

RESOLUTION NO. 20190619-182

WHEREAS, the Imagine Austin comprehensive plan established the goal of providing pathways to prosperity for all as a key challenge and opportunity, as well as an action principle, for the City; and

WHEREAS, the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan was amended to include the Austin Metro Regional Workforce Master Plan, which seeks to address affordability by improving residents' access to better economic opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the City Council set economic opportunity and affordability as a top priority in the Austin Strategic Direction 2023 plan; and

WHEREAS, increasing education and skills training is a key driver leading to increased earning capacity at all levels; and

WHEREAS, while classroom education in a degree program is a valuable driver of increased upward mobility, other non-classroom skills training can also significantly improve earning capacity and affordability options for City residents; and

WHEREAS, the Austin Metro Area Regional Workforce Master Plan included a goal of assisting 2,000 economically disadvantaged employees with advancement towards middle-skill roles; and

WHEREAS, the October 2018 Workforce Master Plan baseline evaluation report did not measure progress towards the advancement and upskilling goal, but the methodology, baseline data and on-going collection strategy is under development; and

WHEREAS, individual City departments may provide assistance for certifications or other job skill training, but may be inconsistent in their eligibility, procedures, or tracking; and

WHEREAS, the City has for many years had a tuition reimbursement program available to all City employees, but last revised this policy in 2001; and

WHEREAS, the Bureau of Labor Statistics' consumer price index, a general indicator of inflation, estimates that prices in 2019 are 44.60% higher than average prices throughout 2001, and

WHEREAS, since 2001, Bureau of Labor Statistics' index specifically for college tuition and fees in all U.S. cities has increased by 146%; and

WHEREAS, although the size of the City's workforce has increased by 17% since FY2012-13, overall employee participation in the tuition reimbursement program has declined by 12%, the number of classes reimbursed has declined by 22%, and the utilization of general fund budgeted for this benefit has declined by 31%; and

WHEREAS, Senate Bill 2 of the 86th Texas Legislature restricts the percentage by which the effective tax rate may increase to 3.5%, which will reduce the expenditure ability of the City; **NOW, THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The City Manager is directed to analyze the City's current tuition reimbursement program and implement any changes to that policy that the City Manager deems appropriate in light of the factors and concerns identified in this Resolution. This analysis may include, but is not to be limited to:

- Assessing the impact of Senate Bill 2 of the City's tuition reimbursement programs;
- Inviting input from City employees regarding barriers to educational opportunities and possible opportunities for improvement;
- Expanding assistance from degree-pursuit tuition to broader opportunities for education and skills-based training;
- Adjusting the allowable assistance per employee per year based on changes in inflation or local tuition costs;
- Moving from a retroactive funding model, focused on a prior semester, to conditional support in advance of an educational program; and
- Improving the availability of forms, including electronic submission, providing targeted information and access to front-line employees who would benefit from skills-based training, as well as communicating the jobs and careers that are in-demand at the City and in the community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is encouraged, as part of the analysis of education assistance, to consult with external marketplace resources such as Workforce Solutions in order to benchmark current policy trends and methods for effectively tracking program participation and successful outcomes.

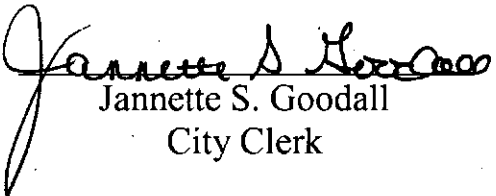
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to develop and implement ways to encourage other area employers to expand their education assistance programs consistent with the factors and concerns identified in this Resolution.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to report to the Council on actions taken and results achieved in response to this Resolution by the end of the City's current fiscal year.

ADOPTED: June 19, 2019

ATTEST: 
Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk