

Senate Committee on Education  
May 19, 2008  
John M. Stroud  
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Longview Economic Development Corporation

Committee Interim Charge  
*Review the access and quality of career technical education programs in the state and make recommendations to improve these programs to address the economic and workforce needs of this state.*

Presentation to the Panel Representing business/workforce and community view's for quality career and technical education

Madame Chair, Members of the Senate Committee on Education, and my fellow panel members

Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this important discussion today. It is honor to be here and I express my deepest appreciation to you to improve access to career technical education. My goal today is to recommend to you how you can take a leadership role so that our young people will have a competitive advantage in the world in which they will live.

It is important for you to know that I am representing a broad spectrum of our community: the Mayor of Longview, educators at the K-12 and college levels, business people, and economic development. We have brought these knowledgeable people together to see solutions together.

This began after we conducted a critical skills analysis which showed a shortage of skilled people in the labor market with demand is rising for these skilled positions and the realization that baby-boomer retirement will add to the shortage. Longview Mayor Jay Dean stepped up to provide leadership and formed a Task Force on Workforce Readiness with the Longview Economic Development Corporation providing funding and staffing. This Task Force consists of seven (7) independent school superintendents, twelve (12) major businesses, and the presidents of our technical and community colleges and chaired by James Wilcox, Superintendent of the Longview



Independent School District. We consider our proposal an economic as well as education issue.

**We propose you allow rigorous articulated dual-credit career technical courses in our high schools to satisfy fourth year math and science graduation requirements. The virtues of doing this are significant and will have a long-lasting impact on education and our economy Texas.**

First, we want more of our young people to graduate from high school. A drop out rate in Texas of 35% is too high and in some areas, it is 50%. We cannot survive at these high rates.

Second, we want greater participation in career technical education because it will increase attendance positively;

Third, we want improved test scores.

And, fourth, we want our students who pursue advanced education, to do better at the advance level.

To accomplish these goals, we need flexibility in student scheduling so that they can participate in rigorous career courses.

**It is also important to consider the circumstances we find ourselves regarding the shortage of skilled people for almost all employers in our state. While there are many reasons for this shortage, one of the largest is baby boomer retirements that started this year with the first baby-boomer retiring at age 62. In our community, for example, we have a major employer of choice who will lose 50% of their 1,700 people over the next five to eight years due to retirements. We see this “across the board” in critical areas such as health care, government, and education.**

We are asking for flexibility for our schools to meet the needs of our students and our society. Today, 70 to 80% of current and emerging occupations require a certification, on-the-job training or a two-year technical degree. Our young people need the opportunities afforded by career technical education and our changing economy needs people with the

skills provided by career and technical courses. Combining rigorous academic and technical skills courses will lead to more participation in our college system for certification, licensure, two and four-year degrees. We think this is what our citizens want from our education system. Please help make this happen!

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this panel today.

#### Additional Comments from Mr. Stroud

**Drop-Out Rate:** We understand that there are questions about how drop-out rates are determined but it has been suggested that the Texas method of making this determination be done nationally. We understand that the drop out rate in Texas is 35% and increasing. In fact, it is 50% along our border. If a school system's grade scores drop below 69 or 70 per cent, the State considers it "unacceptable". We consider our current drop out rate "unacceptable" and bringing relevance back into the system through career technical education will be a step in the right direction to lower drop outs according to data presented to the Texas Education Agency.

**Rigor:** Career and technical education can deliver both academic rigor and industry relevance. Students who take two or more career technical classes for three or more credits have better attendance rates, have lower drop out rates, are more likely to graduate from high school and score higher on TAKS tests, according to data reported by TEA. Industry standards demand rigor and anything less is not acceptable. Our proposal is that only college level courses being taught in high schools be permitted. These dual-credit courses must have the rigor expected by educators and industry.

High demand occupations such as health care, engineering, and advanced manufacturing require more rigorous and relevant options for 4 X 4 credit. Our proposal for articulated dual-credit courses can help achieve the relevance. Educators are well aware of courses that require science: Health Science II and II helping prepare students for health careers: physicians, nursing, medical technician or home health care; and Process technology for careers in manufacturing are two examples. Courses with equal or greater rigor for math include but are not limited to: pre-engineer, machining, industrial maintenance, automotive technology, automation, and construction. While these are examples, each area of the state has different needs and local school systems need flexibility without state bureaucracy inhibiting their ability to serve students in their district.

Mr. Stroud has reviewed the merits of **HB 3485** passed by the Legislature giving support to the State Board of Education for Expanding Options for Career and Technical Education. In a visit with Commissioner of Education Robert Scott, he voiced support for academic, career and fine arts flexibility. We have not ascertained the position of the State Board of Education for our position.

The Mayor's Task Force has met with Senator Kevin Eltiffe (District 1); Representatives: Brian Hughes (5); Leo Berman (6); Tommy Merritt (7); and Chuck Hopson (11).