



Reimagining the Education-to-Workforce Pathway

BridgeYear's
2024-2027 Strategic Plan



Context

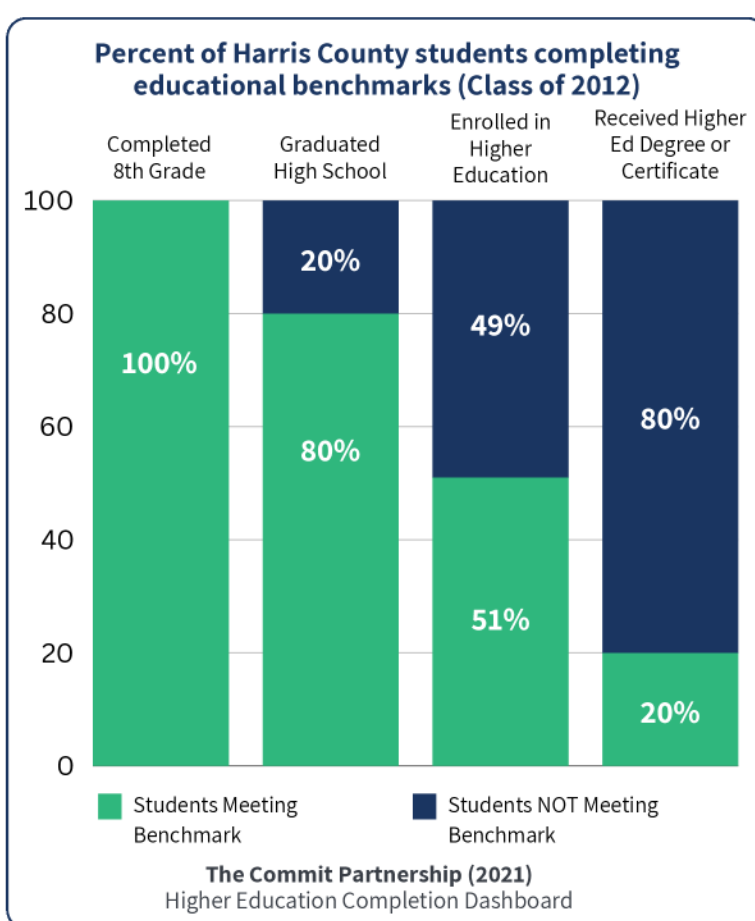
The landscape of higher education is undergoing a significant shift in the United States as the traditional four-year college model faces scrutiny and challenges. With rising tuition costs and corresponding student debt, the college degree no longer guarantees a positive return on investment. Future earning potential has also been shown to be highly influenced by determining factors such as chosen major and type of institution attended - rather than the degree itself.¹ Such conditional factors to economic stability have left youth disenfranchised and distrusting of institutions.

“The percentage of young adults who said that a college degree is very important fell [from 74 percent to 41 percent]. Only about a third of Americans now say they have a lot of confidence in higher education.”²

- Paul Tough, The New York Times Magazine

Though students are turning against the notions of four-year college, youth do not have the knowledge to pursue a non-degree pathway.³ In addition, students are not prepared for postsecondary success; Understanding Houston reports that nearly 2 out of 5 (39.7%) high school graduates in 2019-20 did not classify as College, Career or Military Ready (CCMR), a nearly 12% decline in the previous year.⁴

In Harris County, postsecondary completion has suffered as a result of these realities. 20% of Harris County graduates did not complete a postsecondary degree or certificate within six years of high school graduation; for students from low-income backgrounds, the percentage falls to 14%.⁵



¹Emmons, William R., et al. “Is college still worth it? the new calculus of Falling Returns.” Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review, Vol. 101, No. 4, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.20955/r.101.297-329>

²Tough, Paul. “Americans Are Losing Faith in the Value of College. Whose Fault Is That?” The New York Times Magazine, The New York Times Magazine, 5 Sept. 2023, www.nytimes.com/2023/09/05/magazine/college-worth-price.html

³American Student Assistance (ASA) and Jobs for the Future (JFF). “Degrees of Risk: What Gen Z and Employers Think About Education-to-Career Pathways ... and How Those Views are Changing.” 2022 White Paper

⁴Understanding Houston, Post-Secondary Education, <https://www.understandinghouston.org/topic/education/post-secondary-education#overview>

