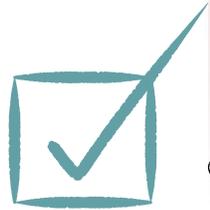


*We Are Rural*  
**2025**  
**ANNUAL**  
**REPORT**



**A Year in Review**

# Collegiate Edu-Nation



*Empowering Rural Innovation*



*Connecting K-12, Higher Ed, and Workforce*



*Driving Community Impact*



*Inspiring Lifelong Learners*



*Leading with Collaboration*

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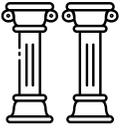
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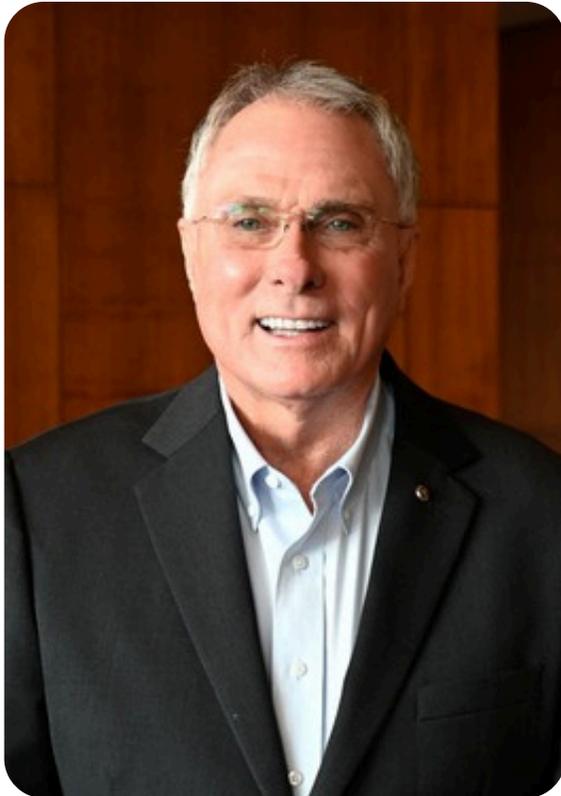
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# Letter from the CEO

## Dr. Kim Alexander

Founder & CEO



As we reflect on 2025, I am filled with deep gratitude and pride for the work we continue to advance across rural Texas and now throughout the United States. Collegiate Edu-Nation was founded with a singular mission: to empower rural students, schools, and communities through world-class learning opportunities that lead to extraordinary life outcomes. This mission guides every step we take and fuels our commitment to ensuring that students—no matter their ZIP code—have access to the highest levels of academic and workforce achievement in the nation.

This year, our network has grown not only in size, but in impact. Across rural communities, we are proving what is possible when expectations are high, opportunities are equitable, and systems

are intentionally designed for student success. Through our P-TECH pathways, students are earning credentials that place them on clear routes to high-wage, high-demand careers. Our rural workforce development initiatives are equipping learners with the skills that strengthen local economies, while our rural community revitalization efforts are helping towns reimagine what sustainable prosperity can look like.

What began as a bold vision for rural Texas has become a national movement. Districts and community partners across the U.S. are looking to Collegiate Edu-Nation as a model for how to deliver accelerated college coursework, industry-aligned certifications, and innovative workforce pipelines that uplift entire regions. Together, we are proving that rural America can—and will—produce the highest student outcomes in the nation.

Thank you for your partnership, advocacy, and belief in the boundless potential of rural students. With your continued support, we will keep building strong schools, strong economies, and strong communities—one learner and one town at a time.

With gratitude and determination,  
Dr. Kim Alexander  
Founder & CEO, Collegiate Edu-Nation

# About Us



## The Rural Dilemma

Rural communities face higher poverty rates, limited access to quality education, low-wage employment, and economic challenges. Strong, innovative educational systems are essential to equip rural students with the skills and opportunities they need to succeed in a competitive, global workforce.

## Our Vision, Mission & Aspiration

- Our **vision** is to end generational poverty in Rural America.
- Our **mission** is 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** is 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.

