

**Written Testimony to TEXAS SENATE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE,
Interim Hearing, Tuesday, June 22, 2010 at 9:00 a.m.
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Charge 2: Community Colleges

Panel 7. Include an assessment of the role of technical and vocational training programs and their impact on jobs.

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Senator Judith Zaffirini, Chair, and Members

I appreciate the opportunity to share with you the critical role community colleges play in keeping and creating jobs for Texans and in particular what South Texas College is doing in deep South Texas along the U.S./Mexico border.

South Texas College was the last community college district created in Texas and was established by the Texas legislature in 1993. This is a region of 700,000 people in Hidalgo and Starr Counties who did not have access to a community college or workforce training opportunities until the creation of STC.

When South Texas College was created, unemployment in Hidalgo county was 24.1% and unemployment in Starr county was 40.3%. Today, those unemployment rates have been cut in half. One half of the population did and still lives below the poverty level. One half of the adults over the age of 25 did not and still do not have a high school diploma.

STC was created as an economic development strategy and has played a key role in facilitating the successful transition from an agricultural-based economy to a hub for advanced manufacturing, health care, and retail sales along the U.S./Mexico border.

It is clear workforce development always has been and remains the most significant infrastructure need for South Texas.

Much progress has been made in the last 17 years:

- Expect over 30,000 students for Fall 2010 and 45,000 students for Fall 2020
- Five new state of the art campuses funded by local taxpayers
- Over 100 degree and certificate options in response to employers and recommended by workforce advisory committees
- Bachelor of Applied Technology in:
 - Technology Management
 - Computer and Information Technologies
- 19,000 graduates since 1994
- National recognition for institutional focus on student success

Jobs are the drivers of prosperity and help create a middle class for a region previously without a “middle class.” Families need job training and workforce skills if they are to have any hope for a good paying job and social mobility.

It is education that drives this prosperity by creating high wage-high skill jobs and human capital is the foundation for developing competitive regional economies.

South Texas College serves as the catalyst for regional economic prosperity and social mobility.

Today, in our region, even with the downturn in the economy, McAllen Economic Development Corporation is working with 41 companies wishing to locate in South Texas on the U.S. side. These companies will require 1.5 million to 2 million sq. ft. of industrial space and more importantly, these companies have the potential of creating up to 3,300 new jobs in the next 2-3 years. The Brookins Metro Monitor had identified McAllen as the only metro area they track to surpass pre-recession peak employment levels. As these plant relocations become a reality, there will be a huge economic impact on the entire state of Texas.

The role of STC and all Texas community colleges is to develop the human capital of the region and to provide competitive talent for the workforce pipeline. Community colleges play a critical role in the creation of jobs and the revitalization of local economies in all regions of this state.

When STC was established, it was clear the educational attainment level of the entire region had to be raised if the region was to ever develop a world-class, competitive workforce. While the region has one of the youngest workforces in the U.S., the higher educational attainment level was one-half the national average. Of the adults in South Texas, 10% as compared to 20% for the nation have a college degree. As a basic workforce development strategy, STC has focused on developing the expectation that attending college is possible, necessary, and affordable for all.

We have focused on leading the transformation of the region to a “college-going” culture whereby attending and completing higher education was possible and expected for all.

As a result, the college going rate for recent high school graduates has increased from 52% to 60% in the last eight years.

Workforce development remains the most important infrastructure need for South Texas.

The economic future of the deep South Texas region, to a great extent, will be influenced by the ability of the higher education institutions to increase the educational level and competitive workforce skills of the local talent.

A significant development over the last five years has been the North American Advanced Manufacturing Research and Education Initiative (NAAMREI). This is an \$8 million U.S. Department of Labor, Texas Workforce Commission, and City of McAllen initiative. The purpose is to create a world-class advanced manufacturing workforce for the entire Rio South Texas region from Laredo to Brownsville, Texas. This initiative is a network of more than 60 partners in business, industry, higher education, economic development, and local government with all dedicated to making the Rio South Texas region the hub for North America’s world-class advanced manufacturing industry. Thus far, 15,000 new and incumbent workers have been trained for specialized jobs in advanced manufacturing.

South Texas College, Brazosport College and Midland College were selected to offer the Bachelor of Applied Technology (BAT) degree in response to local workforce development needs. Local business, industry, and employers needed the next level of high skill employees, but also wanted them to have high level supervisory, managerial, and leadership skills. These baccalaureate degrees do not duplicate or compete with the offerings of regional universities.

All three community colleges underwent a rigorous process to be accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools as baccalaureate degree granting institutions to be authorized to offer the baccalaureate of applied technology.

The Bachelor of Applied Technology (BAT) provides an opportunity and career pathway for students from their Associate of Applied Science degrees and high level technical skills to a bachelor's degree with the opportunity for advancement to managerial and supervisory roles. The Associate of Applied Science degree typically does not transfer to the university; thus, students with high levels of technical skills could not reach for the next step on their career ladder and were expected to start over at the university.

It has not been an easy journey, but STC now offers two Bachelor of Applied Technology degrees: Technology Management, and Computer & Information Technologies. We expected an enrollment of about 100 students and now have 369 students enrolled in both programs.

All performance outcome measures for the baccalaureate degree programs demonstrate the success and effectiveness of these programs.

- The fall to fall retention has been 85-93% since the programs began
- 215 students have graduated – 90% completed in 3 years, and 93% completed in 4 years
- 88% of graduates are employed locally
- Approximately one half of the graduates have received promotions or were offered new jobs upon graduation

Employers have given an A+ satisfaction rating to these graduates and acknowledged the additional skills as a result of their baccalaureate degree preparation. Employers rated BAT graduates significantly higher on managerial and leadership skills as compared to associate degree graduates.

South Texas College has expanded the middle class and possibly created a middle class of families in South Texas. Families can enjoy the economic prosperity that comes from having a good paying job and being able to provide for yourself and your family. This was not always possible in South Texas.

South Texas College is a role model for Hispanic student success, ranked #3 in the nation for graduating Hispanic students following El Paso, and has forever changed the lives of over 19,000 graduates and their families since 1994.

I will close with the words of John F. Kennedy; “Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education.”

Please allow me to paraphrase. Our prosperity, economic development, and social mobility can be no swifter than our progress in educating the talent of the entire state of Texas.

Senator Zaffirini and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share the contributions South Texas College and the other 49 Texas community college districts make to prepare and maintain the workforce necessary for a strong Texas economy.