



RGV FOCUS

a collaboration with Educate Texas

RGV FOCUS LEADERSHIP TEAM

Bios for education, community-based, and workforce organizations

SCHOOL DISTRICTS



Alda T. Benavides, Ed.D., Superintendent, La Joya ISD

Alda Benavides attended the University of Texas Pan American (UTPA) – now UTRGV, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Elementary Education and English. She began her career as an elementary school teacher and eventually went on to earn her Superintendent Certificate in 1985. In addition, she received certifications for Mid-Management Administrator, Counselor, Supervisor, Elementary Self-Contained and Bilingual ESL. She continued to expand her knowledge of the educational system by earning her Master of Arts Degree in Counseling and ultimately earned a Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership in 2001 from UTPA.

Benavides parlayed her knowledge and experience into other opportunities, such as an elementary and high school counselor, a high school assistant principal, an alternative center coordinator, principal at La Joya ISD of Kika De La Garza Elementary, and principal of E.B. Reyna Elementary. Through her leadership and vision, E.B. Reyna Elementary garnered several national awards and recognitions, which included being named a National Blue Ribbon School, a National Drug Free School and National Title 1 School. Benavides also received a National Distinguished Principal Award for her outstanding achievement in school leadership in 1997.

Benavides' accomplishments as a principal made her the ideal candidate for Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, a position she held for nine years. Throughout her tenure as Assistant Superintendent, Benavides served a vital role in helping the district grow in terms of the educational programs offered to students. Under her leadership, La Joya ISD was named a "Recognized" district in 2001 and continued to receive numerous regional and state accolades each year after that.

On September 13, 2006, she was officially named La Joya ISD's Superintendent. Her three main goals have been to make every child a successful reader, return every dropout back in school, and to graduate every student college and career ready. During this span as superintendent, she has facilitated the transition from one high school into three comprehensive high schools, has been involved in numerous building projects (including ten new schools in the first four years as superintendent) and has assisted in the creation of various post-secondary programs.

Moreover, Benavides initiated our College and Career Center to give students (who did not graduate or dropped out of high school) an opportunity to get back on track – graduating 1,768 students to date. Also noteworthy is the launch of three Early College High Schools that have graduated thousands with Associates Degrees, Certificates and college hours.

In 2015, the Texas Association of School Boards named Benavides as the recipient of the Region 1 Superintendent of The Year award. Without a doubt, the success that La Joya ISD continues to experience is due, in no small part, to Benavides' leadership and her commitment to education.

Despite her many accomplishments, Benavides' greatest achievement remains being a mother of two sons, Victor Lucas and Matthew Marco. For them and everyone else who has come into contact with Benavides, she sets an example of what it means to be passionate about your work and how education is a lifelong experience. She has proven that with hard work and dedication, anyone can achieve their dreams and live a successful life.



Arturo Cavazos, Ed.D., Superintendent, Harlingen CISD

Changing the landscape of education and the opportunities that are provided to students, Harlingen CISD Superintendent Art Cavazos is a nationally recognized leader with almost 30 years of experience in education. Since being named the HCISD Superintendent in November 2013, he was awarded the 2014 national and state Distinguished School Administrators Award by the American and Texas Association of School Librarians for his efforts to advance library and literacy services. In November 2014, it was announced that he was selected by the U.S. Department of Education as one of 100 top school leaders from across America and was invited to participate in the first-ever National ConnectED Superintendents Summit at the White House. Texas Governor Greg Abbott recently appointed Cavazos to serve on the State Board for Educator Certification.

Cavazos is a valley native who grew up in the fields of South Texas and worked his way through school to eventually attain his doctorate degree from the University of Texas.

He has been married to Sharon for over 20 years and has two sons, Christopher and Matthew.



Lisa Garcia, Ed.D., Superintendent, Point Isabel Independent School District

Lisa Garcia is completing her 29th year in public education. Her teaching career began in Tennessee and continued in Florida before moving to Texas in 1998. She has been a para-professional, teacher, assistant principal, principal, accountability and compliance officer, and now serves as Superintendent for Point Isabel ISD.



