

148 House introduces 1st phase of Ed Reform

8 bills aimed to transform SC's education delivery system

House Speaker Jay Lucas (District 65-Darlington) released the following statement after eight bills were introduced in the House as part of the first phase of the House Education Reform package. These bills were crafted in direct correlation with the House Education Policy and Review Task Force's findings and recommendations.

"The Abbeville decision brought necessary attention to the critical state of South Carolina's education delivery system. At the end of the day, our job is to provide school districts and teachers with the tools they need to give every child the opportunity to succeed. The House Education Task Force did a tremendous job studying this complicated issue for nearly a year. This diverse and experienced group found that the best way to achieve this goal is not to reactively give our schools more money and hope for a quick fix, but to open doors so that our students receive a 21st century education," Speaker Jay Lucas said.

"South Carolina has become a powerhouse for economic and job growth and we have a responsibility to match our education system with the needs of our emerging workforce. Focusing solely on improving conditions for rural, struggling school districts does not help our students acquire the skills they need to become college or career ready," Speaker Lucas continued. "The eight bills filed today will allow our State Department of Education to successfully work with the business and technical college communities to offer assistance to our entire school system. They also address teacher retention, promote realistic expectations for graduates and put in place proactive measures to keep our education

system competitive nationally. These common sense measures are a critical first step in the right direction for the comprehensive education reform South Carolina students deserve."

All of the bills have been referred to committee, with a majority assigned to the Education and Public Works Committee. Chairwoman Rita Allison, who also chaired the House Education Policy and Review Task Force, has been a champion for education reform thus far and will continue to advocate for reform as these bills continue throughout the legislative process.

"The House Education Task Force's unique and diligent study laid the groundwork for education

reform in South Carolina. Giving our teachers the ability to provide every child in South Carolina with a 21st century education starts with reducing unnecessary regulations and outdated practices. Representative Tommy Stringer, Chair of the K-12 Subcommittee, the entire Education and Public Works Committee and I will ensure that these bills advance as quickly as possible with thorough, meaningful debate," added Chairwoman Rita Allison.

Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Education and Special Schools Chairman Kenny Bingham, who

also served on the House Education Task Force, is committed to ensuring that this year's budget will continue to offer increased support for school districts in need.

"Over the past few years, South Carolina's state budgets have provided resources designed to effectively assist our rural and poor school districts. This year we will continue this trend and support programs and policies Governor Haley and the Department of Education have recommended as we draft a responsible budget that works to meet South Carolina's education needs," Representative Kenny Bingham said.

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Dictatorial Chapin mayor needs to go

Former Chapin Police Chief Troy Crump is an upstanding citizen of our community and long time resident with high standards, strong ethics and morals and a faithful Christian man. He is a picture of what a man should be — from being a loving husband to supporting father and a role model to many in our community.

Mayor Skip Wilson should be ashamed of himself for the bad publicity that he alone has brought to our community.

He not only has been rude, unfair, deceitful and a bully but also cost our town money by an out of court settlement, due to wrongfully terminating an employee.

I wish that would have gone to court to air more dirt on how he single-handedly is ruining the reputation of Chapin.

This time he has chosen the wrong person to try and push around. The entire community stands with Troy Crump and supports him. His actions have been brought to Gov. Haley. His wrongful actions are being published in newspapers and all over social media.

In the future, he should choose his victims wisely. It's time for him to leave, take a small suspension without pay or go on a long vacation — just go, we really don't care where he goes ... just go.

— Charli Wessinger, Chapin

We welcome your letters

Do you want to share your concerns with other Chronicle readers? Our deadline for letters is 3 p.m. Friday. Send them to JerryBellune@yahoo.com

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FOLKS ABOUT TOWN

Jessica Todd, with McNair Law Firm, has been appointed to the Legal Marketing Association's Southeastern Chapter's 2016 Board of Directors.

The University of South Carolina School of Journalism and Mass Communications has been awarded LEED-Gold certification by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Christy Hall has been appointed secretary of transportation by Governor Nikki Haley.

