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Coalition: Revamp state accountability system, set college readiness standard

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Texas Institute for Education Reform President Andrew Erben and Chief Executive Officer of the Texas Association of Business Bill Hammond met media in the Midland Chamber of Com

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Five trade associations plan to lobby lawmakers in the upcoming legislative session to set a career or college readiness standard for high school graduates with an eye toward better preparing students for life.

The 10-month-old Texas Coalition for a Competitive Workforce, which includes the Texas Association of Business, Texas Institute for Education Reform, Texas Public Policy Foundation, Governor's Business Council and Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, also wants a wholesale revamping of the state accountability system.

Texas Institute for Education Reform President Andrew Erben and Chief Executive Officer of the Texas Association of Business Bill Hammond met media in the Midland Chamber of Commerce boardroom Tuesday to talk about their proposal.

The group came together with a common concern that the "quality and quantity" of students coming out of high school needs to improve. It wants to use a score of 2300 on the current TAKS test or community college entrance requirements as the standard.

"Unless we do a better job than we are today, the economy of Texas will suffer in the future," Hammond said.

The coalition's focus is revamping the school accountability system, measuring each child every year to see if they're "on track," Hammond said.

Another key component, Erben said, is rigorous, relevant career and technology education. "There are a lot of students who do not want to go on to four-year institution," he said.

"Ideally," Erben said, "career and technology courses in our view should offer dual credit (so students can get high school and college credit at once) ... or lead directly to an industry certification, state license or certificate."

And while the state requirement is that students take four years of math and science to graduate, Erben said it should have some flexibility to allow an applied math, science and technology courses to allow students interested high-tech or trades to get some practical experience "while getting the knowledge they need in each of those core subjects."

"We have seen anecdotal evidence from many employers, but we have also seen 19 percent of students graduate from high school who are college ready in the four core courses," including English, math, science and social studies, according to data from the ACT, Erben said.

About 65 percent of future jobs will require post secondary education. "We want our children to be able to compete in this world in the future," Hammond said.

Today's accountability system is "failing the people of Texas, particularly employers and students because it's not giving a true indication of where we are," Hammond added.

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