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### **House Higher Education Interim Charge 1:**

*Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 86th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:*

**HB 1638 (85R), which relates to statewide goals for dual credit programs. Review best practices for providing opportunities to high school students to earn college credit while ensuring that courses taken reflect authentic, college-level rigor.**

#### **1. What challenges have institutions faced with dual credit prior to and as a result of the pandemic?**

Dual credit enrollment in Texas grew by more than 750% from 2000 to 2017, and since 2011 community and technical college total enrollment in Texas has declined when dual credit enrollments are excluded (see Appendix, Figure A).<sup>1</sup> Yet practices related to data collection and reporting, accountability, and transparency failed to keep pace with growth. Thus, there is wide variation in dual credit quality and funding across districts and IHEs. The credit that students earn is often not sequenced towards high-value, stackable credentials, and often does not transfer to higher education institutions. The University of Texas System found in 2018 that students had to take staggering amounts of dual credit for it to have any meaningful impact on student debt and time to degree. For students who took 16-30 hours of dual credit in high school, the average student debt was only \$682 less (See Appendix, Figure B).<sup>2</sup> This study and others signal serious problems in dual credit course sequencing and transferability.

As a result of the pandemic, acquiring meaningful, transferable dual credit has become more important than ever to students who are concerned about the costs and time commitment of higher education. Establishing clearer pathways and course sequences for high school students as well as stronger, statewide standards for credit transfer can ensure that students enter college with meaningful credit under their belt. Further, given the massive expected disruptions to higher education finance structures -- declining student enrollment for some institutions, and potentially reduced state contributions across the board -- many institutions may increasingly turn to dual

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<sup>1</sup> Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, "Dual Credit and Total Enrollments, Fall Semesters," 2000-2017, <http://www.txhighereddata.org/index.cfm?objectId=AEE9A640-D971-11E8-BB650050560100A9>

<sup>2</sup> University of Texas System, "Dual Credit and Success in College," Graph 4 (p. 38), 2018. <https://www.utsystem.edu/sites/default/files/documents/ut-system-reports/2018/dual-credit-and-success-college/utsystem-dualcreditstudy.pdf>

credit offerings as a vital source for revenue. Without strong policies in place that establish and protect dual credit quality, course sequences, credit transfer, and program accountability, students may not stand to benefit from the continued expansion of dual credit in Texas.

## **2. How have institutions addressed these challenges?**

Fitful progress has been made in individual institutions around the state to improve credit transfer and strengthen student pathways to degrees, credentials, and meaningful credit completion. For example, the Dallas County Community College District recently consolidated into a unified Dallas College, enabling seamless credit transfer among its five sites and greatly simplifying an array of transfer and reverse transfer agreements with many Texas universities.<sup>3</sup> Many high schools around the state are working with local community colleges to design clear and direct dual credit pathways for students to take to ensure that credits earned are meaningful and lead to high-value degrees and credentials. For example, Vanguard Academy in Pharr has partnered with South Texas College to design a discrete set of course sequences that students must take in order to ensure that credits earned will contribute to high-value degrees and credentials. However, efforts to improve credit transfer tend to be isolated and one-off. To make meaningful progress in increasing the value and transferability of dual credit, comprehensive statewide strategies should be considered.

## **3. What changes, if any, are needed to ensure that students have opportunities to earn college credit which fulfills the criteria outlined above?**

Statewide approaches should be considered in addressing challenges related to course sequences, credit transfer, course quality, transparency, and accountability. First, while SB 25 made significant progress in strengthening recommended course sequences, more can be done. Student-facing data tools showing key outcomes by degree program (employment, earnings, debt, time-to-degree) can help students make more informed decisions about program pathways. Further, the community college Success Points formula can be altered to focus less on dual credit enrollment and more on meaningful program completion and credit transfer benchmarks. Currently, only 35% of Success Points are distributed to Texas community colleges based on degree and credential completion or transfer to 4-year universities (See Appendix, Figure D).<sup>4</sup> Increased weights on meaningful credit completion, degrees and certificates, and 4-year transfer would more effectively align state outcomes incentives with the state's desired end goals and the students' best interests.

