

1. Good morning. I am Dr. Mary Hensley, and seven months ago, on July 1, 2015, I was appointed to be the 15<sup>th</sup> District President/CEO in the 132-year history of Blinn College.
2. It is my honor and privilege to speak with you today regarding the interim charges related to community college taxing districts, service areas, barriers to access, governance, and transparency.
3. To begin, I would like to tell you a little about myself. Early in my career, I worked in K-12 education, serving as a teacher, counselor, middle school principal, high school principal, director of secondary education, assistant superintendent, and deputy superintendent in the Ysleta, Socorro, and Round Rock school districts.
4. I later transitioned to higher education administration, where I served 5 years at McLennan Community College, and most recently 17 years at Austin Community College, including the last 6½ as executive vice president for college operations.

5. In my role at ACC, I served as the lead administrator for 9 annexation elections over a 6-year period, so I fully understand the challenges faced by community colleges with tax bases that represent only a small portion of the college's total service area and budget.
6. Since arriving at Blinn, it has been my pleasure to work with a knowledgeable Board of Trustees that embodies a student-centered approach to educational leadership.

7. The Blinn trustees include a board chair who is a former president and chairman of the board of the largest farm mutual insurance company in Texas, as well as members who include:
  - a. a bank CFO,
  - b. an award-winning newspaper publisher,
  - c. a city mayor,
  - d. a former mayor pro tem,
  - e. an attorney,
  - f. a Texas A&M University professor,
  - g. and several current and former small business owners.
  
8. As you are aware, this past December, Blinn transitioned from a 7-member to a 9-member Board of Trustees resulting from the legislation passed in House Bill 2621.

9. I want you to know that Blinn is committed to building strong, collaborative, transparent relationships with all Texas legislators and their staffs, and I have actively met with members of Blinn's legislative delegation – literally – since my first day on the job.
10. I would particularly like to thank Representative John Raney of District 14 and Representative Leighton Schubert of District 13, who are here today as part of this very important discussion. I also would like to thank Representatives Cecil Bell, and Kyle Kacal, and Senators Lois Kolkhorst and Charles Schwertner for their communication and commitment to student success.
11. As the Texas community college with the state's highest academic transfer rate at 42.9%, Blinn proudly sets the benchmark for providing pathways to the state's leading four-year universities.

12. Additionally, Blinn actively seeks opportunities to expand its workforce programs. For example, since July 2015, Blinn has partnered with the Texas Workforce Commission and area businesses to obtain grants to provide skills and safety training for employees at businesses such as:

- a. Axis Pipe and Tube, Incorporated;
- b. Igloo Products Corporation;
- c. Tempur-Sealy International, Incorporated;
- d. Mid-South Synergy, Incorporated;
- e. Blue Bell Creameries;
- f. and Stanpac USA, Incorporated.

13. A significant aspect of Blinn's mission is a commitment to reaching underserved populations. Last Fall semester, Blinn provided educational services to more than 7,000 minority students, including almost 4,000 Hispanic students, and the College expects these numbers to continue to increase.

14. Looking ahead, Blinn and other community colleges will play a key role in the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's 60x30 Texas Strategic Plan due to the affordability and accessibility they offer students throughout their service areas.

15. However, limited resources make it a challenge to meet the needs of growing populations, and to:

- a. Expand the breadth and scope of workforce, technical, and career training programs;
- b. Recruit and retain underserved populations;
- c. And address the varied needs of rural communities.

16. May I refer you now to the materials in your packet. As you can see in the map on Page 1, Blinn's service area includes 13 Texas counties. Even as the district's greatest growth takes place in Brazos and Waller counties, the district only draws taxes from one county – Washington County. This is not an unusual situation.

17. Note the map on Page 2, and you will see that only 66 of the state's 254 counties pay taxes to support community colleges.
18. Despite tax increases in 7 of the last 8 years, Blinn expects its taxes to provide \$1.8 million in revenue, which represents less than 1.7% of this year's \$106.8 million operating budget.
19. However, Blinn is unique in one respect. Unlike most community colleges, the majority of Blinn students – 74% – come from outside its service area.
20. This is because students from across the state choose to attend Blinn prior to transferring to a four-year university, or they co-enroll at Blinn and Texas A&M during their freshman and sophomore years.
21. A Fall 2014 study found that Blinn students hailed from 1,533 zip codes across the state and nation, so while Bryan-College Station is the most populated region within Blinn's service area, it is important to note that only 18% of Blinn students come from Brazos County.

22. As a community college with a small tax base and population growth outside its taxing area, Blinn is challenged to serve its entire service area. Blinn is currently addressing this challenge through:

- a. A \$10 million renovation of its current Bryan campus location.
- b. The \$3.8 million purchase of 95 acres for the development of a new Bryan campus that will serve as many as 15,000 students. Phase 1 of this project will be a \$46.5 million development and is scheduled to open in Fall 2017.
- c. Workforce training sites that offer a variety of technical, career and professional development courses, including community-specific workforce training courses at rural campus locations in Schulenburg and Sealy.
- d. A \$1.8 million annual lease agreement for Blinn's Health Science Center campus located in Bryan.
- e. And an early college high school operated in partnership with Bryan ISD.

23. Balancing the needs of the service area with limited tax dollars, while keeping tuition and fees as low as possible, can be a daunting task.
24. On Page 3, you can see that community colleges vary in their primary revenue sources. While Blinn relies primarily upon tuition revenue, many community colleges are primarily state-funded.
25. Some depend upon a blend of state and tuition revenue, while others rely upon a balance of state, local, and tuition funding.
26. Each community college district has developed its own plan to meet the varied demands of its service area, affording them the flexibility they need to meet local needs with local solutions.
27. In conclusion, the role community colleges play in Texas is significant.
28. 78% of all bachelor degrees earned in Texas have community college hours on their transcript.
29. Community colleges have seen a 74% enrollment increase in the past 15 years.
30. 52% of all students currently enrolled in public higher education attend a community college.

31. 74% of all freshmen enrolled in Texas are at a community college.
32. 76% of all minority freshmen are enrolled in a Texas community college.
33. 73% of all Hispanic freshmen and sophomores are enrolled in a Texas community college.
34. 90% of all dual credit opportunities are provided by community colleges.
35. To maintain and build upon this success, community colleges look forward to working alongside policymakers to ensure a bright future for Texas students, businesses, and communities.
36. I sincerely hope this information, and all the information shared today, provide background that will prove helpful in future discussions.
37. Thank you.