

Response to House Higher Education Committee
Interim Charge #3
Tuesday, September 1, 2020
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The Austin Chamber of Commerce supports building an education, finance and policy culture that will help Texas remain economically competitive and achieve 60x30TX goals. As Texas stands at 13% unemployment with 1.9 million Texans out of work over the last 60 days, it is critical that policymakers focus on advancing state 60x30 goals to hone the talent we need to meet current and future labor market demand and keep our economy strong.

At present, Texans without a postsecondary credential were 60% more likely to file an unemployment claim, and only 1 in 5 Texas eighth graders currently go on to complete an associates' degree, a vocational certificate, or a bachelor's degree within six years of their high school graduation.

Passage of HB3, and in particular, its strong focus on college, career, military readiness incentives for school districts, along with Gov. Abbott's call for Tri-Agency alignment between the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Education Agency are good steps toward improving higher education and K12 alignment to advance 60X30 education attainment and workforce goals, but more work remains to be done.

Our responses below outline other actions and policy considerations to help meet 60X30 goals and strengthen workforce preparedness as laid out in interim charge 3.

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

- Ensure a greater share of high school graduates enroll directly in postsecondary immediately following high-school graduation. Austin Chamber DTC70 (Direct-to-College) Partnership data compiled by the University of Texas Ray Marshall Center shows:
 - 61% of students who enroll in postsecondary education the fall following high school graduation complete their degree vs only 23% of those who delay enrollment beyond fall following graduation.
- Ensure a greater share of high school graduates complete high school meeting state college ready standards:
 - 66% of students who enroll in postsecondary education meeting current state college readiness standards complete their degree in 6 years, vs only 39% of those who do not meet state standards.
- Ensure Texas has clear strategy to improve completion of federal and state college financial aid to complement HB3 FAFSA graduation and that the TEXAS Grant Program is fully funded:
 - Low-income students who complete a FAFSA, and graduate college ready, are 3X more likely to complete a degree than low-income students who do not.
- Improve data alignment/sharing between THECB, TEA, and TWC to track completion of industry certifications across CTE, dual-credit, higher education, workforce training, and continuing education programs (to include completion of industry certifications completed by Texans exiting TDCJ system) to better track progress to 60X30 goals.
- Develop stronger pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship articulation/crosswalks to local community and technical colleges for college credit.
- Improve transparency surrounding certificate completion and workforce outcomes to better track progress to 60X30 goals for regional workforce boards. This will also be helpful to economic development groups working to attract key companies and industries to the region and provide better clarity on local talent pipelines. This information should be centralized to gauge progress on 60X30 metrics.

- Resource local Chamber/EDCs, with the largest membership reach in their respective region to help define and develop talent pipelines aligned to labor market demand and advance 60X30 goals.
- Ensure accountability and maintenance of per pupil state funding at K12 level to protect HB 3 provisions targeted to improve teacher quality, support Pre-K, early literacy, STEM proficiency, and improve K12 learning outcomes to ensure a greater share of Texas students graduate college, career, and or military ready to meet 60X30 goals.

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

- The pandemic has highlighted the need for postsecondary credentials in our labor market and the need for improved digital resources to allow for remote work and remote learning and instruction to occur across K12, higher education, and the workforce.
- Underscored the need for enhanced UI wage information to better understand the demographic breakdown, educational qualifications and previous occupation/SOC codes of the unemployed to ensure appropriate career and educational pathway counseling and resources can be provided timely and effectively. A third of the unemployed also fell into the 25-34 age group, and 28% were between 35-49.
- Our local workforce will face an urgent need for more childcare services when the state fully re-opens. There is need for a state-funded program to certify and train more early childhood education workers with college credit articulation across community or technical colleges granting/awarding teaching/education degree/certification.

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

- Continue to fund and increase opportunities like the P-TECH or commensurate models for students to pursue dual-credit course offerings, internships and other credentials in advanced manufacturing, health care and IT.
- Allow employers or local Chambers to receive incentives to partner with school districts and offer internships with legal barriers simplified and teacher externships opportunities
- Expand the structure, dedicate state-funded investment and measurable outcomes for quality, employer-based apprenticeship programs.
- Create a one-stop online information site of work-based learning opportunities (including apprenticeships/traineeships) available at the high school, postsecondary and adult levels.
- Increase or maintain the Skills Development Fund to continue the incentivize companies to upskill/train their employees and attract businesses to invest in Texas.

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?

