

# Solutions

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE TEXAS WORKFORCE

## Nick & Kendra

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE  
WITH VR COUNSELORS

Page 6

## It's Never Too Late

Incarcerated Students  
Receive Associates Degrees  
Page 5

## New We HireAbility Decal

Page 9

KENDRA SCOTT



IN THIS ISSUE



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Texas Internship Challenge Accepted ..... 4

It's Never Too Late.....5

Anything is Possible with VR Counselors ..... 6

Powering Through a Bad Call.....8

TWC Unveils We Hire Ability Decal ..... 9

Professional Growth Opportunities ..... 10

Out with the Old, in with the New..... 11

Texas Workforce Commission

- Bryan Daniel**  
Chairman, Commissioner Representing the Public
- Julian Alvarez**  
Commissioner Representing Labor
- Aaron Demerson**  
Commissioner Representing Employers

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## WELCOME TO THE FALL 2019 EDITION OF SOLUTIONS!

I am honored to serve as your new TWC Chairman and Commissioner Representing the Public and am especially grateful to Governor Abbott for the opportunity to serve.

During the past few months, I have had the opportunity to meet with TWC program staff along with several workforce boards and am very encouraged by the commitment and dedication of our staff and associates to help keep Texans working. With our partners at Workforce Solutions offices, we are able to combine a newly refreshed WorkInTexas.com, the state's jobs site, with the kind of one-on-one-service both employers and employees have come to expect in the Lone Star State.

We continue to hear one of the top reasons businesses create jobs in Texas is the Texas workforce. Our current

economic climate creates opportunities for our skilled workforce and strong talent pipeline.

We can leverage this economic success for future opportunities too. We recently granted \$1 million dollars to FIRST in Texas, to expand statewide participation in robotics programs for high school students. An important part of our job at TWC is to ensure students are ready for the careers of the future. Partnerships that create opportunities for our youth help Texas remain a leader in STEM.

### WHEN TEXAS THRIVES, WE ALL THRIVE.

During the last quarter, the Texas unemployment rate fell to a historic low of 3.4%. Texas was once again named the "top state for business start-ups" for

the second year in a row by Wallethub. Our state boasts a healthy business environment with an 11 percent growth in the number of small businesses and a 36 percent growth of average business revenue.

In October, we recognized National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). In connection with our year-round HireAbility campaign, TWC continues to host multiple employment fairs to help individuals with disabilities find gainful employment.

In November, in line with Veterans Day, TWC will host our 8th annual Hiring Red White & You! (HRWY) Statewide Hiring Fair on November 7th in multiple cities across Texas to connect veterans and their spouses with employers. It is our honor and duty to ensure they have career opportunities when they make the move back into the civilian workforce. To find an event in your area, visit our events page at [twc.texas.gov/hiring-red-white-you](http://twc.texas.gov/hiring-red-white-you).

Finally, I would like to welcome our new Commissioner Representing Employers Aaron Demerson to his new role. Commissioner Demerson previously served TWC as the Director of the Office of Employer Initiatives. I am excited to work alongside both Commissioner Alvarez and Commissioner Demerson to advance the interests of all Texans.

As we close out the year, I look forward to continuing partnerships with each one of you to develop innovative opportunities that help keep Texas the best place in the nation to work and do business.



**Pictured Above:**  
Commissioner Aaron Demerson, Chairman Bryan Daniel, Commissioner Julian Alvarez

**BRYAN DANIEL** | TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION  
Commissioner Representing the Public



# CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

## I TOOK THE TEXAS INTERNSHIP CHALLENGE

By Caroline Core

I never realized how rare paid internships were until I began hunting for my first one the summer before my senior year. Thankfully, through the Texas Internship Challenge, I was able to secure a paid internship with the Texas Workforce Commission working in their External Relations Department. I spent the summer gaining valuable experience, networking and building my career.

The Texas Internship Challenge is a campaign that encourages companies, both private and public, to offer paid or for-credit internship programs for students in Texas.

