

Education, Arts & Culture

10

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cultivator n. a mechanical implement for breaking up the ground.

cultural adj. **1** relating to the culture of a society. **2** relating to the arts and to intellectual achievements.

■ **culturally** adv.

culture • n. **1** the arts and other instances of human intellectual achievement regarded as a whole. **2** an understanding or appreciation of this. **3** the arts, customs, ideas, etc. of a nation, people, or group. **4** a preparation of cells or bacteria grown for medical or scientific study. **5** the growing of plants. • v. (**cultures, culturing, cultured**) grow cells or bacteria for medical or scientific study.

– ORIGIN Latin *cultura* ‘growing’.

cultured adj. **1** well educated and able to appreciate art, literature, music, etc. **2** (of a pearl) formed round a foreign body inserted into an oyster.

culvert /kul-vert/ n. a tunnel carrying a stream or open drain under a road or railway.

cum /kum/ prep. combined with: *a study-cum-bedroom*.

– ORIGIN Latin.

cumbersome adj. **1** difficult to carry or use through size or weight.



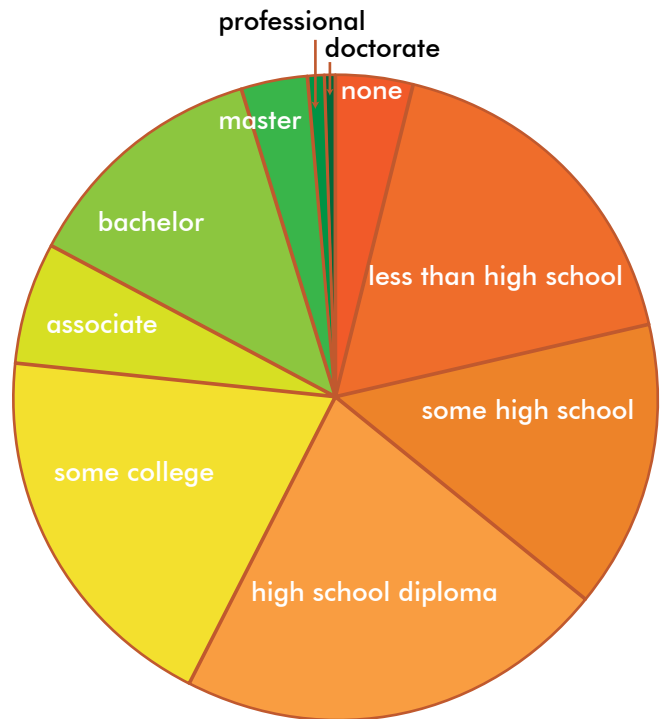
EXISTING CONDITIONS

Education

The City of Laredo public school system falls under the Laredo Independent School District (LISD) and United Independent School District (UISD) jurisdiction for Webb County, with local control over the education system in their respective areas. This accounts for 13 High Schools, 14 Middle Schools and 48 Elementary/Primary Schools, plus the Gateway (Student Alternative Program Inc) and Harmony Science Academy (Laredo’s First Charter School). There are also several private schools. While the City has a limited role in education, its collaboration with the school districts and both institutions of higher education, Texas A&M International University and Laredo Community College, is strongly encouraged. Developing policies and a support structure that will ultimately enrich our city by supporting education and its many academic components is key to the future and success of the city and its citizens.

Laredo as a bicultural and bilingual community faces several challenges other border cities have, such as the challenge to level two completely different languages among children and adults alike, and one of the highest illiteracy rates in the country. Laredo’s school systems have the least diverse communities, being almost 99% Hispanic. 66% of the population’s first language is Spanish, so test indicators are usually lower compared with other cities with a less bilingual component.

