

## **MINUTES OF THE WORKSHOP MEETING DEL MAR COLLEGE DISTRICT**

December 9, 2025

The Workshop Meeting of the Board of Regents of the Del Mar College District convened on Tuesday, December 9, 2025, at 11:00 a.m., at the Center for Economic Development, 3209 S. Staples, Room 106, Corpus Christi, Texas.

### **From the Board:**

Present:

Chair Carol Scott, Dr. Nicholas Adame, Ms. Libby Averyt, Mr. Carl Crull, Mr. Rudy Garza, Jr., Mr. Bill Kelly, and Mr. David Loeb.

Not present:

Dr. Anantha Babbili and Dr. Laurie Turner.

### **From the College:**

Dr. Mark Escamilla, President and CEO; Ms. Lenora Keas, Executive Vice President and COO; Mr. Raul Garcia, Vice President and CFO; Mr. Ali Kolahdouz, Vice President and Chief Information Officer; Dr. Jonda Halcomb, Vice President and Chief Academic Officer; Ms. Tammy McDonald, Vice President of Administration and Human Resources; Dr. Patricia Benavides-Dominguez, Vice President for Student Affairs; Mr. Augustin Rivera, Jr., General Counsel; Mr. Matthew Busby, Vice President of Development and Donor Advising; Mr. Jeff Olsen, Chief of Staff and Vice President of Communication and Marketing; Ms. Delia Perez, Director of CEO Office and Board Relations, Mr. Conrado Garcia, Superintendent in Residence, and other staff and faculty.

### **CALL TO ORDER/QUORUM CALL**

Chair Scott called the meeting to order with a quorum present. She requested a moment of silence followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and Del Mar College Vision Statement.

**GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS** – The public was given the opportunity to provide public comments (both general and specific to any agenda item).

There were no public comments.

### **ITEM OF BUSINESS:**

1. Discussion and feedback on the Student Tuition and Fee Waiver Program (Freedom to Dream 2.0 – Building the Next Cohort)  
.....Dr. Patricia Benavides-Dominguez and Mr. Raul Garcia  
*(II: Elevate, Goal 2: Maximize resources entrusted to the College)*

Dr. Escamilla provided introductory remarks regarding the Freedom to Dream 2.0 program. Dr. Benavides-Dominguez stated how exciting this new initiative has been even though it has had some challenges. The fundamental premise is to help students access higher education without financial barriers.

This document is a summary of a presentation discussing the "Freedom to Dream" program, a College initiative aimed at making higher education accessible without financial barriers. The presentation outlines the program's evolution, its current status, and future enhancements, with a focus on financial sustainability and student success.

Dr. Benavides-Dominguez stated the fundamental premise is to remove financial barriers to higher education. The College continues to recruit from high school graduating classes, adult learners, GED learners, and students within the taxing district. The eligibility criteria includes a 2.0 GPA, full-time enrollment with a minimum of 12 hours, and commit to a formal agreement.

The key changes and new developments include Dual Credit Seniors (Class of 2026 and onwards) must have a 2.0 GPA in both high school and college credits, prior college students must have a minimum 2.0 GPA and have attempted no more than 18 college credit hours and dropping or not completing courses could impact eligibility.

The Continuing Education pathway includes students who enroll in courses to earn an Institutional Credential Leading to Licensure (ICLC), Workforce Skills Award, or OSA (Certificate 1) with the goal being to earn a credential within the first semester. The program is a controlled pilot and expected to be capped at around 200 students.

Dr. Benavides-Dominguez discussed college readiness and academic performance. Regarding TSI (Texas Success Initiative) Assessment, it details REM (Reading, English/Writing, Math) used to assess college readiness. A 3-3-3 score is required for college-level courses in program of student. Approximately 725 students were fully college-ready, and approximately 180 students were majoring in OSA or Certificate 1 programs. Roughly 975 students were not TSI complete and required developmental coursework.

Exemptions from TSI are considered but have expiration dates and are reviewed based on previous coursework.

Dr. Benavides-Dominguez and Dr. Halcomb provided information for students not college-ready, various pathways are available, including continuing education courses to build skills, tutoring centers, and traditional developmental courses. The Freedom to Dream

tuition waiver applies only to college credit courses, not developmental courses. Students in developmental courses need to seek other financial aid or loans. The program emphasizes assessing and supporting each student individually, with a focus on "holding" students until they are ready and committed to getting ready.