# Meet the CEN Team



**KIM ALEXANDER**  
Founder & CEO



**JEFF WALKER**  
President



**KENDALL GUYNES**  
Chief Financial Officer



**SUSAN RUIZ-GROVE**  
Chief Development Officer



**BRITTANY BARTLEY-WILLIAMS**  
Chief Partnerships Officer



**MICHELLE CARROLL SMITH**  
Chief of Schools



**ANDY WILSON**  
Director of 4-H & Research



**KELLY SPRINGFIELD**  
Director of P-TECH



**KATY CADE**  
School Action Director



**EMILY BIRDWELL**  
Director of Marketing & Communications



**KRISTIN LUFT**  
TWiM Coach



**KIM MOUSER**  
School Impact Coach



**CHANTEL SCHULZ**  
CTE Instructional Specialist



**MELINDA BRASUELL**  
EDU-Reach Coach



**AMY ANTHONY**  
EDU-Reach Coordinator



**ANGELA MEHL**  
EDU-Reach Coach



**CAMDEN BOREN**  
Technology Coordinator



**KATIE DAUGHERTY**  
CEN AmeriCorps Program Coordinator



**DARRELL DROMGOOLE**  
Community Development Consultant

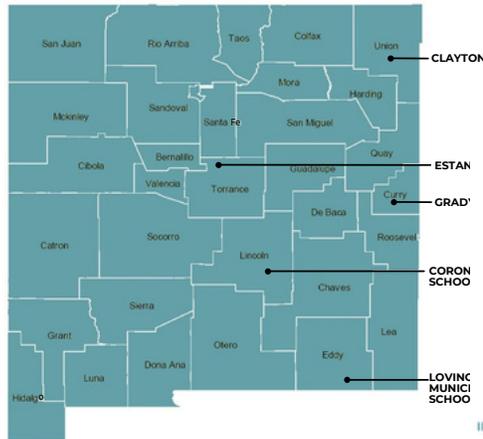


**MARSHA ALEXANDER**  
Co-Founder & Consultant

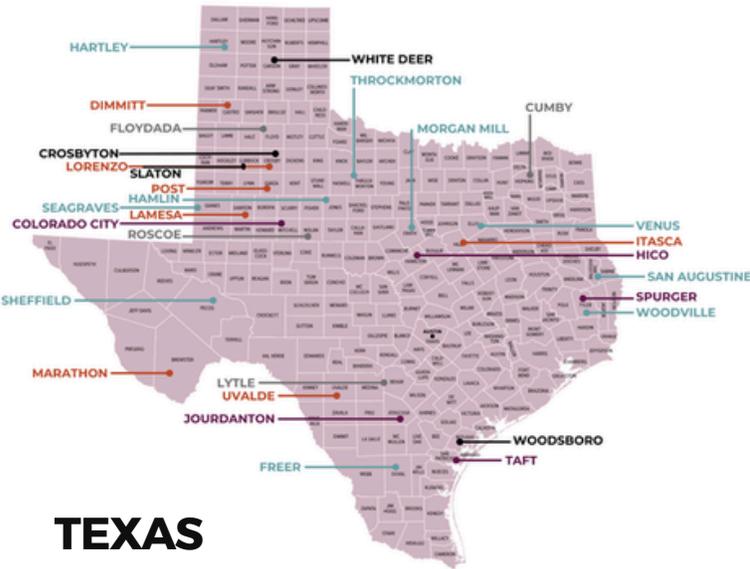


**NELSON COULTER**  
Organizational Leadership Consultant

# CEN's Reach: Partnered Schools & Communities

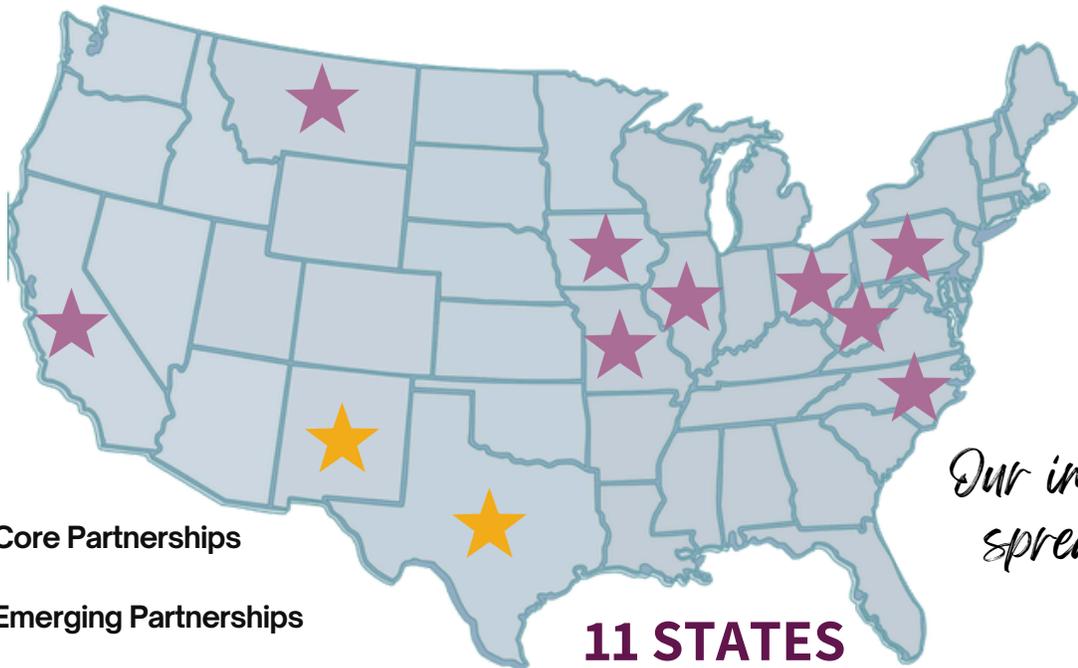


**NEW MEXICO**



**TEXAS**

## Continuum of Engagement



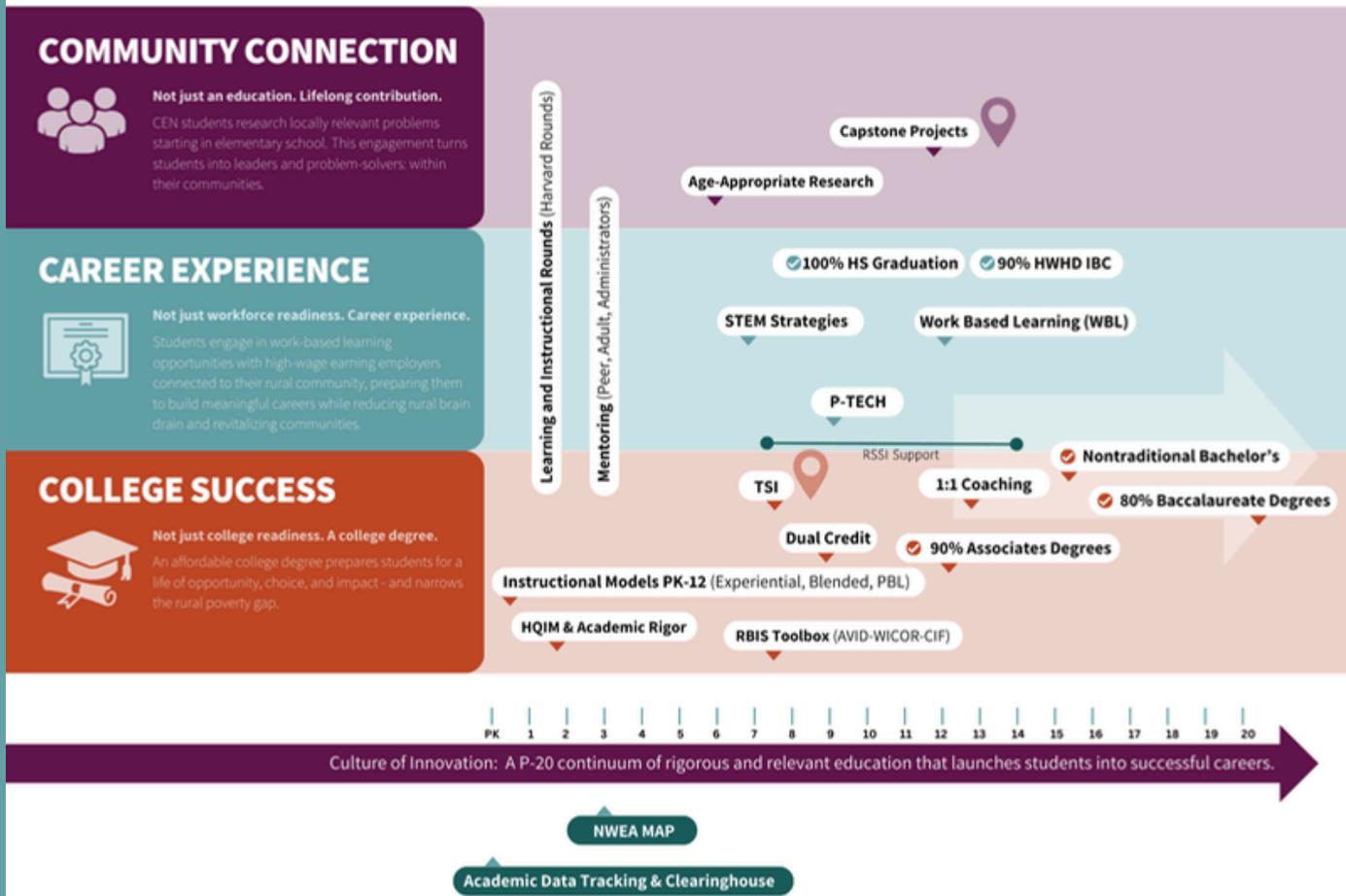
*Our impact is spreading!*

**11 STATES**  
National Expansion

# Theory of Change

We believe lasting change happens when every level of the education and workforce system works together toward shared goals. Our Theory of Change drives this collaboration—aligning K-12, higher education, and workforce partners to remove barriers, expand opportunity, and build sustainable systems of success. Through the P20 System Model, we connect ideas to action, ensuring that every step a student takes—from preschool to career—is part of a stronger, more equitable rural future.

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



When education, higher learning, and workforce partners align around a shared vision, we create a pathway where every student can thrive. Collaboration isn't just a strategy—it's the foundation for lasting impact in our rural communities.

**Dr. Kim Alexander**  
 Founder & CEO

## The CEN Pillars

# PILLAR 1

*School Impact Team*

## Transforming PK-12 Education Through Rural Innovation

By 2030, Collegiate Edu-Nation will partner with 100 CEN districts across 300 rural communities, advancing regional collectives and cohorts that support mentorship, collaboration, and shared implementation. Guided by the Essential Elements rubric, CEN works with districts to develop growth measures that track progress along the Pathway to P-20 System Models—driving sustainable pathways to education, workforce development, and economic opportunity to help end generational poverty in rural America.

# PILLAR 2

*Community Impact Team*

## Empowering Adult Education, Workforce Development & Community Engagement

By 2030, Edu-REACH will support eight rural regions on a path to sustainable vibrancy by aligning education, workforce, and community leadership efforts. Through targeted landscape analysis, increased awareness of the EPIC initiative, and the development of rural industry hubs, this work strengthens regional collaboration and economic opportunity. Community engagement is advanced through regional think tanks, expanded postsecondary-to-career pathways via Registered Apprenticeships with higher education and industry partners, and intentional local leadership development through the 13/14 Entrepreneurship Mentorship Program.

# PILLAR 3

*Voice, Impact & Philanthropy*

## Elevating the Rural Voice and Advocacy

By 2030, Collegiate Edu-Nation will be the nationally recognized leader and intermediary for rural education-to-workforce systems. Through integrated PK-12 transformation, postsecondary and workforce pathways, and regional systems building, CEN will elevate rural voices, strengthen local leadership, and drive measurable economic vitality. Leveraging its Eight Essential Elements and P-20 system models, CEN will support more than 100 rural districts and eight rural regions to redesign learning systems, build sustainable talent pipelines, and connect education, industry, and community—serving as a trusted national convener and voice for rural America.

