

# SOLUTIONS

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE TEXAS WORKFORCE

TEXAS  
WORKFORCE  
COMMISSION

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2017 Volume 14  
No.2

Innovative  
workforce programs  
inspire students  
to reach high





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## ADVANCING PARTNERSHIPS to support job creation

The Texas economy continues to expand in 2017 while the Texas Workforce Commission creates and advances innovative partnerships that support job creation. At TWC we recognize that maintaining economic growth and retaining our state's dominance as the best place to do business will require leveraging locally driven partnerships that strengthen sector aligned talent development solutions. A focus on generational strategies that reflect the dynamism across diverse industry clusters will be critical.

We remain steadfast in our efforts to improve child care quality and to expand partnerships that seek to improve early learning and school readiness in Texas. We must elevate our efforts to increase the number of Texas Rising Star (TRS) quality childcare providers while increasing linkages between high quality providers and public pre-K programs.

Meeting the challenge of raising students' career awareness while enhancing their understanding about the diverse industry clusters in Texas will be a key part of our efforts. Accelerating our partnerships with high schools and community colleges to build more high demand career pathways for students will serve our job creation goals well. There must also be a focus on a statewide strategy that better allows students to acquire and document skills through validated credentials. We need to elevate the ability of students to earn, document and communicate

their skills to accelerate and strengthen their connections to employers. Working in partnership to make sure our students graduate with marketable skills will be a priority.

As we move forward, the transformations occurring across occupations reinforce the critical importance of inspiring and attracting Texas students to pursue excellence in science, technology, engineering and math as we work to maintain competitive edge across industry sectors. Working in partnership to inspire students and demonstrate the relevance of classroom learning to these changes occurring in the workplace will be important.

Our work to support high quality dual credit delivered through innovative industry academy early college models will continue. Partnerships will be expanded to increase the number of applied learning opportunities, such as apprenticeship, co-ops and internships. We must meet the Texas internship challenge while ensuring students with disabilities have an opportunity to earn and learn.

For veterans, we continue to provide the Texas Veterans Leadership Program, work to increase College Credit for Heroes partnerships, and further expedite their transition into the Texas workforce through efforts like Texas Operation Welcome Home. Veterans are and will continue to be a priority population for Texas Workforce Solutions.

Support for innovative strategies serving current and former foster youth need to be examined and promising practices replicated. TWC remains



Paula Reilly, a sixth grader at Saint Matthews Catholic School in San Antonio, a Junior Division Second Grand Prize Winner for her project "Effects of Common Nutritional Supplements on Heart Rate, Fertility Function and Survival" with TWC Chairman Andres Alcantar at the Texas Science and Engineering Fair.

committed to supporting partnerships like the Foster Youth Dropout Recovery and High School Completion pilot program, which will help current and former foster youth earn a high school diploma or its equivalent, with the opportunity to gain workforce skills and a pathway to employment or postsecondary education.

With the close of the 85th Texas legislative session upon us, TWC will continue to work in partnership to build a stronger Texas that continues to create jobs in a broad range of exciting industries. We look forward to working with you in the year ahead. ■

ANDRES ALCANTAR | TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION  
Chairman and Commissioner Representing the Public

# Simulating real life IN THE CLASSROOM

BY RONNIE BURCHETT

Creating a learning environment similar to the real world helps jump-start students' skillsets toward a career in nursing, welding, electrical engineering and software development. To help create these simulated environments, TWC's **Jobs and Education for Texans (JET)** supports career and technical education programs in high-demand occupations by defraying the equipment costs for the classrooms.

Laredo Community College (LCC), a JET grant recipient, is a two-campus district serving more than 12,000 students each year through a variety of academic, technical and vocational programs. The school serves many more through its adult education and literacy, continuing education and economic development courses.

LCC's Health Sciences Division prepares graduates with skills needed for employment in the nursing and health science fields. LCC purchased high-tech equipment, including SimMan, SimMom and Sim Junior patient simulator manikins, for real-life medical scenarios in preparation for employment in the nursing field.

"With the purchase of these manikins, our nursing department can continue in its mission of providing a top-notch education that will strengthen our medical community by graduating highly skilled nurses," said LCC President Dr. Ricardo J. Solis. "These state-of-the-art educational tools help ensure our students remain at the head of the pack in such a highly competitive field."

