

Editorial: Welcome Tier One support from Dewhurst

Reproduced with permission from *The Dallas Morning News*

04:47 PM CST on Wednesday, January 21, 2009

Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst has staked out a positive and pragmatic approach to strengthening the research status of state universities. Start now, he says. Amen, we say.

Indeed, given the proportion of Tier One schools to its population, Texas is overdue in developing more. North Texas is most overdue, given that it's the nation's most populous metro area without an elite university and that these schools whip up enormous economic activity.

Dewhurst told this newspaper's Austin bureau that he favors a strategy that rewards universities for their own efforts and successes. That aligns with House legislation filed by Dallas Rep. Dan Branch that would provide matching dollars to emerging research universities – say, the University of Texas at Dallas, UT-Arlington and the University of North Texas – when they land major grants or sign top faculty talent.

The presidents of all three schools support such a roadmap for developing their programs. They also share Dewhurst's pragmatism about the years it will take and the difficulty in finding money for dramatic impact in this tight budget cycle. The important steps now are to square away the funding mechanism and then battle for dollars.

At the same time, we also support other higher-education initiatives, such as improving affordability of state schools and protecting the excellence of UT-Austin and Texas A&M. (Those two, along with Houston's Rice University, are the only Texas schools among the 62 members of the Association of American Universities, a status that recognizes excellence of faculty and scope of research. California has nine.)

Gov. Rick Perry seemed last week to have a less-precise prescription for advancing another Texas school toward Tier One status. His office says he shares the goal and recognizes the need in North Texas. Further, Perry's office points to his record of boosting research – for instance, through his Emerging Technology Fund.

True. But determined strides forward are needed on behalf of specific campuses. Dallas-Fort Worth leaders will be listening closely during the governor's State of the State message Tuesday.