

Texas Higher Education Accountability System

In 2000, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), the state agency charged with institutional oversight, adopted a statewide plan for higher education entitled *Closing the Gaps by 2015 (Closing the Gaps)*. The plan calls for each public higher education institution to engage in an ongoing pursuit of excellence. A strategy for carrying out that goal relies on the selection of institutional peers and benchmarks of performance against which progress can be measured. *Closing the Gaps* has been enthusiastically supported by the state's executive and legislative branches, but it did not encompass an accountability process.

On January 22, 2004, Governor Perry issued Executive Order RP 31 requiring the THECB and each institution and system work together to provide "the information necessary to determine the effectiveness and quality of the education students receive at individual institutions" also to provide "... the basis to evaluate the institutions' use of state resources." (See page 3 for text of the RP 31 Proclamation.)

Accountability System Structure

The Texas Accountability System for public higher education provides data for 38 public universities, nine health-related institutions, four Texas State Technical Colleges, and three two-year Lamar State Colleges. The state's two-year community colleges were added to the Accountability System in March 2005.

The THECB took the lead on the Accountability project and collaborated extensively with public universities, health-related institutions, two-year institutions, and legislative and executive office staffs on the selection, definition, and calculation of measures.

Closing the Gaps became the structure around which accountability measures were organized. *Closing the Gaps* calls for alignment between racial/ethnic groups in Texas in the areas of participation, success, excellence, and research. These became the four corner stones of Accountability, along with institutional efficiency and effectiveness.

One reason often cited for the support of *Closing the Gaps* was the plan's understandability. It has a limited number of explicit goals and targets. For similar reasons, the accountability system was designed to have a limited number of key measures in each of the primary areas, plus a more extensive set of contextual measures to inform the data reflected in the key measures. The measures are not static; they can be, and have been, changed as needed when more appropriate measures have been selected.

The System has four essential components:

- Key Accountability Measures. A small number of key accountability measures were identified for each goal. There are five categories of accountability measures (Participation, Success, Excellence, Research, and Institutional Effectiveness and Efficiencies) for the general academic and two-year institutions. Health-related institutions include an additional area for patient care.

- Contextual/explanatory Measures. Additional measures are included to help place the key accountability measures in context and/or to better describe the efforts of each institution.
- Institutional explanation and description. Each institution is given the opportunity to provide further information or explanation. Each institution is also given the opportunity to add one or two additional measures.
- Out-of-state peer comparisons. For each university group, at least two group peers were selected. In addition, individual institutions selected three other unique peers. Health-related institutions chose peer for their individual components. The U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System is the source of most peer data.

Accountability Peer Groups

Institutions have been grouped for "like" comparisons. The groups will be *neither permanent nor prescriptive* and are reviewed every two years to reflect institutional changes as well as changing higher education needs.

Because comparisons between institutions are inevitable when data on many institutions is presented, institutions were sensitive as to how the Accountability System would be used. They emphasized that their uniqueness made comparisons invalid. While conceding that Texas has a wide variety of institutions, the state developed an approach that acknowledges institutional differences but stresses that some institutions are more similar than others.

To assist with making comparisons among the most similar institutions, universities have been grouped according to general academic mission and certain key academic indicators, such as size and number of graduate programs, research expenditures, and other factors. The groupings are intended to be neither permanent nor prescriptive. Rather, they are to be considered permeable, subject to revision as institutions evolve. These groupings are reconsidered biennially with appropriate full participation by institutional leaders. The university "peer" groups are: Research, Emerging Research, Doctoral, Comprehensive, and Master's.

Community colleges are clumped into five groups based primarily on institution size, labeled Very Large, Large, Medium, and Small. In addition, health-related institutions form a separate peer group as do state two-year institutions.

Besides being useful for appropriate data comparisons, the peer groups are at the heart of the second major function of the Accountability System: institutional improvement. The accountability process is not used as a "gotcha", but instead is designed to help institutions share best practices and discuss pertinent issues.

Each Accountability peer group meets several times a year to address specific charges identified by THECB, as well as to consider possible changes to data measures. All groups are asked to conduct thoughtful, deliberative, and student-centered process, with each institution's representatives actively participating and providing input into discussions.

Governor's Proclamation RP 31

Executive Order

BY THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF TEXAS

Executive Department

Austin, Texas

January 22, 2004

EXECUTIVE ORDER

RP 31

Relating to accountability of higher education systems and institutions.

WHEREAS, the people of the State of Texas expect the state to provide the highest quality of higher education; and

WHEREAS, Texas public institutions of higher education and the systems in which they operate are funded by both public funds and tuition paid by private citizens; and

WHEREAS, the public has the right to demand complete accountability for its investment in institutions of education; and

WHEREAS, public K-12 education has been required to provide comprehensive accountability to the citizens of Texas for more than 10 years; and

WHEREAS, systems and institutions of higher education must be able to clearly define the need for additional state-funding in a manner which will justify the public's continued investment of resources;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Rick Perry, Governor of the State of Texas, by virtue of the power and authority vested in me by the constitution and laws of the State of Texas, do hereby order the following:

The boards of regents for public institutions of higher education in the state shall direct that each institution and system work with the Higher Education Coordinating Board to create a comprehensive system of accountability.

This system will provide the citizens of Texas, the Governor, and the Legislature with the information necessary to determine the effectiveness and quality of the education students receive at individual institutions. It will also provide the basis to evaluate the institutions' use of state resources.

This system of accountability shall be approved by the Boards of Regents and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board no later than December 17, 2004.

This executive order supersedes all previous orders inconsistent with its terms and shall remain in effect and in full force until modified, amended, rescinded, or superseded by me or by a succeeding Governor.

Given under my hand this the 22nd day of January, 2004.

RICK PERRY

Governor

Attested by:

GEOFFREY S. CONNOR

Secretary of State