Texas Workforce Investment Council

Policy News Highlights

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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

Making Skills Everyone's Business: A Call to Transform Adult Learning in the United States, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education, February 2015
The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's *Survey of Adult Skills* (2013) tested adult skills in literacy, numeracy, and problem solving in technology-rich environments across 24 countries. The survey has been the nexus of further analyses, reports, and policy recommendations. This report presents key findings for the U.S. and highlights the consequences that low skills have on individuals, families, and communities. Notably, more than 60 percent of U.S. adults with low skills have completed high school—higher than other industrialized nations—but have lower average performance on all of the assessed domains according to this report. A national framework for more flexible and diverse training opportunities is proposed to help 24 million low-skilled workers gain foundational skills for the increasing number of technical jobs in the U.S. economy that remain unfilled.
www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/making-skills.pdf/

Career Pathways: Approaches for the Delivery of Education, Training, Employment, and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, February 2015
To increase understanding and inform the development of high-quality career pathways systems, this analysis considers information and recommendations from public and private sector stakeholders across the U.S. It considers facilitators of career pathways development and implementation, such as partnerships and collaboration, data sharing agreements, effective communication strategies, leadership, employer engagement and more. It also presents how policies, performance measures, and credentials can become barriers that impede the implementation of pathways. An overview of key opportunities is presented with cross-agency recommendations from the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor.
www.lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/CP_RFI.pdf/

The New Forgotten Half and Research Directions to Support Them, William T. Grant Foundation, January 2015
Nearly 86 percent of high school graduates now enroll in postsecondary education, many in community colleges, according to the findings in this report. This high level of enrollment can be considered a positive outcome as it relates to the 1988 report, *The Forgotten Half*, which focused on non-college-bound youth aged 16 to 24 years old. However, the reality demonstrated in this update to that report suggests that many students who now enroll do not complete a program of study, and as a result, experience similar career outcomes to those with only a high school diploma. Therefore, college completion has gained considerable attention, and youth with some college but no credential make up the new forgotten half. With updated data, this report illustrates that key issues remain relevant. Also included are recommendations for additional research with the specific objective of improving student experiences in credential attainment in community colleges, the quality of job outcomes for various credentials, research on counseling, and institutional reforms.
www.wtgrantfoundation.org/newforgottenhalf/

Missing in Action: Job-Driven Educational Pathways for Unauthorized Youth and Adults, National Skills Coalition, January 2015
While covering the effects of the U.S. immigration policy on the estimated 11.4 million unauthorized immigrants in America's labor force, this report emphasizes the economic and individual benefits of aligning educational requirements with labor market demand. The findings highlight skills shortages in middle-skill occupations and industry-recognized middle-skill certificates as an important pathway into the labor market for immigrant youth. Recent immigration policies are examined and workforce system challenges are identified. Recommendations suggest developing a comprehensive job-driven skills strategy—informed by innovative approaches in immigration and adult basic education—that leads to middle-skill credentials.
www.nationalskillscoalition.org/documents/2015-02-NSC_Missing-In-Action_Job-Driven-Educational-Pathways-for-Unauthorized-Youth-and-Adults.pdf/

Back to School: Exploring Promising Practices for Re-engaging Young People in Secondary Education, Center for Promise at America's Promise Alliance, December 2014
Finding that 2.5 million young people ages 16 to 24 do not have a high school diploma and are not enrolled in secondary or postsecondary education, authors of this report explore re-engagement strategies and programs that provide support for youth who have left high school before graduating. A previous report found that students who re-engage exhibit resilience, optimism, and ambition, and do so with aspirations of achieving higher levels of educational attainment. That report also found that approximately two-thirds of students who leave high school before graduating eventually return to the education system. Therefore, this report on current research considers effective strategies for helping students to attain successful outcomes. Recommendations include integrated work-based learning experiences, flexible schedules, and support services such as child care, housing assistance, and sponsoring affinity groups on campus.
www.americaspromise.org/news/back-school-exploring-promising-practices-re-engaging-young-people-secondary-education/

