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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **State education and workforce leaders announce \$7.2 million in available funding for Texas Industry Cluster Innovative Academies**

*Grants intended to add industry partners and expand Early College High Schools*

AUSTIN – Public education, higher education and workforce development agency leaders today announced the availability of \$7.2 million in grant funding to support the launch of the [Texas Industry Cluster Innovative Academies](#).

The new funding opportunity, which is the result of Gov. Greg Abbott’s Tri-Agency Initiative, builds on the state’s extensive Early College High School program to create partnerships between industry and education institutions to enhance learning opportunities that prepare our students for the high demand jobs being created within the six targeted industry clusters in Texas’ diverse economy.

“The Innovative Academies are a crucial step toward ensuring that the next generation of Texans is prepared to enter an increasingly dynamic workforce,” said Governor Abbott. “From aerospace to biotechnology, these academies will elevate students through strategic partnerships with industry leaders who will benefit from the immense talent Texas has to offer. In establishing the Innovative Academies, Texas is investing in its future workforce and providing opportunities for both students and businesses to grow and prosper.”

The Texas Industry Cluster Innovative Academies (Innovative Academies) will provide students opportunities to earn postsecondary credentials in high school with a focus on applied learning opportunities like internships, externships, apprenticeships, mentorship programs and career counseling in high-demand fields.

Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Chairman Andres Alcantar and TWC Commissioners Ruth Hughs and Julian Alvarez, in partnership with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Commissioner Mike Morath and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) Commissioner Raymund Paredes, are working in concert with industry leaders, local independent school districts, public community colleges and universities to increase the number of students who graduate with marketable skills and college credit toward credentials in these high-demand industries.

Texas’ Targeted Industry Clusters include:

- Advanced Technologies and Manufacturing
- Aerospace and Defense
- Biotechnology and Life Sciences (Includes Health Care)

- Energy
- Information and Computer Technology
- Petroleum Refining and Chemical Products

The grants will support school districts and charters in forming partnerships with regional employers, community colleges and universities to raise industry and career awareness and increase meaningful career and post-secondary programs that lead to opportunities in high-demand occupations. The Innovative Academies leverage the efficiency of the existing Early College High School frameworks in Texas and innovate through partnership with industry.

“These Innovative Academies allow a greater number of Texas students to start pursuing their dreams while completing their education at the high school level,” said TEA Commissioner Morath. “Thanks to the leadership of Governor Abbott and the strong collaboration between TEA, THECB and TWC, high school students will be positioned to succeed and strengthen our state’s economy.”

An Innovative Academy can be designed to meet state, regional or local workforce needs while allowing students to earn college credit that results in an associate degree or an articulated agreement toward a baccalaureate degree. Texas independent school districts (ISDs), public junior colleges, public technical institutes and general academic teaching institutions are eligible to submit applications. Any one of these entities may serve as the fiscal agent for partnership applications. It is intended that among the awards there be at least two grants to general academic teaching institutions or to districts or charters who partner with a general academic teaching institution as their primary Innovative Academy partner.

“The Texas Industry Cluster Innovative Academies are transformative partnerships between education and industry that will enable our students to receive mentoring, career guidance and applied learning opportunities to position them for success in school and in high demand occupations in key regional industry clusters,” said TWC Chairman Andres Alcantar.

To receive an Innovative Academy grant, a high school must have a partnership that includes a regional employer, community college, or university. Identification of high-demand occupations and programs of study that lead to these occupations must be developed in partnership with the local workforce development board. As part of the new model, industry will be able to contribute to curriculum content and design, as well as employ students through paid internships, externships, mentorships, and apprenticeships. Innovative Academies will support efforts to better align educational opportunities with market activity in different industry sectors and build strong regional economies that support job creation.

“Innovative Academies will provide another education option that prepares students to go into the workforce in a range of well-paying jobs that are available to recent graduates,” said Commissioner of Higher Education Raymund Paredes. “Texas must continue to re-imagine how to meet the state’s workforce needs while helping to fulfill students’ aspirations.”

“Innovative Academies will further expand on the foundation of working with our industry and education partners to create a more skilled and competitive workforce for Texas,” said TWC Commissioner Representing Employers Ruth R. Hughes. “Students in Texas will reap the rewards long into the future thanks to the unique opportunities created through these partnerships.”

“I look forward to the implementation of the Innovative Academies and excited that the lives of our students and future workforce will be transformed by having unique mentorship opportunities and meaningful engagement with industry leaders and mentors,” said TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Julian Alvarez.

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