



## Texas Workforce Investment Council

# *Policy News Highlights*

Issue 24, Quarter 4, December 2013

*Policy News Highlights* is a quarterly review of selected reports relevant to the policy and research functions of the Texas Workforce Investment Council (Council). 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 the Council's Information Repository (IR).

The IR is divided into 12 topic areas that correspond to priority issues supporting the Council's current strategic plan. They are: adult education, apprenticeship, career and college readiness, career and technical education, clusters and sector strategies, competitiveness, data, disabilities, dropout prevention, green initiatives, supply-demand, and training. Not every topic area is addressed each quarter.

*Policy News Highlights* is organized as an annotated bibliography with short summaries of recent articles grouped according to their topic area.

## Adult Education

***Tapping the Potential: Profile of Adult Education Target Population***, U.S. Department of Education, December 2013

These infographic profiles of the U.S. Census data display the percentages of adults without a high school credential or English proficiency by age, gender, race, and ethnicity. Participation rates in the labor market and in adult education are also included. The graphics cover both federal and state investment in adult education for 2009 and 2010 and are available for each of the fifty states and the District of Columbia.

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/factsh/us-country-profile.pdf>

***Repairing the Nation's Education System for Adult English Learners***, Lexington Institute, July 2013

This paper presents findings that demonstrate the challenge the U.S. faces in serving the over 23 million adults who lack adequate English proficiency. It includes insight into adult English as a Second Language (ESL) programs provided by grants administered by federal and state government agencies. While few data are collected on the learners or the efficacy of the programs, available evidence suggests that the programs are not working effectively or efficiently. Only 40 percent of learners improve their proficiency level. By comparison, programs run by community-based organizations demonstrate that 85 percent of learners advance in proficiency. This paper suggests that policy makers re-assess adult ESL and implement rigorous and informative data collection and program design innovations proven successful among community-based organizations and charter schools.

<http://www.lexingtoninstitute.org/library/resources/documents/Education/AdultELLpaperJuly13.pdf>

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***The Potential and Value of Using Digital Badges for Adult Learners***, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, July 2013

This draft report, open for public comment, explores the value and potential impact of the digital badge on the field of adult education. The digital badge serves as a portable, electronic means of recognizing and communicating what a person knows and can demonstrate. Badges can represent learning outcomes in both formal and informal/experiential environments and validate specific skills achieved by an individual. Adult learners may have few formal credentials, yet be able to demonstrate functional skills obtained through experience that would be valued in the workplace. These badges are also suggested to increase learner engagement, motivation, and progress while displaying evidence of learning objectives. Appropriately implemented, digital badges can serve to certify the skills of adult learners in basic education programs and improve employment outcomes.

[http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/AIR\\_Digital\\_Badge\\_Report\\_508.pdf](http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/AIR_Digital_Badge_Report_508.pdf)

## Apprenticeship

***Apprenticeship: Completion and Cancellation in the Building Trades***, Aspen Institute, Workforce Strategies Initiative, September 2013

This report studies the volume and primary causes of completion and cancellation rates in construction apprenticeship programs, including: challenges that apprentices experience, examples of innovative support and mentoring strategies, and ways that apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs may be strengthened to encourage success. The research is based on national- and state-level analysis of apprenticeship completion rates. Interviews and focus groups with apprentices, journey workers, union representatives, construction contractors, pre-apprenticeship program leaders, and other stakeholders in the industry provide further insight into why some apprentices reach journey-level status and others leave the program. Additional research on retention counseling and mentoring highlights promising practices to increase effectiveness.

[http://www.aspenwsi.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/aspen\\_apprenticeship.pdf?utm\\_source=WSI+Construction+Apprenticeship+Report&utm\\_campaign=Construction+Apprentice+Rpt&utm\\_medium=email](http://www.aspenwsi.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/aspen_apprenticeship.pdf?utm_source=WSI+Construction+Apprenticeship+Report&utm_campaign=Construction+Apprentice+Rpt&utm_medium=email)

***Recommendations to Encourage Registered Apprenticeship – Community-Based Organization Partnerships***, Advisory Committee on Apprenticeship, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, June 2013

Given the success of registered apprenticeship programs that partner with community-based organizations, this paper explores key factors in successful partner programs as well as the challenges that hinder partnerships. It documents feedback and recommendations from stakeholders fostering effective registered apprenticeship/community-based organization partnerships and replicating existing alliances. It highlights four successful collaborations that are helping under-represented communities implement registered apprenticeship programs to engage local talent and presents findings on the common successes and challenges among these partnerships.

