



Texas Workforce Investment Council

Policy News Highlights

Issue 12, Quarter 4, December 2010

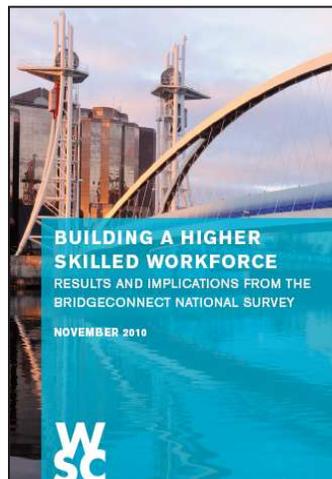
Texas Workforce Investment Council – *Policy News Highlights* is a quarterly review of selected reports relevant to the policy and research functions of the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC). Federal and state agency websites, in addition to numerous public policy and educational databases, are scanned monthly for relevant and emerging issues. Reports are catalogued and stored electronically in TWIC’s Information Repository (IR). Topic areas include: economic development; higher education; K-12 education; literacy and adult education (AE); and skills, training and employment.

Policy News Highlights is organized into three sections, beginning with selected articles that focus on workforce trends and issues that have received heightened attention over the previous months. The second section contains abbreviated summaries of recent articles of interest to the Council and the final section consists of a comprehensive list of all articles and their sources that were added to the IR in the last quarter.

This Quarter’s Selected Articles

This quarter has produced a number of papers aimed at tightening up the workforce pipeline to ensure that students and incumbent workers alike are better prepared for 21st-century jobs. There are new options for adults who did not follow the traditional pathway to postsecondary education and training, but who wish to acquire or improve skills for high-demand, high-paying jobs. The first paper featured below discusses a variety of “bridge” programs. The second paper highlights one of the country’s most successful bridge programs, I-BEST, in Washington state.

“Bridge programs are a 21st-century idea for helping prepare low-skilled individuals for jobs that require more education.”



Building a Higher Skilled Workforce – Results and Implications from the BridgeConnect National Survey, Workforce Strategy Center, November 2010.

BridgeConnect refers to a survey conducted from August 4th to September 10th, 2010, and designed to collect information about various bridge programs aimed at assisting students with low math and reading skills to improve their employment prospects. According to this paper, the current unemployment rate for people without a high school diploma is 15 percent, compared to seven percent for those who have an associate degree. Bridge programs are intended to enable their participants to bridge the gap between an

insufficient skill set and those skills needed to successfully pursue a self-sustaining career path.

The Workforce Strategy Center, a nonpartisan organization, developed and conducted the survey. Funded by the Joyce Foundation, the survey collected information from 515 programs in 345 communities, across 47 states and the District of Columbia. Bridge programs are known by various names, sometimes called integrated education and training programs, contextualized learning programs, or embedded skills programs. Bridge programs are designed for adults with skill levels below the ninth grade in reading and math. Participants may or may not have a high school diploma or General Educational Development certificate (GED). Often people in bridge programs have been out of school for a significant period of time and are ill-equipped to participate successfully in postsecondary education or training programs.

Bridge programs are run through community colleges, school districts, workforce centers and community-based organizations. Specifically, they offer preparation for GED, English as a Second Language, developmental education and Workforce Investment Act-supported training programs. Two major federal funders of bridge programs are: the U.S. Department of Education and its Office of Vocational and Adult Education; and the U.S. Department of Labor and its Employment and Training Administration. According to the paper, important private funders include the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the Lumina Foundation for Education and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

The BridgeConnect survey yields significant findings about the educational and career track outcomes of individuals completing bridge programs, along with information about industry participation and program composition. For example, some promising outcomes include the following:

- 39 percent of completers earn some college credit.
- 67 percent of completers are likely to enroll in further education or training within six months.

- 50 percent of completers are eligible to enter degree-track program.

Since the goal of bridge programs is to introduce more adult workers into the workforce pipeline, industries play a large role in their design. The survey found that 75 percent of bridge programs targeted the allied health fields, followed by administrative and office technologies, construction, energy, information technology and manufacturing.

