



Prosperity Requires Being Bold: A Progress Report

The Tri-Agency Report to the Office of the
Governor from the

Texas Education Agency

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Texas Workforce Commission

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Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Tri-Agency Initiative	2
Prime Recommendations	3
About this report	3
Collective Impact Areas and Supporting Initiatives	4
86th Legislature, House Bill 3	4
60x30TX Higher Education Plan	6
Regional 60x30TX targets and projections	6
Marketable Skills Conferences	8
Marketable Skills Task Force	9
Supports for Adult Learners	9
College Readiness	10
Advise TX	10
Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs	10
Enhancing college readiness in the K-12 accountability system	11
Texas OnCourse college and career readiness resources	11
Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools	11
College and Career Signing Days	11
Math Innovation Zones	12
Career and Workforce Readiness	13
Work-based learning to support career preparation and skill development	13
Creating awareness of Texas careers	15
Strengthening educational pathways into the workforce	16
Supporting underserved populations	17
Serving veterans and transitioning service members	19
Efforts to improve labor market data availability and accessibility	20
Conclusion	22
Acronyms Used in This Report	23



Executive Summary

Among its many assets, Texas has the great potential of a youthful population, which is likely to produce 75,000 more high school graduates in 2027 than it currently does. This is an enormous economic advantage for Texas, but only if we educate and prepare these young people for success in tomorrow's workforce.

To this end, Governor Greg Abbott established the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative in March 2016. As partners in the Tri-Agency Initiative, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Texas Education Agency, and Texas Workforce Commission have joined together to:

- strengthen stakeholder relationships, through efforts such as the Tri-Agency Education to Workforce Summit;
- encourage innovative opportunities that help meet current and future educational and workforce demands, such as Texas OnCourse college and career readiness resources; and
- advance educational and workforce training opportunities across the state, through initiatives such as the Texas Internship Challenge.

We are committed to Texas public schools graduating students who are academically prepared for the rigor of postsecondary education and prepared to meet the needs of Texas businesses and industries. These commitments will benefit all Texans and will ultimately support the state's economic prosperity, which is dependent on a skilled and knowledgeable workforce.

We are taking bold steps to help Texans gain the education and skills needed to sustain and grow the robust Texas economy. As the labor market evolves and advances, extensive and meaningful collaboration among the state's prekindergarten through 12th grade school system, institutions of higher education, and the workforce is increasingly important. Governor Abbott and the Tri-Agency partners are working together to ensure a strong pipeline for Texas students to move successfully through the education system and into the workforce.

Collaboration is defined as any joint activity between two or more agencies that is intended to produce more public value than could be produced when any agency acts alone. Our collaborative goal is to gain the best results for all Texans.

If we continue to achieve actions such as the programs and projects outlined in this report, we will make significant strides toward meeting the charges laid out by Governor Abbott. We must continue to work together and be relentless in our efforts to embrace boldness and innovation that will pave the way to a bright future for all Texans.



Introduction

Texas has a rapidly growing and increasingly diverse economy. As the labor market evolves and advances, with many existing occupational fields transforming and new fields emerging, extensive and meaningful collaboration among the state's prekindergarten through 12th grade (P-12) school system, institutions of higher education, and business and industry is more important than ever for the state to create a skilled workforce that meets the changing needs of employers and to experience continued prosperity. The Governor and the Tri-Agency partners are working together to ensure a strong pipeline for Texas students to move successfully through the education system and into the workforce.

Tri-Agency Initiative

In March 2016, Governor Greg Abbott established the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative and tasked the commissioners of the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to work together on five charges centered on developing strong links between education and the workforce, with the goal of helping Texas grow in economic prosperity. The Governor laid out the following charges, which dovetail with the state's higher education plan, *60x30TX*, which was launched in 2015 by the THECB:

- **Charge 1:** Commissioners should identify and advance public and higher education initiatives that make college more affordable for families and help students enter the workforce more quickly with marketable skills.
- **Charge 2:** Commissioners should work with industry and local stakeholders to assess local workforce needs and identify innovative workforce development models that directly coordinate with industry partners and promote post-secondary success. The commissioners should include career and technical education (CTE) and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education models in their assessment.
- **Charge 3:** Commissioners should evaluate current agency efforts, as well as state and local web-based education and career awareness systems, in an effort to better link students, parents, and educators to the broad array of high-demand jobs in this state and the educational requirements to secure those opportunities.
- **Charge 4:** Commissioners should identify gaps in services to Texas veterans, advance strategies to enhance their education and employment opportunities, and develop solutions to ensure a seamless and accelerated transition back into the Texas workforce.
- **Charge 5:** Commissioners should make recommendations that build the skills of the Texas workforce and advance regional economic expansion, job creation, and the goals of *60x30TX*.

To begin addressing the charges, the commissioners of the three agencies held eight regional meetings in Midland, San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, El Paso, McAllen, Tyler, and Austin from April through June 2016. They posed questions and listened to responses and concerns from business and industry leaders, business executives, and entrepreneurs, including leaders from historically underutilized businesses; superintendents of independent school districts



(ISDs); economic and workforce development leaders; directors of community and nonprofit organizations; elected officials; higher education administrators; and other stakeholders.

The commissioners heard about exemplary regional models among high schools, community colleges, universities, and business and industry representatives for educating and training students in high-demand fields, and they heard concerns about how to close gaps in the education pipeline to help fill jobs in technology, manufacturing, the financial sector, construction, transportation, engineering, nursing, and other in-demand fields.

Prime Recommendations

Armed with input from stakeholders around the state, the commissioners identified four prime recommendations, which served as a guide for targeted efforts by all three agencies to help Texans transition seamlessly through the state's educational system and into the workforce:

1. Identify statewide initiatives for the next generation that will make Texas the clear leader in targeted fields and position the state for future economic preeminence.
2. Strengthen prekindergarten through high school academic instruction to establish students' foundational skills in math, science, language arts, and social studies so that students graduate career and college ready and are prepared for lifetime learning.
3. Build a proactive, ongoing partnership among the TEA, THECB, TWC and other stakeholders to align the educational goals of Texas with the state's higher education plan *60x30TX*, which aims for 60 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds to hold either a certificate or degree by 2030, with the goal of growing the state's workforce, industry, and economy.
4. Identify services for Texas veterans and advance strategies to enhance their education and employment opportunities and develop solutions to ensure a seamless and accelerated transition back into the Texas workforce.