Those who received City of Cayce Employee Awards include **Travis Stover**, who received the 2015 Outstanding Employee Award. **Michelle Paulchel** received the Five Year Service Award and Whole Sole Recipient. Others who received the Five Year Service Award were **Travis Roberts**, **Pattie Rabon**, **Jacob Harlow**,



Jessica Todd



Christy Hall

Cole Lanigan, **Jarrett Epperson**, **Erin Nanney**, **Chris Mills**, **Mike Thurman**, **Marquell Frost**, **Matt Hamlin**, **Robert Morey**. **Rodney Thomas** received the 10 Year Service Award and the Employee Safety Recognition Award; **Paul Dufault**, the 10 Year Service Award and Whole Sole Award; **Findlay Wihlidal**, 10 Year Service Award; and **Erick Kennedy**, 10 Year Service Award. Those receiving the 15 Year Service Award were **Virgil Dillon**, **Charley McNair**, **Tim Shealy**, and **George Jeff-**

coat. **Terry Burgess** received the 20 Year Service Award; and **J.R. Sharpe**, the 25 Year Service Award. Those who received the Whole Sole Award were **Ken Walters**, **Jorge Dominguez**, **Mike Gearon**, **Austol Youmans**, **James Gleason**, **John Reese**, **Nathan Haskett**, **Jacob Harlow**, **John Maynard**, and **Tom Steinbring**.

Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott has received the Military Support Medal from the South Carolina Military





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Tom Driskell

Department, South Carolina Military History Foundation.

Tom Driskell has joined Mashburn Construction as a superintendent.

Travis Wright has joined Mortgage Network, Inc. as a loan officer.

Sima Patel, with Nexsen Pruet, has been named to the South Carolina Women Lawyers Association Board of Directors.



Hal Stevenson

Those who have been elected to the Congaree Vista Guild Board of Directors include **Hal Stevenson**, president; **Merritt McNeely**, vice president; **Michael Evans**, secretary; and **Richard Burts**, treasurer.

Mike Wooten has been elected as chairman of the South Carolina Department of Transportation Commission.

Stephanie Kripa Cooper-Lewter has been promoted to vice presi-



Guthrie McQueen

dent of initiatives and public policy for the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina.

Guthrie McQueen served as an intern for Congressman Joe Wilson during the month of January.

Beth McMillan has been named a 2016 Leadership in Law honoree by *South Carolina Lawyers Weekly*.

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— Chris Trainor

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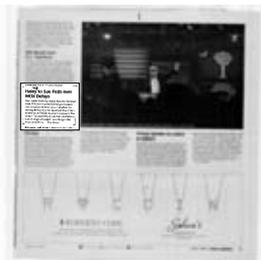
S.C. GOP Leaders Begin to Pick Primary Sides

As the South Carolina GOP primary nears, three S.C. GOP heavyweights endorsed three different presidential candidates this week: Lt. Gov. and former attorney general Henry McMaster threw his support to Donald Trump; U.S. Rep. Jeff Duncan, a leading tea party voice, went for Sen. Ted Cruz; and U.S. Sen. Tim Scott, the state's most popular politician, endorsed Senate colleague Marco Rubio. Other S.C. leaders who've already endorsed candidates include U.S. Rep. Mick Mulvaney, who picked Sen. Rand Paul; and U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, who picked Jeb Bush. Gov. Nikki Haley has not said when or if she'll endorse a candidate. — *Eva Moore*

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LOWE TOLD WALS. — *Chris Trainor*
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Haley to Sue Feds over MOX Delays

Gov. Nikki Haley has asked Attorney General Alan Wilson to sue the federal government over its failure to meet a Jan. 1 deadline for moving forward on the Savannah River Site's mixed-oxide (MOX) nuclear fuel project. The project "is years behind schedule, and billions over its original budget," according to The Associated Press. — *Eva Moore*

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198 Peeler says he's lost patience on roads bill

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — A month into the legislative session, state senators are no closer to finding a way to fix South Carolina's crumbling roads, but they spent hours Thursday arguing over their inability to officially debate the issue.

Senate Majority Leader Harvey Peeler criticized his colleagues for "dilly-dallying" on the public's top priority.