Jose Gonzalez, Ed. D., Superintendent, McAllen ISD

J. A. Gonzalez became McAllen ISD's Superintendent in August 2016 and oversees a district which has all its high schools nationally ranked. The district has 33 campuses, 24,000 students and 3,300 employees.

McAllen ISD's schools offer choice. There are campuses designated as STEAM + (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) and campuses that follow the International Baccalaureate Programme. A veteran of 18 years as an educator, Gonzalez is a proponent of emotional intelligence and rigor.

A former state finalist for Principal of the Year and a participant in The Principals' Center at Harvard University, Gonzalez has a wealth of experience and a passion for teaching. He has taught in the Educational Leadership Department as a Practicing Lecturer at the former University of Texas-Pan American.

He graduated from Texas A&M University – Kingsville with a Bachelor of Science in 1996 and earned a Master of Science in Educational Administration from the University of Texas-Pan American in 1999. He completed his Doctor of Education with an emphasis in Educational Leadership in 2008 through UTPA.



Marla M. Guerra, Ed. D., Superintendent, South Texas Independent School District

Marla Guerra took over the helm of South Texas Independent School District in 2001. STISD is an exemplary magnet school district that offers a specialized, college prep curriculum to secondary age students from a three-county area in the Rio Grande Valley. For the past five years, all four STISD high schools have been recognized by *Newsweek*, *U. S. News and World Report*, and the *Washington Post* in their rankings of America's Best High Schools.

Prior to joining STISD, Guerra served as a professor in the College of Education's graduate program at the University of Texas Pan American. She also has extensive public school experience and has served as Assistant Superintendent, Administrator for Elementary Education, Principal, Assistant Principal, Migrant Consultant, and teacher for several school districts and the regional service center in the Rio Grande Valley.

Guerra holds a doctorate from the University of Houston, a master's degree from the University of Texas Pan American and a bachelor's degree from Texas Women's University.

Guerra's vision for South Texas ISD is that the district continues to be at the forefront academically by ensuring that a nurturing, inviting, challenging environment always prevails.



Eduardo Infante, Superintendent, Lyford Independent School District

Eduardo Infante is the Superintendent of Schools for the Lyford consolidated Independent School District. Infante has been a public school educator for over 35 years. He is the product of the educational system in the Rio Grande Valley. He is a proud graduate of Lyford High School Class of 1976. He received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the University of Texas-Pan American.

He has been superintendent in Lyford CISD for the last 10 years. Infante was a classroom teacher for 8 years and served in various administrative positions for the last 27 years including assistant principal, principal, director, assistant superintendent and superintendent. Infante is a member of the Texas Association of School Administrators and has also served as President of the Region One Superintendent's Regional Advisory Council. Infante was named the Region One Superintendent of the Year in 2011. Under his leadership, Lyford CISD received District "recognized" status

for the first time in 2009 prior to the new accountability system. Additionally, Lyford CISD is currently a TEA Texas-Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (T-STEM) designated school district offering STEM-based instruction at all three campuses.



Daniel P. King, Ph.D., Superintendent, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District (PSJA)

A public school superintendent for the last 18 years, Daniel P. King was named the 2013 Texas Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators and was the 2006 Superintendent of the Year for the Texas Association of School Boards. Since July of 2007, he has led the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District (PSJA). Under his leadership, PSJA has made tremendous progress on some of the most significant challenges that face our state and nation.

A border school district serving more than 32,000 students (99% Hispanic and 89% economically disadvantaged), PSJA ISD had a dropout rate almost double the state average. The number of annual dropouts has been cut dramatically, and the dropout rate is now less than half the state rate. The number of annual high school graduates has doubled and the four-year graduation rate and overall high school completion rate has increased from 62.4% to 90.1% during his

tenure, surpassing the state average. PSJA has become a state and national model for dropout prevention and recovery, inspiring state legislation (SB 975) and replication of its innovative initiatives across Texas and the nation.