INDUSTRY FOCUS	
Please choose the industry focus of your bridge program. (If you can run programs for more than one industry, please check all that apply.)	
Allied Health	75%
Administration/Office Technologies	40%
Construction/Trades	35%
Manufacturing	34%
Information Technology	33%
Energy/Green Energy	28%
Automotive/Transportation	21%
Logistics/Warehousing	11%
Biotechnology	9%

Excerpted from *Building a Higher Skilled Workforce*, p. 7

Bridge programs are designed and structured to meet the needs of their adult participants. Therefore, classes are offered in locations and at times that accommodate adult working schedules. Many share the common characteristic of offering a “learning while doing” environment that allows students to progress at their own pace. Many are “cohort-based,” which enables groups of students to progress through their classes together. On average, class sizes are around 19 persons, and the average length for bridge programs is about 20 weeks.

To conclude, the authors of this paper emphasize how the BridgeConnect survey revealed the considerable number of bridge programs already in place across the nation. They are complex, with many different funding sources, different goals, and different outcomes. They appear promising, and with the federal administration and policymakers calling for improved levels of education and training attainment, the authors have several recommendations:

- Build a bridge program community of practice to allow for an exchange of information and ideas in this field.

- Implement a bridge program demonstration project that meets national standards and has built in a process for evaluating results.
- Form a Bridge Program Policy Commission that will be responsible for reviewing policy and practice at local, state, and federal levels so that national bridge program standards can be developed. ★

How I-BEST Works: Findings from a Field Study of Washington State’s Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program, Community College Research Center, September 2010.

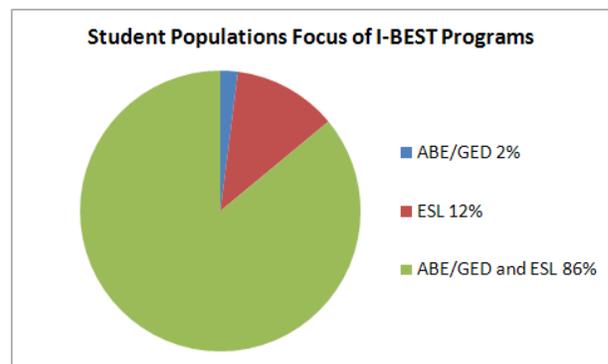
Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) was developed by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (Board) in partnership with Washington’s 29 community colleges and five technical colleges. This paper explains that the I-BEST model was developed as the state emerged from the 2001 dot-com bubble burst. At the time the economy was improving, but employers were consistently reporting difficulty in finding enough workers with adequate postsecondary training. Washington had a large population of available adult workers, but without the postsecondary training and skills required by these employers. Educators and policymakers recognized that while many of these adults would benefit from postsecondary occupational training, few actually entered and succeeded at college-level programs or received certificates. I-BEST was designed to address the needs of adult basic education and English-as-a-second language students, with special emphasis on successfully directing them to postsecondary training and eventual certification or degrees for well-paying career fields.

A distinguishing feature of the I-BEST program is that basic skills instructors and professional-technical faculty work together to develop a curriculum for college-level classes that are open to students at the basic skills level. All I-BEST students must be at the basic-skills level, but many of Washington’s colleges open these “team-taught” classes to professional-technical students, as well. About 70 percent of I-BEST programs last three academic quarters while more than half (54 percent) are two or fewer quarters.

Another feature of I-BEST programming is extensive student support services. Since many I-BEST students have either had prior unsuccessful experiences in higher education, or are unfamiliar with the demands and culture of college, special supports are available. These include additional courses or labs that focus on study skills and coordinators who serve as the main point of contact for students. Again, I-BEST is structured to contextualize basic skills so that low-skill adults can succeed at college-level technical classes within a program of study that eventually leads to college credentials and sustainable employment.

The I-BEST program is comprised of a series of integrated courses, within a professional-technical field that will lead to a credential for students and prepare them for work in a high demand and well-paid field or for further postsecondary education. Since its goal is to move low-income students into high-demand, high-wage industries, in Washington State programs are in health care, manufacturing, education and business.

