



Annual Report

September 2002 – August 2003

Texas Skill Standards Board

Texas Skill Standards Board Members

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Annual Report Texas Skill Standards Board

AS REQUIRED BY HOUSE BILL 3431, 76TH LEGISLATURE

A Message from the Chair:

In FY 2003, the Texas Skill Standards Board (TSSB) continued to improve and expand the Texas skill standards system. A few of the highlights of a year that saw major changes in the TSSB itself, including a new chair and five new members, are described below.

The number of skill standards in the Texas system grew, thereby increasing access and availability. The TSSB recognized existing industry-endorsed standards in Computer-Aided Drafting and Design and Retail Management and Operations. A partnership was established with the Industrial Instrumentation and Controls Technology Alliance to develop new standards for Instrumentation Technician.

The TSSB developed or enhanced tools to make the use of skill standards easier and more effective. A separate section on the TSSB web site was developed for community and technical colleges. The section consists of frequently asked questions, a toolkit for using skill standards in workforce education programs, and the TSSB program recognition process and application packet. In addition, the TSSB developed a user's guide that explains the skill standards elements and format and how to translate standards into technical curriculum. Finally, the industry certifications list on the web site was greatly expanded and restructured. This list contains links to third-party certifications that can provide documented evidence of competence in skills standards. Education and training providers can use the list to prepare their students to attain such certifications.

This report describes these and other major accomplishments, progress on system building and future challenges of the TSSB. As a businessman who has seen the value of strong employer-education partnerships in the petrochemical industry, I invite you to read this report and to join in supporting the TSSB's goal to produce a more qualified Texas workforce through the valuable communication tool of skill standards.

Wayne J. Oswald

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Legislative Background, Role and System Vision

“The Texas Legislature established the TSSB in 1995 as an advisory body to the Governor and the Legislature...”

Legislative Background

The Texas Legislature established the Texas Skill Standards Board (TSSB) in 1995 as an advisory body to the Governor and the Legislature on the development of a statewide system of industry-defined and industry-recognized skill standards. The system encompasses all major skilled, sub-baccalaureate occupations that provide strong employment and earnings opportunities. The TSSB is charged in its statute with four specific mandates:

- 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.

Catalyst for Industry

The TSSB facilitates the convening of industry groups to voluntarily develop skill standards for occupations in which none exist. It provides technical assistance on the skill standards development process and TSSB recognition requirements. Identifying for conditional recognition nationally established skill standards that have already been endorsed by industry is another aspect of this function.

“Skill standards are a tool to communicate industry skill requirements.”

Quality Assurance Agent

The TSSB determines the standards for the standards. It establishes the content and procedural validity criteria for TSSB recognition, as stated in its policy manual, *Guidelines for the Development, Recognition and Usage of Skill Standards*. It then evaluates the skill standards against the criteria and grants statewide recognition to standards that meet the requirements.

Facilitation of Usage

Skill standards are a tool to communicate industry skill requirements. But they must be used to be effective. Education and training providers must incorporate the standards into their curricula and employers must hire the graduates of those programs. However, the Texas skill standards system is voluntary.

The TSSB serves a dual function in this system. First, it disseminates and facilitates usage of the standards among education and training providers. Secondly, it promotes the standards with employers so that they will drive the use of the skill standards through

the labor market. The TSSB’s guidance on skill standards usage is delineated in its second major policy manual, *Guidelines for the Certification and Credentialing of Skill Attainment*.

Major Accomplishments

“In FY03, the TSSB developed a separate section on its web site for community and technical colleges.”

The TSSB achieved a number of notable outcomes in FY03. These accomplishments focused on recognizing industry-endorsed skill standards and developing tools and outreach materials to facilitate skill standards usage among community and technical colleges. Specific accomplishments include the following:

CADD Standards Recognized

The TSSB granted conditional recognition to Computer-Aided Drafting and Design (CADD) skill standards. The TSSB worked with the industry advisory committees of Texas State Technical College (TSTC) Waco and TSTC-West Texas to bring the national CADD standards into the Texas system. The CADD standards were developed and validated with industry nationally by the National Coalition for Advanced Manufacturing and revised in 1999. The standards include fundamental drafting skills, fundamental computer skills, basic CADD skills and advanced CADD skills. The skill standards are posted in the Texas Skill Standards Repository on the TSSB web site.

Retail Management Standards Recognized

The TSSB granted conditional recognition to Retail Management and Operations skill standards. The TSSB worked with Priority Retail, a retail skill center in San Marcos, Texas, to import the standards from Australia. Priority Retail endorsed the high-level standards as critical for the training of mid-level retail managers and supervisors in Texas. The standards were developed by the Australian National Wholesale, Retail and Personal Services (WRAPS) Industry Training Council and endorsed by the Australian National Training Authority. The skill standards are posted in the Texas Skill Standards Repository on the TSSB web site.

