Senate Higher Education Committee
Interim Report

November 2020

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SENATOR ROYCE WEST, VICE CHAIR

SENATOR PAUL BETTENCOURT
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SENATE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

November 20, 2020

The Honorable Dan Patrick
Lieutenant Governor of Texas
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Lieutenant Governor Patrick:

The Senate Higher Education Committee hereby submits our interim report, including recommendations to the 87th Legislature.

The report reviews several topics, including adult learner students, innovative collaboration initiatives, data transparency and a legislative update on Senate Bill 25 (86th Legislature). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee only met once on October 12, 2020, and addressed three interim charges. The Committee took testimony and considered guidance from higher education institutions, state agencies and other educational stakeholders.

We appreciate your leadership and trust the recommendations in this report will help guide our discussions next session.

Respectfully submitted,

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Senator Brandon Creighton, Chair

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Senator Royce West, Vice Chair

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Senator Paul Bettencourt

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Senator Peter Flores

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Senator Beverly Powell

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Senator Judith Zaffirini

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Senator Dawn Buckingham

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Senator José Menéndez

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Senator Larry Taylor

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Texas Legislative Council
Senate Publications and Printing

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Please direct any questions to:

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Introduction

On October 30, 2019, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick issued the following interim charges to the Senate Higher Education Committee:

1. **Adult Learner Students:** Examine existing innovative programs in higher education institutions that assist non-traditional students in completing a degree or credential, including first-time adult learners, re-enrolling students, first generation students, working adults, and at-risk students. Provide recommendations on methods the state can use to partner with higher education institutions to expand successful programs throughout the state.

2. **Data Transparency:** Explore methods to improve data sharing and transparency among state agencies, school districts and charter schools, and higher education institutions. Consider best practices to increase the ability of high schools and higher education institutions to support student postsecondary access and degree completion and how to provide policymakers with data on each. Recommend methods of integrating existing data systems at the K-12 and higher education levels to provide real-time support and direction for students.

3. **Monitoring:** Monitor the implementation of legislation addressed by the Senate Committee on Higher Education passed by the 86th Legislature, as well as relevant agencies and programs under the committee's jurisdiction. Specifically, make recommendations for any legislation needed to improve, enhance, or complete implementation of the following:
   - Senate Bill 25 (86th), relating to measures to facilitate the transfer, academic progress, and timely graduation of students in higher education.

Charge One -- Adult Learner Students

Examine existing innovative programs in higher education institutions that assist non-traditional students in completing a degree or credential, including first-time adult learners, re-enrolling students, first generation students, working adults, and at-risk students. Provide recommendations on methods the state can use to partner with higher education institutions to expand successful programs throughout the state.

Testimony

The Senate Higher Education Committee heard testimony regarding this charge on October 12, 2020. Testimony was presented by the following individuals:

- Harrison Keller, Ph.D., Commissioner of Higher Education, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
- Peter Beard, J.D., Senior Vice President for Regional Workforce Development, Greater Houston Partnership
- Brenda Hellyer, Ed.D., Chancellor, San Jacinto College
- Carlos Rivers, M.B.A., Executive Director of the Institute for Competency-Based Education, Texas A&M University-Commerce
- Beth Brunk-Chavez, Ph.D., Dean of Extended University, The University of Texas at El Paso

Findings & Analysis

It is important to acknowledge that this year has brought much uncertainty for students, their families, and higher education institutions due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Texas economy has also been severely disrupted by the pandemic. However, our higher education institutions and state agencies have not hesitated to rise to the challenge. They have made the necessary adjustments in order to serve their students and keep their respective communities safe during these unprecedented times. As Commissioner Harrison Keller -- Commissioner of Higher Education, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) -- stated in his testimony, this has been a time of historic change in the delivery of higher education.

Commissioner Keller opened the hearing with an overview of the importance of postsecondary credentials. According to Commissioner Keller, especially in today's economy, jobs follow skills. He stated approximately 85% of the new jobs created in Texas after the recession in 2008 required at least some education beyond a high school diploma. He referred to high-quality postsecondary credentials as the best insurance policy against long-term unemployment. Unemployment rates for American workers without a postsecondary credential are twice as high when compared to workers with a four-year degree.

Commissioner Keller emphasized that adult students are one of the most important populations higher education needs to serve in Texas. There are two major initiatives the Commissioner highlighted to specifically assist adult students and support the role institutions will have in the state's economic recovery.

The first initiative is THECB's Request for Applications (RFA) process, established to distribute the $46.5 million in the Texas Reskilling Support Fund grant program[1]. This was supported by a portion of the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) fund. There is a scarcity of funds, and the Governor and legislative leaders alike made clear that they want GEER funds to be used strategically. The Texas Reskilling Support Fund will assist in upskilling and reskilling displaced Texas workers who have some college credit but no credential or degree. The Support Fund allows Texas institutions to provide financial support for tuition and fees to students. According to Commissioner Keller, with more than 3.6 million Texans out of work since March 2020, the state must move quickly and efficiently to help Texans obtain the skills they need to transition back into the workforce. He noted that it is important to view the broader context of how Texas is going to bring other funds to the table, including more federal funds, so Texas can help its institutions build more capacity in structuring those reskilling pathways. After the hearing, THECB's RFA for the Texas Reskilling Support Fund was released on October 21, 2020.

The second initiative is a re-boot of the GradTX program, an initiative that aims to re-engage the "some college, no credential" population of individuals. The "some college, no credential" population refers to individuals who have some college credit but no postsecondary credential or degree. The new emphasis of the GradTX program is a comprehensive strategy for each region in the state to engage with higher education institutions, businesses, and community organizations. THECB has been gathering data to identify those most affected by the economic disruptions and determine the kind of reskilling pathways that would be most beneficial for them. According to survey data collected by THECB, a third of individuals who have some college credit and no credential, no longer have their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These individuals will need to re-enroll and complete a credential in order to transition back into the workforce. According to the same survey, over 70% of individuals provided with essential supports, such as financial aid or childcare, would likely re-enroll and complete a postsecondary credential.

The newest version of the GradTX initiative is beginning in the Greater Houston region. It is focused on bringing together strong collaborative leadership from the local business community, institutions such as San Jacinto College and organizations such as the Greater Houston Partnership. According to Commissioner Keller, there could be as many as one million Texans in the Houston region alone that fall under the "some college, no credential" category, and the unemployment claims are particularly high in this region.

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[1] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, *Texas Reskilling Support Fund Grant Program*, October 2020, https://www.highered.texas.gov/institutional-resources-programs/institutional-grant-opportunities/texas-reskilling-support-fund-grant-program/.

Over the course of the next several years, Houston's diverse economic base and populations will require a workforce with skills across a broad spectrum. According to Mr. Beard -- Senior Vice President for Regional Workforce Development, Greater Houston Partnership -- approximately 75% of students who graduate from Houston ISD (HISD) may lack the necessary skills and education to fill middle-skill and high-skill positions in the Houston region. In reference to Figure 1 below, 18% of those who graduated from HISD in 2017 went on to obtain a bachelor's degree, 4% obtained an associate's degree, and 3% obtained a certificate[2]. Mr. Beard stated approximately 40% of the existing workforce in Houston does not have the education and skills necessary to fill middle- and high-skill jobs.

