CLOSING THE GAPS BY 2015: TEXAS' STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND SUCCESS

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

and

Richard T. Ingram Center for Public Trusteeship and Governance of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges

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Table of Contents

Preface 1

Introduction 3

Achievements in *Closing the Gaps* 6

Goal 1: Close the Gaps in Participation 6

Goal 2: Close the Gaps in Success 7

Goal 3: Close the Gaps in Excellence 10

Goal 4: Close the Gaps in Research 11

Strategies for Achieving *Closing the Gaps* Goals 13

Recommended High School Program 13

Post-secondary Readiness Standards 13

Texas Success Initiative 14

Uniform Grade Point Average 15

Texas High School Accountability 16

Texas Higher Education Accountability System 16

Education Research Centers 17

Higher Education Policy Institute 18

P-16 Collaborations 19

Go Centers 21

Achieving the Dream 21

College Admissions Criteria 22

Developmental Education 23

Communicating with Governing Boards 23

Financial Aid 24

Texas P-20 Longitudinal Data System Partnership 25

Texas Higher Education Star Awards 27

Challenges 29

Next Steps 32

Legislative Priorities 32

Increase and improve financial and educational support for students 32

Institute more effective and strategic methods for funding higher education 33

Provide a strong P-12 academic foundation 34

Expand collaborations in higher education 35

Develop a strategic plan for delivering higher education 35

Grant Initiatives 36

Increase the number of underrepresented students in higher education 36

Improve productivity in higher education 37

Improve education research capabilities 37

Conclusion 39

Appendix A. Education Research Centers 44

Appendix B. Summary of Recommendations from *Closing the Gaps* Regional Meetings 45

Appendix C. Star Award Winners 47

Preface

This report is a Texas story – one that is still being written. The story will continue for many more years; how it ends will determine much about the future of the state. We offer this story in the hopes that other states, particularly those with similar demographic challenges, will benefit from the Texas experience of attempting to close major achievement gaps in higher education student participation and success. Despite continuing and encouraging progress since the Texas higher education plan, *Closing the Gaps by 2015,* was initiated in 2000, major challenges remain. The state's higher education leaders, beginning with the Texas Commissioner of Higher Education, Dr. Raymund A. Paredes, are the first to acknowledge this.

Given demographic trends in Texas, *Closing the Gaps* places special emphasis on Hispanic student participation and success. The Hispanic population will account for nearly 80 percent of the population growth in Texas over the next half-century. Unless Texas raises Hispanic educational outcomes, economic competitiveness and quality of life will decline in the state. It is expected that educational work in Texas will have profound ramifications nationally, because in many ways, the demographic trends in Texas prefigure those in many other states. As Dr. Steve Murdock, the former state demographer of Texas and now the director of the U. S. Census Bureau stated: "As Texas goes, so goes the nation."

There is much for which Texas and its colleges and universities can be proud, and there are several things that Texas has done well in its higher education plan from which other states and their higher education, elected, and policy leaders can learn. Most are captured in narrative form in this report. As just one example, awards are given to individuals, groups, educational institutions, businesses, and community organizations for innovative

programs that advance the goals of *Closing the Gaps*, and these awards (and the associated ceremony) provide high profile public recognition for these efforts.

Too few states establish a comprehensive statewide public agenda or plan in the first place, and those that do are often unable to sustain it through fiscal uncertainty, turnover in political office, and changes in higher education leadership. Sustaining a statewide higher education plan and keeping everyone's attention focused on it is a big part of the battle. Texas is to be commended for its ability to keep *Closing the Gaps* as the table upon which most policy discussions and initiatives are set. The half-way mark to 2015 was passed this year, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is still able to generate excitement and enthusiasm for the plan.

More detailed annual progress reports on *Closing the Gaps* are available from the Coordinating Board and its website. This report is only part of the story, and it is only part of the story at the half-way point. But it is a compelling story, and one that has a good chance of ending well.

Introduction

Since 2004, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges have worked together to identify best practices in higher education, particularly in student participation. This collaborative effort, supported by funding from the Lumina Foundation for Education and Houston Endowment, Inc., was fueled by the work being done in Texas to meet the goals of the state's master plan for higher education, *Closing the Gaps by 2015*,[1] which was implemented in 2000. The development of this plan and its goals is a historical achievement for Texas higher education.

In March 1999, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board determined that the state needed a new plan for higher education. The new plan would concentrate on the most critical goals, set a date to reach those goals, and create a means to measure the state's progress. Over the next 19 months, the Coordinating Board's Committee on Strategic Planning worked with business representatives and community leaders from around the state to develop the new plan.

In October 2000, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board adopted the Texas higher education plan, *Closing the Gaps by 2015*. The goal of the plan is to close educational gaps within Texas and between Texas and other leading states by focusing on the critical areas of participation, success, excellence, and research. When introduced, *Closing the Gaps* received strong support from educational, business, and political communities. The plan has maintained a high level of visibility and support from these and other entities.

There are four goals of *Closing the Gaps*:

<u>Goal 1: Close the Gaps in Participation</u>
By 2015, close the gaps in participation to enroll 630,000 more students.

[1] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2000). *Closing the Gaps by 2015: The Texas Higher Education Plan*, online: http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/ClosingTheGaps/default.cfm

Goal 2: Close the Gaps in Success
By 2015, award 210,000 undergraduate degrees, certificates and other identifiable student successes from high quality programs.

Goal 3: Close the Gaps in Excellence
By 2015, substantially increase the number of nationally recognized programs or services at colleges and universities in Texas.

Goal 4: Close the Gaps in Research
By 2015, increase the level of federal science and engineering research and development obligations to Texas institutions to 6.5 percent of obligations to higher education institutions across the nation.

In order to better appreciate the economic impact of higher education, the Perryman Group, a nationally-recognized economic consulting firm, studied the effects of reaching the goals of *Closing the Gaps*. The ensuing report, *A Tale of Two States – and One Million Jobs!,*[2] documents the wide-ranging personal and societal benefits of achieving higher rates of participation, success, excellence, and research.

Examining the outlays needed to cover the cost of *Closing the Gaps* revealed that the state will generate more than enough revenue to compensate for its investment through full implementation in 2015. The Perryman Group found that if the goals of *Closing the Gaps* are achieved, the state will gain $121.9 billion in annual personal income as well as one million permanent jobs.[3] Moreover, the cumulative addition to output if the goals of *Closing the Gaps* are achieved is estimated to be more than $1.897 trillion in gross product (in constant dollars) over the 2006-2030 period.[4] By 2030, the Perryman Group also projects that the state will have provided more than $85.3 billion (in constant dollars) as well as $73.5 billion in receipts to local governments. According to the Perryman Group, every $1 in funding provided by the state results in approximately $8 in revenue. "When all public (state and local) and private

[2] The Perryman Group (2007). *A Tale of Two States – and One Million Jobs!*, http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/Reports/PDF/1345.PDF
[3] Ibid., 6.
[4] Ibid., 7.

costs are considered, the annual economic returns per $1 of expenditures by 2030 are estimated to be $24.15 in total spending, $9.60 in gross state product, and $6.01 in personal income."[5] Thus, the goals of *Closing the Gaps* are the top priority for the state's higher education system and are critical to continuing Texas' prosperity. Meeting these goals means that Texans will have a bright future of economic vitality, social independence, and civic engagement.

[5] Ibid., 7.

Achievements in *Closing the Gaps*

Closing the Gaps goals are challenging, but the Coordinating Board has not hesitated to raise the bar even higher if the situation demands it. For instance, when the state demographer revealed in 2004 that the state population was increasing at a much faster rate than predicted in 2000, the Coordinating Board in 2005 re-set the participation goal from 500,000 additional students (as set in the original plan) to 630,000 additional students by 2015.

As with any long-term plan, and with goals this challenging, the state will see more progress in some years than in others. But Texas has every right to be proud of and encouraged by its overall track record in *Closing the Gaps* thus far, and has every chance of success if it stays the course.

Goal 1: Close the Gaps in Participation
By 2015, close the gaps in participation to enroll 630,000 more students.

Since the inception of *Closing the Gaps*, participation in Texas higher education has substantially improved. Higher and public education sectors have worked together, and this has resulted in a significantly larger percentage of high school graduates going on to higher education.

Statewide, approximately 1,020,000 students enrolled in public and independent higher education institutions in 2000. From 2000 to 2007, enrollment grew by 23 percent (235,000 students), which accounts for 37 percent of the 630,000 additional students needed by 2015. In 2007, enrollment was 5.3 percent of Texas' population, up from 5.0 percent in 2000. The 2010 state target is 5.6 percent, which means enrollment must increase by 13.4 percent (168,000 students) between 2007 and 2010 to meet this target.

Despite substantial early growth, statewide enrollment began slowing in fall 2004. Enrollment escalated at the brisk pace of 15.2 percent in the first three years of *Closing the Gaps.* In the following four years, enrollment growth has been minimal, only 6.8 percent from 2003 to 2007. Despite this, preliminary enrollment numbers for fall 2008 are encouraging; between fall 2007 and fall 2008, public and independent non-profit institutions in the state enrolled almost 54,000 more students. After certification, this figure will most likely drop by about 5 percent, but even at that amount, an increased enrollment of 50,000 students is anticipated. This would be the largest enrollment increase since 2002.

Each of the various ethnic groups has seen changes in enrollment. The African American participation rate has increased substantially and is now just one-tenth of a percentage point below the White participation rate. White enrollment fell for the third consecutive year, but it was slightly above the target for fall 2007.

