

# WE ARE RURAL EDUCATION

A YEAR IN REVIEW

# 2024

A YEAR OF PROGRESS,  
INNOVATION, AND  
COLLABORATION

**CEN**  
COLLEGIATE EDU-NATION

# THE RURAL DILEMMA

**Rural environments have disproportionately higher poverty rates, lower educational achievement, low-wage jobs, and struggling economies. Quality educational systems are our best bet for preparing rural students to compete globally for jobs and have satisfying careers.**





# WHAT'S INSIDE?

1

## INTRODUCTION

A GLIMPSE OF OUR YEAR IN REVIEW, FINANCIALS, MEET OUR TEAM, AND LEARN OUR “WHY”

2

## PILLAR 1

TAKE A LOOK AT OUR 2024 EFFORTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES, AGE APPROPRIATE RESEARCH, AND DEGREE//CERTIFICATION ATTAINMENT

3

## PILLAR 2

LAST YEAR'S EFFORTS HIGHLIGHTED THE MANY PATHWAYS TO BACHELOR DEGREES AND BEYOND INCLUDING APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS, MEETING RURAL WORKFORCE NEEDS, DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES AND MORE!

4

## PILLAR 3

IN 2024, WE WORKED TO EXPAND FUNDING, BUILD BEST PRACTICES AND REMAIN RURAL THOUGHT LEADERS FOR IMPACTS REACHING FAR BEYOND RURAL

## LOOKING AHEAD

# SNAPSHOT OF 2024

48%

Students in P-20 districts are earning dual credit during their high school years.

44%

Class of 2024 earned a high-wage, high-demand industry certification.

22%

Class of 2024 earned an associate degree prior to high school graduation.

51%

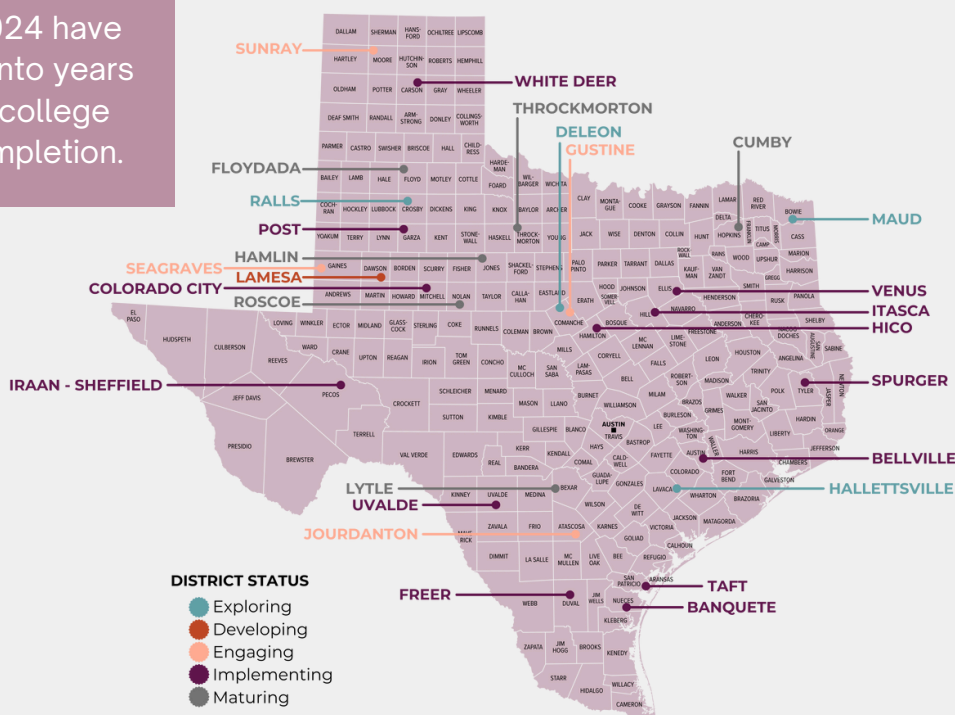
Class of 2024 have continued into years 13 & 14 for college degree completion.

29,398

Rural Texas Students served by CEN

28

Rural districts currently being served





# INTRODUCTION

A glimpse of our year in review, financials, meet our team, and learn our “why”

**CEN**  
COLLEGIATE EDU-NATION

# WELCOME STATEMENT

At Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN), we firmly believe that the future of our state, nation, and world rests in the hands of our youth. In today's fast-paced, ever-changing world, a high school diploma and a strong work ethic—once the foundation for success—are no longer enough. Rural communities face unique challenges, including higher poverty rates, lower educational attainment, limited access to high-paying jobs, and struggling local economies. That's why we are committed to building quality educational systems that equip rural students to compete globally and pursue fulfilling, prosperous careers.

## **Our mission has never been clearer.**

Fortunately for rural students in Texas and around the United States, we are finding more and more school leaders who are willing to roll up their sleeves and do this difficult work. As a result, in 2024, CEN looks to expand into over 30 Texas schools and communities, and impact in excess of 30,000 rural Texas students, not to mention similar conversations in 9 other states with large rural populations, including West Virginia, Idaho, North Dakota, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Colorado and North Carolina.

This year also marked an exciting chapter for CEN's leadership as I transitioned to a new role as Founder and CEO. With that in mind, I have been focused on strategic national expansion efforts while our newly appointed President, Dr. Rachael McClain, will continue to lead the organization's transformative initiatives in K-12 education, postsecondary success, and rural community advocacy. We were also thrilled to welcome Michelle Carroll Smith as Chief of Schools and Katy Cade as School Action Director, both of whom bring decades of experience and a shared commitment to rural excellence.

Together, we have the power to transform the future of rural education and empower the next generation to dream bigger, achieve more, and shape a better world. This work is not just about schools or programs—it's about unlocking potential, creating opportunities, and ensuring every student have the tools they need to not just survive but, thrive.

The future is bright, and it begins with us. Let's keep building, innovating, and inspiring—because our youth deserve nothing less.



