

# SUMMIT HIGHLIGHTS:

## VALU[ED]: CENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE QUEST FOR EQUITABLE OUTCOMES FOR TEXANS



As communities look to rebuild and reimagine their structures in light of the COVID pandemic, the value of higher education has come into question.

On March 25, 2022, Trellis Foundation hosted a [Summit on Postsecondary Access, Affordability & Attainment](#), convening many of the foremost stakeholders in Texas to discuss both public policy and regional and philanthropic levers to support statewide priorities, such as the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's strategic plan "Building a Talent Strong Texas." This year's Summit explored the ways that we may reframe the perceptions and realities of the value of higher education to ensure greater participation and success for Texans and the state of Texas as a whole.

The conversation was grounded in the extensive work of the [Postsecondary Value Commission](#). Presenters included members of that commission—**Dr. Mildred García**, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and **Margaret Spellings**, Texas 2036—as well as the **Tri-Agency commissioners** and **higher education and business leaders** from regions across the state.

This convening summary provides key takeaways from each panel, policy and practice recommendations, and contextual data on college affordability in Texas.

### ✓ KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Despite current debates on the importance of postsecondary education, **college is worth it, but we must transform educational opportunities to be responsive to the needs and challenges of today's students and employers.**
- Students are deciding to pursue postsecondary education because they view it as leverage to change their lives, but they need increased coaching on opportunities and elimination of process and logistical barriers in order to access education in the midst of work and family obligations.
- We are experiencing a change in employer needs across the country; this offers a pivotal opportunity for postsecondary systems to partner with employers for the economic prosperity of students, businesses, various industries, and local communities.

“If you're going to do the work on the value of education, getting lots of voices into the conversation matters.

*Dr. Mark Milliron, Trellis Foundation Board Chair*

## THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Questions of the worth and value of higher education gained traction over the past several years, but its relevance grew during the pandemic alongside the declines in postsecondary enrollment. On the national level, the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation and the Institute for Higher Education Policy gathered a commission to study this issue and to make recommendations for policy and practice to reinforce what the data has long supported: education beyond high school is the surest path to economic mobility for individuals and thriving communities and economies across our nation.

Trellis Foundation has considered these questions in the context of our mission and strategy – with a particular emphasis on the importance and urgency for Texas stakeholders to understand and take action to strengthen the support for higher education and to smooth the pathways for student success.



*Dr. Mark Milliron, Trellis Foundation Board Chair*

To that end, several data points opened the convening to set the context for the event:

Texans of color accounted for 95% of our state’s population growth – a growth of 16 percent from 2010 to 2020. Hispanic Texans were responsible for half of that increase. This is a snapshot of who we are – a Texas family photo, if you will. And while we need to BE better at serving the students who are the future of Texas, we have a place to start. We have some amazing institutions – 2-year, 4-year, public, and private – that include 97 HSIs and 9 HBCUs – many of which are consistently, nationally recognized for high rates of success supporting students to and through graduation and boosting the social and economic mobility of their graduates. The expertise is already here – we just need to support and grow it.

Direct-to-college enrollment rates in Texas have been flat to slightly declining over the past few years, but the rates for high school graduates matriculating dipped considerably for the class of 2020. When you consider this data along with the workforce sector’s alarm about a dearth of qualified talent for existing open jobs, Texas has sufficient cause for concern.

Hispanic Texans are almost the state’s largest demographic group

The 2020 census shows there are nearly 2 million more Texans who identify as Hispanic than in 2010.

