Closing the Gaps by 2015 plan surpasses several goals
Texas Higher Education staff to update Senate committee

April 14, 2014 – Austin, Texas – Tomorrow the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board will update the Senate Committee on Higher Education regarding the Closing the Gaps (CTG) by 2015 strategic plan. Several CTG goals and targets have been met or surpassed, including the plan’s goal of awarding 210,000 undergraduate credentials each year by 2015. The most recent data show that in 2013, Texas institutions awarded more than 242,000 undergraduate credentials to students—more than doubling the annual awards in 2000. Additionally, higher education enrollments, while slowing in recent years, have increased by 55 percent since the CTG launch.

“Texas has much to celebrate but there is a lot of work yet to accomplish over the next 18 months to fully achieve our higher education goals,” said Deputy Commissioner for Academic Planning and Policy David Gardner, who will testify at the April 15 Senate committee meeting. “The good news is that we are well on our way to meeting the overarching Closing the Gaps goals thanks to the sustained commitment of Governor Perry, the Texas Legislature, Texas higher education institutions, and local community organizations.”

In 2010, in a collaborative effort to place greater emphasis on key CTG targets where Texas lagged, the THECB developed the Accelerated Plan for Closing the Gaps by 2015. The Accelerated Plan focused specifically on increasing Hispanic and African American participation and success rates, expanding the number of teacher certifications as well as placing heightened emphasis on increasing graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields of study. As a result of the plan, Texas increased state support in the TEXAS Grant and other financial aid programs aimed at helping students enroll in college. The state also invested in academic and student support initiatives such as AVID and summer bridge programs aimed at helping the most academically at-risk and first generation students make a successful transition from high school to college. In addition, programs such as GenTX and AdviseTX were implemented to inspire students to achieve education and training beyond high school. Texas also continues to advance and scale innovative strategies for developmental education to help academically underprepared students complete college coursework.

“We are pleased that many of the interventions and strategies outlined in the Accelerated Plan have led to marked improvement in key areas where Texas was struggling,” Gardner explained. “But we still have a lot of work to do to engage and inspire young African American and Hispanic males, particularly at the eighth grade level.”

Dr. Gardner’s Senate committee testimony coincides with the release of a new THECB report that highlights various initiatives and strategies implemented over the course of the 15-year master plan for higher education: Closing the Gaps: Strategies that Shaped Improvements in Texas Higher Education. According to Dr. Gardner, the new report makes clear that the progress on Closing the Gaps did not happen by accident, but rather is the result of sustained collaboration and investment from the state and institutions. As part of the THECB’s core mission to promote transparency and accountability, the agency recently published the 2014 Texas Public Higher Education Almanac.

The Senate committee will also hear testimony from the chair and vice chair of the newly appointed Higher Education Strategic Planning Committee to discuss the next long-term plan for Texas higher education that will be presented for consideration and adoption in July 2015. The planning committee, comprised of education and business leaders from throughout the state, will hold its second meeting in Austin later in the day. The meeting will be webcast at www.thecb.state.tx.us.

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THECB Mission Statement
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.