"I have absolutely lost my patience when it comes to this infrastructure debate that we are not having," said Peeler, R-Gaffney. "It's past time. Every day, there are more potholes in my area."

A bill that raises roughly \$800 million additionally yearly for roadwork through increases in gas taxes, vehicle sales taxes and license fees is in special debate status on the Senate calendar — where it's been since the session ended last year amid a filibuster that blocked a vote.

"We've been dilly-dallying and slow-walking for four weeks. ... Everything's blocked by this bill in interrupted debate," Peeler said. "Our calendar's swelling like it's got a peanut al-

lergy, and nothing's getting done."

His comments prompted a debate for more than two hours on what's blocking progress.

Peeler said whatever the Senate passes must provide revenue, relief, and reform.

That's because Gov. Nikki Haley has pledged to veto any legislation that increases gas taxes unless it also cuts income taxes and restructures the Department of Transportation.

Democrats argue it's folly to link the three issues in one bill.

"We can debate income tax reform, but let's get the roads fixed. Tying them together will prolong it tremendously," said Sen. Creighton Coleman, D-Winnsboro. "Let's put politics aside and do what's right."

Despite the discussion, floor debate won't start until Feb. 16 at the earliest.

In meetings next week, the Senate Finance Committee will hear from leaders of the DOT and the state Infrastructure Bank.

Senate President Pro Tem Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, said he wants senators to hear from the agencies before floor debate, when potentially inaccurate information will be tossed about.

Sen. Shane Massey, who doesn't sit on the Finance Committee, said whatever's discussed in that committee won't matter. It just means the Senate won't accomplish anything next week either, he said.



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a sick woman. (But if that moves Aiken resident (name withheld))

Activists pay morning commuters' gas tax, show how much drivers are paying in taxes

January 19, 2016 by Jessica Cross
@carolinaledger @thecarolinaledger

Bill Seymour didn't know that almost half his gas bill these days pays for taxes.

"I have not thought about those gas taxes," said the Gilbert resident, who has been spending almost \$30 to fill up his Dodge Ram 1500 truck. Gas prices in South Carolina averaged \$1.64 per gallon as of January 20, according to GasBuddy.

The state chapter of the activist group, Americans for Prosperity paid the tab on the gas tax for Seymour on Wednesday morning. It costed him \$13.98 to fill up his truck.

The fill up was an effort by the group to raise awareness among Lexington residents of how much they're already paying in tax, despite multiple proposals in the Statehouse to increase the gas tax to fund infrastructure repairs.

"Most people don't realize how much we're paying in gas tax already," said Seth Powell, a Greenville resident who led the event.

Nine volunteers were slated to gather between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. at a Lexington Exxon to share their message and pick up drivers' gas tax tab on the first 2,000 gallons.

Seymour said drivers are paying enough in gas taxes already. "It would be just like our government to slide those taxes in [when gas prices are low], and we wouldn't notice it until they came back up," said

Seymour.

Seymour thinks policy makers should explore other means of funding roads repairs. The state Transportation Department has said it needs \$137 million to repair roads and bridges damaged by statewide flooding last October.

One Lexington volunteer thinks lawmakers should spend money they already have to repair roads. Lawmakers should use the state's approximately \$1.3 billion surplus, said Wes Howard.

Many lawmakers, and Republican Gov. Nikki Haley, have said they will only support a tax increase if it is offset by tax relief in other areas. Among them is Howard's senator, Shane Massey, R-Edgefield, whose district extends into Lexington.

Howard disagrees with that approach. "I'm of the opinion that we need zero tax increase," he said. "Think of all the years they've had our money and look at the condition of our roads now."

Powell said the group won't support any hike, regardless of a corresponding tax cut. "Any plan that has a gas tax hike, we're going to consider a hike. Period," he said. "I haven't seen a plan that I honestly believe will be a tax cut."

Powell said the plans he has seen—including Haley's plan to offset a 10 cents-a-gallon increase with a state income tax cut—increase taxes immediately and string out cuts over a longer period of time. Haley's plan would raise the gas tax over a period





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of three years and cut the income tax from seven percent to five percent over 10 years.

