

Legislative Update



A Publication of the **TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION**
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Budget Writers Face Historic Shortfall

The 2011 Regular Session of the Texas Legislature will provide a major challenge for community and technical college educators, as lawmakers contend with a projected budget shortfall estimated to be as high as \$18 billion. The economic recession has been devastating to state and local governments nationwide, and Texas, while better off than many states, is no exception.

The state budget was helped considerably during the current biennium by the infusion of federal stimulus funds to all states in 2009. Although Congress enacted restrictions on how the money can be used, the boost relieved financial stress in all areas of the budget.

This “cushion” will not be available in 2011, as the Legislature gears up to convene in January. State leaders have pledged repeatedly that there will be no tax increases, and revenue collections from the sales tax and other sources remain anemic, despite signs of recovery.

“This is a time for us to be united as never before,” said Fred Newbury, TCCTA president. “I urge everyone to stay informed and to convey the importance of two-year colleges to legislators and community leaders in all areas of the state.”

TCCTA President Testifies

TCCTA president Fred Newbury testified before the Senate Committee on Higher Education, on June 24, addressing an interim legislative charge to examine ways to improve developmental education in Texas. The committee is chaired by Sen. Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo).

Dr. Newbury, professor of economics at Richland College, was an invited witness before the panel. Members of the committee at that time included: Sen. Robert Duncan (R-Lubbock), Sen. Dan Patrick (R-Houston), and Sen. Royce West (D-Dallas).

“We have a lot of work to do,” Dr. Newbury told the committee, responding to testimony from previous witnesses, including Commissioner of Higher Education Raymund Paredes,

who presented statistics on the low “success” rates in the field of developmental education. As the commissioner phrases it often, “Texas has improved, but not fast enough.”

Dr. Paredes, as reported in TCCTA communications frequently, has called for a complete overhaul of developmental education in Texas. He stated during the hearing, however, in response to a question from the panel, that the statistics in our state are consistent with nationwide data in the field. The commissioner also testified that (1) we need the best teachers in the discipline as instructors, (2) developmental reading and writing should be taught as one subject, (3) Adult Basic Education should be separate from developmental education, and (4) professional development for faculty in the field should be a priority.

Dr. Newbury praised the current programs that are showing promise, including the Achieving the Dream initiative. The nationwide program is concerned especially with students who traditionally face ethnic and income-related barriers to success.

As noted by a perennial chorus of developmental education instructors, there are plenty of good ideas out there. What is needed is a centralized location for sharing the latest developments and best practices, Dr. Newbury said.

He informed the Senate panel about The Network, an online resource initiated by TCCTA, and funded by the Perkins Foundation. Dr. Newbury commented that, regarding the plethora of impressive initiatives described during the hearing, “We thought it might be a good place to put all these things together.”

Sen. Zaffirini asked Dr. Newbury for more information on The Network.

Plan Now to Attend
TCCTA Conference for
Faculty Leaders
October 8-9
San Luis Hotel, Galveston

What You Can Do

by **Beaman Floyd**
TCCTA Lobbyist



The coming Regular Session of the Texas Legislature is likely to involve a number of difficult issues for us.

Lawmakers will be on a “money hunt” this Session, and where they find the revenue to balance the budget will likely come down to the final days of May, right before adjournment. It’s important for all of us to be prepared for the long haul.

I genuinely believe in the social good of your profession, and promise to continue engaging lawmakers and their staffs, urgently and constructively. As you might expect, when visiting with clients, I am asked, “What can I do?”

First, you can join TCCTA. Your association is respected in Austin, and policy makers pay attention when your professional voices speak in unison, from every campus—and legislative district—in Texas.

Next, get informed. Pay attention to the abundant information and commentary TCCTA provides.

Third, get to know your representative and senator now, while they are “at home.” Take advantage of the information provided under “Legislative Resources” at www.tccta.org. It’s the best collection of its kind.

Fourth, invite your representative and senator to visit your campus, ideally in a joint meeting with faculty, administration, and board members. It’s always impressive when all stakeholders are on the same page. As someone who represents clients in public education, I can tell you that such unity is very rare.

Finally, participate in TCCTA events—especially the Fall Conference for Faculty Leaders on October 8-9 in Galveston, and the Annual Convention on January 27-29 in San Antonio.

I hope to see you there!

Benefits Changes Set to Take Effect in September

As reported on the TCCTA Blog this summer, a number of changes in health benefits for higher education employees were approved by the board of trustees of the Employees Retirement System. The changes, which mainly involve price hikes for some medical procedures and doctor visits, take effect September 1.

Importantly, these adjustments were designed to accommodate a budget shortfall for the current biennium and are not related to more severe problems with medical inflation that must be addressed in the forthcoming Regular Session.

The ERS Web site is www.ers.state.tx.us.

Momentum Points Proposal Takes Shape

Over the summer the Coordinating Board published its funding recommendations for the next Regular Session of the Legislature, which convenes in January. As expected, the Board endorsed the proposals of Commissioner of Higher Education Raymund Paredes, including the use of Momentum Points to encourage higher education institutions to find ways to improve student performance. Simply put, schools would receive more revenue if their students achieve additional degrees or credentials, advance through the curriculum, or transfer successfully. An explanatory document states that more precise definitions will be the result of participation by a committee of stakeholders, including faculty.

Significantly, the revenue for achieving the Momentum Points would come from ten percent of the base formula appropriation, which reflects actual previous enrollment and associated costs. College leaders asserted in testimony

that such funds should be supplemental to base funding, to serve as an incentive, rather than as a penalty. However, a statement accompanying the Coordinating Board official report says, "The state's fiscal environment makes such an approach unrealistic at this time."

The Board recommends a funding increase of over 19 percent above the previous biennial level. Nevertheless, experience has demonstrated that "full formula funding" is elusive to say the least. Currently the Legislature is funding only 51 percent of the formula, and the state is facing a budget deficit of unprecedented magnitude.

The Board did, however, agree with college officials that implementation should occur over a reasonable period of time. As the proposal stands presently, funding for Momentum Points would commence during the second year of the next biennium (2012-13).

HB 2054 "Transparency" Law Attracts Attention

Texas may be the proverbial canary in a coal mine when it comes to the prospective online publication of student evaluations of faculty. At least it's the only state with a legislative mandate mentioned in the April 25 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, in an article on the variety of approaches for evaluations used around the country.

As reported often in TCCTA communications, the Legislature in 2009 enacted HB 2504, requiring all colleges and universities to formulate a plan to post evaluations, and other course information, online.

Some schools report substantial costs associated with the law. Members are urged to share such information with colleagues by communicating with the TCCTA State Office.

TCCTA Leader Testifies on Faculty Workload

Danita McAnally, dean of assessment and development at Amarillo College (and TCCTA president from 2006-07), was among the invited witnesses before the Senate Committee on Higher Education, on July 22, offering testimony on faculty workload from the perspective of community colleges.

She pointed out the unique role that community colleges play as today's "workhorse" of higher education, especially given the current surge in enrollment of under-prepared students. She added that funding shortages have exacerbated workload problems. Colleges that are strapped for funds rely upon more supplemental adjunct instruction, which often draws full time faculty away from teaching and advising so they can fulfill other institutional responsibilities.

More Resources Available Online

Please visit the "Legislative Resources" section of the TCCTA Web site for useful tools in communicating with policy makers.

Members are also urged to consult the "News" and "Blog" features of the site for news affecting community colleges and updates on the latest developments in Austin and around the country. Visitors to the site are encouraged to respond on the Blog to all timely issues affecting the profession.

Get connected!

www.tccta.org

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