- Geofencing to determine completion of high-need/in-demand credentials and employer hiring within a community college system's boundaries can help determine how well community colleges are meeting local hiring needs and advancing educational opportunities aligned to 60X30 goals.
- Assessment of transportation/mobility challenges, poverty/child care deserts and digital access across respective community college districts can also help determine access barriers, especially in cities where traffic is a huge issue. Expansion of online/hybrid courses and other virtual instruction may help address some access challenges and allow working adults with some college and no degree to complete courses more easily as they balance work and family obligations.

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

- Most of the unemployed have a high school diploma, or some college but no degree, and many community colleges for re-training/upskilling. Where campus capacity is limited, expansion of online/hybrid courses and other virtual instruction may help address some access challenges and allow adults with some college and no degree to complete courses more easily as they look for work and balance family obligations.
- The Rapid Skills Training option at Austin Community College already reflects the increasing demand for online instruction with flexible start/end time towards certificates. Improving the availability of this virtual degree/certification framework across other institutions may accelerate 60X30 goal attainment among adults with some college and no degree. These models may also improve access to credentialing opportunities for rural communities.

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

- Improved data alignment/sharing between THECB, TEA, and TWC to track completion of degrees/certifications across CTE, dual-credit, higher education, workforce training, and continuing education programs (to include completion of industry certifications completed by Texans exiting TDCJ system) to better track progress to 60X30 goals.
- Enhanced UI records to enable policymakers to better understand how degree/credential completion tied to 60X30 aligns to state and regional labor market demand. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding training received via degree/certification programs and employment and wage outcomes across occupations (SOC Codes). The Austin Chamber has advocated for this at every federal legislative DC fly-in for many years. States such as Alaska, Louisiana, Oregon, and Washington already have enhanced UI wage information at the state level.
- An annual Tri-Agency review of high-demand/in-demand and certifications/credentials to linked to occupations/labor market demand by Texas region. It would be helpful to work with Chambers and EDCs on methodology and to better understand regional labor market needs.

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

Improved capacity for higher education and public education institutions to share data needed to target summer college transition support for recent high school graduates would significantly advance 60X30 goals.

Nationally, researchers have found that between, 10-40 percent of college-intending students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, encounter enrollment barriers during the summer and fail to enroll in college the fall after high school graduation. Researchers have dubbed this phenomenon as “summer melt.” These obstacles include verification of financial aid information, meeting orientation requirements, registration or housing deadlines, and other enrollment barriers.

To counter postsecondary enrollment barriers, the Austin Chamber of Commerce began an initiative, in 2013, to decrease the impact of summer melt, partnered with school districts to extend counselor contracts for summer, and worked with Austin Community College to facilitate data exchanges between ACC and partner schools to better target college transition support to students.

Data exchanges tied to text/digital reminders and support to navigate verification of financial aid information, meeting orientation requirements, registration or housing deadlines, transcripts and other enrollment process barriers have been particularly helpful for students. Counselors/partners

have exchanged 150,000 text messages around college going milestones for Class of 2019 and have seen improved enrollment outcomes across all summer melt cohorts since 2013.

Evaluations conducted by The University of Texas Ray Marshall Center, Johns Hopkins and Harvard University demonstrated direct college enrollment rates for key student populations, including low-income, first-generation and underrepresented students, increased by 4 to 10 percentage points or more.

We believe closer coordination and data exchange for summer advising between higher education institutions and school districts could help significantly reduce summer melt and contribute to 60X30 goals.

We are happy to provide the committee additional details on our work with school districts, higher education partners, and research partners to implement summer melt support.

7. What changes, if any, are needed to align data collection between the THECB, TWC and TEA in order to collect consistent metrics?
 - Improved interoperability or capacity to exchange data between the THECB Apply Texas and Counselor Suite system, TEA PEIMS/TAPR Data Bases, and TWC data systems to track enrollment, persistence, and completion across postsecondary and workforce training programs.
 - Identify the licensing/regulatory barriers for training prison inmates, collect data on certifications/credentials earned from these programs and include them as part of 60x30TX as they re-enter the Texas labor market.
 - Determine the alignment and number (year-to-year change) of certifications or credentials earned by populations that face greater barriers to employment such as vocational rehab, adult education and literacy, veterans, foster youth and re-entry at the local workforce board level to the Targeted Occupations list of each local workforce board. Align the employment outcomes (over 24 months) to the invested amount to ensure the effective use of future resources.
 - The PSEO project is a good model for data sharing agreement between universities, university systems, State Departments of Education, State Labor Market Information offices, and the U.S. Census Bureau to help students determine ROI on various degrees/certifications.
 - Measurable longitudinal outcomes for students beginning in early education, K12, higher education, and workforce training need to be tracked across agencies to better inform policy decisions around education/workforce strategies aiming to meet future demand for talent.