

# Highlighting a S.T.A.R.—System with Targeted Actions and Results

Houston Galveston Area Council (HGAC), one of Texas Workforce Commission’s Adult Education programs, is the largest Adult Education (AE) provider in Texas, serving over 18,000 students annually. Today’s highlighted S.T.A.R. will be HGAC’s sub-recipient Houston Community College (HCC). This S.T.A.R. is utilizing three of the five TX-PMN tenets (1) Leadership: through implementing systems that provide structural changes, (2) Student Services: by removing barriers for students that allow fully understood access to pathways and completion, and (3) Digital Capacity: using their student management system to implement and track structural change. All three assist with transforming the lives of students and promoting upward mobility within the Houston community.

Communities, sector-based clusters, meta-majors, pathways, IET’s, or whatever an institution chooses to call a career pathway, HCC is doing it right. Even the branding is pretty sweet, “Career4U,” and all 29 campuses are well informed and share the same positive message about their workforce training opportunities. On January 29, 2019, the Texas Peer Mentor Network (TX- PMN) hit the road to visit Nakia Edwards and his team at HCC’s Central Campus and had the pleasure of viewing a well-designed career pathway model. The TX-PMN team was strategically designed to implement and move HCC’s mission forward at their Central Campus and to filter the message to all the other campuses under the guidance of Dr. Christina Robinson, Executive Director of Adult Education and Literacy. When thinking of career pathway implementation at higher education institutions, one doesn’t typically lean toward believing an AE program accounts for significant enrollments into the institution.

However, this is happening at HCC. While walking through the halls of HCC’s Central location, it is evident that the slogan, “Change Your Life For \$20”, is intentionally everywhere. The slogan continues throughout every office that students enter. Immediately accompanying the slogan is a list of 18 different career paths under the “Career4U Academies” catch-phrase. Some on the TX-PMN team wondered, “Is this Adult Education program a workforce training program that just so happens to offer HSE and ESL classes as the student completes the training?”

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**HCC AE students receive a 66% discount  
for the first two academic classes**

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Upon further thinking, isn’t this the charge by TWC: “changing the lives of students in AEL programs through placement and completion of a career pathway that will earn students a living wage”? What is clear is that the emphasis to inform students about workforce training opportunities is a leading charge at HCC.

What makes Career4U even more unique is the "cost" for an HCC student's first six semester credit hours. Take a guess, "How much does an AEL student pay for the first six credits?" To take the guesswork out (drum roll, please), HCC AEL students receive a 66% discount for the first two academic classes. It is genuinely a "drop the mic" moment and perhaps even a Batman "POW." Whether "drop the mic" or "POW" is fully understood, place take in the awesomeness of the significant accomplishment HCC has provided for the AE student population. Kathy Dowdy from Austin Community College and Keegan Ried and Michelle Lamons from Amarillo College totally understood, and most likely it was the reason their mouths were wide open as they sat listening intently to Nakia Edwards as he described the structural changes related to AEL at HCC. He informed the Network site visit team that for all students connected to an AEL program at the time of registration, the 66% discount would be applied at checkout. A student's AEL courses are registered in HCC's student management system, "People Soft," and links to student information in the HCC system. Anahi Figueroa, a Teacher Supervisor and passionate student advocate, explained that the first time the system was pushed through, it seemed to have a glitch because the balance appeared much too low.

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**It was confirmed that direct beneficiaries of low-cost tuition were now AE students.**

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Her staff asked to remove the AEL courses to check whether the total was correct. Once the courses were removed, the total increased, and it was confirmed that direct beneficiaries of low-cost tuition were now AEL students. To further highlight the money moves made HCC, the Adult Education program actually pays for the student's first six credits, thus removing any financial barriers and further creating access to transformational opportunities. AE students can move into a Career4U program while HCC Adult Education instructional staff provide the wrap-around support services to ensure completion. The power move and synergy culminate with the final impact of Ability to Benefit (ATB). HCC has a robust ATB program in place that includes funding for the remaining Career4U student's career pathway program. Many AEL providers are familiar with ATB, but if not, here is a quick rundown. ATB is a form of FASFA, and "students are eligible for ATB after completing six credits or its equivalent, or passing a U.S. Department of Education (ED)-approved exam." (Lauren Walizer) In Texas, an example of an approved exam would be the "Accuplacer." Usually, the focus of ATB funding is for students without an HSE.

HCC has many strengths, and only a few have been highlighted here (career training opportunities with discounted rates for AEL students that are funded by the AEL program and ATB funding.) Please see HCC's well-assembled website for more information about their Adult Education Career4U program.

<https://www.hccs.edu/changemylife>



**Left Image, Clockwise:**  
Kathy Dowdy (ACC) , Keegan Ried (AC),  
Michelle Lamons (AC)

**Right Photo, Left to Right:**  
Keegan Ried, Kathy Dowdy, Michelle  
Lamons, Nakia Edwards (HCC)

*For more information about ATB*

<https://ifap.ed.gov/fsahandbook/attachments/1718FSAHbkVol1Ch1.pdf>

<https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/ATB-Implementation-Guide.pdf>

[https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018/10/2018.10.11\\_abilitytobenefitstateprocess.pdf](https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018/10/2018.10.11_abilitytobenefitstateprocess.pdf)