Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Promising and Best Practices

**for Improving Student Outcomes
and Governance, Administration, and
Transparency
in Texas Higher Education**

July 2012

Division of Planning and Accountability

College for all Texans

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Mission of the Coordinating Board

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's mission is to work with the Legislature, Governor, governing boards, higher education institutions and other entities to help Texas meet the goals of the state's higher education plan, Closing the Gaps by 2015, and thereby provide the people of Texas the widest access to higher education of the highest quality in the most efficient manner.

Philosophy of the Coordinating Board

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board will promote access to quality higher education across the state with the conviction that access without quality is mediocrity and that quality without access is unacceptable. The Board will be open, ethical, responsive, and committed to public service. The Board will approach its work with a sense of purpose and responsibility to the people of Texas and is committed to the best use of public monies. The Coordinating Board will engage in actions that add value to Texas and to higher education. The agency will avoid efforts that do not add value or that are duplicated by other entities.

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Introduction

Through House Bill 9 (HB 9), the 82nd Texas Legislature in its Regular Session directed the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to report on student success and governance issues:

> "*Not later than September 30, 2011, and subsequently not later than July 1, 2012, the (Texas Higher Education Coordinating) board shall submit to the Joint Oversight Committee on Higher Education Governance, Excellence, and Transparency a written report reviewing, comparing, and highlighting national and global best practices on: (1) improving student outcomes, including student retention, graduations, and graduation rates; and 2) higher education governance, administration, and transparency.*"

Because the initial report was due so soon, the Coordinating Board contracted with two external organizations – Complete College America (CCA) and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) – to provide information needed to respond to the mandate.

CCA provided the information needed for the Coordinating Board to respond to the mandate for "improving student outcomes, including retention, graduations, and graduation rates." CCA is a national nonprofit organization working to significantly increase the number of Americans with a college degree or credential of value and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations.

NCHEMS provided the information needed for the Coordinating Board to respond to the mandate on "higher education governance, administration, and transparency." The NCHEMS staff is recognized nationally for its expertise and technical assistance on issues related to state policy, structure, and governance of higher education. Aims McGuinness, a senior associate at NCHEMS, is largely responsible for the *State Postsecondary Education Structures Sourcebook*, which is recognized nationally as the principal reference guide on this topic.

The initial Coordinating Board report on these issues was submitted to the Joint Oversight Committee on Higher Education Governance, Excellence, and Transparency in September 2011.

This subsequent report, made up primarily of one section covering the student outcomes issues and another section covering governance/administration issues, expands and builds on much of the information provided in that previous report. In particular, the governance/administration section focuses almost exclusively on the role of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Improving Student Outcomes,
Including Student Retention, Graduations,
and Graduation Rates

CCA noted that promising policies and practices have the greatest potential when combined into a comprehensive, at-scale, system-wide reform strategy. With that in mind, Texas is developing a comprehensive plan for reforming the way it provides higher education and is well on its way to becoming a national model of best practices in higher education policy aimed at improving college completion rates.

CCA identified three attributes of successful reform policies directed at improving student educational outcomes:

- Linked to measurable goals and benchmarked on standard metrics,
- Responsive to workforce demand and economic development efforts, and
- Innovative, at scale, with system-wide changes creating the structures and incentives for student success at every point across the pipeline.

CCA also offered four strategies – transforming developmental education, reducing time to degree and accelerating success, restructuring higher education delivery for a new generation, and implementing outcomes-based funding – that have been implemented successfully through different programs showing promise in various states and nations.

1. Transform Developmental Education

CCA has identified critical policy measures needed for establishing promising new approaches for delivering developmental education. Notably, the Texas Legislature has already recognized the importance of improving developmental education success rates, making success in developmental math and English courses indicators in the outcomes-based funding model proposed in HB 9. Bringing about sustained improvements on these measures will require additional bold reforms at the state level. They should include:

- Establish a statewide approach to developmental education.

  Inconsistency in placement policy and articulation of courses between colleges is one of the greatest challenges facing students who need developmental education. Students may be placed into one level of developmental education at one institution, only to transfer and find that they must take additional courses. Moreover, institutions might define "college readiness" in drastically different ways, leaving students to navigate a maze of different policies and requirements. Improving the effectiveness of developmental education requires a consistent, standard placement policy and alignment of college readiness requirements across all public institutions in the state. A comprehensive statewide approach to developmental education should:

    a) Limit the number of developmental education courses provided at four-year universities. Developmental education courses provided by community colleges are usually less

expensive for the state than those provided by four-year institutions, but students taking developmental education courses at community colleges need some guarantee that taking advantage of these lower-cost courses won't disadvantage them from continuing on at a four-year university. "Passport" programs that allow students to take required developmental education courses at community colleges and subsequently be guaranteed admission to four-year universities are a promising strategy for increasing both the system-wide efficiency and effectiveness of developmental education.

b) Clarify and communicate – system-wide – what constitutes college readiness. "Early warning" programs such as anchor assessments administered in high school demonstrate promising results in telling students what their specific academic deficiencies may be in time for them to "catch up" while still in high school.

c) Establish statewide placement tools and policies. Existing placement tests are known to be poor predictors of actual remedial needs (Bailey, 2009), and inconsistent institutional policies on cut-off scores only add confusion. The state should establish a single placement test and standard cutoff score to be used by all colleges in the state.

d) Align math requirements with students' credential goals. Institutions should review all degree and certificate programs to determine the math requirements needed in each program, and then align developmental education requirements accordingly.

- Create integrated, accelerated paths through developmental education.

a) Divert students from traditional developmental education into customized programs integrated into their programs of study. Embed developmental education in college-level courses when possible.

Of students with academic deficiencies, as many as possible should be placed directly into college-level courses. In particular, students with minimal academic deficiencies should be placed directly into college-level courses and provided developmental education courses as a co-requisite rather than a pre-requisite. Offering developmental education as a concurrent or companion course has been shown to help students complete the first college-level courses in math and English in half the time as standard developmental education programs. Developmental education embedded in college-level courses increases the number of students completing developmental education and dramatically reduces the time it takes them to complete it.

Students with significant academic deficiencies in multiple areas should be provided alternative pathways to a career-focused credential. Developmental education linked to specific job competencies should be embedded in that instruction, offering students the opportunity to quickly gain a credential with demonstrated labor market returns.

