



## RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

### Economic Prosperity Commission

Recommendation Number: 20251119-009: Summer Youth Employment & Workforce Development

**Date of Approval:** November 19, 2025

#### **Recommendation:**

The Economic Prosperity Commission recommends several key actions to strengthen Travis County's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and City of Austin's Summer Internship Program (SIP) to better prepare Austin's future workforce. These policy recommendations outline how the City of Austin can make strategic investments that expand career pathways and long-term income opportunities for high school students.

#### **Description of Recommendation to Council:**

The Economic Prosperity Commission encourages the Austin City Council to undertake the following **low- or no-cost actions**:

1. **Centralize the application process** for both students and employers across City and County programs.
2. **Improve coordination and resource sharing** among all youth employment partners, including Travis County, the City of Austin, and AISD.
3. **Connect AISD P-TECH internships** with SYEP & SIP apprenticeship opportunities.
4. **Establish requirements for Chapter 380 businesses** to hire high school students for summer positions and contribute financially to SYEP & SIP, given their vested interest in developing a skilled local workforce.
5. **Develop an outreach and awareness strategy** targeting Infrastructure Academy partners, Capital IDEA, AFL-CIO, AFSCME, Skillpoint Alliance, the startup community, Chambers of Commerce, and other workforce industry groups.
6. **Obtain employer-funded internships**, with payment determined to employers' tax status to unlock additional external funding opportunities.
7. **Coordinate job-shadowing opportunities through SYEP & SIP** so AISD students can visit internship sites before summer begins. These visits should be open to both SYEP & SIP participants and nonparticipants and can especially support students who lack required documentation

8. **Increase public access to program data**, including student outcomes and overall program performance on the 1-3 years following programs conclusion
9. **Create employer-friendly guides** explaining the benefits of hosting high school interns.
10. 10. SYEP & SIP will be provided for 14-15 year olds.

The Economic Prosperity Commission encourages the Austin City Council to pursue the following investment-based actions:

- **Embed AI literacy certifications** into the curriculum of SYEP & SIP career tracks.

## **Rationale:**

### **Operations and Student Demand**

To inform these recommendations, the Commission met with the Travis County SYEP, the City of Austin SIP, and founding members of the City's program, and reviewed peer-city models. We learned that of the 717 students who applied to the City's program, only 190 were offered jobs. The County's program reflected similar trends. The primary barrier is limited private-sector participation. City staff estimated that only **30%** of positions—approximately **57 jobs**—were provided by private-sector employers.

Upon examining data from the SIP, although the purpose of this program was intended to serve as a juvenile crime prevention program, with a focused effort on disadvantaged communities, **only 36%** of participants attend Title I schools. City staff indicated this is partly due to a lack of structured, school-based outreach. Currently, exposure depends on individual teachers inviting SIP staff to speak with students. A formal partnership with AISD's Title I high schools—ensuring regular visits to campus career and counseling offices—would likely increase program awareness and applications.

### **Program Duplication and Untapped Opportunities**

The City and County programs duplicate many efforts, including maintaining separate student applications, job-readiness trainings, and employer outreach—often targeting the same employers. This duplication occurs every summer.

Funding structures give the City substantial leverage to improve alignment. The City program is supported by City funds and national partners such as JP Morgan Chase and Comerica Bank. For the County program, City funding accounts for roughly **60%** of the budget, creating opportunities for the City to guide both programs toward greater coordination and efficiency.

Students are placed across public-sector, nonprofit, and private-sector employers based on interests. The City currently pays **\$13/hour** for every student placement—even for those working at private for-profit companies. Requiring large employers to contribute financially, especially for returning students or those with P-TECH apprenticeship experience, represents an opportunity to service more students interested in employment. No Chapter 380 employers currently participate in SYEP or SIP, despite Chapter 380 agreements referencing workforce development, there is no requirement for them to participate and hire youth during the summer.

### **Student Barriers and Workforce Needs**

SYEP & SIP were originally created to reduce crime in low-income communities by providing high

school students with six-week summer employment. Students still face significant barriers, including:

- Transportation challenges
- Difficulty completing formal application requirements
- High competition for positions in high-demand industries (e.g., healthcare, technology)

Given robust student demand, SYEP & SIP remains an underutilized workforce development tool. For context, **286 adults** participated in specialized job training through the City's primary workforce program last year. According to the Mayor, 10,000 people per year are needed to fill jobs related to airport and I35 infrastructure projects. However, Mayor Watson also said if leaders allowed people to be trained for those jobs organically without additional training efforts, they'd only be about 4,000 people short.

As Austin anticipates major AI-driven shifts in healthcare, energy, education, and manufacturing, strengthening early workforce pathways is increasingly critical.

### **Need for Better Data**

The SYEP & SIP lack publicly accessible data necessary for measuring impact. Useful metrics would include:

- Career outcomes for participants
- Earnings 1–5 years after participation compared with nonparticipants
- Student travel distance to job sites
- Types and locations of job placements
- Academic performance (e.g., grade improvements) following participation

### **Aligning SYEP & SIP With P-TECH and Career Pathways**

Many AISD P-TECH students receive early training in construction science, cybersecurity, real estate, health science, business administration, and tourism—and complete apprenticeships during the school year. Yet many lack clear pathways for continuing this work in the summer. Greater coordination between the City, Travis County, and AISD could better align SYEP & SIP placements with these students and with high-demand career pathways. Even when demand exceeds available positions, the City and County can still support career exploration. Under SB 68, students may receive excused absences for career exploration activities. SYEP & SIP could coordinate job-site visits and career pathway tours for interested students.

### **Expanding Employer Partnerships**

The City Council and Economic Development Department can play a major role in raising awareness among employer partners. In recent discussions, the Hispanic Chamber expressed strong interest in seasonal workers and a desire to engage more deeply with SYEP & SIP. Additional partnership opportunities exist with the Infrastructure Academy, Capital IDEA, AFL-CIO, AFSCME, Skillpoint Alliance, the startup community, and local Chambers of Commerce. Achieving this will require a coordinated outreach strategy that includes employer guides, FAQs, and sample job descriptions.

### **Preparing for Funding Uncertainty**

Although recent state actions—including HB 8, SB 68, and the Skills Development Fund—show support for workforce development, other federal and state actions signal possible funding

constraints. Building stronger local workforce strategies is prudent. As LBJ School Professor Steven Pedigo notes in *A Blueprint for Metro Areas in Texas*, economic development is workforce development. Austin must align workforce development with environmental priorities and prepare workers for AI-driven changes across healthcare, education, and manufacturing.

Sources: The information within this recommendation came from this [report](#) given to the Economic Opportunity Committee, this [recommendation](#) passed by the Human Rights Commission, and interviews with both the city and county program offices.

Motioned By: Commissioner Nahas

Seconded By: Commissioner Zapata

Vote: 7-0

For: Chair Gonzales, Commissioners Cantu, Joshi, Nahas, Randall, Rashed, Zapata

Against: None

Abstain: Commissioner Tomaszewski

Off the dais: Commissioner Pleuthner

Absent: Vice Chair Valdez-Sanchez

Attest: *Ryan Sperling*

(Economic Prosperity Commission Staff Liaison)