**Dr. Kim Alexander**  
*Founder & CEO*

# FROM OUR BOARD

As we reflect on another incredible year, I am honored to share the progress and accomplishments that demonstrate the power of our collective commitment to rural education. This year, CEN launched exciting new initiatives, including expanded teacher preparation programs and groundbreaking partnerships that further align K-12, higher education, and workforce development.

**These initiatives are transforming not only our schools but also the broader rural communities they serve.**

The milestones in this report are a testament to the unwavering dedication of our students, educators, and the CEN staff who champion this vital work every day. They remind us of the impact we can achieve when we come together with a shared vision for student success.

The CEN Board of Directors is proud to support this mission and the meaningful progress being made. As we look ahead to 2025 and beyond, we remain steadfast in our belief that rural communities are key to a brighter future for our nation.

Thank you for joining us on this journey.

**Together, we are making a lasting difference.**



**Dr. Susan Holley**  
*Board President*



# MEET OUR TEAM



KIM  
**ALEXANDER**  
Founder & CEO



RACHAEL  
**MCCLAIN**  
President



KENDALL  
**GUYNES**  
Chief Financial Officer



SUSAN  
**RUIZ-GROVE**  
Chief Development Officer



BRITTANY  
**WILLIAMS**  
Chief Partnerships Officer



MICHELLE  
**CARROLL SMITH**  
Chief of Schools



ANDY  
**WILSON**  
Program Director



KELLY  
**SPRINGFIELD**  
Director of P-TECH



KATY  
**CADE**  
School Action Director



DAN  
**BOREN**  
STEM Instructional Coach



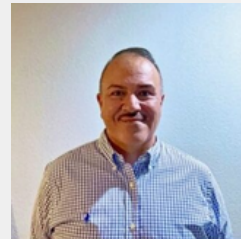
KIM  
**MOUSER**  
RLA Instructional Coach



CHANTEL  
**SCHULZ**  
CTE Instructional Specialist



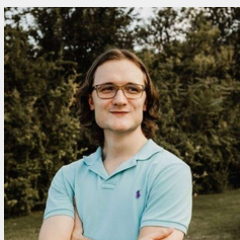
KRISTEN  
**LUFT**  
Instructional Coach



VICTOR  
**NATERA**  
EDU-Reach Coach



ANGELA  
**MEHL**  
EDU-Reach Coach



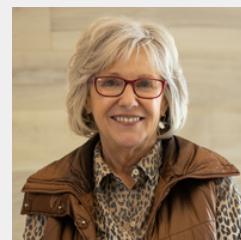
CAMDEN  
**BOREN**  
Robotics & Programming  
Coordinator



KARSHA  
**DAUGHERTY**  
CEN AmeriCorps  
Program Coordinator



DARRELL  
**DROMGOOLE**  
Community Development Consultant



MARSHA  
**ALEXANDER**  
Co-Founder & Consultant



NELSON  
**COULTER**  
Organizational Leadership Consultant

# OUR VISION, MISSION & ASPIRATION

## OUR VISION

To End Generational Poverty In Rural America

## OUR MISSION

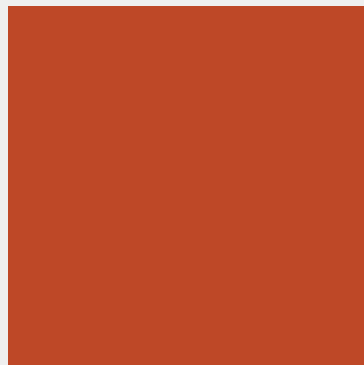
To empower rural school districts and communities to support and educate students/youth, beginning at home, continuing from the first day of Pre-K through postsecondary, leading to meaningful careers for lifetime success.

## OUR ASPIRATION

To achieve the highest student performance outcomes in the country resulting in the intervention of rural community economies and better life.

## OUR CULTURE

At Collegiate Edu-Nation, our culture is rooted in care, passion, and deep knowledge. Guided by a strong vision for innovation and action, we are dedicated to supporting rural communities and driving impactful solutions to end generational poverty.



# OUR CORE VALUES



**Rural matters.** We believe in the talent and potential of ALL **rural students** to contribute to the prosperity and quality of life of their **community, country, and world.**

1

2

**Success for all students** requires a P-20 culture shift. We believe in an **integrated approach** that raises aspirations and expectations for **all students** from the moment they first set foot in a classroom to the day they start high-wage, high-demand careers.

**Education** must constantly adapt to the changing world. We are committed to **real-world learning** and 1:1 support, preparing students for a life of choice and impact. Education is a lifelong community effort.

**We develop promising communities through education** and career potential by harnessing rural America's **connectivity, resourcefulness, and grit.**

3



# CEN THEORY OF CHANGE

## CEN STUDENT JOURNEY The Rural P-20 System Model Elements

### COMMUNITY CONNECTION



**Not just an education. Lifelong contribution.**

CEN students research locally relevant problems starting in elementary school. This engagement turns students into leaders and problem-solvers within their communities.

### CAREER EXPERIENCE



**Not just workforce readiness. Career experience.**

Students engage in work-based learning opportunities with high-wage earning employers connected to their rural community, preparing them to build meaningful careers while reducing rural brain drain and revitalizing communities.

### COLLEGE SUCCESS



**Not just college readiness. A college degree.**

An affordable college degree prepares students for a life of opportunity, choice, and impact - and narrows the rural poverty gap.

Learning and Instructional Rounds (Harvard Rounds)

Mentoring (Peer, Adult, Administrators)

Age-Appropriate Research

Capstone Projects

✓ 100% HS Graduation

✓ 90% HWHD IBC

STEM Strategies

Work Based Learning (WBL)

P-TECH

RSSI Support

TSI

1:1 Coaching

✓ Nontraditional Bachelor's

✓ 80% Baccalaureate Degrees

Dual Credit

✓ 90% Associates Degrees

Instructional Models PK-12 (Experiential, Blended, PBL)

HQIM & Academic Rigor

RBIS Toolbox (AVID-WICOR-CIF)

PK 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Culture of Innovation: A P-20 continuum of rigorous and relevant education that launches students into successful careers.

