

Annual Report

September 1998 – August 1999



Texas Skill Standards Board

Annual Report Texas Skill Standards Board

AS REQUIRED BY HOUSE BILL 3431, 76TH LEGISLATURE

A Message from the Chair:

This report has a two fold purpose: 1) to document the performance and progress of the Texas Skill Standards Board (TSSB) in meeting its legislative mandates; and 2) to communicate with our partners and users the TSSB's vision of a voluntary Texas skill standards system and ways in which we can collaborate to reach that vision.

A statewide skill standards and credentials system can bridge the gap between employers' skill requirements of workers and education and training providers' programs. Skill standards serve as the all-important communication tool to develop curricula that is relevant and reflects the needs of industry. Developing such a voluntary system that benefits all Texans, including employers, workers, students and job seekers, education and training providers, and the general public, is the mission of the TSSB.

If you are an employer or industry representative, you will find valuable information to assist you in your roles as developers and users of skill standards. We refer to policy and procedural guidelines, as well as technology tools, for those industry groups that are developing and seeking TSSB recognition for skill standards. You can also read about other valuable tools the TSSB is developing to ease the process of accessing and using skill standards for training purposes.

As an education or training provider, you will learn what steps the TSSB is taking to incorporate skill standards into the community and technical college curriculum development and review process, and into the local workforce development system. You will benefit, along with students, job seekers, and workers, from a status report of the web site we are designing to store and maintain recognized skill standards. Partnerships for skill standards development that are currently underway are also recorded in this publication.

Our ultimate goal in designing the skill standards system is to contribute to a strong, qualified workforce, which will lead to increased economic competitiveness for the state of Texas. We hope you will find this report a source of useful information in understanding the system and the progress that has been made thus far and is expected in the near future to implement that system.



Billie Pickard

Table of Contents

Legislative Background, Role and Major Accomplishments.....1

- Legislative Background
- TSSB Role: Leadership and System Building
- Major Accomplishments

System Vision: Texas Skill Standards Infrastructure.....5

- Policy and Procedural Framework for Skill Standards Development and Recognition
- Guidelines for Certification and Credentialing of Skill Attainment

Progress on System Implementation8

- TSSB Skill Builder Data Base
- Skill Standards Currently in Development
- Dissemination: Statewide Skill Standards Repository
- Usage throughout the Workforce Development System
- States and National Skill Standards Alignment

Major Challenges Ahead.....13

- Certification/Credentialing Guidelines
- Awareness and Outreach to Industry Groups
- Translation of Skill Standards into Postsecondary Course Content

Work in Progress: 1999-2000.....15

- Texas State Leadership Consortium for Curriculum Development
- Partnership for Community and Technical College Awareness and Outreach
- Development of Procedures and Tools to Facilitate Skill Standards Usage in Workforce Education
- Incumbent Worker Training Program
- TSSB Web Site: Information, Development, Storage and Access of Skill Standards

Legislative Background, Role, and Major Accomplishments

“In 1999, the 75th Legislature...gave the TSSB explicit authority to recognize skill standards defined by industry.”

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 75th 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.

Catalyst for Industry
The TSSB does not develop skill standards. The authorizing legislation

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

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

“TSSB endorsed Guidelines for the Development, Recognition and Usage of Skill Standards in Texas.”

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."

Major Accomplishments

The Texas Skill Standards Board has made significant progress in Fiscal Year 1999 (FY99) in fulfilling its role of building a statewide system of skill standards and credentials. Several systemic innovations and advancements over the past year have established the TSSB as one of the leading states in skill standards system-building across the

nation. Beginning the year in a state of transition, with several new members and a new director, the TSSB held a review session in which its vision was clarified and refined and its direction elaborated. The major accomplishments, which stemmed from that session, include the following:

Texas Infrastructure

TSSB refined and elaborated on its Texas Skill Standards Infrastructure (TSSI), the conceptual umbrella for the Texas skill standards system. The TSSI is supported by policy and procedural frameworks endorsed by the TSSB, called guidelines. (See next section for more detail.)

