



# **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Strategic and Operational Plan**

**Program Years 2025-2028**

## Table of Contents

<b>Part 1: Board Vision and Strategies</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>A. Vision and Goals</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>B. Board Strategies</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>C. High-Performing Board</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Part 2. Economic and Workforce Analysis</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>A. Regional Economic and Employment Needs Analysis</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>B. Labor Force Analysis and Trends</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>C. Workforce Development Analysis</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>Part 3: Core Programs</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>A. Workforce Development System</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>B. Core Programs—Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access</b> .....	<b>48</b>
<b>Part 4: One-Stop Service Delivery</b> .....	<b>52</b>
<b>A. One-Stop Service Delivery System</b> .....	<b>52</b>
<b>B. Employer Engagement, Economic Development, and Unemployment Insurance Program Coordination</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>C. Coordination of Wagner-Peyser Services</b> .....	<b>66</b>
<b>D. Integrated, Technology-Enabled Intake and Case Management</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>E. Third Party Partnership in SNAP Employment and Training Programs</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>Part 5: Workforce Investment Activities</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>A. Rapid Response Activity Coordination</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>B. Youth Activities and Services</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>C. Coordination with Secondary and Postsecondary Education Programs</b> .....	<b>74</b>
<b>D. Child Care and Early Learning</b> .....	<b>78</b>
<b>E. Transportation and Other Support Services</b> .....	<b>82</b>
<b>F. Coordination of Adult Education and Literacy</b> .....	<b>83</b>
<b>Part 6: Adult and Dislocated Workers</b> .....	<b>84</b>
<b>A. Adult and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training</b> .....	<b>84</b>
<b>B. Service Priority</b> .....	<b>90</b>

<b>Part 7: Fiscal Agent, Grants, and Contracts .....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>A. Fiscal Agent .....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>B. Subgrants and Contracts .....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Part 8: Performance .....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>A. Board Performance Targets .....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Part 9: Training and Services.....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>A. Individual Training Accounts .....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>B. ITA Limitations.....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Part 10: Apprenticeship .....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>A. Registered Apprenticeship Programs.....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>B. ApprenticeshipTexas.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Part 11: Public Comment .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Appendix: Texas Workforce Investment Council Requirements.....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Local Board Plan Requirements .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Requirement for Workforce Systemwide Alignment .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Demonstrating Local Alignment with Texas’ Workforce System Strategic Plan .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Directions for Demonstrating Alignment with the Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan ..</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>System Goals and Objectives.....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>1. Employers Goal – Delivery of Relevant Education and Training Programs.....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>2. Learners Goal – Expansion of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship .....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>3. Partners Goal – Alignment to Support Career Pathways.....</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>4. Policy and Planning Goal – Relevant Data Sets.....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Strategic Opportunities .....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>1. Strategic Opportunity 1 – Employer Engagement.....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>2. Strategic Opportunity 2 – Improving Outcomes for Texans with Barriers to Employment</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>3. Strategic Opportunity 3 – Use of Data to Support Investment Decisions.....</b>	<b>105</b>

## Part 1: Board Vision and Strategies

### A. Vision and Goals

#### Part 1.A Vision and Goals

References: WIOA §108(b)(1)(E); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(5)

Each Board must include a description of the Board’s strategic vision to support regional economic growth and economic self-sufficiency. The description must contain:

- goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including the provision of early education services and services for youth and individuals with barriers to employment as defined by WIOA §3(24); and
- goals relating to the performance accountability measures based on the performance indicators described in WIOA §116(b)(2)(A).

#### Minimum Plan Requirements:

- A description of the strategic vision to support regional economic growth and self-sufficiency
- Goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including the provision of:
  - early education services;
  - services for youth; and
  - services for individuals with barriers to employment.
- Goals relating to the performance accountability measures based on the performance indicators described in WIOA §116(b)(2)(A)

#### Strategic Vision

The mission of the Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas Board (“the Board”) is to provide resources for good jobs, strong employers, and a healthy regional economy. The Board’s vision is that:

*People are more self-sufficient and better educated, thereby achieving full employment. Convenient, easy access to all services is provided through consolidation in a centralized 1-stop system. The citizens of our communities are aware of available services. A skilled workforce is in place which enables businesses to be competitive in the ever-changing global economy.*

In West Central, economic development involves participating in broader community initiatives to promote an educated and skilled workforce to meet the needs of employers. While the Board views as its responsibility the effective operation of program and frontline services, the maintenance of this task is left largely to the staff of the Board. Board members regard their role as that of more extensively impacting the economic well-being of West Central Texas. Employers are seen as the primary customer of the workforce system and the Board is the lead in working with business, economic development, and education partners. The Board utilizes committees and task forces to accomplish its initiatives. These groups are comprised of Board members, Board staff, other non-Board members as needed for their requisite expertise, and applicable representation from subrecipient staff. The groups are tasked with developing and executing action plans for the accomplishment of the Board’s overall goals and strategic projects.

## Board Goals

The Board initiated a strategic planning process in fall 2022 focused on improving alignment of our core values to our mission to increase our effectiveness and serve as a guide for investment decisions—where to invest our time, resources and leverage our strengths. Through this process, key priorities were identified as follows:

- Establish Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas as a partnership manager and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with key stakeholders in workforce development including employers, economic development, education and community organizations. (TTEG Goal 3: Partnership Managers)
- Establish Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas as a trusted convener and recognized source for relevant information and resources. (TTEG Goal 1: Texas Talent Experts)
- Support the growth and stability of quality workplaces that provide sustainable wages and career opportunities. (TTEG Goal 2: Service Optimizers)
- Define, align and systematically support high-quality career pathways and work-based learning through cross-sector partnerships. (TTEG Goal 3: Partnership Managers)
- Provide exceptional customer service for individuals and families to access a system of services leading to quality career opportunities. (TTEG Goal 2: Service Optimizers)

As noted, these strategic priorities align with the statewide action plan known as the Texas Talent and Economic Growth Plan (TTEG). The key priorities were formally adopted by the Board in October 2023 and allow the Board to function as a key infrastructure support to:

- assist area secondary and postsecondary schools in the preparation of the emerging workforce;
- offer job seekers the opportunity to obtain training, increase skills, and gain a credential that enhances their employment value;
- impact the ability of workers to retain and advance in employment, both in terms of their career ladder and income; and
- benefit employers through skilled workers and reduced turnover.

These priorities support the Board’s mission and position it as resource hub that serves all system customers—partners, employers, and beneficiaries. To this end, the priorities in fact support all of the performance metrics. However, the tables below identify the following metrics that are more closely aligned with each priority and its associated strategies.

Note: The abbreviations listed in the last column of each of the tables represent the WIOA performance indicators as follows:

- Empl. (Employment Attainment/Retention Measures)
  - EmpQ2 = Employed Q2 Post-Exit
  - EmpQ4 = Employed Q4 Post-Exit
  - Emp/Ed Q2 = Youth Employed/in Education Q2 Post-Exit
  - Emp/Ed Q4 = Youth Employed/in Education Q4 Post-Exit
- Skills/Earn. (Skills and Earnings Measures)
  - MedEarnQ2 = Median Earnings Q2 Post-Exit
  - CR = Credential Rate
  - MSG = Measurable Skills Gain
  - Emp/Ed Q2 = Youth Employed/in Education Q2 Post-Exit
  - Emp/Ed Q4 = Youth Employed/in Education Q4 Post-Exit
- ESE = Effectiveness in Serving Employers (measures related to employer services)

Priority One: Establish WFSWCT as a partnership manager and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with key stakeholders in workforce development including employers, economic development, education, and community organizations.

Strategies	Actions	Progress	Performance Connection
Prioritize partnerships with key stakeholders	Identify existing cross-sector partnerships and where gaps exist	<a href="#">Pathways Landscape Mapping</a> and <a href="#">Asset Map and Gap Analysis</a> completed in summer 2024	ESE
Consistently communicate with stakeholders and partners	Align internal communication and information sharing	CRM implemented in early 2024 to centralize sharing of information and track communication with partners	ESE

Priority Two: Establish Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas as a trusted convener and recognized source for relevant information and resources.

Strategies	Actions	Progress	Performance Connection
Engage with partners in regular, cross sector convenings	Conduct relationship building activities with partners from priority customer groups	Establishment of Pathways Leadership Team consisting of secondary, postsecondary, industry, and community partners as part of Texas Regional Pathways	Skills/Earn., ESE

		Network/Regional Convener work	
Maintain and share data, information, and resources	Expand avenues for accessing and sharing relevant data, information, and resources	Developed subsite embedded in Board website to improve navigation and access to data and resources to support quality career pathways	Skills/Earn., ESE

Priority Three: Support the growth and stability of quality workplaces that provide sustainable wages and career opportunities.

Strategies	Actions	Progress	Performance Connection
Prioritize engagement with employers offering quality workplaces and support implementation of best practices to sustain quality workplaces	Develop prioritization framework for employer outreach and engagement	Development of employer prioritization framework launched September 2024 in collaboration with contractors	Empl., Skills/Earn., ESE
	Create a guide to implement prioritization framework	Guide will be created as part of framework development process	Empl., Skills/Earn., ESE
Collaborate with economic development stakeholders to attract and retain businesses providing quality jobs	Conduct outreach meetings with economic development (EDC) leaders	Initial meetings with EDC partners have begun and will be ongoing to maintain collaboration efforts	ESE

Priority Four: Define, align, and systematically support high-quality career pathways and work-based learning through cross-sector partnerships.

Strategies	Actions	Progress	Performance Connection
Implement evidence-based work-based learning model to increase paid youth internship opportunities	Pilot launched during 2023 -2024 school year and external evaluation completed in June 2024	Revisions have been implemented and availability expanded during 2024 - 2025 school year. Another review will commence for second year of pilot.	Empl., ESE
	Evaluate existing pathway entry points for access to education	Geographic and capacity analysis will be conducted in 2025	Empl., ESE

Improve access to high-quality career pathways	and training programs aligned to targeted industries	(supplemental data will be gathered if needed)	
	Facilitate connections to encourage implementation of high-quality career pathways from K-12 to IHE to industry with identified schools	Establishment of cross-sector committees for each of the four identified industries to support pathway development and implementation	Empl., ESE
Increase career exploration opportunities aligned to targeted industries	Build regional infrastructure to support industry tours and other opportunities of value	Added a day of organized tour opportunities for each of the four identified industries across 2024-2025 school year. Will evaluate capacity building measures to grow support upon completion.	Empl., ESE

Priority Five: Provide exceptional customer service for individuals and families to access a system of services leading to quality career opportunities. (Priority Five supports many of the objectives in the TWC Strategic Plan under Goal 3.)

Strategies	Actions	Progress	Performance Connection
Provide individualized support to obtain necessary skills and advancement along a career pathway	Facilitate connections to education and training that produce strong outcomes	Evaluated and identified changes to policy guiding the selection of demand/target industries and occupations. Refresh of demand and target occupation resources, materials, and messaging for use with customers and partners. Identified opportunity to customize material for regional training providers.	Skills/Earn, Empl.
	Conduct training on customer-centered approach	Research on established models and systems has begun	Skills/Earn, Empl.
Increase awareness of and access to quality jobs	Expand intra-agency multi-service access	Integrated services pilot launched fall 2024 that physically co-locates staff representing multiple workforce programs and child care services. Customer satisfaction survey of child care customers and early childhood providers was launched by Board in August 2024. Development of	Empl.

		survey and data collection approach for workforce center customers will be part of integrated services pilot.	
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In order to measure efforts towards strategic priorities, address sustainability of programmatic data-driven decision-making, and support broader, system-wide efforts for quality career pathway development, a data tool is being developed as a centralized data repository for the organization with subsets of data that reflect strategic efforts. The following areas of focus were identified for metric housing to reflect organizational structure:

- Partner Engagement Metrics
- Resource Provision Metrics
- Education and Training Metrics
- Work-Based Learning Metrics
- Customer Service Metrics

Development of this internal tool is underway, with baseline metrics being determined. Programmatic data for internal career pathway support efforts of Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas are readily available and are being integrated into the data management tool.

**B. Board Strategies**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(1)(F); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(6));**

**Boards must provide a description of their strategies to work with the partners that carry out Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) activities to align the resources available to the local workforce development area (workforce area) to achieve the Boards’ vision and goals.**

**Minimum Plan Requirements:**

**A description of the Board’s strategies to work with the entities carrying out AEL and VR to align:**

- resources available to achieve vision and goals

**Core programs:**

- Adult Education and Literacy activities**
- Vocational Rehabilitation services**

The Board contracts with a subrecipient entity, CECT, to operate the workforce center system, through which core and other program services are provided. The Board’s workforce subrecipient collaborates with the Texas Workforce Commission – Vocational Rehabilitation Program (TWC-VR) and the AEL provider, Abilene Adult Education (AAE) to coordinate services to common and potential customers. CECT and AAE coordinate activities to seamlessly connect AEL customers with workforce development services, ensuring that customers receive a comprehensive package of support. Workforce staff host a workforce orientation for AEL students at least twice a month which allows workforce staff the opportunity to engage with AEL leadership simultaneously. These meetings include presenting a summary of workforce services to AEL students. Additional communication or meetings for discussion happen in between orientations as needed between both agencies. In addition, a well-established customer referral process exists between workforce and AEL to ensure

customers have effective and timely access to the full array of services, regardless of where they enter the system. This streamlined referral process ensures individuals seeking assistance can be quickly connected with the appropriate workforce or adult education services. The goal is to eliminate barriers to service access and create a smoother pathway for customers to move between services. These collaborative initiatives support Goal 1 in the TWC AEL Strategic Plan.

The Board has a long-standing partnership with AAE. The director of AAE is a member of the Board and works closely with Board staff to coordinate services for mutual customers. AAE has been an active partner for numerous Board-level initiatives. One example of this includes the Board's cross-sector manufacturing partnership that recently focused on the three strategies of: improving awareness of manufacturing opportunities among students and job seekers, creating or improving pathways to education and training, and aligning systems to reduce barriers to employment. One of the outcomes of this partnership was the development of a Manufacturing Upskilling Short Course. Another partnership initiative that includes AAE is the Trellis Reskilling/Upskilling Initiative that resulted in the development of an Electrical Construction Rapid Training (ECRT) program. Both of these courses were endorsed by employers in those respective industries. For the ECRT project, AAE provided space, technology, and technical support as well as mentoring leadership. The accessibility of the AEL Learning Center with the flexibility of hours was a great benefit as some of the participants had jobs and needed flexible hours to complete the course. While these specific courses are not ongoing, the partnership between the Board, its service provider, and AAE have benefited from enhanced coordination of quality services to common customers. These initiatives also produced a model for developing short-term upskilling/reskilling courses as seen in the subsequent creation of short-term courses by TSTC in consultation with AEL related to manufacturing that are offered at night. AEL is able to provide financial assistance for students to attend as all courses result in industry-recognized certifications. These career pathway initiatives support Goal 3 in the TWC AEL Strategic Plan.

One of the primary functions of the Board's Student HireAbility Navigator ("Navigator") is to promote alignment of services between TWC-VR, school districts, and community partners for students with disabilities. The Navigator works to strengthen the infrastructure that serves those students, improve communication and relationships between employers and TWC-VR, and foster access and usage of services by students with disabilities, all for the purpose of increasing employment opportunities for students with disabilities. Some of the many collaborative activities in which the Navigator engages to align services for these students include:

- presentations at area schools to students and teachers regarding available services;
- informing employers about the advantages of working with students with disabilities, and making connections between employers and school district special education personnel, students, and TWC-VR;
- promoting Workforce and TWC-VR services at area events and resource fairs; and
- hosting training events for all stakeholders.

The Navigator also promotes the five Pre-Employment Transition Services that are required by WIOA and provides information and resources so students with disabilities can develop effective transition plans with the special education team. The Navigator connects students with disabilities with community partners that can increase the opportunity for integration into inclusive and competitive employment opportunities and/or post-secondary success. Navigator presentations to educators,

students, and parents at schools provide information that help students with disabilities access VR and other services that will empower them to pursue additional training, postsecondary education, or employment following graduation. Navigator connections with employers help them overcome challenges and perceived barriers to working with individuals with disabilities and open new opportunities.

TWC-VR is co-located in the Abilene and Brownwood workforce centers and regularly collaborates with Board and workforce subrecipient staff for service delivery coordination. This co-location allows for greater ease of referrals as well as immediate consultations for workforce customers who may require those services. A well-established customer referral process exists between workforce and TWC-VR to ensure customers have effective and timely access to the full array of services, regardless of where they enter the system. Subrecipient and TWC-VR meet at least once quarterly to address key topics related to effective communication, collaboration, and operational matters. The discussions include addressing challenges, sharing updates, and brainstorming solutions to better serve customers. In addition to quarterly meetings, workforce and TWC-VR staff begin monthly planning and work readiness coordination for the SEAL Program as early as March, meeting again in April and May. After work readiness classes conclude in May, workforce and TWC-VR meet weekly for updates on placements and start dates of all customers. Both entities continue communication as frequently as is needed during placement and program duration. As mentioned in the partnership with AAE, the goal for both entities is to eliminate barriers to service access and create a smoother pathway for customers to move between services.

**C. High-Performing Board**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(18); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(17)**

**Boards must include a description of the actions each Board will take toward becoming or remaining a high-performing Board, consistent with the factors developed by the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC).**

**Minimum Plan Requirements:**

- Actions a Board will take to become or remain a high-performing Board**

TWC evaluates Board performance based, in part, on contracted measures. Where these standards of evaluation are concerned, the Board believes it has performed very well. As reflected in the table below, the Board met or exceeded at least 90% of all of its contracted performance measures for the last three years.

Year	# Failed	# Met	# Exceeded	# Total	% Met/Exc.
BCY22	2	7	12	21	90.5%
BCY23	2	12	8	22	90.9%
BCY24	1	9	11	21	95.2%

BCY25 WIOA targets are as follows. As of the writing of this plan, current performance has not been provided by TWC and is largely unavailable to boards. Preliminary manual tracking estimates for the three MSG measures indicate West Central is exceeding the targets and are provided in parentheses below.

Measure	Target	Current Performance
Employed Q2 Post Exit - Adult	82.8%	Not Available
Employed Q4 Post Exit – Adult	76.7%	Not Available
Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit – Adult	\$6890	Not Available
Credential Rate – Adult	77.9%	Not Available
Measurable Skills Gains – Adult	69.7%	Not Available (85%)
Employed Q2 Post Exit – DW	82.4%	Not Available
Employed Q4 Post Exit – DW	85%	Not Available
Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit – DW	\$9500	Not Available
Credential Rate – DW	85%	Not Available
Measurable Skills Gains – DW	75%	Not Available (100%)
Employed/Enrolled Q2 Post Exit - Youth	78.2%	Not Available
Employed/Enrolled Q4 Post Exit - Youth	75.4%	Not Available
Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit – Youth	\$4630	Not Available (80%)
Credential Rate – Youth	72.1%	Not Available
Measurable Skills Gains – Youth	64.3%	Not Available

TWC also evaluates Board performance through annual monitoring reviews and capacity oversight assessments that result in reports detailing any policy violations and assessment scores. The most recent monitoring reports from TWC indicated the Board had no findings or questioned costs. In addition, the latest capacity oversight evaluation indicates the Board is meeting state standards.

The Board regularly considers the effectiveness of the service delivery system, the responsiveness of activities, and the impact or outcomes. To this end, the following strategies are employed to regularly evaluate the local system and make improvements. Board senior staff meet monthly to review various operational aspects including performance for all programs and services, financial management, and activities related to oversight, management and technical assistance. Board staff meet monthly with the local subrecipient management teams in meetings being designed to become progressively more integrated. The end goal of the progression is that a single meeting with complete attendance by both subrecipients will be in full effect, replacing traditionally separate meetings with each subrecipient team. The Board Director of Program Operations and Chief Program Officer also meet bi-weekly with subrecipient leadership staff. These meetings are used as an opportunity to review performance, discuss current and planned initiatives, and dialog about issues and opportunities. The subrecipients also convene regular “partner” meetings that include other partners. This meeting focuses primarily on operational rather than strategic issues. Additionally, subrecipients are required to submit monthly reports to the Board Director of Program Operations that relate information on issues such as staffing changes, staff training, quality assurance activities, financial status and projections, and emerging issues. Those reports also contain information about the status of performance measures, strategies the subrecipient is using to improve deficiencies, and customer success stories. Formalized methods of ensuring services meet customer needs and are provided appropriately include monitoring reviews of all programs no less often than annually.

While providing subrecipient oversight is a key strategy for being a high-performing board, the Board uses other strategies to positively impact the job-seekers, employers, and overall community of the

West Central Texas area. Some of those strategies include strategically seeking, developing and adapting approaches to address local needs, such as retaining skilled workers in rural communities, developing and/or participating in regional partnerships to leverage limited resources, and consistent messaging across multiple platforms and audiences. The examples below demonstrate the Board's willingness to take these types of actions as a high-performing board.

- WSWCTB staff networks with and attends meetings, conferences, and webinars hosted by various entities (such as, DOL, NAWB, other boards in and outside Texas, and TWC) that promote workforce industry best practices. Those that appear to be promising for West Central are incorporated into the service delivery structure.
- The Board has connections with state and national entities that provide access to resources, technical assistance, networking with other workforce development organizations, and connections to grant opportunities. For example:
  - The Board is a member of the CareerConnect Texas network (formerly WECANTX) that supports innovative work-based learning experiences by leveraging resources, integrating equity, and promoting opportunities for employer engagement.
  - The Board is also a member of the national Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeships (PAYA) network. PAYA convenes collective networks of national, state, and regional partners to:
    - Improve public understanding of the benefits of high-quality American youth apprenticeship;
    - Disseminate better information about the conditions and strategies necessary for success and sustainability of youth apprenticeship partnerships; and
    - Support high-quality, youth apprenticeship partnerships in more places.
- The Board continues to provide Career Education Outreach (CEO) services to area secondary students in middle and high school classrooms. In the 2023-2024 school year, 535 workshops were provided in 28 partner school districts, totaling 7473 student engagements. These varied workshops utilize slide decks depicting regional demand occupations, labor market information, and activities centered around employability skills to equip students to think critically about career choices. In response to school requests, the CEO activities have expanded to include workshops on interview skills and resume writing. Organizing and conducting mock interviews has also been added to the repertoire.
- The Board continues to provide individual career guidance to secondary students in rural school districts in the Youth Success Program through the grant from rootEd Alliance, Inc. Youth Success Advisors work directly with partnering districts and their seniors to ensure a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education and the workforce. Advisors meet one-on-one with students to develop plans based on their interests and skills. Youth Success Advisors are embedded in the campuses of participating area high schools to provide students with postsecondary education and training support, early exposure to education pathways and careers, and strong connections to education and local industry. Students are also connected with sources of financial aid and opportunities for work-based learning experiences. Eight Youth Success Advisors are currently serving 1100 seniors across 18 school districts, and one Retention Coach supports students making the transition into their first year of post-secondary education or training.
- The Board has procured a service provider to assist with enhancement of services to employers. This procurement was driven by an internally identified need for more robust and

customized training around the application of labor market information to guide service delivery (both to employers and job seekers). In addition, since the Board is looking to enhance employer service delivery in significant ways, the need for system analysis and guidance by an external entity is needed to invigorate conventional service patterns with fresh concepts and methods. At the time this plan is being developed, Learning Designs, Inc. has been engaged to provide services that will help staff understand how to effectively serve employer customers while allowing LMI and other guidance to inform their decisions and actions with employers. In addition, the Board will have a solid service delivery framework along with a comprehensive guidebook (both of which can be adjusted and customized for new and future challenges) as well as a train-the-trainer piece that will ensure the investment in this project will help improve our service delivery beyond the short scope of the technical assistance project.

- Board staff participate in several partnerships whose purpose is, in part, to exchange information on best practices, collaborate on common issues, and share resources/tools to address those issues. Those partnerships include:
  - Texas Rural Funders Collaborative
  - Workforce Innovation Network
  - Texas Midwest Community Network
  - Educate Texas (part of Communities Foundation of Texas)
  - Jobs for the Future
  - Career and Technology Association of Texas
  - West Central Texas Economic Development District

## **Part 2. Economic and Workforce Analysis**

### **A. Regional Economic and Employment Needs Analysis**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(1)(A); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(1); WIOA §108(b)(1)(B); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(2); WD Letter 24-20, Change 1**

**Boards must include a regional analysis of the following:**

- **Economic conditions, including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors, in-demand occupations, and target occupations**
- **Employment needs of employers, including the knowledge and skills needed to meet such employment needs, within in-demand industry sectors, in-demand occupations, and target occupations**

#### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

**An analysis of the economic conditions that includes the following:**

- Existing in-demand industry sectors
- Emerging in-demand industry sectors
- Existing in-demand occupations
- Emerging in-demand occupations
- Target occupations

**A description of employer employment needs, including the knowledge and skills needed to meet such employer's needs, within the following:**

- Existing in-demand industry sectors
- Emerging in-demand industry sectors

- Existing in-demand occupations
- Emerging in-demand occupations
- Target occupations

**The Board must include its In-Demand Industries List, In-Demand Occupations List, and Target Occupations List**

**Note: As appropriate, a workforce area may use an existing analysis, if it provides a current and accurate description of the regional economy.**

Through the work of the Board’s committees, engagement with industry and economic development entities, and utilization of intelligence produced by various entities, the Board maintains a constant awareness of regional economic conditions. The following analysis was constructed from a combination of those resources.

#### Regional Economic Conditions

This workforce development area consists of 19 counties covering 17,000+ square miles with a labor force of 152,862, and encompasses 9147 employers\*. (\*Note: This is the number of employer reporting units registered with Texas Workforce Commission in this area.) The five largest industries at the 2-digit NAICS level (in terms of numbers of employees) are: Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Educational Services, Accommodation and Food Services, and Manufacturing. When this expansive region is subdivided and the dominant industries are compared with those in the foremost positions from four years ago, a trend becomes apparent. In terms of employment numbers, Health Care has grown to become the largest industry, not just in certain county pockets, but throughout the region. Over the last 5 years, this area has gained 3711 jobs, with Healthcare and Social Assistance comprising 36.3% (1347) of that growth.

(The following information was obtained from a regional economic analysis obtained from JobsEQ.) Over the next 10 years, employment in the West Central WDA is projected to expand by 9,004 jobs. The fastest growing sector in the region is expected to be Utilities with a +2.9% year-over-year rate of growth. The strongest forecast by number of jobs over this period is expected for Health Care and Social Assistance (+2,909 jobs), Accommodation and Food Services (+857), and Construction (+787). The largest sector in the West Central WDA is Health Care and Social Assistance, employing 24,632 workers. The next-largest sectors in the region are Retail Trade (17,123 workers) and Educational Services (14,676). High location quotients (LQs) indicate sectors in which a region has high concentrations of employment compared to the national average. The industries with the highest location quotients overall for this region are Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction (LQ = 8.62), Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting (3.95), and Utilities (2.48). Sectors in the West Central WDA with the highest average wages per worker are Management of Companies and Enterprises (\$96,075), Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction (\$93,112), and Utilities (\$93,051). Regional sectors with the best job growth (or most moderate job losses) over the last 5 years are Health Care and Social Assistance (+1,347 jobs), Retail Trade (+1181), and Educational Services (+910).

Abilene is the largest city in this region, with a population (127,130) over six times that of the next largest city, and is home to 4831 businesses<sup>1</sup>, including the following industries: military, education, healthcare, government, manufacturing, energy, engineering, telecommunications, aviation, and banking. The following analysis was obtained from JobsEQ, and examines Taylor County (roughly 88% of the county population lives in Abilene). “The largest sector in Taylor County, Texas is Health Care

and Social Assistance, employing 14,484 workers. The next-largest sectors in the region are Retail Trade (8,738 workers) and Educational Services (7,413). The sectors with the largest LQs in the county are Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction (LQ = 4.27), Utilities (2.23), and Health Care and Social Assistance (1.31). Over the next 10 years, employment in Taylor County, Texas is projected to expand by 5,498 jobs. The fastest growing sector in the region is expected to be Utilities with a +2.9% year-over-year rate of growth. The strongest forecast by number of jobs over this period is expected for Health Care and Social Assistance (+1,826 jobs), Accommodation and Food Services (+572), and Construction (+387).”

<sup>1</sup>Note: Information obtained from <http://developabilene.com/community-profile>.

\*Note: JobsEQ uses the QCEW as its source and, as of the update of this report, its data were updated through 2024Q2 with preliminary estimates updated to 2024Q3.

In addition to the quantitative data above, the following information was obtained during [Pathways Landscape Mapping](#) and [Asset Map and Gap Analysis](#) studies conducted by the Board in its role as Tri-Agency Regional Convener. The studies were performed to provide a comprehensive overview and analysis of the current state and dynamics of the labor market within the West Central Texas Workforce Development Area. The following gaps were identified through the mapping process, organized by the Texas Regional Pathways Network (TRPN) seven components of quality career pathways.

