

RURAL COLLABORATIVES

Empower Schools
June 16, 2026





DRIVING STUDENT SUCCESS IN SCHOOL AND IN LIFE

Empower Schools works with state agencies, policymakers, public school districts, institutions of higher education, and in partnership with communities across the United States in service of millions of students. Through Empowered Partnerships and Policy and Thought Leadership, we improve outcomes for urban and rural communities by developing sustainable systemic solutions at the school, district, and state levels. 80% of students we serve identify as Black/African American or Hispanic or are experiencing poverty.

WAYS WE EMPOWER

- **Innovation Schools:** Creating local and state conditions for the development and sustainability of empowered school models.
- **Early College and Career Pathways:** Blending high school, college, and career, to prepare students to own their future.
- **Rural Innovation:** Partnering with rural communities to expand postsecondary opportunities and accelerate economic development.



WHO'S HERE TODAY



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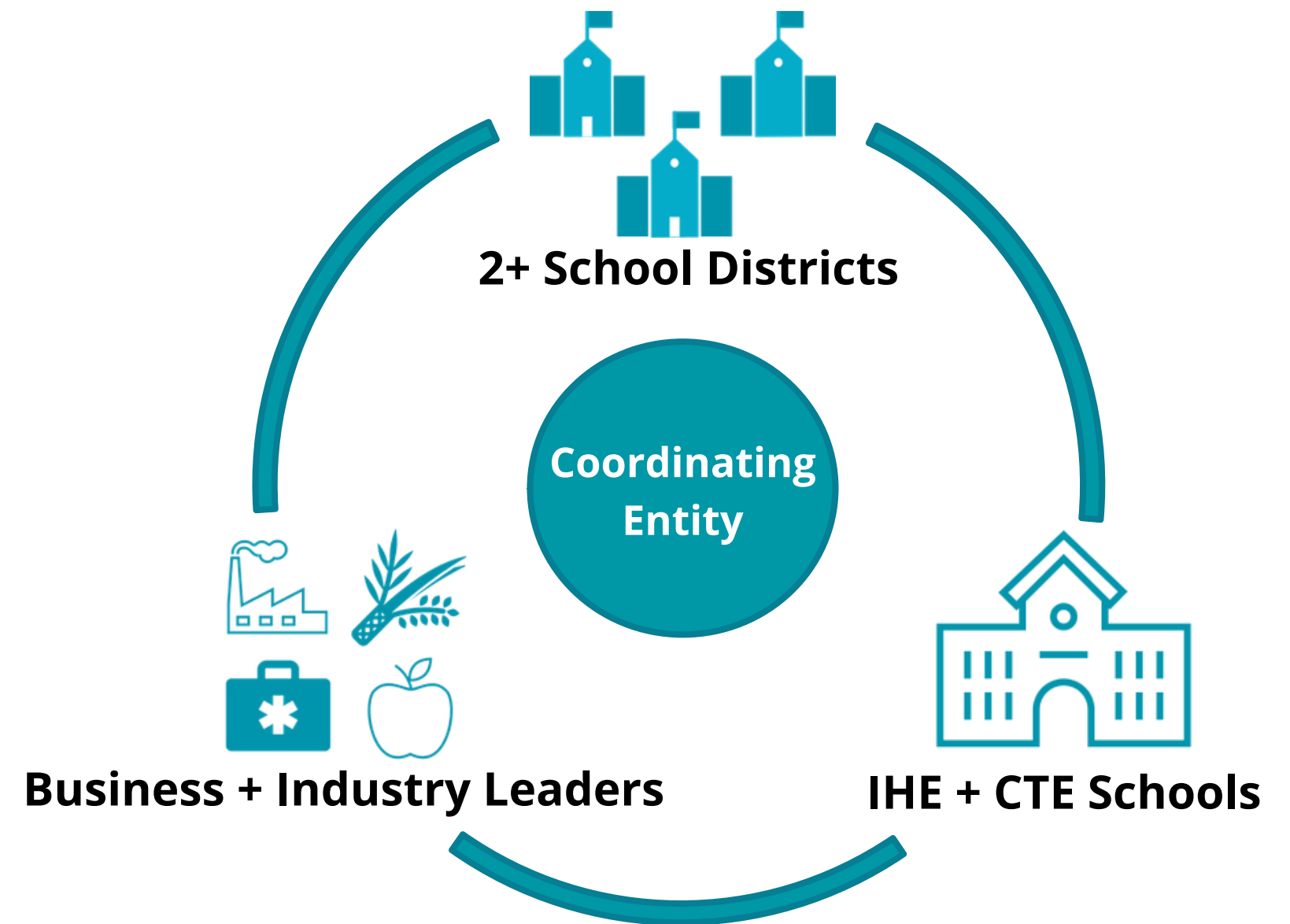


RURAL COLLABORATIVES

Rural Collaboratives

Regional Rural Collaboratives expand the individual capacity of small and rural schools so that rural students and their communities thrive.