In line with these promising strategies, the Coordinating Board is piloting instructional changes (as part of its CCA Completion Innovation Challenge Grant) to deliver developmental mathematics as a co-requisite to College Algebra or Elementary Statistics. To further address the needs of students in developmental mathematics, the Coordinating Board is also working closely with the Texas Association of Community Colleges and the Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin in the

development and implementation of the New Mathways Project, a system of new mathematics courses and student support services to help students earn college-level math credit more quickly. Texas is also on the way to becoming a national model for bold and innovative policy reforms that fundamentally change the way developmental education is provided throughout the state. State policy efforts include legislation to mandate a single remedial assessment instrument (SB 1564/HB 1244) and to develop a statewide plan for reforming developmental education at community colleges (SB 162). The state has also taken the critical step of adopting statewide College and Career Readiness Standards and requisite end-of-course exams for high school students – an important step in reducing the disjuncture between high school graduation standards and the preparation students need to avoid developmental education in the first place. The Coordinating Board is also piloting innovative programs to promote developmental education success at the state's largest institutions, particularly to improve success rates for the large numbers of Latino and African-American students served by those institutions. Programs include the integration of developmental reading and writing courses along with non-course-based options that use diagnostic profiles to individualize student interventions. These are urgent and timely reforms, because delays in developmental education result in delays along the remaining path toward a degree – delays that accumulate over time, affecting the success rates of all students and exacerbating initial gaps among different demographic groups.

<u>Promising Practices – Transforming Developmental Education</u>

- *Temple College* implemented "Zero Week" to help faculty and students prepare for the academic year. Zero Week is the week following registration and prior to the first day of classes each fall. To help transfer students become acquainted with the campus and to assist first-time freshmen with the transition to college life, the institution offers a variety of activities and programs, including student orientations and sessions on money management, student life, and eLearning.

- *Community College of Baltimore County's Accelerated Learning Project (ALP)* enrolls remedial English students in the regular credit-bearing English 101 course as well as a companion course that meets immediately after the credit-bearing course. The companion course provides targeted reinforcement of topics from the mainstream course in a small cohort group that enables intensive faculty and peer support.

- At *The University of Maryland at College Park*, all students take a math placement exam during orientation, and about 20 to25 percent of students are deemed in need of math remediation. In place of the earlier two-course sequence of math remediation, students scoring in the lowest 40 percent on the placement exam are enrolled in a one-semester lab-based course that uses a modularized curriculum to guide students at their own pace through the remedial material. Moreover, the specific curriculum students receive in the remedial course is linked to a college-level math course best suited to their credential goals – statistics, college algebra, pre-calculus, or a general math course. Students scoring in the upper 60 percent on the placement exam are placed into a combined remedial/college-level course that meets five days a week. Almost 90 percent of students in the combined course pass the placement exam after the fifth week and successfully transition into the college-level course.

- The *California State University System* added a series of college-readiness questions to the state's 11th grade exam. After students take the test, they are told whether they are on track for credit-bearing classes in the CSU system.

- The *Washington I-BEST* and the *Arkansas Career Pathways* programs deliver basic skills instruction embedded in career certificate or other career-oriented credential programs. In Washington, ESL (English as a Second Language) students receive basic skills and ESL instruction in a course that also delivers career-specific instruction.

2. Reduce Time-to-Degree and Accelerate Student Success

Many efforts to improve student outcomes focus on changing student behaviors. While it is important for those behaviors to change – i.e., for students to embrace more effective ways to pursue higher education and to perform well academically– institutions must also change to address the changing, evolving needs of the students they enroll. Also, when new direction is required to meet a higher education challenge, it can be much more efficient to change institutional behavior, culture, or practice – any of which can continue to have effect over time supporting most or all students – rather than focus on "fixing" individual students as they come through the door. Moreover, new institutional practices, programs, and policies show greater promise if they are met with an overall cultural shift – one which meets the characteristics and needs of the student populations served.

Recognizing the roadblocks that many students confront on their way to earning a college credential is vital for determining which institutional behaviors, cultures, or practices are most worthy of change to help improve student outcomes. Those student challenges generally involve inadequate knowledge about how to negotiate the financial aid system, how to pursue the most appropriate academic pathway, and other aspects of the college experience.

Financial aid, as described by CCA and as designed in certain grant programs administered by the Coordinating Board, should be a part of the student success agenda. But, financial aid must also continue to be available to students from low-income families if Texas is to meet its student success goals.

- Tight state and federal budgets dim the outlook for the availability of needed financial aid, which is vital for ensuring student persistence in and completion of higher education. Student outcomes will be difficult to improve if students are unable to meet college costs. Studies indicate that institutions that work with students before and after they are enrolled to ensure they are getting appropriate financial support are more likely to keep those students enrolled (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Deep consideration of funding for financial aid, as well as for strategic thinking at the state and institutional level regarding how best to package available aid, is needed more than ever.

  As the number of students from lower-income families enroll in college at higher rates in coming years, their need to supplement potentially slimmer financial aid packages as college costs rise will require a larger percentage of them to hold jobs and take on other responsibilities, as noted in Public Agenda's 2009 report. Research shows, however, that working off campus is associated with lower persistence rates among students and the reduced likelihood of completing a college degree (Tinto, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

<u>Promising practices – Financial Aid</u>

▪ Part-time work on campus is linked with increased likelihood of degree completion, perhaps because of increased connections with the campus community (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This pattern suggests that work-study financial aid and other forms of on-campus employment may be of particular benefit to students (Tinto, 1993; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Muraskin et al, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Colleges and universities have taken advantage of this approach to student financial support by employing students not only in traditional campus jobs, such as library or office assistants, but also in supportive roles such as peer mentors and tutors, which allows the institution to increase engagement for both the employed student and the students who benefit from the peer program's services.

▪ The Connecticut Community College System provides, to all enrolling students who apply for financial aid, a financial aid package based on full-time enrollment – even if those students apply as part-time students. As a result, the System reports a dramatic increase in the number of students enrolling full-time.

Students' need for more and clear information about the appropriate academic pathways appears to be a substantial barrier for their continued academic success (Purnell et al, 2004; Tinto, 2004). Institutional efforts to meet this challenge could involve identification and effective responses to these barriers through improved academic advising, data scans, robust early-alert systems, and improved articulation for previously earned credentials:

• Improved academic advising, providing students with clear and definitive information about the courses they should take for the most direct, or otherwise most appropriate, path to earning an academic credential has long been a need. Research consistently shows a positive connection between academic advising and student success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; TG, 2008). However, advising services, which students often feel are inadequate (Kuh et al, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008), have not always been a priority for institutions and have suffered from a lack of staff and resources (Brock et al, 2007; Brock, 2010). Still, even minimal advising is correlated with increased rates of student success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Most important is that all students are advised and cannot opt out; at least minimal advising should be offered throughout a student's college career, with more intensive advising provided in the first two years, when student attrition rates are at their highest. Advising offers an opportunity as well for the institution to help students select a major course of study and maintain appropriate financial assistance.

Based upon SB 36 by Senator Zaffirini in the 82nd Texas Legislature, the Coordinating Board worked with colleges and universities to develop a methodology by which institutions can assess the quality of advising on their campuses. This effort will result in a stronger capacity to evaluate advising and to identify areas of improvement and excellence in advising on individual campuses.

