

September 13, 2026

To: Senate Committee on Economic Development

Re: Preparing the Texas Workforce for AI (Artificial Intelligence)

Honorable Chair Paxton, Vice Chair Sparks, and members of the Senate Committee on Economic Development:

Thank you to the Committee for your commitment to study the impact of AI on the Texas workforce and its implications for economic competitiveness. I appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony with recommendations about our education system to ensure the Texas labor market remains a national leader in growth and opportunity.

I am Jason Schenker, a futurist, economist, and educator. Since 2016, I have served as Chairman of The Futurist Institute, where I help professionals prepare for economic, technological, and workforce changes. Through more than 40 online courses, my educational work has reached over 1.6 million learners worldwide. I have written dozens of books, including *Jobs for Robots*, *Recession-Proof After AI*, and *The Future After AI*, which focus on artificial intelligence, education, and the future of work. I am also a Board Member of the Texas Business Leadership Council, faculty for the Joint Special Operations University at USSOCOM, and the AI and Emerging Technologies Advisor for the Seoul International Policy Advisory Group (SIPAG), which advises the Seoul Metropolitan Government.

The Future of Education After AI

The U.S. labor market faces significant opportunities and growing risks. Both have been amplified by artificial intelligence. There are already potholes in the road, with more likely ahead. The most important factor that will determine how the future plays out is education. Looking ahead, students at every level will need to be able to use artificial intelligence. But they will also need to demonstrate the ability to perform work without the use of AI. The future of education must provide opportunities for them to learn how to do both.

Abundant Open Jobs and Missed Opportunities

The U.S. job market currently has a large number of job openings, especially in sectors with physically demanding in-person roles. To put a finer point on it, the July 2026 JOLTS data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that the U.S. economy had almost 7.3 million open jobs, with almost 1.3 million open jobs in trade, transportation, and utilities, alongside over 1.4 million jobs in health care and social assistance, and 580,000 jobs in manufacturing.¹

These openings are even more significant when we consider the average of under 1.8 million people collecting unemployment benefits in July 2026.² This means that there were almost 5.5 million more open jobs in the United States in July 2026 than there were people collecting unemployment benefits. Put another way, as of July 2026, there were slightly more than four job openings for each American collecting unemployment benefits.

In Texas, the dynamic is very similar. Based on the latest available state data, Texas recorded around 603,000 job openings in December 2025.³ Meanwhile, the average number of people collecting unemployment benefits in December 2025 was only 154,000, indicating that there were almost four job openings for each Texan collecting unemployment.⁴

Although unemployment-benefit recipients represent only a portion of unemployed workers, the comparison highlights the scale of the mismatch between available jobs and immediately available U.S. and Texas workers.

At the same time, many recent high school and college graduates are struggling to find work. The coexistence of millions of vacancies and job seekers unable to find jobs reflects a major labor-market mismatch. And that mismatch could become even more pronounced if AI allows students to pass exams, earn certificates, and earn degrees without developing the capabilities employers actually need. In an AI-enabled education environment, there is a significant and growing risk that credentials could come to certify little more than completion rather than reflecting true competency, further widening the gap between the skills employers need and the capabilities job seekers can demonstrate.

To improve career outcomes, educators, education administrators, and policymakers need to help learners develop the skills employers need and deploy their human capital effectively now, as well as in a more complicated future. After all, the challenges facing the labor market today may continue to worsen as Baby Boomers leave the labor force. But thoughtful education policies will be crucial for addressing current and future labor market challenges.

The Opportunities of AI

Artificial intelligence, especially generative AI, can dramatically improve a student's homework, papers, exam grades, or other assignments. But those improvements are not the same as demonstrating effective learning, analytical reasoning, knowledge, or communication skills. In fact, giving students access to AI too early may short-circuit the learning process entirely, just as giving a calculator to a young student could prevent them from actually learning multiplication tables. The risk is clear and significant: students may use AI to perform the work rather than to simply check their work.