LCC Associate Degree Nursing students, Monica Colchado and Cynthia Aguilar noted that the equipment gives them an opportunity to experience real hospital emergencies.

"Since no two patients are the same, the simulations have become an excellent tool to provide insight to differences in symptoms, sounds and level of care for a specific health care need," said Colchado.

"Also, working in the simulation area gives us the flexibility to make mistakes and learn from them," said Aguilar.

Simulation rooms enable students to be highly trained and learn to provide the best care to a patient in a life-threatening situation.

"Students are able to perform a variety of skills and develop their critical thinking skills in a safe learning environment," said LCC's Nursing Programs Director Dr. Dianna Miller.



Waco High School Automotive Technology class demonstrates classroom equipment. *From left* – TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Julian Alvarez, Waco High Auto Tech Teacher Mario Chavez and Waco High Student Ladaruis Rollings.

In addition to defraying the start-up costs associated with the development of a career and technical education program, JET funding focuses on projects that target high-demand jobs in new or emerging industries.

Waco High School's (WHS) Automotive Tech program received a JET grant and purchased shop equipment, such as air compressors, toolboxes, tools and new lifts so that the program meets the certification for dual credit with Texas State Technical College. The philosophy of WHS technical programs is to prepare students for a future well-paying career by providing them with the most up-to-date, industry recommended equipment and curriculum. WHS prepares students to be workforce ready and the district provides the local industry with a trained, ready-to-work qualified employee.

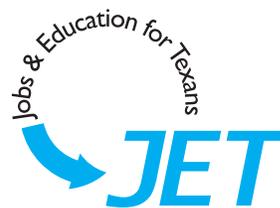
"The updated equipment helps the kids have a taste of what they would be using in the real world of automotive repair," said WHS Automotive Tech Instructor Mark Penney. "They can go out and begin using their knowledge on the job or continuing their education."

The real-world experience students receive through simulation classrooms not only prepares students for a high-demand job, but helps in determining their career path.

The JET grant program allocates \$10 million for the FY 2016 – 2017 biennium for eligible educational institutions through a competitive process.

During the first year of funding in 2016, **25 grants** totaling nearly \$5 million will provide training in high-demand occupations for at least 5,394 students. During its second year of funding, **26 grant recipients** received funding to train an estimated 4,900 students.

For more information on the TWC program, visit [JET Grant Program](#). ■





## COLLEGE CREDIT FOR HEROES

# Supports Four New Programs for Veterans

BY W. J. SCOTT

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) recently announced the award of over \$1 million to support four new accelerated certificate or degree programs through its College Credit for Heroes (CCH) program, a statewide effort designed to maximize the award of college credit to veterans and service members for their military experience.

Since inception, more than 85,000 veterans have created accounts at [CollegeCreditforHeroes.org](http://CollegeCreditforHeroes.org). An estimated 27,000 veterans have received evaluations with an average of 16 credit hours awarded per student from participating colleges and universities.

Nick St. Clair served as a medical specialist, practical nurse and field artillery officer in the U.S. Army. After leaving the service, he applied for the nursing school program at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC), a College Credit for Heroes partner school, and was referred to the program. St. Clair was awarded nine service credit hours and used the credit to obtain his Bachelor of Science in nursing in 2016.



Registered Nurse Nick St. Clair, a College Credit for Heroes awardee.

"I began my adult life as a medic, practical nurse and hospital educator in the Army and absolutely loved it," said St. Clair. "After some time away from patients, I'm fortunate to have had the opportunity to return to my first professional love."

St. Clair is currently employed as a registered nurse at John Peter Smith Hospital in Fort Worth. He credits his success to the College Credit for Heroes program and TTUHSC's unique program for veterans with his military background.

"With the College Credit for Heroes grant, the university created the Veteran to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (VBSN) track, an accelerated program for veterans with prior military medical training and experiences who want to obtain a nursing degree," said TTUHSC VBSN Director Debbie Sikes.

