



Texas Commission on Community College Finance Testimony by Dr. Mike Flores Chancellor, Alamo Colleges District

September 12, 2022

Good morning, Chairman Hunt, Commissioner Keller, and members of the Community College Finance Commission. My name is Dr. Mike Flores, and I serve as the Chancellor of the Alamo Colleges District based in Bexar County, Texas. I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you today and for your commitment to this very challenging work on the future investment structure for Texas' community colleges. I know my colleagues and I all agree, the outcomes of this Commission are critical to the future of our students and state's economic future. My goal is to share a few highlights of the impact on larger community colleges.

The Alamo Colleges District is one of the nation's largest community college systems. Our five individually accredited colleges, eight workforce training centers and multiple high school programs, have a combined enrollment of over 100,000 annually. Our service region covers 8 counties that includes only one taxing district - Bexar County. With population growth in the region and demand increasing in our other service area counties you can imagine the strain this has placed on only having one taxing district.

We serve not only a vast region but also a diverse student population. More than 70% of our students identify as students of color and 73% rely on financial aid and scholarships. We also serve an ever-increasing student parent population with 1 out of 5 of our students also caring for one or more children. This diverse group of students is not too dissimilar from my colleagues and has required us to expand academic and student supports to serve the whole student. It's why the recommendations from this commission are so important as we continue to evolve and grow to end generational poverty through education and training.

Now, getting to the draft recommendations, I share my colleagues' enthusiasm with what the Commission has outlined thus far. I also commit to working with each of you on a final report that will lift all 50 Texas community colleges. The devil is in the details, especially with any overhaul to a complex system of state investment, but the work can and must be done.

State Funding for Outcomes

Like my colleagues, we at the Alamo Colleges support a system of investment that is results driven and focuses on student achievement. We are especially pleased to see the inclusion of added value for our workforce and other non-credit programming that is of value and in demand by students and employers.



The Alamo Colleges recently launched a new partnership with Coursera offering all Fall 2022 enrolled students' free access to one of six Grow with Google professional certificates. In just the first few weeks we have seen 500 students reserve their spot!

This is affirmation that providing students with options is critical to their success as much as our own. However, I would caution the Commission on making the definition of "credentials of value" and "high-demand" fields too narrow. So many industry-recognized certificates alone may not lead to the highest of earnings, but they are the stepping stone towards a pathway of success in both earnings and career achievement.

Transfer rates and the number of Semester Credit Hours (SCH) our students acquire before graduation has been a focus at the Alamo Colleges. In the last five years, our board and team at the colleges have committed to investing in streamlining the processes and pathway for students. Between our AlamoADVISE program and expanded Transfer Advising Guides (TAGs), we have been able to reduce the number of semester credit hours taken by graduating students at Alamo Colleges to 65.1 - and, as Commissioner Keller stated in his testimony last Friday to the House Appropriations Committee, reducing time-to-degree is one of the most effective ways to increase affordability toward a postsecondary degree or credential. Additionally, just under 89,000 of our students have successfully transferred to a 4-year university. In partnership with our colleagues of the South & Central Texas Transfer Compact, we are working on the next phase to expand dual enrollment and Promise to Promise pathways for area students.

Affordability for Students

With regards to section 2 of the Commission's draft recommendations, we whole heartedly agree that college affordability is critical for the future of our state. Everyone should have access to a postsecondary education. It's the reason the Alamo Colleges launched the AlamoPROMISE program in Fall 2019 providing last-dollar scholarships to graduating seniors from participating high schools in Bexar County. In our third year of recruitment, we have seen tremendous success and increases in the college going rate for our participating high schools.

We also support the concept of incentives or funding to support increased work-based learning opportunities. The earn and learn model has always been a successful way of helping students see the value of the credential they are seeking but this became even more important during the pandemic. Utilizing our HEERF aid, we allocated funds to help support added work-based learning opportunities for students off-campus with area employers. Having state investments into these efforts would help sustain programs we built during the pandemic.

One area of concern for us is with the concept of a uniform tuition rate for dual credit students. At the Alamo Colleges, we waive all tuition and fees for our high school program students while entering into separate agreements with each ISD regarding other costs such as faculty, equipment, and instructional materials. As my colleague Dr. Wallace mentioned, these are agreements made not only by my locally elected board but with more than a dozen other locally elected ISD boards based on their specific needs & financial ability.



Additionally, we would ask that if increase investments are made to the TEOG as proposed, that we allow for community college students attending a baccalaureate program at a community college to be eligible for those grants. Currently our baccalaureate students aren't eligible for TEOG grants nor Texas Grants making them reliant on scholarships or their own funds to support their continued post-secondary education. I'd also ask that we consider how to better support our transfer students to 4- year universities who often are not able to access Texas Grants due to preference priorities.

Investments in College Capacity

Investing in programs like the TRUE and the Skills Development Fund have assisted us in expanding workforce program offerings and create stackable and convertible pathways for our non-credit programs. Funded by institutional funds and a TRUE grant, our team has been able to build a micro-pathway focused on allied health and leading to our new BSN program. Our goal is to build a similar pathway across the district especially with those pathways that lead to baccalaureate programs we will have at the Alamo Colleges.

My only caution on the recommendations in this section of the draft report is that investment in workforce innovations be more than seed funding. Workforce development programming is expensive and can be capital intensive depending on the industry. Current funding for workforce is helpful but most are one-time start-up grants for community colleges that must be applied for and have no guarantee of awarding. Additionally, they often don't cover the entire cost of the training program including wrap-around support services often required by participants.

In conclusion, I want to thank Chairman Hunt, Commissioner Keller, and the entire Commission for the opportunity to speak to you today. The proposal being considered by the Commission is a great start to what we hope will be a productive legislative session in 2023.

On behalf of my fellow community college chancellors and presidents across the state, thank you for your service and I'd be happy to answer any questions.