We know that collaboration comes in many forms in rural communities, both informal and formal. In our definition **“Rural Collaboratives”** are formalized regional partnerships that offer all students access to high-quality pathways leading to college credit and industry credentials before graduating from high school.



Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP)

Legislation and Program



Background: The Rural Pathways Excellence Partnership program (HB2209) was passed during the 88th legislative sessions and expanded in the 89th legislative session, with identical provisions in HB 120 and HB 2, with the goal of **increasing access to high-quality post-secondary pathways for rural students** through the replication of the successful Rural School Innovation Zone model in South Texas. R-PEP is two things

Additional Allotment

R-PEP Designated Districts earn **additional ADA Allotment** for each student in a postsecondary pathway **& an Outcomes Bonus** for each student that earns a postsecondary credential of value up to 5 years after graduation.

Grant Program

TEA supports new R-PEP Collaboratives through a **grant** that provides district funding and technical assistance for **planning and implementation**.

Elements of a Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP)



Collaborative of districts

with fewer than 1,600 students, within 100 miles of each other, with a willingness to think creatively

College and Career Pathways open to all eligible students

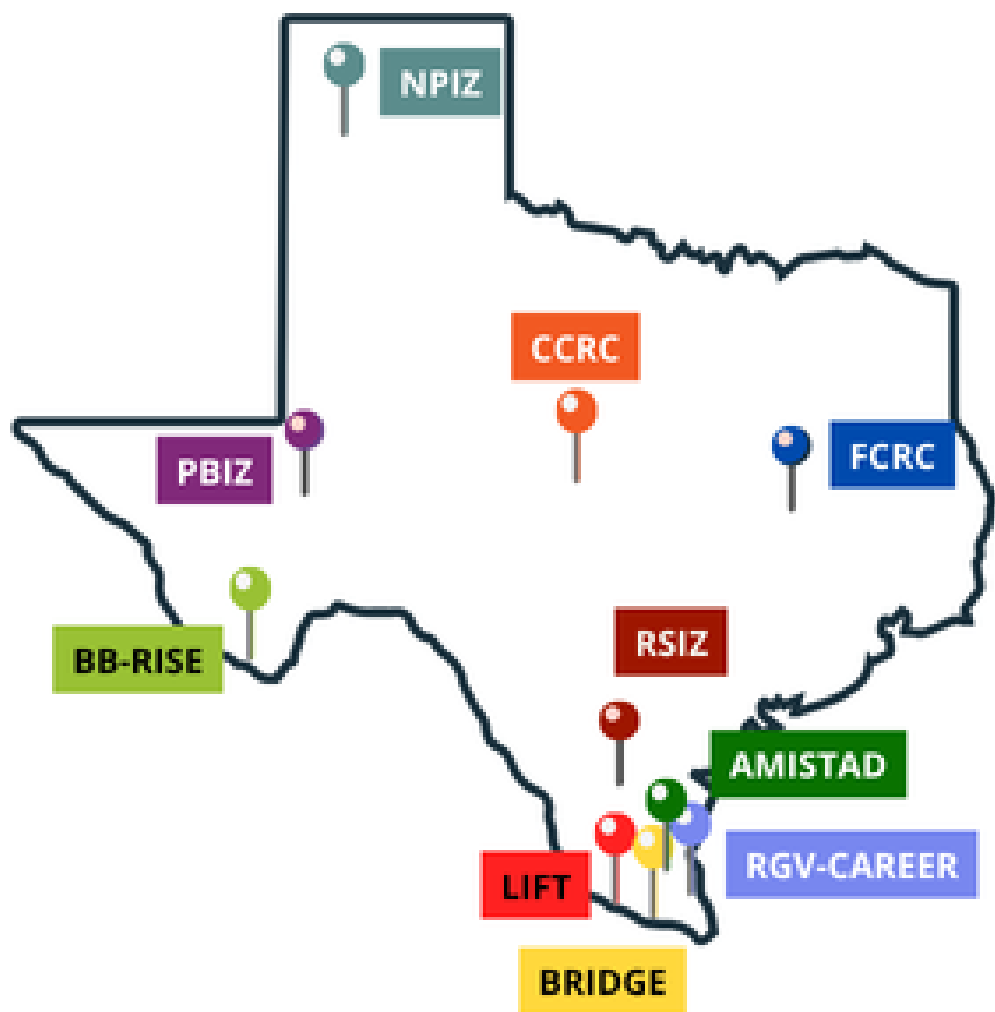
Coordinating Entity with capacity to operate pathways

