North Central Texas Pathways

Is the Applied Sciences Pathway Program Right for Your District?

Expanding Opportunities Through House Bill 20 — A Strategic Guide for Texas District Leaders, CTE Directors, and Curriculum Planners

Purpose of This Session

This session is designed to help district leaders make informed decisions about implementing the Applied Sciences Pathway Program under HB 20. By the end, you'll have a clear picture of what the program requires — and whether it's the right fit for your community.

01

Understand the Program

Learn the scope and design of the Applied Sciences Pathway Program established by House Bill 20.

02

Assess District Readiness

Evaluate your district's capacity, partnerships, and student population for alignment.

03

Explore Requirements

Understand what implementation actually demands — from IHE partnerships to scheduling logistics.

04

Identify Next Steps

Walk away with a clear action plan for the 2026–2027 school year launch.

LEGISLATIVE FOUNDATION

Legislative Overview

The Applied Sciences Pathway Program was established through **House Bill 20** during the 89th Texas Legislative Session and codified in **Texas Education Code §29.914**. This landmark legislation creates a new, structured pathway for upper-level high school students to earn both a diploma and a workforce-ready credential simultaneously.

Authorizing Law

House Bill 20 — 89th Texas Legislature

Texas Education Code

Codified under §29.914

Target Students

Grades 11–12 enrolled in Texas public schools

Launch Year

Implementation begins 2026–2027 school year

Program Purpose

At its core, the Applied Sciences Pathway Program is designed to give students something they've never had before in Texas: the ability to **graduate high school with a diploma and a credential of value — simultaneously.** This isn't about adding more coursework. It's about strategic alignment that accelerates student outcomes.

Dual Outcomes

Students earn a high school diploma alongside a Level I or Level II certificate or credential of value — completing two milestones at once.

IHE Partnership

Delivered in direct partnership with an Institution of Higher Education, giving students access to college-level instruction and credentialing.

High-Wage Industries

Focused exclusively on high-wage, high-growth sectors where workforce demand is strong and career trajectories are clear.

Eligible Industry Pathways

Programs must align to one of the following high-demand sectors identified by the Texas Legislature. These industries represent strong regional workforce needs and clearly defined credential ladders from Level I through Associate of Applied Science.

⚒️ Skilled Trades

Plumbing, electrical, welding, sheet metal, carpentry, masonry

⚙️ Mechanical & Industrial

Diesel, HVAC, industrial maintenance, manufacturing

🤖 Engineering & Technology

Robotics, automation, aerospace, electronics

⛽ Energy Sector

Oil and gas, refining, chemical processes

🚛 Transportation

Logistics, automotive, heavy equipment operation

💻 Information Technology

Information technology and cybersecurity

WHAT SETS IT APART

What Makes This Different

The Applied Sciences Pathway Program is **not a traditional Program of Study**. It is a purpose-built framework designed for districts ready to take dual enrollment to the next level — moving beyond individual courses toward full **credential completion** while students are still enrolled in high school.

Traditional CTE Pathway

Course sequence focused on career exploration. Credential completion often happens after graduation, if at all.

Applied Sciences Pathway

Dual enrollment with IHE. Credential completion is the target outcome before a student receives their diploma.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

What Students Graduate With

The Applied Sciences Pathway Program redefines what graduation means. Rather than exiting with a diploma alone, students leave with a credential stack that immediately signals workforce readiness to employers — and a clear pathway for continued education if they choose it.

1

Foundation High School Diploma

No endorsement required — students meet graduation requirements through the pathway program itself.

2

Level I or Level II Certificate

Industry-recognized credentials earned through dual enrollment with an IHE partner institution.

3

AAS Pathway Progress

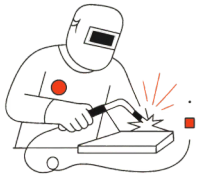
Students may complete significant progress toward an Associate of Applied Science degree before leaving high school.

Example Pathways

These illustrative examples show how districts can structure Applied Sciences Pathway Programs. Each pathway maps dual credit coursework directly to a credential outcome — creating a clear, sequenced plan from day one of enrollment.

Electrical Construction

Dual credit coursework aligned to a **Level I Certificate** in Electrical Technology. Students complete foundational safety, code compliance, and wiring coursework in partnership with a community college — entering the workforce as certified apprentices.



Welding Technology

Dual credit coursework leading to significant progress toward an **Associate of Applied Science (AAS)** in Welding Technology. Students earn stackable credentials, with many completing Level I and Level II certificates before graduation.

Scheduling Flexibility

One of the program's most significant advantages for district administrators is the **local control over scheduling**. The Applied Sciences Pathway Program does not impose rigid scheduling mandates — it is designed to integrate into existing campus structures while giving students maximum flexibility in their course-taking.