Policy and Procedural Framework

TSSB endorsed *Guidelines for the Development, Recognition and Usage of Skill Standards in Texas*. These guidelines supercede the 1998 interim guidelines. They are the policy and procedural framework for development and recognition that supports the TSSI and

“Alpha testing of the database has begun through piloting by TSSB partner groups.”

ensures stakeholder awareness and understanding.

Development and Recognition Process

TSSB refined and streamlined the development and recognition process. To more adequately address industry needs, the TSSB added explicit recognition requirements, the capacity to recognize standards from a variety of sources, and a comprehensive application package.

Standards Elements and Format

TSSB defined the seven elements that comprise a Texas skill standard, under which the job analysis data compiled during the development process must be organized. The skill standard elements define both the common statewide nomenclature and the level of skill data under each element. The TSSB also specified the required Texas format under which the skill standards must be presented for recognition.

Skill Builder Data Base

TSSB designed an automated database for entering and organizing job analysis information under the seven skill standards elements and format. When completed, the database will also enable industry groups to apply electronically for TSSB recognition. Alpha testing of the database has begun through piloting by TSSB partner groups.

System Vision: Texas Skill Standards Infrastructure

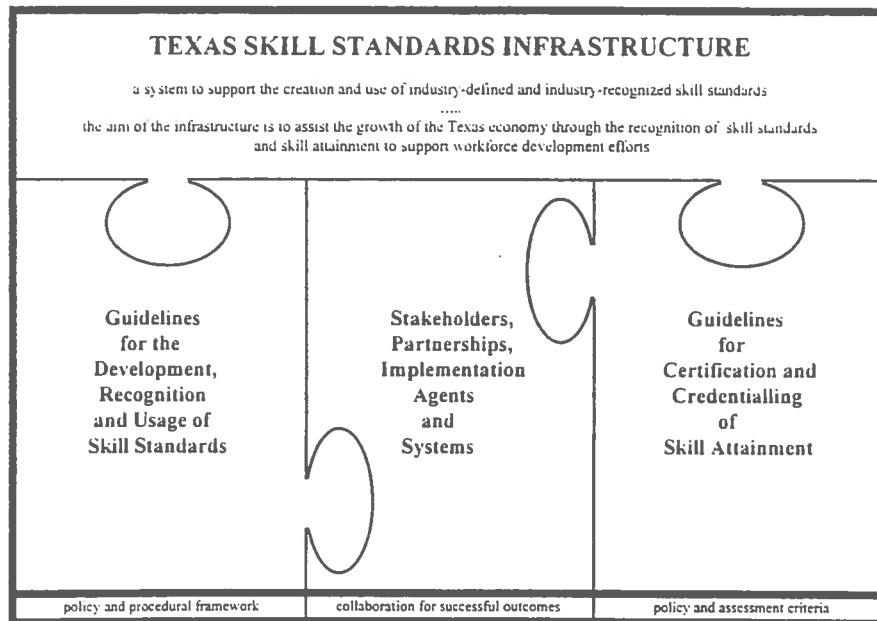
The Texas Skill Standards Board (TSSB) refined and elaborated upon its vision of the Texas skill standards system, defined conceptually under the umbrella of the Texas Skill Standards Infrastructure (TSSI). The TSSI is the system to support and promote the creation and use of industry-defined and industry-recognized 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 from 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.

Figure 1



“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.”

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 organization 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.

Policy and Procedural Framework for Skill Standards Development and Recognition

The first set of policy and procedural frameworks supporting the TSSI, *Guidelines for the Development, Recognition and Usage of Skill Standards (Guidelines)*, was endorsed by the TSSB in May, 1999.

The *Guidelines* are composed of six essential components: 1) skill standards development; 2) submission for recognition; 3) recognition by the TSSB; 4) storage and access; 5) usage; and 6) review and updating.

Each of these components is critical to the integrity and usability of the skill standards resulting from the development process. Component 1, Skill Standards Development, outlines considerations in the identification of occupations for the development of industry skill standards, as well as principles, processes and requirements for recognition by the TSSB. Component 2, Submission for Recognition, details the procedural and supporting documentation requirements for submission to the TSSB. Component 3, Recognition by the TSSB, details the specific requirements for recognition and possible categories of recognition by the TSSB. Component 4, Storage and Access, focuses on storage and access of recognized skill standards

“The TSSB has begun work on the second policy and procedures pillar... Guidelines for Certification and Credentialling of Skill Attainment.”

and notes pertinent details regarding an agreement between the TSSB and the development group for the storage of the skill standards. Component 5, Usage, notes issues for consideration by stakeholders interested in using TSSB recognized skill standards. A number of uses are discussed, and a caveat is noted regarding legal defensibility. Component 6, Review and Updating, discusses issues in keeping skill standards current, and outlines the process and requirements for review and updating of TSSB recognized skill standards.

