



## **Response to House Higher Education Committee September 1, 2020**

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### **Interim Charge 3**

Review progress toward the goals of the 60X30TX plan, including institutional strategies for responding to diverse and rapidly changing workforce needs and demands, including workforce education, industry certification, and degree programs to address healthcare shortages.

Specifically review community colleges' capacity to meet the goals of 60X30TX, including a review of taxing districts and service areas versus geographic areas of need. Review the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative's work-based learning, industry-aligned internships, and industry credential initiatives. Consider whether legislative action may be needed to expand work-based learning and recruitment efforts for adults who have previously completed some college-level coursework.

#### **1. How can the state meet the goals of 60x30TX?**

The most productive approach in our experience is through the establishment of partnerships between universities and community colleges. Working together to align degree plans and a seamless transition from one institution to another, as well as reverse transfer agreements to complete associate degrees, adds significantly to our ability to meet these goals. Doing these things ultimately increases the number of citizens earning degrees and certificates.

Further, recognizing and approving generalist degree programs would help. While it is understandable that degree programs with a single, overt, pathway to a job is clear, there are many degrees with broad application to a number of fields. These degrees provide flexibility over a career and a valuable, flexible workforce for the state. Publishing our

marketable job skills for all of our degree offerings should clarify the value and importance of each degree and minimize concerns regarding generalist degrees.

2. How has the pandemic impacted our state's workforce needs?

The pandemic's effect on the economy relates directly to workforce needs. Some businesses will not recover, leaving citizens in need of training, re-training, or higher education to once again become marketable. We may also see citizens returning to school for advanced degrees or certifications to be less affected by future events of this nature. The state should invest in the training and education of these individuals to build a more resilient workforce for the future of the state.

3. Is there legislative action that could help expand work-based learning?

Any action that would incentivize the acceleration of partnerships would help. Being responsive in the short term to specific job skills is generally the role of a community college. However, longer range and broader degree programs with alignment to community college offerings would provide a flexible, well-educated citizen across a career. If funding to explore and develop such programs were made available, that may well accelerate the process, such as the state's investment in and support of competency-based degree programs.

4. Do current community college district boundaries align with the needs of the communities they serve? If not, how should they be altered, and why will those changes improve educational opportunities for Texans? NA

5. What is the current capability to handle an influx of Texans seeking re-training or upskilling opportunities through state programs?

For many of our professional programs, we have the scalability to increase capacity. Our primary limitation would be the availability of clinical, internship, or field-based experience opportunities. This limitation could be partially addressed through simulation if allowed, where technology and facilities are available.

6. What is needed to identify and address gaps in existing data collection methods?

The different constituencies (THECB, TWC, and TEA) should coordinate their data definitions and collections. The current data required by each agency are varied, so anything to make it more uniform and decrease the reporting requirements would be an improvement.

7. What improvements could be made to alleviate 'summer melt' and to facilitate streamlined student advising?

'Summer melt' is seen across the prospective student population. One area significantly affected is lower-income, first-generation students who run into financial barriers related to covering tuition, fees, room, and board costs. Keeping tuition and fees low while providing these families with the necessary resources to overcome financial hurdles is important.

Ongoing communication is another key consideration, and providing information via text, social media, email, and regular mail is critical. This needs to be done collaboratively by the high school and higher education institutions to keep students on track. Higher education institutions should engage with high schools and returning students early to build trust and develop relationships. Entering college freshmen have difficulty navigating the higher education process. In many instances, they feel abandoned upon high school graduation and are left on their own to figure out the next steps. Advising plays a critical role at this stage as the higher education process is often very different than high school. The number of choices alone may be overwhelming for these students. Frequent and personalized contact with an academic advisor helps with the navigation of the schedule selection. Equally as important for many students is the discussion of education/career goals. An experienced advisor may provide such guidance and connect students to other campus resources. These things together help address student melt.

The following are some additional ideas that we are using to try to help alleviate the melt at MSU.

- a. Creating summer bridge programs to reduce the fear of college.
- b. Connecting students early to university advisors.
- c. Intervening early in the student's senior year of high school to demystify the college process and, hopefully, improve the summer melt phenomenon.

8. What changes, if any, are needed to align data collection between the THECB, TWC, and TEA to collect consistent metrics?

Since the data requirements and submission methods for each agency are different, having a central repository where uniform data for these agencies could be housed would significantly improve data integration. The greater integration with TWC would allow better tracking of outcomes of students.

Also, on a specific item related to the TEA, a uniform calculation of high school GPAs to a 4-point scale would make data more useful. Currently, there are numerous different GPA scales at high schools, which make using GPAs for any modeling problematic.

9. Does the overall financial status of small and rural community colleges affect their capacity to meet the goals of 60x30TX? NA
10. How has the overall financial status of small and rural community colleges been affected since COVID-19? How does that affect their ability to carry out normal operations? NA