



Innovating the STEM Pipeline: Aligning Education, Industry, and Workforce Needs

October 17, 2024 | 10:00AM CT
Speaker Bios



Dr. Marcos Silva, Executive Director, Rio Grande Valley Linking Economic and Academic Development

Dr. Silva holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master's in Educational Administration from the University of Texas – Pan American. In addition, he earned a Doctorate in Education with a concentration in Curriculum, Teaching, Learning and Leadership from Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. Dr. Silva's dedication to excellence earned him prestigious recognitions, including being named a TED-Ed Innovative Educator, a Bezos Educator Scholar, and a Presidential Scholar's Influential Teacher by the US Department of Education. Additionally, he has contributed to programming that was recognized as a Bright Spot for Hispanic Education by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics.

Dr. Silva's commitment to further amplify the stories and ideas of the RGV on a global platform led him to curate TEDxMcAllen. Lastly, Dr. Silva serves as an adjunct professor at the University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley and the Executive Director for RGV LEAD.



Dalinda Gonzalez-Alcantar, CEO, Boys & Girls Club of McAllen

Dalinda Gonzalez-Alcantar is a mom, wife, and social entrepreneur currently serving her community as CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of McAllen impacting over 18,000 K-12 children and teens through programs focused on health and well-being, academic success, character and leadership and teen and workforce development. More recently Gonzalez-Alcantar was elected to the South Texas College Board of Trustees where she serves over 30,000 students creating access to academic and workforce development opportunities across Hidalgo and

Starr County where she also serves as the finance and Human Resource chair at South Texas College.

Gonzalez-Alcantar was born and raised in McAllen, TX and has over 10 years of teaching experience in public education. She received her Bachelor's of Fine Arts in Communication Design from Texas State University, San Marcos and her Masters in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas Pan American. Gonzalez-Alcantar began her work in educational policy as an intern with Senator Eddie Lucio.

Dalinda has won numerous state and national awards including the United States Small Business Administration's Innovation Through Technology Business of the Year for the Rio Grande Valley, Boys & Girls Club of America's National Executive of the Year representing the Southwest and the National Southwest Contribution to the Profession Award, The Coveted National Blue Spirit for her work in youth development, Children at Risk's Child Advocate of the Year or The Rio Grande Valley and has taken the stage to speak at Georgetown University's OWN IT Summit, Texas State University's Leadership Institute where she spoke on "Leadership and Justice in the 21st Century", as well as The International South by Southwest's conference focused on, "Minority Report: Engaging Kids of Color in Tech!"

Gonzalez-Alcantar appointments include Boys & Girls Club of America's Intergovernmental Committee, Texas Workforce Commission's Childcare Advisory Committee, and the Quad Caucus Committee, representing Hispanic Voice, in Youth Development.

She is the proud mother of Elijah and Madalin and wife to educator, Marco Alcantar. Together the Alcantar's run their first real estate investment, an Airbnb on South Padre Island and serve their community through Baptist Temple in McAllen, TX where Gonzalez-Alcantar serves on the finance committee. Gonzalez-Alcantar's purpose is to serve others, create equitable opportunities for all people and envisions a world where poverty is eradicated.



Amy Draper, Deputy Director, Programs, Educate Texas

As a deputy director of programs for Educate Texas, Amy focuses on building successful College and Career Readiness Programs while overcoming challenges and barriers at the campus, district, and state levels.

Before joining CFT, Amy spent seven years serving in many capacities for the Fort Worth Independent School District. Her roles included post-secondary success specialist, early collegiate program coordinator, and post-secondary success coordinator, overseeing fifteen CCRSM schools and the district's advanced academic and dual credit programs.

Amy holds a bachelor's degree in education from Mississippi State University and a master's degree from the University of West Georgia. Amy is currently in the final writing phase of her Doctor of Education program for organizational leadership at Abilene Christian University, focusing on higher education. Amy also received her principal and superintendent certifications from Stephen F. Austin.



Dr. Martha Salazar-Zamora, Superintendent, Tomball Independent School District

Dr. Salazar-Zamora has served as an educator in Texas for over 37 years and as the Superintendent of Schools in Tomball ISD since 2017. Prior to being named Superintendent, she worked as the District's Chief Academic Officer for three years.

Recognized as the 2023 Texas Superintendent of the Year, representing Region 4 as well as a 2024 AASA National Superintendent of the Year Finalist, Dr. Salazar-Zamora not only leads a fast growth district, but one of the highest academic achieving districts in the State of Texas, all while maintaining strong financial management practices.