Does Developmental Education Improve Labor Market Outcomes? Evidence from Two States, Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment, December 2014
To examine the economic consequences of developmental education for students, this working paper estimates earnings outcomes for students earning developmental credits versus college-level credits. Using longitudinal student-unit-record data through wage-record data, the study examines two cohorts of students who attended two large community college systems in two states. When students leave the

workforce or work fewer hours in order to attend college, earnings and experience are lost—referred to as an opportunity cost. Findings presented in this report suggest that students who earn developmental English credits may improve employability outcomes and earnings. Whereas students earning developmental math credits experience a consistent negative impact on earnings, particularly among those students placed in the lowest levels of math. The majority of these students do not reach attainment of a postsecondary credential. Authors of the study recommend teaching math skills that are applicable to students' real world career needs.
www.capseecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/does-developmental-education-improve-labor-market-outcomes.pdf/

Career and College Readiness

Funding Career Pathways: A Federal Funding Toolkit for States, Center for Law and Social Policy, March 2015
This funding toolkit has been updated to include revised program profiles that reflect key changes in federal programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The toolkit is designed to help states identify and use federal resources to more effectively implement career pathways by aligning adult education, workforce development, and postsecondary education to eliminate barriers to progress for individuals with low education and skill levels. The updated federal program summaries identify resources to support state career pathways initiatives including 10 federal funding sources that can be used to provide services. Each summary includes the type of program, eligibility requirements, type of services provided, and opportunities and limitations of the program in support of career pathways.
www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Career-Pathways-Funding-Toolkit-2015-8.pdf/

Credit for Prior Learning: Charting Institutional Practice for Sustainability, American Council on Education, February 2015
Policies that guide the provision of credit for prior learning—or academic credit granted to a postsecondary student for demonstrated college-level equivalencies gained through learning experiences outside of the college classroom—are typically left to colleges and universities, according to this report. Therefore, acceptance rates, campus policies and practices, and types of earned credits vary significantly across institutions and assessment methods. Findings from previous studies suggest that students provided with credit graduate at more than twice the rate of students that do not receive credit for prior learning; however, only 27 percent of institutions report granting such credit. The findings highlight a number of implications and recommendations based upon current policies and practices that guide institutional infrastructure, student outreach and support practices, and faculty engagement across a diverse group of institutions. This report also draws attention to the contemporary learner in community colleges—large numbers of non-traditional students, referred to as post-traditional students—who enter with competencies developed through work experience and for whom credit for prior learning may be particularly relevant to successful completion.
www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Credit-for-Prior-Learning-Charting-Institutional-Practice-for-Sustainability.pdf/

The Currency of Higher Education: Credits and Competencies, American Council on Education and Blackboard, February 2015
Exploring the postsecondary education processes built around use of the credit hour, this report considers credits and competencies as currency for measuring postsecondary outcomes in an age that demands both greater flexibility from educational systems and reliability in the validation of credit for demonstrated skills and competencies. It illustrates the value of credits to stakeholders in

postsecondary systems and how college credit hours fail to address some critical needs in systems that are now more complex and multifaceted. The authors then examine the implications of competency-based education to evaluate how effectively credits correlate (or not) to competencies and how both represent important structures of value for diverse stakeholders: government agencies, educational leaders and administrators, faculty, assessors, students, and employers.
bbbb.blackboard.com/CurrencyofHigherEducation/

What about the Non-Completers? The Labor Market Returns to Progress in Community College, Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment, February 2015
Using a large dataset matching community college transcripts to earnings data, this working paper outlines an innovative method for calculating labor market returns on programs of study. It accounts for both those who obtain an award and those who do not by linking non-completers with completers according to their program of study. Findings indicate that returns vary not only by program completion but also by program non-completion, and non-completers are more numerous and varied in community colleges. This unique method considers a student's revealed preference—the courses in which the student is enrolled—and the stated preference—the student's declared program of study or major. Given the emphasis on completion rates, few studies analyze the labor market value of progression in a program of study. However, to raise completion rates, colleges need to know their students' preferences and progress in their programs of study in order to effectively guide them. If validated, these findings have significant implications for policies on program choice and student retention.
www.capseecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/capsee-noncompleters-returns-to-progress.pdf/

