



LEARNING

TO WORK

IN TEXAS

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Introduction

Young workers make up a significant part of the Texas workforce, with 39.7 percent between the ages of 16 to 34 years old.¹ The state's economic prospect rests on this generation's ability to secure good jobs and to support themselves and their families. However, young people today are more likely to earn less than previous generations, face skyrocketing higher education costs, and have dim prospects of social mobility as a result.²

While state median wages in Texas have gone up in recent years, wages for young Texas workers are down. In 2014, the median annual income for a young adult worker in Texas was \$26,211, down \$1,149 (when controlled for inflation) since the Great Recession.³ The unemployment rate for young workers ages 16 to 24 is 13.4 percent,⁴ roughly triple the statewide figure.⁵ Without action on the part of policymakers, the state could harm its economic prospects for years to come.

Elected officials in Texas have taken some action in recent years to prepare young workers better for the 21st century workforce. At the state level, the legislature has attempted to create stronger career pathways and college counseling for high schools students. At the local level, Houston recently launched a new summer program for youth. These actions have the potential to help high school students, postsecondary students, and young adults out of school looking for work in unique ways. Though these and other initiatives are in their early stages and success remains to be seen, the momentum is headed in the right direction.

Recognizing this, Young Invincibles launched the Texas Jobs Tour in 2015, with a focus on Houston, to identify how best to address the unique needs of young workers in the state as more reforms are enacted. Too often, young adult voices are left out of critical policy conversations that impact their future. During the summer and fall of 2015, Young Invincibles set up over 20 focus groups with the help of numerous partners, reaching over 250 young participants. We also reviewed existing data around youth unemployment challenges both across Texas and locally in Houston, identifying major employment trends and opportunities for addressing those challenges.

While a forthcoming report will provide comprehensive findings from our conversations during the Tour, this policy brief focuses on two themes we heard related to workforce development. The young workers we spoke with generally expressed a desire for 1) more early work experiences that build toward their career interests, and 2) training on practical job search skills like resume writing, networking, and interviewing skills.

Based on these conversations, we detail an agenda for city and state policymakers that would build upon current initiatives. To improve job search skills and connections to the job market, the state of Texas must strengthen high school advising programs and improve access to information about career outcomes at Texas Colleges. Cities have a role to play as well by expanding basic job search initiatives for their youngest workers.

Local and state policymakers must also expand early work experience opportunities for young Texans. We are particularly interested in expanding Hire Houston Youth and implementing reforms such as year-round jobs, and alignment with key growth industries. Statewide, legislators should look to expand the state work study program at Texas universities and create a robust apprenticeship program.

We also note that most of these proposals address the challenges of students in high school or postsecondary education, but not those who are both out-of-work and out-of-school. This high-need population often

requires additional resources to reconnect with the workforce. Reforms to city employment programs can help address these gaps, but we acknowledge that a more comprehensive approach targeted specifically at this population is also needed.

State of Young Texas: Initial Progress on Youth Workforce Development

Recently, state and local lawmakers in Texas have taken a series of key steps to connect education and career outcomes. In the local context, we focus on Houston's initiatives--largely unreplicated elsewhere in the state--to demonstrate both opportunities for the city to build on its own efforts, and also opportunities for the city to serve as an example for others. Multiple Houston programs are also in the early stages, providing ample opportunities to best address the needs of young workers and the businesses that hope to hire them. The momentum demonstrated by city and state lawmakers suggest openings for further reforms.

Statewide Action

In recent years, Texas lawmakers have acted to pass bipartisan legislation aimed at helping young workers in several ways. For example, legislators have created academies to support counselors' college and career advising,⁶ and to remove limitations on the number of dual credit courses students can enroll in.⁷