NWEA MAP

Academic Data Tracking & Clearinghouse

# OUR BELIEFS

**STUDENTS FROM RURAL COMMUNITIES SHOULD HAVE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO ACCESS CHALLENGING CAREER PATHS AND ACHIEVE POSTSECONDARY DEGREES AND INDUSTRY-RECOGNIZED CERTIFICATIONS.**

**RURAL SCHOOLS ARE STRONGER THROUGH COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING.**

**EDUCATION DOES NOT WORK IN SILOS. THROUGH ECONOMIES OF SCALE AND CONNECTIONS AMONG PASSIONATE EDUCATORS, WE CAN DO MORE FOR STUDENTS AS A DYNAMIC NETWORK THAN FOR THEM ALONE.**

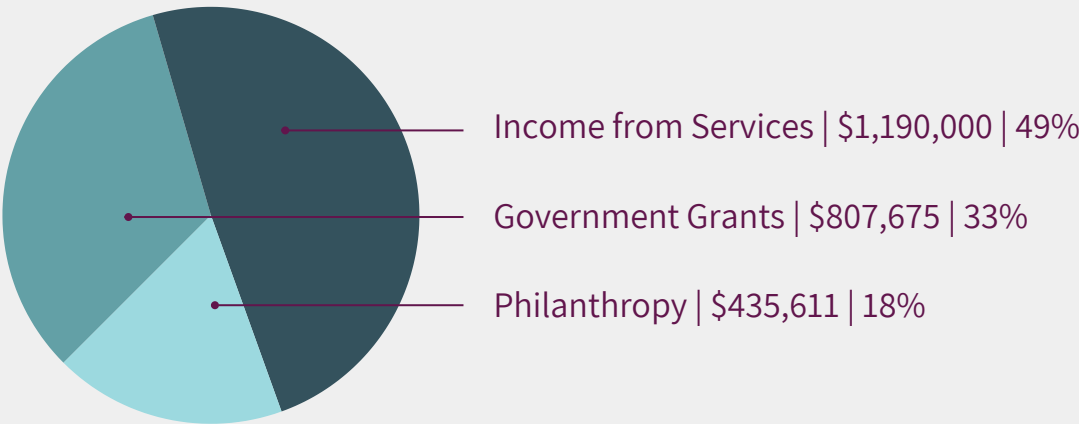
**RURAL COMMUNITIES NURTURE BIG DREAMS BY DEVELOPING AND APPLYING INNOVATION.**

**OUR BEST TEACHERS IN AMERICA SHOULD MENTOR RURAL STUDENTS.**

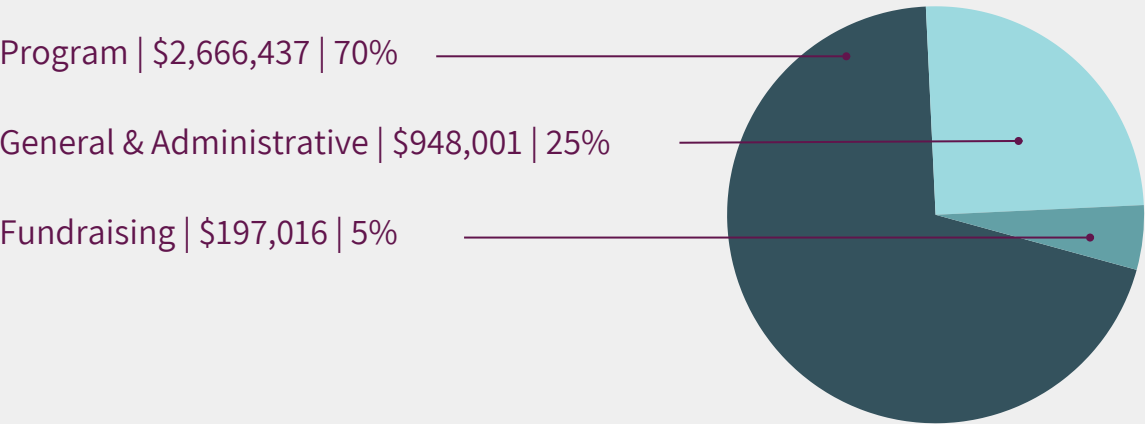
**OPTIMAL STUDENT LEARNING IS ALWAYS PREDICATED ON OPTIMAL EDUCATOR LEARNING.**

# 2024 FINANCIALS

## SOURCES OF INCOME



## CATEGORIES OF EXPENSES

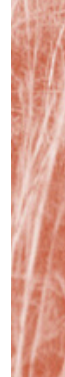
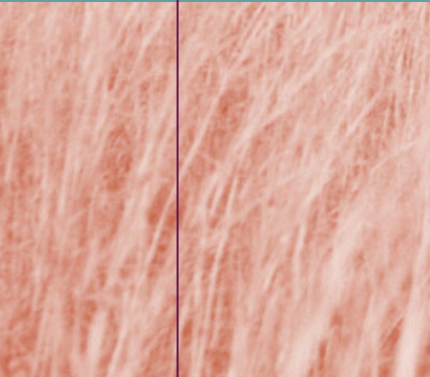
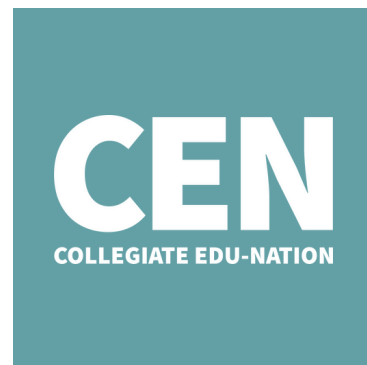
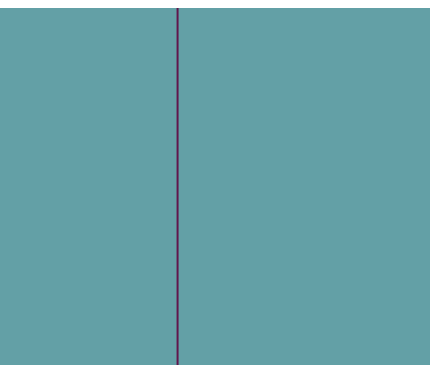
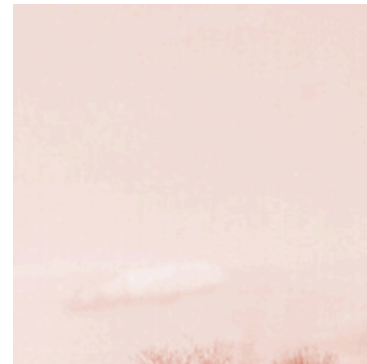




