

Legislative Issues Impacting Higher Education: Regarding Equity, Access & Affordable

TABPHE Mission: *The Texas Association of Black Personnel in Higher Education (TABPHE) is a statewide, voluntary, educational association that represents all levels of higher education and serves as a voice for Black faculty, staff, students and administrators in order to ensure a better educational system for all. TABPHE provides an avenue for professional development opportunities that enrich higher education personnel and improve the quality of their professional growth.*

TABPHE's vision *is to ensure that the higher educational system in the state of Texas provides equitable opportunities and advancement for Black personnel, while fostering a positive environment for Black students to successfully matriculate.*

Legislative Priorities

The 87th Legislature commenced Jan. 12, officially marking the start of the 140-day legislative session. The Texas House elected Rep. Dade Phelan as the new Speaker of the House and both the House and Senate adopted rules that will govern their respective chambers during the 2021 session. That week, Commissioner Harrison Keller and Coordinating Board staff hosted a higher education briefing for legislative and institutional governmental relations staff. More than 100 representatives participated in the briefing where we discussed important issues facing higher education and previewed items for the upcoming quarterly board meeting.

COVID19 Pandemic Relief Higher Education Federal Legislation

Consolidated Appropriations Act (CAA)

On December 21, 2020, Congress passed the 2,100-page Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 (CAA), which includes a stimulus and pandemic relief package of almost \$900 billion. The stimulus package includes \$81.88 billion for the Education Stabilization Fund, dollars available through September 30, 2022.

Institutions of higher education may use the funds to defray expenses associated with the coronavirus pandemic (including lost revenues and expenses already incurred), technology costs associated with distance learning, faculty and staff training, and payroll. Institutions may also use funding to carry out student support activities or provide financial aid grants to assist with any component of a student's cost of attendance or emergency costs arising from the pandemic, such as tuition, food, housing, health care, mental health care or child care.

GEER Reskilling/Upskilling

The Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) was established in Fund, the Texas Reskilling Support Fund Grant Program is established to support displaced Texas workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic who need to reskill or upskill to get back into the workforce and Texas students who have previously stopped out of higher education institutions

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without completing a postsecondary credential. To date, during Round 1 of the process, we have allocated \$18,111,447 in reskilling grants to 40 applicants, representing 49 institutions.

Texas Reskilling Upskilling Education (TRUE)

Texas Reskilling Support Fund Grants are intended to be deployed as quickly as reasonably possible during the 2021 calendar year to enable Texas public IHEs to support adversely impacted students who need additional education and training during this period of significant economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The Grant awards may only be used to provide last dollar financial aid support for tuition and fees for eligible students in eligible programs after other federal, state, and institutional financial aid has been applied. Due to the complex and evolving issues related to the delivery of postsecondary education and training during COVID-19, public IHEs are encouraged to collaborate with other public higher education institutions, employers, and Regional Workforce Development Boards in the development and execution of this effort. Academic or workforce credential programs selected for support by institutions must meet either or both of the following criteria:

- *High-value short-term workforce credential programs* of fewer than 60 Semester Credit Hours, including programs that may be converted to credit or are stackable to credit-bearing programs, Level 1 Certificates, Level 2 Certificates, or Level 3 Enhanced Skills Awards and Advanced Technology Certificates. Eligible workforce credential programs must *either*:
 - Be aligned with high value occupations in the region as determined by the most recent TWC Target Occupations regional list; *or*
 - Be aligned with high value occupations offering above-average wages and strong job placement for the region as determined by the institution following examination of pertinent labor market information in partnership with regional employers and in consultation with the Regional Workforce Development Board.
- *Undergraduate degree programs* (Associate's and Baccalaureate programs) that an eligible student may have 75% or more of program requirements already completed or may reasonably be expected to complete within twelve months from re-enrollment in the program.

Academic or workforce credential programs may be delivered digitally, face-to-face or in a hybrid mode of delivery.

Student financial aid provided under this program must:

- Only be used to provide last dollar financial aid and only be applied towards the student's tuition and required fees, after any federal, state, or institutional gift aid the student has received;
- Not exceed an eligible student's demonstrated financial need; and

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- Be between \$500 and \$2,500, but not exceed \$2,500, for any eligible student per semester.
- Institutions shall explain to students where this funding came from, why they were selected, and make clear that the funds are to be utilized only during the allowed grant period.
 - Students in receipt of this aid must meet the following eligibility requirements:
 - Texas residents eligible for in-state tuition as determined by the institution;
 - Have filed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA);
 - Have financial need and are eligible for federal Title IV aid. Students who are enrolled in short-term non-eligible Title IV workforce credential programs but who are otherwise Title IV eligible may be included;
 - Have affirmed they were affected by COVID-19. Institutions may establish their own processes for determining COVID-19 impact;
 - Be enrolled in an eligible undergraduate or short-term workforce credential program as described in this RFA on either a full time or part time basis;
 - Have not been enrolled in an accredited postsecondary institution in the previous academic (long) semester or previous six months; and
 - Are within twelve months or 75% of completing their credential program.