Some institutions create a centralized advising center, where students can seek advice and assistance in addition to receiving advising from their major department (Tinto, 1993; Kuh et al, 2005; TG, 2008; Bradley & Blanco, 2010). Other institutions take a case management approach to advising, in which underprepared or academically struggling students are paired with an

advisor who works with them on a regular basis throughout the semester. Case management advising has the advantage of creating a closer relationship between the student and the advisor, who may be able to determine if factors other than academics are affecting the student's performance. Connecting academic advising to career exploration and financial aid counseling has also been identified as an effective practice. Indeed, connecting advising to other segments of the institution and coordinating it with complementary programs is becoming more common at institutions that aim for comprehensive strategies to improve student success. At George Mason University, for instance, advising staff collaborate with various offices and programs, from departmental faculty to career services and new student orientation programs.

Students who first receive information about college academics while they are still in high school can make more informed choices about high school courses so that they have the necessary academic preparation to be admitted to the institution and program of their choice and to succeed in college classes. While high school counselors and teachers often communicate this information to their students, they typically do not have the most updated or institution-specific information.

Also, HB 3025 by Representative Dan Branch in the 82nd Texas Legislature requires students to file a degree plan at their institution in the semester after attaining 45 semester credit hours. This will help students reduce the possibility of taking courses that don't count toward their degree. It will also help students define a clear path to a degree.

Promising practices – Improving Academic Advising

▪ Multifaceted partnerships between institutions of higher education and school districts or individual high schools are important and useful vehicles for sharing academic expectations and enrollment information. These partnerships also engage faculty and staff from both sectors of education in developing more explicit alignment between secondary and postsecondary curricula and thereby communicating to students more effectively and seamlessly the expectations of college-level work. Pre-college programming can also help students perceive themselves as college-bound and contribute to a sense of engagement even before students arrive on campus for their first year in college (Tinto, 1993; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Kuh et al, 2005; Lumina Foundation for Education, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008). Texas is engaged in multiple recognized practices to improve these sorts of cross-segmental communications, from local partnerships fostered through college readiness funding to local P-16 Councils to the newly implemented national model of Advise Texas.

▪ At *Western Kentucky University*, students with fewer than 90 credit hours are required to contact an academic advisor each semester prior to registration. The Academic Advising and Retention Center (AARC) is centrally located on campus, offers online appointment scheduling, and has extended hours on weekday evenings and Sundays. The AARC also supports faculty advisors through workshops and webinars and a Master Advisor Certificate program that helps faculty members improve their advising skills (Bradley & Blanco, 2010)

▪ *South Texas College* also uses a case-management advising approach. Each new student attends a mandatory orientation and is assigned a mentor – a faculty or staff member trained in how to advise students on academic and other issues – providing a single point of contact at the college to whom students can turn for help with a range of questions.

Research conducted during the first year of the program, when not all students were matched with a mentor, found that participating students had higher grades, higher rates of course completion, and higher fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall persistence rates than a group of similar students who did not participate (2007 Examples of Excelencia semi-finalist).

- Periodic data scans, perhaps performed every five years, could identify where students tend to get "hung up" in making academic progress. Culprits might be duplicative courses, repetitive withdrawals from courses, or courses with high rates of failure. After these courses are identified, duplicative courses can be reviewed and perhaps eliminated, and appropriate support can be provided to students or faculty involved in "problem" courses.

  Promising practices – Data Scans

  - A data scan at Odessa College identified course sections with high and low drop/withdrawal rates. To further refine the results of the data, staff interviewed faculty who taught the course sections with the lowest rates of withdrawal to identify common characteristics. Study results revealed that faculty who, regardless of instructional style, engaged in behaviors that exhibited interest in and concern for students had the lowest rates of course withdrawal. Faculty with high withdrawal rates were counseled and provided tips (e.g., learn and use students' names) for engaging with students more effectively. One academic year from the initial study and intervention, course withdrawal rates have dropped precipitously. Faculty who implemented changes report they have higher morale because students are more enthusiastic and engaged.

- Robust early-alert systems function like an ongoing data scan, allowing quick identification of students who are in need of academic support, and then providing them with the needed help quickly. These programs work best when they are proactive and do not rely on students to seek academic assistance on their own initiative (Tinto, 1993; AASCU, 2005).

  Promising Practices – Early-alert and Response Systems

  - *South Texas College's Beacon Program* assigns mentors to lower-level and developmental math courses with high failure rates. Mentors make several in-class presentations throughout the semester highlighting the availability of support services. Mentors also work with faculty members to identify students who may be struggling in class and offer them assistance. Students in classes with a mentor were found to be more likely to use the Centers for Learning Excellence and to be less likely to drop the class. Part-time students, in particular, seemed to benefit from the program (2010 MDRC evaluation report).

  - Several Texas colleges and universities are piloting early-alert systems as a part of the Comprehensive Student Success Program funded through the federal College Access Challenge Grant and through small sub-grants, both overseen by the Coordinating Board. Participating sites will be closely monitored from 2012 to 2014 to track the systems' effect on reducing course non-completion rates.

- In conjunction with efforts to standardize quality and transferability of courses across institutional systems (most recently in Texas through adoption of a new common academic core and through the Lumina-funded Texas Tuning Project), articulation of certificates, associate's

degrees, and bachelor's degrees must be improved as well. With the increase in associate's degrees and college credits earned by high school students through dual credit Early College High Schools and other dual credit programs, more degree-seeking students at universities find that previously earned credits or degrees do not apply to their four-year degree. Students who stop out with a certificate or an associate's degree to work full-time also need simpler and more transparent opportunities to reenter the education pipeline to earn higher-level degrees. Statewide structures for more effective upward articulation along the credential ladder are difficult to implement in a state college and university network as diverse as in Texas, but approaches used by the Tuning Project might be broadened to provide for more pathways to the bachelor's degree. Perhaps additional and more updated Fields of Study Curricula, which have been created by the Coordinating Board in the past, would help.

- Other efforts beyond those strictly focused on academic advising, data scans, robust early-alert systems, and improved articulation for previously earned credentials play a large role in reducing time to degree.

    Promising Practices – Other Efforts

    ▪ Texas is already a national leader in efforts to reduce unnecessary course-taking. For example, House Bill 1172, passed by the Texas Legislature in 2005, allows colleges to charge out-of-state tuition rates to students who have exceeded 30 hours beyond what is required for their degree program. It reduces state subsidies for excess courses taken by students. In addition to these restrictions, Texas provides incentives for on-time completion through the B-On-Time Loan program and through a $1,000 tuition rebate to students completing a bachelor's degree with no more than three credits beyond the number required for their degree program.