# PILLAR 1

## School Impact Team

### Serving High-Need Populations

By 2030, Collegiate Edu-Nation will partner with 100 CEN districts across 300 rural communities, advancing regional collectives and cohorts that support mentorship, collaboration, and shared implementation. Guided by the Essential Elements rubric, CEN works with districts to develop growth measures that track progress along the Pathway to P-20 System Models—driving sustainable pathways to education, workforce development, and economic opportunity to help end generational poverty in rural America.

#### Low Economically Disadvantaged

68.2%



#### Special Education

16.1%



#### English Language Learners

14.1%



**equity and inclusion,  
supporting students  
with the greatest  
needs.**



“Strong schools are the backbone of strong communities. By investing in rural education, we’re not just teaching students—we’re empowering entire towns to thrive for generations.”

Dr. Kim Alexander

# RURAL SCHOOLS RISING



**Four Texas school districts have been selected to join the national RAISE AI Collaborative, positioning rural schools at the forefront of innovation in education.**

Roscoe, TX – September 3 – Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN) is proud to announce that four Texas school districts—Cumby Collegiate ISD, Floydada Collegiate ISD, Roscoe Collegiate ISD, Uvalde CISD—have been selected to participate in the RAISE AI Collaborative (Rural AI Schools of Excellence), a groundbreaking initiative designed to help rural schools harness the power of artificial intelligence (AI) to advance student learning and workforce readiness.

Leading Educators, aiEDU, Collegiate Edu-Nation, and the Arizona Institute for Education and the Economy at Northern Arizona University lead the RAISE AI Collaborative. Together, these partners are working to empower rural educators to design AI-enhanced instructional strategies that align with local priorities, rather than relying on isolated pilot programs or one-size-fits-all solutions.

“Texas educators and students are leading the way in demonstrating how rural schools can use innovation to create new opportunities for all learners,” said Rachael McClain, President of Collegiate Edu-Nation. “We are thrilled to see these four districts recognized for their leadership and commitment to building future-ready systems.”

Through this initiative, the selected districts will participate in co-design sessions with experts and peers, trial AI-enabled instructional practices, and develop sustainable frameworks to ensure that technology supports their long-term goals.

“Texas educators and students are leading the way in demonstrating how rural schools can use innovation to create new opportunities for all learners,” said Rachael McClain, President of Collegiate Edu-Nation. “We are thrilled to see these four districts recognized for their leadership and commitment to building future-ready systems.”

This work builds on the tradition of rural schools being early innovators—whether in distance learning or technology adoption—and positions them at the forefront of the next wave of educational transformation.

CEN remains committed to supporting Texas districts as they design instructional systems that reflect the needs of their students, families, and communities while preparing young people for the demands of a rapidly changing workforce.

For more information about the RAISE AI Collaborative visit <https://initiatives.leadingeducators.org/raise-collaborative>.

## Press Contact:

Emily Birdwell  
Marketing & Communications Coordinator  
Collegiate Edu-Nation  
[ebirdwell@edu-nation.org](mailto:ebirdwell@edu-nation.org)

# A Year of Impact



Network Impact:

~35,000

Rural Learners

Across all national districts.