The activist group has held three similar events across South Carolina already, with plans to pay more taxes at a Greenville pump within the next couple of weeks.

The state's gas tax is among the lowest in the nation—16.75 cents per gallon.

What they're saying (online) about money for roads

"I think any objective look at the situation leads to the unmistakable conclusion that we need to devote more money to SCDOT for the specific purpose of repairing and maintaining roads and bridges. Having said that, I will not vote for a straight-up tax increase. For me, the package must include (1) sufficient funding for SCDOT to do what we all expect SCDOT to do, (2) significant income tax relief for South Carolinians, and (3) substantial reform at SCDOT to ensure more confidence in how decisions are made and who makes those decisions."

-Sen. Shane Massey, R-Edgefield. Sits on a special Senate committee mulling a possible gas tax increase.

"A gas tax hike will help line the pockets of powerful lobbyists and politicians, but it won't fix our roads. Even though the state government collected \$1.2 billion more from us than they budgeted, some politicians still want a gas tax hike."

-Dave Schwartz, director of South Carolina chapter, Americans for Prosperity.

"House Democrats believe the time for being picky over how we fund our crumbling roads and bridges is over. Whether it is increasing the state's embarrassingly low gas tax or diversifying our tourism economy through gaming, House Democrats are determined to pass legislation which responsibly address this \$30 billion challenge."

-State House Democratic Legislative Caucus, from their 2015 legislative agenda. This year marks the second year of a two-year legislative session.

"Any legislation that I would consider would have DOT reform and a Personal Income Tax reduction."

-Sen. Katrina Shealy, R-Lexington.

"Annual spending on roads and bridges in SC has grown from \$1 billion in 2009 to \$1.8 billion this year; however, despite this 80% increase in funding, our state's transportation infrastructure remains in poor condition. Why? Because in recent years the capital outlays for new projects have been more than triple the amount spent on routine maintenance. And so long as spending decisions continue to be made by politically motivated and legislatively controlled state agencies, that inexcusable waste of the taxpayers' money will continue. Push back hard against anyone who says "only higher gas taxes will fix our roads"."

-Sen. Tom Davis, R-Beaufort.

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Three reasons for S.C.'s ethics reform logjam

January 25, 2016 by Jessica Cross
 @carolinaledger @thecarolinaledger

... Or "The legislative ethics reform paradox"

Ethics reform, that shining hope on which the notion of good government rests, is before the Senate.

And like a long-hoped for January snow storm, conditions have to be just right if lawmakers are to pass comprehensive reform this year.

But Republican Gov. Nikki Haley's finger wagging at senators during her State of the State address last week, which riled up Democrats and had Republicans echoing support of her sentiment, may not do much to sway lawmakers' support for ethics reform in the end.

And while many from the General Assembly will tell you they're for reforming the state's ethics laws, (even a handful of members from that hard-nosed, fractious, more deliberative body, the Senate, stood in support of reform during Haley's call out), it's becoming harder to believe they mean it after several years of reform in the making.

And why should they?

Strengthening the state's ethics laws is a good thing, but we shouldn't be surprised when lawmakers don't want to do it.

Who else among us can see the grand irony in a body of lawmakers self-imposing puritanical restrictions? The people gave them the ring of power, expecting them to set restrictions on how they use it.

This is the grand ethics reform paradox.

Year after year the sun sets on the Statehouse as lawmakers flock home to their districts for the summer without approving a reform package that includes income disclosure and independent investigation.

After all, who would want outsiders to be able to inspect their finances? And who among us would want to sacrifice accountability to our peers, whose lives are interwoven with ours?

As with your typical case of "he said, she said," or in this case, "the House said, the Senate said," it can be difficult to tell who's responsible for the perennial run-out-the clock maneuver. Here are three reasons lawmakers might not pass a reform package this year.

The history of the House blaming the Senate

The House passed both income disclosure and independent investigation proposals to the Senate last year. The body has been successful at propelling ethics reform in the past several years, often making the Senate a scapegoat for stalled legislation. Last year's income disclosure proposal passed the House and the Senate Judiciary Committee. The bill, which would require public officials to disclose all private income, is sitting in the Senate.