[https://21stcenturyapprenticeship.workforce3one.org/view/Recommendations\\_to\\_Encourage\\_Partnerships\\_between\\_info](https://21stcenturyapprenticeship.workforce3one.org/view/Recommendations_to_Encourage_Partnerships_between_info)

## Career and College Readiness

***The Deepest Learners: What PISA Can Reveal About the Learning that Matters***, Alliance for Excellent Education, December 2013

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is designed to measure deeper learning, i.e., whether students can use their knowledge to think critically, solve problems, and communicate understanding. This report describes the competencies associated with deeper learning and the ways that PISA measures them. Administered to 15-year-old students in over 60 countries, it offers comparative results of the countries assessed including which countries appear to produce greater equity in their educational outcomes as demonstrated by the narrowest gaps between high-performing students and low-performing students. PISA results reveal that the U.S. struggles to produce top performers in reading, math, and science at the rates of its international peers, and that math scores demonstrate the greatest disparity between low and high performers. The report also presents evidence from countries with large numbers of high-performing students to inform policy makers.

<http://www.sccharterschools.org/assets/2013Newsletters/deepestlearners.pdf>

***Making a Market for Competency-Based Credentials***, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, October 2013

This report highlights key findings and recommendations from research that analyzed the credentialing landscape to determine what is needed to create a marketplace for competency-based credentials. This marketplace of high-quality, employer-supported, independently validated, and competency-based credentials would provide a more precise measure of workers' proficiencies, particularly in the technical disciplines. These credentials also would complement traditional academic degrees and diplomas and provide more comprehensive validation of the skills and knowledge needed to perform on the job. The report considers the current progress, benefits, and challenges to developing competency-based credentials and suggests strategies to address the challenges and build a market for them.

<http://www.skilledwork.org/sites/default/files/MakingaMarketforCompetency-BasedCredentials.pdf>

***What's The Value of an Associate's Degree? The Return on Investment for Graduates and Taxpayers***, American Institutes for Research, October 2013

Investigating outcomes from almost 600 community colleges, this report evaluates the labor market success of students who have graduated with an associate's degree as their highest credential. It measures the costs and benefits of an associate's degree from the perspective of the graduate and the taxpayer. The methodology used in the study accounts for several factors associated with students attending community colleges such as transfers, non-completers, certificate completers, average length of time to degree, and student outcomes from lower-performing colleges as compared to higher-performing colleges. The results clearly support rewarding retention and completion, emphasizing technical training, and working closely with local industries to significantly increase the likelihood that graduates will attain substantial income gains compared to high school graduates.

[http://www.air.org/files/Value\\_of\\_an\\_Associate\\_Degree\\_10.13.pdf](http://www.air.org/files/Value_of_an_Associate_Degree_10.13.pdf)

***Understanding Accelerated Learning Across Secondary and Postsecondary Education***, American Institutes for Research, September 2013

This brief helps policy makers understand a variety of accelerated learning options. Accelerated learning programs allow students the opportunity to move through secondary and postsecondary education at an individualized pace that meets their academic needs. This brief covers the types of programs, populations served, and outcomes of acceleration first, at the secondary education level, then across

secondary and postsecondary education, and finally, solely at the postsecondary level including programs that integrate workforce training. It also includes a list of resources for further reference. A future brief will cover a number of policy facilitators and barriers, including: funding, instructor training and credentialing, the representation of credit on transcripts, articulation and the transfer of credits, quality assurances, equitable access, and affordability.

[http://www.ccrscenter.org/sites/default/files/Accelerated%20Learning%20Brief\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ccrscenter.org/sites/default/files/Accelerated%20Learning%20Brief_FINAL.pdf)

***Informing Students about Their College Options: A Proposal for Broadening the Expanding College Opportunities Project***, Brookings Institute, June 2013

Targeting high-achieving, low-income students, this study proposes expanding the reach and building on the success of the Expanding College Opportunities Project that disseminates information on college options, information on the process for applying, and details of the financial information relevant to the individual student's situation. The project has demonstrated a significant impact on college application behavior and increased the likelihood that the students would apply to more-selective colleges commensurate with their academic achievements. Students also were accepted and matriculated in greater numbers. Early evidence shows student success in those programs.

<http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2013/06/26-expanding-college-opportunities-hoxby-turner>

***What Does It Really Mean to be College and Work Ready? The Mathematics of First-Year Community College Students***, National Center on Education and the Economy, May 2013

Because a large proportion of high school graduates go on to attend community colleges, this report presents research findings on the mathematics preparation required for students to succeed. These colleges provide a majority of the vocational and technical education programs, and for some, the first two years of a four-year college program. A large proportion of high school graduates who enroll are unable to succeed in their first year. The report first highlights data findings that support the position that Algebra II should not be required to graduate from high school. Other findings include the need to emphasize sound teacher professional development to ensure mastery of middle school mathematics concepts; to require inclusion of high school courses that teach mathematical modeling, statistics, and probability; to add courses rarely offered, such as complex applications of measurement, geometric visualization, and schematic diagrams; and to ensure alignment between courses taught in the mathematics departments of community colleges and the required applied programs.

