

By Dr. Jeannie Stone and Dr. Marcelo Cavazos, Superintendents in Residence at the Commit Partnership and the Holdsworth Center

As superintendents of schools we stood on the stage at convocation at the beginning of each year to share a message that “this year we will see every student as an individual and help them open their gifts and accelerate their learning and growth.” We shared this truly believing in personalizing college and career pathways for all. Reflecting on that message it felt more like an aspiration than a plan. As former high school leaders and superintendents of Richardson ISD and Arlington ISD, we have some new perspectives in our current roles of Superintendents in Residence at the Commit Partnership and the Holdsworth Center respectively. In our new roles we help superintendents and district leadership teams focus, plan, and execute to achieve stronger and more equitable college and workforce outcomes in a fast-changing community, policy, political, educational, and workforce context.

To this end, we have helped shape and sit on the board of a Texas Non-Profit organization called Economic Mobility Systems (EMS) to develop a new network of high performing school districts. The EMS “College and Career Solutions Network” was initiated through a Texas Education Agency grant to help school districts move from aspiration to operational planning to:

- Develop a personalized support model for comprehensive high schools
- Build internal real-time data capacity
- Leverage new real-time data to improve
- Network with other school districts to accelerate learning and growth
- Improve data partnerships with higher education, workforce, and community partners to execute on the middle school through a good job continuum

Leading secondary school transformation in big public school systems is challenging. We will discuss three challenges leading toward stronger and more equitable college and workforce outcomes. Then, we will illustrate how Dallas ISD, Aldine ISD, Arlington ISD are laying the groundwork required for all of us

to understand how to plan and execute personalized pathways to college and career success for ALL students and the challenges and opportunities we face in developing leadership for this work.

Three Challenges

(1) purpose (2) systems (3) leadership:

Purpose: Superintendents have often viewed our leadership role to graduate students from high school. In large districts we run “at risk” lists and then run every student through interventions to help them meet high school graduation requirements without really understanding their unique needs and narratives. Over the last decade, many of us have begun to build stronger programmatic partnerships with colleges, employers, and communities that help students earn credits, credentials, degrees, and important work-based learning experiences. We are learning that there is a bigger purpose in our work.

We must move from high school graduation as our purpose to being agents of socioeconomic mobility. This does not mean we abandon our focus on developing well rounded global citizens. It does mean we do this with the goal of helping students coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, chart a real and achievable path to earning a sustainable living wage and hold ourselves accountable for those outcomes. In Texas, the passage of House Bill 3 was a step in that direction, providing \$1.6 B in outcomes bonus dollars for school districts to help students test college ready and either earn an industry-based certificate, an associate degree, or enroll in a postsecondary program after high school. These new dollars will help school district leaders build the people, process, and program capacity to step toward our new purpose.

PURPOSE: AGENTS OF SOCIOECONOMIC MOBILITY