Building Paths That Pay:
Strong Progress, Missing Links

Postsecondary Pathways for the Future of Texas

Event name

Date

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Agenda

1. **Who we are**
   LONESTA**RP3** and our research team
2. **Why this research**
   The problem, why it matters, and how we studied it
3. **What we learned**
   Key findings from the evidence
4. **What it means**
   What is at stake and what to do about it
5. **Questions**
   Your questions and discussion

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01 Who we are

LONESTARP3 and the research collaborative behind this work

1 **Who we are**

2 Why this research

3 What we learned

4 What it means

5 Questions

About LONESTARP3

LONESTA**RP3** is a statewide network that brings multiple perspectives together—connecting **researchers, practitioners, and policy advocates** in pursuit of shared solutions.



Researchers



Practitioners



Policy advocates

LONESTA**RP3**

Our research collaborative



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02 Why this research

Does workforce-aligned instruction prepare Texas students for the jobs ahead?

What is the problem?



Texas invests heavily in IBCs. Do they prepare students for work?

1. **Aligned instruction builds skills**
   Marketable skills while students are still in high school

2. **Texas has invested heavily**
   In career and technical education (CTE) and industry-based certifications (IBCs)

3. **A critical question remains**
   How well do IBCs offered in Texas public schools prepare students for the workforce?

Earning a certification does not, by itself, show that a student is prepared for work.

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Why does it matter?

63%

of Texas jobs are estimated to need a postsecondary credential by 2031

1. **~30%** of high school graduates attain a postsecondary credential within six years
2. **Interest in IBC pathways is rising**
   As enrollment declines and doubts about higher education grow
3. **Accountability may not match need**
   How state accountability lines up with student and employer needs is unclear

Regions want a workforce that meets local needs, with equitable access to opportunity.

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What did we want to know?

How well do IBCs prepare students for work?

1. **Do IBCs match local jobs?**
   Local labor demand, employer expectations, state-approved lists and accountability, and CTE pathways
2. **What value does alignment add?**
   For students: employment and earnings after graduation
3. **How do districts choose IBCs?**
   What local factors, like capacity and regional job markets, shape access and outcomes

Together, they ask whether credentials, coursework and local jobs line up, and what shapes that.

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What did we do?

2021–24

graduating classes of Texas public high school students

1. **Statewide student records**
   Four graduating classes, linked to state education and wage records
2. **Alignment measures**
   IBCs matched to CTE programs and to in-demand jobs in each region
3. **Interviews**
   Education, workforce and employer leaders in two border regions

Data show what is happening; interviews help explain why.

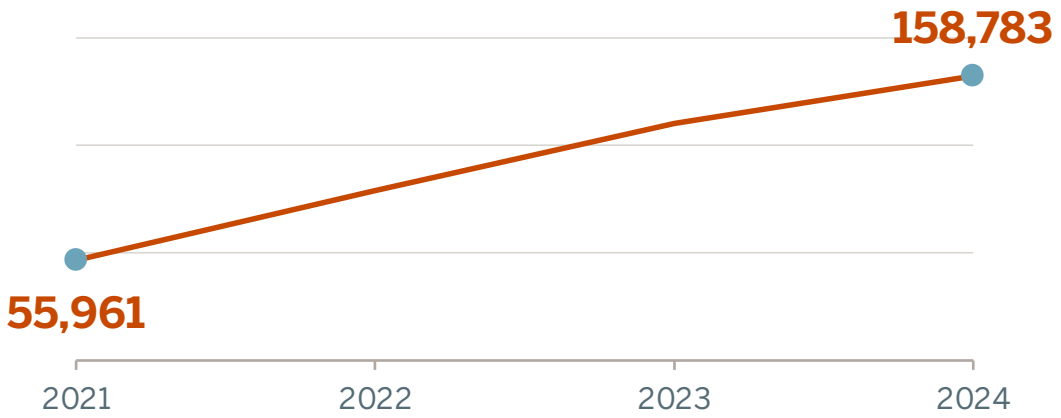
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03 What we learned