Further, credit transfer is a massive and growing problem for both dual credit students and higher education students at large. On average, transfer students who earn a 4-year degree accumulate 22 hours of excess semester credit, compared to only 4 semester credit hours for non-transfer

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ccdaily.com/2020/06/meet-the-new-dallas-college/>

<sup>4</sup> Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Texas Higher Education Accountability System, Weighted Success Points, 2019. <http://www.txhigheredaccountability.org/AcctPublic/InteractiveReport/AddReport>

students (See Appendix, Figure C).<sup>5</sup> Issues with credit transfer have significant costs: In 2015, the Greater Texas Foundation estimated that \$120 million is lost annually for students and taxpayers due to credit transfer barriers.<sup>6</sup> Statewide solutions, such as common course numbering or establishing guaranteed transfer pathways for lower-level courses can address unnecessary barriers to credit transfer for students around the state. The Tennessee Transfer Pathways model, for example, is an agreement between public and private community colleges to ensure that all credits earned from specific associate degrees transfer to partner 4-year institutions.<sup>7</sup> If that is impractical, regional partnerships with clearly defined pathways should be mandated so students can have advance notice of where their credits will and will not be accepted.

Local and statewide approaches are needed to ensure dual credit coursework is held to high, shared standards. We can look to the Advanced Placement (AP) program as a model -- AP courses are universally respected and widely transferable because they maintain clear standards and a rigorous end of course assessment to determine student proficiency. Dual credit standards are inconsistent and often unclear -- students can earn credit through a variety of means. Shared standards, especially for the most common, entry-level courses, paired with prior learning assessments and a competency-based approach, can ensure that dual credit is held to consistent and rigorous expectations throughout the state.

Finally, state agencies must play a more active role in dual credit data collection, reporting, and accountability. Public reporting on dual credit funding agreements can provide insight into how the costs of dual credit are shared among higher education institutions, local education agencies, and students and families. Further, data reporting on dual credits not applied towards higher education programs (due to credit transfer or course sequencing challenges) can also shed light on critical challenges facing students and institutions.

**SB 25, which relates to measures to facilitate the transfer, academic progress, and timely graduation of students in public higher education. Monitor the process by which the Higher Education Coordinating Board adopts rules via negotiated rulemaking. Monitor the progress of institutions developing recommended course sequences and the progress of the feasibility study to implement statewide meta majors.**

## **1. In what ways can data collection and sharing between THECB and TEA improve and assist institutions with college credit transferability?**

Data collection and sharing between the THECB and TEA should provide institutions with specific information on which students (and from which programs and pathways) are losing significant amounts of earned credit due to transferability issues. Right now, the problem is not

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<sup>5</sup> Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Texas Higher Education Accountability System, Semester Credit Hours in Excess of Program Requirements, Public Universities, 2015-2019.

<http://www.txhigheredaccountability.org/AcctPublic/InteractiveReport/AddReport>

<sup>6</sup> Greater Texas Foundation, Policy Brief: Transfer for Student Success, February 2015.

<https://www.greatertexasfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Transfer-Brief-June-2017.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Tennessee Transfer Pathways, <https://www.tntransferpathway.org/>

quantified on a granular, institutional level. Specific data on which students are being most affected and from which institutions is necessary to begin to address credit transfer challenges in Texas.

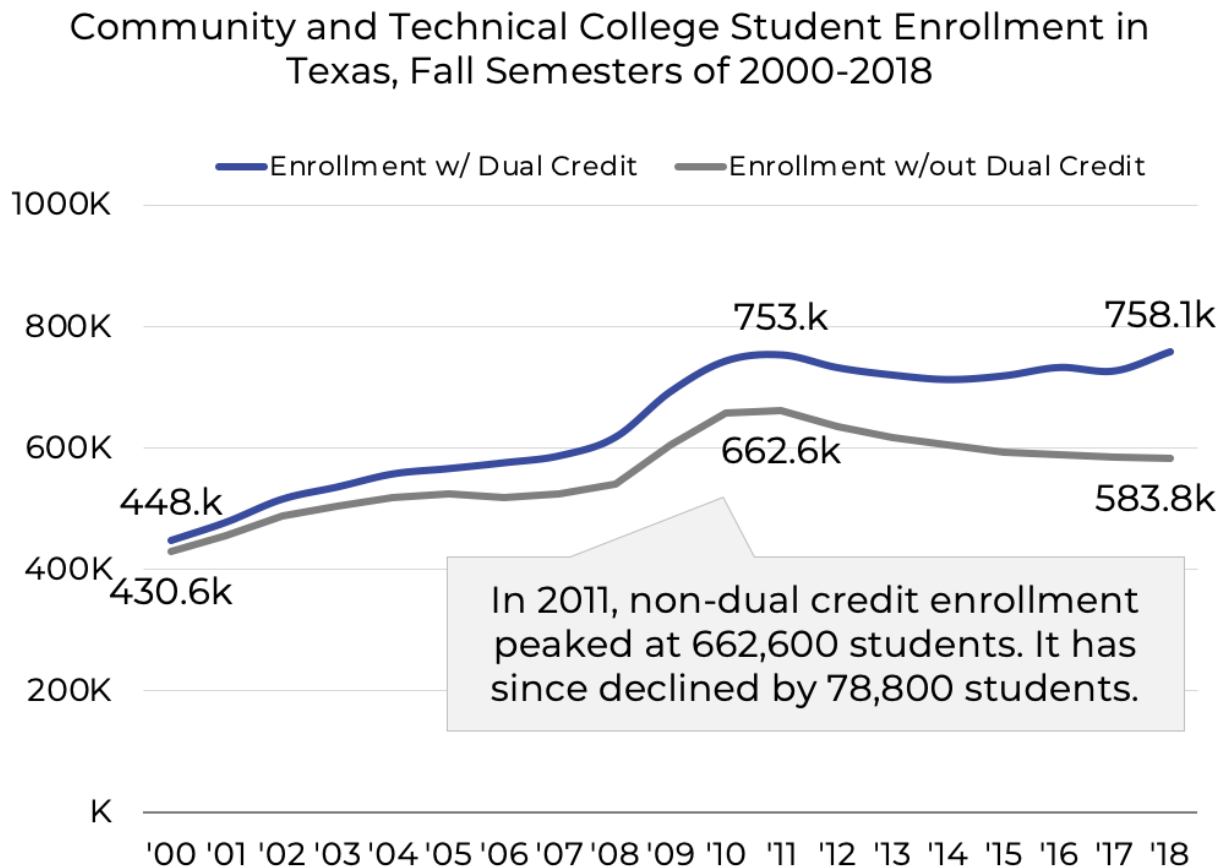
**2. What role can school counselors and advisors play in the success of transferable credits? Are there ways in which the state can utilize their expertise and student relationships more effectively?**