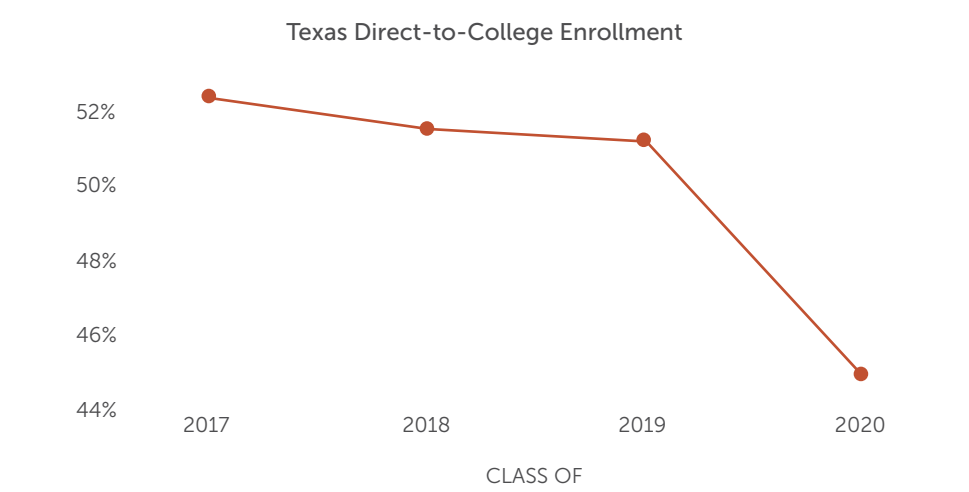
GROUP	2010 POPULATION	2020 POPULATION	2020 PERCENT	INCREASE
White	11,397,345	11,584,597	39.75%	187,252
Hispanic	9,460,921	11,441,717	39.26%	1,980,796
Black	2,888,825	3,444,712	11.82%	557,887
Asian	948,426	1,561,518	5.36%	613,092

Note: The white, Asian, and Black categories include individuals who indicated they were not Hispanic and selected only one race on the 2020 census. The Hispanic category includes individuals of any race.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Credit: Jason Kao  
Source: <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/08/12/texas-2020-census/>

Finally, we know there’s been unprecedented federal support for higher education and K-12 in response to COVID, but that support has an expiration date in the not-too-distant future. The fact remains that support from the state has never recovered from cuts made in 2008. We have a unique opportunity to examine what can be done and to make a case for the state to level up the support for the strategies that work. If we truly believe that there’s an undeniable reliance on education to maintain and grow the state’s economy, then we need to talk about the state’s role in making that happen.



Dr. Richard Rhodes, Immediate Past Chair, Trellis Foundation



Source: <https://www.edtx.org/txcn/resources/direct-to-college-enrollment-dashboard>

One of the primary goals of the Summit was to facilitate and encourage the unpacking of all the nuances that come with considering the value of higher ed. Executive Director Kristin Boyer noted in her remarks:

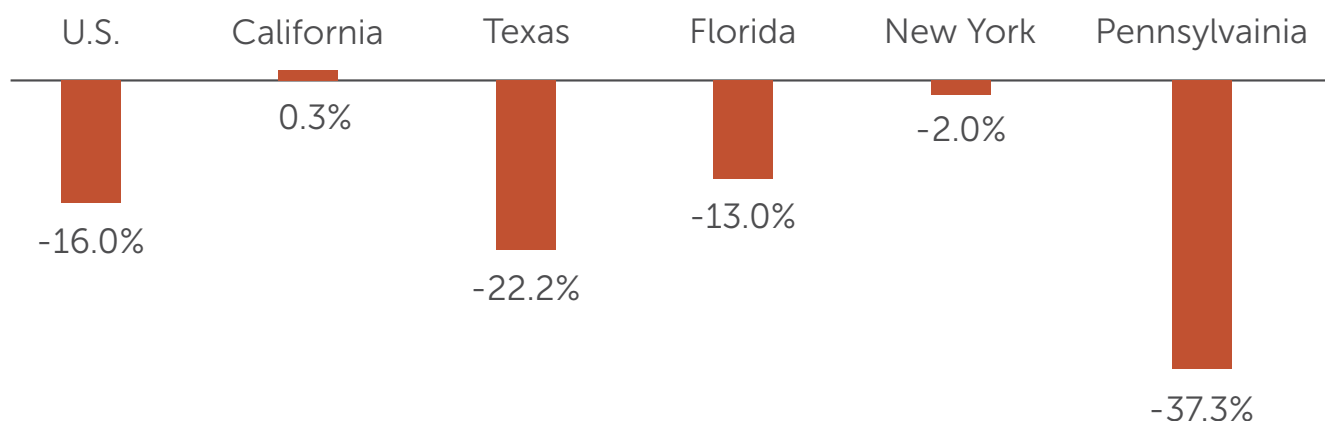
"I can see the assets we have to work with and the power of collective effort. I believe the promise of the American higher education system is glorious, but it is inequitably available and attainable. ...And so, this is what's at the heart of our conversation today: What is the value of higher education? Who gets to determine it? How do we measure it? And what are the implications for all of us individually and collectively?"