A key element in Texas' progress is the participation of the state's fastest growing ethnic population, Hispanics, who account for 80 percent of the growth of the college-age population. Efforts initiated by *Closing the Gaps* have contributed to increasing the enrollment of Hispanics by 50 percent and increasing their completion rates of all degrees and certificates by 67 percent. However, to reach the 2010 target for Hispanic students, enrollment must accelerate significantly in the next three years.

Goal 2: Close the Gaps in Success
By 2015, award 210,000 undergraduate degrees, certificates and other identifiable student successes from high quality programs.

Since 2000, the number of bachelor's degrees, associate's degrees, and certificates has increased every year at public and independent colleges and universities. In 2000, higher education institutions awarded 74,906 bachelor's degrees. By 2007, institutions awarded an additional 18,126 (24 percent) bachelor's degrees, raising the total to 93,032. Public and

independent institutions of higher education awarded 37,869 associate's degrees in 2007, 48.5 percent more than in 2000. In order to reach the 2010 target, institutions must award 43,400 associate's degrees, a 14.6 percent increase over 2007.

As with the participation goal, growth has slowed since 2004. The rate of growth for awarding bachelor's degrees, associate's degrees, and certificates from 2006 to 2007 was 2.9 percent, which was less than half the rate from 2001 to 2002 (6.7 percent). Between 2000 and 2007, bachelor's degrees, associate's degrees, and certificates increased by 30.8 percent (35,800 awards) at public and independent institutions. Thus, the total increase through 2007 is 38 percent of the increase needed by 2015.

Likewise, a target was set for graduate education. The Coordinating Board estimates that the number of students completing doctoral degrees will increase to 3,350 by 2010 and to 3,900 by 2015. From 2000 until 2003, awards of doctoral degrees were basically flat. However, from 2004 to 2006, the number increased by approximately 200 per year. In 2007, 403 more degrees were awarded than the previous year, a 12.5 percent increase. Therefore, the 3,623 doctoral degrees awarded in 2007 are well above the 2010 target. Another 277 doctoral degrees (7.6 percent) will be needed in 2015 to meet that year's target.

To help place more emphasis on retention, the Coordinating Board recently adopted recommendations for funding public institutions on the basis of outputs rather than inputs. Specifically, the Coordinating Board has recommended changing the date at which enrollment is calculated from the 12th class day of the semester to the last class day. Additionally, the Coordinating Board has recommended that the formulas be based more on performance and has asked for performance funding that rewards institutions for helping students get through the pipeline and graduate.

In addition to identifying the numbers of degrees needed, the Coordinating Board identified the need to increase achievement in certain disciplines in which the state is experiencing a critical shortage of qualified workers. The state needs to increase the number of students completing engineering, computer science, math, and physical science bachelor's degrees, associate's degrees, and certificates from 12,000 in 2000 to 24,000 by 2010, and to 29,000 by 2015. Increases in math and engineering awards since 2000 have been offset by declines in computer science and physical science awards, so that awards in science and technology now must almost double by 2010 to meet the *Closing the Gaps* target.

Similarly, the state expects to increase the number of students completing allied health and nursing bachelor's degrees, associate's degrees, and certificates to 20,300 by 2010, and to 26,100 by 2015. Unlike technology awards, allied health and nursing degrees and certificates from public institutions have steadily increased since a modest decline between 2000 and 2001. The growth from 2000 to 2007 was 35.7 percent, and further growth of 13.3 percent is needed to meet the 2010 target.

The state seeks to increase the number of teachers initially certified through all teacher certification routes to 34,600 by 2010, and to 44,700 by 2015. In addition, the state would like to increase the number of math and science teachers certified through all teacher certification routes to 6,500 by 2015.

Certifications from traditional teacher education programs at universities and from all other routes fell below the target line for the first time in 2006. Certifications showed a pronounced spike in 2003. The spike is likely the result of changes in certification procedures that prompted many prospective teachers to apply for certification prior to 2004.

Qualified teachers are critical in helping prepare students to pursue technology degrees and certificates, but while initial certifications in math and science have grown by 41

percent since 2000, they needed to grow by 120 percent to stay on track to meet the state's 2010 target. In 2000, 81 percent of all teachers graduated from traditional university programs. By 2007, the traditional university programs' share had declined to 40 percent, and alternative certification programs had risen to 48 percent of initial certifications.

Institutions are making progress toward achieving the goals but still have areas in which to improve. Increasing participation and success are important; however, this should not be at the cost of quality. For that reason, the third goal of excellence was developed.

Goal 3: Close the Gaps in Excellence

By 2015, substantially increase the number of nationally recognized programs or services at colleges and universities in Texas.

Measuring excellence has proven to be challenging. *Closing the Gaps* measures excellence by the number of nationally recognized programs or services at colleges and universities. This is due to the number of entities that rank institutions as well as programs and services. Some individual measures of excellence can be seen from these rankings. For instance, The University of Texas at Austin maintained its ranking of a tie for thirteenth place among national public universities in *U.S. News & World Report's* 2008 ratings, while South Texas College was one of two community colleges in the United States that received the 2008 MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Award. As another example, Richland College received the 2005 Baldrige Award in April 2006 for quality and organizational excellence; it was the first and only community college in the nation to receive this very prestigious award. The Texas Performance and Accountability System for public higher education makes data available for Texas' public universities, colleges, and health-related institutions. The system is now being used for purposes of comparison among similar institutions in order to help determine and share best practices for improving higher education administration, institutions, and programs.

An examination of excellence measures is being conducted, particularly with the development of the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA).[6] The VSA is a collaborative effort among two of the nation's higher education entities – the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) – as well as the larger public higher education community. Together, AASCU and NASULGC represent over 500 public institutions, enroll 7.5 million students, and award 70 percent of the bachelor's degrees in the U.S. each year.[7] All Texas universities have agreed to participate in the VSA. As a participant, institutions will be required to evaluate more carefully and concretely students' experiences and perceptions as well as student learning outcomes.

In addition, the Coordinating Board is exploring other measures that signify excellence. Measuring participation and success is somewhat straightforward. However, the quality of education that a student receives, and the individual growth that takes place as a result of their participation and success, are more challenging to measure.

Goal 4: Close the Gaps in Research

By 2015, increase the level of federal science and engineering research and development obligations to Texas institutions to 6.5 percent of obligations to higher education institutions across the nation.

Federal obligations for research and development in science and engineering to Texas' public and independent higher education institutions totaled $1.4 billion in 2005 (the most recent year for which data were available), an increase of $52.7 million (3.9 percent) from 2004 obligations of $1.34 billion. Despite the increase, Texas' share of national research and development obligations dropped from 5.6 percent in 2004 to 5.5 percent in 2005, as

[6] Voluntary System of Accountability, http://www.voluntarysystem.org
[7] Voluntary System of Accountability, *About the VSA*, http://www.voluntarysystem.org/index.cfm?page=about_vsa

obligations grew at a faster rate in five of the other top 10 states and national obligations increased by 5.1 percent.

In 2003, when Texas had 6.1 percent of national obligations, it seemed to be on course for meeting or exceeding the 2010 target. Since 2003, obligations in Texas grew by only $10.4 million (0.8 percent), while national obligations grew by 9.7 percent. The largest dollar increase from 2004 to 2005 among Texas institutions with more than $10 million in obligations was at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston ($27.5 million or 31.0 percent). Attracting more sponsored research will be important in keeping Texas globally competitive.

Closing the Gaps has stimulated new visions for Texas higher education. Achieving the plan's goals requires ingenuity in order to develop appropriate strategies for success. The public and higher education sectors have worked together and designed initiatives that provide greater cooperation throughout the educational pipeline. State lawmakers, communities, and businesses have endeavored to elevate Texas' system of higher education. Throughout the state, stakeholders are committed to achieving the goals of *Closing the Gaps* and have put measures in place that will serve as important building blocks for gaining momentum and accelerating progress.

Strategies for Achieving *Closing the Gaps* Goals

Recommended High School Program

Texas has taken bold steps to improve the educational pipeline. One of the most significant improvements is making the Recommended High School Program the mandatory curriculum for all students unless they opt out with special permission. Fewer than 12 states have been able to implement this statewide mandate. Texas public and higher education sectors put this strategy into place, allowing educators to build a foundation for future educational opportunities. Too often parents and students believe that simply graduating from high school, no matter what the curriculum, will prepare a student for college.

Post-secondary Readiness Standards

Texas recently adopted post-secondary readiness standards[8] and is now aggressively instituting those standards. Only a small number of other states have taken on the challenge of post-secondary readiness standards to the extent that Texas has. In a global economy, Texas needs high school graduates that can compete with students graduating from the best high schools in the most progressive countries in the world. These standards will assist in advancing Texas high school graduates to a higher academic level, preparing students for college as well as the global competition they may encounter.

Operating in vertical teams, public and higher education teachers, faculty, and administrators worked together to develop these standards. Although students are required to take the Recommended High School Program, which should prepare students for college, more must be done to ensure that these courses meet the standards that lead to post-secondary readiness. Texas is one of 34 states participating in the American Diploma Project

[8] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, *Texas College Readiness Standards*, http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/collegereadiness/TCRS.cfm

sponsored by Achieve, Inc. This project is dedicated to aligning standards, graduation requirements, assessments, and accountability policies with the demands of college and careers.[9]

The Texas initiative on College Readiness Standards provides a strong academic grounding whether a student chooses to go to college or into career and technical education. Making these standards a reality will require intensive cooperation between public and higher education. Public schools must work to implement these standards, and institutions of higher education must prepare teachers who can teach to the level needed for post-secondary readiness.