School counselors and advisors currently play a pivotal role in the success of transferable credits. They are most often responsible for informing students about often complicated MOU agreements between secondary schools and higher education institutions. They encourage students to make smart course selections that contribute to meaningful degrees and credentials. However, due to growing student-counselor ratios and complicated agreements between LEAs and IHEs, counselors are often not able to give the nuanced, personalized support that many students need. The state can play a major role in supporting counselors and advisors by leveraging technology and artificial intelligence platforms to create intuitive and tailored student-facing resources. Course crosswalks, outcomes-based data dashboards, and clear summaries of student obligations and costs can give students critical, personalized information. Utilizing technology can also free up counselors and advisors to work in one-on-one settings to help students who need more individualized support.

## Appendix:

**Figure A: Community and Technical College Student Enrollment in Texas, Fall Semesters, from 2000-2018.**

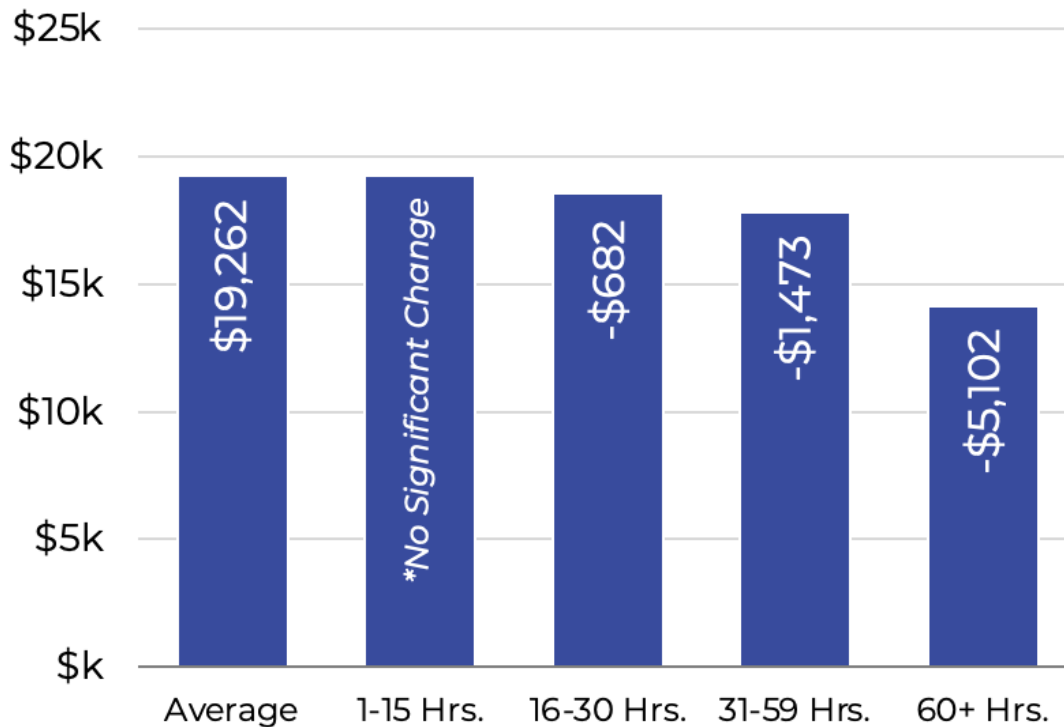
Source for Data: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, "Dual Credit and Total Enrollments, Fall Semesters." <http://www.txhighereddata.org/index.cfm?objectId=AEE9A640-D971-11E8-BB650050560100A9>



