The Office of P-20 Initiatives at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) spearheaded a College and Career Readiness (CCR) summit at the Institute of Texan Cultures on June 14, 2013. Participants determined that stakeholders from the greater San Antonio community must collaborate more efficiently and do more to help area students become college- and career-ready graduates.

The one-day summit focused on successful collective action at the PreK-12, higher education and private sector levels to elevate the educational achievement of San Antonio’s youth in an ever-changing economy. Following three panel presentations, round-table discussions including parents and students addressed two questions: *Where do you see gaps in CCR? What are your recommendations to close these gaps?*

Analyzed and organized by the UTSA Academy for Teacher Excellence, the results listed below indicate that each round-table identified similar areas in need of improvement: *easy access to college and career information, rigorous coursework, and emphasis on the workplace skills today’s students need.*

**Panel 1: K-12**

The first panel focused on “K-12: Successful Strategies.” Facilitated by NISD Superintendent Dr. Brian Woods, the panel also included Superintendents Dr. Lloyd Verstuyft, SWISD; Mr. Rey Madrigal, HISD; and Mr. Gene Bowman, Alamo Academies. The following gaps and proposed recommendations were identified:

**Theme:** *Parent Outreach*

**Gaps:**

- Information and/or communication from school districts is lacking.
- Students and the community are not getting a persistent message about CCR.
- Parents do not know how to navigate the school system.
  - What can they do? They don’t know what’s available for their students.
• Counselors have much of the information (especially for summer programs), and parents should have that information.
• Schools do not understand the family/home structure dynamics that prohibit parents from acquiring this information (e.g., being unable to take time off at work to attend school functions).

Recommendations:
• Capitalize on current technology to improve communication; create a parent website to provide information on city-wide programs with resources in Spanish and English; launch a public relations campaign; and gain influential supporters (e.g., from government or business community).
• Take the message to the community and visit churches, community centers, businesses, etc.; translate materials and use language that parents and students find accessible; welcome teachers and administrators to participate in community outreach; and focus on the transition points between primary, middle and secondary grades.
• Offer ongoing public forums at schools that allow local businesses to share information on workplace skills with parents and students.

Theme: Curriculum Alignment

Gaps:
• Curriculum rigor and relevance is insufficient.
• Student access to dual credit and Advanced Placement (AP) coursework is lacking.
• College and high school faculty curricula and expectations are misaligned.
• Access to STEM, especially for underrepresented populations such as girls and minority boys is inadequate.
• Teacher roles in the classroom must be redefined (e.g., fewer lectures and more real-life application).
• Despite earning college credit, some students still are not college-ready.
• Because of student mobility rates, school districts need to be consistent with coursework that leads to a path of college readiness.
Recommendations:
- Provide opportunities to foster a **stronger dialogue** between high school teachers and university/college faculty to bridge the curricula (e.g., vertical alignment meetings based on state standards).
- Provide more opportunities to assist students/parents in understanding the transition to college through after-school programming (e.g., similar to the TRIO model).
- Institute rigor and relevance in the curriculum **throughout the city** (e.g., consolidate the school districts as a way to standardize a rigorous curriculum).

**Theme:** *Workforce Development*

Gaps:
- Students lack sufficient opportunities to gain work experience.
- Collaborative relationships between schools and the workforce are weak; a disconnect exists between education and skills needed in the workforce.

Recommendations:
- Offer mentorship initiatives like *Inspire U*, which includes businesses and schools working together, as a model for other programs to follow.
- Increase the **public’s awareness** about vocational and technical programs throughout the P-16 pipeline.
- Increase access to **practical workforce knowledge** through internships, apprenticeships, and skills-training activities.
- Continue to inform parents and the educational systems about **ongoing employment trends** (e.g., automotive trades, plumbing, etc.).

**Panel 2: Institutions of Higher Education (IHE)**

The second panel focused on IHE’s successful CCR strategies and was facilitated by Dr. Judith Loredo from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. It included the following IHE representatives: Dr. Jo Carol Fabianke, Alamo Colleges; Dr. Steve Wilkerson, UTSA; Dr. Shari Albright, Trinity University; and Dr. Melissa Mahan, TAMUSA. Based on the panel’s conversation, the following gaps and proposed recommendations were identified:

**Theme:** *College Knowledge and Access*
Gaps:
- Schools and the community lack adequate staffing and resources to provide college access information and training.
- The FAFSA completion rate is inadequate, and the terminology on the application needs to be better explained to student and parents.
- The distinctions between degree attainment, career choice and salary are unclear and need to be better explained to students and parents.