Several programs have been in operation to combat some of these existing challenges. The Texas Migrant Council started the first Mobile Head Start Program designed especially for migrant families in 1971. This program started in Laredo, Texas providing mobile education for non-permanent immigrant families. The program continues and has diversified within the City of Laredo, and today they manage the Laredo-Webb County Safe Haven Program, Head Start and the Early Head Start Services, and Early Childhood Intervention; they are state and federally funded.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Texas Migrant Council Seasonal Head Start



Los Presidentes Early Head Start

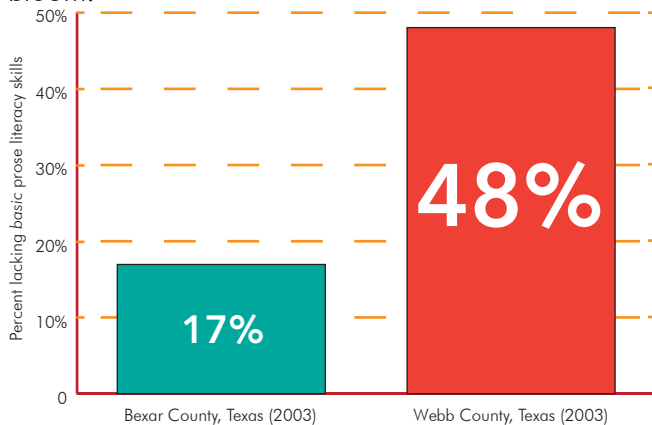
Head Start and Early Head Start Programs

Head Start and Early Head Start Program Centers in Laredo are under the Webb County Office of Head Start, focused primarily on low-income families. Physical and mental health, nutrition counseling, along with disabilities treatment services are provided. Education is aligned with the Texas Pre-K Guidelines, Head Start Program Child Development and Early Learning Framework.

The Project Niños is another Early Childhood Intervention Program, a non-profit organization under the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services. It is State funded through the Individuals with Disabilities Education ACT (IDEA, P.L 108-446).

Nonetheless, the community still experiences a serious lack in expert evaluation for children above the toddler age. Children that schools send for neurological evaluations for conditions such as ADD often find themselves having to travel to San Antonio or McAllen for qualified attention, diagnosis and treatment courses. Private and Public Schools face the same need for qualified psychological attention.

The City of Laredo should endeavor to support the further development of these services locally and provide facilities and proper conditions for existing programs to expand and new required programs to bloom.



US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Childcare-Kindergarten Facilities

In terms of private facilities many of them do not last long enough due to lack of specialized teachers. Among them, daycares such as Los Pepitos, First Class, Lollipop, Blooming Kids, and Mundo Montessori are just a few that have been around for more than ten years. Mundo Montessori is one of Laredo’s alternative schooling methods. Other alternative schooling options are almost non-existent in the community.

Problems noted in establishing alternative education programs include the lack of organized resources providing guidance and advice. There appears to be a need to support awareness of grants and benefits available to these programs.



First Class Learning Center



Mundo Montessori School

Arts and Culture

While daily life is mostly filled by trade and logistics, the diverse arts in the city are a testament to the Hispanic American culture of the border which has blended to form a distinct expression. Art, theater, spoken word, music, dance, culinary arts are well represented on the border. Although the city has not made the arts a priority quality of life issue, the artists are exuberant about the culture of the border.

The city has produced artists, actors, directors, musicians, and chefs that have gone on to have major careers, and all have credited the culture of the border as a defining inspiration in their work. While most no longer live in the city, their memory of Laredo and their goodwill is a valuable resource for the city.

Much about the city can be discerned about the culture by the local festivals that are attended by the citizens. Laredoans will show up for a party and a parade.

The Washington Birthday Celebration arguably Laredo's most prominent event. A month long, the event is 121 years old. The WBCA website describes the reason for the event:

"Well, besides being proud citizens of this great nation and there being many deserving men and women in our history -- The WBCA™ decided that Celebrating George Washington was as good a cause as any. Also, with the unique geographical location of Laredo and its predominantly Hispanic community, the city wanted to do something to remind the nation, just how proud the citizens of South Texas are to be a part of the United States of America."