Texas Success Initiative

Instituting the Recommended High School Program for all secondary education students and setting the post-secondary readiness standards will help prepare students for life and work, and for success in college. In addition to these standards, the state developed the Texas Success Initiative (TSI),[10] specifically for those students who do not meet standards for college readiness.

TSI is a state-legislated program with two components: 1) an assessment to diagnose students' basic skills in reading, mathematics, and writing; and 2) developmental instruction to strengthen academic skills that need improvement. The purpose of this initiative is to evaluate students' learning to determine the need for additional college preparation after graduating from high school.

High school graduates are exempt from one or more TSI requirements if they score above a particular level on certain standardized tests. For example, a student who has an ACT

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[9] Achieve, Inc., http://www.achieve.org/
[10] Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Part I, Sections 4.51 through 4.60, http://info.sos.state.tx.us/pls/pub/readtac$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=5&ti=19&pt=1&ch=4&sch=C&rl=Y

composite score of 23 (with a minimum of 19 on the English and/or mathematics section) is exempt from the TSI requirement, as is a student who has a SAT composite score of 1070 (with a minimum of 500 on the verbal and/or mathematics section). High school graduates are exempt from all TSI requirements under any one of the following conditions:

- The student has earned a bachelor's degree or an associate's degree.
- The student is serving on active duty as a member of the armed forces of the United States, the Texas National Guard, or as a member of a reserve component of the armed forces of the United States and has been serving for at least three years preceding enrollment.
- The student was honorably discharged, retired, or released from active duty as a member of the armed forces of the United States or the Texas National Guard, or served as a member of a reserve component of the armed forces of the United States on or after August 1, 1990.
- The student is a non-degree-seeking or a non-certificate-seeking student.
- The student has attended another institution and has been determined to have met readiness standards by that institution.
- The student has transferred to the university from a private or independent institution of higher education, an accredited out-of-state institution of higher education, or an international institution of higher education and has completed college-level coursework.

From the Texas Success Initiative, state leaders hope that all students will be given the academic support they need to succeed in college.

Uniform Grade Point Average

Another challenge is calculating the uniform grade point average for all high school graduates. Across the state, high schools calculate grade point averages differently. Universities are unable to make uniform admissions decisions without a standardized assessment. The Coordinating Board has begun working with university admissions officers, community college representatives, superintendents, principals, as well as members of the

Parent Teacher Student Association to develop a methodology for calculating a uniform grade point average.

Texas High School Accountability

Texas needs to progress in implementing a high school accountability system, which measures how effectively every high school in the state performs in sending graduates to higher education. The expectation is that each high school will set college as a priority and create a college-going culture for all of its students. Not all students will attend college, but those who do should be connected back to the high school where they attended in order to determine if the academic rigor of that high school appropriately prepared the student for higher education.

A new 15-member Joint Select Committee on Public School Accountability was statutorily created during the 2007 session of the Texas Legislature. Members are directed to provide a comprehensive review of the current high school accountability system in Texas and to report their findings and recommendations to the Texas Legislature by December 2008.

Texas Higher Education Accountability System

In January 2004, Governor Rick Perry issued an Executive Order requiring the Coordinating Board and each institution and system of higher education to work together to provide the information necessary to determine the effectiveness and quality of the education students receive at individual institutions.[11]

The Texas Accountability System for public higher education provides data for 35 public universities, nine health-related institutions, four Texas State Technical Colleges, and

[11] Office of the Governor, Higher Education Accountability, http://governor.state.tx.us/priorities/education/higher/higher_ed_accountability/

three two-year Lamar State Colleges. The state's community colleges were added to the System in early 2005. The System currently has three essential components:

- *Key Accountability Measures.* A small number of key accountability measures were identified for each goal of *Closing the Gaps*, plus a fifth goal. There are five categories of accountability measures (Participation, Success, Excellence, Research, and Institutional Effectiveness and Efficiencies) for the general academic and two-year institutions. Health-related institutions include an additional area for Patient Care.

- *Contextual/Explanatory Measures.* Additional measures are included to help place the key accountability measures in context and/or to better describe the efforts of each institution.

- *Institutional Explanation and Description.* Each institution was given the opportunity to provide further information or explanation. Each institution was also given the opportunity to add one or two additional measures.

Institutions have been grouped for comparison. The groups are reviewed every two years to reflect institutional changes as well as changing higher education needs. This accountability system provides a source of information to legislators, governing board members, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and the general public. In addition, institutions are able to specify measures which lead to the state's priority of closing the gaps in participation, success, excellence, and research.

Education Research Centers

In 2006, the Texas Legislature authorized the creation of three Education Research Centers. These centers were envisioned to conduct research that benefits education in Texas, including research relating to the impact of state and federal education programs, the performance of educator preparation programs, public school finance, and the best practices of school districts with regard to classroom instruction, bilingual education programs, special language programs, and business practices. In addition to other resources, the centers utilize the Texas P-20 Public Education Information Resource (TPEIR), an integrated data warehouse that provides a comprehensive view of public education in Texas.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Coordinating Board entered into an interagency cooperation contract which authorizes TEA to share with the Coordinating Board certain data that is protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The FERPA-protected data is to be be used for purposes of research at the three Education Research Centers. The Coordinating Board is responsible for day-to-day operations to maintain the data, for confidentiality, and for immediate oversight of the Education Research Centers.

Through a competitive process, three universities were funded by $1 million grants from the Coordinating Board: Texas A&M University at College Station, The University of Texas at Austin, and The University of Texas at Dallas. Each hosting institution has partner institutions that collaborate in fulfilling the research mission of the center. Each Education Research Center is authorized to operate through August 31, 2012, unless extended by the governing board of their institution of higher education, TEA, and the Coordinating Board. An overview of areas of study for these research centers can be found in Appendix A.

Higher Education Policy Institute

In April 2007, the Coordinating Board received a grant from Houston Endowment, Inc. to conduct research and analysis of the critical higher education issues that challenge Texas. Following the announcement of the creation of the Higher Education Policy Institute, the Coordinating Board began to lay the groundwork to determine priorities and specific research agendas in the three areas of importance outlined in the original proposal to the Houston Endowment: student outcomes, developmental education, and Hispanic student success. Additionally, a legislative mandate for a financial aid study has led to further research recommendations to assist in strategic planning for the state. The project is in its initial stages of providing the types of in-depth analysis and strategic planning for higher education

envisioned in the original proposal. From this research, the state will be able to improve educational outcomes and cost efficiency in higher education.

P-16 Collaborations

In 1998, a state-level working group called the Public Education/Higher Education Coordinating Group started meeting voluntarily and regularly to address P-16 issues. By 2000, the group included representatives of the public and independent institutions of higher education, K-12 schools, business community, and staff from key legislative committees. The name of the group was officially changed to the P-16 Council, which reflected the group's efforts to help public education and higher education work together to improve education in Texas at all levels. The Council also represented the rapidly growing P-16 movement in Texas to improve and extend the benefits of education to all the people of the state.

In 2003, the Texas Legislature placed the P-16 Council in statute[12] to ensure that the long-range plans and programs established by elementary and secondary education are coordinated with higher education. In 2005, lawmakers identified the members of the Council, which represent agencies with a direct interest in Texas education: the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services. The State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC) remains a statutory member; however, subsequent legislation moved SBEC's responsibilities under the purview of Texas Education Agency. The Commissioner of Higher Education and the Commissioner of Education serve as co-chairs of the council and may appoint three additional members to serve two-year terms expiring

[12] Texas Education Agency, *Texas P-16 Council*, http://www.tea.state.tx.us/p16/p16council.html; Texas Education Code, Section 61.076, http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/ViewSection.aspx?key=10509.77299&date=11/4/2008%2012:00:00%20AM

February 1 of each odd-numbered year. The three additional members currently serving on the P-16 Council represent public education, higher education, and the business community.

Beginning in 2006, with grant support from the Lumina Foundation for Education and Houston Endowment, Inc., the Coordinating Board began organizing regional meetings throughout the state to facilitate the development of P-16 regional councils. Developing these regional councils was considered essential, because the state has a vastly different population scattered over a large geographic area. The meetings allowed an open dialogue between representatives from higher education and public schools, as well as business and community leaders. Every meeting generated ideas for improving P-16 education in that region. A comprehensive list of those ideas from each regional meeting can be found in Appendix B.

Beginning in 2007, the Coordinating Board provided funding to strengthen and/or create P-16 regional councils. Members of each of the 33 regional councils that have emerged (or which are developing) meet to discuss issues of concern and determine how those impact their local community. The overall purpose of the regional councils is to foster systemic change in how educational institutions and communities work together to promote implementation of the post-secondary readiness standards and to create and sustain a college-going culture. The primary goals of these councils are as follows:

- Expand access to early learning for children ages three to five and improve their readiness for kindergarten
- Smooth student transitions from one level of learning to the next
- Close the achievement gap between White and minority students
- Upgrade teacher education and professional development
- Strengthen relationships between families and schools
- Create a wider range of learning experiences and opportunities for students in the final two years of high school

- Improve college readiness and college success
- Promote other activities including raising scholarships, creating promotional campaigns, and providing incentives or recognition awards for high academic performance

GO Centers

GO Centers are local community-managed prospective college student centers that focus on creating a school-wide college-going culture and promoting college awareness in the surrounding community. By means of the Internet, peer-to-peer education, and other on-site resources, each GO Center provides access to a wide range of information about college and careers. Traditional GO Centers are located in educational settings. They generally are located on high school campuses, but can also be found on middle school and/or college/university campuses. Satellite GO Centers are located in non-educational settings. These can be found in public libraries, local workforce centers, or community centers. Mobile GO Centers are contained in vehicles outfitted with computers, printers, and internet connectivity. They travel to nontraditional settings (i.e., festivals, sporting events, and supermarket or mall parking lots). GO Centers have been established in over 250 high schools and other locations around the state to offer academic counseling and financial aid information to prospective students.

