

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Public Education
For HB 2615

Compiled on: Friday, April 21, 2023 12:26 AM

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Hearing Date: April 20, 2023 8:00 AM

Tyane Dietz
Self/Project Manager
Lufkin, TX

I am a twenty-five year private sector representative on my local workforce board. I have served as a past chair of that organization, as well as a past chair of the Texas Association of Workforce Boards.

I am happy to SUPPORT HB 2615. The bill provides for improved opportunities for students to thrive in meaningful, high-demand careers while addressing the lack of skilled workers needed for the Texas economy to grow. Vocational education/CTE students are less likely to drop out of school and most likely to pursue post secondary education. These educational opportunities are a win-win for both students and the business community.

Greg Vaughn
Texas Association of Workforce Boards
Frisco, TX

The Texas Association of Workforce Boards (TAWB) respectfully submits the following testimony in SUPPORT of HB 2615 to the House Higher Education Committee.

TAWB represents the 28 Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) in Texas and the more than 700 business and community leaders across Texas who serve as volunteers on those boards. The 28 LWDBs in Texas are responsible for the planning, oversight, and evaluation of workforce development activities in their respective areas, with key functions including Employer Engagement, Workforce Stakeholder Partnerships, Career Pathways Development and Coordination with Education & Training Providers.

Due to the increasing importance of middle-skill jobs, TAWB and other members of the business community have long called for more vocational training opportunities in public schools. Vocational training, which includes Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs present the business community with an actionable agenda for solving growing workforce shortages and provides students with diverse sets of knowledge, skills, and abilities that employers in many industries need to fill crucial jobs. For students, CTE prepares them to succeed and thrive in the workforce by equipping them with industry-recognized certifications and credentials, and access to post-secondary occupational training. But it will require new, innovative approaches such as that which is proposed in HB 2615. We encourage you to seriously consider the elements of this bill and stand ready to provide additional information going forward.

We wish to thank the members of the House Public 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 during the 88th Texas Legislature.

Trista Bishop-Watt
Good Reason Houston
Houston, TX
HB 2615 - Opposed

We respectfully submit our concerns with the changes proposed in HB 2615. While we appreciate the intent of strengthening vocational pathways in K-12 education, we are concerned that, as written, the bill creates a separate and less rigorous path to graduation, which will reduce post-secondary options for many high school students. For this reason, we must regretfully oppose HB 2615.

Texas students are capable of high levels of achievement. Our current system recognizes this by providing standards for graduation under the Foundation High School Program, which not only ensures students have a solid academic foundation for the future, but also leaves room for vocational education through diploma endorsements that allow students to specialize in areas such as business and industry and/or public service. Under law, schools are held accountable for college, career, and military readiness (CCMR), which incentivizes districts to offer a host of career and technical education (CTE) courses. In Houston, students can graduate high school with a pilot's license, welding certification, or associate's degree. Further, Texas law outlines Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) programs, which allow career-focused students the opportunity to meet high school graduation requirements while also pursuing work-based education.

Our current system is set up so students can graduate with the full arsenal of options for their future. The system that HB 2615 presents is one in which some students will graduate from high school with a more limited future pathway. By creating a separate vocational diploma with less rigorous academic standards, curriculum requirements, and teacher certifications, students will be deprived of the option of attending college after graduation without significant and costly remedial courses. While students make this decision in 10th grade, it will almost certainly lead to negative trickle down effects in student expectations early in their educational journey. This is detrimental to students and the Texas economy.

As it stands now, Texas has seen slower growth than the national average for high-wage, skilled jobs. Migrants to our state are 1.5 times more likely to have a Bachelor's degree than native Texans. Rather than allowing students to opt out of core academic courses in 10th grade, we need to focus on strengthening our educational pipeline early on so students can pursue vocational programs without losing the option to attend college post-graduation.

For the foregoing reasons, we respectfully oppose HB 2615. We agree that students need access to vocational options, but our kids deserve choices. We feel that the best way forward is refining and strengthening the current system and not creating a separate track for only some students.

