

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

Region 9 Education Service Center is unique among institutions in the Texas Peer Mentor Network (TX-PMN), as it is currently the only education service center in the Network's membership. This S.T.A.R. is working creatively to nurture relationships with partner colleges and other agencies in a regional effort to build IET programs and help students succeed in planning career pathways in high demand occupations. Region 9 is focused on developing three of the TX-PMN five tenets: (1) Curriculum, (2) Professional Development, and (3) Digital Capacity.

Based in Wichita Falls, Region 9 serves eleven counties in north central Texas. Vernon College (campuses in Vernon and Wichita Falls) has been its partner for the past few years. In fall 2018, Region 9 added a new college partner, North Central Texas College (NCTC) in Gainesville, which has campuses in two towns within the Region 9 service area, Bowie and Graham.

The TX-PMN site visit team from Amarillo College arrived in time for an early evening leadership meeting with the Vernon College (VC) Vice President of Instructional Services, Dr. Elizabeth Crandall, and Director of Continuing Education, Nina Feldman, in addition to the Region 9 AEL program director, Janis Heebner, and two other Region 9 AEL team members. They met at VC's Century Center Campus in Wichita Falls for over an hour, with each participant eagerly asking questions and discussing options.

Following the leadership meeting, site visitors Dr. Linda Munoz and Janice Johnston walked to a classroom section of the VC building to observe the Culinary Arts/IET class. Students see this program as a chance to build skills and earn industry recognized certificates. The class meets Thursday evenings with an IET instructor using reading and math curriculum materials contextualized for culinary arts. And on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings, the class meets in an industrial kitchen on another campus, where they put their skills into practice. On these nights, the IET instructor is still present to help with vocabulary, math conversions, and other basic skills.

The next morning, the TX-PMN team met with the 5-member Region 9 AEL team at their main service location. Bright, airy, and welcoming, the Region 9 Education Service Center (ESC) is a large building that has been renovated in the past year with fresh paint and new carpet. The team meeting started at a large table in the main office waiting room, but student traffic flow was higher than usual for a Friday morning with intake, registration, and TABE test tickets — busy, busy, busy. So the meeting moved to a conference room down the hall and around a few corners from the main entrance.

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Region 9 ESC has a strong partnership with its WIOA partners: two community colleges, Workforce Board, Workforce Solutions, and Vocational Rehabilitation. The group meets monthly to share ideas and discuss the students they serve. In addition, Region 9 is building partnerships with other agencies and organizations in the region. For example, local temp agencies are eager to refer individuals to the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) training at Region 9, as this certificate makes it easier to find temporary office placements. In addition, Region 9 is the official GED testing entity for local prisons and provides HSE instruction at one of the prisons.

Furthermore, they have talked with Tyson's Foods and other large employers about potentially providing instruction to their employees. In preparation for working with Tyson's, Region 9 developed a robust curriculum, which is still waiting to be piloted.

IET Curriculum Development is central to many Region 9 initiatives. In addition to providing ESL and HSE classes at all six service sites, Region 9 provides an IET supplemental instructor for the Culinary Arts program at Vernon College, a CNA program for both VC and NCTC, and a MOS program at the Region 9 site in Wichita Falls. None of the existing IET programs are certificate or degree programs, which is a challenge that requires the colleges to take the lead on establishing academic credit for any programs they help provide. VC has recently started its LVN program again, and Region 9 hopes to re-establish its former LVN/IET as well. The Region 9 team also has plans to start a new Entrepreneurship IET program this year.

Another program being created at Region 9 is the "Helping You Build" (HUB) program, scheduled to begin in Summer 2019. As part of the HUB's career research activities, students will select an IET course related to one of three industry sectors for Fall 2019 (Healthcare/Health Sciences – CNA/IET; Business – MOS/IET; Hospitality & Tourism – Culinary Arts/IET). The HUB curriculum includes course materials, core requirements, learning outcomes, course policies, and a course outline/schedule for nine weeks.

Professional Development (PD) plans are moving forward for the spring. PD trainings are routinely scheduled on Saturdays, four times/year, and all instructors are encouraged to attend. One topic planned for March is *Entrepreneurship Program Techniques*, to be presented by an instructor from Lubbock who developed these for her own program. Region 9 is also considering hosting a *Poverty Training* in April. The Region 9 Distance Learning Coordinator has been taking technology training online with TCALL and is urging all Region 9 instructors to take TCALL's *Apprenticeship I* online training.

Region 9 has made progress in the Digital Capacity arena by developing its knowledge and use of Google Docs. A former employee developed a specialized procedure in Google Sheets for reporting attendance on all HSE, ESL, and IET programs at one location by "Class Sites," rather than by individual instructors. This customized procedure simplifies the online data reporting process by making use of multiple short cuts in Google Sheets that use formulas for TANF, attendance, and other data categories.

Aware of the need to improve promotional activities to build enrollment and completion numbers, Region 9 is actively engaged in pursuing fresh, new ideas. Their team approach to problem solving and their willingness to change to meet student needs are considered significant group strengths. For example, they do SWAT analyses with sites on Saturdays, identify the good ideas, and then find ways to implement them right away. Region 9 uses instructional coaches with HSE and ESL classes and also networks well with their community college, agency, and other community partners. This team is firmly committed to finding a path to success. One team member described their commitment level like this: "We work in Adult Education. We'll still be here two months after we die!"

For more information about Region 9 Education Service Center, see
www.esc9.net
www.facebook.com/Region9ESC