

DesignForScale: TEXAS

FINDING COMMON GROUND THROUGH THE TEXAS STUDENT SUCCESS COUNCIL

The DesignForScale Series encourages the field to develop a more strategic and cohesive approach to scaling student success reforms at and across community colleges. The series affirms that it is time to be more systematic, serious, and organized about designing visionary, integrated reforms to be implemented at scale, while maintaining appreciation for questions, new evidence, and college context. The series highlights innovative state efforts to scale structured pathways reforms across the community colleges in their states; other states seeking to scale reforms will find these approaches instructive.

Photograph courtesy of South Texas College

CREATING A STRUCTURE TO ENGAGE DIVERSE— EVEN SEEMINGLY ADVERSARIAL—STAKEHOLDERS

In 2011, a prominent Texas business group erected provocative billboards in Austin and Dallas condemning low completion rates at the state's community colleges and questioning the value of tax dollars spent there. The Texas Association of Business, an advocacy group for business owners and 200 local chambers of commerce, put up the signs to prod community colleges to do more to increase student success and help create a better educated workforce. College leaders were outraged at the vitriolic public attack. Yet, just a year and a half later, the once apparent adversaries were working together to help community college students across the state.

By forming the Texas Student Success Council, Texas education leaders accomplished a rare feat of joining forces with businesses, philanthropies, and nonprofit organizations, whose agendas have not always aligned, to improve the state's low community college completion rates. It is far easier to convince a legislature or state agencies to act on a consensus request from diverse stakeholders than on a controversial issue about which key constituents disagree, and the Texas Student Success Council has achieved impressive legislative results.

While all states have a unique political and cultural context, the Texas group's success provides interesting lessons for other states committed to increasing the number of students who complete community college with a meaningful credential.



WHAT IS THE TEXAS STUDENT SUCCESS COUNCIL?

The Texas Student Success Council is a diverse group of education leaders and stakeholders that plays a crucial role in ongoing efforts to improve the success of students in the state's 50 community colleges. The Council's 36 members represent all of the key players in Texas higher education, including the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Texas Association of Community Colleges, two-year and four-year colleges and universities, public school districts, employers, workforce agencies, community-based organizations, philanthropy, and the Legislature. The group includes organizations that previously appeared to be community college antagonists, such as the Texas Association of Business, which publicly criticized low completion rates.

The Council identifies and attempts to resolve policy and funding challenges that are barriers to student success, through recommendations at the institutional, state agency, and legislative levels. Specifically, the Council aims to create innovative policy conditions that can build momentum for developing clear, structured pathways through college to help students complete a credential or transfer to a four-year institution more quickly.

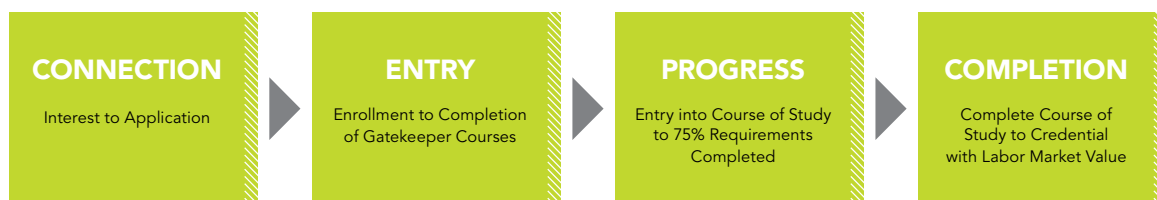
The Council initially focused on a few key areas, met frequently, hashed out differences where possible, and emerged unified in support of significant policy and funding proposals to promote student success. In 2013, the Texas Legislature adopted most of the Council's recommendations, including the implementation of outcomes-based funding, a redesign of developmental math education statewide, a competency-based education pilot program, and new transfer policies.

NEW STUDENT SUCCESS MODEL FOR FUNDING 2014-15

The Council advocated that the state's community college funding formula be changed to reward student outcomes rather than just enrollment. **10 percent** of community college funding is now allocated based on student success outcomes after \$500,000 is appropriated to each college district for core operations; the remaining **90 percent** is allocated based on enrollments.

Developmental Education	Gateway Courses	College Credit Attainment	Credentials Awarded	Transfer to a General Academic Institution
Completion of developmental education in math, reading, and writing <i>(1 point for math; 0.5 points each for reading and writing)</i>	Completion (with a C or better) of first-level math, reading, or writing course <i>(1 point for math; 0.5 points each for reading and writing)</i>	Completion of first 15 college credits, and first 30 college credits <i>(1 point each)</i>	Completion of an Associate's degree, certificate, or Bachelor's degree (where offered) <i>(2 points each; 2.25 points for STEM credentials)</i>	Transfer to a general academic institution after having completed 15 hours of coursework <i>(2 points)</i>

PREVENTING LOSS, CREATING MOMENTUM FRAMEWORK



KEY COUNCIL STRATEGIES

The Council's strategies emerged as it did its work, always focused on engaging a broad range of stakeholders and reaching consensus on its recommendations. These components stand out:

- > Engaging policy influencers along the community college completion continuum, with special attention to those with influence at transition points.
- > Focusing on a small number of strategically selected goals for which there was already significant support across members, in order to take advantage of momentum for specific policy change.
- > Embracing a “big tent” philosophy, involving a diverse mix of individuals and organizations, some of whom had not typically been involved in community college policy deliberations and with different perspectives on which solutions to adopt.
- > Developing clear and transparent protocols for communication to manage the inherent tensions associated with diverse stakeholders. This includes the regular and effective presentation of data and other evidence to hedge against anecdote and opinion.

