Your Next Step After High School

A student's guide to college, career, and workforce training in Texas

For Texas public high school students, grades 9-12. This is your guide to what comes next: a two-year degree, a four-year degree, a career certificate, an apprenticeship, or the military. All of it counts. All of it pays off. This document meets the content requirements of *§33.007(b)(1).*

Why What Happens after High School Matters

Postsecondary education refers to any learning you pursue after you graduate from high school. That includes a four-year college, a two-year community or technical college, a workforce certificate program, an apprenticeship, or military training. It does not have to mean a university, nor does it have to mean four more years of school.

Whatever path you pick, Texas jobs are moving in one direction: more of them require some kind of training or credential beyond a high school diploma. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) projects that most well-paying Texas jobs in the next decade will require at least a certificate, an associate degree, or a bachelor's degree. Workers with a postsecondary credential earn more on average and change jobs more successfully over their lifetime than workers with only a high school diploma.

What postsecondary education can look like

- A bachelor's degree (four years) at a Texas public university like UT-Austin, Texas A&M, Texas State, or University of Texas San Antonio, or a private university like Baylor or Rice.
- An associate degree or workforce certificate (usually one to two years) at a community or technical college like Austin Community College, Dallas College, or Texas State Technical College.
- An industry-based certification you can earn while still in high school through Career and Technical Education (CTE), P-TECH, or a Registered Pathway to Employment Program (R-PEP).
- A Registered Apprenticeship that pays you while you learn - common in construction, electrical, plumbing, HVAC, manufacturing, and healthcare.
- Military service through any branch, which comes with tuition benefits (GI Bill, Hazlewood Act for Texas veterans) if you decide to go to college later.
- A trade school or licensing program (nursing, cosmetology, welding, commercial driving, EMT).

Why it matters for you

- **Higher lifetime earnings.** Every level of credential you earn beyond a high school diploma raises your average lifetime pay. Texas workforce data shows workers with a bachelor's degree earn roughly 60-80 percent more per year than workers with only a high school diploma. Workers with an associate degree or certificate earn roughly 20-40 percent more.
- **More career options.** Fields like nursing, teaching, engineering, cybersecurity, welding, and skilled construction all require training beyond high school. Skipping that step closes the door on those jobs.
- **Financial aid you may not know you qualify for.** Federal Pell Grants, Texas Grants, institutional scholarships, and free-tuition programs at many Texas community colleges are available to students whose families never expected them to qualify.
- **You do not have to pick one path forever.** Starting at a community college and transferring to a four-year school is common in Texas. Working, saving, and returning to school later is common. Trying an apprenticeship first is common. The point is to keep going.

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A Grade-by-Grade Plan

Your counselor will meet with you every year to talk about postsecondary options. Here is what to focus on when.

Grade	What to work on
Grade 9	Sign your Personal Graduation Plan (PGP) with your parent or guardian. Pick an endorsement (STEM, Business & Industry, Public Services, Arts & Humanities, or Multidisciplinary Studies). Create a free profile on My Texas Future. Start a career-interest inventory. Aim for the Distinguished Level of Achievement, so you keep the Top-10-Percent automatic admission option open.
Grade 10	Take the PSAT 10. If you are in the top 25 percent of your class, your counselor will explain the Texas Top-10-Percent automatic admission rule to you. Explore CTE courses, dual credit, AP, IB, or P-TECH options at your campus. Visit at least one college campus (in person or virtually).
Grade 11	Take the PSAT/NMSQT (National Merit qualifier), then the SAT or ACT. Try a state-cost career readiness assessment if your campus offers one. Attend college fairs. Start a scholarship list. If you're working toward Top-10-Percent, meet with your counselor again about §51.803 automatic admission. Draft a postsecondary plan.
Grade 12	Apply to your college and workforce programs through ApplyTexas or the Common App. Complete the FAFSA (starting October 1) or the TASFA if you cannot file FAFSA. Complete My Texas Future direct admissions or file an opt-out (required to graduate beginning 2026-2027). Apply for scholarships every month. Decide by May 1 for four-year colleges; community colleges and workforce programs have later deadlines.

Career Readiness and Workforce Training in Texas

You do not have to leave high school to start career training. Every Texas public high school offers Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses in fields like health science, computer science, culinary arts, welding, construction, agriculture, engineering, business, education, criminal justice, and cosmetology. Many campuses also offer programs that let you earn a workforce credential or college credit before graduation.

