

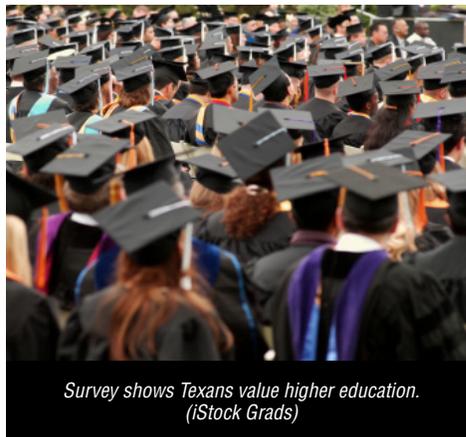


Higher Education a Top Priority

Texans Value Degrees But Worry About Cost

A new survey commissioned by TAB member WGU Texas shows that the overwhelming majority of Texans agree that a college degree is important and essential for getting a good job. It also shows a big concern about the ability to afford such a degree.

The [WGU Texas](#) Higher Education Poll measured Texans' attitudes and opinions on a wide range of issues related to higher education. Of note, Texans' overwhelmingly positive views of a postsecondary certificate or degree are not weakened by widespread concerns about increasing student debt. Among those Texans who think student loan debt is a major problem, 93 percent still view obtaining a postsecondary degree or certificate as important.



*Survey shows Texans value higher education.
(iStock Grads)*

“While the debate about the value in higher education continues in the United States, the WGU Texas Higher Education Poll found that Texans share a noticeably positive view about the importance of a degree for better jobs, improved quality of life, higher incomes and pride,” said Veronica Vargas Stidvent, Chancellor of WGU Texas. “The survey results confirm that access to affordable, flexible higher education options is imperative for today’s students.”

The WGU Texas Higher Education Poll found that among Texans without college degrees:

- Seventy-six percent cited cost as the leading obstacle to obtaining a degree;
- Family and work responsibilities were cited as challenges in obtaining a college degree for 71 percent and 69 percent respectively; and
- Sixty-eight percent noted that the time it takes to complete a degree presents obstacles to graduation.

“To remain competitive and to meet our current and future workforce demands, Texas business needs more highly-skilled workers with college degrees,” said TAB CEO Bill

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WORKFORCE Q&A

Can a Texas employer fire an employee who tests positive for marijuana if the employee produces documentation establishing that she lawfully obtained and consumed the drug in a state that permits its medical or recreational use?

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UPCOMING EVENTS

TAB is launching more regional chapter events to go with the statewide events that we have done for years. Information on all of those events, along with links to register for all of them, on our website. We invite you to go to our events page and explore all of the events in your area and sign up today.

WWW.TXBIZ.ORG/EVENTS

TAB MISSION

To make the Texas business climate the best in the world.

WORKFORCE Q&A



James R. Griffin
Jackson Walker L.L.P.

Can a Texas employer fire an employee who tests positive for marijuana if the employee produces documentation establishing that she lawfully obtained and consumed the drug in a state that permits its medical or recreational use?

Yes, though the ever-changing legal landscape requires Texas employers—especially those with employees outside the state—to take certain precautions.

More than 20 states have passed laws permitting the medical use of marijuana, and four states—WA, OR, AK, and CO—now permit its recreational use. More states are sure to follow suit.

Meanwhile, federal law classifies marijuana as a schedule 1 controlled substance, which means its manufacture, sale, distribution, and possession are strictly prohibited. Texas law mirrors the federal standard.

This discrepancy between federal/Texas law and the laws of medical- and recreational-use states creates an increasingly common dilemma for employers. The scenario plays out like this: An employee who has recently been out of state tests positive for marijuana in a random drug test, but presents documentation showing that the employee obtained and consumed the drug in accordance with a valid medical-use permit in another state, or in accordance with the recreational-use laws of that state. The number of positive drug tests under these circumstances will rise as more states legalize medical or recreational use—especially since marijuana can produce a positive test weeks after consumption. Because marijuana remains illegal under federal law, an employer is generally within its rights under these circumstances to fire the employee—even if the employee’s marijuana use was legal under the laws of the state where he or she obtained and consumed it.