    ▪ Tennessee, through the Complete College Tennessee Act, is establishing a common core curriculum consisting of 41 hours of general education and 19 hours of pre-major courses.

3. Restructure Higher Education Delivery for a New Generation

No longer does the typical college student come from a background of general familiarity with the college experience. A high and growing proportion of traditional college-age students in Texas are the first in their families to attend college, thus matriculating without much knowledge, familiarity, or experience about what it takes or what it's like to go to college. In addition, many of these students have jobs and family obligations and commute to campuses rather than living on them. To serve this more diverse student body and to ensure that more of these students succeed academically in college, institutions must change and adapt, perhaps more than is comfortable for many of their administrators and faculty who are familiar with and experienced in traditional higher education delivery.

Creating a campus environment that will support all students through to completion demands a deep and comprehensive commitment to undergraduate education. Such a commitment runs the risk of alienating faculty and/or staff, so making the bold move to create a widespread, pervasive culture of student success might not be painless. To meet that challenge, institutions must:

- Support and provide incentives to faculty – Supporting and providing incentives to encourage faculty to prioritize undergraduate education is a must to counter the traditional "publish or perish" view that typically defines faculty opportunities for career advancement. Just as new students benefit from early intervention and increased support, institutions and academic departments also fill a crucial role in providing such guidance to new faculty (Carey, 2005b). New faculty orientations and mentoring programs that emphasize teaching, pedagogical innovation, and student engagement, along with the more typical guidance regarding publication and tenure requirements, reinforce the undergraduate mission and help faculty members live that mission.

- The Coordinating Board focuses its attention on the participation and success of undergraduate students as the primary standards on which institutions are held accountable. Significant effort is underway to require institutions to meet high-level standards at the undergraduate level before expanding their offerings at the graduate level.

  <u>Promising Practices – Prioritizing Undergraduate Education</u>

  - *St. Olaf's College* ranks effective teaching as its first priority in the consideration of faculty for tenure. St. Olaf's "gives primary emphasis to effective undergraduate instruction. It holds that high quality teaching is inseparable from scholarly and creative effort, and it expects that members of its faculty will ground their teaching in research, scholarship, and creative activity," states the institution's faculty handbook.

  - The *University of Michigan*, after establishing undergraduate education as a priority, established multiple faculty support and incentives to improve teaching and learning across the university (Kuh et al, 2005). Both the Office of the Provost and the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), founded in 1962 as the nation's first teaching center, support faculty, graduate student instructors, and academic administrators to enrich learning and teaching in all 19 schools and colleges at the university. The CRLT's mission to promote excellence and innovation in teaching guides a variety of opportunities for teaching evaluation, curricular consultation, faculty mentoring, and recognition for excellence in undergraduate education. The CRLT also offers individual teaching consultation, grant competitions, and instructional technology support. Among its many innovations is an interactive theatre program that assists faculty in addressing issues of diversity and inclusion in the classroom. In addition to performances, the director of the theatre program consults with faculty and conducts workshops on theatre-related topics such as role playing, stage fright, and voice projection.

    School of Dentistry faculty mentors focus especially on effective instruction. The school also has an educational resource specialist on staff to help develop pedagogical skills and identify appropriate teaching workshops. All instructional faculty are expected to develop a teaching dossier as well.

    With grant competitions offered through the CRLT, the Provost's office annually awards the Arthur F. Thurnau Professorship to several tenured faculty in recognition of their contributions to undergraduate education. It provides a $20,000 award to each recognized faculty member to further activities that enhance teaching and learning. Nomination and selection criteria include a strong commitment to students and to teaching and learning,

excellence in teaching, innovations in teaching and learning, a strong commitment to working effectively with a diverse student body, and a demonstrable impact, including advising and mentoring, on students' intellectual and/or artistic development and on their lives.

- Provide professional development opportunities to faculty and staff – If responsibility for student success is part of the job description for everyone on campus, it is important to provide professional development opportunities so that faculty and staff members understand student needs and how to address them (Brock et al, 2007; Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation [TG], 2008). Professional development in promoting student success is of particular importance for faculty members, who are experts in the content of their disciplines but may never have received training in pedagogy and may not themselves have experienced academic difficulties in college (Tinto, 1993; Lumina Foundation for Education, 2007; Santiago, 2008). Many students respond well to innovative pedagogical approaches, and faculty members can benefit from learning about why these approaches work and how to apply them in their classrooms (Kuh et al, 2005; Cuseo, 2008; Engle & Tinto, 2008). Learning new teaching strategies and reflecting on their own pedagogy and their student's skills often inspires and reinvigorates faculty to engage with students more substantively and consistently. Requiring a certain number of hours of professional development each year, as at *Texas A&M International University* among others, and establishing that requirement during the hiring process, helps set expectations for faculty and staff. At smaller institutions with fewer resources, peer-to-peer mentoring or frequent and regular small group meetings that focus on classroom and student-engagement strategies can be valuable, too.

  <u>Promising Practices – Professional Development</u>

  - *Montclair State University's Research Academy for University Learning (RAUL)* takes a scholarly approach to creating an environment that supports student success, bringing faculty members from a variety of disciplines together to explore the literature on teaching and learning. RAUL activities support faculty members in improving their teaching through classroom observation and feedback, promote discussion of teaching and learning on campus through workshops and lectures, and encourage a research-based approach to teaching by conducting literature reviews and providing proposal-development and assessment support for educational initiatives. The RAUL website hosts an extensive collection of resources on teaching and learning, and faculty and staff members can apply to participate in a year-long fellowship program, which includes seminars, mentoring, and a multi-day retreat (AASCU, 2005; Bradley & Blanco, 2010).

- Support faculty-student engagement – Too often, especially at large universities, students have few individual interactions with faculty or staff members. Students might feel uncomfortable approaching faculty or staff members to ask for help with academic or other problems, but such interactions are an important factor in preventing students from dropping out. Increased interaction with faculty members, in particular, is strongly correlated with student success, including persistence and degree completion (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Kuh et al, 2005).

  Institutions that effectively promote faculty-student engagement go out of their way to create opportunities for students to connect with individual faculty and staff members. For example,

they might require faculty and staff members to participate in orientation and related events. Not only does this practice ensure that faculty and staff members are aware of the services available for students, it also sends a message to students that faculty and staff members are available to them. Research on student-centered institutions also finds that faculty and staff members at these institutions play an active role in identifying and reaching out to vulnerable students, creating and supporting student groups, and ensuring that they come across to students as approachable and caring. This sort of informal mentoring is important to student success and can be fostered by an institutional culture that puts students first (Purnell et al, 2004; AASCU, 2005; Kuh et al, 2005; Bradley & Blanco, 2010).

