

**88TH INTERIM CHARGE RECOMMENDATIONS**  
**POSTSECONDARY/WORKFORCE**

**Recommendation #1 - Monitor Implementation of Multiple Bills Supporting Parenting Students:**

Monitor the implementation of House Bill 1361 (88R), Senate Bill 412 (88R), and Senate Bill 459 (88R), which created supports and protections for parenting students enrolled in Texas higher education institutions. Specifically, consider how colleges are responding to new requirements to designate liaison officers, communicate available resources, and offer early registration windows to parenting students who, according to national estimates, represent 22% of all undergraduate students and 26% of all public 2-year students.

- **HB 1361 (88R)**, Relating to the designation of liaison officers to assist certain students at public institutions of higher education who are parents.
- **SB 412 (88R)**, Relating to protections for pregnant and parenting students enrolled in public institutions of higher education.
- **SB 459 (88R)**, Relating to early registration for parenting students at public institutions of higher education.

**Rationale:**

In Texas, an estimated 26 percent of all undergraduates, or 372,255 students, are parents and 158,936 college students are single mothers. Ensuring that these parenting students complete credentials of value will improve their families' well-being and economic security and bring important benefits to the Texas economy. Their children also reap important benefits, such as improved behavioral and academic outcomes and an increased likelihood of postsecondary success themselves.

The 88th Legislature passed multiple bills to better identify and offer targeted support to help parenting students meet their financial, caregiving, and time demands - and therefore improve their chances of persistence and completion. The outcomes-based funding formula for community colleges in House Bill 8 (88R) also focuses on the success of economically disadvantaged, academically disadvantaged, and adult learners - many of whom are also likely parents. The Legislature should monitor early implementation and initial impact of related legislation at higher education institutions across the state.

---

**Recommendation #2 - Study the Use and Impact of Federal Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds:**

In response to the pandemic, the federal government made one of the most substantial investments ever in the nation's colleges and universities through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF). Since 2020, Texas institutions have received more than \$6.5 billion, of which \$2.5 billion was required to be distributed directly to students in the form of emergency aid. As of August 2023, Texas higher education institutions had spent over 96% of their HEERF dollars — including 99% of student aid funds. This presents the Legislature with a key opportunity to study resulting changes in institutional behavior and consider potential state policy implications related to student affordability and completion supports.

**Rationale:**

Based on data reported by Texas higher education institutions to the US Department of Education, more than 1 million students received an average award of \$1,565 in federal emergency aid through HEERF in 2021. More than 450,000 Pell recipients — nearly 80% of all Pell recipients statewide — received emergency aid and were awarded significantly higher average amounts than non-Pell recipients. Nearly one-third of all non-Pell recipients — over 404,000 students — also received emergency aid.

Texas higher education institutions used a wide range of sources and methods to assess and respond to the financial needs of their students through disbursement of federal emergency aid funds. The Legislature should consider whether any of these methods warrant further study or continued use to gain a more accurate, real-time understanding of student need and implement best practices for preventing and/or intervening when basic needs insecurity threatens postsecondary persistence and completion.

---

**Recommendation #3 - Monitor Higher Education and Workforce Programming within Texas Prisons:**

In response to federal reinstatement of Pell eligibility for incarcerated students and additional revenue through the new outcomes-based funding formula under House Bill 8 (88R), colleges are seeking to expand or introduce new education and workforce programs within Texas prisons. Following the Governor’s veto of Senate Bill 526 (88R), there remains no law governing enrollment, eligibility, program quality, or data collection for higher education programs operating in carceral settings. Consider how agencies, including the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and Texas Department of Criminal Justice, are providing clear criteria and guidance to colleges that align with the state’s goals for public safety and workforce development.

**Rationale:**

In 2020 alone, 56,669 Texans were released from prison, 9,625 of them women. The average person released from TDCJ custody that same year was 37 years old with the equivalent of an eighth grade education. A postsecondary credential is an essential asset for returning citizens to improve their prospects of competing in today’s workforce and gaining self-sustaining employment, which can mean the difference between successfully transitioning back into our Texas communities or returning to prison.

There are more than 120,000 people currently incarcerated in TDCJ facilities, more than half of whom could be eligible for Pell Grants. Although more than 6,300 incarcerated Texans received Pell Grants since 2017 through the federal Second Chance Pilot, zero women out of approximately 10,000 currently incarcerated have received a Pell Grant to support their education. The Legislature should study how state agencies and higher education institutions are responding to federal rules and maximizing the benefits of education and workforce programs for Texas students, employers, communities, and taxpayers.

**Supporting Organizations:**

