

Contributing Factors to Hispanic Educational Outcomes in Texas

Karen Hale Lewis

Assistant Professor of Sociology
Dickinson State University
291 Campus Drive
Dickinson, North Dakota 58601

Dianne Dentice

Associate Professor of Sociology
Stephen F. Austin State University
1936 North Street, LAN 330
Nacogdoches, Texas 75962-3047

Abstract

Relationships between communities and schools contain political, institutional, and network dimensions that impact education inequality. Neighborhood economic characteristics have been linked to reading and math test scores and have been found to impact educational outcomes within communities. Since local government and property taxes largely fund schools in the United States, it is important to examine differences within local communities by identifying limitations imposed on educational success at the district level. School districts have authority to impose regulations beyond both federal and state guidelines with far reaching implications for school age children and their families. Our research focuses on Hispanic students in Texas with an emphasis on the 14 border counties. This study advances knowledge about Hispanic student educational success and our synthesized theoretical model, including aspects of social capital and political resources, acts as a valuable explanation regarding factors that foster student success rather than issues that impact failure.

Keywords: education inequality, Hispanic students, social capital, resource allocation, border counties

1. Introduction

Throughout history, education has been seen as a mechanism for socializing children, creating social change and encouraging human progress. The structure of schooling in the United States has remained virtually the same throughout the 20th century and now into the 21st century even though demographic changes have occurred and the population is becoming more and more diverse. Much of the research on educational inequality in the United States assesses the relationship between race and both family and community access to social capital and political resources. Outcomes are often measured by examining family income, opportunities for job advancement, and educational attainment among the population (Lomax, West, Harmon, Viator, & Madaus, 1995; Polinard, Wrinkle, & Meier, 1995; Meier, Polinard, & Wrinkle, 2000; Buchmann, Condron, & Roscigno, 2010; Carbonaro & Covay, 2010). Many comparative studies linking income and performance demonstrate the expectation that, in the United States, educational achievement and success is not only stratified by race and ethnicity but also by social class.

School administrators must consider the level of political resources available to minorities, which in turn influence the development of strategies to achieve specific educational goals (Polinard et al., 1995; Meier et al., 2000). Other studies have linked educational inequality to social capital in families (Coleman, 1988, 1990; Morgan & Sørensen, 1999; Morgan, 2000; Gillies & Edwards, 2006; Laser & Leibowitz, 2009; Freeman & Condron, 2011). The relationships between the community and schools have also been noted in literature as having political, institutional, and network dimensions that impact inequality (Arum, 2000; Reardon, 2011). Our study focuses on 14 counties along the Texas Mexico border that contain 71 school districts. In regions such as the South and Southwest, Teachman, Paasch, and Carver (1996) found that low wage, low skill work creates limited opportunities for families and may negatively affect education outcomes for their children.

National trends from the late 1960s suggest that minority students are more likely to encounter barriers to advancement in education no matter the region of residence (England, Meier, & Fraga, 1988; Lomax et al., 1995; Polinard et al., 1995; Buchmann et al., 2010; Grodsky, Warren & Felts, 2008; McDaniel, DiPrete, Buchmann, & Shwed, 2011). Even with language and other barriers, Mexican American student success is a reality based on the findings cited in this research study. This study advances knowledge about Hispanic¹ students of Mexican origin in South Texas and provides a critical assessment of a neglected area, the Texas Mexico border region.

2. Background: High Stakes Testing in the United States

Since the 1960s, standardized tests have been used in the United States for descriptive and research purposes, diagnostic purposes, and gate keeping, as well as a means of holding instructors and administrators accountable for the academic achievements of their students (Grodsky et al., 2008). Reformers suggest that standardized testing improves our educational system while critics argue that standardization weakens the educational system – especially for minority student populations (Finn, 1997; Ravitch, 1997). Because funding for education in the United States is based on property tax rates and assessment, standardized test scores help determine students' eligibility for educational support and benefits under a myriad of bilingual programs at the state level and programs for students with disabilities at the federal level, among others. Because of the perception by many educators, administrators, and government bureaucrats that standardized tests are a necessary function of public education in tandem with allocation of fiscal resources, much academic research addresses issues surrounding stratification, culture, and environment that affect students in the American educational system. Since the early 1990s, research findings indicate that more affluent families, regardless of race/ethnicity, continue to utilize shadow education or out-of-school college preparation for their children in efforts to increase scores on the American College Test (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) (Stevenson & Baker, 1992; Buchmann, 2002; Bray & Kwok, 2003; Buchmann, et al., 2010). Additionally, private school students have been found to go further in math curriculum than their counterparts in public schools which is a predictor of college enrollment and completion (Carbonaro & Covay, 2010). According to Downey, von Hippel, and Broh (2004), the primary source of inequality for young students lies in home and neighborhood environments.

