

# Texas Statewide Capacity Building Conference

*Transition Planning and Pre-Employment Skills Training  
for Younger Teens with Disabilities*

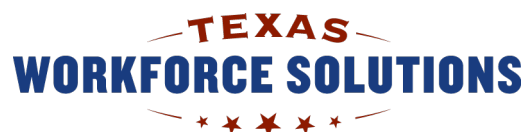
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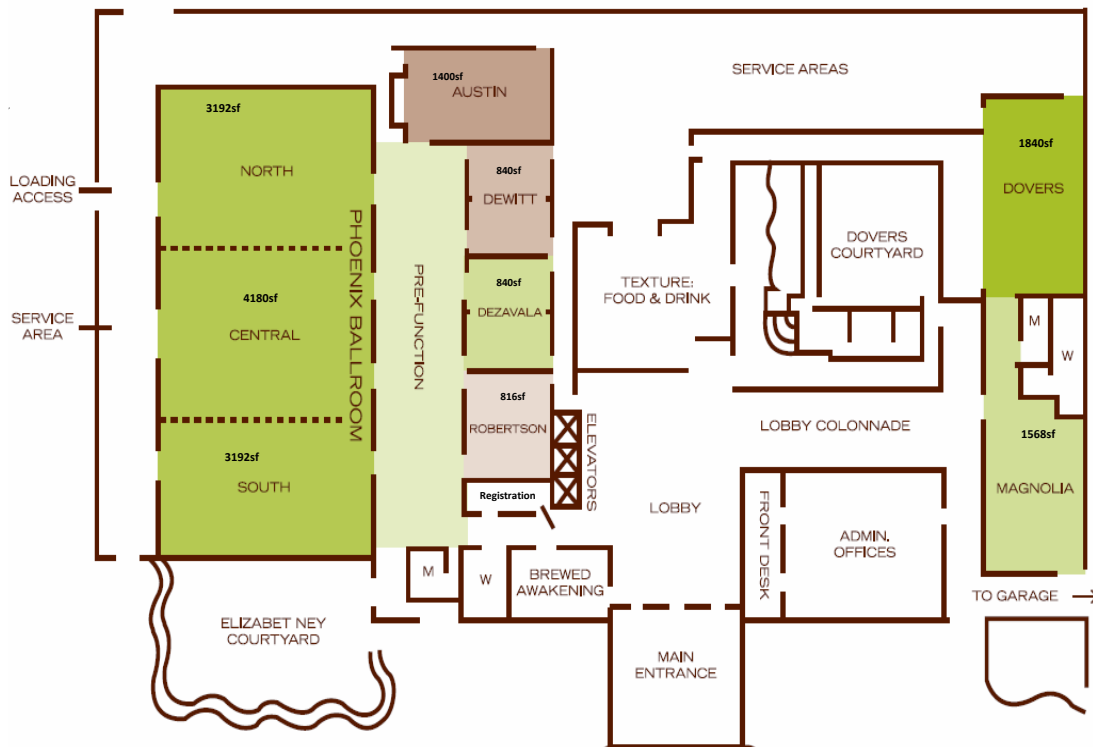
Lighting a

October 24–25, 2023



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
Center on Disability  
& Development





These activities are financed under the TWC Federal Vocational Rehabilitation grant. For the Federal fiscal year 2023 (October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023), TWC anticipates expending \$243,212,287 in Federal Vocational Rehabilitation funds. Funds appropriated by the State pay a minimum of 21.3% of the total costs (\$65,824,926) under the Vocational Rehabilitation program. Revised May 2023.

For purposes of the Supported Employment program, the Vocational Rehabilitation agency receives 94.7 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For the 2023 Federal fiscal year, the total amount of grant funds awarded are \$1,482,250. The remaining 5.3 percent (\$82,347) are funded by Texas State Appropriations. Revised May 2023.

For purposes of the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals who are Blind program, the Vocational Rehabilitation agency receives 90 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For the 2022 Federal fiscal year, the total amount of grant funds awarded are \$2,202,209. The remaining 10 percent (\$244,690) are funded by Texas State Appropriations. Revised May 2023.

*Estas actividades están financiadas bajo la subvención de Rehabilitación Vocacional Federal de la TWC. Para el año fiscal federal 2023 (octubre 1o, 2022, hasta el 30 de septiembre, 2023), La TWC espera gastar \$243,212,287 en fondos Federales de Rehabilitación Vocacional. Fondos apropiados por el estado para pagar un mínimo de 21.3% del costo total (\$65,824,926) bajo el programa de Rehabilitación Vocacional. Actualizado mayo 2023.*

*Para fines del programa de Empleo Apoyado, la dependencia de Rehabilitación Vocacional recibe el 94.7 por ciento de sus fondos por medio de una subvención del Departamento de Educación de EE.UU. Para el año fiscal federal 2023, la cantidad total de fondos de la subvención concedida es de \$1,482,250. El 5.3 por ciento restante (\$82,347) es subsanado por Apropiaciones del Estado de Texas. Actualizado mayo 2023.*

*Para fines del programa de Servicios de Vida Independiente para Personas Mayores Ciegas, la dependencia de Rehabilitación Vocacional recibe el 90 por ciento de sus fondos por medio de una subvención del Departamento de Educación de EE.UU. Para el año fiscal federal 2022, la cantidad total de fondos de la subvención otorgada es de \$2,202,209. El 10 por ciento restante (\$244,690) está subsanado por Apropiaciones del Estado de Texas. Actualizado mayo 2023.*

## HOWDY!

On behalf of the Center on Disability and Development at Texas A&M University, it is our pleasure to welcome you to Austin, TX for the 2023 Statewide Capacity Building Conference. Thank you for your devotion in serving young Texans with disabilities, their family members, and all who provide our students with quality transition services. We are glad you are here!

This conference is made possible by the work and dedication of many individuals, all of whom represent their respective entities with integrity, compassion, wisdom, and professionalism. We applaud the conference organizers, speakers, and facilitators for providing a platform for attendees to engage in thought-provoking conversations and deepen their understanding of how to strengthen our capacity to enhance Texas' quality of transition services. This work is important and necessary, and we take pride in the intentionality and relevancy of the conversations that will further engage us throughout our time together.

We humbly want to thank Robin Miller, Joette Hardin, Erin Wilder, Leigh Ann Godinez, and Kristen Davis for the countless hours of listening, brainstorming, planning, and implementing a conference of this magnitude. You have done the impossible of creating a sacred and safe space in which the honest and important realities that transition professionals, students, family members, and employers face each day were shared and handled with the utmost care and respect. Thank you for leading by example and dedicating your lives to this work.

To our friends and colleagues who have graciously sacrificed your time and energy to gather these next few days, it is your words that have set the foundation for the knowledge-sharing, development of best practice, and building the capacity of transition professionals in Texas to be excited and equipped for the jobs you have, and most likely, love to do. Thank you for "sitting at the table" to make your voice heard. We are here because you embrace, embody, and exude the clarion call of the disability community, "Nothing About Us Without Us," in which all voices matter. Your vision for what is possible for young Texans with disabilities unites us, regardless of our agency, university, school district, or organization affiliation. We encourage you to re-define, re-imagine, and transform what it means to prepare ALL people to work in Texas by providing quality transition services in our state.

Once again, welcome, and we wish you all the best for a successful conference!