Achieving the Dream

Another strategy for student success in Texas has been Achieving the Dream.[13] Achieving the Dream is a multi-year national initiative to improve the participation and success of community college students. The program focuses on student groups which have faced significant barriers to success.

[13] Achieving the Dream: Community College Count, http://www.achievingthedream.org/

Houston Endowment, Inc. and the Lumina Foundation for Education funded the initiative to improve student success at 10 higher education institutions in the Houston/Gulf Coast region. Through this initiative, all public two- and four-year universities and colleges in the Houston area worked on a common agenda to increase student success, particularly for low-income students and African American and Hispanic students.

A team at each funded institution conducted an in-depth examination of student achievement data in order to determine that institution's unique strengths and weaknesses. Using the data, as well as input from faculty and students, the team will create a strategic plan for improving institutional and student success, with a focus on traditionally underserved populations. As a part of the initiative, participating institutions' governing board members received training and were able to discuss policy and refine strategies that encourage student success.

College Admissions Criteria

Making adjustments to college admissions criteria also has become a priority. Institutions need to have better alignment between admissions criteria and the capability to educate and graduate the students they admit. The college-preparatory Recommended High School Program became the default curriculum for students entering public high schools in fall 2004. Effective fall 2008, passing the Recommended High School Program is a minimum criterion for admission to a public university, but it is only the first step in college admissions. The Coordinating Board is working with Texas colleges and universities to ensure that the students they admit are academically successful and complete their degrees in a reasonable period of time. The goal is to align preparation with the rigor of a given institution.

Developmental Education

For students needing developmental education, more innovations must be designed to promote success. Recent data show that if a student takes a developmental course in math, that student has only an 11 percent chance of advancing and completing a credit-bearing college-level math course with a passing grade. New innovations must be developed to help students succeed. The Coordinating Board is in the process of researching best practices for developmental education, and in October 2008, a symposium was held for that purpose. National experts were assembled to examine the topic and discuss innovations that can be implemented at Texas institutions of higher education.

Communicating with Governing Boards

Early in the process, the Coordinating Board recognized the importance of the regents and trustees governing the state's colleges and universities in achieving the goals of *Closing the Gaps*. Their decisions directly affect the ability of institutions to implement actions to attain *Closing the Gaps* targets. With the assistance of grant funds provided by Houston Endowment, Inc. and the Lumina Foundation for Education, two leadership conferences were held and annual governing board conferences were enhanced to provide information on current and relative topics of concern for university and college regents, chancellors, and presidents.

Topics for discussion included P-16 partnerships; post-secondary readiness; student motivation and academic achievement; teaching excellence; the balance between institutional excellence and affordability; and the intellectual, social, and economic benefits of higher education to the community. Grant funding for these conferences allowed the Coordinating Board to bring in a number of national experts to enhance learning and encourage discussion.

These national experts have included: John C. Burkhardt, Ph.D., Professor of Higher Education and Director of the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good, University of Michigan; Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D., Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology, Stanford University; and George D. Kuh, Chancellor's Professor and Director for the Center for Postsecondary Research, Indiana University – Bloomington.

As noted earlier in this report, regional meetings also provided several opportunities for trustees and regents to become educated about *Closing the Gaps*, and to receive updates on the progress and challenges it presented to the region, their institution, university system, or community college district.

Financial Aid

An individual's ability to afford college is also a major concern, particularly since the bulk of the students in Texas who will be college-eligible over the next 10 years will be from economically disadvantaged families. Many of these students will be the first in their family to attend college and may be underprepared academically. Consequently, these individuals will not only need financial aid, but academic assistance. Community colleges are expected to be the first access point for higher education for many of these students, whether for an associate's degree, certificate, or to transfer to a university.

Since 2000, Texas has invested more than $2.5 billion in state financial aid to improve access to higher education. Even with this unprecedented investment, aid is not keeping pace with growth in the state's population and the cost of attending a college or university. Large numbers of eligible students do not have access to Texas' major grant programs. Current estimates show that only 50 percent (90,000 students) of eligible Towards EXcellence, Access,

and Success (TEXAS) Grant[14] recipients will receive an award, and less than 4 percent (6,000 students) of eligible students for the community college Texas Educational Opportunity Grant[15] will receive an award. Likewise, funding for the B-On-Time Loan Program,[16] a loan forgiveness program that rewards both achievement and time-to-degree, has not kept pace with the demand. In the last biennium, the Texas Legislature was only able to fund renewals – no new awards were funded. The Coordinating Board recently adopted recommendations to increase funding for these and other programs so that a significantly higher percentage of eligible students receive financial assistance.

Texas P-20 Longitudinal Data System Partnership

A final success strategy supports all of the other success strategies discussed thus far. The development and maintenance of a strong, integrated data system of both public and higher education information is critical to measuring and assessing the success of institutions and programs. Texas systems are among the most comprehensive in the nation, containing considerable amounts of information that can be used to benchmark institutional achievements towards the goals of *Closing the Gaps* for an individual student's academic attainment. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Education Agency not only amass and share information, but collaborate to develop compatible systems, making Texas a national leader in public and higher education data resources.

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[14] College for Texans, *Towards EXcellence, Access and Success (TEXAS) Grant Program*, http://www.collegefortexans.com/TEXASGrant/TexasGrant.cfm
[15] College for Texans, *Texas Educational Opportunity Grant Program*, http://www.collegefortexans.com/cfbin/tofa2.cfm?id=93
[16] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, *B-On-Time Loan Program*, http://www.hhloans.com/borrowers/BOTFactSheet.cfm

The Texas Education Agency's Public Education Information Management System[17] was designed in 1986 as a state-level reporting system to facilitate accountability, funding allocations, and the monitoring of Texas schools. It provides snapshot and cumulative data that have served for over 20 years as important navigational tools for those charting the course toward closing the gaps in student performance in Texas.

The Coordinating Board initially established the Educational Data Center[18] for higher education program oversight and funding. The first statewide higher education data collection began in the early 1970s and currently includes detailed information on student enrollment, admissions, faculty, and degrees and credentials earned, plus summary semester credit hour and contact hour data. Institutional and statewide summaries, aggregated from the detail reports, are available to the public via online query. Increasingly, these data are used for education research and evaluation.

Over the years, confidence in Texas' educational data systems grew, and requests for data collection and analyses increased. In 2001, Texas P-20 Public Education Information Resource (TPEIR)[19] was funded by the 77th Texas Legislature to build an integrated data warehouse that would provide a comprehensive view of public education in Texas. TPEIR combines "raw" data from public schools, higher education, and educator certification to allow tracking of students from pre-kindergarten into and through Texas colleges and universities, and in some cases, back into school districts as teachers. This collaborative project, which is managed by the Texas Education Agency and the Coordinating Board, provides information on the postsecondary choices of students in Texas high schools by school, school district, and/or county. The high school to college information is available online to the public. Now,

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[17] Texas Education Agency, Public Education Information Management System, http://www.tea.state.tx.us/peims/
[18] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Higher Education Data, http://www.txhighereddata.org/
[19] Texas P-20 Public Education Information Resource, http://www.texaseducationinfo.org/tpeir/

as more users (educators and policymakers) have become familiar with the benefits and methods of using the educational data system for decision-making, requests for more in-depth analyses, disaggregated to the classroom-level have increased.

The collection of classroom-level data and expanded course completion data will provide the ability to analyze student performance by a range of factors not currently available. The collection of more detailed postsecondary data will provide feedback to school administrators on the effectiveness of educational programs. These improvements will provide greater accessibility, functionality, and usability of new and existing data. Changes will benefit stakeholders by providing an online query of data for improved evaluation of academic programs.

Texas Higher Education Star Awards

In 2001, the Coordinating Board established the Texas Higher Education Star Awards.[20] These awards are bestowed annually to recognize public and independent institutions of higher education; public and private schools, and school districts; and organizations, groups, and individuals for their exceptional contributions toward one or more of the goals of *Closing the Gaps*. The awards provide a venue to reward recipients for their efforts to develop and implement the state's most successful programs, projects, and activities. The awards are competitive and are made during the annual governing board conference held each fall. To be considered for a Star Award, programs, projects, and activities, as well as organizations, groups, and individuals must meet the following criteria:

[20] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, *Star Awards*, http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/StarAward/

Programs/projects/activities must:

- Have been in operation for at least two years;
- Demonstrate successful outcomes in areas of student participation, student success, academic excellence, or research that are attributable to the program/project/activity;
- Demonstrate an efficient cost/benefit ratio per student; and
- Clearly demonstrate improvement and excellence over time through the use of benchmarks and other comparison data that allow progress to be monitored and evaluated.

Organizations/groups/individuals must:

- Have been focused on helping to meet the goals of *Closing the Gaps by 2015* for at least two years (to include the creation of a college-going culture);
- Demonstrate successful outcomes in areas of student participation, student success, academic excellence, or research that are attributable to the organization/group/individual; and
- Clearly demonstrate improvement and excellence over time through the use of benchmarks and other comparison data that allow progress to be monitored and evaluated.

Star Award recipients represent collaborations among individuals, groups, educational institutions, businesses, and communities. A complete listing of all Star Award winners by year can be found in Appendix C.

Challenges

The changes taking place in Texas bring enormous challenges, particularly given that they affect the entire educational pipeline. When changes are introduced, challenges inevitably arise. Getting past these barriers can be a difficult task.