The event culminates in two debutant events, Society of Martha Washington and Princess Pocahontas Pageant and Ball, and one grand parade. There are many events along the way for everyone and many opportunities in these events to highlight the arts and culture in Laredo.

As in most cities, the arts bubble up in places that offer support to the talented individuals who simply want a venue to showcase a developing idea or a fully formed work yet to be seen. Laredo has few places like these because patrons are needed. A more energetic support of the arts is required to sustain a burgeoning artistic community. There is some movement in this direction in Downtown Laredo and in surrounding neighborhoods. It is a result of the City representatives catalyzing investment in the area.

The following is a compendium of the Arts and Culture entities, venues, and programs that exist today in Laredo and the City of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico.

Laredo, TX

Laredo Center for the Arts
Laredo Little Theater
Laredo Energy Arena
Republic of the Rio Grande Museum
Villa Antigua Border Heritage Museum

Texas A&M International University (TAMIU)

Fine and Performing Arts Center
Helen Richter Watson Art Gallery
Casa Ortiz

Laredo Main Street Events:

- Artisan Bazaar
- Jamboozie
- City Tours
- Laredo Border Slam

Cultural Events and Organizations

- Washington Birthday Celebration
- Webb County Heritage Foundation
- CaminArte
- Hecho a Mano
- Laredo International Fair & Exposition
- Laredo Theater Guild Events
- Laredo Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorale events

Laredo Community College (LCC):

- Guadalupe and Lilia Martinez Fine Arts Center Theatre



Concert Theater, TAMIU Fine and Performing Arts Center

Nuevo Laredo Cultural Centers

- Casa de la Cultura de Nuevo Laredo
- Estación Palabra Gabriel Garcia Márquez
- Zoológico y Acuario Nuevo Laredo

Cultural Events

- Expomex Nuevo Laredo
- Secretaría de Cultura y Deporte-events
- Compañía de Danza Nuevo Laredo-events

Local Philanthropic Organizations Which Support the Arts and Culture

- The Guadalupe and Lilia Martinez Trust
- The Lamar Bruni Vergara Trust
- The Hachar Trust



Estación Palabra, Nuevo Laredo, Mexico.



Laredo Center for the Arts

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Education

On June 14th and August 26th people attended the Town Hall meetings to engage the citizens in the making of this Comprehensive Plan. During both events people were given small comment cards. The comment cards asked participants to rank the importance of eleven plan-related categories, and to provide any additional comments or concerns for Laredo that they had. In both Town Hall meetings Education was the number one priority topic.

During the Education workgroup meetings, several professionals stated the absolute need to engage children in reading fluently and preferably in both languages. One of the main concerns for families around the city is for their children to grow up and choose to stay in Laredo. Local access to excellent education options that lead to diverse job opportunities were often cited as the proper strategy to achieve retention.

In this Comprehensive Plan, page 3.28, College Campuses and Education have been addressed as assets to place making and community enhancers. Several programs in TAMIU and LCC already consider specific short term programs intertwined with the Economic Development needs of the community, such as, the specific curriculum created for the Oil and Gas industry. However, talent recruitment continues to be a challenge for the City, namely in target industries such as health care, education, and advanced manufacturing technology.

The community asks that the current assets defined by trade and transportation logistics expertise be enhanced and supported by education. LCC and TAMIU already have these programs in place; they believe the next step is to promote awareness of these programs locally and market them as a worldwide learning center for international trade logistics.



First Comprehensive Plan Town Hall meeting survey results

Arts and Culture

One unifying theme among many artists and promoters of the Arts in the community is that there needs to be more City resources spent on the arts. They agree that there is a great need for public art, yet a real lack of energy and resources spent by the city representatives. They would like to have a commission for the arts, and like other cities, have 2% of the city capital improvement projects spent on public art. There is a common belief that the Arts in Laredo can contribute to the economy on a local and regional level. They would also like the public in general to support the arts more. There is a great need for funding opportunities to sustain the Arts and Culture in Laredo.