**Figure B: Student Debt for University of Texas System Graduates by Dual Credit Experience, 2018**

Source for Data: University of Texas System, "Dual Credit and Success in College," Graph 4 (p. 38), 2018. <https://www.utsystem.edu/sites/default/files/documents/ut-system-reports/2018/dual-credit-and-success-college/utsystem-dualcreditstudy.pdf>

## Student Debt for UT System Grads by Dual Credit Experience, 2018

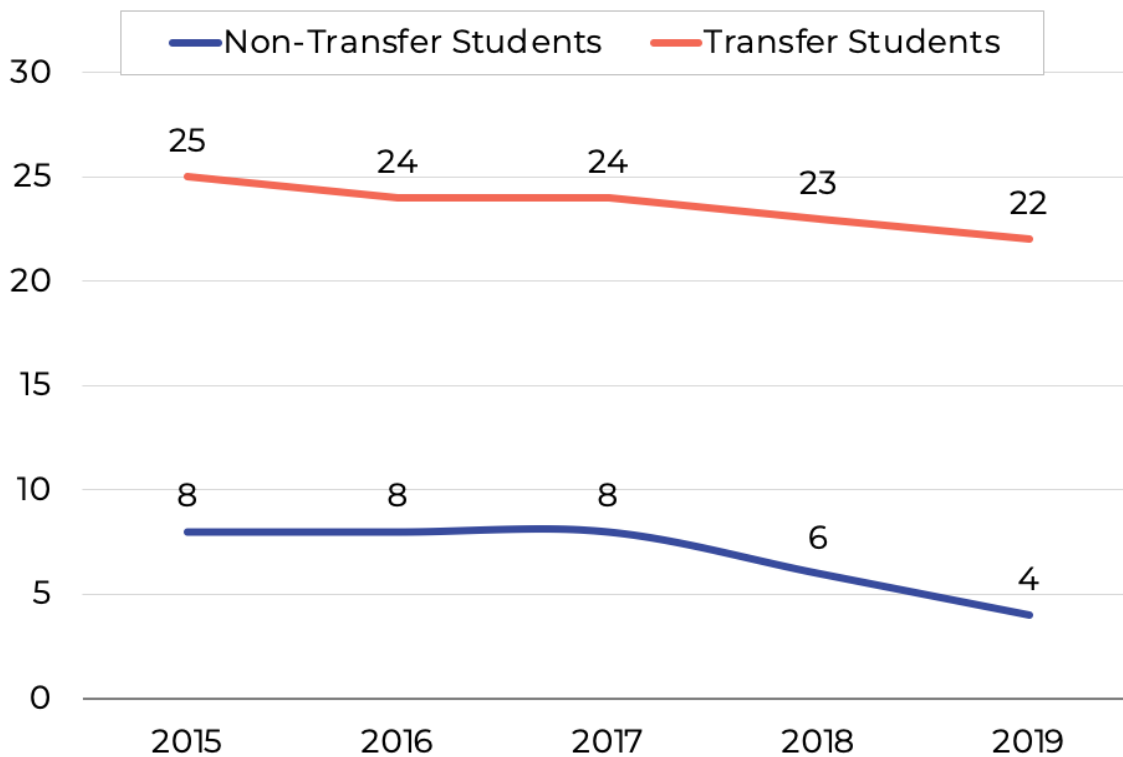


**Figure C: Semester Credit Hours in Excess of Program Requirements at all Texas Public Universities, Transfer and Non-Transfer Students, 2015-2019.**

*Source for Data: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Texas Higher Education Accountability System, Semester Credit Hours in Excess of Program Requirements, Public Universities, 2015-2019.*

<http://www.txhigheredaccountability.org/AcctPublic/InteractiveReport/AddReport>

Comparing Semester Credit Hours in Excess of Program Requirements for Transfer and Non-Transfer Students, Texas Public Universities, 2015-2019



**Figure D: Statewide Success Points Earned by Community Colleges, 2018**

Source for Data: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Texas Higher Education Accountability System, Weighted Success Points, 2019.

<http://www.txhigheredaccountability.org/AcctPublic/InteractiveReport/AddReport>

More than half of Success Points are allocated to Texas community colleges for benchmarks falling within a student's first 15 semester credit hours

