

Testimony

SB 346

Closing the Skilled Trades Gap & Ensuring Equal Opportunity for All Public School Students

Testimony in support of SB 346 submitted to the Senate Higher Education Committee

by Erin Davis Valdez, Policy Analyst

Chairman Creighton and Members of the Committee:

My name is Erin Davis Valdez, and I am a policy analyst for career and technical education and workforce development at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 346.

Benefits of Career and Technical Education for Students

The Texas Workforce Investment Council [reports many benefits](#) for Texas students who participate in CTE programs in high school, including:

- Higher graduation rates (95.6% of CTE participants vs. 89.1% of all students).
- Better academic performance in Algebra I and English II on state assessments.

According to the [U.S. Department of Education](#), “eight years after their expected high school graduation, the median annual earnings for CTE concentrators were higher than for non-concentrators.”

Figure 1

Percentage distribution of high school CTE concentrators by employment earnings eight years after expected high school graduation.

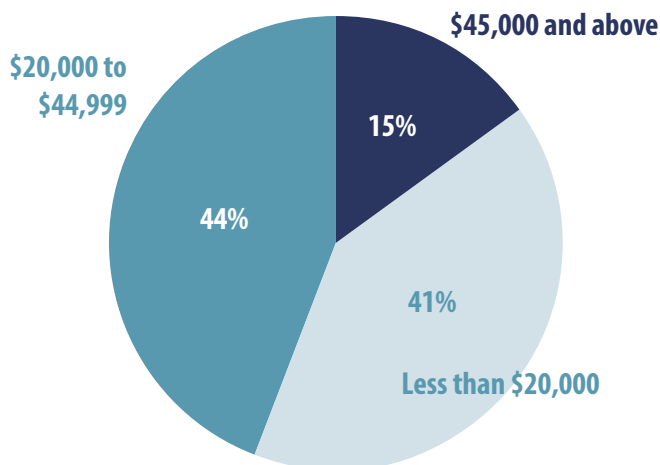
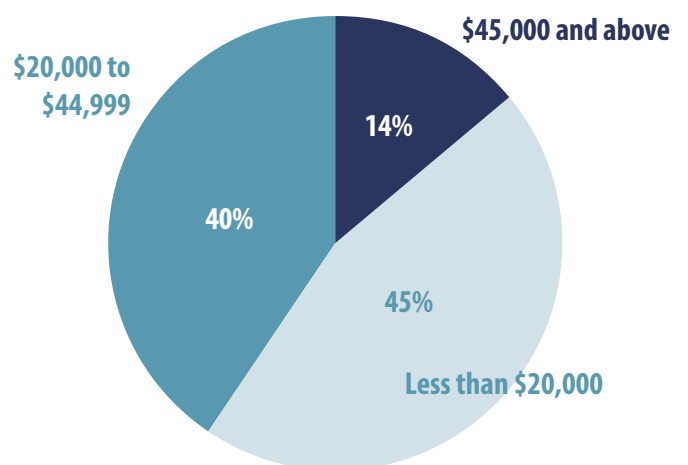


Figure 2

Percentage distribution of high school non-CTE concentrators by employment earnings eight years after expected high school graduation.



Winter Storm Uri Highlights Skilled Trades Gap

In addition, after the significant damages recently caused by Winter Storm Uri, the shortage of skilled tradespeople—such as plumbers—has become an urgent matter of public policy.

According to the *Texas Tribune* (February 26, 2021):

A shortage of skilled trade workers — plumbers, electricians and the like — has been growing in the state for the past decade, and that is exacerbating problems for those seeking help with broken pipes and damaged water heaters.