The House-passed independent investigation proposal is sitting in the Senate Judiciary Committee. The bill would allow the State Ethics Commission to investigate ethics complaints against public officials, effectively putting an end to the problem of lawmakers being able to police themselves without independent oversight.



The Senate floor. Photo by Billy Hathorn.

The more deliberative body

There's something to the claim that the Senate is the more deliberative body—especially these days—with a variety of factions keeping bills from passing. A centrist Republican wing can blame far right Republicans for squelching progress, while Democrats can blame the fractious nature of the Senate Republicans.

Watchdog groups with a special interest in ethics

Many watchdog groups that support ethics reform have other ideas about what constitutes good ethics in South Carolina. They deem some of the bills before the legislature unethical. And they have an uncanny ability to rile up constituents in opposition to these bills. Take for example the libertarian-leaning South Carolina Policy Council using its megaphone to tell constituents that efforts by lawmakers to end self-policing wouldn't.

Or their insistence that the reform bills that lawmakers trumpeted as strong ethics reform weren't.



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2003 capsule reveals state hasn't made much progress

BY RICK CARPENTER
rick@theitem.com

HILTON HEAD ISLAND
— The president of the state chamber of commerce told Greater Sumter Chamber of Commerce Retreat on Sunday that a 2003 time capsule the organization opened last month read like today's legislative agenda.

At the top of that 2003 list to make South Carolina competitive from a business environment: improve the roads and provide a well-educated workforce.

More than a dozen years later, not much has changed.

Ted Pitts, president of South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, said those are the same goals for this legislative session.

Pitts, a former state representative and chief of staff for Gov. Nikki Haley during her first term, said surrounding states are spending more money on roads, including North Carolina, which he estimated invests more than \$150,000 per sur-

face mile of its roads compared to South Carolina's investment of \$15,000 per mile.

Echoing much of the governor's legislative agenda, Pitts said road funding for this legislative session should prioritize spending at least \$600 million on improv-

ing roads, reforming the governance of the Department of Transportation to make the chief executive accountable to the governor and providing some type of tax relief to offset whatever kind of gas tax the Legislature might increase.

Pitts suggested tax relief would benefit all residents while an increase in gas taxes would put a third of that tax burden on people who don't live in the state but use the state's highway

system and purchase fuel while traveling through the state.

As far as workforce development, Pitts said the state has 60,000 jobs available right now.

"The jobs are there," he

said. "We need to prepare people to take those jobs."

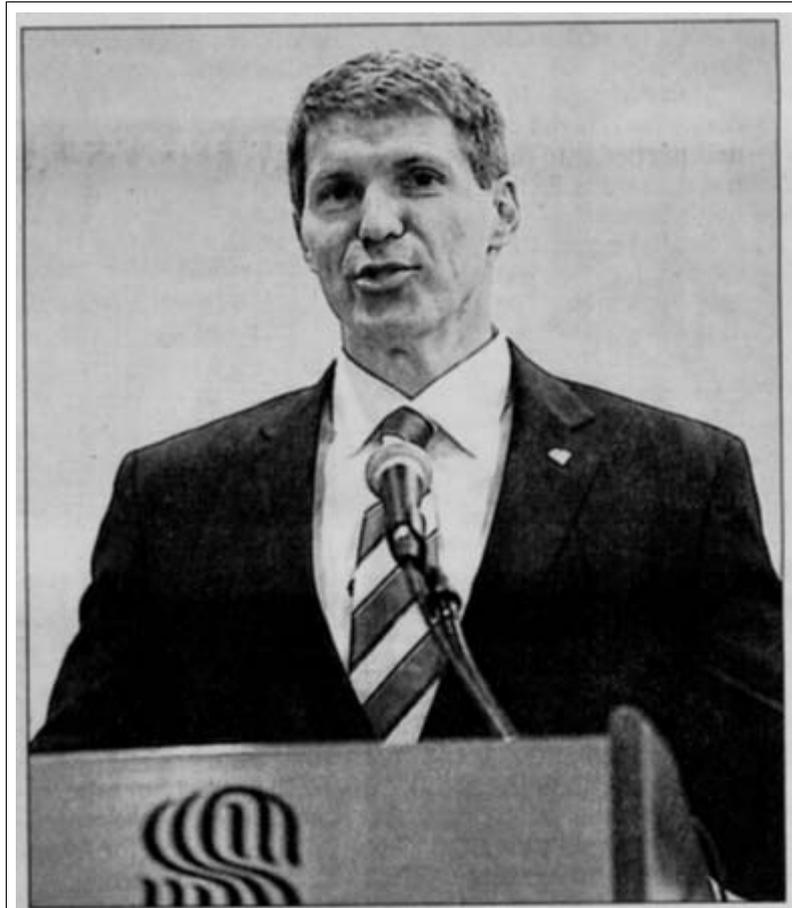
He applauded Central Carolina Technical College's announcement that it would provide free college to future graduates of high schools in Clarendon, Kershaw, Lee and Sumter counties. Graduates from those high schools must meet minimum qualifications for the program. He said that kind of commitment from higher education should help build a viable workforce pipeline to local industry.

