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PRESS RELEASE

Autism Intervention Center at TAMIU Sets Opening Wednesday, Feb. 17

A new Autism Interventions Center, a first for Laredo, will be ushered into existence with a special ribbon-cutting ceremony scheduled **Wednesday, Feb. 17 at 11:30 a.m. in Dr. Billy F. Cowart Hall, Room 125.**

U. S. Congressman Henry Cuellar, who was crucial in helping to secure US Department of Health and Human Services funding support for the Center, will be on hand for the historic event.

"I applaud the lead that TAMIU is taking with this program because they are raising the bar and setting the standard on how best to address the needs of students with autism," said Congressman Henry Cuellar (TX-28). Once fully developed, this model program will be able to be used by other colleges and universities."

When fully operational, the Center, in collaboration with the Autism Treatment Center (ATC) in San Antonio, will be able to provide specialized screening services utilized in autism diagnosis to help determine the most viable options to pursue for each client. Prior to this service at TAMIU, families drove to San Antonio or Corpus Christi for diagnostic and intervention services.

Dr. Ray Keck, TAMIU president, said the Center has also enabled the University's College of Education to launch a Master's Degree in Education Interventions with Autism program.

"With support from the Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE), a competitive grant award, the Center will establish a model plan to evaluate teacher effectiveness with students. As part of the program, TAMIU will design and implement a research-based Master's Degree program, and develop a teacher quality evaluation model to use with candidates in the degree program," Dr. Keck explained.

Dr. Humberto González, dean of the College of Education, noted that the Center also helps to underscore how program development and research at the University can positively impact its service community.

"Autism is very much a part of our Laredo community and one of our most challenging arenas for both teachers and families. We look forward to an opportunity to work with Laredo families to meet the challenges of autism today," Dr. González said.

Alonzo Andrews, ATC director and native Laredoan, said ATC is proud to be collaborating in an effort they consider crucial for Laredo-based clients.

"The establishment of a teliagnostic clinic at TAMIU is the culmination of five years of discussions between Cong. Cuellar and ATC. It is our experience that this technology can virtually provide a range of autism experts. With the recent establishment of applied behavior analysis and autism programs at TAMIU, we simply could not have asked for a better partnership," Andrews remarked.

The ribbon-cutting event will highlight the first day of the Center's operation. Center and ATC staff will meet with clients and deliver scheduled assessments. Tours of the Center will also be available.

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Among services to be available at the Center are diagnostics, function-based assessments, behavior analyses, and interventions.

Dr. Candace K. Baker, associate professor in TAMIU's College of Education, department of Professional Programs, will direct the Center and its outreach efforts.

"We're very excited about being able to offer Laredo families this important new resource. Many times, families are challenged and often feel overwhelmed when autism is diagnosed. We hope to be able to provide an important broad-based bridge to services and assistance as families learn to enrich the lives of their children," Dr. Baker said.

Originally from central Illinois, Baker holds her Ph.D. in Rehabilitation from Southern Illinois University and joined TAMIU in 2008. Other degrees include an MS and Ed.S. in Educational Psychology and a BS in Special Education, she was a school psychologist prior to entering higher education.

For additional information and scheduling appointments, please contact Dr. Baker at 326.HOPE (4673) or visit offices located in Cowart Hall, Room 125.