



# Window on State Government

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### For Immediate Release

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## Comptroller Susan Combs Urges Action on Work Force Training Gap

(AUSTIN) — There is a widening gap between the demand for skilled workers in Texas and the state's ability to supply them, Texas Comptroller Susan Combs said today.

"Texas' secondary and postsecondary education system is not meeting the demands of the current workplace," Combs said. "Employers tell us that good paying jobs are going unfilled because they cannot find qualified workers. And we're hearing from students about the value to them of programs at community and technical colleges. For Texas to remain an economic powerhouse, our education system needs added focus on career and technical training to fill available jobs."

Today, Combs issued a new report, *Texas Works*, which examines the changing Texas job market and the growing shortage of workers with the technical skills required for many of the fastest growing jobs. The report recommends establishing a fund to help with startup costs for new technical training programs and eliminating obstacles that discourage students from pursuing career-technical education (CTE).

Texas has many community and technical colleges offering state-of-the-art training facilities and employment opportunities after just one or two years. But state funding of community and technical colleges has declined, not keeping pace with inflation and hampering schools' ability to train the next generation of Texas workers. CTE courses can be expensive for a college, often requiring state-of-the-art technology and equipment, but the state does not provide funding for startup costs. To address this concern, Combs' report makes two recommendations:

- Establish a \$25 million Jobs and Education for Texas (JET) fund to provide support for postsecondary CTE courses, including startup funding for new programs.

- Link any incentive funding to measurable results to ensure the state receives a positive return on its investments.

Increasing state funding for community and technical colleges will not help the state achieve its goals if students don't take advantage of these educational resources. Combs' report says far too many Texas high school students fail to pursue postsecondary education. Texas Works has some recommendations to meet this challenge:

- Make more parents and students aware of *all* postsecondary educational options and the availability of financial assistance.
- As part of this effort, use data on education and employment to measure the benefits of CTE and publicize the results to make more people aware of its value.
- Ensure state graduation requirements and grade point average (GPA) calculation standards do not prevent or discourage high school students from enrolling in career and technology courses.

Combs' report recommends greater flexibility in the state's new "four-by-four" graduation requirements, which require all high school students take four years each of math, science, social studies and language arts. Many CTE courses do not count toward the "four-by-four" requirements, and grades in many CTE courses will not count toward students' GPAs under a proposed uniform statewide grade point calculation system.

"Texas should ensure high school students have multiple pathways to graduation, preparing them for a variety of education and training options after high school," Combs said. "While the state has done a good job of encouraging more students to pursue college degrees, it is critical that we do not discourage students who will not go to a four year college from attaining valuable training that will raise their standard of living and will have substantial economic benefits to Texas."

In 2007, more than 80 percent of all Texas jobs did not require a bachelor's degree. Neither did nearly 44 percent of the jobs paying wages above the state average. The U.S. Department of Education estimates that about 80 percent of the fastest growing occupations in the near future will require some postsecondary training, but not a bachelor's degree.

The cost to obtain career training is relatively low. Two years of tuition and fees at a Texas community college cost an average of \$3,800, compared to more than \$26,000 for four years at a public university. A student who achieves an associate degree will earn an average of \$340,000 more over a working lifetime than someone with just a high school diploma.

For Texas, the economic impact from the earnings of all workers with associate degrees and postsecondary technical certificates is estimated at \$10.1 billion annually. Combs said the state's economic strength depends on making the future success of every Texan a top priority.

"If we sacrifice the future productivity of a large number of our young people, we risk jeopardizing Texas' economic future," Combs said. "Without an adequate supply of skilled workers, Texas' ability to attract and retain new businesses will suffer — meaning fewer companies to employ a growing population, lower economic output, lower personal income and poorer performance on other measures of economic health."

*Texas Works* is available on the Comptroller's Web site at [www.window.state.tx.us/specialrpt/workforce](http://www.window.state.tx.us/specialrpt/workforce).

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