## Transforming PK-12 Education Through Rural Innovation

# PILLAR 1

**Our Goal:** Establish 100 CEN Districts impacting 300 rural communities by 2030 through regional collectives and cohorts to guide mentorship and collaboration across the CEN districts.



# 2024 SNAPSHOT



## PK-12+ Support

**21,556**

Students Texas P-20 Districts



**7,842**

Additional  
Supports to  
Rural Districts  
(non-network)



In-person professional  
development provided  
to over **1,460 teachers**  
in 23-24 School year

**48%**

## Dual Credit

Students in P-20 districts are  
earning dual credit during their  
high school years.



**76 Programs of Study** in designated P-TECH  
high schools, serving **1,395 (registered)**  
students for 24-25 school year

## CURRENT STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

### Race



**50%**  
Hispanic



**44%**  
White

### Economically-Fragile



**66%**



**Serving  
29,398  
rural  
students**



**8 STATES**

National Expansion

# Transforming PK-12 Education Through Rural Innovation

**Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN) is driven by its unwavering commitment to transforming rural education and ending generational poverty through a comprehensive P-20 system.**

The foundation of this mission lies in supporting rural districts as they guide students from the first day of pre-K through postsecondary education, equipping them with the skills and certifications needed for meaningful careers. Through targeted professional development, innovative programs, and a strong support network, CEN ensures every student has access to a future of possibility and success.

## **Impact of the Thoma Foundation's Support**

The \$1 million investment from the Thoma Foundation over three years has ignited transformative change in rural communities across Texas. This visionary support empowered CEN to implement impactful initiatives that are reshaping the educational landscape for rural students and educators. With these funds, CEN has delivered:

- Virtual and in-person professional development for over 1,460 educators during the 2023-24 school year.
- Hands-on learning experiences through Summer Regional Trainings, aligning to the P-20 Model's 13 essential elements.
- Regional instructional coaches, providing direct support to district and campus leaders in designing, launching, and implementing P-20 initiatives.
- These efforts have driven remarkable results: 48% of students in P-20 districts earn dual credit, 44% graduate with high-wage, high-demand certifications, and 22% achieve associate degrees before completing high school

## **A Catalyst for Rural Empowerment**

The impact of the Thoma Foundation's partnership is vividly felt in rural districts like Lytle ISD. Dustin Breithaupt, Superintendent of Lytle ISD, emphasized, "The support from CEN and the Thoma Foundation has created opportunities that were unimaginable just a few years ago. We are witnessing firsthand how rural students are embracing high-level learning and preparing for impactful futures."

Instructional coaching has been a cornerstone of this transformation. Kim Mouser, a CEN Instructional Coach, shared, "Seeing the growth and confidence in our educators as they adopt the P-20 Model has been incredible. The Thoma Foundation's investment ensures we can provide tailored support, bringing meaningful change to rural schools."

Reflecting on the broader vision, Rachael McClain, President of CEN, stated, "This partnership demonstrates the transformative power of targeted resources and collaboration. The Thoma Foundation's investment has strengthened our ability to empower rural students and communities to achieve their highest potential."

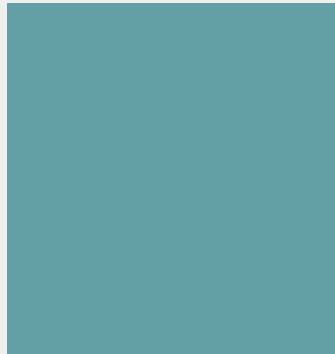
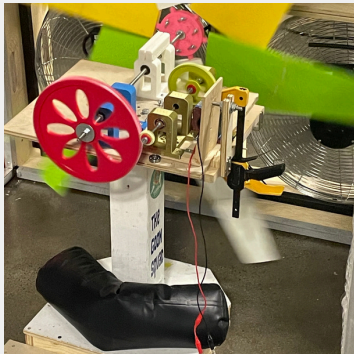
The work supported by the Thoma Foundation epitomizes CEN's dedication to fostering Rural Empowerment across Texas, ensuring every rural student can thrive and contribute to a vibrant future.

**"We are witnessing firsthand how rural students are embracing high-level learning and preparing for impactful futures."**

**-Kim Mouser**  
CEN Instructional Coach



# STEM ON THE MOVE



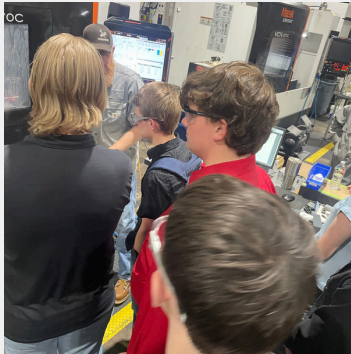
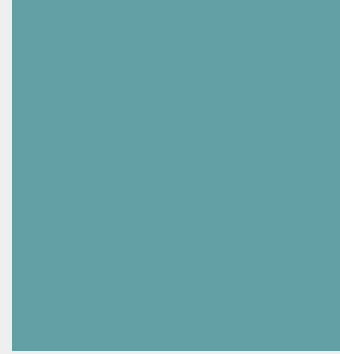
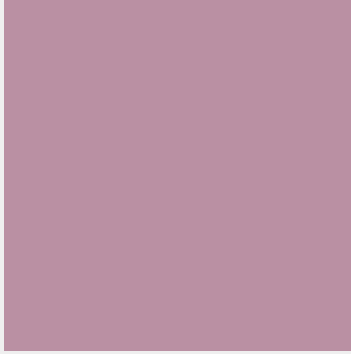
## KIDWIND