About this report

This report outlines the progress the Tri-Agency partners have made thus far in working together to produce substantive initiatives based on the prime recommendations. The report provides a summary of initiatives aligned to the charges to and recommendations of the Tri-Agency Initiative, all of which remain ongoing priorities of the three agencies and their partners. The initiatives reflect collaboration among the three agencies and serve as examples of alignment among the efforts and areas of responsibility of the three agencies. The report, however, does not reflect all the work of each individual agency.

The report also outlines meaningful legislation passed by the 86th Texas Legislature as part of House Bill 3 (HB 3). HB 3 is major legislation that restructures how the state finances public P-12 education, and several aspects of the bill help to advance the goals of the Tri-Agency Initiative and its three agency partners.

In addition to HB 3, this report is organized around three additional areas of focus – *60x30TX*, college readiness, and career readiness efforts.



Collective Impact Areas and Supporting Initiatives

The initiatives that follow address the Governor's charges by creating and strengthening programs that support the goals of HB 3, the 60x30TX higher education plan, college readiness, and career readiness. The initiatives reflect numerous collaborations among the three agencies of the Tri-Agency partnership, as well as educators, business and industry leaders, and other stakeholders to create a streamlined, effective pipeline through the education system to the workforce.

The programs highlighted in this report provide support for all Texans in all regions of the state, with strategies for on-the-ground assistance such as student advising programs, internships and apprenticeships, and accessible business and industry and labor market data. The initiatives aim to serve students of every background, including often underserved populations such as students with disabilities, foster youth, veterans, rural residents, and students from economically disadvantaged families.

The collaborative efforts of educators, employers, government officials, and local communities are resulting in improved services for students and families to make informed, calculated decisions about their educational and career choices.

86th Legislature, House Bill 3

With the passage of HB 3 in the 86th legislative session, the Legislature restructured how the state finances public P-12 education, infusing billions of new resources into Texas schools that provide the foundational education for college and career readiness. The Legislature's deep investment builds upon and will accelerate many of the related efforts of the Tri-Agency partners to produce initiatives to achieve the goals of the prime recommendations. Among the provisions passed in HB 3, the new law includes:

- **College, Career and Military Readiness bonuses** - creation of the College, Career and Military Readiness (CCMR) Outcomes Bonus, which will provide school districts with additional funding for each CCMR graduate beyond a threshold to be determined by the commissioner of education, as well as an additional \$2,000 that school districts will receive for each college, career, or military ready special education graduate.
- **College, career, and military readiness plans** - a new requirement that boards of school districts and open-enrollment charter schools must adopt college, career, and military readiness plans with specific performance goals.
- **FAFSA requirement** – a new requirement that before graduating from high school, students must complete and submit a free application for federal student aid (FAFSA), a Texas application for state financial aid (TASFA), or have an approved exemption.
- **College preparation exam funding** - legislation that establishes that a school district is entitled to be reimbursed by the state for fees paid for each of its students to take one college readiness assessment (the Scholastic Assessment Test, or SAT; the American College Testing Program, or ACT; or Texas Success Initiative Assessment, or TSIA) or at least one industry certification examination before graduation.



Pre-Kindergarten public-private partnership grants

The Legislature also, as part of HB 3, passed legislation supporting pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) public-private partnerships, which dovetails with ongoing efforts by the TEA and TWC. Efforts in this area include:

- **Texas Rising Star partnerships** – The TWC provided grants to the TEA to support development of Pre-K public-private partnerships. The grants helped local educational agencies develop partnerships with Texas Rising Star (TRS) 4-Star private child care providers to expand access and service delivery models for provision of 3 and 4-year-old prekindergarten. About \$6 million in supported grants were in place February 2017 through November 2018 with 15 LEAs and 37 TRS child care providers. HB 3 allows Pre-K partnerships with TRS 3- and 4-Star providers, and the TWC and Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) have increased the number of TRS providers. In September 2015, there were 835 TRS providers statewide; in September 2018, there were 1,370 TRS providers, a 64 percent increase, and TWC continues to see increases, with 1,551 providers as of June 2019.
- **Support for Regional Early Childhood Education Support Specialist initiative** – The TWC awarded \$10 million for the three-year period of January 2019-February 2022 to support TEA's Regional Early Childhood Education Support Specialist (RECESS) initiative. Through this partnership with the TWC, the TEA awarded RECESS grants to several regional ESCs and non-profit organizations to support early childhood education quality and access efforts, including increasing and sustaining public-private pre-K partnerships.

Texas Instructional Leadership program

HB 3 also included about \$2 billion for raises for teachers, as well as funds for merit pay, mentoring, and professional development for teachers. These actions complement the 2016 Tri-Agency Initiative recommendation that the state improve teacher ranks through better recruitment, preparation, and in-service training to support high-quality teaching.

The TEA's Texas Instructional Leadership (TIL) program is an example of the type of support recommended. TIL provides job-embedded professional development to district and campus instructional leaders to support effective teaching and improve student outcomes. Since the 2017-18 school year, approximately 130 campuses across 34 districts have participated in the training. Results show that campuses are maintaining gains earned beyond the initial training year, with a 50-percent reduction in D and F ratings for participating campuses in year one holding even a year after training has concluded. The TEA is working with the 20 regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) around the state to offer TIL training and support in every region beginning in the 2019-20 school year.



60x30TX Higher Education Plan

The state's higher education plan, *60x30TX*,¹ is the cornerstone for guiding efforts to connect education in Texas to workforce needs. The Tri-Agency partnership's Prime Recommendation #3 specifically states, "Build a proactive, ongoing partnership among the TEA, THECB, TWC and other stakeholders to align the educational goals of Texas with the state's higher education plan *60x30TX*, which aims for 60 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds to hold either a certificate or degree by 2030, with the goal of growing the state's workforce, industry, and economy."