PARTNERS IN THE TEXAS STUDENT SUCCESS COUNCIL

- > **Educate Texas** is the state policy partner for Texas Completes. The public-private initiative of the Communities Foundation of Texas convenes and staffs the Council and provides strategic guidance for the council's work.
- > **Texas Completes** is a self-funded initiative created to implement model pathways to community college completion and scale lessons learned across the state. Led by Lone Star College System, the initiative has expanded from five to eight college systems, which cover 43 percent of the community college population in the state. The institutions are: Alamo Colleges, Austin Community College, Dallas County Community College District, El Paso Community College, Kilgore College, Odessa College, and South Texas College, in addition to Lone Star.*
- > **Texas Association of Community Colleges** is a nonprofit organization that represents the interests of all 50 public community colleges across the state.
- > **Texas Success Center** is a new entity within the Texas Association of Community Colleges whose purpose is to align the multiple completion initiatives in the state into a coherent framework. The Center disseminates evidence-based best practices to colleges and aggregates the colleges' need for policy support into an advocacy agenda.
- > **Jobs for the Future** provided cross-state policy research, technical assistance, and documentation of the Council's work.
- > **Community College Research Center** provides evidence from recent research studies on a range of topics, such as transfer outcomes.

* The colleges that had participated in the Texas Completion by Design cadre in 2011 and 2012, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, decided to form a new entity called Texas Completes, with their own resources, to implement the work they began planning as part of Completion by Design. Texas Completes worked closely with Educate Texas to continue the strategic advisory board formed for Completion by Design, under the new name of the Texas Student Success Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Council members offered the following advice for other states that are considering a similar approach to increasing student success at community colleges:

For a longer report on the work of the Texas Student Success Council, please see: <http://www.jff.org/publications/texas-student-success-council-finding-common-ground-increase-community-college>

- > **Engage each of the stakeholder groups that influence postsecondary education.** Cross-sector collaboration is essential to creating, scaling, and sustaining innovative pathways to increase community college completion. Key sectors include K-12 education, community colleges, and regional employers, as well as four-year colleges and universities and nonprofit organizations that support public education.
- > **Embrace a “big tent” philosophy.** Ensure that members include people with different points of view, including individuals and organizations that have traditionally not participated in postsecondary policy conversations.
- > **Include student voices.** Ground advocacy efforts in the experiences of students, whose voices are typically absent from policy deliberations.
- > **Build on existing momentum for policy change.** Focus on issues where some agreement and momentum for change already exist. This dramatically increases the likelihood of success.
- > **Focus on a small number of actionable goals.** Resist the urge to take on all of the important issues at once. It is far more effective in the near term to zero in on three or four actionable goals and build strong consensus recommendations to propose to policymakers.
- > **Sync practice and policy.** Ensure that policy is informed by exemplary college practice, based on the work of institutions that have sustained innovative reforms and can increase understanding of policy barriers.
- > **Anticipate and manage inherent tensions associated with diverse membership.** Develop clear and transparent protocols for communication of data and other evidence to manage the inherent tensions associated with diverse stakeholders, each with their own agendas and pressure points.
- > **Anticipate the ways in which the group might evolve.** Assess trends in policy development and anticipate how the composition and priorities of the group might need to evolve in order to be effective.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Members of the Council leadership agree that the group must continually evolve, as state policy priorities develop, in order to maintain relevance and impact. As the Council looks ahead, it is developing a strategy to build momentum in advance of the next legislative session, which begins in 2015, ensuring that community colleges have the chance to communicate their opportunities and needs, rather than have the issues framed externally. This requires a careful assessment of each institution's priorities and consistent communication of the opportunities and barriers. New organizations and individuals may need to be brought to the table to expand the council's perspective and sphere of influence.

LEARN MORE

To learn more about scaling reforms through a similar advisory board, please contact:

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—Richard Rhodes, president of Austin Community College and chair of the Texas Student Success Council

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGY.”

“WE WANTED INPUT AND GUIDANCE FROM A GOOD CROSS-SECTION OF PEOPLE

FROM EDUCATION, THE COMMUNITY, CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE, AND THE WORKFORCE TO GET US TO THINK ABOUT THINGS WE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES MAY NOT THINK ABOUT. WE WANTED THEM TO ASK THE REALLY

COURAGEOUS QUESTIONS THAT WE NEED BUT SOMETIMES GLAZE OVER . . . SOMETIMES THAT'S GOING TO BE PEOPLE WHO APPEAR TO BE YOUR ADVERSARY . . . THAT WAS AN EARLY LESSON FOR US, AND IT WAS A