The 2nd Annual TSTC Big Country KidWind Challenge was held in February 2023 at the Texas State Technical College (TSTC) campus in Sweetwater, where teams from **Colorado ISD, Hamlin Collegiate ISD, Roscoe Collegiate ISD, Floydada Collegiate ISD, and New Home ISD** competed to showcase their skills in renewable energy design. Middle school and high school teams put their creativity and knowledge to the test by building and optimizing wind turbines, competing against each other in engineering and efficiency challenges. Following this event, students from **Colorado ISD** and Floydada Collegiate ISD continued their journey to the 1st Annual Texas Tech Regional KidWind Challenge in March. Colorado ISD excelled at the Texas Tech event, earning two teams spots in the World KidWind Challenge in Minneapolis in May, while Floydada Collegiate ISD advanced two teams to the world competition from the TSTC challenge. To further support students and educators, CEN and KidWind have partnered to provide professional development workshops to teachers in Lubbock, Abilene, and other regions, equipping them with the skills and resources needed to effectively teach renewable energy concepts through hands-on learning experiences.

In October 2024, the 3rd Annual TSTC Wind Activity Day was held for eighth-grade students from Colorado ISD, Hamlin Collegiate ISD, Roscoe Collegiate ISD, and Floydada Collegiate ISD. This interactive day allowed students to immerse themselves in the field of renewable energy through various activities, including climbing in the climb lab, building and testing their own wind turbines, and exploring circuitry concepts. Students also gained insights into career pathways within the renewable energy sector, bridging hands-on learning with potential futures in clean technology. Through events like Wind Activity Day and the KidWind challenges, students engage in collaborative, experiential learning that encourages resilience as they design, build, test, troubleshoot, and iterate on their projects. These activities not only develop problem-solving abilities but also foster a high-level understanding of systems, equipping students with critical thinking skills and practical knowledge in a field that is rapidly shaping the future.



# STEM ON THE MOVE

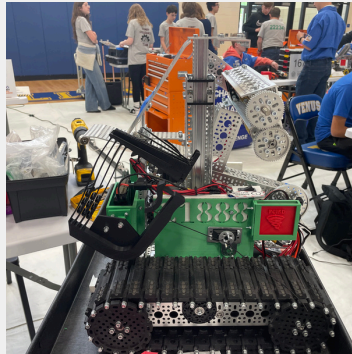
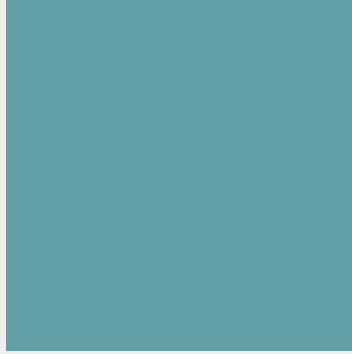


## ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

The first annual Big Country 3-D Printing Challenge took place in the spring of 2024, bringing together seven teams from three schools, including CEN Network's **Venus High School**, in an innovative competition to design a product for use in a specific manufacturing task. This collaborative effort, spearheaded by the Big Country Manufacturing Alliance (BCMA), Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas (WSWCT), ESC14, McMurry University, and CEN, was designed by BCMA industry experts to mirror real-world manufacturing demands. In May, students and their coaches gathered at Hartmann's Inc., where each team presented their product to a panel of judges, undergoing thorough quality control and safety inspections. Those who scored the highest and passed the safety check had the unique opportunity to see their product utilized in a state-of-the-art milling machine.

CEN is enthusiastic about this multi-entity partnership, and registration for the 2nd Annual Big Country 3D Printing Challenge opened in October. Opportunities like this challenge empower students to collaborate with peers and industry experts, tackling real-world problems through the manufacturing design process.

# ROBOTICS



# ROBOTICS CHALLENGE



May 11, 2024 marked the **second annual CEN Challenge for FTC Robotics**. This year's event took place at Venus Middle in Venus, TX. The Challenge is a sanctioned off-season FIRST Robotics event. Officiating was Texas FIRST Access Coordinator Erika Diggs, and running the scoring system was Garrett Smith, the FIRST Coordinator of the west Texas area. This year, 16 teams sponsored through the TWC Robotics grant participated, doubling last year's participation. The event also featured a round-robin Unified tournament featuring teams with drivers with special needs.

**A special congratulations to the teams from Sunray, Diboll, and Hamlin for taking home the 2024 Challenge victory.**



# STATE SUCCESS

Success at FTC Robotics UIL State Championship: **Diboll** had impressive individual performances and finished 16th of 24 in qualification rounds. **Lytle** finished 5th of 24 in qualification rounds and competed in the nail-biting semi-finals as the captain of the 3rd alliance.



# PLACE-BASED LEARNING:

THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL, PLACE-BASED LEARNING, WE ARE DEEPENING OUR RURAL ROOTS BY CONNECTING EDUCATION TO THE UNIQUE NEEDS AND STRENGTHS OF OUR COMMUNITIES.



Junior High Students of **Lytle ISD** enjoy the **Roscoe Collegiate Mobile STEM VR/AR lab experience**, where students can try on virtual and augmented reality technology for themselves.

These 4th grade math students of **Bellville ISD** practiced recording DATA by measuring the length of their arms and hands.



Veterinary Medicine students of **Iraan-Sheffield Collegiate ISD** had the chance to practice giving vaccines to a new litter of puppies.

Digital Design Student, Joseph Garcia, of **Lytle ISD** completed a work-based Multimedia Design Internship for CPS Energy.