In 2013, the Texas legislature took a substantial step toward increasing alignment between K-12 academic coursework and college or career pathways by passing HB 5. In addition to reducing the number of testing requirements for high school students, HB 5 increased career exploration options for high school students by providing a variety of graduation plans to explore their interests and support their future career goals.⁸ Under HB 5, most Texas students are required to satisfy basic foundation requirements for graduation, and then select an additional sequence of courses geared directly toward career development under one of several "endorsements" that are organized around different interests, including Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM); Business and Industry; Public Services; Arts and Humanities; and Multidisciplinary Studies.⁹ HB 5 also raised the level of communication expected between school officials and students and their families. School administrators or counselors are now required to start postsecondary education and career planning conversations with students as early as eighth grade.¹⁰

The efforts to increase curriculum flexibility also received skepticism that the stated goal of empowering students and their families with college and career knowledge would succeed. Concerns centered on the fact that some course options lowered education requirements over all, and that low-income students with less parental support could end up in pathways that did not prepare them for the colleges or careers they sought.¹¹ Although the law itself appears to try to prevent that kind of tracking through greater engagement with counselors, it is unclear whether enough counseling resources exist to meet student needs. It remains to be seen whether HB5's implementation will achieve its intended goals.

In 2015, a significant update to the Texas College Work Study Program (TCWSP)--one of the very few state work study programs in the country¹²--was enacted (SB 1750). Higher education institutions receiving program funding are now required to provide 20 percent to 50 percent of their TCWSP students with off-campus employment opportunities related to the student's major or career interest.¹³ The TCWSP covers 75

percent of the salary for on-campus positions compared to 50 percent of the salary for off-campus positions. Thus, SB 1750's shift to off-campus positions for work-study students frees additional program dollars so that the program can serve more students.¹⁴

Importantly, this program update did not restrict institutions' ability to find students for on-campus jobs, but rather shifted the intent of the state's work study program to incentivize institutions to help match students to work study opportunities that more closely aligned with their majors or careers. The measure also requires institutions of higher education to identify and partner with off-campus nonprofits and businesses to foster the development of regional employment opportunities and tangible career pathways for work-study students to pursue post graduation.¹⁵

Finally, Texas' executive branch has also begun the process of evaluating how best to strengthen workforce development for young Texans. In 2016, Governor Greg Abbott established an interagency task force on college affordability and workforce development. The task force, initially charged with conducting a six-month listening tour, is led jointly by the Texas Education Agency, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and Texas Workforce Commission.¹⁶ One key item the task force is charged with is to examine local workforce needs and build workforce development models tailored to these needs. Expanding on previous policy changes and effectively leveraging the results of the executive branch's initiatives will be essential in upcoming legislative session.

Local Action: Houston Case Study

Texas has experienced regional policy momentum on workforce development in key communities as well. In 2016, Houston launched two new workforce initiatives led by Mayor Sylvester Turner, Turnaround Houston¹⁷ and Hire Houston Youth.¹⁸ The programs engage multiple partners from the public and private sectors to support job creation for young Houstonians and hard to employ adults.

The Turnaround Houston initiative is a series of fairs that offer access to job training, resume writing, tattoo removal, social service agencies, educational institutions, counseling, and intervention to help hard-to-employ Houstonians.¹⁹ The program is not specifically targeted at youth but could potentially reach this population. The inaugural Turnaround Houston event occurred in March 2016, with further events planned for September and November of 2016.

Hire Houston Youth is a city-wide youth summer jobs initiative that kicked off during the summer of 2016. Currently, the city has an unemployment rate for young people ages 14 - 24 of 12.7 percent -- lower than some areas but approximately triple the overall state unemployment rate.²⁰ The program's initial goal was to connect 450 students ages 16 - 24 to entry-level jobs or internships in both the public and private sector while guaranteeing a minimum of \$8 an hour pay. In addition, the students participate in a career readiness training one week prior to the start of the program.²¹ In just its first year, Hire Houston Youth had over 2,000 applicants with only 450 spots available.²² Houston's new initiatives are of particular interest because these programs are in the early stages and therefore easily adaptable to experimentation and change.

The Young Texas Works Jobs Tour

Policy developments like those described above, while well-intentioned, only address a small portion of the challenges facing young Texans looking for quality jobs. Recognizing this, Young Invincibles organized the Young Texas Works Jobs Tour to bring a missing young adult perspective into critical conversations about workforce development in Texas. We believe that taking into account the lived experience of young Texas workers will ultimately lead to better policy.

