

# OPTIMIZING FEDERAL BENEFITS TO DRIVE PREPARATION FOR TEXAS' HIGH-DEMAND JOBS

Texas has a skills gap that is putting a strain on our regional and statewide workforce, yet we are failing to efficiently use federal resources to help Texans fill these high-demand, high-wage jobs.

There are 1.27 million working-age Texans who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Unless they qualify for an exemption or are already working more than 30 hours per week, they are required to participate in the SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) program. This number is only expected to grow as new federal SNAP work requirements from H.R.1 go into effect.

According to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission's Sunset self-evaluation, SNAP E&T "participation levels are not at acceptable levels, and sanction levels are much higher than desired." **The small fraction of participants who complete their assigned training component earn median quarterly wages of approximately \$4,500 – far below what is needed for an individual to gain self-sufficiency and no longer qualify for public assistance.** This data clearly shows that Texas' SNAP E&T program, as currently administered, is failing to help eligible individuals access credential-based training that can position them for high-wage job opportunities in the Texas workforce, meet the state's demand for skilled workers, and reduce reliance upon public benefits.



**Texas can more efficiently leverage federal SNAP benefits to ensure Texans participate in workforce programs proven to yield self-sufficient employment earnings. Here's how:**

1. Direct HHSC, in collaboration with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, to **recognize postsecondary programs that award a credential of value as "equivalent to SNAP E&T."** This change would enable students enrolled in these programs to count their coursework toward SNAP work requirements. Because these programs are demonstrated to lead to a self-sufficient wage, this simple policy change will help more low-income Texans complete credentials of value and upskill into high-demand employment.
2. Direct HHSC and TWC to **grow the number and quality of third-party partners approved to provide SNAP E&T services**, with an emphasis on community colleges and other workforce partners equipped to provide industry-aligned training and support. To date, only one community college has been approved as a third-party provider, limiting access across most of Texas and leaving unrestricted federal funds on the table.
3. By making these changes, Texas can **ensure parents pursuing meaningful workforce preparation are first in line to access child care assistance.** Because participation in an approved SNAP E&T program qualifies within the first priority group, eligible parents will access the child care services needed to complete their program and increase their family's earning potential, instead of lingering on the waitlist and delaying credential completion.



Through this session's Sunset process, state lawmakers can ensure federal benefits programs equip more Texans with workforce preparation, support, and high-demand job opportunities to provide for themselves and their families.