Reliance on high stakes testing to measure and improve the quality of public education is entrenched; however, little progress has been made in narrowing gaps between White and minority students and middle and lower class students in mathematics achievement according to Lomax et al. (1995) and Lee and Wong (2004). In fact, Lomax et al. (1995) found that students in high-minority classrooms received less quality instruction in math and science because of the demands on teachers to prepare them for mandated tests. While inequalities in schooling conditions persist, education public policy has failed to counteract possible differences in life chances for low income and minority students (England et al., 1988). While some studies have noted high stakes testing reduces the achievement gap among low-achieving minority students and schools with high proportions of minority students, other studies ignore factors that contribute to resource allocation and opportunities for success (Lee & Wong, 2004).

Wojtkiewicz and Donato (1995) found that students living in a home where a foreign language is spoken had lower high school graduation rates compared to students living in homes where English is spoken. Language barriers have also been cited as explaining underachievement among Mexican American students; therefore, most policy efforts have focused on English language acquisition (Ream, 2003). Other studies have found that proficiency in English lowers the likelihood that Hispanic students will drop out of high school (Bean & Tienda, 1987; Wojtkiewicz & Donato, 1995). Additionally, cultural differences and language ability affect teacher labeling of certain students as slow learners with resultant placement in remedial classes (Warren, 1996). The geographic location of school districts has also been found to negatively impact social capital formation and resource mobilization (Teachman et al., 1996). In the Southern and Southwestern regions of the United States, excessive low wage, low skill work exists due to proximity to the Mexico border and the availability of jobs for migrants in the primary job market. These factors result in limited educational opportunities for children from immigrant families largely due to the migratory nature of many of the jobs available to wage earning adults (Healey, 2014: p. 295).

¹We use the United States Census label Hispanic throughout this paper. Texas students of Latin American origin are selected for data analysis. The border counties are one of the variables tested for statistical significance.

Since local government and taxes largely fund schools in the United States, focusing on inequality within the local communities can help identify limitations in educational success at the district level with data supporting the fact that schools in poor neighborhoods are more likely to be inferior to schools in more affluent communities (Kozol, 2005: p. 44). National trends in data from the late 1960s through the early 1980s support Arum's (2000) and Ainsworth's (2002) findings that minority students are more likely to encounter barriers due to neighborhood segregation, migratory nature of jobs, and lack of parental support to stay in and finish school and eventually go on to college (Coleman, 1988; England et al., 1988; Dika & Singh, 2002). While most educational research has focused on disparity between African Americans and non-Hispanic Whites, Warren (1996) explored inequality among White and Mexican-origin adolescents' educational achievement in the American Southwest region. Findings from the Pew Research Center reveal that in 1993 the Hispanic student dropout rate was 33% and by 2013 it had decreased to 14% (Krogstad, 2015). In 2011, a record 2.1 million Hispanic students (ages 18 to 24) were enrolled in American colleges (Fry & Lopez, 2012) which indicate a positive trend for Hispanic American families with school age children.

3. Theoretical Framework

For this paper, we focus on social capital and political resource theories and propose a model that utilizes both perspectives to help explain factors that impact Hispanic student performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), a standardized test administered during the years 2003 through 2009. Passing the test was a prerequisite to high school graduation for all Texas students at the time. Social Capital Theory According to Coleman (1988, 1990) educational achievement as a form of capital can be of use as long as families are stable and there are no disruptions in the order of community life where schools are located. Educational studies following a reproduction approach to social capital effects have been heavily influenced by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Bourdieu (1986, 1990). The Bourdieu model suggests that cultural and social environments are important socializers of children providing them with important attributes essential for achieving lifetime success. Families with greater forms of capital are believed to have more resources with which to expose their children to valued experiences and social networks that, in turn, give them access to extended cultural capital. Extensive education research supports the idea that family structure and mobility are linked to forms of capital that provide distinct status advantages in both academic and occupational endeavors (Coleman, 1988, 1990; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Teachman et al., 1996; Amato, 1998; Runyan, Hunter, Soicolar, Amaya-Jackson, English, Landsverk, Dubowitz, Browne, Bangdiwala, & Mathew, 1998).