Figure 1
Education and Skill Level (HISD)

HISD Outcomes in 2017, from incoming Eighth Graders in 2006
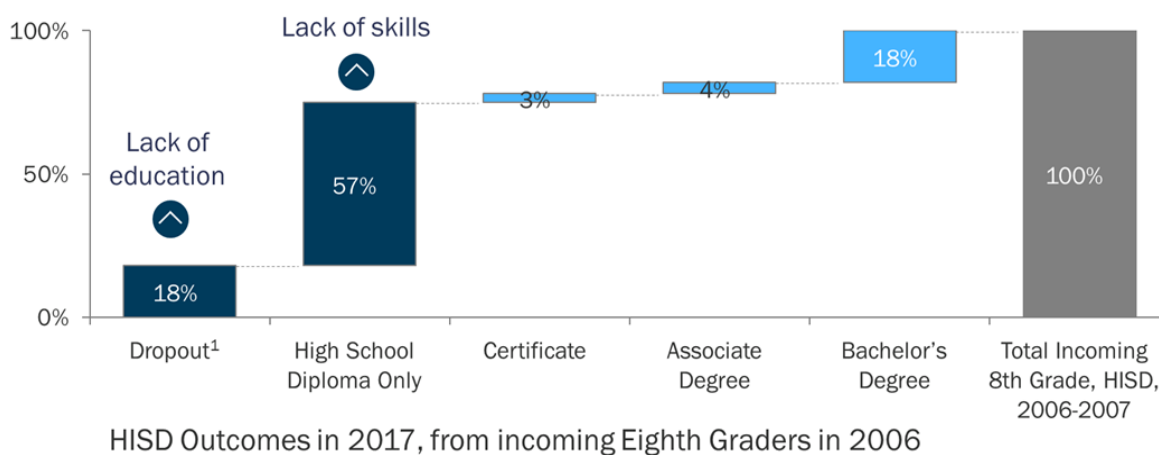
In order to address this waging skills gap in Houston, the Greater Houston Partnership created the UpSkill Houston initiative. The goal of UpSkill Houston is to fill careers that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree. It is an attempt led by employers to bolster the pipeline of skilled workers needed, while simultaneously creating better pathways for Houston students. UpSkill Houston uses the framework of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Talent Pipeline Management (TPM), to put employers at the forefront of the initiative[3]. The idea is to create an employer collaborative to address shared difficulties in the workforce.

Mr. Beard stated employers have the ability to collect real-time data regarding the needs of their respective field of work. This data is the key to aligning their needs with the required workforce development at the institutional level. When this data is collaboratively collected by employers, educational institutions will benefit by knowing 1) what type of workers are needed for the workforce,

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[2] Greater Houston Partnership Presentation to Senate Higher Education Committee, October 12, 2020 (pg. 3).
[3] U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, *Greater Houston Partnership: Strengthening the Talent Pipeline*, https://www.forwardontalent.org/stories/greaterhoustonpartnership/.

2) when they are needed and 3) which skills workers need to thrive in their respective field. In addition, UpSkill Houston created a continuum of skills to better understand the interventions needed to upskill and reskill adult learner students for the Houston workforce. The continuum follows a spectrum from low-skill occupations, emerging middle-skill occupations, entry middle-level skill occupations, advanced middle-skill occupations, and finally, high-skill occupations. Each occupation level indicates the level of required work experience, the essential skills needed, the level of education required, as well as the share of employment for that occupation level in the Houston area.

Mr. Beard pointed out that our economies, both statewide and national, are shifting to a more innovation-based format, where workers are expected to be lifelong learners. This means it will be more challenging to solve talent shortcomings in the traditional classroom setting. Workers will be required to have higher digitization competencies, and employers will be placing more of an emphasis on "soft skills" such as problem-solving, persistence and communication[4]. Mr. Beard believes employers are strengthening the workforce by offering employees opportunities to upskill and reskill internally. They are moving away from hiring based on degrees and moving towards hiring based on proficiency in skills that are needed for a given occupation. Figure 2 below illustrates the relationship and respective responsibilities of institutions and employers[5].

Figure 2.
Talent Pipeline Value Stream

Mr. Beard noted the challenges for adult students and how such challenges will evolve and vary over time. Factors to consider include whether the students are first-generation, parents, displaced workers looking to re-enter the workforce or simply individuals looking for a better career. The long-term success of these students is reliant on career support services that cover the obligations carried by these individuals outside of their workplace and learning. Mr. Beard concluded his remarks by stating

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[4] UpSkill Houston, *Soft Skills*, https://upskillmylife.org/softskills/.
[5] Greater Houston Partnership Presentation to Senate Higher Education Committee, October 12, 2020 (pg. 5).

Houston has seen promising efforts of programs that allow such students to earn a wage while also earning college credit and developing skills along the way.

Dr. Brenda Hellyer -- Chancellor, San Jacinto College -- has established various partnerships between San Jacinto College and industry leaders in the Greater Houston area to ensure the institution's curriculum best meets workforce needs. According to Dr. Hellyer, 41% of all community college students are over the age of 22, which is the minimum age to be considered an adult student[6]. Most community colleges cater to the adult worker by offering training and upskilling through continuing education programs.

According to Dr. Hellyer, San Jacinto College serves a high percentage of Hispanic students with an average student age of 23 years old. Dr. Hellyer stated 30% of enrolled students at San Jacinto College are in workforce programs. Many of these programs attract an older demographic of students. In the petrochemical program, 63% of enrollment is over the age of 22, and only 7% to 10% of enrollment over the last five years have been first-time college students.

San Jacinto College partners with businesses and industries that drive the Houston economy to ensure their workers have the skills they need when they enter the workforce. San Jacinto College operates from the position that both employers and students are the clients of the institution. The job of San Jacinto College is to bring them together.

Industry partners are integrated into San Jacinto College's business model. According to Dr. Hellyer, all technical programs that the institution offers are required to have an advisory committee, made up of industry partners. They meet at least twice a year to keep the programs relevant to the current workforce and economic needs. San Jacinto College has taken this a step further by creating the Chancellor's Advisory Council. The Council was created to bring senior leaders of business and education together to have strategic conversations about what is needed in the industry. In this environment, business leaders have the opportunity to listen and respond to the needs of educational leaders. Educational leaders have the same opportunity to listen and respond to the needs of industry leaders. This collaboration effort ensures facilities and programs at San Jacinto College are built for industry, by industry.

San Jacinto College has utilized this model for all of their programs including their petrochemical program, where they have partnered with companies such as LyondellBasell. LyondellBasell is at the table as educational leaders at San Jacinto College design, implement and change aspects of the program, so the company's needs continue to be supported.

Dr. Hellyer stated workforce training programs, such as the petrochemical program, have been in place at the institution for decades. In the past, San Jacinto College was not able to keep up with the expansion of the petrochemical industry. To address this gap, leadership at San Jacinto College pulled

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[6] San Jacinto College Presentation to Senate Higher Education Committee, October 12, 2020 (pg. 2).

together the Chancellor's Advisory Council. San Jacinto College made it clear that if the Houston region was to be successful in the petrochemical industry, then the companies themselves needed to provide honest feedback. As a result, industry re-designed facilities, made cash and in-kind contributions, spent thousands of hours helping restructure the curriculum and placed the appropriate people on the advisory committees who could accurately address the industry's needs.

