

# Legislative Update



A Publication of the **TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION**  
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## Regular Session Fraught with Challenges

As reported over the summer on the TCCTA Web site, the forthcoming Regular Session of the Texas Legislature will involve historic challenges for community and technical college educators. Lawmakers will face abundant controversy over the higher education needs of the state, and the method used to pay for all state programs.

Revenue will be tight, notwithstanding media reports of surpluses. The commissioner of higher education and Coordinating Board have endorsed dramatic changes to the method of funding colleges and universities and, in particular, developmental education. Proportionality in funding health benefits to community colleges is certain to return as a controversial issue. And it is likely that lawmakers will attempt to regulate the faculty role in the choice of textbooks for students.

### New “Talking Points” Portfolio Offered

In anticipation of these historic and complicated issues, TCCTA has expanded its collection of legislative “Talking Points.”

While we are still months away from formulating the TCCTA Legislative Program for 2009, included are some points our association makes when discussing various salient issues with public officials. Members may find them useful in communicating with lawmakers while they are “at home” in the districts, especially when they are campaigning this fall.

As pointed out in the TCCTA *Guide to Political Participation*, Capitol insiders have long maintained that form letters and petitions are not nearly as effective as individually written correspondence from constituents. Members are encouraged to consult the *Guide* (under “Legislative Resources” at [www.tccta.org](http://www.tccta.org)) for other useful strategies. The site also contains a convenient link to find out “Who Represents Me?”

**IMPORTANT:** Do not use college equipment, e-mail addresses, or stationery when communicating with state policy makers. Also, it is crucial to always be constructive when communicating with public officials. Be sure to thank them for their hard work on behalf of the people of Texas.

### On General Appropriations

- TCCTA fully supports the funding goals of the Texas Association of Community Colleges in asking that the Legislature should invest sufficient base funding in community colleges through the “New Community College Compact with Texas” in the amount of \$2.29 billion.
- This amount reflects the recommendations of the Coordinating Board (\$3.67 billion, based on the formula cost study, minus tuition and fees, and minus ten percent for incentive funding).
- Funding must be increased for the TRS and ORP retirement programs to attract and retain talented faculty. TCCTA appreciates the progress made during the 2007 Regular Session and urges lawmakers to continue its commitment to increase the state’s contribution to these vital programs.
- Community colleges are expected to enroll over 70 percent of new students under the Closing the Gaps initiative.
- Community colleges now enroll 75 percent of the state’s freshmen and sophomores, and 78 percent of minority freshmen and sophomores.
- The state’s financial commitment must rise in order to prevent more local tuition increases. High tuition hampers community college enrollment, since many of these students are in precarious financial situations.

### On Proportionality

Background: Proportionality would fund the health benefits for community college educators based on the state’s “share” of the cost in funding these schools. There is more than one way to calculate this percentage. Ironically, as the state’s share has decreased, the potential damage of proportionality has gone up for community colleges. TCCTA has consistently opposed proportionality and plans to support the efforts of the Texas Association of Community Colleges in passing legislation to require coverage for all eligible employees.

- If the state reduces appropriations for community college health benefits, the revenue

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### 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. Performance Funding. An assault upon developmental education as we know it. Textbook selection. And, of course, our old friend “Proportionality” in the funding of health benefits.

I genuinely believe in the social good of your profession, and promise to continue engaging lawmakers and their staffs urgently and constructively. Naturally, 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. Read the *Messenger*. Visit the Web site and contribute to the online discussion on the “Blog” feature of the site. Communication is indispensable.

Third, get to know your representative and senator now, while they are “at home.” Follow the *Guide to Political Participation* published by TCCTA (and available in printable form under “Legislative Resources” at [www.tccta.org](http://www.tccta.org)). It’s the best document 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 10-11 and the Annual Convention on February 19-21. Both are in Austin.

I hope to see you there!

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must be replaced with local funds. Inevitably, this means increased property taxes, higher fees, and diminished instructional support for students. Proportionality would hence jeopardize the Closing the Gaps initiative, a state program that recognizes explicitly the vital role of community colleges.

- Proportionality would penalize colleges for subsidizing instructional programs with local revenue—in effect punishing them for good behavior.
- Proportionality would not be an issue for community colleges if the state fully funded the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's instructional formula, which is based on actual student enrollment and associated costs.
- For many years, community college educators have been hired under an assumption of state responsibility for health benefits. Applying proportionality would "change the rules in the middle of the game." Any perceived loss of security could hinder recruitment of talented professionals from the private sector, other states, and universities.
- Community college educators ask to remain full participants in the Group Benefits Program (GBP) for state and higher education employees under the Employees Retirement System of Texas (ERS).

