



Testimony

HB 572

Testimony Before the Texas Senate Education Committee

by Erin Valdez, Policy Analyst

Chairman Taylor, Vice Chairman Lucio, 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 House Bill 572.

- The relationship between a high school education and involvement in the criminal justice system is well-established. HB 572 specifically encompasses student populations, such as dropouts, that are likely to interact with the criminal justice system. According to recent data provided to TPPF by TDCJ, about 40% of those entering the criminal justice system had a verified high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate. This is in contrast with about [83% of all Texans](#) over the age of 25 who have diplomas or HSEs.

- In addition, in 2018, the quarterly wages of high school graduates ages 25-30 was 38% higher than those of non-graduates (data drawn from Texas Public Education Information Resource and based on author’s calculations).

Individuals Entering the Texas Department of Criminal Justice with a Verified High School Diploma (HSD) or High School Equivalency (HSE) Certificate

School Year	Entering with HSD/HSE Claimed	Entering HSD/HSE Verified	Percent Verified HSD/HSE
SY 2020	27,079	23,036	40.1%
SY 2019	30,090	24,998	38.8%
SY 2018	30,425	25,320	38.9%
SY 2017	30,413	25,577	38.9%
SY 2016	31,324	26,587	39.3%
SY 2015	32,139	27,676	39.4%
SY 2014	31,147	26,808	38.0%
SY 2013	31,124	26,573	36.9%

Source: Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

- While HB 572 includes specific, vulnerable student populations within its pilot model, all students can benefit from competency-based education (CBE). According to [TPPF research](#), “competency-based education is a modern expression of the ancient idea that underlies apprenticeship: Advancement to the next level depends on demonstrating skills.” CBE can take many forms, but, in essence, it is a framework that is fundamentally learner-centered and that allows for measurable and meaningful assessments. It emphasizes student agency within a robust framework that holds learning as the constant but time as the variable. Examples of CBE include:

- Credit by examination, which the Texas Education Code (28.023) already stipulates as possible, depending on district policies. Under credit by examination, students can accelerate through curriculum more quickly than the pace for the whole class.
- Diplomas for early college readiness, which exist in a couple of forms already in Texas. The first is a pilot program that allows Texas research universities to work with school districts to establish competencies to demonstrate college readiness. The second resides in that certain districts are also allowed to pilot a 3-year diploma program that requires their coordination with higher education institutions to demonstrate college readiness.
- Other models of CBE in other states include New Hampshire’s Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE) program. The state is a national leader due to its pivot toward a statewide development of a set of competencies that can be used instead of time-based credits. The New Hampshire Virtual Learning Academy Charter School (VLACS) is entirely competency-based. [Our research](#) has revealed that according to data from *U.S. News and World Report*, “92% of VLACS students were proficient or above in reading, and 67% were proficient or above in math. Both scores highly outperformed the New Hampshire state average.”

The intent of this bill is very simple: provide a pilot program that gives at-risk students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma through a framework that supports them in their unique circumstances, while maintaining a rigorous framework of learning.

We are eager to work with Chairman Dutton and the committee on a committee substitute that includes three programs instead of one within the pilot, prioritizing existing programs instead of new programs in order to contain costs, and expanding the language of the bill to include “successful demonstration of competencies that show mastery of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills” as a component of eligibility for a diploma. ★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Erin Davis Valdez is a policy analyst for Next Generation Texas, an initiative of the Texas Public Policy Foundation. 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 classical studies from Hillsdale College.

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