68.2%

Economically- Disadvantaged (P20 Network)



71.4%

Students of Color (P20 Network)



100% Participation

High-Quality Instructional Material Alignment

652 Teachers

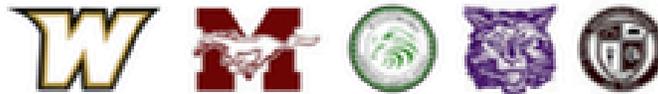
In-person professional development provided

22 AI Trainings

22 AI Training Sessions provided to 608 attendees



# THE MEADOWS FOUNDATION AWARDS \$125,000 GRANT TO COLLEGIATE EDU-NATION TO EXPAND P-TECH OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS RURAL TEXAS



Roscoe, TX - October 2025 - Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN) has been awarded a \$125,000 grant from The Meadows Foundation to expand its innovative P-20 System Model through the launch of five new Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) campuses across Texas. The grant will directly support students in Woodville ISD, Marathon ISD, Dimmitt ISD, San Augustine ISD, and Woodsboro ISD, offering rural communities unprecedented access to high-quality college and career opportunities without leaving their hometowns.

#### **P-TECH campuses allow students to:**

- Earn a high school diploma, industry certifications, and up to 60 hours of tuition-free college credit or an associate degree.
- Benefit from mentorship, work-based learning, and internships with industry partners. Prepare for high-wage, high-demand careers while building a strong foundation for continued postsecondary education.

*"By bringing P-TECH programs to these districts, we're not only changing the trajectory of individual students but also strengthening entire communities through education and workforce development."*

*~ Rachael McClain  
CEN President*

This expansion is expected to benefit hundreds of students across rural Texas, equipping them with the skills, credentials, and experiences needed to thrive in today's economy. Beyond empowering students, these programs foster sustainable workforce pipelines and promote long-term community growth.



#### **About The Meadows Foundation**

Established in 1948 and based in Dallas, The Meadows Foundation is dedicated to improving the quality and circumstances of life for the people of Texas. With more than \$1.3 billion in grants awarded statewide, the Foundation has a long-standing commitment to advancing educational equity, health, arts and culture, civic improvement, and human services.

#### **About Collegiate Edu-Nation**

Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN) is a nonprofit organization committed to transforming rural education through its P-20 System Model, which provides students a seamless pathway from high school to college and into meaningful careers. By collaborating with schools, colleges, and industry partners, CEN ensures that rural students have access to the same life-changing opportunities as their urban peers.

# P-TECH Student Outcomes & Impact

*P-TECH students are graduating with college credit, workforce credentials, and clear momentum into postsecondary education.*



## P-TECH Participation & Academic Progress

Across participating P-TECH districts (excluding Banquete ISD due to missing data):



# 33%

of students in grades 9–12 are designated as P-TECH participants.

P-TECH students collectively earned **13,627 college credit hours**, accelerating progress toward postsecondary credentials.

# 13,627

# college credit hours



# 82

Programs of Study in designated P-TECH high schools



## Credentials & Degrees Earned

Class of 2025 Graduating Cohort:



# 68%

earned **Industry-Based Certifications (IBCs)**.

32% earned an **associate degree** prior to high school graduation.

# 32%



# 63%

of P-TECH graduates are **continuing** into college, demonstrating strong postsecondary persistence.

# STEM Expansion & Program Growth

*Between 2021 and 2025, Collegiate Edu-Nation significantly expanded access to hands-on STEM programming across partner districts.*



## Robotics



Robotics teams **grew** from **1 team** (2021) to **21 teams** (2025).



## KidWind



KidWind teams **expanded** from **0 teams** (2021) to **14 teams** (2025).

## Student Participation & Reach

As STEM programs scaled, student participation increased substantially.

### 2021

- Robotics: 10 students
- KidWind: 0 students



### 2025

- Robotics: 138 students\*
- KidWind: 80 students

*\*Student participation estimates include approximately 5 students per team for districts with missing school-reported robotics enrollment data (Roscoe ISD and Floydada ISD).*

# COLLEGIATE EDU-NATION LEADS INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS AT COLORADO ISD AND ROSCOE COLLEGIATE

## COLLABORATIVE CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS HELP STRENGTHEN TEACHING AND LEARNING ACROSS CEN'S P-20 NETWORK.

November 2025 – Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN) recently led Instructional Rounds at both Colorado ISD and Roscoe Collegiate ISD, engaging district and campus leaders in a collaborative process designed to strengthen instructional practices and align classroom learning to CEN's P-20 System Model. The P-20 System Model—spanning from preschool through career—serves as the foundation of CEN's work to transform rural education. Through this model, CEN supports partner districts in creating seamless pathways where learners gain the academic skills, technical knowledge, and real-world experiences needed to thrive in college, career, and life.

Instructional Rounds provide an opportunity for educators to observe authentic classroom instruction, reflect on patterns of teaching and learning, and share insights that promote continuous improvement. By focusing on classroom practices that support learner agency, critical thinking, and real-world application, these rounds ensure instructional excellence remains central to each district's P-20 vision.

CEN's leadership in these Instructional Rounds underscores the organization's commitment to ensuring every learner in rural Texas has access to a high-quality, interconnected educational experience—from early learning to postsecondary and workforce success.

WE ARE RURAL NEWSLETTER



"Instructional Rounds provide a powerful lens for reflection," said Katy Cade, Director of Schools for Collegiate Edu-Nation. "They allow our teams to see great teaching in action, celebrate what's working, and identify meaningful next steps to continue supporting teachers and learners. The collaboration and openness we witnessed at both Colorado and Roscoe Collegiate are what make this network so special."

**KATY CADE, DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL ACTION AT CEN**



Colorado ISD was very grateful and thankful to have CEN and the team of professionals engage in The Harvard Instructional Rounds Protocol at our district campuses to assist us in refining our practices in the area of Differentiated Instruction. We were very pleased with the authentic level of collaboration, feedback, and the laser focus towards determining the next level of work to ensure continuous instructional improvement that leads to high student academic achievement across our district.

**DR. LARRY POLK**  
**SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**  
**COLORADO ISD**



### **ABOUT COLLEGIATE EDU-NATION**

Collegiate Edu-Nation is a nonprofit organization rooted in West Texas and dedicated to ending education and income inequality in rural communities nationwide. We engage whole communities – schools, families, businesses, and local leaders – to reinvigorate education, revitalize local economies, and reimagine what’s possible for rural America.

Learn more at <https://edu-nation.org>.