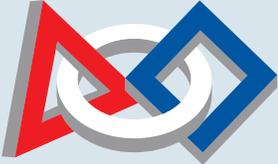
"Nick was among our first VBSN graduating class, which included six other students. Success of the VBSN track was demonstrated by all seven students passing the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN) on their first attempt and becoming employed as registered nurses," she said. ■

## New 2017 programs that received funding through College Credit for Heroes

- **Dallas County Community College District** — \$262,977 to develop the Veterans Education Transition program, designed to create an accelerated transition to a civilian career by replicating existing programs developed by Grayson College and Lee College.
- **Houston Community College** — \$472,687 to develop a veterans academy for veterans and service members to assess prior military experiences and provide employment.
- **Lee College** — \$145,457 to establish an accelerated emergency medical technician program.
- **Texas State University** — \$145,495 to create Accelerate TXState, an online prior learning assessment curriculum.

For more information about College Credit for Heroes partner schools or to register for the program, visit [CollegeCreditForHeroes.org](http://CollegeCreditForHeroes.org)

For more information on workforce programs available for Texas veterans, visit the veterans' resource page at [twc.state.tx.us/jobseekers/just-veterans](http://twc.state.tx.us/jobseekers/just-veterans)



# FIRST ROBOTICS COMPETITION

## Provides students with disabilities opportunities to compete

BY JUSTIN MINSKER



PHOTO BY HEATHER NOEL/WWW.DALLASINNOVATES.COM

*Above and left*— Antonio Haddon of Sunset High School and members of the RoboFlash 6751.



When Antonio Haddon started participating in (For Inspiration & Recognition of Science & Technology) *FIRST* Robotics, he never knew he would develop such a passion for learning.

“What I like most about robotics is building the robot, driving the robot and working together as a team while we cheer each other on.”

Haddon, a senior at Sunset High School in Dallas drives robots as a part of team RoboFlash 6751, the first robotics team to be comprised of students with disabilities. The students competed at the Dallas Regional *FIRST* Robotics Competition (FRC) on March 8-11 in Irving and won one of their matches.

In 2016, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) supported 270 *FIRST* teams across the state through a grant totaling \$1 million to the *FIRST* in Texas Foundation, inspiring nearly 4,200 students to be leaders in science and technology by engaging them in exciting, mentor-based programs that promote innovation, build skills for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) careers, and foster well-rounded life skills.

Working in teams to solve complex problems and create a working robot, these competitions equip students with STEM applied learning opportunities.

“I felt that I gained a lot of respect from other teams,” said Haddon. “I proved to myself that I can drive in a robotics competition despite my disabilities.”

TWC supports youth education programs that prepare students for high-demand careers through its partnership with after-school robotics programs. Support for hands-on learning activities in robotics continues to grow as shown by the University Interscholastic League’s decision to officially sanction statewide robotics competitions.



PHOTO BY LARA LONGO



PHOTO BY STEVE LIPOFSKY



PHOTO BY ADRIANA M. GROCMAN



PHOTO BY HEATHER NOEL/  
WWW.DALLASINNOVATES.COM

“Students participating in the *FIRST* in Texas Robotics Competition at the University Interscholastic League (UIL) State Championship in Austin and at the International competition in Houston showcased their ingenuity, teamwork and prowess in STEM skills,” said TWC Chairman Andres Alcantar. “Texas employees and teachers who mentor these students are inspiring future Texas innovators by helping them develop and apply their programming, technical, engineering and other skills needed to succeed in the dynamic Texas economy. TWC is proud to support this successful and inspiring STEM strategy.”

*FIRST* was founded in 1989 to inspire young people’s interest and participation in science and technology. The programs encompass age-appropriate, hands-on activities for K-12 students.

“As the demand for qualified STEM professionals continues to grow for Texas employers, programs like *FIRST* Robotics give students a strong start,” said TWC Commissioner Representing Employers Ruth R. Hughs. “Through the *FIRST* grants, we are proud to lay the groundwork by providing opportunities for 4,190 students throughout Texas to gain new skills and real-world experiences.”

*FIRST* provides opportunities for all ages. Students ages six to 10 start with *FIRST* LEGO Leagues Jr., which introduces STEM concepts through LEGO elements. Students in 4th-8th grades can start *FIRST* LEGO League teams and are challenged to develop solutions to real world problems all while building and programming a robot.

