



April 20, 2023

To: House Public Education Committee

Re: Written Testimony Submitted AGAINST HB 2615

Honorable Chairman Buckley and Members of the House Public Education Committee,

The Education Trust and the 15 organizations undersigned thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in **opposition to House Bill 2615**. We are united in our desire for all Texas students to graduate high school equipped to pursue college and career pathways that ensure their economic mobility and meet our state's rapidly evolving workforce demands.

As filed, HB 2615 **lowers the bar for high school graduation and sacrifices the academic rigor necessary for students to exit high school prepared to successfully enter the workforce and/or postsecondary education**. In doing so, this bill runs counter to the state's ongoing strategic efforts and investments to improve education and workforce alignment and undermines the state's [Building a Talent Strong Texas](#) goals to ensure 60% of Texans obtain a degree, certificate or other postsecondary credential of value by 2030.

We are especially concerned that the creation of the proposed Vocational Education Program will disproportionately "track" our fastest-growing student groups – students from low-income backgrounds and students of color – in ways that limit their college and career options after graduation. While students would only be eligible to opt-in after 10th grade, we fear this program will incentivize schools to prematurely enroll students in less rigorous courses and negatively impact expectations and opportunities earlier in their educational journeys. **Rather than investing in solutions and programs to help get students on track and academically proficient, this proposal is more likely to exacerbate gaps in postsecondary readiness and attainment of high-wage, high-demand jobs.**

Fortunately, Texas has taken significant steps in recent years to tackle these gaps head-on. By establishing and investing in Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools, or P-TECH, over 21,200 students in 152 districts now have opportunities to access academically appropriate and rigorous curriculum along with work-based learning experiences. HB 2615 creates less rigorous courses designed to compete for the same students.

Through HB 1525 (87R), the Legislature also increased weighted CTE funding to prioritize approved Programs of Study aligned with workforce needs. Even before this additional incentive, more than half of all high school students in the state participated in CTE courses in 2019-20, an increase of 81.4% since 2009-10. The state's existing architecture for CTE programs emphasizes transferability, portability, and stackability so that students take courses that can be aligned and used toward a postsecondary credential.

HB 2615 diverges from this approach and may limit student opportunities after graduation by creating separate TEKS as part of a pathway that lowers expectations for students in core academic subjects. **The bill leaves open the question whether or not students could apply courses or experiences used in this program toward an associate or Bachelor's degree.** More immediately, by creating unique TEKS that are not portable, highly-mobile students already more likely to be academically behind would have to repeat courses or be stuck with credits that do not transfer if they move to a district or school that does not offer the program during 11th or 12th grade.

Finally, with HB 3 (86R) in 2019, the Legislature established CCMR Outcomes Bonus funding as a clear incentive for our education systems to prepare students for college and career opportunities that meet current and future workforce demands. HB 2615 attempts to undercut this intentionally high bar for readiness by adding completion of vocational training as a stand-alone criterion.

Before considering a bill that would have such dramatic and far-reaching implications, we respectfully ask the Committee to reject HB 2615 and stay the course in supporting all students in Texas to reach rigorous expectations for high school completion that are worthy of their potential.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Feinstein
Texas State Director, The Education Trust

Supporting Organizations