Guidelines for Certification and Credentialling of Skill Attainment

The TSSB has begun work on the second policy and procedures pillar to support the TSSI, which eventually will become the *Guidelines for Certification and Credentialling of Skill Attainment*. TSSB staff held an introductory session at a Board meeting in which Board members were briefed on the concept, major policy issues and system challenges.

Progress on System Implementation

“The TSSB leveraged other public funding and private-sector resources by establishing partnerships with several industry-driven groups.”

Through its leadership and system-building role, the TSSB is in the process of implementing this vision, the Texas Skill Standards Infrastructure, through a number of key initiatives, projects and partnerships. Progress made in FY99 on these system initiatives is described below.

TSSB Skill Builder Data Base

The TSSB, in partnership with Austin Community College (ACC) under federal Perkins leadership funding from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, designed a relational database for entering and organizing job analysis information under the seven skill standards elements and format specified in the *Guidelines*. In addition, the TSSB-ACC partnership began alpha testing of the database. When finished, the database will be a helpful tool for facilitating the development and recognition of skill standards by industry groups. It will enable them to both organize their skill

standards and apply electronically for TSSB recognition. The TSSB has plans to implement the use of the database on-line in 2000.

Skill Standards Currently in Development

The TSSB made significant progress on its mandate to convene industry groups for the purpose of developing skill standards and certification procedures. In the absence of state legislative appropriations to convene groups, the TSSB leveraged other public funding and private-sector resources by establishing partnerships with several industry-driven groups that will be developing and seeking TSSB recognition for statewide skill standards.

Principally, the Gulf Coast Process Technology Alliance, composed primarily of major petrochemical companies in southeast Texas and the surrounding region, entered into partnership with the TSSB to develop skill standards for the occupational area of process technology.

“The TSSB continued its successful partnership with Texas State Technical College at Marshall.”

A sub-committee of the Alliance has met to begin the process of establishing an advisory group to provide expertise and oversight to the process.

The TSSB began to put into operation with the Texas A&M System the non-profit organizational structure conceived in 1998 to support the convening of industry groups for skill standards development. A Memorandum of Agreement was signed by the Chancellor of the Texas A&M System and the Chair of the TSSB, signifying the collaborative partnership between the two entities. Renamed the Texas Technology Skills Coalition to reflect its more specialized high-technology focus, the Coalition will focus principally on the semiconductor, information technology, software, telecommunications, and computers and peripherals sectors. A planning group was formed to develop an outreach product to generate industry awareness and interest in membership.

Through federal Perkins funding from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the TSSB continued its successful partnership with Texas State Technical College at Marshall. TSTC Marshall began the process of validating with Texas industry and translating according to the TSSB *Guidelines* national and state skill standards in the areas of computer network technician and machinist.

Finally, the TSSB established a partnership with EnterTech, a project of the University of Texas' IC² Institute, which is developing industry-driven, computer-based curriculum for entry-level jobs in technology manufacturing. EnterTech has begun the process of deriving skill standards from the job analysis information gathered during the curriculum development process. These skill standards will then be submitted to the TSSB for recognition.

“The TSSB, working in partnership with Austin Community College’s TechWEB Project, began the design phase of an internet-based repository for storing, maintaining and updating TSSB-recognized skill standards.”

Dissemination: Statewide Skill Standards Repository

As stated in the introduction of this report, one of the key functions of the TSSB’s system-building role is to facilitate dissemination and usage of skill standards once they have been developed by industry groups and recognized by the TSSB.

One of the principal dissemination tools for skill standards, which was listed as a major challenge in the TSSB’s 1997-98 Annual Report, is establishment of a statewide repository.