When *60x30TX* was written in 2015, only 38 percent of Texans in this age group had a higher education credential, and only 35 percent had an associate degree or higher.² By 2018, higher education attainment increased to 43.5 percent of 25- to 34-year olds with a certificate or degree.³ To achieve the overarching goal, the plan has the following targeted goals:

1. **The overarching 60x30 goal - Educated Population:** At least 60 percent of Texans ages 25-34 will have a certificate or degree.
2. **Completion:** At least 550,000 students in 2030 will complete a certificate, associate, bachelor's or master's from an institution of higher education in Texas.
3. **Marketable Skills:** All graduates from Texas public institutions of higher education will have completed programs with identified marketable skills.
4. **Student Debt:** Undergraduate student loan debt will not exceed 60 percent of first-year wages for graduates of Texas public institutions.

To accomplish these goals, the TEA, THECB, and TWC are working proactively to align state and local educational goals with *60x30TX*, with the end goal of growing the state's workforce, business and industry, and the economy. The initiatives below speak directly to this recommendation.

Regional *60x30TX* targets and projections

Beginning in 2017, the THECB worked with all 10 higher education regions to develop regional targets for selected *60x30TX* goals and targets. Targets were designed to help identify the projected improvements in student success that are needed to meet the statewide goals.

Regional targets catalyzed action and produced outcomes at two levels. The first has been to bolster stakeholder engagement across kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12), higher education, and workforce sectors around the goals of *60x30TX* with the support of the TEA and TWC. Each higher education region has established advisory groups, which include representatives from higher education, K-12 ESCs, and TWC Workforce Development Areas to identify and implement relevant, high-impact, large-scale strategies to improve education outcomes tied to *60x30TX*.

Several common strategies have emerged among regions.

¹ A [PDF of 60x30TX](#) is available here.

² Source: THECB data. As of 2015, the baseline data for *60x30TX*, 40.3 percent of 25-34 year-olds had a higher education credential.

³ Source: THECB data



Most Common Regional Strategies

60x30: Educated Population Goal

- Strengthen relationships between business/industry and higher education stakeholders to develop a competitive workforce in Texas. Leverage regional intermediaries, such as Workforce Development Boards and economic development boards, to identify career opportunities and in-demand skills. Expand experiential learning opportunities, including career-oriented internships and apprenticeships for students. Enhance or develop industry councils and advisory boards in targeted sectors to improve recruitment, development, and retention of the talent pipeline. (High Plains, Central Texas, Southeast, Gulf Coast, West Texas, Northwest)
- Develop initiatives to support adults who attended college but never completed a certificate or degree. Engage business, higher education, community-based organizations, and social service providers to remove barriers for adult students to return and complete a college certificate or degree. (South Texas–San Antonio, South Texas–Valley, Upper Rio Grande, High Plains)
- Implement a large-scale public information campaign to communicate the value of earning a higher education credential. (Upper East, West Texas)

Completion Goal

- Improve transfer pathways through regional collaborations focused on strengthening reverse transfer, developing transfer pathways with predictable course sequences, strengthening advising for transfer students, and creating or joining regional transfer consortiums. (South Texas–Corpus Christi/Kingsville/Laredo, South Texas–Valley, South Texas–San Antonio, Metroplex, Northwest, Central Texas, High Plains, Gulf Coast)
- Scale guided pathways which include intensive advising, early commitment to a major or meta-major, efficient degree plans, and timely graduation. (High Plains, Central Texas, Southeast, South Texas–San Antonio, Metroplex, Gulf Coast, Upper East, West Texas)
- Use data to increase degree completion, namely through data sharing across institutions or enhancing use of data internally to auto-award credentials to students who meet requirements or outreaching to students who are very near completion. (Metroplex, Central Texas, Upper East)

High School-to-Higher Education Direct Enrollment Target

- Support students in taking advantage of programs that provide college experiences while in high school, including dual credit, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate courses, through more strategic course offerings and student advising. Continue to scale the implementation of college prep courses for high school students who are not yet college ready. (Metroplex, Upper Rio Grande, Upper East, High Plains, West Texas)
- Track and increase rates of FAFSA and ApplyTX completion. (High Plains, Central Texas, South Texas–Valley)
- Link guided pathways at the higher education level more seamlessly to the K-12 school system (link HB 5 endorsements as approved by the 83rd Texas Legislature to guided pathways, including technical pathways, industry-sponsored experiences, and fast-track to employment programs; and enhanced advising for college at K-12 level). (South Texas–Corpus Christi/Kingsville/Laredo, High Plains, Upper East, Northwest, West Texas)



- Improve data sharing and engagement with all/most districts in a region to better understand who is really matriculating vs. going into the workforce or making other choices (Central Texas, Gulf Coast).

The second outcome of this work to date has been the development of individual institutional completion targets.⁴ The THECB supported institutions to develop their own targets within the regional projections to reflect institutional priorities and local contexts. This process has greatly increased the transparency around institutional efforts and fostered shared responsibility for state goals.

Exhibit 1. Progress of Regions Toward Meeting 2020 Completion Targets

Progress Toward Targets: Regions have continued to increase completions. As of 2018, institutions had already reached 93 percent of their 2020 targets.

Region	2018 Completion Totals	2020 Institutional Completion Targets	Percentage Difference between 2018 and 2020 Completion Targets
High Plains	17,703	18,064	98%
Northwest	5,615	6,111	92%
Metroplex	80,345	87,087	92%
Upper East Texas	13,214	15,849	83%
Southeast Texas	9,063	9,760	93%
Gulf Coast	61,112	68,546	89%
Central Texas	58,404	60,168	97%
South Texas	51,471	56,096	92%
West Texas	5,464	6,197	88%
Upper Rio Grande	9,690	10,365	93%
Career schools (not region specific)	29,226	30,073	97%
Statewide	341,307	368,316	93%



Source: THECB

The THECB provides ongoing support by developing and updating the 60X30TX Regional Target Starter Kit and by training data fellows on regional and institutional data. The THECB also provides technical assistance to regions to track progress toward regional and institutional targets and enhance strategy implementation with support from the TEA and TWC. Regions have received small information dissemination grants, and two regions were selected to enhance implementation of their high school-to-higher education target strategies.