# CEN EXPANDS NEW MEXICO FOOTPRINT WITH \$400,000 COMMUNITY BENEFIT FUND GRANT

## Grant to Strengthen Rural Workforce and Expand College & Career Pathways Across the State

Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN) is proud to announce an exciting new chapter in our mission to expand college and career readiness opportunities across New Mexico. Working collaboratively with state and regional partners, CEN helped secure \$400,000 in funding through the Community Benefit Fund for Comprehensive Rural Workforce Reform for the State of New Mexico to support this launch. This investment will enable CEN to bring its proven P-TECH and workforce readiness systems to rural communities throughout the state, creating meaningful pathways from high school to high-wage, high-demand careers. Through this initiative, 7 rural districts have committed to joining the CEN network. Among them, two districts will become stand-alone affiliates, implementing the full CEN model independently. Additionally, four districts will serve as regional hubs, providing coaching and program support to 18 satellite districts. This hub-and-spoke model ensures that even the smallest and most remote communities can access high-quality resources, educator training, and workforce partnerships, scaling opportunity while maintaining local identity.

“This grant represents a transformative opportunity to strengthen the rural workforce and give every student a clear pathway to a successful future,” said PTECH Director Kelly Springfield. “We are deeply grateful for this investment in rural innovation and collaboration.”



The Community Benefit Fund grant will support technical assistance, data tracking, and district partnerships that ensure programs are implemented effectively and sustainably, and that students graduate with purpose, credentials, and confidence.

With this expansion, CEN continues to advance its vision of transforming rural education through excellence, innovation, and community collaboration while equipping every student to thrive in the modern economy.

# PILLAR 2

## Community Impact Team

### Empowering Adult Education, Workforce Development & Community Engagement

By 2030, Edu-REACH will support eight rural regions on a path to sustainable vibrancy by aligning education, workforce, and community leadership efforts. Through targeted landscape analysis, increased awareness of the EPIC initiative, and the development of rural industry hubs, this work strengthens regional collaboration and economic opportunity. Community engagement is advanced through regional think tanks, expanded postsecondary-to-career pathways via Registered Apprenticeships with higher education and industry partners, and intentional local leadership development through the 13/14 Entrepreneurship Mentorship Program.



**184**  
NEW BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS  
(9 FORTUNE 500/1000)

**81%**  
OF YEAR 13 STUDENTS PERSISTING INTO YEAR 14 COMPLETED IN 2023-24 COHORT

**44**  
WORKFORCE BOARDS, MAYORS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPS, CHAMBERS ENGAGED

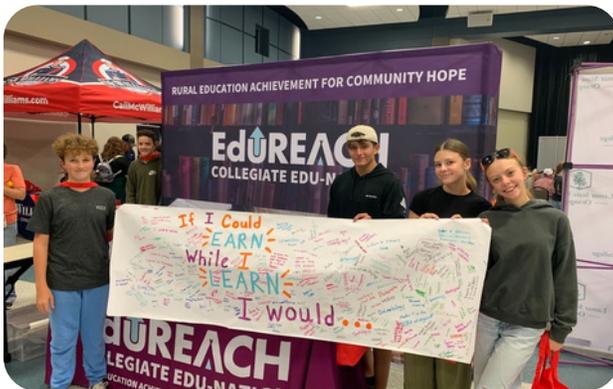
**165**  
ADULT LEARNERS SERVED BY 6 EDU-REACH COACHES

**24**  
COMPLETED REGISTERED APPRENTICES



**PROUD MEMBERS OF:**

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



# PILLAR 2

## Edu-REACH

At Collegiate Edu-Nation, we envision a future where **every** individual in rural communities has access to **transformative** education, **meaningful** career pathways, and **long-term** economic opportunity—strengthening both community resilience and local prosperity.

As a comprehensive **P–20 System Model**, we support learners from Pre-K through Year 20, ensuring that education and workforce development are fully aligned. Our **Edu-REACH Program** (Pillar 2) builds on the momentum of our PK–12 partnerships (Pillar 1), recognizing the essential role that homegrown talent plays in rural advancement. In 2025, this work accelerated significantly, marking a pivotal year in expanding adult learner access and community-centered innovation.

Edu-REACH provides adults with the opportunity to pursue degrees, certifications, and apprenticeships without leaving their communities—removing barriers like relocation and financial strain. By bringing **relevant postsecondary options** directly to rural regions, the program **strengthens local economies** and closes long-standing gaps in educational access.

Through Edu-REACH, we are creating a future where non-traditional and adult learners have the resources, support, and high-impact pathways they need to thrive. This initiative exists to empower rural communities by delivering innovative education and career training that expand workforce capacity and unlock meaningful opportunities for underserved adult learners.

### EPIC: Empowering People, Inspiring Communities

The **EPIC Initiative** is a transformative pillar of the Edu-REACH initiative, created to drive community growth and long-term sustainability by engaging local and regional leaders in purposeful collaboration. EPIC bridges education, workforce, and civic leadership to ensure rural communities are prepared to grow, compete, and thrive—*economically* and *socially*.

Through EPIC Think Tanks, Edu-REACH brings together key stakeholders such as mayors, economic development corporations (EDCs), chambers of commerce, city managers, councils of government, school superintendents, higher education partners, business partners, and other community leaders. These convenings focus on identifying **high-demand industry sectors**, **developing strategies** that *accelerate* economic growth, and crafting **actionable plans** to strengthen resident recruitment and retention.

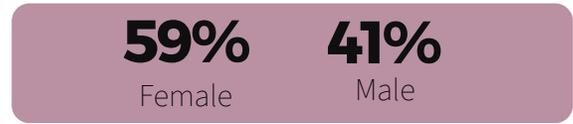
A cornerstone of EPIC is its **Leadership Mentorship Program**, which embeds the “**why**” behind community transformation into both emerging and established leaders—including Year 13–20 students. By fostering shared purpose and vision, this mentorship cultivates a new generation of talent committed to advancing rural prosperity and revitalizing the communities they call home.

# Student Outcomes

## Demographics



## Demographics



## Equity & Access



## Success Outcomes



ANNUAL REPORT 2025

PILLAR 2: COMMUNITY IMPACT TEAM

# Tyler County THRIVE



Over the past year, in partnership with the Tyler County Development Foundation, CEN Edu-REACH has worked collaboratively with local leaders, educators, employers, and community stakeholders to plan and develop the vision for the THRIVE Hub in Woodville. This effort has included extensive community engagement, site visits, partnership development with higher education and workforce providers, infrastructure and cost analysis, and the creation of a sustainable operating model. Together, we have focused on designing a multi-use center that expands access to adult education, workforce training, and small business support, ensuring that Tyler County residents are equipped with the skills, resources, and opportunities needed for long-term economic and personal success.