Predictably, finances are most often cited as the reason to resist change. Instituting a new program can be costly, but its benefits must be weighed to determine if the outcome will further the effectiveness of an institution towards a goal. The change may be expensive in the short-term, but bring greater cost-saving benefits in the long-term. Likewise, existing programs must be evaluated to determine if they are still effective. Savings can be obtained from eliminating unnecessary or unproductive programs.

Another challenge is keeping people focused on new initiatives. Once a new plan has been introduced, efforts must be made to relentlessly pursue this innovation. It is easy to become distracted. There always will be political concerns that can derail a new initiative. For instance, *Closing the Gaps* was developed as a 15-year master plan for Texas higher education. After a few years, new accountability systems were introduced which might have taken the attention off the plan. However, the Coordinating Board continued to focus on and tie the accountability system to the goals of *Closing the Gaps*. Institutional and system accountability reports contained key indicators for the four goals of the state's master plan. For example, The University of Texas System instituted the Graduation Rates Initiative,[21] an accountability system for increasing participation and success. This accountability system was influenced by and is tied to the goals of *Closing the Gaps*.

[21] The University of Texas System, *Graduation Rates Initiative*, http://www.utsystem.edu/aca/initiatives/gradrates/gradrates.htm

Institutions may find it difficult to focus on statewide interests. Too often, attention may be drawn to institutional agendas. Developing a new law or medical school can be a more attractive topic than undergraduate retention and degree completion. For that reason, governing boards and institutional leaders should keep the larger goals of the state in mind when planning and implementing institutional policies.

Communicating with the public about the educational needs of the state will also provide buy-in for the proposed changes. Too often, parents are surprised by statistics that identify problems in the educational pipeline. For example, it is surprising for parents to hear that of all high school graduates, only 35 percent of those enrolled in Texas public higher education met the standards set in the Texas Success Initiative. Yet, it is this kind of information that provides a more complete picture of the problems facing the state's educational system and explains the need for radical changes in standards for post-secondary readiness.

Texas has a vast population scattered across an immense geographic area. Therefore, as noted in previous sections of this report, it was important to develop regional conferences and councils in order to understand the unique challenges encountered by different areas of the state. During a series of regional meetings, each region received data which compared their achievements on the participation and success goals of *Closing the Gaps* to the state as a whole. In doing this, the Coordinating Board was able to provide to regional representatives a greater understanding of how their region fits into the state's educational system.

In addition, these regional meetings were invaluable because they provided a two-way system of communication. The Coordinating Board listened to and worked with regional representatives to find solutions for their specific issues as well as statewide concerns. Once each regional conference adjourned, participants were given specific actions to help in the

formation of regional councils in order to provide an ongoing forum through which to manage challenges and implement change.

A significant goal of implementing new programs is to socialize those involved to the changes it offers. As an example, Texas hopes to socialize teachers and students to the post-secondary readiness standards. In the short-term, there is anxiety about implementing these standards and helping students perform at a higher level. However, over time, future generations will have a better understanding of the connections between the high school curriculum and post-secondary readiness.

Funding new initiatives, maintaining focus, informing the public on education issues, and socializing individuals to new standards are the major challenges facing Texas' efforts in educational reform. Each of these barriers to change is being addressed through various means. More specifically, the Coordinating Board is asking the Texas Legislature for increased funding of certain initiatives and adjustments to current state law, and is actively seeking grants to begin new initiatives to advance the state's educational goals.

Next Steps

Full implementation of the strategies mentioned earlier takes time and effort; for that reason, continued vigilance is needed to build upon past successes. Likewise, evaluation is a key component to long-term achievement. Each strategy must be reviewed to determine if its objective is being met, and adjustments must be made as environmental changes influence the success of these initiatives.

Next steps for the Coordinating Board include the introduction of new legislative priorities and recent grant initiatives.

Legislative Priorities

Increase and improve financial and educational support for students

Financial aid must be increased to meet the current demand. As noted earlier in this report, only 4 percent of students attending two-year institutions receive funds from the Texas Educational Opportunity Grant (TEOG). Likewise, only 50 percent of students attending a four-year university receive funding under the Toward EXcellence, Access & Success (TEXAS) Grant Program. College work-study, graduate medical education funding, and loan forgiveness programs such as *Teach for Texas*[22] should also be increased. The Coordinating Board recently adopted specific recommendations to increase and improve financial and educational support for students, including those in high-need fields.

The Coordinating Board also supports adding merit criteria for initial eligibility for the TEXAS Grant program to be phased-in over four years (25% first year, 50% second year, 75% third year, 100% fourth year); implementing the merit criteria beginning with students

[22] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, *Teach for Texas Loan Repayment Program*, http://www.hhloans.com/borrowers/TFTLRAPFactSheet.cfm

graduating from high school in 2010; converting the program so that it is available only to students attending public four-year universities; and evaluating the impact of the changes as soon as data are available. This recommendation is contingent on the Legislature appropriating at least $77 million in additional funds for TEOG for the 2010-2011 biennium, as well as appropriating a sufficient level of funding for the TEXAS Grant program to ensure the state continues to fund at least as many students as it currently funds under the program. Students would be required to meet at least two of the following merit criteria:

- complete the Distinguished Achievement High School Program or the International Baccalaureate Program (and passing the IB test);
- achieve a college readiness score on the SAT or ACT;
- rank in the top third of the student's high school graduating class; or
- graduate from high school with a 3.0 GPA (or the equivalent of 3.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale).

Institute more effective and strategic methods for funding higher education

State lawmakers want institutions to succeed at producing better educational outcomes while also demonstrating efficiency and cost-effectiveness. In Texas, the majority of appropriations to institutions of higher education are distributed through funding formulas designed to allocate funds equitably. The Coordinating Board is charged by statute with reviewing and recommending changes to the funding formulas for public institutions of higher education.

To help achieve the outcomes and efficiencies desired by state lawmakers, the Coordinating Board has recommended that funding not be distributed based on the number of semester credit hours attempted, but rather on those completed. In other words, the enrollment census that is currently taken on the 12th class day would be taken on the last

class day. Additionally, the Coordinating Board has recommended performance funding that rewards institutions for both increases in graduation rates and increases in the absolute number of graduates. The Coordinating Board believes that such changes will have a positive effect on achieving the success goal of *Closing the Gaps*.

Finally, the Coordinating Board believes that a more coherent method should be developed for funding capital projects. At present, the Texas Legislature determines from session to session whether or not any funds will be available for capital projects. This is problematic, since it does not allow institutions to plan long-term.

Provide a strong P-12 academic foundation

With the adoption of the post-secondary readiness standards, support should be directed to implementing these standards at the regional and local district levels to improve learning outcomes and overall student success in higher education. This includes aligning teacher preparation programs with the new standards. Collaborations should also be strengthened between public and higher education through P-16 councils, dual credit programs, and early college high schools.

The Coordinating Board is in the process of identifying and promoting best practices in developmental education. From the symposium of developmental education experts held in October 2008, the Coordinating Board gathered information on successful programs from around the country. Additionally, a request for $30 million has been made to the Texas Legislature for developmental education. These funds would be used to help institutions implement programs, including non-course-based activities that prove successful in preparing students for college-level work.

Expand collaborations in higher education

The transfer of students between two-year and four-year institutions needs greater facilitation. Collaborations among the various institutions of higher education will ensure that students lose fewer hours and become more successful academically. Other collaborative innovations such as dual admissions should be encouraged.

Develop a strategic plan for delivering higher education

Texas currently has three universities which are members of the Association of American Universities: The University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University, and Rice University. Demand is increasing for more national research institutions within the state; therefore, the state needs to determine which institution(s) should become the next national research institution(s) in order to meet the growing demand for research. This could help the state better meet the *Closing the Gaps* goal in research.

Grant Initiatives

Increase the number of underrepresented students in higher education

The Coordinating Board is the recipient of a recent federal formula grant of $12 million for two years – the College Access and Challenge Grant (CACG).[23] The purpose of these funds is to significantly increase the number of underrepresented students who enter and remain in postsecondary education.

The focus of this initiative will be on schools that currently have lower than average college-going rates. Funds from the CACG will be used to: 1) increase awareness of the importance of postsecondary education and how to prepare for it academically; 2) provide knowledge and skills to students and their parents enabling them to apply to and pay for college; and 3) provide counselor professional development incorporating strategies to prepare underrepresented students for success in accessing and completing postsecondary education.

These broad goals of awareness, outreach, and counselor professional development will build on existing programs, services, and networks. A new post-secondary readiness awareness campaign will be developed, with materials in a broad array of media deployed throughout the state. Requests for proposals will invite P-16 regional councils and other qualifying nonprofit educational organizations to apply for funds for community partnership outreach and "College Connection" programs. This approach will help ensure that planning for outreach activities and the delivery of professional development occurs locally and serves the schools and populations most in need. The Coordinating Board will partner with the Texas

[23] U.S. Department of Education, College Access Challenge Grant, http://www.ed.gov/programs/cacg/index.html

Counseling Association and the Education Service Centers to provide professional development for counselors statewide.

Improve productivity in higher education

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has received a planning grant of $150,000 from the Lumina Foundation for Education to support a stakeholder team, comprised of policymakers and two- and four-year institution leaders, to work with and learn from other states and higher education policy experts. The team will create a strategic five-year plan for improving the state's productivity in higher education. This plan of action will ensure decreased cost-per-degree while maintaining the quality of postsecondary education in Texas and educating an increasing number of students.

Improve education research capabilities

The Coordinating Board has recently requested both federal and private funds supporting two initiatives to enable informed, data-driven decisions for setting educational policy and improving educational practice in Texas, by enhancing the capacity for education research and effective use of P-20 data in the state.

