Houston Economic Mobility Coalition | Shared Ambitions

From Shared Concern to Collective Action

The Houston Economic Mobility Coalition grew out of a regional conversation about what it would take to improve economic mobility at scale. At the inaugural Economic Mobility Summit in October 2025, cross-sector leaders identified the need for shared direction, common measures, stronger coordination, connected pathways for residents, and sustained infrastructure to support collective action.

In January 2026, partners committed to forming a coalition; in March, they established a three-year MOU; and in May 2026, the second Summit provided an opportunity for broader stakeholders to inform the coalition's emerging vision, mission, framework, and regional measurement approach. Since then, partners have been translating that shared direction into action by defining a set of shared ambitions. Ambitions are broad, long-term, system-level goals that define what the coalition seeks to make meaningfully different for Houston and its residents. These ambitions are meant to be direction-setting, not final strategies. The Summit and future engagements are opportunities to test, sharpen, and help shape what each ambition should mean in practice.

A Shared Direction

VISION:

A Houston where all people thrive, no matter where they start.

MISSION:

Uniting Houston's communities to drive actions that help every Houstonian reach their full potential.

The coalition's framework recognizes that upward mobility is shaped by interconnected systems and conditions across **basic needs, housing, education, jobs and health**, as well as connected people and communities and policy. **Ambitions** translate this framework into broad, long-term system goals for collective action.

Where the Coalition Adds Unique Value

The coalition is not intended to replace existing organizations, programs, or leadership. Its value is greatest where progress depends on multiple institutions and sectors acting together. The coalition prioritizes ambitions where:

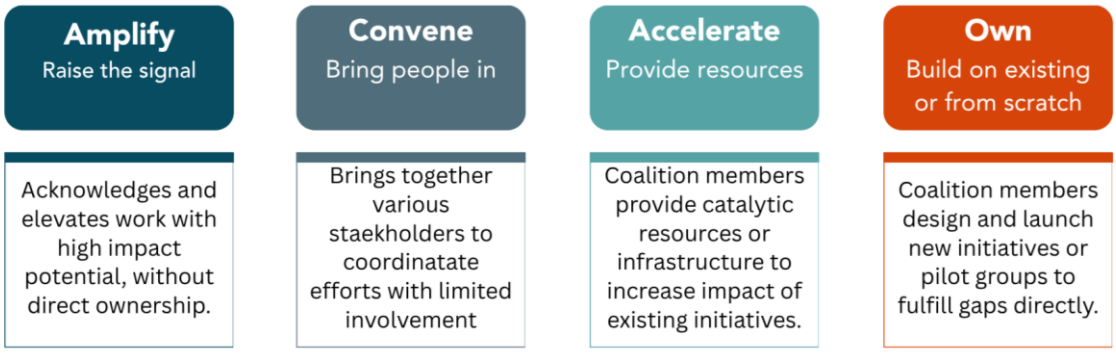
- **Coordination is the unlock** and no single organization or sector can solve the challenge alone.

- There is **potential for impact at scale** across a significant share of Houston residents.
- The opportunity is **grounded in evidence** and learning.
- Houston can **build on and strengthen existing assets** rather than create new ones.
- Progress can create **catalytic ripple effects** across multiple mobility pathways or conditions.

Across the portfolio, the coalition also seeks to span the systems shaping mobility, balance long-term systems change with near-term momentum, and concentrate coalition capacity where it can add the greatest value.

The Coalition's Role Varies by Ambition

The coalition plays a different role depending on what it can uniquely contribute:



These roles reflect the **depth and type of coalition involvement**, not the importance of an ambition. Across the current ambitions, the coalition plays each of these roles based on where it can add the most value within the current landscape.

Ambition Leadership

Each ambition has an Ambition Lead, a representative who stewards progress toward the shared goal. Ambition Leads guide the process to define strategy, coordinate across initiative teams and other ambitions, and are accountable for moving the ambition forward. Leading an ambition does not mean solving it alone. Initiative teams, coalition partners, residents, practitioners, and other subject-matter experts are essential to shaping and carrying out the work.

