



Board of Trustees Involvement in Texas Pathways

August 2017

Introduction

Texas Pathways

Community colleges are the largest sector of Texas higher education—in fall 2016, Texas community and state colleges enrolled 719,700 students, roughly 52% of total higher education enrollment in the state.¹ Yet while the state’s [Higher Education Strategic Plan](#) calls for 60% of 25- to 34-year-old Texans to hold a quality certificate or degree by 2030, only 38% of young Texans currently have a postsecondary credential.

The Texas Success Center is now entering the second phase of the Texas Pathways—a statewide strategy focused on building capacity for community colleges to design and implement structured academic and career pathways at scale for all students. Texas Pathways is patterned after the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Pathways Project. Texas Pathways is built on three important design principles of guided pathways. First, redesign must attend to the entire student experience, rather than to just one segment, such as developmental education or the intake process. Second, guided pathways redesign is not next in a long line of discrete reforms, but rather a framework that helps unify a variety of reform efforts around the central goal of helping students choose, enter, and complete a program of study aligned with students’ goals for employment and further education. Third, the redesign process starts with

¹ Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board enrollment data, <http://www.txhighereddata.org/> 2017.





student end goals for careers and further education and “backward maps” programs and supports to ensure students are prepared to thrive in employment and education at the next level.

Cadre Participation

Colleges completed an application process designed to assess the institution’s readiness and capacity for six years of intensive work. Texas Pathways colleges are divided into cadres to meet their needs in implementing pathways at scale. Colleges were notified in July 2016 of their assignment into one of four cadres. Cadre 1 colleges demonstrate serious commitment to, and greatest capacity for, transformational work at scale as well as strong partnerships with public schools and four-year institutions. The Texas Success Center supports twelve colleges in Cadre 1.

Texas Pathways Project Cadre 1 Institutions	
Amarillo College	Lone Star College
Austin Community College	McLennan Community College
Brazosport College	Midland College
Dallas County Community College	South Texas College
Grayson College	Southwest Texas Junior College
Houston Community College	Temple College

Board of Trustees Institute

The Board of Trustees Institute (BOTI) is an annual convening of board and CEO delegates from colleges in cadre 1 and/or Achieving the Dream to share and elevate knowledge of how effective governance contributes to student equity, success, and completion. At the 2017 BOTI, “The Role of the Board in Enabling Student Pathways to Successful Careers,” trustees examined data, policies and practices related to guided pathways implementation.

Scope of Analysis

This analysis examines the trustees’ involvement with pathways at the 12 cadre 1 colleges in order to determine how boards at each of the institutions support Texas Pathways. The analysis is based on interviews with pathways leads and documents including records and meeting minutes from each institution. Though cadre 1 colleges are in their first year of Texas Pathways implementation, many of these institutions have been involved with earlier iterations of pathways work. Therefore, board actions that have influenced student success and pathways initiatives but predate Texas Pathways have been included in the analysis. Pathways leads at each of the colleges provided all quotations in this analysis.



Findings and Analysis

While colleges met specific requirements to be considered for cadre 1, boards of trustees have varied levels of experience and background in pathways work at their institutions. At all 12 schools, boards have been informed of pathways work through presentations by college CEOs and pathways leads. The role of the board is to develop policy; therefore, boards are not involved in day-to-day implementation of reforms. The majority of board action related to pathways comes in the form of approving recommendations or fiscal allocations. Board involvement in the Texas Pathways work falls under four main categories:

1. Budget and Fiscal Support
2. Strategic Planning
3. Policy
4. Data and Presentations

Budget and Fiscal Support

In conjunction with updated policies and college strategic plans, many cadre 1 boards have supported pathways work with fiscal allocations and budgetary changes. At least two-thirds of cadre 1 boards have approved fiscal changes related to pathways and student success in the past two years. While many of these changes do not stem solely from the Texas Pathways initiative, they all influence the goals of the work.

