

March 5, 2025

To: Permanent Standing Subcommittee on Academic & Career-Oriented Education

Re: House Bill 120

Position: For

Chairman Ashby and Members of the Subcommittee on Academic & Career-Oriented Education,

The Commit Partnership and the 14 organizations undersigned thank you for the opportunity to provide **written testimony in support of House Bill 120 (HB 120)** by Rep. Bell relating to career and technology education programs in public schools, the Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP) program, and a high school advising program, including funding for those programs under the Foundation School Program. We commend Rep. Bell for authoring this bill which will strengthen Texas students' ability to achieve postsecondary success. We support the following provisions and respectfully suggest recommendations to further strengthen the bill through the following:

I. INVESTING IN EFFECTIVE COLLEGE AND CAREER ADVISING

Texas public education prioritizes preparing students for college, career, or the military, as reflected in the Governor's [Emergency Item on Expanding Career Training](#) and the fact that [94%](#) of Texans support high quality college and career advising for high school students.¹ The proposed High School Advising Program and accompanying High School Advising Allotment will provide essential resources for year-round, individualized guidance that supports students with seamless transitions into postsecondary education or the workforce, ultimately strengthening Texas' economy. We commend efforts to expand year-round advising, which can help prevent missed opportunities and support smooth transitions into adulthood. We appreciate HB 120's focus on advising and respectfully recommend:

- The House consider adopting a unified approach that integrates both college and career pathways, rather than differentiating training for college and career advisors. This both/and strategy ensures students receive comprehensive guidance that connects academic and workforce opportunities, rather than present them as an either/or choice.
- The House consider ensuring advisors receive specialized training with proven efficacy to improve student outcomes. Trainings like Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's OnCourse or offerings from the National College Attainment Network can offer great promise, for example.
- The House consider adding that school systems provide additional information on advising practices tied to strong student outcomes to evaluate effectiveness, identify best practices, and scale successful strategies across the state.
- The House consider clarifying the funding formula contemplated in Sec. 48.162(c) to ensure schools can restore funding once a Local Education Agency meets any of the subcategories under Section 48.162(c).

Expanding comprehensive advising through the High School Advising Allotment will help more Texas students achieve successful postsecondary outcomes. Personalized, year-round advising grounded in data-driven accountability will prepare students for success beyond high school, benefiting both their financial future and the state's economic growth.

II. SCALING EFFECTIVE HIGH SCHOOL MODELS

SB 22 (85R) established the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) model to foster PK-12, higher education, and industry partnerships where students earn a high school diploma and an associate degree, credential, or industry-based certification. The number of P-TECH campuses in Texas has grown significantly from 34 designated campuses in the 2018-2019 school year to over 275 operating and planning P-TECH campuses now providing students with work-based learning opportunities across the state today.² **We support the provision within HB 120 to increase**

¹ Ragnar Research Partners, Commit Partnership Statewide Education Poll, November 2024.

² Texas Education Agency, ["8/12 HPE Commissioner State of Education Comments"](#)

incentive funding to \$150 per student (previously \$50) for those enrolled in P-TECH campuses. These investments will incentivize and reward high-quality, in-demand credential and degree attainment in high school to better support Texas students.

III. SUPPORTING THE RURAL PATHWAYS EXCELLENCE PARTNERSHIP (R-PEP)

HB 2209 (88R) created R-PEP to enable small schools to collaborate with education and industry partners and provide numerous career pathways. R-PEP students significantly increase their postsecondary readiness outcomes, including increased participation in dual credit and industry-based credentials attainment. **We support efforts to ensure that more students in rural communities have access to career-aligned pathways** that lead to postsecondary success and economic mobility by building on key design features of the original legislation (HB 2209) by:

- Repealing 48.118 (f), **effectively removing the annual \$5 million cap on R-PEP funding.** By eliminating this cap, the Legislature is ensuring that more rural districts across Texas can benefit from this program, significantly expanding opportunities for students in communities where high-quality pathways have historically been out of reach.
- Preserving the requirement that **pathways offered by R-PEPs all align to high-wage, high-demand jobs in the region**, recognizing the rigorous process planning regions go through to strategically select pathways aligned to labor market demand without mandating particular programs of study. Allowing R-PEPs to retain this flexibility within guardrails ensures that partnerships are built around real regional needs rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Clarifying that the R-PEP program can be **effectively combined with P-TECH and the Financial Aid for Swift Transfer (FAST)** program under HB 8 (88R), ensuring that R-PEPs are able to offer consistent support to all students participating in a pathway regardless of their home school district.
- Retaining incentives for longitudinal outcomes through the **R-PEP outcomes bonus**, anticipating a further refinement of the definition of credentials of value by the THECB that will clarify how these bonuses can be calculated and operationalized going forward.
- Separating planning, implementation, and expansion grants into a separate dedicated pool of funds to ensure consistency and predictability in grant program offerings. **A rider to allocate these grant funds** will be a crucial component of R-PEP expansion in the years to come.

We appreciate the House’s commitment to invest in strong student outcomes and respectfully suggest considering the measures outlined above to strengthen HB 120. This subcommittee’s support will empower Texas students to navigate postsecondary pathways with confidence, equipping them with the skills and opportunities needed to thrive in the workforce and drive the state’s economic future.

Gratefully,
Katrina Fraser
Director of Postsecondary Education and Workforce Policy
The Commit Partnership

Supporting Organizations:

