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Workforce Board's New Report Card Cites Need To Strengthen Region's Educational System

HOUSTON — Making improvements at every level of the Texas Gulf Coast region's educational system ranks as a top priority in the second annual Workforce Report Card released this month by the Gulf Coast Workforce Board.

As with the first report card, the 2006 report card provides a means of benchmarking the Workforce Board's efforts to make the Texas Gulf Coast region one of the most competitive in the world. Comparisons are primarily made with metropolitan areas located across the Sunbelt — regions sharing characteristics similar to those of the Gulf Coast/Greater Houston area.

According to the new report card's findings, residents with minimal skills continue to suffer a decline in well-paying job opportunities. Residents with only a high school diploma, or less, are more likely to become trapped in a series of low-paying jobs which do not enable families to rise above the poverty level.

To reverse this trend, the report card suggests enacting several changes throughout the region's educational institutions, including:

- An improvement in the quality of early childhood education;
- Greater access to pre-kindergarten programs for more children;
- An improvement of the acquisition of basic language, math, science and reasoning skills for students;
- A greater flow of accurate information to schools, parents and youth about career opportunities;
- An alignment of all levels of education providers with information about what employers need

Also, the report card cites the Gulf Coast region's young, diverse population, rich in immigrants, as a promising factor in the changing Texas and U.S. workforce. Other positives are the Port of Houston's continued growth and the region's thriving health care enterprises. The report card also emphasizes a need to deal with business climate

limitations related to the environment (clean air and visual pollution); difficulties in attracting venture capital; and George Bush Intercontinental Airport continuing to rank behind rival airports in Miami, Atlanta and the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

To improve the region's overall "grade," the report card notes that the Workforce Board must continue to cultivate relationships with industries and companies possessing the greatest potential for sustainable high job growth today and well into the future.

The full report card is available and can be viewed online at theworksource.org.