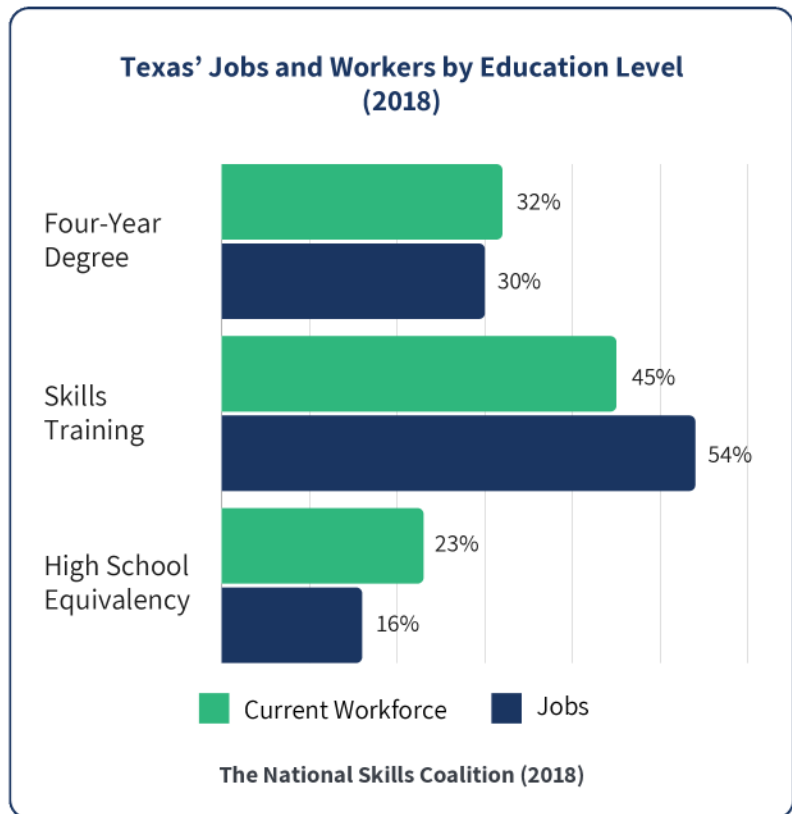
⁵The Commit Partnership (2021) Higher Education Completion Dashboard. Higher Education Completion Dashboard | Tableau Public Higher Education Completion Dashboard. <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/the.commit.partnership/viz/HigherEducationCompletionDashboard/Dashboard1>

Too often, students graduate from high school without a postsecondary plan or the opportunity to participate in skills development and career building in their formative young adult years. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, 12% of young adults in Texas are disconnected from school and work.⁶

Without pathways into education and careers, youth will be more likely to rely on government support, continue the intergenerational cycle of poverty, and experience worsened life outcomes. In 2020, The American Public Health Association reported that disconnected youth in the United States are almost twice as prone to experiencing poverty compared to their connected counterparts.⁷

Youth disconnection is a significant loss of economic opportunity for the individual and the community; young people are not investing in themselves with further education or training and not participating in the labor market. In Texas, more than half of jobs require skills training beyond high school but do not require a four-year degree. However, only 45% of the state's workforce has attained the essential skills training required for these in-demand careers.⁸

This mismatch of skills and labor market needs, combined with the low postsecondary completion rates, calls for a reevaluation of the education and workforce paradigm in the Greater Houston area.



