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OPINION: WHILE BUSINESS BOOMS, A LABOR SHORTAGE LOOMS

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Business is booming in Texas. The Lone Star State ranks first in the nation in over-the-year jobs added according to the Texas Workforce Commission. However, we have a shortage of skilled workers that continues to concern our employers. Thankfully, our state's community colleges are poised to help us build the workforce of tomorrow with the help of the Texas Commission on Community College Finance's final recommendations.

Texas continues to set new records for total employment and jobs, but filling those jobs has been challenging. Ninety percent of small businesses surveyed by Goldman Sachs said they are finding it difficult to recruit qualified candidates. These small businesses are not alone – as of Nov. 2022, there were just under a million unfilled job openings in Texas. In order to continue being a top state for business, Texas must produce more qualified workers.

When you look at the data, a solution clearly emerges: a postsecondary credential is increasingly essential to participate in our workforce and earn a living wage. Sixty-two percent of all Texas jobs will require a postsecondary credential by 2030. But right now, only 22% of Texas students earn any type of degree or certification within 6 years of high school graduation. Until we improve these postsecondary outcomes, we put an entire generation of Texans – and our businesses – at risk.

Community colleges offer a clear and accessible path forward. By preparing students for middle-skill jobs – those that require some sort of credential beyond high school, but less than a bachelor's degree – these schools are uniquely positioned to address our workforce shortage all while providing the most affordable option for students. These colleges can quickly and nimbly respond to needs in their local community and develop new workforce education programs in high-demand fields such as advanced manufacturing, medical technology, and IT.

With over 650,000 students attending Texas' 50 community college districts, businesses across the state have long recognized the power of partnering with colleges on workforce development programs. In Houston, Lone Star College's Corporate College provides customized technical training to several businesses in the

region, including Anheuser-Busch and FMC Technologies. In Corpus Christi, Del Mar College offers petrochemical industrial pathways aligned to the Coastal Bend job market, and maintains close relationships with major firms like Cheniere Energy.

However, the current state funding model for community colleges is out of date and has not kept pace with the needs of a modern workforce. In order to equip more Texas workers with the skills our businesses need, community colleges need strategic investment by the state. Thankfully, the Texas Commission on Community College Finance recognizes this and released a strong plan that will help our workforce and businesses thrive.

With adequate funding, the commission's recommendations will provide the targeted investments in community colleges our state needs to upskill and reskill our students – including an updated funding model that matches the critical role they play in developing our workforce. The business community supports outcomes funding because we know it works, and I'm pleased to see our perspective alive and well in these recommendations.

I'm also excited by the push to incentivize community college and employer partnerships to provide work-based learning opportunities. It is a win for businesses and students alike by providing employers with a hiring pipeline and students with the opportunity to earn a living while getting a credential.

The commission's recommendations provide a clear roadmap for our legislators to support Texas employers, grow our state's economy, and ensure more Texans have the ability to support themselves and their families. The [Texas Business Leadership Council](#) is proud to support a bill that reflects these recommendations.

According to recent estimates from Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar, Texas lawmakers are facing a \$33 billion surplus in 2023 creating an advantageous opportunity to invest in workforce development. The 88th Legislative Session must be the Workforce Session. Our community colleges need it, and our businesses are depending on it.

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