**Dalun Zhang, PhD**  
Director  
Texas A&M Center on Disability and Development



**Meagan Orsag, PhD**  
Co-Director  
Texas A&M Center on Disability and Development

# Capacity Building Team



**Dalun Zhang, PhD**

Director, Texas A&M  
Center on Disability and  
Development



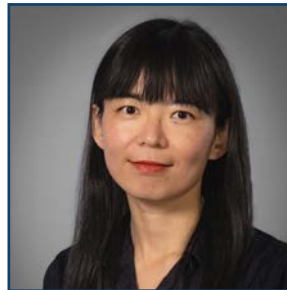
**Meagan Orsag, PhD**

Co-Director, Texas A&M  
Center on Disability and  
Development



**Wen-Hsuan Chang, PhD**

Assistant Professor of  
Special Education,  
Texas A&M University



**Xinyuan Yang, PhD**

Assistant Research  
Scientist, Texas A&M CDD



**Robin Miller, MS**

Director of Employment  
Programs,  
Texas A&M CDD



**Joette Hardin, MEd**

Program Coordinator,  
Texas A&M CDD



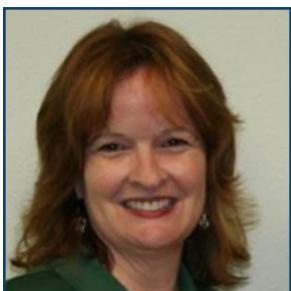
**Jana Bishop, BS**

Program Coordinator,  
Texas A&M CDD



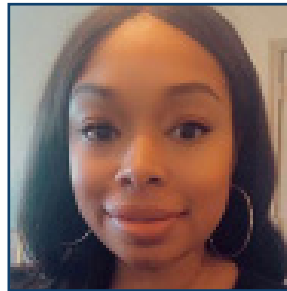
**Erin Wilder, MEd, CRC**

TWS Program Manager  
for Transition and Pre-  
Employment Transition  
Services (Pre-ETS)



**Leigh Ann Godinez, CRC,  
LPC**

TWC Program Specialist for  
Transition



**Kristen Davis MS, LPC**

TWC Program Specialist for  
Transition and Pre-ETS

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# Special Thanks to the Texas Workforce Commission for Making this Event Possible



**EDWARD "ED" SERNA** is the Executive Director of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), the second largest workforce system in the United States.

Appointed to his position by the agency's three-member Commission in August 2019, Mr. Serna oversees an operating budget of \$1.5 billion and provides leadership and vision for the agency's more than 4,600 personnel in the implementation of workforce policies, education and training initiatives and vocational rehabilitation services set by the Commission, as well as the administration of \$2 billion in Unemployment Insurance benefits annually.

During Mr. Serna's 35 plus-year career, he has occupied numerous leadership positions in state government at 6 different agencies and in the private sector. He has successfully managed large-scale IT, operations, contracting and continuous improvement projects that have resulted in improved service delivery.

Before coming out of retirement to join TWC in 2014 as Director of Business Operations and later as Deputy Executive Director, Ed was selected as the first executive director of the then newly established Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV) in 2010.

Mr. Serna earned a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the University of North Texas.



**BRYAN DANIEL** serves as Chairman of the Texas Workforce Commission where he works to promote and support the growth of Texas' world class employers and talented workforce. To champion that goal, he advances innovative workforce and economic development strategies in collaboration with TWC's education partners, local officials, and industry leaders to establish Texas' competitive edge as the best place to work in the world.

Prior to joining TWC, Bryan served for four and half years on Texas Governor Greg Abbott's senior staff where he led the Office of Economic Development and Tourism – which included the Texas Enterprise Fund, Events Trust Fund, Governor's University Research Initiative, Texas Tourism Office, Texas Music Office, Texas Film Commission, Texas Workforce Investment Council, the Economic Development Bank, the Texas Military Preparedness Commission and the State of Texas Mexico Office.

Bryan's tenure as the Texas State Director for Rural Development for President George W. Bush and as Chief Administrator for Trade and Business Development at the Texas Department of Agriculture, along with his private sector experiences as a marketing executive and member of the board of directors, have provided him with valuable insights on economic development and workforce issues.

Bryan is a graduate of Texas Tech University with both a bachelor's degree and master's degree. In 2019, Texas Tech's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources recognized Bryan as a Distinguished Alumnus.



**ALBERTO TREVIÑO III** serves as the Commissioner Representing Labor for the Texas Workforce Commission. Governor Greg Abbott appointed him to the three-member Commission on January 9, 2023.

Prior to his appointment, Commissioner Treviño of Harlingen served as a retired U.S. Border Patrol agent. Treviño has nearly 33 years of combined law enforcement and border patrol experience, with 21 years of service to Local 3307 of the National Border Patrol Council (NBPC), where he served as executive vice president, and later, as treasurer.

Prior to NBPC, Commissioner Treviño served as a police instructor, background investigator, and patrol officer for the Harlingen Police Department. He is a 3rd degree knight of the Knights of Columbus, former member of the City of Harlingen Tennis Advisory Board, and former volunteer for Little League Baseball.

Treviño received an Associate Degree in Criminal Justice from Texas Southmost College.



**AARON DEMERSON** currently serves as the Commissioner Representing Employers for the Texas Workforce Commission. Governor Greg Abbott appointed him to the three-member Commission on August 20, 2019.

Prior to his appointment, Aaron Demerson served as the Director of the Office of Employer Initiatives at the Texas Workforce Commission. In this position he provides leadership and direction to engage employers, business organizations and the economic development community in the ongoing development of a customer-focused, market-driven workforce system.

Prior to employment at the Texas Workforce Commission he served as a Senior Advisor to Governor Rick Perry and Executive Director of the Economic Development & Tourism Division in the Governor's Office leading a team that marketed the State of Texas as a premier destination for both business and travel.

Demerson has a BBA in Finance from Texas A&M University-Kingsville. He also received a general banking diploma from the American Institute of Banking, and is a '91-'92 graduate of Leadership Austin.



**CHERYL FULLER** of Austin is the Director of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Vocational Rehabilitation Division. She has 33 years of experience working in federally funded programs that focus on helping Texans prepare for, obtain, and retain employment. Prior to transferring to TWC on September 1, 2016, with the former DARS programs, she served as the DARS assistant commissioner for its Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS) from August 2013 through August 2016. Fuller joined DARS in 2011 as the director of its Center for Learning Management after serving more than 11 years as director of the Texas Workforce Investment Council in the Office of the Governor. She began her career in Abilene, where she worked for almost nine years in employment and training programs funded by

the Job Training Partnership Act and the Workforce Investment Act. Fuller was appointed to the Rehabilitation Council of Texas by Governor Perry in 2014 and was reappointed by Governor Abbott in 2019. She has a bachelor's degree in Communications from Angelo State University.

# Keynote Speakers



**DR. ADAM SÁENZ** earned his Ph.D. in School Psychology from Texas A&M University as a United States Department of Education doctoral fellow. He completed clinical training under a fellowship appointment to Harvard Medical School, and he has a post-doctorate in clinical psychology from the Alpert Medical School of Brown University. Dr. Sáenz also earned a Doctorate of Ministry in Pastoral Counseling from Graduate Theological Foundation with residency at Christ Church college of Oxford University.

He currently serves as the C.E.O. of the Applied EQ Group, the counseling and assessment clinic he founded in 2003. He also serves as a consulting psychologist in the Texas A&M College of Medicine and the Texas A&M Department of Athletics, and he leads professional development courses in public schools throughout the United States.