College Web Section Developed

In FY03, the TSSB developed a separate section on its web site for community and technical colleges. The section is designed to help college instructors and curriculum designers understand skill standards and integrate them into college workforce education programs. A

“Dozens of industry certifications were added to the TSSB web site in FY03.”

targeted informational pamphlet was also developed to be sent to all college presidents in FY04. The pamphlet describes the Texas skill standards system and the community and technical college services provided by the TSSB.

Usage Guide Completed

A valuable tool to help community and technical colleges integrate skill standards into workforce education curriculum was developed. *A User’s Guide: Incorporating Skill Standards into Community and Technical College Curriculum* is a guidance manual that explains the skill standards elements and format and how to translate that content into technical program components. It is available on the community and technical college section of the TSSB web site.

Industry Certifications List Expanded

Dozens of industry certifications were added to the TSSB web site in FY03. Industry certifications are granted to an individual who has met de facto performance or skill standards specified by the industry group or association.

Third-party certifications provide documented evidence of competence in skill standards that education and training providers can prepare their students to attain. The Certifications web section was reorganized into the TSSB’s 15 industry clusters to improve its navigability.

Library Assembled

The TSSB organized its collection of historical and current skill standards research articles, reports and other reference publications into an in-house library. The library houses both national and Texas skill standards-related documents that cover the origins of skill standards, major studies supporting the initiative, other states’ standards and usage guidebooks, and current TSSB recognized skill standards and other publications. The materials are available for on-site reference only.

Progress on System Implementation: 2002 - 2003

“The IICTA will develop skill standards to address an anticipated shortage of skilled instrumentation and control technicians due to impending retirements.”

In its leadership role, the TSSB continued in FY03 to build the Texas skill standards system through a number of ongoing initiatives, projects and partnerships.

TSSB Partnerships

The TSSB established a partnership with the Industrial Instrumentation and Controls Technology Alliance (IICTA) to develop statewide skill standards for Instrumentation Technician. The IICTA is a consortium of colleges and companies in the manufacturing, chemical processing, refining, and oil and gas exploration and production industries. The IICTA will develop skill standards to address an anticipated shortage of skilled instrumentation and control technicians due to impending retirements. The IICTA plans to develop a standard curriculum that all participating colleges will adopt to prepare entry-level technicians. Through the skill standards development process, current workers in the industry will identify the required skills and knowledge that will form the basis of the curriculum.

National and States Standards Coordination

The TSSB served as a member of or monitored the work of the National Skill Standards Board (NSSB) industry-led skill standards voluntary partnerships (VPs). Those VPs include the Information and Communications Technology VP, the Sales and Service VP, and the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council. In March 2003, the Sales and Service VP spoke with the TSSB regarding state strategies to integrate its national assessment and certification with Workforce Investment Act training provider initiatives.

Outreach and Awareness Implementation

The TSSB continued implementation of the outreach and awareness action plans for employers and community and technical colleges. An employer-oriented informational pamphlet was produced and distributed to targeted companies. The mailer was sent to industries selected through the TSSB's labor market information (LMI) model to gauge interest in developing skill

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standards. The LMI model identifies occupations that fit the legislative criteria of sub-baccalaureate with strong employment and earnings opportunities for which to target skill standards development. For community and technical colleges, the TSSB developed introductory presentations and usage workshops to be conducted in FY04 as requested.

Participation on Key Committee

The TSSB continued to serve as a Steering Committee member of the Texas State Leadership Consortium for Curriculum Development (CD Consortium). The CD Consortium coordinates and communicates Perkins grant-funded curriculum development projects statewide. It also advises the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) on curriculum development issues and trends. In FY03, the TSSB, as a member of the CD Consortium Steering Committee, participated in the development of an initiative to competitively award incentive grants to community and technical colleges that incorporate TSSB recognized skill

standards into their curriculum. The Request for Quotes for grant proposals will be released in FY04.

Program Recognition Implementation

The TSSB developed administrative processes and procedures to support the Program Recognition initiative approved in FY02. Community and technical colleges that incorporate skill standards into their curriculum, teaching and assessments are eligible to apply for Program Recognition. This Recognition signals to employers that a college program is teaching to industry standards and thus is a likely source of qualified applicants. Given that no new programs approved by the THECB in FY03 were in skill standards-related occupational areas, the TSSB Recognition pilot will be expanded in FY04 to existing programs that revise their curriculum to incorporate skill standards, as well as new programs.

Standards Review and Update

The Texas skill standards system remains viable only if the standards content is rele-

“Under TSSB policy, recognized skill standards are required to be reviewed and updated...every five years at a minimum.”

vant. Under TSSB policy guidelines, recognized skill standards are required to be reviewed, and updated if needed, every five years at a minimum to maintain their recognition status. Three standards, Telecommunications Maintenance Technician (TMT), Heavy Equipment Maintenance Technician (HEMT), and Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Technician (HVAC) are scheduled to expire in December 2003. In FY03, workshops with industry representatives were organized to review the TMT and HEMT skill standards. The review sessions are scheduled to be conducted in FY04. The TSSB also worked with the Texas chapter of the American Air Conditioning Contractors Association and North American Technician Excellence toward updating the HVAC skill standards.

