high academic performance. The mentor principals meet monthly with their cluster members and communicate with them on an ongoing basis to ensure that the cluster principals have regular support. The mentor principals provide assistance to their cluster principals in a non-threatening, non-evaluative way. The relationship focuses on instruction, student achievement, and intervention strategies.

Mentor principals have several responsibilities:

- Report to the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction or to the administrator for elementary education.
- Serve as a liaison between the central office and cluster principals.
- Assist cluster principals with disaggregation of data after each district benchmark test.
- Share ideas, strategies, and materials of successful practices with cluster principals.
- Maintain consistent contact with cluster principals.
- Disseminate information to cluster principals in a timely manner.
- Guide and assist first-year principals to problem solve through difficult situations.
- Support first-year principals in areas specific to his/her needs.

In addition, the mentor principals assist their cluster principals in the development of action plans for their school and set up professional development for these principals. As

a group, the mentor principals share ideas and develop materials and activities across campuses. Teachers from cluster campuses observe classes and are invited to professional development at the mentor principal campus. According to the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, the principal mentor program increased collaboration among all elementary principals.

PSJA incorporated the Mentor Principal Program at the middle school level, with the principals of Alamo Middle School, San Juan Middle School and Liberty Middle School acting as mentor principals.

### **DUAL LANGUAGE**

PSJA ISD has an effective dual-language program that is closing the achievement gap among student groups. TAKS performance of students enrolled in the dual-language program meets or exceeds the performance levels of students not in the program. Enrollment in the dual-language program also motivates students to go to college.

PSJA ISD has a dual-language program in five elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools. The program has been implemented in collaboration with The University of Texas – Pan American as a result of an August 1995 five-year grant. Initially, the grant funded the program at the elementary level. In August 2001, with a second five-year grant, PSJA ISD extended the program into the middle schools. In 2005–06, the program was extended to the high schools. PSJA ISD schools that participate in the dual-language program include Garcia Elementary, Palmer Elementary, Pharr Elementary, Ramirez Elementary, Reed & Mock Elementary, Liberty Middle School, PSJA High School, and PSJA North High School.

The mission of the dual-language program is to graduate students who are bilingual, biliterate, bicultural, and prepared for higher education. PSJA ISD uses a K–12 Gomez & Gomez 50/50 Dual language Enrichment Model Curriculum. The model's goals couple conceptual learning or content knowledge with language development. The model was originally developed and implemented in 1996 and revised in 1999. It was developed in Texas for schools in the Rio Grande Valley along the border with Mexico with a high percentage of English Language Learners (ELLs). In the 50/50 model, students learn in each language about 50 percent of the time throughout the program. Students learn to read in their primary language and then add a second language. Teachers may divide instructional time between the languages in different ways: allocate half a day to each, alternate days or even alternate weeks. Under this model, teachers can team teach, allowing the bilingual teacher to teach one group of students in the morning and another in

the afternoon thereby maximizing instructional resources. At the secondary level, the dual-language model is an 80 (English)–20 (Spanish) model.

The 50/50 Dual Language Enrichment Model is unique in dividing languages by subject area rather than by time. It provides instruction in each subject area (with the exception of language arts), in only one of the two languages. In participating PSJA ISD elementary schools, language arts and math are taught in English; social studies and science are taught in Spanish. In PSJA ISD middle schools that have the program, reading, writing, math, and science are taught in English; but social studies (world history) is taught in Spanish. In participating PSJA ISD high schools, language arts is taught in English; but math, social studies (i.e. American history, world history, world geography, government, and economics), and science are taught either in English or Spanish.

The dual-language model also uses reinforcement activities. The additional enrichment supports the second language learner in each subject area and promotes the development of content biliteracy by the end of fifth grade. The model uses Bilingual Learning Centers in pre-kindergarten through first grade and then Bilingual Resource Centers beginning in grade 2. Both types of centers are interactive, subject-based learning areas with activities that support both types of learners. The centers provide an opportunity for first language and second language learners to use their languages in self-paced independent learning situations with minimal teacher guidance or intervention. The program alternates by day the language used for public announcements, story telling, music, computer lab, physical education, and library activities. The model calls for putting students in bilingual pairs or bilingual groups for all subject areas.

The dual-language model was implemented in 2005 in 45 schools in Texas and Washington. Data, based largely on student performance on state-mandated tests, has shown that the model has been effective in promoting academic achievement of participating students. This also holds true for PSJA ISD dual-language students. PSJA ISD elementary school students enrolled in the dual-language program outperformed their peers, Region 1, and the state, as shown in **Exhibit 18**.

**Exhibit 19** shows performance on TAKS of students enrolled in the dual-language program at Liberty Middle School in grades 6 through 8. Liberty Middle School students in the dual-language program met or exceeded the performance of students in their grade level in grade 6 math; grade 7 writing; and grade 8 math, history, and science. The district's dual-language students outperformed the state in grade 6 math, grade 7 writing, and grade 8 math and science.



**EXHIBIT 18**  
**TAKS PERFORMANCE OF 5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE STUDENTS**  
**THREE YEARS OR MORE IN DUAL LANGUAGE**  
**COMPARED WITH ALL STUDENTS**  
**PSJA ISD, REGION 1, AND STATE**  
**2006–07**

	READING	MATH	SCIENCE
<b>PHARR ELEMENTARY</b>			
Students in dual language (61)	91%	90%	78%
Pharr Elementary	83%	74%	69%
PSJA ISD	83%	72%	67%
Region 1	79%	64%	59%
State	81%	68%	57%
<b>REED &amp; MOCK ELEMENTARY</b>			
Students in dual language (56)	89%	85%	75%
Reed & Mock Elementary	83%	81%	67%
PSJA ISD	83%	72%	67%
Region 1	79%	64%	59%
State	81%	68%	57%
<b>GARCIA ELEMENTARY</b>			
Students in dual language (54)	94%	76%	62%
Garcia Elementary	83%	75%	61%
PSJA ISD	83%	72%	67%
Region 1	79%	64%	59%
State	81%	68%	57%
<b>PALMER ELEMENTARY</b>			
Students in dual language (40)	100%	78%	75%
Palmer Elementary	91%	86%	83%
PSJA ISD	83%	72%	67%
Region 1	79%	64%	59%
State	81%	68%	57%

SOURCE: Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, Dual Language Program, April 2007.