- Alignment with Labor Market Data: Districts must balance utilization of labor market information while also meeting other demands of the educational system, with the current landscape revealing a lack of alignment between the two.
- Cross-sector Partnerships: Partners working on talent pipeline development lack the capacity of personnel, resources, or time to add intermediary functions.
- Credentials with Value in the Labor Market: There is no formalized ecosystem of credentialing that holds value for both education and industry.
- Links between Secondary and Postsecondary Education: Challenges exist for secondary and postsecondary educators when offering dual credit for students, particularly technical dual credit, including access to a qualified instructor, equipment, cost, transportation, and number of students.
- Integration of Rigorous Core Academics and Career-Focused Learning: Very few districts have fully implemented a connection between core academics and career and technical education.
- Effective Advising: There is a need for increased awareness of high-wage, middle-skill occupations available to students through career advising opportunities PK-12.
- Continuum of Work-Based Learning Experiences: There is a lack of work-based learning experiences of value implemented with collaboration between employers, secondary educators, and postsecondary educators, specifically in the “Learning through Work” area of the continuum.

In response to the results of the asset map and gap analysis, the [Regional Career Pathways Strategic Plan](#) was developed to expand and refine quality career pathway opportunities and work-based learning experiences of value across the region during the next 3 – 5 years. This plan emphasizes early engagement, equitable access, and ongoing support for students, particularly those from underserved communities. It also places an emphasis on increasing avenues for recognition of work-based learning activities in postsecondary credit and credentialing.

1. Ensure access to high-quality education and training programs aligned to targeted industries across the region by 2029.
  - a. Evaluate access to high-quality education and training programs aligned to target industries at each entry point in the identified career pathways.
  - b. Ensure programs exist with the capacity to meet the economic and labor market needs in under-represented areas.
  - c. Evaluate and implement a teacher apprenticeship model to mitigate shortages in the education field.
  
2. Increase quality work-based learning opportunities aligned to targeted industries by 10% by 2029.
  - a. Improve cross-sector collaboration in support of career pathway development.
  - b. Implement an improved advisory board structure to ensure aligned and effective career pathway development.
  - c. Increase postsecondary credit opportunities for work-based learning.
  
3. Increase quality engagement in career pathway development among K12, higher education, industry, and community partners by 10% 2029.
  - a. Increase career exploration opportunities aligned to targeted industries.
  - b. Increase paid youth internship opportunities aligned to targeted industries.
  - c. Increase postsecondary credit opportunities for work-based learning

In-Demand Industries, Demand/Target Occupations

The following table provides the list of in-demand industry sectors and occupations, as well as targeted occupations.

<b>In-Demand Industries</b>	<b>In-Demand Occupations</b>	<b>Targeted Occupations</b>
5412- Accounting, Tax Preparation, Bookkeeping, and Payroll Services	13-2011 – Accountants and Auditors	49-3023 – Automotive Service Tech.
3323-Architectural and Structural Metals	49-3023 – Automotive Service Tech.	49-3031 – Bus/Truck Mech./Diesel Spec.
4411-Automobile Dealers	43-3031 – Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	49-9051 – Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers
8111-Automotive Repair and Maintenance	49-3031 – Bus/Truck Mech./Diesel Spec.	47-2111 – Electricians
2382-Building Equipment Contractors	47-2061 – Construction Laborers	25-2021 – Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education
1121-Cattle Ranching and Farming	33-3012 – Correctional Officers and Jailers	29-2042 – Emergency Medical Technicians
6113-Colleges, Universities, and Professional Schools	49-9051 – Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers	49-9021 – Heating AC and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers
5221-Depository Credit Intermediation	47-2111 – Electricians	53-3032 – Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers
2211-Electric Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution	25-2021 – Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	49-9041 – Industrial Machinery Mechanics
6111-Elementary and Secondary Schools	29-2042 – Emergency Medical Technicians	29-2061 – LVNs
5613-Employment Services	11-9013 – Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers	51-4041 – Machinists
9211-Executive, Legislative, and Other General Government Support	47-1011 – First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction	31-9092 – Medical Assistants

In-Demand Industries	In-Demand Occupations	Targeted Occupations
	Workers	
4841-General Freight Trucking	49-1011 – First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers	25-2022 – Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education
6221-General Medical and Surgical Hospitals	43-1011 – First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	47-2152 – Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters
2373-Highway, Street, and Bridge Construction	51-1011 – First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	29-1141 – Registered Nurses
5241-Insurance Carriers	11-1021 – General and Operations Managers	25-2031 – Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education
9221- Justice, Public Order, and Safety Activities	49-9021 – Heating AC and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers	51-4121 – Welders/Cutters
3274-Lime and Gypsum Product Manufacturing	53-3032 – Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	49-9081 – Wind Turbine Service Technicians
4238-Machinery, Equipment, and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers	49-9041 – Industrial Machinery Mechanics	
6211-Offices of Physicians	29-2061 – LVNs	
2111-Oil and Gas Extraction	51-4041 – Machinists	
2389-Other Specialty Trade Contractors	49-9071 – Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	
2361-Residential Building Construction	11-9111 – Medical and Health Services Managers	
6232-Residential Intellectual and Developmental Disability, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Facilities	31-9092 – Medical Assistants	
2131-Support Activities for Mining	25-2022 – Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	
2371-Utility System Construction	47-2073 – Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators	
	47-2152 – Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	
	33-3051 – Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	
	29-1141 – Registered Nurses	
	41-3091 – Sales Representatives of Services, Except Advertising, Insurance, Financial Services, and Travel	
	41-4012 – Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	
	25-2031 – Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	
	43-6014 – Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	
	25-2056 – Special Education Teachers,	

In-Demand Industries	In-Demand Occupations	Targeted Occupations
	Elementary School	
	25-2057 – Special Education Teachers, Middle School	
	25-2058 – Special Education Teachers, Secondary School	
	51-4121 – Welders/Cutters	
	49-9081 – Wind Turbine Service Technicians	

### Regional Employment Needs

The needs of employers in the in-demand industry sectors are provided in the matrix below. While each industry employs a wide variety of occupations, this analysis looks at the jobs that will have up to the four highest employment needs\* (the sum total of growth and replacement needs, where the total is at least 50) over the next 10 years. (\*Note: These figures will not match numbers provided for the same occupations in other places/spreadsheets throughout this plan due to the timing with which each data set was obtained, and because these occupation numbers are specific to the demand of these particular industries. In addition, while an occupation may represent a particular need for a specific industry, it is not necessarily a demand occupation for the region.) Data for this matrix was obtained from JobsEQ.

In-Demand Industry Sector	Highest Need Occupations	Projected Employment Needs
5412--Accounting, Tax Preparation, Bookkeeping, and Payroll Services	13-2011--Accountants and Auditors	232
	43-3031--Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	94
	13-2082--Tax Preparers	90
3323-Architectural and Structural Metals	51-4121--Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers	142
	51-2092--Team Assemblers	80
4411-Automobile Dealers	49-3023--Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	370
	41-2031--Retail Salespersons	443
	53-7061--Cleaners of Vehicles and Equipment	146
	41-2022--Parts Salespersons	85
8111-Automotive Repair and Maintenance	49-3023--Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	286
	53-7061--Cleaners of Vehicles and Equipment	275
	49-3021--Automotive Body and Related Repairers	120
	11-1021--General and Operations Managers	65
2382-Building Equipment Contractors	47-2111--Electricians	699
	47-2152--Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	354
	49-9021--Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers	339
	47-1011--First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	131
1121-Cattle Ranching and Farming	45-2093--Farmworkers, Farm, Ranch, and Aquacultural Animals	724
	11-9013--Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers	315
	45-1011--First-Line Supervisors of Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Workers	56
	45-2092--Farmworkers and Laborers, Crop, Nursery, and Greenhouse	52
6113-Colleges, Universities, and Professional Schools	25-1071--Health Specialties Teachers, Postsecondary	187
	11-9033--Education Administrators, Postsecondary	81

	43-6014--Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	70
	21-1012--Educational, Guidance, and Career Counselors and Advisors	58
5221-Depository Credit Intermediation	43-4051--Customer Service Representatives	195
	43-3071--Tellers	188
	41-3031--Securities, Commodities, and Financial Services Sales Agents	159
	13-2072--Loan Officers	94
2211-Electric Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution	49-9081--Wind Turbine Service Technicians	593
	49-9051--Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers	150
	51-8013--Power Plant Operators	85
	49-1011--First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers	83
6111-Elementary and Secondary Schools	25-9045--Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	1,338
	25-2021--Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	1,158
	25-2031--Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	826
	25-3031--Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	727
5613-Employment Services	53-7062--Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	181
	53-7064--Packers and Packagers, Hand	64
	51-2092--Team Assemblers	57
	25-3031--Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	56
9211-Executive, Legislative, and Other General Government Support	33-3051--Police and Sheriffs Patrol Officers	264
	33-2011--Firefighters	131
	43-4031--Court, Municipal, and License Clerks	57
	33-3012--Correctional Officers and Jailers	53
4841-General Freight Trucking	53-3032--Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	687
	53-7062--Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	69
6221-General Medical and Surgical Hospitals	29-1141--Registered Nurses	1,205
	31-1131--Nursing Assistants	625
	31-9092--Medical Assistants	236
	11-9111--Medical and Health Services Managers	235
2373-Highway, Street, and Bridge Construction	47-2061--Construction Laborers	250
	47-2073--Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators	149
	53-3032--Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	101
	47-1011--First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	96
5241-Insurance Carriers	43-4051--Customer Service Representatives	287
	43-9041--Insurance Claims and Policy Processing Clerks	79
	41-3021--Insurance Sales Agents	56
9221- Justice, Public Order, and Safety Activities	33-3012--Correctional Officers and Jailers	691
	33-3051--Police and Sheriffs Patrol Officers	284
	33-2011--Firefighters	123
	33-1011--First-Line Supervisors of Correctional Officers	99
3274-Lime and Gypsum Product Manufacturing	53-3032--Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	73
4238-Machinery, Equipment, and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers	41-4012--Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	151
	49-9041--Industrial Machinery Mechanics	100
	49-3042--Mobile Heavy Equipment Mechanics, Except Engines	97

	11-1021--General and Operations Managers	86
6211-Offices of Physicians	31-9092--Medical Assistants	612
	43-6013--Medical Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	231
	43-4171--Receptionists and Information Clerks	226
	29-1171--Nurse Practitioners	140
2111-Oil and Gas Extraction	11-9199--Managers, All Other	139
	53-7073--Wellhead Pumpers	79
2389-Other Specialty Trade Contractors	47-2061--Construction Laborers	638
	47-2073--Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators	119
	53-3032--Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	76
	47-1011--First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	69
2361-Residential Building Construction	11-9021--Construction Managers	192
	47-2031--Carpenters	142
	47-2061--Construction Laborers	148
	11-9199--Managers, All Other	82
6232-Residential Intellectual and Developmental Disability, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Facilities	31-1122--Personal Care Aides	1,485
	31-1121--Home Health Aides	430
	21-1018--Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors	94
	21-1093--Social and Human Service Assistants	85
2131-Support Activities for Mining	47-5071--Roustabouts, Oil and Gas	409
	47-5013--Service Unit Operators, Oil and Gas	375
	53-3032--Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	236
	47-1011--First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	154
2371-Utility System Construction	47-2061--Construction Laborers	163
	47-2073--Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators	76
	47-1011--First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	66

The following matrix provides the employment needs (the sum of growth and replacement) for each of the demand occupations for the next 10 years (occupations that are included on the Board's Target Occupations List/TOL are indicated with a check mark in the middle column). These figures represent employment across industries. Data was obtained from JobsEQ.

In-Demand Occupations	TOL	Projected Employment Needs
13-2011 – Accountants and Auditors		819
49-3023 – Automotive Service Tech.	✓	860
43-3031 – Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks		1,463
49-3031 – Bus/Truck Mech./Diesel Spec.	✓	295
47-2061 – Construction Laborers		1,637
33-3012 – Correctional Officers and Jailers		797
49-9051 – Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers	✓	210
47-2111 – Electricians	✓	862
25-2021 – Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	✓	1,177
29-2042 – Emergency Medical Technicians	✓	188

In-Demand Occupations	TOL	Projected Employment Needs
11-9013 – Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers		4,593
47-1011 – First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers		817
49-1011 – First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers		634
43-1011 – First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers		1,337
51-1011 – First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers		615
11-1021 – General and Operations Managers		3,346
49-9021 – Heating AC and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers	✓	409
53-3032 – Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	✓	2,674
49-9041 – Industrial Machinery Mechanics	✓	574
29-2061 – LVNs	✓	721
51-4041 – Machinists	✓	198
49-9071 – Maintenance and Repair Workers, General		1,401
11-9111 – Medical and Health Services Managers		713
31-9092 – Medical Assistants	✓	1,089
25-2022 – Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	✓	580
47-2073 – Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators		552
47-2152 – Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	✓	464
33-3051 – Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers		694
29-1141 – Registered Nurses	✓	2,159
41-3091 – Sales Representatives of Services, Except Advertising, Insurance, Financial Services, and Travel		720
41-4012 – Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products		755
25-2031 – Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	✓	842
43-6014 – Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive		1,880
25-2056 – Special Education Teachers, Elementary School		208
25-2057 – Special Education Teachers, Middle School		76
25-2058 – Special Education Teachers, Secondary School		113
51-4121 – Welders/Cutters	✓	592
49-9081 – Wind Turbine Service Technicians	✓	613

#### Knowledge and Skills Analysis

Many of the occupations in this region require knowledge and skills in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) subjects. This is a recurring theme, not only for in-demand occupations, but also for in-demand industries, with many STEM-oriented occupations and knowledge/skill sets crossing industries. The table below delineates a sample of the knowledge and skills needed for each in-demand occupation, as obtained from O\*NET Online. The occupations included in the Board's Target Occupations List are indicated in the second column.

In-Demand Occupations	TOL	Skills Needed	Knowledge Needed
13-2011 – Accountants and Auditors		-Reading Comprehension -Active Listening -Critical Thinking	-Economics and Accounting -English Language -Mathematics
49-3023 – Automotive Service Tech.	✓	-Repairing -Troubleshooting -Critical Thinking	-Mechanical -Computers and Electronics -Customer and Personal Service
43-3031 – Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks		-Mathematics -Active Listening -Critical Thinking	-Customer and Personal Service -Administrative -Mathematics
49-3031 – Bus/Truck Mech./Diesel Spec.	✓	-Repairing -Troubleshooting -Operations Monitoring	-Mechanical -Transportation -Education and Training
47-2061 – Construction Laborers		-Speaking -Active Listening -Coordination	-Building and Construction -Public Safety and Security -Mechanical
33-3012 – Correctional Officers and Jailers		-Active Listening -Monitoring -Social Perceptiveness	-Public Safety and Security -English Language -Law and Government
49-9051 – Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers	✓	-Active Listening -Troubleshooting -Monitoring	-Building and Construction -English Language -Education and Training
47-2111 – Electricians	✓	-Troubleshooting -Repairing -Active Listening	-Building and Construction -Administration and Management -Mechanical
25-2021 – Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	✓	-Instructing -Learning Strategies -Speaking	-English Language -Education and Training -Mathematics
29-2042 – Emergency Medical Technicians	✓	-Mathematics -Verbal, Written Communication -Customer Service	<b>Note:</b> Knowledge and Skills were not listed in ONET. List of skills obtained from JobsEQ RTI.
11-9013 – Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers		-Active Listening -Critical Thinking -Reading Comprehension	-Administration and Management -Production and Processing -Biology
47-1011 – First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers		-Coordination -Active Listening -Speaking	-Administration and Management -Building and Construction -Mechanical
49-1011 – First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers		-Monitoring -Management of Personnel Resources -Coordination	-Administration and Management -Mechanical -Customer and Personal Service
43-1011 – First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers		-Active Listening -Coordination -Monitoring	-Administration and Management -Customer and Personal Service -Administrative
51-1011 – First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers		-Active Listening -Management of Personnel Resources -Speaking	-Production and Processing -Administration and Management -Personnel and Human Resources
11-1021 – General and Operations Managers		-Active Listening -Monitoring -Reading Comprehension	-Administration and Management -Customer and Personal Service -English Language
49-9021 – Heating AC and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers	✓	-Operations Monitoring -Critical Thinking -Troubleshooting	-Mechanical -Building and Construction -Customer and Personal Service
53-3032 – Heavy and Tractor-	✓	-Operation and Control	-Transportation

In-Demand Occupations	TOL	Skills Needed	Knowledge Needed
Trailer Truck Drivers		-Operations Monitoring -Monitoring	-Public Safety and Security -Customer and Personal Service
49-9041 – Industrial Machinery Mechanics	✓	-Equipment Maintenance -Operation and Control -Operations Monitoring	-Mechanical -English Language -Production and Processing
29-2061 – LVNs	✓	-Service Orientation -Coordination -Social Perceptiveness	-Customer and Personal Service -English Language -Psychology
51-4041 – Machinists	✓	-Operation and Control -Critical Thinking -Monitoring	-Mathematics -Mechanical -Production and Processing
49-9071 – Maintenance and Repair Workers, General		-Equipment Maintenance -Repairing -Troubleshooting	-Mechanical -Building and Construction -English Language
11-9111 – Medical and Health Services Managers		-Critical Thinking -Speaking -Active Listening	-Administration and Management -English Language -Customer and Personal Service
31-9092 – Medical Assistants	✓	-Social Perceptiveness -Active Listening -Speaking	-English Language -Customer and Personal Service -Medicine and Dentistry
25-2022 – Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	✓	-Instructing -Learning Strategies -Speaking	-Education and Training -English Language -Philosophy and Theology
47-2073 – Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators		-Operation and Control -Equipment Maintenance -Operations Monitoring	-Mechanical -English Language -Public Safety and Security
47-2152 – Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	✓	-Critical Thinking -Judgement and Decision Making -Repairing	-Building and Construction -Mechanical -Design
33-3051 – Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers		-Active Listening -Social Perceptiveness -Speaking	-Law and Government -Public Safety and Security -English Language
29-1141 – Registered Nurses	✓	-Social Perceptiveness -Active Listening -Coordination	-Psychology -Customer and Personal Service -Medicine and Dentistry
41-3091 – Sales Representatives of Services, Except Advertising, Insurance, Financial Services, and Travel		-Sales -Verbal and Written Communication -Cooperative/Team Player	<b>Note:</b> Knowledge and Skills were not listed in ONET. List of skills obtained from JobsEQ RTI.
41-4012 – Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products		-Active Listening -Speaking -Negotiation	-Sales and Marketing -Customer and Personal Service -English Language
25-2031 – Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	✓	-Instructing -Speaking -Active Listening	-Education and Training -English Language -Psychology
43-6014 – Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive		-Active Listening -Speaking -Reading Comprehension	-Administrative -English Language -Computers and Electronics
25-2056 – Special Education		-Teaching/Training	<b>Note:</b> Knowledge and Skills were not

In-Demand Occupations	TOL	Skills Needed	Knowledge Needed
Teachers, Elementary School		-Verbal and Written Communication -Cooperative/Team Player	listed in ONET. List of skills obtained from JobsEQ RTI.
25-2057 – Special Education Teachers, Middle School		-Instructing -Speaking -Active Learning	-Education and Training -English Language -Psychology
25-2058 – Special Education Teachers, Secondary School		-Learning Strategies -Active Listening -Instructing	-English Language -Education and Training -Computers and Electronics
51-4121 – Welders/Cutters	✓	-Quality Control Analysis -Monitoring	-Production and Processing -Mechanical
49-9081 – Wind Turbine Service Technicians	✓	-Equipment Maintenance -Operations Monitoring -Repairing	-Mechanical -Computers and Electronics -English Language

The table below provides a sample of the knowledge and skills needed for the highest demand occupation within each in-demand industry, as obtained from O\*NET Online. This list of occupations does not match the Board’s Demand Occupations List, since high demand in an individual industry does mean the occupation is in high demand for the region.

In-Demand Industry Sector	Occupation in Highest Demand	Skills Needed	Knowledge Needed
5412--Accounting, Tax Preparation, Bookkeeping, and Payroll Services	13-2011--Accountants and Auditors	-Reading Comprehension -Active Listening -Critical Thinking	-Economics and Accounting -English Language -Mathematics
3323-Architectural and Structural Metals	51-4121--Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers	-Quality Control Analysis -Monitoring	-Production and Processing -Mechanical
4411-Automobile Dealers	49-3023--Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	-Repairing -Troubleshooting -Critical Thinking	-Mechanical -Computers and Electronics -Customer and Personal Service
8111-Automotive Repair and Maintenance	49-3023--Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	-Repairing -Troubleshooting -Critical Thinking	-Mechanical -Computers and Electronics -Customer and Personal Service
2382-Building Equipment Contractors	47-2111--Electricians	-Troubleshooting -Repairing -Active Listening	-Building and Construction -Administration and Management -Mechanical
1121-Cattle Ranching and Farming	45-2093--Farmworkers, Farm, Ranch, and Aquacultural Animals	-Critical Thinking -Monitoring -Active Listening	-Production and Processing -Administration and Management -Biology
6113-Colleges, Universities, and Professional Schools	25-1071--Health Specialties Teachers, Postsecondary	-Instructing -Reading Comprehension -Speaking	-Education and Training -English Language -Biology
5221-Depository Credit Intermediation	43-4051--Customer Service Representatives	-Active Listening -Service Orientation -Speaking	-Customer and Personal Service -English Language -Administration and Management
2211-Electric Power	49-9081--Wind Turbine	-Equipment Maintenance	-Mechanical

Generation, Transmission and Distribution	Service Technicians	-Operations Monitoring -Repairing	-Computers and Electronics -English Language
6111-Elementary and Secondary Schools	25-9045--Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	-Teaching/Training -Working with Children -Written and Verbal Communication	<b>Note:</b> Knowledge and Skills were not listed in ONET. List of skills obtained from JobsEQ RTI.
5613-Employment Services	53-7062--Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	-Coordination	-Administration and Management -Customer and Personal Service -Public Safety and Security
9211-Executive, Legislative, and Other General Government Support	33-3051--Police and Sheriffs Patrol Officers	-Active Listening -Social Perceptiveness -Speaking	-Law and Government -Public Safety and Security -English Language
4841-General Freight Trucking	53-3032--Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	-Operation and Control -Operations Monitoring -Monitoring	-Transportation -Public Safety and Security -Customer and Personal Service
6221-General Medical and Surgical Hospitals	29-1141--Registered Nurses	-Social Perceptiveness -Active Listening -Coordination	-Psychology -Customer and Personal Service -Medicine and Dentistry
2373-Highway, Street, and Bridge Construction	47-2061--Construction Laborers	-Speaking -Active Listening -Coordination	-Building and Construction -Public Safety and Security -Mechanical
5241-Insurance Carriers	43-4051--Customer Service Representatives	-Active Listening -Service Orientation -Speaking	-Customer and Personal Service -English Language -Administration and Management
9221- Justice, Public Order, and Safety Activities	33-3012--Correctional Officers and Jailers	-Active Listening -Monitoring -Social Perceptiveness	-Public Safety and Security -English Language -Law and Government
3274-Lime and Gypsum Product Manufacturing	53-3032--Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	-Operation and Control -Operations Monitoring -Monitoring	-Transportation -Public Safety and Security -Customer and Personal Service
4238-Machinery, Equipment, and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers	41-4012--Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	-Active Listening -Speaking -Negotiation	-Sales and Marketing -Customer and Personal Service -English Language
6211-Offices of Physicians	31-9092--Medical Assistants	-Social Perceptiveness -Active Listening -Speaking	-English Language -Customer and Personal Service -Medicine and Dentistry
2111-Oil and Gas Extraction	*11-9199--Managers, All Other	-Writing -Reading Comprehension -Active Listening	-English Language -Law and Government -Administration and Management
2389-Other Specialty Trade Contractors	47-2061--Construction Laborers	-Speaking -Active Listening -Coordination	-Building and Construction -Public Safety and Security -Mechanical

2361-Residential Building Construction	11-9021--Construction Managers	-Coordination -Management of Personnel Resources -Active Listening	-Building and Construction -Administration and Management -Engineering and Technology
6232-Residential Intellectual and Developmental Disability, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Facilities	31-1122--Personal Care Aides	-Service Orientation -Social Perceptiveness -Active Listening	-English Language -Customer and Personal Service -Transportation
2131-Support Activities for Mining	47-5071--Roustabouts, Oil and Gas	-Critical Thinking -Judgement and Decision Making -Monitoring	-Mechanical -Customer and Personal Service
2371-Utility System Construction	47-2061--Construction Laborers	-Speaking -Active Listening -Coordination	-Building and Construction -Public Safety and Security -Mechanical

\*Note: Skills and knowledge analysis is not available at the “all other” 6-digit level, so the analysis at the highest 8-digit level was used from ONET.

**B. Labor Force Analysis and Trends**

References: WIOA §108(b)(1)(C); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(3)

Boards must include an analysis of the regional workforce, including:

- current labor force employment and unemployment data;
- information on labor market trends; and
- the educational and skill levels of the workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment.

**Minimum Plan Requirements:**

An analysis of the regional workforce, including the following:

- Employment data
- Unemployment data
- Labor market trends
- Educational and skill levels
- Individuals with barriers to employment

**Demographic Profile**

The population in the West Central Texas, TX WDA was 332,651 per American Community Survey data for 2018-2022.

The region has a civilian labor force of 152,862 with a participation rate of 58.8%. Of individuals 25 to 64 in the West Central Texas, TX WDA, 22.5% have a bachelor’s degree or higher which compares with 35.8% in the nation.

The median household income in the West Central Texas, TX WDA is \$57,840 and the median house value is \$132,463.

