

Guidelines for Texas Skill Standards Based Program Recognition

Texas Workforce Investment Council
1100 San Jacinto Boulevard, Suite 1.100
Austin, Texas 78701
(512) 936 8100
<https://gov.texas.gov/organization/twic>

Publication Date: December 2023

Publication Date: Amended December 2023

Eleventh Edition

Permission is granted to copy, reproduce, distribute, download, and display materials in this document for training, education, and workforce development purposes provided that the materials are not modified in any way and that acknowledgment is given to the Texas Workforce Investment Council (the Council). Permission to copy, reproduce, and distribute materials in this document, of copyright owners other than the Council, for any purpose, is specifically limited by the copyright of those materials.

**Published by the Texas Workforce Investment Council
1100 San Jacinto Boulevard, Suite 1.100
Austin, Texas 78701
(512) 936 8100
<https://gov.texas.gov/organization/twic>**

**Texas Workforce Investment Council
Guidelines for Texas Skill Standards Based Program Recognition**

PREFACE

About These Guidelines

Guidelines for Texas Skill Standards Based Program Recognition is designed for community and technical colleges interested in using skill standards in their workforce education programs. These *Guidelines* provide policies and guidance regarding the usage of skill standards in Texas for curriculum development, assessment, and certification of workforce skills. The use of skill standards is not endorsed for purposes other than education, training, and career information.

Using skill standards as a starting point to derive a credential that specifies to an employer what skills and knowledge an individual has attained involves a three-step process: 1) translating skill standards into curriculum; 2) assessing individuals' knowledge and skill level acquisition; and 3) documenting that skill attainment. These *Guidelines* do not prescribe a particular way to accomplish this objective; rather, this document presents options and references for conducting this process.

About the Texas Workforce Investment Council

Guidelines for Texas Skill Standards Based Program Recognition is published by the Texas Workforce Investment Council (Council). The Council was established by the Texas Legislature in 1993 to assist the governor and the legislature with strategic planning for and evaluation of the Texas workforce system. It is composed of 19 members representing business, labor, education, community-based organizations, and five state agency partners. One of the Council's legislative mandates is to maintain a statewide system of industry-defined and industry-recognized skill standards for sub-baccalaureate occupations with strong employment and earnings opportunities. The goal of the Texas skill standards system is to assist the growth of the Texas economy through the recognition of skill standards and skill attainment to support workforce development efforts.

To Reach the Council

On the Web: <https://gov.texas.gov/organization/twic>

By Email: twic.mail@gov.texas.gov

By Phone: 512/936-8100

By Fax: 512/936-8118

By Mail: Texas Workforce Investment Council 1100
San Jacinto Boulevard, Suite 1.100
Austin, Texas 78701

**Texas Workforce Investment Council
Guidelines for Texas Skill Standards Based Program Recognition**

INTRODUCTION	1
Development and Recognition of Skill Standards	1
Facilitation of Skill Standards Usage	1
Purpose and Scope of Guidelines	1
Relationship with Existing Occupational Certification Systems	1
Credential Granting Educational Institutions	
Licensure	
Industry-Based Certifications	
POLICIES AND GUIDANCE	3
Usage of Skill Standards to Guide Curriculum Development	3
Skill Standards-to-Curricula Linkages	
Assessment	4
Texas Approach and Scope	
Skill Attainment Documentation	4
Levels of Credentials	
Program Recognition	4
Program Recognition Criteria	
Rules and Requirements Governing the Following Changes Prior to Program Recognition Expiration	

INTRODUCTION

The Texas Workforce Investment Council (Council) assists the Governor and the Legislature with strategic planning for and evaluation of the Texas workforce system. As one of its duties, the Council maintains a statewide system of industry-defined skill standards. In that role, the Council is charged with two major functions.

Development and Recognition of Skill Standards

The first function is to facilitate the development and recognition of skill standards by industry groups. Part of this function is to serve as a quality assurance agent for the development process, informing industry groups of the content and procedural validity criteria required for recognition in Texas. The Council then evaluates the skill standards against the criteria and recognizes the standards. For details on this process, see the companion publication, *Guidelines for the Development, Recognition, and Usage of Skill Standards (Guidelines for Development)*.

Facilitation of Skill Standards Usage

The second function is to facilitate dissemination and usage of skill standards. The Legislature intended the skill standards to “guide curriculum development, assessment, and certification of workforce skills.” However, the system in Texas is voluntary, with no authority granted to compel the use of skill standards. Thus, the Council helps to bridge the gap between industry skill standards and their usage by education and training providers to prepare students and trainees for the workforce in two ways: 1) provides technical assistance on skill standards usage, and 2) promotes the use of standards and credentials among employers through the employer section of its website.

