

Annual Report

Texas Skill Standards Board

Annual Report Texas Skill Standards Board September 2001 – August 2002 As Required by House Bill 3431, 76th Legislature

A Message from the Chair:

FY2002 was a year of growth and strategic collaboration. The Texas Skill Standards Board (TSSB), in its liaison role between employers and education and training providers, made great strides in both increasing Texas' recognized skill standards and in facilitating their usage.

The TSSB recognized 12 national skill standards, more than in any other year. These standards, developed by industry groups, are now available in the on-line Texas Skill Standards Repository. The standards provide education and training providers with explicit skill requirements for developing curriculum and assessments that meet the needs of industry.

Of key significance, the TSSB and representatives of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) agreed on specific collaborative actions to encourage awareness and use of skill standards among community and technical colleges (CTCs). Those actions included the following:

- A hot link from the THECB to TSSB web site so that CTCs have direct access to skill standards for use in the development of new, or revision of existing, technical programs.
- A requirement that CTCs applying for approval of new technical programs review TSSB-recognized skill standards and consider their inclusion in the curriculum.
- Development of a process for the TSSB to recognize new CTC programs that incorporate TSSB-recognized skill standards.

This report describes these and other major accomplishments, progress on system building and future challenges of the TSSB. In these tough economic times when skilled workers are needed as much as ever, skill standards provide a valuable communication tool to define industry needs for a qualified workforce. The TSSB hopes you will find this report a source of useful information in understanding the Texas skill standards system and the progress that has been made thus far.

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Texas Skill Standards Board

Legislative Background, Role, and Major Accomplishments

Legislative Background

The Texas Legislature established the Texas Skill Standards Board (TSSB) as part of the workforce development system. It is an advisory body to the Governor and Legislature on the development of a statewide system of industry-defined and industry-recognized skill standards for all major skilled, sub-baccalaureate occupations that provide strong employment and earnings opportunities. The TSSB was charged with four specific mandates.

In 1999, the 76th Legislature amended the TSSB mandates with the passage of House Bill 3431. This bill gave the TSSB explicit authority to recognize skill standards defined by industry. The TSSB's mandates are:

- 1) validate and recognize nationally-established skill standards to guide curriculum development, training, assessment, and certification of workforce skills;
- 2) convene industry groups to develop skill standards and certification procedures for industries and occupations in which standards have not been established or adopted and recognize the skill standards and certification procedures;
- 3) review standards developed by other states and nations and enter into agreements for mutual recognition of standards and credentials to enhance portability of skills; and
- 4) promote the use of standards and credentials among employers.

TSSB Role: Leadership and System Building

To achieve its statutory charge, the TSSB plays a leadership and system-building role. Within that role are several functions.

“To achieve its statutory charge, the TSSB plays a leadership and system-building role.”

“...skill standards become the tool for communicating industry skill requirements to education and training providers.”

Catalyst for Industry

The TSSB does not develop skill standards. The authorizing legislation explicitly states that the skill standards shall be defined and recognized by industry. The TSSB serves as a catalyst to convene industry groups for the purposes of voluntarily developing skill standards and certification procedures for industries and occupations in which none exist. As part of this role, the TSSB provides assistance and clarification to industry groups on technical requirements for the skill standards development process needed for TSSB recognition.

Quality Assurance Agent

The TSSB plays a quality assurance role, establishing the criteria to inform industry groups that are developing skill standards of the content and procedural validity requirements for TSSB recognition. The TSSB then evaluates the end product, the skill standards, against the criteria and grants statewide recognition of those standards. In other words, the TSSB determines the standards for the standards, whether they are newly developed skill standards, already-established national standards, or standards imported from other states and nations. In the latter case, the TSSB review and recognition of standards enables portability of credentials through reciprocity agreements, thereby building a national and even international system of skill standards.

Facilitation of Usage

An essential aspect of the TSSB's system-building role is to facilitate dissemination and usage of the state-recognized skill standards throughout the workforce development system. Without usage, development of skill standards would be a futile exercise. As stated in statute, the Legislature intended the skill standards to "guide curriculum development, training, assessment, and certification of workforce skills." Used in this way, the skill standards become the tool for communicating industry skill requirements to education and training providers. Thus, the TSSB's role includes a liaison function with the Texas system of community and technical colleges and workforce education and training providers. At the same time, it is essential that employers hire graduates of programs that utilize skill standards as the basis for their curricula. In this way, employers can drive the use of skill standards through the labor market. Thus, the Legislature in its wisdom also mandated the TSSB, as part of its system-building role, to "promote the use of standards and credentials among employers."