The consensus is that there exists an untapped opportunity to make Laredo a destination celebrated for its contribution to the arts and culture in the region and US. The arts community and its patrons of the arts and culture strongly believe that the arts can enhance the quality of life of Laredoans; they also believe that it is valuable to our culture to support professional growth of the arts. The art community affirms that the arts support a strong economy, enhance the experience of tourists, and promote the authenticity of place.

Participants of the second Plan Viva Laredo Town Hall were asked to rank 11 KEY FACTORS TO A CITY'S SUCCESS. What were the findings? Here is how they stacked up.

EDUCATION, JOB OPPORTUNITIES and ARTS & CULTURE were among some of the highest ranked



WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

"...Creation of jobs, bring innovation, technology, industries to the area. The eleven topics are important and all of them are interconnected, let's do synergies..."

"...opportunity through the Arts!!! Entertainment!! Culture!! Focusing on this through walkability and affordability..."

"...Laredo needs to draw people downtown by building a connection center to attract people to stay in the hotels and buy at the local stores. We need nightlife in downtown..."



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!



Get involved, share your vision and make Laredo the best it can be. visit VivaLaredo.org

Second Comprehensive Plan Town Hall meeting survey results

STRATEGIES

Establish a City of Laredo Education, Arts and Culture Department

The City should create a department within City Hall in charge of Education, Arts and Culture. This department can bring funding strategies as well as offer specific venues that support projects for Education, Arts, and Culture, and that work to enrich and market Education and the Arts.

The department would facilitate two commissions, Education, and Arts and Culture. The Arts and Culture Commission would be made up of the different institutions and organizations related to arts and culture. It would assign resources from a set aside budget to different arts projects, advise council in all arts related matters such as long term projects, and coordinate with the Public Arts Plan. The Commission would also seek cooperation from private citizens, institutions, and agencies interested in or conducting activities relating to the arts in the City.

The Education Commission would be made up of the four primary investment sectors of the community; public, private, academic, and philanthropic for the purpose of accelerating Plan initiatives in education as they relate to talent retention and business growth.

Education

Provide Smart Code Use for Current School Neighborhoods

Complete streets benefit school areas, where families can walk with small children to several places around a school and engage in different activities without depending on a car for each destination. Areas surrounding schools, daycares, and kindergarten facilities should consider different strategies to reduce the heat island effects and sun exposure for children, such as vegetated roofs and trees, pergolas, flat sloped roofs or/and vegetative ground cover, trees in planting strips, swales and verges instead of pavement.

Promote Stronger Literacy and a Bilingual Community

A comprehensive outreach program should capitalize and can catalyze the community's strengths. Coordination of both school districts in Webb County (LISD and UISD), as well as the many private and non-profit organizations in the community, will synergize the efforts already in place.

Lack of information of the many events at bookstores, libraries and alike is one of the biggest obstacles in educational outreach. Coordination with general media on a plan (print, radio and TV) to commit to a weekly section in each medium would help disseminate information on events on arts, technology, books, festivals happening around the City.

Mobile libraries are already in place through by the Laredo Public Library System. The advantage of having the mobile library is that they can be located at several venues and provide some experience in place making that ultimately can become permanent. These small libraries park in the same location, and those locations could also be places for impromptu art exhibits and/or also provide a location for literacy volunteering for children and adults alike. Libraries, even small ones, should be allocated in each neighborhood within walking distance.

Economically accessible venues and programs, must provide intertwined activities that complement educational and cultural experiences with other type of activities, such as storytelling, theater, music concerts, and matching mixed use as coffee spots, places to sit that foster community gathering and communication.

Arts, Culture and Technology Programs K-12

Support STEM Initiatives and Education in Arts and Culture for all ages. Make them economically accessible to school age children in as many public venues as possible.