Performance Agreement outlining CE and LEA roles, responsibilities, and metrics for success

Note- districts must have less than 1600 students in ADA to be eligible for the R-PEP Allotment and Outcomes Bonus, districts with more the 1600 students in ADA may be part of a collaborative but will not draw down R-PEP allotment funding

Rural Pathway Excellence Partnerships Across Texas

There are **10 designated R-PEPs** in Texas. They serve over **9,000 rural high school students in 30 districts**. Of those, over **2,200 students are participating in 40 shared pathways** in the 25-26 school year.

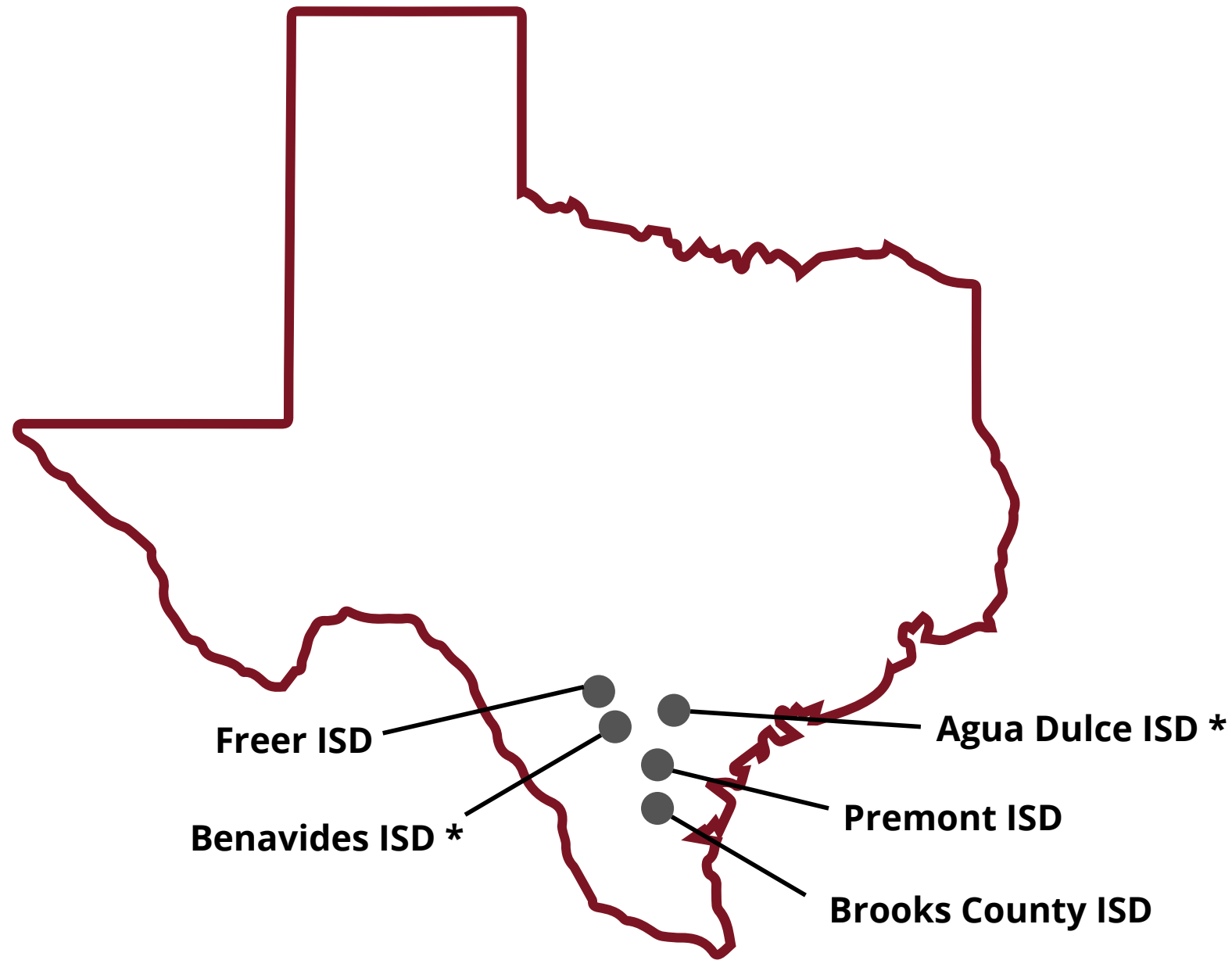


As of School Year 2025-2026, there are ten Texas R-PEPs

- | | |
|--|--|
| ● Permian Basin Innovation Zone (PBIZ) | ● Northwest Panhandle Innovation Zone (NPIZ) ★ |
| ● Falls County Rural Collaborative (FCRC) | ● Big Bend Rural Initiative for Success in Education (BB-RISE) ★ |
| ● Rural Schools Innovation Zone (RSIZ) | ● RGV Collaborative Alliance for Rural Education and Employment Resources (RGV-CAREER) ★ |
| ● Building Rural Innovation Through Dual Graduate Education (BRIDGE) ★ | ● Leading Innovative Future Technologies (LIFT) ★ |
| ● Comanche County Rural Collaborative (CCRC) ★ | ● Advancing Mutual Integrated Student Training and Development (AMISTAD) ★ |

APPENDIX: RURAL SCHOOLS INNOVATION ZONE

The Rural Schools Innovation Zone was the first Rural Collaborative in South Texas



*new districts for 23-24 school year



The Rural Schools Innovation Zone (The RSIZ) is a **partnership across 5 districts, 4 institutions of higher education, and regional workforce partners.**

The mission is to **provide all rural students in the region high-quality opportunities for post-secondary success.**

1000

Rural Students



84%
Economically Disadvantaged



88%
Hispanic/Latino

RSIZ model in practice

5 school districts, regionally proximate to one another.



Brooks County ISD



Freer ISD



Premont ISD



Benavides ISD



Agua Dulce ISD

