Commissioner's Statement and Preliminary Recommendation on Methodology for Calculating the Uniform GPA

Coordinating Board General Counsel has determined that the proposed changes I have recommended for the calculation of a uniform GPA for university admissions are sufficiently different from my preliminary recommendations to the Board that they will require reposting and consideration by the Board at a subsequent meeting. I believe that the postponement of formal Board action is a good thing. Just yesterday, I received comments from the Career and Technology Association of Texas, the Texas Association of School Boards, the Texas Association of School Administrators and several other representatives of the public school community and my colleagues and I would appreciate the extra time to consider fully their recommendations. In addition, the Select Committee on Public School Accountability, chaired by Senator Shapiro and Representative Eissler met yesterday and identified several points of consensus, such as educating students to post-secondary readiness standards and including college readiness standards in end-of-course exams that I would like to take into account as we further refine our recommendations.

At this point, my key preliminary recommendations for the uniform GPA calculation are these:

- The methodology for calculating a uniform GPA for public university admissions will begin with students entering the 9th grade on or after May 1, 2009. All academic courses in the Recommended High School Program

shall be used in calculating the uniform GPA regardless of when the course was taken.

- On a 4.0 scale, a weight of 1.0 will be given to Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and academic dual credit, including career-oriented, courses listed in the Lower Division Academic Course Guide Manual (available online at http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/PDF/1252.PDF). In addition to the career-oriented courses listed in the Lower Division Academic Course Guide Manual, high school career and technical education (CTE) courses aligned with university programs of study will be counted.
- Pre-AP and pre-IB courses will be weighted at .50. Within four years, all pre-AP courses will be expected to meet Laying the Foundation (or comparable) standards and pre-IB courses will be expected to be part of an approved IB program. After four years, the weighting of pre-AP courses will be reviewed by the GPA Advisory Committee (referenced below) as appropriate.

- The Coordinating Board will establish a 15-member GPA Advisory Committee, which will include representatives from public education, higher education and the workforce sectors, to oversee implementation of the GPA standards, to develop a GPA conversion model, to assure rigor across all courses included in the GPA calculation and to make adjustments in the courses counted in the GPA calculation as curricula in high schools and universities change. Another key responsibility of the GPA Advisory Committee will be to ensure institutional compliance with Coordinating Board rules (§4.85) which specify requirements for dual credit courses.

Courses that are under consideration to be included in the uniform GPA calculation

Social Studies – 3.5 CREDITS

World History Studies (one credit)
World Geography Studies (one credit)
U.S. History Studies Since Reconstruction (one credit)
U.S. Government (one-half credit)

English – 4 CREDITS

English I, II, III, IV
English I and II for Speakers of Other Languages (SOL) may be substituted for English I and II only for immigrant students with limited English proficiency

Mathematics – 4 CREDITS

Algebra I, II, & Geometry. The fourth credit may be selected from the following: Mathematical Models with Applications, Pre-calculus, Independent Study in Mathematics, Advance Placement Statistics, Advanced Placement Calculus AB, Advanced Placement Calculus BC, IB Mathematical Studies, IB Mathematics Standard Level, IB Mathematics Higher Level, IB Advanced Mathematics Standard Level, AP Computer Science

Science – 4 CREDITS

Biology, AP Biology, or IB Biology
Integrated Physics and Chemistry
Chemistry, AP Chemistry, or IB Chemistry
Physics, Principles of Technology I, AP Physics, or IB Physics. A fourth credit from the courses listed in 19 TAC 112 approved for science credit, which includes the following: Astronomy, Aquatic Science, Environmental systems, Earth and Space Science, Advancement Placement courses in Biology, Chemistry, Physics B, Physics C, and Environmental Science. The following health science technology education courses: Scientific Research and Design, Anatomy and Physiology of Human Systems, Medical Microbiology and Pathophysiology, Principles of Technology 1 & 11 and Engineering.

Language Other than English – 2 CREDITS

(must consist of Level I and Level II in the same language).

Fine Arts – 1 CREDIT

A single year-long approved arts course from a fine arts discipline: dance, drama/theater, music or visual art as listed in TAC 117.

College-Preparatory Electives – 3.5 CREDIT

One year (two semesters), in addition to those required above, chosen from the following areas: Visual and Performing Arts (non-introductory level courses), History, Social Science, English, Advanced Mathematics, Science, and language other than English.

CTE Courses – Those courses with a "university" content connection such as Accounting maybe included in the GPA calculation.

As I mentioned, we have received recommendations on all these issues and I'd like to have the time to give them the careful consideration they deserve.

As always, the continuing development of GPA standards will be guided by these principles: to help move Texas successfully toward the goals of *Closing the Gaps*; to promote academic rigor and post-secondary success for all students in Texas public education; and to increase understanding among Texas high school students and parents about genuine college, especially, university awareness. Although Texas has made significant progress in preparing students for college and the skilled workforce in recent years, we still lag behind leading states. A few key points:

- ACT, which tests over 70,000 students for college readiness, in its latest study determined that only 20% of high school graduates are ready for college;
- 50% of Texas college students require developmental education;
- In regard to so called "advanced" courses, a 2006 study by the National Center for Educational Accountability described the phenomenon of "course credit inflation" and cited findings that demonstrate that advanced course credits in high school do not predict college persistence. Much of the data for this article came from Texas, including some from the Coordinating Board.

To be fair, what is happening in Texas is part of a disturbing national trend. Just as in Texas, national data show that only a relatively few number of high school students are exposed to the sort of academic rigor that will prepare them well for life beyond high school. A new study by the Strong American Schools Organization, ominously entitled "Diploma to Nowhere", notes that nearly 80% of college students placed in remedial education had a "B" average or higher in high school.

Whatever rigor is available in high schools in Texas and elsewhere, the evidence suggests it is disproportionately unavailable to low-income students. Data on the availability of AP courses indicate as much and The College Board, which administers the AP program, warns that pre-AP courses typically lead to tracking

and advocates instead for educational practice whereby pre-AP, pre-IB and honors courses are taken by all students.

In conclusion, I want to quote from a new study from the National Summit on Academic Rigor and Relevance entitled "No Longer at Risk: A Nation in Peril." This is a follow up study from a 1980's study called "A Nation at Risk." The report notes that the U.S. is falling behind academically and offers several recommendations for our high schools, the first two of which are these: "First, a single, rigorous standard must be developed…at every level of education that lets students really know how well they are doing. Second, we need to define and implement one rigorous course of study for *all* students."

I would like to cite a quote by U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings in her address at the John F. Kennedy, Jr. Forum at Harvard University on October 1, 2008. She said, "Last year, I sent back to the U.S. Treasury more than 500 million dollars in unused academic grants for low-income college students. Why? Because not enough had been offered or taken rigorous coursework in high school—coursework essential for college admission and success."

As educators from both higher and public education continue to deliberate on the issue of the uniform GPA calculation, I trust that our mutual goal will be to promote rigor and high achievement for all Texas students. All of our youngsters from whatever background, affluent or poor, from whatever ethnicity, deserve nothing less.