The dual-language program is implemented in two high schools: PSJA High School and PSJA North High School. Dual-language students in grades 9 and 10 in PSJA High School outperformed students in their grade levels at their school, the district, and the state in all core content areas, as shown in **Exhibit 20**. PSJA North High School dual-language students in grades 9 and 10 outperformed their school and district in all core subject areas. The students outperformed the state in grade 9 math, grade 10 English language arts, science and history. The first cohort of students in the dual-language program (50 students) will graduate from high school in 2008–09. All plan to attend college.

**EXHIBIT 19**  
**TAKS PERFORMANCE OF LIBERTY MIDDLE**  
**SCHOOL STUDENTS IN DUAL LANGUAGE**  
**COMPARED WITH ALL STUDENTS**  
**PSJA ISD AND STATE**  
**2006–07**

GRADE	DUAL LANGUAGE	SCHOOL	PSJA ISD	STATE
<b>GRADE 6</b>				
Reading	90%	90%	88%	92%
Math	87%	84%	73%	79%
<b>GRADE 7</b>				
Reading	74%	77%	76%	85%
Math	63%	64%	63%	76%
Writing	94%	93%	92%	93%
<b>GRADE 8</b>				
Reading	85%	78%	81%	89%
Math	74%	47%	59%	71%
History	79%	73%	81%	87%
Science	68%	55%	51%	60%

SOURCE: Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, Dual Language Program, April 2007.

**EXHIBIT 20**  
**TAKS PERFORMANCE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN**  
**DUAL LANGUAGE COMPARED WITH ALL STUDENTS**  
**PSJA ISD AND STATE**  
**2006–07**

	DUAL LANGUAGE	SCHOOL	PSJA ISD	STATE
<b>PSJA HIGH SCHOOL - GRADE 9</b>				
Reading	100%	80%	76%	86%
Math	68%	50%	44%	60%
<b>PSJA NORTH HIGH SCHOOL - GRADE 9</b>				
Reading	81%	78%	76%	86%
Math	81%	44%	44%	60%
<b>PSJA HIGH SCHOOL - GRADE 10</b>				
English Language Arts	95%	80%	78%	84%
Math	82%	59%	58%	63%
Science	74%	40%	39%	58%
History	87%	78%	77%	86%
<b>PSJA NORTH HIGH SCHOOL - GRADE 10</b>				
English Language Arts	88%	78%	78%	84%
Math	60%	56%	58%	63%
Science	60%	41%	39%	58%
History	88%	75%	77%	86%

SOURCE: Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, Dual Language Program, April 2007.

Participation in the dual-language program promotes taking advanced classes. For example, PSJA ISD middle schools with a dual-language program offer high school level Spanish classes (Spanish I is offered in grade 7 and Spanish II is offered in grade 8) for high school credit. Liberty Middle School was designated an AP test site in November 2005

because many of its students in the dual-language program were eligible to take the AP Spanish II exam. Of the 65 Liberty Middle School students who took the AP exam on May 2, 2006, 91 percent, or 58 students, received scores which made them eligible for college credit at most colleges and universities. Eight students scored a 5, 23 students scored a 4, and 28 students received a score of 3. In high schools, the dual-language program offers AP Spanish III (grade 9) and AP Spanish III and IV (grades 10–12).

### **INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM**

PSJA ISD implemented an International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (IB-PYP) at Garcia Elementary. This set high academic standards and increased academic excellence in the district.

Garcia Elementary had 737 students in 2006–07. All students were Hispanic; 88.6 percent were English Language Learners, 97.7 percent were economically disadvantaged, and 95.5 percent were at-risk. The school also had a high student mobility rate of 17.8 percent. The IB Primary Years Program began at Garcia Elementary in 2004 with a three-year Enabling Students to Understand and Demonstrate the Importance of Outstanding Scholarship (ESTUDIOS) grant. The grant award was \$25,000 a year. These grant funds were matched by PSJA ISD to provide additional financial support. Garcia Elementary was chosen as one of three dual-language schools to receive the grant. Since the IB program requires a foreign language, the expectation was that dual-language schools would implement the IB program and become authorized IB schools. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) provided financial, technical, and administrative support. Garcia Elementary is expecting to be authorized as an IB school in fall 2008. Garcia Elementary is one of a few dual-language schools in the U.S. that has an IB-PYP.

The International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma program is an educational program taught in English, French, and Spanish and is considered a leading pre-university program. The IB

program adds an international perspective and measures teaching and learning against an international standard. The program is taught in 2,363 schools in 128 countries around the globe and involves more than 637,000 students. In the U.S., many colleges give college credit for participation in IB courses and tests. The IB Organization has three programs: a Primary Years Program that is targeted for students 3 to 12 years old, a Middle Years Program that is targeted to students 11 to 16 years old, and a Diploma Program targeted at students 16 to 19 years old. The mission of the IB program is to develop inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring young people who help create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

The program seeks to develop well-rounded students. These pupils become inquirers, thinkers, communicators, risk-takers, well-informed, principled, caring, open-minded, well-balanced, and reflective students. The curriculum seeks to have students develop attitudes such as appreciation, commitment, confidence, cooperation, creativity, curiosity, empathy, enthusiasm, independence, integrity, respect, and tolerance. It uses concepts such as form, function, causation, connection, perspective, responsibility, and reflection. The PYP curriculum is inquiry-based and promotes questioning and student-led learning. It creates a concept-driven program that emphasizes meaning and understanding and is considered transdisciplinary because it interrelates multiple subject areas through a central idea. The PYP curriculum framework combines disciplinary themes, subject areas, and essential elements, as shown in **Exhibit 21**. The PYP curriculum gives students an opportunity to:

- Gain knowledge that is relevant and of global significance.
- Develop an understanding of concepts, thereby allowing students to make connections throughout their learning.
- Acquire transdisciplinary and disciplinary skills.

### **EXHIBIT 21 ELEMENTS OF IB PRIMARY YEARS PROGRAM CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK**

<b>DISCIPLINARY THEMES</b>	<b>SUBJECT AREAS</b>	<b>ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS</b>
Who are we?	Language	Concepts
Where we are in place and time?	Social studies	Knowledge
How we express ourselves?	Mathematics	Skills
How the world works?	Science	Attitudes
How we organize ourselves?	Technology	Action
Sharing the planet.	Arts	
	Personal, social, and physical education	

SOURCE: International Baccalaureate Organization, IB Primary Years Programme Curriculum Framework.

- Develop attitudes that will lead to international-mindedness.
- Take action as a consequence of their learning.