About These Ambition Briefs

The following ambition briefs are intended to establish a **shared starting point.** Together, they describe what the coalition is working toward, why each ambition matters for economic mobility in Houston, what progress could require, a starting list of the assets already available to build upon, and the coalition's potential role. As the work advances, specific strategies and initiatives will continue to be shaped with the organizations, practitioners, residents, and communities closest to each system.

PK-12 to Postsecondary Pathways

Ambition Overview

Ambition Statement: Strengthen PK-12 to postsecondary pathways needed to access economic opportunity so more Houston students graduate with the skills, experiences, credentials, and connections needed to transition successfully into postsecondary education and family-sustaining careers.

This ambition aims to strengthen Houston student's PK-12 journey and the transition that follows, so that every student is prepared and supported along the pathway from PK-12 to postsecondary completion. It seeks to make strong academics, rigorous coursework, dual credit and career and technical education, career exploration, advising, and a clear postsecondary pathway part of the typical student experience rather than opportunities available to only some students. Its primary responsibility ends with successful postsecondary progression and credential or degree completion.

This ambition builds on the coalition's access to high-quality early childhood education ambition ensuring the gains made in children's earliest years transition into a supported environment for sustained progress. Additionally, this ambition provides the foundational support that feeds into the industry-aligned talent pipelines ambition by ensuring students have the skills, experiences, credentials, and connections to move to and through postsecondary education creating seamless education-to-employment pathways. This ambition owns student preparation and educational progress through postsecondary education while the industry-aligned talent pipeline ambition owns the transition of education and training into hiring and career advancement into family-sustaining wages. Together, these three ambitions form a continuous cradle-to-career pathway, from a child's earliest learning environment through education and into a family-sustaining career.

Why This Ambition Matters

Connection to Economic Mobility and Houston

The problem to solve: Too many Houston students do not consistently receive the academic preparation, rigorous coursework, career-connected experiences, and guidance needed to move successfully from secondary school into and through postsecondary education. Schools, colleges, employers, and workforce programs each own a piece of the student journey, but students often encounter inconsistent expectations and weak handoffs between each transition of the education-to-employment pathway. As a result, students and families must navigate these transitions on their own. The result is a steep gap between high school graduation and living wage attainment with 88 out of 100 Houston students finishing

high school, 27 completing a postsecondary credential, and only 20 earning a living wage by their mid-twenties[1].

Why it matters for mobility: Educational attainment alone does not guarantee mobility, but strong academic preparation and completion of a postsecondary degree or credential substantially improve a young person's chances of reaching work that provides a living wage. Houston graduates with a bachelor's degree were 3.8x more likely, and those with a professional certificate 3x more likely, to earn a living wage than graduates without a postsecondary credential[2]. Houston-specific research identifies middle- and high-school experiences connected to later credential and wage outcomes, including grade-level achievement, algebra 1 in eighth grade, advanced coursework, and postsecondary completion as milestones that predict living wage outcomes. For example, graduates taking five or more advanced courses were predicted to be 22 percentage points more likely to earn a postsecondary credential[3]. National evidence also shows that integrated approaches such as early college high schools and career academies can improve postsecondary completion and long-term earnings[4].

Why it matters in Houston: An estimated 70% of Texas jobs will require a postsecondary credential by 2036[5]. Houston's public schools are the region's largest source of future talent servicing nearly 680,000 students across 18 public education systems and graduating approximately 45,000 young people each year[6]. Houston has made progress in student achievement and college, career, and military readiness, but still too many students are not earning a postsecondary credential and even fewer are earning a living wage six years after high school graduation. Whether young Houstonians reach a living wage depends heavily on how successfully they navigate the path from secondary school through postsecondary education and into the workforce. That trajectory is shaped by the strength of their academic foundation and rigor of the courses they take, the skills and experience they build, the connections they make, whether they earn a credential valued in the labor market, and whether they secure an initial job that puts them on a path toward advancement.