Dr. Benavides-Dominguez discussed enhancements for the next cohort, Freedom to Dream 2.0. The 2.0 cohort will include enhanced support services, including a new Success Coach Director and coaches, requiring students to seek help before withdrawing from classes. The credit hour limit will cover up to 60 semester credit hours, next cohort students must be college-ready in their chosen program. Application deadline is moved to April 30th to coincide with scholarship deadlines, encouraging early engagement, and outreach strategies include working with high school principals, counselors, and Communities in Schools.

Dr. Rivera discussed Continuing Education (CE) integration which has the current headcount up 23% year-over-year, indicating demand; short-term programs (weeks to months) leading to certifications (e.g., CNA, EKG Technician) and Workforce Skills Awards (equivalent to 9 credit hours, e.g., welding, accounting). CE also include stackable credentials, allowing students to progress to Level 1 certificates, associate's degrees, and even bachelor's degrees. With significant growth in dual enrollment headcount, the College will use strategies to target these students for Freedom to Dream 2.0.

Mr. Raul Garcia provided background information regarding the Freedom to Dream initiative. The financial model and sustainability for the program includes primarily state performance dollars, supplemented by contributions from the DMC Foundation. The model allows qualifying students to retain financial aid awards for non-tuition expenses (food, transportation, childcare), thereby minimizing financial stress and focusing on academics. The aim is to improve college performance metrics by encouraging full-time enrollment and accelerated credential completion.

Mr. Garcia reviewed the financial projection scenarios which include Scenario 1: (1000 students + 200 CE): projects a net surplus of nearly \$300,000 over a four-year period, despite initial deficits in the first two years; and Scenario 2: (1500 students + 200 CE): projects a net surplus of nearly \$1 million over the same period.

The key factors for sustainability include student adherence to program requirements, credential completion within three years, and increased dual credit hours. Questions regarding cost considerations were raised about the accuracy of cost assumptions, particularly regarding foregone tuition when overhead is already absorbed. The financial model is based on conservative estimates and projected persistence rates (initially 70%).

Some of the early victories include 35 Freedom to Dream students graduating who are primarily pursuing OSAs and certificates. These early successes demonstrate the program's potential impact and generate valuable data for future projections.

Challenges and future considerations discussed include college readiness as a barrier with math proficiency as identified as a significant challenge for many students. Financial barriers for remedial coursework while tuition is waived for college credit, finding ways to address the financial burden of remedial coursework is a concern. The accuracy of financial projections depends on evolving data and refining assumptions, particularly regarding student persistence and completion rates. The program's long-term financial viability is contingent on continued state funding for performance-based initiatives.

The presentation highlighted the ongoing commitment to the "Freedom to Dream" program, with a clear focus on enhancing accessibility, supporting student success through comprehensive services, and ensuring financial sustainability through strategic planning and data-driven adjustments.

Comprehensive discussion as well as responses to questions regarding the Freedom to Dream 2.0 program was held throughout the workshop between the Board of Regents and administration.

2. CLOSED SESSION pursuant to:

- a. **TEX. GOV'T CODE § 551.071**: (Consultation with legal counsel), regarding pending or contemplated litigation, or a settlement offer, including, but not limited to Tax Exemption Settlement Agreements (2) with CPS Energy (Barney Davis Power Plant and Nueces Bay Power Plant), with possible discussion and action in open session; and the seeking of legal advice from counsel on pending legal or contemplated matters or claims, with possible discussion and action in open session;
- b. **TEX. GOV'T CODE § 551.087**: (Deliberation Regarding Economic Development), regarding discussion or deliberation of information received from a business prospect with which the College is conducting economic development negotiations and/or the deliberation of an offer of a financial or other incentive to a business prospect, with possible discussion and action in open session; and,
- c. **TEX. GOV'T CODE § 551.074(a)(1)**: (Personnel matters), regarding the appointment, employment, evaluation, reassignment, duties, discipline, or dismissal of a public officer or employee.

The Board of Regents did not go into Closed Session during the Workshop.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 12:20 p.m.

MINUTES REVIEWED BY GC: /s/ARjr