Garcia Elementary has implemented the IB-PYP over the last three years. At every grade level, the program connects six Units of Inquiry, overarching broad questions developed by teachers and students, to a transdisciplinary theme throughout the year. In implementing these units, students use best practices such as self-paced learning, cooperative learning, research, and product development resulting in student presentations and real world connections. Through the inquiry-based learning process, students develop information processing and problem-solving skills. The IB-PYP helps students develop a positive attitude toward learning by encouraging them to ask challenging questions, reflect critically, develop research skills, and “learn how to learn.” It builds students’ confidence in their learning abilities, develops students’ capacity to think critically and to act compassionately in a complex world. Garcia Elementary’s principal, teachers, and staff indicated that as a result of the IB-PYP students are more engaged in learning; have stronger decision-making skills; approach problems more analytically; and have improved communication, expression, and knowledge-sharing.

During the three years of the IB-PYP, Garcia Elementary improved its TAKS performance across all subject areas, as shown in **Exhibit 22**. Its reading pass rates increased from 74 percent in 2004–05 to 90 percent in 2006–07, surpassing both the district and the state. In math, Garcia Elementary School’s performance increased from 69 percent in 2004–05 to 79 percent in 2006–07, above the district and state averages. In writing, Garcia Elementary increased its passing rates from 94 percent in 2004–05 to 97 percent in 2006–07, above both the district and the state. Garcia Elementary also improved its performance in science by 20 percentage points from 35 percent in 2004–05 to 55 percent in 2006–07. Its

overall performance also improved and surpassed both the PSJA ISD average and the state average.

### **INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES**

PSJA ISD has implemented a wide range of instructional programs and strategies to address students’ academic needs and improve performance.

Key PSJA ISD instructional programs and strategies include:

- The district is piloting a new curriculum in 2007–08: C-SCOPE. The K-12 curriculum model addresses the four subject areas and is aligned to Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). C-SCOPE has been developed by the Texas Education Service Center Curriculum Collaborative, a group of educators spanning nine state education regions. The curriculum model aligns the written, taught, and tested curriculum and is research- and best practice-based. To implement the new curriculum, PSJA ISD spent 2006–07 planning and training the teachers. In 2007–08, the district has been piloting different components of the curriculum: science in elementary schools and English language arts, math, and science at the middle school level. C-SCOPE will be implemented fully at the high school level in 2008–09.
- The district has standardized its curriculum and timelines across all schools. This strategy helps address high student mobility within the district.
- PSJA ISD has implemented a successful Reading First program. The Reading First program, first implemented in 2003–04 and funded through a federal Reading First grant, targets kindergarten to grade 3 students in 15 schools. The program has benefited the district by providing professional development to the reading coaches and to all elementary school teachers and daily help and support from technical assistance providers

**EXHIBIT 22**  
**PASSING RATES ON TAKS**  
**GARCIA ELEMENTARY, PSJA ISD, AND STATE BY SUBJECT AREA**  
**2004–05 THROUGH 2006–07\***

SUBJECT	2004–05			2005–06			2006–07		
	GARCIA ELEMENTARY	PSJA	STATE	GARCIA ELEMENTARY	PSJA	STATE	GARCIA ELEMENTARY	PSJA	STATE
Reading/ELA	74%	76%	83%	84%	81%	87%	90%	83%	89%
Math	69%	63%	71%	80%	67%	75%	79%	70%	77%
Writing	94%	89%	90%	97%	91%	91%	97%	94%	92%
Science	35%	49%	63%	56%	55%	70%	55%	59%	71%
All Tests	60%	53%	62%	73%	57%	67%	77%	61%	70%

\* Sum of all grades; Standard Accountability indicator.

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, AEIS, 2004–05 through 2006–07.

associated with the grant. According to Reading First coaches, it has personalized instruction and improved reading fluency and comprehension and increased teacher accountability. In 2006–07, Reading First reduced the percentage of kindergarten students still developing phonemic awareness from 86 percent at the start of the year to 18 percent at the end of the year. In first grade, the percentage of students still developing on comprehension decreased from 61 percent to 24 percent. Second grade students increased their independent reading level 86 percent. Third grade students showed an increase of 33 percent in spelling and word study. Teachers have also implemented Reading First strategies in other subject areas.

- The district has also implemented numerous district-wide and school-specific reading programs to encourage students to read and become avid readers. For example, the district-wide Leaders Are Readers program targets reluctant readers across all grade levels and introduces them to different literary genres. The program starts in September and students are required to read 10 to 15 books. Students who read the requisite number of books receive a certificate. The district also organizes four book clubs per year through which students, organized by school level, read the same book and discuss its contents.

North Alamo Elementary, an *Exemplary* school, has a Raising Readers Make & Take program for struggling readers. Through this program, the school trains parents in how to assist their children with reading activities at home. The school hosts a Monday Night Reading Party every other week to encourage reading, offering extended library hours and staffing volunteers who assist students with the Accelerated Reading program. The school also has mini-labs with five to ten computers in the classrooms that are used for reading, research, and individualized instruction. Since 2005–06, the district has used an intensive, research-based program for struggling readers (READ 180) at middle and high school levels. This program has been used with English Language Learners to help improve their English fluency and comprehension in a short time period.

- In the writing area, PSJA ISD engages outside consultants twice a year to review and score students' compositions. The initiative was implemented in 2003–04 at the elementary level and was expanded to include middle schools in 2007–08.
- The district reorganized its curriculum departments and established two school improvement teams in 2007–08. The units consist of one elementary team and one secondary team. The teams spend the majority of

their time at the campuses and provide direct assistance to campus administrators and teachers. The groups' objective is to work with teachers and administrators on improvement strategies, curriculum alignment, lesson and program design, resource selection, development of assessments, and program evaluation. The teams identify campuses in need of assistance and prioritize their time on these campuses. Each unit has a schedule, a campus observation protocol to document their on-site work, and has to prepare a report. The teams also prepare elementary and secondary reports identifying areas of focus, weaknesses and strengths, suggested technical assistance, obstacles to overcome, and ideas shared. These reports, based on observation and analysis, help PSJA ISD in planning and resource allocation.