The first proposal, to the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Science, was submitted in collaboration with the Texas Education Agency. If funded, it will allow both state education agencies to gather a more in-depth collection of student data, along with the ability to link to teachers and faculty, P-20. Additionally, the agencies will improve the manner in which these data are made available to the public and ensure that standard reports and analyses are useful to districts. The result will be a more robust data collection to serve as the foundation for improved education research at the state level, and increased district use of data to improve policy and practice at the local level.

The second proposal, to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is to provide short-term support of a nascent educational research infrastructure in Texas, while engaging in a strategic planning process to design a strategy for its long-term support. The Texas Education Agency and the Coordinating Board have collaboratively taken initial steps to provide access to P-16 longitudinal data collections through the Texas P-16 Public Education Information Resource. Further, the Texas Legislature has funded three Education Research Centers, and Houston Endowment, Inc. has funded a Higher Education Policy Institute. These separate and distinct efforts will have greater cumulative impact when they are functioning as a coherent whole – a viable and sustainable infrastructure for educational research in Texas – to address the challenges faced by Texas now and in the future.

Conclusion

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board launched *Closing the Gaps* in 2000; since then, Texas has been expanding and refining its higher education strategy so that it now addresses: 1) increasing college enrollment and graduation rates, particularly of low-income, first-generation students and those from underrepresented groups; 2) increasing accountability and cost-efficiency; and 3) improving student learning using measurable pedagogies. The explicit goals of *Closing the Gaps* are to: 1) increase higher education participation (in both two- and four-year institutions); 2) increase the number of students completing certification and degree programs (especially in high-need fields such as teaching, nursing, and engineering); 3) improve the quality of public institutions of higher education in Texas as measured by standard surveys of academic excellence; and 4) increase federal research support for Texas institutions.

Texas has already made substantial progress in achieving some goals associated with *Closing the Gaps*. With a total enrollment increase of more than 235,000 students since 2000, the state is on track to achieve participation goals. Texas also is on target for awarding bachelor's degrees, and above target for awarding associate's degrees and doctoral degrees.

In addition to achieving numerical gains, Texas, with central involvement by the Coordinating Board, has also put into place the educational infrastructure necessary to reach the 2015 goals of *Closing the Gaps* and improve educational outcomes well into the future. For example, in 2000 Texas became one of a handful of states that have adopted a college preparatory curriculum as the default academic program for public high school students. In 2004, Governor Rick Perry signed an executive order directing the Coordinating Board to establish a higher education accountability system which has now been in place for four years. As a result of legislation passed in 2006, the Coordinating Board, the Texas Education

Agency, and the elected State Board of Education are working together to implement the post-secondary readiness standards which, when fully in place in 2012, will prepare Texas high school graduates for the rigors of post-secondary education and the workplace. Most recently, in the 2007 session, the Texas Legislature mandated a new “4 x 4” curriculum, which will require, beginning in 2011, Texas high school graduates to complete four years of English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Science. Finally, a higher education strategic planning commission was established, precisely to advise the governor and the Texas Legislature on matters related to improving access, success, and cost efficiency.

As the 2009 legislative session approaches, the Coordinating Board has recommended new methods for funding public higher education that contain both performance-based and incentive-based elements; in other words, funding public institutions on the basis of outputs rather than inputs. Further, following the models developed by the National Center for Academic Transformation, the Coordinating Board has launched a state-wide course redesign project intended to improve learning with greater cost-efficiency, and has convened a group of university representatives to examine various approaches for measuring learning outcomes. And because Texas has one of the best P-20 data collection systems in the country, the actual impact of the various educational initiatives described in this report can be tracked.

A key mechanism for implementing these and other educational reforms in Texas is the network of P-16 regional councils now expanding across Texas. Texas is a large and diverse state with a long tradition of local control, and P-16 regional councils have proven to be successful models for addressing educational challenges at the community level. The State P-16 Council identifies major educational issues to be addressed, develops an educational agenda to be presented to the legislature at the beginning of each legislative session, and gathers from and distributes to P-16 regional councils information about effective educational

practices. Thirty-three P-16 regional councils are now established or are in the process of being formed in Texas. Each is distinct, with a somewhat different focus, source of funding, and organizational structure. The El Paso P-16 regional council, for example, has been in place for over 16 years, has raised millions of dollars in federal support and is based at The University of Texas at El Paso. The Houston P-16 regional council, on the other hand, is only three years old, is mostly locally-supported, and was founded primarily by local business groups. Nevertheless, all Texas P-16 regional councils are composed of educational, business, and community leaders that are committed to increasing achievement throughout the educational pipeline.

As noted in this report, Texas has made substantial educational progress recently but still has a long way to go. In many urban school districts, ninth-graders, especially economically disadvantaged African American and Hispanic students, have only a 50 percent chance of graduating from high school. According to American College Testing, only 18 percent of Texas high school graduates are prepared to do rigorous college work across all disciplines. Texas' statewide college-going rate directly from high school has improved to 51.9 percent, and the state's six-year college graduation rate has risen to 57.2 percent, numbers that still do not place Texas among the national leaders. Furthermore, the likelihood of achieving a postsecondary degree in Texas, as in other states, is statistically linked to ethnicity. At current rates of success, an African American or Hispanic seventh grade public school student has a less than 10 percent probability of earning a bachelor's degree. In contrast, a White student has a 30 percent probability. And, despite continued efforts to make college more affordable, only 38 percent of economically disadvantaged high school students enroll in college compared to 55 percent of students from families with greater resources.

Inadequate preparation and lack of effective academic support for under-prepared college students are two of the key obstacles to achieving the goals of *Closing the Gaps*; another is the rising cost of higher education. Historically, Texas has been a low-cost state, but with increases in tuition and fees of over 50 percent since 2000, higher education costs in Texas are now close to the national average. What is challenging for Texas is that family income is well below the national average, and state financial aid lags well behind that of other large states. Texas, with the Coordinating Board in a leadership role, is working on the following three-part affordability strategy: 1) encouraging cost-efficiency on campuses through such devices as flat-rate tuition, more extensive and efficient use of instructional facilities year-round, and the establishment of a higher education strategic planning process to restrain institutional "mission creep" and unnecessary duplication of programs; 2) studying the expansion of innovative financial aid programs such as repayable loan programs for students completing degrees in high-need fields, as well as work-study funding for college students involved in tutoring and mentoring high-school students; and 3) creating incentives for more students to follow "two-plus-two" educational paths where students opt for completing their first two years of academic coursework at community colleges rather than universities. The higher education accountability system as well as the state's extensive data bases will allow Texas to monitor how well institutions and systems are doing in improving cost-efficiencies and holding down costs.

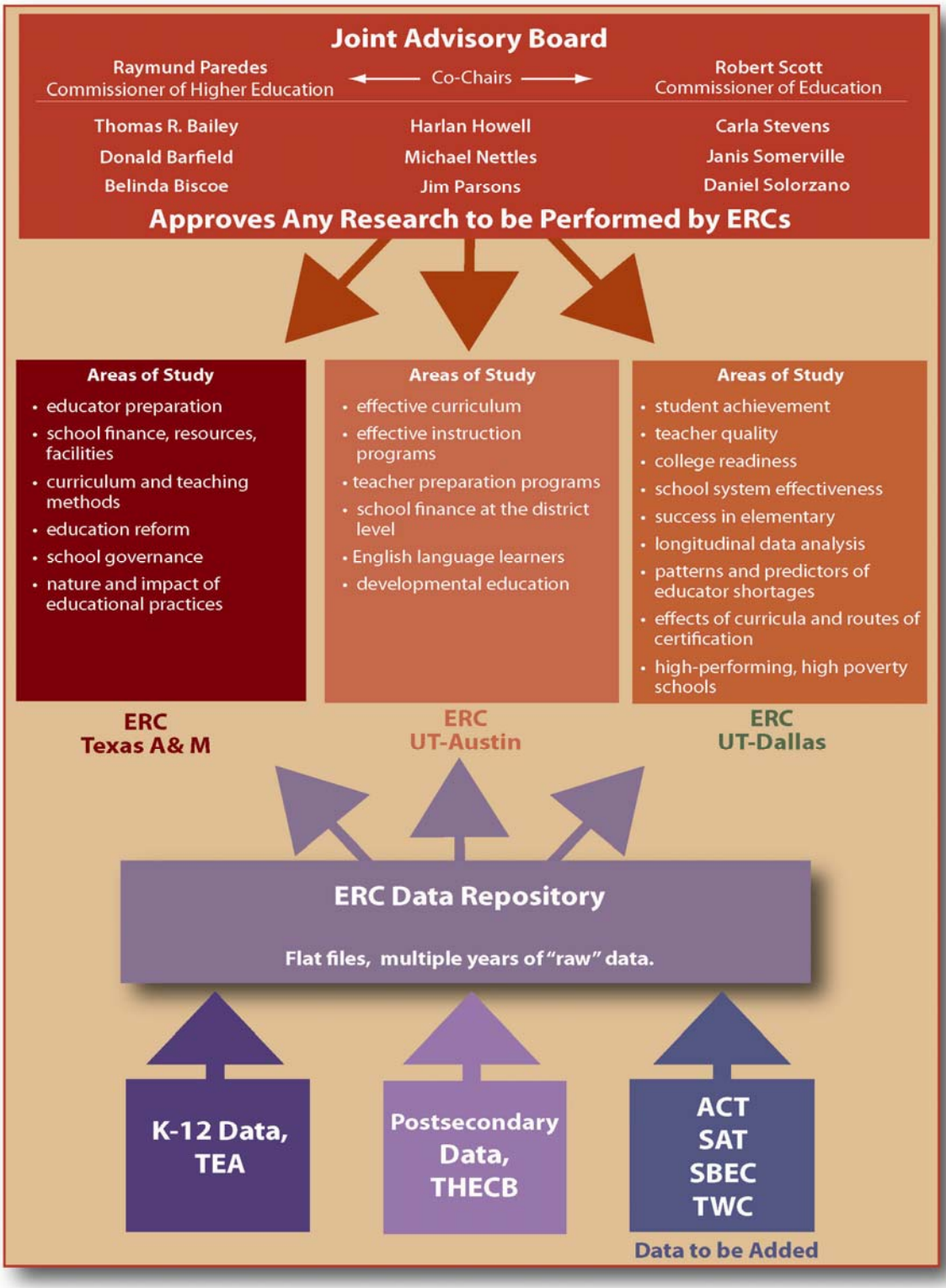
Because virtually the entire state leadership understands the stakes involved, education reform and improvement in Texas are broadly supported, with extensive involvement by the Office of the Governor, the Texas Legislature, the business community, and such recently-formed groups as the Governor's Competitiveness Council, the Council on High School Success and Completion, and the Commission for a College Ready Texas. The

formation of these bodies by the Office of the Governor and the Texas Legislature underscores the state's commitment to improving educational outcomes through integrated, measurable initiatives.

