

Act Locally Waco

[AVATAR in the Heart of Texas](#)

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By Christine Holecek

AVATAR is not just an icon or figure representing a person in a video game and it is not a blue hybrid alien from a movie. AVATAR in the Heart of Texas stands for “Academic Vertical Alignment Training and Renewal.” It is a joint project, now in its third year, organized by the Education Service Center Region 12 (ESC Region 12) and the Heart of Texas P20 Council to bring together local school districts and local colleges to collaborate on high school transition to college.



Year one looked specifically at High School English Courses (AP and Dual Credit) and expectations for college English courses. Critical conversations were held on the alignment that needs to happen for students to be more successful in college. Great strides were made. For example, high school and college teachers worked together to develop a tool for all teachers to use to grade essays consistently and holistically.

Year two's project added math to the equation. Representatives from both ELAR (English, Language Arts and Reading) and Math disciplines began discussing the College Preparatory course requirements introduced by House Bill 5 in 2012. These course offerings are now required by the legislature to help students be better prepared to enter college without remediation. High School and College ELAR and Math teachers worked with McLennan Community College (MCC) to develop a course that was made available the fall of 2014. School districts interested in using the college prep course can complete a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with MCC.

A College Prep Course symposium was held in September 2014 to introduce school districts to local

college offerings. Representatives from McLennan Community College, Texas State Technical College, Hill College, Temple College, and Central Texas College provided an overview of their new College Prep Courses that provide course content in English/Language Arts and Mathematics. Each college representative answered specific questions related to course design and MOUs. This symposium offered a format that allowed participants to attend one or all of the college overviews.

Year three's focus brought counselors into the fold. Their discussions about college transition will result in a "Frequently Asked Questions" document about what students need to know as they transition to college. The counselors are continuing their work together with critical conversations around college and career readiness, dual credit courses and college prep courses. They have been meeting once a month (February – May) to discuss trends and issues in college and career readiness. Counselors will also review and critique college and career readiness products: such as the Texas Online College and Career Readiness Resource Center.

Planning for year four has begun. Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers will be asked to contribute expertise into high school endorsement pathways. Six year plans will be created in the areas of Business and Industry, Public Services, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

For more information about the AVATAR program, please contact Christine Holecek cholecek@esc12.net.



This Act Locally Waco blog post was written by Christine Holecek. Christine is an Education Specialist at Education Service Center Region 12 in Waco. She has worked in the area of Adult Education and Career & Technical Education for the past 25 years. She earned an AAS degree from MCC, a BAAS and Master's Degree from the University of North Texas and is currently enrolled in the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at

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The Act Locally Waco blog publishes posts with a connection to these [aspirations for Waco](#). If you are interested in writing for the Act Locally Waco Blog, please email ashleyt@actlocallywaco.org for more information.