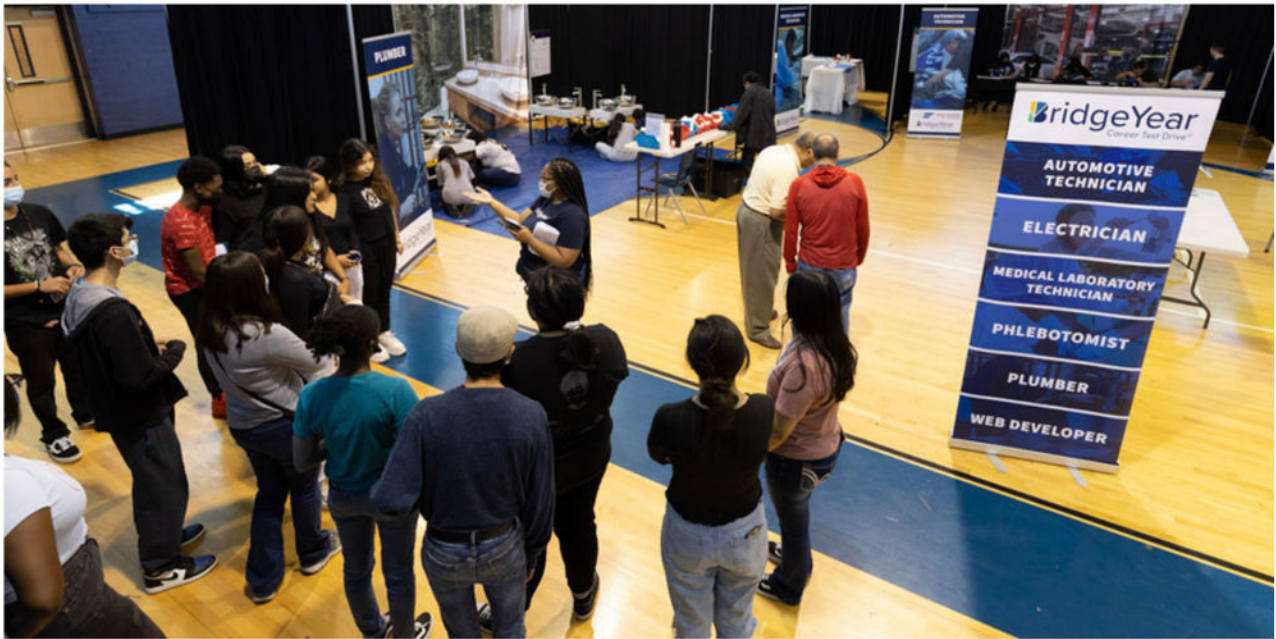
Executive Summary

Since 2016, BridgeYear has worked to realign the education and workforce landscape with a mission to connect underserved youth to careers and educational pathways that provide economic stability and independence. BridgeYear is the only non-profit in Houston that focuses on students with GPAs of 2.5 or lower and offers a pathway to short-term industry certifications and associate degrees. BridgeYear accomplishes this mission through comprehensive programming including hands-on, realistic career simulations as well as workforce training support for in-demand, well-paying careers in the Houston area that do not require a four-year degree. This innovative programming, coupled with MorePathways, BridgeYear's free online database for local workforce training programs linked to specific careers, has allowed the organization to serve over 12,000 students each year.

⁶Crockett, Ana and Zhang, Xiaohan. "Young adults are disconnected from work and school due to long-term labor force trends." Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, 06 Apr. 2023, <https://www.dallasfed.org/cd/communities/2023/2303>

⁷Lewis, Kristen. "A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus." Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council. May 2020. [ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/ADecadeUndone.pdf](https://static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/ADecadeUndone.pdf)

⁸National Skills Coalition (2018). "The Texas Skills Mismatch." National Skills Coalition. 2018. <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/skills-mismatch/texas-skills-mismatch/>



With a team rooted in the community they serve and a history of successful programs, BridgeYear is poised to make a meaningful and lasting impact on reshaping the education and workforce landscape for the better. However, there is still work to be done. Existing workforce training programs focus on enhancing the skills of older adults through upskilling and reskilling, leaving a gap for recent high school graduates who opt not to pursue a four-year degree and need a different educational pathway. BridgeYear is committed to creating avenues for young individuals by offering access and support.

Serving over 37,000 students since its inception, BridgeYear has made a significant impact in the Greater Houston community and seeks to do more. Over the next three years, the organization will take its programming to greater heights, broadening the horizons of students, challenging notions that a four-year college is the sole pathway to success, and facilitating access to relevant skills training and educational opportunities that prepare students for the workforce. Specifically, BridgeYear has outlined four goals to achieve this vision in the next three years:

2024-2027 Strategic Goals

1

Broaden BridgeYear's reach in the Houston community such that students, teachers, and parents are educated about high-quality non-four-year pathways each year.

2

Break down barriers to entry for youth in Houston's existing workforce development system to allow for a more seamless transition from graduation to enrollment in high-quality skills training program.

3

Leverage the full potential of MorePathways to be an all-encompassing and dynamic tool for students and adults to find and connect to workforce development programs.

4

Strengthen BridgeYear's infrastructure by attracting, retaining, and developing top talent, diversifying and growing our revenues, and investing in technology.