Promising Practices – Student-Faculty Engagement

- At *Elizabeth City State University*, student success and a student-centered environment are central to the university's mission and are embraced by the entire campus community. Faculty and staff members consider it part of their job to watch for students who seem to be struggling academically, and intervene as necessary to assist them. Class size is kept small, class attendance is mandatory, and students learn that professors will follow up with them if they miss a class. The university website also features a "Student Retention Suggestion Box," through which any member of the university community can provide feedback on ways to improve student success (AASCU, 2005; Carey, 2005b; Bradley & Blanco, 2010).

- At *Virginia Tech*, a university known for its innovation in new forms of course delivery (i.e., the emporium model), a professor who is teaching a mega-course (more than 3,000 students in a section) adopted online office hours, fielded student questions via instant messaging, and provided his responses through video streaming. The use of social media and online video and chat, which are very familiar to students, provide the opportunity for students to further engage with faculty during off hours as well. Commuting students and students who feel least prepared are more apt to engage faculty on course questions through after-hours online capabilities than they are to sit outside a faculty member's office door waiting for a traditional office visit.

- Other efforts that show promise in restructuring the delivery of higher education to meet the needs of today's students are in place across the country.

Promising Practices – Restructuring Higher Education Delivery for New Generation

- The *City University of New York* offers an Accelerated Study in Associate Programs to help select community college students earn associate's degrees more quickly.

- *Tennessee's* 27 Tech Centers have an average 75 percent student completion rate, with some centers graduating all of their students. Job placement rates are high too. Unlike traditional approaches, students enroll in whole academic programs, not individual courses, thereby streamlining the path to completion by removing the burdens of individual course selection and availability.

- *Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana* and *Lumina Foundation for Education* have developed and launched a one-year accelerated associate's degree program. Two key

components address the needs of today's students and shorten time-to-degree: recruiting and working with students in high school so they are able to start college without the need for remediation, and block-scheduled associate's degree courses Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

▪ Internationally, the *Bologna Process and Tuning Project within the European Union (EU)* provides an example of a cross-national approach for aligning and standardizing the structures and quality of higher education credentials. With the goals of providing greater labor market flexibility for a new generation of highly mobile young people and improving the overall quality of higher education across the EU, the Bologna Process began as a declaration by European nations of the intent to standardize credential structures and has evolved into an effort to align teaching and learning quality measures across institutions and programs.

4. Implement Outcomes-Based Funding

Outcomes-based funding (also referred to as performance funding) ties state appropriations to a set of defined outcomes and has been a popular, though controversial, strategy for decades. The appeal of effective outcomes-based funding policy is predicated on its alignment of institutional efforts with statewide higher education goals, focus on the state's commitment to producing high quality degrees and credentials, and holding institutions of higher education accountable for their public funding. In the 1980s and 1990s, several states implemented outcomes-based funding, but with a few exceptions, these policies were short-lived. Analysis by the Community College Research Center determined that failures stemmed primarily from flaws in design and implementation – in most cases, the policies were too weak to bring about serious change and lacked sustained political support from institutions (Dougherty, et al., 2011).

With lessons learned from prior generations of outcomes-based funding, a number of states – including Texas, with HB 9 – are reintroducing this funding policy amid severe budget constraints and renewed urgency regarding college completion.

Outcomes-based funding remains a critical strategy not only for holding institutions accountable and aligning state and institutional priorities, but also for creating the incentives that help ensure that all other reform efforts become effective. While outcomes-based funding itself is not a the sole solution for improving college retention and completion rates, CCA (Complete College America) concluded that outcomes-based funding must be in place to make other reforms and practices effective.

Several characteristics are important for ensuring effective, sustainable outcomes-based funding models:

• Keep the outcomes-based funding formulas simple and transparent.

   The funding model should include a small number of explicit, easy-to-understand outcomes-based indicators that have been intentionally designed to target completion and the state's specific higher education priorities. Complexity and lack of transparency will weaken sustained support for the funding model.

• Include indicators that provide incentives for progress toward and completion of degrees and certificates.

Progress indicators should include:

   ◇ Increases in completed rather than attempted courses. Implementation involves only changing the enrollment-count date from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester.

   ◇ Increases in the number of students completing college-level, credit-bearing English and math courses within the first academic year.

   ◇ Increases in the number of full-time students earning 30 credit hours (or part-time students earning 15 hours) within the first year.

   ◇ Increases in the number/percentage of students returning each semester and each year.

Completion indicators should include:

   ◇ Increases in the number of certificates and degrees awarded annually (not only increases in graduation rates).

   ◇ Increases in the number of "on-time" completions (e.g., two years for an associate's degree or four years for a bachelor's degree).

   ◇ Increases in the number of students who successfully transfer from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities.

   ◇ Increases in the equity of student outcomes, with incentives for improvements among underrepresented populations (e.g., Pell Grant students).

   ◇ Incentives to increase degrees and certificates awarded in high-demand disciplines and disciplines that could stimulate economic growth for the state.

- Establish a strong commitment to outcomes-based funding among state and institutional leaders by being fair and consistent.

  Involve legislators and higher education leaders early and often in the development of the outcomes-based funding system. Present the rationale for outcomes-based funding and solicit higher education leadership and policymakers to shape the funding model so that it best meets the needs of the state.

- Initiate outcomes-based funding as a modest but consequential portion of total appropriations (at least 10 percent), then depending on effectiveness, increase the portion gradually over time.

  Use outcomes-based funding consistently for both appropriating new money and for cutting budgets when necessary to ensure a cumulative, predictable impact.

Do not include "hold-harmless" provisions that take the teeth out of outcomes-based funding. If necessary, include provisions that limit the total amount of losses institutions may face through the funding formula in any given year.

Include measures that provide incentives and reward serving at-risk and underrepresented students. Outcomes-based funding metrics that measure success in graduating students against institutions' own baselines can eliminate the perception that colleges will have to limit access to at-risk students to raise graduation rates, or colleges that serve more at-risk students are "competing" against other colleges under outcomes-based funding.

<u>Promising Practices – Outcomes-Based Funding</u>

- With HB 9, *Texas* is required to study a outcomes-based funding model that incorporates differentiated models for two-year and four-year institutions, metrics that benchmark institutions' success in graduating students against their own "predicted" graduation rates, incentives for graduating at-risk students, and critical progression metrics for developmental education completion and credit accumulation.

- *Indiana* ties funding to its goals for course and degree completion, graduating more students on time, graduating more low-income students, and successfully transferring students from two- to four-year institutions.

- *Ohio* ties state funding to course and degree completion as well as to achievement of institutional goals that are aligned with the state's 10-year strategic plan for higher education.

