



EDUCATION

**REGIONAL WORKFORCE SUMMIT
EVENT RECAP**

JULY 16, 2026

PREPARING TOMORROW'S EDUCATORS TODAY

SUMMIT OVERVIEW



The Gulf Coast Workforce Board closed out its 2026 Summer Regional Summit Series with the Education Futures Summit on July 16 at Lone Star College. The event brought together educators, workforce leaders, policymakers, community partners, and employers to explore how education and workforce systems can better prepare students for lifelong success and economic mobility.

With 184 attendees, the Education Futures Summit was the largest summit in the series. The strong turnout reflected the essential role education plays in workforce readiness, economic competitiveness, and community prosperity.

Through keynote presentations, employer perspectives, workforce program highlights, and education and training discussions, participants examined how stronger partnerships, responsive programs, and better-aligned pathways can help students move successfully from learning to meaningful careers.

SUMMIT AT A GLANCE

 **184 ATTENDEES**

 **7 PANELISTS**

 **LONE STAR COLLEGE
THE WOODLANDS, TEXAS**

 **JULY 16, 2026**





WELCOME AND OPENING

The Education Futures Summit opened with welcoming remarks from Dr. Christina Hagerty, Senior Associate Vice Chancellor of Curriculum and Instruction at Lone Star College.

Dr. Hagerty emphasized the critical role educational institutions play in preparing learners for a rapidly evolving economy. She highlighted the importance of innovation, collaboration, and responsiveness to workforce needs.

Her remarks established the summit's focus on creating stronger connections between education and employment and developing pathways that lead students from learning to meaningful careers.



INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES

WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED



Moderated by Madeline Chaisson, Senior Manager with Jobs for the Future (JFF), the morning employer panel featured Arun Gir, CEO of iEducate; Scott Corrick, Executive Director of Talent Acquisition at Aldine ISD; and Dr. Dana Carmouche, Director of Career and Technical Education at Houston ISD.

Panelists discussed how education systems can better align with employer expectations and evolving workforce needs. They highlighted the skills and competencies needed for success, along with the importance of career exploration, work-based learning, industry partnerships, and student engagement.

The discussion emphasized that workforce preparation must begin early and continue throughout a student's educational journey. Stronger connections between education and employment can help ensure graduates possess both the technical and durable skills needed to succeed in today's labor market.



INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES

KEY MESSAGES



Education must align with workforce needs.

Education systems should remain responsive to employer expectations and the skills required in an evolving labor market.

Workforce preparation must begin early.

Career preparation should start early and continue throughout a student's educational journey.

Students need technical and durable skills.

Graduates need occupation-specific knowledge as well as communication, adaptability, problem-solving, and other skills that support workplace success.

Career exposure strengthens readiness.

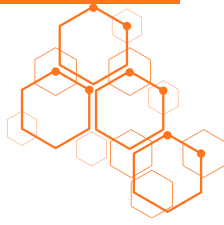
Career exploration and work-based learning help students understand available opportunities and connect classroom learning with the workplace.

Partnerships create stronger pathways.

Collaboration among educators, employers, and industry partners can strengthen student engagement and create clearer connections to meaningful career opportunities.



APPRENTICESHIPS AS A REGIONAL STRATEGY



The Education Summit intentionally incorporated information on apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, and Registered Apprenticeships as a key workforce development strategy for addressing the Gulf Coast region's current and future talent needs. During the summit, the Gulf Coast Workforce Board staff provided valuable insight into the Board's efforts to expand work-based learning opportunities, strengthen career pathways, and increase employer engagement through apprenticeship models. Participants gained a deeper understanding of how apprenticeships serve as a proven workforce solution that allows individuals to earn while they learn, develop industry-recognized skills, and access careers that offer long-term economic mobility.

The Gulf Coast Workforce Board (GCWB) emphasized its commitment to advancing Registered Apprenticeship Programs as part of its broader mission to help employers meet their workforce needs and assist individuals in building careers that allow both to compete in the global economy. As outlined in the Board's Strategic Vision for 2024-2029, GCWB is focused on supporting business-forward strategies that fuel the regional economy, strengthening partnerships between education and industry, developing clear career pathways, and expanding work-based learning opportunities, including pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, internships, and on-the-job training programs. These strategies are designed to ensure the region has a skilled workforce that can meet the demands of high-growth industries while creating opportunities for residents to access family-sustaining careers.

