



**Invited Testimony:**  
**House Select Committee on Healthcare Education and Training**  
**October 6, 2014**

Ernie S. Lacy, DDS  
Executive Director, Office of Student Development and Multicultural Affairs  
Director, Center of Excellence  
Director, Education for Healthcare Professionals Master of Science Program  
Professor, Department of Restorative Sciences  
Texas A&M University Baylor College of Dentistry

Good morning, Madame Chair and Members of the committee. Thank you for presenting me with the opportunity to testify today. My name is Dr. Ernie Lacy, and I currently serve as Executive Director of the Office of Student Development and Multicultural Affairs and Director of the Center of Excellence at Texas A&M University Baylor College of Dentistry. I am also Director of the Education for Healthcare Professionals Master of Science Program and Professor of Restorative Sciences at the College.

Located just east of downtown Dallas, Texas A&M Baylor College of Dentistry enjoys a rich, 108-year history as a resource for dental education and oral health care in North Texas. It has graduated more than 8,000 dentists and dental hygienists, most of whom serve citizens of the State of Texas. Annually the College has nearly 120,000 patient visits and serves more than 40,000 adults and children through community-based activities.

As an alumnus of the dental school and a longtime faculty member, I proudly stand before you today to provide testimony about my College's thriving pipeline program and the vital role it plays in making healthcare education more accessible to underrepresented minority students. When I graduated from the college 20 years ago, I was one of eight students who were identified as underrepresented minorities. That was 8 % of my class. Today my alma mater's incoming classes are 33% to 38% URM.

Texas A&M Baylor College of Dentistry leads the nation's dental schools in student body diversity with 37% underrepresented minorities (URM). This achievement has not been easy to attain nor sustain. It has taken determined leadership and significant human and financial resources. Why has this been important to our College? Because we read the reports of state and national demographers; we observed the increasing diversity of our communities and we internalized and applied the message that Texas must produce an increasingly diverse health workforce in order to achieve better access to care in our underserved communities.

Our response has been “Bridge to Dentistry” – a pipeline program composed of a highly successful series of initiatives designed to expose and recruit underrepresented minority and underprivileged students to dentistry as a profession. Bridge to Dentistry meets the recommendation of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) Closing the Gaps goals of participation of a more diverse student body, including in the health professions. Although almost 50% of Texans are Hispanic or Black, only 9% of dentists are from these groups. Dentists from underserved communities and populations are most likely to provide care for these citizens.

Recruiting and educating more URM and disadvantaged students through Texas A&M Baylor College of Dentistry’s Bridge to Dentistry not only introduces these young people to new educational and professional opportunities. Their successful matriculation, graduation and entry into the dental profession also positively impacts access to care for underserved Texans, creating healthier, more productive communities.

### **Our Programs:**

- Project Dental Awareness: Visits to elementary schools to present hands-on activities and fieldtrips to the dental school for 7th-12th graders for oral health and career awareness activities.
- Future Dental Clubs: Monthly meetings and activities to nurture interest in dentistry for 4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders.
- Summer Pre-Dental Enrichment Programs for 10th-12th Graders: One- and four-week programs to increase students’ awareness of dental careers and the academic preparation they require.
- Summer Pre-Dental Enrichment Program for High School Graduates: A four-week program for students to strengthen their academic background in preparation for entering a pre-dental college curriculum.
- Summer Pre-Dental Enrichment Program for College Students: A six-week program for college students to prepare for and successfully take the DAT, strengthen their academic background, increase competitiveness for admission to dental school and enhance success once admitted.
- Post Baccalaureate Program: A year-long, intensive dental school preparatory program for college graduates who are admitted to TAMBCD upon successful completion of the program.
- Peer Tutoring and Academic Support Programs: Assists with retention and graduation of TAMBCD’s URM and disadvantaged students.

### **Our Outcomes:**

- Project Dental Awareness (PDA) started in 2000 and involves dental health and career awareness presentations to elementary school children. Presentations have been made to 68,871 students.
- Field Trips to TAMBCD started in 2000 and 10,081 junior high and high school students have visited the College.
- Future Dental Clubs started in 2008. Clubs are established in 5 elementary schools for their students and city-wide Clubs exist for junior high and high school students.

- The Summer Pre-Dental Enrichment Program for 10<sup>th</sup> Graders (SPEP 10) started in 2000 and almost 250 students have completed the program.
- SPEP 11 started in 2000 and more than 250 students have completed the program.
- SPEP 12 started in 2000 and 392 students have completed the program, 318 of whom entered college. Nine participants of SPEP 10, 11 and/or 12 entered TAMBCD.
- SPEP Collegiate I (for high school graduates) started in 2008 and 77 students have completed the program. All participants entered college, one entered TAMBCD and two entered other dental schools.
- SPEP Collegiate II (for college students) started in 1997 and 484 students have completed the program, 325 of whom entered dentals and other health professions schools; 175 of these students entered TAMBCD.
- The Post-Baccalaureate Program (PBP) started in 2002 and 123 students successfully completed the program and entered TAMBCD. Three additional PBP students entered TAMBCD through the regular application process and 8 entered other dental schools.
- Since 2006, TAMBCD has enrolled in its first-year classes greater numbers and proportions of Black and Hispanic students than any other non-minority dental school.
- Since 2007, TAMBCD has had the greatest total URM enrollment among non-minority schools. (The attached graph shows 2012-2013 total enrollment of URM students in U.S. dental schools. This is the most current data available.)
- TAMBCD retains and graduates >90% of its URM students. For example: 37% of the 2014 graduates were URM students. 95% of URM students in the class graduated.

### **Our Future:**

Bridge to Dentistry has been funded by Texas A&M Baylor College of Dentistry with both cash and in-kind contributions. Additionally, Bridge to Dentistry is in year three of a five-year Center of Excellence Grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Other past sources of funding have included HRSA, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Texas Guarantee, Baylor Oral Health Foundation, American Dental Education Association, and Doctor's Nursing Center Foundation. However, the continuation of HRSA support of Bridge to Dentistry is not guaranteed for years four and five of the program, but depends on availability of funds. In addition, other funding sources for these programs are very limited and are under threat for being reduced and/or eliminated. Therefore, Bridge to Dentistry is always in jeopardy of being dramatically downsized or eliminated due to a lack of external funding. It is very worrisome to know that Bridge to Dentistry's future is tentative and successes achieved through the program can disappear very quickly.