Closing the Gaps is the top priority for the state's higher education system and is critical to Texas' economic future. The goals of this plan, if accomplished, will serve as an economic engine for the state. Future generations will benefit from the financial prosperity afforded by those determined to increase the educational opportunities for all the state's residents. Just as the state will benefit from higher levels of education among its population, so too will the individual participants. Those with a college education will earn more income over their lifetime than those with a high school diploma; they also will benefit from greater social independence and civic engagement. Therefore, it is critical to continue the state's efforts to enroll and graduate more students, to maintain excellence in academic programs, and to increase research endeavors for the benefit of the state and its people.

APPENDIX A

Education Research Centers



APPENDIX B

Summary of Recommendations from *Closing the Gaps* Regional Meetings
February 2006 - April 2008

Recommendations	San Antonio 2/3/06	Weslaco 5/12/06	El Paso 10/10/06	Houston 2/23/07	Dallas 4/13/07	Lubbock 3/26/08	Laredo 4/28/08	Total
Support and advocate for curriculum and assessment alignment between public education and higher education; make better use of the high school senior year.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Increase collaboration among educational sectors and the community; develop partnerships for success.	1	1	1	1		1	1	6
Grow an intellectual base at all levels; strengthen counseling; engage students; start advising and providing resources for students early.		1	1	1		1	1	5
Showcase successes; create an inventory of best practices; create a "Best Practices Clearinghouse."		1	1	1	1	1		5
Link educational opportunities and career pathways; plan for the needs of our future workforce; create articulation teams among parents, businesses, and colleges.			1	1		1	1	4
Make post-secondary education affordable; stabilize state support for higher education; find ways to offset college costs; provide business incentives.		1		1		1	1	4
Develop a collaborative marketing campaign for a college-going culture; provide talking points that could be used in churches, workforce centers, and videos that would send consistent messages on higher education.		1	1	1	1			4
Create an area P-16 council; create an advisory group that includes parents; establish calendar dates for regular meetings.	1	1					1	3
Strengthen the teacher pipeline; create a retention program for teachers; provide instructional leadership; train teachers in psychology to reach students.			1	1			1	3
Increase synergy in the classroom–reward innovations.			1	1		1		3
Secure grants from community organizations for GO Centers.		1		1			1	3
Provide special support for first-generation, first-time college students.	1	1						2
Sponsor a sector-wide education symposium.			1	1				2
Conduct education research and utilize data; provide higher education data to high schools.		1		1				2

Recommendations	San Antonio 2/3/06	Weslaco 5/12/06	El Paso 10/10/06	Houston 2/23/07	Dallas 4/13/07	Lubbock 3/26/08	Laredo 4/28/08	Total
Establish a culture of achievement; develop an environment of academic success.				1			1	2
Simplify financial aid forms.		1		1				2
Increase teachers' and parents' expectations of students.				1			1	2
Distribute GO Center kits to teachers and parents; engage parents in innovative ways.					1	1		2
Provide career courses for students who do not plan to go to college.		1					1	2
Develop a county-level strategic plan for education.	1	1						2
Align communications – policies, procedures, transferability; remove administrative barriers.		1		1				2
Create a county-wide academic center for learning and teaching for faculty development.	1							1
Provide "family education," not just "parent education," regarding college aid and requirements.						1		1
Make requirements for dual-credit courses consistent.					1			1
Provide incentives for community colleges to encourage transfer to four-year colleges.					1			1
Add Adult Basic Education to P-20.						1		1
Improve literacy in all grades.							1	1
Instill internal motivation in students – give them the expectation of college.							1	1
Instill study skills in students.							1	1
Increase on-line accessibility to higher education.							1	1
Fund Pre-K for all students.							1	1
Use asset mapping to evaluate resources at all levels.							1	1
Give attention to dual language learning.							1	1
Increase funding for work-study.		1						1

Note: 1=Recommendation from that region

APPENDIX C

Star Award Winners 2007

Alamo Community College District-San Antonio College – *League of United Latin American Citizens Parent/Child Scholarship Program*
This program is a joint effort by the League of United Latin American Citizens Council #2, the Alamo Community College District Foundation, Inc., and the Alamo Community College District. The program focuses on recruiting first-generation college students who are also parents of children six years of age or younger, and provides scholarship support to both the parent and first child of each parent once the parent successfully completes their college objective.

El Paso Community College – *Developmental Education Initiative Title V Project*
The Education Initiative strives to accelerate the pace that students go through developmental education and significantly decrease the number of students going into developmental education. The program prepares students for placement testing by offering workshops on test preparation and computer assisted instruction.

The University of Texas System – *UT TeleCampus*
The UT TeleCampus works with all 15 University of Texas institutions to build and deliver high-quality interactive online courses, degree programs, and support services in its mission to expand the reach of The University of Texas System. The program was launched in 1998 and has since facilitated more than 45,000 enrollments. The TeleCampus is nationally recognized for its inter-campus collaborative degree programs and the extensive array of student services offered in support of the distant student.

University of North Texas – *Student Money Management Center*
This center is defining student success beyond traditional academic and student affairs models. All students, including graduate students, are offered a variety of services and programs intended to give them the knowledge of managing their personal finances. The easily accessible online resources, workshops, consultations with trained counselors, and emergency loan support improve student success.

Star Award Winners 2006

Austin Community College – *College Connection Program*
Through this partnership between Austin Community College and 15 school districts, with support from private industry and foundations, high school seniors receive admission and enrollment services on their high school campuses. As a result, virtually all of Central Texas' 6,400 high school seniors received an admissions acceptance letter to Austin Community College with their high school diplomas.

Stephen F. Austin State University – *Academic Assistance and Resource Center*
The Academic Assistance and Resource Center offers one-on-one peer tutoring, student-led study groups, supplemental instruction, and related services leading to increased intellectual development and academic success among participating students. Average grades for student participants were nearly half a grade point higher than for other students, and college persistence rates for participants improved as well.

Tarrant County College District – *SureStart Program*
SureStart is a learning community for under-prepared, first-time-in-college students, offering early intervention to students who are at risk of dropping out of college. Through the program, students who need better reading skills take a developmental education reading course. They take their first college classes together, allowing them to bond and support each other. As a result, SureStart students are more successful in college.

The University of Texas at El Paso – *Chemistry Peer Leader Program*
"Two Plus Two Workshops" are a key element of this effort, which has increased student success in science, engineering, and math at The University of Texas at El Paso. Two hours of workshops (small-group, peer-led, team-based activities) are substituted for one hour of a large-section lecture per week in a first-semester general chemistry course. Since the program was implemented in fall 2000, the "C-or-better" passing rate has significantly improved.

YES College Preparatory Schools
Admission to a four-year higher education institution is a high school graduation requirement at YES College Preparatory Schools, based in Houston. A comprehensive college counseling program is a key element, beginning in middle school with college campus visits. During their junior year, students take a SAT/ACT preparatory course. As seniors, students are enrolled in a "college seminar" course, which allows them time to work on college and financial aid applications, and visit with college counselors.

Star Award Winners 2005

Houston Community College System – *Graduates and Completers*
Through six strategies, the Houston Community College System increased its number of graduates and other completers. The strategies include degree audits and related assistance to help students take the courses needed for graduation; degree completion fairs; a twice-a-year Student Success Week focusing on advising, transcript evaluation, and graduation applications; identifying and advising students who have completed core courses; a process allowing students to transfer back equivalent courses taken within three years of enrollment in the system; and a focus on resolving individual students' graduation problems.

North Harris Montgomery Community College District-North Harris College – *Summer Bridge Program*
North Harris College's Summer Bridge Program provides an intensive three weeks of developmental education to graduating high school seniors who need improved reading, writing, and math skills, allowing those students to make a smoother transition from high school into college. The program also links students to faculty or staff mentors, offers grants to pay for textbooks, and offers $100 scholarships to students who successfully complete the program.

Texas A&M University-Commerce – *Navarro College Partnership*
Through this partnership, Texas A&M University-Commerce offers on the Navarro College campus upper-division courses leading to teacher certification. It also provides a full-time director and advisors, faculty who teach on-site, and student support services. Prior to the partnership, Navarro students had to drive one to two hours to reach a campus offering upper-division courses.