Dr. Sáenz has authored multiple titles, including the best-selling, *The Power of a Teacher and Relationships That Work*. His most recent release, *The EQ Intervention*, was an Amazon best-seller that won the Independent Publisher Association gold medal in psychology.

Dr. Sáenz and his wife, Kim, have been married 27 years, and they have four adult children: Alisa, Mya, Isaiah, and Andrew.



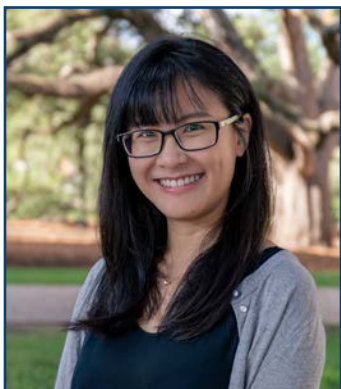
**JUDY AVERILL, M.ED.**, currently serves as the Director at the Center on Transition Innovations within Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center. Ms. Averill has held a faculty position at Virginia Commonwealth University since 2008 and has accumulated over thirty years of experience in the field of special education. Her expertise lies in facilitating the transition of youth with disabilities into the realms of employment or postsecondary education. Her specific competencies encompass career counseling, the development and implementation of school-to-work programs tailored for students with complex needs, and the creation and dissemination of best practices related to employment, postsecondary education, independent living, and self-determination. Additionally, Ms. Averill is currently involved in assisting the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services in developing and implementing an Interagency Service Delivery Model and Statewide Resource Hub aimed at enhancing Pre-Employment Transition Services in Virginia.



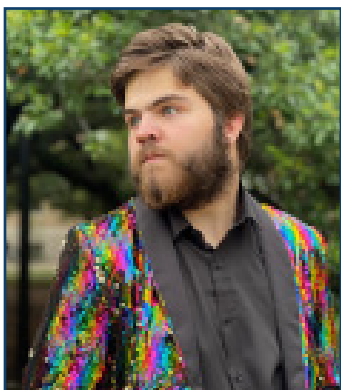
## Keynote Speakers



**ELIZABETH DANNER** is the State Transition Coordinator with the Texas Education Agency (TEA). She coordinates statewide technical assistance to promote effective transition planning “from early to exit.” Elizabeth has worked in public education for over 20 years, in roles that include paraprofessional, teacher, professional development specialist, and consultant. Her professional focus continues to be connecting people with disabilities to careers, continued learning, and community beyond high school.



**WEN-HSUAN CHANG, PH.D.** is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at Texas A&M University. Drawing on her experience providing services to individuals with disabilities in both Taiwan and the United States, Dr. Chang’s research endeavors to identify family-related factors that affect youth with disabilities. Additionally, she is committed to developing evidence-based practices that equip families with the tools they need to support their children, ultimately enhancing the children’s postschool outcomes.



**TY DAY** is a Senior at Bryan High School and a member of the Junior Varsity Tennis Team. He presents at conferences to share his story and help others learn how to listen to kids to help them have better lives. It makes him happy to be seen as an equal and as cool person on the inside. He enjoys drawing and spending time with people who care about him.



**AIMEE DAY** is the mother of two young men who are adventurous, funny, kind and have a disability. As the Director of PCP & Family Outreach at the Center on Disability and Development and Person-Centered Thinking Mentor trainer, she strives to incorporate Person-Centered Practices in all aspects of her professional and personal life. Aimee has spoken in multiple conferences and provided training for educators, law enforcement officers, individuals with disabilities, families and professionals.

# Agenda — Tuesday, October 24, 2023

TIME/LOCATION	SESSION
7:30–8:30 <i>Phoenix Ballroom</i>	<b>BREAKFAST AND REGISTRATION</b>
8:30–9:00 <i>Phoenix Ballroom</i>	<b>WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS</b> Edward Serna, Executive Director, Texas Workforce Commission   Cheryl Fuller, Vocational Rehabilitation Division Director, Texas Workforce Commission   Justin Porter, Ed.D., Associate Commissioner, Special Populations Programs and Policy, TEA   Dalun Zhang, Ph.D., Director of the Center on Disability and Development, Texas A&M University
9:00–10:00 <i>Phoenix Ballroom</i>	<b>KEYNOTE: THE POWER OF ONE</b> Adam Saenz, Ph.D., D. Min., Founder and CEO, Applied EQ Group
10:00–10:15	<b>BREAK</b>
10:15–10:20 <i>Phoenix Ballroom</i>	<b>GREETINGS FROM ALBERTO TREVINO, III, COMMISSIONER REPRESENTING LABOR, TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION</b>
10:20–11:20 <i>Phoenix Ballroom</i>	<b>KEYNOTE: EDUCATE, COLLABORATE, AND ENGAGE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES AS TRANSITION PARTNERS</b> Judy M. Averill, M.Ed., Director, Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Transition Innovations
11:20–12:05 <i>Phoenix Ballroom</i>	<b>EARLY TO EXIT: COLLABORATION CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL</b> Elizabeth Danner, State Transition Coordinator, TEA
12:05–1:00 <i>Phoenix Ballroom</i>	<b>LUNCH</b>
1:00–1:50 <i>Breakout rooms by region</i>	<b>WORKING TOGETHER TO SERVE YOUNGER TEENS</b> Group Planning Session led by Joette Hardin and Jana Bishop, Texas A&M Center on Disability and Development
1:50–2:00	<b>BREAK</b>
<b>2:00–2:50</b>	<b>BREAKOUT SESSION 1</b>
<i>Phoenix Central</i>	<b>THE HERO'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE PANDEMIC: A NEW WAY TO UNDERSTAND STRESS</b> Adam Saenz, Ph.D., D. Min., Founder and CEO, Applied EQ Group
<i>Magnolia</i>	<b>AUTHENTIC STUDENT PARTNERSHIPS: IT IS NEVER TOO EARLY TO START</b> Denise Geiger and Samantha Blanton, Leander ISD

Phoenix North	<b>COLLABORATING BEYOND THE VR-LEA RELATIONSHIP: THE PURPOSEFUL LIFE MODEL</b> Robin Miller, TAMU Center on Disability and Development
Phoenix South	<b>OVERVIEW OF TWC PROJECTS</b> Erin Wilder, M.Ed., C.R.C., Leigh Ann Godinez, C.R.C., L.P.C., and Kristen Davis, M.S., L.P.C.
Dovers	<b>STUDENT EARNED INCOME EXCLUSION: AN IMPORTANT RESOURCE FOR SSI-ELIGIBLE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b> Alyssa Kee, CRC, LPC, and Gabriela Martinez, CRC, LPC, TWS-VRS Program Specialists for Transition
Austin	<b>BUILDING BRIDGES TO EMPLOYMENT: WORK EXPERIENCE INSIGHTS FOR STUDENTS (14-16) WITH DISABILITIES</b> Benigno Aceves, Program Specialist for Business Relations, TWC-VRS   Leslie Abbott, VR Manager, TWS-VRS   Kelly Majewski, iGROW Program Director, Texas A&M CDD
2:50-3:10	<b>AFTERNOON BREAK — EXHIBITS OPEN</b>
<b>3:10-4:00</b>	<b>BREAKOUT SESSION 2</b>
Austin	<b>BEST PRACTICES FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS</b> Alma Alvarez, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor   Janine Bunke, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor   Flavia Carr, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor   David Enriquez, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor   Whitney Boykin, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor
Phoenix Central	<b>WHAT DOES SELF CARE REALLY LOOK LIKE? (HINT: CALGON AIN'T GONNA TAKE YOU AWAY)</b> Adam Saenz, Ph.D., D. Min., Founder and CEO, Applied EQ Group
Phoenix North	<b>SERVING YOUNGER STUDENTS WITH PRE-ETS SERVICES</b> Leigh Ann Godinez, C.R.C., L.P.C., TWC Program Specialist for Transition, and Kristen Davis, M.S., L.P.C. TWC Program Specialist for Transition
Phoenix South	<b>INTRODUCING TEXAS SPED SUPPORT - YOUR HUB FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCES</b> Brynn Biggs, M.Ed., and Jeanette Driffill, M.Ed., Garrett Center on Transition and Disability Studies, Sam Houston State University
Dovers	<b>GROUP SKILLS TRAINING FOR STUDENTS</b> Kevin Markel, TWC Program Specialist for Transition   Elizabeth Soto, TWC BVI Transition Counselor   Crissy Hunter, TWC BVI Transition Counselor   Erica Cairns, Region 13 ESC   Katherine Salmon, Region 13 ESC
Magnolia	<b>EVERY STUDENT HAS A STORY: CHOOSING THE RIGHT TRANSITION ASSESSMENTS TO HONOR THE STUDENT</b> Denise Geiger and Samantha Blanton, Leander ISD