## Summary<sup>1</sup>

	Percent			Value		
	West Central Texas, TX WDA	Texas	USA	West Central Texas, TX WDA	Texas	USA
<b>Demographics</b>						
Population (ACS)	—	—	—	332,651	29,243,342	331,097,593
Male	51.0%	50.0%	49.6%	169,586	14,624,638	164,200,298
Female	49.0%	50.0%	50.4%	163,065	14,618,704	166,897,295
Median Age <sup>2</sup>	—	—	—	37.3	35.2	38.5
Under 18 Years	22.8%	25.3%	22.1%	75,890	7,396,128	73,213,705
18 to 24 Years	11.7%	10.0%	9.4%	38,789	2,936,266	31,282,896
25 to 34 Years	13.1%	14.4%	13.7%	43,670	4,224,194	45,388,153
35 to 44 Years	12.2%	13.8%	12.9%	40,423	4,046,302	42,810,359
45 to 54 Years	10.6%	12.3%	12.4%	35,112	3,597,088	41,087,357
55 to 64 Years	12.2%	11.2%	12.9%	40,460	3,274,387	42,577,475
65 to 74 Years	9.9%	7.9%	9.7%	32,951	2,297,666	32,260,679
75 Years and Over	7.6%	5.0%	6.8%	25,356	1,471,311	22,476,969
Race: White	75.7%	59.1%	65.9%	251,654	17,293,460	218,123,424
Race: Black or African American	5.8%	12.1%	12.5%	19,147	3,552,579	41,288,572
Race: American Indian and Alaska Native	0.4%	0.6%	0.8%	1,368	169,576	2,786,431
Race: Asian	1.3%	5.2%	5.8%	4,293	1,511,069	19,112,979
Race: Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	57	27,350	624,863
Race: Some Other Race	5.4%	7.8%	6.0%	17,942	2,281,525	20,018,544
Race: Two or More Races	11.5%	15.1%	8.8%	38,190	4,407,783	29,142,780
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	26.5%	39.9%	18.7%	88,275	11,665,280	61,755,866
<b>Population Growth</b>						
Population (Pop Estimates) <sup>4</sup>	—	—	—	338,039	30,503,301	334,914,895
Population Annual Average Growth <sup>4</sup>	0.3%	1.4%	0.6%	1,094	402,366	1,885,495
People per Square Mile <sup>4</sup>	—	—	—	19.0	116.8	94.8
<b>Economic</b>						
Labor Force Participation Rate and Size (civilian population 16 years and over)	58.8%	65.0%	63.3%	152,862	14,674,135	167,857,207
Prime-Age Labor Force Participation Rate and Size (civilian population 25-54)	75.7%	81.5%	82.8%	88,228	9,621,423	106,380,520
Armed Forces Labor Force	1.9%	0.5%	0.5%	5,030	110,177	1,236,378
Veterans, Age 18-64	5.6%	4.7%	4.3%	10,904	835,988	8,636,019
Veterans Labor Force Participation Rate and Size, Age 18-64	73.4%	78.7%	77.1%	8,003	658,147	6,656,238
Median Household Income <sup>2</sup>	—	—	—	\$57,840	\$73,035	\$75,149
Per Capita Income	—	—	—	\$30,221	\$37,514	\$41,261
Mean Commute Time (minutes)	—	—	—	19.2	26.6	26.7
Commute via Public Transportation	0.3%	1.0%	3.8%	377	142,353	5,945,723
<b>Educational Attainment, Age 25-64</b>						
No High School Diploma	11.5%	13.9%	10.1%	18,325	2,103,422	17,373,867
High School Graduate	32.6%	24.1%	25.1%	52,003	3,653,228	43,176,248
Some College, No Degree	24.2%	20.9%	19.7%	38,653	3,158,279	33,916,989
Associate's Degree	9.2%	7.9%	9.2%	14,686	1,199,146	15,886,884
Bachelor's Degree	15.9%	21.7%	22.4%	25,327	3,281,456	38,451,123
Postgraduate Degree	6.7%	11.5%	13.4%	10,671	1,746,440	23,058,233
<b>Housing</b>						
Total Housing Units	—	—	—	152,843	11,654,971	140,943,613
Median House Value (of owner-occupied units) <sup>2,5</sup>	—	—	—	\$132,463	\$238,000	\$281,900
Homeowner Vacancy	1.8%	1.2%	1.1%	1,582	78,790	931,393
Rental Vacancy	4.4%	7.4%	5.5%	1,890	318,227	2,623,236
Renter-Occupied Housing Units (% of Occupied Units)	32.3%	37.6%	35.2%	40,120	3,944,826	44,238,593
Occupied Housing Units with No Vehicle Available (% of Occupied Units)	4.7%	5.3%	8.3%	5,890	551,100	10,474,870

## Summary<sup>1</sup>

	Percent			Value		
	West Central Texas, TX WDA	Texas	USA	West Central Texas, TX WDA	Texas	USA
Total Owner Occupied Housing units	67.7%	62.4%	64.8%	84,031	6,545,727	81,497,760
<b>Social</b>						
Poverty Level (of all people)	14.0%	13.9%	12.5%	43,672	3,990,326	40,521,584
Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	11.8%	11.5%	11.5%	14,608	1,209,485	14,486,880
Enrolled in Grade 12 (% of total population)	1.7%	1.5%	1.4%	5,493	433,670	4,476,703
Disconnected Youth <sup>3</sup>	4.6%	3.0%	2.5%	911	50,502	430,795
Children in Single Parent Families (% of all children)	34.1%	34.1%	34.0%	23,721	2,400,195	23,568,955
Uninsured	16.9%	17.6%	8.7%	53,148	5,056,008	28,315,092
With a Disability, Age 18-64	14.3%	9.7%	10.5%	26,061	1,710,522	20,879,820
With a Disability, Age 18-64, Labor Force Participation Rate and Size	48.0%	49.8%	45.5%	12,504	851,439	9,492,098
Foreign Born	5.9%	17.1%	13.7%	19,573	4,987,855	45,281,071
Speak English Less Than Very Well (population 5 yrs and over)	4.6%	13.0%	8.2%	14,269	3,538,224	25,704,846

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

1. American Community Survey 2018-2022, unless noted otherwise

2. Median values for certain aggregate regions (such as MSAs) may be estimated as the weighted averages of the median values from the composing counties.

3. Disconnected Youth are 16-19 year olds who are (1) not in school, (2) not high school graduates, and (3) either unemployed or not in the labor force.

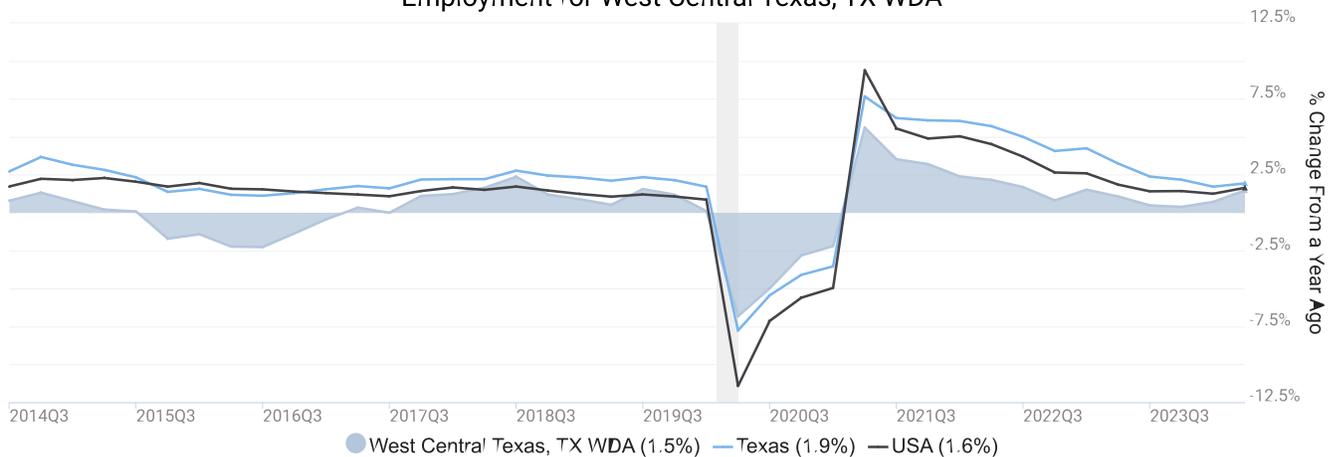
4. Census Population Estimate for 2023, annual average growth rate since 2013.

5. The Census's method for calculating median house values changed with the 2022 data set, so pre-2022 values are not directly comparable with later data.

## Employment Trends

As of 2024Q2, total employment for the West Central Texas, TX WDA was 145,744 (based on a four-quarter moving average). Over the year ending 2024Q2, employment increased 1.5% in the region.

### Employment for West Central Texas, TX WDA



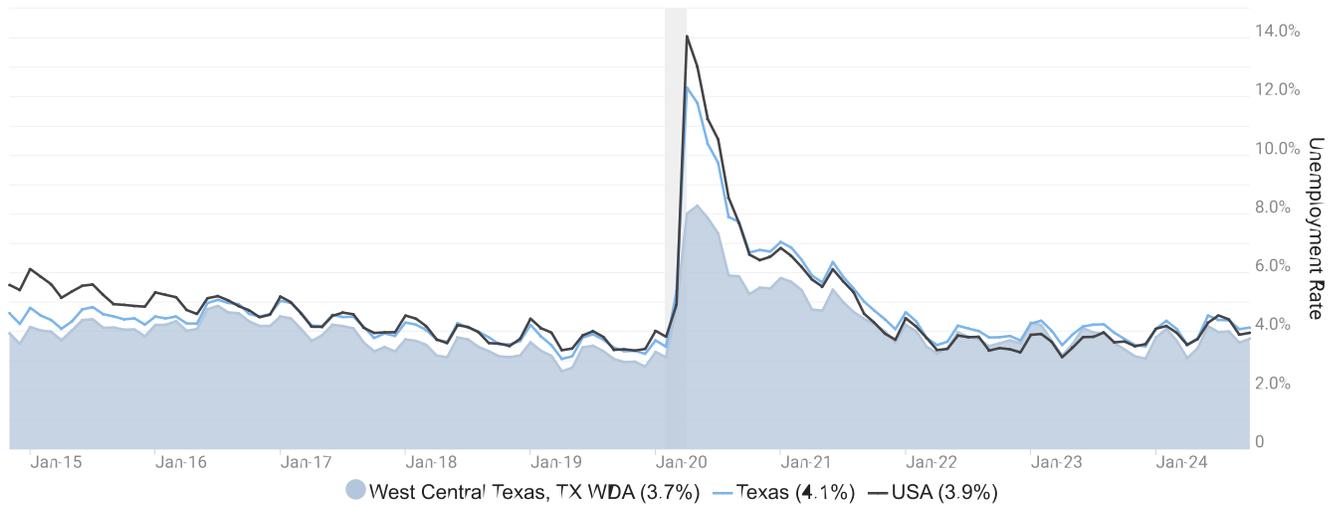
Employment data are derived from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and imputed where necessary. Data are updated through 2024Q1 with preliminary estimates updated to 2024Q2.

Source: JobsEQ®. Data as of 2024Q2. The shaded areas of the graph represent national recessions.

## Unemployment Rate

The unemployment rate for the West Central Texas, TX WDA was 3.7% as of October 2024. The regional unemployment rate was lower than the national rate of 3.9%. One year earlier, in October 2023, the unemployment rate in the West Central Texas, TX WDA was 3.4%.

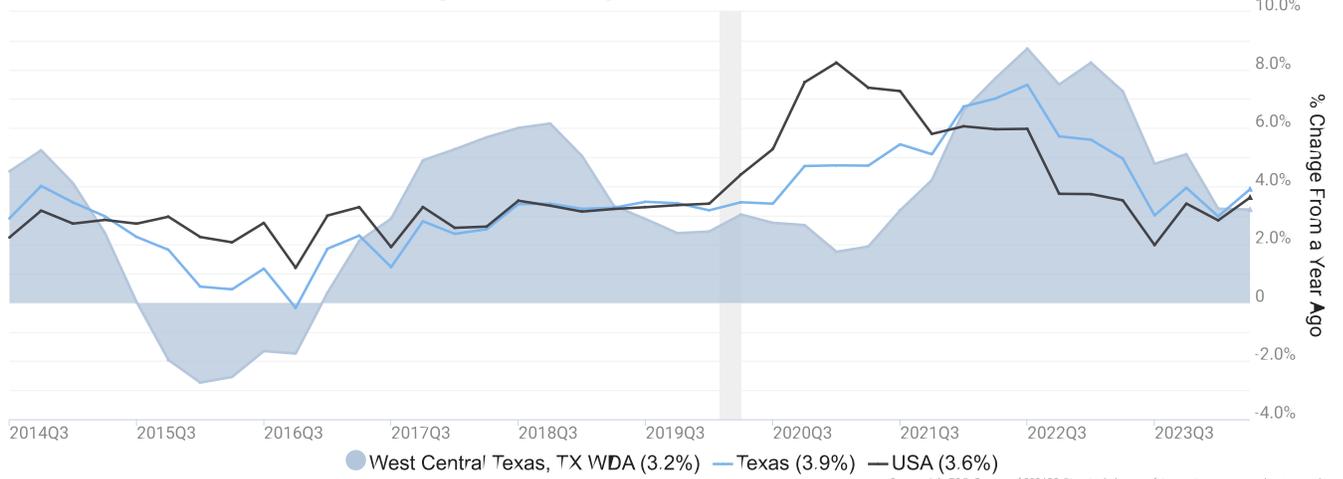
### Unemployment Rate for West Central Texas, TX WDA



### Wage Trends

The average worker in the West Central Texas, TX WDA earned annual wages of \$51,320 as of 2024Q2. Average annual wages per worker increased 3.2% in the region over the preceding four quarters. For comparison purposes, annual average wages were \$72,405 in the nation as of 2024Q2.

### Average Annual Wages for West Central Texas, TX WDA



### C. Workforce Development Analysis

References: WIOA §108(b)(1)(D); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(4)

Boards must include an analysis of:

- workforce development activities in the region, including education and training;
- the strengths and weaknesses of the Board’s workforce development activities;

- the effectiveness of the Board’s programs and services;
- the Board’s capacity to provide workforce development activities to address;
  - the identified education and skills needs of the workforce; and
  - the employment needs of employers.

**Minimum Plan Requirements:**

An analysis of workforce development activities in the region, including the following:

- General workforce development activities
- Education activities, including Early Childhood Education (ECE) and K–12
- Training activities
- Strengths and weaknesses of activities
- Effectiveness of programs and services
- The Board’s capacity to provide workforce development activities
- Individuals with barriers to employment
- Employment needs of employers

Workforce Development Activities—Core Program Services

The following programs are made available to the region through contracts with the Board’s subrecipients, CECT (for workforce services—all except the last bullet) and SERCO (for child care services).

- Wagner-Peyser-funded employment services
- Trade Adjustment Assistance
- Choices Program
- Choices NCP Program
- SNAP E&T Program
- WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker Title I services
- WIOA Youth services
- Military Family Support Pilot Program
- Child Care services

One of the Board’s priorities is to “Provide exceptional customer service for individuals and families to access a system of services leading to quality career opportunities.” One of the strategies for achieving this priority goal is to fully integrate local service delivery whereby one subrecipient will operate all programs and services in a customer-centered structure. Rather than operating from the perspective of an internal menu of services, staff will seek to determine and address customer gaps, and will function as a service partner to connect system customers with resources that correspond to their needs. In this way, staff will function as a partner service manager in much the same way the Board operates as a partnership manager. The Board took steps in 2024 to move toward a single system operator during its subrecipient procurement process. Since both operator contracts were expiring in the same year, the Board issued a request for proposals that included language advocating for a single system entity to manage all programs and services. While this attempt was unsuccessful, the Board is continuing to advance the integration of services and development of a single provider structure through enhanced collaboration and accountability of both current subrecipients. The Board intends to re-procure services this coming year, with a renewed emphasis on a single provider that will operate all programs and services.

### Workforce Development Activities—Board-Administered Initiatives

In addition to contracted program services, the Board engages in the following initiatives to address the education and skill needs of the workforce, as well as the employment needs of employers.

Beginning as the “Career Pathway Program” in 2008, the Board’s Career Education focus has evolved into a comprehensive, responsive, and agile initiative in the region. Recognizing that career education is the foundation of a healthy, growing regional workforce, the Board’s continued engagement with secondary schools has expanded into areas of partnership with employers and postsecondary institutions. What initially began with two funding sources for these initiatives has grown into a multi-faceted educational engagement model that seeks to equip the emerging workforce with information about the labor market they are entering and supply them with resources to meet the workforce challenges they will encounter. The funding for this initiative braids public and private resources to support career education and career pathway development in our region.

#### **Career Education Outreach**

The Board continues to provide services to area secondary students in middle and high school classrooms. In the 2023-2024 school year, 535 workshops were provided in 28 partner school districts, totaling 7473 student engagements. These varied workshops utilize slide decks depicting regional demand occupations, labor market information, and activities centered around employability skills to equip students to think critically about career choices. In response to school requests, the CEO activities have expanded to include workshops on interview skills and resume writing. Organizing and conducting mock interviews has also been added to the repertoire.

Since 2021, Career Education Specialists have utilized virtual reality headsets that allow students to experience over two dozen career exploration simulations, most of which are related to demand occupations in this region. For students in 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, virtual reality opportunities take many forms. Smaller schools may host a virtual reality day to serve several grades, while larger schools permit attendance for students who attend a specific class, usually career exploration. Students typically complete three or more simulations per session. “Career Days” and “FAFSA Nights” are also occasions for virtual reality career exploration. In addition, simulations are utilized for undecided seniors. A senior student may experience several simulations and have guiding conversations with their Youth Success Advisor to help them determine what types of occupations appeal to the student, thus making progress towards postsecondary goals. During the 2023-2024 academic year, 1171 students participated in virtual reality career exploration at 25 ISD partner schools.

Beyond the ISDs, virtual reality headsets make appearances at ESC professional development events (Region 14, Region 15), day-camps for students with barriers to employment (Bloom Consulting), and non-profits that serve students (Youth Voice). Demand has also been growing through the leadership of economic development corporations. As they are exposed to the simulations, they become advocates to bring the experience to their communities.

The benefits of an immersive learning experience have been appreciated for some time. Occupation simulations bring that immersion to the next level--a spherical experience with the student front and center as the main character. Virtual Reality Career Exploration creates community buzz and garners the kind of attention that makes subsequent conversations about occupations so much more impactful.

### **Youth Success Advising**

The Board continues to provide individual career guidance to secondary students in rural school districts in the Youth Success Program through the grant from rootEd Alliance, Inc. Youth Success Advisors work directly with partnering districts and their seniors to ensure a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education and the workforce. Advisors meet one-on-one with students to develop plans based on their interests and skills.

Youth Success Advisors are embedded in the campuses of participating area high schools to provide students with postsecondary education and training support, early exposure to education pathways and careers, and strong connections to education and local industry. Students are also connected with sources of financial aid and opportunities for work-based learning experiences.

Eight Youth Success Advisors are currently serving 1100 seniors across 18 school districts, and one Retention Coach supports students making the transition into their first year of post-secondary education or training.

### **Work-Based Learning**

The Board supports the expansion of work-based learning opportunities for students including:

- Job shadowing and industry tours, which permit students to see behind the scenes of a local business and learn the day-to-day responsibilities of a person in a high demand occupation.
- Work readiness seminars, which provide students with information about professional behaviors, their rights, and general information about how the workplace is different from the educational setting.
- Internship interviews, which offer students the authentic experience of representing themselves well in a competitive environment.
- Paid internship placements, which increase accessibility to those who might not otherwise participate due to financial constraints and their need for a part-time job while in high school.

During the '24 – '25 school year, the Board partnered with 18 employers and nine school districts to support:

- over 200 job shadowing activities,
- 64 work readiness seminars to 695 students, and
- 63 paid internships.

### **Career Education Special Events**

- World of Work (WOW) Youth Expo – The 2024 regional career exploration mega-event gathered approximately 3,000 students and teachers from 53 school districts, and one home-school consortium to explore regional college and career opportunities. Eighty-eight exhibitors represented their career or training opportunities and countless volunteers supported the day's efforts. The students were engaged, the educators were appreciative, and the employers were impressed with the quality of the questions from the students.
- Teacher Summer Externship Program 2024 – Arranged for 26 educators from 12 school districts to experience in-depth industry tours over 3 days with 12 industry partners. The educator experience culminated in the writing of lesson plans related to what they learned

for middle through high school grades across a spectrum of subjects like robotics, animal science, welding, entrepreneurship, journalism, health science, and middle school science.

- Industry Tours – Arranged tours for students as another component of work-based learning. The targeted industries include manufacturing, finance, and healthcare. Twelve manufacturers hosted close to 300 students. Regional manufacturers really shine in bringing awareness to the vast opportunities that exist for students. Nearly 120 students toured businesses and heard from professionals in the finance sector in order to gain insight into fields such as financial planning, global investment banking, private wealth management and more. Healthcare tours are supported by 6 employers, one of which is practically a regional entity in its own right. At the time of this writing, the registration for student attendance had been open for only one day and the sign-ups are at 70% of the full capacity of 125 students for these healthcare industry tours.

### **Student Hireability Navigator**

The Board's Student Hireability Navigator ("Navigator") works with TWC-VR, community partners, area school districts, and employers to increase awareness of the services available to students with disabilities. The Navigator promotes the five Pre-Employment Transition Services that are required by WIOA and provides information and resources so students with disabilities can develop effective transition plans with the special education team. The Navigator connects students with disabilities with community partners that can increase the opportunity for integration into inclusive and competitive employment opportunities and/or post-secondary success. Navigator presentations to educators, students, and parents at schools provide information that help students with disabilities access VR and other services that will empower them to pursue additional training, postsecondary education, or employment following graduation. Navigator connections with employers help them overcome challenges and perceived barriers to working with individuals with disabilities and open new opportunities.

### **Employer Engagement**

The Board has procured a service provider to assist with enhancement of services to employers. This procurement was driven by an internally identified need for more robust and customized training around the application of labor market information to guide service delivery (both to employers and job seekers). In addition, since the Board is looking to enhance employer service delivery in significant ways, the need for system analysis and guidance by an external entity is needed to invigorate conventional service patterns with fresh concepts and methods. At the time this plan is being developed, Learning Designs, Inc. has been engaged to provide the services described below. Upon completion of these services, staff will understand how to effectively serve employer customers while allowing LMI and other guidance to inform their decisions and actions with employers. In addition, the Board will have a solid service delivery framework along with a comprehensive guidebook (both of which can be adjusted and customized for new and future challenges) as well as a train-the-trainer piece that will ensure the investment in this project will help improve our service delivery beyond the short scope of the technical assistance project. This initiative supports Goal 1 in the TWC Strategic Plan.

#### **1. Obtaining employer perspectives about engagement with the workforce ecosystem:**

- Host focus groups of employers within targeted industry sectors (healthcare, education, construction and manufacturing) to assess their perspectives on engagement with the

workforce ecosystem, ecosystem being defined as secondary, higher education, economic and workforce development entities.

- Conduct surveys and/or interviews with employers to identify effective messaging, outreach, and engagement strategies
- Prepare a summary of focus groups, interviews, and surveys that identifies key findings, opportunities and actionable recommendations.

#### **2. Training to enhance staff knowledge and application of labor market information:**

- Conduct training with staff who work directly with employers and/or job-seeker customers on a daily basis, provide oversight and technical assistance on labor market information, and any related supervisors.
- Ensure training is interactive and results in a deepened understanding of how to use publicly-available resources, such as Texas Workforce Commission Labor Career and Labor Market Information tools, and why the data is relevant for engaging with employers and job seekers.
- Topics may include: understanding demand and targeted industries and occupations, defining a career pathway and identifying connections between training and employment.

#### **3. Training on a solutions-based approach to employer engagement**

- Conduct training with staff who work directly with employers on a daily basis, provide oversight and technical assistance on building successful relationships with employers, and any related supervisors.
- Ensure training focuses on utilization of a solutions-based approach to engage with employers vs. a sales approach to programs (demand approach vs. supply approach)
- Focus on creating a culture of collaboration and cooperation with local workforce ecosystem partners who are also engaged with employers

#### **4. Creation of a framework and guidebook for employer engagement and associated staff training**

- Develop a framework to support building and maintaining quality relationships with employers that identifies goals and successful outcomes.
- Develop a guidebook that formalizes essential processes and concepts into a cohesive document of actionable daily practices. The guide will serve as a training tool to ensure consistency throughout the region.
- Ensure the guidebook includes case studies, common scenarios, scripts, templates, links to resources, and/or other valuable learning tools.
- Provide training for staff or train-the-trainer training on the guidebook and framework to ensure staff can effectively implement related practices and activities in their daily work.

### **Early Childhood Education**

The Board employs five Early Childhood Specialists that include a Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS) Subject Matter Expert and an Infant and Toddler Specialist to:

- plan and manage quality activities, which includes mentoring and providing technical assistance for early learning programs to support obtaining, maintaining or increasing Texas Rising Star Provider (TRS) levels,
- provide mentoring services that will improve teacher-child interactions and improve the quality of early learning environments,
- maintain awareness of best practices in child care quality, and

- partner with other organizations to enhance and expand the availability of quality child care and early learning experiences.

More details about how the Board supports Early Childhood Education (ECE) and K–12 education activities are contained in the following sections from the Board’s FY25 Child Care Quality Plan. (This plan supports Board compliance with the requirement in the WIOA Combined State Plan to develop the CCQ Plan. It also supports objectives in the TWC Strategic Plan under Goal 2.)

Strategy	Description
Personnel cost associated with Infant Toddler Specialist (IT Specialist)	<p>The Board shall maintain .75 FTE Infant Toddler Specialist. This person will work closely with TRS mentor staff, infant/toddler teachers and directors.</p> <p>This activity is designed to assist staff and teachers that work with infants and toddlers to strengthen their teaching practices and to achieve and maintain quality standards by providing mentoring and technical assistance.</p>
CDA Certification Courses, Certification Scholarships	<p>Board will pay tuition and fees up to \$500 for caregivers employed by a CCS provider to attend CDA Certification classes. CDA assessment scholarships of \$425 per student will be paid directly to the CDA Council to cover the cost of the CDA certification exam.</p> <p>This activity is designed to assist early learning programs in achieving and maintaining quality standards by providing training relative to director/teacher qualifications. The Board will outreach all CCS providers, with class enrollment capped at 25 per session. CDA Sessions will be offered twice throughout the fiscal year. (This strategy supports Strategy 2.2 of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan.)</p>
Professional Development specific to guidance and discipline and teacher child interaction	<p>Board will allocate funds to pay for training associated with needs identified by early learning program needs survey and TRS mentors. The two subjects with the most interest are guidance and discipline and teacher child interaction.</p> <p>This activity is intended to assist providers with specific training needs. All CCS providers will be outreached and encouraged to attend. (This strategy supports Strategy 2.2 of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan.)</p>
Personnel costs associated with TRS mentor staff	<p>Goal is to maintain 4 full time mentor staff throughout FY25 in order to provide mentoring services and technical assistance to ELP's to support obtaining, maintaining or increasing TRS star levels.</p> <p>This activity is designed to assist early learning programs in achieving and maintaining quality standards by providing mentoring services that will improve teacher-child interactions and improve the quality of early learning environments. TRS mentors will provide mentoring services to all directors and teachers of early learning programs and child care centers that are currently certified and CCS providers who are at TRS Entry Level and are working on achieving certification. (This strategy supports Strategy 1.2 of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan.)</p>
Personnel cost associated with Quality activities and managing quality staff	<p>The Board will maintain .75 that is assigned to manage all quality activities to include mentor staff throughout FY25. This position will support ELP's, mentors, and manage all quality activities. Manager will support 5 mentors and 92 CCS providers.</p>

	(This strategy supports Strategy 1.2 of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan.)
Personnel cost associated with TECPDS SME	The Board shall maintain .50 TECPDS SME throughout FY25, to provide specific and specialized help with all things related to TECPDS, and to collect TECPDS data to assist in identifying training needs (with input from mentor staff, Early Childhood Advisory Council, etc.). This position will help ELP directors create and maintain a Texas Workforce registry account for their operation. This position will also maintain the LWDB organizational dashboard as well as validate all information put in the TECPDS system. (This strategy supports the following strategies of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan: 1.1, 3.1, and 3.2.)

Serving Individuals with Barriers to Employment

The Board uses many resources for serving individuals with disabilities. In its workforce centers, the Board employs the following assistive devices to help customers with disabilities access job search resources (each device is located in all centers unless otherwise indicated):

- Accessible workstations
- Height adjustable desks and chairs
- Screen Magnifier Software (MAGic)\*
- Screen Reader Software (JAWS)\*
- Large print and reverse color keyboards
- 19” monitor
- Headphones
- Trackball mouse
- Speech Amplification System (Pocket Talkers)
- Telephones with volume control and hearing aid compatible
- Video Relay Services (Sorenson)
- Relay Texas
- Written materials for orientations, workshops, trainings, etc.
- Automatic door openers (Abilene offices)

\*Note: These tools are now known as “Fusion”.

For customers with hearing impairments, a sign language interpreter service may be used to facilitate communication with individual staff. In addition, captioned workshops are offered online.

Board EO policies communicate requirements for providing equitable service and ensuring the accessibility of facilities as well as services for individuals with disabilities, including, in part:

- The requirement to provide reasonable accommodations/modifications
- Prohibition on denying customers access to services or benefits on the basis of a disability or the need for a reasonable accommodation
- The requirement to provide services to individuals with disabilities in integrated settings, to the extent possible
- Admittance of service animals
- Use of mobility devices
- Meaningful language requirements

The Board EO Officer reviews program and physical accessibility annually to ensure services and

facilities are accessible to individuals with disabilities, and that subrecipients are in compliance with federal, state, and local EO requirements. Staff receives accessibility training during onboarding and at other times as needed.

CivicPlus, which hosts the Board’s website, ensures the site’s compliance with the standards of the Government-wide Section 508 Accessibility Program as well as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Working Group. WCAG standards are built into best practices for content development and file sharing to ensure that all information and web components meet the four core principles: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. CivicPlus utilizes AudioEye software to deliver immediate ADA and WCAG accessibility compliance at scale, using patented technology, subject matter expertise and proprietary processes. From the CivicPlus website:

*Web accessibility standards ensure content can be easily accessed by all citizens, which is why as an industry leader in local government web development, CivicPlus® has partnered with AudioEye, a leader in automated Web accessibility and remediation, to help our local government clients ensure their websites' continue to meet the latest compliance standards. The only technology-first digital accessibility provider, AudioEye goes beyond accessibility, to enhance the user experience for all website visitors. AudioEye's patented technology runs in the background of your CivicEngage® website to automatically detect Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA and Section 508, legacy, and 2018 refresh success criteria violations. Through AudioEye Managed, issues of accessibility are resolved as they arise.*

Board and subrecipient staff participate on area committees that address services/resource for individuals with disabilities and other barriers:

- The RCTP (Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan) committee considers transportation across the region, including the 5310 federal funding for the elderly and individuals with a disability;
- West Central Texas Aging and Disability Resource Center steering committee reviews grants and projects the agency has secured to benefit the needs of the elderly and disabled community;
- West Central Texas Council of Governments: Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities committee reviews grant applications and receives progress reviews of the programs in Brown, Coleman, Comanche, and Runnels Counties;
- West Texas Homeless Network, which is a group of local organizations and advocates working together to prevent and end homelessness in West Central Texas.