Recognized as  
**APPRENTICESHIP  
AMBASSADOR**

BY U.S.  
DEPARTMENT OF  
LABOR



# Big Country Rural Healthcare Hub



## FROM DREAMS TO REALITY: BRITTANY BAUMBACH'S PATH WITH CEN

From the very start of her career in healthcare, Brittany Baumbach knew she wanted more. "I've been working in healthcare since I was 18," she shares, "and as rewarding as each step has been, I always felt I wasn't quite where I was meant to be."

The spark to return to school came from a deeply personal place: her children and her baby sister. She wanted to show them that "nothing is impossible. You can set goals and crush them at any age, no matter your circumstance!" Another powerful influence was her best friend's father, a chiropractor who returned to school to become an FNP. "He was my only true father figure," she says. "When he passed last year, it lit a fire underneath me to continue and make him proud."

**"YOU CAN SET GOALS AND CRUSH THEM  
AT ANY AGE, NO MATTER YOUR  
CIRCUMSTANCE!"**

Growing up in poverty, Brittany always dreamed of a better life for herself and her children. That drive has guided her through the challenges of balancing work, family, and school. "Staying disciplined is my biggest challenge," she admits. "I have to set aside designated times for schoolwork—but I'm learning I can do hard things."

Her proudest achievement so far? Buying her childhood dream home—a milestone she celebrates alongside her academic progress. Support from the Big Country Rural Healthcare Hub has been instrumental. "They keep me on task, hold me accountable, and celebrate life's successes with me," she says.



Connecting with Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN) has been another key part of her journey. Weekly check-ins and a supportive community help her stay on track and feel less alone in her studies. "One of our last meetings hit me—I'm almost at the finish line," she recalls. Through CEN, she's also discovered opportunities like UTA's BSN program and local clinical placements, bringing her dreams closer to home.

**"ONE OF OUR LAST MEETINGS HIT ME—I'M  
ALMOST AT THE FINISH LINE," SHE  
RECALLS.**

Looking forward, Brittany is focused on completing her prerequisites and entering UTA's BSN program, with a long-term goal of becoming a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner. Her advice to anyone considering a similar path? "Don't get overwhelmed. Take it one class at a time. You can do 5 weeks of anything. You got this!"

Her story is a testament to the mission of CEN: opening doors for rural and underserved communities, showing that education can transform lives—even when life feels unpredictable. "Life is truly a beautiful mystery," she reflects. "One day I'm working as an LVN in a correctional facility, the next I'm following my dreams. And I hope my story inspires others to do the same."

# EPIC- Empowering People, Inspiring Communities



EPIC is the Edu-REACH division's community engagement initiative designed to strengthen rural postsecondary readiness and workforce pathways. In partnership with NLC and CAEL, EPIC convenes cross-sector leaders to align education, industry, and civic partners around shared economic mobility goals and sustainable regional collaboration.

#### Hamlin Launch (11/18/24):

CEN launched EPIC in Hamlin on November 18, 2024, convening 100+ regional leaders to strengthen workforce and postsecondary alignment.

#### Snyder Convening (4/24/25):

On April 24, 2025, CEN hosted the EPIC Digital Workforce Convening in Snyder, bringing 100+ leaders together to explore AI and rural economic mobility.

#### Ongoing Engagement:

EPIC also hosts regular virtual Think Tanks to support regional collaboration across rural Texas.

## PILLAR 2

# Trailblazer Finishes HVAC Registered Apprenticeship

## Joey Cook

Joey Cook was 17 and a junior in high school when he heard about a way to learn a profession while getting paid: by landing an apprenticeship, a path into the workforce that everyone was suddenly talking about as an alternative to college.

“I didn’t want to go get a degree.”

Joey Cook  
BAAS completed May 2024



"I didn't want to go get an associate degree," he says. "I didn't want to get a bachelor's degree." Cook wanted a certification in heating, ventilation and air-conditioning, an in-demand field in his rural Texas hometown of Hamlin.

An apprenticeship would lead to that. But when he began making inquiries, he was told that if he wanted an apprenticeship, he'd have to find it himself.

His disappointment was brief; a local HVAC company happened to be looking for apprentices, and hired him. "It was perfect timing," Cook recalls. He sailed through the training and now, at 20, is working at Cary Services full time.

# Midland Health

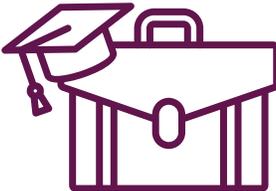
## Registered Apprenticeship Program Launched

In partnership with Midland Health and the U.S. Department of Labor, Collegiate Edu-Nation proudly launched its first Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) focused on supporting and developing healthcare professionals through structured on-the-job training and related technical instruction.

This year, 17 new apprentices were officially registered, marking a major milestone in our mission to build sustainable workforce pipelines across rural and regional communities. By serving as the program's intermediary sponsor, CEN is helping reduce barriers for employers while creating clear, supported career pathways for adult learners.

This foundational work lays the groundwork for future expansion, with the ultimate goal of replicating the model across other sectors and partner communities throughout the state.

**17**  
New  
Apprentices




# FINDING HER CALLING CLOSE TO HOME: HOW AMERICORPS AND CEN HELPED ONE RURAL EDUCATOR LIVE HER DREAM

Gay Hibbitts, a proud Throckmorton High School graduate, was born and raised just two blocks from the school she now calls home as a teacher. After raising her three sons and caring for her parents through their battles with cancer, she felt a deep pull back to the classroom—but wasn't sure where to begin.

**“I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A TEACHER,” SHE SAID. “I JUST DIDN’T KNOW HOW TO BEGIN.”**

“I always wanted to be a teacher,” she said. “I just didn’t know how to begin.”

That changed the day Kristina Gaspar, a local education leader, introduced her to **AmeriCorps’ Teach Where It Matters** program—an initiative that partners with **Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN)** to support aspiring rural educators in earning their degrees while gaining hands-on classroom experience.

“Kristina told me, ‘There’s a program that would be wonderful for you. You have so much to give,’” she recalled. “Eventually, I started believing it myself.”

Now teaching 3rd- and 5th-grade social studies and 6th-grade technology, she’s seeing the difference every day. Her sixth graders—who started the year typing with one finger—are now writing full paragraphs, creating slide presentations, and communicating online with confidence.

“They just finished a 20-slide project called *If I Was*,” she said proudly. “These are life and college skills they’ll use forever.”



