

## **BUILDING BACK EQUITABLE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FOR TEXAS**

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*SB1622 and HB3767 will be key to ensuring that all Texans have the opportunity to grow, thrive and attain a good paying job.*

In the decade after the recession of 2008-09, the Texas economy became a powerhouse. Business boomed, and our state was among the most prosperous in the nation.

But behind that flourishing façade was a sad truth: Too many weren't sharing in that prosperity. In 2019, three out of four Texans aged 25-34 weren't earning wages high enough to support themselves and their families. Even fewer Black and Hispanic residents had an opportunity to make ends meet.

Now, we're facing the daunting task of recovering from another economic crisis — this one brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. As our state recovers, we must ensure that all Texans, regardless of their circumstances, can grow, thrive and attain good paying jobs.

In today's economy, a good-paying job requires in-demand skills — and increasingly, those skills are developed through postsecondary education. In fact, by 2036, 71% of Texas jobs will require postsecondary experience.

Because education and the workforce are so closely linked, it's imperative for the three state agencies that oversee these areas — the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) — to collaborate more even closely to support the success of all Texans. Working together the past two years as the Tri-Agency Commission, these agencies now have a unique opportunity to leverage federal stimulus funds to build seamless educational and career pathways, and help millions of young Texans attain better-paying jobs.

High-quality career pathways that intentionally connect high school students to college and careers in high-wage, high-demand industries and occupations will prepare our citizens for the jobs of today and tomorrow. High school students who earn college credit as part of a career-focused education pathway complete degrees faster, at less cost, with better outcomes and with the greatest gains going to underserved students.

The Commit Partnership, for example, brings together the

Dallas Independent School District, Dallas College, The University of North Texas at Dallas and TEA to align the Dallas County Promise with in-demand career and real-world work experiences for students. By working together, our state agencies can build durable partnerships just like this between local school systems, post-secondary institutions and employers, offering high-skill, high-wage jobs across the entire state of Texas.

The Texas Education and Workforce Alignment Act, introduced by state Sen. Paul Bettencourt, R-Houston, as Senate Bill 1622 as and by state Rep. Jim Murphy, R-Houston, as House Bill 3767, would require ongoing collaboration among TEA, TWC, and THECB. This legislation would provide strong guidelines for the interagency collaboration already underway and require the agencies to work together to develop and scale statewide workforce goals — such as teaching more Texans the skills needed for in-demand, high-wage jobs. The agencies also would create an easily accessible dashboard where anyone could track the state's progress.

Under the legislation, the agencies also would share critical information about jobs and education with each other and with Texans — something that technology upgrades can help foster. The bill would require the agencies to create tools that help Texans understand the employment prospects in an industry, see which education programs and upskilling opportunities will help them land a job and evaluate workforce programs based on outcomes of their graduates.

For Texas to truly recover from the pandemic, it's critical not to leave anyone behind. Our young people are the future of our state, and they deserve the opportunity to gain the skills and access the information they need to get sustainable jobs that provide a living wage. TEA, TWC and THECB are already doing great work on behalf of those young people. Ensuring they continue to work together will maximize their effectiveness and make our community stronger, more successful and more equitable.