“Employers...drive the use of skill standards through the labor market.”

System Vision: Texas Skill Standards Infrastructure

The TSSB's vision of the Texas skill standards system is defined conceptually under the umbrella of the Texas Skill Standards Infrastructure (TSSI). The TSSI is the system to support and promote the creation and use of industry-defined and industry-recognized skill standards. The aim of the infrastructure is to assist the growth of the Texas economy through the recognition of skill standards and skill attainment to support workforce development efforts.

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, the TSSI is composed of two key functional areas, each supported by policy and procedural frameworks called guidelines. On the left, Guidelines for the Development, Recognition and Usage of Skill Standards define the processes and requirements to be undertaken by industry groups that seek recognition by the TSSB for skill standards. On the right, Guidelines for Certification and Credentialing of Skill Attainment define the policies and processes for education and training providers to assess and document the skill attainment of individuals to the standards specified by industry. In the middle, the stakeholders (employers and industry groups, public/private partnerships, education and training providers, and state agencies) implement and use skill standards within their workforce development realms. The two sets of guidelines support the collaboration of these implementation agents and partnerships by ensuring common understanding.

The purpose of this system is to provide a foundation to accelerate the capacity of business and industry in Texas to build high-performance workplaces. Skill standards are key building blocks of high-performance workplaces, which focus on building of individuals' competencies through private and public workforce development efforts and the leveraging of those competencies to build organizational strength. These workplaces will increase businesses' and industries' competitive capabilities and strategic market placement to ensure that Texas will be globally competitive in the future.

Figure 1

Major Accomplishments

The TSSB achieved a number of notable outcomes in FY02. Its accomplishments focused on skill standards recognition, identification of potential industry groups to develop skill standards in targeted occupations, development of policy and processes to facilitate skill standards usage in workforce education programs, and expanding outreach and awareness efforts. Specific accomplishments include the following:

“The TSSB developed a process to recognize new community and technical college programs that incorporate skill standards into their curriculum.”

National Skill Standards Recognized

The TSSB granted conditional recognition to 12 skill standards. The TSSB worked with industry groups such as the Precision Metalforming Association, the ARIES (Austin Regional Industry-Education Systems) Alliance, and the Sales and Service Voluntary Partnership of the National Skill Standards Board (NSSB), to bring nationally established standards into the Texas system. The recognized standards include Customer Service; Sales; Metalforming Skills, Level I; Metalforming Skills, Stamping Level II; Metalforming Skills, Stamping Level III; Texas County Corrections Officer; and six Information Technology Skill Standards. These Information Technology skill standards, developed by the National Workforce Center for Emerging Technologies, include Technical Support, Technical Writing, Digital Media, Network Design and Administration, Programming, and Enterprise Systems Analysis and Integration. All 12 skill standards are stored in the Texas Skill Standards Repository on the TSSB web site at www.tssb.org.

Program Recognition

Process Developed

The TSSB developed a process to recognize new community

“Recognized programs

will be prominently displayed on the TSSB's web site, signaling to employers a likely source of qualified job applicants."

and technical college (CTC) programs that incorporate skill standards into their curriculum. This recognition is designed to encourage and facilitate the use of skill standards to "guide curriculum development, training, assessment and certification of workforce skills," in accordance with the Board's first legislative mandate. In the application for TSSB recognition, a community and technical college must document its incorporation of skill standards into the workforce education courses that comprise the new or revised program. The college must also agree to teach to, and assess students' mastery of, the standards. Recognized programs will be prominently displayed on the TSSB's web site, signaling to employers a likely source of qualified job applicants.

In a collaborative meeting, the TSSB and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) agreed that program recognition was a more effective strategy for facilitating skill standards use in community and technical college programs than through the Workforce Education Course Manual (WECM) maintenance process as pursued by the TSSB in FY00 and FY01. The TSSB's recognition process will be piloted in FY03 with community and technical colleges seeking THECB approval for new workforce education programs.

Guidelines for Certification Revised

The TSSB articulated and documented its recognition policy for community and technical college programs in a revision to its Guidelines for the Certification and Credentialing of Skill Attainment (Guidelines for Certification). The Guidelines for Certification is the TSSB's authoritative source that provides policies and guidance regarding the use of skill standards for education and training purposes.

Outreach and Awareness Action Plans Developed

The TSSB developed detailed action plans to conduct outreach and awareness to employers, community and technical colleges, and proprietary schools. The action plans provide specific strategies, target audiences and timelines for implementing the goals and objectives of the TSSB's broad Outreach and Awareness Plan approved in FY01. The Outreach and Awareness Plan disseminates information about the TSSB, skill standards and their benefits, in accordance with the legislative mandate to promote the use of standards

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and credentials.