Acknowledge and promote Laredo as the best of both cultures

Most of the statistics in education as they relate on the border region focus on its many challenges:

“Webb County, Texas, has a higher than average percentage of foreign-born adults (28 percent compared with the U.S. average of 12.5 percent); more adults with a high school education or less (60 percent vs. 45 percent U.S. average); a high Hispanic population (94.5 percent vs. 15 percent for the United States); and more poverty (25 percent of families live below poverty level compared with U.S. average of 9.6 percent). The cumulative impact of each of these variables contributes to the high value for the percentage of adults who lack basic prose literacy in English; in Webb County, the estimate is 48 percent, which is more than double the highest state-level estimate (23 percent in California).”¹

1. The Occurrence of Low Literacy Among Adults in U.S. States and Counties. 2010 National Center for Education Statistics.

In an effort to counterbalance and redefine life on an International border, the University of El Paso, Texas has developed the project, the “Philosophy for Children in the Borderlands” targeting immigrant children to tackle these mind frames and ultimately help create a feeling of belonging and pride in their dual culture nature. A strategy of positive identity helps create communities that are collectively thoughtful, deliberative, and intellectually curious.

A similar program could be developed by the departments of Philosophy in both TAMU and LCC to promote a positive cultural image among not only children but the community in general. Funding via grants can be submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Economic Development and Education, Arts and Culture

The city’s economy is tied to education opportunities and funding mechanisms for entrepreneurs. The Economic Development liaison proposed in chapter 9 of this document should help coordinate city plan initiatives with School Districts and institutions of higher education. For example the liaison could coordinate efforts to best take advantage of FOBESSII, The U.S.-Mexico Bilateral Forum on Higher Education, Innovation and Research, programs. These organization and programs were created to promote binational cooperation in higher education and research, especially regarding important areas for innovation in businesses in the two countries. Combining talented people in science, engineering as well as entrepreneurs, fosters bi-national and regional competitiveness. In Mexico, these programs are headed by the SEP (Ministry of Education) and CONACYT (National Council for Science and Technology). In the US the programs are headed by the State Department and the Department of Education. One of the three main initiatives is to enhance the unique potential of the US-Mexico Border. The City of Laredo should encourage and foster access to these programs.

Work with the Education Sector to Become a member of the World Affairs Council of America to Foster, Promote and Retain Talent

The City and the education sector could help establish a World Affairs Council and design a program similar to CONACYT (National Council for Science and Technology), in which students are encouraged to study abroad and specialize in industries that align with the City's economic development plan.

The City of New York recently implemented the Excelsior Scholarship, making public college tuition free for families meeting the stated requirements. The City of Laredo can implement a very similar program that would allow students to acquire such a benefit, particularly one that would focus on students who need to work and study at the same time.

In this endeavor, the city would work with the Binational Center at Texas A&M and LCC office of Economic Development. A membership council could also promote a program that enlists LISD and UISD teachers with a curriculum based on particular issues present on the border and specifically in Laredo, such as literacy and dual language excellence.

Encourage a Commission for Regional Funding, made up of Local and Regional Public Representatives, Private Business Representatives, District and Higher Education Representatives, and Philanthropic Organizations to Foster, Promote and Retain Talent

For the City to sustain a good quality of life, education opportunities provide a vital component of any plan for a healthy, sustainable economy. Cities compete with other cities for talent; regions compete with other regions for talent. A Commission made up of the 4 sectors which provide the highest investment in the community: public, private, educational, and philanthropic can act with laser point precision when it comes to planning and funding needed projects and programs for educational innovation as it pertains to talent retention and business retention and attraction.

Food Sustainability Curriculum K-12

Given the importance of food security, the City must work with the School Districts to establish ongoing urban agriculture programs within the school facilities as well as City urban farms, engaging the community to understand and participate in food local production.

World Affairs Councils of America's mission:

"The World Affairs Councils of America represents and supports the largest national non-partisan network of local councils that are dedicated to educating, inspiring and engaging Americans in international affairs and the critical global issues of our times."