During the summer and fall of 2015, we set out to highlight young people's experiences with work, focusing on Houston, and involving young Texans in the research, analysis, and policy recommendations. The tour itself consisted of over twenty focus groups reaching over 250 young participants.

We heard from young people that represented diversity in educational attainment, employment status, as well as racial and ethnic backgrounds and gender identity. We sought out a variety of different partners to accomplish this goal. Our partners included five community organizations, five colleges, two universities, two workforce development agencies, one church, and one alternative high school, and emphasized groups who engage underrepresented communities. Over 60 percent of the student body of Houston Community College, for example, is Hispanic or African American.²³ Over 90 percent of those served by Genesys Works program in 2015 were people of color.²⁴ HATCH Youth, another one of our partners, focuses their work on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual and allied youth aged 13-20.²⁵ Our efforts focused on Houston with nineteen focus groups taking place across the city.

Job Search Skills

Though a more comprehensive account of the stories and experience shared during the Jobs Tour is forthcoming, this brief focuses on solutions tied to two common themes that emerged related to the workforce development. First, young people frequently brought up the need for greater job search skills. Despite the far-ranging nature of our conversations, these skills were in the top three most frequent topic discussed, and were a concern for both high school students and those in college. Participants spoke about problems with networking, creating resumes, writing cover letters, and interviewing. One young Houstonian explained to us that, while she knew building a professional resume was vital to landing her first job, she had never received any guidance on how to do so--or even on how to best dress for an interview. "[S]omething that is absolutely a barrier when you're finding a job is whenever you are very young and you are not able to come up with a good resume and good skills... We don't really get that in high school... none of them have given me... this is how you do your resume, what to put in it, how you go to an interview... this is how you dress up."²⁶ Young workers often have little experience with finding jobs and, as the woman above noted, lack access to training for these basic skills.

A further challenge in landing an early job is building a professional network without the benefit of experience working in the field. Another participant noted that "trying to go from jobs as a student to career kind of jobs, I think one of the main barriers was lacking an access point... Really what opened the door for me for that first position, when I think back it was the network. It was an alumni network that I was able to access, and that's something that I realize not a lot of people have."²⁷ As the young worker noted, many do not have a point of access into a field, making it more difficult to find and apply for open positions.

Entry Level Experience Paradox

The second major theme revolved around a lesson in paradoxes most young workers find when they seek their first jobs. Even for entry-level positions, employers will often look for prior experience in a field when young workers have had little opportunity to gain it. “[Employers] nowadays want to hire young people with lots of experience and a college degree too. [...] Sometimes I feel that they don’t have the time to train the new people. They want everything now.”²⁸ The seemingly impossible requirements generate significant frustration on the part of young workers.

These problems can be compounded as students advance through school, and employers expect more substantive job experience along with increased education. Further, as tuition rises and need-based financial aid fails to keep up, more students must seek out paid work in order to stay enrolled in school. Too often, the paid work that is available to young people does not help them develop the skills to make them competitive for jobs in the careers they are studying to enter. “I’ve never had a problem getting a job,” a young University of Texas student explained, “[but] the only jobs that are available to get is like waitressing or ...retail.”²⁹

Often the only opportunities to gain experience in a student’s chosen career path take the form of unpaid internships. Even internships, which many think of as truly entry-level positions, sometimes require previous experience. Even one Master’s student told us that his degrees were simply not enough for employers to seriously consider his job application. He found that he needed substantive work experience in his field, “even for volunteer or internship opportunities!”³⁰ Unlike their more affluent peers, low-income students are frequently unable to take advantage of unpaid internships where they might otherwise gain the necessary skillset and social network to advance their careers post college completion.³¹

Concerns about finding and securing opportunities for early work experience are well founded. Early employment can have lasting effects on economic security, lifelong earnings, and social well-being.³²

Young Texas Works Agenda

The momentum around increasing employment prospects for young Texans creates a number of opportunities to address the challenges shared during our jobs tour. Texas policymakers must pursue a variety of solutions. Young workers need opportunities to build careers skills while in school, receive better job search training, and gain skills that match their interests as well as the needs of employers in their region.

