



HB 1247 (87-R): Work-Based Learning Strategic Framework

*Written Testimony submitted to the Senate Natural Resources & Economic Development Committee
June 13, 2022*

Key Takeaways:

- 76% of Texas voters want the Texas Legislature to prioritize resources towards education and training programs linked to good-paying jobs.
- The Legislature has passed legislation to ensure that Texas has a high-quality workforce, and work-based learning plays a key role in achieving this vision.
- The Tri-Agency is establishing a state credential library that can be used as a resource to engage Texas employers and establish more work-based learning programs.
- The Texas Virtual Education Commission and Texas Commission on Community College Finance can ensure that high-quality work-based learning is accessible in every Texas community.

Texas continues its strong recovery from the pandemic recession, steadily breaking job records and sustaining low unemployment rates over the past several months. Texans want to enjoy this economic success – now and in the future. The Texas 2036 January 2021 Texas Voter Poll found that 76% of Texas voters believe the Legislature should prioritize resources on college and workforce programs that are linked to good-paying jobs.

State career education and training programs funded by taxpayers should meet this demand, particularly given mixed results in some state programs. For example, from 2014-2015, state-supported apprenticeship programs saw a 29% increase in quarterly earnings, but **veterans participating in veteran workforce programs saw quarterly earnings decline.**¹

Work-Based Learning (WBL) can Help Achieve the Legislature’s Vision for a High-Quality Texas Workforce

The Legislature has responded to Texas voters’ demands by calling for state education and training programs to lead to employment with a self-sufficient wage, ultimately empowering Texas families to meet their basic needs without public assistance. Through HB 3767 (87-R), the Legislature proposed to achieve this by charging the Tri-Agency with adopting state workforce goals and implementing workforce strategies. The Tri-Agency’s recently adopted goals make it clear that a high-quality workforce will require a continuum of pathways and supports that are accessible throughout state public education, higher education, and workforce systems.

HB 1247 can help the development of this continuum given its legislative direction to make WBL programs more accessible through public schools, higher education institutions, and workforce training programs. By taking a broad look at WBL to include models such as apprenticeships, internships, simulated/virtual workspaces, and service learning, the state can ensure the WBL framework is relevant for any and all state education and training providers.

¹ Aim Hire Texas, *Aim Hire Texas Workforce Issues*, February 2021, page 28, <https://texas2036.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/AHT-Initial-Findings.pdf>.

The Tri-Agency has integrated HB 1247 as a strategy under HB 3767 to meet state workforce goals. WBL's incorporation of real-life work to program curricula can make more Texans competitive in the job market. However, work remains to make WBL more readily accessible to all Texans. For instance, the state currently ranks second-lowest in apprentices as a percentage of its total workforce among peer states.² How do we expand WBL opportunities?

The State Credential Library can Help Ensure Access to WBL for All Texans

Also through HB 3767, the Tri-Agency is establishing a web-based credential library where information on credentials, alongside the Texas education or training program offering them, will be publicly reported. This will be the first state-level resource where every credential that is delivered, issued, funded, or governed by the state can be accessed in a single location.

Including WBL programs in the library can help expand WBL and meet Texans' workforce needs. The library can be a useful resource for employers in particular, who are needed to establish and expand WBL. By reporting all existing credential programs offered by education and training providers, employers can identify cost-efficient opportunities where existing WBL programs can be expanded in partnership with their local providers – ultimately leading to increased capacity that produce more workforce-ready Texans.

Additionally, HB 1247's broad definition of WBL empowers employers to be decision-makers in incorporating WBL into education and training programs that are conducive to WBL models. For example, simulated workplaces can be found in certain high schools and community colleges who offer nursing programs, such as rural Texas where there may not be enough capacity for nursing students to get their required hands-on clinical training. Healthcare employers in need of more trained nurses can use the credential library to identify the local nursing programs in their area and initiate conversations to stand up simulated workspaces, bolstering both the quality and capacity of those programs.

The Legislature can Drive WBL Opportunities to Local Communities through Aligned Workforce Reforms in 2023

In addition to HB 3767's strategic alignment, current efforts from the Texas Commission on Community College Finance (TCCCF) and Texas Commission on Virtual Education (TCVE) can be leveraged to locally implement the WBL framework that will be established through HB 1247. (*see the graphic on the next page for a visual representation*). Both the TCVE and TCCCF are focusing on workforce-aligned recommendations for Texas public schools and community colleges that will deliver a long-term, high-quality Texas workforce. Each commission's discussions have involved WBL programs due to the existing availability of WBL and its focus on workforce outcomes.

² Registered Apprenticeship National Results Fiscal Year 2019, 10/01/2018 to 9/30/2019.

The Legislature states in HB 1247 that the WBL strategic framework is meant to encourage WBL in Texas, including through the articulation of the roles and responsibilities of public schools, higher education institutions, and workforce boards and organizations to implement WBL programs and partnerships. This gives the TCVE and TCCCF a resource to provide recommendations on how to increase WBL programs in Texas. There is also the added benefit that the two commissions' respective focus on public schools and community colleges can ensure that every Texas community will have access to high-quality WBL programs.

Pathway to Aligned Workforce Reforms in 2023



Note: The boxes highlighted in orange in the graphic represent steps that have already been completed or initiated by the relevant state agency or agencies

Conclusion

WBL is already a strong tool for the state to strengthen its workforce and secure its long-term economic competitiveness. However, as HB 1247 articulates, there is a need to ensure that any Texan wanting to participate in a WBL program has the opportunity to do so. While HB 1247 and its strategic framework will develop a helpful report that can be used to increase WBL opportunities in Texas, it would be efficient to also utilize other, ongoing state education and workforce efforts. The workforce goals and strategies, alongside the state credential library, coming from HB 3767 provides the state with the framework and data infrastructure needed to strategically target WBL expansion efforts. Meanwhile, the TCVE and TCCCF can ensure that all Texas public schools and community colleges are fully leveraged for WBL expansion in every Texas community.

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