



## IN THIS ISSUE

### Page 2

- Message from Our Executive Director

### Page 3

- Highlights from the 2023 Higher EDge Conference

### Page 4

- Looking Back at 2023 and Forward to 2024

## Building Momentum After a Historic Year for Texas Higher Education

2023 represented a year of historic progress for higher education. The year was filled with activities supporting higher education opportunities and access across Texas. The partnership between the Texas Higher Education Foundation (THEF) and our partner, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) helped build a solid foundation for the exciting road ahead.

In 2023, the THECB launched multiple ambitious initiatives, released new online tools, established new partnerships, and expanded opportunities for students, institutions, and communities across our state.

Across this work, there is evidence of the catalytic role THEF partnerships have played in furthering strategic priorities and our shared goals for advancing higher education across the great state of Texas.

In this issue of the THEF newsletter, we'll delve into a few of the ways grants to THEF have furthered THECB's strategic initiatives, helping transcend the traditional pace of change in the world of higher education.

We'll also look ahead to this new year, a time that will undoubtedly be filled with abundant opportunities for developing deeper partnerships and expanding what is possible through our collective efforts. Working together, we will achieve impact at scale and realize the vision of Building a Talent Strong Texas.

# Message from the Executive Director: Transcending the Traditional Pace of Change

Happy New Year to you all!

As is customary, the start of a new year serves as a moment to reflect on past events and set goals for the coming year.

During his State of Higher Education Address, Commissioner Keller did just that by looking back on Texas higher education's historic year and urging institutional, industry, and philanthropic leaders to set their sights on transcending the traditional pace of change to ensure we stay competitive throughout the 21st century.

Last year's events continue to position Texas higher education to lead on multiple fronts – with new resources, state incentives, and expanded student support translating into increased enrollment in every higher education sector. This reality is evidenced by the 88th Legislature's historic investment of more than \$5 billion for our students and higher education institutions to advance our shared visions for Building a Talent Strong Texas.



Melissa Henderson  
THEF Executive Director  
&  
THECB Chief of Staff

Across this work, we can see the catalytic role grants to the Texas Higher Education Foundation have played in laying the groundwork for the priorities these legislative investments will carry forward. Philanthropic funds supported the development of the first iteration of My Texas Future. The initial roll-out aims to help working-age Texans identify a degree or credential that propels them to lasting, successful careers with greater earning potential and low or no debt. Now, legislative investments will support additional iterations of the tool designed specifically to help K-12 learners transition from high school to college.

Philanthropic dollars also supported the work of the Texas Commission on Community College Finance. Funds for public polling and message testing to gauge Texans' views of community colleges provided input for the Commission to produce a stakeholder-informed final report. These recommendations guided the way for the passage of House Bill 8, a \$684 million investment in overhauling the community college funding system and bolstering community colleges' roles in meeting emerging workforce needs.

Grant funds also supported the creation of a report identifying strategies for improving innovation and technology transfer ecosystems, providing a framework to guide strategic legislative investment for research, development, and innovation across the state.

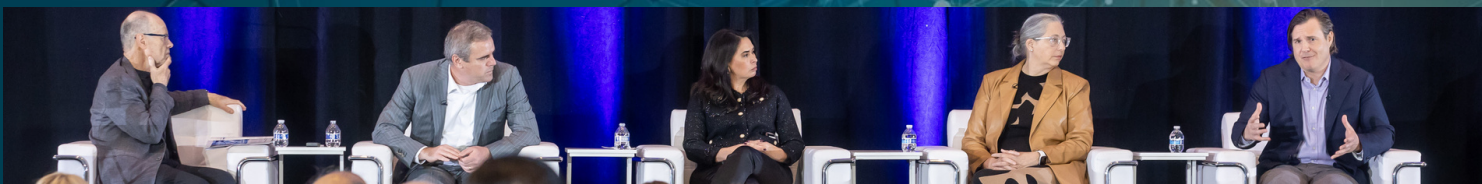
Commissioner Keller emphasized how these historic legislative investments have come not a moment too soon. Last year, our state's economy moved up to the eighth largest in the world. Our state has seen 24 consecutive months of job growth, and we continue to create more jobs than any other state. However, many of these, and future, jobs will require education and training beyond a high school diploma, and nearly 4 million working-aged Texans have some college and no credentials. Another 2 million don't have high school diplomas or equivalents.

To close his address, the Commissioner underscored the need to innovate at an unprecedented scale and speed to meet the urgency of this moment and the needs of our communities, economy, and state.

