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**POLICY IMPLICATIONS  
COMMUNITY COLLEGES  
STATE OF TEXAS**

Community Colleges are the key to a vital Texas economy. In order to maintain the vitality and the strength of the eighth largest economy in the world, Texas must invest in Community Colleges. Community Colleges enroll 63% of all students involved in public institutions of higher learning. Affordability and Accessibility to educational opportunities is the cornerstone for their existence. Their ability to provide academic programming as-well-as workforce development is unmatched by any other public institution in this state. As this state looks to the future we must understand the mission of Community Colleges and the role that they play in sustaining an educated and vibrant citizenry.

**CLOSING THE GAPS**

The goals of the closing the gaps initiative will not be met unless Community Colleges are recognized as the main conduit for providing education to at-risk populations and increasing enrollment in higher education. Presently, 70% of incoming freshmen are enrolling in community colleges due to the increase in tuition and fees in the state system and in the two flagship institutions. With open enrollment and low cost tuition, Community Colleges are becoming the most viable option for families that want an education for their children, but cannot afford the costs at our General Academic institutions.

Any Legislative action should provide for give consideration to the role and the mission of Community Colleges. Further, the distinct differences in their mission should not be co-mingled with that of the General Academics. Their efforts to enroll more students and

produce quality results should be recognized and appropriate attention given to such efforts.

## **GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS**

The present system of grants in the state of Texas is provided mainly to students in the General Academics. Of the total amount appropriated for grants, Community Colleges received only 11%. The average age of a student in Community Colleges is 26 years old. Most of the students are in the workforce and usually are from at-risk populations which adds to their challenges in attempting to attend and complete post-secondary work. Additionally, when they do complete and achieve an associate's degree, the "sticker shock" as they transfer to the General Academics is significant. Many students delay or do not pursue a four year degree.

Any Legislation formulated should provide for an increase in funding that provides equity given the number of students enrolled in Community Colleges. Scholarships for transfer students from community colleges to the General Academics should become a priority in order to assure that they will be able to move toward completing their four year degree.

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Community colleges are the sole public source of technical and vocational training in this state. Companies coming to Texas rely on Community Colleges to establish training programs consistent with their needs. Skills necessary to maintain and grow to businesses in Texas are developed and sustained through the programming at each of the Community Colleges. Each area of the state has varied and specifically targeted programs due to the industry and businesses of each area.

Any Legislation related to workforce should include Community Colleges as one of the major components in realizing workforce vitality in this state.

## **FUNDING**

Community colleges are funded by tuition, local tax levy and from state appropriations. The state's responsibility is to fund all instructional costs with the local tax-payer funding maintenance and operational costs. Local Community College districts have struggled to keep tuition and fees affordable and have tried to maintain a tax rate that is not burdensome to tax payers. Given the growth in this state in the last five years this has become increasingly difficult to sustain. The state on-the-other-hand has reduced its allocation from about 60% ten years ago to about 30% in this last biennium. Of the total amount allocated for higher education in the state of Texas, Community Colleges received only 9% of the funds according to the Legislative Budget Board.

Taxing capacity in most Community College districts is either capped or subject to roll-back elections; giving trustees limited options in increasing revenue. Additionally, each district is responsible for a service area beyond its taxing jurisdiction.

Any Legislation should address the inequity in funding given that community colleges have 63% of the enrollment and get only 9% of the total funding appropriated for Higher Education. This state will close the gaps and provide an educated workforce if it invests in Community Colleges.

## **DUAL CREDIT**

The preponderance of the awarding dual credit is contained within the Community Colleges. Trustees have waived tuition in order to increase access to college courses. The program is of great

financial benefit to the students and to their parents. Dual credit also creates a relationship with the ISDs that allows for curriculum alignment and sharing of staffs. Community Colleges have been able to increase enrollment due to the “pipe line” that this process produces.

Reduced state funded is causing districts throughout this state to reconsider the waiver of tuition. There are district already charging nominal fees to recover costs to operate these programs.

As funding for Community Colleges is considered by the legislature, dual credit and the cost that it brings to a college district should be factored into the decision.

## **COLLABORATION**

At the present time, there is very little collaboration between the public school districts, community colleges and the general academics. Collaborative efforts should be implemented at all levels in order to better align and promote completion of a degree in higher education. P-16 councils have been established in many regions of this state and must be supported. Most of these efforts are locally supported and will need infusion of state support if this valuable work is to be successful

Collaborative programs with the goal of enhancing transition from High School into Higher Education or from Community Colleges to the General Academics must be incentivized. Such efforts would help establish practices that would promote increases in participation in Higher Education, but also would draw institutions together to maximize recruiting and funding.

Any Legislation should encourage and support collaborative efforts between all levels of education in this state.

## **DATA**

A student data base or mechanism much like the Pathways program being piloted in San Antonio and Houston must be established. The purpose of the system would be to track students from the public schools, Community Colleges and the General Academics using criteria not only for attendance or completion, but for performance and interaction with the curriculum. If these institutions have the current and appropriate data, they will be able to intervene early in the education experience for students and make adjustments in the curriculum.

Any Legislation should ask and require that data be generated in order to make decisions that will make our system of education collaborative and proactive.

## **DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION**

Community colleges due to open enrollment accept students that are not prepared for the rigor of college work. The majority of all students enrolled in developmental education courses are in Community colleges. Students enrolling directly from the ISD's comprise some of the population that must take developmental courses due to not being college ready (This is especially true in the area of Math). A larger portion of the students in developmental education are students that are either enrolling for the first time after being out of high school for a period of time and working in the workforce or those that are needing to upgrade their skill level in order to be more competitive in the workforce. The process is costly for both the colleges and the students.

Community Colleges throughout the state are currently exploring strategies to reduce the number of students in developmental education and to accelerate their entry into college courses. All of these efforts are being supported through local funding or through grants.

Any Legislation should carefully consider developmental education and its cost as funding is considered for Community Colleges. An investment in initiatives to reduce the time in these courses and accelerate a student toward completion would further the goals of Closing the gaps.