The Math Analogy: Calculators and Compute

Growing up in the 1980s, calculators were contraband in school. They became tremendous productivity levers in finance, just as generative AI offers the opportunity to boost productivity and improve accuracy today. But technological innovations and opportunities often present challenges for educators. When thinking about the impact of calculators on mathematical education, we need to consider the popular economist mantra that this time is *never* different.

As a child, I saw firsthand the temptation calculators presented to young students. They were generally banned during exams, and teachers would require most math tests to be taken without the aid of a calculator to ensure learners could demonstrate their capabilities without assistance. Even today, although most students own a smartphone with a built-in calculator, tests for young learners still demand the demonstration of manual competency. The same future likely lies ahead for education and testing in the era of generative AI.

This distinction creates a central challenge for the future of education: how to leverage AI to enhance learning without letting it replace the foundational skills students need to develop.

The Future of Testing

Future assessments in Texas should resemble how education approached mathematics: testing for competency without AI assistance. Homework might involve AI, but exams need to measure and test what students can do alone. The stakes are high because ubiquitous access to generative or agentic AI may reduce student writing ability, critical thinking, and future job performance unless educators deliberately separate practice environments at home from classroom testing environments.

Generative AI has made it incredibly tempting for students to use AI to write papers and complete assignments. This raises a fundamental testing issue. How do you test whether students can write without AI? Such testing should occur in an environment where AI cannot intervene. That likely means more in-class, handwritten work — bringing us back to the blue book and secure testing environments. It could also include oral examinations, live problem-solving, practical demonstrations, supervised simulations, and other methods that control for students' potential use of AI.

While AI presents significant opportunities for businesses and learners, it is essential to test people in a manner that ensures they are capable of doing their jobs without the assistance of artificial intelligence. This is especially crucial in sectors where competency has significant implications for public safety. For example, some priority sectors for secure testing include roles involving substantial fiduciary duties or responsibility for public health, safety, and well-being. This includes financial professionals, medical professionals, and

tradespeople like electricians, plumbers, HVAC technicians, and others we rely on to keep our homes and workplaces safe.

Many professional licenses require test-taking in a secure, AI-free testing environment. But this should be a requirement in Texas for more than just licensure. It should be required throughout relevant coursework and professional development. The first time someone takes a test without AI in their profession should not be the final exam to enter the profession. There should be secure, AI-free testing along the way. And this should be an increasingly common requirement for individual courses at all educational institutions, especially in sectors with public safety and fiduciary implications.

AI Education and the Future Workforce

The future of education in Texas must embrace a dual-competency model. Learners at every level must be able to effectively use artificial intelligence, while also demonstrating the ability to perform work without AI assistance. Policymakers should encourage educational institutions to provide both AI-enabled learning opportunities and secure, AI-free assessments of underlying competency. Such assessments should be prioritized in fields involving public safety, health, infrastructure, and fiduciary responsibility. This dual approach to AI education and AI-free assessments can smooth out the future road for job seekers by helping to ensure that Texas students are prepared to succeed in an AI-enabled workforce.

I appreciate the Committee's attention to this important issue that is critical to ensuring Texas remains globally competitive and welcome the opportunity to provide additional input as you consider potential legislative action in the 90th Session.

Respectfully,

Jason Schenker



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Endnotes:

¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS), retrieved from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/jolts.pdf>, September 10, 2026.

² U.S. Employment and Training Administration, Continued Claims (Insured Unemployment) [CCSA], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/CCSA>, September 13, 2026.

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, State Job Openings and Labor Turnover, Table 1: Job Openings Levels and Rates for States, retrieved from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/jltst.t01.htm>, September 10, 2026.

⁴ U.S. Employment and Training Administration, Continued Claims (Insured Unemployment) in Texas [TXCCLAIMS], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/TXCCLAIMS>, September 13, 2026.