High school teams compete in the *FIRST*Tech Challenge (FTC) and FRC. FTC is considered the junior varsity level

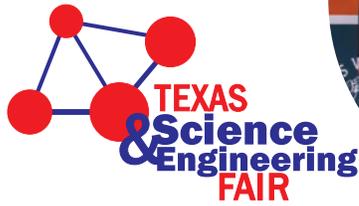
competition, where teams of up to 10 students receive a robot kit and are challenged to design, build and program their robots to compete against other teams.

FRC is considered the “ultimate sport for the mind.” It involves teams comprised of at least 25 students and adult mentors who must raise funds, design a team “brand” and build a robot to perform tasks based on real-world engineering challenges. Each season culminates with top teams competing at the *FIRST* Championship.

The RoboFlash 6751 team introduced students with intellectual disabilities such as autism, learning disabilities and Down syndrome to the competition and to apply their skills on the team. This special robotics program has helped bring awareness to providing learning opportunities for all students including individuals with disabilities and presents opportunities for companies to hire students as future engineers and computer programmers.

“TWC is dedicated to supporting *FIRST* Robotics as the positive impact this program has on Texas students continues to grow in innovative ways,” said TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Julian Alvarez. “The labor force of Texas must continue to innovate and programs like *FIRST* provide the training and skills our students need to compete.”

The results of a Brandeis University evaluation survey indicated that *FIRST* programs encourage participants to consider STEM-related careers. *FIRST* participants are two times as likely to major in science or engineering. Over 75 percent of *FIRST* alumni enter in-demand STEM fields as a student or professional after they graduate high school. ■



# FUTURE LEADERS

## of Science & Engineering Workforce Compete at Annual State Science Fair in San Antonio

*Photo above left* – Left: UTSA College of Sciences Dean Dr. George Perry, Best-of-Show winner Tatiana Streidl and Interim Executive Director of TXSEF Dr. Aaron Cassill.

*Above right* – 51 top science fair winners.

*Bottom right* – Left: UTSA College of Sciences Dean Dr. George Perry, Best-of-Show was awarded to Kshitij Sachan and Yesh Doctor and Interim Executive Director of TXSEF Dr. Aaron Cassill.



*Photo above* – Areebah Fatima, an 8th Grader at Qalam Collegiate Academy Middle School in Plano, shows her exhibit to TWC Labor Commissioner Julian Alvarez.

*Below* – A bird's-eye view of more than 1,200 science fair participants.

More than 1,200 of the best and brightest young science and engineering minds from across the state displayed their projects at the [Texas Science and Engineering Fair \(TXSEF\)](#) on April 1. The fair, which was hosted by The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), is co-sponsored by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and ExxonMobil.

Students competed in 22 life and physical science project categories. The top two projects in the life science and physical science disciplines earned first and second grand prize recognitions, and from among these winners, one individual in each division was selected for the Best-of-Show designations.

This year's junior division Best-of-Show winner, Tatiana Streidl of North Texas Academy of Higher Learning Middle School in Frisco, earned the honor for her project on "Unplanned Ingredients Investigating the Chemical Transfer of Cl<sub>2</sub> NO<sub>3</sub> NO<sub>2</sub> Cr<sub>6</sub> CHO<sub>2</sub>," which explores potential health problems in paper plates.

The senior division Best-of-Show was awarded to Kshitij Sachan and Yesh Doctor of Plano East Senior High School in Plano, who presented a project on "Site Specific Genomic Integration of Large DNA Fragments."