When testing Coleman's theory, Gillies and Edwards (2006) found that Coleman's social networks were present in the sample of working class families in their study. They argue that their findings contradict the assumptions held by both Coleman (1988, 1990) and Bourdieu (1986) that working and lower class communities are deficient in social capital in its many different forms. Additionally, Krogstad (2015) reports that over the past ten years, the Hispanic high school dropout rate in the United States has dropped significantly and more and more Hispanic students are enrolling in colleges and universities. Still, variations of social capital that include cultural capital, symbolic capital, and human capital have been used in research studies to explain differences in educational attainment due to lower competency in English (especially for Hispanic English as second language students) and socioeconomic disadvantages that affect student mobility within the system (Wojtkiewicz & Donato, 1995; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Ream, 2003).

Political Resource Theory

The political resource model examines demographic characteristics that impact educational outcomes. Unlike the social capital approach, political resource theory focuses on district attributes, policymakers, and school board members who have direct impact on how resources for school districts are allocated (Polinard et al., 1995). This model also assumes that policymakers who are elected by minority voters will take care of the needs of their constituents, hire minority administrators and faculty, which in turn benefits minority students in the school district (Meier, Stewart, & England, 1989; Meier & Stewart, 1991). Subsequent studies revealed that disparities in educational resource allocation are directly attributable to the use of property taxes as the mode of funding of public schools (Roscigno, 2000) and school districts with families of higher socioeconomic status are more able to lobby local and school officials to provide resources that satisfy their children's educational needs (Klugman, 2005; Kozol, 2005).

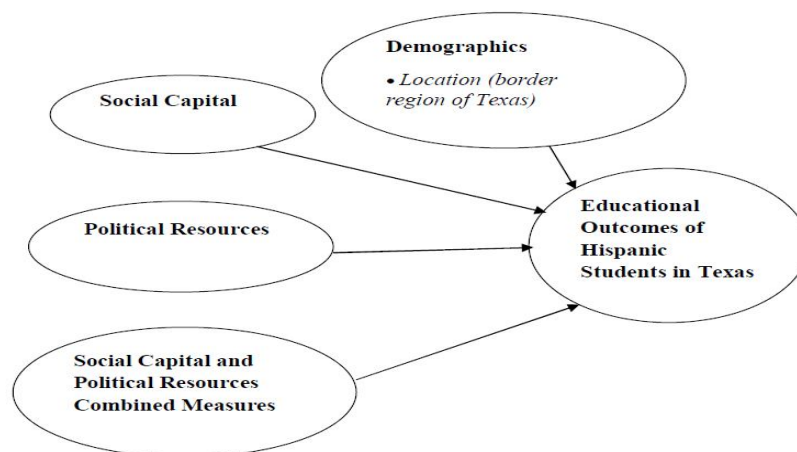
Resource allocation in school districts is shaped by political practices and negotiations at local, state and federal levels (Ferguson & Ladd, 1996; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001; Volk, Slaughter, & Thomas, 2001; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2010; Carnoy, Ngware, & Oketch, 2015). According to Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder (2001), the socioeconomic composition of a school's student population can influence educational outcomes along with allocation of both fiscal and human resources.

They also found that districts composed of students with higher status family backgrounds experienced higher levels of engagement among the student body and with lower overall dropout rates. Schools serving students in neighborhoods that have high poverty rates have been found to need more resources in order to create productive environments conducive to positive educational outcomes (Murphy, 1986; Ferguson et al., 1996; Spillane et al., 2001). These resources include computers, textbooks, updated facilities and low student-to-teacher ratio (Roscigno, 2000).