Alignment has improved, but progress is uneven across Texas

Far more Texas graduates now earn an IBC than in 2021

Graduates earning at least one IBC nearly tripled



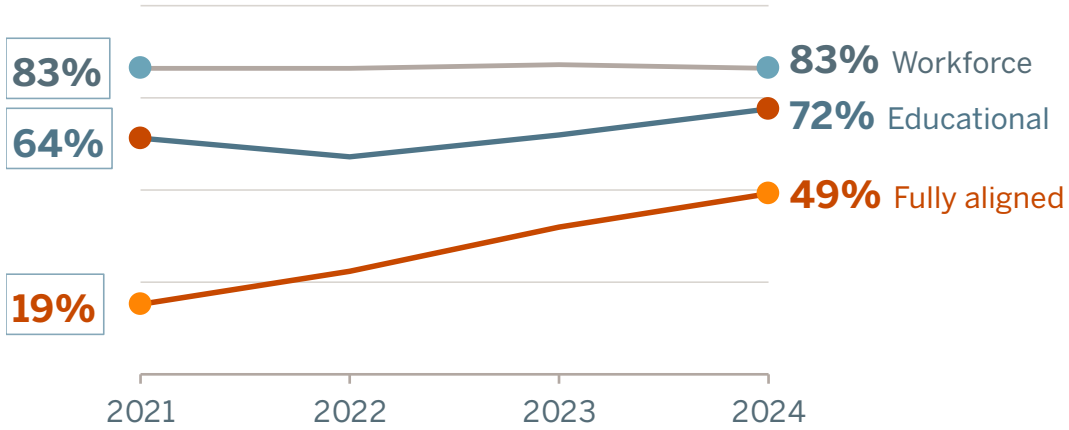
Texas public high school graduates with at least one IBC, by graduating class

Source: Aguilar et al. (2026), Texas Education Agency records, classes of 2021–2024.

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Full alignment is rising, but fewer than half of CTE completers are fully aligned

Fully aligned CTE completers rose 30 percentage points



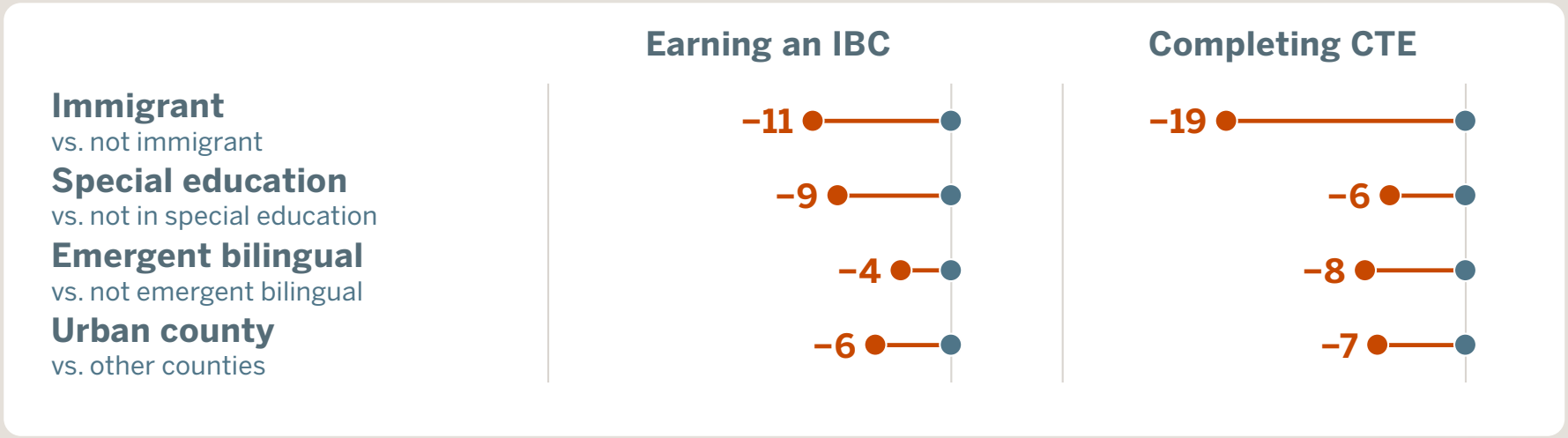
Fully aligned = educational (IBC matches CTE program) plus workforce (program tied to in-demand jobs).

Why it matters: fully aligned graduates earn more early on.

Source: Aguilar et al. (2026), Texas Education Agency records, classes of 2021–2024.