Dr. Hellyer went on to speak from the perspective of her role as the Chair of the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) Executive Committee. From a statewide standpoint, the voice of business and industry in the work of community colleges is critical. At this point, actions must become more responsive, flexible and move beyond simple conversations. While Houston has greatly benefitted from these industry and institution collaborations, TACC has been looking at how to address this in other regions of the state during this time of economic uncertainty.

Dr. Hellyer cited a recent study conducted by the Texas Comptroller's Office that found workers with some college or an associate's degree and stable jobs earn an average of $8,393 more annually than those with only a high school degree[7]. The increase in wages alone for such individuals would add $27.2 billion in direct compensation for the state economy each year.

The Texas Reskilling and Upskilling through Education (TRUE) initiative was created by TACC and funded by Economic Development and Department of Labor federal grants. The goal of the initiative is to get Texans who have lost their jobs due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic back to work. Dr. Hellyer believes this is done by helping them earn employer-informed micro-credentials or certificates to ensure that participants have what they need to regain employment. High-demand jobs have changed as workers have lost their jobs over the past several months. Micro-credentials and certificate programs are more adaptable for a dynamic job market.

Dr. Hellyer stated, within the TRUE initiative, TACC is looking to create a business advisory committee to secure information in order to appropriately align workers' earned skills with industry and workforce needs region by region. There will be 28 members on the business advisory committee, 21 of which will be industry representatives and members of the workforce boards. The work of the business advisory committee is set to begin in November 2020. According to Dr. Hellyer, 61% of students who graduate from a community college stay within 50 miles of that community college when entering the workforce. The intention of TRUE is to design these programs specifically for each region of the state so students have the capability to enter the workforce within their respective community.

In closing, Chancellor Hellyer emphasized that community colleges in Texas are ready, willing and able to help Texas meet the needs of the current economic challenges in order to move forward.

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[7] Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, *The Economic Impact of Texas Community Colleges*, July 2020, https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/fiscal-notes/2020/july/community-colleges.php.

Following testimony presentations from Commissioner Keller, Mr. Beard and Dr. Hellyer, the panelists took questions from the Committee. Referring to UpSkill Houston, Senator West asked if internships are provided to students, and if so, whether the students get paid. According to Mr. Beard, UpSkill Houston's career exploration covers a broad spectrum. UpSkill tries to encourage member employers to provide work-based learning opportunities, like internships, to students. Many of the community-based organizations that UpSkill partners with have apprenticeship programs where work-based learning is built into that opportunity. Such programs allow students to complete college in three years while progressively emerging into the workforce and getting paid at the same time.

Mr. Beard added the work-based learning opportunities should be considered outside the scope of the traditional internship. Traditional internships are usually temporary and do not tend to be viewed as strategic investments for employers. Micro-internships, which are much more project-based, give students an excellent opportunity to build their portfolio of experience in a much shorter period of time and are a much more strategic investment for employers.

Senator Taylor inquired about the exact terms THECB has in place for its RFA process. According to Commissioner Keller, institutions will have flexibility. THECB will be providing allocations directly to institutions, with the ultimate goal focused on reskilling pathways that will be the most productive for institutions, individuals, and communities. THECB is encouraging institutions to utilize local workforce support organizations to align reskilling initiatives with targeted occupations so they can apply those funds strategically to benefit their region. The information collected from these applications will provide a better sense of targeted needs.

Senator Taylor inquired about the fairness and accuracy in distributing the GEER funds to institutions through the RFA process. Commissioner Keller responded that the RFA process became necessary so that THECB could gather information to establish where funds were most needed.

Senator Bettencourt pointed out that there is a regional problem in the Houston area. He stated unemployment is at an all-time high due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Senator Bettencourt's district, Senate District 7, is currently number one in regional unemployment. Currently, seven out of the ten senatorial districts in the Houston region have the highest unemployment rates in the state. Senator Bettencourt inferred part of the problem also lies in the fact that oil production will not surpass $43 a barrel until 2023. There is a systemic problem on energy cost coupled with transformational issues that have transpired over the past year. The state will likely see this energy sector recession period for some time. Senator Bettencourt asked each panelist to comment on this issue.

Commissioner Keller responded by recognizing an advantage in Houston is the strong partnership between the business community and higher education leaders, which provides a better platform. The conversations regarding locating the pressure points and how the state can distribute resources strategically is exactly the right direction to head. Population is higher in the Gulf Coast regions, but

unemployment rates are highest in rural communities in Texas. Therefore, part of the challenge is going to be how to take advantage of the capacity in Greater Houston to address the problems laid out by Senator Bettencourt while simultaneously scaling across the state to respond to local needs.

Mr. Beard added to the discussion by revealing one of the things UpSkill Houston expects to do in 2021 is support the transition of what he called "energy 1.0 workers" to "energy 2.0 workers". Mr. Beard was specifically referring to those working in the oil and gas industry who will eventually need to transition to the clean energy industry. There has been a fair amount of work done to attract the renewable and clean energy technology industries to the Houston region. The goal would be to help transition some of those oil and gas workers into a new space, recognizing that over time, the field will have to evolve. Mr. Beard believes, as a region, Houston needs to begin thinking of the long-term transition of the economy from petroleum-based to a much more diversified economy.

According to Mr. Beard, there is also a digital trend that cannot be ignored, which translates into more probable opportunities for individuals to enter tech-related occupations. The economy is seeing much more integration of technology into the workplace. Eventually, there will be better opportunities to think about the programs that will be needed. For example, medical device integration is a critically emerging trend. The medical centers across the state will need to be considering the integration of various new devices into hospital rooms system-wide.

Senator Bettencourt noted that if the state were to look at the medical integration issue, it could serve as an open-house of best practices in terms of new designs for other programs. For example, when looking at Dr. Hellyer's programs at San Jacinto College, it started with a niche in one program and was duplicated over to several other programs.

Dr. Hellyer elaborated on that point by stating the aerospace program is directly tied to the maritime program when it comes to the control side of each. Workers who do not have any experience in the petrochemical field can easily transfer their skills over. This has happened in the past when aerospace took a shortfall and their workers transitioned into the petrochemical industry. According to Dr. Hellyer, short-term career-technical education programs will remain critical during this time, because students can move into the workforce quickly with their translatable skills.

Senator Powell inquired, given the current need to reskill and upskill our workforce, how the state can look toward incentivizing the private and independent institutions in similar ways to public institutions in order to achieve some of the goals for adult learners. Commissioner Keller emphasized that this is a time to get contributions from every sector of higher education in Texas. The private and independent institutions may have a smaller percentage of enrollment compared to public institutions, but they do play an important role, and will continue to do so. It is essential to look at the whole picture, because there are definitely needs to be met across the spectrum. Short-term credentials to graduate degrees will be critical in driving the recovery of our current economy and building the new economy.

