



House Bill 799 83rd Legislative Session Implementation Guide



H.B. 799 (Thompson, Miles) [SP: Whitmire]: *Relating to vocational training programs provided by the Windham School District.*

Vocational Training in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Should Reflect the Texas Job Market

The Windham School District (WSD), which is the entity that provides vocational training for individuals incarcerated in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), offered 30 vocational trades for individuals during fiscal year 2011.¹ But Texas licensing agencies demand that individuals receive a license in only three of those trades to be eligible to practice: electrical; piping/plumbing; and heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and refrigeration. In other words, inmates are being trained — and certified — in trades that will not require licensure upon release.

However, the Texas Education Code mandates that WSD “prioritize the programs that result in certification or licensure, considering the impact that a previous felony conviction has on the ability to secure certification, licensure, and employment.”² While certification is surely a positive outcome for incarcerated individuals, the individuals who prefer to pursue an occupation that demands licensing — with its greater prestige, occupational security, and increased income — are limited by the selection currently offered by WSD.

What does H.B. 799 intend to do?

This bill directs WSD to assess Texas job markets in order to update, augment, and expand the vocational training programs offered to incarcerated individuals, and, by doing so, to ensure that those individuals are released with the skills to compete in occupations that will allow them to provide for their families and be contributing members of their communities.

This bill ensures that more returning individuals are matched with available trades in Texas communities. It will reduce the likelihood that such individuals will become unemployed and return to crime. It will also provide incarcerated individuals with a greater range of educational opportunities, resulting in a larger qualified workforce. This will allow Texas employers a broader set of options, ensuring they have the most skilled, qualified employees possible.



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How can I help implement H.B. 799?

Windham School District

WSD administrators should continue to seek educational programming that is designed to fit the needs of the fastest-growing employment markets in Texas, always keeping in mind the fact that many employers will be hesitant to hire people with criminal records. Admittedly, this presents a dilemma for WSD, especially given that one of its missions is to train individuals for in-prison positions. A look at one of the online websites that projects employment growth, and taking into consideration the educational level of many individuals incarcerated in TDCJ, reveals that most of the growth takes place in areas that don't require licensing.³

Given this, WSD could focus on a few fast-growing job markets — for example, solar panel installers, wind turbine operators, and surveyors — with the belief that the movement toward licensing will benefit individuals who take those courses. WSD could also expand its existing courses that DO offer licensing as a way to provide more opportunities to interested individuals. Coupled with a judicious trimming of some of its less-appealing vocational courses, this could lead more incarcerated individuals to focus on the trades that require licensing and provide secure employment and upward mobility.

¹ Legislative Budget Board, *Windham School District Evaluation*, January 2012, 30.

² Texas Education Code, Section 19.004(c).

³ CareerOneStop, Pathways to Career Success, Available at <http://www.careerinfonet.org/oview1.asp?next=oview1&Level=edu&optstatus=&jobfam=&id=1&nodeid=3&soccode=&stfips=48&ShowAll=>