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Some student groups are less likely to earn IBCs or complete CTE

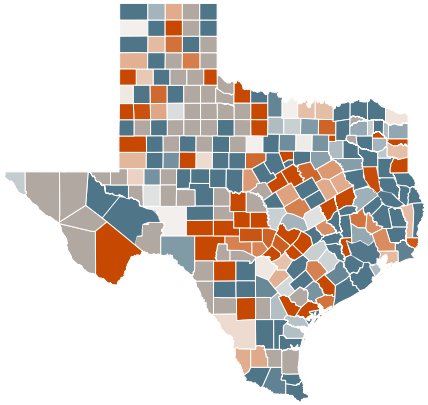


● the group, in percentage points less likely ● graduates not in the group = 0

Source: Aguilar et al. (2026), Texas Education Agency records, graduating classes of 2021 to 2024.

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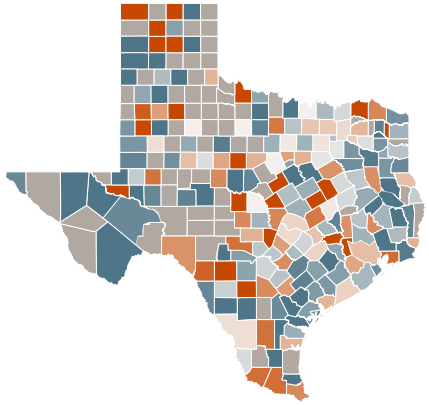
Statewide gains mask big differences between Texas counties



Educational alignment

Does a student's IBC match their CTE program?

119 counties gained
82 decreased
47 masked



Workforce alignment

Does the CTE program fit in-demand local jobs?

116 counties gained
75 decreased
56 masked

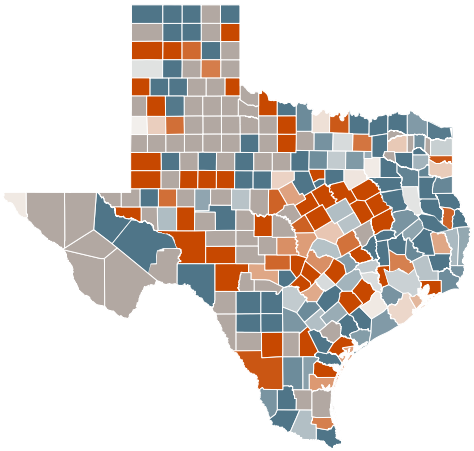
Gained Decreased Unchanged Masked: numbers too small to report

Change in each rate, classes of 2021 to 2024. Darker means a bigger change: darkest is 10 points or more on the left map, 5 or more on the right. Unchanged: 4 counties on the left, 5 on the right.

Source: Aguilar et al. (2026), Texas Education Agency records, county-level change 2021–2024.

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Full alignment rose statewide, but many counties fell behind



Fully aligned CTE completers

About 4 in 10 counties with data fell behind from 2021 to 2024

109 counties gained
78 decreased
64 masked

Statewide

19% to 49%

of CTE completers were fully aligned, classes of 2021 to 2024

Gained Decreased Unchanged Masked: numbers too small to report

Change in the share of CTE completers who are fully aligned, classes of 2021 to 2024. Darker means a bigger change: darkest is 10 points or more. Unchanged: 1 county.

Source: Aguilar et al. (2026), Texas Education Agency records, county-level change 2021–2024.

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EL PASO + RIO GRANDE VALLEY ONLY

El Paso and the Rio Grande Valley took different paths: alignment gains are uneven

Some counties gained alignment and others decreased. Two regions show how.

El Paso gained on both measures; the Valley gained on one and slipped on the other

	Educational alignment	Workforce alignment
El Paso	↑ Increase	↑ Modest increase
Rio Grande Valley	↑ Increase	↓ Slight decrease

Change, classes of 2021 to 2024. Rio Grande Valley: Cameron and Hidalgo counties.