Policy Meets Pathways: A State Policy Agenda for Transformational Change, Jobs for the Future, December 2014
Defined as an integrated set of institutional policies, practices, and programs, career pathways are intended to maximize student completion of a credential regardless of where they begin the process. While there is no single model for developing pathways, this report offers eight design principles and the core elements of a structured pathways mode. To implement structured pathways, campuses and states have to align all initiatives. This process begins with student engagement, leading to enrollment in postsecondary education, progress, and completion, and continues to the singular goal of high-quality certificates, industry-based certification, or degrees that demonstrate to employers that students are prepared for jobs that require critical skills.
www.jff.org/sites/default/files/publications/materials/Policy-Meets-Pathways-121714.pdf/

Four-Year Myth: Restore the Promise on On-Time Graduation, Complete College America, November 2014
Reinforcing the importance of on-time graduation, this report presents the data findings on current graduation rates, and the associated costs and causes of completion delays. Recommendations reestablish the expected time for completion and focus on a comprehensive, integrated method of restructuring higher education delivery under a strategy referred to as guided pathways to success. In this model, students agree to complete a structured path to the desired outcomes, and institutions agree to develop the pathways, monitor progress, and guarantee availability of courses along the way. The guided pathways approach is designed to more effectively inform student choices through individualized academic advising in order to improve outcomes. Essential elements of this model include coherent academic programs and pathways that align mathematics to programs of study and then use completion of critical path courses each semester to ensure timely progress.
www.completecollege.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/4-Year-Myth.pdf/

Career and Technical Education

CTE: The Key to Economic Development, Association for Career and Technical Education, February 2015
Career and technical education (CTE) provides career exploration, foundational academic and technical education, and career pathways that prepare students for postsecondary education and the workforce. To illustrate the current employment outlook and the educational programs available to students interested in these pathways, a series of two-page briefs describe CTE's role in growing the workforce for specific industry sectors. Briefs on aerospace and defense, hospitality and tourism, financial services, and transportation, distribution, and logistics have recently been published.
www.acteonline.org/uploadedFiles/Assets_and_Documents/Global/files/Publications/Sector_Sheet_TransportationDL.pdf/

Issue Sheet: CTE's Role in Rural Education, Association for Career and Technical Education, January 2015
This fact sheet explores how CTE supports rural students and the needs of local economies. Small geographically dispersed populations face challenges that lead to disengagement of youth in rural communities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, rural high school students take more credits of CTE, where available, than urban or suburban students. This brief covers several models of delivery that help rural communities offer CTE, such as technology centers, comprehensive high schools, online learning, national and international competitions, and student entrepreneurship programs. By integrating academic, technical, and employability skills and providing opportunities for work-based learning and mentorship, CTE career pathways facilitate higher levels of student attainment in rural areas.
www.acteonline.org/uploadedFiles/Assets_and_Documents/Global/files/Publications/Issues/IssueSheet_RuralEducation.pdf/

Clusters and Sector Strategies

Skills and Innovation Strategies to Strengthen U.S. Manufacturing: Lessons from Germany, Brookings Institute and JPMorgan Chase, February 2015
The U.S. model for innovation in manufacturing has changed after years of downsizing and offshoring; the sector has come to recognize the importance of locating key functions within production closer to those of research and development. This report reviews the current state of manufacturing in the U.S., and then focuses on the contrasting strengths and weaknesses of U.S. and German systems for innovation and vocational education and training. It considers the advantages of the German dual system of education and training that guides students into career training from an early age. By the age of 20, approximately 60 percent of Germans receive a relevant occupational certification from among some 350 federally recognized certifications. Employer engagement in updates and system reforms is maintained through a nationally organized advisory committee and a network of business and government entities. Several U.S. cities and states—Detroit, San Diego, South Carolina and Pennsylvania—are adopting elements of Germany's success including regional collaboration, incentive-based investments, and development of institutional intermediaries that address market and coordination failures.
www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/reports/2015/02/25-germany/lessonsfromgermany.pdf/

