



TEA Time: An Introduction to Texas Instructional Leadership – November 2018

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

Host: And welcome again to another edition of TEA Time, here from the Texas Education Agency. Today, we have the pleasure of visiting with Tim Regal, director of instructional leadership here at TEA. Tim, thanks for taking time for joining us today.

Tim Regal, TEA Director of Instructional Leadership: Of course.

Host: One of the things we're going to be talking about today, or the thing we're going to be talking about today, is Texas Instructional Leadership. That's an initiative you're overseeing and heading up. For those who are uninitiated, kinda tell us what is TIL, or Texas Instructional Leadership?

Regal: Yeah, Texas Instructional Leadership is a program where we provide training and support to campus and district leaders on how to help build capacity of the educators that they manage. And the idea being that, if we can build the capacity of district leaders to help grow and develop principals, and we can grow and develop the capacity of principals to help grow and develop teachers, then that's going to have a trickle-down effect on student outcomes and we're going to see a lot of gains on those campuses that take part in this program.

Host: So what's the importance of this initiative? What are we trying to accomplish with this?

Regal: Right. So basically, if you think about it at all levels of education, part of the primary goal of the particular educator is to really help identify where folks are struggling, right? So if I'm a teacher and I'm working with students, the quicker I can identify where the struggle exists and respond to the struggle, the quicker we can correct it and move forward. As opposed to not having the process in place to identify the struggle and then the struggle persists for weeks, months, right?

The same exact concept applies as we move up to campus leaders and district leaders. If I'm a campus leader and I can get shoulder to shoulder with my teachers and really help identify quickly where they're struggling so that we can work together, and I can support them to rectify the struggle quickly and it doesn't persist for weeks and months, right? And that's going to obviously lead to better student learning more rapidly. Same exact concept exists as we move up to the district leadership. If district leaders can get shoulder to shoulder with their principals, help identify where those struggles might exist, rapidly respond to those struggles by supporting them in their growth and development, and again, those struggles don't persist for weeks and months on end, then those principals and campus leaders improve their practice quickly, which again will lead to them helping them improve the practices of their teachers quickly, which then trickles down to student outcomes. So that's really sort of the general idea of the program.

Host: Now I know this isn't just a concept. We're actually out in the field in districts working with TIL and district leadership on this. What are we seeing right now? What are some of the things you're seeing from this?

Regal: Yeah, so our work in this is relatively recent – so 2017-2018 school year was our first year doing it. I do want to say that, you know, these practices and this type of training has existed for a long time across the state, across the nation, but we got involved with this last year. We had 60 campuses across 16 districts participating in our first pilot year. This year we're in about 20 districts, that covers about 85 campuses. And the results we saw last year were very promising. Basically, of the 60 campuses that participated last year, coming into the training year 13 of them had a rating of an A or a B as their campus rating. Coming out of the training program, that went up to 26 campuses had a rating of A and B, so we were able to double the number of A and B campuses. Conversely, coming into the training program, we had 27 of the campuses rated D and F. Coming out of the training program, we were able to reduce that to 14. So the highlight is we were able to double the number of A and B campuses and reduce by half the number of D and F campuses through this training program.

Host: You mentioned the number of districts that we're in – a diverse set of districts? Are they all the same? Very different? Or what can you tell us about that?

Regal: Yeah, they are – they are diverse. We actually chose areas of the state to ensure diversity. So we were in three different locations last year. We basically had a hub in Houston that pulled in Houston-area districts – some large, some medium-sized. We've had some direct work with Fort Worth ISD in the DFW area. And then we were out in East Texas, and in East Texas, we were working with a number of districts, but as you would suspect, a lot of those districts are relatively small districts where there are three campuses or less. So we did get a nice diversity of participation over the course of the year.

Host: So is the approach the same in each district, or does it depend on the district and the size?

