

Hidalgo Early College District Toolkit

City of Hidalgo Profile

The south Texas city of Hidalgo, with about 14,000 residents and 4.4 square miles in area, is eight miles south of McAllen and just across the Rio Grande from Reynosa, Mexico, a city of over 1 million people. Hidalgo is home to the McAllen-Hidalgo-Reynosa International Bridge, the fourth busiest port of entry on the southern U.S. border. The main industries on the Texas side of the border are construction, hotel and food service, educational services, and health care. Major employers include the Hidalgo and Valley View school districts, the federal government (U.S. Customs and Border Protection), the City of Hidalgo, and Logicon, one of south Texas's largest transportation companies.

Hidalgo History

In 1749, Spanish colonizer José de Escandon founded what is today known as Hidalgo. Until the mid-1800s, the main economic activity in the Spanish settlement was raising cattle. The land is chaparral, characterized by hot dry summers and cool moist winters. In 1848, Scottish merchant John Young claimed the area as a trading post and ferry landing opposite Reynosa, Mexico. Young named the town Edinburg, after his hometown in Scotland, but the town changed its name to Hidalgo in 1876, honoring Mexican patriot Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla for whom the county had been named 24 years earlier. Hidalgo was the county's only town until 1905.

Over the following decades, Hidalgo grew from a fledgling frontier community into a popular trading post, with frequent ferry crossings and steamboat landings from Mexico. Meanwhile, nearby McAllen, Texas, was becoming a vibrant commercial center, beginning in 1904 when the city became connected to the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway. Although Hidalgo did not experience the growth of McAllen and the other railroad cities, it retained its significance as an international border city. However, in 1913, the railroad arrived in Hidalgo, and the bridge over the Rio Grande opened in 1926, connecting Hidalgo with Reynosa. With the arrival of the railroad, Hidalgo County became a magnet for settlers from the Midwest and east.

In 1910, an irrigation pump house in Hidalgo began pumping Rio Grande water into a canal system that irrigated thousands of acres of chaparral, which were then cleared and sold for the growing of sugar cane, cotton, citrus and vegetables in the semi-arid land. By 1978, Hidalgo County was averaging \$188 million in annual farm income, 90 percent of which came from cotton, corn, citrus fruit, sugarcane, and grain. In 1983, the pumps were electrified and moved downstream, and the original pump house with its historical steam engines and pumps became a museum.

The city attracted national attention in 1990 when the Africanized honey bee—also known as the “killer bee”—made its first U.S. appearance in Hidalgo. Within months, the citizens of Hidalgo had commissioned and installed a 10-foot tall, one-ton statue of the famed bee. To date, over 100,000 locals, tourists, and journalists have visited this now famous landmark.

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As a border city, Hidalgo is today on the frontline of national security and immigration issues. The Hidalgo police force works closely with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which is one of the area's top employers, to deter terrorism, illegal immigration, and drug trafficking.

Hidalgo and McAllen have had historically low rates of educational attainment for their populaces. In fact, only 15.1 percent of the population aged 25 and older in Hidalgo County held a Bachelor's degree in 2008, compared with 35 percent of the U.S. population. Hidalgo Independent School District is now actively working to change this situation. In 2005, the Hidalgo Independent School District became the first school district to implement an Early College program, pre-kindergarten through Grade 12. This initiative has had tremendous success. The first class of early college students graduated in June 2010 with more than 3,700 college credits completed. 95 percent of the students graduating had successfully completed at least one college course and two-thirds of the students had earned at least a semester of credit. With these accomplishments, Hidalgo ISD is creating a new chapter in its city's history.

Hidalgo Demographics

	Hidalgo	Texas	United States
Hispanic-American	98%*	37%*	15%*
Median household income	\$20,357	\$50,043*	\$52,029*
Persons living below poverty line	41%	15%*	13%*
Children (individuals under age 18) living below poverty line	51%	23%*	18%*
Average household size	4.19	2.7	2.6
Female-headed households with no husband present	21%	22%	12%
Households with married couples	66%	54%	52%
Median Age	25	32.3*	36.7*
Population 18-years-old and under	39%	28%*	24%*

*2008-09 Estimate

Sources: The Official Website of Hidalgo, TX, <http://www.hidalgotexas.com>, Hidalgo, Texas City-Data Profile Website, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Hidalgo-Texas.html>, The U.S. Census Bureau State & County Quick Facts Web site, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48000.html>, U.S. Census Bureau Fact Sheet for Hidalgo County Web site, <http://factfinder.census.gov>, The Monitor Newspaper Web site, <http://www.themonitor.com/articles/study-41026-hidalgo-among.html>, The Handbook of Texas Online, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/HH/hch14.html>