

Texas Higher Education FOUNDATION



Our Mission:

As a trusted partner and philanthropic agent for higher education in Texas, the Texas Higher Education Foundation is a catalyst for purposeful and strategic impact at scale.

Welcome to the Texas Higher Education Foundation's (THEF) inaugural newsletter!

Since 2001, THEF has served as the non-profit partner of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). We are uniquely attuned to agency priorities and have the ability to foster and cultivate relationships with philanthropic and corporate partners.

Recent years have marked a new chapter of THEF and THECB partnership, with THEF more purposefully supporting the development and goals of the state's revised strategic plan for higher education, ***Building a Talent Strong Texas.***

We believe achieving the vision set forth by this plan will lead us to a future where Texas is among the highest-achieving and globally competitive states in the nation. Fueled by this vision, THEF and THECB work together, optimizing public and private resources to develop and enhance initiatives that ensure all Texas students and families can access resources to improve their lives through higher education.

To date, the Foundation has raised more than \$27 million to advance higher education in Texas, with one-third of that total, approximately \$9 million, secured during Commissioner Keller's tenure, beginning in late 2019. The momentum gained by THEF under Commissioner Keller's leadership paired with the state's innovative and ambitious goals, make this an exciting time for THEF-shaping the future of higher education in Texas and leading the nation by supporting the goals of ***Building a Talent Strong Texas.***

We look forward to offering current and future partners a glimpse into the nature and mission of our work.

Letter from the Executive Director

Stepping into this role just over two years ago, I could have never anticipated the ways in which our world was about to fundamentally change. Among so many other things, COVID transformed both the nature and focus of our work.

But even before the pandemic, the Texas Higher Education Foundation (THEF) was embarking on a new phase of its journey as a strategic partner to the Coordinating Board (THECB), in alignment with Commissioner Keller's vision to optimize public and private resources to the enhanced benefit of Texas students and families.

In the early months of the pandemic, we partnered with multiple foundations to stand up the Texas Emergency Aid Grant Program – providing flexible resources to 86 public and private, two-year and four-year institutions across Texas, filling crucial gaps in emergency aid programs and enabling thousands of students to stay enrolled.



Then, in late 2020, THEF and THECB launched a joint effort to revise and refresh the statewide strategic plan for higher education, then known as *60x30TX*. Over the course of a year and a half, THEF and THECB held ten virtual listening sessions across the state with hundreds of employers, higher education leaders, policymakers, and other stakeholders. We engaged leading state and national experts, and we polled the public to better understand what Texas expects and needs from its colleges and universities. The result is a plan that reflects the needs of Texans and broadens our focus in ways that promote Texas higher education as an engine of economic growth and opportunity. In January 2022, the Board adopted that plan- ***Building a Talent Strong Texas.***

And finally, alongside all of this work were opportunities to partner with philanthropy in support of key strategic initiatives, such as:

- Redesigning our college and career advising tools in ways that better meet students' needs
- Aligning the Coordinating Board's internal structure to serve the vision of the new strategic plan
- Modernizing our state's education and workforce data infrastructure to provide actionable insights to institutional leaders, policymakers, students and families, and other stakeholders to enable success

These are but a few examples of how catalytic investments made through the Foundation have accelerated the work of the Coordinating Board to support millions of Texans seeking to improve their lives through higher education and create a globally competitive workforce for our state.

The work is just beginning, and we are excited for the many partnership opportunities to come!

Raising the Bar: *Building a Talent Strong Texas*

In late 2020, THECB partnered with THEF to update the state strategic plan for higher education. After gathering feedback-through listening sessions across the state engaging hundreds of employers, higher education leaders, policymakers, state and national experts, and polling the public to understand what Texas needs now from colleges and universities-the demands were clear.

Employers increasingly rely on highly educated workers, Texans need postsecondary credentials of value, and innovation continuously remakes the economic landscape. From these findings, a new strategic plan, called *Building a Talent Strong Texas*, was created. It builds on the ambitious work of the former strategic plan, 60x30TX, and sets a bolder, market-driven vision that raises the bar for Texas higher education.

The plan includes 3 primary pillars:

ATTAINMENT
of Postsecondary
Credentials

Postsecondary
CREDENTIALS
OF VALUE

RESEARCH,
Development,
and Innovation

Here is some of what makes the new plan bold and innovative:



Texas will be the first state in the nation to tie our completion goals directly to the wage premiums associated with postsecondary credentials.



The attainment target, initially focused only on 25-34-year-olds, is expanded to include 35-64-year-olds-acknowledging and embracing all Texans who want to pursue higher education, including working adults who may benefit from more flexible, short-term programs aligned with current and emerging jobs.