TWC-VR is co-located in the Abilene and Brownwood workforce centers and regularly collaborates with Board and workforce subrecipient staff for customer referrals and service delivery coordination. In addition, staff periodically receive training for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities.

One of the primary functions of the Board’s Student HireAbility Navigator (“Navigator”) is to promote alignment of services between TWC-VR, school districts, and community partners for students with

disabilities. The Navigator works to strengthen the infrastructure that serves those students, improve communication and relationships between employers and TWC-VR, and foster access and usage of services by students with disabilities, all for the purpose of increasing employment opportunities for students with disabilities. Some of the many collaborative activities in which the Navigator engages to align services for these students include:

- presentations at area schools to students and teachers regarding available services;
- informing employers about the advantages of working with students with disabilities, and making connections between employers and school district special education personnel, students, and TWC-VR;
- promoting Workforce and TWC-VR services at area events and resource fairs; and
- hosting training events for all stakeholders.

The Navigator also promotes the five Pre-Employment Transition Services that are required by WIOA and provides information and resources so students with disabilities can develop effective transition plans with the special education team.

For individuals who have limited English proficiency (LEP), the Board uses the following strategies:

- Some staff are able to translate for Spanish-speaking persons.
- For languages other than Spanish, staff have access to a language line service.
- In the centers, staff use “I Speak” cards listing various languages to present to LEP individuals so they may identify the language required for assistance. Staff will then either use an on-site interpreter or the Board’s vendor to obtain an interpreter who is fluent in the customer’s language.
- A Babel Notice tagline is included with vital information on social media as well as on required documents in the Board’s designated languages to communicate language services are available free of charge.

#### Effectiveness of Services

The Board believes the services and activities available through subrecipients, as well as from the Board, are effective in addressing local needs; however, the Board believes there is always opportunity for improvement. The Board regularly considers the effectiveness of the service delivery system, the responsiveness of activities, and the impact or outcomes. To this end, the following strategies are employed to regularly evaluate the local system and make improvements. Board senior staff meet monthly to review various operational aspects including performance for all programs and services, financial management, and activities related to oversight, management and technical assistance. Board staff meet monthly with the local subrecipient management teams in meetings being designed to become progressively more integrated. The end goal of the progression is that a single meeting with complete attendance by both subrecipients will be in full effect, replacing traditionally separate meetings with each subrecipient team. The Board Director of Program Operations and Chief Program Officer also meet bi-weekly with subrecipient leadership staff. These meetings are used as an opportunity to review performance, discuss current and planned initiatives, and dialog about issues and opportunities. The subrecipients also convene regular “partner” meetings that include other partners. This meeting focuses primarily on operational rather than strategic issues. Additionally, subrecipients are required to submit monthly reports to the Board Director of Program Operations that relate information on issues such as staffing changes, staff training, quality assurance activities, financial status and projections, and emerging issues. Those reports also contain

information about the status of performance measures, strategies the subrecipient is using to improve deficiencies, and customer success stories. Formalized methods of ensuring services meet customer needs and are provided appropriately include monitoring reviews of all programs no less often than annually. The Board currently contracts with an external consultant to conduct annual program and financial reviews. However, the Board is moving to hire a shared QA Specialist who will be a WSWCTB staff person, but will conduct quality assurance program reviews for both West Central and Permian Basin board areas under a Shared Services agreement with the Workforce Solutions Permian Basin Board. The Board EO Officer reviews program and physical accessibility annually to ensure services and facilities are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

The performance measures contracted by TWC to the Board are also contracted by the Board to the subrecipients. These measures gauge how many job seekers and employers receive workforce development services and how well they benefited from those services (successfully completed training, obtained employment, received assistance with filling job openings, etc.). This provides an objective evaluation of the effectiveness of programs and services. For BCY22 and BCY23, the Board met or exceeded 90% or higher of its contracted measures, and in BCY24, the Board met or exceeded 95% of its contracted performance measures.

In addition to the Board's local review of workforce services and operations, TWC performs a review of the Board's capacity to oversee and manage local funds and the delivery of local workforce services, related to:

- Developing, maintaining, and upgrading comprehensive fiscal management and accountability systems
- Hiring, training, and retaining qualified staff to carry out the Board's oversight function
- Selection and oversight of local contractors to improve delivery of workforce services
- Oversight and improvement of operation of local Workforce Solutions offices in the area served by the Board
- Managing contractors' performance across multiple Board programs and achieving required performance standards
- Identifying and resolving long-standing oversight problems of the Board and performance problems of contract providers

The results of the latest review of West Central are located on the TWC website, [here](#), and indicate the Board meets the required standards.

The effectiveness and capacity for providing services can also be seen in the following accomplishments from the past year.

- **High Profile Statistics:**
  - Employers Receiving Texas Talent Assistance\*: 1,941
  - Children in Care Daily Average: 1,665
  - Texas Rising Star (TRS) Providers Supported: 90
    - 64% of providers are 2 Star or above
  - Students Receiving Career Advising: 1,081
  - Student Career Exploration Exposures: 6,928
  - Student Work-Based Learning Experiences: 69

*\*Data through 6/30/24*

- **Assistance to Employers and Job-seekers**

Creating connections between employers and qualified job-seekers.

- Hosted 37 on site and virtual hiring events and partnered with Cisco College and Texas Veterans Commission to host job fair for Cisco College students and their families.
- Hosted annual Hiring Red White and You Veteran’s Job Fair with 64 employers in attendance.
- Upskilled 10 individuals through provision of professional truck driver training in partnership with three local training institutions. All students successfully completed training and obtained CDL certification.
- Hosted ribbon-cutting and open house for Workforce Center located on campus of TSTC West Texas – Sweetwater on April 9, 2024 in conjunction with Sweetwater Chamber of Commerce and TSTC with Dist. 71 State Representative Stan Lambert as a key speaker. The event also provided an opportunity for local high school seniors to visit the center, register in WIT and learn about resources available and learn about resources available for training and job search assistance.

- **Business and Education Partnerships**

Building relationships between business and education to improve alignment.

- Twenty-six educators from local schools participated in a dynamic three-day Summer Industry Experience, hosted in partnership with Region 14 Education Service Center and area employers in summer 2024. During the experience, educators visited nine (9) different employers that included manufacturers, financial services, construction, hospitality, professional services, early childhood and government services. This unique approach offered educators an opportunity to network with each other as well as gaining real-world experience and knowledge about high demand career opportunities available within the region.
- Continued to serve as backbone support for industry sector partnership, Big Country Manufacturing Alliance (BCMA). BCMA provided \$9,000 in scholarships to five (5) high school and two (2) college students. To promote greater awareness of manufacturing careers, area manufacturers hosted 8 community open house events in October as part of National Manufacturing Month. Participating employers included:
  - BWJ Metalworks, Abilene
  - Chike Nutrition, Abilene
  - Great Lakes Cheese, Abilene
  - Hartmann’s Inc., Abilene
  - OX Manufacturing, Breckenridge
  - RAM Inc., Cisco
  - Rentech, Abilene
  - USG, Sweetwater

- **Career Pathways**

Promoting awareness of and preparing students for local quality career opportunities.

- The 11th annual World of Work youth expo events was held on September 24, 2024, as an in-person event at the Abilene Convention Center. The event was attended by approximately 3,000 high school students from 53 school districts and included a

keynote address. Eighty-eight exhibitors representing business, education and community partners connected with students and educators.

- Hosted CTE Signing Day on April 30, 2024 at the Historic Paramount Theatre. The event honored over 140 students who attend high schools across the region who have decided to pursue a high demand technical career pathway after high school. Students who participated in internships and the employer partners were also recognized at the event.
- The Career Education and Outreach Specialist initiative concluded its fifth year of career awareness building in middle schools and high schools across the region. During the academic year of fall 2023 to spring 2024, 535 Career Awareness sessions were conducted at 28 different schools to 7,473 students.
- Partnered with Cisco College to offer a workshop as part of Abilene Bloom Camp, a two-week experience focused on preparing students with disabilities for life after high school. Students spent a morning exploring a variety of careers through use of virtual reality headsets with coaching by Career and Education Outreach Specialists.
- Piloted internship programs for 28 high school juniors and seniors from eight rural school districts with 10 employers that provided between 50 and 150 hours of paid work experience. More than 90% of students reported the experience helped them gain valuable work experience and 87% it increased their confidence in their career choices.

- **Promoting Quality Child Care**

Improving the quality of affordable child care for families who are working or attending school.

- Partnered with Cisco College to provide Child Development Associate (CDA) training for individuals currently employed in the child care industry during the fall and spring semesters. Fourteen students successfully completed and obtained their CDA certification in December 2023 and additional 19 students completed training and obtained their CDA certification in May 2024.
- Providing mentoring support for 277 programs (classrooms and home settings) to 540 early childhood professionals. By offering high quality mentoring and technical assistance, early childhood professionals are able to improve the quality of care and learn valuable skills that improve their daily work experience.
- Hosted in-service conference for nearly 100 early childhood educators in September 2024 with Brody Powell, who has over a decade of experience in the mental health field with a focus on “Caring for Caregivers.” In the Caregiver 2.0 keynote and workshop, early childhood professionals were given practical and solution tools to combat burnout and learn to prioritize self-care.
- Recognizing the importance of recruiting and retaining quality workers in the child care industry, over \$225,000 in recruitment and retention bonuses were distributed to 550 early childhood professionals at 39 different early childhood programs.

### Training

Although the Board sponsors training through ITAs and special initiatives, the actual provision of education and classroom training (“CRT”, which also includes distance learning environments) is conducted by local training providers. A matrix showing the area providers’ capacity to address training needs for demand occupations is provided below.

<b>In-Demand Occupation</b>	<b>Average Annual Demand</b>	<b>Annual Regional Training Capacity<sup>1</sup></b>
13-2011 – Accountants and Auditors	82	49
49-3023 – Automotive Service Tech.	86	31 <sup>2</sup>
43-3031 – Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	146	A
49-3031 – Bus/Truck Mech./Diesel Spec.	30	25 <sup>2</sup>
47-2061 – Construction Laborers	164	A
33-3012 – Correctional Officers and Jailers	80	A
49-9051 – Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers	21	33 <sup>2</sup>
47-2111 – Electricians	86	0
25-2021 – Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	118	117
29-2042 – Emergency Medical Technicians	19	24 <sup>2</sup>
11-9013—Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers	459	A
47-1011—First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	82	A
49-1011—First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers	63	A
43-1011 – First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	134	A
51-1011—First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	62	A
11-1021—General and Operations Managers	335	319
49-9021 – Heating AC and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers	41	11
53-3032 – Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	267	151 <sup>3</sup>
49-9041 – Industrial Machinery Mechanics	57	5 <sup>4</sup>
29-2061 – LVNs	72	84 <sup>2</sup>
51-4041—Machinists	20	3
49-9071—Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	140	A
11-9111—Medical and Health Services Managers	71	37
31-9092 – Medical Assistants	109	4
25-2022 – Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	58	105
47-2073 – Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators	55	A
47-2152 – Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	46	0
33-3051 – Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	69	A
29-1141 – Registered Nurses	216	247 <sup>2</sup>
41-3091—Sales Representatives of Services, Except Advertising, Insurance, Financial Services, and Travel	72	A
41-4012—Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific	76	A

Products		
25-2031 – Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	84	267
43-6014— Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	188	A
25-2056 – Special Education Teachers, Elementary School	21	22
25-2057 – Special Education Teachers, Middle School	8	19
25-2058 – Special Education Teachers, Secondary School	11	19
51-4121 – Welders/Cutters	59	216 <sup>2</sup>
49-9081 – Wind Turbine Service Technicians	61	30 <sup>4</sup>

Average Annual Demand is from JobsEQ.

1. Note: Source is JobsEQ Awards Data. Data as of the 2022-2023 academic year; obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). This data excludes any awards from Action Career Training or TSTC unless otherwise noted.
2. Note: For programs offered by TSTC, data was retrieved from the THECB database for academic year 2022-2023 and added to the JobsEQ data.
3. Note: This figure is solely from completion information for Action Career Training for the latest year available 9/1/21 – 8/31/22.
4. Note: These programs did not appear in JobsEQ, therefore data was retrieved from the latest available ETPL performance report (for 7/1/20-6/30/24).
5. Note: The “A” indicates occupations that do not require formal classroom training.

### Part 3: Core Programs

#### A. Workforce Development System

References: WIOA §108(b)(2); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(1)

Boards must describe how the local workforce development system will work with entities carrying out core and required partner programs to support alignment to aid in the provision of services that support the strategies identified in TWC’s WIOA Combined State Plan.

#### Minimum Plan Requirements:

- A description of the local workforce development system will work with entities carrying out core and required partner programs to support alignment.

Note: The plan must describe how the Board’s system will work with the entities carrying out the core programs. The following checklist is for reference only.

#### Core programs:

- Youth workforce investment activities
- Adult employment and training activities
- Dislocated worker employment and training activities
- Adult education and literacy activities
- Employment services
- Vocational rehabilitation services

#### Required programs (if operated in the Board Area)

- WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs
- Wagner-Peyser Employment Service program

- Unemployment Insurance (UI) programs**
- Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program**
- Choices, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) employment and training program**
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program (SNAP)**
- Child Care Services**
- Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) programs**
- Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) programs**
- Vocational Rehabilitation programs**
- National Dislocated Worker Grant (NDWG) program**
- Apprenticeship programs**
- Career and Technical Education programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) (20 USC §2301, et seq.)**
- Veteran employment and training programs—Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER)**
- Job Corp programs**
- Native American programs**
- US Department of Housing and Urban Development programs**
- Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act**
- Reintegration of Offenders programs**
- Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker programs**
- Senior Community Service Employment Program**

The Board contracts with a subrecipient entity, CECT, to operate the workforce center system through which core and other program services are provided, including: WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs; Wagner-Peyser Employment Services Program; RESEA and other services to Unemployment Insurance recipients; TAA; TANF/Choices Program; SNAP E&T Program; and Choices Noncustodial Parent Program. The Board contracts with a second entity, SERCO, to operate the child care services program. The service delivery system consists of one full-service workforce center in Abilene, two branch offices in Brownwood and Sweetwater, and one itinerant office in Eastland. The Abilene Workforce Center serves as the hub for the region and, in addition to workforce services and all child care service staff, houses staff from the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) and the Texas Veterans Leadership Program. TWC-VR is also co-located in the Abilene and Brownwood workforce centers and regularly collaborates with Board and workforce subrecipient staff for service delivery coordination. This co-location allows for greater ease of referrals as well as immediate consultations for workforce customers who may require those services.

The Board supports the Commission’s integrated service delivery strategy by conveying those expectations contractually with subrecipients. The Board has taken this further by developing five strategic priorities that:

- Support and emphasize the importance of partnerships,
- Strengthen the Board’s support of employers and economic development players, and

- Endeavor to provide excellent services and resource connections to system customers.

Strategic Priority One: Establish WFSWCT as a partnership manager and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with key stakeholders in workforce development including employers, economic development, education, and community organizations.

Strategic Priority Two: Establish Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas as a trusted convener and recognized source for relevant information and resources.

Strategic Priority Three: Support the growth and stability of quality workplaces that provide sustainable wages and career opportunities.

Strategic Priority Four: Define, align, and systematically support high-quality career pathways and work-based learning through cross-sector partnerships.

Strategic Priority Five: Provide exceptional customer service for individuals and families to access a system of services leading to quality career opportunities.

Fulfilling these strategic priorities supports the four core principles on which the state and national workforce systems were founded:

- **Universality:** Services must be available for everyone—all workers and employers.
- **Customer Choice:** All customers must be informed and aware of the choices and opportunities that exist for employment, education, and training, both those services provided directly through the workforce center system and those available through community partners.
- **Integration:** Customers should be able to enter the system through multiple access points, yet it should feel like a single system.
- **Performance-driven and Outcome-based:** The system must be accountable for achieving the outcome of a skilled workforce.

The Board believes that accomplishing these principles and its own strategic priorities is best served by procuring a single entity responsible for the delivery of all services. The Board believes there are important efficiencies and added value that can be achieved through removing repetitious processes for functions such as administrative support, internal quality assurance, financial management, performance management and staff development. We prioritize putting the customer at the heart of our work, recognizing that a seamless, coordinated approach is key to achieving positive outcomes. This enables cross-functional teams to work in harmony, empowering staff to make the right connections to meet customer needs as an integrated system rather than in separate silos. We believe this amplifies the value for the customer, increases their level of satisfaction and improves outcomes for the customer and the system. Co-locating staff with diverse programmatic expertise who represent the range of workforce services facilitates communication, leverages the knowledge of individual team members and creates a culture of support and a shared success. Until the goal of a single system operator is realized, the Board is working to advance the integration of services and development of a single provider structure through enhanced collaboration and accountability of both current subrecipients.

In WIOA regulations, adult education/literacy (AEL) is also a core program. The Board has a long-standing partnership with Abilene Adult Education (AAE; the AEL provider for the entire West Central area) to serve mutual customers. CECT coordinates with AAE to provide services to workforce customers seeking GED, ESL, or basic education, as well as tutoring assistance.

There are four technical/community colleges in this area that provide training to address the employment needs of employers. The Board works with all of these providers to coordinate services for job seekers and to ensure training meets the needs of employers. In fact, the Board has long-standing relationships with these entities, as well as a Career Schools and Colleges provider of truck driver training and one of the three universities to offer a fast track teacher certification program. The Board partners with all of these entities to list their applicable training programs on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL).

The Board works directly with VR services through its Student HireAbility Navigator Program (“Navigator”). The Navigator engages area school districts, employers, TWC-VR, and community partners to promote and align services for students with disabilities. The Navigator works to strengthen the infrastructure that serves those students, improve communication and relationships between employers and TWC-VR, and foster access and usage of services by students with disabilities, all for the purpose of increasing employment opportunities for students with disabilities.

The Board maintains memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with both required and optional partners to coordinate service delivery to mutual customers and to proffer supplementary resources to distinct customers needing additional services. The Board has standing MOUs with all required partners operating programs in the West Central WDA. This includes the following, all of which are active:

- CSBG Programs:
  - Aspermont Small Business Development Center
  - Cornerstone Community Action Agency
  - Rolling Plains Management Corporation
  - West Texas Opportunities
- SCSEP Programs:
  - AARP
  - MET

These agreements outline services available with the respective entities, promote sharing of program information, and commit to coordination of services and resources to support better outcomes for customers as well as efficient use of community resources. In addition, the Board requires the workforce subrecipient to track referrals of customers with all partners to monitor outcomes and ensure alignment and nonduplication of services.

The following programs do not have any identified providers or a known presence in West Central Texas:

- MSFW Programs
- Second Chance/Re-Entry Programs

**B. Core Programs—Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(3); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(2)**

**Each Board must include a description of how the Board will work with entities carrying out core programs to:**

- **expand access to employment, training, education, and support services for eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment;**
- **facilitate the development of career pathways and coenrollment, as appropriate, in core programs; and**
- **improve access to activities that lead to a recognized postsecondary credential (such as an industry-recognized certificate or certification) that is portable and stackable.**

**Minimum Plan Requirements:**

**A description of how the Board will work with entities that facilitate core programs to do the following:**

- Expand access to employment training, education, and support services for the following:**
  - Eligible individuals**
  - Eligible individuals with barriers to employment**
- Facilitate development of career pathways and coenrollment in core programs**
- Improve access to activities that lead to a recognized postsecondary credential (such as an industry-recognized certificate or certification) that is portable and stackable**

**Core programs:**

- Youth workforce investment activities**
- Adult employment and training activities**
- Dislocated worker employment and training activities**
- Adult education and literacy activities**
- Employment services**
- Vocational rehabilitation services**

The Board contracts with a subrecipient entity, CECT, to operate the workforce center system through which core and other program services are provided, including: WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs; Wagner-Peyser Employment Services Program; RESEA and other services to Unemployment Insurance recipients; and TAA. The service delivery system consists of one full-service workforce center in Abilene, which serves as the hub for the region, two branch offices in Brownwood and Sweetwater, and one itinerant office in Eastland. CECT works with the AEL provider (Abilene Adult Education, AAE) to provide services to workforce customers seeking GED, ESL, or basic education, as well as tutoring assistance. TWC-VR is co-located in the Abilene and Brownwood workforce centers and regularly collaborates with Board and workforce subrecipient staff for service delivery coordination. This co-location allows for greater ease of referrals as well as immediate consultations for workforce customers who may require those services.

The Board's Student Hireability Navigator ("Navigator") works with TWC-VR, community partners, area school districts, and employers to increase awareness of the services available to students with disabilities. The Navigator promotes the five Pre-Employment Transition Services that are required by WIOA and provides information and resources so students with disabilities can develop effective transition plans with the special education team. The Navigator connects students with disabilities

with community partners that can increase the opportunity for integration into inclusive and competitive employment opportunities and/or post-secondary success. Navigator presentations to educators, students, and parents at schools provide information that help students with disabilities access VR and other services that will empower them to pursue additional training, postsecondary education, or employment following graduation. Navigator connections with employers help them overcome challenges and perceived barriers to working with individuals with disabilities and open new opportunities.

In addition to partnering with training providers to list their training programs on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), the Board has on many occasions partnered with providers, economic development entities, school districts, and community-based organizations to provide training opportunities to address skill shortages in the West Central Texas area. One current collaboration is the West Central Texas Pathways Leadership Team, which has been developed as the Board leads Tri-agency Regional Convener efforts, and is comprised of partners from:

- Urban and rural economic development entities,
- Postsecondary members from community and technical colleges,
- Employers from several in-demand industries, and
- Education service center members representing independent school districts across all 19 counties of the workforce area.

The Board is at the forefront of efforts in the development, implementation, and monitoring of a regional strategy for high-quality career and education pathways into targeted industries. Career and education pathways are focused on high-wage, high-demand occupations with local training and stackable credentials available, with the goal of creating a future where individuals are able to navigate career pathways with confidence, supported by integrated systems emphasizing experiential learning and access to training for quality jobs.

The team was established in June 2023 to foster shared responsibility in developing regional talent pipeline strategies. Leadership and decision-making power are distributed among partners, with each organization playing a pivotal role in shaping both strategic direction and implementation. The collaborative structure ensures that diverse perspectives—representing workforce development, education, and industry—are integrated into every stage of the process. The team engages the communities it represents and the populations it is working to support in order to gather feedback, assess challenges, and make continuous improvements. Surveys and targeted interviews are conducted regularly to ensure that the team regularly reviews its strategies based on stakeholder input. This process enables us to refine our work, remove barriers, and maintain authentic engagement with our community. The following examples demonstrate specifically how we have integrated community input into our work.

- **Student Survey and Community Input:** In May 2024, the Board partnered with 12 rural independent school districts to survey graduating seniors, gathering over 500 responses. The survey captured students' perspectives on their post-high school plans, support needs, and career goals. These insights have guided both the Pathways Leadership Team's broader strategies, and the individual programmatic adjustments made by school districts and community colleges to meet the evolving needs of their students.

- **Work-Based Learning Pilot Feedback:** Following the 2023–2024 work-based learning pilot program, feedback was collected from 30 participating students through surveys and interviews. More than 90% reported gaining valuable work experience, with 87% expressing increased confidence in their career choices. Students highlighted the need for better preparation and clearer communication, which has informed improvements for the upcoming year. Insights from teachers and employers have also been incorporated, and an executive summary of the evaluation is available upon request for further reference.
- **Community Representation:** In August 2024, the Pathways Leadership Team expanded its membership to include representatives from at least two rural communities at all times, ensuring that rural voices are consistently integrated into decision-making.

The team has achieved the following key accomplishments that have laid the foundation for expanding quality career pathways and work-based learning opportunities across West Central Texas. These achievements demonstrate the strength of our collaboration, the inclusiveness of our process, and our commitment to addressing the needs of rural, economically disadvantaged students.

- **Comprehensive Research:** We conducted an extensive asset and gap analysis to assess the accessibility of quality career pathways for rural and economically disadvantaged students. This research informed our strategic priorities and allowed us to tailor our efforts to the unique needs of these populations.
- **Unified Vision and Goals:** Through a collaborative process that included input from students, parents, K-12 and postsecondary educators, employers, and community leaders, we established a shared vision, mission, and set of goals around career pathways. This collective commitment has strengthened cross-sector alignment and focused our efforts on supporting students at critical transition points.
- **Work-Based Learning Evaluation:** A third-party evaluation of our pilot work-based learning program provided valuable insights from participating students, teachers, and employers. With over 90% of students reporting positive experiences, the feedback has been integral to refining our work-based learning strategies, and an executive summary of the evaluation has been shared with all partners to guide future improvements.
- **Industry-Based Committees:** We created industry-specific committees for high-demand sectors like construction, healthcare, manufacturing, and education. Each committee includes cross-sector representation, ensuring that our career pathways reflect current industry needs and provide students with relevant, future-oriented skills.
- **Expanded Leadership and Inclusivity:** Recognizing a gap in representation, we expanded the Pathways Leadership Team in August 2024 to include voices from economic development, higher education, and the community, including students and adults. This expansion ensures that diverse perspectives are consistently integrated into our decision-making and implementation processes.

**Regional Career Pathways Strategic Plan:** The Pathways Leadership Team developed the [Regional Career Pathways Strategic Plan](#) to expand and refine quality career pathway opportunities and work-based learning experiences of value across the region during the next 3 – 5 years. This plan emphasizes early engagement, equitable access, and ongoing support for students, particularly those from

underserved communities. It also places an emphasis on increasing avenues for recognition of work-based learning activities in postsecondary credit and credentialing.

1. Ensure access to high-quality education and training programs aligned to targeted industries across the region by 2029.
  - a. Evaluate access to high-quality education and training programs aligned to target industries at each entry point in the identified career pathways.
  - b. Ensure programs exist with the capacity to meet the economic and labor market needs in under-represented areas.
  - c. Evaluate and implement a teacher apprenticeship model to mitigate shortages in the education field.
2. Increase quality work-based learning opportunities aligned to targeted industries by 10% by 2029.
  - a. Improve cross-sector collaboration in support of career pathway development.
  - b. Implement an improved advisory board structure to ensure aligned and effective career pathway development.
  - c. Increase postsecondary credit opportunities for work-based learning.
3. Increase quality engagement in career pathway development among K12, higher education, industry, and community partners by 10% 2029.
  - a. Increase career exploration opportunities aligned to targeted industries.
  - b. Increase paid youth internship opportunities aligned to targeted industries.
  - c. Increase postsecondary credit opportunities for work-based learning

The West Central Texas Pathways Leadership Team (PLT) uses labor market information on a continual basis to ensure that efforts in career pathway development are aligned to economic need. To determine key industries and occupations of focus, PLT utilizes the same methodologies and standards used to determine the WFSWCT In-Demand Industries and Occupations lists. For the purpose of the Pathways Leadership Team, industries are reviewed at the 2-digit NAICS level to determine those meeting established standards for household living wage and employment. Filtered industries are then used to cross-reference with a table of all occupations across the WDA. Occupational criteria established by Board policy regarding self-sufficiency wage and the number of employed within each occupation are used to further filter. Throughout this process, alignment with and representation of the local knowledge of labor market needs is ensured through frequent input from employers and industry partners. Exceptions to WFSWCT standards are considered on a case-by-case basis, particularly for occupations within a defined pathway. The Pathways Leadership Team will review and approve the established list of target industries and occupations for regional career pathway development in alignment with the WDA industry/occupation process in order to account for macroeconomic shifts or emerging industries and occupations. As part of the Pathways Leadership Team, an established Data Task Force is charged with the broad data collection, analysis, and capacity-building required to advance strategic goals, enable metrics reporting, and support continuous improvement. Aligned career pathway development efforts, including the above referenced goals and strategies, are evaluated using specific metrics, including the following.

Goal	Aligned Metrics
Ensure access to high-quality education and training programs aligned to targeted industries across the region by 2029.	Percent of districts with adequate access to programs of study aligned to targeted industries.
	Percent of counties with adequate access to postsecondary programs aligned to targeted industries.
Increase quality work-based learning opportunities aligned to targeted industries by 10% by 2029.	Percent of students engaged in worksite tours aligned to targeted industries.
	Percent of students engaged in job shadowing aligned to targeted industries.
	Percent of students engaged in internships aligned to targeted industries.
	Percent of internships aligned to targeted industry that are paid by employers.
Increase quality engagement in career pathway development among K12, higher education, industry, and community partners by 10% by 2029.	Number of industry partners engaged in quality career pathway activities.
	Percent of secondary partners utilizing advisory boards with cross-sector representation.

