# Taking Aim at Success after High School

***An Opinion-Editorial Respectfully Submitted by Senator Florence Shapiro and Representative Rob Eissler***

Steve Murdock, former Chief Demographer for the Texas State Data Center, projects that, "If participation and graduation rates remain low, the poverty rate in Texas will increase by 3 percent and the average Texas household income will decline by $3,000, in constant dollars, by 2030."

Unless we want our children and grandchildren to be the first generation of Texans to have a lower standard of living than the generations before them, we must improve the readiness of our high school graduates for success beyond high school. As Chairs of the Senate and House Education Committees, we remain committed to ensuring that every student graduates with the tools necessary to succeed in the workforce or college. A quality, skilled workforce and college ready curriculum, coupled with a rigorous foundation curriculum can go a long way toward addressing workforce shortages, improving college readiness, and toward improving dropout numbers.

Today, 80 percent of high growth, high demand jobs require some education beyond high school. We must ensure that more students, from every background, have the opportunity to go to college and, once there, are ready for the rigor of college-level work. And for those students who don't go to college, we must prepare them for the rigors of the workplace with post-secondary training.

To prepare students for the rigor of life after high school, we must adequately prepare students during high school. In the Third Called Session of the 79th Texas Legislature, we passed landmark legislation addressing many of the issues confronting public education today.

By requiring four years of English, math, science, and social studies in high school, revising our high school curriculum to include college readiness standards, and making college-level coursework available through dual credit or advanced placement, we designed legislation that focuses schools on preparing students for their future. And these efforts were followed last legislative session with the passage of Senate Bill 1031, which ends the TAKS test in high school and requires end-of-course exams in the next few years, so teachers are not forced to "teach to the test."

Moving forward, we must evaluate and clearly identify our remaining problems. And we must be bold with our solutions. These legislative accomplishments were only the first steps and we must be resolute in implementing these laws. Before the next legislative session in 2009, we have the opportunity to create an innovative new approach to accountability through the work of the Select Committee on Public School Accountability, which we chair.

We must focus the current system on preparing students for post-secondary success when in the workforce or college. We can best incorporate growth measures into the public school system by relieving the pressures of one size fits all performance standards, and by providing a better picture of the education that occurs at schools. Different school districts face different student bodies so not all districts face the same measures or hurdles as others. That means we must have accountability in our public schools, while maintaining local autonomy. And we must make our education system fair for all districts while not losing our focus of providing the best education for every student. The future of our state depends on it.

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