Locally Determined

Scheduling decisions are made at the district level. Each campus can design a schedule that works for its student population and IHE partner's course offerings.

CTE Flexibility

Students may continue participating in other CTE courses alongside their pathway enrollment, preserving broad career exploration opportunities.

Open Entry

There is no restriction on pathway entry timing. Students may also enroll in dual credit prior to formally joining the program.

Applied Sciences Pathway

ADA & Funding Impact

Participation in the Applied Sciences Pathway Program counts toward **full-time student status** and is included in **Average Daily Attendance (ADA)** calculations — protecting your district's funding while students pursue non-traditional learning environments.

Why This Matters for Districts

Dual enrollment programs have historically created funding uncertainty for districts when students spend significant time off-campus. The Applied Sciences Pathway Program resolves this by ensuring that pathway participation is treated as full participation for funding purposes.

- Supports funding stability during program ramp-up
- Enables flexible, off-campus scheduling models
- Removes a major barrier to IHE partnership implementation

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Key Implementation Requirements

Implementing the Applied Sciences Pathway Program requires intentional planning across multiple operational areas. Districts that succeed will invest time upfront in building the right partnerships, sequences, and logistics before the first student enrolls.

IHE Partnership with MOU

A formal Memorandum of Understanding with an Institution of Higher Education is required. This document governs curriculum alignment, instructional roles, credentialing, and shared expectations.

Approved Pathway Alignment

All coursework must align to one of the approved industry pathways specified in TEC §29.914. Programs cannot be self-defined — they must map to recognized credential frameworks.

Sequenced Course Design

Course sequencing must be deliberately aligned to ensure credential completion by graduation. This requires close coordination between high school counselors and IHE advisors.

Transportation & Substitution Planning

Districts must plan for student transportation to IHE facilities and determine which high school courses may be substituted by pathway coursework to avoid credit conflicts.

APPLICATION TIMELINE

Don't Wait — Planning Starts Now

The application window for the 2026–2027 launch is defined and will not be extended. Districts that begin partnership conversations, pathway mapping, and internal planning **now** will be best positioned to submit a strong, competitive application.

1

Now – Fall 2025

Internal readiness assessment, IHE outreach, pathway identification, and MOU negotiation

2

January 15, 2026

Application window opens. Districts may submit their completed program applications to TEA.

3

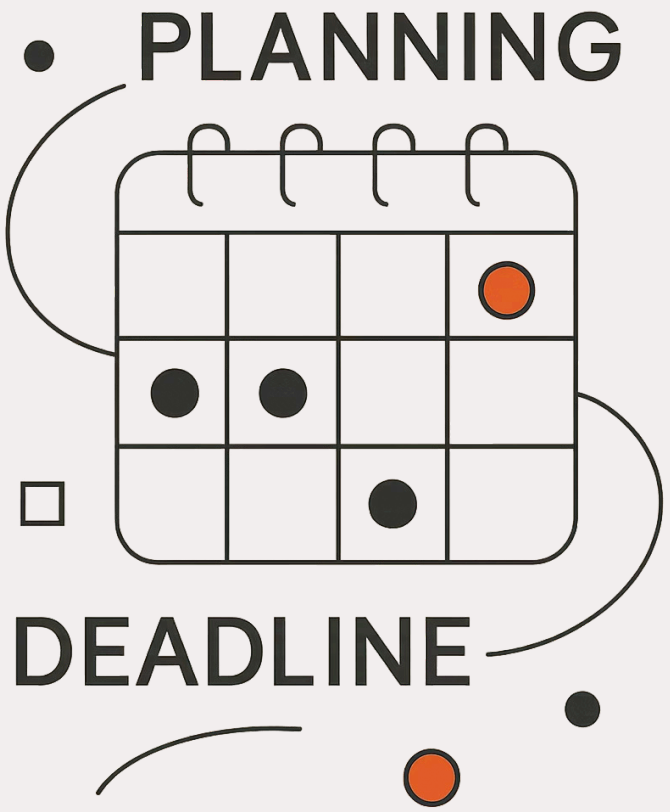
May 15, 2026

Application window closes. All materials, MOUs, and pathway plans must be finalized.

4

2026–2027

Program launches. Students begin earning dual enrollment credits toward credentials of value.



Program Design Considerations

Before committing to implementation, districts should conduct a structured design process that accounts for regional labor market data, student interest, and institutional capacity. A well-designed pathway is one that students want to pursue and employers are waiting to hire from.