The campaign's website matches students to potential employers and vice versa. With an estimated 1 million Texas students, ages 18 to 24, potentially available for internships, employers have access to a diverse, enthusiastic employee pool. The Texas Internship Challenge also emphasizes the importance of showing what real-world work ethic looks like for students looking to transition into the workforce.

The press conference included testimonies from both employers and interns from major companies such as IBM, Lockheed Martin, Accenture, Trio Electric, Home Depot and many more. Together, the interns and I had an opportunity to share our experience, talk about our plans post-graduation, discuss skills we've learned in our respective offices, and tout the benefits of offering paid internships.

It was truly energizing to hear the stories of other students about how their internship experience has solidified their career goals or ignited a previously unrecognized passion in a specific field.

I took the Texas Internship Challenge at Texas Workforce Commission, and I have never been more hopeful for the future.



**Pictured Above:**  
Director of External Relations Tom McCarty and Caroline Core.





# IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

## INCARCERATED STUDENTS RECEIVE ASSOCIATE DEGREES

By Joe Shine

Most are familiar with the adage that states, “If you think you can and if you think you can’t, you’re right.” On June 22, 2019, a graduation took place to celebrate those who looked in the mirror and said, “I think I can.” Thanks to hard work, determination and a desire to improve their circumstances, nearly 200 incarcerated students (Students) received their Associate Degrees. As part of a collaboration between the Lee College Huntsville Center and the U.S. Department of Education’s Second Chance Pell Initiative, Students were given access to postsecondary courses and have now earned their degrees.

Texas Workforce Commissioner Representing Labor Julian Alvarez was invited to the facility to meet the graduates and provide the commencement speech for the ceremony.

“A postsecondary degree is a vital step towards finding good paying jobs that lead to financial security,” said Commissioner Alvarez. “I’m proud of the individuals at the Lee College Huntsville Center. We’ve all had obstacles in our lives, some beyond our control, that can be difficult to overcome. I applaud the resolve of these Students as they work to ensure that when the time comes they are properly prepared to find fulfilling careers as part of the thriving Texas workforce.”

The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world, so prison education programs that provide opportunities for Students to reenter society with the tools

for success are essential. With a focus on promoting degrees aimed at creating self-sufficient Students ready to fill high demand jobs, institutions like the Lee College Huntsville Center are not only enriching the lives of their Students but bettering the community around them.

“Education in prison works,” said Dr. Michael Gary, a Professor at Lee College. “If you get your associate degree, the recidivism rate’s about 10 percent—90 percent stay out, 10 percent come back. With no higher education, the recidivism rate’s about 60 percent—you stand a better than 50-50 chance of coming back to prison.”

For these, and future grads, the TWC will be there to support them when they are ready to reenter the workforce. Utilizing a \$100,000 Fidelity Bond Grant, the TWC will be able to coordinate with local boards to apply these funds to help at-risk job applicants, such as ex-offenders, get and keep jobs. Through free fidelity bonding, a type of insurance policy that protects the employer against employee acts of dishonesty such as larceny, embezzlement, and theft, the TWC and the Workforce Development Boards can reduce employers’ concerns about hiring at-risk job applicants who cannot be bonded through other sources.

Either the job applicant or the prospective employer can request bonding through any Workforce Solutions office. If the applicant is eligible, bonding coverage is effective immediately following certification or on the applicant’s first day of work once certified.

A rewarding career that provides job security and peace of mind should be available to all Texans, no matter their circumstances. Through TWC sponsored Fidelity Bonding and programs like those available at the Lee College Huntsville Center, a historically underserved population is being given the chance to say, “I think I can,” and better their lives through education.



**Pictured at Top**  
Students at the Lee College Huntsville Center Graduation

**Pictured Above:**  
Commissioner Alvarez speaks to Lee College Huntsville Center Class of 2019



# Anything is Possible with VR Counselors

By Talan Tyminski

Since she founded her company in 2002, designer, humanitarian and successful entrepreneur, CEO Kendra Scott, whose global company bears her namesake, has operated the business based on her core values—family, fashion and philanthropy. Yet for Nick Hentschel, an Austin-based employee, the company means so much more. For Nick, the modern office space and yellow-gold type font also signals stability, a concept that was foreign to him before joining the Kendra family.