One of the initiatives Senator Powell addressed last Legislative Session is the need for placement of the right type of counseling and academic advising for students. She asked Dr. Hellyer to comment on any kind of additional funding or support community colleges have in place to ensure students are better advised. According to Dr. Hellyer, over the past several months of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent altered operations, institutions have addressed additional challenges for students. In response, institutions like San Jacinto College are designing ways to build on the support systems already in place. Providing advising, educational planning and orientation from the start of a student's postsecondary career is critical. Many community colleges have invested additional funds in those supports. Dr. Hellyer mentioned Senate Bill 25 (86th Legislature) includes a provision requiring students to receive academic advising and declare a degree plan earlier in their postsecondary journey's[8]. Advising and career paths are part of the overall model of community colleges.

Carlos Rivers -- Executive Director of the Institute for Competency-Based Education (ICBE), Texas A&M University-Commerce -- transitioned the conversation to the Institute's role in creating innovative programs that specifically benefit adult learner students in completing a postsecondary degree or credential. According to Mr. Rivers, ICBE was created in 2015 by the 84th Legislature through a non-formula support item. The intent of the program is to advance understanding of competency-based education (CBE) and to expand the growth and development of CBE programs in order to ultimately advance the state's 60x30TX goals. The ICBE works directly with the THECB to assist other institutions of higher education in establishing their own CBE programs.

According to Mr. Rivers, there are currently two CBE programs offered at Texas A&M University-Commerce. The first is a Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences in Organizational Leadership, which was created based on the need for middle-level managers in the north Texas region. The second is a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice with an emphasis in Law Enforcement Leadership. This program was designed so police officers could receive credit for prior work experience and complete their degree plans at a flexible pace.

Mr. Rivers stated CBE programs at Texas A&M University-Commerce are designed collaboratively by those in the workforce and faculty at the university. Mr. Rivers offered compelling data in favor of the CBE programs. Compared to a traditional postsecondary program that costs an average of $14,000, CBE programs cost an average of $6,000. Similarly, the average time it takes an individual to complete a degree through a CBE program is 1.39 years, which is 20% faster than comparable degree programs. Furthermore, 43% of graduates report receiving an increase in earnings after completing a degree through a CBE program[9].

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[8] S.B. 25, 86th Legislature, Regular Session, 2019.
[9] Texas A&M University-Commerce Presentation to Senate Higher Education Committee, October 12, 2020 (pg. 11).

According to Mr. Rivers, only 36% of the 17.8 million adults in Texas have an associate's degree or higher[10]. A growing number of adults are returning to higher education, though, and CBE proves to be one of the most innovative and effective models intended to meet the demand of the changing student demographic.

Mr. Rivers listed a few reasons why CBE best serves adult students. First, CBE grants course credit for students' prior learning and experience in the workforce. At Texas A&M University-Commerce, students may transfer up to 90 credit hours from prior learning, including military service. Second, CBE provides a flexible manner in which students can complete their degree. All classes are online, so students may log in and complete their coursework at their own pace. The CBE model at Texas A&M University-Commerce offers six, seven-week terms year-round. Finally, the CBE model at Texas A&M University-Commerce is affordable. Students may accelerate and complete multiple courses during a single term at a flat rate of $750 per term. The CBE model at Texas A&M University-Commerce utilizes open educational resources, free online learning resources, to further reduce burdensome costs on students.

Mr. Rivers stated it is important for other higher education institutions to realize that the initial years of implementing a program such as this may well incur a financial burden. Institutions should expect the CBE program to break-even by the fifth year of operation. Data indicates that the expenses initially outweighed the revenues, but as the program grew at Texas A&M University-Commerce, total tuition revenues grew at a faster pace than the expenses.

Given the current state of the economy, CBE is a promising solution to address workforce gaps by putting a bachelor's degree within reach of millions of Texans with college credit but no degree, and reskilling displaced workers or students seeking a new career path. In order for this to be a possibility, Mr. Rivers recommended additional grant funding for Texas institutions of higher education to build innovative programs like CBE. Texas A&M University-Commerce and other higher education institutions in Texas have received grant funding to build innovative programs through the Texas Affordable Baccalaureate (TAB) program. The TAB program awards grants to increase the availability of affordable baccalaureate programs, including CBE, at Texas higher education institutions. Mr. Rivers commented that grant programs have become a common way to fund start-up costs for CBE programs, and the State of Texas needs to continue offering these funding opportunities in order for institutions of higher education to expand innovative programs.

On a similar note, Mr. Rivers also recommended a systemic and collaborative marketing effort to communicate with stop-out students on how they can come back to school and complete their degree. This would allow for our state to recapture a greater portion of these students and boost enrollment across all state colleges and universities who offer flexible programs such as CBE.

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[10] Texas A&M University-Commerce Presentation to Senate Higher Education Committee, October 12, 2020 (pg. 5).

Senator Taylor inquired about funding for the ICBE. Over the last several years, the Legislature has been funding ICBE at about $1 million per biennium with non-formula support. Senator Taylor inquired if enrollment has reached a point where ICBE no longer needs the start-up funding that is outside of the formula. Mr. Rivers responded that the Organizational Leadership CBE program at Texas A&M University-Commerce is self-sustaining on tuition and revenue alone. However, ICBE's purpose is to support all CBE programs around the state. Mr. Rivers noted the current focus is to continue to produce evidence that CBE does accomplish its value proposition to reduce time and cost for students, but the ICBE is simultaneously serving the entire state. The ICBE particularly serves those institutions who are looking to expand their own programs to serve adult learner students. Therefore, the Institute hopes to continue receiving that non-formula support in order to persist in that goal.

The final panelist reviewing adult learner students was Dr. Beth Brunk-Chavez -- Dean of Extended University, University of Texas at El Paso. Dr. Brunk-Chavez serves on the University of Texas (UT) System Finish@UT Advisory Committee. According to Dr. Brunk-Chavez, Finish@UT began as an innovative and collaborative online infrastructure called UT Telecampus that distributed learning opportunities across multiple UT campuses. Finish@UT is supported by the UT System itself, and is an efficient use of resources as students apply to one UT institution but have the capability to enroll in courses across several. Finish@UT is a collaborative degree completion program between UT Arlington, UT El Paso, UT Permian Basin, UT Rio Grande Valley, and UT San Antonio. Each participating institution offers a completion degree that meets students where they are, meaning students have several degree options to choose from that make efficient use of any previously-acquired credits.

Finish@UT is unique compared to other similar programs across the country in its cross-campus registration portal. This portal streamlines the exchange of information between students, campus advisors, registrars and financial aid officers. The range of course options and flexible term lengths available to students through the program allow for opportunities to complete degrees while continuing to commit to their respective work and home lives.

Dr. Brunk-Chavez stated, as of December 2018, there are 2.3 million Texans that have some college credit but no degree. This places Texas as the fifth-highest ranking state in that category. Dr. Brunk-Chavez provided that 76% of students participating in the Finish@UT Program are adults that are close to completing their degree. Based on Figure 3 below, over 60% of Finish@UT student enrollment falls within the 30 to 44 age demographic. Additionally, only 1.56% of enrollments are of the traditional student age demographic of 18 to 24[11].

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[11] University of Texas at El Paso Presentation to Senate Higher Education Committee, October 12, 2020 (pg. 4).