As the Team Tomball leader, Dr. Salazar-Zamora has elevated Tomball ISD into a highly-rated school district and as the #1 Best School District in Harris County for the fifth straight year, according to Niche rankings. In addition, Tomball ISD was honored as a 2023 H-E-B Excellence in Education Awards finalist in both Large School District and Outstanding School Board categories, the only school district in Texas recognized for one than one award.

Under Dr. Salazar-Zamora's leadership, Tomball ISD continues to set the bar high with innovative programs and initiatives that are student-centered and intentional. Since 2017, she has led the implementation of Tomball Star Academy, the District's early college high school, Tomball ISD's Two-Way Dual Language Academy, the District's first P-TECH focused on healthcare, a Pre-K Center for young learners, the state-of-the-art Tomball ISD Stadium and Event Center, along with the opening of several campuses and CTE programs which are in place to accommodate the fast growth happening in Tomball.

Leading over 22,500 students and over 3,100 employees across 23 campuses, Dr. Salazar-Zamora remains committed to the growth of public education and the impact it plays in our local community by serving her time on numerous boards:

- Texas Education Agency (TEA) Commissioner's Cabinet
- Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) - President
- American Association of School Administrators (AASA) - Executive Committee (Texas Representative)
- Fast Growth School Coalition (FGSC) - President
- The Council of Women School Executives (TCWSE) - President Elect
- Past President and Founding Member of Texas Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (TALAS)
- Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) Tomball - Board of Trustees
- Greater Tomball Area Chamber of Commerce - Board of Trustees

She is a role model and positive influence in public education, serving as the first female Superintendent of Tomball ISD and the first Hispanic Superintendent of Tomball ISD.

Dr. Salazar-Zamora earned a Doctor of Education at Texas A&M University, a Master of Education in educational administration and a Master of Education in special education at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, and a Bachelor of science at Texas A&I University.

She also enjoys spending quality time with her husband Emilio, their two daughters, Milan

and Matisse, and their two granddaughters, Arya Rose and Aurelia Rose.



Bob Thompson, Tomball ISD Dean of Student Advancement

Bob Thompson serves as the Dean of Student Advancement at Tomball Independent School District (TISD), bringing over three decades of dedicated service in education. Prior to joining TISD in 2017, Bob held multiple roles within the Spring Independent School District (SISD) starting in 1990. His career in education spans from elementary and secondary teaching to coaching, campus administration, curriculum leadership and district administration.

During his tenure with SISD, Bob led the development and implementation of an early college high school, a virtual school, and Carl Wunsche Sr. High School, one of the first career and technical programming schools in Texas. As principal of Carl Wunsche Sr. High School from 2012-2017, the campus earned national recognition as a Breaking Ranks High School by the National Association of Secondary Schools and the Center for Secondary School Redesign. The campus was honored in Washington, D.C. for career pathway implementation in 2016.

Bob has presented in both statewide and nationwide educational conferences, presenting on curriculum design, instructional practices, student engagement, college readiness, and more. Bob also served as a panelist at an international assembly in Washington D.C. to promote 21st Century Skills in school systems.

As principal of Tomball Connections Academy in Tomball ISD, Bob administered three programs including the district's Discipline Alternative Education Program, the launch of the Success Academy for at-risk high school students and the district's Community Connections program that supports high school graduates receiving special education services.

In his current capacity with TISD, Bob focuses on strategic initiatives in Career and Technical Education (CTE) and supports the district's healthcare P-TECH program. He is currently designing a P-TECH devoted to students who will pursue a career in teaching and education.

Born in Port Arthur, Texas, Bob has been a resident of Houston since 1970. Though a Houstonian, Bob is a lifelong Dallas Cowboys fan. Bob holds degrees from the University of Texas at Austin, Lamar University, and Sam Houston State University. He resides in Houston with his wife, Lauren, who is also a district administrator within TISD. Together, they are proud parents of two children attending high schools within the district.



Karla Sandoval, Director of Career and Technical Education,

Tomball ISD

Karla Sandoval is a seasoned CTE administrator with more than thirty years of experience at both the junior high and high school levels as a teacher, counselor, and in a variety of CTE leadership roles. She is passionate about providing the opportunities that allow each student to identify and succeed in their chosen profession.



Katerina Wingfield, Dean Academic Affairs, Lone Star College –

Tomball

Katerina Wingfield serves as the Dean of Academic Affairs at Lone Star College–Tomball, where she leads the strategic oversight of dual credit programs, library services, evening and weekend college, and instructional compliance and support. Additionally, she currently serves in a dual deanship as the Acting Instructional Dean of the Creekside Business & Industry division, providing workforce and continuing education programs to the community.

