



April 3, 2023

## HB 3211

### Testimony Before the Texas House Committee on Higher Education

Chairman Kuempel, Vice Chair Paul, and Members,

My name is Erin Valdez, and I'm an education policy director at Texas Public Policy Foundation. We support HB 3211, which would permit Texas State Technical College to open a campus in Denton County.

Our Foundation's public amplification of TSTC's unique outcomes-based funding model goes back to 2012, as it was being phased in. As Dr. Thomas Lindsay wrote in [National Review Online](#), "One is hard-put to imagine an arrangement better suited to providing the accountability to which taxpayers are entitled."

TSTC does not levy property taxes to cover its capital expenditures, and it is not seeking to levy taxes in this community. Each session, legislators seek out new TSTC campuses in their communities because their constituents demand it. This session alone, lawmakers from both sides of the aisle have filed nine bills to bring TSTC to their districts.

The Foundation's [recent research](#), which you have before you, provides a deep dive into the funding model which drives TSTC's success—because it is based on alumni wages, it necessarily leads to tight alignment between program offerings and employer needs.

But there is another kind of alignment that matters even more—the alignment of opportunities with the unique abilities and interests of students.

The [Wall Street Journal reported](#) on Friday that in 2023 "56% of Americans think earning a four-year degree is a bad bet compared with 42% who retain faith in the credential" compared with 2013, when 53% of Americans thought college was worth the cost—an **11% shift in public opinion**. The *Journal* notes significant trends that may be driving this—overly politicized offerings, soaring student loan debt relative to earnings, and a decrease in overall quality.

Too many young people are not finding postsecondary options that appeal to them—they may believe that college is not for them because they associate it with classroom instruction. [Our research](#) shows that about 23% of the class of 2019 from Texas public schools were neither in the workforce nor in any form of higher education six months after graduation. According to economist Nick Eberstat of the American Enterprise Institute, young men in particular seem to be struggling to find meaningful pursuits. As of early last year, 11% (over 7 million) workforce-able men between the ages of 25 and 54 were neither working nor looking for work. In 1965, that fraction was about 3%. Labor force participation [increases](#) with educational attainment, yet [in 2020](#), men earned 42% of bachelor's degrees, 38% of master's degrees, and 44% of doctoral degrees.

TSTC is bucking these trends. According to data from the Texas Workforce Commission, TSTC graduates from metro Dallas high schools had an average first year earnings of \$52,000. They earn higher starting

salaries than the market average for their career fields, and see their wages grow rapidly. Programs like electrical line worker and diesel equipment even have money-back guarantees.

Finding ways to engage young people in pathways of purpose is not just important for our economy; it is important to the very fabric of our families, communities, and our state. We at the Foundation support the expansion of outcomes-based career and technical education opportunities because we believe that all Texans should have opportunities to grow and thrive.

The community of Lewisville is speaking loud and clear. Incumbent services should not get a veto power over the needs of citizens to get great jobs, and/or over employers to hire well-qualified employees.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak for this important legislation. I am happy to take any questions.

***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.*