

# Local & State

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## Two students walk as Class of 1998

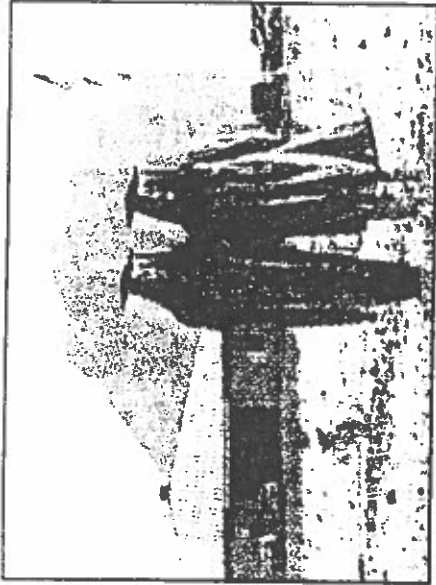
STUDY BUTTE (AP) — First, there were six students.

A classmate's fatal fall from a cliff during their junior year, then the dropping out of another at the start of 12th grade left four. Then the Rodriguez twins ended up a few points short on the state T&AS exam.

Thursday night, only Yesica Garcia and Claudia Garcia donned cinnamon-colored robes and matching mortarboards at Big Bend High School for what the Texas Association of Community Schools said was the smallest graduating class of any public school in the state.

"I cried when I heard the twins couldn't graduate with us," said Claudia Garcia, 18, the salutatorian, reflecting the close-knit nature of the school, which is in the Chihuahuan desert with a backdrop of mountains called Bee and Cuesta Blanca.

There is no gym, lunchroom or library for the 47 students. But the school shared by three towns and a national park has other things.



AP PHOTO

**Yesica Garcia, left, and Claudia Garcia** (not related), who comprise the graduating class of Big Bend High School in 1998, pose outside the school on Tuesday in Study Butte as the smallest graduating class of any public school in the state.

There is a computer for every two kids, small classes and personal attention where one-on-one violin or pre-calculus classes are there for the asking. And

a new school it had struggled to build through a nationwide fund-raising campaign.

As had been done for decades, Yesica and Claudia endured the country's longest school bus ride — 160 miles round trip — from the Lajitas-Terlingua-Study Butte area to high school in Alpine during their freshman and sophomore years. High school classes began in 1996 by sharing space with Terlingua's middle school and holding some outdoors. Big Bend High got its own building that August — thanks to \$450,000 in donations.

## CLASS

From 1B

there's a golf coach who washes carts to give his players free green fees on a nearby course.

The small graduating class in no way makes it less an achievement for the two unrelated girls who each overcame formidable obstacles. Or for the remote community, which observed the first graduation inside