# Agenda — Wednesday, October 25, 2023

TIME/LOCATION	SESSION
7:30–8:30 <i>Phoenix Ballroom</i>	<b>BREAKFAST AND REGISTRATION</b>
8:30–8:50 <i>Phoenix Ballroom</i>	<b>WELCOME, RECOGNITION, AND THANKS</b> Dr. Justin Porter, Associate Commissioner, Special Populations Programs and Policy, TEA   Aaron Demerson, Commissioner Representing Employers, Texas Workforce Commission   Robin Miller, Director of Employment Programs, Texas A&M Center on Disability and Development
8:50–9:45 <i>Phoenix Ballroom</i>	<b>KEYNOTE: ADDRESSING FAMILY AND PROFESSIONALS' OBSTACLES IN PRE-ETS: PROVIDERS' PERCEPTIONS ACROSS TEXAS</b> Wen-Hsuan Chang, Ph.D., Texas A&M University
9:45–10:15	<b>BRYAN DANIEL, CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONER REPRESENTING THE PUBLIC, TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION</b>
10:15–10:30	<b>BREAK</b>
10:30–11:20 <i>Phoenix Ballroom</i>	<b>WORKING TOGETHER TO COLLABORATE WITH FAMILIES</b> Group Planning Session led by Wen-Hsuan Chang, PhD, Sanjukta Mukherji, and Sarah Lee, Texas A&M Center on Disability and Development
<b>11:20–12:10</b>	<b>BREAKOUT SESSION 3</b>
<i>Phoenix Central</i>	<b>BEST PRACTICES FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS</b> Trusure Adams, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor   Whitney Boykin, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor   Steven Martinez, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor   Erica Moya, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor
<i>Magnolia</i>	<b>EVERY STUDENT HAS A STORY: CHOOSING THE RIGHT TRANSITION ASSESSMENTS TO HONOR THE STUDENT</b> Denise Geiger and Samantha Blanton, Leander ISD
<i>Phoenix North</i>	<b>OVERVIEW OF TWC PROJECTS</b> Erin Wilder, M.Ed., C.R.C., Leigh Ann Godinez, C.R.C., L.P.C., and Kristen Davis, M.S., L.P.C.
<i>Phoenix South</i>	<b>INTRODUCING TEXAS SPED SUPPORT — YOUR HUB FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCES</b> Brynn Biggs, M.Ed., and Jeanette Driffill, M.Ed., Garrett Center on Transition and Disability Studies, Sam Houston State University, and
<i>Dovers</i>	<b>COLLABORATING TO SUPPORT MEANINGFUL WORK-BASED LEARNING</b> Robin Miller, M.S., Texas A&M Center on Disability and Development
<i>Austin</i>	<b>ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS TO CREATE A VISION FOR COMPETITIVE, INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT</b> Joette Hardin, M.Ed., and Jana Bishop, Texas A&M Center on Disability and Development

12:10–1:10  
Phoenix Ballroom

**LUNCH**

1:10–2:10  
Phoenix Ballroom

**KEYNOTE: EQUAL POWER! EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO TAKE POSITIVE CONTROL OF THEIR LIVES AND EDUCATION**

Aimee Day, Mentor Trainer, Person-Centered Thinking, Learning Community for Person-Centered Practices, and Ty Day, Student and Self-Advocate

2:10–2:25

**BREAK**

2:25–3:40  
Phoenix Ballroom

**IMPLEMENTING PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING TOOLS**

Group Planning Session facilitated by Joette Hardin and Jana Bishop, Texas A&M Center on Disability and Development

## Keynote Presentations

### **THE POWER OF ONE**

Adam Saenz, Ph.D., D. Min., Founder and CEO, Applied EQ Group

Remember? You went into this field to make a difference! But is it really possible to build the kinds of life-impacting relationships with students in the wake of the massive disruptions caused by a global pandemic? Licensed psychologist Dr. Adam L. Saenz answers with a resounding, “Yes!” Dr. Saenz presents two case studies that will encourage you by reminding you that what you do in your professional role doesn’t just matter—it matters deeply. We in education and vocational rehabilitation are uniquely postured to make life-changing impacts in the lives of the students with whom we interact every day.

### **EDUCATE, COLLABORATE, AND ENGAGE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES AS TRANSITION PARTNERS**

Judy M. Averill, M.Ed., Director, Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Transition Innovations

Student and family involvement in transition planning is important to successful post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. However, schools often struggle to harness the power of these partnerships. With all the other responsibilities we have, how do we incorporate effective strategies to support student and family engagement? This workshop will focus on easy-to-implement, high-leverage practices and strategies schools can introduce to enhance the development of students’ self-determination skills that will lead to better involvement of students and families in transition planning and successful postsecondary outcomes.

### **EARLY TO EXIT: COLLABORATION CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Elizabeth Danner, State Transition Coordinator, TEA

This session will focus on subjects to consider when students are exiting out of middle school and going into high school. Attendees will learn about TEA guidelines and best practices that should be considered by staff when working with transitioning students with disabilities. Education and VR staff will learn effective approaches for transitioning students.

## **ADDRESSING FAMILY AND PROFESSIONAL'S OBSTACLES IN PRE-ETS: PROVIDERS' PERCEPTIONS ACROSS TEXAS**

Wen-Hsuan Chang, Ph.D., Texas A&M University

Individuals with disabilities experience challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment. Pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) are designed to help youth with disabilities acquire essential employment skills to prepare them for employment. This study investigates the challenges and solutions that professionals encounter in providing Pre-ETS. Particularly, this presentation will address family and professional's obstacles and solutions in providing Pre-ETS. We conducted 24 focus groups, consisting of 162 Pre-ETS professionals to gather information. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data, using open, axial, and selective coding through a constant comparative iterative method. The study aims to identify effective strategies for addressing obstacles in Pre-ETS, and the results will inform practitioners about the importance of collaborating with families and providing practitioners with effective coping strategies for family-professional obstacles in Pre-ETS. This study represents an essential step in improving the provision of Pre-ETS and enhancing the employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities. This interactive session will also encourage you to share your personal experiences of working with families.