Arts & Culture

Develop a Public Art Program Plan

The City and the Arts and Culture Community must work to adopt a Public Arts Master Plan and pass a Public Arts Ordinance to establish a set aside budget for the acquisition of public art for municipal property. The Program should strive for inclusive input concerning a neighborhood's distinctive sense of place.

The Program's goals would be to enhance the quality of life of residents, promote economic revitalization, and strengthen Laredo's image as a unique place.

Establish a Community Art Center and Artist Incubator

There is a need for a Community Gallery, Community Art Center and artist incubator program in the Arts and Entertainment District in Downtown Laredo. The center could provide an Artists in Residence Program where local artists can create and produce art. The incubator could also provide low cost studio space to start up artists.

Expand Public Entertainment Venues in Public Spaces

The city can provide municipal public areas for theatrical and musical entertainment. The recent ordinance that permits musicians in the downtown area can be expanded to include street shows. Promotional campaigns which call for musicians and actors to participate will need to be programmed and funded.

Supporting Art Festivals and Film Festivals is another way to bring visitors and attention to Laredo.

Promote Cultural Heritage

Investment in historic architecture and the streets of Downtown Laredo sets the stage for a strong economic sector of cultural tourism.

GOALS & POLICIES

Overall Goal:

Establish by ordinance a Department for Education, Art and Culture, to include an Education Liaison, and an Arts and Culture Liaison, as well as a Commission of Arts and Culture, with close integration with the Department of Economic Development.

Education

Goal 10.1: Support the improvement of the education system of Laredo through coordination of efforts across all agencies.

Policy 10.1.1: Establish the Commission on Education for the purpose of accelerating Plan initiatives in education as they relate to talent retention and business growth. The Commission would be governed by persons from the four primary investment sectors of the community: public, private, academic, and philanthropic.

Policy 10.1.2: Support and coordinate curriculum alignment across all education agencies and grade levels. Special focus should be placed on aligning curriculums that support target industries.

Policy 10.1.3: Enter into partnerships with the school districts and the institutions of higher education to increase educational opportunities and improve student performance.

Policy 10.1.4: Coordinate with educational and business sector to promote and support quality early education, child care, and after school programs for all residents, while working to foster potential and increase retention of citizens.

Policy 10.1.5: Promote Food Sustainability Curriculum for grades K-12.

Arts and Culture

Goal 10.2: Recognize local and regional arts and culture as the foremost indicator of the community's unique identity and support its development to cultivate civic pride and identity and as an essential component to economic development and for attracting and retaining talent.

Policy 10.2.1: Establish a Commission on Arts and Culture. The Commission would help realize the goals of the Public Arts Plan.

Policy 10.2.2: Create a Public Art ordinance to establish a 2% for the arts program, setting aside 2% from every Capital Improvement Project budget for the acquisition of art for municipal property.

Policy 10.2.3: Promote Higher Education in the Arts.

Policy 10.2.4: Support creative and professional growth of the arts community.

Policy 10.2.5: Support economic growth of Heritage Tourism by investing in the Historic Streets of Laredo and in Historic Architecture.

Policy 10.2.6: Enhance the experience visitors have of Laredo by investing in wayfinding signage and apps, and support the creation of a Tourism Bus/Trolley Route.

Policy 10.2.7: Promote Laredo as a unique place, community, and destination.

Policy 10.2.8: Make Arts and Culture the cornerstone of Laredo’s identity by encouraging and growing our cultural arts base, film and art festivals, theater, and other artistic projects.

Policy 10.2.9: Promote Children’s Art Programs.

Policy 10.2.10: Promote the creation of an art incubator studio, exhibition, performance and office space for arts organizations, artists, and creative industry businesses.

Policy 10.2.11: Create a standard policy for selection of artists for public art through RFQ’s and paid competitions to encourage the development of the industry and to help the recruitment of more artists into the local community.