Kate Greer
The Commit Partnership
Dallas, TX

HB 2615 as-filed creates a Vocational Education Program, lowering the bar for high school graduation and sacrificing the academic rigor necessary for students to exit high school prepared to successfully enter their next step. This risks backtracking on past state efforts to bolster postsecondary readiness and attainment of high-wage, high-demand jobs, ultimately undermining our state's ability to meet the Building a Talent Strong Texas Plan goals.

We are particularly concerned that it also "tracks" students onto this pathway in ways that could limit their college and career options after graduation – as filed the bill leaves open the question of whether or not students could apply courses or experiences used in this program toward an associate or Bachelor's degree.

Christina Etri
Scholarshot
Dallas, TX

Hello, Chairman Buckley and Committee Members,

My name is Christina Etri, and I am a former educator, having taught most recently high school College and Career Readiness. I'm also a former fellow with Teach Plus. I'm now the Director of Institutional Improvement for ScholarShot, a postsecondary degree completion program in Dallas with a 90% credential completion rate for first-generation, low-income students.

According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, our ability to transfer Texas High school students from a diploma to a sustainable wage has declined over the last decade. In 2019, only 46% of all high school students attempted a postsecondary credential, and only 26% succeeded, essentially 1 in 4 students. In larger urban districts, the current credential rate is 1 out of 5.

Texas has over 1 million unfilled jobs because our students lack the necessary skills or credentials to fill them. 74% of Texas students fail to earn a postsecondary credential representing a \$40-billion yearly loss in Texas investment in poverty wages or low employability. This loss is calculated by multiplying the Texas investment in public education K-12 times the number of students who do not pursue post-secondary education. There are 5,156,972 students in Texas public schools. 74% equates to 3,816,159 students who have the potential to attain an industry-recognized certification, license, and associate degree in high school, leading them to high-wage, high-demand jobs, thus closing the current career gap.

Every high school graduate must have a pathway to obtain a sustainable wage that fits them academically and financially to maximize their odds of success. Not all students are college-bound or a match for P-TECH. Robust vocational training in high schools and employer partnerships throughout the state provides a clear path to career readiness and employability.

We can improve outcomes for all Texas students by fully funding and implementing this bill. ScholarShot supports the passage of HB 2615.

Our great state can and must do better. I'm happy to assist in this effort or answer any questions. Thank you.

Beverly Roberts
Self
Houston, TX

Not every student is college material. We desperately need trained workers to do the daily tasks of plumbing, electrical, car maintenance, and etc. It is tragic to try to focus every student on college, leaving those who cannot thrive in that environment with NO marketable skills when they leave high school. Please vote YES on this bill. Thank you!

Linda Litzinger
Texas Parent to Parent - Public Policy Specialist, and self (public policy)
Austin, TX

Thank you for providing a comment portal. Texas Parent to Parent is a statewide nonprofit serving 14,000 families having children with all types of disabilities, mental health or special healthcare need. We support HB2615 and thank Rep Gates for filing it.

Emily Lee, Chief Instructional Officer
DeKalb ISD
De Kalb, TX

The new development of the CTE program of studies has not been given time to show that student will be increasingly more ready to enter the workforce with the new requirement to be a completer in a program of study (3 or more aligned courses for 4 or more credits).

Please give this new program of study rollout time to prove its effectiveness in solving for lack of CTE readiness.

Virginia Felle

Myself. Texas Retired Educator fifty years in SBISD
Houston, TX

This is a positive message to our high school students

Hearing Date: April 20, 2023 8:00 AM

Shannon Noble

Texas Industrial Vocational Association

Austin, TX

The Texas Industrial Vocational Association opposes HB 2615. It would create a new path for graduation with a "vocational high school diploma," with a minimum of Algebra 1 and English 1. Will this set up a student to not be admitted to college later if they choose to go, because they didn't get the required credits while in high school? The bill also allows CTE teachers to not obtain a teaching certification. Maybe there should be a stipend for teachers who DO have a teaching certificate. Thank you.

Trina Hoover

Self

Irving, TX

I am For a vocational training track for issuance for a high school diploma.

Students and families should be assessed and placed into appropriate classes if that's what they want aimed at career readiness and new able to be industry certified if applicable.

College isn't for everyone but some students want to prepare for careers in hvac;automotive; IT, Audio and Video technology and construction to name a few.

Our son is in one such program and he's gaining necessary skills to work in his chosen field of video and photography.