## **EQUAL POWER! EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO TAKE POSITIVE CONTROL OF THEIR LIVES AND EDUCATION** Aimee Day, Mentor Trainer, Person-Centered Thinking, Learning Community for Person-Centered Practices, and Ty Day, Student and Self-Advocate

Join Ty Day and Aimee Day to learn how they have used person-centered planning and trauma-informed care to help Ty grow into a strong self-advocate. When Ty leads his ARD meetings, he makes informed choices and has positive control over his goals and the support needed to help him reach his vision of a good life.

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### **BREAKOUT SESSION 1 | TUESDAY 2:00–2:50 PM**

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## **THE HERO'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE PANDEMIC: A NEW WAY TO UNDERSTAND STRESS**

Adam Saenz, Ph.D., D. Min., Founder and CEO, Applied EQ Group

*Phoenix Central*

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrust us from the known into the unknown. In other words, we are on a hero's journey, facing dragons at closer range than ever before (e.g., racial unrest, economic uncertainty, and political division).

Most of us are aware of the potential negative effects of stress (which is another word for facing the unknown), including physical and mental illness and eventual burnout. In worst-case scenarios, stress erodes not only our individual wellbeing, but also our ability to create healthy, effective relationships with our colleagues, the students that we serve, and their families.

The good news is that stress doesn't have to be the enemy. In fact, if our goal is to live a stress-free life, we are cheating ourselves out of a potentially valuable fuel source. Stress, when understood and managed effectively, can result not only in increased personal wellbeing, but also in authentic community among our colleagues and relational connection with the students we serve.

Learning Outcomes:

- Participants will understand how the hero navigates the unknown to return home stronger, with more power than before.
- Participants will understand the role of the "fight or flight" response mechanism as we approach stressful events.

- Participants will identify how to engage (e.g., fight) in ways that are helpful and hurtful.
- Participants will understand how to disengage (e.g., run) in ways that are helpful and hurtful.
- Participants will build a “Dream Team”: those four individuals who will keep them in their area of peak performance through stress.

### **AUTHENTIC STUDENT PARTNERSHIPS: IT IS NEVER TOO EARLY TO START**

**Denise Geiger and Samantha Blanton, Leander ISD**

*Magnolia*

Transform students from passive participants to authentic partners in their life. In this session, participants will learn the benefits of growing student voice early on and strategies to build student partnership. Exploring the Four Levels of Independence, we will learn how to meet students where they are at and target skills to support students in achieving their independence goals.

### **COLLABORATING BEYOND THE VR-LEA RELATIONSHIP: THE PURPOSEFUL LIFE MODEL**

**Robin Miller, TAMU Center on Disability and Development**

*Phoenix North*

The Purposeful Life family training series is a collaboration between the Bryan and College Station School Districts, the Center on Disability and Development, Texas Workforce Solutions, the Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living, MHMR of the Brazos Valley, and local parent organizations. It is offered in-person and via livestream, and youth training sessions and sibling group topics are aligned with the parent/caregiver session. This session will provide a blueprint for creating collaborative training opportunities in your community.

### **OVERVIEW OF TWC PROJECTS (SESSION OFFERED TWICE)**

**Erin Wilder, M.Ed., C.R.C., and Kristen Davis, M.S., L.P.C.**

*Phoenix South*

Vocational Rehabilitation is a large program with extensive policies and procedures. This session will highlight current and future programs that TWC has created in order to serve younger Students with Disabilities.

- Attendees will learn about both General VR and Pre-ETS projects currently available
- Attendees will learn about TWC projects upcoming.
- Attendees will learn about needed steps to be able to access Vocational Rehabilitation services.
- Attendees will learn about the VR referral process.
- Attendees will learn about incorporating TWC projects into other service implementation for best outcomes for students with disabilities.

### **STUDENT EARNED INCOME EXCLUSION: AN IMPORTANT RESOURCE FOR SSI-ELIGIBLE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

**Alyssa Kee, CRC, LPC, TWC Program Specialist for Transition, and Leigh Ann Godinez, CRC, LPC**

*Dovers*

Sara Kendall Alyssa Kee, and Leigh Ann Godinez will share facts and helpful tips on how to transition from school to the workforce when utilizing Social Security Benefits. Attendees can expect to find out more information about Social Security and how it is applied to Students with Disabilities. Attendees will learn more about how to navigate student work experiences, income reporting, and maintaining benefits. Social Security limitations, exceptions, and rules will also be discussed. This session will explore how to continue having benefits while exploring employment.

## **BUILDING BRIDGES TO EMPLOYMENT: WORK EXPERIENCE INSIGHTS FOR STUDENTS (14-16) WITH DISABILITIES**

Benigno Aceves, TWS-VRS Program Specialist, Leslie Abbott, VR Manager, TWS-VRS | Kelly L. Majewski, iGROW Program Director, Texas A&M

*Austin*

Discover the importance of providing early work experience opportunities for students aged 14 to 16 with disabilities in our presentation, "Building Bridges to Employment." We'll dive into the transformative impact of job skills development and exposure at a young age, offering practical tips for identifying and tapping into work experience initiatives and sharing impactful success stories. Join us as we discuss ways to support our young individuals on their path to meaningful competitive employment and independence.

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### **BREAKOUT SESSION 2 | TUESDAY 3:10-4:00 PM**

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## **WHAT DOES SELF-CARE REALLY LOOK LIKE? (HINT: CALGON AIN'T GONNA TAKE YOU AWAY)**

Adam Saenz, Ph.D., D.Min., Founder and CEO, Applied EQ Group

*Phoenix Central*

Remember when you were much younger, and you thought all that was required to keep a car running was gasoline? Then you learned the reality of what is required to maintain a vehicle: insurance, maintenance, repairs, etc. Self-care is very similar, and we should make no mistake: treating ourselves to a bubble bath and a piece of chocolate won't keep us sustainable any more than just having gas money will keep a car on the road. Robust and sustainable living requires attention to our emotional, occupational, financial, spiritual and physical well-being. Remember: you are worth being taken care of, and one of the most loving things you can do for those depending on you is to offer them the healthiest version of you.

## **BEST PRACTICES FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS (SESSION OFFERED TWICE)**

Alma Alvarez, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor | Janine Bunke, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor | Flavia Carr, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor | David Enriquez, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor | Whitney Boykin, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor

*Austin*

Counselors from Vocational Rehabilitation will describe and share strategies from the field that are effective for working with younger Students with Disabilities. Counselors will discuss effective partnerships and steps needed to build and nurture these partnerships. Counselors will also discuss success stories of students that benefited from partnerships.

## **SERVING YOUNGER STUDENTS WITH PRE-ETS SERVICES**

Leigh Ann Godinez, C.R.C., L.P.C., TWC Program Specialist for Transition, and Kristen Davis, M.S., L.P.C., TWC Program Specialist for Transition

*Phoenix North*

ShapeSession will discuss Best Practices for VR staff working on provision of services to younger Students with Disabilities. Speakers will share strategies that have been implemented with staff that have resulted in success for service implementation. Attendees can expect to learn strategies for successful partnerships, and learn about several spotlighted services that are successful with the population.

## **INTRODUCING TEXAS SPED SUPPORT — YOUR HUB FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCES**

*(SESSION OFFERED TWICE)*

Brynn Biggs, M.A., Garrett Center on Transition and Disability Studies, Sam Houston State University |

Jeanette Driffill, MEd

*Phoenix South*



In the ever-evolving landscape of special education and transition support, finding reliable and comprehensive resources can often feel like navigating uncharted waters. Join us in this engaging presentation as we unveil the game-changing platform, "Texas Sped Support."