We support Senate Bill (SB) 64 passed by the 86th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, required the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), in collaboration with the Department of Information Resources (DIR), to explore ways to incentivize Texas higher education institutions to develop more certificate and degree programs in the area of cybersecurity and submit a report detailing strategies to the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the House of Representatives, the presiding officer of each legislative standing committee with primary jurisdiction over higher education, and each governing board of an institution of higher education not later than September 1, 2020.

In accordance with Texas Education Code 61.0518, the SB 64 report, *Strategies to Incentivize Institutions of Higher Education to Develop Degree Programs in Cybersecurity* was submitted to The Honorable Greg Abbott, Governor, The Honorable Dan Patrick, Lieutenant Governor, The Honorable Dennis Bonnen, Speaker of the House of Representatives, The Honorable Chris Turner, Chair, House Committee on Higher Education, and The Honorable Brandon Creighton, Chair, Senate Committee on Higher Education. This report presented the following information:

- Initial findings show there is a growing need for graduates of certificate and degree programs in cybersecurity. Recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics showed that of the 1.9 million students who graduated with a bachelor's degree in 2018, only 64,405 earned a degree in computer and information sciences. If only three percent of college students continue to enroll in computer science programs related to cybersecurity, the shortage of workers in this under-employed area will get worse (Knoll, 2019);

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- An overview of the methodology that was used to conduct and collect data on the development of degree programs in cybersecurity at Texas institutions of higher education; and
- Recommendations for providing state funding, creating industry partnerships, developing a standardized curriculum, and creating articulation pathways from high school to college.

The report can be found on the THECB website at:
<http://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/reports/legislative/>.

Senate Bill (SB) 64 passed by the 86th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, required the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), in collaboration with the Department of Information Resources (DIR), shall coordinate with lower-division institutions of higher education and entities that administer or award postsecondary industry certifications or other workforce credentials in cybersecurity to develop certificate programs or other courses of instruction leading toward those certifications or credentials that may be offered by lower-division institutions of higher education. The board may adopt rules as necessary for the administration of this section. THECB has formed an SB 64 Cybersecurity Pathways Workgroup to fulfill the second part of this legislation.

We support Texas Transfer Framework Senate Bill 25

The report can be found on the THECB website at:
http://www.tccao.org/documents/THECB_TxTransferFramework_ConceptPaper_FINALDRAFT_Nov21.pdf

Background. Under the leadership of Commissioner Harrison Keller, substantially improving transfer, particularly for students attending community colleges who plan to transfer to a public four-year university, is a central priority for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. State policy mechanisms available for the agency and institutions to improve transfer were strengthened during the 86th Texas Legislative Session (2019) with the passage of Senate Bill 25. Senate Bill 25 included several important provisions to improve transfer in Texas, including recommended course sequences, earlier filing of degree plans, and new reporting on nontransferable credit. To build upon the momentum created by Senate Bill 25, earlier this year the Coordinating Board convened a small, informal workgroup – the Improving Texas Transfer Workgroup – which was comprised of an equal number of representatives from public two- and four- year institutions.

Continuity and change with existing transfer policy. The Texas Transfer Framework will build upon the strengths of existing Texas transfer policy, while introducing new policies and procedures that will substantially improve transfer. In implementing all aspects of this new transfer framework, the Coordinating Board is committed to working in close consultation with institutions. The Texas Transfer Framework is intended to complement and bolster transfer pathways and cross-institutional partnerships that are student-centric and flexible for students and institutions, particularly through regional collaborations that effectively streamline students’

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most common transfer pathways. The proposed implementation rollout will also protect current students who are pursuing existing Field of Study Curricula, while providing paths for current and future students to take advantage of the Texas Transfer Framework.

We support [HB 855 by M. Gonzalez](#) requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Coordinating Board to conduct a joint study on the transition to higher education for public-school students with disabilities.

We support [HB 1247 by Lozano](#) requires the TEA, Coordinating Board, and Texas Workforce Commission to jointly develop a strategic framework to encourage work-based learning in the state.

We support [SB 302 by Hinojosa](#) relating to the administration of the Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) Grant Program.

We support [SB 32 by Zaffirini](#) Loan repayment program for certain professionals for exceptional service during the coronavirus pandemic

We support [SB 101 by Menendez](#) Establishment of the Texas Emergency Aid for Public Postsecondary Students Grant Program

We support [SB 102 by Menendez](#) Enforcement of certain requirements regarding the transfer of course credit.