Vision of Success & Conditions for Progress

Long-term outcome: If this ambition succeeds, more Houston students, regardless of where they live or attend school, progress successfully from PK-12 into postsecondary education or training, complete a degree or credential of value, and enter the next stage with a clear and supported pathway toward family-sustaining work. Students leave high school with a strong academic foundation, meaningful career exposure, trusted guidance, and a concrete next step; fewer students are lost during the transition into or through postsecondary education. This means that over time Houston would see steady gains on essential academic milestones in the student journey from 4th grade through postsecondary completion, more students taking part in work-based learning, and an increase in the share of young adults earning a living wage six years after high school graduation. Progress would be reflected not only in stronger outcomes at each stage, but in fewer students falling off the pathway between stages.

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[1] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, "The Texas Talent Trajectory (T3)," *THECB DataBridge,* July 13, 2026, https://databridge.highered.texas.gov/the-texas-talent-trajectory/.

[2] Good Reason Houston, "New Research Reveals Which Experiences in Grades 8-12 Best Prepare Students for Long-Term Success," January 28, 2025, https://goodreasonhouston.org/new-research-helps-predict-which-k-12-experiences-prepare-students-for-long-term-success/#heading-read-the-full-report

[3] Good Reason Houston, "New Research Reveals Which Experiences."

[4] James J. Kemple, *Career Academies: Long-Term Impacts on Work, Education, and Transitions to Adulthood*, https://www.mdrc.org/work/publications/career-academies-long-term-impacts-work-education-and-transitions-adulthood.

[5] Texas 2036, *Shaping Tomorrow's Workforce,* https://texas2036.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Future-Focus-Areas-2023-2025.pdf.

[6] Good Reason Houston, *Houston Public Education Snapshot 2025*, Houston Public Education Snapshot Report 102725

What it could take to get there:

- **Strong achievement and rigorous academics at every grade level:** Students in every district reach the milestones research links to living wage outcomes, from grade-level reading and math in elementary school to Algebra I in 8th grade, passing end-of-course exams, and completing multiple advanced courses in high school. Partners can see every student's progress against these milestones and step in when students begin to fall behind.
- **Career-connected learning at scale:** Career exploration, career and technical education, dual credit, internships, and apprenticeships are designed with employers and available to far more students than they reach today.
- **Linked data and advising that follows students across transitions:** Students and families receive consistent guidance from middle school through a first credential, connected to navigation tools and to supports that help families stay stable and PK-12, postsecondary, and workforce data are connected so partners can see which pathways lead to living wages and for whom, and adjust together.
- **Aligned funding and policy:** State outcomes funding, federal career and technical education dollars, employer investment, and philanthropy are braided around shared priorities rather than spread across disconnected efforts.
- **A shared definition of readiness across transitions:** A common definition of readiness at each transition between PK-12 to postsecondary education and into employment that is anchored in skills that matter in the workforce.

Existing assets to build on: The region has substantial infrastructure across PK–12, higher education, workforce, employers, and philanthropy—including CTE and dual-credit pathways, postsecondary promise scholarship models, employer-led workforce efforts, apprenticeships, and growing regional data and research capacity. State policy and funding also increasingly reinforce these goals: HB 3 (K–12 college, career and military readiness incentives) and HB 8 (outcomes-based community college funding, including FAST dual-credit support) create stronger incentives across PK–12 and community colleges around readiness, dual credit, transfer, credentials of value, and workforce outcomes. Federal resources, including Perkins V (federal funding for career and technical education in high schools and colleges), as well as significant employer, philanthropic, and workforce investments, provide additional infrastructure to build on.

New capacity likely needed: The strategic opportunity is therefore not simply to add more programs or funding, but to better connect and leverage existing assets around a coherent student pathway while selectively building capacity where important gaps remain. Key gaps may include linked data across systems, consistent advising and navigation through transitions, broader access to high-quality work-based learning, and stronger alignment between education pathways, credentials of value, and economic opportunity.