Dedicated to transforming the journey of students with special needs, this platform serves as a beacon of guidance for educators, families, and professionals. We will explore the wealth of specialized resources, innovative tools, and up-to-date information it offers, all tailored to address the unique challenges and opportunities within the Texas education system.

Through a dynamic showcase, you will discover how Texas Sped Support becomes your partner in fostering successful transitions. From individualized education plans (IEPs) to post-education pathways, we'll demonstrate how this hub streamlines access to critical materials, empowers collaboration and fosters a strong community network.

Our expert presenters will walk you through the platform's user-friendly interface, highlighting features that empower educators to create inclusive classrooms and families to navigate the educational journey confidently. Whether you're a seasoned educator, a dedicated parent, or a passionate advocate, this session equips you with the tools needed to make informed decisions and foster student success.

Join us for an insightful journey into the heart of Texas Sped Support and learn how it's revolutionizing the way we approach special education and transition support. Together, let's navigate the path to success and ensure that every student's journey is guided, supported, and filled with possibilities.

Key Takeaways:

- Gain a comprehensive understanding of the Texas Sped Support platform and its mission.
- Learn how to access specialized resources for special education and seamless transitions.
- Discover tools to foster collaboration among educators, families, and professionals.
- Explore pathways for creating inclusive classrooms and promoting student success.
- Join a community dedicated to advancing the future of special education in Texas.

### **GROUP SKILLS TRAINING FOR STUDENTS**

**Kevin Markel, TWC Program Specialist for Transition | Elizabeth Soto, TWC BVI Transition Counselor | Crissy Hunter, TWC BVI Transition Counselor | Erica Cairns, Region 13 ESC | Katherine Salmon, Region 13 ESC**  
*Dovers*

Specialists from TWC and ESC 13 will discuss the process of creating a Group Skills Training, specifically for Students with Disabilities. Attendees will learn about the process that staff must complete to create a group skills training and the process needed for Group Skills Training approval. Benefits of Group Skills Training will be discussed as well as successful outcomes and benefits of GST's. Attendees can learn strategies to work with partners to develop successful programs for Students with Disabilities.

### **EVERY STUDENT HAS A STORY: CHOOSING THE RIGHT TRANSITION ASSESSMENTS TO HONOR THE STUDENT (SESSION OFFERED TWICE)**

**Samantha Blanton and Denise Geiger, Leander ISD**  
*Magnolia*

Learn how we use transition assessments to tell a story about the student and practice how to administer each assessment. These assessments can give you insight into the skills they know or need to learn based on the four Life Domains (Life Long Learning, Social Rec Leisure, Adult Living, and Employment), help determine whether the

student needs on-campus work-based learning or is ready for the community, determine levels of independence in the classroom, and levels of self-advocacy in the school and work environment.

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### **BREAKOUT SESSION 3 | WEDNESDAY 11:20-12:10**

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#### **BEST PRACTICES FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS (SESSION OFFERED TWICE)**

Trusure Adams, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor | Whitney Boykin, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor | Steven Martinez, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor | Erica Moya, TWS-VRS Transition Counselor  
*Phoenix Central*

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*Phoenix South*

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- Discover tools to foster collaboration among educators, families, and professionals.
- Explore pathways for creating inclusive classrooms and promoting student success.
- Join a community dedicated to advancing the future of special education in Texas.

### **COLLABORATING TO PROVIDE MEANINGFUL WORK-BASED LEARNING**

**Robin Miller, Texas A&M Center on Disability and Development**

*Dovers*

High school work experience is a strong predictor of postsecondary success, but obtaining authentic, integrated work experience can be a challenge for some students with disabilities. To address this need, over the past two years Texas A&M's Center on Disability and Development and Texas Workforce Solutions have funded, trained, and supported 50 work-based learning projects in schools across the state. Informed by our successes and challenges as well as research in the field, this session will provide insight into how to avoid pitfalls, build partnerships, and create sustainable, meaningful work experiences for students with disabilities.

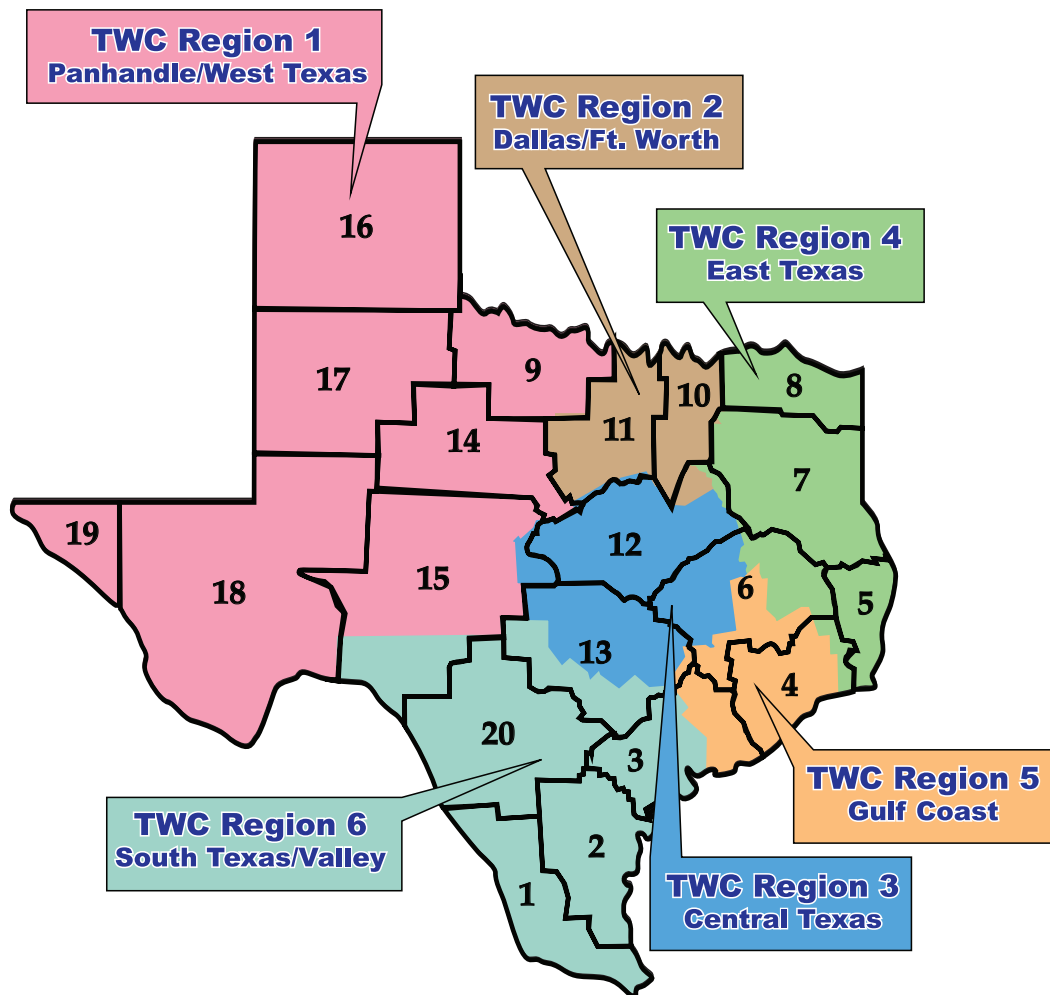
### **ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS TO CREATE A VISION FOR COMPETITIVE, INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT**

**Joette Hardin, Texas A&M Center on Disability and Development**

*Austin*

Texas Workforce Commission and Texas A&M University's Capacity-Building Project seeks to improve postsecondary outcomes by addressing barriers to Pre-ETS service provision for students ages 14-16. Younger teens often lack buy-in for transition planning because they are not thinking about life after high school. Families, school staff, and other key stakeholders may be too focused on coursework and graduation requirements to think about preparation for work and independent living. This session will provide strategies local teams can use to help students and families explore careers, develop a vision for employment, and take an active role in transition planning.