In the meantime, PSJA has undertaken an even bolder initiative College³ (All students: Ready.Connected.Complete.™) Initiating and scaling up a network of Early College High Schools, concurrent and dual enrollment opportunities, and college and career connected career pathways, PSJA is determined to offer every single student the opportunity to earn at least 12 college hours by high school graduation, with many earning more – up to an Associate's Degree. This ambitious plan has many PSJA graduates completing their Bachelor's Degrees in as little as two years. Over the last few years, hundreds of PSJA students have received an Associate Degree or College Certificate prior to their high school graduation.



Silvia Ibarra, Ed. D., Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services, McAllen Independent School District

Silvia Ibarra is a life-long educator with 28 years of experience under her belt. She is currently the Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services at McAllen ISD, where she provides leadership and expertise in curriculum and instruction with a focus on academic rigor and college readiness for all students. Prior to this position, Ibarra served as an Elementary Principal at Jackson Elementary. In her leadership role, Ibarra advocates for programs and services that serve the whole child: the social, physical and emotional needs of students as well as their academic needs.



Gonzalo Salazar, Superintendent, Los Fresnos Consolidated Independent School District

Gonzalo Salazar was named Superintendent of the Los Fresnos Consolidated Independent School District in June 2006. He was named Interim Superintendent in December 2005.

During his tenure, Los Fresnos CISD's student performance has consistently surpassed state and regional averages. All 14 campuses have met state standards each year. As a result of student performance levels, Los Fresnos CISD is among 26 districts in the state to receive the College Readiness distinction and is one of only five districts in Texas to receive this distinction three consecutive years.

He serves on the UIL Legislative Council, TASA Commissioner's Cabinet of Superintendents, TASA Legislative Council, Executive

Board for RGV LEAD and RGV FOCUS and serves on the Advisory Committee of The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley College of Education and P-16 Integration.

Salazar is one of 38 superintendents in Texas selected to participate in the Future-Ready Superintendents Program. He is a contributor to the ongoing Visioning Institute Document, "Creating a New Vision for Public Education in Texas." He represents Region One on Texas Education Agency's Accountability Policy Advisory Committee and is a member of several community service groups.



Jessica Swerdloff, Chief of Staff, IDEA Public Schools

Upon graduating from Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, in 2010, with a double major in English and Spanish, Jessica Swerdloff joined Teach for America and relocated to the Rio Grande Valley. Jessica worked as an 8th grade teacher with Roma Independent School District from 2010-2013, ensuring significant gains for her students on the Reading state assessments, leading extracurricular activities and initiatives, and crafting curriculum for the district.

Jessica transitioned her work in the Rio Grande Valley to IDEA Public Schools in the summer of 2013 as a Talent Recruiter for IDEA's schools from Pharr – Weslaco. In this role, she supported a portfolio of twelve schools with instructional staff recruitment, hiring, staff engagement and retention. Jessica now serves as Chief of Staff, supporting the organization and senior team with varied initiatives.



Esperanza Zendejas, Ed.D., Superintendent, Brownsville ISD

Esperanza Zendejas officially began her second term as the Superintendent of the Rio Grande Valley's largest school district, Brownsville ISD, on June 25, 2015 with unanimous approval from the Board of Trustees. Prior to her permanent appointment, she had served as the BISD Interim Superintendent for five months beginning on February 16, 2015.

Since arriving back in Brownsville, Zendejas has initiated open enrollment at all 38 BISD elementary schools and implemented an Extended Day Enrichment Program at several of those schools. She installed cost-saving measures, including the reduction of expenditures and positions through attrition that enabled the School Board to award 3% raises for the 2015-16 school year to all teachers and classified employees. Zendejas was instrumental in passing a Tax Ratification Election with 84% voter approval which generates \$5 to \$6 million net per year for one time expenditures to improve, repair, and expand district facilities without increasing the current tax rate.

Most importantly, Zendejas has taken significant steps to improve the district's image by making herself readily available and visible in the community. She has worked vigorously to establish and formalize partnerships with local, state and national organizations and businesses to support students. She has actively realigned employee responsibilities to improve campus services and district operations.

