

THE POLICY SCIENCES CENTER, INC.

Project Director: DR. LLOYD ETHEREDGE
7106 Bells Mill Rd.
Bethesda, MD 20817-1204
Tel: (301)-365-5241
E-mail: lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net

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Acting Superintendent Hon. Jack R. Smith
Maryland Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Acting Superintendent Smith:

I am following up my letter of February 6, 2016. I write (in your current joint capacities as Superintendent-designate of Montgomery County and as Acting State Superintendent) to ask if you will begin a process to provide free County-wide and state-wide AP (in all fields), and a free freshman year of college (with top quality courses in 30 subjects), via edX.org, this fall? ¹

I also write because one of my foundation responsibilities is to achieve these goals, worldwide. A generous philanthropist and a grant from the Modern States Education Alliance (modernstates.org) to edX.org now brings this package of courses online, worldwide and (with a light touch of leadership by you) to students throughout Montgomery County and Maryland). AP certification and college credit can be provided by standard, recognized exams through the AP and College Level Examination Programs of the College Board. The edX.org open resources are available to everyone as individuals and to students attending public, charter, parochial, private, and cyber schools in Maryland as well as those who are being home schooled.

I attach a copy of the announcement by the University of Texas system. Texas will launch their statewide (almost free) freshman year option this fall. SUNY, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Arizona, and Colorado also will start. Texas and edX will charge about \$90/course for an in-course exam system and Certificate of Completion (edX has found that this Certification Track option substantially increases completion rates).

Adding ingredients to evolve what is online into an exciting, fully functional, County-level and State-level system, and deliver an outstanding educational experience, is what will require your leadership. I hope that you can provide a catalyst at the State level (including first steps in Montgomery County) and bring the new Montgomery County system to life, in consultation with the Board of Education, when you relocate here in several months.

To begin, perhaps a working group might identify interested jurisdictions and partners and begin to scope-out what will be needed to launch a first phase this fall? A first task in each secondary school will be to tell students – an Online Education Adviser to inform students about what will be available in the first phase and provide logistical support, e.g., to help students to identify other students for possible study groups and, if the need arises, facilitating use of secondary school, junior college, or college classrooms for study groups. The Online Education Advisers will be designated, *de facto*, the Chief Learning Officers for Montgomery County (and across Maryland) to learn lessons, make recommendations, identify any new resources, and evolve a growing system.

We are learning that adding social structures and human relationships to the online experience can support motivation and improve the quality of the experience. The public school and college systems in Maryland might organize experiments, optional tutoring, social learning tools, and other support services on a cost-reimbursement basis. The Modern States Education Alliance and edX have evolving plans to experiment with a range of these options: a useful starting point might be to ask retired and certified teachers in Maryland if they can be available, in return for an honorarium, to help to launch the first phase and contribute advice. I think that we are going to learn, rather quickly, that a friendly adult face will be a catalyst to enhance whatever happens online. In the longer term – since this is only the first year of college – a diverse network of qualified people and resources may be available, throughout the State, to build this new era of education.

A great deal is in motion. We can anticipate a cornucopia of online educational resources, from a range of providers, in different formats, serving many needs and levels in Maryland. Statewide, perhaps the best policy for the State is to support all groups (e.g., of five people or more) who want to learn anything online. Online Education Advisers can facilitate study groups, meeting places, and identify options for tutors (services to be contracted for by the students themselves.) If we begin now, with the focused AP and freshman year project, we can gain experience to understand what Montgomery County (and Maryland) can add to these online resources to deliver affordable educational experiences equal to (or nearly equal to) the best that is available with traditional methods and settings.

Also: I expect that the Governor will support this. Maryland gains visibility as one of the first states to build this new era by making a commitment to its students and citizens at this level.

If you decide to get behind this, in your new official capacity in Montgomery County that begins this summer, your leadership can capture imaginations and build momentum for the entire state.

I would be grateful to know your decision. If I can help, please let me know.

Yours truly,

Dr. Lloyd S. Etheredge, Montgomery County
Public School Graduate (1964); Director – In-
ternational Scientific Networks

News Release

TSUS Joins ‘Freshman Year for Free’ Program

September 10, 2015. <http://www.tsus.edu/news/news-releases/release-091015>

(AUSTIN) – The Texas State University System today announced a partnership with the not-for-profit Modern States Education Alliance that could help students earn up to one full year of college credit tuition-free, reducing the cost of a degree by up to 25 percent. TSUS is the first public university system in Texas to partner with Modern States’ ‘Freshman Year for Free’ program.

The program, available to students in fall 2016, will offer more than 30 top quality online college courses at no cost, along with free online texts and materials. These courses are under development through edX, the joint venture of Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology that is the nation’s leading developer of Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

Students wishing to participate in the TSUS-Modern States program will be able to select freshman-level courses from the Modern States catalog that apply toward degrees at TSUS’s eight component institutions. After completing these courses, students will be prepared to take Advanced Placement (AP) or College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests offered independently by the College Board, and may receive course credit from TSUS institutions when they enter with an AP test score of three or better, or a passing score on a CLEP test.

The ability to earn college course credit through AP and CLEP exams is already well-established in Texas for high school students. For the first time, however, the ‘Freshman Year for Free’ program will make this option available to non-traditional students who did not have access to college-credit courses in high school or who are entering college as working adults.

“As our student population becomes older and more diverse, the pathway to a college degree varies greatly from student to student,” said TSUS Chancellor Brian McCall. “Our goal in partnering with Modern States’ ‘Freshman Year For Free’ program is to provide students with another option to earn their degree on a time-line and budget that works for them.”

“We are proud to be partners with the Texas State University System and its 83,000 students, in order to make college more available and affordable for everyone,” said Steven Klinsky, founder and chairman of the Modern States Education Alliance. “No one should be shut out of education after high school because of tuition cost or lack of access.”

Modern States is creating a web portal that will offer the course catalog, and will also link students to resources such as low-cost or no-cost tutors, volunteer mentors, and information about partner colleges and universities.

The Modern States Education Alliance was launched in 2014. Its goal is to create at least one readily available path to a tuition-free, high quality and universally accessible college education for any motivated student who seeks one. The 'Freshman Year for Free' program is Modern States' initial effort toward this goal.

Along with TSUS, other major colleges and university systems involved in the 'Freshman Year for Free' program include: the State University of New York; the Ohio Department of Higher Education; the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education; the Tennessee Board of Regents; Arizona State University; Colorado State University-Global; and Rice University. Together, these university systems serve more than 500,000 students.

The Texas State University System is Texas' first university system, comprising eight institutions spanning from far West Texas to the Gulf Coast.

¹ <https://www.edx.org/high-school-initiative>