Dallas County Community College District

In June 2017, the Dallas County Community College board approved \$2.5 million in funding for a network model aligned with guided pathways. Included in this funding are new positions for navigators and pathways advisors. The model was listed as the top recurring budget priority in the budget overview given at the June 2017 finance meeting. While the board did not address operational details, they discussed how the allocation aligns with strategic priorities. Although the district-wide pathways work formally began in the last year, individual campuses had been previously engaged with pathways on their own. For instance, North Lake College worked with Complete College America, and in 2010, Richland College was selected as one of the founding colleges of the Carnegie Foundation's Statistics Pathway (Statway) Network to develop an accelerated pathway for developmental math. Anna Mays, associate vice chancellor for educational policy and student success, reports the chancellor encouraged the application to Texas Pathways in order to formalize pathways as a district-wide approach. Approximately 40% of DCCCD students take classes across multiple campuses, including online. The board received their first [formal presentation](#) on pathways in November 2016.

Amarillo College

At Amarillo College, Dr. Tamara Clunis, vice president for academic affairs, estimates the board has approved budget changes totaling over \$1 million in support of student success and pathways, including multiple investments in faculty professional development. For instance, in 2017, every faculty member received a \$1,200 stipend for the college's professional learning requirement, the first allocation of its kind for the college. The college has a goal to eventually raise this amount to \$2,400 per faculty member annually. In addition, the college aims to increase the number of students continually enrolled throughout the summer so more students can complete a degree in three years. To this end, the board approved a



budgetary change so faculty members receive 100% of their normal pay, rather than the lower adjunct faculty rate, to teach during the summer. The board has also allocated funds for pathways-related travel. Recently, the board chair accompanied a group from the college on a site visit to explore pathways implementation at St. Petersburg College in Florida.

Brazosport College

As of July 2017, Brazosport College's board was in the process of approving a separate budget account solely for pathways work. If approved, the account will be codified in September. Dr. Lynda Villanueva, vice president for academic and student affairs, estimates nearly \$1 million has been approved for student success efforts in recent years. The majority of this funding has been allocated to the college's new advising system, *ACE it*, which necessitates additional full-time and part-time staff.

Grayson College

In the 2016-2017 budget, the board approved a new \$150,000 student success fund, which is up for re-approval in the FY 2018 budget. While not expressly for pathways work, representatives from across campus may apply to receive money from the fund by justifying a need in their department related to student success. In FY 2016-2017, the college received applications for projects including the creation of an active learning classroom, veterans' hub re-vitalization, and alumni data tracking. Dr. Dava Washburn, vice president of instruction, has also been granted travel funds for additional faculty and staff to attend Texas Pathways Institutes.

Temple College

Over the past three years, the board at Temple College approved funding for two additional academic advisors and three full-time student success coaches. The college hired success coaches to assist students identified as at-risk stay on their chosen pathway, and hired advisors to broaden the advising team's ability to holistically advise students. While this board approval pre-dated Texas Pathways cadre 1 work, it enables the college to more robustly assist students stay on path to completion.

Lone Star College

At Lone Star College, the board approved funds for 16 new advisors in FY 2016 (for comparison, the college added 70 new faculty positions that year).² Lone Star College adopted internal performance-based-funding, which allowed the college to identify core metrics for student success, notes Jamie Posey, associate vice chancellor in the office of completion. Funds are now awarded based on the individual performance of a campus.

Austin Community College

At Austin Community College (ACC), a focus on pathways and student success led the board to approve a new strategic plan titled "Student Success Through Guided Pathways." The same student-centered philosophy that influences board actions and the redesign of the strategic plan at ACC permeates to faculty

² Lone Star College [Comprehensive Annual Financial Report](#) for FY ending Aug 31, 2016.



and staff at the college as well. Over the last few years, the board has approved new resources and reshuffled existing resources to fund 15 new advising positions.

Houston Community College

Dr. Betty Fortune, executive director of success and completion at Houston Community College (HCC), says while the board is not involved with details of pathways work, board members are “vital to accepting recommendations related to the work, and for expenses that are incurred to do the work.” In 2016, HCC launched Pathways to the Ultimate Student Experience (PULSE), a comprehensive student success effort.