- In preparation for science TAKS, PSJA ISD has organized science mini-camps for elementary school students. The camp offers a hands-on science review and assessment to determine how well students are able to apply what they have learned in the classroom. The mini-camp is located in a large room in one of the high schools. The room is set up with 16 stations with visiting students spending up to five minutes at each station. According to the Assistant Superintendent for curriculum and instruction and based on benchmark test scores, the mini-camp has been effective. PSJA ISD plans to implement similar science mini-camps for middle school students in 2008–09.
- The district offers summer camps to students in the Gifted and Talented (GT) program. It offers math and science camps to all grade levels, biotech camps to GT students in grades 5 to 10, and creativity camps to all grade levels. About 1,200 students participate in the summer camps each week, according to the GT coordinator.
- The district has five vertical teams. Each team is organized by feeder patterns and has representatives from elementary, middle, and high schools. A district staff member chairs each team. The teams meet monthly to discuss common issues. This has formed close relationships among team members and increased the support provided to each other.
- Administrators perform walkthroughs in each school. To keep current about what happens in classrooms and monitor teachers, elementary and middle school principals are required to do a minimum of five walkthroughs a week. The elementary and middle school principals submit their walkthrough results every week to the Assistant Superintendent for curriculum and instruction for review. The data are compiled into a walkthrough report, by month and week, by school,

and by principal showing the number of walkthroughs each principal did. High school principals are required to spend five to ten minutes in class during their walkthroughs.

- The district has an extensive tutoring program. Tutorials are provided before, during (instead of PE or art), and after school. Some schools also have tutorials on Saturday from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. At the elementary and middle school levels, schools assign their best teachers to tutor students. At the high school level, students are tutored by teachers already known to them. In 2007–08, PSJA ISD middle schools have also implemented reading enrichment classes for students who failed the TAKS. The reading enrichment classes are offered as electives and use a slower instructional pace. According to middle school department heads, students who participated in these classes have made significant gains. At the beginning of each year, the administrator for secondary education gets a report on each student who has not passed TAKS the previous year. The report specifies what sections of TAKS the student did not pass and what instructional support the student received the previous year. PSJA ISD high schools set up their own tutoring program or hired outside help. For example, PSJA High School has hired a professional tutoring company (Sylvan) to tutor its students. Between 60 and 70 students in 10th grade have received tutorial help from this company in 2007–08.

**DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY INITIATIVE**

PSJA ISD implemented a comprehensive “Countdown to Zero” dropout prevention and recovery initiative. This effort has reduced the number of its dropouts. The initiative consists of multiple components involving a district dropout prevention and recovery task force, a summer school program for TAKS remediation and credit recovery, an academic program in collaboration with a community college, a vocational program in collaboration with a local training organization, and a dropout recovery walk.

In 2005–06, PSJA ISD’s annual dropout rates for grades 7 to 12 and grades 9 to 12 and its longitudinal dropout rate exceeded the dropout rates of both Region 1 and the state. In 2005–06, the PSJA ISD longitudinal dropout rate was 18.7 percent. The PSJA ISD longitudinal dropout rate was about 10 percentage points higher than the statewide rate and 6.6 percentage points higher than Region 1. In 2003–04 and 2004–05, the PSJA ISD annual dropout rates for grades 7 and 8 and grades 7 to 12 and its longitudinal dropout rates for grades 9 to 12 were lower than Region 1 and the state, as presented in **Exhibit 23**.

**EXHIBIT 23  
ANNUAL AND LONGITUDINAL DROPOUT RATES  
PSJA ISD, REGION 1, AND STATE  
2003–04 THROUGH 2005–06**

ENTITY	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06
<b>ANNUAL DROPOUT RATE GRADES 7-8</b>			
PSJA	0.1%	0.0%	0.4%
Region 1	0.3%	0.3%	0.5%
State	0.2%	0.2%	0.4%
<b>ANNUAL DROPOUT RATE GRADES 7–12</b>			
PSJA	0.6%	0.4%	4.1%
Region 1	1.2%	1.2%	3.1%
State	0.9%	0.9%	2.6%
<b>ANNUAL DROPOUT RATE GRADES 9–12</b>			
PSJA	*	*	6.2%
Region 1	*	*	4.5%
State	*	*	3.7%
<b>LONGITUDINAL DROPOUT RATE (GRADES 9–12)</b>			
PSJA	2.8%	3.8%	18.7%
Region 1	5.3%	6.2%	12.1%
State	3.9%	4.3%	8.8%

\* Information not available on AEIS.  
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency AEIS, 2004–05 through 2006–07.

In 2006–07, annual dropout rates in PSJA ISD middle schools ranged from 0.0 to 0.7 percent. Annual dropout rates in PSJA ISD high schools ranged from 4.7 to 20.8 percent, as shown in **Exhibit 24**.

The initiative’s goal was to account for and recover every student who left PSJA ISD from 2006–07 without graduating.

**EXHIBIT 24  
ANNUAL DROPOUT RATES  
PSJA ISD, MIDDLE SCHOOLS, AND HIGH SCHOOLS  
2006–07**

SCHOOL/DISTRICT	ANNUAL DROPOUT RATES
<b>MIDDLE SCHOOLS</b>	
San Juan Middle School	0.0%
LBJ Middle School	0.3%
Liberty Middle School	0.3%
Alamo Middle School	0.6%
Austin Middle School	0.7%
<b>HIGH SCHOOLS</b>	
PSJA High School	4.7%
PSJA Memorial High School	5.4%
PSJA North High School	5.6%
Buell-Central High School	15.8%
TAPP*	20.8%
<b>PSJA District</b>	<b>4.1%</b>

\* TAPP refers to Teenage Parenting Program.  
SOURCE: Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, Dropout Prevention and Dropout Recovery Task Force – Countdown to Zero, 2007.



In July 2007, PSJA ISD campus community liaisons visited 230 students. Visits were made during the day, in the evening, and on Saturdays. The campus community liaisons contacted and visited those students and asked them and their parents to come to a meeting. The district held three such meetings and the superintendent explained the different options available to these students and invited them to apply to the College, Career, and Technology Academy. On October 11, 2007, the superintendent organized a reception for the campus community liaisons and presented each with a certificate of accomplishment to thank them for their effort.

PSJA ISD also implemented a Dropout Recovery Walk targeted at students who dropped out. The walk included the respective principal of the school from which the student dropped out and a dropout specialist. Both visited each dropout. Memorial High School used staff members to visit homes of students who dropped out on Saturday, over a three-week period.