## Empowering Adult Education and Workforce Development & Community Engagement

# PILLAR 2

**Our Goal:** By 2030, CEN will establish and support 100 CEN districts impacting 300 rural communities through programs that integrate Rural P-TECH (Years 13/14), Adult Education (Years 13-20), and Workforce Development. These efforts will empower eight rural regions by fostering career pathways, strengthening industry and community partnerships, and creating opportunities for lifelong learning that drive regional collaboration and mentorship across CEN districts.

**CEN**  
COLLEGIATE EDU-NATION

**Floydada &  
Hamlin ISD  
Showcase**

[click here to watch](#)



# 2024 IMPACTS

**38**

NEW BUSINESS  
PARTNERSHIPS  
(9 FORTUNE 500/1000)



**88%**

OF YEAR 13 STUDENTS  
PERSISTING INTO YEAR  
14 COMPLETED IN  
2023-24 COHORT

**PROUD MEMBERS OF:**

Partnership to Advance  
Youth Apprenticeship  
(PAYA), Jobs for the  
Future (JFF), National  
Collegiate Attainment  
Network (NCAN), Texas  
Midwest Community  
Network (TMCN)

**165**

ADULT LEARNERS  
SERVED BY 6 EDU-  
REACH COACHES

RECOGNIZED AS  
**REGISTERED  
APPRENTICESHIP  
PROGRAM**

BY U.S.  
DEPARTMENT OF  
LABOR

**32**

WORKFORCE BOARDS,  
MAYORS, ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT CORPS,  
CHAMBERS ENGAGED

**26**

CERTIFICATES  
COMPLETED IN  
2023-24 COHORT



**18**

ASSOCIATE & BACHELOR  
DEGREES COMPLETED IN  
2023-24 COHORT

**1**

GRADUATE DEGREE  
COMPLETED IN  
2023-24 COHORT

**129**

REGISTERED  
APPRENTICES

CELEBRATED  
NATIONAL  
APPRENTICESHIP  
WEEK

**54**

PRE-APPRENTICES

# Empowering Adult Education and Workforce Development

## Collegiate Edu-Nation's second strategic pillar focuses on bridging the gap between high school and meaningful postsecondary opportunities.

By equipping rural students and adult learners with the resources, mentorship, and guidance needed to succeed, CEN empowers communities to thrive economically and socially. This pillar leverages the strengths of local partnerships and innovative programming to ensure students transition seamlessly into higher education or the workforce, equipped with the tools to succeed.

## Impact of Trellis Foundation's Investment

With the generous support of the Trellis Foundation, CEN has significantly expanded its ability to support students and adult learners in rural Texas. This partnership has fueled the creation and implementation of initiatives that provide direct, personalized support for individuals navigating the critical transition from high school to postsecondary education or careers.

“It's about building a sustainable model of support for generations to come.”

—Kim Alexander  
CEO and Founder of CEN

Through this funding, CEN has achieved:

- Deployment of Edu-REACH coaches, who work closely with students and adult learners, offering guidance on postsecondary pathways, career readiness, and overcoming barriers to success.
- Establishment of 13/14 Mentors, a pivotal program designed to support students in years 13 and 14 as they pursue associate degrees, certifications, or other postsecondary milestones, helping them stay on track and meet their goals.
- These programs have been instrumental in improving outcomes for rural students and communities, contributing to key successes such as 51% of CEN students continuing their education into years 13 and 14 and 44% graduating with industry-recognized certifications.

## Driving Rural Postsecondary Success

Edu-REACH coaches and 13/14 Mentors are creating life-changing opportunities for students across rural Texas. They not only help students navigate academic challenges but also foster the confidence and resilience needed to thrive in postsecondary settings. This personalized, high-touch support ensures that rural learners are equipped to overcome barriers and reach their full potential.

Brittany Williams, Chief Partnership Officer of CEN, shared, “The Trellis Foundation's investment has given rural communities access to the support systems they desperately need. Through Edu-REACH and mentorship programs, we are breaking down barriers and opening doors for students to build brighter futures.”

Kim Alexander, CEO and Founder of CEN, emphasized the long-term vision for these efforts, stating, “The work we are doing with the Trellis Foundation is not just about immediate outcomes. It's about building a sustainable model of support for generations to come. We are laying the groundwork for a future where every rural student can achieve their full potential, creating lasting impact in communities across Texas and beyond.”



# EDU-REACH



At **Collegiate Edu-Nation**, we envision a future where every individual in rural **areas has access to transformative education and employment opportunities by** fostering community resilience and economic prosperity.

As a P-20 System Model, we are committed to supporting students from Pre-K through Year 20. The Edu-REACH Program (known as Pillar 2) recognizes the critical importance of nurturing talent within rural communities. 2024 was a groundbreaking year for these efforts and we are proud to work alongside the efforts in PK-12 (Pillar 1) to facilitate true community and economic development.

By offering local, adult students the opportunity to pursue degrees and certifications **without the burden of relocation**, Edu-REACH seeks to bridge the educational gap that many rural communities encounter. The project bolsters local economies by ensuring that students can access relevant post-secondary education and apprenticeships in their respective communities.

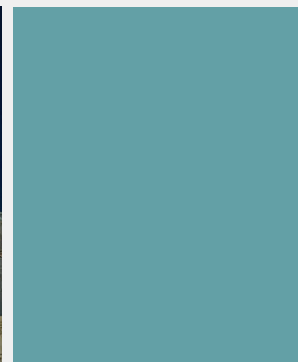
Through the Edu-REACH initiative, we **envision a future where non-traditional, rural students have the resources, support, and opportunities needed to thrive in their local communities**. The mission of this initiative is to empower rural communities by providing innovative educational pathways and career training that enhance workforce development and career opportunities for underserved adult learners.

## EPIC: Empowering People, Inspiring Communities

The **EPIC Initiative** is a transformative component of the Edu-REACH program, designed to foster community growth and sustainability by engaging local and regional leaders in meaningful collaboration. EPIC serves as a bridge between education, workforce development, and civic engagement, ensuring that communities are equipped to thrive economically and socially.