With over 23 years of experience in education, Katerina has a proven track record in both secondary and post-secondary environments, including career and technology education, collegiate workforce education, and dual enrollment. She pioneers creative strategies to enhance students' access to purposeful academic experiences, fostering their aspirations for higher education and career achievement. Her extensive experience includes responsibilities connected to curriculum development, experiential learning design, educator training, and academic strategic planning. Her work has consistently focused on promoting equitable pathways to education and career success. She leverages her skills to support students, faculty, and staff holistically, consistently championing initiatives that bridge gaps in education access and workforce readiness.

Katerina holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Central State University and a Master of Business Administration from Strayer University. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Houston, with a research focus on student access, equity, and advanced academics.



**Susan Harris, MBA, BSN, RN, Health Care Alliance, Tomball Director,
Medical and Surgical Clinical Decision Unit**

I have been a nurse for 45 years, and in nursing leadership most of my career. My strengths are in mentorship, and helping our staff grow professionally. I enjoy teaching classes, and working with students, that is why being involved with the P- TECH program means so much to me. I want the students to have a great experience when they come to the hospital.

I have worked in most areas of the hospital as a leader, and also participated in many committees, such as being the Chair of the Peer Review committee currently. I am also serve on Boards in our community.



Dr. Stephanie Garcia, Education Associate, IDRA

Stephanie Garcia, Ph.D., is IDRA's STEM and gender equity education specialist with more than 10 years of experience in STEM education as a middle school science teacher, university instructor and graduate research assistant in engineering education. She provides professional development and technical assistance to schools across the nation on effective STEM education for all students. She designs and delivers interactive training that provides teachers with tools for increasing student achievement in STEM areas.

Dr. Garcia co-leads the Alamo STEM Ecosystem that brings together educators, industry and other partners, increasing opportunities for young students to work directly with technology to expand their problem-solving skills. She is responsible for the Defense STEM Education Consortium naming the Alamo STEM Ecosystem as one of four STEM hubs in the country. She leads this DSEC project to work with students, teachers and industry to build STEM pipelines for underserved students.

Dr. Garcia directs IDRA's VisionCoders™ program that is a new eighth grade computer science course being developed by IDRA in partnership with Texas A&M University–San Antonio and Title I middle schools in Bexar County. In this course, middle school students who are in at-risk situations will become software designers who create educational games for prekindergarten, kindergarten and first-grade students (their “buddies”).

Dr. Garcia directed IDRA's Texas Chief Science Officer program and, as an IDRA EAC-South project associate, she coordinated service delivery activities in the area of gender equity to school systems and classrooms across the U.S. South.

Dr. Garcia earned her Doctor of Philosophy in interdisciplinary learning and teaching with a concentration in curriculum and instruction from the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). She also earned a Master of Arts in education and Bachelor of Arts in interdisciplinary studies with a concentration in grades 4-8 math and science from UTSA. She holds a teaching certification for grades 4-8 in math and science, as well as a generalist certification for grades EC-6. Dr. Garcia serves as the lead of the Alamo STEM Ecosystem, a county-wide community of practice with a commitment to provide STEM/STEAM experiences for all students with a focus on students traditionally underrepresented in STEM/STEAM.

Her areas of research have included equity frameworks in STEM education, specifically those centered on inquiry and inclusivity; critical race theory and LatCrit approaches in STEM education; critical and engaged pedagogy in STEM curriculum and instruction; STEM curriculum development and teacher education; and youth leadership through family and community engagement.



Kenya Wilson, Director of College and Career Readiness Programs, Educate Texas

As a director for Educate Texas' College and Career Readiness team, Kenya provides technical assistance to designated, Early College High Schools (ECHS), and Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECHs). Kenya also leads the Educate Texas Districtwide STEM Initiative, preparing and connecting Southern Dallas County schools and students to college and career opportunities in STEM-related sectors.

Prior to joining CFT in 2018, Kenya served as a science/STEM specialist in the Lancaster ISD. She helped develop STEM programs in three districts and coached statewide STEM initiatives. Kenya worked as a physical therapist before becoming a teacher. She has taught biomedical science, biology, physics and chemistry in the Dallas ISD, Uplift and Lancaster ISD.

Kenya holds a bachelor's in physical therapy from Florida A&M University and a master's in education administration from Grand Canyon University.