Nick was diagnosed with autism when he was thirty-seven, a late diagnosis that helped provide context to why, despite desperately wanting to work, he bounced between jobs after

graduating college. Since entering the workforce, Nick had a sense of waiting to be fired from any position he held which left him jumping between offices and, at times, stressed. Adding to this stress was that due to his disabilities, Nick cannot drive, which can make finding and keeping a full-time position in Austin near impossible regardless of a disability.

In 2018, Nick's mom, worried about her son, shared a heartfelt plea on Facebook with other parents of children living with autism to see if anyone was aware of resources to help Nick find stable employment. Thanks to his mother's note, Nick met Jennifer Hines. Jennifer is a Board Certified and Licensed Behavior Analyst and a



**Pictured Above:**  
Nick Hentschel on the Kendra Scott Distribution Floor.



# TWC AND KENDRA SCOTT PARTNER TO CREATE STABILITY FOR WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES

State Neurodevelopmental Program Specialist at the Texas Workforce Commission. Jennifer connected Nick to his Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor BK Hines, who worked to establish a plan for employment. That led them to Tracy Ray, an Employment Service Provider, and together they developed a game plan to find and support Nick with employment.

Tracy lead the charge. She believed that Kendra Scott would be the perfect place for Nick to grow and find a home due to their focus on family and desire to foster inclusion. She began writing letters to the company's human resources department to set up an interview. Kendra Scott responded alerting Tracy to an opening in their South Austin distribution center. The job was perfect; Nick would be following clear cut directions, gathering orders and packaging boxes. The black and white nature of the position eliminated ambiguity and the stress that often comes with problem solving. Tracy worked with Alysa Bolda, a Human Resources Business representative at the Kendra Scott distribution center, to set up the interview as well as make accommodations for the process.

"Tracy was the most supportive. She supplied us with articles and suggested that rather than asking Nick to recall experiences we do a hands-on interview," said Bolda. "We showed him how to make a box, and he showed us how to do it right back."

Before meeting and working with Nick, Alysa admitted she did not know much about individuals with autism, only what had been portrayed in the media. Tracy's involvement and preparation for the interview were essential in not only assisting with securing Nick the job but helping Alysa and her staff set up accommodations.

At the end of 2018, Kendra Scott hired Nick as seasonal staff and today he is a full-time employee. This status means that for the first time, Nick has full benefits, something to which he is still getting used.

"To put a twist on an old phrase, when you're used to unequal treatment, equality feels like an accommodation," said Nick. "There's a difference between normalcy and character, and often employers look at people with disabilities in terms of normalcy rather than the quality of their character."

Nick's position at Kendra Scott has improved not just his life but the lives of those who interact with him daily. Since starting at the distribution center, Nick has connected with co-workers fostering a sense of empathy and compassion among his peers. One co-worker even went above and beyond to create a visual representation of one of Nick's job assignments to help him learn.

As a company, Kendra Scott is taking pro-active steps to ensure that all employees feel included. The company's



**Pictured Above:**  
Alysa Bolda, Human Resources, Kendra Scott

Human Resources Department has scheduled training with local VR staff from Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services to be sure they are making all the accommodations necessary and are fostering a supportive environment for individuals such as Nick.

The big yellow sign above the floor of the distribution center reads anything is possible. For Nick, joining the Kendra Scott team has truly made anything possible. Nick has gone from worrying about how he is going to make his next rent payment to planning for the future. He wants to go back to school and follow his passion of one day teaching history.

When asked about the company's commitment to inclusion, Founder and CEO Kendra Scott explained "At Kendra Scott, we are proud to be leading that charge. As disability awareness increases, businesses must adapt to the idea that every one of us is different and may require different needs in the workplace. Our differences open our eyes to new ways of thinking and solving problems and allow us to connect with our customers in a way that leaves them feeling a genuine sense of connection."