Coalition Role

Why Is This Suited for Collective Action?

Coalition value-add: The coalition's role for this ambition is to Accelerate—helping existing leaders and promising efforts move faster, become better connected, and reach greater scale. Houston has significant pathway work underway, but its impact is constrained by uneven access, fragmentation, and gaps in alignment across systems. The coalition is positioned to bring K-12, higher education, workforce, employer, philanthropic, and community partners to one table around a shared definition of future-ready

skills and common outcomes. It can connect education data with labor market data through partners such as the Kinder Institute, Good Reason Houston, and the Gulf Coast Workforce Board, so the region can see which pathways lead to living wages. It can direct catalytic resources toward proven practices, help partners capture public funding already available to them, and make sure student and family voice shapes how pathways are designed. In this role, the coalition strengthens and connects the work of existing leaders rather than operating programs itself.

Strategic Fit:

Coalition Criterion	Why This Ambition Meets It
Coordination is the Unlock	No single system controls a student's path from PK-12 through postsecondary education and into career. Districts shape academic preparation, colleges and training providers award credentials, employers define the skills and jobs, and workforce boards connect labor market data and services. The handoffs between them are where students are most often lost, and only coordinated action can close those gaps.
Potential for Impact at Scale	Nearly 700,000 students attend Houston-region public schools. Even modest gains in postsecondary completion and living wage attainment would change outcomes for tens of thousands of young people each year, along with the families and employers who depend on them.
Evidence-Informed	Houston-specific research identifies 10 milestones from pre-K through postsecondary that predict living wage outcomes, and Good Reason Houston publishes regional and district results for them. Rigorous national studies show that career-connected learning and cross-class relationships improve long-term earnings and mobility.
Catalytic / Ripple Effects	Stronger pathways raise earnings and family stability, supply talent to Houston's growth industries, and strengthen the next generation's start in life. They also feed directly into the industry-aligned talent pipelines ambition and build on gains from the early childhood ambition.
Builds on Existing Assets	Houston already has substantial research, pathway infrastructure, employer engagement, public funding, and postsecondary capacity to build on. The opportunity is to connect, strengthen, and scale these assets rather than create a parallel system—including Good Reason Houston's postsecondary research, Gulf Coast TradeUp Careers, UpSkill Houston and Ready Set Next, Gulf Coast Career Pathways, community college promise and dual credit programs, and the coalition's emerging shared measurement and navigation systems. Examples of key assets to leverage: Gulf Coast TradeUp Careers and the Bloomberg investment; HB 3 and HB 8/FAST; existing regional CTE, dual-credit, P-TECH/Early College, and apprenticeship infrastructure; Greater Houston Partnership/UpSkill Houston and employer networks; Workforce Solutions and regional labor-market data; community college pathway and promise scholarships efforts, including San Jac Promise; Good Reason Houston's longitudinal education-to-workforce research; and the coalition's emerging shared measurement and navigation infrastructure.

Timeline

Years 1-2: Align and Strengthen
Identify successful cross-sector approaches with districts and postsecondary partners to build evidence for what works in Houston; improve shared understanding of where students succeed or fall off the pathway; and advance aligned strategies that lead to successful postsecondary transitions.

Years 3-5: Scale and Integrate
Scale aligned pathways across districts and postsecondary partners, integrating advising, credentials, and work-based learning into the student experience.

Years 5+: Sustain and Expand
More Houston students graduate with the skills, experiences, and credentials needed to transition successfully into postsecondary education and family-sustaining careers. The region has a durable, connected pathway system that adapts as the economy changes and steadily increases the share of young Houstonians on a path to a living wage.

What's Next:

How Others Can Help Shape the Work

Ambition Lead	Good Reason Houston
Coalition Role	Accelerate
Sign Up for the Next Engagement Opportunity	