

## **Information Submission**

### **Texas House of Representatives Higher Education Committee Interim Charge 3**

**Submitted by:  
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The Texas Association of Workforce Boards (TAWB) respectfully submits the following recommendations with regard to the House Higher Education Committee's Request for Information, Interim Charge Three.

TAWB represents the 28 local workforce development boards in Texas and the more than 700 business and community leaders across Texas who serve as volunteers on those boards. TAWB's goal is to ensure a highly skilled, well-trained talent supply for Texas employers and an employer-driven workforce system. The hands-on business and workforce development expertise of its members uniquely positions TAWB and its representatives to advise on education, training and workforce development policies for the state's emerging and incumbent workforce necessary to build a true employer-driven workforce development system.

The COVID-19 public health crisis and economic disruption has impacted millions of Texans in every region. Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) working on the ground in communities across Texas agree that the demand for services directed to both employers and job seekers will grow to unprecedented levels. WDBs and other stakeholders in the workforce development system are rising to the challenge as "frontline responders" for those individuals and businesses seeking immediate help while also positioning themselves to be the long-term solution for workers and business alike. An increased and sustained commitment to post-secondary education and workforce training programs are vital to ensure we can respond quickly to current and projected demands for new workers in key industries, while helping those who have lost their jobs as a result of this crisis to transition to new family-supporting jobs. The importance of this is magnified by the fact that many of these lost jobs are never coming back.

TAWB's recommendations herein are consistent with those it provided during the past several Texas Legislative Sessions. While some of the recommendations at first blush may appear to fall outside the scope of the requested information, we believe they are intertwined with the desire of our leaders in the business community and government, as well as education to move past the current economic crisis and lay the groundwork for long-term economic prosperity.

TAWB also participates with the Tri-Agency Commission's Texas Regional Pathways Network and the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Industry-Based Certification Advisory Committee, and several of our

recommendations are consistent with those being considered by these groups. Progressing these efforts is more critical than ever before as we seek to respond to our current crisis and recovery from it.

### **TAWB Recommendations**

- **Maintain and bolster programs administered by TWC in collaboration with WDBs and higher education providers to respond to the anticipated need for training, re-training and upskilling of Texas students and dislocated and incumbent workers, including:**
  - Skills Development Fund
  - Skills Development Fund COVID-19 Special Training Initiative
  - Skills for Small Business Program
  - Career and Education Outreach Specialist Program
- **Incentivize the development of additional fast-start fast-finish upskilling programs that award industry-recognized credentials for in-demand occupations as identified by local WDBs.**
- **Expand apprenticeships and internships for high school and post-secondary students and incentivize and/or remove barriers for business participation.** Apprenticeship and internship programs are a proven approach to meeting growing demand for skilled workers. TAWB's recommendations include:
  - provide employer tax credits for employers providing internships for high school and community college students that are aligned to the demand occupations in the local region;
  - increase funding of TWC's Apprenticeship Training Program (ATP) to meet the growing demand for skilled workers; and
  - increase apprenticeship and internship opportunities for people with disabilities.
- **Incentivize the development of apprenticeships and internships for veterans and require that college credit and credit toward industry certifications be awarded for demonstrated skills arising from the military training of veterans.**
- **Expand dual course study programs, certificate programs and workforce continuing education programs at both high school and middle school levels and require contact hour reimbursement for community colleges offering dual credit programs toward recognized industry certifications that do not involve college credit courses.** Dual credit is both a proven means for students to earn college credit even while they are still in high school, and a critical element in meeting the state's 60X30TX plan. This affordable alternative usually takes less than one or two years to complete and can boost a worker's earning power by 20% over those with only a high school diploma. State leaders also should give early consideration to recommendations of TEA's Industry-Based Certification Advisory Committee, of which TAWB is a member, related to increasing the number of industry certifications recognized in Domain 1 of TEA's accountability system.

- **Develop Statewide Articulation Agreements as a means of ensuring that students taking dual credit courses receive full credit for those classes when transferring among state education institutions.**
- **Increase the availability of Career & Technology Education (CTE) programs in public community and technical colleges and independent school districts, and the promotion of the opportunities that can result from CTE.** CTE presents the business community with an actionable agenda for solving growing workforce shortages and provides diverse sets of knowledge, skills, and abilities that employers in many industries need to fill crucial jobs.
- **Maintain and, if possible, increase state funding for Texas State Technical College (TSTC) and Texas Community Colleges.** TSTC and Texas' community colleges are on the front lines of putting people back to work by providing customized training for workers aligned with the skills desired by Texas employers.
- **Early consideration and adoption of strategies and sub-strategies identified in the Tri-Agency 2020 Commissioners' Report, and recommendations of the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Texas Regional Pathways Network, related to Upskilling, Career and Technical Education (CTE), and College, Career, and Military Readiness.**
- **Work with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and WDBs to educate federal congressional representatives and federal agencies about the vital role WDBs play in workforce development, and to encourage them to support increased funding of federal workforce programs.**

We wish to thank the members of the House Higher Education Committee for this opportunity to share information we trust will be helpful to you in your deliberations. TAWB stands ready to provide additional information, both in the interim and during the 87<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature.