



THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

FOR A STRONGER ECONOMY, RESKILL AND UPSKILL THE TEXAS WORKFORCE

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The global pandemic upended learning on college campuses across our state, challenging students' pursuit of post-secondary degrees in ways we had not anticipated. It also disrupted the global economy and deepened the mismatch between employer workforce needs and skilled workers. Texas community and technical colleges are committed to addressing this gap. It is time to take bold, purposeful action to strengthen our workforce, support employers and help our communities build a stronger economic recovery.

That is why, in partnership with business and community leaders, we are proposing the Texas Reskilling & Upskilling through Education (TRUE) initiative to strengthen the economic recovery and build a stronger Texas workforce.

"As the current provider of more than 90% of credit-bearing career and technical education certificates, Texas community colleges are best positioned to close the skills gaps to good-paying jobs. Millions of Texans were affected when the job market transformed overnight, and many lack skills to quickly reenter the workforce."

While the unemployment rate continues to decline, it remained at 6.9% in February 2021, more than double the rate from a year earlier.

This is not just a problem for workers, but also for businesses struggling to hire. There were already significant skills gaps before the pandemic, with more than 6 million jobs unfilled at the end of 2019. Now, as highly skilled baby boomers continue to leave the workforce, our companies and our economy depend on younger people able to acquire the education, skills and credentials our labor market requires.

TRUE will connect community and technical colleges with employers to highlight areas of future job growth and to provide high-quality training in high-demand career areas. The initiative will also bring industry and education together to develop new — or redesign existing — industry-aligned, high-demand postsecondary programs that lead to career credentials that can be completed in six months or less.

Our economy works best when our education system aligns with the needs of employers.

TRUE, which the Texas Legislature is considering this session, advances that alignment. That is why many prominent employer groups support the measure, including the Texas Association of Manufacturers, the [Texas Business Leadership Council](#), The Texas Chemical Council and the Texas Association of Business.

We must also ensure our economy is positioned to adapt to the changes in the workplace.

TRUE will include data infrastructure and institutional capacity-building investments that allow skills and credentials to be "stacked" into career pathways that prepare students for regional or statewide high-demand occupations. These learning pathways will help first-generation college aspirants, adult learners and other students pursue 2- or 4-year degree programs.

Under TRUE, more of our community and technical colleges' valuable credential programs would be recognized under the state's 60x30TX higher education plan, raising our state's post-secondary completion rates while also helping Texans get back to work.

We estimate that with every \$50 million investment, TRUE will help at least 30,000 Texans receive training in high-demand fields. When you consider that workers with associate or bachelor degrees earn, on average, more than \$8,000 more per year than those with just high school diplomas, the math is easy.

TRUE responds to the urgency of the moment with a bold framework for long-term success. It closes costly skills gaps while generating higher levels of critical post-secondary credential attainment vital to long-term higher education goals. It builds a skilled, high-performing and competitive workforce essential to growing and attracting business in Texas.

TRUE will strengthen the Texas workforce, meet the needs of employers and build a stronger Texas economy. Now is the moment for TRUE. We urge policy leaders to enact the TRUE legislation and support funding to launch this critical workforce initiative this year.