With regard to funding, all Washington colleges receive state funding for the I-BEST programs. The Board has developed a set of criteria for I-BEST funding and for colleges to be eligible, they must show that their programs are part of a career pathway offering a series of classes that lead to credentials and jobs defined as in-demand by local labor market analysis. I-BEST programs are expensive to administer. Professional-technical professors and basic skills instructors are both needed to deliver an integrated curriculum. Additional staff is necessary for administration



Adapted from *How I-BEST Works*, p. 13. Source: I-BEST program applications submitted to the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges. Note: N = 133. Four programs were missing data.

and support services. Furthermore, while basic skills classes are almost nominal in cost (about \$25), regular tuition is required for all college-level classes within an I-BEST program. In 2005, the Board approved a higher funding rate for I-BEST that provides 1.75 times the regular reimbursement rate for other full-time equivalent students.

Evaluation of these programs has shown that I-BEST students are much more likely than their basic skills counterparts to complete occupational certificates. These promising results have sparked interest around the country in learning how the I-BEST model works and funders such as the Bill & Melinda Gates and Annie E. Casey Foundations have sponsored this and future studies by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia University.

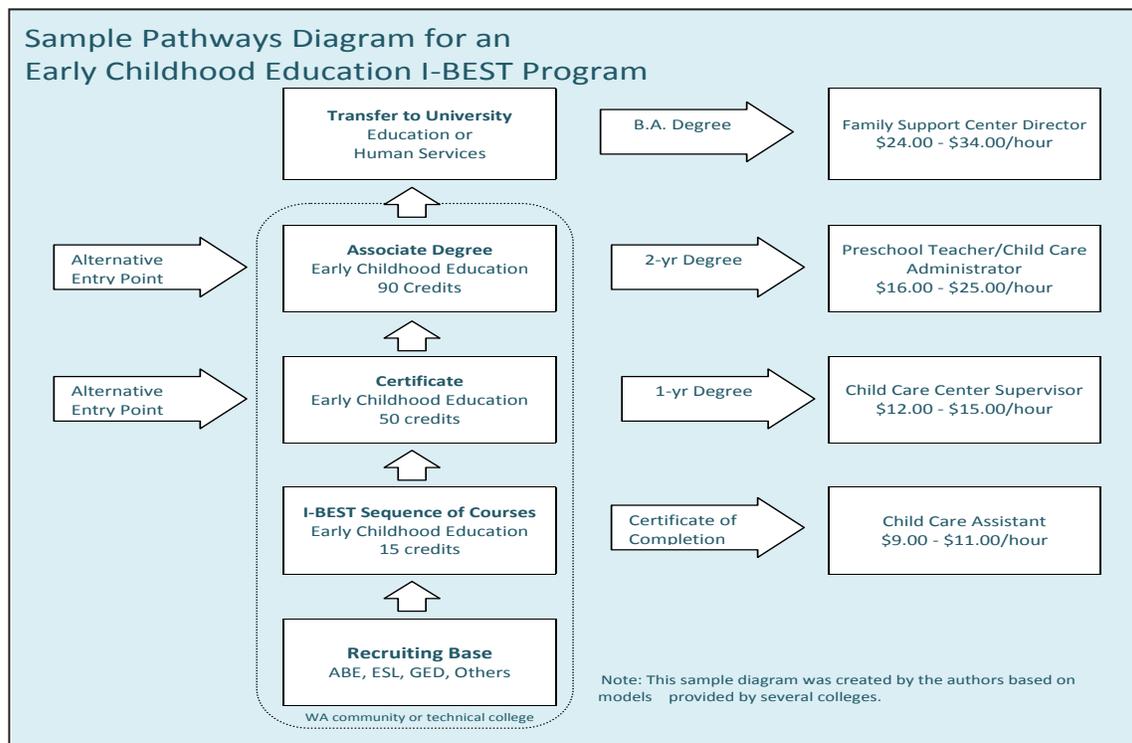
Looking more closely at this CCRC report, it focuses on how Washington State’s 34 community and technical colleges implement the I-BEST model. Research in this paper was conducted by telephone interviews with faculty, staff and administrators, along with observing I-BEST classes and interviewing instructors at four colleges. Research was conducted between November 2009 and January 2010.

Last, the I-BEST program is not without its

challenges. Since it is an expensive program to operate, funding remains an issue and determining the best methods for funding is a chief concern for postsecondary education policymakers. For some colleges, state funding is not adequate to run I-BEST and they must seek additional funding. I-BEST also requires strong coordination between the actual departments housing professional-technical and basic skills curricula at colleges.