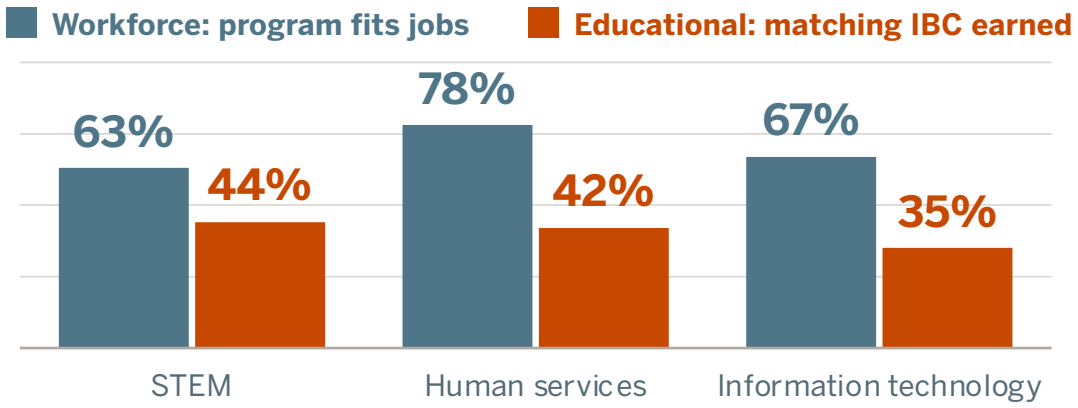
Local job markets, school capacity and employer ties may explain the different paths.

Source: Aguilar et al. (2026), Texas Education Agency records, county-level change 2021–2024.

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High-demand fields: programs fit local jobs, but matching IBCs lag

Programs fit local jobs, but far fewer students earn a matching IBC



STEM, human services and IT: the three lowest in educational alignment.

Why it matters: completing the program is not enough; matching IBCs need to be available and students also need to earn them.

Source: Aguilar et al. (2026), Texas Education Agency records, classes of 2021–2024.

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Greater alignment is associated with higher earnings and employment

$200–$500

more per quarter in earnings than graduates with lower alignment

About $2,000

more per year, among graduates who are employed

Up to 6

percentage points higher employment rate than graduates with no IBC or CTE

Alignment intensity, from none to full



Source: Aguilar et al. (2026), Texas Education Agency and Workforce Commission records, 2021–2024.

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INTERVIEWS: EL PASO + RIO GRANDE VALLEY ONLY

State accountability and employers define workforce readiness differently

Interview findings from El Paso and the Rio Grande Valley, not statewide data.

WHAT THE STATE REWARDS	WHAT EMPLOYERS SEEK
Credentials on the state-approved IBC list	Durable skills, like communication
Credit in college, career and military readiness	Work-based training, like internships
Tiers that shape which IBCs districts offer	Bilingualism

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INTERVIEWS: EL PASO + RIO GRANDE VALLEY ONLY

District capacity is a major constraint on workforce alignment

District program portfolios may reflect what can be staffed, financed and sustained as much as what labor-market data indicate is needed.

1. Teacher shortages
2. Instructor credentialing requirements
3. Facilities and equipment
4. Program costs
5. Limited student capacity

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Alignment is rising, but gaps remain in places, groups and fields

1. Graduates earning an IBC grew from 56,000 to 159,000
2. Full alignment rose from 19% to 49% of CTE completers
3. El Paso and the Valley gained in different ways
4. Some student groups earn fewer IBCs and less CTE
5. High-demand fields lag on educational alignment
6. Full alignment goes with higher early earnings
7. State rules, employer needs and district capacity differ

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04 What it means

Putting the findings to work

What's at stake?

Earning a credential and being prepared for a career are not always the same thing.

STUDENTS	DISTRICTS AND EDUCATORS
Earnings potential	Teacher retention
Meaningful career readiness	Accountability ratings
Equal economic opportunity	Realistic program capacity

EMPLOYERS AND WORKFORCES	POLICYMAKERS, COMMUNITIES
Job-ready local talent	Regional economic growth
Solutions to labor shortages	Return on public investment
	Retaining local talent

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Policy recommendations

For state and regional policymakers

1. Build infrastructure and accountability systems that fit regional demand
2. Adapt funding to allow career exploration
3. Keep SB 1786 wage-data collection moving
4. Recognize work-based learning beyond IBCs
5. Extend teacher recruitment levers to CTE

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Practice recommendations

For districts and school leaders

1. **Close gaps, open doors for all students**
   Use local data to find participation gaps and target career advising

2. **Illuminate local and state labor market relevance**
   Offer IBCs that match local demand, even when not Tier 1

3. **Prioritize skills that regional employers value**
   Build durable skills and access to work-based learning locally

4. **Invest in CTE teacher capacity**
   Include CTE teachers in pay incentives, especially in urban areas

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05 Questions

What would you like to know more about?

Thank you

Postsecondary Pathways for the Future of Texas

Questions? Contact

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Acknowledgements

This research was made possible by generous support from

Gates Foundation

Moody Foundation

The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the contributing foundations.

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