Coordination and compromise among districts, school boards, and leaders are essential for optimizing student outcomes and developing a sustainable collaborative structure.

Coordinating entity/intermediary with shared decision making across partners and performance agreement



Districts pool resources and invest in the continued excellence of pathways

Intermediary operates pathway programs (CTE, PTECH, or ECHS) aligned with high-wage, high-demand career open to all students in the partnership, students remain part of their home district



The RSIZ academies focus on a specific career pathway with opportunities open to all RSIZ students

Each RSIZ academy is aligned to regional workforce needs leading to high wage job opportunities post graduation. The RSIZ improves and expands existing CTE programming and creates new academy opportunities aligned to regional workforce demand and community input. The RSIZ also offers two Early College High School pathways.



**IGNITE
TECHNICAL
INSTITUTE**
**Brooks County ISD
Welding Academy**
Partnership with Del Mar
College



**EARLY COLLEGE
HIGH SCHOOL**
**Freer High School and
Premont Collegiate High
School**
Partnership with Texas A&M
Kingsville, Coastal Bend College,
DelMar College



**NEXT GENERATION
MEDICAL
ACADEMY**
**Freer ISD Health and
Science Academy**
Partnership with Texas A&M Kingsville,
Coastal Bend College, DelMar College



**GROW YOUR
OWN
ACADEMY**
**Premont ISD
Education Academy**
Partnership with Texas A&M
Kingsville, Coastal Bend
College, DelMar College



**WILL ZELAYA
STEM DISCOVERY
ZONE**
**Premont ISD STEM
Academy**
Partnership with, Del Mar College
Texas A&M Kingsville



**TRADE WINDS
ACADEMY**
**Benavides ISD Electrical,
HVAC, and Construction
Academy**
Partnership with Lamar Institute of
Technology



APPENDIX - RAZ-32

2025-2026 RAZ-32 Districts

Host Schools and Founding School Districts



- **Monroe Central School Corporation** - Monroe Central High School
- **Randolph Central School Corporation** - Winchester Community High School
- **Randolph Eastern School Corporation** - Union City High School