In addition, there are myriad ways that basic skills and professional-technical teaching can be integrated, and for program administrators choosing the best approach can be difficult. Even finding appropriate locations to base the programs and conduct the administration and registration for I-BEST can be challenging. I-BEST programs may be difficult to administer in states where adult education or basic skills training are provided by many entities, including community colleges.

Nevertheless, recent quantitative studies show that I-BEST students outperform their basic skills counterparts and are also more likely to complete and attain their occupational certificates. Next year, CCRC has plans to carefully research those I-BEST programs that have been identified as having the best outcomes. It will also take a closer look at the costs and sustainability of the I-BEST model. ★



Of Interest - Abbreviated Summaries

Economic Development

Higher Education

Competitive States 2010: Texas vs. California - Economic Growth Prospects for the 21st Century, Texas Policy Institute, October 2010.

This article builds upon a 2008 study by the same authors comparing California and Texas. It shows that despite the very difficult economic challenges posed to all states by the Great Recession, Texas maintains a sharp competitive edge over California. The authors point out that the reasons for which Texas’ economy continues to grow and outperform California are threefold:

- Texas has no personal income tax while California does
- Texas maintains a low level of government spending relative to the ability of its citizens to finance such spending
- Texas imposes a lighter regulatory burden on the use of its natural resources

The authors of *Competitive States 2010* emphasize that Texas must proceed with caution if it is to maintain its prosperity. They note that emerging from a recession always imposes additional spending burdens for states and they suggest that policymakers make an effort to support the following policies:

- Balance the state budget without increasing taxes
- Reduce the state’s reliance on federal funds
- Establish stricter tax and expenditure limitations
- Reduce taxes on capital
- Continue reliance on private sector for economic growth ★

Competitive Event	California	Texas	Winner
Overall Tax Environment			
Overall Tax Burden	\$115.96	\$94.00	
Personal Income Tax Progressivity	\$36.19	\$0.00	
Recent Legislated Tax Changes per \$1,000 of Personal Income (2008 & 2009)	\$6.19	\$-2.59	
Number of Tax Expenditure Limits	\$2	\$1	

—*Competitive States 2010: Texas vs. California*, p.7

Expanding Career Readiness Through Online Learning, Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), November 2010.

Online learning is increasingly at the center of the discussion surrounding “college and career readiness.” *Expanding Career Readiness Through Online Learning* draws the distinction between “college readiness,” which typically refers to academic skills and “career readiness,” which is a more rigorous combination of academic, technical and employability skills and their application in specific environments. Career technical education provides the foundation for acquiring career readiness skills through comprehensive programs of study. Where such programs are not available, online learning is an excellent tool for providing access, particularly at the postsecondary level. In 2009, almost 12 million postsecondary students in the U.S. took online classes and that number is expected to reach 22 million in just five years.

Online learning is flexible and courses can be structured entirely online, or as hybrids, requiring some online and some classroom or lab time. Online learning can be utilized for credit and non-credit courses at the postsecondary level, as well as for employer sponsored programs.

The technologies involved in online learning are directly aligned to the real-world lives of students in the 21st century—making education more relevant to their every day existence.

— *Expanding Career Readiness Through Online Learning, ACTE - Career Readiness Series*

Another important aspect of online learning is that it can be either asynchronous or synchronous. That is, students acquire knowledge through e-mail, Power Points, web pages (asynchronous) or through online meetings and web chats (synchronous) that allow personal interaction. ★

K-12

College Success for All, Jobs for the Future, October 2010.

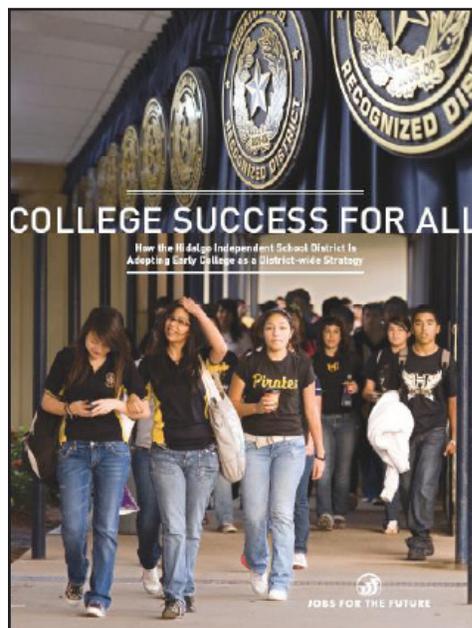
Hidalgo Independent School District (ISD) has adopted a unique approach to the early college high school concept and appears to be having considerable success. Early college high schools offer traditionally underrepresented students the chance to earn college credits along with their high school diploma. Unlike dual enrollment programs that target high-performing students, early college high schools cast a broad net designed to encompass populations that are habitually underrepresented in college: low-income; first-generation immigrants; and English language learners. They use what is known as a “small schools” approach with approximately 100 students per grade and about 400 students per school.