Purpose and Scope of Guidelines

Guidelines for Texas Skill Standards Based Program Recognition provides policies and guidance regarding the usage of skill standards in Texas for curriculum development, assessment, and certification of workforce skills. These *Guidelines* are designed for community and technical colleges interested in using skill standards in their workforce education programs. As stated in the *Guidelines for Development*, the use of skill standards is not endorsed for purposes other than education, training, and career information. These *Guidelines* are limited to providing policies and guidance on the usage of skill standards within the existing public postsecondary workforce education system in Texas.

Relationship with Existing Occupational Certification Systems

Third-party assessment and credentialing systems in the United States perform one or more of the three functions—curriculum development, assessment, and certification—referred to in the legislation establishing the Texas skill standards system. These occupational credentialing systems can be divided into three categories:

Credential granting educational institutions – Degrees or certificates are awarded by educational institutions for workforce education programs that teach skills and knowledge to prepare students for employment in a career field. Students are awarded the credentials after successfully completing instruction and demonstrating mastery of knowledge through provider-administered assessments.

Licensure – Awarded by government-regulated agencies, a license is required for certain professions before employment begins.

Industry-Based Certification – An industry-based certification (IBC) is a type of nontraditional award that is conferred to an individual who demonstrates proficiency and knowledge, through examination, in a specific industry or trade. An IBC is not dependent on any actual education or training program. Instead, evaluating candidates for certification relies on independent, third-party professional and industry groups. These national organizations develop and maintain relevant, uniform proficiency standards that are assessed and sanctioned by industry-approved examination facilities, independent of any educational institution or training program. Defining characteristics of IBCs include:

- nationally recognized,
- third-party assessed to industry-recognized occupational standards, and
- portable across regions and state boundaries.

Texas Credential Granting Educational Institutions

In Texas, the skill standards system, which encompasses sub-baccalaureate occupations, is implemented through public community and technical colleges, which are governed by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). Colleges choose the courses to comprise their technical education programs from the Workforce Education Course Manual (WECM). The WECM is THECB's approved inventory of workforce education courses for use by public two-year colleges in Texas.

In developing a workforce education program, colleges must identify the competencies (academic and workforce skills and knowledge) that are needed to attain entry-level employment in the relevant occupation. THECB, in its *Guidelines for Instructional Programs in Workforce Education*, suggests several processes or methods for identifying those competencies, including skill standards. The competencies provide the content for choosing the courses that will constitute the program. Skill standards provide an ideal source of statewide industry workforce requirements that colleges may integrate into a technical core of WECM courses.

POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

Texas skill standards are a tool for communicating employers' workforce requirements to education and training providers. Translating skill standards into workforce education program content consists of three processes:

- Usage of skill standards to guide curriculum development.
- Assessment (measuring individuals' acquisition of skill standards).
- Skill attainment documentation (certification and credentialing).

Usage of Skill Standards to Guide Curriculum Development

Skill standards and workforce education curricula essentially convey the same information. Skill standards, developed by industry, state what the worker needs to know and be able to do (knowledge and skills) and the level to which the work must be performed. Curricula, developed by workforce education providers, state what learning outcomes (knowledge and skills) the learner must attain and the level to which the outcomes must be demonstrated. This similarity allows the use of skill standards to construct curricula. The seven elements of skill standards correspond to curricula components, as follows.

Skill Standards Elements	Curricula Components
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Critical Work Function• Key Activities• Occupational Skills, Knowledge, and Conditions• Academic and Employability Knowledge and Skills• Performance Criteria• Statements of Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program Structure• Learning Outcomes• Workplace Context and Resources/ Equipment• Sequence and Competencies Integration• Benchmarks and Assessment• Methodology and Instruments

Skill Standards-to-Curricula Linkages

Critical work functions are the principal responsibilities that a worker must perform. This element is roughly parallel to the courses that comprise a workforce education program. Thus, critical work functions suggest a potential course breakdown within a program of study.

Key activities are the major duties that workers must perform to accomplish each critical work function. This element is comparable to learning outcomes in curricula. An education or training provider developing curriculum based on skill standards would expect a learner, by the completion of the program, to demonstrate the successful performance of the key activities.

Occupational skills, knowledge and conditions are the technical or occupation-specific skills and knowledge and the associated tools, resources, and equipment required to carry out the key activities to the level specified in the performance criteria. This element enables the design of curriculum in the context of the workplace.

