



CONSTRUCTION

REGIONAL WORKFORCE SUMMIT
EVENT RECAP

JUNE 11, 2026

BUILDING STRONG FUTURES TOGETHER



SUMMIT OVERVIEW



The Gulf Coast Workforce Board launched its 2026 Summer Regional Summit Series with the Construction Futures Summit on June 11 at Wharton County Junior College. The event brought together 75 attendees representing employers, education partners, workforce organizations, and community stakeholders to strengthen the talent pipeline supporting the Gulf Coast region's construction, industrial, and energy sectors.

Industry and education leaders shared insights into current workforce challenges, hiring needs, and the skills employers expect. Discussions highlighted safety, technical expertise, adaptability, continuous learning, registered apprenticeships, and industry-aligned training. The summit reinforced the importance of employers, educators, and workforce partners working together to connect talent development with industry demand and expand pathways into high-demand careers.

SUMMIT AT A GLANCE

 **75 ATTENDEES**

 **7 PANELISTS**

 **WHARTON COUNTY JUNIOR COLLEGE,
WHARTON, TEXAS**

 **JUNE 11, 2026**



WELCOME AND OPENING



The summit began with welcoming remarks from Dr. Amanda Allen, President of Wharton County Junior College. Dr. Allen emphasized WCJC's commitment to expanding workforce education and creating pathways that lead directly to high-demand careers. She highlighted the importance of aligning education with industry needs through innovative training programs, strategic partnerships, and continued investment in workforce infrastructure.

A key focus of the opening was WCJC's continued expansion of its Construction Trades Training Facility in Bay City. Developed in response to strong regional demand for skilled workers, the facility provides hands-on training in carpentry, plumbing, pipefitting, and other construction trades that support the region's construction, industrial, and energy sectors.



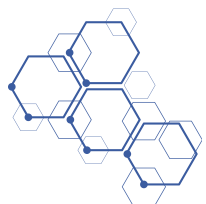
INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES

WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED



Moderated by Paul Puentes of the Houston Gulf Coast Building and Construction Trades Council, the employer panel featured Scott Mackebon of South Texas Project Nuclear Operating Company; Larry Lockhart, Senior Director of Nuclear Operations at Day & Zimmermann, Inc.; and John Wilson, Site Manager at Day & Zimmermann, Inc. Together, they shared real-world perspectives on workforce challenges, hiring needs, and future industry demands.

Panelists emphasized the growing need for skilled trades professionals who are safety-minded, technically prepared, adaptable, and committed to continuous learning. The discussion underscored the importance of aligning education and training with workplace expectations so employers have access to the qualified talent needed to support their operations and future growth.



INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES

KEY MESSAGES



Demand for Skilled Trades Is Growing

Employers need qualified professionals to support construction, industrial, and energy operations across the Gulf Coast region.

Safety and Technical Expertise Matter

Workers must have the technical preparation and strong commitment to safety required in construction and industrial workplaces.

Adaptability and Continuous Learning Are Essential

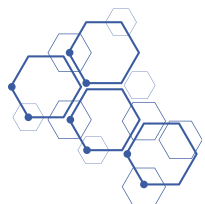
As industry needs evolve, workers must remain open to new practices, additional training, and continued skill development.

Training Must Reflect Workplace Expectations

Education and training programs should prepare individuals with the technical and professional skills employers seek.

Industry and Education Must Work Together

Strong talent pipelines depend on employers and educators collaborating to align training with demand and expand pathways into high-demand careers.



APPRENTICESHIPS WORK



Desi Holmes of the Texas Workforce Commission delivered the summit's keynote presentation on expanding Registered Apprenticeship Programs and developing high-quality workforce training models. She emphasized that apprenticeships provide an employer-driven strategy for creating sustainable talent pipelines while preparing individuals for skilled, high-demand careers.