[http://www.ncee.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NCEE\\_MathReport\\_May20131.pdf](http://www.ncee.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NCEE_MathReport_May20131.pdf)

***Implementation Evaluation of the Community-Based Job Training Grant Program***, Urban Institute, December 2012

This evaluation report of the Community-Based Job Training Grant Program provides a comprehensive overview of funded initiatives, including innovations, implementation successes, challenges to date, and trends and patterns across projects. The program is working to address a critical capacity shortage in high-growth occupations by training community and technical college workers. Healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and energy were the three most-represented industries in the program. Two major challenges identified were adverse economic and labor market conditions and low skill levels of applicants. The report's recommendations include allowing longer start-up periods for community colleges, encouraging peer-to-peer interaction among grant recipients, the formation of industry partnerships, and providing additional support for low-income and low-skilled workers.

<http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412890-Implementation-Evaluation-of-the-Community-Based-Job-Training-Grant-Program.pdf>

## Career and Technical Education

***Oregon Applied Academics: Final Report***, National Research Center for Career and Technical Education (CTE), December 2013

This final report presents the results of a three-year research and development project to develop and implement a technical math course for career and technical education (CTE), Math-in-CTE, as an alternative approach to teaching core academic content. Following one year of instruction using the math-enhanced, problem-based lessons, students in the classrooms of teachers trained in the Math-in-CTE model performed better on standardized math tests and community college math placement tests than students who received the regular CTE curriculum while still gaining the important technical skills needed for college and career readiness. As part of this evaluation of the model's implementation, data from focus groups, surveys, observations, and teaching reports were analyzed. This research led to the development of five core principles for future implementation of the model, including: establish partnerships between math and CTE teachers, foster a community of practice, maintain math as the central feature of the problems and questions, adapt the instruction, and recognize that mathematics teachers are not CTE teachers.

[http://www.nrccte.org/sites/default/files/publication-files/oregon\\_applied\\_academics\\_project\\_report\\_0.pdf](http://www.nrccte.org/sites/default/files/publication-files/oregon_applied_academics_project_report_0.pdf)

***The Promise of High-Quality Career and Technical Education: Improving Outcomes for Students, Firms, and the Economy***, Georgetown University, the Business Roundtable, and College Board, October 2013

Promising CTE models are highlighted in this report which presents the economic case for, and most important characteristics of, high-quality CTE programs. Characteristics include: being part of career-oriented systems in secondary and postsecondary schools; integrating rigorous academic curricula into CTE; teaching rigorous technical and employability skills in project-based or work-based settings; providing professional development for staff and support services for students; using appropriate assessment tools; and emphasizing accountability based on assessment results. The report covers the challenges that limit the extent to which these models have been replicated and expanded to the regional, state, or national level. Federal and state policies that would encourage the expansion of high-quality CTE, along with continuing research and evaluation on their effectiveness, are also discussed.

[http://www.careertech.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Georgetown.BR\\_CB-CTE-report-11.2013.pdf](http://www.careertech.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Georgetown.BR_CB-CTE-report-11.2013.pdf)

## Clusters and Sector Strategies

***Step IT Up America Initiative***, UST Global, November 2013

A global information technology solutions and services company, UST Global, announced its launch of "Step IT Up America." This national program will train and employ inner-city minority women in support of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) efforts across America. The first phase of the program will target 50 minority communities in 10 of the nation's largest cities and identify 1,000 inner-city women who demonstrate a commitment to attending community college. The employer will work with local community colleges, foundations, and civic organizations to identify women who have the desire and aptitude to be successful in the program. The selected women will go through intensive training in advanced visualization, mobility, quality assurance, and other aspects of IT. The long-term goal is to create 5,000 new jobs and provide women with the technological skills to launch successful IT careers by 2020.

<http://www.ust-global.com/en/index.php/step-it-up-america-ust-global-national-program>

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**Workforce Development Study**, The Center for Energy Training, Central Piedmont Community College, September 2013

This study identified 28 high-demand energy occupations by industry sector, including: engineering services and construction; manufacturing; and power generation, transmission, and distribution. Research used was based on interviews with local employers, labor analytics software data, Bureau of Labor Statistics data, and Central Piedmont Community College’s subject matter experts. First identifying regional employment demand, the research then focused on high demand in nine occupations for which the energy industry has the greatest difficulty finding qualified employees. The occupations include maintenance and repair technicians, welders, pipe fitters, supervisors for manufacturing mechanics and construction workers, and specialists in non-destructive testing. The study additionally identified the required technical and baseline skills for each occupation and includes the college’s program development plans based on the findings.