Sara Mann, Chief High School Programs Officer, Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Success, Alamo College

Sara Mann is an educator with 30 years of experience in K-12 public schools and higher education. She served as a teacher and counselor, as well as a middle school and high school principal before taking on multiple curriculum roles as a district level administrator. Moving into the higher education sector at the University of Texas – San Antonio, Mrs. Mann trained thousands of K-12 administrators and mental health professionals in developing after action plans and preparing for loss of life events at their campuses. Currently, Mrs. Mann is the Chief High School Programs Officer for Alamo Colleges District. Dual credit programming across the Alamo Colleges encompasses five different colleges partnered with over 70 public, private, and charter organizations with students from more than 115 high schools. As Chief High School Programs Officer, Mrs. Mann oversees enrollment of more than 16,500 students in dual credit, 46 ECHS and PTECH campuses, and the Alamo Academies.



Dr. Ragina Taylor, District Career and Technology Education and STEM Facilitator, Grand Prairie ISD

Dr. Ragina Taylor is entering her 21st year as an educator with Grand Prairie ISD. She has served in various roles, including as a high school CTE teacher for 12 years, Instructional Coach, CTE Coordinator, and is currently a District Administrator in CTE & STEM. Her initial career as an electrical engineer and her love for education are the reasons she is passionate about supporting teachers and students in and outside the classroom to help prepare them for college and the future workforce.

Dr. Taylor graduated from Texas Tech University with a B.S. in Electrical Engineering and received her Master of Science from the University of Texas at Tyler. She received her PhD in Curriculum & Instruction from the University of North Texas, where her publications address underrepresentation of women and students of color in STEM.



Alexandra Whittington, Futurist Writer and Speaker

Alexandra Whittington is a futurist writer and speaker who explores the future of humanity and society. She is a member of the Future of Business team at TCS, where she helps clients navigate the complex and uncertain world of tomorrow. She is a former Lecturer in Foresight at the University of Houston and co-author and co-editor of several books such as *A Very Human Future*, *Aftershocks and Opportunities*, and *The Future Reinvented*. She has been featured as one of the world's top women futurists by Forbes and delivered a TEDx talk called *The Museum of the Future*. She is passionate about empowering people to imagine and create positive futures for themselves and their communities.



Kara Branch, MBA, LSSGB, Founder and CEO of Black Girls Do Engineer Corporation

Kara Branch is the visionary Founder and CEO of Black Girls Do Engineer Corporation also known as The Ivy Leagues of Nonprofits, an award-winning national nonprofit established in June 2019 and headquartered in Houston, TX. Black Girls Do Engineer is dedicated to empowering young women in STEM fields through mentoring, personal growth programs, STEM projects, and career guidance from leading industry professionals. Our mission is to Educate, Elevate, and Empower girls ages 6-21 by offering exposure and representation to help them achieve their aspirations in life.

Kara, a Prairie View A&M University alumna with a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering (2015) and an Executive MBA (2021), founded Black Girls Do Engineer in response to her oldest daughter's dream of becoming a software engineer at age nine. Her dedication to her daughter and hundreds of girls aged 6 to 21 mirrors her own experiences as a pioneering Black woman in STEM roles. Her programs have empowered girls to become critical thinkers, with notable successes including guiding a team of girls with no prior STEM background to the finals of the NASA Wear Challenge, where they outperformed over 70 teams nationwide.

With a career spanning seven years, Kara has managed over 15 major projects, ranging from \$1 million to multi-million dollars, in the Oil & Gas and Space industries, including supporting NASA and working as an Engineering Manager for Intel. She has been a Science and Engineering Lead and a Diversity & Inclusion Region Chapter Leader in Corporate America and holds a Lean Six Sigma Green Belt certification. Kara's impactful work has been recognized with her selection into the National Black MBA Association Accelerator Program.

Her accolades include the 2022 Mentor of the Year Award from the Houston Innovation Award Gala, 2023 Mentor of the Year from the Texas Girls Collaborative Project, the Grit-Executive Award from ALLY Energy, the 2022 Women in the Fast Lane of STEM Role Model Award from the Greater Houston Women Chamber of Commerce, the Rising Star in Child Advocacy from Children at Risk, the Outstanding Diversity Champion Award from the Houston Business Journal, and the STEAM Trailblazer of the Year Award from Imagine Excellence. Additionally, Black Girls Do Engineer was honored with its own "Black Girls Do Engineer Day" in Houston, awarded by the Mayor. Kara was recently named to the Houston Business Journal's 40 Under 40 Class of 2023.

As an author, Kara penned the children's book *What is S.T.E.M?*

 to educate youth and their families about STEM and career pathways. She also developed the STEMXposed kit line, which provides hands-on STEM activities for kids everywhere. Kara is a member of the Forbes Nonprofit Council and an inductee into Marquis Who's Who, reflecting her significant impact and leadership in the field.