# POWERING THROUGH A BAD CALL

## TWC, THE CRISS COLE CENTER AND VR SERVICES COLLABORATE TO ASSIST A STUDENT WITH A VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

By Joe Shine

Colin Baxter was a proud member of the Texas Tech University Red Raiders Men's Basketball team. He worked hard at every practice. He challenged himself to be better at rolling with the good calls and learning from the bad. Announcers loved to have him sit courtside with them. He was, and still is, an inspiration to all who meet him. Did we mention that Colin Baxter is not a basketball player?

Long before any of this, in the fall of 2016, Colin was six classes away from graduating. That's when life delivered a bad call: Colin had a brain tumor that would need to be removed. Prior to surgery, the doctors briefed Colin on the possible risks, but never once did they mention a permanent loss of vision.

For many, the shock of having cancer, needing brain surgery to remove a tumor and losing their vision would be a bad call they might never recover from. Colin Baxter, true to his nature, took it in stride as well as anyone could.

Loss of vision or not, Colin was still determined to graduate. Resolute, and with a set path, Colin knew adjustments would have to be made before he could go back to school, before his life could even begin to return to normal. He knew he would need help, so he turned to the Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS).

In February of 2017, Colin reached out to TWS-VRS to start the process of assessment. His Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) quickly determined he was eligible for assistance and began developing an Individual Plan of Employment (IPE). Colin's case was unique. Many customers are born with visual impairment or have a steady decline in their vision, so the suddenness of Colin's blindness added an additional level of difficulty. For Colin, he had to relearn daily life skills such as reading, writing, and mobility.

In July 2017, Colin went to the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center (CCRC), a full-time residential vocational rehabilitation training facility that serves adults who are legally blind. Here, attending classes five days per week from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Colin learned alternative techniques to prepare himself for finding and retaining employment, attending college, and living independently in the community. He

graduated in October 2017, prepared and ready to reenroll as a student at Texas Tech University in the spring of 2018.

Before returning to Texas Tech, Colin continued his blindness skills training at home with a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher (VRT), Karen Guay. The training at home reinforced the skills he had learned at CCRC in his home environment. "Colin never showed any fear whatsoever, only confidence," said Karen.

Prior to the spring 2018 school semester, with funding from TWS-VRS, Colin was able to obtain the necessary assistive technology needed to reenroll in school. Still only six classes short of graduating, Colin completed two online classes that spring semester. Two classes down and four to go, but those remaining courses were not offered online. Colin would have to return to campus.

As if Colin wasn't motivated enough, a chance meeting with the coach of the Red Raiders basketball team led to an invitation to come work for them once he was back on campus. Little by little, Colin's life was returning to normal. He was going to be back on campus soon and there was a job ready and waiting for him.

Thanks to the various supports provided by TWS-VRS, Colin's VRT, the skills Colin learned at the CCRC and the addition of a new seeing-eye dog, Chase, Colin returned to campus in the fall of 2018 believing and saying, "I'm still me. I'm just a better me."

Once he was back at campus, he began working for the basketball team and quickly became an integral part of the Red Raider family, an inspiration to all of them.

Many will argue that the Red Raiders basketball team never recovered from a bad call in the dying seconds of the 2019 National Championship game. The dream of a national title slipped away with a shrill whistle, and a cruel stroke of bad luck. The same cannot be said of Colin Baxter and his dreams.

Life dealt Colin a bad call, but he didn't let it derail his dreams.

With determination, assistance from available programs and a great attitude, Colin overcame it. He is now a proud graduate with a degree in History and working full time at Texas Tech University as an Event Specialist.





# TWC UNVEILS WE HIRE ABILITY DECAL

By Talan Tyminski

This past October, the Texas Workforce Commission celebrated National Disability Employment Awareness Month with the debut of a new decal specifically for employers whose workforce is at least 10% individuals with disabilities. The window sticker proudly reads “We Hire Ability.” The award was unveiled during the Texas HireAbility Employer Forum at the El Paso Zoo on Wednesday, October 2. The forum provided an opportunity for discussion on best practices for hiring and retaining people with disabilities, creating a culture of inclusivity through leadership, and illustrating how a diverse and inclusive workforce leads to business improvements.

