




Texas Business Leadership Council
816 Congress Avenue, Suite 990, Austin, TX 78701
info@txblc.org | (512) 481-0525

 txblc.org  /txblc  @tx_blc

1994 | **30 YEARS** | 2024

Q2 2024

PUBLIC POLICY FOR A MORE GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE TEXAS

INVESTING IN WORK-BASED LEARNING PAYS OFF FOR EMPLOYERS

Texas has experienced tremendous economic development over the past decade and has led the country in job growth since the pandemic. However, this growth brings challenges. As Texas Workforce Commission Chairman Bryan Daniel regularly notes at employer convenings, we currently have more job openings than available skilled workers in the state.

Texas Business Leadership Council (TBLC) members report major pain points for their businesses related to finding enough qualified applicants and grappling with entry-level new hires who lack the essential workplace skills needed to be successful.

“I refer to these workplace success skills as ‘durable skills’ because of their life-long durability and portability across industries compared to hard skills that are often short-lived with today’s rapidly evolving technology,” noted Debra Chromy, President & CEO of Trellis Company and Co-Chair of TBLC’s Education & Workforce Task Force. These represent the skills necessary for long-term career advancement such as interpersonal and written communication, critical thinking, problem solving, adaptability, initiative, perseverance, collaboration, leadership and organizational skills to name just a few.

According to a study by America Succeeds that compared over 80 million job postings, roughly [7 out of 10 skills requested by employers are durable skills](#) yet these skills are often challenging for companies to validate during the hiring process and to train on internally. The critical nature of these skills is further reflected in a 2021 study by Mursion that revealed [44% of HR professionals](#) would hire an applicant with strong durable skills over an applicant with superior job-specific skills.



Partnering Between Higher Education and Business Is Critical

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's [Guidelines for Instructional Programs in Workforce Education](#) require that community colleges create an industry-based advisory committee for each workforce education discipline offered. The goal of these committees is to ensure that colleges regularly engage with the business community to understand their needs.

Advisory committee members establish workplace competencies for a program and provide input on curriculum, including embedding relevant durable skills, as well as assisting in the professional development of faculty and identifying local businesses and industry partners to provide work-based learning opportunities.

"I have high expectations of community colleges to be there to meet our needs but the business community cannot just expect a silver bullet and not be engaged," said Ben Peavy, HR lead at Accenture Federal Services and Chair of the [Ready to Work](#) Advisory Board, a workforce development program in San Antonio.

Work-Based Learning Is a Win-Win for Employers and Students

In our current tight labor market, employers that invest resources in offering work-based learning opportunities and engage with higher education institutions on program development will gain a competitive advantage by taking this more proactive approach to building a strong talent pipeline and improving retention. Employers gain the opportunity to see students' skills in action, observe their work ethic and how they adapt to the workplace and react to feedback.

Often a requirement to earn workforce credentials, students participating in robust work-based learning programs are able to put the durable skills learned in the classroom to the test in a real-world environment and will enter the workforce better equipped for success. They are also able to develop professional relationships, learn about a company's culture, and gain a better understanding of the day-to-day work before making a longer-term commitment to a permanent position — all of which ultimately serve to improve employee retention.

"Offering work-based learning experiences has been a game-changer for our company. It enables us to cultivate and evaluate young talent in real-world settings, ensuring that we can make informed and effective hiring decisions. The students bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas that have positively impacted our workplace, and we've seen a marked improvement in the development of durable workplace skills among participants," said TBLC member Kaleb Warnock, CEO of [FloWar Business Management Services](#), an El Paso company providing strategic management and operational support to franchisees.



SUCCESS STORIES

The following are examples of successful work-based learning programs across the state that support several [high-demand fields](#) as defined by House Bill 8 (88R) rulemaking for the community college funding formula.

