

## Quorum Report

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### Plumbers ask board to reverse course on rule changes

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A state agency decision to strike a high school diploma from the requirements to be a plumber has not been well received by the industry, as the board of the Texas State Board of Plumbing Examiners learned at their meeting earlier this month.

The new rule was suggested in the plumbing board’s Sunset Commission review and was adopted by the board in May because it required no statute change.

The bill, which would have transferred the oversight of the board to the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, failed to pass the Texas House in the final days of the session leading to a huge post session controversy.

Gov. Greg Abbott diffused the situation by using an emergency executive order to reinstate the plumbing board. The room was full at this month’s meeting and a lot of the speakers had something to say about getting rid of a requirement of a high school diploma or GED for licensure.

Jeff LaBroski of Plumbers Local 68 sits on the Gulf Coast Workforce Board. The board is continually spending money – and grants – on educating people, trying to get them ready for new jobs, he told the members of the state plumbing board.

“What this will create is a path to prison,” LaBroski said. “Now how come I have to have a high school diploma or GED when I can drop out and become a plumber’s apprentice. I think it’s something that the board should reconsider and put back into the rules.”

The board had opened a pathway that won’t be beneficial to the public or the profession, LaBroski said. He was followed by several other speakers including Rick Lord from Pasadena, also in Plumbers Local 68, who said the regulation would undo a lot of progress.

“One of those issues is, we’ve been working – our industry has been working hard – to get with the local high schools and start doing these vocational training programs,” Lord said. “Well, if you have a vocational training program – but it’s easier for me to drop out of school to get that license – that doesn’t make a lot of sense.”

Legislators who talked to the plumbers' union felt the same way, Lord said. "It was very short-sighted on the part of the Sunset Commission to make that kind of recommendation," he said. Lord was joined by others who said it was time for Texas to correct the mistake, along with those who addressed the board about overhauling the agency and adding testing sites.

The Texas Education Agency does produce reports that should tell stakeholders whether efforts to increase career and technical education are effective. But those numbers – at least on the latest report – don't appear to be complete. The number of students directly enrolled in the state's two plumbing courses appear to be only 300 students.

The numbers the prior year were even smaller, possibly indicating plumbing might be used as part of a sequence for construction trades. By comparison, more than 48,000 students are enrolled in the initial course for agriculture and 13,000 are enrolled in livestock production.

Under the current accountability system, school districts are intended to get credit for students who complete career-and-technical education sequences with an acceptable industry credential, the same as a child who may be completing a dual-credit or AP course.

Statewide programs of CTE study are expected to go into effect for the 2020-21 school year.

The proposed areas of study, plus possible course sequences, can be found on this page.

By Kimberly Reeves

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