Through **EPIC Think Tanks**, Edu-REACH convenes key stakeholders, including mayors, economic development corporations (EDCs), chambers of commerce, city managers, councils of government (COGs), and other community leaders. These think tanks focus on identifying high-demand industry hubs, crafting strategies for economic growth, and creating actionable plans to recruit and retain residents.

A cornerstone of EPIC is its **Leadership Mentorship Program**, which embeds the "why" behind community transformation into the hearts and minds of local leaders and Year 13-20 students. This mentorship fosters a shared vision for the future, inspiring students to carry forward the mission of revitalizing their communities.



## Pilot: Hamlin #EPIC

Hamlin, Texas, serves as the pilot community for the EPIC initiative. Under the leadership of the Mayor, EDC Director, and other local leaders, Hamlin has set an ambitious goal: to grow the population to 5,000 by 2035. Through EPIC Regional Think Tanks, local leaders are aligning education and workforce opportunities with long-term economic and population growth strategies.

Year 13-20 students are actively engaged in this mission, building the leadership skills and vision needed to sustain their community for future generations.

### IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

- Convened the Big Country regional think tank, engaging over 30 local leaders in identifying key industry hubs and collaboration opportunities.
- Launched strategies in participating communities to retain local talent and attract new residents.
- Established a scalable mentorship program connecting civic leaders with adult students in years 13-20, to foster leadership and community ownership.

The EPIC Initiative exemplifies Edu-REACH's mission to integrate education, leadership, and economic development, creating thriving, self-sustaining rural communities. By prioritizing collaboration and mentorship, EPIC is positioning rural regions as hubs of innovation, resilience, and opportunity.





## Big Country Rural Healthcare Hub

The **Big Country Rural Healthcare Hub** (BCRHH) is a groundbreaking initiative under the Edu-REACH program, addressing the critical shortage of healthcare professionals in rural communities. BCRHH provides seamless pathways for students to advance from high school and entry-level certifications to high-demand nursing careers, all while remaining in their local communities.

### PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

BCRHH is a collaborative effort with **Cisco College, the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA)**, and regional rural hospitals. The program enables students to progress through the following healthcare career stages:

- Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)
- Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN)
- Registered Nurse (RN)
- Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)

Students complete their coursework and clinical rotations within rural healthcare facilities, with minimal travel to nearby Level 1 trauma centers for specialized training. This model allows students to gain hands-on experience while addressing workforce gaps in their own communities.



### IMPACT IN 2024

- 22 students enrolled in the nursing pipeline, progressing toward RN and BSN degrees.
- 5 rural hospitals participating as clinical rotation sites, providing valuable real-world experience.
- Expanded partnerships with regional healthcare organizations to support workforce placement and mentorship.



### COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACH

BCRHH focuses on creating career opportunities for both high school students and adult learners seeking to reskill or upskill. By offering accessible healthcare education and training, the program strengthens local healthcare systems and ensures that rural residents have access to high-quality medical care.

### VISION FOR THE FUTURE

With a model rooted in collaboration, BCRHH is designed to be scalable and replicable across other rural regions. By addressing healthcare shortages and retaining talent within communities, BCRHH exemplifies Edu-REACH's mission to align education with workforce needs, creating thriving rural economies.

The **Big Country Rural Healthcare Hub** is more than a workforce solution—it's a commitment to building healthier, more resilient rural communities.



# GRADUATES

**Congratulations to all CEN network graduates for receiving their Associate's Degrees in 2024.**





## Elevating the Rural Voice and Advocacy

# PILLAR 3

**Our Goal:** Enlist and engage 10,000+ Rural Champions in rural education & workforce development priorities (including 800+ rural educators and rural community leaders annually) activated with playbooks, webinars, panel events, podcast series, and capacity-building supports.

**CEN**  
COLLEGIATE EDU-NATION

# Elevating the Rural Voice and Advocacy

**Collegiate Edu-Nation's third strategic pillar focuses on empowering rural communities by amplifying their voices and providing innovative solutions to challenges unique to rural education.**

By fostering collaboration, advancing policy and advocacy, and showcasing the successes and needs of rural schools, CEN is creating a national movement to ensure rural educators and students are supported, valued, and heard.

## Current Achievements in Rural Advocacy

CEN's work under Pillar III has already made significant strides in elevating the rural voice and bringing national attention to the opportunities and challenges in rural education. Key accomplishments include:

- Monthly Virtual PLCs: Rural districts across Texas are connected through regular Professional Learning Communities, offering peer support, shared resources, and innovative solutions tailored to rural schools.
- Seven-State Community of Practice: This collaborative effort brings together educational leaders from seven states to explore and develop the P-20 Model, laying the groundwork for the first national cohort of P-20 design work.
- Quarterly Webinars: Featuring insights from national leaders, these sessions provide cutting-edge strategies and tools for rural educators and community leaders to implement transformative practices.

## Future Work for Rural Empowerment

Looking ahead, CEN is poised to expand its impact through exciting initiatives, including the launch of a rural-focused podcast to share stories and solutions, ongoing policy and advocacy support to address systemic barriers, and the continued elevation of the rural voice in national conversations. These efforts aim to create a sustained platform for rural communities to lead the way in educational innovation.

## Voices from Rural Leaders

Rachael McClain, President of CEN, shared, "The rural voice has often been underrepresented in education reform. Through our work with educators, leaders, and policymakers, we are not only amplifying the incredible stories of success but also advocating for the support and resources rural communities need to thrive."

Glen Shinn, Texas A&M University Professor and a key contributor to the P-20 Model, highlighted the significance of the work, stating, "The P-20 Model provides a blueprint for the future of rural education. CEN's leadership in creating national collaborations and empowering local leaders ensures that rural communities are equipped to thrive in a global economy while staying true to their unique strengths and heritage."

Michelle Smith, CEN Chief of Schools, emphasized the personal and professional impact of these efforts, saying, "As someone who has spent my life educating in rural communities, I see firsthand the transformational power of this work. The resources, training, and advocacy provided by CEN are not just helping students and educators today—they are creating opportunities for future generations."