Competitiveness

Aligning Employers and Workforce Development Strategies, John Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, February 2015
To engage employers in developing more effective education and training programs to address skills demand, this paper draws insight from panelists at the *Transforming U.S. Workforce Development Policies for the 21st Century Conference*. Under the previous Workforce Investment Act, panelists noted that employers viewed the public workforce systems' engagement of employers as advisory board members to be relatively ineffective. Panelists recommended developing industry leaders as more effective intermediaries to represent and facilitate ongoing dialogue with employers. Other recommendations include promoting adaptable program models, experimenting with employer incentives, and encouraging the growth of networks. The panelists all agreed on the necessity to establish agreement on the goals of programs, to support research that informs evaluation program implementation, to pilot metrics before establishing high-stakes metrics for performance-based funding, and to take a cautious approach to evaluation and balance quantitative measures with qualitative study.
www.heldrich.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/products/uploads/Aligning_Employers_and_Workforce_Development_Strategies.pdf

America's Advanced Industries: What They Are, Where They Are, and Why They Matter, Brookings Institute, February 2015
Supporting nearly one-fourth of all U.S. employment—directly and indirectly—the fifty advanced industries identified in this report each meet two criteria: research and development spending in technology innovation and the occupations whose above the national average share of workers require a high degree of STEM knowledge. This study finds that an advanced industry geography has emerged, and that it is regional, not national. It demonstrates how advanced industries tend to cluster regionally and attract highly productive and knowledgeable employees. However, the report poses concerns that too few of these ecosystems continue to retain the technology inputs, supplier density, and workers to effectively maintain the cluster effects that drive global competitiveness. To support the sustainability of advanced industries, strategic, industry-led and sector-specific regional skills initiatives are recommended to stimulate the skills pipeline and address the rapidly changing skill needs of the advanced industries.
www.brookings.edu/~/media/Research/Files/Reports/2015/02/03%20advanced%20industries/final/AdvancedIndustry_FinalFeb2lores.pdf/

Global Competitiveness Report 2014–2015, World Economic Forum, September 2014
A comprehensive assessment of the national competitiveness of some 144 global economies, this report provides insight into the dynamic and static components of competitiveness. The institutions, policies, and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country are measured in the Global Competitiveness Index to determine the level of prosperity that can be earned by an economy. The report supports communication between government, industry, and public stakeholders about the actions required to improve and sustain economic prosperity. Twelve interrelated pillars of competitiveness, such as technological readiness, labor market efficiency, and innovation reinforce each other yet affect different economies in different ways. Economies are introduced in three primary stages of development that include meeting the basic requirements for competitiveness, enhancing efficiency, and driving innovation. Countries in the innovation stage must continuously perform higher value functions to retain a competitive advantage. The U.S. climbed up in the overall rankings for the second year in a row, now in the third position behind Switzerland and Singapore.
www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalCompetitivenessReport_2014-15.pdf/

Data

The Importance of Data Occupations in the U.S. Economy, U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, March 2015
As data processing and analysis gain importance to an increasing number of industries, this report measures the size of employment, earnings, and educational requirements of these occupations and identifies the industries and geographic regions that have the highest concentrations of them. It defines data occupations and notes that data-intensive jobs are demonstrated to pay relatively well and require relatively high levels of education. However, using a broader definition, the use of data has become at least an important part of the job for over half of the U.S. workforce (74.3 million jobs). The report presents postsecondary fields of study, employment by industry, geographic concentration of the jobs, public- and private-sector employment, and a ranked list of data occupations by importance in the use of data.
www.esa.doc.gov/sites/default/files/the-importance-of-data-occupations-in-the-us-economy_0.pdf/