“While we observe National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October, Texas HireAbility is a year-round campaign focused on highlighting the contributions individuals with disabilities make to the Texas workforce,” said TWC Chairman and Commissioner Representing the Public Bryan Daniel. “We are proud to work closely with the Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities and Texas Workforce Solutions to ensure every Texan has the opportunity to put their abilities to work.”

This year’s Texas HireAbility Employer Forum featured national disability employment advocate Michael Murray, Director of the Employer Policy Team in the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor. Participating employers in panel discussions included El Paso Electric, Providence Healthcare and SAP, as well as TWC employment attorneys, experts on the Americans with Disabilities Act, and assistive technology.

“As we celebrate the workforce contributions of people with

disabilities during October’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month, let us be reminded that the unemployment rate for people with a disability is still too high, and we must continue to make workforce inclusivity a priority,” said TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Julian Alvarez. “Forums like Texas HireAbility, which include an open dialogue among stakeholders and leading companies like El Paso Electric, Providence and SAP are helping us pave the way and meet our goal of increasing employment among those with disabilities and for Texas to benefit from a more diverse workforce talent.”

The Texas Workforce Commission has partnered with the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities and Texas Workforce Solutions Offices for the Texas HireAbility campaign. The campaign is now in its fourth year and is committed to not only encouraging employers to hire individuals with disabilities but ensuring individuals have the access to training and resources they need to find gainful employment.

“National Disability Employment Awareness Month is a perfect time to reflect on the progress made while continuing to learn even more about inclusivity,” said TWC Commissioner Representing Employers Aaron Demerson. “I encourage employers to utilize the resources provided by the Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities and TWC to continue to strive for inclusion and accessibility.”

For more information about the HireAbility campaign and its related events visit <https://twc.texas.gov/partners/texas-hireability>.



# CAREER PATHWAYS CELEBRATION RECOGNIZES PROFESSIONAL GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY EDUCATORS

By Lyn Lucas

On September 11, 2019 a Celebration for Early Education Career Pathways was held, at Tarrant County College (TCC). The event opened with a welcome from Tarrant County College Northeast President Dr. Kenya Ayers and featured addresses by Judy McDonald, Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County, Mayor of Arlington Jeff Williams, and Fort Worth City Councilmember Kelly Allen Grey.

This event featured two key developments in workforce and educational development:

1. Child Development Associate Credential (CDA) to College Credit
2. US Department of Labor approved Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship Program (the first of its kind in Texas)

The CDA is a long-standing certification obtained by early educators who want to improve their professionalism in the field. This rigorous course, if offered by a community organization, previously did not transfer into college credit at Tarrant County College, a gold-standard college in the DFW metroplex. As of the Fall semester 2019, TCC will accept an active CDA for 3 hours of college credit. This step helps bridge the gap of uncertainty many early educators face when entering the college environment.

The Early Education Apprenticeship program (EEAP) was announced. This is the first-of-its-kind program in Texas and also is approved by the US Department of Labor. The two-year EEAP will begin accepting applications in early 2020. Upon

completion of the EEAP, apprentices will:

1. Earn a non-expiring Child Care Development Specialist Certificate from the US Department of Labor
2. Earn college credit through Tarrant County College and Tarleton State University
3. Have their apprenticeship experience recognized by the Texas Early Childhood Career Lattice for Practitioners
4. Be able to negotiate for higher wages

More than 100 students, early childhood education professionals, funders and elected officials joined Camp Fire First Texas, TXTEACH, Tarleton State University, Tarrant County College, Early Learning Alliance, Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County, CCMS/TRS and Children @ Risk to celebrate new Career Pathways in Tarrant County.



