



FALL 2024

PATHWAYS


Research Agenda

How do we prepare students for the good jobs Texas offers?



LONESTAR**RP3**

Education research practice policy partnership



Texas has a booming economy, but the question remains: will our students be prepared to access the good jobs it offers? Estimates predict that by 2036, at least **70%** of jobs in Texas will require some form of postsecondary credential, yet today, less than half of all Texas' young adults hold a postsecondary credential.

The stakes are high: young adults without a certification, credential, or degree within six years of finishing high school have just a **12%** chance of earning a living wage. As Texas grows and becomes more diverse, we need to eliminate opportunity gaps to ensure all residents are prepared to thrive in the workforce and that the Texas economy remains the envy of the world.

ONLY
50%
of young adults in
Texas hold a postsecondary
degree.

ONLY
35%
of young Black adults
in Texas hold a
postsecondary degree.

ONLY
24%
of young Latino adults
in Texas hold a
postsecondary degree.

➤ Identifying Opportunity

Despite historically strong high school graduation rates, many graduates are not transitioning into postsecondary education or completing certificates, credentials, or degrees. Texas' preK12 public schools need to expand and develop their initiatives to better prepare students for life beyond high school, and at the same time higher education institutions must address barriers to access and completion.

Of the degree-seeking students who enrolled in a postsecondary institution in 2013, just half graduated from a Texas university within six years; only 36% of Black and 48% of Latino students, compared with 60% of White students. Limited collaboration between our preK12 schools and institutions of higher education—in areas like academic advising, course expectations, and admission requirements—adds unnecessary obstacles that students must also overcome in pursuit of their chosen pathway.

Despite these challenges, there are bright spots in our preK12 and higher education schools and classrooms that point to promising solutions. Between 2007 to 2017, dual credit participation by Texas student across both academic and workforce education programs increased by 57%. And Texas' robust state longitudinal data systems continue to grow and evolve, allowing us to collect evidence to continue to target and drive improvement efforts.

In recent years, Texas policymakers have prioritized funding for improved postsecondary outcomes. In 2019, House Bill 3 established outcomes funding for preK12 based on students meeting defined college and career readiness benchmarks. Later in 2023, House Bill 8 created an outcomes-based funding model for community colleges based on students earning credentials of value. The urgency of our workforce needs, coupled with this investment of state resources, creates a unique moment to evaluate what's working—and what's not.

Here LONESTARP3 presents a set of Pathways research questions aimed at identifying additional bright spots and the conditions required to support and sustain them. These studies will drive informed decisions that will enable students, families, and communities to prosper.

How does academic and career advising help students succeed on their chosen pathway?

Supporting Research Questions

- What academic and career advising practices contribute to improved student outcomes?
 - How do the impacts of these practices vary across different student groups?
- How strongly aligned are secondary and postsecondary academic and career advising messages and practices?
 - What factors enable or constrain better alignment?
 - What existing models and practices promote strong alignment?

Why This Matters

Academic and career advising plays a key role in helping students successfully transition from high school to college to career. Our analysis will show how advising models affect students' access to opportunities and highlight which work best for different student groups. We will also look at how schools and colleges can work together to align advising practices and create more equitable experiences for students.

This is especially important in Texas, where student populations are becoming more diverse, and evolving legislation is changing how students prepare for their chosen postsecondary pathway. Good advising ensures that all students—no matter their background—receive the guidance they need to pursue their education and career goals.

Strong advising models need both people and financial resources to function well. Our research will identify what makes advising models effective so that schools can focus limited resources on improving student success.

Potential Impact

- Identify advising models in Texas that are successful in improving students' chances of graduating and entering college or the workforce.
- Create opportunities to increase coherence across high school and college advising programs to support students in making smooth transitions and succeeding on their postsecondary pathway.
- Equip advisors and schools with the knowledge and resources to adopt best practices to meet the unique needs of their students.
- Strengthen collaboration between preK12 schools and colleges, so resources are directed to areas that will make the biggest difference for students.

OVER
70%
of school counselors and advisers reported working with more than 300 students, above the 250:1 recommended threshold

70%
of 8th grade counselors' time is spent on tasks unrelated to college and career counseling

STRAND 2 | DUAL CREDIT ACADEMIC AND WORKFORCE EDUCATION

What characteristics of dual credit programs for academic and workforce education propel students into degrees or work?

