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Carrying the Momentum Forward

Welcome to the fifth issue of the Texas Higher Education Foundation (THEF) newsletter!

In this edition, we share a message from our THEF Board Chairman, Neal Adams, reflecting on Commissioner Keller's transformative leadership.

We'll also highlight some of the ways the unique and valuable partnership between THEF and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) supports stakeholder engagement and cross-sector collaborations that catalyze statewide strategic initiatives.

Finally, we'll share details about some of our new partnerships and opportunities ahead with Building a Talent Strong Texas providing a visionary roadmap for carrying our momentum forward.

DataBridge is live!

We invite you to explore the state's resource for insightful and interactive higher education dashboards and reports.

Reflections on Transformative Leadership

Message from our Board Chairman

I have served as a member of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (“Coordinating Board”) (2001-2007), as its Vice Chair (2006-2007), and as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Texas Higher Education Foundation (“THEF”) since 2007.

As Chairman of THEF since 2011, I have experienced first-hand the power of higher education and what it can do to improve opportunity for generations of a family. This perspective has shaped my belief in the transformative power of education for individuals and for society as a whole. Through this lens, I offer reflections on my collaborative work with a colleague and my friend, Dr. Harrison Keller.

As THEF Chairman, I have witnessed the profound impact of Commissioner Keller's vision for nearly five years. Under his stewardship, we've seen unprecedented achievements that have reshaped the future of education in our state. Though the reasons for these achievements are innumerable, the theme of this remarkable success can be surmised with one word: TRUST.

The evidence of this TRUST can be seen in the ways stakeholders across the state fully support the vision put forth in Building a Talent Strong Texas, the state strategic plan that emphasizes credentials of value. The plan aims to ensure higher education's commitment to serving as a primary pathway to a world of opportunity and that there's a place for all Texans in tomorrow's economy.

The evidence of this TRUST can be seen through the historic investments made by the 88th Texas Legislature when it made a once-in-a-generation commitment of more than \$5 billion to higher education. This investment increased access, affordability, and attainment; supported the creation of a dynamic community college finance model; and bolstered institutional research and innovation across the state, which is already making a difference in the lives of students and families across the state.

The evidence of this TRUST can be seen through the philanthropic investments in Texas higher education THEF has received. When Commissioner Keller accepted his position in 2019, he saw THEF's potential to serve as a strategic partner, moving key agency priorities forward. Since then, THEF has become an integral part of the agency's work, bringing in and deploying nearly \$17 million in grants since 2019. This has helped accelerate work to support students and institutions by acting as a catalyst for philanthropic funding to maximize public investments.

Finally, this TRUST finds its embodiment in the dedicated individuals who are employed at THECB. These committed professionals remain steadfast in their mission to enhance educational opportunities, ensuring the transformative impact initiated under Commissioner Keller's leadership continues to benefit all Texans. They are poised to sustain and amplify the momentum, collectively guiding the vision of Building a Talent Strong Texas into the future.

As we look forward, we will all continue to support and contribute to these endeavors with steadfast determination, firm in the belief that by continuing to cultivate the TRUST that has been the cornerstone of our success, the best days lie ahead.

Thank you, Commissioner Keller, for your service to the students of Texas and your incredible leadership. We wish you the best on your new adventure!



Congratulations Chairman Farias!



Chairman of the THECB and member of the THEF Board of Trustees Dr. Fred Farias was recently awarded two prestigious distinctions. First, he received the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley President Medal of Honor, bestowed upon those “whose extraordinary contributions and exemplary dedication have profoundly impacted the university.” Second, he received the 2024 Mollie Armstrong Leadership Award, presented by the Texas Optometric Organization, for significant public service for the visual welfare of others, educational institutions and organizations, research programs, and civic and community groups. Congratulations, Chairman!

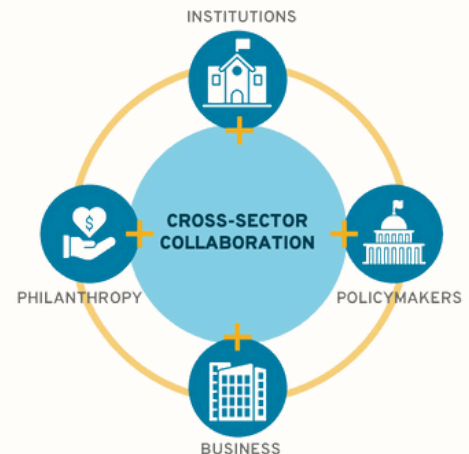
Partners in Progress: Supporting a Shared Strategic Vision for Our State

Commissioner Keller's tenure with the Coordinating Board has marked a new chapter for Texas higher education, resulting in, among many other things, a refreshed strategic plan for the state. The plan's goals highlight the Coordinating Board's ambitious vision—for all Texans to have the opportunity to benefit from earning a credential of value and, in turn, participate in and contribute to Texas' robust economy. This vision set a new national standard with its focus on credentials of value, guiding our strategic direction and sparking critical policy discussions nationwide.

