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BUSINESS, PHILANTHROPIC, AND HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS FIND COMMON GROUND IN TACKLING THE HIGHER EDUCATION CHALLENGE IN TEXAS

AUSTIN—Today, against the backdrop of a new report issued about the status of higher education in Texas, officials from leading philanthropic organizations, business groups and higher education pledged to work collaboratively to identify, adapt, and implement innovative strategies for higher education to create a globally competitive workforce. The leaders recognized that while Texas has made significant strides to close the attainment gap in Texas, much more must be done to meet the future workforce demands where 2 in 3 jobs will require postsecondary education or training.

The leaders were joined by Stan Jones, President of Complete College America (CCA), which released a new report recommending that Texas adopt a series of “game changers” for higher education designed to dramatically boost college completion rates. The report—*Complete College Texas: Is Texas Utilizing Game Changer Strategies to Boost College Completion Rates? Not Fully*—was commissioned by the **College For All Texans Foundation** to gauge the state’s progress on implementing innovative strategies in higher education as Texas moves to close the gaps by 2015 and beyond.

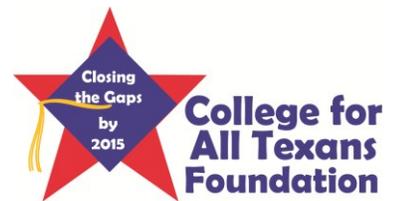
“The Foundation finds great value in having outside experts provide an honest, tough-love assessment of where we stand in Texas,” explained Charles Matthews, Board Member of the **College For All Texans Foundation**. “This report confirms what many of us already know—great work aimed at improving completion rates is well underway at our community colleges and universities. But we also appreciate that a nationally-respected organization like CCA is able to offer specific policy recommendations on how to improve on progress made in Texas so we can become globally competitive.”

The CCA report details five “game changer” strategies for higher education that have been tested or implemented throughout the nation to increase college completion rates:

- Create the conditions for change by measuring and paying for performance
- Provide remediation as a co-requisite, not a prerequisite
- Reduce time and increase intensity
- Use block scheduling to help working students
- Place all students on Guided Pathways to Success

“Across Texas, examples can be found of efforts to boost student success and produce more college graduates,” said Stan Jones, president of Complete College America. “But, Texas will not “close the gaps” to achieve its goals for college completion unless the most effective approaches are deployed on each and every campus. It’s time for all Texas colleges and universities to focus on the game changer strategies.”

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In the report, CCA illustrates a series of “Strategies in Action” occurring in Texas designed to tackle the higher education challenge, including:

- A math bridge program piloted by Texas State University-San Marcos on college campuses around Texas to improve remediation rates for students underprepared for college-level math.
- An accelerated certification program to be launched at two Texas State Technical College campuses in fall 2013 utilizing block scheduling to help working students and accelerate time to completion.
- A fast-track program for workforce certification designed for adult basic education students at 19 community colleges across Texas.

“Texas has come a long way in closing the achievement gaps, but the need is great and we must do more,” said John Fitzpatrick, Executive Director of Educate Texas. There is growing momentum and interest building among educators, business and philanthropy groups to partner in support of improving post-secondary education in Texas – a trend that is not only timely but necessary.”

The Texas Student Success Council, convened by Educate Texas, is a unique group of field stakeholders representing (K-16), business and labor, as well as non-profits and philanthropy, working collaboratively to improve completion rates. Part of the Council’s charge is to help identify and mitigate policy and funding challenges that are barriers to student success. This type of cross-sector alignment is unprecedented and will continue to play a significant role in the Texas higher-education landscape.

“Texas has turned an important corner when it comes to higher education,” explained James Huffines, Vice-Chairman of the Texas Business Leadership Council and former Chair of the University of Texas System. “The level of commitment, consensus, and collaboration between the business community and higher education leaders has never been stronger as we work together toward the same goal: making Texas a pre-eminent leader in higher education.”

The Texas Legislature is currently considering a number of the CCA recommendations this session, to include adopting outcomes-based funding models for universities, community and technical colleges, capping associates degrees to 60 credit hours, and other similar strategies to improve completion rates and decrease time and credits toward a degree or certificate.

Funding for the report was provided by the Lumina Foundation which is supporting efforts across the country to increase the percentage of Americans with high-quality college degrees, certificates and credentials to 60 percent by 2025.

“Lumina Foundation is pleased to help Texas advance its agenda of graduating more students,” said Jamie P. Merisotis, the Foundation’s president and CEO. “Linking some portion of public funding to outcomes that will lead to higher educational attainment is critical. And ensuring that those outcomes are tied to student-centered pathways and instruction will lead to greater number of Texans who are truly prepared for the future.”