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State should continue funding ACE job training

Don Beeler, For the Express-News

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On March 21, [Rhiannon Reyes](#) made her way to Austin with COPS/[Metro Alliance](#) and other organizations from throughout Texas. She was there to ask our state senators for their support in the continued funding of a vital program that has made a huge difference in the lives of thousands of Texans seeking a better life: the [Texas Innovative Adult Career Education Fund](#), or ACE.



Analia Narvaez, Program Services Liaison for Project QUEST, talks to a group of people going through the orientation session for the jobs program in 2002. The program relies on city and state funding. The Legislature must renew its funding.

Photo: Tom Reel /SAEN

ACE is a competitive grant for innovative workforce job training strategies across the state.

In San Antonio, [ACE funds](#) collaborations among employers, education partners and Project Quest. Quest is a jobs-driven nonprofit that has helped nearly 7,000 San Antonio residents achieve higher levels of education and training, leading to higher wages. This type of workforce development is essential to continuing the growth of our region's economy.

The ACE Fund has opened the door for thousands of Texans to realize their potential and the potential of Texas businesses. Reyes is one of those Texans. Divorced while pregnant, she moved in with her parents at age 31.

Not seeing a future raising a child on a waitress' salary, she enrolled in the nursing program at [San Antonio College](#). With the help of quest and ACE funding, she graduated from the program and was certified as a registered nurse. She continued her education, receiving her Bachelor of Science in nursing, and now earns close to \$70,000 a year. She purchased her first home in 2014, drives a new car, and now has time to volunteer at her church and be a member of the PTA.

Her story was so impressive, Sen. [José Menéndez](#), D-San Antonio, joined the delegation in advocating for the ACE Fund on the steps of the state [Capitol](#) and publicly declared his support

for their efforts. Stories like the one that Reyes shared with legislators is proof that ACE is vital to Texans in their search for a better life.

ACE is also good for Texas business. Before employers open their doors, they must know whether they can staff the nurses, physical therapists, lab techs, welders, radiography techs, HVAC installers and aircraft mechanics needed to succeed in their industry. Through the ACE program, veterans are being trained to re-enter the civilian workforce in careers far removed from their military occupation. Single mothers are gaining higher wages to take care of their children. Nontraditional students, such as Reyes, are leaving low-wage jobs and contributing to the overall growth of the Texas economy.

Without the workforce training programs such as Quest supported by ACE, employers would be hard-pressed to staff their businesses and may consider importing workers from outside the Lone Star State — or worse, not opening their doors in Texas at all. The funding for this education and training produces enormous benefits in family stability, neighborhood rejuvenation and positive education outcomes. In fact, in San Antonio alone, every \$1 invested in Quest yields a return on investment of \$17 after five years.

Year after year, Quest and associated programs around the state have ensured extensive training and support for students, with the sole purpose of strengthening our economy. The impact of Quest and ACE is reflected in fewer people relying on government assistance.

The year Reyes graduated, participants in Quest saw an annual increase in salary from \$9,365 to \$42,097. This is consistent with years before and since.

Texas must continue to fund the programs that drive our economy and provide an opportunity to those who work hard to build a better life. People like Rhiannon Reyes, RN, BSN.

Don Beeler is the retired CEO of Christus Santa Rosa Health System.