# TWC & ESC Regional Map Overlay



## TWC Regions and Regional Transitions Specialists

### **TWC REGION 1 – Andrew Castillo, 915-330-9014**

ESC Region 9 Wichita Falls  
 ESC Region 14 Abilene  
 ESC Region 15 San Angelo  
 ESC Region 16 Amarillo  
 ESC Region 17 Lubbock  
 ESC Region 18 Midland  
 ESC Region 19 El Paso

### **TWC REGION 2 – Rosla Hocker, 817-524-8536**

ESC Region 10 Richardson  
 ESC Region 11 Fort Worth  
 ESC Region 12 Waco (Navarro County)

### **TWC REGION 3 – Vacant**

ESC Region 6 Huntsville  
 (Milam, Robertson, Leon, Madison,  
 Brazos, Grimes, Burleson, Washington)  
 ESC Region 12 Waco  
 ESC Region 13 Austin  
 ESC Region 15 San Angelo (San Saba)

### **TWC REGION 4 – Kirstin Johnson, 903-504-9531**

ESC Region 5 Beaumont  
 ESC Region 6 Huntsville  
 (Houston, Trinity, Polk, San Jacinto)  
 ESC Region 7 Kilgore  
 ESC Region 8 Mt. Pleasant

### **TWC REGION 5 – Janeen Gordon, 832-840-2946**

ESC Region 3 Victoria  
 (Colorado, Wharton, Matagorda)  
 ESC Region 4 Houston  
 ESC Region 6 Huntsville  
 (Austin, Montgomery, Walker)

### **TWC REGION 6 – Rebecca Quintero, 210-238-3592**

ESC Region 1 Edinburg  
 ESC Region 2 Corpus Christi  
 ESC Region 3 Victoria  
 ESC Region 20 San Antonio

# Education Service Center (ESC) Transition Specialists

## ESC REGION 1 – EDINBURG

Josie Reyes - joreyes@esc1.net

## ESC REGION 2 – CORPUS CHRISTI

Kathleen McNeill-Murch

kathleen.mcneill-murch@esc2.us

Veronica Brotherton

veronica.brotherton@esc2.us

## ESC REGION 3 – VICTORIA

TJ Burke - tyoung-burke@esc3.net

## ESC REGION 4 – HOUSTON

Dr. Theresa Cortney

theresa.cortney@esc4.net

## ESC REGION 5 – SILSBEE

Lauren Peet - lpeet@esc5.net

## ESC REGION 6 – HUNTSVILLE

Suzanne Jones - sjones@esc6.net

## ESC REGION 7 – KILGORE

Tracy Johnston - tjohnston@esc7.net

## ESC REGION 8 – MT. PLEASANT

Jennifer Solomon - jsolomon@reg8.net

## ESC REGION 9 – WICHITA FALLS

David Hamilton - david.hamilton@esc9.net

## ESC REGION 10 – RICHARDSON

Amy Reeves - amy.reeves@region10.org

## ESC REGION 11 – WHITE SETTLEMENT

Carla Johnson - cjohnson@esc11.net

## ESC REGION 12 – WACO

Monica Johnson - monica.johnson@esc12.net

## ESC REGION 13 – AUSTIN

Chris Nelson - chris.nelson@esc13.txed.net

## ESC REGION 14 – ABILENE

Casey Westmoreland

cwestmoreland@esc14.net

## ESC REGION 15 – SAN ANGELO

Valerie Moos - valerie.moos@esc15.net

## ESC REGION 16 – AMARILLO

Myra Johnson - myra.johnson@esc16.net

## ESC REGION 17 – LUBBOCK

Nancy Coffey - ncoffey@esc17.net

## ESC REGION 18 – MIDLAND

Mary Groomer - mgroomer@esc18.net

## ESC REGION 19 – EL PASO

Leah Wood - lwood@esc19.net

## ESC REGION 20 – SAN ANTONIO

Sam Gonzalez - samuel.gonzalez@esc20.net

## STATE TRANSITION COORDINATOR — TEA

Elizabeth Danner

elizabeth.danner@tea.texas.gov

## How to contact your TED



Scan the QR code or follow the link for video instructions for how to contact your TED.

[tx.ag/FindingYourTED](https://tx.ag/FindingYourTED)



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
**PATHS Certificate  
 Program**

[paths.tamu.edu](http://paths.tamu.edu)



**Are you ready to get on the PATH?**

**What is PATHS?**

The Postsecondary Access and Training in Human Services (PATHS) Program is a two-year certificate training program that prepares individuals for employment as a Direct Support Professional - General (DSP-G), Direct Support Professional - Paraprofessional (DSP-P) or as Child Care Professionals (CCP). Students are required to successfully complete the Summer I semester prior to entering the PATHS Program. After completing six semesters at the PATHS Program, participants earn a certificate that combines classroom instruction with practical career building experiences.

**What can PATHS graduates expect?**

Students can expect an education that provides them not only with employment skills but also independent living skills, self-determination training, and self-advocacy training as well as various support systems to help each student achieve maximum success. The PATHS Program curriculum is rigorous and expectations for success are high.



**Help support the PATHS Program and other programs in the School of Education and Human Development and with the Center on Disability and Development at Texas A&M University.**

Students enrolled in the program will pay over \$50,000 for the duration of the program for non-state supported academic and support fees. For those who are eligible Texas Workforce Commission Services are available. Private funding is needed to support the organizational structure. Philanthropic support is critical to ensure this initiative is on a path to success. To partner with us on this life-changing effort, contact Leticia LaSota at [paths@tamu.edu](mailto:paths@tamu.edu).

**CAREER TRACKS**

**Direct Support Professional - General**

Students on the DSP-G career track are trained to support the elderly and other people with disabilities to live in their homes, with their families, or in other community settings. DSPs are instrumental in supporting a person to live a valued life in his or her community.

**Direct Support Para-Professional**

A student in the DSP-P career track is trained to support teachers and students in the classroom. A DSP-P can be employed by school districts or other educational facilities.

**Child Care Professional**

This track will closely align with the competency standards set by the CDA Council (CDACouncil.org). Graduates will have knowledge to begin/continue working with children ages 0-5 in the classroom setting.



[paths.tamu.edu](http://paths.tamu.edu)





# Aggie **ACHIEVE**

Academic Courses in Higher Inclusive  
Education and Vocational Experiences

*Texas' first inclusive, certificate-based, four-year educational opportunity for  
young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.*

**More than one million school-eligible individuals  
(ages 6-21) in the United States have intellectual or  
developmental disabilities.**

As young adults, many hold the very same dreams for adulthood as others without disabilities in their community: find a great job, forge new friendships, live on their own. The catalyst of many of these opportunities is the ability to go to college.



Through Aggie ACHIEVE, these students can have this experience while building employment skills. Aggie ACHIEVE aligns coursework, internship opportunities, and extracurricular activities with each student's academic interests and employment goals. Students have access to all campus-related activities.