- Internationally, *Denmark* funds public higher education through performance contracts with institutions in which the allocation for teaching – a third of total revenue – is based on the number of students who pass course exams and the number of credits accumulated by students

CCA notes that reform is best implemented across an entire system of higher education in a comprehensive manner. Stitching together 104 public institutions of higher education that enroll over 1.4 million students and are funded with approximately $5 billion in general revenue every year is no small task, however. The reality of coordinating 50 locally elected community college district boards with six independently appointed university system boards and assorted independent institutions can overwhelm even the most organized effort.

Improving Student Outcomes

Conclusions:
System-Wide Commitment Necessary

Students who are engaged and invested in their college or university are more likely to earn a credential. They typically feel connected to their institution, are invested in their education, and believe their institution is equally committed to their success.

Research on programs serving students at higher education institutions indicates that successful student-engagement programs are remarkably similar in certain aspects. Regardless of the type of program – developmental education, a student success program, an honors program, or something else – certain characteristics help ensure these programs (and the institution as a whole) are successful. Successful programs and practices:

- Receive strong institution-wide support, from campus leadership down;

- Assess the needs of students and rely on data-driven, research-based practices;

- Engage faculty and staff in program development and support;

- Provide comprehensive advising and support to students; and

- Provide both content and skill development.

When considering ways to increase student success, policymakers and practitioners often turn immediately to specific programs. But for programs to be effective, they must be implemented and supported through coordinated and integrated policies and practices institution-wide. Making student success a priority is central to achieving the goal of increasing student persistence and completion rates. Establishing and ensuring that priority must come from the institution's leadership and permeate the campus hierarchy and its way of doing business.

Improving Student Outcomes

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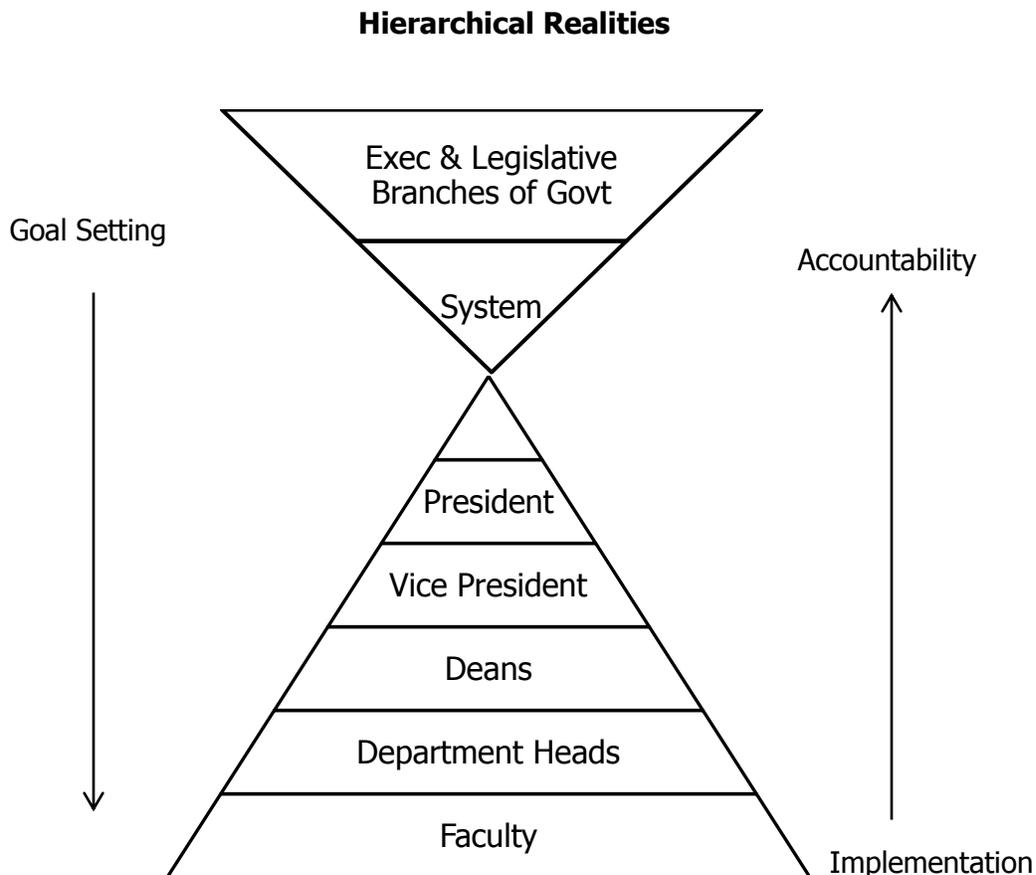
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Higher Education Governance, Administration, and Transparency

Effective Governance through Shared Responsibility

In its report, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) noted that basic assumptions frame the issue of governance. The fundamental challenge of an effective governing board is to achieve balance between advancing the interests of institutions and ensuring responsiveness and accountability to stakeholders. Governance, defined as the allocation of decision authority, is the means – not the end.

The organizational reality at institutions, as depicted in the chart that follows, dictates that effective governance provides a framework for establishing structure within which highly independent and autonomous faculty implement a shared vision. No single model is the perfect solution. An effective system of governance will reflect the political, economic, geographic and education realities of the state.

Hierarchical Realities

Exec & Legislative Branches of Govt

Goal Setting

Accountability

System

President

Vice President

Deans

Department Heads

Faculty

Implementation

The experience of other states working on major higher education reform initiatives dictates that several characteristics emerge as prerequisites for both statewide coordination and system and institutional governance to develop and sustain globally competitive higher education systems. Such systems include a highly diverse network of institutions, including globally competitive research universities as well as universities and community colleges linked to the state's long-term goals to improve the educational attainment of the workforce and improve the economy and quality of life.

Texas, one of the first states to establish a coordinating board, has one of the most complex networks of higher education governance in the U.S. The governance structure in Texas is a combination of system and single institution governing boards. There are ten statutory university boards, six responsible for multiple campuses, along with 50 public community college districts with locally elected boards and one statutory board for the Texas State Technical College System. The Coordinating Board's role in this mix is the primary focus of the governance/administration section of this report.

Effective statewide coordinating boards with authority and responsibility similar to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board have these characteristics:

- A consistent, detailed long term public agenda focused on narrowing gaps in performance in comparison to other states in key areas.

- The authority and capacity to lead and sustain attention surrounding the state's goals over the long term across changes in political leadership and economic conditions.

- A reputation for independent, non-partisan leadership and objective analysis in the public interest.

- Oversight of the implementation of financing policy linked to the public agenda including the allocation of state appropriations, tuition policy and student financial aid.

- A public accountability system including supporting information and analytic capacity for monitoring progress on the public agenda and performance in relationship to the public agenda at both the regional and institutional levels.

