

# **STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY**



Response to Request for Information  
House Higher Education Committee  
Interim Charge Three

September 1, 2020

**Below is Stephen F. Austin State University's (SFA) response to the House Higher Education Committee's request for information related to Interim Charge Three:**

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?

*Several factors need to be considered:*

- (1) increase the college-going rate among high school graduates*
- (2) develop more effective partnerships between academic departments of colleges and universities with high schools and community colleges*
- (3) enhance industry-based degrees and certificate programs at colleges and universities*
- (4) enhance funding for state educational grants*

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

*In only a few months, the coronavirus pandemic has upended the daily lives of people in Texas and around the world. For Americans, the economic impact of the virus has led to new categorizations of "essential" workers, a large-scale move to remote work and skyrocketing unemployment that is expected to continue increasing. The need for developing high quality jobs with a skilled workforce is essential.*

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

*Work-based learning is an important tool as institutions strive to give students real-world experience prior to graduation. Funding institutional efforts in work-based learning will help expand opportunities for students. For instance, Stephen F. Austin State University hopes to bring faculty and students together with business, industry, education and community partners in an interactive way. Under the supervision of a faculty members, students will use the community as a kind of laboratory for their instruction to solve complex real-world problems. This kind of hands-on experience will serve as a culmination of a student's education. In addition, partnering with enterprises outside the university will allow students to build relationships that will hopefully lead to job opportunities.*

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?

*Not applicable*

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

*There is a need for skills training centers at state universities to provide short-term and long-term re-training programs that connect residents to emerging jobs in high-demand occupations.*

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

*A comprehensive review of data collection methods is needed. This should be coordinated by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, but should include institutional research professionals from universities across the state.*

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

*Academic mentors/advisors are a good way to alleviate summer melt. Students face many obstacles between graduating high school and starting college. High School counselors are unable to support all students, and many feel isolated, a lack of support and slip through the cracks. Students need to feel connected to the university or community college. For example, students in dual credit programs while in high school need to be accepted early in the university/college and not have to re-submit an application. Community College students need to be accepted early into a university and feel connected to that university.*

*Intrusive college/university advising also helps to alleviate summer melt. As colleges face pressures to improve retention and graduation rates, it is becoming increasingly important to employ long-term strategies for student success. One solution that has proven effective for many colleges, particularly those in the community college sector, is known as intrusive academic advising. Although the concept of intrusive advising is not new, it has taken on more meaning recently as college students have come to campus with more academic and personal challenges.*

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

*A comprehensive review is needed. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Texas Workforce Commission, and Texas Education Agency share a significant amount of information with community colleges because of Workforce Education Programs.*

9. Does the overall financial status of small and rural community colleges affect their capacity to meet the goals of 60x30TX?

*Not applicable*

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?

*Not applicable*