Marketable Skills Conferences

The THECB partnered with the TWC and other partners to host two Marketable Skills Conferences, in 2016 and 2018, bringing together business leaders and higher education representatives from more than 100 public and independent institutions to discuss suggestions for achieving the 60x30TX marketable skills goal. The marketable skills goal specifies that by 2030, all graduates from Texas public institutions of higher education will have completed programs with identifiable marketable skills, which include interpersonal, cognitive, and applied

⁴ Institution-level information for each region can be found on the 60x30TX website in the [Regional Starter Kit](#) section.



skill areas that are valued by employers and are primary or complementary to a major. The conferences provided training sessions and practical suggestions for how institutions could develop a process to identify marketable skills in their programs.

Marketable Skills Task Force

To facilitate communication and calibration of terms between higher education and business/industry representatives regarding skills and knowledge, the THECB is creating a Marketable Skills Task Force. The task force will provide a mechanism for stakeholders to identify challenges and solutions associated with the marketable skills goal and enable open high-level communication between higher education representatives and employers.

Supports for Adult Learners

The goal of the Tri-Agency Partners is to work together to translate the strategies for the 60x30TX goals into functional initiatives. For example, the 60x30: Educated Population goal includes the strategy of developing initiatives to support adult learners. Below are two examples of that strategy in action.

- ***Accelerate Texas opportunities***

Accelerate Texas is a shared initiative between the THECB and TWC to expand career pathways programs at colleges around the state through grants that provide opportunities to earn valuable skills and industry-recognized certifications for high-demand occupations. The program is a collaboration among employers, workforce development boards, adult education providers, and community colleges to provide specialized training for occupations such as pipefitters, welders, nursing assistants, HVAC technicians, child care professionals, IT specialists, medical assistants, and supply chain technicians. While participating in Accelerate Texas programs, TWC's Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) students had access to a student support call center that delivered live tutor support as they prepared for high school equivalency exams and gateway tests, such as the Texas Success Initiative Assessment.

- ***Career Pathways Initiative***

The Career Pathways initiative aims to boost college and career readiness by developing high quality college and career pathways to higher wage and high-demand careers. The Tri-Agency partners hosted four regional summits in 2019 to focus on integrating efforts between the TWC's AEL program and community colleges. In summer 2019, the partners hosted a statewide convening to discuss strategies for leveraging Perkins and Ability to Benefit funds to build career pathway models.



College Readiness

Often students assume that if they graduate from high school, they are ready to attend college. However, many students who enter college need remedial courses to prepare them to take college-level coursework. THECB data show that in fall 2017, 38.7 percent of students who enrolled in a public two- or four-year college directly from high school needed remediation in at least one subject.⁵ And those remediation courses do not count toward degrees, adding time and expense to a student's degree path. The CCMR bonuses approved by the 86th Legislature in HB 3 will incentivize school districts to focus on not just graduating students but graduating them college ready.

The Tri-Agency partners have worked together on several initiatives to help students graduate high school college ready. The initiatives in this section represent strides toward Prime Recommendations 1, 2, and 3 in addressing the Governor's 2016 charges, as well as progress toward the *60x30TX* plan's overarching goal and completion goal.

Advise TX

Advise TX works to increase the number of low-income, first-generation college and underrepresented high school students who enter and complete postsecondary education by placing recent college graduates from four participating Texas higher education institutions (The University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University, Texas Christian University, and Trinity University) as full-time college advisers in 112 high schools with historically low college-going rates to help students identify the education options that best fit their career and academic goals.

Advisers provide guidance on how to research, select, and apply to colleges; help with completion of financial aid applications; provide feedback on college essays; help interpret and compare financial aid award letters; and meet with parents and families. In 2017-18, advisers served more than 40,000 Texas students, facilitated more than 188,000 one-on-one meetings, assisted students with 130,000 college applications, and saved students \$1.7 million in application fees. An independent study found the program had a positive effect on college enrollment by low-income students.⁶

Advise TX for Students with Disabilities

The THECB and TWC partnered to launch Advise Texas Innovation and Opportunity (IO) in 2019, which aims to increase the number of students with disabilities who pursue and are successful in post-secondary education. Beginning fall 2019, Advise TX advisers will provide counseling to students with disabilities in 110 high schools across the state. Approximately 5,000 students are projected to receive Advise TX IO services during the 2019–20 school year.

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs

With the THECB and other partners, TEA administered a Gaining Early Awareness and

⁵ THECB, "Annual TSI High School Summary Report," August 2018, <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/PDF/11704.PDF>

⁶ College Advising Corps, "Evaluation Report on Advise TX: A Report on the Effectiveness of Advise TX (per Rider 53, III-58)," October 2018, <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/PDF/11573.PDF?CFID=98432382&CFTOKEN=62721220>



Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) state grant from 2012 to 2019 and was awarded an additional state grant in 2017. Each GEAR UP grant is a seven-year federal initiative designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Through the GEAR UP grant, the TEA provides students, parents, teachers, and school districts with high-quality, free resources, tools, and advising for college and career readiness.

Enhancing college readiness in the K-12 accountability system

The TEA rolled out a new accountability system for schools in 2019 using A-F ratings, rather than a pass/fail system, with scores based on a variety of indicators including graduation rates; college, career, and military readiness; SAT/ACT scores; and college prep course completion. Previously, students would be considered college ready in either math or reading to meet state requirements. New standards require students to demonstrate college readiness in both math and reading, which is an expectation of the THECB accountability system. This change improves alignment between the accountability systems in K-12 and higher education. In addition, the THECB is in the process of integrating the assessment of college readiness skills in reading and writing into the TSIA, which will bring greater consistency with the TEA's approach to tracking English language arts skills.

Texas OnCourse college and career readiness resources

Launched in 2015, [Texas OnCourse](#) is a comprehensive, statewide college and career readiness initiative that provides free digital tools, easy-to-digest information, and access to extensive resources for counselors, students, and families. Developed by the University of Texas at Austin, with support from the TEA, THECB, and TWC, Texas OnCourse provides students and families with one-stop access to explore career options, plan their educational paths, and learn how to pay for college. The site also includes professional development for educators to increase their skills in college and career advising.

Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools

Jointly funded by the Tri-Agency partners, the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) program provides students with the opportunity to gain work-based experience in high-demand fields while earning a high school diploma and/or simultaneously earning industry certifications, level 1 or level 2 certificates, and/or college credit at no cost to the student. With the passage of HB 3 in the 86th legislative session, districts receive incentive funding for every student enrolled in a P-TECH program.