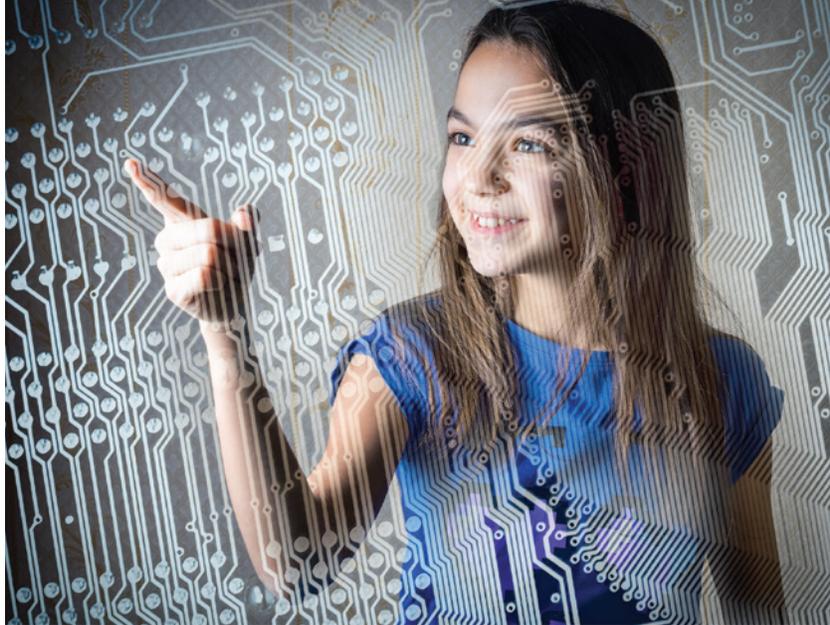
The top two finishers in each category (51 students in total) at the TXSEF from the senior division were awarded scholarships to attend the Texas Governor's Science and Technology Champions Academy, a weeklong residential summer camp, also sponsored by TWC, which will be held at Southern Methodist University.

The Governor's Science and Technology Champions Academy and the Texas Science and Engineering Fair are two of TWC's many programs designed to encourage students to learn and participate in STEM activities to acquire the knowledge and skills to equip them for in-demand occupations. ■

# STEM

## Science, Technology, Engineering & Math

# PROGRAMS



BY JUSTIN MINSKER

TWC supports programs including robotics that encourage students to participate in STEM programs and pursue postsecondary degrees and careers in these in-demand fields.

## Governor's Summer Merit Program

This summer, Texas Workforce Commission awarded 18 grants totaling more than \$1.26 million to Texas universities and community colleges for summer youth camps that focus on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) through the Governor's Summer Merit Program. The grants provide the opportunity for 1,351 students, ages 14 to 21 to attend camps that will help prepare them for future high-skill, high-demand jobs.

The Governor's Summer Merit Program aims to inspire Texas youth to pursue STEM-related careers. The camps introduce students to future careers available in advanced technologies and manufacturing, aerospace and defense, biotechnology and life sciences, information and computer technology, and energy.

Several of the camps are specifically targeted to encourage young women and minorities to pursue further education and careers in STEM fields.

Some students will have the opportunity to take field trips that will give them access to high-tech equipment, such as 3-D printers and electron telescopes, while others will visit science and engineering facilities and have the opportunity to meet and speak with industry professionals.

## Camp Code

New for this year, TWC awarded eight grants totaling \$599,681 for Camp Code to focus on increasing the interest of middle school girls in computer coding and computer science by providing summer camps. Camp Code will offer hands-on experiences that provide students with challenging and innovative concepts and experiences in learning, problem solving and analytical skills while fostering an interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) related careers with a focus on computer science.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 American Community Survey, only 26 percent of employees in computer and mathematical occupations in Texas were women. The grants awarded to independent school districts, universities and higher education institutions are designed to spark girls' interests in careers in computer programming from an early age, and for young women to consider careers in these highly sought after fields.

Creating summer camps that offer computer science projects that incorporate art and storytelling with robotics, video games, websites and applications can also further interest in the coding field. The coding education includes the most in-demand and popular computer science languages, such as Java, SQL, C++, Net, Perl, Ruby and JavaScript.

Camp Code provides students with activities and lessons that encourage their interest in high technology, such as working in teams to use programming languages to build games, web pages and robots. These activities can enhance girls' interest in the industry and inspire them to pursue coding as their career. ■

# New Career Initiative & Programs



## PREPARE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT

BY W. J. SCOTT

Teenagers and young adults who want to jump-start their careers can benefit from Pathways to Careers, a Texas Workforce Commission initiative to expand pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities. These career-focused services will include work opportunities, such as internships, apprenticeships, summer employment and other job opportunities available throughout the school year.

The first Pathways to Careers program is Summer Earn and Learn which will launch statewide this year. The program will provide 2,000 students with disabilities with work readiness training and paid work experience. The 28 [Texas Workforce Solutions Board Offices](#), in partnership with Texas Workforce Solutions– Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS) staff will implement the Summer Earn and Learn program and coordinate the skills training and paid work experience.

The Boards will identify business partners and pay the students' wages.

