

Eastwood, Silva lauded in science, math study

By Brandi Grissom / Austin Bureau

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AUSTIN -- Two El Paso schools are among 18 in the state identified as examples of how high schools can achieve success in math and science in a study to be released Friday.

"We should be one of the top schools in the state," said Oscar Quezada, coordinator at Silva Health Magnet, which was named along with Eastwood High School.

"That should be the expectation because we choose the best and brightest to come here."

The Texas Public Policy Foundation, an Austin-based conservative think tank, analyzed education data and surveyed high schools statewide to determine which were doing well in math and science and how the results were achieved.

According to the study, students at the schools scored well in math and science and made performance gains over time.

Other schools could emulate the practices on campuses such as Eastwood and Silva, said Jamie Story, an education policy analyst who wrote the report.

"They're all implementable by schools right now," Story said.

The study found that science teachers at high-performing schools typically had some expertise in science either from a degree or from professional

experience.

In some schools, teachers with other degrees sometimes wind up teaching math and science classes, because teachers for those subjects are harder to find.

Many of the teachers at Eastwood have or are working on advanced degrees in their fields, said Linda Hall, who teaches algebra and precalculus there.

"I think it makes a great deal of difference," she said. "It means they really know their subject matter -- they know what's important."

Schools that perform well in math and science, according to the study, also had larger classroom sizes, allowing for higher pay for teachers because fewer were needed.

The schools spent less money per student than other schools -- about \$1,000 less per student than the state average of \$7,229 -- but more of that money was spent on teachers and campus leaders, according to the study.

Many math and science teachers at those schools also received stipends and some received incentive pay, according to the study.

Quezada attributed the success at Silva largely to students who come to the school with the goal of preparing themselves for college.

Students must apply for admission to the school in eighth grade. To be accepted, they need to have exemplary grades and high scores on standardized tests.

The study found that schools students choose, such as magnet schools, seem to have motivated

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students with involved parents.

Brooke Terry, an education policy analyst at the foundation, said lawmakers could do more to improve Texas students' performance in math and science.

The foundation recommends, among other things, that lawmakers relax requirements for math and science professionals to become teachers, increase teacher pay and require that more funds go directly to classrooms.

"We want to make sure a high- school diploma actually means you're ready to succeed in college," she said.

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