Nevertheless, given the fluid legal landscape, employers should take certain precautions. First, employers should ensure that drug-testing policies are uniformly enforced to avoid any allegations of discrimination. Second, employers should consult legal counsel when an employee claims to have used marijuana in accordance with state law—especially if the employee works outside of Texas. While no state currently prevents an employer from prohibiting recreational use, a growing number of states—including AZ, CT, DE, IL, ME, MN, and RI—have passed laws prohibiting employers from dismissing employees for participation in the state’s authorized medical-use programs. Because courts have not yet addressed these anti-retaliation laws, their validity and impact are still unknown, and thus employers with offices in those states should proceed with particular caution.

Employment Relations questions?

Don't forget to call TAB's Employment Relations Hotline for your next HR Question
1.800.856.6721, ext. 164 or E-mail smcgee@txbiz.org

TEXAS BUSINESS REPORT

Volume 30 | Issue 9
September 2015

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Texas Business Report (ISSN0892-6816) is published on the 15th of every month by Texas Association of Business, located at: 1209 Nueces Street, Austin, TX 78701. Subscriptions are available at a rate of \$2.00, which is deducted from TAB members' annual dues. Articles may be reprinted with permission. Legislative advertising paid by TAB.

Periodicals Postage Paid at Austin, Texas. POSTMASTER
- Send address changes to:
Texas Business Report,
1209 Nueces Street, Austin, TX 78701

The New TAB Website

A new look and new functionality

Starting around Oct. 1, the Texas Association of Business will have a new website. It not only will look different, but it will bring a new functionality for members and the general public looking for more information about TAB.

“We want to make it easier for members to find what they are looking for on the site,” said TAB President Chris Wallace. “We feel that the design of the site is not only more pleasing to the eye but will be more navigable as well. I think anyone who looks at it will be very impressed with the image that it will present for TAB.”

The website has been in the works for almost a year now. It includes a newly redesigned front page and new navigation that should make it easier for people to find the information they are looking for.

“We have tried to cut down on the number of layers to find information,” said TAB Marketing and Social Media Director Randall Chase. “There are direct links on the front page that are easy to find that take you directly to the latest Texas Business Report and to our newest publications, like the ‘For the Record’ legislative scorecard and our legislative ‘Results’ piece. Our goal for this website is not only to make it look good but to increase the ease for our members and the public to find what they are looking for.”

The new website also will make it easier for members to get involved with TAB. There will be easily

accessible information on how to join TAB committees, which make the decisions on what the priorities for our association will be on the state and federal level.

It will have a connect button that will help you better connect with TAB, including event information, the latest press releases and our daily messages. It also includes a link to Texas Job Search.

“We haven’t finished developing new content for the website,” said Chase. “We are looking at increasing the interaction of the site by adding

new video and audio components in the future, including videos from our events and testimonial videos that will attract new

members. That has been one thing missing from our current website that I want to ensure is on our new one.”

One main goal of the website is to do a better job of telling TAB’s story. “We want to show the world how engaged TAB is on a daily basis to make the Texas economy stronger and maintain our lead in job creation,” said TAB CEO Bill Hammond. “TAB is one of the most influential business organizations in the country. That is something I think our members know, but I’m not sure the general public knows the kind of great work our team does here. One thing I want this new website to show is some of the terrific work our staff does to represent business in Austin and in Washington.”



Higher Education a Top Priority

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Hammond. “We must look for innovative ways to overcome the obstacles many students face on the path to obtaining a degree, and above all, we must graduate more Texans from universities, especially in high-demand fields like technology, healthcare and STEM education.”

Hammond adds that the survey results are consistent with what employers have always believed about the importance of a higher education. “That is why TAB and other business groups have always been a strong supporter of higher education and have always stressed the importance of improving completion rates for community colleges and four-year institutions.”

