

**MEDIA ADVISORY
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**



**Breakthrough Central Texas Partners with Local Higher Education Institutions to Bridge Funding Gaps,
Offer Student Services for First-Generation College Students**

Amid federal financial aid cuts, nonprofit develops collaborative solutions to promote student success

WHAT:

Breakthrough Central Texas Austin Community College Student Orientation

Breakthrough Central Texas, Austin's leading college access and career success nonprofit organization, will host "Riverbat Orientation" on Thursday, July 24 at the Austin Community College Highland Campus Welcome Center to help students served by the organization, who aim to be first in their family to earn a college degree or certificate, prepare for the start of the fall semester. This orientation is one of many the organization hosts this fall as part of a collaborative partnership with Austin Community College District (ACC), Texas State University and St. Edward's University.

Breakthrough Central Texas partners with institutions of higher education to ensure students select the postsecondary pathway of their choosing and receive support they need to succeed by:

- Designing first-generation college student supports across campus
- Creating and facilitating dedicated orientations for Breakthrough students
- Conducting monthly meetings between advisors
- Providing academic recovery services

"Breakthrough student orientations are hugely impactful for incoming freshmen," says Berenice Soto, Breakthrough Central Texas Director of College & Career Success. "Many of our students are the first in their family to enroll in college. They may not have someone in their life to show them the ropes, such as registering for classes or applying for financial aid. Breakthrough is here to fill that role and ensure our students are confident and prepared to launch their collegiate journey."

Beyond student support services, Breakthrough's partnership with local institutions of higher education is innovating to provide scholarships for students to overcome financial barriers. These funds are designed to fill the gap for high-potential, first-generation students with the most need. To date, nearly \$500,000 has been awarded to Breakthrough Scholars attending Texas State and St. Edward's University.

Austin Community College District offers the Free Tuition Pilot Program, a five-year initiative that began in fall 2024. It offers eligible students free tuition and general fees. The program is open to high school graduates and Texas GED® graduates from the ACC service area, starting with the class of 2024 through the class of 2028. Eligible students receive free tuition and general fees for three years to pursue an associate's degree or

up to five years for a bachelor's degree at ACC, including many of the nearly 300 currently enrolled Breakthrough students.

"Austin Community College is proud to partner with Breakthrough Central Texas," says David Zuniga, Director of ACC's Welcome Centers. "Many of our Riverbats are the first in their families to attend college. They're navigating complex systems, from course registration, financial aid, career planning and often on their own. Breakthrough plays a vital role in helping students overcome those barriers. Together, we're working to make sure every student feels supported and has the tools they need to thrive here at ACC and beyond."

During Riverbat Orientation at ACC, students will develop a sense of belonging with their campus and Breakthrough community, submit additional documentation needed for the fall semester, register for classes, and apply for financial aid awards.

Among Breakthrough scholarship recipients at Texas State University, 90% have either graduated or remain enrolled. Overall, 86% of Breakthrough students at St. Edward's University who receive scholarships go on to graduate. These success rates compare to just 14% of low-income high school graduates in the Central Texas region who graduate college.

During Riverbat Orientation at ACC, students will develop a sense of belonging with their campus and Breakthrough community, submit additional documentation needed for the fall semester, register for classes, and apply for financial aid awards.

This event is part of a larger initiative in collaboration with institutions of higher education to expand student support services and close financial gaps. Now more than ever, as federal financial aid cuts make it harder for students to afford college, these partnerships are essential in helping first-generation students overcome systemic barriers and persist toward graduation.

Media must RSVP to Breakthrough Riverbat Orientation by emailing Mary Green, Mary@liveoutloudpr.com by Wednesday, July 23, 2025.

WHEN: **Thursday, July 24, 2025**
9-11 a.m.

WHO: **Berenice Soto, Breakthrough Central Texas Director of College & Career Success**
David Zuniga, Austin Community College Welcome Center Director

WHERE: **Austin Community College Welcome Center**
6101 Highland Campus Drive
Building 1000
Austin, TX 78752

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ABOUT BREAKTHROUGH CENTRAL TEXAS

Breakthrough Central Texas is the leading college access and success nonprofit in Central Texas. For more than 20 years, we have partnered with thousands of middle and high school students who aspire to be the first in their family to graduate with a degree or certificate. We make a radical, long-term commitment to students, to and through college, unlocking the power of education and a lifetime of opportunity. We support the whole student with personalized services, work closely with community partners, campuses, and employers, and advocate for our students with lawmakers. Breakthrough students attend 60+ public schools and persist at nearly 100 colleges and universities. The result is that nearly 60% of Breakthrough students graduate from college, compared to 14% of low-income students in our region. Our work has resulted in more than 470 college graduates, with 3,700 on their way, positively impacting families for generations, our region's educational equity, and the Central Texas economy. Join the conversation at [@BreakthroughCTX](#), Instagram [@BreakthroughCTX](#) and at [Facebook.com/BreakthroughCTX](#). To learn more, visit [www.breakthroughctx.org](#).

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