2025-2026 New Districts - Participating Schools

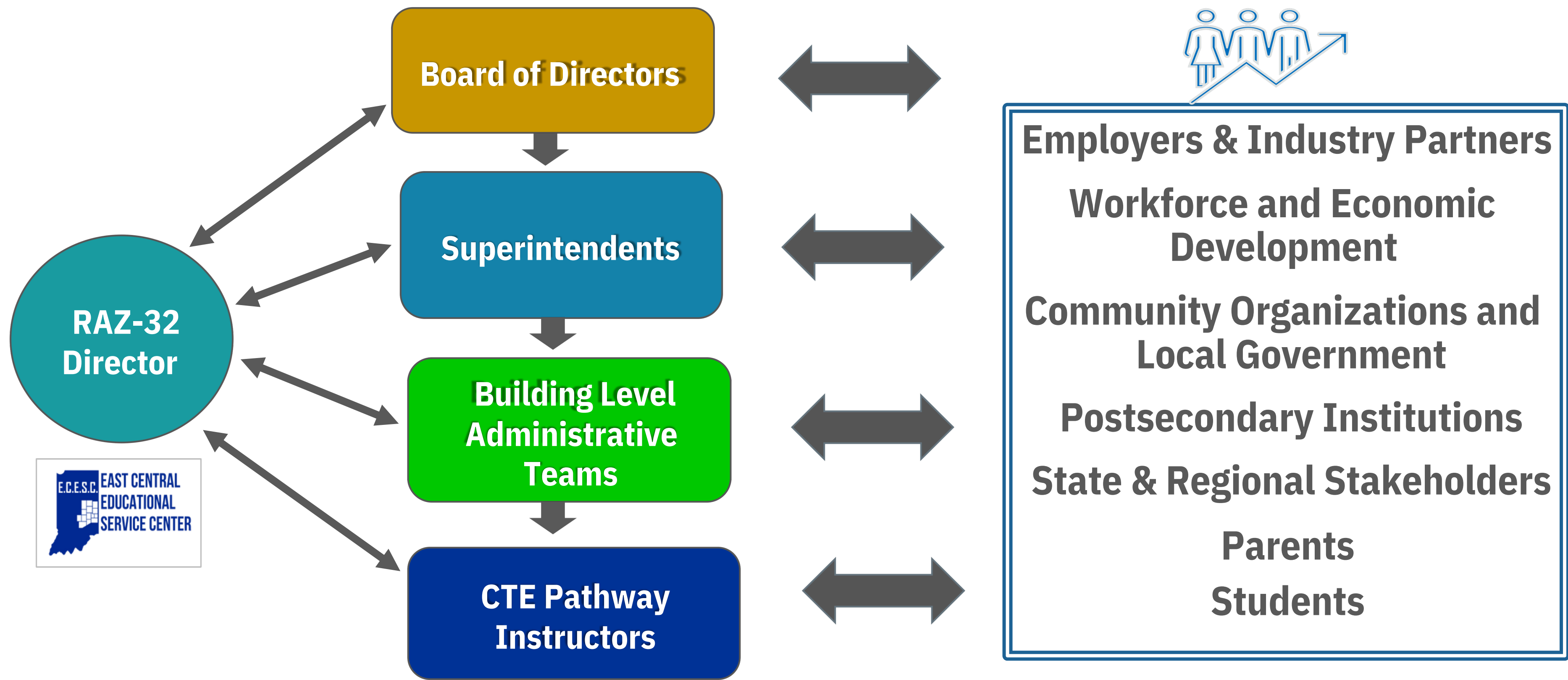
- **Liberty-Perry Community School Corporation** - Wapahani High School
- **Northeastern Wayne School Corporation** - Northeastern High School
- **Randolph Southern School Corporation** - Randolph Southern High School



The Organizational Structure of RAZ-32

2024 - 2025 SY

How the Work gets Done



26-27Career Pathway Guide

2026 - 2027 RAZ-32 Career Pathways

(Updated 3/4/26)



Career & Technical Education Pathway training programs open to Juniors and Seniors at Monroe Central HS, Winchester Community HS, Union City HS, Wapahani HS, Northeastern Wayne HS, and Randolph Southern HS.



Early Childhood Education Monroe Central High School



Enlistment & Service Seal Monroe Central High School



Precision Agriculture Monroe Central High School



Agricultural Capstone Multiple Ag. WBL Pathway Monroe Central High School



Commercial Driver's License – Class A Winchester High School



Precision Machining Winchester High School



Welding Technology Winchester High School



Medical Assistant (CCMA) Union City High School



Media Productions Union City High School

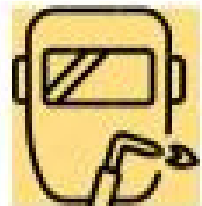


Marketing & Sales Union City High School

RAZ-32 Funded by Randolph County Commissioners & Council

Career Pathway: Welding Technology

Host School: Winchester Community High School



High Demand
High Wage
Careers

1st Year Schedule: Enrollment Juniors (seniors only when there is capacity)