From Hard Times to Better Times: College Majors, Unemployment, and Earning, Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce, February 2015
Full employment recovery from the Great Recession for college graduates may not take place until 2017, with earnings recovery taking even longer. However, this report suggests that even given variation between some college majors, most college graduates experience better employment and earnings outcomes. Using data from 2011 and 2012, this update to previous analyses summarizes the effects of the Great Recession on college graduates as compared to both recent workers and experienced workers with only high school diplomas. Although earnings remain flat or in decline, the earnings advantages of college graduates reflect declining earnings for workers with high school diplomas. This report also presents findings in the unemployment rates of graduate and undergraduate fields of study for both experienced and recent graduates. Experienced workers with graduate degrees experienced the strongest outcomes.
cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/HardTimes2015-Report.pdf/

Using Workforce Information for Degree Program Planning in Texas, RAND Corporation for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, February 2015
This review of workforce modeling, data sources, and current practices in the application of workforce data in higher education program planning was conducted to identify ways to more effectively integrate workforce analysis into the process. The findings in this report suggest that the sources and analysis of workforce information used for planning degrees and certificate programs vary widely among practitioners. Several tools were developed over the course of the study to address gaps in existing resources and allow comparisons of occupational data at the state and regional levels. Authors recommend improvements to the planning process and enhancing data resources.
www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1000/RR1011/RAND_RR1011.pdf/

Training

Improving Education and Training for Older Workers, John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, March 2015
To address the challenges that older workers face in a changing work environment, this report explores several innovations in the design and delivery of education and training programs that may help older adults and working learners retain or seek new employment opportunities. Findings suggest that many

older unemployed workers lack the skills that are in demand, understanding of the skills requirements, and awareness of cost-effective approaches to obtain these skills. Many federal and state workforce programs are not targeted to the needs of adults and working learners even when some innovations in the design and delivery of programs can be leveraged to benefit these workers. The report discusses flexible and affordable strategies that reduce the time and cost of training, such as stacked or micro-credentials, credit for prior learning, online learning, and competency-based education models. Given changes in the expectations of the workforce, recommendations also include potential reforms to financial assistance programs, including expanding tax credits and deductions for education-related expenses, and modifying the Pell Grant program to accommodate short-term training programs.
www.heldrich.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/products/uploads/report-improving-education-training-older-workers-AARP-ppi.pdf/

Who Is Being Served Well? Using Pathway Evaluators for State Workforce Planning, National Skills Coalition, February 2015
Career pathways show promise in helping a wide variety of participants—students, jobseekers, and workers, especially those within vulnerable populations—navigate a diverse offering of workforce and education programs. However, current pathways rely on people's abilities to access multiple services, as needed, in order to overcome individual barriers. To effectively evaluate what pathways produce the best employment outcomes for which groups of participants, this report explains how to use pathway evaluator tools. Pathway evaluator tools show different patterns of participation across programs and the credential and labor market outcomes associated with the programs. These tools help states determine which combination of services and skills programs work most effectively for a given population—students, jobseekers, and workers—to earn credentials and gain employment in middle skill jobs.
www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/SWEAP_Pathway_Evaluator_Report.pdf/

College Is Just the Beginning: Employers' Role in the $1.1 Trillion Postsecondary Education and Training System, Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, January 2015
In the U.S., spending on formal and informal on-the-job, postsecondary education and training has reached $1.1 trillion annually, according to this report. Most of this spending is attributable to employers, who spend more on education and training of incumbent workers, whereas only approximately $649 million in training funds are attributable to formal postsecondary institutions. Federally funded job training is a very small portion of this spending. Manufacturing is the most training-intensive industry for its size, whereas the services sector spends significantly more on formal training for a small percentage of its workforce. Notably, most of the employer training goes to prime-age college graduates. Only 17 percent of employer spending on training goes to workers with a high school education or less.
cew.georgetown.edu/report/trilliontrainingsystem/