Texas had 34 designated P-TECH campuses implementing with students in the 2018-19 school year. For example, in Roscoe Collegiate ISD, more than 250 students are part of two P-TECH programs: Edu Drone and Vet Tech. Edu Drone helps students earn a Federal Aviation Administration certification to legally fly drones, which can lead to jobs in law enforcement, emergency response, surveying, and utility inspection. Vet Tech enables students to work toward a veterinary technician certification, which can put them on the path to become a licensed veterinarian. Roscoe's P-TECH programs partner with several institutions of higher education, including Western Texas College, Texas Tech University, and Texas A&M University. An additional 29 campuses engaged in planning during the 2018-19 school year to implement with students in 2019-20.

College and Career Signing Days

College and career "signing days" or "decision days" help promote the participation of high school students in postsecondary education and in career-oriented pathways. The THECB hosts GenTX Decision Day, which recognizes high school seniors choosing to pursue



postsecondary education. GenTX Decision Day is typically held the first Friday in May and is designed to remind students to complete the admission process and to encourage younger students and families to prepare early for postsecondary education.

In 2019, the TWC launched Texas Career Signing Day to recognize high school seniors entering career pathways directly from high school that lead to in-demand careers in targeted occupations. Texas Career Signing Day builds upon partnerships and articulation agreements made between high school and community/technical colleges, and events are held across the state to celebrate students entering into:

- the workforce as a result of completing career certifications in targeted occupations while in high school;
- an applied learning opportunity such as an internship or apprenticeship; or
- a CTE program.

Math Innovation Zones

Blended learning combines face-to-face instruction with online learning to help teachers effectively differentiate instruction for all students. Math Innovation Zones (MIZs) is a four-year process to design, launch, and scale high-quality blended learning models in K-8 grade math classes in school districts and charter schools. In the 2019-20 school year, 27 school districts are implementing the program for almost 30,000 students. During fall 2019, the TEA will engage 20 new MIZ grantees. Additionally, through HB 3 districts may apply for grants for the planning and implementation of high-quality blended learning models including Math Innovation Zones.



Career and Workforce Readiness

The goal for most students is to get the education they need to get a good-paying job, and the goal for employers is to hire employees with the skills needed to do the jobs available. It seems like the solution to achieving both goals should be simple, then – graduate enough students with the skills needed to fill employers’ jobs. But the execution of that solution hasn’t been simple. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, 83 percent of employers who responded to a 2019 skills gap survey said they’ve had trouble recruiting suitable candidates for open positions in the last 12 months. The top three reasons given for the difficulty in hiring is competition from other employers, lack of needed work experience, and lack of needed technical skills.⁷

One way to achieve the goals of both students and employers is for students to complete postsecondary education that gives them the skills they need to succeed in the workforce – to graduate “career ready.” Georgetown University projects that by 2020, 62 percent of the jobs in Texas will require postsecondary education.⁸

With this in mind, the Tri-Agency partners have coordinated on a variety of initiatives to help students prepare to enter the workforce. The initiatives outlined in this section represent strides toward Prime Recommendations 1, 3, and 4 in addressing the Governor’s 2016 charges, as well as progress toward all four of the 60x30TX plan’s goals – the overarching goal and the completion, marketable skills, and student debt goals.

Work-based learning to support career preparation and skill development

Work-based learning provides students with the opportunity to gain work experience while they attend school. Well-planned work-based learning programs help students to apply the knowledge they have learned in a classroom setting while developing practical skills through real-world experience, sometimes while also earning certifications or course credits, which can increase students’ employability while, in some cases, reducing the cost of postsecondary education. For school districts, HB 3 supports costs to transport students to work-based learning sites.

Internship Toolkit

The THECB produced the [Internship Toolkit](#) in collaboration with the TWC in July 2019 for Texas employers to use when creating or upgrading internship programs. The toolkit is designed both as a primer for employers who do not have an internship program and as a guide for those who have existing internships to provide information about the benefits of internships and how they can help meet the goals of the state’s higher education plan 60x30TX.

Texas Internship Challenge

The [Texas Internship Challenge](#) is a Tri-Agency effort to encourage employers around Texas to offer paid internships and to make it easy for students to search and apply for them. The partnership launched the program in 2017. Since then, the Texas Internship Challenge website has featured more than 100,000 internship positions. The site features 6,500 positions

⁷ Society for Human Resource Management, “The Global Skills Shortage: Bridging the Talent Gap with Education, Training and Sourcing,” 2019, <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/research-and-surveys/Documents/SHRM%20Skills%20Gap%202019.pdf>

⁸ Georgetown Public Policy Institute, Center on Education and the Workforce, “Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020; State Report,” June 2013, https://1gyhoq479ufd3yna29x7ubjn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/StateProjections_6.1.15_agc_v2.pdf



per month on average for Texas students. On July 22, 2019, the Tri-Agency partners held a press conference and roundtable discussion in Austin to highlight internship success stories with employers and stakeholders and to recognize the importance of creating more paid internships and other applied learning opportunities.

Texas Working Off-Campus: Reinforcing Knowledge and Skills Program

The 86th Texas Legislature created the Texas Working Off-Campus: Reinforcing Knowledge and Skills (WORKS) internship program, administered by the THECB. The purpose of Texas WORKS is to provide jobs funded in part by the state to enable students to attend public or private institutions of higher education while exploring career options and strengthening marketable skills.

Texas Talent Connection Internship Grants

In collaboration with the Office of the Governor and the Texas Workforce Investment Council, TWC awarded grants to workforce boards to provide high school or community and technical college students the opportunity to earn class credit, industry-based certifications, and on-the-job experience through work-based internships in middle-skill STEM occupations across a range of industries. Grant recipients offer internships that provide training for good-paying, in-demand positions such as medical technicians, network support specialists, engineering technicians, quality control technicians, welders, and more. In 2018, six Texas Talent Connection Internship grants were awarded.

