

New Report Highlights Opportunities to Strengthen Classroom-to-Career Programs

Texas could optimize funding streams to better support regional workforce initiatives

AUSTIN, TX, UNITED STATES, December 10, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- State leaders have a significant opportunity to support innovative classroom-to-career programs next legislative session without the need to raise

taxes. A new report, "[Improving Funding Efficiencies for Classroom-to-Career Programs in Texas](#)," by Texas 2036, outlines how a braided funding model—which combines multiple funding sources to support a single program—can support proven career programs in high schools across the state.



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David Leebron, President and CEO, Texas 2036

With 63% of jobs in Texas requiring a postsecondary education but only 36% of high school graduates earning a credential within six years, the state needs to act now. This new report maps a path forward based on strategic resource allocation along with robust state agency and school district collaboration. The report also calls for scaling innovative models that have demonstrated success, like the Rural Schools Innovation Zone (RSIZ).

“This report underscores the urgency of thinking strategically about how we can leverage available funding sources for the highest impact in building the classroom-to-career programs our state and its students need,” said

David Leebron, president and CEO of Texas 2036 and former president of Rice University. “It’s important for school districts in every corner of our great state to have the opportunity to increase the number and variety of offerings to enable students to pursue a path to career opportunity.”

Key highlights from the report include:

- Braided Funding Models: The report includes recommendations to combine multiple funding sources into a cohesive framework that enables programs to maximize efficiency and maintain accountability.
- Rural Schools Innovation Zone Model: The five South Texas school districts that make up the RSIZ are outperforming state averages in College, Career and Military Readiness (CCMR) since the implementation of this innovative approach to improving access to career and technical education. The state could incentivize versions of this model across the state to better support workforce development.
- State Policy Opportunities: Opportunities exist for lawmakers next year to improve the visibility of funding sources and their allowable uses as well as promote flexibility in the administration of programs that receive state funding.

Legislators have made significant progress on workforce development in recent years. That includes their support of the Texas Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative, which coordinates efforts by the state’s main education and workforce agencies to identify long-term workforce solutions, and House Bill 8, which establishes an outcomes-based funding model for community colleges. The report emphasizes the need to build on these initiatives by taking additional steps to facilitate scaling up programs, such as the Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP), across more Texas communities.

“In recent years, legislators have adopted several measures that improve alignment among state agencies overseeing education programs that provide pathways to good careers by increasing interagency coordination and data sharing,” said Mary Lynn Pruneda, director of education and workforce policy at Texas 2036. “In the upcoming legislative session, lawmakers will have an opportunity to expand these programs, especially in rural areas, by modernizing state law in ways that give more schools access to available funds.”

Rural Schools Innovation Zone Case Study

The report highlights the success of the Rural Schools Innovation Zone (RSIZ), a partnership among five South Texas school districts—Freer ISD, Premont ISD, Brooks County ISD, Agua Dulce ISD, and Benavides ISD—and local higher education institutions.

This initiative demonstrates how innovative resource allocation and braided funding can transform education outcomes. Through this program, students in these school districts have enhanced opportunities to graduate college- and career-ready by earning college credits, associate degrees, industry-based certifications and certificates while still in high school.

Since the program’s start in 2019, students have already demonstrated widespread gains in academic achievement, including in:

- Industry-Based Certifications: RSIZ graduates achieved a completion rate in 2022 of 58.4%, far

exceeding the state average of 28%.

□ Dual Credit Graduates: 58.9% of RSIZ students completed dual credit coursework in 2022, compared to the state average of 24%.

“The Rural Schools Innovation Zone demonstrates the potential of this model across our state,” said Mitrah Avini, policy advisor at Texas 2036. “By leveraging local partnerships and strategic funding initiatives, we can ensure Texas students have access to life-changing career pathways.”

State Policy Opportunities to Strengthen Classroom-to-Career Pathways

Looking to the future, the report outlines several key policy opportunities for lawmakers to consider next legislative session to maximize the impact of braided funding and ensure students graduate career-ready:

1. Support Strong Governance and Staffing at the Texas Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative:

- Establish integrated project management tools and processes for shared initiatives.
- Increase dedicated staffing at the Tri-Agency to improve coordination and program delivery.

2. Enhance Transparency of Funding Sources:

- Develop a central database of funding sources and allowable uses.
- Provide public guidance on federal, state and local funding strategies to improve efficiency.

3. Promote Flexibility in Fund Administration:

- Simplify grant applications and reporting requirements across agencies.
- Grant state agency leaders authority to waive certain administrative barriers to streamline operations.

4. Provide Legislative Authority for Braided and Blended Funding:

- Eliminate statutory and regulatory silos that restrict resource sharing.
- Prioritize performance outcomes over inputs to assess program success.

5. Fund and Scale Proven Programs:

- Expand models like the Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP) and P-TECH.
- Invest in start-up grants and incentives for regional collaborations tailored to workforce needs.

These legislative strategies can help ensure a more coordinated, efficient and impactful education-to-workforce pipeline for Texas students.

For the full report and additional information, visit www.texas2036.org/braided-funding.

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