The plan includes broad new goals for strengthening colleges' and universities' roles in promoting research, development, and innovation, to propel our state's global competitiveness well into the future.



Across all goals, the plan renews our commitment to equity. Over the past decade, Texas added more people than any other state. Over 95% of that growth was in communities of color. If we're not advancing our goals equitably, we can't achieve them.

The path forward is clear—when we help more students graduate with credentials of value and foster innovation, we increase Texans' opportunities to succeed, while bolstering Texas' ability to flourish. That's how we keep ***Building a Talent Strong Texas.***

Supporting Partnership



Major Policy Discussion: Initiatives to Support High-Achieving High School Students

Recent data reveal that enrollment of Texas students directly from high school to college was declining prior to the pandemic and continues to do so despite our state's increasing high school population. Additionally concerning is the fact that Texas is not reaching all academically talented students, including many historically underrepresented groups in higher education.

In response, and in keeping with the strategic plan's commitment to equity, the April 2022 THECB Board meeting focused its major policy discussion on two initiatives designed to ensure high-achieving high school graduates have much-needed support and resources to enroll in college directly after high school.

Texas First: An Early High School Completion Program and Scholarship



Texas First builds on legislation creating an early high school graduation option for students demonstrating early readiness for college. Qualifying students can graduate high school early and be awarded a \$10,000, one-time scholarship if they enroll in a Texas public institution. Through coordination with the Texas Education Agency, this option could be available to students as early as Spring 2023.

Texas Leadership Scholars Program



Texas Leadership Scholars uses Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Funds to seed a program aimed at increasing the number of high-achieving Texans from lower-income backgrounds who enroll in higher education.

Launching in Fall 2022, beginning with 250 to 300 students a year, the program will serve as the state's premier merit-based scholarship and leadership development opportunity for high-achieving, emerging leaders from lower-income families.

Scholars will have 100% of their tuition and fees covered, through a combination of federal, state, and institutional aid, plus a room and board stipend. Additionally, students will take courses as a cohort and have opportunities to develop leadership and career skills through mentorships, internships, group service projects, a scholar's conference, study abroad, and preparation for additional graduate and professional education.

To listen to the entirety of the April 2022 THECB Major Policy Discussion, visit:
<https://www.highered.texas.gov/apps/events/board-meetings/board-meeting185/>

Leadership Spotlight: Neal W. Adams, Chair of the Board



Neal Adams
Board Chairman
Texas Higher Education
Foundation

In this, our inaugural newsletter, we honor the leadership of Neal W. Adams, who has served on the THEF Board since 2009 and as Chairman since 2011.

A deeply involved alumnus of Texas A&M University, Chairman Adams experienced first-hand the power of what higher education can do to improve opportunity for generations of a family. Both his father and uncle utilized the GI Bill following service in World War II, and he believes that he, and many others, “stand on the shoulders” of those who benefited from the historic higher education investment.

Fellow board member Darryl Heath shared, "Neal has a deep-rooted passion for education, and he brings that to every thought he has concerning the THEF." Neal feels very strongly about what education has done for him in his life, and he sees it as our duty and responsibility as Texans to give that same opportunity to as many students as possible, regardless of their background or situation.

In addition to leading THEF's work with philanthropy, he also deeply values the role of Texas corporations in promoting higher education opportunities for all Texans. "His efforts to engage the support of the business community of Texas for the importance of higher education will have a lasting and positive benefit for the citizens and the economy of the State," shared fellow board member Stuart Stedman.

Chairman Adams believes that through his work with THEF, he is “paying it forward” to the next generation of Texans to ensure that higher education is an opportunity for others to experience the power of education, so they can, in turn, make a difference for others. In reflecting on his leadership, fellow board members Dr. Richard M. Box and Ray Messer shared that "Neal's heart and soul is truly in seeing that the opportunity for a higher education degree is available to all Texans who aspire to have one" and "there is no one more dedicated to making higher education accessible to anyone who desires to continue their education beyond secondary school.”

Thank you, Chairman Adams, for your tireless advocacy for Texas students!

Case in Point: Data Modernization

The Data Modernization Initiative serves as an exemplar of how leveraging public and private funding can catalyze a THECB strategic priority.



The Challenge:

Texas has a rich repository of K-12, higher education, and workforce data, but the current data infrastructure makes it difficult for stakeholders to readily access the information for informed, timely decision-making.

The Response:

THEF has stewarded almost \$6 million in philanthropic support, enabling THECB to engage state and national technology data experts and practitioners to support and inform the groundwork of the project, while significant federal GEER resources were used for the logistical and structural components of the undertaking. Among other tools, some of the first data dashboards released will be tied to strategic plan goals, empowering students and families, colleges and universities, employers, and policymakers to make timely decisions based on access to robust data.