Plan to Convene Industry Groups Begun

The TSSB began implementation of its plan to convene industry groups for skill standards development. The TSSB developed the plan based on a labor market information decisions model created and approved in FY01. The model generated a list of potential occupations that fit the legislative criteria for the Texas skill standards system. In FY02, the TSSB evaluated the potential occupations to determine the ones for which “standards had not been established or adopted,” in accordance with its legislative mandate. Those occupations that met the legislative criteria were further researched to determine the degree to which the related industry was organized and active, and ranked accordingly. TSSB staff then began contacting industry representatives of the highest-ranked occupations to determine interest in skill standards development.

Employer Web Section Added

As part of its Outreach and Awareness Plan, the TSSB designed a new section of its web site tailored for employers and industry groups. The employer section will provide a skill standards overview from the industry perspective; a “toolkit” for skill standards development, including instructions and related documents; and a list of community and technical college programs recognized by the TSSB as using skill standards in their curricula and assessments. TSSB staff tested the web section text with a focus group of employers. Their comments will be used to revise the text, as needed, before launching the site in FY03.

Progress on System Implementation: 2001-2002

In its leadership role, the TSSB continues to build the Texas skill standards system through a number of ongoing initiatives, projects and partnerships.

Skill Standards Development/Partnerships in Process

The TSSB continued to provide technical assistance to industry partnerships involved in skill standards development. The Gulf Coast Process Technology Alliance (GCPTA), composed primarily of major petrochemical companies in southeast Texas and the surrounding region, continued to make significant progress in skill standards development for process technicians. In consultation with the TSSB, the GCPTA completed the work-oriented data collection and developed a survey and sampling methodology to validate the information across the industry.

The TSSB also continued working with the ARIES (Austin Regional Industry-Education Systems) Alliance, which is validating six national information technology skill standards developed by the National Center for Emerging Technologies (NWCET) at Bellevue Community College in Washington State. TSSB staff provided technical assistance in the design of a validation survey for dissemination across the Texas information technology industry. The ARIES Alliance submitted the NWCET skill standards for TSSB conditional recognition in FY02 as an interim step in its plan to ultimately submit them for full recognition.

State Skill Standards Working Group

The TSSB continued to participate as a member of the State Skill Standards Working Group (SSSWG), supported and funded by the NSSB, to define and establish consistency of standards development processes across states, and to share implementation successes. The SSSWG provides state input to the NSSB regarding national skill standards system implementation and issues regarding standards and certification alignment between states. The TSSB hosted the February SSSWG meeting in Texas. The group discussed the participant states' cooperation with the NSSB's industry-driven voluntary partnerships in their skill standards national validation and assessment initiatives. At its July 2002 meeting, the SSSWG met to organize the first national conference on industry skill standards and occupational certifications for employer-based systems and workforce training programs to be held in May 2003.

National Linkages

“The TSSB continued to provide technical assistance to industry partnerships involved in skill standards development.”

“The TSSB designed and developed informational materials and web site text for the employer action plan.”

As part of its efforts to align and coordinate state and national skill standards systems, the TSSB served as a member of and/or monitored the work of the NSSB's industry-driven skill standards voluntary partnerships (VPs). Those VPs include Information and Communications Technology, Education and Training, Sales and Service, and the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council, each of which are in different stages of their skill standards, assessment and certification development. The Sales and Service VP piloted its newly developed assessment for the Customer Service and Sales skill standards, which were conditionally recognized by the TSSB in 2002, at 13 sites nationwide. Priority Retail, a retail skill center in San Marcos, was one of those sites.

Outreach and Awareness Implementation Begun

The TSSB began implementation of the outreach and awareness action plans for employers and community and technical colleges. Both the employer and the CTC action plans consist of two major strategies: targeted outreach and general awareness to be implemented in two phases. The targeted outreach strategies promote skill standards development and use to specific audiences. The general awareness strategies are designed to increase widespread knowledge of skill standards and the liaison role the TSSB can play to facilitate development and usage of skill standards among employers and education and training providers. Each strategy requires development of informational materials, articles, presentations slides and web site text. The TSSB designed and developed informational materials and web site text for the employer action plan, and began design and development of text for the new CTC web section.

