

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify before your committees on the important topic of dual credit courses. First, I want to acknowledge and thank the two chairs Senator Shapiro and Senator Zaffirini. The fact that you have made this a joint hearing speaks volumes about your commitment to leading by example and getting P-16 right. It cannot happen in isolation and has to be an equal partnership between k-12 and higher education.

As many of you know the Texas High School Project is a unique \$346 million public/private partnership between the State of Texas and private philanthropy. Over the past five years we helped redesign and open over 170 schools across the state specifically focused in major urban areas and the Texas/Mexico border impacting over 80,000 students. Again I want to thank the committee members because you have been the majority investor in this effort that has lowered the dropout rate and closed the achievement gap.

Specifically related to dual credit we have spent the past five years working on the ground to create partnerships around the state between ISDs and IHEs to build 41 early college high schools. These small learning academies are targeted towards low-income, first generation students to give them a leg up in obtaining a postsecondary credential. The blueprint involves a hand-in-glove partnership between the ISD and local community college or 4 year institution, which provides students with the opportunity to earn up to 60 college credit hours by their senior year of high school. In addition to the state investments through our partners at the Texas Education Agency, I would also like to thank and acknowledge the investments made by the Greater Texas Foundation, the Meadows Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in the early college initiative. Together these private foundations have provided over \$12 million towards early college high schools, while the TEA has provided \$14.5 million. These costs include both startup money and ongoing technical assistance and professional development.

The data from these schools speaks volumes about the ability of students to meet high expectations. Last year, students in early college high school outperformed their peer group by 27 percentage points on the math TAKS, and they significantly outperformed their peer group and the state average in advanced courses and dual credit completion by almost 2 to 1.

Three critical lessons have come out this work that I would like to share with you today.

- 1) P-16 partnerships are hard. As you know, there is not a seamless pipeline between K-12 and higher education. Content and standards do not match. The support systems are different. The culture is different. All of these factors make it extremely difficult, especially for first generation college goers to be successful.

However, dual credit makes it seamless. It forces the two entities to work in collaboration with one another and it allows the students an opportunity to experience what college courses are really like. In many cases breaking the stigma of what it means to go to college.

It also forces adults to play well with each other. As you know, P-16 does not have a great track record at any level, however I point to great several partnerships that have been forged throughout the state around dual credit whether it be my good friend Richard

Rhodes and Lorenzo Garcia in El Paso, or Lee Jackson at UNT, Wright Lassiter at DCCD, and Michael Hinojosa at DISD. Just to name two.

- 2) The financial dividend to the state is enormous both in terms of dropout prevention, getting kids to earn some sort of postsecondary credential, and to the individual families who save on the college tuition.

As my good friend Joel Vargas mentioned in the first panel, JFF is developing pricing models that can show the savings back to the state based on the number dual credit hours a student earns.

The dropout prevention piece is another key element. Last week the Texas Education Agency announced an innovative \$2 million grant to Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, led by Dr. Danny King, who has been a leader in this work. He has implemented a number of dual credit strategies in his 30,000 student district including an early college high school, optional flexible school day, and creating career pathways for students who otherwise would have left the system. These efforts have led to the dropout rate in PSJA decreasing by 75 percent in the district and graduation rates increasing by 60 percent in only two years. That is a phenomenal accomplishment and one that I do not think would have happened without this tool in the tool kit.

Finally, we cannot overlook the savings that Texas families see from this program. Last year alone, we estimate that students in our early college high schools saved \$4.5 million in college tuition. That is a staggering number and just the tip of the iceberg when looking at the broader, statewide participation in dual credit.

- 3) I was asked today to speak specifically about early college high schools as a best practice. While we are extremely proud of our network of 41 early colleges throughout the state, we also acknowledge that they are Navy Seals of dual credit and not the only tool for making this initiative successful. Instead we should view these academies as laboratories for innovation and pull out the insights and lessons learned on how to scale at a district and regional level.

In partnership with JFF and two other states, THSP recently applied for a federal stimulus grant that would allow us to do just that type of insight evaluation and scaling. If the grant is successful we will be working with 10 urban, rural, and suburban districts around the state to build out district-wide dual credit strategies, more thoughtful and deliberate career pathways within schools, and expanding the successful instructional practices into middle school.

So, those are the positive aspects of dual credit. One major challenge that continues to work against dual credit is the uneven quality found throughout the state. A dual credit course in one ISD does not necessarily look like a dual credit course in another ISD. This lack of a common statewide standard for content and quality is a huge roadblock in creating better articulation arrangements among other things. On a case by case basis ISDs and community colleges have to design and build articulation agreements on a series of courses. This process does not help

assuage concerns about the quality and consistency of courses across the state. The legislature, in conjunction with TEA, school district, THECB, and IHEs should work together to create a common statewide standards for dual credit. This problem will only get worse as new end-of-course exams come online over the next two years.

Another issue that the legislature should consider is the current funding model for dual credit, especially in terms of textbooks and transportation. Currently there are no baseline policies for how long an IHE has to use a particular textbook for a course. Often time it can change once a year. This ongoing expense is an enormous burden to ISDs and community colleges that cover the costs for our students. A small policy change requiring courses to use the same book for at least three years would be a huge relief to our partners.

In closing I would like to acknowledge that private philanthropy is committed to leveraging research and resources to help create consistent standards for quality, funding, and common definitions for dual credit. We hope that your committees will continue to see us as a source for data, promising practices, and potential private matching funds. THSP is committed to strengthening the public/private partnership and looks forward to working with you in the future.