Strategic Planning Process

Over the course of several months, the strategic planning team gained extensive input from students, partners, funders, Board, and staff through surveys and informational interviews. The team also assessed historical data on BridgeYear programs and finances and conducted research on the education to workforce landscape in the Houston region. What was learned through this process was shared with BridgeYear partners, funders, and internal stakeholders who offered recommendations for the organization's strategic priorities. This process identified BridgeYear's strengths and weaknesses, as well as trends that could influence its work moving forward.

Key BridgeYear accomplishments that were identified included:

- Remarkable growth in terms of:
 - The number of students served, growing from 1,800 in 2018 to 13,000 in 2023.
 - The number of adults educated about non-four-year pathways from 54 in 2021 to 153 in 2023.
 - The number and depth of partnerships with districts, employers, and training organizations.
 - A stronger organizational infrastructure and doubling of the annual budget.
- The development of MorePathways which brought to fruition the vision of a central location for finding workforce training programs in the Houston area.
- The expansion of the Career Test Drive® (CTD) Program to other states during COVID through CTD Labs and CTD Kits.

“BridgeYear is not only changing lives of the students but also the lives of their current and future families by showing them additional paths to viable careers, for economic success and stability.”

- Community Member

Several opportunities for improvement were also identified, which included the need for:

- Increased awareness about BridgeYear and its work in the workforce development ecosystem.
- Student outcome tracking after high school to understand BridgeYear's impact.
- Integration of BridgeYear programming components to enhance overall program impact.
- Diversification of funding sources to minimize dependence on earned revenue sources from schools.

Finally, two external trends were identified as having the potential to have a significant impact on BridgeYear and its work:

- Lower student enrollment in public high schools and changes in public education funding (with the elimination of pandemic relief funds) have the potential to reduce high school participation in BridgeYear's programming and impact earned revenue opportunities.
- Greater Houston's workforce training landscape has historically served upskilling and reskilling adults, limiting BridgeYear's ability to connect recent high school graduates to certification opportunities.

“Generally, the workforce arena in Houston is largely unknown and poorly addressed.”

- BridgeYear Partner

Taking all these findings into account, the BridgeYear Board of Directors and key staff developed the following strategic direction and goals to guide their work over the next three years.

BridgeYear 2024-2027 Strategic Goals and Objectives

BridgeYear will continue to expand awareness of non-four-year degree pathways and reimagine the education-to-workforce pathway for youth in the Greater Houston region. BridgeYear will accomplish this through the following four goals and related objectives.



Goal 1: Light the path for more students by broadening the reach of BridgeYear in the Houston community.

Strategic Objective 1.1: Increase the quantity of CTD Fairs to reach more students.

Key Performance Indicator: BridgeYear will reach at least 20,000 students each year through the CTD program by 2027, a 56% increase from the start of the plan.

Strategic Objective 1.2: Increase educator and parent engagement with BridgeYear resources.

Key Performance Indicator: BridgeYear will educate 10,000 adult stakeholders each year about high-quality non-four-year degree pathways by 2027, a 74% increase over current levels.

Strategic Objective 1.3: Ensure that CTD programming is continually aligned with the latest labor market trends.

Key Performance Indicator: 100% of CTD modules will be aligned to a vetted training pathway.



Goal 2: Break down the barriers to entry for youth in Houston's existing workforce development system.

Strategic Objective 2.1: Create a seamless and integrated student outreach and onboarding experience for high school seniors enrolled in workforce development training.

Key Performance Indicator: By 2027, 1,000 students will be recruited to join a BridgeYear-supported workforce development training cohort each year.

Strategic Objective 2.2: Implement comprehensive enrollment support for students in BridgeYear-supported workforce development training opportunities.