Participation on Key CTC Committee

The TSSB continued to participate as a member of the Texas Leadership Consortium for Curriculum Development (Consortium). The mission of the Consortium is to serve as statewide leader for information, resources, and guidance in curriculum development and management for workforce education programs in community and technical colleges. The Consortium coordinates and communicates statewide the Perkins grant-funded curriculum development projects led by colleges and advises the THECB on curriculum development issues. The Consortium is a vehicle for the statewide, systemic change in content and process for curriculum development. The TSSB serves on the Consortium's Steering Committee, which provides policy and programmatic leadership.

Technical Assistance Documents Piloted

“The TSSB began to pilot...technical assistance documents that provide detailed instructions on the skill standards development process.”

The TSSB began to pilot a number of technical assistance documents that provide more detailed instructions on the skill standards development process described in the Guidelines for the Development, Recognition and Usage of Skill Standards. The TSSB solicited comments from two industry partnerships, the ARIES Alliance and the GCPTA, on the documents and expects to finalize those in 2002, for publication in 2003.

Major Challenges Ahead

In FY02, the TSSB accomplished or made significant progress, as detailed in this publication, on the challenges set forth in its 2000-01 Annual Report, including:

“In FY03, the TSSB will pilot the process with community and technical colleges seeking recognition for new programs”

- Recognized 12 skill standards.
- Developed a recognition process for community and technical colleges that incorporate skill standards into their programs to facilitate usage throughout the state.
- Began implementation of the plan to convene industry groups for skill standards development.
- Piloted technical assistance documents to help industry groups in conducting the skill standards development process.
- Developed outreach and awareness action plans for three targeted audiences and began implementation of the employer plan.
- Designed a new employer section of the TSSB web site.

Major challenges to address in FY03 and beyond include the following:

Pilot CTC Program Recognition Process

In FY02, the TSSB developed a process to recognize community and technical college programs that incorporate skill standards. The TSSB’s policy underlying the recognition process was adopted in an amendment to the Guidelines for Certification and Credentialing of Skill Attainment, the guidebook on skill standards use for education and training purposes.

In FY03, the TSSB will pilot the process with community and technical colleges seeking recognition for new programs. Community and technical colleges must seek approval from the THECB to offer a new workforce education program in Texas. Working with the THECB, the TSSB will establish collaborative procedures that enable colleges to apply for recognition as they develop their new program curriculum during the state approval process.

This pilot program will allow the TSSB to test, and revise and improve as needed, the recognition application process and procedures. The TSSB will then assess the feasibility of expanding the recognition program to existing community and technical college programs and other institutions such as private, for-profit schools.

Accelerate Convening of Industry Groups

In FY03, the TSSB will build upon the groundwork laid in FY02 for convening groups for new skill standards development. The industry groups that were identified in the targeted occupations produced by the LMI model will be contacted and their interest in skill standards development determined, with the goal of establishing a partnership with the TSSB for that purpose.

Expand Outreach and Awareness Plan Implementation

In FY03, the TSSB will continue implementation of its employer outreach and awareness action plan that was begun in FY02, including contacting the business and industry target groups, distributing the informational materials and conducting presentations under the targeted outreach strategy for skill standards development. For the community and technical college audience, the TSSB will begin implementation of the outreach and awareness action plan that was developed in FY02. A separate web site section, informational materials, presentations and articles for community and technical colleges will be designed and developed. The TSSB will also begin implementation of the proprietary schools out-reach and awareness action plan and will develop action plans for the remaining two stakeholder groups: Local Workforce Development Boards and Other Entities.

Maintenance/Update

Process for Existing Skill Standards

The TSSB's Guidelines for the Development, Recognition and Usage of Skill Standards require that recognized skill standards be reviewed and updated every five years, at a minimum, to maintain recognition status. As occupations change in response to business and

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*skill standards
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technological advances, skill standards need to be revised to reflect those changes. A number of TSSB-recognized skill standards in the Texas Skill Standards Repository will reach the maximum, five-year shelf life in FY03. To renew their recognition status, the standards will need to be reviewed and their content either validated or updated and resubmitted to the TSSB. In FY03, the TSSB will facilitate the review and update process, contacting the original Industry Technical Advisory Committees that submitted the standards for recognition.

**Skill Standards-Based
Curriculum Development Grants**

In FY02, TSSB and THECB representatives met to discuss how to collaboratively encourage awareness and use of skill standards among community and technical colleges. Among the initiatives agreed upon by both groups to address this goal was to award Perkins grants to community and technical colleges for incorporating skill standards into their program curricula. In FY03, TSSB staff will work with THECB staff to develop a request for proposals for skill standards-based curriculum development grants. The TSSB will also provide technical assistance to community and technical college awardees as needed.