<http://www.cpcc.edu/news/cpcc-study-identifies-skills-most-needed-in-charlotte-area-energy-sector>

## Data

**WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT: DOL Should Do More to Improve the Quality of Participant Data**, Government Accountability Office, December 2013

This report examines concerns about the quality of data on job seekers enrolled in the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs. These data sets rely on states and local areas to track participants and the services they receive. Findings suggest that limitations in some state information systems and the flexibility of data reporting guidance from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) contribute to inconsistencies. The agency requires states to validate the data to ensure accuracy and has worked to improve data consistency across states in a pilot project. However, DOL does not strategically evaluate and use the findings from this effort to identify systemic data issues or improve the quality of the data. There are no plans to evaluate the systemic impact of the pilot on data quality before expanding it to other states. GAO recommends that DOL take steps to improve the consistency and completeness of data reported across states and to promote a continuous process for improving the data’s quality.

<http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/659336.pdf>

**Rise of the Medical Assistant: And Five Other Frontline and Nonclinical Healthcare Jobs Growing in Number, Complexity, and Importance**, College for America, November 2013

This industry report explores growth in six nonclinical healthcare occupations: medical office specialist, medical assistant, office supervisor, community health worker, medical records technician, and patient representative. These occupations are evolving to support increased emphasis on healthcare teams and the need to shift more responsibility to positions that extend care provided by the physician. Analysis of the detailed work activities that are common across multiple occupations reveals broader and more complex workplace competencies including technical communication and information technology fluency. The report also provides a brief description for each of the six occupations and a list of some of the specialized skills and detailed work activities analyzed for this report.

<http://collegeforamerica.org/healthcarejobsreport>

**DATA POINT: Trends in CTE Coursetaking**, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), November 2013

This brief shows changes in high school students’ participation in CTE between 1990 and 2009. It documents an overall decline in CTE participation during this period while the average number of credits

earned in other subject areas increased. However, participation increased in some occupational areas, such as communications, healthcare, and public services.

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014901.pdf>

***Literacy, Numeracy, and Problem Solving in Technology-Rich Environments among U.S. Adults: Results from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies 2012***, National Center for Education Statistics, October 2013

By assessing the key information-processing competencies that are necessary for adults to fully participate in social and civic life—literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving—this report helps policy makers better understand the performance of education and workforce training systems in developing the skills required by the labor market. The research focuses on how adults develop and maintain or lose these skills and how these skills are related to health, income, participation in the labor market, and political and social engagement in the community. Results are reported for a representative sample of 5,000 adults in the U.S. age 16 to 65 and are compared to an international average of adults in the countries or regions that participated in the assessment. Findings note the significant impact the skills have on each individual’s life experiences and stress the importance of measuring and developing the skills of adult populations.

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014008.pdf>

***A Guide for Using Labor Market Data to Improve Student Success***, The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, January 2013

Given declining resources, changing labor market expectations, and increasing emphasis on student success, colleges need labor market information to develop programs and guide students through options in career pathways. This guide aims to advance colleges’ understanding of how to access and use labor market data to improve student success. Specifically, the guide addresses how colleges can use labor market data to decide which programs to offer and how many students to enroll to meet the labor market demand for those credentials; assess program effectiveness in terms of competencies and post-graduation success; and help students make more informed choices.

<http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/pubs/New%20Labor%20Market%20Guide.pdf>

## Supply Demand

***Workforce Investment Act: Local Areas Face Challenges Helping Employers Fill Some Types of Skilled Jobs***, Government Accountability Office, December 2013

This report is the result of a study into how local workforce areas have identified occupations that are in demand, how they have guided participants toward training for these jobs, and what challenges local workforce areas have faced in helping employers fill certain jobs. Findings suggest that most local areas use surveys and local initiatives to determine occupational demand, but face challenges in guiding participants toward training. The report identifies the specific challenges faced by local workforce areas, training providers, or participants. The difficulty that workforce areas and training providers experience finding participants with the relevant qualifications or basic skills needed to train for middle-skilled jobs is a focus of the report. While the U.S. Department of Labor has recommended the use of career pathways, combining job training with basic skills education and support services, little is known or has been shared between local areas that are using career pathways approaches. This report recommends the collection and dissemination of information on how local areas have used career pathways approaches to prepare workers for middle-skilled jobs that employers have difficulty filling.

<http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/659322.pdf>