Social Capital and Political Resource Combined

Both social capital and political resource theories have been used to explain factors that facilitate positive educational outcomes. Although social capital and political resource theories each address the different processes involved in attaining positive outcomes in education, this study combines aspects of both to further explain factors that contribute to educational success of Hispanic students in Texas school districts along the border with Mexico. These factors include educational institutions, location of border area, language proficiency, and program resources. Social capital has been criticized for not considering the social resources and access to social networks (Dika & Singh, 2002; Gillies & Edwards, 2006). Political resource theory fails to consider differing forms of capital, including social and linguistic, that allow for social network associations (Gillies & Edwards, 2006). However, we argue that both theories make important contributions to explaining conditions that produce positive education outcomes. Following the work of Lin (1999), we combine both political resource and social capital theories in order to strengthen an understanding of resource mobilization and other characteristics accessed within social networks in South Texas school districts examined in this study. Refer to Figure 1 for a graphic depiction of our combined theoretical model.

Figure 1: Combined Social Capital and Political Resource Theoretical Model Explaining Hispanic Educational Outcomes in Texas



4. Data and Methodology

The Academic Excellence Indicator System for 2006-2007 (AEIS) data is used in this study. The data for AEIS is collected annually by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and is available from the agency website at <http://tea.texas.gov/>. TEA data are arranged in 23 files that can be downloaded by district aggregates. The data set includes state, county, district and school performance indicators. The contents include information on the district reference, student demographics, staff information, finances, non-TAKS performance indicators, college admissions and college ready graduates, completion rates, and TAKS indicators for different grades and grade aggregates. District reference information includes the county name, county number, charter status, district name, district number rating, region, region name, and special education monitoring results status.

These variables allow for the data in each set to be arranged by district name and number to combine reference sets. For this project, a single working data set was constructed from variables selected from five main reference sets including district student information, district staff information, district financial information, district non-TAKS performance information, and TAKS cumulative pass rate for 2006. Refer to Table 1 for descriptive statistics of variables for Hispanic student educational outcomes in Texas.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Variables*for Hispanic Educational Outcomes in Texas School Districts

Variables	Percent/Mean	Standard Deviation	District Funding Amount in 2006 dollars
<i>Dependent Variable</i>			
TAKS cumulative pass rate Hispanic students	79.79	15.798	
<i>Independent Variables</i>			
Border Region (dummy variable)	.09	.279	
Revenue per student		\$2238.92	\$9545.92
Economically disadvantaged students	56.52	19.815	
English language learners	5.65	8.850	
Hispanic special education students	11.86	4.190	
At risk Hispanic students	47.70	16.945	
Hispanic teachers	16.21	23.630	
Hispanic students in advanced courses	13.53	8.868	
Attendance rate	95.20	2.858	
Dropout rate – (Grades 7-12)	2.78	3.828	
Hispanic students enrolled in Texas school districts	43.97	27.125	
Hispanic students enrolled in Texas gifted/talented programs	6.36	3.358	

*Defined in the TEA codebook for AEIS 2006-2007

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. Does social capital theory, as measured by language proficiency, percent of students in special education programs, and percent of students at risk have a linear effect on educational success for Hispanic students in Texas school districts?
2. Does combining social capital and political resources, as measured by economic deprivation and district revenues, have a linear effect on educational success for Hispanic students in Texas school districts?
3. Does political resource theory, as measured by percent of Hispanic teachers, percent of Hispanic students enrolled in advanced courses, overall attendance rate of Hispanic students, dropout rate of Hispanic students, the percent of Hispanic students enrolled in school, and the percent of Hispanic students enrolled in gifted and talented programs have a linear effect on educational success for Hispanic students in Texas school districts?

This study uses school districts as the unit of analysis because by examining aggregate data and identifying variation within the structural forms that contribute to educational outcomes we can implement policy to foster an environment that is optimal for successful outcomes. With that said, in Texas, school districts are also the institutional forms that account for educational resources along with funding sources.

5. Results

The purpose of this study was to examine what effects location of school districts in border counties of Texas, social capital factors such as language proficiency, and allocation of political resources have on explaining educational outcomes for Hispanic students. Simple linear regression was conducted to test whether attending a school in a border district affects the TAKS cumulative pass rate of Hispanic students in Texas school districts. The following regression equation reflects results in Table 2:

$$y (\text{TAKS pass rate}) = a (79.986) - b1x1 (2.303 \text{ border}) + \epsilon1$$

Table 2: OLS Bivariate Regression Results Predicting Hispanic TAKS Pass Rate in Texas School Districts

Independent Variable	b	β
Border County (location)	-2.303	-0.041
Constant	79.986	----
R ²	.002	
N	703	