Programs that get you a credential before graduation

- **Career and Technical Education (CTE).** Course sequences ("coherent sequences") in more than a dozen career clusters. Many CTE courses include the option to sit for an industry-based certification recognized by the Texas Workforce Commission and TEA.
- **P-TECH (Pathways in Technology Early College High School).** A partnership between your high school, a community college, and an industry partner. You can earn a high school diploma, an associate degree, and industry credentials - often at no cost.
- **R-PEP (Registered Pathway to Employment Program).** A structured, paid pathway that connects your high school coursework to a job with a Texas employer.
- **Dual Credit and Early College High School.** Earn college credit while still in high school. Credits transfer to any Texas public college or university.
- **AP, IB, and Advanced Academics.** Take college-level courses and earn credit by scoring well on the end-of-course exam.
- **JROTC and Military Pathways.** If you are considering military service, JROTC courses count toward CTE credit under Texas law. Your counselor can arrange for you to take the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) to see which military jobs match your skills.
- **Registered Apprenticeships.** Paid, structured on-the-job training combined with classroom instruction, leading to a nationally recognized credential. Search for apprenticeships at *apprenticeship.gov*.

High-demand Texas career fields

The Texas Workforce Commission tracks the industries adding the most jobs across the state. Fields consistently in the top group include:

- Health care - registered nurses, medical assistants, radiology and ultrasound technicians, and dental hygienists.
- Skilled trades - electricians, plumbers, HVAC technicians, welders, industrial mechanics, wind turbine technicians.
- Construction - carpenters, project managers, surveyors, heavy equipment operators.

- Information technology - cybersecurity, network administration, software development, cloud computing.
- Advanced manufacturing - CNC machining, quality control, semiconductor technicians (especially around Austin and Sherman).
- Energy - oil and gas, wind and solar, plant operations.
- Transportation and logistics - commercial driving, aviation maintenance, supply chain.
- Education and public service - teaching, social work, law enforcement, and emergency services.

MY TEXAS FUTURE - YOUR FREE PLANNING ACCOUNT

My Texas Future is a free website built by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to help you plan your next steps. You do not have to pay anything, and you can create an account on your phone.

What you can do with a free My Texas Future account

- Take an interest inventory that suggests careers matching your strengths and interests.
- Explore more than 500 Texas careers, including expected wages, education needed, and where the jobs are.
- Search Texas colleges, community colleges, and technical schools by location, cost, and programs offered.
- Save your favorite careers, schools, and programs so you do not have to start over each visit.
- Get financial aid basics and step-by-step help with the ApplyTexas application.
- Connect with an advisor at a participating Texas institution.
- Sign up for Direct Admissions - see which Texas colleges will admit you based on your class rank, GPA, and test scores before you even finish applying.

HEADS UP - THIS IS NOW PART OF GRADUATION

Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, every Texas public high school student must decide, before graduation, whether to create a My Texas Future profile and share basic academic information (like class rank, GPA, and test scores) with Texas colleges through the Direct Admissions program - or to opt out. This is a state law under Texas Education Code §28.0257. Creating a profile is the fastest way to satisfy the requirement, and it gives you the benefit of seeing which schools will admit you. If you do not want to participate, you can opt out with a form signed by a parent, guardian, an adult (18+) student, or a school counselor. Ask your counselor if you have questions.

How to create your profile - step by step

1. Go to *mytexasfuture.org* on your phone or computer.
2. Tap or click **Create an account**. If you already have an ApplyTexas account, you can log in with the same email and password - you do not need a new account.
3. Use a personal email address you check regularly (not your school email if you are close to graduation - you may lose access to it after you leave the district). Write down your username and password in a safe place.
4. Choose the K-12 or Middle/High School path when the site asks for your role or who you are.
5. Fill in your Learner Profile: name, birthday, high school, expected graduation year, and career interests. You can also add academic information like unweighted GPA, class rank, SAT/ACT scores, and graduation plan. You can update these anytime.
6. Verify your email address by clicking the confirmation link the site sends you.
7. Log in and take the career interest inventory. Save the careers, schools, and programs you like.
8. Come back at least once a year. Update your class rank, GPA, and test scores whenever they change to keep your Direct Admissions results accurate.

Tips

- Use a personal email address you will keep after graduation - Gmail, iCloud, Outlook, or a similar free service.
- Keep your login information somewhere you can find it - a password manager, a note in a locked phone app, or written down at home.
- Your profile is private. Data you share is protected under state law and only released to participating Texas institutions if you opt in to Direct Admissions.
- If you get stuck, email MyTexasFutureSupport@highered.texas.gov or ask your counselor.