Regional Demand Analysis

- Identify top high-wage, high-growth industries in your region using state LMI data
- Map local employer partners who can support apprenticeships or work-based learning
- Align to industries where your IHE partner already offers credentialed programs

Capacity Planning

- Survey student interest to validate pathway demand before launch
- Confirm IHE partner has sufficient instructional and facility capacity
- Plan for staffing, instructor credentialing, and course sequencing
- Build a contingency plan for transportation and scheduling conflicts

STUDENT IMPACT

Benefits for Students

The Applied Sciences Pathway Program changes the trajectory of a student's life. By the time they walk across the graduation stage, they're not just diploma-holders — they're **credentialed professionals with a head start** on career earnings and continued education.

Graduate with a Credential

Students earn a Level I or Level II certificate recognized by industry — before they leave high school.

Reduce Cost & Time

Dual credit hours earned reduce the time and cost of pursuing postsecondary education significantly.

Enter High-Wage Careers

Direct workforce entry into industries with strong starting wages and long-term growth potential.

Workforce Alignment

Skills and credentials are precisely aligned to what Texas employers are actively recruiting for.

Benefits for Districts

Beyond student outcomes, the Applied Sciences Pathway Program delivers measurable institutional value. Districts that implement strong pathway programs are increasingly recognized as regional workforce leaders — strengthening relationships with employers, IHEs, and the communities they serve.

Expands CCMR Outcomes

Students earning credentials of value directly contribute to College, Career, and Military Readiness accountability metrics — improving your district's performance ratings.

Strengthens Workforce Alignment

Formalizing IHE partnerships and aligning to regional industries positions your district as a key player in the local workforce development ecosystem.

Flexible & Innovative Pathways

Offers a differentiated program that attracts students who may not see themselves on a traditional four-year college track — increasing engagement and reducing dropout risk.

HONEST ASSESSMENT

Common Challenges to Anticipate

Successful implementation requires eyes-open planning. Districts that struggle with this program typically underestimate the complexity of partnership management and logistics. Here's what to plan for before you begin:

IHE Partnership Development

Building a strong MOU takes time. IHEs have their own processes, timelines, and approval structures. Start conversations 12+ months in advance and engage legal counsel for MOU review.

Scheduling & Transportation

Getting students to and from IHE campuses on a consistent schedule requires logistical coordination. Districts must build transportation plans that don't disrupt other campus operations.

Instructor Credentialing

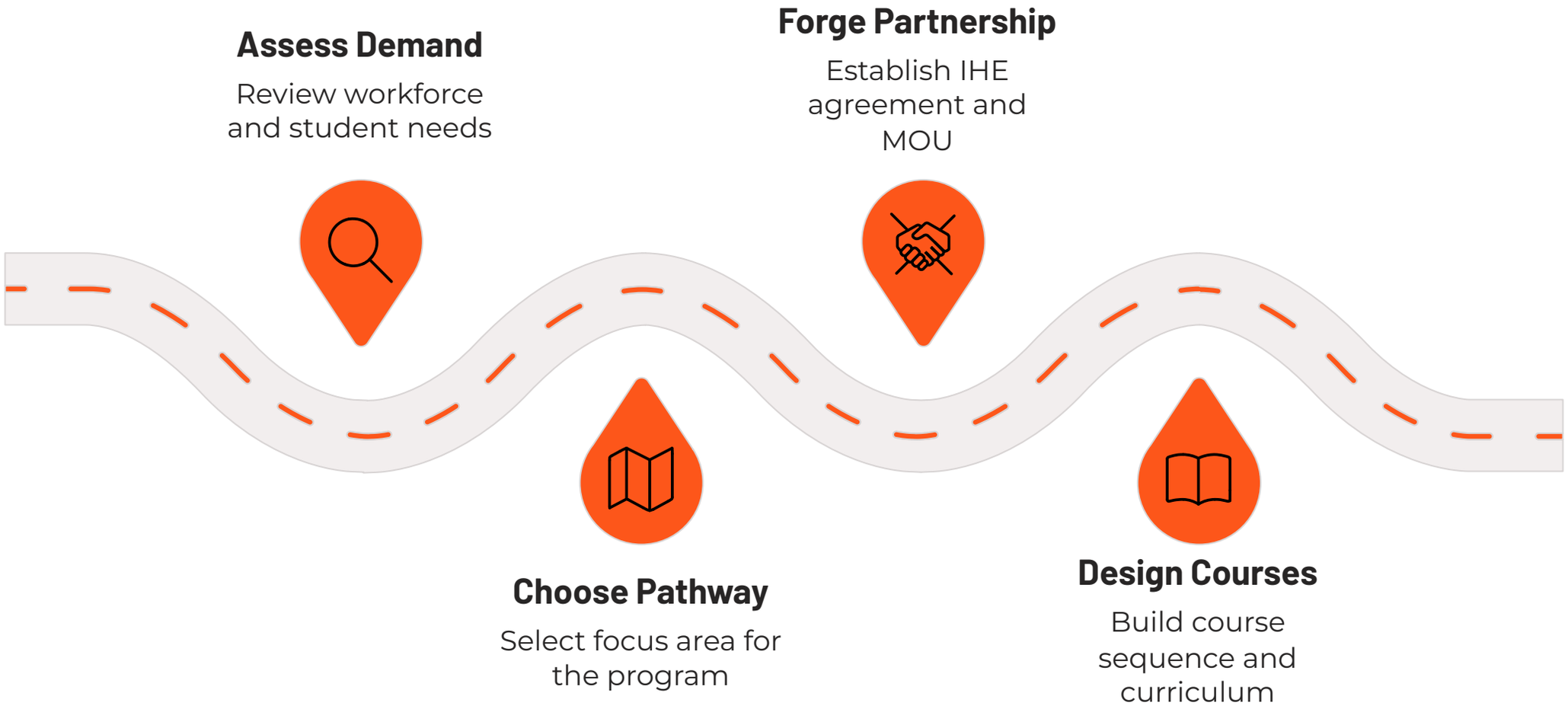
Faculty teaching dual enrollment courses may need to meet IHE credentialing standards — which can differ significantly from standard Texas teacher certification requirements.