The Countdown to Zero initiative has been implemented throughout 2007–08. The initiative uses a collaborative effort between the PEIMS clerks and the district’s 26 campus community liaisons to identify those who are potential dropouts or who actually dropped out. Beginning in May, the district targets students who did not pass TAKS, and again in August targets seniors who did not pass TAKS and contacts these students at the end of the summer. PSJA ISD community liaisons conduct home visits to all these students

and offer them a fifth year option at the College, Career, and Technology Academy. In addition, PSJA ISD has recognized the need to check the status of students who withdraw from school in a timely manner, verify that the students have indeed enrolled somewhere else, and track those that have not enrolled where previously indicated. PSJA ISD has instituted daily tracking of students that are unaccounted for in the month of September. At the beginning of the 2007–08 school year, PSJA ISD had 1,211 potential dropouts and 191 migrant students that did not show up in school. Through use of these verification and dropout recovery strategies, PSJA ISD reduced the number of potential dropouts by September 28, 2007 to 253 and the number of migrant students that could not be tracked to 20, as shown in **Exhibit 25**.

The Countdown to Zero Initiative reduced the district’s annual dropout rate for grades 7 through 12 by almost one-half from 4.1 percent in 2006–07 to 2.2 percent by Fall 2007, as shown in **Exhibit 26**. In 2007–08, PSJA had 453 student withdrawals and was able to track all but 42.

#### COLLEGE, CAREER, AND TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY

To prevent students from dropping out and recover students who dropped out, PSJA ISD opened a College, Career, and Technology Academy that not only helps potential and recovered dropouts graduate from high school but also provides these students the opportunity for a seamless transition to college.

#### EXHIBIT 25 POTENTIAL DROPOUTS PSJA ISD, MIDDLE SCHOOL, AND HIGH SCHOOL SEPTEMBER 2007

SCHOOL/DISTRICT	SEPTEMBER 10, 2007		SEPTEMBER 28, 2007	
	POTENTIAL DROPOUTS	MIGRANT STUDENTS	POTENTIAL DROPOUTS	MIGRANT STUDENTS
San Juan Middle School	63	8	***	***
LBJ Middle School	68	**8	***	***
Liberty Middle School	52	5	***	***
Alamo Middle School	44	6	***	***
Austin Middle School	55	13	***	***
PSJA High School	270	40	56	5
PSJA Memorial High School	251	62	67	9
PSJA North High School	277	33	82	***
Buell-Central High School	26	5	13	***
TAPP*	93	13	32	***
JJAEP**	12	***	***	***
<b>PSJA District</b>	<b>1,211</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>20</b>

\*TAPP refers to Teenage Parenting Program.

\*\*JJAEP refers to Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program.

\*\*\* Results masked to protect student confidentiality.

SOURCE: Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, Dropout Counts 2007–08.

**EXHIBIT 26**  
**ENROLLMENT AND ANNUAL DROPOUT RATES**  
**PSJA ISD, MIDDLE SCHOOL, AND HIGH SCHOOL**  
**2006–07 AND 2007–08**

SCHOOL/DISTRICT	2006–07			2007–08			YEAR-TO-YEAR DIFFERENCE		
	CUMULATIVE ENROLLMENT	AEIS DROPOUTS		CUMULATIVE ENROLLMENT	PEIMS FALL SUBMISSION DROPOUTS		CUMULATIVE ENROLLMENT	DROPOUTS	
		N	%		N	%		N	%
San Juan Middle School	881	***	0.0%	919	***	0.0%	38	***	0.0%
LBJ Middle School	919	***	0.3%	894	***	0.1%	(25)	(2)	(0.2%)
Liberty Middle School	1,002	***	0.3%	1,022	***	0.1%	20	(2)	(0.2%)
Alamo Middle School	829	5	0.6%	824	***	0.1%	(5)	(4)	(0.5%)
Austin Middle School	711	5	0.7%	749	***	0.0%	38	(5)	(0.7%)
PSJA High School	2,600	122	4.7%	2,619	63	2.4%	19	(59)	(2.3%)
PSJA Memorial High School	2,298	124	5.4%	2,430	71	2.9%	132	(53)	(2.5%)
PSJA North High School	2,644	148	5.6%	2,686	81	3.0%	42	(67)	(2.6%)
Buell-Central High School	183	29	15.9%	155	13	8.4%	(28)	(16)	(7.5%)
TAPP*	221	46	20.8%	252	36	14.3%	31	(10)	(6.5%)
JJAEP**	57	***	0.0%	70	***	1.4%	13	***	1.4%
<b>PSJA District</b>	<b>11,849</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>4.1%</b>	<b>12,110</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>(217)</b>	<b>(1.9%)</b>

\*TAPP refers to Teenage Parenting Program

\*\*JJAEP refers to Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program.

\*\*\*Results masked to protect student confidentiality.

SOURCE: Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, Annual Dropout Rate, 2006–07 and 2007–08 Fall Submission.

The College, Career, and Technology Academy opened its doors on September 4, 2007 three weeks after it started recruiting students. The motivation for the establishment of the Academy was the more than 200 students in the Class of 2007 who were not able to graduate from PSJA ISD high schools. An analysis of the records of these students showed that the pupils lacked three or fewer credits or did not pass one section of the exit-level TAKS. However, PSJA ISD did not have a program that could accommodate such a large number of students. The new superintendent, Dr. King, reached out to South Texas College (STC), a local community college, to partner in creating a program that would not only help these students graduate from high school but would allow them to actually start their college education at the same time.

PSJA ISD undertook a massive recruitment campaign for the Academy. The PSJA Office of Public Relations created a flyer in English and Spanish inviting students and their parents to an information and registration session about the Academy. A few days before the session, PSJA community liaisons armed with the names and addresses of these non-graduating seniors went door to door, passed out flyers and invited non-graduates to come to the session to learn more

about the Academy. The district also distributed the flyers and posted a press release in all PSJA campuses and local businesses. Local newspapers and television stations, including the district's TV channel, featured stories about the Academy. More than 230 students and their families attended the first information session and 146 students signed up. Following two more information sessions, the number of students who enrolled increased to 223. The College Career and Technology Academy is located in an old Wal-Mart building.

During admission, the superintendent brought in representatives from different agencies and Workforce Solutions, the local workforce development board, to administer a skills inventory. According to the superintendent, the objective was to design a school to fit the students and their needs. The Academy has a principal, six teachers, a lab manager, a counselor, a community liaison, a clerk, and a secretary. It offers two sessions a day, allowing students to attend either from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM or from 12:30 PM to 4:30 PM. The Academy offers childcare through a contract with local daycare providers. The Academy funds childcare from a variety of sources. In addition to high school classes in the four core subject areas,

it offers a “College Success” course that orients students to college. Following the first TAKS administration, 72 of the 223 students enrolled in a mini-semester at STC to earn up to four college credits. Students can take STC courses in medical terminology, body systems, Business Computer Information Systems I and II, welding, and training to become an electrician. These college courses were chosen based on student interest.