McLennan Community College

At McLennan Community College, the board approved a reallocation within the existing budget to fund additional advisors and student success coaches. “We have [done this] by being careful about how we fill open positions in faculty,” says Dr. Donald Balmos, former vice president of instruction at McLennan. Advising is now mandatory for all students who have enrolled since Fall 2015. Advisors are assigned based on a student’s declared academic program.

South Texas College

At South Texas College, the board has approved funding for additional advisors, along with technology resources to assist students with guided pathways. These include Starfish, an early alert system that was approved and purchased in 2016 and DegreeWorks, an online degree audit and advising tool.

Strategic Planning

Seven out of twelve cadre 1 colleges have updated their strategic plans within the last three years to reflect a focus on student success and guided pathways. Boards are involved in the concluding stages of strategic planning—granting final approval to plans and encouraging committees to incorporate student success goals into strategic objectives.

Austin Community College

The Board of Trustees at ACC approved a planning redesign that resulted in the new strategic plan: “Student Success Through Guided Pathways: The ACC Strategic Plan 2017-2021.” Dr. Charles Cook, provost and executive vice president for academic affairs, describes the new strategic plan as a “lens” through which the college views various reforms. As Dr. Cook explains, “Everything we do [at ACC] is looked at in the light of our broad goals: Is it helping students persist and engage, and is it helping students complete and transition into their next stage in life?” In his communication with the board, Dr. Cook explains that while board members may have wanted to previously highlight the “big-ticket” items like community partnerships and the new Bioscience Incubator, they now view these various initiatives in the context of student success efforts. “Student success is a lens through which we are trying to examine everything we do; it’s not just a stand-alone project,” says Dr. Cook.

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-Dr. Charles Cook, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, ACC



Guided pathways was part of the college's previous annual master plans, but as the college moved away from that style of planning, pathways was incorporated more prominently into the current, multi-year strategic plan. At the same time, ACC is in the process of moving from its own board policy to adopting Texas Association of School Board (TASB) policies. ACC's past board policy leaned heavily on reporting, requiring roughly 30 administrative reports to the board each year. According to Dr. Cook, adopting the TASB policies will help to bolster the relationship between administrators and the board. The new TASB policies reflect a concerted effort by ACC's board and administrators to be more student-centered. As part of this plan, the board is to be provided with an annual report on student success each November.

Temple College

The Temple College [Strategic Plan 2016-2021](#) maintains a focus on student success, and "Foster Student Success" is the first of three strategic goals within the plan. Multiple tenets of this goal pertain to guided pathways, including "provide guided pathways for all degree programs" and "maintain alignment of guided pathways between Temple College and transfer institutions." The board of trustees chair added a statement to the introduction of the plan highlighting the importance all trustees place on student success. According to Dr. Mark Smith, chief academic officer, board members who participated in the college's recent five-year strategic planning process are "adamant" that the strategic plan be a living document that is revised based on ongoing student success goals.

Brazosport College

In April 2017, the board at Brazosport College approved "[Vision 2020](#)," the college's updated strategic plan. Math pathways were added into the strategic plan three years ago, and the college has broadened the plan to reference larger pathways initiatives. Student success is listed as the first goal of the strategic plan. To achieve this goal, the plan lists strategies including integrating math pathways and integrating all instructional programs and student support services within the guided pathways model.

Lone Star College

Ms. Posey reports pathways became a strong priority for the college when Dr. Stephen Head became chancellor in 2014. The next year, the board approved an updated strategic plan, "[Strategic Plan 2015-2020](#)," which lists student success as one of the five strategic goals for the Lone Star system. Posey says with the board's support, pathways work spans numerous parts of the strategic plan. "The more we work on pathways the more I see the impact on all the parts of the strategic plan," Posey says.

Amarillo College

The data-informed revision process that led to Amarillo College's updated strategic plan, "[No Excuses 2020](#)" began in the fall of 2015, with the new plan rolled out in the fall of 2016. Board members receive frequent enrollment updates at their meetings, and often these data relate directly to objectives outlined in the strategic plan.