Change must start in high schools with stronger career counseling, better information for students and families, and early work opportunities. Young workers need continued support as they pursue postsecondary education including connections to internships in their fields of study, year round employment, and programs that teach skills employers need. Increasing access to key career skills, better information, and connections to growing industries will empower young Texans to make decisions about the career pathways that achieve their long-term goals.

CONNECT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH CAREER PATHWAYS

Ensuring young Texans have opportunities to build job search skills, acquire on-the-job experience, and make smart career choices begins in high school. School counselors are a natural source of information, but need training and resources to support students as they explore career options. Students also need early internship and work opportunities where they can acquire basic career skills that set them up for later success in the working world. Below we lay out priorities that address these concerns both statewide and at the city level with a focus on Houston.

Increase the number of High School and College Advisors

A wealth of research demonstrates student access to counseling leads to higher test scores, higher graduation rates,³³ and higher rates of college enrollment.³⁴ While the Texas legislature has taken some steps recognizing the critical role counselors play, it has also cut the overall number of counselors available making it more difficult for them to do their jobs. Policymakers must reverse this trend for students to thrive.

As of 2014, Texas has about one high school counselor for every 465 students.³⁵ This is substantially higher than the American School Counselor Association's maximum recommended ratio of no more than 250 high school students for every one counselor.³⁶ Texas had a higher number counselors before recession-related budget cuts reduced the number statewide in 2011. Worse still, as the student population grows, the number of students served by each counselor will grow as well.

Meanwhile as financial support for school counselors dwindles, the legislature has placed greater demands on their time. Not only must they serve more students than they once did, the changes brought about by HB 5 require greater engagement from counselors in supporting student education and career pathways. First, students have more graduation options that counselors need to understand and provide guidance about. Second, the law requires counselors to have conversations about college and career pathways as early as middle school increasing their time commitments. Doing more with fewer counselors is not a recipe for success, particularly given that counseling programs were understaffed to start.

The state legislature has made limited progress in supporting counselors. It passed HB 18 in 2015 to create postsecondary and career counseling academies for counselors serving middle and high school students. Additionally, the law requires the Texas Education Agency Commissioner to work with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Workforce Commission to create content for the academies that is based on regional workforce demands.³⁷ Greater training should help counselors improve their ability to assist students, but it cannot make up for the fundamental numbers dilemma.

A good first action step is to reduce the student-to-counselor ratio to at least pre-recession levels of approximately 430:1. That would cost about \$66 million a year.³⁸ Once achieved, legislators should examine ways to further increase the number of counselors including through additional resources and through cost-effective college advising programs driven by recent college graduates. This state work could be complemented by implementing Young Invincibles' national recommendation to expand the AmeriCorps program.³⁹ Part of that proposal is to establish a new "American Counseling Fellows" program. Doing so would send 30,000 recent college graduates into our nation's high schools in order to aid students.⁴⁰ The demonstrated benefits that good counseling can bring to students' college and career prospects make the worthiness of these investments clear.

Improve Access to Data on College and Career Outcomes

Compounding the counselor shortage, Texas students also lack basic information to evaluate their college and career options. Choosing which college to attend, what to study, and how to finance it, are complex decisions, whose outcomes are difficult to project. When students and families are provided with information about college costs and graduates' career outcomes, they make more informed decisions.⁴¹ However, a federal law known as the student unit record ban currently prevents the U.S. Department of Education from providing this information at a fully comprehensive level.⁴² Texas, though, can and should do so.

Providing this kind of information is invaluable for college and career success. Rising tuition means that the vast majority of students must take out loans in order to afford post-secondary education. Since 2003, tuition at Texas public higher education institutions has increased 55 percent⁴³ with the average graduating college senior at a four-year university owing \$26,250 in debt.⁴⁴ For many students, this is the most complex financial transaction they will make apart from taking out a mortgage. Typically consumers taking out loans to purchase major products such as cars have access to comprehensive information about features, durability, and drawbacks. Students on the other hand, routinely lack information about a program's quality and outcomes, such as how many students find jobs, how much they earn, and how many can successfully pay back their student loans. They have to make choices about where to go and how much debt to take out without knowing how likely they'll be able to pay it back.