Local TWS-VRS offices will assist with recruiting students and providing case management services.

[Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast](#) is partnering with the Houston Independent School District (HISD) to launch a Summer Earn and Learn program.

“We’re pleased to partner with HISD in providing summer jobs and

career exploration for students with disabilities,” said Gulf Coast Executive Director Mike Temple.” We truly appreciate HISD’s commitment to the future for these young adults.”

[Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County](#) is partnering with its local schools and Goodwill Industries of Fort Worth to implement its summer program.

“In addition to Goodwill, other employers we’ve reached out to include CVS Pharmacy, Klein Tools and the City of Mansfield Park and Recreation” said Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County Executive Director Judy McDonald. “Helping students with disabilities gain work-related knowledge and skills is extremely important, and we want to enlist the support of as many employers as possible.”

Other Pathways to Careers programs are still in development or preparing to launch and will expand upon Pre-ETS and career-related education to students with disabilities. Read more about those programs in future editions of Solutions. ■



Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas staff at the Opportunity Fair in Dallas.

## Dallas Opportunity Fair Provides Youth With on-the-Spot Job Offers

More than 2,000 students attended the fifth annual Opportunity Fair in Dallas on May 19. The students met with nonprofit community leaders and executives from 50 top U.S. companies, including Starbucks, Target, Walgreens and Plano-based Pizza Hut. The fairs are designed to help engage underserved youth and help connect them to employment, training, as well as career mentoring and job readiness activities.

Youth shared their voices with more than 50 executives and nonprofit leaders. Students also had the opportunity to connect with more than 30 job-readiness and social services coaches who helped with resume writing, interviewing skills and college and financial aid applications.

Approximately 700 students received on-the-spot job offers. The event boasts an extraordinary interview-to-hire ratio (1.6 interviews to 1 offer), with more than 60 percent of interviews resulting in a job offer.

Members of the Dallas Opportunity Coalition say they will work with existing community partners — including the City of Dallas, Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas, United Way of Metro Dallas, and CitySquare — and others to expand the fair in future years. Launched in August 2015, the [100,000 Opportunities Initiative](#) is the largest employer-led coalition focused on hiring opportunity youth. ■

## Skills for Small Business Program and National Small Business Week



TWC Employer Commissioner Ruth R. Hughes (second from left) with the Small Business Week Award recipient Bohuslav Feed Mill of Moulton, Texas.



TWC Chairman Andres Alcantar and U.S. Small Business Administrator Linda McMahon.

Small businesses account for 97 percent of employers in Texas. In recognition of National Small Business Week this spring, Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) celebrated the state's 483,430 private-sector employers with fewer than 100 employees at events across Texas.

TWC Chairman Andres Alcantar welcomed U.S. Small Business Administrator Linda McMahon at the Salute to North Texas Small Business Awards in Arlington. TWC Commissioner Representing Employers Ruth R. Hughes attended the Small Business Week Awards Ceremony in San Antonio and later presented a proclamation from Governor Abbott at the Woman's Way Business Awards Ceremony in Austin.

Through the Skills for Small Business grant program, eligible small businesses can receive up to \$1,800 in training for each new worker and \$900 for each existing worker for classes offered at their local community and technical college.

TWC Skills for Small Business program helps businesses with less than 100 employees train new workers or upgrade the skills of current workers. Since the program began, TWC has allocated \$2 million to support small businesses.

Employers seeking more information about the Skills for Small Business program, including applications and information about how to apply, may visit the TWC website at [www.texasworkforce.org/ssb](http://www.texasworkforce.org/ssb). ■

## Vocational Rehabilitation Office Moves

In May, six vocational rehabilitation (VR) staff in Waxahachie moved from former Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) offices into a co-located space with staff at Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas. Late last year, two VR staff in Corsicana moved into another Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas office in Corsicana.

Future office moves will occur over the next several years, as required by the transition of services from DARS to the Texas Workforce Commission.

Co-location will benefit VR customers through the expanded network of employment services. There will be no disruption to services related to these VR staff relocations.

Other cities in which VR staff have moved into Workforce Solutions offices include Killeen (Workforce Solutions of Central Texas), Dallas (Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas), and Bastrop (Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area).

***Be sure to read future editions of Solutions for announcements of additional moves. ■***

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