Best Practices in Statewide Coordination

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is widely perceived outside of Texas as one of the most effective in the nation. Several strong points include the Coordinating Board's leadership in establishing the state's *Closing the Gaps by 2015* higher education plan, its accountability system, and recent initiatives related to promoting the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education.

However, the Coordinating Board faces many of the same challenges faced by other statewide coordinating boards. Funding formulas are still largely focused on allocating resources based on complex input models. Much of the staff capacity is dominated by administrative and regulatory functions. Mandated studies consume the bulk of the board's policy and analytical capacity.

The experience from other states proves there are no easy answers. But effective systems, especially consolidated systems encompassing institutions with a broad range of missions, have common characteristics. States can apply best practices for effective performance by:

- Developing a strategic plan and related accountability metrics aligned with statewide goals clearly delineating individual and collective institutional contributions.

- Establishing and reinforcing clearly defined and differentiated institutional missions aligned with statewide goals.

- Clearly defining lines of authority and responsibility to boards, system chancellors and institutional presidents.

- Focusing on recruiting, supporting and evaluating effective leaders for each institution to ensure effective and efficient management.

- Aligning finance, governance and accountability across institutions within a broader framework to promote both collaborative efficiencies and quality assurance.

Transparency and Accountability

Reporting responsibilities differ between statewide boards and institutional governing boards but should be complementary. The state and system planning, accountability, and resource allocation responsibilities are interrelated as illustrated in the following figure.
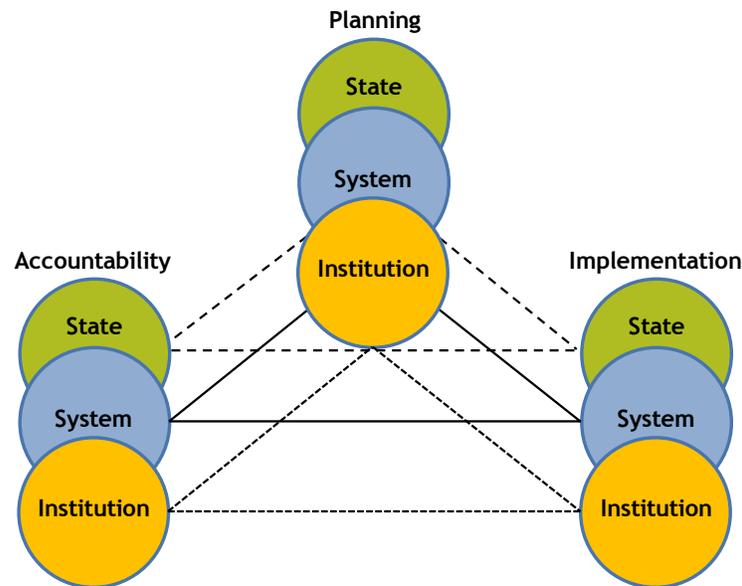
Common governance and accountability issues arise when:

- State leaders and coordinating boards focus on issues that are basically within the decision making authority of institutions or systems.

- System boards (especially in complex systems) focus on information that is primarily related to the decision making authority of institutional presidents and not the system board.

- At all levels, there is inadequate attention to the information necessary to monitor progress to the goals of the state's public agenda. The focus is only on internal institutional management issues and not on the overall performance of the system in terms of its strategic priorities.

Data reported on a statewide basis should focus on the performance of the system and how higher education is serving the state's goals. Basic indicators should focus on college and career preparation, diversity of access, affordability, completion rates, degree production and the contribution of R&D to the state's economic competitiveness. Kentucky and Minnesota are cited as examples of best practice.

The indicators the state of Minnesota uses illustrate those appropriate for use at the level of a state coordinating board. The five goals include improving success, producing graduates, increasing learning and skill levels, contributing to the development of the state's economy, and maintaining adequate access. The state coordinating board has the authority to hold governing boards and individual institutions accountable for performance related to the goals.

Information reported by system governing boards is different than information an effective coordinating board should report. Best practice indicates systems should report data on how the system and institutions contribute to statewide goals as well as on the system as a whole. The institutions should report data on institutional effectiveness and efficiency.

As the Coordinating Board revises *Closing the Gaps* to extend the goals beyond the current target of 2015, it will be important to:

- Establish goals benchmarked to the best performing states and nations. The focus of the current plan was on Texas meeting the national average. Texas must compete on a global scale with the highest performing states and countries.

- Broaden the data and indicators beyond higher education to include links with K-12 and the state's workforce. The indicators in Minnesota's Measures and Kentucky's accountability system provide examples, including possible metrics.

- Develop clearer – and perhaps simpler (fewer number of indicators) – displays in "dashboard" form to assist coordinating board members and the Legislature in monitoring progress toward state goals.

- Clarify the information appropriate for accountability reporting at each level of the system. The Coordinating Board could take the lead in mapping the kinds of data that should be available and utilized for decision-making and accountability at the institutional, system and state levels.

Best practices in statewide coordination of American higher education were identified in a 2005 NCHEMS policy brief. This policy brief outlines the challenges facing states and the nation in efforts to improve preparation, participation, affordability, and completion in higher education. It emphasizes that every state should have:

- A broad-based public entity with a clear charge to increase the state's educational attainment and prepare citizens for the workforce.

- Strength to counter inappropriate political, partisan, institutional, or parochial influences.

- Capacity and responsibility for articulating and monitoring state performance objectives for higher education that are supported by the key leaders in the state; objectives should be specific and measurable, including quantifiable goals for college preparation, access, participation, retention, graduation, and responsiveness to other state needs.

- Engagement of civic, business, and public school leaders beyond state government and higher education leaders.

- Recognition of distinctions between statewide policy – and the public entities and policies needed to accomplish it – and institutional governance.

- A role of statewide policy leadership distinct from the roles of institutional and segmental governing boards.

- Information gathering and analytical capacity to support the choice of state goals/priorities and to interpret and evaluate statewide and institutional performance in relation to these goals.

- Capacity to bring coherence and coordination in key policy areas, such as the relationship between institutional appropriations, tuition, and financial aid.

- Capacity to influence the direction of state resources to ensure accomplishment of these priorities.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

The context for higher education has changed significantly since the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board was established in 1965. The network of institutions has expanded dramatically and the complexity of governance has increased as the state consolidated the majority of the universities within systems. And over the years, the statutory responsibilities of the Coordinating Board have expanded – largely through an accumulation of legislative mandates.

As NCHEMS noted in a 2011 white paper, the Texas Coordinating Board is widely perceived outside of Texas as one of the most effective agencies in the nation, especially in terms of the criteria listed above. In summary, several strong points regarding the Coordinating Board are:

- Leadership in establishing and sustaining attention to the state's *Closing the Gaps* plan.

- Leadership on key issues such as:

  ▪ Development, in collaboration with the Texas Education Agency (TEA), of standards for college readiness and success in response to HB 1 enacted by the 79th Texas Legislature.