* $p \leq 0.05$. ** $p \leq 0.01$. *** $p \leq 0.001$. (two-tailed test)

The results are not significant, therefore, no linear relationship exists between border location and Hispanic TAKS pass rate. The R² of .002 suggests that less than one percent of the variation in Hispanic TAKS pass rate is accounted for by its linear relationship to border location. The Hispanic TAKS pass rate is 79.986 when location is not accounted for. By combining both district revenues with the percent of economically disadvantaged students, Table 3, provides the results of multiple OLS regressions that test whether the percent of economic disadvantaged students in a district negatively affects the TAKS cumulative pass rate for Hispanics students in Texas school districts and if the amount of school revenue per pupil positively affects the TAKS cumulative pass rate for Hispanics students in Texas school districts. The following regression equation reflects results in Table 3: y (Hispanic TAKS rate) = a (74.084) + b₂x₂ (0.002 revenue) – b₃x₃ (0.231disadvantage)

Table 3: OLS Regression Results of Combined Measures Predicting Hispanic TAKS Pass Rate in Texas School Districts

Independent Variable	b	β
District Revenue	.002***	.278***
Percent Economically Disadvantaged	-.231***	-.289***
Constant	74.084	----
R ²	.149	
N	704	

* $p \leq 0.05$. ** $p \leq 0.01$. *** $p \leq 0.001$. (two-tailed test)

The results for both predictors are significant suggesting the presence of linear relationships between both revenue and disadvantage with Hispanic TAKS pass rate. The R² of .149 suggests that almost 15 percent of the variation in Hispanic TAKS pass rate is accounted for by its linear relationship to revenue and economic deprivation. The Hispanic TAKS pass rate is 74.084 when revenue and disadvantage are zero. For every percent increase in district revenue, Hispanic TAKS pass rate increases by .002, holding economic disadvantage constant. For every percent increase of economic disadvantage, Hispanic TAKS pass rate decreases by 0.231, holding revenue constant. Based on the β , the percent of economically disadvantaged (-0.289) has a stronger effect on Hispanic TAKS pass rate than revenue per pupil (0.278). Both predictors are statistically significant at a $p < .01$. The predictors of most importance are shown in Table 4 and include the percent Hispanic teachers and students, percent gifted and talented, dropout rates, attendance and students in advanced courses. High correlation between Hispanic students and Hispanic teachers, as well as attendance and dropout rates, require these predictors be evaluated individually to assess which predictors should remain in the final model. The following regression equation represents results in Table 4:

y (Hispanic TAKS rate) = a (-76.426) + b₇x₇ (-.023hispanic teachers) + b₈x₈ (.012Hispanic students) + b₉x₉ (.856gifted) + b₁₀x₁₀ (-1.250dropout) + b₁₁x₁₁ (1.609attendance) = b₁₂x₁₂ (.067 advanced)

Table 4: OLS Regression Results of Political Resources Measures Predicting Hispanic TAKS Pass Rate in Texas School Districts

Independent Variables	b	β
Hispanic Teachers	-.023	-.034
Hispanic Students	.012	.021
Gifted and Talented	.856***	.182***
Dropout rates	-1.250***	-.30***
Attendance	1.609***	.292***
Advanced Courses	.067	.038
Constant	-76.426	
R ²	.432	
N	702	

* $p \leq 0.05$. ** $p \leq 0.01$. *** $p \leq 0.001$. (two-tailed test)

All of the predictors that measure political resources presented in Table 4 should be interpreted with caution as some of the variables are highly correlated. The predictors of most importance include the percent gifted and talented, dropout rates, and attendance. The R² of .43 suggests that about 43 percent of the variation in Hispanic TAKS pass rate is accounted for by its linear relationship to Hispanic teachers, students, gifted, dropout, attendance, and advanced courses. Of the significant predictors in this model based on the β , dropout (-.30) has the most importance in predicting Hispanic TAKS pass rate followed by attendance (.292) then percent of Hispanic students in gifted and talented courses (.182). For every percent increase in dropout rate, TAKS pass rate decreases by 1.250 percent. For every percent increase in attendance rate, TAKS pass rate increases 1.61 percent. For every percent increase of students in gifted and talented courses, TAKS pass rate increases by 0.86 percent. Each of the three predictors is statistically significant at a $p < .01$ for a one-tailed directional test. A full model, presented in Table 5, includes all of the predictor variables for location, combined measures, social capital measures, and political resource measures.