The survey also revealed that those without a college degree were less likely to see their current job as a career as compared to those with a degree. Thirty-four percent of Texans view their current job as a “stepping stone” or as a means to “get by.” Of these, 67 percent said they need more education and training to get the kind of job or career they wanted. Even so, the survey found that more than half of respondents have no plans to return to school.

“I feel we must do a better job of reaching people who feel like they can never achieve a higher education because they are already working,” said Hammond. “We must make it easier and more affordable for people already in the workforce to continue their education and earn degrees. We need more schools to broaden their focus to serve this population, as WGU Texas is doing. Doing that is key to reaching the Higher Education Coordinating Board’s

MEMBER PROFILE

Meador Staffing



Ben Meador, Founder/CEO

Meador Staffing Services was founded as Meador-Brady Personnel Services, Inc. in 1968 by a pair of human resource professionals in the Houston area. “We recognized a need for professionals with industry human resource experience to serve the expanding Gulf Coast,” explained CEO Ben Meador. “As our company continued to evolve, we grew to serve a national market in direct hire, contract and temporary staffing, and were renamed Meador Staffing Services, Inc. in 1997.”

Since 1968, Meador Staffing has grown from a staffing service, to a full-service human

resources partner. During its periods of incredible growth, the firm added new divisions and areas to its core, including:

- Temporary Help Services Division (1971): This division has now grown to become one of the largest temporary staffing services in the Houston area; and
- Meador Staffing of Austin (1994): To continue its growth in Texas and beyond, Meador acquired Meador Staffing of Austin, previously known as Career Consultants, in 1994, gaining a nationwide network of affiliates and resources.



Melinda Torrison, President/COO

Meador is proud to be recognized in the community as a leader. It has been named a “Top 10 Largest Staffing Firm in Houston” by the Houston Business Journal. The firm’s involvement in the communities it serve reaches many organizations and affiliations: Austin Human Resource Management Association, Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership, Pasadena Education Foundation, Impact Austin, Rotary International, Texas Association of Staffing, and multiple Chambers of Commerce to name a few.

Meador Staffing is a trusted staffing partner for direct hire placements, contract positions and temporary opportunities. Its interviewing and screening capabilities enable it to partner with the human resource departments of clients the firm serves. The Talent Network system provides an electronic update to all candidates regarding job openings that match their career objectives. The firm has a national reach through its affiliate network of staffing organizations that allow it to serve employers across the country providing temporary, contract and direct hire candidates.

Mr. Meador believes, “The greatest challenge currently is dealing with the Affordable Care Act. Businesses are facing some very difficult compliance issues, and the cost of implementation is very high. This Act also has had an adverse impact on the job market as many employers have reduced their workforce or reduced the hours worked by some employees because of the Affordable Care Act.”

Meador Staffing has been a member of TAB since it opened for business. It is a strong conservative business organization that tracks legislation that affects its business. The resources available from TAB provide the firm with expert advice on legislation in both Austin and Washington that represents Meador’s business interests very well. Having Pam Bratton, Vice President with Meador Staffing, serve on TAB’s Executive Committee has been a great partnership for the organization as well. Information received from TAB is shared with employees to keep them informed about how the political environment can affect business and their jobs.

Making the Grade

How did your Legislator do?

This week the Texas Association of Business is releasing its report card, scoring lawmakers on how they voted during the 84th Legislative Session.

“This is our way of showing our members and the public if their Legislators supported the business friendly policies that the Texas Association of Business fought for during this past session,” said TAB CEO Bill Hammond. “Our team has worked long hours to ensure that all of these votes are properly counted and accurately reflect the voting record of every lawmaker.”

You can check your lawmaker’s score using our interactive webpage by [clicking here](#).

When you look at the scores, there are two things to consider: the score from this session, and the cumulative score for lawmakers who have been at the Capitol for two or more terms. Lawmakers with either a session or cumulative score between 80-89 will be presented with a “Fighter for Free Enterprise” award. Lawmakers with



either a session or cumulative score between 90 and 100 will be presented with a “Champion for Free Enterprise” award. All of those awards will be presented at the TAB Annual Conference in January. You can [click here](#) to register and attend that event in Austin.