Texas Internship Initiative

Through the Texas Internship Initiative (TII) program, the TWC provides grants to plan, develop, and expand internship opportunities that demonstrate effective work-based learning experiences that prepare high school and community and technical college students for employment in high-demand, middle-skill STEM occupations in the state. TII grantees partner with educational entities and employers to develop and implement work-based internships, and participating high school and college students receive education credit, on-the-job experience, and potentially make progress towards an industry-based certification in the occupational area related to their education and training course or program.

Apprenticeship Crosswalks

In November 2017, the TWC and THECB worked with representatives from apprenticeship programs and several higher education institutions to create apprenticeship crosswalks, outlining the skills attained in apprenticeships that translate to skills attained in courses offered by community and technical colleges. The crosswalks are designed to help higher education institutions, employers, and training organizations work together to assure college credit for individuals who have completed a U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) registered apprenticeship training program. Currently, crosswalks have been developed for 18 fields and are available on both the THECB and TWC's websites.

Registered Apprenticeship program expansion/Apprenticeship Texas

The TWC recently received a third expansion grant from the U.S. DOL to continue growth of Registered Apprenticeship programs in Texas through ApprenticeshipTexas. From March 2016 through April 2019, the program increased the number of apprentices in Texas by approximately 1,320, a 7 percent increase in statewide apprenticeship. During that same period, the number of newly-registered apprenticeship training programs increased by 21, or 4 percent, to approximately 500 registered apprenticeship programs in Texas. The program has also expanded apprenticeship training programs into new occupational areas such as cybersecurity and healthcare.



Texas Apprenticeship Week

Texas Apprenticeship Week occurs each November. During observance of the week, the TWC's Apprenticeship Texas staff encourages Texas employers to learn how Registered Apprenticeship programs provide training opportunities for businesses, education partners, labor organizations, and industry associations. Apprenticeships can help students earn skills, experience, and certifications with little to no student debt.

Creating awareness of Texas careers

Several initiatives by the Tri-Agency partners aim to improve awareness about Texas careers and the skills and credentials needed to be successful in those careers. By knowing what opportunities exist and how to take advantage of those opportunities, students can make informed decisions about their educational paths and graduate ready to enter the workforce and be productive on day one.

Career Readiness Handbook

The [Career Readiness Handbook](#), developed in 2018 by the THECB in collaboration with the TWC, is a resource to help students determine what skills they need to acquire while in school to transition effectively from college to the workforce. The booklet provides information and worksheets to help students identify both hard and soft skills they need for their career, how to acquire those skills, and how to communicate to prospective employers the skills they have.

Texas Industry Clusters and Careers Outreach campaign "Careers in Texas Industries"

The TWC, in conjunction with the Tri-Agency partners and other government, business and industry, and education partners, conducts this campaign to raise awareness about careers in the state and to help close the skills gap for in-demand industries. The campaign has featured more than 48 career exploration events for students, parents, and educators.

"Jobs Y'all: Your Career. Your story." Campaign

The TWC worked with students, families, educators, and school districts to develop and implement the ["Jobs Y'all"](#) campaign. The campaign launched in November 2018 to raise awareness about the opportunities and benefits of Texas industries and to inspire students to explore careers and the training needed for jobs in the future. In April 2019, an educator webinar drew more than 200 live attendees, and since launch, the campaign has resulted in more than 150,000,000 impressions. The campaign and accompanying website have driven traffic to Texas Career Check, Texas Reality Check, Texas Internship Challenge, and Texas OnCourse.

Workforce Career and Education Outreach Specialist Pilot Program

In summer 2019, the TWC awarded grant funds to seven LWDBs to implement the Workforce Career and Education Outreach Specialist Pilot Program. The objective of the two-year program is to provide career services to students at public middle and high schools, grades 6-12, in designated regions in the state. In partnership with local school districts, the program aims to direct students toward: 1) high-growth, high-demand occupations; 2) opportunities and training in middle-skills jobs; 3) apprenticeship training programs; 4) internships; 5) community and technical colleges; and 6) occupations experiencing existing or projected workforce shortages. The outreach specialists completed training in July 2019 and are co-located at middle and high schools across Texas in over 50 school districts as of fall 2019.



Strengthening educational pathways into the workforce

A number of initiatives have launched or received additional support since the Tri-Agency Initiative began to strengthen the pathways for students to transition from education into the workforce, with particular emphasis on aligning education to workforce needs.

Tri-Agency Education to Workforce Summit

In November 2018, teams from 26 workforce development areas participated in a one-day summit hosted by the TEA, THECB, and TWC designed to provide guidance regarding state and regional labor market and higher education projections, provide resources and technical assistance for regional pathways planning, and facilitate regional education-to-workforce planning.

Texas Regional Pathways Network

Launched in 2019, the Texas Regional Pathways Network (TPRN) supports the Tri-Agency Initiative by linking education to business and industry. The TEA selected the first cohort of 10 regions, representing more than a third of Texas' workforce development areas, via competitive process. The cohort regions are receiving funding and technical assistance to support in-demand pathways.

Inclusion of industry-based certifications in the Accountability System for public schools

In 2017, the 85th Texas Legislature required that industry-based certifications be included as one indicator in the student achievement domain of the state's accountability system. To develop a list of certifications that will apply toward accountability, the TEA requested feedback from stakeholders across Texas on recommendations for additions to the state's approved list of 73 industry-based certifications. The TEA received over 4,000 responses, including approximately 1,000 responses from business and industry representatives, containing 1,319 unique credentials. The 28 TWC's Texas Workforce Development Boards reviewed the recommended credentials to determine industry value, and the TEA reviewed all credentials based on industry value, third-party provider, capstone, attainability by a high school student, and portability.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development labor market study

The THECB is collaborating with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to study labor market relevance and outcomes of higher education to assess how well the supply of graduate skills aligns with labor market demand, to identify potential drivers of these outcomes, and to identify policy options to improve the articulation of higher education systems and labor markets. The OECD is in the process of visiting five cities across Texas to meet with a wide variety of higher education, public education, and workforce stakeholders, with support from the TEA and TWC.

Jobs and Education for Texans grant program

The Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) program provides grants to local school districts and public community, state, or technical colleges to defray the start-up costs associated with developing career and technical education programs. The TWC, with support from the TEA and THECB, oversees the JET program, which allocates \$10 million each biennium toward the purchase of equipment needed for CTE programs.