Previously, Zendejas served as the Brownsville ISD Superintendent of Schools from 1992-1995. She left to assume leadership of the Indianapolis Public Schools in Indiana. She has over 35 years of experience at all levels of education having held positions as a teacher, counselor, principal, central office administrator and superintendent in districts across the United States.

Zendejas holds a doctorate from Stanford University in Administration and Policy Analysis and a Master's degree from the University of San Diego. She is the author of several books. She and her husband of 20 years, also an experienced educator, have three children, two daughters and a son, and six grandchildren. One daughter is a BISD elementary teacher and four of her grandchildren currently attend Brownsville ISD schools.

INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION



Kristin Croyle, Psy.D., Vice President for Student Success, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Kristin Croyle serves as the Vice President for Student Success at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, an institution launched in 2015 with a particular focus on student success. She oversees student academic success, student life and educational outreach initiatives. Previously, she served the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA) as Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, the inaugural Dean of the University College and Interim Dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. At UTPA she had responsibility for overseeing undergraduate student success including retention and graduation initiatives, first-year programming, undergraduate curriculum and assessment, advising, and curriculum alignment. She is current Principal Investigator of a \$3.1 million dollar "Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions" grant from the U.S. Department of Education that focuses on improving student success through experiential learning.

Croyle earned her bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Utah in 1994 and her master's and doctoral degrees in Clinical Psychology at the University of Montana in 2000. She completed a postdoctoral fellowship in clinical neuropsychology at the University of Washington Medical School. She is a licensed psychologist in the state of Texas.

In 2002, Croyle joined the psychology faculty at UTPA where she taught graduate and undergraduate courses in clinical psychology, assessment, and research methodology. She was promoted to Associate Professor in 2007 and to Professor in 2013. Her research interests include emotion regulation, self-harm, and Latino mental health. Croyle values excellence in teaching and in 2010 won the university-level UTPA Faculty Excellence Award in Teaching, an award that recognized her contributions to the development and delivery of effective teaching and learning experiences.



Stella E. Garcia, Ph.D., Provost, Texas State Technical College-Harlingen

Stella Garcia currently serves as the Provost of Texas State Technical College (TSTC) in Harlingen. Since graduating from The University of Texas in Austin with a Bachelor of Science degree in Microbiology in December of 1989, she has worked in the workforce and education industry.

Garcia began her career teaching GED and Adult Basic Education to low-income youth and adults and dislocated workers through a Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) grant with Brownsville ISD from 1990 to 1993. From that experience, she moved on to managing one of the five pilot

one-stop career centers in Brownsville to working at the Texas Workforce Commission in Austin from 1993 to 1999. While working full time in Austin, Garcia earned a Master of Public Administration from Southwest Texas State University (now Texas State University) in San Marcos in December 1999. In March of 2000, Garcia returned to the Rio Grande Valley where she worked in leadership roles with Workforce Solutions Cameron and Workforce Solutions Lower Rio through August 2010. In September 2010, Garcia became the Associate Vice President of Corporate and Community Education for Texas State Technical College in Harlingen. As the Associate Vice President, Garcia oversaw Continuing Education and Corporate Education, which included helping local and regional employers access training for new and existing employees.

In June 2012, Garcia was appointed Chief of Staff working directly with the president of TSTC-Harlingen. In July 2013, Garcia was appointed Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness and Research and also served as the college's Accreditation Liaison, Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator and Institutional Review Board Administrator. In December 2013, Garcia successfully defended her dissertation, "Do critical thinking and personality predict leadership style?" and earned her Ph.D. in Leadership Studies from Our Lady of the Lake University. In May 2014, she was appointed Interim President of TSTC-Harlingen. Under her leadership, TSTC-Harlingen was successful in attaining its reaffirmation of its accreditation with no recommendations. During TSTC's transition into a singly accredited college, Garcia has been named as the Provost overseeing the Harlingen campus.



Sylvia Leal, Ed.D., Associate Vice President for Student Educational Outreach, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Sylvia Leal is Associate Vice President of Student Educational Outreach at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and supervises various P-16 precollege initiatives, federal grants, testing, and other student support services that strengthen the student's preparation to enter and succeed in higher education. She holds a Doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Houston and has over twenty-nine years of educational experience. She continues her lifetime work to seek and develop innovative initiatives that support college access and success of first generation minority students.