The TSSB, working in partnership with Austin Community College’s TechWEB Project, began the design phase of an internet-based repository for storing, maintaining and updating TSSB-recognized skill standards. The repository will provide public access to all stakeholders. The existing and impending workforce--incumbent workers, the unemployed, and students--will be able to identify at a glance the skills, knowledge and performance standards

needed to succeed in a variety of occupations as they prepare themselves to enter or change jobs. Education and training providers will be able to use the skill standards to develop curricula and training programs. Employers will be able to incorporate skill standards into their own in-house training programs.

The TSSB intends to have the repository on-line and fully functional in 2000. At that time, users will be able to access the skill standards through the website address of tssb.org, the domain name acquired by the TSSB.

Usage throughout the Workforce Development System

Skill standards, in the context of the workforce development system within which the TSSB was established, were intended by the Legislature to "guide curriculum development, training, assessment and certification of workforce skills."

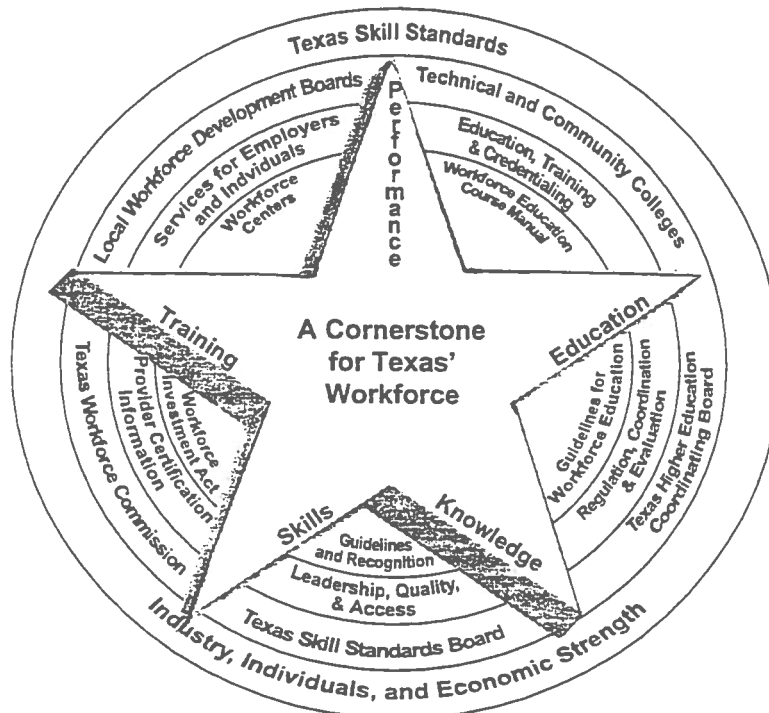
Figure 2 below illustrates the interface and collaboration between the key players in implementing skill standards into the workforce development system. At the base, the Texas Skill Standards Board provides a foundation of leadership, stability and quality assurance in the development of the skill standards to ensure their integrity for usage. Also at the state level, on either side of the TSSB, the workforce development partners of the Texas Workforce Commission

(TWC) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) ensure consistency of skill standards usage among their local partners. TWC performs this function through its rule-making authority and the THECB through its guidance, coordination and evaluation roles. Finally, at the forefront of the system, represented at the top of the diagram, the local workforce development boards and the technical and community colleges implement the skill standards most directly

through information, education and training services for individuals and employers.

In its system-building role, the TSSB began to collaborate with these key partners to ensure usage of skill standards in Texas' workforce development system, as envisioned in the diagram. In its liaison function with the technical and community college system, the TSSB appointed representatives to serve on two key THECB advisory

Figure 2



committees to facilitate the usage of skill standards: the Workforce Education Course Manual (WECM) Maintenance Committee and the Texas State Leadership Consortium for Curriculum Development. These committees are crucial links in ensuring that industry skill standards may be used in the development and review of post-secondary educational programs and courses.

The TSSB worked with TWC to draft a rule, which was subsequently approved, that incorporates the use of skill standards into the determination of subsequent eligibility of local training providers under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The rule states that:

"No later than July 1, 2000, each LWDB [Local Workforce Development Board] shall ensure that training providers, in developing programs of training services and establishing performance criteria for successful course completion, use in descending order:

- (1) skill standards recognized or conditionally recognized by the Texas Skill Standards Board;
- (2) industry-endorsed skill standards; or
- (3) skill requirements by employers."