Summit attendees learned how apprenticeships align with GCWB's strategic priorities to strengthen workforce solutions, foster strategic partnerships, and support employers in building sustainable talent pipelines. The Board's strategic plan specifically calls for investment in and expansion of pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, internship, and on-the-job training initiatives to meet industry demand and create stronger alignment between workforce skills and employer needs. Through these efforts, GCWB seeks to increase awareness of career pathways, improve workforce readiness, support economic growth across the 13-county region, and ensure employers have access to the skilled workers necessary to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving economy.

By highlighting apprenticeship models throughout the summits, GCWB reinforced its role as a regional convener that brings together employers, educational institutions, workforce partners, and community organizations to create innovative talent development solutions. The information shared demonstrated how Registered Apprenticeships can address workforce shortages, support the development of future talent in high-demand industries, and provide clear pathways for individuals to advance from entry-level employment to high-skill, high-wage careers. These discussions aligned with the Board's vision of creating thriving, inclusive communities where all individuals have opportunities to earn, learn, and prosper while supporting the long-term economic vitality of the Gulf Coast region.

KEYNOTE PERSPECTIVES

EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY



Dr. Snejana Nihtianova, Associate Director of the Center for Economic Mobility at Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research, explored the connections among early childhood development, public health, education, and economic mobility.

Her presentation demonstrated how investments in early learning, family supports, educational attainment, and community well-being can create stronger long-term outcomes for individuals and communities. She encouraged participants to view education, health, family stability, and workforce readiness as interconnected parts of economic opportunity.

Dr. Jacob Kirksey, Associate Professor of Education Policy at Texas Tech University, discussed how education policy influences workforce and economic outcomes. He highlighted the importance of strong educational systems, effective workforce pathways, and policies that strengthen educator labor markets while expanding access to postsecondary education and high-quality careers.

Together, the presentations reinforced a central message: educational success and workforce success are inseparable, and strategic investments in both are essential to long-term economic mobility.



WORKFORCE SUPPORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES



Throughout the summit, attendees learned about the comprehensive services available through Workforce Solutions and the Gulf Coast Workforce Board. These programs connect individuals, families, students, and employers with resources that support workforce participation and long-term economic success.

Child Care Division

Provides access to affordable, quality child care, enabling parents to pursue education, training, and employment.

Hire Gulf Coast Youth Division

Prepares young people for future careers through career awareness, work-based learning experiences, and exposure to high-demand industries.

Business Engagement Division

Works directly with employers to identify workforce needs and strengthen connections between talent development and hiring.

Career Pathways Division

Helps individuals navigate educational opportunities, workforce programs, and career pathways that lead to long-term success.

Together, these services demonstrate that workforce development extends beyond job placement. Comprehensive support systems help individuals and families overcome barriers, pursue opportunities, and build greater economic stability.



TRAINING PERSPECTIVES

ALIGNING EDUCATION WITH OPPORTUNITY



Moderated by Madeline Chaisson of Jobs for the Future, the afternoon education and training panel brought together Dr. Christina Hagerty of Lone Star College; Dr. Jose Ricardo-Osorio of the University of Houston-Downtown; Dr. Albert Talley of San Jacinto College; and Dr. Marissa Moreno of Lee College.

The discussion explored innovative approaches to student success, workforce alignment, transfer pathways, credential attainment, and workforce preparation. Panelists shared how educational leaders are adapting programs to meet changing workforce needs while ensuring students have access to multiple pathways toward successful careers.

Panelists emphasized the importance of collaboration among K-12 education, higher education institutions, workforce organizations, and employers. The discussion reinforced that real impact occurs when education and workforce systems operate in alignment, creating seamless pathways that move students from learning to earning.



STRATEGIC CONVENING

BUILDING PATHWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY



One of the most impactful moments of the summit was a special convening led by Chief Deputy Director Juliet Stipeche. The discussion brought together representatives from 19 educational institutions, including 12 independent school districts, one education service center, and six community colleges.

Participants engaged in a focused, solutions-oriented conversation about strengthening regional alignment between education and workforce systems. They explored opportunities to better align educational pathways with employer demand, identify resources that support student success, leverage funding, develop scalable models, and strengthen connections between education outcomes and workforce needs.