Regal: Yeah, the approach is absolutely not the same in each district. I would say that there are best practices that exist no matter what your district's size is. How you put those best practices in place is going to vary. So for example, a large district, they might be able to tap into teacher leadership to help grow other teachers, whereas a smaller district, you know, they might only have ten to twelve teachers on a given campus, and so there's a lot more that campus leadership has to take on themselves to grow and develop their own teachers. They don't have the benefit of a network of teacher leaders to help diffuse those practices.

Host: I know one of the districts that uh we're working in is Fort Bend ISD. What are you hearing from the teachers or the leadership there? Can you just kind of give us a glimpse into that?

Regal: Yeah, so Fort Bend was a really interesting test case last year. And in fact, the success was enough last year that they continued this year and brought in an additional set of campuses. So we worked with four campuses last year, and we saw some of the biggest gains we had seen with any campus um from last year's cohort. Fort Bend, like I said, they had four campuses come in, and I don't want to claim that this particular program was the entire explanation for the success they saw. They were doing a lot of things in that district that obviously had positive impacts. But one of the things they did was they spent a first year prior to coming to our program really trying to reinforce positive behaviors and build a positive school culture. And they came in and they brought in some of our programming and some of our training, again, with the idea that now that we have that base in place, can we develop some systems that help us grow our teachers, grow our campus leaders, grow our district leaders? And when you added those two things together, you saw – you know, their elementary school campuses coming out of last year's training program, they suddenly had 45 percent of their

students who weren't passing the STAAR exam suddenly passing the STAAR exam, right, in reading and math. And at another campus it was 27 percent of students who, the year prior, hadn't passed the STAAR exam were now passing the STAAR exam. So really massive gains in that district. And so much so that they, like I said, they were bringing in a new cohort of campuses to try to spread those practices further across the district.

Host: So from TEA's standpoint, is the goal to get more districts and more campuses involved every year?

Regal: Absolutely. In fact, I think one of the more interesting pieces of this is that we're currently working with our regional service centers, and we have 20 of those across the state, basically geographically covering the state up into 20 sections, and for a lot of our districts, that is who they go to for their professional development. And so we're working with all 20 regional service centers right now so that starting next year, they can be the ones providing that type of training to their districts moving forward. And, you know, that's going to greatly impact how many districts we can reach across the state – as opposed to being in three specific hub locations this year, we can be in all 20 regional service centers next year, and again, have a better chance of reaching the 1,200 school districts across the state.

Host: So as Texas Instructional Leadership grows to more campuses, more districts, as the practices are strengthened within a district and on campuses, what does this mean for students um in those schools?

Regal: Yeah, I would say two things. The most direct that we've already talked about is just improving student outcomes, right? These practices, the reason we focus on them is because if you go to those campuses across the state and across the nation that show the largest amounts of student growth, and you distill down what is it that they're doing, well these are the practices that they're doing, right? So we know that these practices in particular lead to really significant student growth gains.

I think the other thing that is less about just direct achievement is really – it creates a culture on campuses and within districts, I think really foster learning, right? As adults, we say to our students on a daily basis, we want you to come ready to grow, ready to improve, ready to work through the challenges and struggles of learning. It becomes a very powerful learning environment when those students show up every day and they see the adults subscribe to the exact same mentality. They see their teachers that are trying to continuously improve their craft and stand shoulder to shoulder with coaches so that they can get better at their practice, and they see their principals doing the same thing, standing shoulder to shoulder with a district administrator who's helping the principal improve his or her craft. So, you know, as a student, when I show up at school and I see that the adults aren't just saying to ME, hey, show up being ready to improve, struggle – work through the struggle, work through the challenge, because we're going to turn you into a lifelong learner – I actually see adults acting as and modeling lifelong learning every single day, and that just creates a really powerful learning environment for students.

Host: Very encouraging early results on this. Thank you, Tim Regal for taking time. Tim Regal, the director of instructional leadership at the Texas Education Agency.

Regal: Thank you.

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