Recommendations:
- **Sustain programs** like Café College and the high school Go Centers to help improve FAFSA/financial literacy rates in the San Antonio area.
- **Design** a course/workshop/phone application for high school students that provides real-time college and career information (e.g., cost of college, new careers, etc.).

Theme: *College Readiness*

Gaps:
- Curriculum alignment between secondary and postsecondary schools, particularly in the area of math preparation, is insufficient.
- Current students lack critical thinking skills.
- Increased staffing and resources are needed to provide adequate college access information and training to students and members of the community.

Recommendations:
- **Identify specific student remediation needs** (e.g., through diagnostic testing), and provide focused instruction and lab support that helps students develop the required academic skills quickly (e.g., online modules).
- **Encourage rigorous high school courses** like AP and dual credit and provide students and parents with information that clearly demonstrates the importance of taking these courses (e.g., conduct student/parent orientations at the school or in the community using easy-to-understand materials).
- **Improve vertical alignment** between area school districts, community colleges and universities (e.g., conduct a city-wide college algebra alignment project).
- **Create a forum** that helps to educate students and parents on what it means to be TSI compliant.
• **Ensure rigorous standards** in K-12 through customized professional development that supports college readiness at all grade levels.

**Theme: Career Information**

**Gaps:**

- Transfer students lack adequate assistance with transitioning from a community college to a four-year institution.
- Students lack career information and real-time knowledge about future workforce demands.
- Students lack 21st-century skills needed throughout college.

**Recommendations:**

- Provide **focused career counseling** and advising resources to students, parents and instructors.
- Provide **easily accessible information**, online or through social media, that informs students and instructors about extra-curricular activities, sponsored clubs and workshops offered on campus, reflecting fields of study or designated career paths.
- Provide **orientation programs and/or courses** to high school teachers and college faculty that address college-survival skills such as registering for courses, career advising, scholarship opportunities, etc.

**Panel 3: Business/Workforce**

The third panel focused on technical and soft skills (e.g., 21st-century skills) future employees must possess to be successful in business/workforce. Dr. Federico Zaragoza, vice chancellor for Alamo Colleges, facilitated the dialogue of business experts including Mario Lozoya, Toyota; Mr. Ryan McQueen, USAA; Mr. Jorge Elizondo, H.E.B.; and Mr. Jonathan Magid, Rackspace Hosting. The following gaps and proposed recommendations were identified:

**Theme: Soft Skills/21st-Century Skills**

**Gaps:**

- It is unclear who is responsible for teaching soft skills.
- Students lack communication skills (verbal and written), the ability to collaborate in a group setting and problem-solving skills.
• Students are not taught to use their creativity and imagination.
• Self-advocacy skills are missing from the curriculum.

Recommendations:
• **Businesses should assist** with providing professional development for teachers and schools, addressing required soft skills including collaboration, communication and creative problem solving.
• **Schools need to** develop a curriculum or workshop that teaches students how to advocate for themselves, including successful interviewing techniques and the ability to network.

Theme: *Career Pathways*

Gaps:
• Opportunities for high school students to critically discuss different career pathways are insufficient.
• Biased public perceptions discourage students from pursuing certain careers (e.g., being a plumber versus doctor or athlete).

Recommendations:
• **Set aside time** during the school year that focuses on a variety of career opportunities including non-traditional careers.
• **Develop a career-focused mentorship program** outside of the typical school day to better suit the needs of students with a full schedule.
• **Utilize** student organizations and local college career services staff to develop programming for local high schools that focuses on career exploration and workforce needs.
• **Increase opportunities** for student internships and cooperative education.

In conclusion, based on the round-table discussions, it appears that communication among stakeholders could be improved. It is in the best interest of all stakeholders to develop an effective and consistent system of communicating, which provides ongoing information on available opportunities for growth and voices critical needs as they arise. Access to information will no longer be a barrier but rather help foster a college-going culture throughout the greater San Antonio area.