### On Performance Funding

Background: Commissioner of Higher Education Raymund Paredes and the Coordinating Board have endorsed a proposal to fund higher education based on student "completers" rather than enrollment, as is currently practiced under the funding formula.

- TCCTA welcomes all valid documentation of community and technical college "accountability," such as the measures reported under current law to the Coordinating Board.

- The complete mission of community colleges in workforce education should be funded without penalty. Students often take such courses with no intention of certification or graduation.
- Community colleges are held accountable by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the regional accrediting agency for professional standards. Faculty in many workforce disciplines must report to accrediting agencies at the state or national level. Colleges are also accountable to local taxpayers through policies enacted by elected trustees. Faculty members are evaluated routinely by college administrators under local board policies. Student evaluations are typically part of this process.
- No one wants students to succeed academically more than faculty. The Coordinating Board's proposal to reward completers assumes that a new funding mechanism will create a novel motivation. We see no empirical evidence to suggest such a correlation. If the state wishes to undertake such a drastic course, it should do so carefully and with ample opportunity for students, faculty, and others to provide insights about the impact it will have.
- We are deeply concerned about academic integrity and grade inflation. While we are aware that a student would not have to pass a given course to count as a completer, the logic of the Coordinating Board's model would create a culture that rewards staying in school above all other options. Retention of students would increasingly become the paramount criterion for faculty evaluation.
- The Coordinating Board's incentive funding proposal could place the interests of students at odds with the interests of institutions. We believe a student should never be advised to take any course of action because of the way the college receives its appropriation. After an "F," it is particularly hard to convince a stu-

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dent to persist. Many will simply disappear. Is this any way to Close the Gaps?

- There are times when advising a student to stay in class would be unethical, since a failing grade often closes the door on a fresh start later. These decisions are highly personal and complex and should not be subjected to a simplistic remedy. ☆

### Additional Talking Points Now Online

Talking Points on the important topics of **Developmental Education** and **Textbook Selection** are available under "Legislative Resources" on the TCCTA Web site.

Commissioner Paredes has proposed a "complete overhaul" of developmental education and several bills will likely be introduced to regulate the selection of textbooks by faculty.

Members are also urged to consult the "Blog" feature of the site for news affecting community colleges and updates on the latest legislative developments. Visitors to the site are also encouraged to respond to all timely issues affecting the profession.

Get connected!

**[www.tccta.org](http://www.tccta.org)**

## TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

### Membership Enrollment Form

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Instructional  
(Subject taught: \_\_\_\_\_)

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Classified/Retired/Adjunct  
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**CHECK HERE TO PURCHASE THE OPTIONAL LIABILITY INSURANCE PROGRAM, AND ADD \$50 TO THE AMOUNT OF YOUR PAYMENT. MEMBERS MUST PURCHASE INSURANCE TO RECEIVE TCCTA LEGAL ASSISTANCE.**

#### CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING FOUR CATEGORIES OF MEMBERSHIP:

- PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP (Full-time educator at a Texas community or technical college)—Dues \$45
- ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP (Classified employee, retired, or adjunct (part-time) educator at a Texas community or technical college)—Dues \$35 (Retiree may join as Professional or Associate Member.)
- STUDENT MEMBERSHIP (Graduate student in community college education)—Dues \$30
- UNAFFILIATED MEMBERSHIP (Friend of the Association not eligible for one of the foregoing types of membership)—Dues \$35

**CHECK HERE** if you wish to receive the TCCTA *Messenger*. Annual dues **include** \$5 for subscription; there is **no additional charge** for the *Messenger*.  
Membership Period: September 1, 2008–August 31, 2009.

**ENROLL ONLINE SECURELY at [tccta.org](http://tccta.org)**

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Check here if you wish to provide continuous renewal of your membership, until advised to cancel. We will send you a reminder before your credit card is charged.

**IF PAYING BY CHECK:** Make checks payable to TCCTA. Give enrollment form and check to your campus membership representative or mail to: TCCTA, 5113 Southwest Parkway, Suite 185, Austin, Texas 78735.

**If you wish to make a tax-deductible contribution** to TCCTA's foundation, please send separate check to the state office, payable to the Foundation for Professional Excellence in the Community College. \$ \_\_\_\_\_