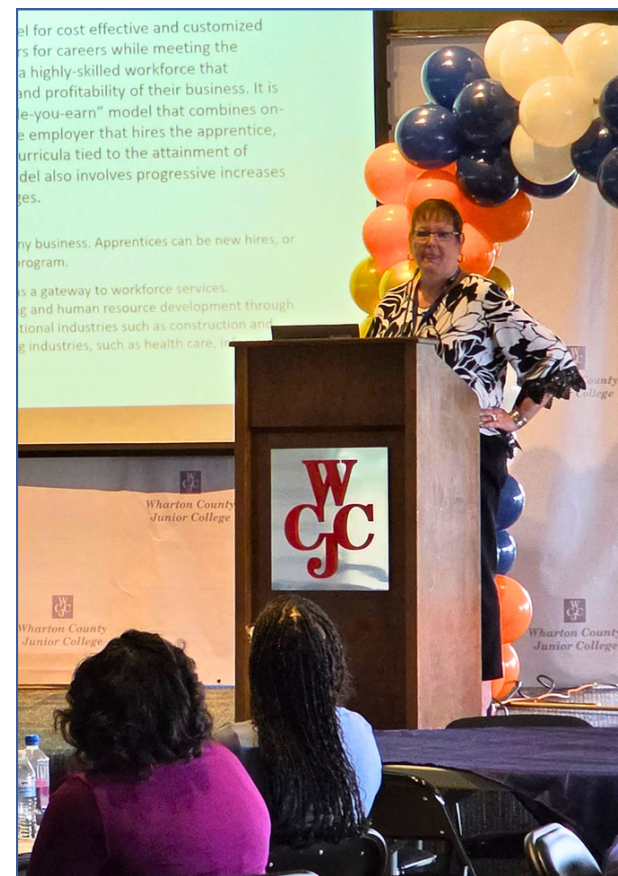
Holmes explained that strong apprenticeship programs help employers develop the workforce they need to remain competitive in a rapidly changing economy. By connecting structured training with practical workplace experience, apprenticeships create career pathways that benefit both employers and workers.

Why Apprenticeships Work:

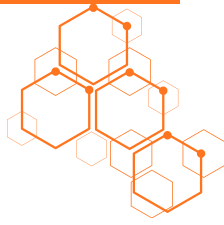
- Build employer-aligned talent pipelines
- Combine training with workplace experience
- Prepare workers for high-demand careers
- Support credentials and advancement
- Strengthen workforce competitiveness



**APPRENTICESHIPS
WORK!**



APPRENTICESHIPS AS A REGIONAL STRATEGY



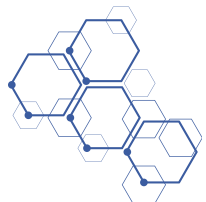
The Construction Summit intentionally incorporated information on apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, and Registered Apprenticeships as a key workforce development strategy for addressing the Gulf Coast region's current and future talent needs. During the summit, the Gulf Coast Workforce Board staff 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.

Helps individuals navigate education and workforce opportunities that lead to sustainable employment and long-term career success.



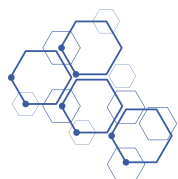
TRAINING PERSPECTIVES

BUILDING CONSTRUCTION CAREER PATHWAYS



Moderated by Madeline Chaisson of Jobs for the Future, the Education and Training Panel featured Brian Trojacek of Wharton County Junior College, Clinton Harris of San Jacinto College, and David Amador Jr. and Robert Sanchez of Wharton County Junior College.

Panelists shared perspectives on developing industry-aligned training programs, creating accessible pathways into high-demand occupations, and preparing students with the technical and professional skills employers expect. The discussion reinforced that strong workforce systems depend on education and industry working together to align training with employer demand, expand access, and connect individuals to rewarding careers.



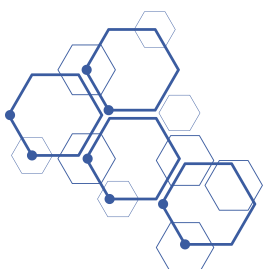


CAREER EXPLORATION TOOL

Wen Zheng of the Workforce Innovation Division demonstrated how labor market intelligence and economic data support workforce planning and career decisions. Attendees learned how data can identify growth industries, uncover skill gaps, guide investments, and align education and training with employer demand.

The Career Exploration Tool provides occupation-level information for the Gulf Coast region, including job descriptions, wages, employment outlook, and education requirements. The Career Lattice Dashboard helps users identify related occupations and explore pathways from entry-level positions to higher-skilled, higher-paying careers.

Together, these resources help job seekers, students, educators, employers, and workforce professionals make informed decisions and turn workforce data into meaningful outcomes.





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.

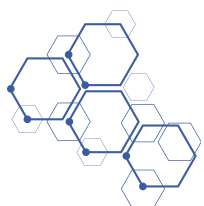
Building on the momentum created through the summit series, students will have access to a combination of in-person and virtual micro-experiences designed to introduce them to high-demand careers, emerging industries, and educational pathways that exist right here in the Gulf Coast region.

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

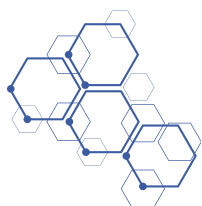
The success of this work depends on all of us. We invite employers, educators, workforce professionals, community organizations, and industry leaders to join us as we continue building stronger connections between education and workforce development. Together, we can create experiences that help students 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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