Expectation Alignment

High school and college academic cultures differ. Districts must bridge these gaps in rigor, grading, attendance, and student support to ensure students succeed in a dual-enrollment environment.

Implementation Roadmap

A successful launch requires a structured, sequenced approach. Use this six-step roadmap to guide your district from initial exploration through program launch and ongoing monitoring. Each step builds on the last — skipping ahead creates risk.



Districts that begin with a strong needs assessment and secure an IHE partner early will have significantly more time for course sequencing and staff preparation before the application window opens.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Program Timeline & Expiration

The Applied Sciences Pathway Program has a defined legislative lifespan. This is not a permanent fixture in the Texas Education Code — it has a **sunset date of September 1, 2031**. Districts that delay implementation risk having little time to demonstrate outcomes and advocate for program renewal before the program expires.

Strategic, early implementation is critical — not just to serve students well, but to build the data record necessary to support future legislative action.

Key Dates at a Glance

Launch: 2026–2027 school year

Application Opens: January 15, 2026

Application Closes: May 15, 2026

Program Expires: September 1, 2031

Early implementation gives your district **four full cohorts** of outcomes data before the sunset date.

Is This Right for Your District?

Before moving to action, every district leader should honestly evaluate readiness across four dimensions. These questions are designed to surface both opportunity and constraint — so your decision is grounded in reality, not enthusiasm alone.

Credential Outcomes

Do we want students graduating with credentials of value — not just a diploma — as a core outcome of our CTE program?

Dual Enrollment Capacity

Can we operationally support dual enrollment at scale, including transportation, scheduling, instructor alignment, and student support services?

Workforce Alignment

Are our current CTE offerings aligned to the high-wage, high-growth industries in our region — and is there employer demand to support graduates?

Higher Ed Partnerships

Do we have — or can we develop — strong, committed relationships with IHE partners ready to co-design and co-deliver this program?

Call to Action

The window to implement the Applied Sciences Pathway Program for 2026–2027 is open — but it won't stay open long. Districts that act now will have the time, partnerships, and plans needed to launch with confidence. Those who wait may find themselves rushing through critical steps or missing the application deadline entirely.

1

Begin Planning Now

Convene your CTE leadership team and begin an internal readiness assessment this semester.

2

Engage IHE Partners

Reach out to your regional community colleges to explore pathway alignment and MOU development.

3

Identify Target Pathways

Use regional labor market data to select one or two high-demand pathways where you can launch strong.

4

Prepare Your Application

Gather required documentation and build your course sequence in advance of the January 15, 2026 opening.

Helpdul Guidance

[1.15.2026 TEA Notice to Administrator - Applied Sciences Pathways]

[Texas Education Agency - Applied Sciences Pathway Program]

Join the Conversation & Get Started

Ready to explore whether the Applied Sciences Pathway Program is the right fit for your district? Connect with us to access resources, register for upcoming planning sessions, and get direct support as you move toward the 2026–2027 launch.

Register Now

Join us each month for more helpful technical support sessions!

Contact Us

Reach out directly for one-on-one consultation, IHE partnership guidance, or application support. Our team is ready to help.

Next Steps

Download the implementation checklist and readiness self-assessment to begin your district's planning process today.

The Applied Sciences Pathway Program represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to redefine what graduation means for Texas students. **Your district has the chance to lead.**

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