Table 5: OLS Regression Results of Full Model Predicting Hispanic TAKS Pass Rate in Texas School Districts

Independent Variable	b	β
Border district (location)	2.42	.04
District revenue	.001**	.11**
Economically disadvantaged	-.055	-.07
English Language Learners	-.227***	-.131***
Special Education Programs	-.002	.000
At-Risk Students	-.261***	-.282***
Hispanic Teachers	-.065	-.10
Hispanic Students	.132***	.232***
Gifted and Talented Students	.479**	.103**
Dropout rates	-1.123***	-.264***
Attendance	.955***	.174***
Advanced Courses (enrollment)	.001	.001
Constant	-6.38	
R ²	.48	
N	702	

* $p \leq 0.05$. ** $p \leq 0.01$. *** $p \leq 0.001$. (two-tailed test)

The percent of Hispanic teachers becomes insignificant along with the percent of Hispanic students enrolled in district schools when accounting for the percent of Hispanic gifted and talented students and dropout rate. Hispanic students who are taking advanced courses become insignificant when accounting for gifted and talented students and dropout rates. Based on these findings we should expect the percent of gifted and talented, dropout, and attendance rates to remain significant in the full model.

The R^2 of .48 indicates that almost 50 percent of the variation in Hispanic TAKS pass rate is accounted for by its linear relationship with the predictor measures included in the model. Location, percent of Hispanic students economically disadvantaged, in special education programs, percent of Hispanic teachers, and percent of Hispanic student in advanced courses do not have significant linear relationships with Hispanic TAKS pass rate when taking other factors into consideration. District revenue, the percent of Hispanic students that are English language learners, at-risk, Hispanic students, and enrolled in gifted and talented courses combined with dropout and attendance rates have statistically significant linear relationships with TAKS Hispanic pass rates. The percent of Hispanic students who were English language learners, at-risk and dropouts each have negative effects of Hispanic TAKS pass rates, while district revenue, percent of Hispanic students, gifted and talented, and attendance each have positive effects.

Based on the β , the percent of Hispanic students at-risk (.28) has the most influence on Hispanic TAKS pass rate, followed by dropout rates (.26) and percent of Hispanic students (.23). Attendance rates (.17) and percent of English language learners (.13) have less significant importance, while district revenue (.11) and percent of gifted and talented have least importance on Hispanic TAKS pass rates. District revenue and gifted and talented are both significant at a .01 level for a two tailed test, while English language learners, at-risk, Hispanic students, dropout and attendance rates are all significant at a .001 level. For every percent increase in at-risk Hispanic students, TAKS pass rate decreases by .261, holding all else constant. Every percent increase in Hispanic dropout rate, decreases TAKS pass rate by 1.12 percent, all else equal. Each percent increase in percent of Hispanic students, increase Hispanic TAKS pass rate by 13 percent, holding all else constant. For every percent increase in attendance rate, Hispanic TAKS pass rate increase by 96 percent, all else being equal. For every percent increase in Hispanic students who are English language learners, Hispanic TAKS pass rate decreases by 23 percent, holding all other factors constant. Every percent increase in Hispanic students enrolled in gifted and talented courses, Hispanic TAKS pass rate increases by 48 percent. District revenue has the least effect on Hispanic TAKS pass rate and only increases by .001 for each percent increase, holding all other factors constant.

6. Discussion

Findings indicate that despite the fact that both social capital and political resources are more limited in Texas border school districts, due to high levels of poverty and bilingual and bicultural residents, this does not have a significant impact on Hispanic students' TAKS pass rates or educational success in these Texas school districts. Attending a border school district alone has no significant relationship with Hispanic student pass rates. We found that Hispanic students in Texas school districts are equally as likely to pass their TAKS exams regardless if they live in the border area or not. Poverty and the percent of families that are economically disadvantaged in the border school districts may produce other factors that affect educational success but location alone, in this case, does not account for any meaningful effect on pass rates for Hispanic students. Additionally, opportunities for citizens to mobilize resources affect status attainment, such as educational success for school age students. School funding based on local tax revenue can limit access to resources for communities with high rates of poverty as well. Social capital factors including the percentage of Hispanic students with limited English language proficiency and the percent of at-risk students in a district have been found to impact successful educational outcomes (Bean & Tienda, 1987; Wojtkiewicz & Donato, 1995; Ream, 2003). Interestingly the percent of Hispanic students in special education programs had no significant effect on Hispanic students pass rates in the Texas school districts represented in this study. We found that the percent of Hispanic students at-risk in a district has the most impact while social capital accounts for about a third of the variation in educational outcomes. Of the six measures of resource allocation, the percentage of Hispanic teachers and the percent of Hispanic students taking advanced courses, are not statistically significant predictors of Hispanic students' TAKS cumulative pass rate in Texas school districts.