In December 2007, 49 Academy students received a high school diploma. In May 2008, an additional 60 students received a high school diploma. Most of the students graduate with some college credit. In January 2008, the Academy accepted additional students up to the age of 25. This helped the Academy in increasing its enrollment to 184 students. The superintendent projects that between 40 and 60 students will graduate in 2007–08, thereby increasing the number of graduates to about 150.

In 2008, PSJA created an advertisement campaign for the academy. The district expanded its publicity and recruitment effort through posters in busy intersections, flyers, television spots on the district’s channel, public service announcements, and radio advertisements targeting students 18 to 25 who lack a high school diploma. Eight of the students who graduated the Academy in May 2008 were between 21 and 25 years old.

The College, Career, and Technology Academy is considered a huge success in the district. According to the superintendent, it has provided an effective solution to a long-standing problem and given the community a sense of hope and pride. It has also offered the district a way to deal with non-graduating seniors and dropouts. In May 2008, all non-graduating seniors, more than 200 students, were placed in the Academy. The superintendent expects that about 100 of these students will pass TAKS and graduate in 2007–08. The Academy has also provided a successful model for a smooth transition of students from high school to college. The superintendent plans to have all juniors and seniors in the district enroll in early college. The Academy has raised interest on the part of neighboring districts who have expressed interest in starting a similar program.

#### **PARTNERSHIPS WITH ORGANIZATIONS AND COLLEGES**

PSJA ISD has partnered with organizations like Workforce Solutions, trade unions like the Electrical Trade Union, and with colleges like South Texas College to develop strategies to reduce dropout and recover dropouts.

Recognizing that the district cannot solve all of its problems on its own, PSJA ISD has collaborated with several organizations. In 2007–08, PSJA ISD started a collaboration with Workforce Solutions targeting three and four-year freshmen and sophomores who dropped out of school. The

project named Prep 4 Life aims to help dropouts who are 17 to 20 years old to both earn a high school diploma while at the same time receiving job training and placement services. PSJA ISD will help students complete their high school diploma and Workforce Solutions will help them identify the most appropriate job given the student’s interests, provide training in that occupation, and find them a job. Workforce Solutions offers training in manufacturing, healthcare, retail and hospitality, business services, law enforcement and homeland security, and construction. PSJA ISD also involved Workforce Solutions in screening students through offering career profiling at the College, Career, and Technology Academy, identifying students’ childcare and other needs, and connecting students with appropriate agencies and service providers.

In response to information from the Electrical Trade Union on a shortage of electricians within the community, PSJA ISD started a program in electrical trades. The program was being piloted with instructors from South Texas College at Buell-Central High School and at the Academy. In 2007–08, 82 students participated in the pilot. In 2008–09, the program will be implemented in all PSJA ISD high schools.

#### **COLLEGE READINESS**

PSJA ISD’s college readiness program targets students at all grade levels. It emphasizes the importance of college education and encourages students to participate in Advanced Placement (AP) and dual credit courses, take the SAT/ACT, and apply to college.

PSJA encourages students to take pre-AP and AP classes. Pre-AP classes are offered at both PSJA ISD middle schools and high schools. PSJA ISD increased student completion of AP/dual credit classes from 24.1 percent in 2004–05 to 44.4 percent in 2006–07. The percentage of PSJA ISD students completing AP or dual credit courses was higher than Region 1 and the state in all three years as shown in **Exhibit 27**. PSJA ISD students performed better than Region 1 students in the percentage of AP examinees with scores exceeding criterion and in the percentage of AP scores exceeding criterion.

PSJA also offers dual credit classes in partnership with South Texas College and the University of Texas – Pan American. Dual credit classes are offered on PSJA ISD campuses with college instructors in AP English III, algebra, pre-calculus, AP history, government, psychology, speech, art appreciation, physics, and engineering. PSJA North High School uses its own teachers for dual-credit classes.

PSJA ISD encourages students to take the ACT/SAT. The district signs up all sophomores to take the PSAT and all juniors to take the ACT. The district pays for the test. PSJA ISD is an ACT testing site. A high percentage of PSJA ISD



**EXHIBIT 27**  
**PSJA ISD, REGION 1, AND STATE PERFORMANCE ON ADVANCED/DUAL ENROLLMENT COURSES**  
**AND ADVANCED PLACEMENT CLASSES AND EXAMINATIONS**  
**2004–05 THROUGH 2006–07**

ENTITY	2004	2005	2006
<b>PERCENTAGE COMPLETING ADVANCED PLACEMENT/DUAL ENROLLMENT COURSES</b>			
<b>PSJA</b>	<b>24.1%</b>	<b>26.6%</b>	<b>44.4%</b>
Region 1	21.0%	22.0%	23.8%
State	19.9%	20.5%	21.0%
<b>PERCENTAGE TAKING ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSE TESTS</b>			
<b>PSJA</b>	<b>15.6%</b>	<b>13.4%</b>	<b>16.9%</b>
Region 1	18.6%	21.7%	22.1%
State	17.4%	18.4%	18.9%
<b>PERCENTAGE OF AP EXAMINEES WITH SCORES EXCEEDING CRITERION</b>			
<b>PSJA</b>	<b>60.3%</b>	<b>60.1%</b>	<b>46.7%</b>
Region 1	46.7%	41.7%	40.2%
State	53.9%	51.8%	51.3%
<b>PERCENTAGE OF ALL AP SCORES EXCEEDING CRITERION</b>			
<b>PSJA</b>	<b>43.3%</b>	<b>43.2%</b>	<b>30.1%</b>
Region 1	34.8%	30.9%	29.0%
State	49.3%	47.4%	47.2%

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, AEIS, 2004–05 through 2006–07.

high school students took the SAT/ACT in 2004–05 (78.8 percent), 2005–06 (80.6 percent), and 2006–07 (79.6 percent). PSJA High School’s average SAT scores exceeded

Region 1 scores in 2004–05 through 2006–07 as noted in **Exhibit 28**.