Supporting underserved populations

To remain competitive, Texas must appropriately prepare all students for our diverse workforce, including traditionally underserved populations, such as foster youth, people with disabilities, and students in rural areas. Several programs supported by the Tri-Agency partners focus on making sure these populations have access to educational and workforce programs in high-demand occupations.

Foster youth support

Foster youth can face unique challenges for successfully navigating the educational system. Multiple residential and school changes, missed school days due to court- or case-related appointments, and a lack of sufficient supports can lead to lower rates of both secondary and postsecondary graduation, as well as lower employment and income rates in the long-term.⁹ Programs tailored to serving these students can help improve outcomes.

Foster Youth Dropout Prevention and Recovery High School Completion Pilot

The TEA and TWC collaborated on implementing this program, which is designed to deliver dropout prevention and recovery services to current and former foster care youth to help them complete high school and to provide them with pathways to postsecondary education and work. Grant awards totaling \$1.5 million were made in July 2017 in Central Texas, Dallas, South Texas, and San Antonio. The pilot concluded summer 2019, with two of the four grants being extended to December 2019 to complete initiative activities. A total of 500 students were enrolled in a prevention or recovery program, with over 100 students receiving a diploma, High School Equivalent, or employment. More data analysis will be completed once remaining data is received.

Foster Youth Transition Centers and Best Practices Summits

The TEA and TWC continue to work together to implement this program, which includes support and annual funding of \$2.8 million for 17 Foster Youth Transition Centers throughout Texas. The TWC is identifying funding to support an additional center for Fiscal Year 2020 (FY 20). Funding provides for Workforce Advocates, who work with liaisons in TWC's Workforce Solutions Offices to ensure foster youth receive the services needed to ensure success in education, employment, and training. In addition, the third annual "All Together Now: Youth in Foster Care Conference" is scheduled for October 1-2, 2019, in Austin. The conferences bring together local staff who serve foster youth, including representatives of school districts, foster youth transition centers, and children's protective services staff, to share best practices for collaboration and communication among stakeholders.

Foster Care and Education Committee Postsecondary Education Workgroup

All three agencies participate in this committee, which is coordinated by the Children's Commission of the Supreme Court of Texas. The committee meets quarterly to prioritize projects and monitor progress and "focuses on strategies to improve educational experiences and outcomes for children and youth and Texas foster care."

⁹ [Improving Outcomes for Students in Foster Care](#), June 29, 2017, presentation at the P-16 Statewide Professional Development Conference, Source: "Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth," The University of Chicago.



Higher education foster liaison officers

The 86th Legislature broadened the reach of higher education liaison officers who assist foster care students to include both students who are currently or were formerly in foster care. Higher education institutions are now required (to the extent allowed under state and federal law) to identify these students to the liaison officer and to publicize the contact information of the officer as well as support services and resources available to current and former foster care students. To assist liaison officers with serving the needs of these students, the THECB developed an information and resource guide in 2017.

Support for people with disabilities

The national unemployment rate for people with disabilities is significantly higher than the rate for those with no disability (8 percent compared with 3.7 percent in 2018).¹⁰ To improve employment opportunities for Texans with disabilities, the state has launched and/or continued support of programs focused on sharing the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and assisting students with disabilities on transition into the workplace. Additionally, with the passage of HB 3, school districts will receive \$2,000 for each college, career, or military ready annual special education graduate, in addition to the general CCMR bonus.

Texas HireAbility campaign and employer forum

The TWC continues to partner with the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities and the Texas Workforce Solutions network on this campaign to raise awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. The TWC, along with local partners, offered 22 HireAbility events in 2018, and hosts the annual DiverseAbility Forum for employers to share successful methods for hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities. The next forum is October 2, 2019, and the commission plans to launch a new employer recognition program in October 2019.

Summer Earn and Learn Program

The TWC's statewide Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) Program establishes a mechanism by which pre-employment transition services are provided to students with disabilities. SEAL is offered in each local workforce development area during the summer months and includes:

- pre-employment work readiness training and preparation for the work experience placement;
- work experience to help participants gain familiarity with the workplace environment and develop transferable job skills; and
- paid compensation for time worked on the job.

2019 is SEAL's third year of implementation. As of July 2019, 2,635 students with disabilities were participating in a SEAL work experience assignment with a local employer, exceeding the TWC's target of 2,500.

Increased services to rural areas

More than 900,000 K-12 students in Texas live in rural areas, and that number grows by 30,000 each year.¹¹ Rural students often face unique barriers to postsecondary education

¹⁰ U.S. DOL Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 26, 2019, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm>

¹¹ Greater Texas Foundation, "Issue Brief: Rural Students," April 2017, <https://www.greatertexasfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Brief-Rural.pdf>



compared with urban students, including geographic location, which can limit students' access to institutions of higher education; teacher retention, which can affect teachers' proficiency, especially in critical STEM fields; and limited broadband access, which can hinder distance education and online classes. Rural students hold great potential to help the state meet the 60x30TX plan's overarching goal with programs, like the ones below, helping to overcome those barriers.

Grants to Local Workforce Development Boards

The TWC awarded \$2.6 million in grants to 21 LWDBs to provide services to 128 of the state's counties with the smallest civilian labor forces that are often difficult to serve due to infrastructure, technology issues, and lack of brick and mortar facilities.

Rural-focused service delivery

The TWC's LWDBs are increasing services through mobile units, online service delivery, and increased career exploration in partnership with local school districts.

Serving veterans and transitioning service members

Charge 4 from the Governor in 2016 states, "Commissioners should identify gaps in services to Texas veterans, advance strategies to enhance their education and employment opportunities, and develop solutions to ensure a seamless and accelerated transition back into the Texas workforce." The Tri-Agency initiatives below address this charge by taking a multi-pronged approach, providing veterans with employment assistance, working with employers to increase opportunities, and expanding programs that assist veterans with postsecondary education by translating military experience into college credit.

Troops to Teachers/Troops to Teaching Assistants

Created in 1993 by the US Departments of Defense and Education, the Troops to Teachers program enables transitioning service members and veterans to begin new careers as K-12 schoolteachers in public and charter schools. In partnership with the ESC for Region 13, the TEA is working to meet their goal of expanding the Troops to Teacher program to 500 participants. As of October 2018, the program has 321 registered participants.