University of Houston – *Center for Mexican American Studies*
A diverse spectrum of programs offered by the University of Houston Center for Mexican American Studies is supporting the needs of a diverse urban Hispanic student population. Efforts are focused on promoting preparation for college, student recruitment, smoothing students' transition from high school to college, financial and academic support for undergraduate students, and career counseling.

The University of Texas at El Paso – *Model Institutions for Excellence Initiative*
The University of Texas at El Paso's Model Institutions for Excellence Initiative supports science, technology, engineering, and math undergraduates by improving their first-year experiences, improving curricula, and providing enrichment activities. As a result of its efforts, persistence rates and the average first-semester grade point average have increased and the average time to graduation has decreased.

The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston – *Gulf Coast Consortia/Keck Center*
The Gulf Coast Consortia brings together the strengths of Houston/Galveston-area academic medical research institutions and universities to build interdisciplinary collaborative research teams and training programs at the frontiers of biomedical sciences. The W. M. Keck Center for Interdisciplinary Bioscience Training supports more than 60 trainees and has more than 200 affiliated training faculty with five joint training programs. This collaborative effort also allows consortia members to more successfully obtain federal research funding.

Star Award Winners 2004

Amarillo College – *Community Link*
Established in 1987, Community Link reaches out to nontraditional students (low to moderate income, minority, first-generation, new resident/immigrant students and adults over 25) to encourage this population to enroll in college. In 2004, thirteen partners, including the Amarillo Area Foundation have provided significant financial support for scholarships, facility expansion, and staff support.

St. Edwards University – *College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)*
Children of migrant farm workers often cannot afford college and are likely to be academically unprepared for college as they move from school to school across the country. CAMP has provided college access and support to thousands of migrant students. The graduation rate for CAMP students exceeds the graduation rate for Hispanics at 29 peer private higher education institutions.

University of Houston-Downtown – *College of Science & Technology Scholars Academy*
The Scholars Academy encourages the persistence of academically capable, first-generation-in-college science, math, computer science, and engineering students by overcoming some of academic preparation, peer culture, and classroom climate barriers they face. As part of an effort to increase the number of minority and female students and graduates in science, technology, engineering, and math, the program provides scholarships, mentorship stipends, and summer research stipends, and cultivates a culture of achievement, community, and support among participants.

The University of Texas at El Paso – *Law School Preparation Institute*
The Law School Preparation Institute is substantially increasing the number of students at The University of Texas at El Paso who qualify for admission to and succeed in the nation's top law schools. Program components include two intensive summer sessions, beginning after the sophomore year and continuing the next year, which improve students' analytical thinking and logical reasoning skills and familiarize them with the type of legal analysis expected in law school.

Star Award Winners 2003

Alamo Community College District – *Community Education Centers*
Through Community Education Centers, which are one-stop outreach centers established in areas of San Antonio with low college-going rates, this effort is making college much more accessible to minority and other populations that were overlooked in the past. Four Centers - at a high school, a college facility, a parent education center, and a church - give personalized, step-by-step registration information and instruction for people interested in pursuing college.

Alamo Community College District – San Antonio College – *Strategies for Success*
Strategies for Success helps students who are struggling academically to improve their grades and remain in college. The program provides counseling sessions and intensive, counseling-based classroom instruction to students who have been placed on scholastic probation.

Dallas County Community College District – *Rising Star Program*
Since 1999, the Rising Star Program has provided funds to high-achieving high school graduates with financial need to help them pay for tuition, books, and other college needs at colleges within the district. More than 70 percent of participants maintain a "C" average or better, and they also have above-average college persistence and graduation rates.

Prairie View A&M University – *The Academy for Collegiate Excellence and Student Success* (ACCESS)
ACCESS motivates "at-risk" students to succeed in college. The program has two primary components: an intensive, residential pre-college effort in the summer and a holistic, centralized student support effort during the freshman year. Participants persist at a higher rate, complete more hours, earn higher grades, and graduate at a higher rate than non-participants.

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi – *Pathways to Success in Science Program*
The Pathways to Success in Science program encourages more South Texas students to succeed in college, particularly in the sciences. Enhanced mentoring, beginning at freshmen orientation and continuing through the undergraduate years, is a key component. Peer mentoring, freshman learning communities, and hands-on undergraduate research and interaction with faculty members are part of the program.

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center – *South Plains Nursing Education Community Coalition*
This Coalition - Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, South Plains College, Lubbock Christian University, and Covenant School of Nursing, in partnership with University Medical Center, Covenant Health System, WorkSource of the South Plains, and American State Bank - is helping to meet the region's nursing needs by working collaboratively to graduate new registered nurses. The Coalition provides scholarships for new nursing students; hires new nurse educators; and funds efforts to recruit, promote, and retain nurses throughout their careers.

The University of Texas at El Paso – *Entering Student Program*

The University of Texas at El Paso developed the Entering Student Program to help ensure the academic success of its first-year students. The first component, called the University Studies Seminar, provides a rigorous academic curriculum, with tutoring and learning support, in a small class setting. The second component, called Learning Communities, allows a community of students to enroll in the same two or three core courses, which may be clustered around a common theme.

West Texas A&M University – *Increasing the Success of the Most Economically Disadvantaged Students*

This effort is significantly improving the academic success and persistence levels of West Texas A&M University's most economically disadvantaged students - students who are not expected, based on analysis of their applications for financial aid, to be able to contribute any of their own funds to pay for college. Through cross-campus collaboration among financial aid, admissions, and academic advising officials, the college persistence rate for these students has increased steadily over the years.

Star Award Winners 2002

Baylor College of Medicine – *Premedical Honors College*
This eight-year, high school-through-medical school pathway, established in partnership with The University of Texas-Pan American in 1994, is significantly increasing the number of South Texas students pursuing medical education. South Texas high school graduates who are selected for the program, based on their academic performance, maturity, and other factors, enroll as undergraduates at The University of Texas-Pan American and are given conditional acceptance to Baylor College of Medicine. They pay no tuition and fees for eight years (as undergraduates and medical school students), and participate in summer academic programs as undergraduates.

Lamar University – *The Monitored Probation Early Intervention Program*
Students in the Center for General Studies with grade point averages less than 2.0 are required to participate in this program as a condition of continued enrollment. Participation includes academic counseling and tutoring services, study skills courses, workshops, and supplemental instruction. Student progress is monitored and evaluated through personal contact and reports on their academic performance.

San Jacinto College-North Campus – *HomeGrown Teacher Education Program*
HomeGrown involves a collaborative partnership involving a community college (San Jacinto College-North), public school districts (Galena Park and Sheldon Independent School Districts), a university (University of Houston-Clear Lake), civic organizations, and students. The educational institutions work together to offer community college preparation, university graduation, and school district experience for future teachers in the Gulf Coast region of the state. Civic organizations provide financial aid to some participants.

Texas Woman's University – *Nursing Success Program*
By providing at-risk nursing students with courses in study skills, time management, English usage, medical calculations, computer skills, stress management, critical thinking and the professional culture of American nurses, this program helps retain students in the nursing program.

The University of Texas at El Paso – *The Mother-Daughter Program*
Thousands of girls in the sixth through twelfth grades and their mothers have participated in the Mother-Daughter Program. Between 200 and 300 mother-daughter teams meet one Saturday each month beginning when the daughters are in the sixth grade. Activities involve building students' self-esteem while encouraging them to complete high school and go to college, orienting the students to higher education and professional careers, providing academic and life-skills training to improve the students' preparation for college, and increasing the parental commitment to higher education.

The University of Texas at San Antonio – *Texas Pre-freshman Engineering Program (TexPREP)*
Middle and high school students interested in engineering, science, technology, and other mathematics-related disciplines participate in seven- to eight-week mathematics-based academic enrichment sessions through this nationally recognized program, a partnership of 23 community colleges and universities. TexPREP develops abstract reasoning and problem-solving skills through coursework, homework, team projects, class presentations, and tests.

The University of Texas-Pan American – *University Scholars*

High school students who take a rigorous college-preparatory academic curriculum can earn a scholarship that pays four-year tuition and fees through outstanding performance in the Advanced Placement (AP) Program and/or the Concurrent Enrollment program at the university. To increase AP offerings in public schools, the university provides AP and Pre-AP summer training for 500 to 600 teachers annually. The success of this program has significantly increased the number of freshmen entering the university with AP credit.

Star Award Winners 2001

Southwest Texas State University (renamed Texas State University-San Marcos) – *SWT Mathworks Summer Program*
This program provides off-campus summer math skills programs to high school students in Houston, Port Lavaca, Austin, Lockhart, and 18 cities in the Rio Grande Valley - where the large population of Hispanic students has relatively few similar opportunities. The program also promotes systemic changes for improving math instruction.

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi – *First-Year Learning Communities Program*
This program places all full-time, first-year students into groups that enroll in clusters of three or four courses. Connections among the courses are emphasized by faculty who collaborate to help students learn across disciplines.

Texas Association of Community Colleges – *Virtual College of Texas*
The Virtual College of Texas (VCT) is a collaborative of Texas community and technical colleges. Through VCT, students may register at their local colleges to take credit and non-credit distance learning courses from other colleges throughout Texas.

Texas Tech University – *The University Writing Center*
This program helps university and public school students improve their writing skills. Between 1995 and 2001, nearly 8,000 documents - including nearly 3,500 from K-12 students, primarily in rural areas - were submitted to this assistance center.

University of Houston-Downtown – *Jesse H. Jones Academic Institute*
This program significantly improves the college-going rates and academic performance of participating high school students at Houston's Jeff Davis High School. The program enrolls high school students every summer in pre-collegiate courses emphasizing reading, writing, math, and sciences courses taught by college and university faculty.

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