**EXHIBIT 28**  
**PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS TAKING ACT/SAT EXAMS MEETING CRITERIA**  
**PSJA ISD AND EACH HIGH SCHOOL**  
**2004–05 THROUGH 2006–07**

DISTRICT	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS TAKING SAT/ACT EXAMS	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS MEETING SAT/ACT CRITERIA	MEAN SAT SCORE	MEAN ACT SCORE
<b>2004–05</b>				
<b>PSJA ISD</b>	<b>78.8%</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>852</b>	<b>16.7</b>
PSJA High School	78.3%	5.5%	960	17.4
Memorial High School	84.4%	3.0%	817	16.3
North High School	82.2%	1.9%	978	16.5
Region 1	57.2%	9.1%	895	17.2
State	61.9%	27.0%	987	20.1
<b>2005–06</b>				
<b>PSJA ISD</b>	<b>80.6%</b>	<b>5.4%</b>	<b>858</b>	<b>16.8</b>
PSJA High School	85.4%	5.2%	989	16.7
Memorial High School	84.6%	4.0%	811	16.3
North High School	80.0%	7.5%	1006	17.2
Region 1	65.1%	8.9%	888	17.3
State	65.5%	27.4%	992	20.0
<b>2006–07</b>				
<b>PSJA ISD</b>	<b>79.6%</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>817</b>	<b>16.7</b>
PSJA High School	94.1%	4.3%	901	16.7
Memorial High School	87.5%	3.1%	785	16.0
North High School	91.7%	5.7%	*	17.4
Region 1	67.6%	8.7%	886	17.3
State	65.8%	27.1%	991	20.1

\*Information not available on AEIS.

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, AEIS, 2004–05 through 2006–07.

PSJA ISD increased the percentage of students ready for college in English language arts and math from 2004–05 to 2006–07. In English language arts it increased the percentage of students from 24 to 43; in math the percentage increased from 29 to 35, as shown in **Exhibit 29**.

**EXHIBIT 29**  
**HIGHER EDUCATION READINESS – TEXAS**  
**SUCCESS INITIATIVE**  
**PSJA ISD, REGION 1, AND STATE**  
**2004–05 THROUGH 2006–07**

ENTITY	ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS		MATH
	2004–05		
<b>PSJA</b>	<b>24%</b>		<b>29%</b>
Region 1	30%		38%
State	39%		48%
	2005–06		
<b>PSJA</b>	<b>36%</b>		<b>34%</b>
Region 1	33%		43%
State	40%		51%
	2006–07		
<b>PSJA</b>	<b>43%</b>		<b>35%</b>
Region 1	44%		47%
State	53%		54%

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, AEIS, 2004–05 through 2006–07.

PSJA ISD students have high post-secondary career aspirations. An ACT survey of the PSJA ISD Class of 2006 showed that 96 percent of the students reported higher education plans. About 7 percent wanted to attend a vocational-technical or a two-year college, and 87.2 percent of the students wanted to go to a four-year college and get a Bachelor's or higher degree (**Exhibit 30**).

**EXHIBIT 30**  
**PSJA ISD STUDENTS POST-SECONDARY**  
**EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS**  
**CLASS OF 2006**

EDUCATIONAL DEGREE ASPIRATIONS	CLASS OF 2006 STUDENTS	
	NUMBER (N-714)	PERCENTAGE*
Voc-Tech	13	1.8%
2-year college degree	35	4.9%
Bachelor's degree	283	39.6%
Graduate study	55	7.7%
Professional level degree	285	39.9%
Other	15	2.1%
No response	28	3.9%

\*Percentages were calculated based on total of 714 graduates.

SOURCES: ACT High School Profile Report, The Graduating Class of 2006; PSJA High School.

About 88 percent of students in the PSJA ISD Class of 2006 identified their post-secondary educational majors, as shown in **Exhibit 31**. Health sciences and allied health was the most commonly identified major.

PSJA ISD Class of 2006 students expressed a wide range of college/university preferences at the time the ACT was taken, as shown in **Exhibit 32**. Students mostly listed universities and colleges in Texas. The most commonly listed institutions included the University of Texas – Pan American, South Texas College, University of Texas in Austin, Texas A&M University, and the University of Texas in San Antonio. The University of Texas – Pan American was the first choice of 53.1 percent of the students.

PSJA ISD has developed a college going culture throughout all grade levels. Counselors go into elementary school classes and talk about college and careers. At some of the elementary schools students wear college t-shirts every Friday. The elementary schools also have career fairs with presenters from different occupations. Elementary schools raise college scholarship funds and give \$300 scholarships to graduating seniors. In 2006–07, North Alamo Elementary gave 20 such scholarships.

The district has several college-awareness/college going programs in middle schools. The middle schools have 30-minute daily advisory periods when college is discussed to create college awareness. Academic counselors also discuss with students the benefits of taking AP classes. PSJA ISD has both the AVID and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for undergraduate Programs (Gear-Up) programs that prepare students for college success. The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, implemented with 8th grade students at PSJA ISD, targets minority, low-income, rural students without a college-going tradition in their families and takes them through a special curriculum to get them ready to take advanced classes in high school and prepares them for college. Students enrolled in AVID go on college trips and have tutors helping them with academics. Students who participate in AVID are required to take advanced classes in high school. The middle schools with AVID programs have a university outreach center that creates college awareness among students. PSJA ISD middle schools adopted AVID strategies in all classes. Gear-Up targets middle and high school students and wants to create high expectations and college going aspirations. The program prepares students for college through academic preparation programs, scholarships, professional development for educators, and college access information for students and parents.

The district's AVID and Gear-Up programs have a parent involvement component. Parents of students in the Gear-Up

**EXHIBIT 31**  
**PSJA ISD CLASS OF 2006**  
**PLANNED POST-SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL MAJORS**

PLANNED EDUCATIONAL MAJOR	ALL STUDENTS		STUDENTS PLANNING	
	NUMBER (N=714)	PERCENTAGE	2 YEARS OR LESS OF COLLEGE (N=48)	4 YEARS OR MORE OF COLLEGE (N=623)
Agricultural Sciences & Technologies	9	1.3%	***	8
Architecture & Environmental Design	18	2.5%	***	18
Business & Management	64	9.0%	***	61
Business & Office	***	0.1%	***	***
Marketing & Distribution	***	0.4%	***	***
Communications and Communication Technologies	13	1.8%	***	13
Community & Personal Services	49	6.9%	***	45
Computer & Information Sciences	15	2.1%	***	14
Education	27	3.8%	5	21
Teacher Education	30	4.2%	***	28
Engineering	59	8.3%	***	54
Engineering-related Technologies	18	2.5%	***	14
Foreign Languages	***	0.3%	***	***
Health Sciences & Allied Health Fields	170	23.8%	13	153
Human, Family & Consumer Sciences	8	1.1%	***	7
Letters	7	1.0%	***	6
Mathematics	***	0.3%	***	***
Philosophy, Religion & Theology	***	0.4%	***	***
Sciences (Biological & Physical)	18	2.5%	***	18
Social Sciences	60	8.4%	***	58
Trade & Industrial	***	0.6%	***	***
Visual & Performing Arts	48	6.7%	***	44
Undecided	48	6.7%	***	39
No Response	38	5.3%	***	11

\*\*\*Results masked to protect student confidentiality.

