



Testimony

Testimony Before the Texas Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development

by Erin Davis Valdez, Policy Director, Next Generation Texas

Chairman Birdwell and Members:

My name is Erin Davis Valdez, and I am policy director of Next Generation Texas at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. I'm here to share some resources relating to the monitoring charge for HB 1247.

TPPF [supported](#) HB 1247 in the 87th legislative session, and in both the 86th and 87th legislative sessions, TPPF supported [bills](#) that would have expanded paid apprenticeships in Texas public high schools, using the existing career and technical education (CTE) allotment to cover the instructional costs for employers when they take on paid interns or students in a work-based learning context.

Furthermore, we support the inclusion of more work-based learning in the [industry-based certification](#) list that is maintained by the Texas Education Agency for purposes of both accountability and the College, Career, and Military Readiness Outcomes Bonus program.

HB 1247's goal -- creating common definitions and terminology for work-based learning across the three agencies—Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Texas Workforce Commission, and Texas Education Agency—is one that is complemented by [HB 3767](#), which created the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative.

In the Tri-Agency's proposed priorities (3), "Create a robust infrastructure for interagency collaboration around common goals, data, and processes to ensure improved student outcomes and meet employers' needs," one of the identified action items is "Research the feasibility of adding Registered Apprenticeship completion to the approved industry-based certification list."

The Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) is a limited one. The persistent skills gap in the United States ([11.4 million](#) open positions as of April 2022) is unlikely to be closed by the [82,000](#) Americans who graduated from the Registered Apprenticeship Program in 2020.

One of the chief obstacles to the expansion of this federal program is that it is generally considered [burdensome](#) by employers. Employees who could complete programs faster based on their prior knowledge or motivation find that many RAP's have a time-based model, not a mastery- or competency-based progression model.

The Trump administration's Department of Labor [created](#) an alternative and more flexible pathway that would have opened more occupations up to apprenticeships, including nursing. It was called the [Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Program \(IRAP\)](#), and it allowed employers to create their own earn-while-you-learn programs, overseen by "[standards recognition entities](#)" (SREs), which were third parties like trade associations.

The Biden administration [ended](#) IRAP in February 2021, a move that was widely celebrated by [trade unions](#). Nevertheless, 27 SREs, which had already gained approval, are still allowed to operate and oversee IRAP's. Under the reauthorization of the National Apprenticeship Act, these programs are [not eligible](#) for federal funding.

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TPPF has long supported [employer-led](#), [competency-based](#), [outcomes-focused](#) career and technical education and workforce development strategies. Three examples of successful work-based learning programs that we recommend this committee study are:

The Federation of Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) offers earn-while-you-learn programs that lead to exceptional wage outcomes for students. According to an October 2020 Opportunity America and Brookings Institution [report](#), “Five years after completing the [Kentucky] FAME program, graduates’ median earnings were nearly [\$98,000]—\$45,000 a year more than the earnings of other career and technical education graduates from the same colleges.” Texas is currently home to several FAME chapters.

Trio Education’s Pre-Apprenticeship Program, which serves as a first step into an electrical Registered Apprenticeship for high school students, is now part of CTE programs in high schools across the state, including [Premier High School](#) at Gallery Furniture in Houston.

Since 2008, S&B Constructors’ Craft Education and Development Program’s [earn-while-you-learn program](#) has offered women, veterans, and other willing learners a pathway into high-wage, high-demand occupations, including pipefitting, electrical wiring, carpentry, and welding.

In light of the limited nature of the Registered Apprenticeship Program and the growing number of innovative, employer-led work-based learning programs, we recommend that this committee study high value pathways for students in secondary career and technical education programs and what obstacles exist to their expansion. IRAP’s and other similar arrangements between employers, educators, and students should be available to students beginning in high school, provided that they have proven great wage and employment outcomes for students. ★



Erin Davis Valdez is the policy director for Next Generation Texas, an initiative of the 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 M.A. in classics from the University of California, Santa Barbara and a B.A. in classical studies from Hillsdale College.

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