

High school graduation requirements show promise for African American, Latino students

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New high school graduation requirements in Texas will significantly affect academic achievement in the state, particularly for low-income students of color, according to a policy report released by the Institute for Urban Policy Research & Analysis (IUPRA) at The University of Texas at Austin.

The report, led by IUPRA Policy Coordinator Victor O. Obaseki, raises important questions about House Bill 5, a package of major education reforms approved by lawmakers and signed by Gov. Rick Perry that overhauls graduation requirements and reduces the number of state tests that high school students must pass.

The new legislation avoids emphasizing testing over curriculum, an approach that widens the achievement gap among whites, Asians, Latinos and African Americans, says Obaseki.

According to the analysis, African American and Latino students fare worse on standardized tests than their white and Asian counterparts. In fact, the latest college readiness indicators of the Texas Education Agency show that just 8.1 percent of black students and 12.1 percent of Latino students in the class of 2011 were at or above criterion score on the SAT or ACT national college entrance exam. However, 40.6 percent of white students and 51.8 percent of Asian students reached the same benchmark.

"Crucially, HB 5 does not allow for national standardized exam scores to be a part of any of the new graduation plans designed by the State Board of Education," Obaseki says. "Fortunately, this decision keeps with the heart of the top 10 percent rule, which aims to focus on students' performance on school curriculum, not standardized exams, in order to diversify the state's flagship universities."

The report also highlights the potential benefits and disadvantages of the Charter School Expansion Bill (Senate Bill 2) approved this year, which opens the door to new [charter schools](#). Obaseki points to data that indicate it remains unclear whether the likely increase in charter schools will lead to improved educational outcomes for students. Charter schools serve disproportionately high populations of students of color.

According to the latest TEA report comparing charter and traditional public schools, state exam passing rates for Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students were higher in all subjects in charter schools. African American students in charter schools fared better than their counterparts in traditional public schools in all subjects, except social studies, in which rates were the same.

However, Obaseki cites another study that shows that Texas [students](#) who transferred from traditional public schools to charter schools achieved lower exam scores at certain grade levels.

"Because private entities run open-enrollment charter schools—with fewer regulations than traditional public schools—and receive state funding, the perennial question with the growth of charter schools is whether this type of school produces better educational outcomes than traditional [public schools](#)," Obaseki says.

More information: [www.utexas.edu/cola/insts/iupr ...
files/pdf/Education%20Brief_10.10_Final.pdf](http://www.utexas.edu/cola/insts/iupr...files/pdf/Education%20Brief_10.10_Final.pdf)

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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