Pitts also wants to simplify the state's business licensing procedures. He said there are more than 70 different licenses, and that makes the state "not very business friendly."

The Sumter Chamber has held a retreat for members for 45 years. Recently appointed Chamber President and CEO Chris Hardy said the leadership team will look at the organization's entire structure to determine the feasibility of each program and event, including the retreat.



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RICK CARPENTER / THE SUMTER ITEM

South Carolina Chamber of Commerce President Ted Pitts said his organization's legislative goals fall in line with Gov. Nikki Haley's goals to improve roads and provide quality education.



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Bill aims to train students for open jobs

Unemployed adults also eligible for state-paid scholarships

BY SEANNA ADCOX
The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — South Carolina would pay for high school students and the unemployed to train for jobs available locally under legislation that overwhelmingly passed the House.

The bill approved 106-5 Wednesday expands dual-enrollment opportunities for high school students so they can take courses that count toward their diploma and a technical certificate or an

associate degree. It also provides scholarships to the state's unemployed so they can train for a job in their area.

Ways and Means Chairman Brian White, the bill's sponsor, said South Carolina's future depends on all businesses whether they're being recruited

to the state or have been here for decades, being able to hire locally. The goal is to match training with businesses' workforce needs.

"If we can't do that as a state, we need to pack up our tent and head home.

We'll be dead in the water. This is something vastly needed," said White, R-Anderson.

Before the vote, the state's business, school and agency leaders filled the Statehouse lobby to show their support.

Although the state's unemployment rate stood at 5.5 percent in December, about 124,000 people are still out of work despite 60,000 job openings statewide, Gov. Nikki Haley said.

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JIM HILLEY / THE SUMTER ITEM

Gov. Nikki Haley announces her education program surrounded by academic leaders on Wednesday.

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“There is no reason we can’t connect the dots,” she said, touting the businesses recruited to the state during her tenure. “Those jobs don’t mean anything if it’s not our South Carolinians getting those jobs. ... We need to make sure everyone who wants a job gets a job.”

The cost of the “Pathways Initiative” is unclear.

Several counties are piloting the program this year with \$5 million from the state. White said more money is needed but the amount will be part of the budget debate.

The legislation creates a council to coordinate all workforce training offered by various state agencies. Its responsibilities will include surveying businesses to determine their hiring needs and working with

technical colleges to fill in any gaps.

The council would also dole out tuition scholarships for adults who need schooling to get a job as well as grants to pay for books and other fees they can’t otherwise afford.

“If you want to get a certificate to be a welder, it’s expensive. We’re trying to remove hurdles for folks,” White said.

State schools Superintendent Molly Spearman was among those applauding the legislation. Earlier this month, she asked legislators to pay for dual-enrollment classes. Students often must pay out of pocket to take a technical college course, which poor students can’t afford, she said.

“Many of our students now in high school are graduating with two-year degrees. They’re ready to go to work,” she said Wednesday. “Many are coming out with industry certifications. We need to give them more opportunity for that.”