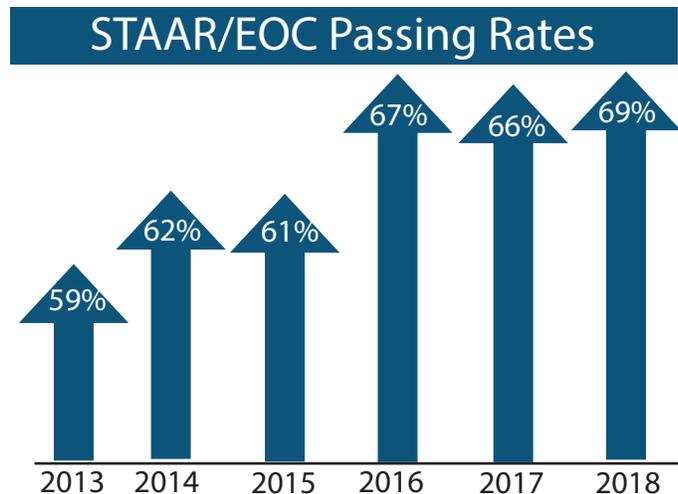


PSJA LBJ Middle School



All Toward Student Growth

Before implementing the Texas Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant, principal Linda Soto did what any good student would do: her homework. What stood out to Soto was that by “growing teachers and staff professionally, and through performance-based compensation, I could attract and keep the best teachers.” So even though this work was, as she put it, “new to us, and we had a lot of questions, along with a little bit of anxiety, there was also excitement, that this was something that will help.”

With support from the Texas Center for Educator Excellence, Soto implemented key features of the Texas TIF grant, including collaborative learning communities (CLCs), which are similar to PLCs, at Lyndon B. Johnson Middle School. Teachers applied to become collaborative learning facilitators (CLFs), which was “a great thing, it increased leaders in the school and teachers became very involved formally.” The CLCs met weekly, and CLFs led data-driven professional development through those meetings. It surprised principal Soto “how well the campus and teachers liked this change, how well they turned around strategies, the way it allows them to be so reflective. It improved collegiality among teachers and administrators working together as a team.”

According to Soto, a CLC meeting is quickly initiated by a CLF who shares “what we’re doing and why. Within five to seven minutes, we move into collaboration where everyone shares ideas of what can be done. Then they move to the transformation phase to set parameters on the work and collect samples of different levels of kids. They then review examples, see issues in the data, analyze, collaborate, and determine next steps.”

Soto loves that “everything is focused on student growth.” The new compensation system is “not only for themselves as teachers but for the school as a whole. It’s more of a team effort and there is this collegiality where teachers bring out the best in each other. They know that together, they can be better than they would on their own.” Student growth is what setting the SLOs and spending time in CLCs is all about. For Soto, “When they do get compensated, it’s very rewarding for them as teachers, us as administrators, and as a school. Then we get to do it all over again.” Doing it all over again is precisely the goal: Rewarding educators for success with students leads to retaining educators.

It improved collegiality among teachers and administrators working together as a team.

PSJA Palacios Elementary School



A Pathway Forward

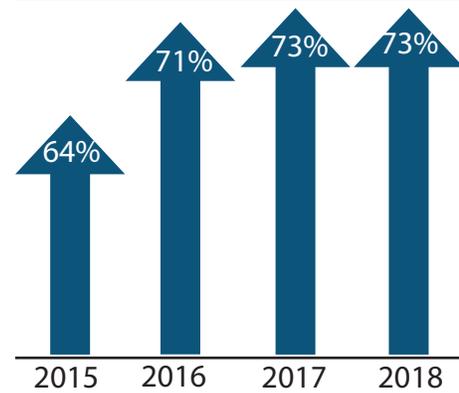
“What do you do?” Ashely Clark had always answered this common question with “I’m a teacher.” Clark has experience across the elementary grades, teaching prekindergarten, third grade, and fifth grade. However, when her district was selected to participate in the Texas Teacher Incentive Fund project, she had the opportunity to expand her definition of what she does as a teacher by taking on the role of a collaborative learning facilitator (CLF), leading job-embedded professional development for her colleagues through the weekly collaborative learning community (CLC) meetings. She became a teacher leader, teaching students within the classroom while opening up her classroom to teachers across the school so they could watch her model instructional practices.

After a year as the CLF, Clark was selected as the school’s collaborative learning leader (CLL). Clark’s new job included several tasks that called on her to learn fresh skills. Clark said there was “definitely a transition from being in the classroom to out of the classroom. It pushed me into a different mind-set.” She began to oversee all CLFs at her school, taking ownership for the outcomes of the all CLCs in the school, acting as the liaison between the administration and teachers, and rating educators through evaluations from McREL.

As CLL, Clark is an instructional coach who can now mentor and coach teachers. She said, “It’s something that I really love. I love the coaching aspect, and I love meeting with teachers one-on-one, getting to know them, and learning from each other. I get to learn from every teacher. It’s helped me to be not only a better coach, but also a better teacher.” In a typical day, Clark spends her time “meeting with teachers and planning, meeting with administration, teaching a small group class, co-teaching with a couple of teachers, and modeling lessons if needed.” She said that supporting teachers is “really valuable, and supporting them in their first year, especially, is really important.”

That support extends further than the first few years of teaching within the teacher leadership model. As Clark points out, “Often,

STAAR Passing Rates



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teachers don’t want coaching because they feel like it’s seen as a weakness. But if it’s a great coach-teacher model, it’s about growth and what we do is dialogue here. It’s between us to help better you.” She says it takes time to open that dialogue between teacher and teacher leaders, and it takes great mentors, but the school community does begin to “trust that it’s going to be here to help you grow.”

In this hybrid role, Clark can grow by supporting teachers while remaining connected to the classroom. She sees herself as a teacher even as she has a pathway forward to leadership. “At the end, all CLFs and CLLs, we’re all teachers. We all have the same goal at the end.” She noted that under past models, teachers had to become “grade-level chairs, which was really just about leading planning. Now, especially for our CLFs, they’re even stronger teachers and they know the work they do is important and valued. Being an instructional coach and leader is something I wanted to do. I never had an opportunity before the grant, so I really appreciate the roles the grant has given to our campus.”

Has Clark’s answer to the question, “What do you do?” changed? No; she still answers that she is a teacher. However, according to Clark, the teacher career pathways provided by the grant have “given teachers the opportunity to really be leaders and grow within their position... I love the work that we do with students and teachers.” Clark found her calling in teaching, and now she is helping other teachers become better at it faster, without leaving her school.