



Wright Lassiter and Mark Milliron: Help college dropouts finish what they started

Published: 01 April 2012 08:16 PM

Finishing what you started matters academically. Our state's economic viability depends on people who start their years at colleges and universities after a strong finish in high school — and to move forward into promising careers after they have finished a degree or a certificate that gives them the analytical and practical skills they need to succeed.

According to a new study released last week by a private foundation, the Houston Endowment, only one in five Texas eighth-graders earns any type of degree within six years after they finish high school. The study, by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, a private, nonprofit organization based in Boulder, Colo., used data provided by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and other sources to track the educational paths of the 883,260 public school students in Texas who started the eighth grade in 1996, 1997 and 1998.

After 11 years, the study indicates that 19.9 percent of those students had earned an associate's degree, certificate or bachelor's degree.

Why should these numbers matter? In Texas, 3.5 million adults have some college, but no degrees. According to Workforce Solutions of North Texas, that number exceeds 250,000 in Dallas County. Those numbers reflect a national trend as well: More than 37 million Americans who started some type of [postsecondary education](#) or training never finished. Reasons vary and "life happens," affecting their plans and long-term outcomes.

But who pays? We all do. All sectors need well-educated employees who are trained to think, analyze and act so that they can do a better job and we can cultivate a robust economy.

With all this in mind, Dallas County Community College District and Western Governors University Texas are joining forces and resources to help adults take those steps to earn credentials and build success — to complete what they started. The program, Finish to Go Further, provides them with an opportunity to keep their education affordable and to complete their degrees.

This program, which enables students to transfer to a totally online degree program at the nonprofit WGU Texas, will help them finish what they started with DCCCD. Then they can continue on their journey toward an associate's degree or a professional certificate with DCCCD. Or the students can go to work while starting the next step in their academic careers at WGU Texas.

No one ever said the journey would be easy, but college credentials can help end the cycle of poverty for low-income students, meet the needs of the business community, energize the workforce and create a better future for all Texans. DCCCD and WGU Texas are developing aligned programs in information technology, business, health care and education that can help students finish what they have started — and more frequently.

Our primary focus is to serve students — to educate them for a productive future, to provide opportunities for them to grow both personally and professionally, and to finish a degree that will take them to the next phase of their lives. DCCCD's partnership with WGU Texas in Finish to Go Further is an excellent example of our shared commitment to that goal.

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