As expressed by many of the day's speakers and panelists, Trellis Foundation intends for the summit to be an inflection point, a catalyst for new collaboration, and an invitation to work together to address the challenges and expand the successes found throughout students' education and career pathways.



*Kristin Boyer, Executive Director, Trellis Foundation*

#### Percent Change in State Spending Per Student, Inflation Adjusted, 2008-2018



States shown in order of population size

State spending per student has fallen nationwide by about 16 percent since 2008. Among the six largest states\*, Texas had one of the largest drops in state spending per student, at 22 percent. California was one of only four states to have a positive change in state spending per student between 2008 and 2016.

\* Illinois, the sixth largest state, is not included because of the unavailability of the data needed to make valid comparisons.

Source: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/state-of-student-aid-2021/section-4-cost-of-education-and-sources-of-aid-in-texas/>

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Our leaders, all of them, [need to] start talking about the centrality of developed people, educated and healthy people, for the future of our state.

*Margaret Spellings, President/CEO of Texas 2036 and former U.S. Secretary of Education*

## ✓ KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Students want postsecondary education, but we need to meet today's students where they are
- The processes for accessing higher education are prohibitively complicated
- More resources are required for institutions and students, such as doubling Pell grant amounts
- Career prep should be a domain of 4-year institutions; too, not just community colleges.
- Accountability for student outcomes must be shared by institutions as well, rather than falling solely on students
- A robust postsecondary plan for the state must incorporate HBCUs as well, particularly given their demonstrated important outcomes for Black students
- Texas lawmakers must return to adequately and fully funding K-12 and higher education, within expectations of accountability, transparency and actionable data

## NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE VALUE OF HIGHER ED – A CONVERSATION

Summit conversations kicked off with an interview by Evan Smith, CEO and Founder of the Texas Tribune, of two members of the Postsecondary Value Commission: **Dr. Mildred García**, President, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and **Margaret Spellings**, President/CEO of Texas 2036 and former U.S. Secretary of Education. The panel discussed levers at the federal, state and institutional levels to create value for today's students.

Based on their work with the Commission and as higher ed leaders, both speakers noted that funding, incentives and accountability should be better aligned; align incentives and desired outcomes for K-12, higher ed and the business community.

The Commission, they explained, emphasized the importance of institutional transformation to support students; colleges must use data to understand the student experience and must share with students the career and earnings data essential for decision-making.

Lack of affordability is often more a function of lack of access to the knowledge needed to navigate the cost and resources successfully. For example, students need the to know the calculation of the number of years it will take for their educational choices to lead to earnings above the high school graduate baseline.

Simplifying complex processes and communicating clearly and proactively to all communities are key to increased college completion.



*Dr. Mildred García, President, American Association of State Colleges and Universities and Margaret Spellings President/CEO of Texas 2036 and former U.S. Secretary of Education*

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Attending to equity will determine the future of our state. Period. Full stop. And so whether it's morally right and responsible, economically prudent, whatever your reason, if we don't do that we're going nowhere fast.

*Margaret Spellings, President/CEO of Texas 2036 and former U.S. Secretary of Education*



## TEXAS PERSPECTIVES ON THE VALUE OF ALIGNMENT — TRI-AGENCY COMMISSIONERS

Following this robust discussion, Smith moderated a panel of the commissioners from the Texas Education Association, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Texas Workforce Commission. They shared the grave challenges of education and workforce post-COVID pandemic and discussed the progress of the Tri-Agency work to date. They emphasized the opportunity and imperative that the education and workforce sectors have in this moment of re-imagining in a post-pandemic world, and in response to growing public skepticism about the value and affordability of higher education — particularly for those who represent the future of Texas, but whom our institutions and systems typically have not served well.

- Commissioner Harrison Keller, THECB, described the Tri-Agency initiative's collaboration to more effectively collect data related to documenting credentials, labor-market needs, implications for career & technology education in high schools, and using all of the information — along with wage data — to power new kinds of advising tools for students, families and institutions themselves.
- Commissioner Morath noted that students in K-12 have experienced a 15 percentage point decline in math proficiency. Based on studies measuring effects of similar disruptions in learning, we can project that this decline will result in a 6% reduction in lifetime earnings for the affected students.
- Texas Workforce Commission Chairman Bryan Daniel noted, "For people who had a baccalaureate degree or higher, about 3% of that population was on unemployment benefits relative to the pandemic. And people who had no post-high school training ... 70% of that population was on unemployment benefits."
- In highlighting the state's strategic plan for higher education, the [Building a Talent Strong Texas](#) refresh of the 60x30TX plan, Commissioner Keller noted that Texas is "the first state to put [a] marker down" to establish the connection between educational attainment and employment outcomes.