- 8:22 AM - 9:59 AM RAZ-Block (Transportation)
- 11:48 – 1:34 PM
- 1:38 – 3:15 PM

2nd Year Schedule:

- 8:22 – 9:59 AM RAZ-Block (Transportation)
- 1:48 – 1:34 PM
- 12:48 – 3:15 PM
 - 2 Credit block for Falcon Industries WBL
 - 3 Credit block for Employer WBL experiences (Instructional days:12:48-3:15 PM)
- Enrollment: Open to students completing Year 1
- Concentrator status in 2nd Year

The Welding Technology program equips students with essential skills in various welding techniques such as Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW), Gas Metal Arc Welding (GMAW), Gas Tungsten Arc Welding (GTAW) and safety practices, preparing them for careers in the welding and fabrication industries. Through hands-on training and classroom instruction, students learn to work with different materials and tools, gaining practical experience that enhances their employability.

Program Outcomes leading to Next Steps:

- Meet Graduation requirements for employability skills and post-secondary readiness
- Ivy Tech Structural Welding Certificate (CT)
- American Welding Society Certification
- Work Ready:** MIG Welder, TIG Welder, Stick Welder, Fabrication Technician, Production Welder, Assembly Technician, and more.
- Postsecondary:** Enroll in college to complete Ivy Tech long-term certifications, associate's degree, or enter a four-year university to major in engineering technology or engineering. Many employers offer tuition-assistance to their employees to advance the knowledge and skills of their workforce.

Year 1- Courses and Dual Credits:

High School Course Titles and Credits	HS Credits	Ivy Tech Dual Credit Coursework embedded in HS Courses	Dual Credits
7110 Principles of Welding Technology	2	WELD 100: Welding Fundamentals	3
7111 Shielded Metal Arc Welding	2	WELD 108: Shielded Metal Arc Welding I	3
		WELD 206: Advanced Shielded Metal Arc Welding	3
Year 1 Total High School Credits	4	Year 1 Total Dual Credits	9

Career Activities: Students participate in field trips to local manufacturing companies to explore careers in welding. Students also gain additional skills development through the operation of Falcon Industries where students work with customers, service providers, suppliers, create quotes and estimates for clients, and manage office duties/tasks.

Year 2 - Courses and Dual Credits:

High School Course Titles and Credits	HS Credits	Ivy Tech Dual Credit Coursework embedded in HS Courses	Dual Credits
7101 Gas Welding Processes	2	WELD 208: Gas Tungsten Arc (TIG) Welding	3
7226 Welding Technology Capstone Parts I and/or III Options: 2 credits Falcon Industry OR 3 Credits Employer WBL placement	2 - 4	WELD 271: Advanced Gas Tungsten Arc Welding II	3
		WELD 273: Advanced Gas Metal (MIG) Welding II	3
		WELD 207: Gas Metal Arc (MIG) Welding	3
Year 2 Total High School credits	4 - 6	Year 2 Total Dual Credits	12

Postsecondary Certification: Ivy Tech Structural Welding Technology Certificate (CT)

- The Ivy Tech Welding Technology CT certifies a student has demonstrated proficiency in a variety of welding processes, demonstrated safety procedures, and has a basic understanding of metallurgy.
- To earn the Ivy Tech Credential:
 - Completion of 21 Ivy Tech credits in the Welding Technology program.

Certification: American Society of Welding

- Welding Technology students will have the opportunity to participate in the American Welding Society's Welding Certification Program titled SENSE (Schools Excelling through National Skills Standards Education).
- To earn the AWS Level I SENSE Certification:
 - Students must complete the required written examinations for all modules and all practical assessments administered by program instructors.



Work-Based Learning: Students will have the opportunity to complete a work-based learning experience in Falcon Industries or with an employer in a job position aligned to the Precision Machining Pathway. These may be paid or non-paid positions.

Link: [26-27 RAZ-32 Pathway Guide](#)



RAZ-32 A Call to Action

Six High Schools - Enrollments Today

	2025-2026 Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total HS
Monroe Central HS	84	80	85	65	314
Winchester HS	105	88	88	98	379
Union City HS	67	53	52	64	236
Randolph Southern HS	28	37	39	32	136
Wapahani HS	89	88	76	80	333
Northeastern Wayne HS	112	112	94	99	447
Total Students					1,845

Education works better if we collaborate rather than compete.
Why reinvent the wheel when another school has already made it round?