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What are the recommendations set forth by the Community College Finance Commission?

During the 87th Legislative Session, Senate Bill 1230 created the Texas Commission on Community College Finance to provide recommendations on the Texas "state funding formula and funding levels for public junior colleges in Texas that would be sufficient to sustain viable junior college education and training offerings throughout the state and improve student outcomes in alignment with state postsecondary goals." (cite)

With the excess funding that Texas has in its budget, the commission prioritizes providing the necessary financial support our colleges and universities need to thrive instead of looking for ways to "reduce" or "slow" the costs of higher education.

Below is a review of the commission's recommendations for the current legislative session.

First, the commission clearly lists the need for the state to provide fixed dollar amounts for specific outcomes. More specifically, the commission recommends that the state:

- Reward non-credit workforce education programs;
- Recognize the additional costs of serving economically and academically disadvantaged students;
- Provide temporary funding for colleges to assist with the "transition" to a new funding model; and
- Provide a foundational amount of funding for each college based on student enrollments and the types of contact hours taught in different fields of study across non-credit and credit-bearing programs. This should include adjustments to recognize the higher cost of operating smaller colleges and providing additional services for all students from low-income backgrounds and those needing to develop additional academic, and re- and up-skilling.

The commission's recommendations also highlights the need to increase affordability for students by:

- Increasing aid for low-income students through Texas Educational Opportunity Grants (TEOG);
- Incentivizing more dual credit hours (offer targeted financial aid and include max tuition rate for dual programs); and
- Expanding partnerships between colleges and private employers for paid work-based learning opportunities (work-study, apprenticeships, and internships).

Finally, the commission's recommendations call for a charge for investments in college capacity. According to the commission, community colleges that increase enrollment rates may still not obtain more state funding, because a large percentage of the funding is based on contact hours. This is especially alarming for colleges in rural areas or with smaller property tax bases, because it may be more beneficial for them to have smaller enrollment numbers since they do not have access to the funding needed to serve more students. The following suggestions were recommended to incentivize community college enrollment in "high-cost or high-demand fields," to develop the "capacity to offer programs in those fields," and to enable collaboration that meets the local and state workforce needs:

- Seed grants for programs in high-demand fields;
- Cross-institutionally shared services (ex. online courses and the ability to stack courses, credits and credentials); and
- Updated state policies that allow for colleges to provide high-quality non-credit credential programs that are convertible and stackable with credit-bearing programs. An updated policy will allow for non-credit credits to be transferred into credit courses and programs. This will make it easier for students to transfer credits through pathways for high school dual credit programs through pathways for adult learners seeking to relearn old skills, develop new skills, and gain additional credentials for career advancement.