Evan Smith, *Texas Tribune*; Harrison Keller, Ph.D., *Commissioner, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board*; Mike Morath, *Commissioner, Texas Education Agency*; and Bryan Daniel, *Chairman, Texas Workforce Commission*

“When we look at educational attainment and the jobs that that provides, you are much more protected from events like the pandemic economically if you have some training post-high school.

*Bryan Daniel, Chairman, Texas Workforce Commission*

## ✓ KEY TAKEAWAYS ON TRI-AGENCY COLLABORATION:

- Increased “blur” of divisions: more students leaving high school with postsecondary credit and degrees; understanding the talent “pipeline” as a lifelong education/career journey
- By the end of 2022, the Tri-Agency initiative will release data dashboards, allowing drill down by higher ed institution and program, incorporating earning and debt outcomes; data can be disaggregated by race, sex, income, and geography
- Multi-agency collaboration is a result of alignment of staff teams throughout the organizations, across various levels of organizational structures
- A new single intake portal called “My Texas Future” will include advising tools for specific populations, such as adult learners, veterans, transfer students and high school students
- Increased focus on outcomes incentives is being incorporated into funding structures of all three systems (workforce, K-12, and higher education)
- Incentives must align with state and community goals. For example, if our goal as a state is to streamline programs to directly align with quick entry into the workforce, then state funding should reward those outcomes.

## ✓ KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Individuals want to increase their educational and career opportunities, but they need supports and flexibility to incorporate it in the midst of work and family commitments
- Policymakers: ensure partners can access necessary data: paywalls at private data sources are consistent barriers
- Community stakeholders: an intermediary organization can translate between workforce/education and align on-the-ground work with broader community/policy contexts
- Community-based organizations: differentiate expertise in services without creating siloes or territorial mindsets
- Disaggregate data, particularly by race, ethnicity and gender

## REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE VALUE OF COLLABORATION

The final panelists represented three of the nine communities in Trellis Foundation's Regional Ecosystem Innovation for Reskilling & Upskilling grantee cohort, with the featured three panelists representing Amarillo, Houston and Waco.

### Recommendations for postsecondary partners:

- Take advantage of employer qualitative data, to understand job openings, skills needs, career progression, and recruitment
- Prioritize clarity in both education and career advising and processes
- Engage with industry tables to understand shared pain points, rather than only talking to a single employer
- Consider expert instructor alternatives: multi-institutional online classes, shared instructors
- Expand earn and learn opportunities (apprenticeship, paid internship, on the job training)
- Adapt quickly to ever-changing student and employer needs

### Recommendations for workforce partners:

- Prioritize living wages; be creative with benefits packages to increase employee support
- Decrease cost of employee turnover through investing in educational opportunities, for progression both within and outside your organization.
- Reconsider education and credential requirements to include only necessities
- Provide staff as "loaned" instructors to colleges to ensure expertise for skills and classes you need for your workforce

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This is an opportunity for you to think through how to continue to be innovative, how to continue to be agile, and how to operate in a complex environment.

*Suzanne Walsh, J.D., President of Bennett College and Trellis Foundation Board Member*



*Photos: Suzanne Walsh, J.D., President of Bennett College and Trellis Foundation Board Member, Tiffany Gallegos Whitley, Director of Workforce Initiatives, Prosper Waco, Peter Beard, J.D., Senior Vice President of Regional Workforce Development, Greater Houston Partnership, and Tamara Clunis, Ph.D., Vice President of Academic Affairs, Amarillo College*

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Jenny Achilles, Sr. Director and Chief Program Officer

Megan Beadle, Grants and Operations Manager

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For more information, visit  
[www.trellisfoundation.org/about-us](http://www.trellisfoundation.org/about-us)



Watch videos of all sessions at:  
<https://www.trellisfoundation.org/learnings-and-resources/summit-takeaways/>





## **Mission Statement**

Trellis Foundation advances equitable educational opportunities in Texas by supporting postsecondary programs, practices and systems that reduce disparities and lead to success for low-income students and students of color.

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