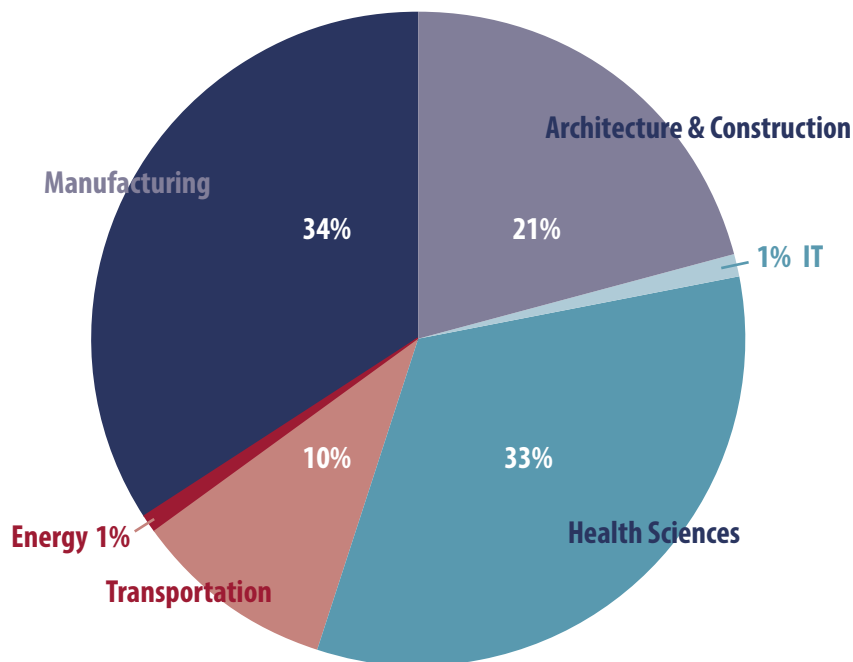
Data released by the Texas Education Agency on March 9, 2021, [sheds some light](#) on a possible origin of this skilled trades gap: Of 82,076 students who completed a career and technology education program of study in 2018-19, only

- 123 were in HVAC and sheet metal (or 0.1%),
- 103 were in plumbing and pipefitting (or 0.1%), and
- 196 were in electrical (or 0.2%).*

Current Allocations of JET (Jobs and Education for Texans) Program

In 2020, the Texas Workforce Commission [granted \\$8,261,090](#) to 41 school districts and public community and technical colleges to help them with capital expenses for CTE programs, such as new equipment. The grant program’s focus is on high-demand occupations. In the chart below, the grants are broken down by the career cluster to which the high-demand occupations belong.*

Figure 3
JET Grants by Career Cluster, 2020



* Author’s calculations.

The Texas Workforce Commission's JET program is focused on helping students connect with occupations—such as welding and electrical technology—that are in high demand as well as offering students pathways to above-median-wage occupations.

SB 346: Closing the Skilled Trades Gap and Ensuring Opportunity for All Public School Students

SB 346 addresses the skilled trades gap by expanding the number of public schools that can apply for these funds that are meant to directly address high demand occupations.

The state of Texas has established charter schools as public schools, intended to improve student learning and opportunities. This bill would simply enable charter schools to have access to the same resources as other public schools, for the benefit of their students and for our state's economic competitiveness.

I appreciate your work and look forward to helping improve the economic opportunities of all young Texans and address the needs of Texas to have a skilled workforce. SB 346 would help all Texas public school students have access to high-quality career and technology education. ★



Erin Davis Valdez

Erin Davis Valdez is a policy analyst for the Texas Public Policy Foundation's Right on Work initiative. She has been passionate about the transformational power of education all her life, having been given the gift of being homeschooled. She taught for over a decade in Austin-area schools and served as an assistant principal at a charter school in Lewisville. These experiences have given her the opportunity to see first-hand how students can thrive when they have excellent options.

Since joining the Foundation, Valdez has conducted research on career and technical education at the secondary and post-secondary levels, civics education, and welfare-to-work programs in Texas.

Valdez earned an MA in classics from the University of California, Santa Barbara and a BA in classics from Hillsdale College.

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The public is demanding a different direction for their government, and the Texas Public Policy Foundation is providing the ideas that enable policymakers to chart that new course.