Midland College

Student success is one of Midland College's four [strategic goals](#). Within this goal, the college lists strategic objective 3.1, "Align credentials with needs of receiving institutions and the labor market," a key tenet of guided pathways.



Policy

In the past four years, at least seven of the 12 cadre 1 institutions (58%) have implemented pathways-related policy changes in areas of advising, student success courses, orientation or dual credit. For instance, Amarillo College updated [advising](#) policies to align with student success and pathways work. Understanding support for underprepared students is a key component of pathways, the college updated institutional policy so all students who place below college-level in writing, reading, or mathematics are advised in the Success Center.

Board policy at Austin Community College dictates “as part of the College’s annual Student Success Report, the President shall report to the Board on the extent and results of College student success strategies.”

Data and Presentations

Board members learn about Texas Pathways through formal presentations given by pathways leads and college presidents or chancellors. One hundred percent of pathways leads reported their board has received at least one formal pathways presentation in the last twelve months.

For some boards, “student success” presentations are a standing agenda item while other colleges have added guided pathways to board agendas in the past year (see below). At some larger institutions, pathways updates are delivered to a student success/services committee rather than to the full board.

Amarillo College

At Amarillo College, pathways and success updates are a standing agenda item at board of regents meetings. This request came after the April 2016 board meeting when board member Dr. David Woodburn presented on his experience at the BOTI. Based on this experience, Dr. Woodburn suggested the board discuss advising and collateral success of all students at their upcoming retreat. Dr. Clunis says that the board is more engaged with data than ever. “We are moving into uncharted waters in terms of board engagement,” she says. While board updates used to consist of the “why” behind pathways, including labor market data and numbers showing over-enrollment in certain programs, Dr. Clunis states that since the college has further developed the work, the board is now receiving more specific pathways updates on marketing campaigns and new web materials.

Brazosport College

Since February 2017, the board of regents at Brazosport College has received a monthly update on guided pathways from the guided pathways steering team. Each month, board members are presented with progress reports on the college’s updated strategic plan. Quarterly reports on performance include data on retention and transfer rates, completion measures, and other selected metrics.

Dallas County Community College District

The DCCCD board received their first formal presentation on pathways in November of 2016. At that time, a new strategic goal emerged from the board—to create “pathways for seamless transition of DCCCD students to four-year colleges and universities.” Additionally, the board approved a new Education and Workforce subcommittee. At the June 2017 meeting of this committee, members heard updates on THECB student success data.



Lone Star College

Since many members have attended the BOTI, the board at Lone Star College (LSC) now requests and receives quarterly updates about specific success metrics. While this is not a standing agenda item, Ms. Posey notes that since returning from the April 2017 BOTI, board members have requested data pertaining to the college’s mandatory student success course at orientation, implemented in fall 2013. The board is now interested in ensuring that there is 100% compliance in offering the course. In February, the “Chancellor’s Briefing Board Update” included a one-page update on pathways, with top-level updates on goals, strategy, timeline and next steps. Though LSC has been involved in other iterations of pathways work with Achieving the Dream and Texas Completes, Posey says that this is “the first time in many years where I have seen a commitment from the board to receiving regular updates on the work. This makes [Texas Pathways] different than what we have done in the past.”

Midland Community College

At Midland College, the board’s first exposure to pathways was an April 2015 presentation by the pathways co-chairs. Mr. Dixon remembers the board being especially surprised the college had been operating in the “cafeteria model” of course selection for so long, and members had questions about reducing options within the core curriculum. Currently, the board receives monthly updates on student success data reports. Mr. Dixon says of the board’s focus on data, “This is something that has really changed in our [board] culture. Five years ago, we weren’t talking about a culture of evidence or making decisions with data. Now we are.”

Southwest Texas Junior College

At Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC), the revised “[Strategic Plan 2017-2022](#)” includes a subsection about “full career pathways implementation” which was added during the mid-plan reviewing process in June 2017. Dr.