In order to measure progress of strategic priority efforts, the Board has a centralized data repository tool under development at this time. The tool is designed to support overlapping efforts of both Board strategic priorities, as well as the above detailed career pathway support priorities established as part of Tri-Agency Regional Convener efforts. The tool is strategically organized to house metrics in a manner which mirrors the Board’s overall strategic priorities, with clear alignment to Tri-Agency Regional Convener goals:

- Partner Engagement Metrics
- Resource Provision Metrics
- Education and Training Metrics
- Work-Based Learning Metrics
- Customer Service Metrics

The data tool will integrate internal and external data sets to measure progress towards each of the goals outlined in the Regional Career Pathways Strategic Plan above.

The work of the Board as the Tri-Agency Regional Convener and collaboration with the Pathways Leadership Team supports many of the objectives in the TWC Strategic Plan, particularly within Goals 1 and 2.

**Part 4: One-Stop Service Delivery**

**A. One-Stop Service Delivery System**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(6); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(5)**

**Each Board must include a description of its workforce area’s one-stop delivery system, including explanations of the following:**

- **How the Board will ensure the continuous improvement of eligible providers and how providers will meet the employment needs of local employers, workers, and jobseekers**

- **How the Board will facilitate access to services provided through the one-stop delivery system, including to remote areas, using technology and other means**
- **How entities within the one-stop delivery system, including Boards, contracted service providers, and one-stop partners, will comply with WIOA §188 (related to Non-Discrimination), if applicable, and with applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 regarding the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs and services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities, including providing staff training and support for addressing the needs of individuals who have disabilities.**
- **The roles and resource contributions of the one-stop partners**

**Minimum Plan Requirements:**

**A description of the one-stop delivery system, including explanations of the following:**

- How the Board will ensure continuous improvement of eligible providers**
- How providers will meet the employment needs of employers, workers, and job seekers**
- How the Board will use technology and other means to facilitate access to services, including referrals to VR and AEL services and access to remote areas**
- Compliance with non-discrimination provisions consistent with WIOA §188 and Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990**
- Roles and resource contributions of the one-stop partners**

Description of System

The Board contracts with a subrecipient entity, CECT, to operate the workforce center system through which core and other program services are provided, including: WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs; Wagner-Peyser Employment Services Program; RESEA and other services to Unemployment Insurance recipients; TAA; TANF/Choices Program; SNAP E&T Program; and Choices Noncustodial Parent Program. The service delivery system consists of one full-service workforce center in Abilene, two branch offices in Brownwood and Sweetwater, and one itinerant office in Eastland. The Abilene Workforce Center serves as the hub for the region and, in addition to workforce services, houses staff from the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) and the Texas Veterans Leadership Program. The workforce subrecipient has primary responsibility for job seeker services.

The Board coordinates services to the business sector by assigning certain responsibilities to the workforce subrecipient, CECT, while retaining other responsibilities at the Board level. Subrecipient staff serving employers are designated as Business Service Specialists. The Board serves as a convener, fostering partnerships with economic development organizations, industry associations, educational institutions, and community stakeholders. These partnerships ensure that workforce services align with regional labor market demands and emerging trends. The Board plays a critical role in analyzing labor market data to identify skill gaps and workforce challenges, shaping the development of responsive programs and policies. Furthermore, the Board prioritizes system alignment and coordination, bringing together partners and subrecipient service providers to deliver a consistent and high-quality experience for employers. The subrecipient service delivery staff focus on operationalizing these strategies by providing direct services to employers. As the primary point of contact, subrecipient staff offer a range of employer-focused services, such as assisting with job postings, facilitating candidate recruitment and screening, and hosting hiring events. These staff members work closely with employers to understand their unique needs and provide customized workforce solutions, such as on-the-job training and various types of experiential learning. Their role

emphasizes building strong, ongoing relationships with employers to ensure satisfaction and identify opportunities for additional support. Board staff meet regularly with subrecipient Business Service Specialists to discuss any issues identified as a result of Board interaction with employers and to provide strategic direction. Additionally, information is shared on emerging issues, events and activities resulting from the Board's coordination with economic development, business associations, businesses, and/or other community agencies and leaders.

The initial contact for most job-seekers is with Customer Service staff in the Resource Room. Customer Service staff identify the individual's reason for contacting the center and provide appropriate information, which may include a referral to a partner agency, a basic overview of services, referral to a service within the center, and/or referral to a Career Navigator. Job seekers may, depending on their needs, individual circumstances, and eligibility, access basic career services, individualized career services (including services received from programs such as Choices and SNAP E&T), or training services. There is no prescribed pathway for job-seekers to access training services. Some job-seekers enter the center already knowing they want to attend training, while other job-seekers may participate in a variety of other services and activities before they decide to pursue training.

Although the Board sponsors training through ITAs and special initiatives, the actual provision of education and classroom training ("CRT", which also includes distance learning environments) is conducted by local training providers. The region has three community colleges, one technical college, and one career school. One of the universities, McMurry University, also has a fast-track training program included on the ETPL. Among these six entities training is available in Abilene, Breckenridge, Brownwood, Cisco, Early, Ranger, Snyder and Sweetwater through the Eligible Training Program List (ETPL). The Board communicates regularly with these colleges and schools to provide information on labor market trends, and discuss issues and concerns related to training and workforce preparation. The Board also works closely with businesses to connect them to training providers when a business has identified a training need that the provider is capable of addressing. When an employer, economic development organization or chamber of commerce contacts the Board for training assistance, the Board identifies potential providers and may contact the providers to assess their level of interest, capacity and capability to meet the requested needs.

The Board has a well-established partnership with Abilene Adult Education (AAE; the AEL provider for the entire West Central area); both entities have a history of collaborating to serve mutual customers. The Board's workforce subrecipient and AAE coordinate activities to seamlessly connect AEL customers with workforce development services, ensuring that customers receive a comprehensive package of support. Workforce staff host a workforce orientation for AEL students at least twice a month which allows workforce staff the opportunity to engage with AEL leadership simultaneously. These meetings include presenting a summary of workforce services to AEL students. Additional communication or meetings for discussion happen in between orientations as needed between both agencies. In addition, a well-established customer referral process exists between workforce and AEL to ensure customers have effective and timely access to the full array of services, regardless of where they enter the system. This streamlined referral process ensures individuals seeking assistance can be quickly connected with the appropriate workforce or adult education services. The goal is to eliminate barriers to service access and create a smoother pathway for customers to move between services.

TWC-VR is co-located in the Abilene and Brownwood workforce centers and regularly collaborates with Board and workforce subrecipient staff for service delivery coordination. This co-location allows

for greater ease of referrals as well as immediate consultations for workforce customers who may require those services. A well-established customer referral process exists between workforce and TWC-VR to ensure customers have effective and timely access to the full array of services, regardless of where they enter the system. Subrecipient and TWC-VR meet at least once quarterly to address key topics related to effective communication, collaboration, and operational matters. The discussions include addressing challenges, sharing updates, and brainstorming solutions to better serve customers. In addition to quarterly meetings, workforce and TWC-VR staff begin monthly planning and work readiness coordination for the SEAL Program as early as March, meeting again in April and May. After work readiness classes conclude in May, workforce and TWC-VR meet weekly for updates on placements and start dates of all customers. Both entities continue communication as frequently as is needed during placement and program duration. As mentioned in the partnership with AAE, the goal for both entities is to eliminate barriers to service access and create a smoother pathway for customers to move between services.

Child care assistance is essential to the success of many parents who work and/or attend school. The Board contracts with a subrecipient, SERCO, to administer the federally-funded child care program. SERCO is co-located with workforce services in Abilene. Workforce and childcare staff meet periodically to discuss shared customers and maintain established processes for ensuring customer services are coordinated and information is shared, as appropriate. The Board provides the following services to workers employed as child caregivers.

- The Board will pay tuition and fees up to \$500 for caregivers employed by a CCS provider to attend CDA Certification classes. CDA assessment scholarships of \$425 per student will be paid directly to the CDA Council to cover the cost of the CDA certification exam.
- To assist providers with training, the Board will allocate funds to pay for training associated with needs identified by early learning program needs survey and TRS mentors.
- The Board shall provide to all child care workers, currently employed at a CCS provider, in our service area a stipend reflective of the level of the child care program at which they are currently employed. Providers must submit an application with required information in order for their staff to qualify for the stipend.

To ensure equal access to workforce services across all areas, including remote and underserved communities, the Board employs a combination of itinerant staffing, toll-free communication, and technology-facilitated services (these are discussed later in this section). *Itinerant Staffing:* Workforce staff regularly travel to counties without a permanent workforce center to provide in-person support. These staff members collaborate with trusted community agencies, including community centers, libraries, and chambers of commerce, to deliver services in familiar and accessible locations. *Toll-Free Communication:* The Abilene Workforce Center's toll-free phone number, widely publicized alongside the Board's website address, provides an essential lifeline for customers who may not be able to access a physical location. Through this service, job seekers and employers can receive guidance, information, and referrals to other services without the need for in-person visits.

#### Ensuring Continuous Improvement

The Board believes the services and activities available through subrecipients, as well as from the Board, are effective in addressing local needs; however, the Board believes there is always opportunity for improvement. The Board regularly considers the effectiveness of the service delivery system, the responsiveness of activities, and the impact or outcomes. To this end, the following

strategies are employed to regularly evaluate the local system and make improvements. Board senior staff meet monthly to review various operational aspects including performance for all programs and services, financial management, and activities related to oversight, management and technical assistance. Board staff also meet monthly with the local subrecipient management teams, and the Board Director of Program Operations meets bi-weekly with subrecipient leadership staff. These meetings are used as an opportunity to review performance, discuss current and planned initiatives, and dialog about issues and opportunities. The subrecipients also convene regular “partner” meetings that include other partners. This meeting focuses primarily on operational rather than strategic issues. Additionally, subrecipients are required to submit monthly reports to the Board Director of Program Operations that relate information on issues such as staffing changes, staff training, quality assurance activities, financial status and projections, and emerging issues. Those reports also contain information about the status of performance measures, strategies the subrecipient is using to improve deficiencies, and customer success stories. Formalized methods of ensuring services meet customer needs and are provided appropriately include monitoring reviews of all programs no less often than annually. The Board currently contracts with an external consultant to conduct annual program and financial reviews. However, the Board is moving to hire a shared QA Specialist who will be a WSWCTB staff person, but will conduct quality assurance program reviews for both West Central and Permian Basin board areas under a Shared Services agreement with the Workforce Solutions Permian Basin Board. The Board EO Officer reviews program and physical accessibility annually to ensure services and facilities are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

As part of the responsibility to maintain an Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), program performance standards must be established for use in reviewing initial training provider applications and in determining ongoing eligibility of a certified program to receive WIOA funds. TWC has established performance standards that will be effective July, 2025. These standards govern program access to the statewide ETPL. Boards may adopt local performance standards that exceed state performance standards for programs to access Individual Training Account sponsorships in local areas. The Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas Board has chosen to use TWC’s performance standards as the local performance standards and not to establish additional local standards.

#### Technology-Facilitated Services

The Board leverages technology to enhance service delivery and expand access, especially for individuals in remote areas. The Board’s website has features that facilitate customers’ access to information about workforce services, as well as links to partner agencies. Along with many other resources, the website provides opportunities for customers to:

- ask questions about services,
- apply for services online in a secure format,
- explore the local Target Occupations List and link to the Eligible Training Provider List,
- participate in customer satisfaction surveys,
- participate in online orientations, job readiness workshops and training sessions, which are offered virtually to enable broader participation and reduce individual barriers such as transportation or scheduling challenges, and
- access portals to a comprehensive suite of resources, including TX3C, WorkInTexas.com and other related sites, resume-building tools, and access to labor market information, empowering customers to engage with services at their convenience.

The newsflash feature highlights important information, updates, and current opportunities in the workforce system under “Workforce Solutions News” on the homepage. The “Stay Connected With Us” section on the homepage features links to Board social media feeds, an option to subscribe to the Board’s newsletter or view current/past issues, and quick links for partners to connect with the Board’s system. The live chat feature allows customers to interact with staff, and the forms feature allows customers to download or complete and submit forms virtually. The website also allows individuals/organizations to become vendors and receive automatic notification any time the Board posts a bid on the website. Customers may set preferences to be notified when changes or updates occur (such as in the calendar, newsflash, etc.). The website utilizes an integrated payment gateway to process training registrations, event payments, sponsorship submissions, etc. online. In addition, hiring events, workshops, etc. are posted to the calendar so customers can receive notification of these events. Events and information are also posted in WIT as a means of communication. The following system features make the site more customer-friendly:

- Hosting using a server with platinum security to encrypt sensitive customer data that is submitted online. This allows customers to complete forms for services, eligibility, etc. containing PII on the website instead of having to physically come to the Center, mail hard copies, etc.
- The homepage makes key items/areas of content more visible.
- The structure of the homepage, global navigation, mega-menu and internal/sub-page navigation aligns with analytics about customer use.
- “Call to action” buttons on internal pages are provided as a visual way for customers to find applications, registrations, tools, etc.
- Information on the website, Facebook page, and Google business profiles.

Customers can schedule and attend appointments with Career Specialists via video conferencing platforms, eliminating the need for travel. In addition, the Board and its subrecipients use Acrobat Sign to digitally sign documents, both internally for staff and externally with customers.

Since 2021, Career Education Specialists have brought virtual reality headsets into schools for students to experience over two dozen career exploration simulations, most of which are related to demand occupations in this region. For students in 6th through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, virtual reality opportunities take many forms. Smaller schools may host a virtual reality day to serve several grades while larger schools are able to give access to their students who attend a specific class, usually career exploration. “Career Days” and “FAFSA Nights” are also occasions for virtual reality career exploration. Simulations are utilized for undecided seniors. A senior student may experience several simulations and have a guiding conversation with their Youth Success Advisor to help them determine what types of occupations appeal to the student, thus making progress toward postsecondary goals.

Beyond the ISDs, virtual reality headsets make appearances at ESC professional development events (Region 14, Region 15), day-camps for students with barriers to employment (Bloom Consulting), and non-profits that serve students (Youth Voice). Demand has also been growing with leadership of economic development corporations to expose them to the simulations. This allows them to see the comprehensive nature of this experience and further advocate for its availability in their communities.

The benefits of an immersive learning experience have been appreciated for some time. Occupation simulations bring that immersion to the next level--a spherical experience with the student front and

center as the main character. Virtual Reality Career Exploration creates a buzz in communities and garners the kind of attention that makes subsequent conversations about occupations much more impactful.

Additionally, the Board's subrecipients use the following technological means of serving customers. CECT utilizes Transcard debit card services for the disbursement of support services to customers. This enables disbursement of funds in a fast and efficient manner—funds can be loaded the same day they are requested. SERCO utilizes the TWC TX3C portal for all aspects of client and provider case management, supplemented by phone calls and text messages.

The Board utilizes additional technology-based methods of remotely conducting business and serving customers. System staff may receive laptops, GoToMyPC licenses, and employer-issued cell phones to work from remotely as applicable to their job functions. The following programs are used to facilitate virtual services to customers, as described below.

- Microsoft Teams—Utilized to facilitate virtual staff meetings as well as meetings with customers and partners.
- Zoom—Facilitates virtual appointments with customers. This is also used to conduct online group orientations.
- GoToAssist—Provides virtual services by allowing staff to access a customer's computer to provide assistance with websites like WorkinTexas.
- ClickSend—Allows staff to communicate with customers via text, and also functions as a fax service.
- Connect to Resource PC—Allows staff to log into resource room computers to provide remote assistance to on-site customers while maintaining social distancing.
- Use of iPads to allow customers who do not have personal computers to attend virtual job interviews or appointments outside the Center.
- Online program orientations as well as a more robust library of customer forms were added to the Board's website.

#### Accessibility

The Board uses many resources for serving individuals with disabilities. In its workforce centers, the Board employs the following assistive devices to help customers with disabilities access job search resources (each device is located in all centers unless otherwise indicated):

- Accessible workstations
- Height adjustable desks and chairs
- Screen Magnifier Software (MAGic)\*
- Screen Reader Software (JAWS)\*
- Large print and reverse color keyboards
- 19" monitor
- Headphones
- Trackball mouse
- Speech Amplification System (Pocket Talkers)
- Telephones with volume control and hearing aid compatible
- Video Relay Services (Sorenson)
- Relay Texas
- Written materials for orientations, workshops, trainings, etc.

- Automatic door openers (Abilene offices)

\*Note: These tools are now known as “Fusion”.

For customers with hearing impairments, a sign language interpreter service may be used to facilitate communication with individual staff. In addition, captioned workshops are offered online.

Board EO policies communicate requirements for providing equitable service and ensuring the accessibility of facilities as well as services for individuals with disabilities, including, in part:

- The requirement to provide reasonable accommodations/modifications
- Prohibition on denying customers access to services or benefits on the basis of a disability or the need for a reasonable accommodation
- The requirement to provide services to individuals with disabilities in integrated settings, to the extent possible
- Admittance of service animals
- Use of mobility devices
- Meaningful language requirements

The Board EO Officer reviews program and physical accessibility annually to ensure services and facilities are accessible to individuals with disabilities, and that subrecipients are in compliance with federal, state, and local EO requirements. Staff receives accessibility training during onboarding and at other times as needed.

CivicPlus, which hosts the Board’s website, ensures the site’s compliance with the standards of the Government-wide Section 508 Accessibility Program as well as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Working Group. WCAG standards are built into best practices for content development and file sharing to ensure that all information and web components meet the four core principles: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. CivicPlus utilizes AudioEye software to deliver immediate ADA and WCAG accessibility compliance at scale, using patented technology, subject matter expertise and proprietary processes. From the CivicPlus website:

*Web accessibility standards ensure content can be easily accessed by all citizens, which is why as an industry leader in local government web development, CivicPlus® has partnered with AudioEye, a leader in automated Web accessibility and remediation, to help our local government clients ensure their websites' continue to meet the latest compliance standards. The only technology-first digital accessibility provider, AudioEye goes beyond accessibility, to enhance the user experience for all website visitors. AudioEye’s patented technology runs in the background of your CivicEngage® website to automatically detect Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA and Section 508, legacy, and 2018 refresh success criteria violations. Through AudioEye Managed, issues of accessibility are resolved as they arise.*

### Partner Roles and Resource Contributions

The two one-stop partners who have an on-going presence in the Abilene center are TVC and TWC—Texas Veterans Leadership Program (TVLP). Both of these partners serve only veterans, but are integrated into the overall operations. TVC staff are located on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor with workforce and employer services staff. Funds are allocated by TWC for the TVLP position, and TVC and the Board negotiate an annual budget that covers facilities, support services and supply costs.

TWC-VR staff in Abilene and Brownwood are co-located in those Workforce Centers. Abilene TWC-VR staff are housed on a separate floor from other Workforce staff, however the cost for their space is included in the Board’s rental agreement. TWC contracts funds for rent in the Abilene office as well as other costs for both locations to the Board.

The Board does not anticipate the physical presence of other partners, even on an itinerant basis for the foreseeable future.

### **B. Employer Engagement, Economic Development, and Unemployment Insurance Program Coordination**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(4); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(3); WIOA §108(b)(5); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(4)**

**Boards must include a description of the strategies and services that will be used in the workforce area to:**

- **facilitate the engagement of employers, including small employers and employers in-in-demand industry sectors, in-demand occupations, and target occupations, in workforce development programs;**
- **support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the workforce area;**
- **coordinate workforce investment activities with regional economic development activities that are carried out in the local workforce area;**
- **promote entrepreneurial-skills training and microenterprise services; and**
- **strengthen the linkage between the one-stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs.**

**Note: This may include the implementation of initiatives such as incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training programs, customized training programs, industry and sector strategies, career pathways initiatives, the use of effective business intermediaries, and other business services and strategies that are designed to meet the needs of regional employers. These initiatives must support the strategy described above.**

#### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

**A description of strategies and services to:**

- Facilitate the engagement of employers in workforce development programs, including small employers and employers of in-demand industry sectors and occupations**
- Support a local workforce development system that meets needs of businesses**
- Better coordinate workforce development and economic development activities**
- Promote entrepreneurial-skills training**
- Promote microenterprise services**
- Strengthen the links between one-stop and unemployment insurance**

### Employer Engagement, Business Services, and Economic Development

The Board coordinates services to the business sector by assigning certain responsibilities to the workforce subrecipient, CECT, while retaining other responsibilities at the Board level. Subrecipient staff serving employers are designated as Business Service Specialists. The Board serves as a convener, fostering partnerships with economic development organizations, industry associations, educational institutions, and community stakeholders. These partnerships ensure that workforce services align with regional labor market demands and emerging trends. The Board plays a critical role in analyzing labor market data to identify skill gaps and workforce challenges, shaping the development of responsive programs and policies. Furthermore, the Board prioritizes system alignment and coordination, bringing together partners and subrecipient service providers to deliver a consistent and high-quality experience for employers. The subrecipient service delivery staff focus on operationalizing these strategies by providing direct services to employers. As the primary point of contact, subrecipient staff offer a range of employer-focused services, such as assisting with job postings, facilitating candidate recruitment and screening, and hosting hiring events. These staff members work closely with employers to understand their unique needs and provide customized workforce solutions, such as on-the-job training and various types of experiential learning. Their role emphasizes building strong, ongoing relationships with employers to ensure satisfaction and identifying opportunities for additional support. Board staff meet regularly with subrecipient Business Service Specialists to discuss any issues identified as a result of Board interaction with employers and to provide strategic direction. Additionally, information is shared on emerging issues, events and activities resulting from the Board's coordination with economic development, business associations, businesses, and/or other community agencies and leaders.

The Board is working with area secondary schools and employers to develop career pathways that will meet the employment needs of businesses, particularly in the areas of demand occupation shortages for the following in-demand industries: healthcare, manufacturing, and construction. A pilot was conducted during the 2023 - 2024 school year in healthcare and manufacturing fields and, with the participation of eight school districts and ten employers, resulted in the following outcomes:

- 117 students participated in job shadowing experiences,
- 28 students completed internships, and
- 4 students were offered full-time employment upon completion.

Following the 2023–2024 work-based learning pilot program, feedback was collected from 30 participating students through surveys and interviews. More than 90% reported gaining valuable work experience, with 87% expressing increased confidence in their career choices. Students highlighted the need for better preparation and clearer communication, which informed improvements for the 2024 – 2025 year. Insights from teachers and employers revealed the following program assessments.

- Teachers valued the program for the benefits it provided to students, as well as deeper relationships that resulted with employers.
- Employers valued the program as a contribution to their communities and as a potential workforce pipeline development effort.

The 2024 – 2025 school year program continues to focus on middle-skill STEM career pathways, specifically welding, medical assisting, and vocational nursing—fields identified as critical need areas for Texas' workforce. Employment connection opportunities include job shadowing, industry tours,

and internship programs. Each internship program may include a technical dual credit course that leads to an opportunity for the student to earn one of six industry-based certifications for a Medical Assistant, Certified Nurse Aide, or Welder. Preparatory activities for the participating students include work readiness workshops and interview coaching provided by Career Education and Outreach team staff.

The Board has procured a service provider to assist with enhancement of services to employers. This procurement was driven by an internally identified need for more robust and customized training around the application of labor market information to guide service delivery (both to employers and job seekers). In addition, since the Board is looking to enhance employer service delivery in significant ways, the need for system analysis and guidance by an external entity is needed to invigorate conventional service patterns with fresh concepts and methods. At the time this plan is being developed, Learning Designs, Inc. has been engaged to provide the services described below. Upon completion of these services, staff will understand how to effectively serve employer customers while allowing LMI and other guidance to inform their decisions and actions with employers. In addition, the Board will have a solid service delivery framework along with a comprehensive guidebook (both of which can be adjusted and customized for new and future challenges) as well as a train-the-trainer piece that will ensure the investment in this project will help improve service delivery beyond the short scope of the technical assistance project. This initiative supports Goal 1 in the TWC Strategic Plan.

**1. Obtaining employer perspectives about engagement with the workforce ecosystem:**

- Host focus groups of employers within targeted industry sectors (healthcare, education, construction and manufacturing) to assess their perspectives on engagement with the workforce ecosystem, ecosystem being defined as secondary, higher education, economic and workforce development entities.
- Conduct surveys and/or interviews with employers to identify effective messaging, outreach, and engagement strategies
- Prepare a summary of focus groups, interviews, and surveys that identifies key findings, opportunities and actionable recommendations.

**2. Training to enhance staff knowledge and application of labor market information:**

- Conduct training with staff who work directly with employers and/or job-seeker customers on a daily basis, provide oversight and technical assistance on labor market information, and any related supervisors.
- Ensure training is interactive and results in a deepened understanding of how to use publicly-available resources, such as Texas Workforce Commission Labor Career and Labor Market Information tools, and why the data is relevant for engaging with employers and job seekers.
- Topics may include: understanding demand and targeted industries and occupations, defining a career pathway and identifying connections between training and employment.

**3. Training on a solutions-based approach to employer engagement**

- Conduct training with staff who work directly with employers on a daily basis, provide oversight and technical assistance on building successful relationships with employers, and any related supervisors.
- Ensure training focuses on utilization of a solutions-based approach to engage with employers vs. a sales approach to programs (demand approach vs. supply approach)

- Focus on creating a culture of collaboration and cooperation with local workforce ecosystem partners who are also engaged with employers

**4. Creation of a framework and guidebook for employer engagement and associated staff training**

- Develop a framework to support building and maintaining quality relationships with employers that identifies goals and successful outcomes.
- Develop a guidebook that formalizes essential processes and concepts into a cohesive document of actionable daily practices. The guide will serve as a training tool to ensure consistency throughout the region.
- Ensure guidebook includes case studies, common scenarios, scripts, templates, links to resources, and/or other valuable learning tools.
- Provide training for staff or train-the-trainer training on the guidebook and framework to ensure staff can effectively implement related practices and activities in their daily work.

The Board has identified opportunities to deepen partnerships with economic development entities across the 19-county region in order to enhance the coordination of workforce and economic development activities. This includes employer-specific supports such as the recruitment or emergence of new businesses with hiring needs, as well as ongoing relationship building and labor market support. A regular meeting cadence has been established with key stakeholders in economic development to build organizational connections and increase participation in cross-sector convenings that inform work in both the workforce and economic development space. There is standing regional representation from economic development partners on the Pathways Leadership Team that consists of at least one member from a rural community as well as a member from the Development Corporation of Abilene.

The Board supports child care providers, including those operating small businesses, by providing services and engaging in initiatives that help strengthen the skills of child care workers and offer resources that may otherwise be inaccessible to those employers. The Board employs five Early Childhood Specialists that include a Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS) Subject Matter Expert and an Infant and Toddler Specialist to :

- plan and manage quality activities, which includes mentoring and providing technical assistance for early learning programs to support obtaining, maintaining or increasing Texas Rising Star Provider (TRS) levels,
- provide mentoring services that will improve teacher-child interactions and improve the quality of early learning environments,
- maintain awareness of best practices in child care quality, and
- partner with other organizations to enhance and expand the availability of quality child care and early learning experiences.

More details about how the Board supports Early Childhood Education (ECE) and K–12 education activities are contained in the following sections from the Board’s FY25 Child Care Quality Plan.

Strategy	Description
Provide outdoor gross motor equipment for TRS providers.	The Board will provide one-time amount for programs to purchase gross motor outdoor equipment for toddlers in their care. This amount will be based on certification level and number of infant/toddler classrooms.

