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DATE: September 1, 2020
TO: House Committee on Higher Education
FROM: Chancellor Mike Reeser, TSTC
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REGARDING: Request for Information, Interim Charge #1

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:

- *House Bill 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?

For most technical pathway offerings, Texas State Technical College (TSTC) requires some form of hands-on lab instruction. When the pandemic altered operations this past spring, TSTC worked with its ISD partners to support students both off- and on-site. Instructional Continuity Plans and Grading Policies were established to provide students with options to complete the required face-to-face lab time when the high schools cancelled face-to-face instruction. Operational policies varied by ISD location and local health ordinances.

Many students did not understand that their TSTC course needed to be completed, per the College's guidelines, even though their high school courses ceased. This circumstance, among others, simultaneously served as a learning experience and operations guide for the College's Dual Enrollment team.

All inquiries for partnerships with ISDs regarding the 2020 – 2021 school year have been impacted. All requests for off-site instruction, which required credentialing, were

placed on hold but will be explored for the 2021 – 2022 school year. Deciding factors included: (1) high school campuses no longer being accessible to TSTC Department Chairs for the evaluation of facilities and (2) the College's decision to place a hold on all TSTC employee travel. Across the board, school districts pivoted operations in an effort to conclude their Spring 2020 semester requirements. As a result, dual enrollment efforts, to include recruitment for the upcoming year, were temporarily paused. New ISD partnerships seeking an inaugural year with TSTC were also affected by this suspension. Accordingly, overall projected enrollment for Fall 2020 decreased significantly due to these various operational hindrances.

Overall, student response has been significantly slow, affecting both the College and the ISDs. Students are not actively engaged and have not responded to phone calls or email messages. The College found that many students did not have access to computers or the internet during the COVID-related shutdowns.

2. How have institutions addressed these challenges?

TSTC has developed and implemented an Instructional Continuity Plan. Programs that were able to shift to a 100 percent online delivery have transitioned accordingly. Programs requiring face-to-face labs and lectures, have shifted to a hybrid learning format that encourage 100 percent lecture via online learning. The required amount of lab hours must be met on both TSTC and ISD off-site campuses, but these lab hours must be completed while maintaining proper COVID-19 safety protocols. Therefore, to ensure the health and safety of each student, instruction is delivered by way of smaller cohort sizes, multiple sections, and modified days and meet times to comply with social distancing guidelines.

The Dual Enrollment team continues to communicate with students regarding their fall enrollment plans, despite high school campus closures. Outreach efforts include phone calls, email, text messaging, and online presentations on a consistent basis. High school counselors, CTE directors, and parents have been invited to online forums where enrollment information was also distributed.

Much of these plans are dependent on the individual plans ISDs create under the purview of the published TEA guidelines. In most cases, methodical reconciliation of ISD plans with TSTC operating realities is critical in ensuring short term and success in the 2021 - 2022 school year for ISD partners.

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

- **Find opportunities via online learning.**
 - **Continue to provide dual enrollment coherent-sequence pathways that are flexible and strategically aligned with TEA Programs of Study.**
 - **Work closely with TEA and ISDs to identify more course offerings that directly align with the new Programs of Study initiative and meet the needs of workforce demand.**
 - **For TEA Programs of Study, find a better way to align TEKS and college WECM course outcomes when each new Program of Study is created to aid in the cross-walking process for high school graduation plans. Without this alignment, colleges and ISDs must manually manipulate this process to ensure appropriate course alignment for both the institutions of higher education and the ISDs.**
 - **Provide training resources, webinars, and forums that help educate high school counselors on opportunities within higher education that aligns with the ISDs accountability.**
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Interim Charge #1 (continued):

- *Senate Bill 18, which relates to the protection of expressive activities at public institutions of higher education. Monitor the process by which institutions of higher education implement policies to protect the expressive rights of persons guaranteed by the Constitutions of the United States and of this state.*

1. What have institutions done to protect the expressive rights of persons while also maintaining an orderly and safe learning environment?

As an institution of higher learning, TSTC is dedicated to maintaining a community that values and encourages the free exchange of ideas. The College honors the rights of free speech, expression, petition, and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution. TSTC's position regarding student rights to free speech/expression is stated in the *TSTC Catalog & Student Handbook* and the *Student/Employee Organizations Handbook*. Specific guidelines are covered in face-to-face and online New Student Orientation Sessions and in the College's Risk Management Training for student organizations at each Student Leadership Conference. Additionally, TSTC has posted on its website two Statewide Operating Standards (SOS), adopted by the College's Board of Regents, which address student and faculty rights: SOS ES 1.06 Academic Freedom and Responsibility and SOS ES 3.23 Student Rights and Responsibilities. Finally, TSTC is in the process of updating

all policies and guidelines to ensure conformity to Senate Bill 18. Updated guidelines will be fully in place by the end of the year.

Interim Charge #1 (continued):

- *Senate Bill 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?

High schools and institutions of higher education across Texas have access to the Texas Records Exchange system (TReX). TReX is a web-based application used to facilitate the exchange of electronic student records between Texas public school districts and for the submission of electronic transcripts to Texas public colleges and universities.

Appropriately used, high schools would use this system to share a student's transcript with his/her college of choice, to include all college-level dual enrollment coursework. Unfortunately, TReX is not universally used. The result is that entering freshmen often unnecessarily repeat coursework they took in high school. THECB and TEA could encourage their respective institutions and ISDs to make full use of the TReX system to share transcripts.

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 can assist by ensuring students are aware that many dual enrollment courses taken during high school can be transferred as college credit and applied to meet college program requirements. Registrars at TSTC report that incoming students are frequently unaware that a high school dual enrollment course counts as college hours, so they fail to report those hours when enrolling in college. Common use of the TReX system, as noted in Question #1, would assist both the colleges and the students with transferable credits.