Through **Teach Where It Matters**, she’s found not only professional growth but also a family of mentors and peers who walk alongside her. “My mentor, Amy Dick, checks on me every morning—asking if I’m okay or need anything,” she shared. “She helps with lesson plans, makes sure we’re meeting standards, and keeps us from feeling overwhelmed. People like her—and CEN—don’t walk behind you. They walk beside you.”

**“PEOPLE LIKE HER—AND CEN—DON’T WALK BEHIND YOU. THEY WALK BESIDE YOU.”**

The support has fueled her confidence as she approaches a major milestone: graduating from West Texas A&M University in May 2025. And she already knows what’s next—continuing her journey at Throckmorton ISD, possibly expanding into Career Pathways, a program she’s studying now and hopes to teach soon.

When asked what keeps her going, her answer is simple: “The kids.”

Her story is one of perseverance and heart—a reminder that it’s never too late to follow a calling, especially when you have a community that believes in you.

“This was a dream. This was my passion,” she said. “And it’s something I hope I can succeed at—and make a difference in somebody’s life.”

# CEN LAUNCHES FIRST GED COHORT IN TYLER COUNTY



**This month, CollegiateEdu-Nation(CEN) celebrated an exciting milestone with the kickoff of our very first GED cohort in Tyler County!**

Like any new beginning, the night brought a few unexpected challenges. A scheduling mix-up left our classroom space unavailable—but with six determined learners ready to begin their adult education journey, canceling class was simply not an option.

Thinking creatively, we relocated to the local Whataburger, a beloved gathering spot in the community. Every student enthusiastically agreed, and together we transformed the restaurant booths into a classroom, complete with laptops, a hotspot, and, of course, a little sweet tea.

This special moment reflects the true spirit of rural education: meeting learners where they are, overcoming obstacles, and proving that learning can happen anywhere.

Thanks to Whataburger's hospitality, our students successfully completed their very first class—a major step toward earning their GED and building brighter futures.

We are incredibly proud of their resilience, dedication, and the giant leap they took this month toward their goals. CEN is honored to support learners in Tyler County and across rural America as they pursue education, opportunity, and lifelong success.

# Edu-REACH Wrap-Around Services



EduREACH supports learners through comprehensive guidance and resources as they plan for their future.

We assist students with FAFSA completion, provide support with the ApplyTexas application, and deliver clear information on Registered Apprenticeships to help them explore meaningful pathways to personal development and long-term career success.



## Student Outreach Education

**650**



## FAFSA and Apply Texas Support

**230**



# Rural Empowerment Conference

## We Are Rural

The Rural Empowerment Conference (REC) took place June 4–6, 2025, at the Kalahari Resort & Convention Center in Round Rock, Texas. Hosted by Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN), the event welcomed more than 200 rural leaders, educators, higher education partners, workforce organizations, funders, and students from across Texas. This year's theme, "We Are Rural," celebrated the strength, resilience, and innovation of rural communities driving educational and workforce transformation through the CEN P-20 System Model.



### Diversity of Attendance

113 distinct job titles represented — including superintendents, principals, teachers, higher education leaders, workforce partners, and nonprofit executives.

### Attendance

~200 Rural Champions!

### Number of Entities Represented

103 unique districts, colleges, and partner organizations participated statewide.

### Geographical Impact

Attendees represented communities serving over 50,000 rural learners.



# Funder Spotlight

## Greater Texas Foundation Awards \$1,118,985 to Expand Rural Innovation and Postsecondary Pathways Across Texas

Greater Texas Foundation has awarded \$1,118,985 to the Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN) to expand rural innovation efforts that strengthen postsecondary access, workforce readiness, and economic mobility for students and adult learners across Texas.

The investment supports the continued growth of CEN's P-20 System Model — a community-driven framework that aligns school districts, higher education institutions, employers, and local leaders to ensure rural students graduate with college credentials and clear career pathways.

Greater Texas Foundation has long prioritized rural communities as part of its commitment to equitable access to postsecondary education. According to Sue McMillin, President and Chief Executive Officer of Greater Texas Foundation, rural communities are often uniquely positioned to innovate.



**“There’s often a lot of innovation in rural communities because there’s not as much red tape,”** McMillin said. **“If you get the community behind what you want to do and you get the right people in the room, you can move things a little bit quicker.”**

SUE MCMILLIN

## From One Rural Community to a Scalable Model

Greater Texas Foundation’s partnership with CEN began with early investments supporting pioneering work in Roscoe, Texas — where community leaders embraced a bold expectation: that rural students would graduate high school with meaningful college credentials, not just diplomas.

McMillin recalls visiting Roscoe and witnessing firsthand the deep level of student and community engagement.

That early momentum demonstrated that rural students — who often graduate high school at strong rates but enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates than their urban peers — could succeed when systems are intentionally aligned around their future.

The new \$1,118,985 grant builds on years of partnership and supports continued scaling of the model across additional rural communities, including expanded work with adult learners and workforce-aligned pathways.

## Advancing Opportunity for Rural Learners

Over time, McMillin said, the impact has extended beyond a single district. CEN’s work has evolved to include adult re-engagement programs, career pathways aligned to regional workforce needs, and innovative strategies such as “Grow Your Own” teacher pipelines that help rural communities address educator shortages by preparing local students to return and teach in their hometowns.

**“You don’t have to have a billion dollars and be the biggest organization in the room,” McMillin said. “You just have to have the passion for the work and a willingness to learn and improve along the way.”**

SUE MCMILLIN



She also pointed to CEN’s national recognition — including being named a finalist and award winner at the ASU+GSV Summit — as evidence that rural innovation can compete on a national stage.

## Rural Communities and Texas’ Future Workforce

McMillin emphasized that rural communities are essential to shaping Texas’ long-term economic competitiveness.

**“The vast majority of our counties are rural,” she said. “If there’s nothing for rural students, they’re going to leave. But if you build opportunities where they live — in education, energy, technology, and workforce pathways — people will stay and contribute to their communities.”**

As broadband access expands and employers increasingly look beyond urban centers, rural regions are becoming critical contributors to the state’s talent pipeline. Strategic investments that align education with regional workforce needs can create lasting economic stability.

# A Call to Philanthropy: Invest in Rural

McMillin encouraged other philanthropic leaders to recognize the opportunity rural communities represent.

“It’s not all about the big cities,” she said. “There’s a lot of innovation happening in rural communities. When funders partner together, we can leverage resources and strengthen the entire ecosystem.”

