

TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD



September 1, 2020

House Committee on Higher Education: Response to formal request for information

Interim Charge 3: 60X30TX Plan

60X30TX BACKGROUND

In 2015, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board adopted the state's current long-range strategic plan for higher education. The 60X30TX plan is comprised of four broad goals, with the central goal being that by 2030, 60 percent of our younger working population, aged 25-34, should have a certificate or degree.

We have made modest progress or held steady on most of the plan's goals. However, it has now been five years since the 60X30TX plan was adopted, and in the coming months our agency will undertake a strategic review of each of these goals to determine whether updates or refinements would be advantageous to the state and its needs and priorities. Specifically, the agency plans to examine ways the 60X30TX plan can emphasize the following key factors:

- Student attainment of high-value credentials other than Level I and II certificates or degrees, such as industry certificates, apprenticeships or certain short-term credentials, that will benefit students, families, and the state's economic recovery;
- Adult learners outside the 18-34 population who return to higher education to reskill and upskill; and
- The essential role institutions of higher education play in research and development.

COVID-19 IMPACT TO 60X30TX GOALS AND THE TEXAS WORKFORCE

Prioritizing higher education and student achievement is particularly important today. The COVID-19 crisis has caused tremendous hardships for Texas students, colleges and universities, and our state's economy. Although the uncertainty of COVID-19 remains, higher education offers a unique path to recovery and to a stronger, more durable workforce once this crisis recedes.

We know that jobs follow skills. During the Great Recession, the United States lost more than 7 million jobs, including 5.6 million that required only a high school diploma. By 2016, the U.S. economy had added more than 11.4 million net new jobs, but only about 80,000 jobs requiring just a high school diploma had come back – meaning workers with only a high school education experienced almost no recovery at all.

Texas now faces perhaps an even greater challenge. Since mid-March, more than 3.2 million Texans have filed for unemployment relief, with unemployment rates reaching a high of 13.5 percent. Texans without certificates and degrees are in an especially vulnerable position. The unemployment rate for American workers who do not have postsecondary credentials is more than twice the rate for workers with bachelor's degrees. We know Texas will recover, but those who participate in the recovery will need new skills and high-value credentials to fill the jobs of tomorrow's emerging economy.

RESKILLING AND UPSKILLING

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Coordinating Board was focused on the importance of reskilling and upskilling Texans with some college, but no credential to help them achieve a better return on their higher education investment and play a critical role in the state's workforce.

Earlier this year, we began a GradTX pilot project focused in the Houston region to reengage the "some college, no credential" population. This comprehensive regional strategy brings together institutions, business representatives, and community organizations under the leadership of the Greater Houston Partnership. There are an estimated 1 million Texans in the Houston region with some college, but no credential who can benefit from the opportunity to reskill and upskill and help drive recovery.

Additionally, Governor Abbott and the Legislature recently awarded \$46.5 million in federal Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funding to the Coordinating Board to support displaced workers who need to reskill or upskill to get back into the workforce.

We believe the GradTX pilot project, coupled with the federal GEER reenrollment support, will allow the Coordinating Board and institutions of higher education to develop capacity and expertise in effectively reengaging the "some college, no credential" population. Statewide, there are nearly 4 million Texans who, at some point, stopped out or left college. Many of these students are within striking distance of finishing, and providing opportunities/incentives to re-enroll at a Texas institution of higher education will allow them to reskill or upskill, get onto a new career path, and contribute to the state's recovery.

TRI-AGENCY ALIGNMENT

Governor Greg Abbott established the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative in March 2016, and tasked the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Texas Education Agency, and the Texas Workforce Commission to work together to strengthen collaboration, encourage innovation, and advance educational and workforce training opportunities across the state.

In February 2020, Governor Abbott issued renewed charges for the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative to identify solutions for long-term workforce needs across the state. The Initiative is currently formulating its recommendations for each of the Governor's charges and plans to release its report this fall.

The Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative is focusing on several areas of interest to the House Higher Education Committee, including:

- Exploring ways to create innovative partnerships between school districts, institutions of higher education, and businesses and increase access to privately funded internships and other work-based learning opportunities;
- Working to identify and address challenges impacting data analysis and capacity, and discussing ways to improve data collection, sharing and analysis across the three agencies; and
- Exploring ways to reduce "summer melt" through its emphasis on the importance of college and career advising.

DATA INITIATIVES AND ALIGNMENT

The Coordinating Board has begun several data-focused initiatives to capitalize on the rich collection of longitudinal data spanning K-12, higher education, and workforce:

- This summer the Coordinating Board launched a Data Infrastructure Modernization Project to help develop a modern data infrastructure and supporting tools for students and their families, higher education leaders, policymakers, employers, and the public. This project will allow the agency to analyze and present actionable intelligence to better inform our stakeholders.
- The Coordinating Board is also working to optimize the agency's existing data by utilizing data sets such as National Student Clearinghouse, the U.S. Census, and other researcher data, and make the resulting analysis available to stakeholders, which will allow critical questions to be more easily answered.
- Governor Abbott and legislative leadership recently directed \$15 million in federal support from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund to the Coordinating Board for improvements to strategic education and workforce data infrastructure. Funding will support critical efforts to modernize the agency's data infrastructure and better inform and support students and families on their paths from enrollment to the completion of a high-value credential and into the workforce. The funding will also include support for interactive advising tools to help students map their most efficient pathways to earn credentials and launch their careers.

STUDENT ADVISING

The Coordinating Board has also initiated several projects to enhance college and career advising available to both traditional and non-traditional students. The agency is working with institutions, employers, and other state agencies to implement interactive advising resources that allow students to find and compare multiple training and educational opportunities, view potential costs and earnings, and connect with postsecondary programs. This collaboration will help to ensure that advising information, messaging, and resources are consistent across the state's education and workforce system.

The recent expansion of the Coordinating Board's AdviseTX program will help reduce summer melt, which affects about 59 percent of Texas high school students that have been accepted into 4-year institutions. The program places near peer advisors at high schools to help students with the transition from high school to college. The agency has also developed a virtual advising system, accessible by text message and web chat, to help ensure more Texans have the information they need to access higher education and complete their certificates or degrees at Texas colleges and universities. A chatbot named ADVi – short for "adviser" – uses artificial intelligence to provide on-demand support to Texans looking to attend or return to higher education. The system provides students quick answers and resources that are often critical to academic progress.

The Coordinating Board will also provide dashboards and secure tools to enable every Texas college and university to monitor individual student progress. These tools will enable all public colleges and universities—and any independent colleges which opt in—to monitor and analyze all students' progress-to-credentials. This suite of advising enhancements is one of the many ways the Coordinating Board is supporting students, institutions of higher education, and legislative priorities.