Paying for It – Financial and Basics

Most students in Texas qualify for some form of financial aid, and the money comes from multiple sources. You will not know what you qualify for until you apply.

The application you must submit before graduation

Texas law (TEC §28.0256) requires every senior to submit one of the following before graduation:

- **FAFSA** - the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, available at *studentaid.gov*. Opens October 1 of your senior year.
- **TASFA** - the Texas Application for State Financial Aid, at *highered.texas.gov*. Use this if you are a Texas resident who cannot file the FAFSA.
- **A signed opt-out form** - only if a parent, guardian, an 18+ student, or a school counselor signs one for you.

Types of aid you may qualify for

- **Federal Pell Grant.** Need-based; does not have to be repaid. Up to about $7,395 per year.
- **TEXAS (Toward EXcellence, Access and Success) Grant.** State grant for Texas residents attending a Texas public university. Does not have to be paid back.
- **TEOG (Texas Educational Opportunity Grant).** State grant for Texas residents attending a Texas public community, state, or technical college.
- **TASSP (The Texas Armed Services Scholarship Program).** Institutional need-based grants at Texas public universities.
- **Institutional scholarships.** Merit, need, and program-specific scholarships are awarded by each Texas college. Apply directly to the school.
- **Private scholarships.** Search at *mytexasfuture.org*, *bigfuture.collegeboard.org*, and *fastweb.com*.
- **Foster youth benefits.** If you have ever been in a DFPS conservatorship, you may qualify for the Texas Tuition and Fee Exemption and the federal Education and Training Voucher (ETV). Talk to your counselor.
- **Military-connected benefits.** The Hazlewood Act (Texas veterans and their children/spouses) and the federal GI Bill can cover most tuition costs.

Automatic admission - Top-10-Percent rule

If you graduate in the top 10 percent of your class (top 6 percent for UT-Austin), you are automatically admitted to any Texas general academic teaching institution. This is Texas Education Code §51.803. Your counselor will explain this to you at the start of grades 10 and 11 if you are in the top 25 percent.

What to Do this Month

If you are in...	Do this now
Grade 9	Go to mytexasfuture.org and create your free account. Take the career interest inventory. Confirm your PGP with a parent and endorsement selection with your counselor.
Grade 10	Update your My Texas Future profile with your GPA and class rank. Take the PSAT 10. If you are in the top 25 percent, meet with your counselor about §51.803 automatic admission.

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Grade 11	Update My Texas Future with new GPA, class rank, and SAT/ACT scores. Register for the SAT or ACT. Attend at least one college fair. Draft your postsecondary plan.
Grade 12	File the FAFSA or TASFA (starting October 1). Complete the ApplyTexas or Common App. Sign up for Direct Admissions in My Texas Future or file the opt-out form. Track scholarship deadlines every month.

Where to Get Help

- **Your school counselor** - your first stop for every decision in this guide. Your counselor is required by state law to meet with you every year to explain these options.
- **My Texas Future support** - MyTexasFutureSupport@highered.texas.gov
- **THECB Center for Financial Aid Information** - *highered.texas.gov*
- **ApplyTexas (single application for Texas public and many private colleges)** - *applytexas.org*
- **Federal Student Aid** - *studentaid.gov*
- **Texas Workforce Commission (careers, apprenticeships, wages)** - *twc.texas.gov*
- **U.S. Registered Apprenticeship Finder** - *apprenticeship.gov*

Sources

Texas Education Code, Chapters 28 (§28.0256 financial aid graduation requirement; §28.0257 direct admissions graduation requirement), 33 (§33.007 postsecondary counseling), and 51 (§51.803 automatic admission).

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board - My Texas Future (https://www.mytexasfuture.org) and Center for Financial Aid Information (https://www.highered.texas.gov).

Texas Education Agency, Updates to High School Graduation Requirements, August 20, 2026 (https://tea.texas.gov/taa-letters/updates-high-school-graduation-requirements).

Texas Workforce Commission (https://www.twc.texas.gov) - occupational wage and employment projections.

U.S. Department of Labor, Apprenticeship.gov (https://www.apprenticeship.gov).

NOTE: This handout is a summary written for students. It is not legal or financial advice. Talk to your school counselor and, if relevant, a licensed financial aid advisor before making decisions.

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