Shirley A. Reed, Ed.D., President, South Texas College

Shirley Reed serves as the founding president of South Texas College, formerly South Texas Community College. She continues her distinguished 43-year career as a community college administrator with experience in three states. Her commitment to the greater good is demonstrated by her choice of fighting structural barriers in higher education and committing to serve low-income, first-generation students. She has devoted her career to facilitating access to quality education for African American, Native American and Hispanic students.

Since its creation in 1993, the College serves almost 35,000 students per semester, has expanded to five campuses, including a sixth virtual on-line campus, and offers 119 degree and certificate program options, 26 on-line Associate degrees and certificates, and four applied baccalaureate degree

programs.

South Texas College is a model of collaboration with public schools. The College has one of the largest dual enrollment programs in the State of Texas. It has instituted a variety of dual enrollment programs, including six academies, drop-out recovery programs and other unique initiatives with 24 school districts, and 72 high school sites, plus six Middle College Academies throughout Hidalgo and Starr counties. Combined, over 16,000 students are currently enrolled in these programs. Since 2000, the college has provided tuition-free dual enrollment to over 92,500 students in 72 school sites, saving families over \$150 million in tuition. South Texas College serves as the higher education partner for 30 Early College High Schools and two Career and Technical Early College High Schools, with over 12,000 students in the pipeline.

A Canadian by birth, Reed is a naturalized citizen who fell in love with the education opportunities available to her in the United States. She has five college degrees, including a Doctorate in Higher Education Administration from Illinois State University, a Master's in Business Administration from Western International University and Master's in Library Science from the University of Hawaii. She completed her undergraduate work at the University of South Florida in English Education. Reed also has an Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts from St. Petersburg Junior College.



Mike Shannon, Interim President, Texas Southmost College

Mike Shannon serves as the Interim President for Texas Southmost College. Mike holds a Bachelor's Degree from Texas A&M University – College Station and a Master's Degree from Texas A&M University – Kingsville.

Mike has worked as a student affairs professional for 25 years. He began his career in higher education at The University of Texas – Pan American where he served as the Coordinator for Cooperative Education for three years before transitioning to South Texas College. During his 17 year tenure at STC, he established the Department of Student Life and created a variety of innovative programs that generated increases in student retention, student success and graduation rates.

Prior to moving to the Rio Grande Valley, Mike was employed in sales and sales management in Houston for seven years.

COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS



Tina Atkins, Ph.D., Administrator for the Center for Excellence in Career and College Readiness, Region One Education Service Center

Tina Atkins has been involved in the field of education for over 30 years. Her experiences range from classroom teacher, education specialist, program director and department administrator. While all of those titles vary in responsibilities, an underlying belief which has inspired her in each of those capacities is that all students have the ability and potential to enter in and succeed in college.

Dr. Atkins currently serves as the Administrator for the Center for Excellence in Career and College Readiness at the Region One Education Service Center. In that capacity, she leads the organization's college access efforts for deep South Texas, an area that includes 37 school districts and seven charter school systems located along the Texas-Mexico border. She has had direct oversight of three competitive federally-funded Region One ESC *GEAR UP* partnerships, which have supported over 25,000 students in 29 school districts, and currently she leads the federally funded Region *One Education Opportunity Center* and the *Investing in Innovation* partnerships, in addition to locally supported efforts. Believing that it does indeed "take a village", she has been instrumental in bringing together major stakeholders to establish collaborative partnerships with seven college and university systems, and numerous businesses and community-based organizations to support post-secondary efforts in South Texas.

Her proudest accomplishment is having witnessed the doors of opportunity swing open for thousands of students to not only pursue a post-secondary education but to also witness their success in those endeavors.