Supporting Research Questions

- What factors influence students' enrollment in dual credit programs for academic and workforce education (e.g. Career and Technical Education or CTE)?
- How does access to and participation in dual credit programs for academic and workforce education differ among student groups, school types, and geographies?
- What are the backgrounds and qualifications of those who teach dual credit programs for academic and workforce education, and are they adequately qualified and distributed across different subjects, schools, and geographies?

BETWEEN 2007-2017

57%

increase in dual credit participation

IN 2017

10%

higher education enrollment was due to dual credit programs for academic and workforce education in Texas

Why This Matters

Dual credit academic and workforce education programs have been shown to drive positive outcomes for students, including higher postsecondary application and enrollment rates. A wide array of courses is now available, covering subjects ranging from welding to transportation, and health sciences to information technology. Districts and families need to understand the quality and outcomes of these offerings to help students choose a path that supports their education and career goals.

Dual credit programs are an important part of helping Texas meet the goals of Building a Talent Strong Texas, which aims to increase the number of Texans who hold a certificate or degree. Deepening our understanding of these programs will ensure they boost degree attainment and contribute to the state's economic prosperity. By identifying disparities in access and participation among different subgroups and regions, we can determine what actions are needed to improve classroom practices and inform policymaking to ensure all Texans benefit.

Potential Impact

- Identify and address factors contributing to disparities in access to and participation in dual credit programs across student groups and geographic areas.
- Promote the growth of dual credit programs that prove to be effective and that align with local education and workforce needs.
- Ensure the continued availability and quality of dual credit programs by improving faculty preparation and support.

How well do Texas Industry-Based Certifications prepare students to enter the workforce?

Supporting Research Question

- To what extent do Industry-Based Certifications (IBCs) earned by Texas students match the workforce demands in their regions and across the state?

Why This Matters

Industry-Based Certifications can help students gain the training and skills needed for high-demand jobs in the Texas workforce. However, students and families need to know whether these certifications are aligned with actual employer needs, and whether they are providing the preparation required to earn a postsecondary credential or enter the workforce. Our research will highlight trends in IBC attainment among different student groups, examine how well these certifications align with Texas labor market demands, and assess whether IBCs are helping students secure stable employment and financial security.

Potential Impact

- Identify which IBCs are most aligned with Texas' workforce and economic needs and prepare students for long-term success.
- Foster stronger partnerships between schools and industries to increase participation in IBCs that improve Texas students' learning outcomes and workforce readiness.
- Identify gaps in current IBC offerings to ensure students have access to roles in Texas' evolving labor market.

90%

of jobs in Texas that require a high school diploma or less still require some form of additional training.

ADDITIONAL FACTS

IBCs in Agriculture and Business are more strongly linked to positive postsecondary outcomes, while certifications in Cosmetology and Transportation show mixed results—improving earnings but negatively affecting success in college.

Most students with IBCs are not employed in the industries directly related to the certification they earned.

STRAND 4 | POSTSECONDARY PURSUITS

How can we better measure and monitor whether a student is prepared and ready to pursue a postsecondary credential?

Supporting Research Question

- Do current college and career readiness indicators used by Texas high schools predict whether students enroll in and earn a postsecondary credential?

Why This Matters

As Texas continues its efforts to improve postsecondary attainment, we need to understand which indicators most accurately predict students' success after high school. This is especially important considering student demographics and economic opportunities are rapidly changing.

The state's longitudinal data systems track a variety of measures, such as attendance, course completion, and test scores. Our analyses will examine how well these indicators predict whether students go on to earn a postsecondary credential, providing valuable insights to better support students as they exit school and enter the workforce.

Potential Impact

- Evaluate the effectiveness of current college readiness indicators in meeting the goal of increasing postsecondary enrollment.
- Promote better alignment between preK12 college readiness standards and postsecondary expectations for enrollment, admission, and degree completion.
- Improve access to strong college readiness programs and enhance student support systems in both preK12 and postsecondary education.

60%

of all Texas students are performing below grade level in math.

ONLY

22%

of Texas 8th graders earn a degree or credential within six years of high school graduation.

PEOPLE MOVING TO TEXAS

2X

as likely to hold bachelor's degrees as Texas' native workforce.

60%

of Texas parents are concerned about whether their child is prepared for life after high school.



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Partnerships drive the success of our work. Whether you are a researcher, educator, policy advocate, or philanthropist, we welcome your feedback, concerns, ideas and aspirations.



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