NOTE: Percentages were calculated based on total of 714.

SOURCE: ACT High School Profile Report, The Graduating Class of 2006; PSJA High School.

program meet twice a month to receive information on financial aid. Parents whose 8th grade children are in the AVID program meet once a month. Beginning in 2004–05 and in collaboration with the University of Texas – Pan American, PSJA ISD instituted a Mother-Daughter program for students in grades 7 and 8 with the focus of increasing college awareness. In addition, PSJA ISD offers high school level classes to students starting in grade 7 with the objective of encouraging students to take a rigorous curriculum and prepare for higher education. It also implements the Texas Scholar Program in all its middle and high schools. This program brings professionals within the local community into the classroom to present information to students on the importance and lasting impact of taking a rigorous curriculum in high school.

The district stresses the value of higher education to the parents. For example, the Step for Success program targets high school parents, informing them about the importance

of college education and the steps involved in applying and receiving admission to college. Parents are invited together with their children to workshops in English and Spanish and to events like College Night and Financial Aid Night. The high schools have College Nights for each grade level. PSJA ISD also takes students to visit colleges both in and outside of Texas.

PSJA ISD assists students with college applications and financial aid forms. Each high school has a GO Center clerk that assists students with college applications. The clerk makes sure that each student applies to several colleges. The district also has a financial aid officer who provides post-secondary information on college admission tests. According to the counselors, all PSJA graduating students in 2007–08 will apply either to STC or to the University of Texas – Pan American.

PSJA ISD's college readiness initiatives are supported through the close relationship it has developed with STC. Through

**EXHIBIT 32**  
**COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY CHOICES**  
**PSJA ISD CLASS OF 2006**

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	NUMBER OF STUDENTS (N=714)		
	TOTAL	1ST CHOICE	2ND TO 6TH CHOICE
University of Texas – Pan American, TX	620	379	241
South Texas College, TX	317	69	248
University of Texas – Austin, TX	187	47	140
Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi, TX	162	22	140
Texas A&M University – Kingsville, TX	151	22	129
University of Texas – San Antonio, TX	129	19	110
Texas A&M University – Main Campus, TX	98	16	82
Texas State University – San Marcos, TX	53	14	39
Texas State Technical College – Harlingen, TX	40	***	38
St. Edwards University, TX	37	***	34
Rice University, TX	33	6	27
University of Houston – Main Campus, TX	33	***	32
St Mary's University of San Antonio, TX	29	6	23
Baylor University, TX	28	***	24
Our Lady of the Lake University, TX	28	5	23
University of Texas – Brownsville, TX	28	***	27
San Antonio College	16	7	9
Trinity University, TX	16	***	14
Texas Tech University, TX	13	***	12
Sam Houston State University, TX	12	***	9
Ohio State University, Ohio	11	***	9
Texas A&M International University, TX	11	***	8
University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio, TX	9	***	8
University of Houston, Downtown, TX	9	***	9
University of Texas – Harlingen, TX	8	***	7
University of Incarnate Word, TX	8	***	5
University of North Texas, TX	8	***	8
The Art institute of Houston, TX	7	***	5
Northwood University of Texas, TX	7	***	7
Wabash College, Indiana	7	5	***
All other institutions	300	61	239

\*\*\* Results masked to protect student confidentiality.

SOURCE: ACT High School Profile Report, The Graduating Class of 2006; PJSJA High School.

this partnership, the district collaborated with the college on a two-year College Connection grant. STC staff comes to PSJA ISD high schools and offers assistance with applications to STC. After students are admitted they can take the Accuplacer test free of charge. STC instructors who teach dual credit classes repeatedly tell PSJA ISD students about the benefits of going to college. Additionally, PSJA ISD has also partnered with STC for the purpose of opening a Texas Science Technology Engineering and Math (T-STEM) Early College High School in 2008–09.

In addition to counselors, PSJA ISD teachers and other staff talk to students about college. For example, while the librarians work with students on research projects, students are taught about the type of research that will be expected of them in college and the type of databases that will be accessed.

To get students college ready, high school teachers give essay and open-ended questions rather than multiple-choice questions on exams, to replicate the type of exams that are given in college. In math, teachers ask students to explain the thought process used in solving problems and justify their approach. High school teachers also invite university professors to attend their classes and assess their instructional rigor. Teachers also use AP strategies and questions from AP exams in all their classes.

### KEY FINDINGS AND KEY FACTORS

PSJA ISD is a large district with more than 30,000 students in 2007–08. Its students are 98.7 percent Hispanic, 90.0 percent economically disadvantaged, 75.9 percent at-risk, and 41.4 percent are English Language Learners. Student performance across the district's 37 campuses varies with two campuses rated *Exemplary* and 14 rated *Recognized*.

The district's drive toward high academic performance is evident. It is found in its wide range of programs serving its different student population groups (e.g. migrants, new comers), its ability to take advantage of and build on its unique characteristics exemplified in its effective dual-language programs, and its willingness to take on challenging programs, such as the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program at Garcia Elementary.

PSJA ISD deserves credit for its revolutionary strategies. This is due to its innovative and effective efforts to address long-standing issues such as the longitudinal dropout rate, high school graduation rate, and preparation of students for higher education. These efforts have been initiated and effectively implemented in 2007–08 under the leadership of the new superintendent. The “Countdown to Zero” initiative that tracks both potential and actual dropouts and verifies the actual status of students who withdraw from school cut down by half the district's dropout rate in a short time and will likely achieve its goal of “0” dropouts through programs such as the College, Career, and Technology Academy and partnerships with area colleges and universities, employment training organizations like Workforce Solutions, and social agencies. In its first year, the College, Career, and Technology Academy will graduate 150 students—students who would have most likely dropped out. Upon graduation, the Academy students have not only earned a high school diploma but have also earned college credit, and are on their way to completing a college program.

The district continues to make higher education a priority. With South Texas College as a partner, PSJA ISD will use programs like the College, Career, and Technology Academy and the T-STEM Early College High School that the district plans to open in 2008–09 as a seamless pathway to college for all its students. It is the goal of the district, as expressed by the superintendent, to enroll all juniors and seniors in early college.