[aggieachieve.tamu.edu](http://aggieachieve.tamu.edu)

*\*Each student's program of study will be individually designed through a comprehensive, collaborative process called person-centered planning, where each student and their family member(s) meet with a staff member to design individualized goals. Faculty will work with ACHIEVE staff to develop a modified syllabus and Independent Learning Agreement to set expectations and assignments.*



# iGROW: I Generate Rural Opportunities for Work



## Project Impact: Year One & Two

Extending Knowledge | Providing Opportunities



### Rural Texans Matter

The Center on Disability and Development (CDD) is at the forefront of developing programs in response to emerging issues in the disability field. We have a commitment to serving Texans with Disabilities. The goal of iGROW is to meet the diverse needs of rural communities by providing middle and high school students with pre-employment and leadership training to support their transition to work and/or postsecondary education. Students also create their student-centered plans for employment that include their definition of a good life.

#### Spring 2022 (19 students)



- 10 – Fourteen year olds
- 2 – Fifteen year olds
- 3 – Sixteen year olds
- 4 – Seventeen year olds

#### Fall 2022 (20 students)



- 6 – Fourteen year olds
- 12 – Fifteen year olds
- 2 – Sixteen year olds

#### Spring 2023 (28 students)



- 14 – Fourteen year olds
- 12 – Fifteen year olds
- 2 – Sixteen year olds

#### Fall 2023 EXPANSION OF CENTRAL TX & ADDITION OF EAST TX (51 students)



- 20 - Fourteen year olds
- 16 - Fifteen year olds
- 11 - Sixteen year olds
- 4 - Seventeen year olds



**40+** Pre-Employment, Professionalism, and Independent Living Skills Training  
*Lessons*



**38** *employers*  
Lee County Employers have agreed to serve as placement sites for students during the iGROW Summer Work-based learning experience



**160** Goal is to provide pre-employment skills training for up to 160 Central & East Texas students  
*students*



**60** *students*  
Students introduced to Vocational Rehabilitation and now have access to services.



**22** Lee County Students earned paychecks this summer and last summer with the Paid Work Experience (PWE) !  
*students worked over the past 2 summers*



**9** *students*  
Students Attended TAMU Summer Career Exploration and Leadership Camp



**15** Parent, Teacher, and Community Trainings provided in Lee County  
*trainings*

*This work was supported by the Texas Workforce Commission [Sponsor Award Number: 3022VRS048]*

**Kelly Majewski, M.Ed**  
iGROW Director, Center on Disability and Development at Texas A&M University  
832-344-7500 | kellymajewski@tamu.edu



2022-2023

[cdd.tamu.edu/education/igrow-project-about](http://cdd.tamu.edu/education/igrow-project-about)

scan me!



Learn more about iGROW  
Informational Video

The "I Generate Rural Opportunities for Work" (iGROW) Project is a four-year, pre-employment and leadership-training program in partnership with TWC's Vocational Rehabilitation Program, for up to 20 students with disabilities per year who are currently enrolled in high school (ages 14-22). The purpose of the program is to provide a training environment to support students gain the necessary skills and experiences in work readiness in order to successfully transition into postsecondary education and/or competitive integrated employment.



# HORTICULTURAL OPTIONS IN PLANT SCIENCES

## Relevance

People with disabilities who leave special education programs want to pursue postsecondary education and employment opportunities. The horticulture industry is facing challenges due to a lack of awareness, an aging workforce, and a shortage of well-trained professionals. Education is crucial for the industry's success. An inclusive postsecondary program is needed to provide training and experience for employment in horticulture, which presents a new opportunity for education programming.

## ABOUT

The **Horticultural Options in Plant Sciences (HOPS)** program is a 32-week certificate program that helps individuals with disabilities gain the skills and experience needed to transition to employment in the horticulture industry. Students take horticulture courses in the fall and a certification course in the spring to prepare for industry credential tests, and participate in a practicum.

## RESPONSE

The HOPS post-secondary certificate program targets young adults with disabilities aged 18-22. The program was developed in 2020 and has graduated a total of 22 students.

### Career Tracks with Industry-Recognized Credential

- Floral Design
- Landscape Management
- Greenhouse and Nursery Production



### Enrichment Courses

- Self-determination
- Self-advocacy
- Professionalism
- Study skills
- Independent living

### Career Exploration

- Guest speakers
- University student organization involvement
- Volunteer experience at employment settings

### Practicum

A semester-long supervised and paid practicum with onsite evaluation and ongoing job readiness skills training.



2023 RESULTS

22 OUT OF 26

STUDENTS HAVE  
GRADUATED WITH A

**82%**  
EMPLOYMENT RATE



**Xuan (Jade) Wu, Ph.D., AIFD, CFD, EMC**  
HOPS Co-Founder and Program Manager  
Assistant Professor and Extension  
Specialist  
Family & Community Health  
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

**Phone:** 979-321-5253

**Email:** jade.wu@ag.tamu.edu

# WORK AND COLLEGE OPPORTUNITIES

## ABOUT

The **Work and College Opportunities (WACO)** program is a 6-week summer residential program for young adults with disabilities. It provides development and instruction in professionalism, self-determination, self-advocacy, teamwork, and other skills related to employment and college attendance. Participants also gain work experience in the Bryan/College Station community. Emphasis areas include vocational skills, career exploration, and independent living skills.

### Relevance

People with disabilities who exit special education programs from their local school districts seek postsecondary opportunities and experiences to continue their education and secure meaningful employment.

## RESPONSE

WACO program students participate in specially designed classes on the Texas A&M campus and are given the opportunity to audit the Blinn College courses based on their career interests. Their interests are matched with the needs of community business partners, providing students with the opportunity to participate in paid work-based learning experiences as interns in integrated job sites.



### Learn Independent Living and Social Skills:

- Prepare and consume meals
- Use public and other forms of transportation
- Participate in various recreational and social activities
- Complete homework assignments and prepare for next day

### Training:

- Navigating the university campus
- Orientation and mobility
- Social security benefits
- Vocational adjustment training (20 hours)
- TAMU disability services
- College online platform
- Kitchen safety

### Classes:

- Self-determination
- Professionalism
- Garden Science 101
- Healthy relationships
- Weekly reflection class
- Opportunity to audit Blinn College courses



BY 2023

**231**  
PARTICIPANTS

**48440**  
CONTACT HOURS



Xuan (Jade) Wu, Ph.D., AIFD, CFD, EMC, CEJ  
Assistant Professor & Extension Specialist  
Family & Community Health  
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Phone: 979-321-5253

Email: jade.wu@ag.tamu.edu

# *Certificate of Attendance*

This certifies that

---

has successfully completed 11 hours of continuing education on  
*Pre-Employment Transition Services for Younger Teens*  
at the

**Texas Statewide Capacity-Building Conference**

**October 24-25, 2023**



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
Center on Disability  
and Development

**Dalun Zhang, Ph.D.**  
Director,

Center on Disability and Development  
TEA Provider ID# 500346

# Watch Your Inbox!



The Capacity-Building Team is planning 12 Regional Showcases. These one-day events will highlight local teams who are effectively providing Pre-ETS to students ages 14 to 16. Join us as they share best practices for success in serving this age group. The CDD staff will also provide training and resources to support your work with younger teens. All conference attendees will receive emails providing details on showcases in your region.

---

**We'll also host a second  
statewide conference in October 2024.**

Details coming soon.

[cdd.tamu.edu/education/transition-capacity-building/](https://cdd.tamu.edu/education/transition-capacity-building/)