Advanced Manufacturing

Texas has led the way in efforts to re-shore semiconductor manufacturing, however, producing the volume of skilled workers needed in this industry remains a challenge for our higher education system. In central Texas, companies like Samsung, Applied Materials, and Infineon have had success by partnering with Austin Community College (ACC) and recruiting in local high schools to offer earn-and-learn opportunities. ACC provides support including advising and tutoring as students work towards earning an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) or Level 1 Certificate in Advanced Manufacturing.

[Samsung's program](#) provides a 10-week internship for students to try out the experience of working in a clean room. If it's a good fit, they can apply for a 2-year apprenticeship opportunity to work while they complete an AAS. During this time, their supervisor serves as a mentor who is invested in their success and students are immersed in Samsung's work culture. Graduates have the opportunity to continue their education in ACC's Manufacturing Engineering Technology program to earn a Bachelor of Applied Technology, further seeding the regional talent pipeline.

Nursing

HCA Healthcare, a TBLC member, partners with local nursing programs across Texas including Dallas College, the Alamo Colleges and Austin Community College (ACC) to provide earn-and-learn opportunities to address the state's nursing workforce shortage. For example, [St. David's Advanced Student Experience \(ASE\)](#) provides students in their final semester of the Associate Degree Nursing (RN) program with an externship opportunity that allows them to earn a stipend while completing their clinical experience.

"We work collaboratively with St. David's and a two-tier interview process where ACC faculty does the first round of interviews ensures candidates are a good fit for the program and we set them up for success," said Dr. Nina Almasy, Dean of the Health Sciences Division at ACC and an advisory member of the [Texas Healthcare Workforce Task Force](#) recently created by Governor Abbott.

Externs get a hands-on, robust clinical experience and St. David's provides study modules that align with the syllabi resulting in better outcomes with a 100% pass rate in first-time RN Licensure compared to 91% for all other ACC students. The goal is for externs to transition to a permanent role and the time needed to orient them into practice once they graduate has been reduced significantly and retention has increased as well.



Information Technology

In San Antonio, the Ready to Work program has had [successful outcomes](#) bringing together local government, community partners, higher education, and the private sector to provide underrepresented talent with earn and learn opportunities to gain exposure and training necessary to put them on better career trajectories. For the business community, it helps to address the workforce demand that is outpacing supply, both in San Antonio and across the state, and bring in diverse candidates. Participating employers include TBLC members Broadway Bank, CHRISTUS, CPS Energy, HOLT CAT, Spurs Sports & Entertainment, SWBC and Valero Energy.

Key features that set this program apart are the focus on entry-level roles, limited requirements for potential participants along with wraparound support provided by community partners that allow them to focus completely on learning. Accenture Federal Services (AFS) offers 12-week IT apprenticeship opportunities through Ready to Work, however, these are not registered apprenticeships so there is less regulatory red tape involved.

Their rubric for performance metrics is agnostic to technology skills. Peavy noted that assessments focus on durable skills such as teamwork and they look for workers that have the mindset of being a continuous learner, which is necessary for long-term success in the 21st century workforce. AFS prioritizes hiring apprentices and has a 90% retention rate for those hired.

In another innovative approach to work-based learning, FloWar is currently partnering with El Paso Community College (EPCC) to develop a toolkit to support employers in providing IT internship opportunities. The goal is to help address the obstacles that companies face when offering work-based learning roles and provide training on how to launch and manage a successful internship program. This approach will ensure companies meet the requirements of the college program the student is enrolled in while addressing business needs.

Warnock points to the impact on student learning as the biggest benefit of work-based learning, “Working directly with the students, they get to apply the knowledge immediately as they learn it which makes learning more enjoyable, and students retain more of what they learn.”

In a challenging labor market with rapidly changing technology and workforce needs, businesses that proactively cultivate talent through work-based learning programs and create a feedback loop with higher education will gain a return on their investment through employees that are better equipped for success and a sustainable hiring pipeline.

RESOURCES

[Apprenticeship Resources from Department of Labor & Texas Workforce Commission](#)

[Guidelines for Instructional Programs in Workforce Education](#)

**For questions or additional information, please contact
TBLC Vice President of Policy, Kelle Kieschnick at kkieschnick@txblc.org**