	<p>This activity is based on feedback provided by early learning programs and mentor staff. It is designed to help teacher child interaction while on outdoors.</p>
CDA Certification Courses, Certification Scholarships	<p>Board will pay tuition and fees up to \$500 for caregivers employed by a CCS provider to attend CDA Certification classes. CDA assessment scholarships of \$425 per student will be paid directly to the CDA Council to cover the cost of the CDA certification exam.</p> <p>This activity is designed to assist early learning programs in achieving and maintaining quality standards by providing training relative to director/teacher qualifications. The Board will outreach all CCS providers, with class enrollment capped at 25 per session. CDA Sessions will be offered twice throughout the fiscal year. (This strategy supports Strategy 2.2 of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan.)</p>
Professional Development specific to guidance and discipline and teacher child interaction	<p>Board will allocate funds to pay for training associated with needs identified by early learning program needs survey and TRS mentors. The two subjects with the most interest are guidance and discipline and teacher child interaction.</p> <p>This activity is intended to assist providers with specific training needs. All CCS providers will be outreached and encouraged to attend. (This strategy supports Strategy 2.2 of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan.)</p>
Provide one-time tiered monetary incentive for programs to purchase equipment.	<p>The Board will provide a one-time monetary incentive to programs to help obtain, maintain, or increase star level. These incentives will be based on Entry level and certification level. This incentive will be used to purchase materials needs based on areas identified by input from assessment results as well as feedback from the TRS mentor.</p> <p>This activity is designed to assist early learning programs in achieving and maintaining quality standards by providing them with materials and equipment needed to assist teachers in implementing developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom. Incentive amounts will be as follows: Entry level= \$8,000, 2 star= \$6,000, 3 star= \$4,000, 4 star= \$2,000.</p>
Consumer education and outreach materials.	<p>The Board shall promote to parents and the general public the importance of quality child care by providing banners and other related materials to assist in identifying quality child care providers, as well as promote the results of TRS assessments. This aligns with the Boards plan help families identify quality places to take their children so they can attend work and/or school.</p> <p>This activity is designed to assist early learning programs by promoting their TRS status both within their community and systemwide. Board goal is to provide banners and framed certificates to all providers who achieve TRS status, or raise their TRS star level in FY25.</p> <p>This activity is designed to assist early learning programs by promoting to parents and the general public the importance of quality child care and how to identify such.</p>
Wage supports, stipends for child care workers	<p>The Board shall provide to all child care workers, currently employed at a CCS provider, in our service area a stipend reflective of the level of the child care program they are currently employed at. After surveying providers and mentors, 83% of all participates felt that it would be beneficial to provide incentives to early childhood staff to help with retention, which will enhance the quality of care with continuity of staff.</p>

	<p>All providers will have to apply for these funds by completing a spreadsheet with required information and submit by specific date.</p> <p>The Board estimates that staff at approximately 90 provider locations will be impacted. (This strategy supports Strategy 1.2 of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan.)</p>
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Entrepreneurship and Microenterprise

The Board supports entrepreneurship and microenterprise through its partnership with the Abilene Chamber of Commerce. The Board has representation on the Abilene Chamber Board and Abilene Regional Growth Alliance. Through a newly formed partnership between the Chamber and the Central Texas Angel Network, the Board supports opportunities for entrepreneurs to connect with funders.

In addition, in partnership with the workforce subrecipient the Board offers career seekers entrepreneurial skills training through online workshops on the website, through Metrix learning, or by connecting the individual to the relevant resources.

The following are economic development initiatives that benefit smaller companies.

- The Board connects employers to community college partners to take advantage of Skills for Small Business.
- The Board has implemented the following ongoing strategies to assist small employers who are child care providers:
  - CDA certification classes supported by the Board, with scholarships, incentives, and other financial assistance offered to offset costs associated with attendance and to promote the utilization of the service
  - TRS provider staff will be given the opportunity to attend a variety of training opportunities designed to enhance their skills and abilities.
  - Assistance with the purchase of materials/equipment/resources for infant and toddler classroom environments.

Unemployment Insurance Linkages

The Board’s Director of Business Engagement also serves as the Rapid Response Coordinator. The Coordinator is a Board-level single point of contact who works closely with the workforce center subrecipient. The Coordinator establishes contact, by phone or in person, with employers and representatives of affected workers—within 48 hours of receiving a WARN notice, a public announcement of a layoff, or notification that a Trade petition has been filed—to assess employer and employee early intervention needs. Rapid Response services include immediate on-site contact with the affected employer and representatives of the affected workers—who may also be the workers themselves—and the local community. The on-site contact:

- includes an assessment of and plan to address:
  - the company’s plan and schedule for implementing the layoff or closure; and
  - the affected workers’ backgrounds and probable assistance needs;
- helps affected workers register in WorkInTexas.com, the state’s labor exchange and case management system;

- coordinates available resources to meet the long- and short-term assistance needs of the affected workers;
- provides information on and assistance to workers in filing for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits;
- informs employers of available UI programs, such as the Shared Work program, designed to avert or minimize the impact of layoffs;
- provides information on and assistance to employers and workers in filing for Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program benefits; and
- provides affected workers with information and access to the comprehensive employment and training activities available through the local Workforce Solutions Offices, including available workshops, classes, job fairs, and other services and resources to support reemployment.

The subrecipient provides Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) to claimants who meet the cutoff score, which now includes the more intensive one-stop services offered through the pilot program. During a series of appointments, claimants receive:

- orientation information,
- assistance with WIT registration,
- review of their job search activity record,
- labor market information customized to the claimant’s local area and individual skills and interests,
- individually tailored resume assistance,
- development of an individual reemployment plan,
- participation in a job search workshop,
- work readiness workshops and job fairs,
- referrals to WIT job orders, and
- screening for additional services to remove barriers to employment.

RESEA participants are also co-enrolled in WIOA Dislocated Worker Program services to receive additional assistance with job search and/or training sponsorship.

### **C. Coordination of Wagner-Peyser Services**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(12); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(11)**

**Boards must include a description of the strategies that are used to maximize coordination, improve service delivery, and avoid the duplication of Wagner-Peyser Act services and other services that are provided through the one-stop delivery system.**

#### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

**A description of the strategies that are used to:**

- Maximize coordination**
- Improve service delivery**
- Avoid duplication of Wagner-Peyser Act services and other services that are provided through the one-stop delivery system**

West Central has followed the Texas Model since it was implemented in 2003 for the delivery of Wagner-Peyser/Employment Services. Locally, Employment Service (ES) staff are integrated in the workforce center system and perform job tasks and functions similar to their locally-employed workforce counterparts. Most ES staff are focused primarily on direct service to employers, with secondary focus on serving job-seeker customers. While daily management of ES staff is performed by TWC, direction of ES staff activity is handled by workforce center management, which ensures equity of treatment and responsiveness, and also serves to avoid duplication of Wagner-Peyser services with other one-stop services. The Board is aware that changes to this structure are impending and, while details of those changes are currently unknown, the Board is prepared to implement adjustments as directed by TWC.

#### **D. Integrated, Technology-Enabled Intake and Case Management**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(21); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(20)**

**Boards must include a description of how one-stop centers are implementing and transitioning to WorkInTexas.com for the programs that are carried out under WIOA and by one-stop partners.**

**Minimum Plan Requirements:**

**A description of the following:**

- How one-stop centers are implementing and transitioning to WorkInTexas.com for programs carried out under WIOA and one-stop partners**

In response to the transition to WorkInTexas.com (WIT) for programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and by one-stop partners, our board has taken several key steps to ensure a smooth implementation process. In the fall of 2023, both board and contractor staff participated in Train the Trainer (TTT) sessions organized by GSI, the WIT vendor. The staff who attended these sessions subsequently trained the rest of the team, ensuring that the majority of our staff now have a foundational understanding of the platform.

To further support the transition to WITCMS, additional resources, templates, and workflows were developed during the transitional period in April, 2024. These tools were specifically designed to help staff become more comfortable with the system and ensure they had the necessary materials to efficiently navigate and use WIT. These resources provided clear guidelines and step-by-step instructions to facilitate a seamless adaptation to the platform.

As part of our ongoing commitment to capacity building and ensuring continued proficiency, we recognize that skill development is an ongoing process. While all staff members have received initial training, we are actively engaging in further development. To enhance staff capabilities and ensure seamless integration with WIT, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) will conduct on-site training sessions in the near future. These sessions will strengthen staff proficiency with WIT and ensure its effective use for WIOA programs and other partner services.

Additionally, we are focused on continuous improvements in workflows and ensuring that all one-stop partners are well-equipped to navigate and utilize WIT for case management, job placement, and other critical services. These ongoing capacity-building efforts are designed to optimize the use of WorkInTexas.com, foster participant engagement, and drive better outcomes for job seekers and employers alike.

### **E. Third Party Partnership in SNAP Employment and Training Programs**

**Reference: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training Third-Party Partnership Guide**

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission has directed TWC to expand the use of SNAP E&T Third Party Partnerships (TPP) throughout the state, with a goal of implementing TPP in all workforce areas by Federal Fiscal Year 2029. Boards must provide an assurance that they are planning for the expansion of TPP and must describe any planned or completed steps toward implementation.

#### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

- An assurance statement that the Board is planning for TPP expansion, including a description of any planned or completed steps.**

In anticipation of the implementation of this service strategy, the Board will begin researching possible partners that receive non-federal funding and that provide employment and training services to SNAP participants. The Board will also use information that may be available from TWC and boards participating in early implementation to inform strategies for West Central.

### **Part 5: Workforce Investment Activities**

#### **A. Rapid Response Activity Coordination**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(8); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(7)**

Each Board must include a description of how the Board will coordinate workforce investment activities that are carried out in the workforce area with the statewide rapid response activities described in WIOA §134(a)(2)(A).

#### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

- A description of how the Board will coordinate local workforce investment activities with statewide rapid response activities described in WIOA §134(a)(2)(A).**

The Board follows the TWC Rapid Response Guide in administering the Rapid Response Program, including the directive to contact employers within 48 hours of receiving notice of a layoff or closure. The Board utilizes the procedures in the guide as the local Board guidelines.

In addition to assisting affected workers during a layoff, the Board also provides services to impacted businesses to help them by identifying Layoff Aversion steps through the Shared Work Program to:

- Better manage human resource needs, reduce Unemployment Insurance costs, and Workers' Compensation Costs during the transition;
- Assist affected employees to return to work and to maintain their standard of living; and
- Demonstrate good corporate citizenship in the community.

The Board's service to businesses is largely accomplished through its Rapid Response Coordinator. The Coordinator is a Board-level single point of contact who works closely with the workforce center subrecipient. The Coordinator establishes contact, by phone or in person, with employers and representatives of affected workers—within 48 hours of receiving a WARN notice, a public announcement of a layoff, or notification that a Trade petition has been filed—to assess employer

and employee early intervention needs. Rapid Response services include immediate on-site contact with the affected employer and representatives of the affected workers—who may also be the workers themselves—and the local community. The on-site contact:

- includes an assessment of and plan to address:
  - the company’s plan and schedule for implementing the layoff or closure; and
  - the affected workers’ backgrounds and probable assistance needs;
- helps affected workers register in WorkInTexas.com, the state’s labor exchange and case management system;
- coordinates available resources to meet the long- and short-term assistance needs of the affected workers;
- provides information on and assistance to workers in filing for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits;
- informs employers of available UI programs, such as the Shared Work program, designed to avert or minimize the impact of layoffs;
- provides information on and assistance to employers and workers in filing for Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program benefits; and
- provides affected workers with information and access to the comprehensive employment and training activities available through the local Workforce Solutions Offices, including available workshops, classes, job fairs, and other services and resources to support reemployment.

## **B. Youth Activities and Services**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(9); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(8)**

**Boards must include a description and assessment of the type and availability of workforce investment activities for youth in the workforce area, including activities for youth with disabilities. This description must include an identification of successful models of such activities.**

### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

**A description and assessment of the type and availability of workforce investment activities for:**

- youth;**
- youth with disabilities; and**

**the identification of:**

- successful models of such activities.**

Services for youth are fully integrated into the workforce system. Staff is located in the Abilene office, but may provide services virtually, or travel and/or coordinate with staff in other offices to make services available in all counties. Outreach for youth is conducted through partnerships with other youth-serving entities such as school districts, juvenile justice, city recreation centers, the local ministerial alliance, and foster youth agencies. In particular, the contractor has worked with 2INgage, Pregnancy Resources, Noah Project, Goodwill Industries, BCFS, 2-1-1, and the At-Risk Coordinator for Abilene ISD. CECT works closely with BCFS to serve foster youth, and both entities make referrals to the other based on the needs of the youth and each organization’s services. In addition, staff conduct outreach activities on social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly known as Twitter).

The Board has been working with CECT to enhance services provided under the 14 elements, using customer journey maps. That process identified several opportunities for improvement as well as opportunities to strengthen connections between the subrecipient's formula-funded services and the Board's Career Education initiatives. Under the Board's guidance, strategies are being developed to address these issues.

Services to youth are coordinated with partner agencies and include:

1. *Tutoring, study skills training, instruction, and evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to completion of the requirements for a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (including a recognized certificate of attendance or similar document for individuals with disabilities) or for a recognized postsecondary credential.*
2. *Alternative secondary school services, or dropout recovery services, as appropriate.*
3. *Paid and unpaid work experiences that have academic and occupational education as a component of the work experience, which may include the following types of work experiences:*
  - Summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year;
  - Pre-apprenticeship programs—a program or set of strategies designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in a registered apprenticeship program and has a documented partnership with at least one, if not more, registered apprenticeship programs;
  - Internships and job shadowing;
  - OJT opportunities, as defined in WIOA §3(44).
4. *Occupational skills training, which includes priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials that align with in-demand industry sectors or occupations in the workforce area involved, if the Board determines that the programs meet the quality criteria described in WIOA §123.*

Occupational skills training is an organized program of study that provides specific vocational skills that lead to proficiency in performing actual tasks and technical functions required by certain occupational fields at entry, intermediate, or advanced levels.
5. *Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation, occupational cluster, or career pathway.*
6. *Leadership development opportunities, including community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors.*

Leadership development opportunities are opportunities that encourage responsibility, confidence, employability, self-determination, and other positive social behaviors, such as:

  - exposure to postsecondary educational possibilities;
  - community and service learning projects;
  - peer-centered activities, including peer mentoring and tutoring;
  - organizational and teamwork training, including team leadership training;
  - training in decision making, including determining priorities and problem solving;

- citizenship training, including life skills training such as parenting and work behavior training;
- civic engagement activities that promote the quality of life in a community; and
- other leadership activities that place youth in a leadership role such as serving on youth leadership committees, such as a Standing Youth Committee.

7. *Support services, as defined in WIOA §3(59), which enable an individual to participate in WIOA activities.* These services include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Linkages to community services;
- Assistance with transportation;
- Assistance with child care and dependent care;
- Assistance with housing;
- Needs-related payments;
- Assistance with educational testing;
- Reasonable accommodations for youth with disabilities;
- Referrals to health care;
- Assistance with uniforms or other appropriate work attire and work-related tools, including such items as eyeglasses and protective eye gear;
- Assistance with books, fees, school supplies, and other necessary items for students enrolled in postsecondary education classes; and
- Payments and fees for employment and training-related applications, tests, and certifications.

8. *Adult mentoring for a duration of at least 12 months that may occur both during and after program participation.*

Adult mentoring for youth must:

- be a formal relationship between a youth participant and an adult mentor that includes structured activities in which the mentor offers guidance, support, and encouragement to develop the competence and character of the youth;
- include a mentor who is an adult other than the assigned youth case manager; and
- at a minimum, match the youth with an individual mentor with whom the youth interacts on a face-to-face basis.

Group mentoring activities and mentoring through electronic means are allowable as part of mentoring activities. Mentoring may include workplace mentoring in which the local program matches a youth participant with an employer or employee of a company.

9. *Follow-up services for not fewer than 12 months after the completion of participation.*

Follow-up services are critical services provided after a youth's exit from the program to help ensure the youth is successful in employment and/or postsecondary education and training.

Follow-up services for youth may include:

- leadership development opportunities and support services;
- regular contact with a youth participant's employer, including assistance in addressing work-related problems;
- assistance in securing better-paying jobs, career pathway development, and further education or training;

- work-related peer support groups;
- adult mentoring;
- supportive services;
- financial literacy education;
- services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local workforce area, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services; and
- services necessary to ensure the success of youth participants in employment and/or postsecondary education.

10. *Comprehensive guidance and counseling, which may include drug and alcohol abuse counseling, as well as referrals to counseling, as appropriate to the needs of the individual youth.*

Comprehensive guidance and counseling is individualized counseling to participants that includes career and academic counseling, drug and alcohol abuse counseling, mental health counseling, and referral to partner programs, as appropriate. When referring participants to necessary counseling that cannot be provided by the Board, the Board must coordinate with the organization it refers to in order to ensure continuity of service.

11. *Financial literacy education.* The financial literacy education program element may include any of the following activities that:

- support the ability of participants to create budgets, initiate checking and savings accounts, and make informed financial decisions;
- support participants in learning how to effectively manage spending, credit, and debt, including student loans, consumer credit, and credit cards;
- teach participants about the significance of credit reports and credit scores, what their rights are regarding their credit and financial information, how to determine the accuracy of a credit report and how to correct inaccuracies, and how to improve or maintain good credit;
- support a participant's ability to understand, evaluate, and compare financial products, services, and opportunities and to make informed financial decisions;
- educate participants about identity theft, ways to protect themselves from identify theft, and how to resolve cases of identity theft and in other ways understand their rights and protections related to personal identity and financial data;
- support activities that address the particular financial literacy needs of non-English speaking participants, including providing support through the development and distribution of multilingual financial literacy and education materials; and
- support activities that address the particular financial literacy needs of youth with disabilities, including connecting them to benefits planning and work incentives counseling.

12. *Entrepreneurial skills training.* Entrepreneurial skills training provides the basics of starting and operating a small business. Such training must develop the skills associated with entrepreneurship, including, but not limited to, the ability to: take initiative; creatively seek out and identify business opportunities; develop budgets and forecast resource needs; understand various options for acquiring capital and the trade-offs associated with each

option; and communicate effectively and market oneself and one's ideas.

Approaches to teaching youth entrepreneurial skills include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Entrepreneurship education that provides an introduction to the values and basics of starting and running a business.
- Enterprise development, which provides support and services that incubate and help youth develop their own businesses.
- Experiential programs that provide youth with experience in the day-to-day operation of a business.

*13. Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the workforce area, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services.*

Career awareness activities include providing information on a variety of careers and occupations available, their skill requirements, working conditions and training prerequisites, and job opportunities across a wide range of industry sectors. Career counseling or guidance may include advice and support in making decisions about what career paths to take, providing information about résumé preparation, interview skills, potential opportunities for job shadowing, and the long-term benefits of postsecondary education and training (for example, increased earning power and career mobility).

*14. Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and training.*

Postsecondary preparation and transition activities and services prepare ISY and OSY for advancement to postsecondary education after attaining a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent. Postsecondary education includes many kinds of education and training programs, including technical college degree and certification programs, apprenticeships, two- and four-year public and private colleges and universities, trade schools, and more.

Transition planning may include, but is not limited to, programs designed to expand access to college and other postsecondary institutions, particularly for youth facing barriers to enrollment. Activities may focus on improving academic readiness, identifying postsecondary strengths and interests, and helping with applying for college and institutional admission or financial aid. Common activities include, but are not limited to:

- individualized career planning;
- career shadowing;
- postsecondary education options exploration, including technical schools, community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, and registered apprenticeship programs;
- postsecondary education admissions counseling;
- postsecondary education application assistance;
- postsecondary education financial aid assistance;
- fields of study guidance;
- postsecondary education campus visits;
- postsecondary education entrance exam (SAT/ACT) preparation; and
- study skills workshops and parent support workshops.

The Board allows use of ITAs for youth however, co-enrollment may occur between WIOA Adult and Youth programs to expand access to training and support services.

All services are made available to youth with disabilities, utilizing reasonable accommodations and modifications as requested and appropriate. Through assessment and the process of developing an individual service strategy (ISS), youth with disabilities may be provided with a referral to TWC-VR or other community entities for additional services/resources. A referral to other entities is only made when the youth requests it or agrees to explore resources that may assist in the accomplishment of ISS objectives—referrals to other services are never used to send a youth with disabilities to another service provider in lieu of services we can provide.

The Board’s Student Hireability Navigator (“Navigator”) works with TWC-VR, community partners, area school districts, and employers to increase awareness of the services available to students with disabilities. The Navigator promotes the five Pre-Employment Transition Services that are required by WIOA and provides information and resources so students with disabilities can develop effective transition plans with the special education team. The Navigator connects students with disabilities with community partners that can increase the opportunity for integration into inclusive and competitive employment opportunities and/or post-secondary success. Navigator presentations to educators, students, and parents at schools provide information that help students with disabilities access VR and other services that will empower them to pursue additional training, postsecondary education, or employment following graduation. Navigator connections with employers help them overcome challenges and perceived barriers to working with individuals with disabilities and open new opportunities.

The Board has progressively enhanced its services to youth/young adults through pursuit of grants that facilitate employment and post-secondary connections for secondary students, including education and career pathway development, career awareness activities, work-based learning initiatives, and college and career advising supports. At this time, the Board has not identified a model that could be directly incorporated into the Board’s service delivery structure and believes it would be more beneficial to first complete an evaluation of the youth service approach across the system and identify ways to integrate new ideas into a broader framework. The Board will continue to explore effective service delivery activities to enhance current programs and to develop an innovative model with a high degree of impact. The Board plans to address the development of a model in the upcoming RFP.

### **C. Coordination with Secondary and Postsecondary Education Programs**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(10); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(9)**

**Boards must include a description of how the Board will coordinate workforce investment activities with relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities to coordinate strategies, enhance services, and avoid the duplication of services.**

### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

#### **A description of how the Board will:**

- coordinate its workforce investment activities with relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities; and**
- coordinate strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication of services.**

Beginning as the “Career Pathway Program” in 2008, the Board’s Career Education focus has evolved into a comprehensive, responsive, and agile initiative in the region. Recognizing that career education is the foundation of a healthy, growing regional workforce, the Board’s continued engagement with secondary schools has expanded into areas of partnership with employers and postsecondary institutions. What initially began with two funding sources for these initiatives has grown into a multi-faceted educational engagement model that seeks to equip the emerging workforce with information about the labor market they are entering and supply them with resources to meet the workforce challenges they will encounter. The funding for this initiative braids public and private resources to support career education and career pathway development in our region.

Each programmatic area and initiative described below represents data collection and aggregation efforts, both internally collected and externally sourced and supplemented from secondary and postsecondary education partners. These data collection efforts support broader efforts to measure career pathway development in the region, and are integrated into the Board’s data repository tool that is currently under development.

#### Career Education Outreach

The Board continues to provide services to area secondary students in middle and high school classrooms. In the 2023-2024 school year, 535 workshops were provided in 28 partner school districts, totaling 7473 student engagements. These varied workshops utilize slide decks depicting regional demand occupations, labor market information, and activities centered around employability skills to equip students to think critically about career choices. In response to school requests, the CEO activities have expanded to include workshops on interview skills and resume writing. Organizing and conducting mock interviews has also been added to the repertoire.

Since 2021, Career Education Specialists have utilized virtual reality headsets that allow students to experience over two dozen career exploration simulations, most of which are related to demand occupations in this region. For students in 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, virtual reality opportunities take many forms. Smaller schools may host a virtual reality day to serve several grades, while larger schools permit attendance for students who attend a specific class, usually career exploration. Students typically complete three or more simulations per session. “Career Days” and “FAFSA Nights” are also occasions for virtual reality career exploration. In addition, simulations are utilized for undecided seniors. A senior student may experience several simulations and have guiding conversations with their Youth Success Advisor to help them determine what types of occupations appeal to the student, thus making progress towards postsecondary goals. During the 2023-2024 academic year, 1171 students participated in virtual reality career exploration at 25 ISD partner schools.

Beyond the ISDs, virtual reality headsets make appearances at ESC professional development events (Region 14, Region 15), day-camps for students with barriers to employment (Bloom Consulting), and non-profits that serve students (Youth Voice). Demand has also been growing through the leadership

of economic development corporations. As they are exposed to the simulations, they become advocates to bring the experience to their communities.

The benefits of an immersive learning experience have been appreciated for some time. Occupation simulations bring that immersion to the next level--a spherical experience with the student front and center as the main character. Virtual Reality Career Exploration creates community buzz and garners the kind of attention that makes subsequent conversations about occupations so much more impactful.

#### Youth Success Advising

The Board continues to provide individual career guidance to secondary students in rural school districts in the Youth Success Program through the grant from rootEd Alliance, Inc. Youth Success Advisors work directly with partnering districts and their seniors to ensure a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education and the workforce. Advisors meet one-on-one with students to develop plans based on their interests and skills.

Youth Success Advisors are embedded in the campuses of participating area high schools to provide students with postsecondary education and training support, early exposure to education pathways and careers, and strong connections to education and local industry. Students are also connected with sources of financial aid and opportunities for work-based learning experiences.

Eight Youth Success Advisors are currently serving 1100 seniors across 18 school districts, and one Retention Coach supports students making the transition into their first year of post-secondary education or training.

#### Work-Based Learning

Career Education services incorporate work-based learning opportunities that are coordinated by the Work-Based Learning Team and offer schools:

- Job shadowing, which permits students to see behind the scenes of a local business and learn the day-to-day responsibilities of a person in a high demand occupation.
- Work readiness seminars, which provide students with information about professional behaviors, their rights, and general information about how the workplace is different from the educational setting.
- Internship interviews, which offer students the authentic experience of representing themselves well in a competitive environment.
- Paid internship placements, which increase accessibility to those who might not otherwise participate due to financial constraints and their need for a part-time job while in high school.

During the '24 – '25 school year, Work-Based Learning Team partnerships with 18 employers and nine school districts accomplished:

- over 200 job shadowing activities,
- 64 work readiness seminars to 695 students, and
- 63 paid internships.

## Special Events

- **World of Work (WOW) Youth Expo** – The 2024 regional career exploration mega-event gathered approximately 3,000 students and teachers from 53 school districts, and one home-school consortium to explore regional college and career opportunities. Eighty-eight exhibitors represented their career or training opportunities and countless volunteers supported the day's efforts. The students were engaged, the educators were appreciative, and the employers were impressed with the quality of the questions from the students.
- **Teacher Summer Externship Program 2024** – arranged for 26 educators from 12 school districts to experience in-depth industry tours over 3 days with 12 industry partners. The educator experience culminated in the writing of lesson plans related to what they learned for middle through high school grades across a spectrum of subjects like robotics, animal science, welding, entrepreneurship, journalism, health science, and middle school science.
- **Industry Tours** are arranged for students as another component of work-based learning. The targeted industries include manufacturing, finance, and healthcare. Twelve manufacturers hosted close to 300 students. Regional manufacturers really shine in bringing awareness to the vast opportunities that exist for students. Nearly 120 students toured businesses and heard from professionals in the finance sector in order to gain insight into fields such as financial planning, global investment banking, private wealth management and more. Healthcare tours are supported by 6 employers, one of which is practically a regional entity in its own right. At the time of this writing, the registration for student attendance had been open for only one day and the sign-ups are at 70% of the full capacity of 125 students for these healthcare industry tours.

The Board's Student Hireability Navigator ("Navigator") works with TWC-VR, community partners, area school districts, and employers to increase awareness of the services available to students with disabilities. The Navigator promotes the five Pre-Employment Transition Services that are required by WIOA and provides information and resources so students with disabilities can develop effective transition plans with the special education team. The Navigator connects students with disabilities with community partners that can increase the opportunity for integration into inclusive and competitive employment opportunities and/or post-secondary success. Navigator presentations to educators, students, and parents at schools provide information that help students with disabilities access VR and other services that will empower them to pursue additional training, postsecondary education, or employment following graduation. Navigator connections with employers help them overcome challenges and perceived barriers to working with individuals with disabilities and open new opportunities.

The Board's Career Education initiative targets a broader population of youth and young adults than those being served through WIOA Title 1 formula-funded services. The Board is currently engaging in customer journey mapping to identify strengths and opportunities to optimize service delivery throughout the system. This identified an opportunity to strengthen existing connections between these inter-system services. Under the Board's guidance, strategies are being developed to address these issues.

## **D. Child Care and Early Learning**

**References: 40 TAC §809.12**

**Boards must include a description of how the Board is strategically managing child care and early learning within the workforce system to enhance school readiness and strengthen and support the child care industry.**

**Efforts include:**

- **coordinating with employers, economic development programs, and other industry leaders to increase the awareness and importance of early learning as a workforce and economic development tool;**
- **supporting improved school readiness through higher-quality child care, including through the Texas Rising Star program and partnership opportunities; and**
- **supporting the needs of the child care industry, such as by providing assistance with business development or shared services, or by providing opportunities to support professional growth and career pathways for early education.**

### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

**A description of how the Board will:**

- incorporate and coordinate the design and management of the delivery of child care services with the delivery of other workforce employment, job training, and educational services;**
- maximize the delivery and availability of safe and stable child care services that assist families seeking to become independent from, or who are at risk of becoming dependent on, public assistance while parents are either working or attending a job training or educational program;**
- use strategies for contracted slot agreements, including any local priorities and how the contracted slot agreements help increase access to high-quality care for targeted communities;**
- develop and implement strategic quality improvement goals to enhance school readiness; and**
- strengthen and support the child care industry**

(Note: Many of strategies and initiatives described in this section support the objectives in the TWC Strategic Plan under Goal 2.) The Board contracts with a subrecipient entity, SERCO, to operate the child care services program and a separate entity to operate workforce services. SERCO staff are housed in the Abilene Workforce Center, which serves as the hub for the region. One of the Board's strategic priorities is to "Provide exceptional customer service for individuals and families to access a system of services leading to quality career opportunities." One of the strategies for achieving this priority is to fully integrate local service delivery whereby one subrecipient will operate all programs and services in a customer-centered structure. Folding all contracted services and programs under one subrecipient will streamline service delivery, ensure cost efficiencies, and eliminate siloed contract management to provide a holistic approach to system administration. The Board took steps in 2024 to move toward a single system operator during its subrecipient procurement process. Since both operator contracts were expiring in the same year, the Board issued a request for proposals that included language advocating for a single system entity to manage all programs and services. While this attempt was unsuccessful, the Board is continuing to advance the integration of services and

development of a single provider structure through enhanced collaboration and accountability of both current subrecipients. The Board intends to re-procure services this coming year, with a renewed emphasis on a single provider that will operate all programs and services.

