

CHAPTER 6

Steps Texas Should Take

The following proposals could help Texas ensure that its community and technical colleges continue to help students embark on well-paid careers while supplying area employers with the technically skilled workers they need to succeed.

1. **The Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Texas Workforce Commission and the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts should collaborate on programs to make parents and students aware of all postsecondary educational options, including career and technical education (CTE), as well as the availability of financial assistance.**

The Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts should be added to the College for All Texans Web Portal Working Committee. Committee members should ensure that Texas' Web portal delivers information on CTE and job opportunities, and emphasize jobs and skills in high demand. The Web site should provide materials in English and Spanish in an attractive style designed to pique interest.

In addition, the GO Centers should ensure that their staff and volunteers emphasize career and technical education opportunities and direct students to the new CTE Web portal for more information. GO Center workers should be trained to assist families in filling out the FAFSA. One of THECB's performance measures should be tied to the number high school seniors in Texas who complete this form.

The site should also provide information on financial aid available to Texas students interested in CTE. The *Compendium of Texas Colleges and Financial Aid Calendar*, produced annually by the Minnie Stevens Piper Foundation, indexes financial aid programs alphabetically and by subject, and is available through

the Comptroller's Web site *Every Chance, Every Texan* (<http://www.everychanceeverytexan.org>). The Comptroller's office is working to make this resource more user-friendly for all students, including those attending or planning to attend two-year institutions.

The site should be supplemented with TEA and THECB data on educational programs and outcomes, and TWC data on work force outcomes.

THECB should conduct ongoing evaluations of these outreach efforts to determine their effectiveness.

2. **THECB, TEA and TWC should use data from the Automated Student and Adult Learner Follow-up System to assess the economic benefits of colleges and their programs to students and the state.**

The results of this research should be disseminated electronically to make current and prospective students aware of the value of all postsecondary options. In conducting this research, THECB should ensure it protects the privacy of individual students and workers.

3. **Texas should ensure that state policies such as the new "four-by-four" policy and GPA calculation standards do not prevent or discourage students from enrolling in career and technology courses.**

The state should include some rigorous CTE courses in the four-by-four graduation plan.

The GPA Advisory Committee should consider the effects of excluding CTE courses from GPA calculations, to ensure that the state does not create an incentive for students to avoid career and technical courses.

When given a choice to select elective courses in high school, students are drawn to classes that count toward their GPA. Omission of GPA weight for courses not aligned with university coursework may deter students from gaining an interest in technical skills and could depress enrollment in CTE courses at community and technical colleges.

4. **Texas should appropriate \$25 million for the 2010-11 biennium to establish a “Jobs and Education for Texans” (JET) Fund to support programs that prepare low-income students for careers in high-demand occupations; to defray startup costs associated with CTE courses; and to provide scholarships for students in career and technical programs.**

The comptroller would administer this fund, with an advisory board chaired by the comptroller and including members appointed by the governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the House, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and Texas Workforce Commission. The board would meet quarterly to review applications and award grants.

The proposed JET fund would award grants in three broad categories:

Grants for Innovative and Successful Programs — up to \$10 million in grants over the biennium would be dedicated to expanding existing programs that help low-income students attend community and technical colleges. The grants should require matching local funds from the colleges, area employers, industry consortia or community-based organizations.

Grants should be awarded to programs that show above-average retention and completion rates, and have a proven track record of providing trained workers to meet local needs at wages equal to or above the prevailing wage of the occupation entered. The grants should be awarded in a way that ensures an equitable geographic distribution.

Startup Funding for Career and Technical Programs — up to \$10 million over the biennium would be dedicated to help start

new CTE programs that support high-growth industries and train students for in-demand occupations in their areas and throughout the state.

The grant process could be modeled after the Texas Enterprise Fund (TEF) administered by the Governor’s Office, and could be used in conjunction with TEF to attract and develop business in Texas communities. Grants would be awarded to help community and technical colleges finance up-front costs associated with course development, equipment purchases, facility construction or renovation and other expenses.

As with TEF, grants would be awarded on a competitive basis; selection should be based largely on potential economic returns to the state. Other elements to be considered could include new, emerging industries and high-demand occupations. The fund also should require that programs receiving this funding lead to degrees or postsecondary certificate awards.

As with the grants for innovative and successful programs, startup grants should require matching local funds. For this program, however, local match could include private investments such as in-kind donations of land, facilities or equipment or qualified instructors as well as direct funding. This would demonstrate the local partners’ commitment to the program and limit the risks involved.

Scholarships for Community and Technical College Students — at least \$5 million will be granted directly to community and technical college students with demonstrated financial need enrolled in CTE programs for high-demand occupations.

5. **Texas should ensure that any incentive funding for postsecondary technical education is linked to measures that help ensure the state receives a positive return on its investment. It should be designed so that it does not punish community and technical colleges for successful work force outcomes.**

Incentive funding programs must be used carefully, since they can have adverse consequences including increased administrative costs to comply with new incentives, lower academic standards and decreased enrollment for less prepared students.

Some portion of state appropriations could be allocated to technical training programs based on their *economic return to the state*.

The state could establish a method whereby it estimates the additional tax revenue generated by technical and community colleges' success in meeting employer needs. It could then appropriate some funding based on incremental revenue gains to the state.

For any incentive funding based on completion rates, the state should count as a 'completer' any student who left community or technical college to take a job related directly to the training program in which the student was enrolled.