Figure 3.
System-wide Student Age Demographics

System-wide Student Age Demographics, All Programs	
Student Age	Percent of Enrollment
18 to 24	1.56%
25 to 29	11.42%
30 to 34	22.46%
35 to 39	21.91%
40 to 44	15.98%
45 to 49	11.63%
50 to 54	7.50%
55 or older	7.53%

Finally, Dr. Brunk-Chavez made note of several goals the UT System is working towards in order to further expand the impact of Finish@UT. Efforts include increasing outreach for and awareness of the program, implementing a strategic, system-wide assessment of student and institutional needs and additional resources to be invested into strong student support services for those in the program. Finish@UT currently offers excellent opportunities for adults who are looking to complete their bachelor's degree, but Dr. Brunk-Chavez believes the program could reach even more Texans by expanding offerings to include a technical associate's degree.

Recommendations

1. The Legislature should consider efforts to expand support for innovative collaborations between postsecondary institutions, private sector businesses and community organizations dedicated to expanding regional upskilling and reskilling pathways. Collaborations should allow for a strong environment that encourages industry leadership in partnering effectively with education and community to develop program curriculums and build talent pipelines that serve regional workforce needs.

2. The Legislature should consider methods to provide incentives for higher education institutions to offer high-quality certificate and degree programs in adaptable and flexible formats for non-traditional students. This can include advising targeted to adult learners, integrated work-based learning initiatives, competency-based education programs, expanded digital learning options, flexible course scheduling and recognition of credit for prior learning.

3. The Legislature shall explore methods removing barriers to and increasing support for wrap-around services to ensure long-term completion and success for adult learner students. The wrap-around services should include ongoing career advising, financial aid, child care assistance and career supports.

4. The Legislature should consider highlighting the availability and support for adult learners, particularly for prospective students with some college credit but no degree, to enroll and complete degree programs at Texas higher education institutions.

Charge Two -- Data Transparency

Explore methods to improve data sharing and transparency among state agencies, school districts and charter schools, and higher education institutions. Consider best practices to increase the ability of high schools and higher education institutions to support student postsecondary access and degree completion and how to provide policymakers with data on each. Recommend methods of integrating existing data systems at the K-12 and higher education levels to provide real-time support and direction for students.

Testimony

The Senate Higher Education Committee heard testimony regarding this charge on October 12, 2020. Testimony was presented by the following individuals:

- Harrison Keller, Ph.D., Commissioner of Higher Education, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
- Eric J. Ban, Ed.D., Managing Director of Dallas County Promise, The Commit Partnership
- Pete Smith, Ph.D., Chief Analytics Officer, University of Texas at Arlington
- Link Alander, M.B.A., Vice Chancellor of College Services, Lone Star College System
- Rebecca L. Riley, Ed.D., President, Lone Star College-Montgomery
- Kyle Scott, Ph.D., Vice Chancellor of Strategic Priorities, Lone Star College System

Findings & Analysis

Dr. Harrison Keller -- Commissioner of Higher Education, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) -- testified that one of THECB's primary roles is to serve as a steward of the state's educational and workforce data. Commissioner Keller stated that student-level higher education data combined with K-12, higher education and workforce data are made available through the state's network of Education Research Centers (ERCs). In 2006, the 79th Texas Legislature authorized the creation of three ERCs to house Texas data and facilitate research that benefits all levels of education[12]. Today, these centers are located at three institutions of higher education in Texas: the University of Houston, the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Texas at Dallas. Each ERC is a multi-institution partnership that allows researchers from around the country the ability to access Texas data. Commissioner Keller further stated that the educational and workforce data housed at the ERCs have great potential to provide students and families with guidance, improved educational and training pipelines, and better informed strategic investment choices.

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[12] H.B. 1, 79th Legislature, 3rd Called Session, 2006.

Texas educational and workforce data includes detailed information about student demographics, enrollments, course completions, test scores and student course, credit and grade information. The data also includes detailed financial aid and unemployment insurance wage records. Commissioner Keller testified that Texas has a strong history of using these data sets to examine how equitable opportunities and outcomes vary between different demographic groups. The long history of longitudinal data collection in Texas allows THECB to monitor student transitions between secondary and postsecondary education and to support institutions.

Commissioner Keller provided an example of how the longitudinal data collected in Texas helps provide stakeholders with ongoing insights. The longitudinal data allows THECB to provide aggregated college freshman GPA reports back to high schools to help them understand how their students are performing in a postsecondary setting. This data is also used to inform discussions about students' dual credit performance and provide insight into postsecondary completions across all sectors of Texas higher education by a specific major.

Senator West asked Commissioner Keller to follow up with a snapshot of the aggregated GPA data reports broken down by senatorial districts to provide committee members with additional insights. Commissioner Keller let the committee know THECB would provide them with that updated information. Commissioner Keller continued by stating that these are the types of requests that he works intently on with Texas Education Agency (TEA) Commissioner, Mike Morath. Commissioner Keller and Commissioner Morath discuss how the state can render more timely information regarding what is happening to students and where they are enrolling. The freshman GPA reports are an example of data collected historically to show an overall snapshot of GPA, enrollments and persistence rates. This does not reach the level of actionable data needed by students, institutions and agencies.

Commissioner Keller cautioned that the state has not always made educational and workforce data useful and readily accessible to influence key decisions. He stated it is important to acknowledge some data has been collected in a manner that may work for regulatory purposes but does not align with how decisions are made within institutions. This has led to wide disparities in the capabilities of Texas' higher education institutions to analyze and use data. The disparities range from some higher education institutions having their own developed data analytics capabilities to other institutions relying heavily on third-party vendors to analyze their institutional data. Leveraging the data does require having information technology (IT) capacity, expertise, bandwidth and robust technology platforms.

Commissioner Keller discussed how much of the underlying state data infrastructure has become obsolete. The state's data infrastructure does not readily interface with institutions' technological systems, and it does not power the kinds of modern analytics tools available today to deliver deeper insights. The current technology inhibits THECB's ability to distill and share data back to institutions without significant manual effort to link and analyze data.

Today, tools exist to automate many of the labor-intensive data processes and accelerate the provisioning of data and analysis back to institutions. According to Commissioner Keller, THECB is working to improve state data capabilities with their colleagues at the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) through the Governor's Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative[13]. The three agencies have organized multiple projects to plan, design and deploy new data infrastructure, analytics and tools. Commissioner Keller also mentioned that Governor Greg Abbott and legislative leadership came together to allocate $15 million from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) fund to accelerate the modernization of the state's educational and workforce data infrastructure[14].

The primary focus of THECB's data modernization initiative is making educational and workforce data accessible and useful. Commissioner Keller stated a modern data infrastructure needs to prioritize timely, actionable intelligence to improve student success, while protecting the security of students' confidential information. Commissioner Keller concluded his testimony by mentioning the data modernization effort is invaluable for long-term success, but it is also important to emphasize the immediate needs to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. THECB has been working with leading state and national experts to analyze the groups most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. These analyses will help identify places where improvements to short-term and long-term educational and training pipelines are needed to drive economic recovery.

Dr. Eric Ban -- Managing Director of Dallas County Promise, The Commit Partnership -- testified on the current work at Dallas County Promise in addressing an increase in Texas' postsecondary completion rates and the strength of data collection methods to empower students. Dallas County Promise is a coalition of school districts, colleges, universities, employers and communities that have joined together to promote enrollment of Dallas County students in higher education. The goal is to have them complete degrees and credentials that enable them to enter high-demand careers that pay a living wage salary.

