

HIGHER EDUCATION

Texas Democrats believe all Texans should have the opportunity and be encouraged to pursue affordable higher education at public universities, community colleges, and technical schools. Today, too many students are saddled with a mountain of debt when they graduate from college, and Republicans have made damaging cuts to formula funding, deregulated tuition and restricted financial aid, policies that threaten our ability to meet state “Closing the Gaps” goals essential to our economic future. We believe the opportunity of higher education to be a right of all those that may seek it, regardless of race, gender, sexual preference, socioeconomic, or immigration status. We support policies that provide opportunity, free from debt, and a vision for tuition-free higher education system for college students, including:

- restoration of formula contact hour funding, adjusted for inflation and student growth;
- rollback of tuition and fees to affordable levels to reflect the restored funding;
- federal income tax credits for college tuition, fees and books;
- increased funding of TEXAS Grants and reforming the mismanaged state Prepaid Tuition Program, to provide higher education to more Texans without excessive debt burden;
- programs to develop alternative repayment plans for students struggling under significant debt burden by capping monthly payments and/or refinance existing loans to a lower rate tied to the current prime rate;
- legislation to reduce the inordinately high costs of college textbooks, technical manuals and other instructional materials;
- an increase in the maximum allowable financial aid set-asides;
- adequate compensation, security, professional status, and benefits for all faculty and fair market wages for college employees;
- higher education research funding to spur economic development and locate a Tier 1 public research and teaching university in every region of the state;
- collaborative public/higher education partnerships from pre-K to completion of bachelor’s degree to enhance learning and teacher preparation;
- enhanced, equitable funding for Prairie View A&M and Texas Southern University and for higher education in South Texas and all border communities;
- efforts to place a voting student regent on the appointed governing board of each state-supported four-year institution of higher education;
- the continuation of the Texas DREAM Act and passage of the federal DREAM Act;
- pay and working conditions sufficient to attract faculty, including adequate pay and reasonable workload for contingent faculty;
- equitable pay for part-time faculty; and

- the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity, and human dignity.

Community Colleges

Texas Democrats recognize and support the essential role of Texas community colleges, where the vast majority of Texas' post-secondary students are enrolled. By combining affordability, high quality and responsiveness to community needs, these institutions provide an education to those who would be otherwise excluded.

State funding for community colleges has been drastically reduced and that burden has been shifted onto students, their families and property taxpayers. In addition, state funding for community college employee benefits has been cut, adding that burden onto tuition and local property taxes. The resulting, reduction in per student state funding has been exacerbated by cutting formula funding for community colleges by an additional 10% to fund a "performance funding" scheme. To maintain community colleges' role in providing job skills lifelong education, we endorse:

- providing tuition-free community college to Texas high school graduates;
- full formula funding of the cost of instruction and the growth in student enrollments;
- requiring that any "incentive" funding be on top of formula funding rather than funded at the expense of the actual cost of operations;
- sufficient financial aid to cover eligible community college students for whom aid is not available;
- fully state-funded full time employee group health insurance and proportional health benefits for part-time instructors and restoration of funding for employee retirement;
- funding for new campuses and program expansions;
- funding for community colleges to assist local school districts in development of programs for the new career and technology endorsements and applied mathematics curriculum;
- requiring establishment of rules to ensure full transferability of community college credit hours to four-year institutions;
- sufficient funding for Adult Basic Education to fully cover the demand for services; and
- elimination of financial aid rules that penalize students who transfer to universities from community colleges.

To prevent further erosion of community colleges' ability to serve their communities, Texas Democrats oppose:

- shifting the basis of formula funding away from actual costs and
- "incentive" programs that would discriminate against colleges and programs serving disadvantaged and non-traditional students or against non-degree skill-building and retraining programs.

Diversity and Safety

Texas Democrats support innovative approaches to ensure diversity and safety in every Texas institution of higher education. We strongly support:

- maintaining the "Top 10% Rule" established by Democrats that guarantees access to our universities for the best students from all communities and regions of Texas;
- encouraging universities to offer culturally competent and culturally diverse curricula, student activities, and student recruitment policies that promote understanding, respect and

- acceptance;
- strict enforcement of policies that prohibit discrimination or harassment in any Texas institution of higher education against any person on the basis of race, sex, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, citizenship or military status;
 - repealing campus carry policies for public university and community college campuses; and
 - comprehensive programs to combat the campus sexual assault crisis.