This approach was presented to the Hidalgo ISD in 2005 by the University of Texas Pan-American and the Communities Foundation of Texas/Texas High School Project. Hidalgo ISD’s superintendent embraced the opportunity and took it one step

further by proposing early college high school for *all* students in the district. Since Hidalgo ISD had about 800 students at the time, the traditional small schools approach would have left out about half of the district’s students. In order to achieve this goal, the entire community has rallied—from student parents, business leaders, the city manager and mayor—to make early college for all students a reality.

The district’s vision was for all students to earn a high school diploma along with a significant number of college credits in order to prepare these young people for postsecondary success. The first freshman class participating in Hidalgo ISD’s early college program graduated recently, in June 2010. This group earned over 3,700 college credit hours and over 95 percent of them received certificates for college hours. In addition, two-thirds of the graduating class earned at least one semester of college credit. While it is too early to know exactly how many will enroll in postsecondary education, indicators such as the high number of college credit hours earned suggest Hidalgo’s early college program is successful. ★

THE HIDALGO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
Rural district encompassing 36 square miles
Spanish is the home language for over 85% of residents
Southern boundary parallels the Rio Grande River
Includes 4 elementary schools, 1 middle school, 1 high school, and 1 alternative high school
Total Enrollment: 3,519 students
Student Demographics (2009-2010):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 99.5% Hispanic, 0.2% African American, 0.2% White, • 0.1% Asian/Pacific Islander • 89% Economically Disadvantaged • 70% At Risk • 53% Limited English Proficient
Source: Texas Education Agency, Public Information Management System, 2009-10. Note: The criteria for At Risk are defined in the Texas Education Code



Literacy and Adult Education

Degree Completion Beyond Institutional Borders Responding to the New Reality of Mobile and Nontraditional Learners,

Center for American Progress – Council for Adult & Experiential Learning(CAEL), October 2010.

According to this article, “nontraditional is the new normal” when describing today’s college student. To better educate the nation’s workforce, institutions of higher learning must enlarge their typical student populations to include people other than the traditional full-time, 18 to 22 year-old. The paper notes that the way the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defines as “nontraditional” actually includes most learners today. Nontraditional students as those who:

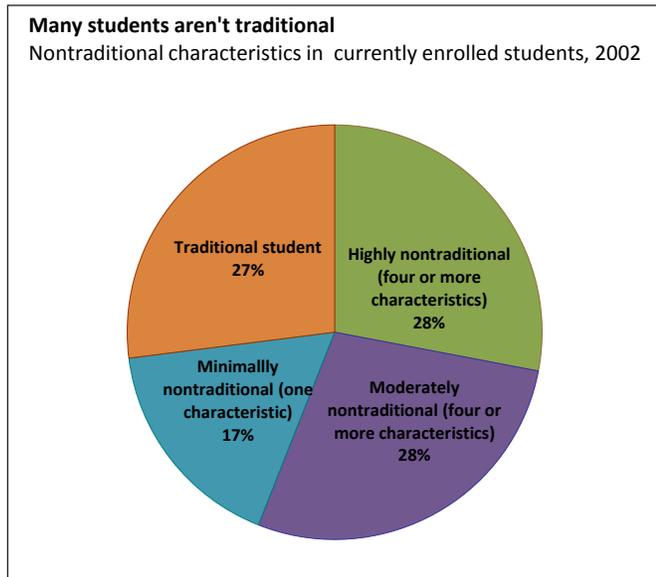
- Have delayed enrollment in postsecondary education beyond the first year after high school graduation
- Attend part-time
- Are financially independent from their parents
- Work full-time
- Have dependents other than a spouse
- Are a single parent
- Have no high school diploma or equivalent

in the military. Unfortunately, most postsecondary institutions assume relevant learning for a particular degree has occurred at one institution only, and these exclusive credit policies result in wasted money, time and effort.