States and National Skill Standards Alignment

The TSSB pursued several initiatives toward fulfilling its third mandate to enter into agreements with other states' and nations for review and mutual recognition of skill standards and credentials. First, in developing the *Guidelines for the Development, Recognition and Usage of Skill Standards*, the TSSB reviewed skill standards of the leading states and the National Skill Standards Board (NSSB) to ensure that Texas' standards elements and format aligned with the best practices across the nation. Second, the TSSB incorporated within its *Guidelines* a policy and process foundation for recognizing skill standards from a variety of sources, thereby enabling the

importing of standards and credentials from other states and nations. Third, the TSSB began discussions with the NSSB on aligning skill standards developed at the national level, which have focused on core skills across an industry, with those developed in Texas at a more specialized occupational level, to avoid duplication and overlap. Fourth, one of the outcomes of the discussions with the NSSB is that the TSSB agreed to field-test the NSSB's academic and employability skills definitions and rating scales in the development of skill standards in Texas.

Major Challenges Ahead

“The TSSB successfully addressed these challenges by establishing formal and informal partnerships...”

In FY99, the Texas Skill Standards Board accomplished or made significant progress, as detailed in this document, on the challenges set forth in its 1997-98 Annual Report, including:

- development of permanent recognition guidelines;
- implementation of the Technology Skills Coalition;
- establishment of a statewide skill standards repository;
- coordination of national and state skill standards initiatives and efforts;
- promotion of standards among employers;
- promotion of standards within the workforce development system; and
- addressing the issues of assessment and credentialing.

The TSSB successfully addressed these challenges by establishing formal and informal partnerships and leveraging existing funds with other workforce development agencies and

industry groups. Major challenges still to address include the following:

Certification/Credentialing Guidelines

As stated earlier in this report, the TSSB began discussion on the second policy and procedural framework, *Guidelines for the Certification and Credentialing of Skill Attainment*, to support the Texas Skill Standards Infrastructure (TSSI). Those guidelines must next be written and adopted by the TSSB.

Awareness and Outreach to Industry Groups

The TSSB has concentrated much of its efforts in FY99 on establishing the system components that will ensure the integrity of skill standards developed by industry groups and will enable their usage throughout the workforce development system. Once those components are in place, the next step will be to accelerate the TSSB's outreach to, and convening of, industry groups to generate skill standards in

“TSSB staff will assist with a direct translation of Texas skill standards elements into program structure, course content and sequence, and learning outcomes.”

priority occupational areas.

Translation of Skill Standards into Postsecondary Course Content

As referenced earlier, in FY 99 the TSSB began serving on the Workforce Education Course Manual (WECM) Maintenance Committee to facilitate the usage of skill standards. The WECM, the state inventory of workforce education courses for public two-year colleges, is a tool that contributes to the quality and consistency of technical courses while streamlining the program application and revision processes. Thus, it allows Texas colleges increased flexibility in responding to business and industry needs, as well as providing employers with some assurance of consistency in learning outcomes of technical programs across the state. The TSSB representative on the WECM Maintenance Committee plays a critical quality assurance role in the incorporation of TSSB-recognized skill standards

into postsecondary workforce education program and course content. The TSSB will continue its liaison function on the community and technical colleges' WECM Maintenance Committee. TSSB staff will assist with a direct translation of Texas skill standards elements into program structure, course content and sequence, and learning outcomes.

Work in Progress: 1999-2000

“TSSB representation... was sought to ensure that statewide industry-identified skill and knowledge requirements are incorporated into the curricula of Texas community and technical colleges.”

This report has described major accomplishments, as well as work begun, by the TSSB in FY99 to implement Texas' skill standards system. These initiatives and projects are part of the ongoing system building that the TSSB will be continuing in 2000. Key components of that work in progress are described below.