Though the federal government is restricted from providing full information about college outcomes, state data systems can fill in the gaps. Fortunately, a data-sharing agreement exists in Texas.⁴⁵ Employment rates and median earnings of Texas students are among the metrics the state can measure and share.⁴⁶

The Texas Education Agency, Texas Coordinating Board of Higher Education and Texas Workforce Commission should improve information for students in two ways. First, Texas should capture longitudinal data on overall earnings by major across all Texas higher education institutions. By matching up student-level educational data with workforce outcomes, these agencies can create data about school outcomes including employment rates and average incomes of graduates.

The state must also work with entrepreneurs and nonprofits to present the information in a way students can use. Busy students and families do not have time to pour through reams of information about Texas colleges to figure out which schools are a good fit. The state should develop an application program interface so that other actors such as education nonprofits can develop effective data sharing tools, tested for usability and user-experience. Digital resources like mobile apps and online tools can help point students toward information and pathways that meet their career interests and financial needs.

SeekUT is a strong step in the right direction. The tool provides valuable insights on majors and employment outcomes at different University of Texas system campuses, but unfortunately stops at the UT System, leaving out thousands of students at community colleges, private institutions, and other four-year public schools.⁴⁷ Texas students need a more robust system that includes employment outcome data by field of study at all Texas institutions.

Finally, a robust information system can provide benefits for students, parents, and counselors. Given the greater demands placed on counselors under HB 5, an integrated software system could provide counselors with tools to help students with high school graduation, college transitions, and workforce information. The right tools could help counselors save time and deal with limited resources.

IMPROVE EARLY CAREER JOB SEARCH SKILLS FOR ALL YOUNG JOB SEEKERS

While greater counseling resources and better information about educational and career opportunities can help students prepare for the workforce, addressing their key concerns about gaining experience and learning job search skills requires more. Their instincts are right - evidence demonstrates that early work experience leads to career success down the road.⁴⁸ While the Texas legislature can help with resources and information, Texas cities must take the lead in ensuring early job search and internship opportunities starting in high school. Houston in particular has shown early promise with two initiatives that could benefit young people.

The first, Turnaround Houston, is in its initial stages. The Mayor recently launched the program with the stated goal to remove barriers to employment for adults in high poverty communities and those who were previously incarcerated.⁴⁹ The campaign rests on a series of resource fairs where individuals can access “job training, resume writing, tattoo removal, social service agencies, educational institutions, [and] counseling...”⁵⁰ Several services including training on improving job search skills and access to education opportunities mirror those requested by young people during our jobs tour. The initiative could present valuable opportunities for struggling young high school students, college students, and those young adults out of school looking for work.

Too often, however, events like these are not well-targeted to youth. Fairs mainly attended by older workers may not appeal to young people. Moreover, young workers may need different services and greater support when trying to land their first jobs. To address this, city officials should create specific outreach efforts in high schools, colleges, and other community centers that serve young people. As the program expands, the city should consider having some fairs that are entirely youth focused. If not on campus, the fairs should be in locations easily accessible by public transportation.

Youth-focused fairs should include resources specific to young people. These could include resume skills for workers just starting their careers as well as basics on how to interview well. Role playing, long-recognized to be an effective training tool in a variety of settings,⁵¹ could be a key way of helping young people feel comfortable and confident in real interviews. At their best, these events can help with job search skills and provide greater awareness of employment, though do not offer the experience young workers crave.

EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES TO GAIN REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

The second Houston initiative, Hire Houston Youth, offers more promise for on-the-job learning. The Mayor recently started the program to provide summer jobs for Houston youth ages 16 to 24. Evidence suggests that summer job opportunities improve educational outcomes and reduce crime among high school age students.⁵² However, in its first year Hire Houston was quite small, serving only 450 of the over 2,000 applications. Even the application total is small compared to other summer youth jobs programs around the country in similarly-sized cities, that will often serve tens of thousands of young adults.⁵³ We propose expanding Hire Houston Youth as well as implementing a number of additional reforms that would meet young people’s need for experience and would help lead to quality work down the road. A well-designed youth employment program has the ability to connect students of all levels, as well as out-of-school youth, with opportunities that build the career experience and skills that young workers want.

