

# Burleson Opportunity Fund

## INTRODUCTION

As part of the City of Burleson's *Strengthening Families* initiative, a group of individuals representing education, social service, city government, healthcare and faith-based institutions met in early 2007 to brainstorm ways the Burleson community could better serve families, children and youth. One idea briefly discussed was the creation of an endowment which would provide Burleson graduates greater access to post-secondary education.

Obviously, any individual receiving a scholarship benefits considerably. However, in order for a scholarship fund to make a substantial impact on the community as a whole, it would have to open the doors of higher education to a significant portion of the population that would not otherwise continue their education beyond high school.

Building an endowment to pay four years' tuition for every Burleson graduate is clearly beyond today's realm of possibilities. However, it is well within our community's current capacity to ensure that far more of our young adults quickly transition from high school to higher education. Hill College, a comprehensive community college, recently established a campus in the City of Burleson. With tuition to Hill College being economical, it is possible in the near-to-mid-term to build a scholarship fund that would guarantee two years' tuition to every Burleson graduate who wanted to attend.

## BASIC CONCEPT

- Scholarship fund providing any Burleson graduate (BISD graduate or JISD graduate living in the City of Burleson) two years' paid tuition to Hill College.
- To be eligible, graduates must enroll in Hill College for the fall semester following their high school graduation. Students must maintain a satisfactory minimum GPA to retain their scholarship eligibility. Students must apply for other available grants, such as the Pell Grant, to be eligible.
- Nominal community service requirements, which scholarship recipients could satisfy by participating in "community service corps projects" such as environmental clean-ups and mentoring projects, would also be a requirement for continued eligibility.
- The City of Burleson and the Burleson Independent School District will each provide "seed money" to establish the fund in the amount of \$25,000. Additional funds will be sought in the form of government and foundation grants, as well as business and individual contributions.
- The City of Burleson will explore possibilities for sources of "dedicated revenue" to provide consistent, reliable funding. This may include seeking legislation to allow a portion of 4A funds to be used for the promotion of higher education.
- The goal for the 2007-2008 school year is to make at least 75 scholarships available to graduating seniors.

## JUSTIFICATION

### **Burleson Growth: Opportunities and Challenges**

Burleson's rapid population growth is well-documented. Each year Burleson grows by five to eight percent. The North Central Texas Council of Governments conservatively projects that Burleson's population will reach 65,000 in less than 25 years. While this growth presents opportunities for enhanced economic development and gives us the ability to build bigger and better community facilities, it also presents challenges. Already more 30% of Burleson ISD students qualify for free or reduced meals. While this does not compare to the 60-80% of students on free and reduced meals in many big-city districts, we can expect more and more Burleson youth to face economic hurdles to success in life. The link between economic hardship early in life and participation in violent and other negative behavior in teen and young adult years is very strong. By acting now to improve the odds for all of our children and youth, we can avoid many of the problems larger cities face. According to the 2000 Census statistics, at least one quarter of our citizens are fourteen years old and younger and over 30% are eighteen years old or younger. As our population continues to grow, the number of children and youth in the city will continue to increase and those children and youth will be continually more economically diverse.

### **Barriers to Higher Education**

It is estimated that between the years 2000 and 2010 economic obstacles will prevent nearly two million low and middle income college-qualified high school graduates from attending college.<sup>1</sup> In addition, in their 2006 report, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, a special commission appointed by U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings determined that many students "don't enter college because of inadequate information and rising costs, combined with a confusing financial aid system that spends too little on those who need the help the most." The commission also concluded, "the current system does not provide definitive information about freshman year aid until the spring of the senior year of high school, which makes it hard for families to plan and discourages college attendance."<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, with our state and federal government placing such importance on students' performance on standardized tests, our public schools have no motivation to even try to prepare pupils for postsecondary education or training. The *Burleson Opportunity Fund* would not only provide a financial solution for families who need it the most, it would encourage families and schools to begin planning for higher education much sooner.

### **The Importance of Expectations**

In a famous 1960s experiment, Harvard Professor Robert Rosenthal and elementary school Principal Lenore Jacobsen tested the hypothesis that a teacher's expectations impacts a student's intellectual development. They gave an intelligence test

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. 2002. *Empty Promises: The Myth of College Access in America*. Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, a Report of the Commission Appointed by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. September 2006. Page 3.

to every student at an elementary school, then randomly selected 20% of the students (with no relation to actual test results) and reported to the teachers that these students had an “unusual potential for academic growth”. At the end of the school year they re-tested all of the students and found that those students labeled as intelligent showed significantly greater improvement on the new tests than the students who were not singled out as having “unusual potential for academic growth.” Put simply, the teachers’ changed expectations about these students led to an improvement in the students’ academic performance.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent studies have emphasized not only the importance of a teacher’s expectations, but also the importance of parental and personal expectations and their impact on educational achievement.<sup>4</sup>

If financial and other barriers to higher education were removed, teachers and parents would perhaps begin to view every child as a future college student. What’s more, if every Burleson child was told from a very early age that their access to higher education was guaranteed, how might that change their own expectations about their future, and how might that shape the decisions they make along the way?

### **Increased Importance of Higher Education in the New Economy**

Whereas previous generations could expect to live a productive life and earn a good living by learning a particular trade or skill, today’s job market places a premium on the ability to adapt to new technologies and continually gain new knowledge. While it may be true that not everyone needs to go to college, some level of post-secondary education is now extremely important to an individual’s economic security.<sup>5</sup> According to the Department of Labor, ninety percent of the fastest growing jobs in the new information and service economy will require at least some postsecondary education. Further, by 2014, there will be nearly four million new jobs in health care, education, and computer and math sciences—fields that usually require some level of higher education.

