

# Texans in poll say certificate or degree essential

**The cost of a higher education is seen as an obstacle along with inadequate student financial aid**

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Adults in Texas agree by sizable majorities that a certificate or degree after high school is essential for getting a good job and that it's important for the state to provide need-based financial aid for college students.

Those are among findings released Wednesday from a statewide public opinion poll commissioned by the Texas arm of Western Governors University, the Texas Association of Community Colleges and the Independent Colleges and Universities of Texas.

The poll also found that those without a college degree cite cost as the leading obstacle, followed by job responsibilities and the need to take on student loan debt. A little more than half of those surveyed said state government spends too little on higher education.

The findings come as the Texas House and Senate begin to consider initial proposals for the next two years that

would keep spending flat on various higher education programs, including the state's main financial aid program. With enrollment rising, that means fewer needy students would receive a Texas Grant.

The poll found that 93 percent of those surveyed regard a degree or certificate as important, with nearly three-fourths of that group terming such a credential as very important. Eighty-four percent said it is very important for the state to provide financial aid, with an additional 13 percent calling that somewhat important. Forty-eight percent said the state doesn't provide enough

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financial aid, while 40 percent said it does and 13 percent didn't know.

The poll was conducted by Strategic Research Associates, also known as SRATEX LLC, whose principals, Jim Henson and Joshua Blank, also conduct polling for the Texas Politics Project at the University of Texas. Henson and Blank conducted three previous polls on higher education for WGU Texas.

"As we accumulate data in this body of polling that now stretches over four years, we continue to find a very consistent pattern in public opinion regarding higher education in the state: Texans see higher education as delivering rewards across a wide range of personal and professional dimensions, but they continue to have concerns about cost," Henson said. "Not surprisingly, large shares of Texans support increasing the amount of financial

aid available, especially for those in financial need. As we go into another legislative session, these attitudes likely inform the views of the majority of Texas adults who say that state government spends too little on higher education."

For the latest poll, conducted earlier this month, 800 people were interviewed by phone. The overall margin of error was plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

Although the results show broad support for the notion that higher education pays dividends in terms of job satisfaction, earnings, pride and respect, they also reveal some concerns. For example, 54 percent said their college education was very useful in preparing for a job or career, down from 67 percent in 2017. Seventy-five percent said the cost of education has or will pay off, down from 82 percent in 2017.

## Among other findings:

- 93 percent said it is essential for Texas to have an educated workforce for the state to compete economically with other states.

- 51 percent said the state spends too little on higher education.

- 79 percent said student loan debt is a major problem in the United States.

- 60 percent said the value college graduates get over their lifetimes is equal to or greater than what they paid for the education.

- 87 percent said a post-secondary credential leads to a higher income, 82 percent said it leads to a better quality of life and 81 percent said it increases the respect one receives from others.