To assist today’s students obtain their college degrees, this paper suggests some best practices that recognize competencies and non-traditional learning as opposed to accepting only credit hours. Some of these mechanisms include:

- Articulation agreements between various postsecondary institutions and systems
- Prior learning assessments that allow students to document college-level knowledge acquired outside of the classroom
- Institutions and services supporting credit transfer and recognition of prior learning such as web-based information, advising and navigation tools
- Competency based programs that clearly specify what skills abilities and knowledge students must have to earn particular degrees.

An increasingly competitive global economy combined with the recent economic downturn mean that a different job market is developing. Economists are forecasting that within the next decade most new jobs will require some postsecondary training. The writers of this paper emphasize that policymakers must adapt and develop programs that actively promote learning across institutional boundaries. ★



—Adapted from *Degree Completion Beyond Institutional Borders*, p. 6

Over 60 percent of college students transfer at least one time while they are earning their baccalaureate degrees. A growing number have college-level knowledge and skills from their work and life experience, particularly if they have served

Skills, Training, and Employment

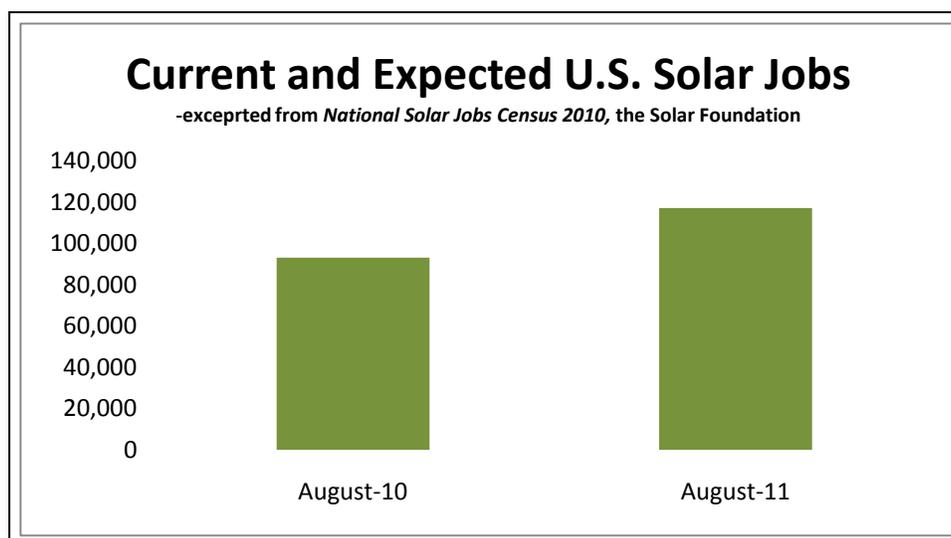
National Solar Jobs Census 2010: A Review of the U.S. Solar Workforce, The Solar Foundation, October 2010.

This paper represents the first substantial effort to quantify current employment and projected growth within the solar industry in the U.S. A non-profit, 501(c)(3) corporation called the Solar Foundation, has partnered with Green LMI Consulting and Cornell University to create a survey of 2,500 employers from every state in the country participating in the solar industry field.

The survey defines solar workers as individuals who spend at least 50 percent of their time working on solar-related activities. Data for the survey was gathered across sectors in categories defined as installation, manufacturing, wholesale trade and other. Some of the report's findings are:

- The current number of 93,502 solar workers is double the estimated number in the U.S. in 2009
- In the next 12 months, solar job growth is projected at 26 percent, while overall economic growth in the U.S. is projected at two percent
- Over half of solar employers expect to increase hiring in the next 12 months, while only two percent expect to reduce staff
- All 50 states have solar jobs

The survey indicates there were approximately 93,000 solar jobs in the U.S. in August 2010. A growth rate of 26 percent would result in an increase of 24,000 jobs throughout the country. Overall, the solar energy sector appears quite robust and the authors of this report emphasize that this is a positive trend in a time of economic uncertainty. ★



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The Texas Workforce Investment Council promotes the development of a well-educated, highly skilled workforce for Texas and advocates a workforce system that provides quality workforce education and training opportunities.

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