Expand Year-Round Employment Opportunities

A strong step forward as city officials increase investment into the Hire Houston Youth program will be to explore the program's usefulness in creating opportunities to provide internships, trainings, and jobs year-round, in addition to summer job placements. Summer jobs programs are often most effective when connected to year-round training and job opportunities.⁵⁴ Short stretches of employment for young adults, while helpful on their own, have the most significant impact on employment rates when coupled with more sustained training and education opportunities in skilled fields.⁵⁵ A shift from focusing purely on summer opportunities to bringing in a new year-round focus has started to happen in a number of cities across the country. For example, Mayor Eric Garcetti launched a goal of creating 15,000 year-round jobs for young adults in Los Angeles,⁵⁶ and Mayor Edwin Lee launched a comprehensive push for summer and year-round jobs for youth in San Francisco.⁵⁷ Within Texas, the Dallas Mayor's Intern Fellows Program has partnered with the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and Texas Woman's University to make high school interns who participate eligible for medical internships while in college.⁵⁸

There has also been a recent emphasis on creating year-round opportunities at a federal level. The White House and the Department of Labor recently announced a \$21 million dollar initiative designed to create expanded summer and year-round opportunities for youth, shifting emphasis from creating jobs for summer alone to creating jobs for "summer and beyond."⁵⁹

Year-round opportunities can be resource-intensive, and a fundamental tradeoff exists between funding more young adults through shorter terms during the summer and providing year-round opportunities to fewer participants. In light of this, Houston officials should explore how to facilitate more opportunities for employers participating in the program to provide year-round opportunities in resource-efficient ways.

One particularly effective tool here will be expanding programs like the Dallas Mayor's Intern Fellows Program that sync summer programs with substantive internships for credit with local colleges and universities. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that these programs are set up in a way that allows current students also to prioritize their studies while participating.

Expand Opportunities in Key Industries

In addition, city officials can target the expansion of the Hire Houston Youth program into growth sectors and high-wage industries that are often hard to break into for young workers, but present significant opportunities to obtain long-term economic security. By doing so, officials will be able to both target existing opportunities, but also to know where opportunity is lacking and strengthen relationships in those sectors as well.

As demonstrated in the chart below, the monthly salary in the sector least likely to employ young workers is triple that of the sector most likely to employ young workers. The health care and social service field employs approximately a third the number of young people that businesses in the accommodation and food services field do, and the monthly salary of someone working in health care is almost double that of someone in accommodation and food services.

Table 1. Jobs held by 14-24 year-olds in Houston by Sector

Sector	Employment Count (Q3 2015)	Proportion	Job Growth from 2010	Average Monthly Earnings (2014)	Change since recession (adj.)
Accommodation and Food Services	81,805	23%	36%	\$1,091	1%
Retail Trade	76,117	21%	14%	\$1,325	-5%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	26,958	8%	19%	\$1,911	7%
Health Care and Social Assistance	27,042	8%	15%	\$1,770	-1%
Construction	22,628	6%	40%	\$2,968	11%

U.S. Census Bureau. 2014. Quarterly Workforce Indicators Data. Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program <http://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/#qwi>.

As many of the young people we spoke to noted, obtaining paid work does not always mean obtaining work experience valuable to employers in a student's chosen career path. Too often, as students pursue internships and volunteer opportunities, substantive experience comes without a paycheck. Policymakers can act to make sure young people have access to jobs with good wages and in sectors with substantial regional growth where they are likely to find work throughout their careers.