Gonzales, SWTJC president, says currently, the board is in an “educational” phase of the pathways work. Though the college is newly engaged in formal pathways work, Dr. Gonzales brings to board meetings a focus on student success. “We used to gauge our enrollment success by fall headcount. Now, we are reporting contact hours, semester credit hours, disaggregating the data by location, and presenting [board members] with dual credit versus non-dual credit course success, etc.”

100% of pathways leads report their board has received at least one formal pathways presentation in the last 12 months.

Additional Highlights

- At Temple College, board members receive a quarterly periodical titled “[Leopard Dreams](#)” (examples online) that highlights student success-related data. At each board meeting, there is a presentation focused on student success.
- At McLennan Community College, student success presentations are a standing agenda item and the board receives a monthly newsletter that includes a detailed report about pathways.
- Each department chair at Grayson College is required to present to the board on student success data and strategies to improve student outcomes, effective spring 2016. Dr. Washburn reports having former faculty members on the board has had a positive impact on board engagement with student success topics.



- While Austin Community College has experienced increased graduation rates partly by way of their reverse transfer and co-enrollment initiatives, the board is realizing graduation rates are not the only metric by which the college should measure student success. In his July 2017 *Report to the Board*, Dr. Richard Rhodes, ACC president, presented the three strategic goals, and then connected summative data analyses to each of the goals. For instance, for the goal of “persistence and engagement,” Dr. Rhodes presented course completion data for ACC.³

BOTI Influence

Pathways leads at many institutions, including Amarillo College, DCCCD and Lone Star College, specifically mentioned that their board members appreciated the opportunity to engage with pathways at the BOTI.

- Dr. Lynda Villanueva at Brazosport College notes that after returning from the BOTI a few years ago, board members were eager to approve a change that made new student orientation mandatory. “Our board is committed, engaged, enthusiastic—they are very aware of our work with pathways, and our student success agenda as a whole. They get regular updates, they have regular input, and they’re very excited to provide support through resources and by way of policy. The board is asking the right questions and making sure that the information they know is important becomes a part of our strategic plan. They see themselves as supporting our ongoing strategic planning efforts” says Dr. Villanueva.
- Anna Mays (DCCCD) reports that the board has appreciated the opportunity for peer-to-peer engagement with other board members at the BOTI.
- Jamie Posey (Lone Star College) notes board members return from the BOTI armed with specific data questions and they now request quarterly updates on related to pathways and student success. In preparation for the 2017 BOTI, participants from all colleges were asked to complete a questionnaire addressing institutional data, and the board at LSC has since asked for an update on these data points. Additionally, she notes the chancellor has been vital in building momentum around pathways at Lone Star. “The secret to our ability to get things done and gain momentum with pathways here is the commitment of the chancellor and the interest of the board,” Posey says. “If they continue to ask for quarterly updates, the chancellor will produce data and results.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the qualitative analysis in this report, the following recommendations may help to promote board involvement at other Texas Pathways institutions:

1. Maintain a focus on pathways at upcoming BOTI meetings, continuing to allow members the opportunity to explore their own institutional data and to connect with other peers in the field. When members are educated at BOTI, they return to campus with specific questions to ask chancellors and administrators. Jamie Posey says when board members at LSC returned, they did just that: “Then,

³ Dr. Richard Rhodes, president. *Report to the Board*, Austin Community College. powerpoint. July 10, 2017.



the chancellor aligns resources to do the work. In years past, we haven't always heard back from the board when they return from BOTI. This year is the first time I've seen our members are asking for follow-up information about items they learned about at BOTI. The homework, the data-driven conversation, allows them to ask questions. It helped make [pathways] a priority in the system.”

2. Encourage boards to add pathways updates as a standing agenda item at student success committee meetings, or, ideally, at full board meetings.
3. Find clear ways to connect pathways to other strategic goals and existing initiatives at the college. At ACC, for instance, the strategic plan connects pathways to other projects, allowing board members and others to view success efforts as an overarching theme rather than in a silo.

Strategic Plans for Cadre 1 Colleges

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