

October 19, 2012

To: Texas House Higher Education Committee
82nd Legislature

Testimony re: House Higher Education Committee interim charge to evaluate proposals for the state's next higher education master plan.

The Center for Public Policy Priorities appreciates this opportunity to provide testimony on the House Higher Education Committee interim charge to evaluate proposals for the state's next higher education master plan.

Strategies for Promoting College Access and Success

Texas' higher education master plan is an important blueprint for our state to set goals for higher education access and success for both young and adult learners aspiring to obtain a postsecondary degree or credential. By 2018, 56 percent of jobs in Texas will require additional training and education beyond high school. While Texas has made progress towards the goals in our current higher education master plan, Closing the Gaps by 2015, two-thirds of adult Texans lack an associate's degree or higher, and our current college graduation rate lags behind other states, with less than half (49.6 percent) of Texas college students graduating within six years.

With the rising cost of college and a move to disinvest in financial aid, Texas students and families are carrying a larger share of the financial burden to pay for the education and training of the state's future workforce. As a result, students are largely turning to loans and working during school to cover college costs. This dependence on debt to finance college education and working long hours during school leads to lower persistence and completion.

Today, over 2.9 million (59.1 percent) of Texas students in the pre-K-12 public school system are economically disadvantaged and will lack the financial resources to pay for college unless Texas makes a commitment to ensure that all students, including those with the greatest financial need, have access to quality higher education.

CPPP urges the Texas Legislature to set clear goals and strategies to reduce the financial barriers to college access and completion as a part of the state's next higher education master plan.

Goals and Strategies for Texas' Higher Education Master Plan

- Reduce student loan dependence and student loan defaults. To prepare Texas' workforce and future leaders, state policymakers and institutions of higher education must work together to reduce the financial barriers to student success through a fair and balanced method of paying for postsecondary education. Strategies to reduce student loan dependence and the state's loan default rate include:
 - Providing adequate state need-based grant aid to cover tuition, fees, and books for all students with financial need.
 - Providing loan counseling to all student loan borrowers in the state loan programs.
 - Supporting early college financial preparation through matched college savings accounts to encourage students to plan and prepare for college over the course of the education pipeline.
 - Ensuring that Texas K-12 students and their families learn strategies to plan and pay for college. Texas should imbed postsecondary education financial preparation into the K-12 space to make it easier to transition into college and to encourage a college-going culture in the state.

Metrics to Measure Student Outcomes

To measure the state's progress in promoting access and success for all Texas students, especially economically disadvantaged students and adult learners who lack postsecondary education, Texas' plan should track the following student outcomes:

- College enrollment and completion by student income level;
- College completion for students needing developmental education; and
- Transition of adult education students and GED completers into postsecondary education.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments and recommendations for the state's next higher education master plan.

Sincerely,

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