Using a synthesis of social capital and political resource theories to improve understanding and estimates of factors that impact Hispanic students TAKS cumulative pass rates in Texas school districts provides a better fit model than applying the two theories individually. Attending a border school district has no significant impact on Hispanic students TAKS cumulative pass rate. Overlapping constructs, district revenue and percent economically disadvantaged, of both social and political resource theories account for 15 percent of variation when predicting Hispanic students TAKS cumulative pass rate in Texas school districts. Social capital measures of human, financial, and cultural capital account for 28 percent of the variation when predicting Hispanic students TAKS cumulative pass rate in Texas school districts.

Political resources of school districts account for 43 percent of the variation in Hispanic students TAKS cumulative pass rate in Texas school districts. The factors combined together account for almost 50 percent of the variation in Hispanic student TAKS cumulative pass rate in Texas school districts. The results of this study are specific to analysis of aggregate level education data. Our focus was to identify and examine structural factors such as location, resource allocation, and poverty independently from individual factors in our examination of educational attainment for Hispanic students in Texas. As a result, the theoretical applications in this study are focused on macro level analysis and interpretation. Factors such as home environment, family background and other micro or individual differences are not part of the analysis. This study is further limited to a specific minority group, Hispanic students in Texas. Analysis is also restricted to a particular location; districts located in the border area of Texas and Mexico. Finally, the conceptualization of both social capital and political resources is restricted by the measurements of variables provided in the data set.

7. Conclusion & Recommendations

Standards-based reform has been the primary approach in public school education since the 1990s. The state of Texas has operated a statewide program of academic assessments in public schools since 1979. A central premise of this model is that schools will be driven to improve as a consequence of rewards and punishments attached to pre-ordained goals established by bureaucratic authorities (Valenzuela, 2004; Honig, 2006). According to McNeil (2000), McNeil and Valenzuela (2001), Sloan (2004) and Valenzuela (2004), this practice resulted in a narrowing rather than a broadening of classroom instruction for Texas school children in grades K through 12. Due to grass roots efforts of activists in Texas, the practice of retaining students in the third grade based solely on poor test performance ended in 2010 before the current system, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) was implemented during the 2011-2012 school year. Valenzuela (2004: p 2) found that the Texas system was actually leaving children behind because of its focus on high-stakes consequences in the areas of retention, promotion, and graduation – specifically underprivileged children of color. She also linked test scores to the school privatization agenda advocated by people who argue that schools can be run more efficiently by private companies utilizing a business model. In 2012, school boards from more than 880 Texas districts passed a resolution demanding an accountability system that does not rely solely on high stakes testing. Responding to vocal opposition from constituents, Texas legislators passed House Bill 5 (HB5) into law in 2013. The Bill would reduce the total number of high school STAAR exams from 15 to 5. The bill passed the Texas House and Senate unanimously but was vetoed by Governor Rick Perry. A report by Valenzuela, Sun, Germain, and Barnes (2015) cautioned that unless a new testing framework is implemented that differs substantially from Texas' current high stakes testing system, our schools will continue to be adversely affected and both children and curriculum, marginalized.

The possibilities for future research in determining structural factors that impact educational outcomes are vast. Research replicating the application of social capital and political resource theories to the analysis of school districts in other border states such as Arizona and New Mexico would allow for comparisons between states. Longitudinal research can also be considered for future research as the AEIS is collected annually by the TEA in Texas. Longitudinal comparisons can help determine if the factors that impact educational success vary from year to year. Future studies might incorporate organizational theories to explore the impact of teacher qualifications and experience on educational outcomes. Finally, presenting alternatives to a system that relies on high stakes consequences for test scores should be a focus for education policy research.

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