Awareness of child care and the importance of early learning is promoted through the use of a brochure the Board developed that advocates Child Care Services as a solution for parents, employers and child care providers. The brochure is provided to parents and providers by SERCO staff. It is also provided to employers by staff who work with them. The importance of child care is frequently discussed at Board meetings, and is the focus of the Board’s Early Childhood Advisory Council (“Council”). The purpose of the Council is to provide an opportunity for input on strategies to improve, sustain and support the quality of care and the child care workforce from a wide array of entities and individuals engaged and interested in early childhood. (The work of the Council supports the following strategies of the TWC Child Care of the Workforce Strategic Plan: 3.1 and 3.2.) The Council is comprised of representatives from the following stakeholder sectors:

- Licensed child care centers participating in TWC’s Child Care Services (CCS) program
- Licensed or registered child care homes participating in CCS
- Current or former CCS families
- Board CCS contractor
- Board member
- Board staff
- Child care stakeholders that represent the interests of the children and/or the families served

The Board shares information resources with the Council as well as higher education and economic development partners related to child care, including reports, events, and grant opportunities. Examples of this include the following.

- multiple presentations to school districts, economic development corporations, and child care providers about the Child Care Expansion grants
- specialized training for Workforce Business Service staff by multiple entities related to child care to share information regarding the Child Care Industry Support Grant
- some of the many resources that have been shared with the Council include: Coalition for Quality Child Care Report, Development Corporation of Abilene (DCoA) Child Care Needs Assessment Report, DCoA Child Care Study Executive Summary, and an update to TWC's 2023-2025 Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan

The Board has always supported school readiness through higher-quality care by means of various services and initiatives. The Board’s plans for supporting quality care and school readiness for the coming year are outlined in its FY25 Child Care Quality Plan.

Strategy	Description
Personnel cost associated with Infant Toddler Specialist (IT Specialist)	<p>The Board shall maintain .75 FTE Infant Toddler Specialist. This person will work closely with TRS mentor staff, infant/toddler teachers and directors.</p> <p>This activity is designed to assist staff and teachers that work with infants and toddlers to strengthen their teaching practices and to achieve and maintain quality standards by providing mentoring and technical assistance.</p>

<p>CDA Certification Courses, Certification Scholarships</p>	<p>Board will pay tuition and fees up to \$500 for caregivers employed by a CCS provider to attend CDA Certification classes. CDA assessment scholarships of \$425 per student will be paid directly to the CDA Council to cover the cost of the CDA certification exam.</p> <p>This activity is designed to assist early learning programs in achieving and maintaining quality standards by providing training relative to director/teacher qualifications. The Board will outreach all CCS providers, with class enrollment capped at 25 per session. CDA Sessions will be offered twice throughout the fiscal year. (This strategy supports Strategy 2.2 of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan.)</p>
<p>Professional Development specific to guidance and discipline and teacher child interaction</p>	<p>Board will allocate funds to pay for training associated with needs identified by early learning program needs survey and TRS mentors. The two subjects with the most interest are guidance and discipline and teacher child interaction.</p> <p>This activity is intended to assist providers with specific training needs. All CCS providers will be outreached and encouraged to attend. (This strategy supports Strategy 2.2 of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan.)</p>
<p>Personnel costs associated with TRS mentor staff</p>	<p>Goal is to maintain 4 full time mentor staff throughout FY25 in order to provide mentoring services and technical assistance to ELP's to support obtaining, maintaining or increasing TRS star levels.</p> <p>This activity is designed to assist early learning programs in achieving and maintaining quality standards by providing mentoring services that will improve teacher-child interactions and improve the quality of early learning environments. TRS mentors will provide mentoring services to all directors and teachers of early learning programs and child care centers that are currently certified and CCS providers who are at TRS Entry Level and are working on achieving certification. (This strategy supports Strategy 1.2 of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan.)</p>
<p>Personnel cost associated with Quality activities and managing quality staff</p>	<p>The Board will maintain .75 that is assigned to manage all quality activities to include mentor staff throughout FY25. This position will support ELP's, mentors, and manage all quality activities. Manager will support 5 mentors and 92 CCS providers. (This strategy supports Strategy 1.2 of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan.)</p>
<p>Provide one-time tiered monetary incentive for programs to purchase equipment.</p>	<p>The Board will provide a one-time monetary incentive to programs to help obtain, maintain, or increase star level. These incentives will be based on Entry level and certification level. This incentive will be used to purchase materials needs based on areas identified by input from assessment results as well as feedback from the TRS mentor.</p> <p>This activity is designed to assist early learning programs in achieving and maintaining quality standards by providing them with materials and equipment needed to assist teachers in implementing developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom. Incentive amounts will be as follows: Entry level= \$8,000, 2 star= \$6,000, 3 star= \$4,000, 4 star= \$2,000.</p>
<p>Personnel cost associated with TECPDS SME</p>	<p>The Board shall maintain .50 TECPDS SME throughout FY25, to provide specific and specialized help with all things related to TECPDS, and to collect TECPDS data to assist in identifying training needs (with input from mentor</p>

	staff, Early Childhood Advisory Council, etc.). This position will help ELP directors create and maintain a Texas Workforce registry account for their operation. This position will also maintain the LWDB organizational dashboard as well as validate all information put in the TECPDS system. (This strategy supports the following strategies of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan: 1.1, 3.1, and 3.2.)
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The Board provided support to the child care industry in FY24 through the following tools/resources:

- materials presented to 3 new programs in the amount of \$40,000 to help enhance the learning environment for the children;
- CDA scholarships to attend Cisco College awarded to 36 students and additional paid for their CDA test for certification;
- Caregiver 2.0 training provided for 86 early childhood professionals to help them understand how to take care of themselves so that they can take care of the children in their care; and
- specific infant and toddler training provided to 50 early childhood staff.

The Board hosted a regional focus group meeting for feedback on the second four-year TRS plan. In addition, West Central was one of five boards to host a public stakeholder meeting in collaboration with TWC to discuss and gather feedback regarding the 2025-2027 Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) State plan. Individuals attending represented West Central as well as other board areas.

The Board plans to continue its support of the child care industry through the following initiatives in its FY25 Child Care Quality Plan.

Strategy	Description
Provide outdoor gross motor equipment for TRS providers.	<p>The Board will provide one-time amount for programs to purchase gross motor outdoor equipment for toddlers in their care. This amount will be based on certification level and number of infant/toddler classrooms.</p> <p>This activity is based on feedback provided by early learning programs and mentor staff. It is designed to help teacher child interaction while on outdoors.</p>
Consumer education and outreach materials.	<p>The Board shall promote to parents and the general public the importance of quality child care by providing banners and other related materials to assist in identifying quality child care providers, as well as promote the results of TRS assessments. This aligns with the Boards plan help families identify quality places to take their children so they can attend work and/or school.</p> <p>This activity is designed to assist early learning programs by promoting their TRS status both within their community and systemwide. Board goal is to provide banners and framed certificates to all providers who achieve TRS status, or raise their TRS star level in FY25.</p> <p>This activity is designed to assist early learning programs by promoting to parents and the general public the importance of quality child care and how to identify such.</p>
Wage supports, stipends for child care workers	<p>The Board shall provide to all child care workers, currently employed at a CCS provider, in our service area a stipend reflective of the level of the child care program they are currently employed at. After surveying providers and mentors, 83% of all participates felt that it would be beneficial to provide incentives to early childhood staff to help with retention, which will enhance</p>

	<p>the quality of care with continuity of staff.</p> <p>All providers will have to apply for these funds by completing a spreadsheet with required information and submit by specific date.</p> <p>The Board estimates that staff at approximately 90 provider locations will be impacted. (This strategy supports Strategy 1.2 of the TWC Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan.)</p>
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After reviewing the requirements for contracted slots, the Board voted to not implement this option. It is therefore the Board’s policy to not contract with providers for reserved slots.

**E. Transportation and Other Support Services**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(11); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(10)**

**Each Board must include a description of how the Board will provide transportation, including public transportation, and other appropriate support services in the workforce area in coordination with WIOA Title I workforce investment activities.**

**Minimum Plan Requirements:**

**A description of how the Board will provide:**

- transportation, including public transportation; and
- other support services

The Board contracts with CECT to administer workforce programs, including WIOA Title I workforce investment activities that provide support services to their customers. These programs are governed by federal and state guidance. In addition, the Board maintains local policies that provide minimum standards and promote safeguards against the misuse of funds. The Board’s policy contains provisions that set documentation requirements and other parameters in the provision of support services for all workforce programs. It also sets parameters for the provision of specific types of support services, including:

- Transportation
  - Gas Money
  - Public Transit
  - Vehicular (including repairs)
- Basic Needs Assistance
- Work-Related Expense Assistance
- Other types of assistance as applicable to the various funding streams

West Central has a website, [www.wctxrises.com](http://www.wctxrises.com) that allows individuals to book trips on-line that may require the use of multiple providers without having to contact multiple providers. This was a project of the RCTP (Regionally Coordinated Transportation Plan) Committee, and Board staff played an instrumental role in the development of this resource. Board staff continue to be active in the RCTP to provide information, connect with transportation providers and stay aware of new developments or changes that impact the region's transportation infrastructure.

## **F. Coordination of Adult Education and Literacy**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(13); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(12); WD 18-23, Change 2**

**Boards must include a description of how the Board will coordinate WIOA Title I workforce investment activities with AEL activities under WIOA Title II. Boards must also include the process used to review the local applications submitted under Title II, as consistent with WIOA §§107(d)(11)(A) and (B)(i) and WIOA §232.**

### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

**A description of:**

- how the Board will coordinate WIOA Title I workforce investment activities with AEL activities under WIOA Title II, including the process used to review local applications submitted under WIOA Title II; and**
- the local application review process.**

The Board has a well-established partnership with Abilene Adult Education (AAE; the AEL provider for the entire West Central area); both entities have a history of collaborating to serve mutual customers. The Board's workforce subrecipient and AAE coordinate activities to seamlessly connect AEL customers with workforce development services, ensuring that customers receive a comprehensive package of support. Workforce staff host a workforce orientation for AEL students at least twice a month which allows workforce staff the opportunity to engage with AEL leadership simultaneously. These meetings include presenting a summary of workforce services to AEL students. Additional communication or meetings for discussion happen in between orientations as needed between both agencies. In addition, a well-established customer referral process exists between workforce and AEL to ensure customers have effective and timely access to the full array of services, regardless of where they enter the system. This streamlined referral process ensures individuals seeking assistance can be quickly connected with the appropriate workforce or adult education services. The goal is to eliminate barriers to service access and create a smoother pathway for customers to move between services.

AEL services in Sweetwater recently relocated from the high school to the campus of TSTC in a building near the Workforce office. We anticipate this will further enhance coordination and provide more seamless access to a continuum of education and training services.

With regard to applications for AEL services, per the requirements in WD Letter 18-23, Chg. 2, the Board used the following process for the previous application review, and will use the same process for the next application review, pending any required changes from TWC.

- Upon notification from TWC, the Board Executive Director identified three Board staff members to comprise the review committee and submitted the names and contact information for each to [rfragants@twc.texas.gov](mailto:rfragants@twc.texas.gov).
- The committee members signed the Nondisclosure and Conflict of Interest statement via DocuSign.
- The committee members reviewed the grant application and recorded comments and recommendations on a single Board Review and Comment Form.
- The completed form was submitted to TWC via email to [rfragants@twc.texas.gov](mailto:rfragants@twc.texas.gov) within the required timeframe.

## **Part 6: Adult and Dislocated Workers**

### **A. Adult and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(7); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(6)**

**Boards must include a description and assessment of the type and availability of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities in the workforce area.**

#### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

- A description and assessment of the type and availability of adult, dislocated worker employment and training activities**
- A list of assessment instruments (tools) used for adults and dislocated workers**

WIOA established two levels of services for adults and dislocated workers: career services and training services. Career and training services are available in each of the office locations. The types of career services established in the Notice of Proposed Rule-Making are basic, individualized, and follow-up.

#### Basic Career Services

These services are primarily self-help and informational in nature, but may require minimal staff assistance. Basic career services are made available to all job seekers. Customers accessing basic career services at a workforce center will generally receive them in the resource room, where a variety of equipment, information, and services exist to help them find or retain employment. These services include:

- Determination of whether the individual is eligible to receive assistance from the adult, dislocated worker, or youth programs
- Outreach, intake (such as RRES), and orientation to workforce services
- Initial assessment of skill levels (may include the use of fee-based tests)
- Labor exchange services such as:
  - Registration in WorkInTexas (WIT)—new, update, or viewing job postings (alone or with staff assistance)
  - Access to online job search resources
  - Information on in-demand occupations and nontraditional employment
- Labor market information including:
  - Job vacancy listings in labor market areas;
  - Information on job skills necessary to obtain the vacant jobs listed; and
  - Information relating to local occupations in demand and the earnings, skills requirements, and opportunities for advancement in those jobs
- Information on the availability of services such as:
  - Workforce programs
  - Child care
  - Child support
  - Health assistance available through Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program
  - Assistance through the earned income tax credit
  - Assistance from programs administered by HHSC such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Provision of information and assistance regarding filing claims for unemployment compensation
- Information on educational and financial aid resources

- Performance information on
  - Eligible training providers
  - Board and workforce system performance

New customers who express interest in needing a job will be directed to resource room staff who will explain center services, recommend and assist the individual with registering in WIT, and offer information about assessments and other resources (typing tests, other websites, etc.) that may help the individual with their job search.

Returning customers who are familiar with center services and merely want to conduct individual job search will be directed to the resource room. Resource room staff will make assistance available to those individuals, but will allow them to conduct individual job search activities, according to the customer's preference. If staff are familiar with customers, or notice them having difficulty with WIT or with unsuccessful job search in general, staff will offer assistance and ask some screening questions that may indicate a need for the individual to explore more individualized services. Customers who then indicate an interest in individualized services will be referred accordingly.

Individuals may access these services either at the center or from an off-site location (home, library, etc.) using a computer with internet access. At the center, customers may work alone or with staff (according to their preference) to access the basic services they need to obtain or retain self-sufficient employment. There is no limit on the length of time customers may access basic services.

#### Individualized Career Services

Individualized career services require staff assistance and go beyond self-service or informational activities. These services must be made available if determined to be appropriate in order for an individual to obtain or retain employment. Customers may receive personal on-going job search assistance from staff through WIOA-funded individualized career services. Those services include:

- Comprehensive and specialized assessment,
- Career planning/development of a Career Development Plan,
- Individual and group counseling,
- Short-term work readiness services,
- Short-term educational activities,
- Internships and work experience that are linked to careers,
- Financial literacy services,
- Transitional jobs,
- Adult education and literacy activities, including activities of English language acquisition and integrated education and training programs, in combination with training, and
- Out-of-area job search and relocation assistance.

Short-term work readiness activities (also called prevocational services) help prepare customers for unsubsidized employment. These services may be provided in classrooms or computer labs of Workforce Solutions. They may also be accomplished in a setting outside of the Center. This type of training may be provided in conjunction with other programs, activities and providers in order to accomplish the best mix of services for the customer.

The process of helping customers find, apply for, and obtain self-sufficient employment begins with an assessment of the individual's education, work history, and skills. This can be accomplished via the interview process, but may also include utilization of formal assessment tools (listed further down in this section). Based on the assessment, staff will ensure the customer's WorkInTexas.com (WIT) registration contains complete and optimal information to facilitate quality job matches and offer assistance with resume development, placement referrals, and job development services. Matching customers with appropriate jobs also requires assessing barriers and other individual circumstances that may limit or otherwise impact an individual's ability to perform employment functions. Staff works to mitigate employment barriers by providing support services and referrals to appropriate partner agencies.

The interview process should also reveal the customer's expectations and should guide the completion of a Career Development Plan. Customers who state a need for, or whose assessment indicates a need for remediation services may receive assistance through enrollment in basic educational skills classes or English as a second language. In addition, development of employment soft skills may be accomplished through paid/unpaid work experience activities, soft skills workshops, or short-term prevocational services.

There is no limit on the length of time customers may access individualized career services. However, customers enrolled in short-term pre-vocational services (as either educational or work readiness activities, codes 82 and 84 respectively) are limited to six months cumulative duration in any 12-month period. The maximum amount of funds that may be spent on short-term work readiness activities is \$3000 in any 12-month period.

Justification for the following activities must include an analysis of the type of work the customer is able to obtain (including knowledge, skills, education, personal barriers, etc.) compared with the requirements of the local labor market.

- Short-Term Work Readiness Activities
- Subsidized Work Experience
- Internships

#### Follow-Up Services

The goal of follow-up services is to ensure job retention, wage gains, and career progress for customers who have obtained unsubsidized employment. Staff may provide assistance to customers who experience difficulty in retaining employment, provide information on new or additional services at Workforce Solutions, and determine the potential need for post-participation support services. Follow-up services could include but are not limited to: additional career planning and counseling; contact with the customer's employer, including assistance with work-related problems that may arise; peer support groups; information about additional educational opportunities; and referral to supportive services. Program-funded support services may not be provided once the customer has exited or is in follow-up services only.

Staff will maintain meaningful communication on a monthly basis with the customer during the follow-up period, and not simply make attempts to contact them. If prior to the end of the established follow-up period the customer becomes unresponsive, unwilling to be contacted, or unable to be located, staff will terminate the follow-up service activities and close out the individual's case.

Training Services

Training services are available for individuals who, after interview, evaluation, assessment, and case management are determined to be unlikely or unable to obtain or retain employment that leads to self-sufficiency or higher wages from previous employment through career services alone.

Customers may receive sponsorship for training opportunities, as locally available. Training services include:

- occupational skills training, including training for nontraditional employment;
- on-the-job training (OJT);
- registered apprenticeship<sup>1</sup>; and
- entrepreneurial training.

Formula funds are currently not being allocated for the following services at this time. However, the Board intends to explore and possibly develop policy around additional training service options for future provision.

- workplace training and cooperative education programs,
- private sector training programs,
- skills upgrading and retraining,
- customized training,
- incumbent worker training,
- job readiness training provided in combination with other training, and
- adult education and literacy activities, including activities of English language acquisition and integrated education and training programs, in combination with training.

Customers expressing an interest in training after participating in other program activities, or who request training immediately upon enrollment, may be considered for sponsorship. Receipt of training services is contingent upon the customer meeting eligibility and gateway requirements, as well as the availability of funds. When the number of training requests exceeds the availability of adult program funds, staff must follow the Board’s Priority of Service policy.

Assessments

The Board’s workforce service provider, CECT, provides an objective assessment of academic levels, skill levels, and service needs of each participant, which includes a review of basic skills, occupational skills, prior work experience, employability, interests, aptitudes, supportive service needs, and developmental needs. Assessments also consider an individual’s strengths rather than just focusing on areas that need improvement. The table below provides a list of the assessment tools used to achieve these objectives.

Assessment Tool Name	Assessment Tool Purpose
eSkill	Used to evaluate skill levels of customers who are interested in changing career paths. Provides individuals with insight into different career paths. Also used as a supplemental literacy test, and contains a typing test component.

TABE	Literacy assessment. When the need arises to measure EFL gains after program enrollment under the measurable skill gains indicator, this NRS-approved assessment is used for both the EFL pre- and post-test to determine an individual's educational functioning level.
CASAS	Literacy assessment. When the need arises to measure EFL gains after program enrollment under the measurable skill gains indicator, this NRS-approved assessment is used for both the EFL pre- and post-test to determine an individual's educational functioning level.
O*NET My Next Move	Enables users to explore occupations, job outlook information, salaries, and other related education and training programs. Includes an online career assessment called the "Interest Profiler" with 60 questions targeted to help individuals learn what they like to do. Used to help customers explore occupational options and to correlate occupational interest for customers requesting training services.

A thorough objective assessment includes a review of:

- Education level and goals
- Work history and job skills
- Employment goals
- WIT registration and job search history
- Transportation and backup
- Childcare needs and backup
- Living situation
- Life circumstances
- Background-criminal history
- Support system
- Health concerns for self and family
- Military background
- Results of tests, skills assessments and interest inventories
- Any other concerns

In addition to formal tools, informal methods are used to gather the data necessary to complete the assessment. Informal assessment data is comprised of information gathered from Intake Common, Assessment Optional Questions, information in WorkInTexas, and interview questions. The list below of interview questions may be asked when conducting the assessment (this list is not all-inclusive).

### **Assessment Questions**

#### **Employment Goals**

- What kind of work would you like to do long term?
- What kind of work would you like to do right now?
- How fast do you see yourself going back to work?

#### **Job Search**

- How long have you been looking for work?
- Where have you applied?

- Have you had any interviews?
- What challenges have you faced in your current job search?
- About how many hours per day do you spend on job search? How many days per week?
- How do you think Workforce Solutions can help you with your job search?

### Employment

- Describe your last three paid jobs.
- What was your job title?
- What was the length of time on the job?
- Was it full time or part time?
- Describe what you did?
- Did you receive any raises or promotions?
- Reasons for leaving?
- What would this employer say about you if I asked for a reference?
- What jobs have you done from time to time to make extra money?
- What work have you done without pay to help in your church, kids' school or community?
- What jobs have you done without pay to help family, friends or others?
- What did you like most about working?
- What did you not like about working?

### Education

- What is the highest grade you've completed?
- Do you have a high school diploma?
- Do you have a GED?
- What other schooling or training have you had since high school?
  - o Community College
  - o Job Corps
  - o Four-year college
  - o Trade school
  - o Military
  - o Other
- Are you currently in school or training? If so, where?
- Do you have any certificates of training or occupational license? (For example C.N.A., cosmetologist, contractor) If so, what kind?
- When did you receive the certificate or license?
- What educational goals do you have?

### Background

- Do you have any background that impact your ability to find or keep work?
- Do you have court ordered requirements?
  - o Restrictions to work schedule?
  - o Restrictions to where and when you may work?
  - o Community service hours?
  - o Limits to how you are able to look for work?

### Family Situation

- How many people are living in your household? How many are children?
- Which of the following describes your household?
  - o Two Parent
  - o Single Parent
  - o Teen Parent
- Are you responsible for caring for a disabled person on a daily basis?
- Who in your household would encourage your working?
- Who in your household would discourage your working?
- Other than people in your household, what other people would encourage your working?
- What help do you think you could get from family and friends?

### Military

- Did you serve in the military?
- Do you have access to your DD214?
- Under what circumstances did you separate?

### Transportation

- How do you currently get around?
  - o Do you currently have steady, reliable transportation?
  - o Do you have a working vehicle?
- Are you familiar with the City Link bus system?
  - o Do you live on/ near a bus route?

## **B. Service Priority**

**References: 20 CFR §679.560(b)(21)**

**Boards must include the Board policy to ensure that priority for adult individualized career services and training services will be given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient, as consistent with WIOA §134(c)(3)(E) and 20CFR §680.600, along with veterans and foster youth, according to the priority order outlined in the WIOA Guidelines for Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth. Boards must also include a list of any Board-established priority groups, if any.**

### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

**A description of the Board policy to ensure priority for adult individualized career services and training services will be given to the following:**

- Recipients of public assistance**
- Other low-income individuals**
- Individuals who are basic skills deficient**
- Veterans**
- Foster youth**
- List of Board priority groups (if any)**

The following is the Board’s policy for ensuring that priority for adult individualized career and training services will be given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient, consistent with WIOA §134(c)(3)(E) and §680.600 of the Final Regulations.

In order for customers to receive individualized career services (or training services), they must meet either Dislocated Worker (DW) eligibility, or basic eligibility and criteria for one of the Adult priority groups. DW eligibility requirements are located in the TWC WIOA Guidelines. Adult basic eligibility requirements are:

- Age 18 or older,
- Authorization to work in the U.S. as a citizen or noncitizen, and
- Selective service registration requirements (males only).

The Adult priority groups include:

- The three following federally-defined groups:
  - Public assistance recipients,
  - Other low-income adults,
  - Individuals who are basic skills deficient, and
- The two following Board-defined local groups:
  - Individuals with a disability,
  - Individuals whose family income is above the WIOA Income Guidelines but below the Board’s Self-Sufficiency Wage.

For individualized career or training services, staff will first determine if the customer is in one of the WIOA federal priority groups. Customers will initially be prioritized according to whether they meet criteria for one of the 3 WIOA federal Adult priority groups—low income, public assistance, or basic skills deficient. Since the Board’s two additional priority groups, individual with a disability, and individual with non-self-sufficient income are not WIOA-mandated priorities, those individuals would be subsequent to anyone in the first 3 priority groups. Following this determination, staff will make services available in this order:

1. Eligible veterans (first) and eligible foster youth (second) who are also in the low income, public assistance, or basic skills deficient priority groups;
2. Other individuals who are low income, receiving public assistance, or basic skills deficient;
3. Eligible veterans (first) and eligible foster youth (second) who have a disability;
4. Other individuals who have a disability,
5. Eligible veterans (first) and eligible foster youth (second) whose household income is above the WIOA Income Limit but below the Board’s Self-Sufficiency Wage, and
6. Other individuals whose household income is above the WIOA Income Limit but below the Board’s Self-Sufficiency Wage.

This policy complies with service priority requirements in the WIOA Combined State Plan.

## **Part 7: Fiscal Agent, Grants, and Contracts**

### **A. Fiscal Agent**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(15); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(14)**

**Boards must identify the entity responsible for the disbursement of grant funds described in WIOA §107(d)(12)(B)(i)(III), as determined by the CEOs or the governor under WIOA §107(d)(12)(B)(i).**

#### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

- The entity responsible for disbursement of grant funds**

The Board contracts with Region XIV Education Service Center, located at 1850 Hwy 351, in Abilene to provide fiscal agent services, which includes disbursement of grant funds and payroll and benefit administration for Board staff.

### **B. Subgrants and Contracts**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(16); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(15)**

**Boards must include a description of the competitive process that will be used to award the subgrants and contracts for WIOA Title I activities.**

#### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

- A description of the competitive process used to award subgrants and contracts**

The Board contracts with procured service providers for the provision of workforce and child care services using the following procurement process. The process is not initiated until approval is granted by full vote of the Board.

- Develop an RFP based on the requirements of the FMGC.
- The RFP is posted on the Board's website and notices are automatically sent to all interested vendors through the website.
- Request notice of intent letters, offer the opportunity to ask questions and provide answers to potential bidders. Typical timeline allows 8 to 10 weeks for response.
- Responses are reviewed by external evaluators.
- Recommendations are developed and may be presented to the Executive Committee for review, prior to final decision made by Board vote.

RFP documents are designed to ensure fair competition for a variety of management models, including managing director, private consultants and corporations and allow for contracting with an entity for up to five years, based on the Board's discretion of whether to renew the contract. Typically, the Board reconsiders the contract after the first year with a new provider, and then extends the contract for an additional one to two years based on performance for up to two additional terms, not to exceed a total of five years. The Board's subrecipients may directly hire staff or may subcontract with a professional employment entity to hire staff to provide services. The Board's competitive process complies with the procurement requirements in the TWC FMGC and in the Agency-Board Agreement.

**Part 8: Performance**

**A. Board Performance Targets**

References: WIOA §108(b)(17); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(16)

Boards must include a description of the local levels of performance that were negotiated with TWC and the CEOs, consistent with WIOA §116(c), that will be used to measure the performance of the workforce area and for measuring the performance of the local fiscal agent (where appropriate), eligible providers under WIOA Title I subtitle B, and the one-stop delivery system in the workforce area.

**Minimum Plan Requirements:**

A description of local levels of performance to be used to measure performance of:

- the workforce area; and
- local fiscal agent (when appropriate)

The following WIOA performance targets have been contracted to the Board for BCY25. These are subsequently contracted to the workforce subrecipient.

Measure	Target
Employed Q2 Post Exit - Adult	82.8%
Employed Q4 Post Exit – Adult	76.7%
Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit – Adult	\$6890
Credential Rate – Adult	77.9%
Measurable Skills Gains – Adult	69.7%
Employed Q2 Post Exit – DW	82.4%
Employed Q4 Post Exit – DW	85%
Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit – DW	\$9500
Credential Rate – DW	85%
Measurable Skills Gains – DW	75%
Employed/Enrolled Q2 Post Exit - Youth	78.2%
Employed/Enrolled Q4 Post Exit - Youth	75.4%
Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit – Youth	\$4630
Credential Rate – Youth	72.1%
Measurable Skills Gains – Youth	64.3%

Per WD Letter 05-19, Change 2, “On August 13, 2024, the Commission approved minimum performance standards for determining the initial and continued eligibility of training programs.” Additionally, “Boards may set additional criteria for performance and may require higher levels of performance than those required by TWC with respect to local training providers becoming or remaining eligible to offer WIOA-funded training services through Individual Training Accounts in their local workforce development areas (LWDAs). These additional and/or higher standards do not affect eligibility for the statewide ETPL.” The Board has therefore elected to not set higher or additional criteria for performance.