Academic and employability knowledge and skills (AEKS) are the competencies associated with traditional subject areas, and the cross-functional skills and knowledge required to perform each critical work function. The Council adopted the AEKS common nomenclature and associated rating scales endorsed by the National Skill Standards Board, which were copyrighted in the accompanying resource, *Skill Scales Companion Guide (2000)*. This information allows the teaching of these underlying competencies to be sequenced in courses relative to the work functions.

Performance criteria indicate the type, quality, and level of output (demonstrable performance) required to successfully complete each key activity. This element can be used as the benchmark in assessing students' performance of the key activity, or learning outcome.

Statement of assessment is the industry group's recommendation of the strategies and tools to evaluate whether the learner meets the competencies specified in a critical work function. Examples might include tests, simulations, demonstrations, work samples, portfolios, interviews, etc. This element can be used to design assessments for a program and determine the methodology and instruments to use.

Assessment

Assessment is the process by which an individual's performance is measured or evaluated to determine whether it meets the level of competence specified in the skill standards. Assessment instruments, as indicated above, include a variety of written and performance-based methods.

Texas Approach and Scope

In Texas, the infrastructure for administering assessments and documenting attainment of skills is the public postsecondary workforce education system, consisting of community and technical colleges. The performance criteria and statements of assessment enable these colleges to develop assessments that measure individuals' attainment of the skills indicated by industry in the standards.

Skill Attainment Documentation

Levels of Credentials

As mandated in its authorizing legislation, the voluntary statewide system of skill standards and credentials shall encompass all major skilled occupations that provide strong employment and earnings opportunities and require less than a baccalaureate degree. In Texas' community and technical college system, the credentials that encompass this range of occupations and are of sufficient length and breadth to encompass the standards content are the level two certificate and the applied associate degree.

Program Recognition

To help facilitate usage of skill standards, the Texas Legislature charged the Council with promoting the use of skill standards to guide curriculum development, assessment, and certification of workforce skills. As part of that responsibility, the Council recognizes community and technical college programs that teach and assess students on the competencies in the skill standards content.

Program Recognition Criteria

To receive recognition for a workforce education program, community and technical colleges must meet the following criteria:

- Incorporate all elements of the skill standards into the program’s curriculum.
- Teach the key activities (or equivalent element) in the standards as learning outcomes in the program and assess students’ performance based on those activities and related performance criteria, skills, and knowledge.
- Complete, submit, and receive approval for, its application for program recognition, which consists of the following documentation:
 - ▶ Application cover page
 - ▶ Key activities-to-courses matrix – indicating in which courses the key activities will be taught as learning outcomes.
 - ▶ Signed statement of assurances indicating the college’s agreement to:
 - List the key activities (or equivalent element) from the matrix as learning outcomes on the corresponding course syllabi,
 - Receive THECB approval for the program,
 - Adhere to the above criteria and statements by all campuses that subsequently offer the recognized program, and
 - Provide documentation of the college’s compliance with the above criteria and statements, including submission of sample assessments to evaluate students’ performance of the key activities (or equivalent element), under a desk audit, if requested by the Council.

To assist curriculum developers, a user guide for incorporating skill standards content into postsecondary workforce education programs is posted in the community and technical colleges section of the Texas skill standards website (<https://tssb.org/community-and-technical-colleges>).

Program Recognition Duration and Application Period

Program recognition is valid for three years, effective on January 1 and expiring on December 31. The Council will accept applications for new program recognitions between August 1 and September 30 of each year. Colleges will be notified of the outcome of their application’s review by December 1 for an effective recognition date of January 1.

Colleges with existing recognized program(s) may apply for an additional three years of recognition by submitting a new application prior to the December 31 expiration of their current program recognition. The new application must be submitted during the application period of August 1 to September 30. Colleges will be notified of the outcome of their application’s review by December 1 for an effective recognition date of January 1.

Requirements Governing the Following Changes Prior to Program Recognition Expiration

College Program Closure

If a college formally initiates the process with THECB to close a recognized program before the three-year recognition term expires, it must submit:

- A statement notifying the Council that the program is being deactivated or closed.

Updated Skill Standards

If skill standards have been updated, i.e., the work-oriented elements (critical work functions, key activities, and performance criteria) have been significantly changed, the resulting skill standards are essentially considered new, and thus:

- When the related programs' recognitions expire on December 31, a college will be required to use the updated skill standards if it submits a new recognition application.

Expired Skill Standards

If the skill standards expire before a college's program recognition expires:

- Program recognition continues until the expiration date. The expired skill standards will remain in the Texas Skill Standards Repository in an archives section until the recognitions of all recognized programs integrated with the expired skill standards have also expired.