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CHAPTER 311. VOLUNTARY WORKFORCE TRAINING FOR CERTAIN STUDENTS

Sec. 311.001. Definitions

In this chapter:

- (1) **"Agency"** means the Texas Education Agency.
- (2) **"Certified program"** means a career and technology secondary and postsecondary education program conducted under an agreement as described by Section 311.003 or a voluntary program certified by the agency in conjunction with the commission as meeting the standards prescribed by Section 311.002, and that:
 - (A) integrates a secondary school academic curriculum with private sector workplace training and a postsecondary curriculum;
 - (B) places students in job internships;
 - (C) is designed to continue into postsecondary education and lead to the participant earning an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree;
 - (D) will result in teaching new skills and adding value to the wage-earning potential of participants and increasing a participant's long-term employability in this state; and
 - (E) meets recognized or accepted industry standards.
- (3) **"Participant"** means a person at least 16 years of age who is enrolled in a public or private secondary or postsecondary school, or an equivalent program, and who began to voluntarily participate in a certified voluntary workforce training program as part of secondary school education.
- (4) **"Sponsor"** means any person operating a certified program and in whose name the program is registered.

Sec. 311.002. Certification Standards

To be eligible for certification by the agency under this chapter, a program must:

- (1) be conducted under an organized, written plan embodying the terms and conditions of employment, job training, classroom instruction, and supervision of participants and be subscribed to by a sponsor who has undertaken to carry out the program;
- (2) comply with all state and federal laws, including laws pertaining to fair labor standards and workplace health and safety;

- (3) comply with recognized industry standards applicable to the program in which the participant is engaged; and
- (4) include an agreement by the employer to assign an employee to serve as a mentor for the participant.

Sec. 311.003. Certified Program Agreements

- (a) A certified program must be conducted under a signed written agreement between each participant and the employer. The agreement may include the following:
 - (1) the name and signature of the participant, the sponsor, and the employer, and a parent or guardian of the participant if the participant is under 18 years of age;
 - (2) a description of the career field in which the participant is to be trained, the academic and technical skills to be attained, and the beginning date and duration of the broad-based training; and
 - (3) the employer's agreement to provide paid employment, at a base wage not less than the minimum wage, for the participant during the participant's junior and senior years in high school and after the participant's first year of postsecondary education.
- (b) A participant's time spent in a program under Subsection (a) may not exceed 15 hours a week, without regard to whether the participant is paid for the time.
- (c) A participant may, but is not required to, enter into a postsecondary education agreement with the participant's employer. An agreement under this subsection must include:
 - (1) the participant's agreement to pay half of the participant's wages to be held in trust to be applied toward the participant's postsecondary education and the employer's agreement to pay into the trust an additional amount equal to the amount paid by the participant;
 - (2) the participant's agreement to work for the employer for at least two years following the date of completion of the participant's postsecondary education;
 - (3) the employer's agreement to pay the participant during the period described by Subdivision (2) at least the prevailing wage for employees having a similar education or license and performing similar work and to provide other employee benefits to which employees performing similar work are entitled; and
 - (4) the participant's agreement to reimburse the employer if the participant fails to perform the two years of employment described by Subdivision (2) for the employer's contribution to the trust established under Subdivision (1), plus interest at the prime interest rate at the time the participant defaults on the agreement.

- (d) If a participant decides not to continue in the program before beginning the participant's postsecondary education, the participant and employer each shall be refunded, not later than the 30th day after the last date of participation in the program, their respective contributions to the trust established under Subsection (c)(1) and a pro rata share of the interest earned on the money in the trust.
- (e) The money held in trust under Subsection (c)(1) must be held in trust for the benefit of the participant under rules adopted by the agency. Payment into a trust approved under 29 U.S.C. Section 1103 for the benefit of the participant satisfies the requirement of this subsection. The fund must be specified in the agreement.
- (f) An employer who enters into an agreement under this section may not retain participants solely to replace the employer's current employees.

Sec. 311.004. Rulemaking

- (a) The agency and commission shall adopt rules as necessary to administer each entity's duties under this chapter. To the extent possible, the agency and commission shall cooperate with each other in adopting rules so that all rules adopted under this chapter are consistent and easily administered.
- (b) Rules adopted under this section must include a requirement that participation in a certified program under this chapter is voluntary.

Sec. 311.005. Commission Duties; Local Workforce Development Boards

- (a) The commission shall:
 - (1) administer its responsibilities under this chapter as part of the commission's workforce development system;
 - (2) cooperate with other state agencies as appropriate; and
 - (3) provide information and technical assistance to the agency, secondary and postsecondary schools, employers, local workforce development boards, and other entities.
- (b) A local workforce development board, working in partnership with other local and regional entities, shall provide to secondary and postsecondary schools and employers in the area in which the board is established information and technical assistance as necessary to implement this chapter.