Tania Chavez, Fund Development Strategist, La Unión Del Pueblo Entero (LUPE)

Born in Veracruz, Mexico, Tania Chavez, 30, moved to Reynosa, Tamaulipas where her parents started a business that has been the source of income for her family. Tania arrived to McAllen, TX at age 14 as an undocumented immigrant. Chavez was a member of the National Honor Society at McAllen High School and managed to graduate in three years while taking college classes after being part of the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. As an undocumented student and beneficiary of House of Bill 1403-Texas In-State Tuition, Tania obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Finance, a Master's in Business Administration and a Master's of Arts in Communication from the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA). After interning as a Student Affairs para-professional during her

graduate years at UTPA, Tania Chavez discovered the world of organizing at the Latino Leadership Initiative at the Harvard Kennedy School-Center for Public Leadership. Combining the power of organizing and her student personnel experience, she was able to start a student organization at UTPA, the Minority Affairs Council. This student-led organization originated from the tragic death of Mission DREAMer Joaquin Luna. Chavez's undocumented status has not stopped her. Tania has learned to value integrity and education. She has made a commitment to help students, in particular minority students, to be granted fair access to quality education. In providing resources and information to undocumented youth in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) to be able to obtain a college education, Tania arrived to La Union del Pueblo Entero (LUPE) with the hope to harness the talents, abilities and determination of the RGV youth. Tania joined the LUPE Team as a service provider where she mainly helped with DACA applications and youth organizing. Tania is currently an independent consultant helping LUPE implement new ideas in service to their membership. Due to the way our broken immigration system works, Tania was unable to qualify for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program but she is determined to continue the fight for immigration relief of the 11 million undocumented immigrants.



Chris Coxon, Managing Director of Programs, Educate Texas

J. Chris Coxon currently serves as the Managing Director for Educate Texas, a unique public-private initiative of the Communities Foundation of Texas dedicated to increasing postsecondary readiness, access and success for all students by building partnerships, leading innovation and scaling practices and policies. He has supported the development and redesign of more than 221 schools serving over 84,000 students across the state of Texas, along with promoting programs and public policy with regard to college-ready standards and practices, post-secondary access and success, human capital, and regional collaboration and alignment. Coxon previously served as the Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning of the Boston Public Schools. During his tenure, the district increased student achievement for all groups of

students and increased graduation and college-going rates while, at the same time, decreasing the achievement gap and reducing the dropout rate. These accomplishments were recognized by the Broad Prize for Urban Education as a finalist four consecutive years and then as the winner in 2006. Coxon has also served as a principal, district administrator and teacher for the Department of Defense Education Activity and in the Dallas Independent School District where he began his teaching career. He has served on various education boards at the state and national level, including serving as the Chair of the College Board's Academic Division, the Texas Educational Leadership Council, and the US DOE Technical Assistance Committee for Comprehensive School Reform. He has also presented at various conferences nationally and internationally on education reform, change management, educational leadership, and human capital management. Coxon holds a bachelor's degree from Benedictine College; and graduate degrees from the University of Phoenix and Harvard University.



Michael Seifert, Network Weaver, Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network Weaver

Michael Seifert is the Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network Weaver. RGV-EVN is a collaborative effort of eight community-based organizations to lift up the voices of RGV families in an effort to effect changes in policies that affect the well-being of their communities.



Juanita Valdez-Cox, Executive Director, La Unión Del Pueblo Entero (LUPE)

As a young woman Juanita began a career in early childhood development. Soon after being married, she began studying and earned a GED. She then enrolled in the Early Childhood Development program at Pan American University where she earned an Associate's Degree and later continued her education as a part-time student in Mexican-American studies and Sociology.

In late 1980, Juanita became a full-time volunteer with the UFW to assist farmworkers and other low-income families build a society that respects their contributions and honors their labor. In 2000 Juanita was elected to the UFW National Executive Board. In 2003 all the Texas UFW staff was transferred from UFW to LUPE. Late in 2007 Juanita was appointed as Executive Director. At LUPE she continues working to continue building momentum for fundamental social change.

Juanita is married and the mother of two sons and the proud grandmother to three beautiful grandchildren.



Traci Wickett, President and CEO, United Way of Southern Cameron County

Traci Wickett has served as President and CEO of United Way of Southern Cameron County since 1996. She came to United Way from a sixteen year career in banking, the last eight years as Vice President and Technology Manager for Mercantile Bank.