## Transforming the Narrative of Rural Education

Through its commitment to collaboration and innovation, Collegiate Edu-Nation is reshaping the narrative of rural education. By highlighting the leadership and resourcefulness of rural educators and community leaders, CEN is proving that rural schools are not only vital to their communities but also key to the future of our nation. With a continued focus on advocacy, innovation, and storytelling, Pillar III is paving the way for rural communities to thrive on their own terms, backed by a network of support and shared vision.

**"The resources, training, and advocacy provided by CEN are not just helping students and educators today—they are creating opportunities for future generations."** —Michelle Smith  
CEN Chief of Schools



# 2024 IMPACTS

28

VPLCs HOSTED

## VIRTUAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Interactive webinars and communities of practice fostering collaboration among rural educators and leaders.

2

## CONDUCTED TWO COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE.

- Focused on P-20 leadership development
- Focused on designing and building P-20 networks within other states.

29,398

STUDENTS SUPPORTED IN TEXAS

933

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS CELEBRATING RURAL

27

MEET THE EXPERT SESSIONS HOSTED

## MEET THE EXPERT SERIES

Insightful sessions connecting rural communities with industry and subject-matter experts.

EXPANSION TO

7

STATES



## RESEARCH INITIATIVES

Driving evidence-based solutions to address unique rural education and workforce challenges.

## AI TRAINING PROGRAMS

for 14 local, state, and national audiences to over 150 participants designed to ensure rural learners are not left behind.

## NATIONAL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE PARTICIPANTS

- Bunker Hill CUSD 8 (IL)
- Greater Ozarks Cooperating School Districts (MO)
- Corona Public Schools (NM)
- Loving Municipal School District (NM)
- Magdalena Municipal School District (NM)
- Mosquero Schools (NM)
- Noble Local School District (OH)
- San Jon Municipal School District (NM)
- West Greene School District (PA)

## COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE STATES

Rural Educational Leaders from California, New Mexico, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Missouri, and Illinois

# Experts on Rural: CEN National Convening

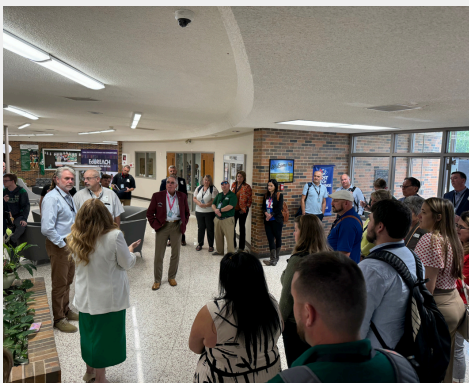


Collegiate Edu-Nation was excited to host our first national convening, where seven state teams explored the transformative potential of the P-20 model in rural education.



As recipients of the **Collective Leadership Award** from the **Carnegie Foundation** and **Transcend**, CEN used the funding to showcase two standout districts—**Roscoe Collegiate ISD** and **Hamlin Collegiate ISD**—both part of the CEN statewide network of 28+ districts serving over 30,000 rural students across Texas. These districts are at the forefront, where students are earning associate degrees and industry-based certifications (IBCs) aligned with high-wage, high-demand careers, all before graduating high school.

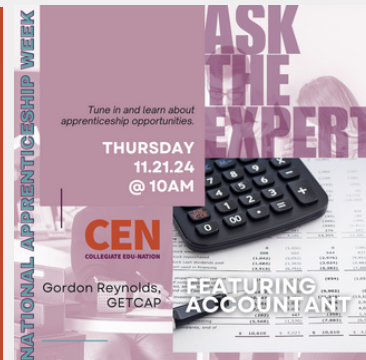
During the convening, state teams engaged in an intensive design process to apply aspects of the P-20 model within their own state frameworks, to create a national network of rural leaders from PK-12, higher education, and workforce sectors. There is a tremendous amount of impactful work happening in rural America, and by collaborating with passionate leaders, **we can ensure all rural students and communities thrive.**





# EXPERTS IN THE CLASSROOM

Ensuring teachers have adequate training to build a framework around student-led research was vitally important. Helping students and teachers choose projects that were challenging yet manageable and allowing students to achieve success while developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills was key throughout the year. To aid in this effort, CEN hosted multiple virtual trainings and acquired nationally known speakers to discuss specific research topics in the **Meet the Expert Series**.



**VIRTUAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**



# EMPOWERING RURAL FUTURES: LOOKING AHEAD TO 2025

As we close another remarkable year, we celebrate the strides we've made in supporting rural communities across Texas. As we realigned and planned for the future in 2024, we are also thrilled to look ahead to 2025.

Together, we are creating lasting solutions to close the opportunity divide and **transform the future of rural communities**. In 2025, we look to launch The North Star Venture, a bold and transformative initiative designed to close the opportunity divide in rural Texas. With a vision of raising \$15 million over the next five years, this campaign will lay the groundwork for **unparalleled impact**.

From establishing regional collectives that amplify rural voices to driving workforce development, postsecondary success, and our work in PK-12 districts, this initiative represents our steadfast commitment to uplifting communities as rural experts. **We know rural because we are rural.**

As we move into 2025, our commitment is stronger than ever. By equipping rural students with debt-free degrees and certifications, training educators with cutting-edge tools, and supporting adult learners in strengthening local economies, we **continue to lead the way** as experts in rural transformation.

Guided by a culture of care, passion, and innovation, Collegiate Edu-Nation has become a driving force in expanding opportunities for students, educators, and adult learners in rural communities. While different organizations may use various terms to describe what we do—Cradle to Career, Career-Connected Learning, Place-Based Learning—what truly matters is the impact we're making. Regardless of the name, CEN is **committed to the hard work of empowering rural communities to grow, thrive, and achieve lasting vibrancy** through strong education and workforce development programs. It's about creating brighter futures and ensuring every individual has the opportunity to succeed.



**Dr. Rachael McClain**  
*President*