Higher levels of education result in higher earnings across gender, racial, ethnic and economic classifications (more specific to the benefit offered under the *Burleson Opportunity Fund Program*, people with associates degrees earn 20 to 30 percent more than people with only high school diplomas).<sup>6</sup> In addition, individuals with higher levels of education also save more money, experience greater personal and professional mobility, pass on higher quality of life to their children, and have more hobbies and leisure time.<sup>7</sup> As for non-monetary benefits, individuals with higher levels of education tend to be more open-minded, cultured, rational, and consistent, and less authoritarian.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Rosenthal and Jacobson’s findings were published in *Pygmalion in the classroom: Teacher expectation and pupils’ intellectual development* in 1968.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *On the Edge of Commitment: Educational Attainment and Race in the United States*. Stanford University Press, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> According to *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, a Report of the Commission Appointed by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. September 2006.

<sup>6</sup> See Bailey, T., Kienzl, G., and Marcotte, D. (August 2004). “Who Benefits from Postsecondary Occupational Education?”

<sup>7</sup> According to a 1998 report by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, and reported in “The Value of a College Degree” by Kathleen Porter.

<sup>8</sup> According to a report published by the Carnegie Foundation and reported in “The Value of a College Degree” by Kathleen Porter.

### **Particular Benefits of a Community College Education**

For many high school graduates, starting their post-secondary career at community college offers greater benefits and greater chances of success than starting directly at a four-year institution. A 1999 report compiled for the U.S. Department of Education concluded that high school students uncertain of their abilities or motivation should strongly consider attending two-year college rather than four-year college.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, students who enter four-year institutions after spending their first two years in community college are more likely to finish with their four-year degree and also tend to finish with a higher grade point average than their counterparts who start out at a four-year institution.<sup>10</sup>

### **Social and Economic Benefits to the Community**

Higher educational attainment leads to lower poverty rates, reduced crime rates, better health (hence lower impact on the health care system), and reduced dependence on social safety-net programs.<sup>11</sup> Investment in higher educational attainment for Burleson citizens is morally and socially the right thing to do, but it is also a good investment from an economic perspective.

One of the problems with Burleson's population growth is that job growth is not projected to keep pace. The North Central Texas Council of Governments projected that in 2005 there were 3,873 more households than jobs in the City of Burleson. By 2020 that gap is projected to be 9,205.<sup>12</sup> A successful *Burleson Opportunity Fund* would facilitate efforts to reverse that trend and bring more jobs to Burleson. According to University of Maine Economics professors Philip A. Trostel and Todd M. Gabe, there is a solid correlation between higher education and economic development:

Another indication of the strong connection between college attainment and regional economic development is the high importance that businesses place on an educated workforce as a determinant of location and growth. Workforce issues, including the availability of educated workers, are commonly near the top of the wish list in business surveys related to firm location.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, a July 2001 report from the United States General Accounting Office comparing site selection practices of the government and private sector noted, “[T]he availability of sufficient qualified labor is crucial to any business location decision

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<sup>9</sup> Boesel, D., & Fredland, E. (1999). *College for all? Is there too much emphasis on getting a 4-year college degree?* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Library of Education.

<sup>10</sup> [Get citation from Dr. Kappus.]

<sup>11</sup> Also, according to a May 2002 report, “The Socioeconomic Benefits Generated by Hill College”, prepared by Kjell A. Christophersen and M. Henry Robison, “persons with higher education are less likely to smoke or abuse alcohol, draw welfare or unemployment benefits, or commit crimes.”

<sup>12</sup> According to the North Central Texas Council of Governments 2030 Demographic Forecast, there were 9,940 households and 6,067 jobs in the City of Burleson in 2005. In 2020 the Forecast projects there will be 18,457 households and 9,252 jobs in the City of Burleson.

<sup>13</sup> “Fiscal and Economic Effects of College Attainment”, Philip A. Trostel, Todd M. Gabe. March 2007.

because, even in a low wage area, the need to train a qualified workforce can wipe out savings from lower labor costs.”<sup>14</sup>

Finally, a thriving Hill College campus will be good for the City of Burleson. Ensuring a healthy enrollment will lead to expanded educational programs and offerings and more cultural benefits for the entire community. What’s more, in addition to the benefits associated with higher educational attainment, community colleges have a direct economic impact on communities through the jobs they create and the retail economic activity associated with a vibrant campus.

### **Greater Synergy Between High Schools and Institutions of Higher Education**

Any credible plan to improve education and boost America’s long-term position in the global economy includes improved alignment between K-12 and higher education. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the overwhelming majority of both college and high school faculty and administrators are unaware of the standards and assessments being used by their counterparts. Removing the financial barriers to higher education would provide incentive for Burleson secondary schools to adopt curricula that prepare all students for postsecondary education and would encourage Hill College to work with the public schools to facilitate a seamless integration between high school and college.

### **CONCLUSION**

Financial barriers to higher education not only create tremendous stress for families, they depresses expectations, diminish student achievement, lower earnings, and lead to many other social problems. Removing those barriers would not only improve the lives of the student beneficiaries, it would pay direct financial dividends to the City of Burleson through lower poverty rates, reduced crime, and enhanced economic development.

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<sup>14</sup> United States General Accounting Office Report to Senator Byron L. Dorgan, U.S. Senate, “Facilities Location”, July 2001. Page 27.