Traci earned a B.A. in Communications and English from Corpus Christi State University in 1979 after attending 6 different universities over the course of seven years.

She served as Chairman of the Board of United Ways of Texas, the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce, and the Texas Southmost College Foundation Board of Trustees. Traci is a member of United Way Worldwide National Professional Council and serves on the Board of Directors of the Brownsville Economic Development Council and United Brownsville. She was named Brownsville's Woman of the Year in 2006.

Traci is deeply involved in education initiatives throughout the Rio Grande Valley. She served as lead staff on Brownsville's Partners for Postsecondary Success initiative and the Family Engagement for High School Success, a partnership between the Los Fresnos CISD and United Way of Southern Cameron County. She also serves on the Leadership Team for RGV FOCUS, an initiative of Educate Texas.

WORKFORCE ORGANIZATIONS



Francisco Almaraz, Chief Executive Officer, Workforce Solutions

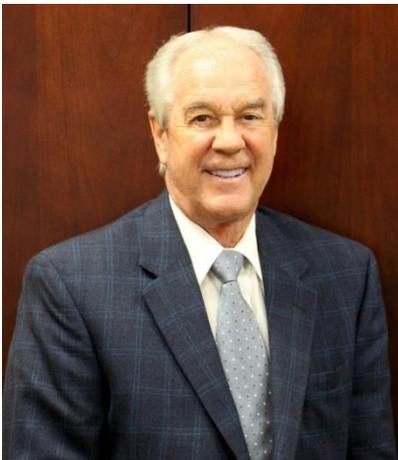
Francisco “Frank” Almaraz was appointed Chief Executive Officer of Workforce Solutions Lower Rio Grande Valley on August 2014. As CEO, Almaraz has planning, oversight and fiduciary responsibility of the organization that oversees workforce development services for Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties in South Texas.

Almaraz is responsible for the overall management and compliance of the workforce programs specified by Local, State and Federal regulations, as well as coordinating the programs with the needs of the private and public sector. With over 25 years of experience in financial accounting, auditing, and investigations, Almaraz brings his expertise to ensure that internal control systems are operating efficiently and effectively. Almaraz, together with the Board of Directors, strives to ensure that public dollars go directly to the development of the local workforce, in training, job seeker and

business services. Workforce Solutions has recently been recognized as one of the highest-performing workforce board’s in Texas, winning three of four performance awards at the 2013 Texas Workforce Commission Annual Conference.

A graduate of Pan American University in 1977 with a Bachelor in Business Administration majoring in accounting, Almaraz began his career in accounting in McAllen, Texas. In 1984, Almaraz earned the designation of Certified Public Accountant. After working as internal audit manager for First City Bancorporation, Almaraz obtained his Certified Internal Auditor certification in 1989. Almaraz also served as an internal auditor for the Texas Workforce Commission and Texas Attorney General’s office where he was instrumental in establishing a monitoring system to monitor contractor performance and evaluating internal control systems of large state agencies.

Almaraz is married to Marisa and enjoys being a proud parent of three children: Francisco III, Jennifer, and Kristy.



Pat Hobbs, Chief Executive Officer, Workforce Solutions Cameron

Pat Hobbs has served in various post-secondary leadership positions for the past 38 years, and in the opinion of many is one of the most experienced and knowledgeable college and workforce persons in the Valley.

His career began as a Business Instructor at Texas Southmost College in 1971 and progressed up the administration ranks over the next 18 years to become the Vice President for Technical Education at the college.

Hobbs left TSC in 1989 and took an administrative position at Texas State Technical College in Harlingen where he advanced to become the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs during the last years of his tenure there. He retired after 20 years of service to

TSTC, then accepted the Executive Director position at Workforce Solutions Cameron six years ago.

Hobbs carries with him a wealth of experience and knowledge of college finance and budgeting, grant development, and organizational and policy-making skills. He has been a leader in education in the Valley for a great number of years and is now applying his management skills to helping Cameron County develop a quality workforce that will maintain our current business needs as well as attract new industries to our area.