**Pictured Above:** Members of the Early Learning Alliance pose with the newly designed Early Education and Career Pathways map. From left: Eboni Kelly, Early Education Apprenticeship Director at Camp Fire First Texas; Lisa Witkowski, Child Care Program Director at Workforce Solutions For Tarrant County; Judy McDonald, Executive Director of Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County; Lisa Self, Assistant Professor at Tarrant County College; Kristina Higgins, Assistant Professor at Tarleton State University and Lyn Lucas, Chief Program Officer at Camp Fire First Texas

## Hiring & You! Red, White & You!

**2019**  
**Statewide**  
**Hiring**  
**Fair**

**Open to the Public**  
**Nov. 7, 2019**  
**10:00am to 2:00pm**

[www.texasworkforce.org/hrwy](http://www.texasworkforce.org/hrwy)



Join the Texas Workforce Commission partnership with Texas Medical Center for the 8th annual Hiring Red, White & You! Statewide Hiring Fair to connect veterans, service members and their spouses to Texas employers.

*No cost to veterans, their spouses or employers.*

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Relay Texas: 800-735-2989 (TTY) and 711 (Voice). [texasworkforce.org](http://texasworkforce.org)



# OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW.

## WORKINTEXAS.COM IS RELAUNCHED WITH NEW TOOLS FOR JOB SEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS

By Joe Shine

Our employers want quick, comprehensive access to Texas' talent-rich workforce, and our world-class pool of workers want a simple, reliable hiring tool that pairs them with great companies. The new WorkInTexas.com delivers this for both sides.

While the old WorkInTexas.com still performed admirably, it was an outdated system that could not keep up with the needs of the state. For the TWC to continue to provide exemplary recruiting and hiring assistance for Texas' employers and laborers, WorkInTexas.com had to be revamped to be competitive in today's market of job boards.

For the more than 2.8 million Texans searching for their next career opportunity, WorkInTexas.com has introduced new features for site users such as a 24/7 Virtual

Recruiter, a Resume Builder and Resume Scorer tools. The Resume Builder and Scorer tools help increase the chances of finding the right job match. Job seekers who register at WorkInTexas.com not only get access to those features but can also find and apply for jobs matching their qualifications, explore potential career paths and find information about job training.

Employers, who face their own set of hiring challenges, can post jobs for free, search resumes, recruit candidates and obtain current labor market information. They can also take advantage of sophisticated candidate matching and ranking tools. The site's tools help hiring managers compare applicants' skills, view salary ranges and assess the talent pool in their area. WorkInTexas.com streamlines the recruiting process and helps companies find the most qualified candidates.

In addition, job seekers and employers using WorkInTexas.com can interact, in person, with knowledgeable staff at 180 Texas workforce offices who can refer them to open positions, and employers and candidates in their area.

Without qualified staff, a company's options for growth and expansion can be limited. Without access to great jobs, a workforce's options for employment and fulfilling careers can be limited. WorkInTexas.com aims to make sure this is not an issue for the state of Texas. The free, comprehensive online job search and matching site connects job seekers to more than 800,000 Texas job postings and information on career exploration and hiring events across the state. These features ensure that WorkInTexas.com remains the premier job seeker site for the state.



**Pictured Above:**

Texas Workforce Commission Executive Director Ed Serna talks to a student about the new WorkInTexas.com at a Texas Tech hiring event in Lubbock, Texas. TWC will be taking WorkInTexas.com on the road at hiring events around the state this fall.

# TEXAS WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS



**Texas Workforce Commission**

512-463-2222  
www.texasworkforce.org

**Alamo**

210-272-3260  
www.workforcesolutionsalamo.org

**Borderplex**

915-887-2600  
www.borderplexjobs.com

**Brazos Valley**

979-595-2800  
www.bvjobs.org

**Cameron County**

956-548-6700  
www.wfscameron.org

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www.workforcepb.org

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www.workforcesolutionsrca.com

**Southeast Texas**

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www.setworks.org

**South Plains**

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www.spworkforce.org

**South Texas**

956-722-3973  
www.southtexasworkforce.org

**Tarrant County**

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www.workforcesolutions.net

**Texoma**

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www.workforcesolutionstexoma.com

**West Central**

325-795-4200  
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www.workforcesystem.org

The Texas Workforce Commission, in partnership with 28 local workforce development boards, forms Texas Workforce Solutions.

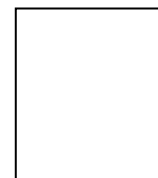
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