The Texas Higher Education Foundation will continue to play a pivotal role in accelerating the pace of change by partnering with the THECB to catalyze innovative solutions that maximize the impact and utility of public and private funds, furthering strategic priorities and our collective commitment to serving as a resource, partner, and advocate for students and institutions across the state.

With these ideas as our framework, we look forward to a new year of possibilities, deepening our internal and external partnerships, and furthering the goals of Building a Talent Strong Texas!





Higher EDge 2023 had it all – panels on artificial intelligence, student success, innovations in digital learning, tech transfer (pictured above), and the historic 88th Texas Legislative session all showcased insightful, cross-sector connections and collaborations. With more than 500 policymakers, state and national thought leaders, and institutional leaders from across Texas in attendance, it was the biggest and best convening to date. We wanted to share just a few of the many highlights from 2023, and we can't wait to welcome you back next year. Save the date for December 12-13, 2024!

The conference hosted the first-ever EDge Expo, a showcase of THECB programs and initiatives designed to foster student success, support families and educators, and empower educational institutions statewide.



Nicole Smith, Ph.D., a research professor and chief economist at the Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce, presented information about the future of our talent pipeline and implications for the future of work.



Governor Greg Abbott highlighted the establishment of the Texas University Fund and community college finance legislation and what these efforts mean for the continued success of the state's economy.



Commissioner Harrison Keller closed out the conference with his annual State of Higher Education Address, urging leaders to transcend the traditional pace of change ensure we can meet the state's future economic.

**A Big  
Thank You  
to the 2023  
Higher EDge  
Sponsors!**



# Looking Back to 2023 & Ahead to 2024

Looking back, 2023 was a historically successful year for Texas higher education. It was also a productive time for the partnership of the Texas Higher Education Foundation and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board as we collectively work toward achieving the goals of Building a Talent Strong Texas.

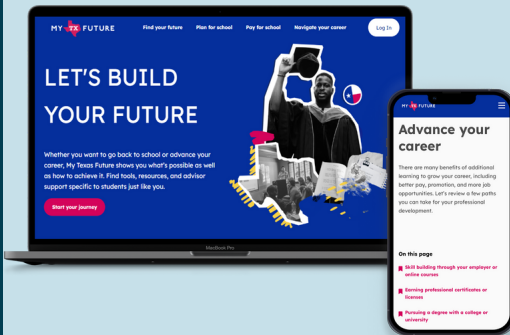
Here's a look back at some of the work that rolled out in 2023 to support key agency priorities. Thanks to our partners, THEF was able to provide support for each of these initiatives, illustrating the role private funds play in amplifying the impact of public dollars.

In tandem with the historic investments from the 88th Texas Legislature, these new resources present abundant opportunities to serve our students by furthering and expanding upon the important work underway.

## My Texas Future

Philanthropic funding catalyzed public dollars to support the design and marketing for the first iteration of [the My Texas Future \(MTF\) tool](#). The initial rollout focused on engaging a population essential to our state's workforce talent pipeline, adult learners, and the next iteration, geared toward the needs of students transitioning from high school to college, was recently launched.

In 2024, philanthropic funding will support work to streamline admissions with tools housed within MTF. Integration with the new Apply Texas site, as well as a Direct Admissions Pathway, will ultimately enable students to receive offers of admission as early as the end of their junior year of high school.



## Secure Data Dashboards

Thanks to generous philanthropic support, the THECB was able to engage a world-class technology strategy and consulting firm to guide the extraordinarily complex work of modernizing the agency's technical infrastructure. One of the results of this work, the secure data dashboards, was featured at an interactive Higher EDge Preconference session, and offered institutional leaders access to actionable information to make data-informed decisions.



## Statewide Course-Sharing

Last year, philanthropic funding supported the design of a course-sharing pilot, providing a framework for the rollout carried forward by public funds. This year, philanthropic funds will help in executing the next step of the work to develop a statewide [Course-Sharing Consortium](#). The Consortium will help students achieve their goals more efficiently by increasing access to online courses through participating institutions across Texas.

## Fostering Technology Transfer & Innovation

Texas' higher education institutions are vital for global competitiveness, yet they often face challenges in translating research into commercial products.

In December 2023, supported by a grant from THEF, THECB released a report with strategic and coordinated approaches to address these challenges. From Insights to Impact: Fostering Innovation Through Texas Higher Education provides a roadmap for achieving three key goals: closing gaps in regional ecosystems across the state and maximizing the return on investment in the state's academic research and technology development.

A Technical Appendix will be released in Spring 2024 with additional details, including case studies, implementation steps, and other recommendations for how leaders across the state can collectively strengthen innovation and commercialization within Texas higher education.



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