Texas Operation Welcome Home

Codified by the 86th Texas Legislature, the [Texas Operation Welcome Home](#) program is comprised of several components that assist service members transitioning from the military into education, career technical training, or entrepreneurship. Components include:

- a. **Welcome Home Texas Transition Alliance**, which promotes partnerships with military installations to address the needs of transitioning service members;
- b. **Skills for Transition Program**, which provides training opportunities to transitioning service members to help them earn certifications in high-demand occupations;
- c. **We Hire Vets** employer recognition program;
- d. **Texas Skills to Work**, which assists service members by translating military experience into civilian terms and skill sets; and
- e. **Military Family Support Program**, which provides grants to fund employment assistance for military spouses.

In FY 19, over 12,500 transitioning service members from Texas military installations were contacted and/or assisted by Texas Workforce System staff through Texas Operation Welcome Home.



Mentoring for veterans

The Texas Veterans Leadership Program, a TWC resource and referral network, along with the Texas Veterans Commission and Fort Hood, supports the American Legion's efforts to provide employment workshops before "mega job fairs" at Fort Hood. The legion brings together members of local posts and state-level officers at workshops to mentor and explain veterans benefits to transitioning service members. The most recent American Legion Employment Workshop was in June 2019, where American Legion officers and members met with over 100 transitioning service members to explain American Legion programs, veterans' benefits, and supports provided by the American Legion throughout the transition period.

College Credit for Heroes

The THECB and TWC are working together to support and expand the College Credit for Heroes program, which seeks to maximize college credit awarded to veterans and service members for their military experience and to expedite their transition into the Texas workforce. The program focuses on acceleration curricula, evaluations of credit, and a network of partner schools. To date, over 90 acceleration curricula courses have been created in fields such as emergency medical services, surgical technology, cybersecurity, wind engineering, and oil field technology. The 86th Legislature directed the TWC to provide public high school students information on the availability of college credit awarded for military experience, education, and training obtained during military service.

Efforts to improve labor market data availability and accessibility

Meaningful labor market data can help students make strategic decisions about their education and career paths by providing information about business and industry and economic trends. The Tri-Agency partners support initiatives that improve availability and access to labor market data so that students and job seekers can research emerging and evolving occupations in Texas.

Career Check and Reality Check

The TWC works with LWDBs, ESCs, and ISDs to help students and job seekers make informed education and career choices via these websites, which make available current data about labor market information, schools, and universities. These sites are considered TWC's flagship tools and are the agency's most visited and used tools, each averaging about 50,000 sessions per month. The number of sessions has increased every year since 2016. In 2019, they are averaging over 68,000 sessions a year. Additionally, since 2016, TWC's Labor Market and Career Information (LMCI) department has provided education outreach services to over 230,000 customers including students, teachers, and school administrators.

TexasLMI.com

The TWC's LMCI division launched www.TexasLMI.com, replacing TRACER2.com, in March 2019. The new website makes accessing the agency's statistics easier. The new site features a user-friendly dashboard with improved navigation and intuitive workflow, and it offers mobile compatibility, which enables Texans to access the information on-the-go. The site has over 3,000 users with over 5,000 sessions, reaching the numbers previously reached on TRACER.



Enterprise Data Warehouse system

In 2019, the TWC was awarded a DOL Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) Round VII grant of \$2.18M to fund the BIG Enterprise Data Warehouse system. This system will integrate Career & Training, AEL, Vocational Rehabilitation, and other customer data to improve performance accountability and program services.

Texas Consumer Resource for Education and Workforce Statistics

Texas Consumer Resource for Education and Workforce Statistics (Texas CREWS) is an interactive dashboard tool providing comparative information about Texas public two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions. The THECB and TWC work together to provide information via the dashboard about programs and institutions on the basis of wages and student loan levels to allow parents and students to make informed decisions about college to get the best return on their educational investment. Some of the funds awarded to the TWC in its DOL WDQI Round VII grant will be used to redevelop Texas CREWS to improve the user experience through more user-friendly navigation and expanded analytic tools.



Conclusion

The Tri-Agency partners continue to demonstrate the value of high-level collaboration, and the many examples of cooperative initiatives in this report show that people in the field, who work directly with students and those in the workforce, are embracing the opportunities to improve our educational pipelines to create more and better opportunities for all Texans. The efforts to bring together educators, employers, government officials, and community stakeholders are moving the state forward toward the goals of aligning the state's P-12 and higher education systems with workforce needs, achieving the statewide goals of *60x30TX*, and expanding and strengthening the Texas economy.

We look forward to working with each other, those in the field, and other stakeholders, with guidance from the Governor, on innovative solutions for a prosperous Texas future. There is more work to be done, but with the support of the Legislature and state leaders, we are poised to take advantage of key policies to accelerate our work, for the benefit of the state as a whole and Texans in every part of the state and at every stage of their education and careers.



Acronyms Used in This Report

ACT	American College Testing Program
AEL	Adult Education and Literacy
CCMR	College, Career and Military Readiness
CTE	Career and Technical Education
DOL	Department of Labor
ESC	Education Service Center
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
FY	Fiscal Year
GEAR UP	Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs
HB	House Bill
ISD	Independent School District
IR	Improvement Required
JET	Jobs and Education for Texans
LCMI	Labor Market and Career Information
LWDB	Local Workforce Development Boards
MIZ	Math Innovation Zones
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
P-TECH	Pathways in Technology Early College High School
RECESS	Regional Early Childhood Education Support Specialist
SAT	Scholastic Assessment Test
SEAL	Summer Earn and Learn
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TASFA	Texas Application for State Financial Aid
Texas CREWS	Texas Consumer Resource for Education and Workforce Solutions



Texas WORKS	Texas Working Off Campus: Reinforcing Knowledge and Skills
TEA	Texas Education Agency
THECB	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
TII	Texas Internship Initiative
TIL	Texas Institutional Leadership
TPRN	Texas Regional Pathways Network
TRS	Texas Rising Star
TSIA	Texas Success Initiative Assessment
TWC	Texas Workforce Commission
WDQI	Workforce Data Quality Initiative