“I think this is an important tool for our members to use to hold their elected officials accountable,” said Hammond. “It is easy to talk about supporting Texas’ business while a candidate is on the campaign trail, but it is much harder when it comes to casting difficult votes on the House and Senate floor during the heat of a Legislative Session. I know, because I have been there. Supporting the businesses of Texas supports everyone. Growing our businesses means more jobs and a stronger economy and that helps everyone in Texas build better lives. I want

to thank the legislators who made the hard votes to keep our Texas economy one of the strongest in the nation and in the world.”

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goal of having 60 percent of 25 to 34 year-olds holding a post-secondary degree by the year 2030.”

“What Texans identify as obstacles to higher education are indicative of the changing face and demographics of college students today,” said Stidvent. “Nontraditional students are a new majority, and that means higher education must evolve and adapt to meet the needs of students who juggle full-time jobs, family responsibilities and limited budgets.”

The WGU Texas Higher Education Poll, developed and performed by SRATEX, LLC, was fielded between July 31 – Aug. 6. The statewide survey of 800 adult citizens had an overall margin of error of +/- 3.46 percent.



WGU Texas Chancellor Veronica Stidvent and Woody L. Hunt, Chairman, Higher Education Strategic Planning Committee, THECB speak at TAB's Higher Education Conference.



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Talk **About** Business

Let's Be Honest About the Cost of Education



Bill Hammond, TAB CEO

Once again, the Texas Supreme Court is considering the constitutionality of our school finance system, and once again, school districts are hoping for a lot more money. My issue is not with spending more money on education if that is what is needed. My issue deals with how the plaintiffs have undermined the very goal they say is what merits increased education spending - college readiness.

One thing I think we can all agree on is that the college readiness rate of our high school graduates is pitifully low. The latest [ACT College Readiness Report](#) for Texas shows only 27 percent of our graduates meeting college readiness standards in all of the subjects tested (English, reading, math and science). The College Board, which administers the SAT college entrance exam, puts that number at [31.8 percent](#).

The plaintiffs in the school finance case claim that spending should dramatically increase to provide what it takes to fulfill college readiness policies of the state. There is one problem with that. Those college readiness policies no longer exist. There is no basis for their argument that they need more money to meet policies that they were successful in doing away with over the last two legislative sessions.

If the Supreme Court decides that the school finance system should have the goal of college readiness, then the

high court also should consider ruling that the state put back into place the requirements that will generate far greater numbers of graduating students who are ready for college or career.

Short of that order, the High Court should consider the cost savings to schools that now have fewer requirements to meet and “reduce the bill” to taxpayers funding our schools.

For example:

1. Since the state no longer expects virtually all students to take the Recommended Program, especially the tougher and more expensive science and math courses, the courts ought to examine that fact for cost savings and reduce the bill.
2. Since students no longer need to pass 15 end of course exams, but rather only five in the lower high school grades, the court ought to examine that for cost savings and reduce the bill.
3. Since the end of course exams that are highly predictive of college success, English III and Algebra II, are gone altogether, along with any need to pass them, the court should examine that for cost savings and reduce the bill.
4. Since the Legislature has now decided that the high school

diploma can be earned without a student passing freshman and sophomore level exams at very low levels of proficiency, the courts should examine that for cost savings and reduce the bill.

5. Since the Legislature has, for all practical purposes, dismantled social promotion policies, thus allowing districts to promote students irrespective of their demonstrated proficiency on objective state tests, the court should examine that fact for cost savings and reduce the bill.
6. Since the state rates over 90% of the schools as acceptable, regardless of whether their students are on the path to being college ready and indeed takes no action if they are not, the courts ought to examine that fact for cost savings and reduce the bill.

The Supreme Court may very well want to continue to shy away from the temptation to touch adequacy. But, if it chooses otherwise, it ought to ask the lower court to review each and every change in policy that has taken place since this case was originally filed to understand the policies that are actually in place in Texas, not the policies the plaintiffs and their allies helped kill.