Major Challenges Ahead

“The TSSB has made significant progress in building the Texas skill standards system, recognizing nearly 30 standards in a variety of occupations.”

The TSSB in FY03 accomplished or made significant progress, as detailed in this publication, on the primary challenges set forth in its 2001-02 Annual Report. The TSSB successfully addressed these challenges by working with state and local agency, education and workforce partners.

Major challenges still to address include:

Recognize New and Update Existing Standards

The TSSB has made significant progress in building the Texas skill standards system, recognizing nearly 30 standards in a variety of occupations. Those occupations range from manufacturing to information technology to heavy equipment maintenance. An ongoing challenge is to continue to recognize standards in a greater number of occupations, particularly those occupations that meet the system’s legislatively established criteria.

The TSSB has pursued this goal from two avenues, corresponding with its first and second legislative mandates. It has solicited industry

groups such as the IICTA to develop skill standards in targeted occupations where no standards exist. And it has continued to identify, for TSSB recognition, industry-endorsed, nationally established skill standards that are valid and reliable. In FY03, fruitful discussions took place with the Maricopa Advanced Technology Education Center regarding conditional recognition of their semiconductor technician standards. The Center for Occupational Research and Development also expressed interest in seeking TSSB recognition for its national photonics standards. These and other skill standards will be pursued in FY04 and beyond.

At the same time, recognized skill standards must be maintained regularly to keep the system current, relevant and viable. The TSSB has scheduled review and update sessions in FY04 for the HEMT and TMT skill standards, and will continue to work with industry groups to update the HVAC standards. Additional skill standards are scheduled to expire in 2004. The TSSB will contact the original

“In a voluntary system, an ongoing challenge is to inform and educate business and industry on the value of skill standards.”

industry groups that developed the standards to review the content and ensure it is still representative of the work it describes.

Promote Standards Among Employers

The TSSB’s fourth legislative mandate acknowledges the need to promote the use of standards and credentials among employers. In a voluntary system, an ongoing challenge is to inform and educate business and industry on the value of skill standards. The TSSB will continue to conduct outreach and awareness to both increase the numbers of recognized skill standards and encourage employers to promote skill standards usage among education and training providers. In FY04, the focus will be on outreach to targeted industry associations. The purpose will be to both increase their awareness of the Texas skill standards system and to invite them to submit valid and reliable standards for TSSB conditional recognition consideration.

Encourage and Facilitate Usage

The TSSB has forged strong

alliances with and built support for skill standards among leading community and technical college deans throughout Texas. These alliances were built over several years through collaborative initiatives, including participation on the CD Consortium and the FY00-01 Perkins-funded project to integrate skill standards into the Workforce Education Course Manual (WECM).

At the state level, the THECB in partnership with the TSSB, has implemented key policies and administrative mechanisms to increase awareness and encourage usage of skill standards among community and technical colleges. Among those initiatives was adding a requirement to the Statement of Assurances in the application for a new workforce education program. Colleges must now certify that they have reviewed any applicable skill standards and considered them for inclusion in the new program’s curriculum. The THECB has also installed a link from the WECM section of its web site to the TSSB web site.

“...promotion of skill standards usage among all stakeholders... including career colleges and schools and local workforce development boards, is an ongoing TSSB priority.”

The TSSB’s ongoing challenge is to move beyond support from workforce education leaders to actual usage of skill standards in community and technical college programs. To increase skill standards usage, the TSSB will undertake a three-fold strategy. The TSSB will: 1) increase widespread skill standards awareness at all community and technical colleges from the president to program administrators; 2) provide technical assistance on how to integrate skill standards content into workforce education program curriculum; and 3) provide incentives to encourage community and technical colleges to use skill standards.

Given the momentum of a number of initiatives with state and local partners in the past two years, the TSSB has focused its outreach and awareness efforts on the community and technical college audience. However, promotion of skill standards usage among all stakeholders in the Texas system, including career colleges and schools and local workforce development boards, is an ongoing TSSB priority.

Align States and National Systems

For the past seven years, the TSSB has worked closely with the NSSB and its industry-led voluntary partnerships to align the Texas and national skill standards systems. This collaborative relationship has been one of the TSSB’s primary vehicles to address its third legislative mandate to coordinate and recognize skill standards and credentials across states. Toward the end of FY03, the NSSB and its states’ coordination arm, the State Skill Standards Working Group, of which the TSSB was a member, ceased to exist. As a result, the TSSB will need to develop a new coordination and communication strategy to meet this mandate in the coming years.