



TEXAS
BUSINESS
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COALITION

Testimony in support of
House Bill 3485

by

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The Texas Business and Education Coalition (TBEC) supports enactment of House Bill 3485 by Representatives King, Anchia and Kolkhorst relating to career and technical education.

This bill and others that are aimed at strengthening Career and Technical Education (CTE) in Texas address two of the major education-related challenges facing our state.

First, the educational attainment levels of the Texas population must be raised. We need:

- more of our students to complete high school,
- more of those who complete high school to go on to college,
- more of those who go on to college to complete a program of study leading to an industry-defined certificate, license or associate degree, and
- more Texans to complete baccalaureate, graduate and professional degrees.

Second, there is a shortage of highly skilled workers at every level to meet the current and emerging needs of Texas employers. Following are just a few examples of the good job opportunities available now for people with the right preparation.

- The Lockheed Martin plant in Fort Worth has 450 current vacancies.
- The five chemical plants in Port Lavaca usually have about 250 vacant positions.
- The Seton Healthcare system in Austin has nearly 300 current nursing vacancies, and that does not include many other job openings.
- Dell Computer is hiring 500 more engineers in their Austin location.
- More than 2,500 engineers and scientists will retire from the Johnson Space Center in the next few years.
- Auto dealers in the Tyler area need so many certified automotive service technicians they are advertising for them on a large billboard.
- Public schools have large shortages of mathematics, science and bilingual teachers.

The shortages of qualified applicants will only be magnified by the retirement of large numbers of "Baby Boomers" over the next decade.

Despite all the talk of downsizing and off-shoring, there will be good jobs in Texas for those who are qualified. In fact, the challenge is to have enough qualified people to serve as the human resources for the future economic development of our state. If employers are forced to bring people in from elsewhere to take the "good" jobs, the people who grow up in Texas will end up in the relatively lower-paying jobs of the service economy.

The fact that our education system is not currently meeting these challenges should cause us to consider doing things differently.

Albert Einstein is credited with saying that “the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” He also said that “we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”

We should listen also to what students say. In survey after survey, American high school students say they aren't working very hard. They don't feel particularly challenged. They don't find their classes interesting and they don't see the relevance to what they are being asked to learn.

TBEC has long been an advocate for strengthening the academic core of the Texas high school education through our support for the Recommended High School Program. We still believe that is a sound approach to preparing students for success after high school.

However, it is also clear that this approach is not working for far too many students. It is clear also that many who succeed in “traditional education” are not prepared to take advantage of current and emerging opportunities in the job market.

One size does not fit all. It is time to look at another way “to get there.”

Evidence shows that students who are engaged in a CTE course of study do better than their peers in several important performance indicators: attendance, high school completion, standardized test scores, and college going rates.

Clearly, Career and Technical Education works. Students should be allowed to use CTE courses to partially complete the math and science requirements of the Recommended Program. Otherwise, many will opt out of that graduation plan so that they can pursue a course of study more appropriate to their interests and career goals.

Not coincidentally, these students are preparing themselves directly to take advantage of the good opportunities that exist in the job market, most of which require at least some post-secondary education or training.

If we care about all our students and our economic future, we will strengthen Career and Technical Education beginning in our secondary schools and continuing into our colleges and universities. We should also give CTE equal status with the traditional straight academic approach to educational achievement.

No one argues that the bill accomplishes all that needs to be done. However, it is a significant step in the right direction and establishes a foundation on which to build in the future. We encourage you to give it your full support.