The conversation recognized that effective systems must support learners at every level of readiness. Participants affirmed a shared commitment to ensuring students leave educational institutions prepared not only to graduate but to thrive in sustainable careers that support long-term economic mobility.



FROM CONVERSATION TO ACTION: BUILDING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE OF THE GULF COAST



The 2026 Gulf Coast Workforce Board Summer Regional Summit Series was more than a collection of events. It was a regional call to action.

Across three summits, Construction Futures in Wharton County, Life Sciences & Healthcare Futures at San Jacinto College, and Education Futures at Lone Star College, nearly 360 employers, educators, workforce leaders, community organizations, students, and economic development partners came together around a common purpose: preparing our region for the future.

Throughout the summer, participants explored the workforce challenges and opportunities shaping the Gulf Coast economy. They heard directly from industry leaders about workforce shortages, emerging occupations, evolving skill requirements, and the importance of developing talent pipelines that can meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. They learned from educators and training providers who are creating innovative learning models, expanding access to credentials, and building pathways that connect students and workers to meaningful careers.

More importantly, these summits moved beyond discussion. They showcased real solutions. They highlighted partnerships already making a difference. They demonstrated how workforce development, education, industry, and community organizations can work together to create opportunities that change lives.

Whether discussing apprenticeship expansion in construction, biomanufacturing workforce development in life sciences, or educational pathways that increase economic mobility, one message emerged consistently:

The future workforce will not be built by any one organization alone. It will be built through collaboration, innovation, and shared commitment.

The Summer Summit Series also reinforced a broader vision for the Gulf Coast region. Workforce development is no longer simply about filling jobs. It is about creating experiences that inspire people, exposing individuals to opportunities they may never have considered, and ensuring that every learner can see themselves in the future economy.

That vision is now leading us into the next phase of this work.



LOOKING AHEAD:

THE 2026-2027 SCHOOL YEAR CAREER EXPLORATION SERIES

Beginning in October 2026, the Gulf Coast Workforce Board will launch its School Year Career Exploration Series, transforming the conversations from the summer into direct engagement opportunities for students across the region.

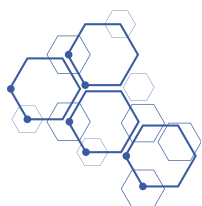
Building on the momentum created through the summit series, students will have access to a combination of in-person and virtual micro-experiences designed to introduce them to high-demand careers, emerging industries, and educational pathways that exist right here in the Gulf Coast region.

These experiences will allow students to:

- Explore careers across multiple industries and occupations.
- Hear directly from employers and industry professionals.
- Learn about innovative training models and education pathways.
- Discover apprenticeship, certification, and degree opportunities.
- Gain exposure to workforce trends and future careers.
- Connect classroom learning to real-world career opportunities.
- Understand how education leads to economic mobility and career success.

Most importantly, students will have the opportunity to see possibilities for themselves.

For many young people, career exploration begins with a single conversation, a single experience, or a single interaction with an employer who opens a door of opportunity. Through these micro-experiences, we hope to spark curiosity, build confidence, and inspire the next generation of workers, innovators, educators, healthcare professionals, technicians, skilled trades professionals, entrepreneurs, and leaders.





AN INVITATION TO GET INVOLVED

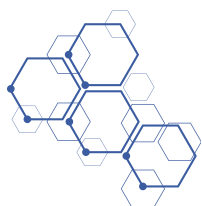
The success of this work depends on all of us. We invite employers, educators, workforce professionals, community organizations, and industry leaders to join us as we continue building stronger connections between education and workforce development. Together, we can create experiences that help students discover their passions, understand the opportunities available to them, and develop the skills needed to succeed in the careers of tomorrow.

The Summer Regional Summit Series proved that our region has the expertise, partnerships, and commitment necessary to address workforce challenges. The School Year Career Exploration Series is our opportunity to take the next step by bringing those insights directly to students.

Because when we connect learning to opportunity, education to employment, and students to their future, we do more than prepare a workforce.

We build pathways to purpose. We expand economic mobility. We strengthen communities. And together, we create a future where every student can see a place for themselves in the success of the Gulf Coast region. The conversations have started.

Now it is time to turn those conversations into action, those partnerships into opportunities, and those opportunities into futures. The work continues, and the future begins with the students we inspire today.





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