EXPAND APPRENTICESHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG TEXANS

Apprenticeships provide a combination of on-the-job training and related classroom instruction in which workers receive payment while learning a skilled occupation. They provide valuable opportunities to connect young adults with employer-designed training in competitive middle-skill fields. According to a 2012 study from the Department of Labor, individuals who complete Registered Apprenticeship programs make \$300,000 more over the course of their lifetimes, including benefits, than their peers.⁶⁰

Nationally, apprenticeships have been gaining increased interest from the Department of Labor and from Congress. The DOL recently launched the American Apprenticeship Grants program, which provided \$175 million to expand 46 different apprenticeship program across the country.⁶¹ A series of bipartisan bills, including the Leveraging and Energizing America's Apprenticeship Programs (LEAP) and Effective Apprenticeships to Rebuild National Skills (EARNS) Acts have been introduced recently focused on expanding and improving apprenticeships for today's youth.⁶²

A designated youth apprenticeship program in Texas would help provide young Texans with the chance to get first-hand experience in their fields of choice. The Wisconsin Youth Apprenticeship Program provides a valuable model here. Since its launch in 1991, the program has grown to serve 2,500 high school juniors and seniors a year, connecting them with experience in growth fields.⁶³ Launching a similar program in Texas would provide young adults who are interested in exploring apprenticeship opportunities but not ready to commit to a full Registered Apprenticeship program with the chance to learn more first-hand.

Texas should also provide resources to businesses looking to launch both Registered Apprenticeship programs and apprenticeship-like structured training opportunities for young adults. South Carolina's Apprenticeship Carolina program has served nearly 11,000 apprentices and worked with more than 670 employers.⁶⁴ Part of the program's success is due to the state launching an apprenticeship consulting program, where state consultants meet with participating employers to give personalized guidance.⁶⁵ Providing resources to businesses to ensure that they have the institutional knowledge needed to launch apprenticeship opportunities will help make sure that the needs of both employers and young Texans are met when creating new training programs.

CREATE MORE WORK-STUDY OPPORTUNITIES TIED TO MEANINGFUL WORK EXPERIENCES

In addition to city-level job opportunities, the state legislature also has a role to play in expanding work experience for young Texans. The state is one of only 14 nationwide with a state-supported work-study program for college students.⁶⁶ The program offers low-income students the opportunity to gain work experience, earn wages, and maintain flexible schedules around their coursework. Employers and the state share salary costs.⁶⁷ Thus state, legislators have an existing policy tool to connect more students with work experience.

One frequent challenge with work study jobs is that placements are often on campus with little relation to a student's career interest. As our roundtable participants noted frequently, a job or internship unrelated to what you want to do creates barriers to future employment. Some take unpaid internships in addition to their work study jobs just to get experience in their chosen field. Others simply don't have the time given other responsibilities. Ensuring students' work-study opportunities are tied to meaningful employment experiences can improve postsecondary outcomes by setting students up for later career success.⁶⁸

Policymakers should require administrators of Texas College Work-Study Program to track implementation of the off-campus requirements to ensure student placements reflect their majors and career interests. Ideally, an annual or biannual report should be provided to legislators, in addition to administrators making such data publicly available online.

Further, in order for more students to take advantage of the benefits of work study, the program deserves more investment as a whole. TCWSP is currently much too small to meet student need in Texas. In fact, there are fewer than 4,000 grantees in the entire state,⁶⁹ with over 1.5 million students enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in Texas.⁷⁰ At a minimum, the legislature should double investment in the program to increase the number of students able to access TCWSP.

Even the existence of Texas's work study program is significant--but to recognize its promise, state leaders can, and should, do more.

CONCLUSION

The Young Texas Works Jobs Tour was an important opportunity to highlight the voices and expertise of young people on critically important workforce and economic opportunity policies. While Young Invincibles' forthcoming report detailing the many powerful stories shared with us will show that young people at all levels - in high school, in college, not in school, or currently seeking work - are looking for greater economic opportunity and deserve adequate investment, it is clear that policymakers can act to quickly build on past work to leverage high school and postsecondary education settings to effectively reach many young job seekers. By including young people's voices and experiences in implementing policy initiatives that connect young Texans with career pathways and workforce opportunities, policymakers can improve young Texans' economic opportunity and strengthen the Texas economy.

End Notes

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