Dr. Ban testified that prior to Dallas County Promise's launch in 2017, approximately 32,000 seniors in Dallas County were graduating high school each year. Of those students, only 54% would enroll in higher education and only 28% were completing a credential 6 years later. These figures are exacerbated for students experiencing poverty. Dr. Ban stated that among the 31 highest poverty schools in the region served by Dallas County Promise, six-year college completion rates were roughly at 11%. Dallas County Promise is a holistic approach to supporting students to and through college and into their first career by removing barriers to college. This approach includes providing wraparound services and a scholarship to pay any balance of tuition not covered by federal or state

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[13] Office of the Texas Governor, *Governor Abbott Charges Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative With Continued Transformation Of Workforce Development*, February 13, 2020, https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-charges-tri-agency-workforce-initiative-with-continued-transformation-of-workforce-development.

[14] Office of the Texas Governor, *Governor Abbott Announces Additional $118 Million In Federal Funding To Support Texas Higher Education*, July 22, 2020, https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-announces-additional-118-million-in-federal-funding-to-support-texas-higher-education.

financial aid at participating colleges. This also includes building breakthrough technology solutions that provide practitioners with critical information on a student's journey.

Dr. Ban stated that Dallas County Promise has rooted its postsecondary access and completion efforts in providing timely, actionable data to students and the adults supporting them, with an increase in the effectiveness of student advising systems. This aggregate on-time information is made possible by data-sharing partnerships among the consortium of Dallas County Promise partners. School districts and institutions use this data to identify trends and effective practices to fundamentally transform the advising systems and tools supporting students. In addition, practitioners in the Dallas region now have access to appropriate, secure and timely student-level information that enables them to quickly and efficiently help students navigate complex enrollment systems. Combining quality insights and efficient support mechanisms resulted in a 7% increase for Dallas County students enrolling in postsecondary in 2019, while the state as a whole remained flat or experienced slight declines. Figure 1 below represents the postsecondary enrollment trends among Dallas County students[15].

Figure 1
Dallas County Promise Cohort Results, 2018-2020
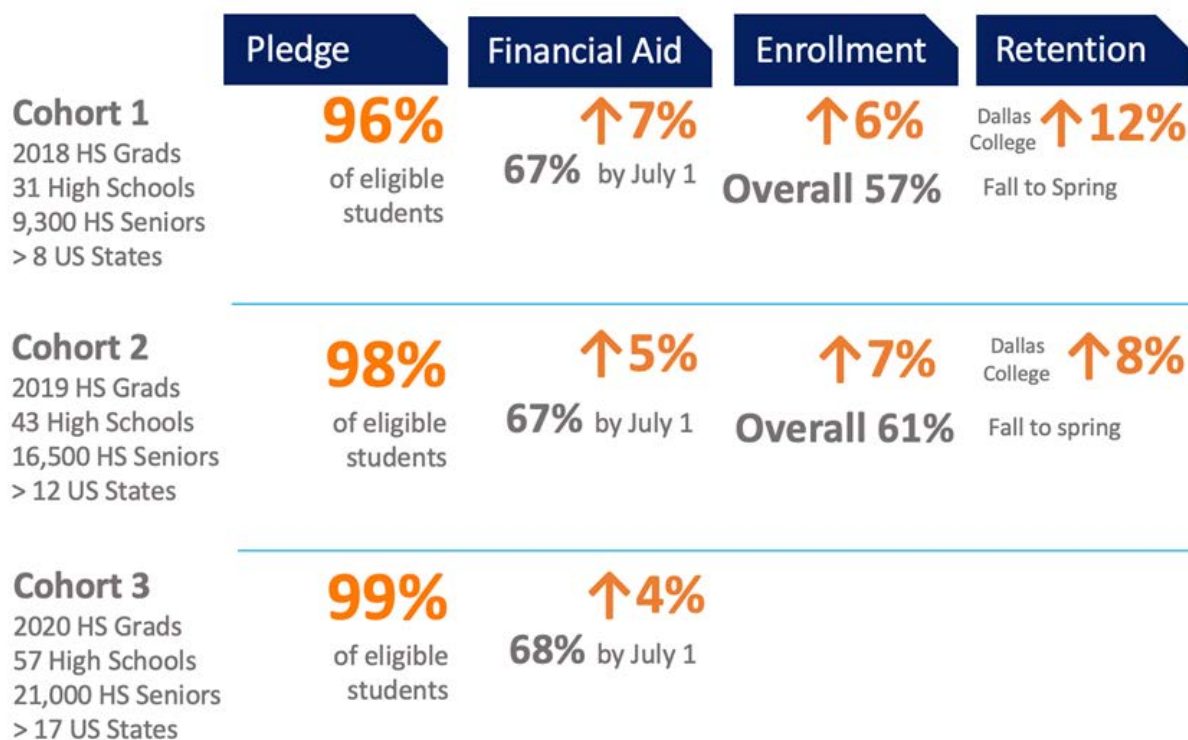
The Dallas County Promise data-sharing and collaboration strategy is rolling out at scale across Texas. Dr. Ban noted that Dallas County Promise is currently supporting the creation of similar postsecondary collaborative efforts in San Antonio, Houston, Tyler and Fort Worth. He also stated

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[15] Dallas County Promise Presentation to Senate Higher Education Committee, October 12, 2020 (pg. 7).

that, although Dallas County Promise has cobbled together support using strong case management systems to provide students with proactive support, the process took several years and continues to require significant manual student matching.

Dr. Ban recommended two solutions to facilitate the creation and use of data information systems that would enable other regions to scale or replicate versions of the Dallas County Promise system. First, Dr. Ban recommended creating a model Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) compliant data sharing agreement. FERPA is federal legislation enacted to protect the privacy of students and their parents[16]. Dr. Ban acknowledged that while the act is designed to ensure that students and their parents may obtain access to the student's educational records, it also can be interpreted to necessarily prevent the release of records to third parties. He continued on that point by noting robust information sharing requires heightened security and privacy precautions, but often, cross-institution or cross-agency information sharing is mired in dozens of agreements. School districts, higher education institutions and community organizations that support students can expend months or years negotiating data sharing agreements.

As a solution, Dr. Ban believes coming to a consensus on guiding principles of data use and how FERPA should be interpreted would streamline inefficiencies and allow for better information sharing. He recommends having education state agencies create sample template language so practitioners, institutions and regional partners can spend more time serving students, rather than expending effort on administrative tasks.

The second recommendation from Dr. Ban is to extend the use of a single, uniform student identification number beyond PreK-12 education. Dr. Ban testified that there is an opportunity to increase the existing Public Education Information Management System, or PEIMS number, in addition to local ID's to support students to and through college and into the workforce. Carrying a uniform student identification number into postsecondary learning and the workforce would compel institutions to use this ID. This would improve a practitioner's ability to efficiently support students in real-time, review student history and identify course options to help students succeed. Dr. Ban stated that a uniform student identification number would result in stronger longitudinal information that can demonstrate results for private and public funders to help these efforts grow and improve over time.

Additionally, Dr. Ban noted a uniform student identification number would support the implementation of the Career, College and Military Readiness (CCMR) bonus contained in House Bill 3 (86th Legislature)[17]. A common student ID across state agencies, and for use by practitioners, would greatly ease the administrative burden on matching and identifying student college enrollment following high school graduation.

Dr. Ban concluded his remarks by stating Texas legislators can accelerate progress toward 60x30TX not only by helping pave the way for a more accessible, actionable student information system as described above, but also by incentivizing and supporting regional collaborations similar to Dallas County Promise. These collaborations would bring together school districts, higher education institutions, businesses and community organizations to coordinate and hold each other accountable

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[16] U.S. Department of Education, *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)*, March 2018, https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html.
[17] H.B. 3, 86th Legislature, Regular Session, 2019.

for ensuring students are accessing and completing a postsecondary degree aligned to workforce demand.

Following Dr. Ban's testimony, Senator Flores asked what would be ideal to incentivize collaborations. Dr. Ban shared that similar postsecondary completion collaborative efforts are emerging in several regions in Texas and are regularly convening to learn from each other. Dr. Ban believes ensuring sustainability in student scholarship funding and providing resources through public-private matches to support intermediaries in bringing regional partners together and holding them accountable for postsecondary outcomes would be strong incentives.

Dr. Pete Smith -- Chief Analytics Officer and Professor, University of Texas at Arlington -- gave an overview on the work being done at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) to invest in the use of data and analytics to support academic operations, with a focus on student success. In 2015, UTA founded University Analytics to modernize the use of data on campus and the development of a campus culture of analytics. Dr. Smith leads the University Analytics unit and he testified that the unit provides campus tool sets for predictive modeling of data focused on UTA's strategic goals such as student retention and graduation.

Dr. Smith stated that UTA has invested in developing a modern technology infrastructure by purchasing two large data analytics packages. UTA purchased a SAS installation, a specialized statistical software developed for predictive analytics, and formed a vendor partnership with Civitas Learning, a company that builds machine learning models of student success and progress. Dr. Smith testified that both SAS and Civitas help University Analytics do a better job of analyzing internal and external data. Also, Dr. Smith mentioned that UTA allowed University Analytics to build up their personnel capacity. At present, the University Analytics office has over 20 staff members and represents one of the largest data science and analytics units in the country at an institution of higher education.

Dr. Smith discussed that University Analytics still handles the basic data reporting functions for UTA. The unit continues to carry out regular data reporting to state and federal entities, as well as data work to support national accreditations and rankings. Dr. Smith continued by stating the unit is moving strategically to make use of that data in order to make better predictions and improve guidance for students. Dr. Smith explained that one example of this is how University Analytics works with Civitas Learning and their machine learning system to predict and model student success. On a daily basis, vendor data science teams ingest UTA data on student background and student activities, such as data from student engagement on their Learning Management System (LMS) for their online courses or any course that has an online component. Every night a student's activity is built into a machine learning model. By the next day, UTA receives feedback from the machine learning models for student persistence, taking into account hundreds of factors such as a student's past academic success, engagement on campus and their academic work this semester.

A student who is engaging well with classes and academic work is visible to the models, as are students who may be struggling with academic progress, giving UTA the opportunity to intervene. Dr. Smith stated these models allow a faculty member or advisor to reach out to a struggling student much earlier and more efficiently than ever before. UTA can then move to make a student's experience more successful by offering specific tutoring and other targeted student support programs.

Dr. Smith summarized his points by stating the machine learning models allow UTA to better understand and guide their undergraduate student population of more than 30,000 on a daily basis.

UTA has been on a strong positive trajectory with their retention and four and six-year graduation rates in recent years. Dr. Smith concluded his remarks by stating the predictive student modeling and outreach have played a significant role in UTA's critical increases in student success.

Following Dr. Smith's remarks, Senator Bettencourt asked Dr. Smith to discuss some of the key insights University Analytics is able to share with the UTA administration (because of the two large data analytics packages). Dr. Smith explained that UTA can see the return on investment because the machine learning models clearly predict which students might be at risk. He testified that by the end of the first week of a course section, their models are about 92% accurate on determining which students will persist to the end of the semester. The models increase their accuracy of student persistence to about 95% by the fourth week. Dr. Smith concluded his response by stating they can clearly see the analytics are helping UTA know their students, learn about their students, and retain those students who would have otherwise dropped out.

Senator Flores asked Dr. Smith to provide some examples of the key metrics used to measure student success and predict student retention. Dr. Smith explained that the data models are different for different students. Models take into account a student's academic success in the previous semester, financial aid utilization and success with core courses. Dr. Smith stated, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, students' log-in habits and engagement history are critical metrics in determining success. Even if a student is struggling with content, discipline goes a long way in making successful students.

The last panel reviewing Data Transparency was represented by administrative and institutional leaders from the Lone Star College System. Link Alander -- Vice Chancellor of College Services, Lone Star College -- began the panel's remarks by stating Lone Star College has worked to help their students achieve their goals by integrating data-informed assistance at key points in a student's academic journey to ensure that they stay on track to degree completion. Lone Star College's data-informed initiatives have allowed their institutions to provide targeted assistance to students who are at risk of dropping out, falling behind academically, or taking classes that are not part of their success plan. The right data combined with a tailored approach to student advising has helped Lone Star College institutions reduce the cost and time to completion and increase students' probability of success.

In 2015, Lone Star College created the Office of Analytics and Institutional Research to lead the initial adoption phase during the system-wide rollout of data-focused initiatives. Mr. Alander testified that their goal was to assist decision makers from all levels with accessibility to the best practices being used, data models and analytics training. Today, Lone Star College has eight data collaboration centers that bring faculty, staff and administrators together to dive into complex problems using data. Mr. Alander explained that ongoing training efforts occur on a regular basis so that data-based decision making becomes part of the standard at Lone Star College rather than confined to a specific department. Mr. Alander stated a good example of taking best practices to scale is bringing faculty, advisors, and registration staff in to review student progress at the 45, 50 and 55 semester credit hour marks. These teams can then look to see what actions they can take and actions they need to take in the future to help students complete their pathways.

Mr. Alander testified that the individualized data Lone Star College uses for their most successful assistance efforts are collected and managed internally. A centralized repository of student data allows Lone Star College to build systems that learn from student experiences and create more predictive models over time. Mr. Alander stated that while Lone Star College and THECB exchange normalized and benchmarked data, the individualized institutional data collections yield the greatest return on

student success. Having real time access to individual student data is the only way Lone Star College can provide targeted assistance to students efficiently and effectively.

Mr. Alander concluded his remarks by recommending the state support a data sharing process by which higher education institutions have access to student data that is already collected by high schools, colleges and state agencies. He continued by stating the decentralized nature of the current data collection and storage processes limit the effectiveness of programs reliant on shared data and creates unnecessary roadblocks to student success initiatives.

Dr. Rebecca Riley -- President, Lone Star College-Montgomery -- continued the panel discussion with a case study of data in action from the Lone Star College-Montgomery campus. Four years ago, Lone Star College-Montgomery launched their Digital Marketing Intelligence Center. Dr. Riley stated the Digital Marketing Intelligence Center was created as a collaboration space where different institutional departments can come together to create data-focused strategies to improve student outcomes. This collaboration space has been the catalyst for hundreds of digital marketing campaigns and strategies that aim to move students towards their goals much more quickly and efficiently.

