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Region One ESC Driving for Success Initiative: Breaking Down Barriers ***Results in New Partnership with Texas Workforce Commission***

The Region One Education Service Center understands that one of the barriers to students pursuing post-secondary education or employment opportunities after high school is the issue of transportation. Driving to either school or a job without having to depend on someone else, limits their opportunities.

To address the need, Region One ESC entered into a MOU agreement with Driving Quest, a Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) approved online driving course to create the *Region One ESC Driving Toward Success Initiative*. The program will offer the online learning component of the driver's education process. Once the student completes the required classroom hours, he can complete the driving hours with a local driving school.

"Our role as an education service center is to provide support to our school districts and students. In this case, by providing opportunities to students and their families that will potentially eliminate barriers to students as post-secondary students or members of the workforce is another level of support that we proudly espouse," explains Dr. Judith M. Solis, Region One ESC Interim Executive Director.

Taking the idea one step further, Dr. Solis identified a group of students that could benefit from the Driving Toward Success Initiative. As a lifelong educator, Dr. Solis recounts how students receiving special education services face greater challenges when it comes to daily living activities, such as driving.

"We hold all students up to high standards and expectations and students receiving special education services are no different," says Dr. Solis. "We want all students to have the same opportunities to pursue post-secondary or workforce activities. If driving to school or to a job is a potential barrier, we want to do something about it."

"We identified this need and reached out to Commissioner Julian Alvarez at Texas Workforce Commission to ask how they could help," explains Dr. Judith M. Solis, Region One ESC Interim Executive Director. "He immediately agreed that this was an underserved area where together

we could make an impact. Connecting with the TWC Vocational Rehabilitation we are now able to provide this impactful initiative “.

The new partnership between Region One ESC and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) targets Section 504 students and Special Education students. Through the Vocational Rehabilitation program of TWC, these students will also have access to the Driving Quest online driving course. The Section 504 students and Special Education students will receive vouchers to enroll in the driver’s education program and challenge the driver’s license exam, leading to further employment or post-secondary opportunities.

The Region One Driving Toward Success Initiative is open to all public, charter school, home-schooled, private, or post-secondary students, ages 14 – 22 years and those students who have been identified as Section 504 or in a Special Education Program. Interested students are encouraged to contact their campus Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor. Home-schooled and private school students should contact the Region One Education Service Center at 984-6000.

School districts that have already expressed interest in the Driving for Success Initiative include Edcouch-Elsa ISD, Brownsville ISD, La Joya ISD, Mercedes ISD, and Hidalgo ISD.

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