  ▪ Reform of developmental education.

  ▪ Efforts to link higher education funding to outcomes.

- Extent and quality of the data systems that undergird the accountability system related to the state's *Closing the Gaps* plan.

- Recent initiatives related to promoting the efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity of the Texas higher education system.

The reality, however, is that the Coordinating Board faces many of the same issues faced by other coordinating boards across the country. As noted in the 2011 NCHEMS paper:

- Despite efforts to link the state's *Closing the Gaps* higher education plan to budget/finance policy, the funding formula development and the budget process remain largely focused on allocating resources to institutions based on complex input-based models that have changed only marginally over the past ten years. Recent initiatives on outcome-based funding are an exception to this pattern, but the general tendency remains unchanged.

- Most of the staff capacity and workload of the Coordinating Board remains dominated by administrative and regulatory functions. Only limited state support is provided for the key policy leadership role. Many of the initiatives, such as those related to developmental education and student success, are funded by foundations, not the State of Texas.

- Legislatively mandated studies, many dating back several years, dominate the Coordinating Board policy analysis capacity. Responding to these requests drives out attention to strategic planning and policy analysis unrelated to the specific requests.

Despite those challenges, the role of the Coordinating Board to provide two major functions continues:

1) Policy and strategic planning for higher education.

2) Coordination of and collaboration within higher education.

The Policy and Strategic Planning Role of the Coordinating Board

As Texas nears 2015, which marks the end of the 15-year implementation effort established by the state's *Closing the Gaps* higher education plan, it is important for the Coordinating Board to build upon progress while expanding the focus to include a more holistic look that encompasses higher education's role in building the state economy. The Board began to consider higher education beyond *Closing the Gaps* with the assistance of FSG Consultants, which was contracted to interview key constituents throughout Texas and to identify important issues and strategies for Texas higher education and the Coordinating Board. More recently, the Board created the Council on Continuous Improvement and Innovation, which is building on the work of FSG to identify key goals and measures for Texas higher education beyond 2015.

Recommendations to encourage and increase the Board's role in strategic planning for Texas higher education include:

- **Strengthen the mission and functions of the Coordinating Board related to strategic planning, finance, and accountability**.

  Several efforts could help meet this need:

  - Develop long-term (i.e., 20-year) goals for Texas (such as through the next generation of the state's *Closing the* Gaps higher education plan) benchmarked to the best performing states and countries.

  - Project the higher education capacity needed to achieve long-term (i.e., 20-year) goals and prepare an analysis and alternatives for the Governor and Legislature on how Texas could finance (through state, student, and other revenue sources) the needed increase. This projection and analysis should address changes in capacity needed by region and sector.

  - Develop a five-year Strategic Agenda[1], revisited every two years in the year prior to the convening of the regular session of the Legislature.

  - Develop and recommend to the Governor and Legislature finance policy aligned with the long-term goals and the Strategic Agenda.

  - Develop and maintain a public accountability system aligned with the long-term goals and the Strategic Agenda. The accountability system should include the necessary data capacity, performance indicators, and benchmarks appropriate for each sector (as is currently maintained for *Closing the Gaps*).

- **Strengthen the Coordinating Board's role as the pre-eminent independent, objective source of data/information and analysis on higher education issues for both the executive and legislative branches**.

  An effective coordinating board must be seen as an objective, non-partisan source of data and analysis on higher education issues for *both* the Governor and the Legislature. The Board must focus on the *public interest*, not the interests of institutions or sectors. Planning must be based on objective data analysis for it to be an effective tool for policy decisions. Texas already has one of the most comprehensive data systems in the country and should build on current strengths. The demand for analysis currently exceeds staffing levels, an issue that should be addressed to ensure the institutions and policymakers have the vital information and analysis needed for making the best possible decisions.

- **Require the Coordinating Board to administer pilot projects to identify best practices only in circumstances where other entities cannot or will not administer the programs.**

  Shift the Coordinating Board's role from operating pilot and demonstration projects, in cases where institutions are willing to make innovative changes, to evaluating projects undertaken by

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[1] NCHEMS only suggests the name "Strategic Agenda" and uses this for consistency in the following recommendations to emphasize the need for a five-year plan (updated every two years) as well as long-term (20-year) goals.

institutions. Emphasize the identification of best practices that should be brought to scale and supported by policy changes.

- **Focus Coordinating Board initiatives and regulatory oversight on issues that affect the higher education system as a whole or that cut across sectors.**

  Examples might include links with the P-12 system, workforce development, articulation and transfer policies, regional strategies, and other such issues.

The Coordination and Collaboration Role of the Coordinating Board

Education is one of the key drivers in supporting any state's economic growth, so the Coordinating Board and higher education institutions must work together to ensure that resources are used in the most effective way. A collaborative effort in which the entire pipeline from the education sector to the work force sector understands the importance of having an educated citizenry is vital. As the Coordinating Board expands its work with other state agencies it should also expand its role of coordinating higher education.

- **Establish a formal advisory body, composed of system and institutional chancellors and presidents, to the Coordinating Board.**

  This strictly advisory body (consistent with the Texas requirements for advisory bodies) would provide a means for systematic consultation with the chief executive officers of the state's higher education systems and institutions on policy issues to be considered by the Coordinating Board. Currently, the Coordinating Board makes every effort to consult with and seek advice from these leaders through advisory committees, direct communications, and other means. But the experience of other states is that these multiple communications with presidents and chancellors are not a good substitute for a formal presidential advisory council in which institutions' chief executives are responsible as a group to provide advice on major policy issues. Recognizing the number of institutions in Texas, the membership should be determined on a rotating basis with assurance on appropriate representation of sectors.

- **Establish by statute a public/private entity to work in tandem with the Coordinating Board to develop cross-cutting, public/private initiatives.**

  An alternative would be to reconfigure the College for All Texans Foundation to be the link between the Coordinating Board and public and private initiatives aligned with the state's long-term goals. The governing body of this entity could be drawn in part from the state's major foundations which are currently deeply engaged in supporting education reforms.

Higher Education Governance, Administration, and Transparency

Conclusions:
Focus on Leadership and Policy Analysis Needed

The role and mission of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Coordinating Board should be clarified in a way that allows elimination of outdated and redundant statutory mandates so that its staff can concentrate more its efforts on providing objective leadership and policy analysis for the Governor and Legislature.

Higher Education Governance, Administration, and Transparency

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Website: **http://www.thecb.state.tx.us**

For more information contact:

Susan E. Brown, Assistant Commissioner
Planning and Accountability
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
P.O. Box 12788
Austin, TX 78711
(512) 427-6153 FAX (512) 427-6147
susan.brown@thecb.state.tx.us