

## Lawmakers Remove Barriers to Adults Going Back to School

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Earning a high school degree or credential is a critical step toward Texans accessing opportunities to provide for their families and reach their full potential. However, about 3.4 million Texans over 18 don't yet have a high school degree or its equivalent. This makes Texas the [lowest-performing](#) state in the nation for high school credential attainment.

Recognizing the need for Texas to make headway in this area, the Legislature took action. A new law – House Bill 1891 by Representative Lynn Stucky and Senator Beverly Powell – removes barriers low-income Texans face when trying to earn a high school equivalency. The law allows Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB)-approved High School Equivalency (HSE) exam scores to count as exemptions to the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA) and meet college readiness standards. Texans who score very well on the any of the THECB approved high school equivalency exams will be able to opt out of taking the TSIA.

Many working Texans face barriers to taking and succeeding on these exams including the exam prices, cost of preparation materials and courses, costs of time spent studying in place of working, and costs of securing childcare during preparation. This law prevents Texans from facing these costs twice to prepare for two separate exams that measure the same skills, removing a significant barrier for adult learners reentering higher education.

Additionally, Representative Diego Bernal filed [HB 441](#), requiring the Texas Workforce Commission to provide subsidies to HSE exam takers. The bill would have represented a \$1.5 million [investment](#) in adult learners over the next two years. Considering Texas' dismal performance in adult learner investment, helping Texans cover the cost of HSE exams is a positive step toward reaching the THECB's 60x30TX goals, which seeks 60 percent of Texas adults ages 25-34 having a post-secondary degree or credential by 2030.

While HB 441 did not pass, [the big new school finance law \(HB 3\)](#) included this subsidy for Texans taking a High School Equivalency exam. This subsidy allows Texans aged 21 years and older to receive a subsidy for taking a state-approved high school equivalency exam once, funded by the Texas Workforce Commission. Texas adult learners will still have to deal with the significant costs of test preparation, but this subsidy will certainly help lighten the load.

There is still more work to be done to ensure Texan adult learners receive the resources they need to reach their full potential. Fortunately, lawmakers worked together this session to show their dedication both to improving higher education outcomes in Texas and investing in adult learners who have historically been left out of the state's investment priorities.

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