Matthew Cushing, Executive Director, Rice Office of STEM

Engagement

Matthew Cushing received a Bachelor's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of Houston in 1999. While completing his coursework at the University of Houston in education, he focused on Early Childhood and Earth Science. In 2008, he obtained a Master's

degree in Instructional Technology with a Specialization in Human Resources Management from the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL).

Matthew has spent 28 years in education serving as a classroom teacher, campus and district specialist, education service center consultant and a staff member in higher education focusing on teacher professional development and K-12 student programming in STEM education. He joined the staff at the Rice University Office of STEM Engagement in 2012 and has worked as an Assistant Director, Associate Director, Director of Programs and Operations, and currently is the Executive Director for R-STEM. In his current role he manages department operations, staff, and STEM programming. Matthew's passion is ensuring that all teachers and students have equitable access to high quality STEM resources and education.

He currently serves on the Texas Education Agency's Executive STEM Committee, Computer Science Teachers Association (CSTA) Greater Houston chapter, Rice Staff council, the TX CS Leadership Network, and is Co-President of the University of Houston College of Education Alumni. He previously served on the Science Teachers Association of Texas (STAT) Executive Board.



Dr. Srimoyee Bhattacharya, Data Science Team Lead, Shell USA

Srimoyee Bhattacharya is an experienced professional with more than 15 years of experience in Oil & Gas industry. She is currently a Team Lead for Data Science and Machine Learning within the Information Technology Organization at Shell. She has a team of Data Scientists and AI Engineers responsible for developing and deploying data science products for various business sectors, including Upstream and Downstream businesses based in America. Srimoyee holds a Ph.D. in chemical engineering from the University of Houston and a Bachelor of Technology in chemical engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, India. She joined Shell in 2013 as a Research Reservoir Engineer in Projects and Technology. Over the past 11 years at Shell, she progressed from pioneering physics-based modeling for unconventional assets, enhancing economic reserves significantly, to leading the Data Science and Machine Learning hub for the Americas. She has driven data science initiatives across various domains from upstream to downstream business, delivered key solutions for the transition to low carbon fuels, and played a crucial role in the development and economic planning of Shell's Permian Asset, contributing to substantial increases in NPV and free cash flow. Complementing her technical achievements, she is a staunch advocate for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion, dedicated to nurturing an environment ripe for learning, growth, and exceptional performance.

She has co-authored a book on machine learning applications in the Oil & Gas industry published by Apress. She served as Technical Editor for the SPE Journal, Journal of Natural Gas Science and Engineering, and Journal of Sustainable Energy Engineering. She has authored/co-authored more than 25 peer-reviewed journal articles, conference publications, and patent applications. She is also an engaging speaker and a thought leader. She regularly shares her insights at various industry conferences.

In her personal time, Srimoyee enjoys exercising, cooking, and indulging in podcasts, all while spending quality time with her husband and 2 kids (6 yr old son and 2 yr old daughter).



Kekeli Ekoue-Kovi, Research and Development Manager/Project Manager, Baker Hughes

Kekeli Ekoue-Kovi is the R&D Manager for Production Optimization. She has more than 12 years of high-level experience in research and product development before taking on a people-leader role. She is passionate about uniquely applying scientific and business knowledge to positively impact sustainable development, working with global teams to achieve Green and Sustainable Chemistry goals.

Kekeli has held previous roles such as R&D Scientist in the OFSE Strategy & Technology Development group and led the development and design of green molecules to bridge product gaps, serving as the Project Lead for multiple OFS product line applications. She also served as an Application Scientist for Fuels Additives and was involved in supporting product and technology development which included leading technical studies on product quality investigations and recommending improvements for Petroleum Fuel Additives Products as well as conducting synthesis and formulations of various H₂S scavengers, corrosion inhibitors, cold flow improver polymers and other fuel additive products.



Akanksha Mehrotra, CVP AI & Enterprise Marketing

Akanksha is a multi-dimensional marketing executive with a 20+ year progressive career spanning engineering, product management, marketing and business operations. She currently leads AI and Enterprise marketing at AMD, encompassing AMD's groundbreaking and fast-growing Datacenter and AI businesses. Prior to that, she spent over 20 years at Dell Technologies where she started as a hardware engineer designing antennas for Notebooks and grew to become a business and change leader at the forefront of various transformational initiatives at Dell. Personally, she is an advocate for diverse women in technology and mentors early and mid-career professionals and entrepreneurs. She has a bachelors in electrical engineering from Purdue University and an Executive MBA from The University of Texas at Austin.

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2024 STEM SUMMIT

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