Texas State Leadership Consortium for Curriculum Development

As noted previously, the TSSB is represented on the advisory committee to the newly-formed Texas State Leadership Consortium for Curriculum Development. The purpose of the Consortium is to coordinate and communicate to all colleges the curriculum development projects led by individual colleges and funded by federal Perkins grants. This collaborative arrangement allows curriculum products and innovative practices to be disseminated throughout the state, thereby avoiding unnecessary and costly duplication of effort. The Consortium is a vehicle for statewide, systemic change in

the content and process for curriculum development. For example, one of the key activities of the Consortium for FY2000 is a proposal to create common course competencies by industry sector for an advanced technology curriculum across the state. TSSB representation on the Consortium's advisory committee was sought as crucial to ensure that statewide industry-identified skill and knowledge requirements are incorporated into the curricula of Texas community and technical colleges.

Partnership for Community and Technical College Awareness and Outreach

The TSSB applied for and received a federal Perkins leadership grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The purpose of the grant is to develop and conduct an outreach and awareness campaign to community and technical

“The outcomes of this proposed project extension are crucial links in the systemic usage of skill standards among education and training providers of the technical and community college system.”

colleges for the purposes of incorporating and using skill standards in technical education program curricula.

Specific objectives of the grant, which will be implemented in 1999- 2000, are: to research community and technical college staff knowledge regarding skill standards; to plan and develop communication and outreach/awareness materials to target community and technical colleges about how skill standards can assist the development of industry-relevant, competency-based curriculum; and to conduct professional development workshops for community and technical college staff regarding skill standards usage.

Development of Procedures and Tools to Facilitate Skill Standards Usage in Workforce Education

The TSSB received additional Perkins grant funding from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to expand the

awareness and outreach project. The expansion includes the development of an implementation plan for establishing an infrastructure to facilitate the systematic incorporation of TSSB-recognized skill standards into workforce education courses and programs through the WECM maintenance process. The outcomes of this project extension are crucial links in the systemic usage of skill standards among education and training providers of the technical and community college system. The outcomes include:

- development of an awareness and outreach plan for community and technical colleges, and THECB staff;
- development of professional development products for delivery to community and technical college staff and THECB staff;
- development sessions at selected colleges and linkage to the Texas State

“TSSB representation was sought on the steering committee for the Statewide Planning Initiative for Incumbent Worker Training.”

Leadership Consortium for Curriculum Development;

- identification and documentation of triggers and processes for signaling the development/review of programs and courses;
- development and documentation of processes and instruction for the use of skill standards to construct or review WECM programs and courses with regard to structure, content and assessment competency profiles; and
- recommendation regarding the piloting of the deliverables.

These outcomes are envisioned as phase one of a three-phase process. Further funding will be sought for FY2001, at which time full implementation phase would begin, including development of technology tools to facilitate the use of skill standards in the WECM process.

Incumbent Worker Training Program

TSSB representation was sought on the steering committee for the Statewide Planning Initiative for Incumbent Worker Training, an initiative of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), funded by a Department of Labor JTPA Title III grant. In 1999-2000, TWC will develop a strategic plan for incumbent worker training in Texas. It will also conduct a competitive proposal process for incumbent worker training projects initiated by its local workforce development boards. The programs will be delivered through WIA-certified training providers, as defined under TWC rules. The role of the TSSB representative on the steering committee is to provide expertise on the use of occupational skill standards in incumbent worker training.

“In 1999-2000, the TSSB will continue this work, moving from the design phase into the development phase, with full functionality expected in 2000.”

**TSSB Website:
Information, Development,
Storage and Access of Skill
Standards**

The TSSB began development and alpha testing of a database to enter and organize job analysis information into the Texas skill standards elements and format. In addition, the TSSB began to design a website and repository for storage and maintenance of TSSB-recognized skill standards. In 1999-2000, the TSSB will continue this work, moving from the design phase into the development phase, with full functionality expected in 2000. When completed, the TSSB Website will include detailed information on the Texas Skill Standards Board; skill standards news and current skill standards development initiatives; links to other skill standards-related sites; a calendar of events; and the Texas Skill Standards Repository. In addition, the website will enable several key functions to be performed on-line, including: collating and

organizing compiled job analysis information by industry groups into the Texas skill standards elements and format; applying for TSSB recognition of skill standards; and searching and accessing TSSB-recognized skill standards by stakeholders and the public.

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