

## Bills focus on tech ed

### One requires students to take two courses to graduate

by Jake Henshaw

SACRAMENTO -- In a bid to increase job-oriented classes in California schools, a business-labor coalition Wednesday called on the state to require students to take two career courses to graduate from high school.

The coalition also backed proposals to better integrate career technical education into state school construction funding, college admissions and the state system for evaluating educational achievement.

Advocates said these steps are necessary both to reduce the number of graduates unprepared for work when they finish their education and to meet the growing demands of the labor market, which are accelerating as baby boomers retire.

"It'll reduce the dropout rate. It'll prepare young people for the work force," said Sen. Tom Torlakson, D-Antioch, one author of the legislation.

The new coalition, dubbed "Get REAL" -- the acronym stands for "Relevance in Education and Learning" -- is composed of more than a dozen groups, including the California Manufacturers and Technology Association, the State Building and Construction and Trades Council, California Farm Bureau and the California Correctional Peace Officers Association, among others.

The group was formed to counter a longterm slide in career technical education, formerly known as vocational education,

and capitalize on what members say is growing support -- especially from the governor -- for moving it back into the education mainstream.

In 1987, 74 percent of state high school students were enrolled in career technical classes. In 2005, 34 percent were enrolled in these classes, according to Get REAL statistics.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has increased funding for career technical education by 18 percent since taking office and has proposed \$52 million for it in the 2007-08 budget, according to his office.

Voters also approved \$500 million for construction of career technical school facilities in the bonds approved in November.

Recalling his own vocational training as a student, Schwarzenegger has said, "I'm very passionate about this subject."

Salinas-area school officials said they appreciate state support and have already expanded job-oriented courses to both enhance college preparation and provide an alternative to it.

Randy Bangs, director of the Mission Trails Regional Occupational Program in the Salinas Union High School District, said his district's already active vocational education program includes a requirement for students to take a career technical class. It also works with them to identify their skills and interests during ninth and 10th grade.

"We try to connect what the assessment (test) said with what they are really interested in,"

Bangs said.

One challenge the program faces, he said, is getting career technical courses approved as University of California electives. High school students bound for college generally pay close attention to the U.C. system's admission requirements and avoid enrolling in courses that don't count toward them.

"The onus is on us to do some things," Bangs said.

Highlights of proposed career technical education bills:

SENATE BILL 672, Sen. Tom Torlakson, D-Antioch: A bill intended to require all students to take two career technical (CT) courses to graduate from high school.

SB 13, Sen. Mark Wyland, R-Del Mar: Requires schools applying for state construction funds to provide specific information about how they would provide space for CT programs.

ASSEMBLY BILL 1586, Assemblyman Mark DeSaulnier, D-Concord: Aimed at including CT classes in recognized courses for college admission.

AB 1414, Assemblyman Loni Hancock, D-Berkeley: Refines the rules for developing CT courses to focus them on specialized technical skills and job-related learning.

AB 400, Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles: Includes schools' CT programs in the Academic Performance Index used to measure educational achievement.