Dr. Riley provided a couple examples of these digital marketing campaigns. Lone Star College-Montgomery has been able to use their data collections and analytics to determine students' course taking patterns over time. Using their data to analyze past course taking patterns, Lone Star College has the ability to reach out to the students following similar patterns and nudge them in the right direction. These course registration "nudges" provide students with recommendations that not only help students progress more quickly towards completion, but also keep students on the right path.

Dr. Riley stated that Lone Star College-Montgomery also has the ability to directly reach out to students that may be considering to register for certain courses but may not have completed the registration process. Lone Star College-Montgomery collects data feedback on the courses students are contemplating signing up for during the registration period. Dr. Riley testified that they will use their analytics to encourage students to complete their registration and suggest to them the courses that are appropriate for their educational pathway. She concluded her remarks by stating these digital marketing campaigns and targeted outreach efforts have saved Lone Star College students time and money.

Following Dr. Riley's testimony, Senator Bettencourt asked if students treat these outreach campaigns as interruptions or if students see these as positive interventions. Dr. Riley responded by stating students often do not know they are off course regarding their degree plan and they generally follow through with the recommendations.

Senator Powell asked Dr. Riley if the analytics and data marketing outreach are used in the student advising process. Dr. Riley commented that Lone Star College does use their data and analytics to strengthen their advising strategies. She stated the best student advising uses a combination of analytics with a personal touch. Lone Star College advisors use data to identify students that are struggling. Advisors determine an array of scenarios that would interrupt a student's progress towards his or her goals and then reach out to the student personally. This allows Lone Star College to be proactive with getting students back on track.

Recommendations

1. The Legislature should support a statewide data-sharing model where higher education institutions and state agencies have access to student data that is already collected by school districts, colleges and state agencies. The data-sharing model should include a Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) compliant agreement to streamline inefficiencies. This process should prioritize providing support for students and protecting the security of students' confidential information.

2. The Legislature should study the current data collection and reporting requirements at the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Workforce Commission.

3. The Legislature should consider methods to streamline enrollment and simplify the student transition process from K-12 into postsecondary education, including simplified methods to transfer student information to institutions of higher education and one-stop advising for new students.

Charge Three -- Monitoring

Monitor the implementation of legislation addressed by the Senate Committee on Higher Education passed by the 86th Legislature, as well as relevant agencies and programs under the committee's jurisdiction. Specifically, make recommendations for any legislation needed to improve, enhance, or complete implementation of the following:

- Senate Bill 25 (86th), relating to measures to facilitate the transfer, academic progress, and timely graduation of students in higher education.

Testimony

The Senate Higher Education Committee heard testimony regarding this charge on October 12, 2020. Testimony was presented by the following individual:

- Harrison Keller, Ph.D., Commissioner of Higher Education, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Findings & Analysis

Dr. Harrison Keller -- Commissioner of Higher Education, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) -- provided an update on Senate Bill 25 (SB 25) from the 86th Legislative Session. SB 25 authorized multiple measures to improve student transfer between Texas public institutions of higher education. Commissioner Keller began his remarks by stating SB 25 is a comprehensive bill and despite the disruptions to operations for institutions and THECB over the past year, implementation of all major provisions of SB 25 are underway and on track.

Commissioner Keller testified that SB 25 requires general academic institutions to submit an annual report on courses in the Lower-Division Academic Course Guide Manual[18]. This is meant for students who transfer to an institution from another institution of higher education and is not granted academic credit or credit that applies towards their major. The report from general academic institutions must include course information, identify the institution which provided academic credit for the course, and the reason why the receiving institution did not grant academic credit for the course. The first report submission will include the cohort of students transferring for the first time from a community or state college and enrolling in a university in fall 2020.

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[18] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Lower-Division Academic Course Guide Manual, 2020, https://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/agency-publication/guidelines-manuals/lower-division-academic-course-guide-manual-spring-2020/.

Commissioner Keller explained that public community colleges are also required to report courses taken by students who, during the preceding academic year, transferred to a general academic teaching institution or earned an associate degree at the college. This report must include 1) the total number of courses attempted and completed at the college disaggregated by lower-division academic courses or workforce education courses, 2) courses not in the recommended core curriculum, and 3) dual credit courses. THECB will be receiving initial data from general academic institutions in November 2020, and the first formal reports to the Legislature will be submitted by March 1, 2021.

Commissioner Keller continued his remarks by stating the bill requires THECB to include the ability for an applicant to indicate, on the common admission application, consent for their application to be shared with another institution if they are denied admission to their preferred degree program. The state's common application, ApplyTexas, now includes consent language to allow institutions to share student applications.

Another major SB 25 provision requires students to declare degree programs earlier in their academic careers and extends the requirement for filing degree programs to dual-credit students. Commissioner Keller stated that students enrolled in an associate or bachelor's degree program at an institution of higher education shall file a degree plan with the institution during the succeeding semester in which the student earns a cumulative total of 30 or more semester credit hours for coursework successfully completed. Students enrolled in dual credit coursework are required to file a degree plan not later than the end of the second regular semester or term immediately following the semester or term in which the student successfully completes 15 or more semester credit hours. Commissioner Keller stated this provision was intended to help focus advising and student's attention on courses that are more likely to apply to their intended programs. Rules relating to filing of a degree plan as required by SB 25 were developed with institutions through negotiated rulemaking, adopted by the THECB board in December 2019, and went into effect this year.

SB 25 also requires each institution of higher education to develop at least one recommended course sequence for each undergraduate certificate or degree program offered by the institution. Commissioner Keller explained that each recommended course sequence must include specific course information aimed to provide students with specific sequences in which courses should be completed. Institutions shall submit recommended course sequences to THECB and include them in their course catalogs and on the institution's website. Commissioner Keller stated THECB is required to engage in negotiated rulemaking and will seek nominations for the negotiated rulemaking committee in the next few months. Course sequence requirements start with the 2021-2022 academic year.

Commissioner Keller testified that during the last Legislative Session there was an active discussion about whether the state should consider adopting meta-majors within the core curriculum. He explained that meta-majors are commonly used within institutions to group majors and courses under larger themes, especially to provide guidance to undecided students about courses they should take. SB 25 requires THECB to conduct a study and make recommendations to the Legislature regarding

the feasibility of implementing statewide meta majors in specific academic disciplines. An advisory committee consisting of representatives of community colleges and general academic institutions must be appointed by THECB to assist in completing the study. Also, the advisory committee must study and make recommendations to THECB regarding the effectiveness of the transfer of course credit between institutions for courses in the core curriculum. Commissioner Keller concluded his remarks by stating this work is underway and the final report will be made available by November 2020[19].

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[19] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, *Study and Report on Core Curriculum*, October 2020, https://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/reports/legislative/study-and-report-on-core-curriculum-october-2020/.

Recommendations

1. The Legislature should continue to monitor the implementation of SB 25 (86th Legislature), relating to measures to facilitate the transfer, academic progress, and timely graduation of students in higher education.