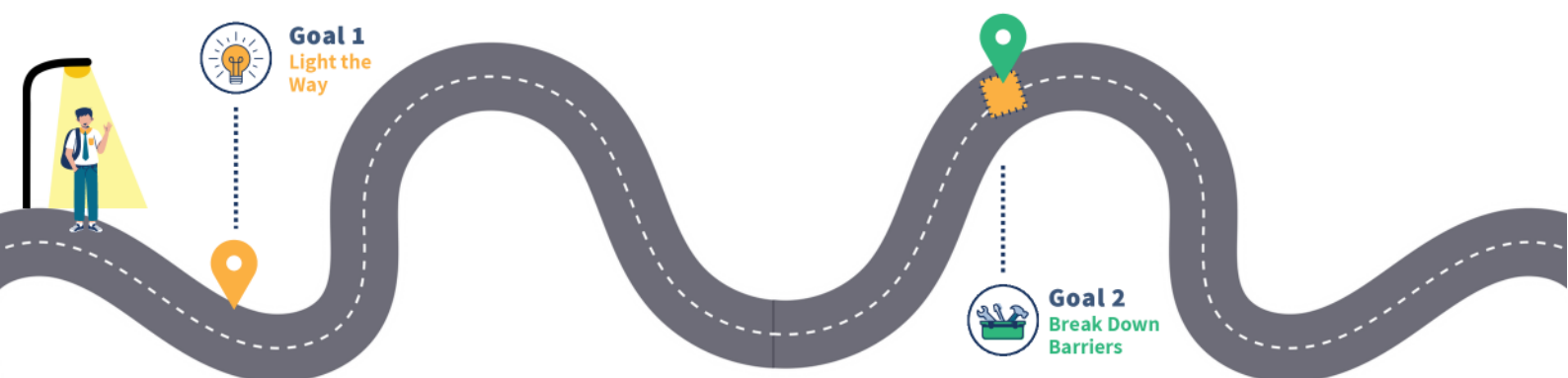
Key Performance Indicator: 150 graduates will enroll in a BridgeYear-supported cohort for postsecondary training each year.

Strategic Objective 2.3: Pilot a "Direct to Employer" pathway.

Key Performance Indicator: BridgeYear will partner with at least one Houston employer to establish an on-the-job training and employment pathway.

Strategic Objective 2.4: Establish new and strengthen existing workforce development partnerships with vetted postsecondary programs.

Key Performance Indicator: BridgeYear will develop criteria for regularly identifying high-quality, reliable postsecondary workforce training programs for youth graduating high school. By 2027, at least 10 BridgeYear-vetted workforce training partnerships will be established.





Goal 3: Share the map by leveraging MorePathway as an all-encompassing, dynamic tool for youth to find and connect to workforce programs.

Strategic Objective 3.1: Enhance MorePathways usability and desirability for students.

Key Performance Indicator: By 2027, the average session duration on MorePathways will increase to at least 2 minutes, an industry recognized benchmark.

Strategic Objective 3.2: Increase MorePathways usage by workforce development programs.

Key Performance Indicator: At least 75% of all BridgeYear's workforce training partners in the Houston area will update training data in MorePathways at least twice a year.

Strategic Objective 3.3: Increase MorePathways program listings.

Key Performance Indicator: At least 600 short-term workforce trainings will be posted on MorePathways each year by 2027, a 50% increase between 2024 and 2027.

Strategic Objective 3.4: Utilize MorePathways as a data hub for the workforce development ecosystem.

Key Performance Indicator: At least 75% of all workforce training partners will have outcomes data on MorePathways.



Goal 4: Strengthen BridgeYear's infrastructure by developing top talent, growing and diversifying revenue, and investing in technology.

Strategic Objective 4.1: Develop a marketing and brand awareness strategy.

Key Performance Indicator: BridgeYear will present as a speaker and/or panelist at a minimum of 4 public-facing education or workforce events each year by 2027.

Strategic Objective 4.2: Diversify and grow philanthropic, corporate, and governmental revenue sources to support programmatic growth.

Key Performance Indicator: Fundraising sources will remain diversified while keeping the cost to raise a dollar to <\$0.15.

Strategic Objective 4.3: Develop a sustainable earned revenue generation strategy.

Key Performance Indicator: By 2027, BridgeYear will replace or exceed the amount of revenue previously earned through pandemic relief funding with additional sources of earned revenue.

Strategic Objective 4.4: Increase organizational efficiency through standardizing external communications and data tracking systems.

Key Performance Indicator: BridgeYear will ensure at least 75% of its programmatic and external data is housed securely in its customer relationship management system, Salesforce, by 2027.

Strategic Objective 4.5: Attract and retain top talent by fostering an inclusive and engaging workplace that people aspire to be a part of.

Key Performance Indicator: BridgeYear will maintain staff satisfaction rating on culture survey each year.



Goal 3 Share the map



Goal 4 Prepare for future growth



Contact Us



3414 Eastside Street, Houston, TX 77098

www.BridgeYear.org