



TEA Time: Commissioner Morath Unveils The *2018 Annual Report* – January 2019

Host: Welcome to TEA Time, a podcast about all things public education from the Texas Education Agency.

Welcome back to another edition of TEA Time. We're joined again by Commissioner Mike Morath. Commissioner Morath, we're here to talk about the *2018 Annual Report*. We issue a lot of data out of this building, but we've got this annual report and it's really something. Tell me about it.

Commissioner Mike Morath: Well the purpose of us issuing an annual report on the state of public education really comes from conversations that I have had with parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, community members all over the state of Texas, because I would hear conflicting assessments of things that were, in fact, based on facts. And my observation was that in the past, we as an agency, we sit on pretty large volumes of data and we report that information periodically to the public – a press release here, a statistical report there. And it seems to come in drips – drip, drip drip – and what that, what happens is it makes it very confusing to develop a comprehensive picture of the state of public education, because you would have to be paying attention for 365 days and, you know, connect a bit of information that you get in August with a bit of information you get in January. So our purpose with the annual report was to try to provide a clear, synthesized view of where we stand, where we're going, and how we got here. So in the 2018 annual report, it starts with an overview of current student performance. It ends, you know, with a discussion of resources coming into public education. And in between is all the work that our public educators are doing all over the state of Texas to improve outcomes for kids.

Host: So give me some examples of what we're going to see in the annual report – give me, give me some examples of that work that's going on in the classroom across the state.

Commissioner Morath: So this year in our annual report, we have a section on our second priority, the building a foundation of reading and math. And in that stream of work all over Texas, educators are engaged in practices to improve the quality of K, 1, 2, 3, both literacy and mathematics instruction, but also to include quality and access in pre-K. So in particular in pre-K, we see so many innovative practices in districts around the state. So Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, for example, is engaged in community partnerships with several private child care facilities, where they're actually going out and training the workers in the private child care centers, and in some cases they actually provide teachers from PSJA to the centers themselves. And they are doing that to expand their reach in the early education space so that kids coming into kindergarten from wherever they're coming into from the community are better prepared academically. And they're not the only district that's doing that, and we discuss that kind of work. Austin has very similar innovative partnerships in a similar vein, as does Alief. And we've tried to describe the nature of that work, knowing that I wish that I could describe everything that I see that is innovative and going right for students in Texas – we again have limited space. So that's one example that we just try to highlight that is consistent with the broader thread of work that we're engaged in to improve outcomes for kids – in that case, in the early education space as part of our second key strategic priority.

For folks that look at this year's annual report, because this will be our second annual report, you can see sections on how the process of the State Board of Education adopting standards translates all the way into classroom instruction. And I think for people that aren't used to the system, an exposure to what those student expectations mean and how we work in a system to make sure all of our students reach those high expectations is important. So there's some information about how that works for members of the public generally. You know, we're entering a legislative session where school finance is certainly a major topic, and so there's you know pretty useful information regarding how the

school system of, you know, how public education in Texas is funded. So hopefully those kinds of vignettes will just help inform even voters on how we are doing collectively as a state in improving how we support students.

Host: So you mention that this report really takes a look at the state of education across the state of Texas. As the Commissioner of Education for the state of Texas, which initiative or which aspect of public education are you proudest of, looking back over the last year?

Commissioner Morath: Over the last year, we as an agency have continued in our attempts to increase our support of capacity in the field. You know, I think for years TEA was focused on accountability really all day, every day. And accountability is important. But accountability by itself is not sufficient to help students around the state of Texas. We've got a lot of hardworking educators and we need to give them more tools in the toolbox to support our students. So one of the initiatives that is starting to bear real fruit is our Texas Instructional Leadership initiative. This is a year fellowship model where we work with leadership teams – so principals, the supervisors of principals, and then the teacher leaders of those campuses over the course of a year on really best practices of instructional leadership. We're doing this in multiple places in partnership with our regional service centers, who are doing yeoman's work in providing leadership coaching and support to school districts that are engaged in this. And so, several of the districts that have participated in this have seen significant gains in student performance – Fort Worth in particular saw multiple campuses jump the equivalent of multiple grades in an A-F rating, as well as other measures of climate and student satisfaction and parent satisfaction rising because of this fellowship and relentless focus on instructional leadership. So that's one of the things that I'm proud of that we as an agency have supported the hard work of educators in the field on, and it's one thing that we try to shine a light on in the annual report, just so that policymakers and members of the public and members of the media can see the great work that is happening in public schools.

Host: So I know that there will be a lot of audiences that will have the opportunity to see this annual report. It will be on our website. We'll also have copies that we'll give out as we're out and about as an agency. I know that as you are out in the field, you like to talk about these things sometimes from the perspective as a parent. So what would you like parents to take away from this report, and what would you like them to take away about the state of public education over the last year?

Commissioner Morath: Well you know, I think for parents – as a parent of four – what I'm most interested in from the perspective of a parent is how well supported my student is, you know, in the school that they attend. But more broadly speaking, I want to make sure that our system of public education is helping all kids. And so for a parent that's reading the annual report, they can get a sense both of the complexity of the work, because you know we take three, four, five year-old, you know, bundles of energy and invest heavily in them with all the love and skill that we can muster to help them become the best versions of themselves. And hopefully they can see the degree of intentionality and the excellence that our educators bring to the work. And also just reflect that we're on a journey together. We don't live in a utopia. Where we are today, what we want to be true, is that next we're stronger than we are this week. And I think many people who read the annual report will take away from that the significant improvements that have happened in Texas public schools over the last 20 years, and the degree of focused leadership and investment that our educators are bringing to the table every single day to get better results for kids.

Host: We'll have a link to the annual report on our podcast page. Commissioner Morath, as always, thanks for joining us on TEA Time.

Commissioner Morath: Thank you.

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