Looking back over the last five years, we'd like to briefly reflect on how the strategic vision of Building a Talent Strong Texas has ushered in a new era of partnership for THEF and the THECB, creating meaningful ways to imbue our work with cross-sector stakeholder engagement and collaboration.

The Foundation has served as a partner in progress through each phase of the plan's development and rollout, serving as a bridge for stakeholder engagement. From the service of THEF Board Members on the Building a Talent Strong Texas Steering Committee, philanthropic funding to message test and poll stakeholders across the state, to support for a statewide listening tour to garner critical input, THEF helped ensure the plan reflected what Texans wanted and needed from higher education.

By leveraging philanthropic funding, the Foundation's work to support THECB strategic initiatives now centers on transforming the vision set forth in Building a Talent Strong Texas into reality. Across the agency, in areas such as college and career advising, data modernization, and agency communications, philanthropic investments enable the agency to better understand our audiences and design tools to meet their specific needs. Philanthropic-supported work aimed at cultivating cross-sector collaboration and engagement from key audiences includes:



Conducting User-Centered Design Research

Philanthropic funding has enabled us to take deep dives into the needs, perceptions, and experiences of key target populations, such as students and advisors, to develop essential insight that guides development and design of resources such as [My Texas Future](#), the one-stop advising portal designed to ensure all students have access the advising resources they need to earn a credential of value and benefit from Texas' world-class economy.

Creating Accessible and Actionable Data Tools

Funding also supports THECB data modernization efforts by creating data tools, such as the newly launched [DataBridge site](#), and developing training resources to ensure institutional leaders can effectively access and use Texas higher education and workforce data, so they can make data-informed decisions about the future.

Catalyzing Adoption of Tools and Resources

Philanthropic dollars have also been used to conduct market research with different types of students, from middle and high school students to recent graduates to working adults, to cultivate and elevate awareness of the products and tools the agency is creating. The insights gleaned from these efforts is then used to catalyze the adoption of resources by ensuring that our messaging and tools resonate with and provide ways for students, often in different places in their lives, to engage with higher education successfully.

Looking ahead, we envision a future filled with opportunities to continue serving as a partner in progress by supporting stakeholder engagement and cross-sector partnerships that enable the Coordinating Board to fulfill its mission of serving as a resource, partner, and advocate for higher education across our great state. By working together, we're not just envisioning the future of Texas; we're collectively ushering our strategic vision to reality.

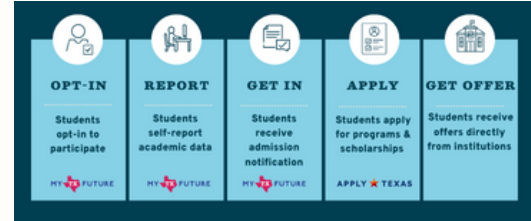
New Foundation-Supported Work: Supporting Strategic Initiatives Across the Agency

Texas Direct Admissions Pathway and more!

We are also thrilled to share a variety of recent partnerships that will support students across the state. From finding ways to increase course offerings to supporting adult learners in getting the skills and credentials they need to succeed, here are some of our recent philanthropically supported strategic initiatives to Build a Talent Strong Texas!

We are excited to announce two new grants supporting the creation of a Texas Direct Admissions Pathway. The Direct Admissions Pathway will allow students to see within My Texas Future where they have been admitted among participating institutions as early as the end of their junior year of high school without submitting an application. Once they know which institutions have offered direct admissions, they can complete an application in ApplyTexas, allowing institutions to determine scholarship and program eligibility. The Direct Admission functionality will roll out this fall and will be housed within My Texas Future (MTF), a one-stop advising tool for college and career planning needs for all Texans.

Direct Admissions Process



A few other grants we'd like to highlight, illustrating the spectrum of work catalyzed by philanthropic funding include:



Apply Texas Integration

Building on previous philanthropic support for work taking a deep dive into the student user experience, grant funding is now being used to connect the new Apply Texas site with the national universal application, CommonApp, continuing to streamline student accessibility to higher education options.

Statewide Course Sharing

After the successful rollout of a philanthropically funded course sharing pilot, grant dollars are now supporting the expansion of these efforts, helping to ensure students, particularly those in rural areas, have access to the courses they need to achieve their higher education goals regardless of their location in the state.



Postsecondary Employment Outcomes Coalition

Philanthropic funding supports the work of the PSEO Coalition, a collaboration between higher education leaders and the U.S. Census Bureau to utilize national earnings data to highlight higher education's economic and non-economic benefits, providing insights into credentials of value.

Opportunity High School Diploma

Grant funding is supporting engagement with employers and institutions to provide key input for developing and implementing the Opportunity HS Diploma Program, providing a simplified path for adult learners to earn a high school diploma while simultaneously completing workforce education.



**TODAY'S STUDENT.
TOMORROW'S TEXAS.**

SAVE THE DATE:

December 12-13, 2024

AT&T Hotel and Conference Center

THECB
HIGHEREDGE