## **Part 9: Training and Services**

### **A. Individual Training Accounts**

**References: WIOA §108(b)(19); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(18)**

**Boards must include a description of how the training services outlined in WIOA §134 will be provided through the use of individual training accounts (ITAs), including if the Board will use contracts for training services, how the use of such contracts will be coordinated with the use of ITAs under that chapter, and how the Board will ensure informed customer choice in the selection of training programs, regardless of how the training services are provided.**

#### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

**A description of the following:**

- How training services will be provided using ITAs in accordance with WD Letter 14-19, Change 2**
- How contracts for training services will be coordinated (if contracts are used)**
- How the Board will ensure informed customer choice**

Training services are provided through Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) for individuals who, after interview, evaluation or assessment, and case management are determined to be unlikely or unable to obtain or retain employment that leads to self-sufficiency or higher wages from previous employment through career services alone. With the exception of OJTs, the Board is opting to not use contracts for training services at this time. The customer must be determined to be in need of training services and to possess the skills and qualifications to successfully participate in the selected program. Requirements for receiving training services include:

- Registration in WorkInTexas (WIT) as a Wagner-Peyser participant;
- Determination of eligibility for Dislocated Worker, or Adult basic eligibility and one of the Adult priority-funded groups;
- A complete assessment of skills, abilities, aptitudes, barriers, and service needs;
- Development of a Career Development Plan in WIT; and
- Documentation in case notes regarding the need and justification for providing training services and that the customer meets the following requirements:
  - the training institution's enrollment stipulations (such as an acceptance letter),
  - pre-requisites for the training program,
  - support systems needed for successful completion,
  - an inability to obtain sufficient grant assistance from other sources to pay the full costs of training, and
  - additional funding needed, if the ITA will not finance all training costs.

As part of the assessment discussion staff review local labor market information and training options to enable the customer to make the most informed choice possible. Staff assist customers in navigating the Eligible Training Provider List as part of the process for researching and choosing the training program that best addresses their needs. Staff must also provide performance and cost information relating to Eligible Training Providers. All WIOA customers desiring financial training assistance through an ITA must select a training program from the ETPL. WIOA funds may not be expended for training programs until the program is certified by TWC for inclusion on the Statewide

List. The customer is free to choose the training program/entity, provided that it:

- Offers the course they have been approved to attend,
- Is geographically appropriate in terms of their needs, and
- Accepts them for study.

Case notes must document staff efforts for helping the customer to make an informed choice and include the rationale for selecting the training program.

## **B. ITA Limitations**

**References: 20 CFR §663.420; WD Letter 14-19, Change 2**

**Boards may impose limits on the duration and amount of ITAs, of which such limitations must be described in the Board Plan. If the state or Board chooses to impose limitations, such limitations must not be implemented in a manner that undermines the WIOA requirement that training services are provided in a manner that maximizes customer choice in the selection of an Eligible Training Provider. Exceptions to ITA limitations may be provided for individual cases and must be described in Board policies.**

### **Minimum Plan Requirements:**

- Identify whether the Board imposed ITA limits
- Provide a description of the limitations, if applicable
- Provide a description detailing how customer training services selection is continuously maximized despite ITA limitations
- Provide a description of any exceptions to ITA limitations and the process for requesting an exception

The Board does not limit the dollar amount for ITAs, choosing instead to allow the contractor to manage ITA costs through budgeting and service delivery planning. The Board's limit on the duration of ITAs is the following.

Customers may not be sponsored for training or education programs more than two years in length. Exceptions to this limit may be made on a case-by-case basis, with the approval of the Project Director. Customers must also maintain a full course schedule of at least 12 hours. Under special circumstances, the individual may obtain permission from staff to take less than 12 hours. This is given if, for example, the school offers insufficient courses or if the student is working full-time.

In addition, it is the Board's policy to allow ITA sponsorship of any program on the Statewide List that trains for an occupation listed on the West Central Targeted Occupations List, or listed on the Targeted Occupations List of another board area to which the customer is willing (and will attest in writing) to commute or relocate.

## ***Part 10: Apprenticeship***

### **A. Registered Apprenticeship Programs**

**Each Board must include a description of how the Board will encourage Registered Apprenticeship programs within its workforce area to register with the Eligible Training Provider System to receive WIOA funding.**

**Minimum Plan Requirements:**

- A description of how the Board will encourage Registered Apprenticeship programs to register with the Eligible Training Provider System to receive WIOA funding**

The Board is a member of the CareerConnect Texas network (formerly WECANTX) that supports innovative work-based learning experiences by leveraging resources, integrating equity, and promoting opportunities for employer engagement. The Board is also a member of the national Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeships (PAYA) network. PAYA convenes collective networks of national, state, and regional partners to:

- Improve public understanding of the benefits of high-quality American youth apprenticeship;
- Disseminate better information about the conditions and strategies necessary for success and sustainability of youth apprenticeship partnerships; and
- Support high-quality, youth apprenticeship partnerships in more places.

The Board’s Apprenticeship Navigator is working with area key stakeholders, including those in industry and post-secondary sectors, to build a support network for the development of apprenticeships. As part of this process, the Board is ensuring partners are aware of the process and advantages of registering programs with TWC’s Eligible Training Provider System. The Board has applied for funding from TWC to support this initiative.

**B. ApprenticeshipTexas**

**Each Board must include a description of the Board’s strategy and commitment to support ApprenticeshipTexas efforts across the state, as applicable.**

**Minimum Plan Requirements:**

- A description of the Board’s strategy and commitment to support ApprenticeshipTexas.**

The Board has identified a lack of work-based learning experiences of value implemented with collaboration between employers, secondary educators, and postsecondary educators, and is working with area key stakeholders to address this gap. The Board supports ApprenticeshipTexas by aligning local strategies to increase the availability and use of work-based learning, including apprenticeship programs, with those of the Tri-Agency Work-Based Learning Framework. The Board’s work-based learning strategy includes:

- Working with industry and education/training partners to identify existing shortages in terms of geography, occupation, and industry,
- Increasing the number and type of work-based learning opportunities by bridging gaps between industry and education/training partners, and
- Providing ongoing support for program continuity.

**Part 11: Public Comment**

**References: WIOA §108(d); 20 CFR §679.550(b) and §679.560(b) and (e) Boards must provide a description of the public comment process, including:**

- **making copies of the proposed local plan available to the public through electronic and other means, such as public hearings and local news media;**
- **an opportunity for comment by members of the public, including representatives of business, labor organizations, and education;**

- providing at least a 15-day, but no more than a 30-day period for comment on the plan before its submission to TWC, beginning on the date that the proposed plan is made available, before its submission to TWC.

**Minimum Plan Requirements:**

- Describe the public comment period process
- Provide any comments received; or a statement that no public comments were received

A notice of the availability of the plan was published on the Board’s website on Saturday, March 1, 2025 (the notice on the website remained there for the duration of the comment period). The comment period was 15 days, with the final date being March 15, 2025. Interested parties could obtain a copy of the plan by calling or sending an e-mail to the Board’s designated contact person. A copy of the plan was also made available on the Board’s website, on the following page: [www.wfswct.org/publicinfo](http://www.wfswct.org/publicinfo). Written comments could be submitted electronically, via fax or delivered via mail or in person to the Board offices at 500 Chestnut, Ste. 1200 in Abilene. A notice of the availability of the plan was also posted to Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), and LinkedIn, and was also sent to the Board’s newsletter list. No comments were received.

***Appendix: Texas Workforce Investment Council Requirements***

***Local Board Plan Requirements***

**Requirement for Workforce Systemwide Alignment**

**Demonstrating Local Alignment with Texas’ Workforce System Strategic Plan**

***Directions for Demonstrating Alignment with the Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan System Goals and Objectives***

**1. Employers Goal – Delivery of Relevant Education and Training Programs**

Describe local board activities, initiatives, or processes that accelerate the delivery of relevant education and training programs to meet employers’ needs, specifically by increasing:

- upskilling and reskilling programs that address employers’ needs for middle skill workers,
- adult learners transitioning to employment through integrated education and training programs, and
- attainment of short-term credentials in programs aligned with high-demand occupations.

Response should address the following:

- the institution and/or expansion of upskilling and reskilling programs to meet employers’ needs for middle-skill workers,
- the identification and delivery of programs, including with adult education and literacy providers, that support attainment of short-term credentials, industry-based certifications, and licenses,
- populations that require supportive services to improve program completion, certification or attainment of short-term credentials, and employment, and
- data used to track reskilling and upskilling program enrollments and outcomes, including program completions, attainment of short-term credentials and industry-based certifications or licenses, and employment directly related to the credential, license, or certification.

The Board supports the delivery of relevant education and training programs by expanding upskilling and reskilling opportunities, integrating adult learners into the workforce, and promoting the attainment of short-term credentials in high-demand fields. Through strategic partnerships and employer-driven initiatives, the Board ensures that training programs align with workforce needs and provide individuals with the skills necessary to secure meaningful employment.

Two of the Board's initiatives, the Trellis Reskilling/Upskilling and cross-sector manufacturing, led to the development of an Electrical Construction Rapid Training program and a Manufacturing Upskilling Short Course, respectively, and were both endorsed by employers. These programs, made possible through collaboration with Abilene Adult Education (AAE), provided participants with access to space, technology, and support to obtain technical skills in-demand by employers. These initiatives produced a model for developing short-term upskilling/reskilling courses, which has facilitated the subsequent creation of short-term courses by TSTC in consultation with AAE related to manufacturing that are offered at night. AAE is able to provide financial assistance for students to attend as all courses result in industry-recognized certifications. The Board additionally supports worker upskilling by offering scholarships and financial assistance for programs such as the Child Development Associate (CDA) certification. The Student HireAbility Navigator Program further strengthens these efforts by connecting students with disabilities to community partners who facilitate inclusive employment and postsecondary opportunities.

Recognizing the importance of education in workforce development, the Board maintains strong relationships with four community and technical colleges, a career school, and a university offering a fast-track teacher certification program. These institutions coordinate with the Board to ensure their training programs are aligned with employer needs and are included on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). Through initiatives such as the West Central Texas Pathways Leadership Team—comprised of economic development partners, postsecondary institutions, employers, and K-12 education leaders—the Board is working to ensure that high-quality, industry-aligned education and training programs are accessible across the region.

When individuals participating in upskilling or any kind of training activity need supportive services, the Board makes those available through Title I assistance (when the individual is eligible), including transportation assistance, basic needs support, and work-related expense assistance. When Title I supportive services are not feasible, the Board coordinates with community-based organizations to help individuals stay engaged in their training programs and successfully transition to employment.

Data plays a crucial role in evaluating the effectiveness of these workforce programs. The Board closely monitors enrollments, program completions, credential attainment, and employment outcomes, using this information to refine training initiatives and ensure alignment with labor market demands. Individuals receiving formula-funded assistance are tracked through data entry in WorkInTexas.com (WIT). Additionally, the Board is currently developing a centralized data repository to track education, training, partner engagement, work-based learning, and customer service metrics that are outside the scope of the data maintained in WIT.

By fostering collaboration among employers, education providers, and workforce agencies, the Board continues to strengthen the regional talent pipeline, providing individuals with the skills needed to secure stable and well-paying jobs while meeting the evolving workforce needs of local businesses.

### **Reference Sections:**

- Electrical Construction and Manufacturing Upskilling Courses: 1.B- Board Strategies, pg. 10
- CDA Assistance: 2.C- Workforce Development Analysis, pg. 36
- Student HireAbility Navigator Services: 1B- Board Strategies, pg. 10
- ETPL and IHE Connections: 3.A- Workforce Development System, pg. 47
- Pathways Leadership Team: 3.B- Core Programs—Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access, pg. 48
- Support Services: 5.E- Transportation and Other Support Services, pg. 81
- Programmatic Data: 4.D - Integrated, Technology-Enabled Intake and Case Management, pg. 66; 3.B- Core Programs—Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access, pg. 51

## **2. Learners Goal – Expansion of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship**

**Describe local board activities, initiatives, or processes that are expanding work-based experiences, including apprenticeship, to accelerate skills and knowledge acquisition that improves system outcomes for learners.**

**Response should address the following:**

- **work-based learning opportunities with system stakeholders as a pre-employment strategy for youth and adults, including those requiring supportive services and resources,**
- **the expansion of the employer network participating in and sponsoring work-based learning opportunities, including registered and industry-recognized apprenticeship programs, and**
- **partnerships that address regular engagement with employers and system stakeholders, including collaboration with a Regional Convener for the Tri-Agency Texas Regional Pathways Network and input on the quality of existing apprenticeship programs and development of new programs.**

The Board is committed to expanding work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities to equip youth and adults with the skills needed for in-demand careers. Through the Pathways Leadership Team and the Board’s role as the Tri-Agency Regional Convener, the Board collaborates with secondary and postsecondary institutions, employers, and economic development organizations to align training programs with industry needs. The Board has also implemented an evidence-based work-based learning model, refining it based on external evaluations to ensure effectiveness and accessibility.

The Pathways Leadership Team (PLT) was established as part of the Board’s Tri-Agency Regional Convener work. The PLT has further established industry-specific committees in healthcare, education, construction, and manufacturing to align career pathway development efforts with business needs. Each focus group is currently prioritizing onboarding additional members to expand the employer network engaged in career pathway development, including work-based learning support. The Board’s continuous employer engagement ensures that work-based learning programs evolve based on labor market demands and industry feedback.

As a member of CareerConnect Texas and the national Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeships (PAYA), the Board leverages resources to promote innovative work-based learning experiences. The Board coordinates job shadowing, work readiness seminars, and paid internships to provide hands-on career exposure. A successful pilot in the 2023-2024 school year engaged eight school districts and ten employers, resulting in 117 job shadowing experiences, 28 completed internships, and four full-time job offers. In the 2024-2025 expansion, 18 employers and nine school districts participated, leading to over 200 job shadowing activities, 64 work readiness seminars for 695 students, and 63 paid internships. In addition, the Board's Apprenticeship Navigator is working with area key stakeholders, including those in industry and post-secondary sectors, to build a support network for the development of apprenticeships. As part of this process, the Board is ensuring partners are aware of the process and advantages of registering programs with TWC's Eligible Training Provider System. The Board has applied for funding from TWC to support this initiative.

Individuals participating in work-based learning activities through Title I programs may receive supportive services, as needed. When Title I supportive services are not feasible, the Board coordinates with community-based organizations so individuals can receive the support they need to complete work-based training. The Board also prioritizes inclusion, particularly for youth with disabilities, through the Student HireAbility Navigator program. Individuals who need and are eligible for supportive services are co-enrolled in the HireAbility Navigator program as applicable. This initiative connects students with disabilities to resources, pre-employment transition services, and inclusive job opportunities. By collaborating with employers to create accessible workplaces, the Board expands opportunities for diverse learners. Through these strategic efforts, the Board is building a skilled workforce and strengthening the regional talent pipeline in West Central Texas.

#### **Reference Sections:**

- Pathways Leadership Team, Industry Committees: 3.B- Core Programs—Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access, pg. 48
- CareerConnect Membership: 10.A Registered Apprenticeship Programs, pg. 95
- Work-Based Learning Model: 4.B- Employer Engagement, Economic Development, and Unemployment Insurance Program Coordination, pg. 61; 5.C Coordination with Secondary and Postsecondary Education Programs, pg. 75
- Apprenticeship Navigator: 10.A-Registered Apprenticeship Programs, pg. 95
- Support Services: 5.E- Transportation and Other Support Services, pg. 81
- Student HireAbility Navigator Services: 1B- Board Strategies, pg. 10

### **3. Partners Goal – Alignment to Support Career Pathways**

**Describe local board activities, initiatives, or processes to build the board's capacity, responsiveness, continuous improvement, and decision-making to:**

- **support the identification of credentials of value, and**
- **streamline and clarify existing career pathways and models to increase alignment between secondary and postsecondary technical programs.**

**Response should address the following:**

- **system stakeholders' input to assess the alignment and articulation of secondary and postsecondary technical programs supporting career pathways; and**
- **collaboration with secondary and postsecondary institutions to engage employers to identify**

**credentials of value that respond to local labor market needs, including postsecondary technical sub-baccalaureate credit and non-credit credentials, industry-based certifications, apprenticeship certificates, and licenses; and**

- **processes to continuously improve career pathways.**

The Board is dedicated to strengthening career pathways and credentialing systems to ensure alignment with industry needs. The West Central Texas Pathways Leadership Team, established in June 2023, plays a central role in developing regional talent pipeline strategies. The Pathways Leadership Team created industry-specific committees in the high-demand sectors of healthcare, construction, manufacturing, and education, ensuring that career pathways align with evolving labor market demands. Additionally, expansive leadership representation—including rural community stakeholders—ensures that diverse perspectives shape the development of career pathways. By distributing leadership among partners, the team ensures that employer and educator input identifies credentials of value and drives decision-making, leading to a more effective and responsive workforce development system. This strategy enhances the pipeline for high-demand careers and increases pathways for youth and adults to obtain credentials of value.

In its role as the Tri-Agency Regional Convener, the Board conducted [Pathways Landscape Mapping](#) and [Asset Map and Gap Analysis](#) to provide a comprehensive overview and analysis of the current state and dynamics of the labor market within the WDA. Based on the gaps discovered in work-based learning experiences, the Board prioritized increasing high-quality apprenticeships and technical training opportunities through expansion and refinement of work-based learning models in collaboration with industry and education partners. In partnership with the Pathways Leadership Team, the Board developed the [Regional Career Pathways Strategic Plan](#) to expand and refine quality career pathway opportunities and work-based learning experiences of value across the region during the next 3 – 5 years. This plan emphasizes early engagement, equitable access, and ongoing support for students, particularly those from underserved communities. It also places an emphasis on increasing avenues for recognition of work-based learning activities in postsecondary credit and credentialing, and on high-wage, high-demand occupations with local training and stackable credentials available.

The Board serves as a source of labor market intelligence and operates as a partnership manager to facilitate solutions for workforce concerns. Through its collaboration with four technical and community colleges, economic development entities, school districts, and workforce stakeholders, the Board coordinates efforts to enhance training opportunities that directly address employer workforce needs.

**Reference Sections:**

- Pathways Leadership Team, Regional Career Pathways Strategic Plan: 3.B- Core Programs—Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access, pg. 48
- Career Pathway Assessments, Strategic Plan: 2.A- Regional Economic and Employment Needs Analysis, pg. 16
- Postsecondary, Employer Collaboration: 4.A- One-Stop Service Delivery System, pg. 53 and 4.B Employer Engagement, Economic Development, and Unemployment Insurance Program Coordination, pg. 64

#### **4. Policy and Planning Goal – Relevant Data Sets**

**Describe local board activities, initiatives, or processes that support the availability and coordination of relevant workforce, education, and employment data to evaluate program outcomes to respond to the needs of policy makers and planners to:**

- **expand high-quality childcare availability,**
- **identify and quantify quality outcomes, including industry-based certification data, and**
- **enhance wage records.**

**Response should address the following:**

- **engagement with childcare providers and employers to establish on-site or near-site, high quality childcare facilities and expand Texas Rising Star certifications,**
- **collaboration with employers to identify enhanced employment and earnings data to gain deeper insight into program outcomes, and**
- **how the board and its system partners identify, evaluate, and implement ways to streamline and improve timeliness and completeness of data matching and sharing, specifically with industry- based certification attainment, to evaluate program effectiveness and outcomes.**

Through strategic initiatives, the Board ensures that data-driven decision-making enhances workforce services, childcare availability, and employment outcomes while improving data-sharing mechanisms for regional partners.

Recognizing the critical role of quality childcare in workforce participation, the Board prioritizes engagement with childcare providers and employers. The importance of child care is frequently discussed at Board meetings and is the focus of the Board’s Early Childhood Advisory Council (“Council”). The purpose of the Council is to provide an opportunity for input on strategies to improve, sustain and support the quality of care and the child care workforce from a wide array of entities and individuals engaged and interested in early childhood. The Board shares information resources with the Council as well as higher education and economic development partners related to child care, including reports, events, and grant opportunities. To engage local voices, the Board hosted a regional focus group meeting for feedback on the second four-year TRS plan. In addition, West Central was one of five boards to host a public stakeholder meeting in collaboration with TWC to discuss and gather feedback regarding the 2025-2027 Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) State plan. Individuals attending represented West Central as well as other board areas.

The Board has established a priority of acting as a trusted convener and recognized source for relevant information and resources, with a strategy of maintaining and sharing data, information, and resources with relevant partners in order to facilitate and support cross-sector collaboration towards career pathway development. The Board serves as a convener, fostering partnerships and engaging in initiatives with economic development organizations, industry associations, educational institutions, and community stakeholders. Each of these partnerships and initiatives represents sources of shared data.

Secondary and postsecondary institutions provide certification attainment data as part of programmatic data-sharing agreements, which are integrated into the Board’s centralized data repository, currently under development. This tool will track education, training, partner engagement, work-based learning, and customer service metrics for comprehensive program evaluation. The

Pathways Leadership Team, comprised of educators and employers, engages the communities it represents in order to gather feedback, assess challenges, and make continuous improvements. Surveys, targeted interviews, and asset analyses are conducted regularly to ensure that the team regularly reviews its strategies based on stakeholder input.

Internal Board efforts also serve to streamline and enhance data matching and sharing. Customer satisfaction surveys help refine program effectiveness and ensure continuous improvement. Subrecipients submit monthly reports detailing staffing, quality assurance, financials, and customer outcomes. Formal program monitoring ensures services meet workforce demands. An integrated services model under development will co-locate staff from multiple workforce programs to improve service accessibility.

**Reference Sections:**

- Early Childhood, Advisory Council: 5.D- Child Care and Early Learning, pg. 77
- Board Priorities and Data Collection: 1.A- Vision and Goals, pg. 5
- Pathways Leadership Team, Data Collection/Sharing Initiatives: 3.B- Core Programs—Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access, pg. 48
- Service Effectiveness Strategies: 2C- Workforce Development Analysis, pg. 39
- Integrated Service Strategy: 3A- Workforce Development System, pg. 46

***Strategic Opportunities***

**1. Strategic Opportunity 1 – Employer Engagement**

**Describe how the local board coordinates with its stakeholders to gain insight into the needs of employers and minimize “asks” that burden employers.**

**Response should address the following:**

- **coordination efforts that gain more insight from employers, including participation in the Tri- Agency Texas Regional Pathways Network, if applicable, and**
- **reducing the number of regional system partners individually making requests of employers.**

The Board prioritizes strategic coordination with stakeholders to gain meaningful employer insights while minimizing redundancies that could be a burden. Beginning in fall 2022, the Board has developed a set of strategic priorities, which include a focus on partnership management and serving as a trusted convener of workforce development efforts. One strategy has been streamlining internal communication through a new CRM system and fostering stronger relationships with priority stakeholders. These efforts ensure that employer engagement is intentional, efficient, and mutually beneficial.

The West Central Texas Pathways Leadership Team, established in June 2023 as part of the Tri-Agency Texas Regional Convener work, exemplifies the Board’s commitment to cross-sector collaboration. By consolidating advisory functions and industry engagement into structured committees, the team minimizes duplicative outreach and ensures employer input is effectively integrated into career pathway development. The recently developed [Regional Career Pathways Strategic Plan](#) outlines a strategy to enhance career pathway advisory structures among education partners, ensuring that engagement remains streamlined and effective.

The Board also facilitates internal alignment by coordinating closely with subrecipient service providers. Regular strategy meetings between Board staff and subrecipient teams ensure consistent messaging, shared insights, and the integration of emerging industry trends into workforce programs. This streamlined model fosters stronger partnerships with businesses, enhancing the region's workforce development capacity while reducing administrative burdens on employers.

Additionally, the Board has procured a service provider to enhance its employer engagement framework. Learning Designs, Inc. is assisting with training staff on labor market data application, equipping them with the tools to provide tailored workforce solutions rather than simply soliciting employer participation. By embedding labor market intelligence into service delivery, the Board ensures that employer engagement is data-driven and responsive to workforce needs. Additionally, an employer engagement guidebook and framework are in development to standardize outreach efforts and improve coordination across system partners.

**Reference Sections:**

- Board Strategic Priorities: 1.A- Vision and Goals, pg. 5
- Pathways Leadership Team, Strategic Plan, Regional Convener: 3.B- Core Programs—Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access, pg. 48
- Internal Employer Service Alignment, Employer Engagement Strategies: 4.B- Employer Engagement, Economic Development, and Unemployment Insurance Program Coordination, pg. 60

**2. Strategic Opportunity 2 – Improving Outcomes for Texans with Barriers to Employment**

**Describe how the local board engages Texans with diverse needs — including those with disabilities, foster youth, sex-trafficking victims, incarcerated juveniles and adults, and opportunity youth — by designing programs that address their needs, maximize outcomes, and improve career opportunities.**

**Response should address the following:**

- **models, initiatives, programs, or processes that effectively engage these populations; and**
- **promising practices in supportive services models and outcomes that consistently demonstrate success.**

The fifth of the Board's five strategic priorities is to "Provide exceptional customer service for individuals and families to access a system of services leading to quality career opportunities." As part of this priority the Board is committed to engaging Texans with diverse needs by designing inclusive programs that address barriers to employment, maximize outcomes, and improve career opportunities. The Board ensures accessibility in all workforce centers by implementing various assistive devices. Staff receive continuous training to provide equitable services. Assessments for adult and dislocated workers include a thorough review of education levels, employment goals, job skills, and barriers such as transportation, childcare, basic skills, and criminal history to provide individualized services for those with barriers to employment.

Youth services are fully integrated into the workforce system. The Board partners with key organizations such as 2INgage, BCFS, Pregnancy Resources, Goodwill Industries, and juvenile justice

agencies to support foster youth and opportunity youth. Additionally, the Student HireAbility Navigator collaborates with Texas Workforce Commission Vocational Rehabilitation (TWC-VR) to enhance employment opportunities for students with disabilities by facilitating employer connections, training events, and promoting workforce services at schools and community events.

The Board prioritizes service for adults with barriers, ensuring that individuals receiving public assistance, those with low income, and those who are basic skills deficient receive individualized career and training services. Veterans and eligible foster youth receive priority within these categories.

**Reference Sections:**

- Strategic Priorities: 1.A- Vision and Goals, pg. 8
- Services for Individuals with Employment Barriers and HireAbility Navigator: 2.C- Workforce Development Analysis, pg. 37
- Assessments: 6.A- Adult and Dislocated Workers, pg. 86
- Integrated Youth Services: 5.B- Youth Activities and Services, pg. 68
- Service Priority Groups: 6.B- Service Priority, pg. 89

**3. Strategic Opportunity 3 – Use of Data to Support Investment Decisions**

**Describe how the local board uses data and evidence to identify and target strategic investments to improve system performance.**

**Response should address the following:**

- **evidence-based practices and data to strategically implement and fund initiatives; and**
- **programs that have successfully demonstrated previous program participant credential attainment and employment.**

By leveraging data and partnerships, the Board ensures targeted investments in programs that demonstrate measurable outcomes. The West Central Texas Pathways Leadership Team (PLT) conducted asset and gap analyses to inform the development and support efforts of career pathways across the region. The PLT applies rigorous criteria to identify key industries and occupations based on labor market data from sources like JobsEQ and Lightcast. Data include wage thresholds and employment data, aligned with Board criteria, with regular updates to address economic shifts. Metrics such as access to targeted industry-aligned programs and work-based learning opportunities are monitored to evaluate progress and ensure alignment with regional economic needs. This data-driven approach tailors efforts to community needs and ensures efficacy. Initiated in 2022, the Board’s alignment of strategic priorities has led to the development of a centralized data collection tool to house metrics related to education, training, partner engagement, and work-based learning, ensuring sustainability and data-driven decision making, and providing support to career pathway development and other system efforts. Data includes internally developed data, as well as supplemental external partner data. Metrics reflect the efficacy of the Work-Based Learning Program with 4 students from the 2023-2024 pilot school year program gaining employment upon completion of the program.

**Reference Sections:**

- Pathways Leadership Team, Labor Market Analysis, Data Standards, Repository Tool: 3.B Core

- Programs—Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access, pg. 48
- Data Coordination with External Partners: 5.C Coordination with Secondary and Postsecondary Education Programs, pg. 73
  - Work-Based Learning Efficacy: 4.B Employer Engagement, Economic Development, and Unemployment Insurance Program Coordination, pg. 61