Greater Texas Foundation continues to collaborate with public and private partners to support sustainable, community-driven solutions that expand postsecondary success across the state.

## Building Momentum

CEN’s model has gained growing visibility among state and national partners, and recent investments have helped expand its reach into additional rural communities. The latest grant from Greater Texas Foundation reinforces the long-term commitment to ensuring rural learners have the same opportunities as their urban peers.

Reflecting on the journey from the early days in Roscoe to today, McMillin expressed optimism about the future.

“When you look at the building blocks from where this started to where it is now, it’s incredibly inspiring,” she said. “There is good happening in rural communities. And when you see it in action, you know it’s worth investing in.”

## About Greater Texas Foundation

Greater Texas Foundation is committed to ensuring Texas students are prepared for, have access to, persist in, and complete postsecondary education. The foundation prioritizes underserved and rural populations and advances its mission through strategic partnerships, research, and grantmaking.

“

**We are once again deeply indebted to The Greater Texas Foundation for their tremendous generosity and support. Thanks to Sue McMillin and her amazing Team, Collegiate Edu-Nation is once again able to facilitate the highest student outcomes in the nation for all rural students in the CEN Network of High Performing Rural Schools. Without the support and inspiration provided by GTF, this accomplishment would not be possible!**

DR. KIM ALEXANDER  
FOUNDER & CEO

”

# Communications & Outreach

Expanded Communication Channels: This year, we continue to grow our **We Are Rural Monthly Newsletter**, a monthly publication designed to share success stories, updates, and innovations across our network—strengthening our connection with partners and supporters nationwide.



to our Newsletter!

**Our new newsletter is already making waves—subscribers are up 11% in the first month, with monthly viewership increasing 5% each month.**



### CEN Edu-REACH Helps Rural Seniors Take the First Step Toward Their Future

In partnership with schools and families, CEN helps rural learners unlock their full potential—opening doors to college, career, and life success through innovative systems of support and opportunity.



[Read More](#)

*We've got a name tag for you.*

[Insert Your Name Here]  
President of CEN

### Now Hiring: President, Collegiate Edu-Nation

Are you ready to join and lead an action-oriented, people-centered, visionary organization driving meaningful impact in Rural America? Collegiate Edu-Nation (CEN) is seeking an

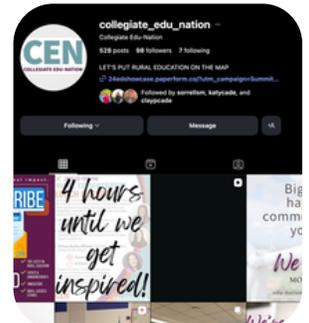
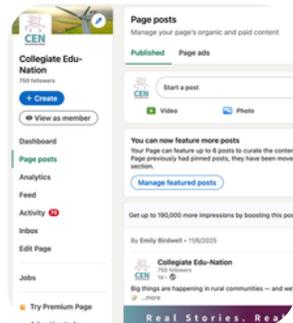
Real Stories. Real Impact.

**SUBSCRIBE**

*We Are Rural*  
**Newsletter**

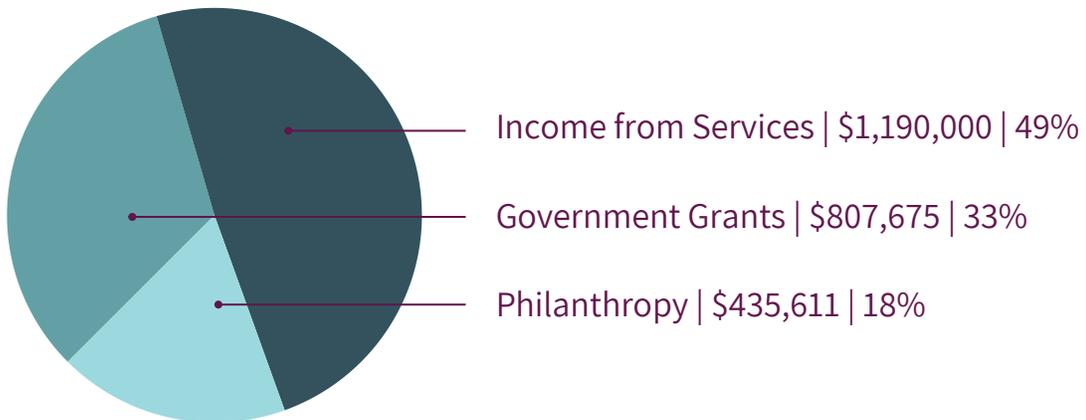
**AND BE INSPIRED**

- ✓ THE LATEST IN RURAL EDUCATION
- ✓ EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS
- ✓ INNOVATION
- ✓ RURAL SUCCESS STORIES



# Financial Highlights

## SOURCES OF INCOME



## CATEGORIES OF EXPENSES



# Message from the President



*Joining the Collegiate Edu-Nation team at this moment is something special. Our network of schools and communities continues to grow because of a relentless commitment to sharing a targeted model of support. At the heart of our work is intentional partnership, planning and building alongside the leaders and communities we serve. CEN's key role is to work alongside our partners and systems to best integrate our services in a way that is most impactful.*

As a longtime leader in education, I've committed my career to expanding opportunity and elevating students toward long-term success. It's a privilege to do that work across Texas and now beyond. I'm excited to bring a mindset of partnership, alignment, and vision to CEN as we expand our reach and help more students access clear pathways to economic mobility.

This year, our work impacted 35,000 students across 48 communities and 45 school districts. That reach is possible because of designed alignment among higher education, workforce partners, and community leaders. This work does not happen in isolation and is built through intentional collaboration and shared commitment. There is nothing more powerful than watching partners come together around a common purpose: our students' futures.

With clarity, careful design, and continued partnership, we will grow alongside more rural schools and communities as we strive to expand our impact through 2026 and beyond. Our goal is simple, build pathways that give students choice, agency, and meaningful opportunities to thrive. To those of you who are engaged in our efforts, may we join together in a way that ensures the greatest opportunity for rural students to gain long-term economic mobility.

It's important work, and I look forward to building great things alongside those who are seeking to create the best possible future for our kids!

*Jeff Walker*  
President

# Contact Us

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*Thank You*

**from the CEN Team**



As we reflect on this year's progress, we are reminded that access to education is more than opportunity—it is transformation. Because of our students, partners, and supporters, futures are being rewritten every day. Together, we are not only expanding access to higher education—we are building a generation of leaders who will shape communities, economies, and nations. The work continues, and the impact is only beginning.