TEA Time: A Conversation about Leander ISD’s “Grow Your Own” Teaching Program – October 2018

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

Host: Welcome back to another episode of TEA Time. We’re joined today by Stacy Eberwine, a Family and Consumer Science teacher at Vista Ridge High School in the Leander ISD, and Sylvia Brooks, a junior in her Instructional Practices course. They are part of their district’s Grow Your Own teaching program, and we’re here today to talk all about it. Ladies, welcome to TEA Time.

Leander ISD Teacher Stacy Eberwine: Thank you.

Leander ISD Student Sylvia Brooks: Thank you.

Host: So, talk to me first, Mrs. Eberwine, about Leander ISD’s Grow Your Own teaching program. What do those courses look like?

Eberwine: We call them Ready, Set, Teach In Leander ISD. In the first level, the students are getting a lot of knowledge on how to write a lesson plan, what does a mini lesson look like, what are the different types of learners that you have? So they’re getting a lot of the basics, a lot of the foundations in level 1. They do get some time to do internships in the elementary school in Ready, Set, Teach 1. And they’re bussed there. They’re there for an hour. We go for about eight to ten weeks in the year. Then the second level course, the Instructional Practices class, I keep them for about nine to ten weeks and we continue to go over some TEKS and skills that I want them to be aware of before they intern. And then they go into the classroom after that. They’re about to start on Monday, actually, their internships for the remainder of the year.

I really try hard to make everything authentic for the students, in that I let them choose whatever. If they want to be a coach, then do a lesson over something, you know, a TEK that has to do with coaching. If they want to teach special education, if they want to teach art, music, whatever they want to do, I want it to be what they’re passionate about. So Ready, Set, Teach II, or the Instructional Practices, they’re going to start their internships in whatever they’re interested in.

Host: Sylvia, talk to me about what led you into Mrs. Eberwine’s classes in the first place, and what your passion is.

Brooks: I have always loved being around kids and helping them learn. For example, I have two younger sisters that I pretty much helped teach all my life, and my mom is a first grade teacher. So I would help around in her classroom a lot and work with students outside of school before I was even in the program. So it’s always been something that I’ve been very passionate about.

Host: What have you learned in your first year of the program?
**Brooks:** In my first year of the program, I interned in both first and second grade, so it’s about the same grade that I’ve always been used to. And I learned how to work around the students and in the class we learned a lot about ethics and how to differentiate our lesson plans for different learners, because not every kid learns the same. Everybody goes at their different pace, they learn in different styles, so that’s another thing that we learned a lot about while working in the classroom and in the class.

**Host:** It sounds like what you’re teaching Sylvia and your other students, and the students who have come before her, are really, they’re really lessons that could take them years to master and they’re getting to learn them while still in high school. What’s your goal when you have them in your classroom?

**Eberwine:** Well I tell them on day one a couple things. One thing I’ll tell them is, you know, you may take this class and you may do your internships or take the things you’ve learned in this class, and you may at the end of the year say, ‘You know what, this is not for me.’ And I tell them, ‘That is okay.’ Because number one, you’ve saved your parents a lot of money for changing your major in college. But that’s okay, this is your time to explore what you want to be when you grow up. And I say, ‘You know, you may walk into the classroom or leave the classroom in your internship and realize, this is definitely what I want to do.’ And that is extremely rewarding. And just watching them walk out, especially after the first day of their internship and seeing the excitement on their face is super awesome.

Another thing that I love and another reason why I love teaching this class, not only because the students are amazing – they already know what they want to do, they’ve got a passion for being with kids and that’s extremely rewarding – but I love to see the growth in their teaching skills, really. You know, they’ll teach a lesson, and my level 1 students are about to start doing that. And to see the improvement from their first lesson – Sylvia just did a lesson to my Ready, Set, Teach 1, my first level students, a couple weeks ago. And it’s like she’s been teaching for ten years. I mean, she was amazing. You know, she’s got a natural skill. And a lot of them do. But I notice such a big improvement from the first year even to the second year and that’s very rewarding.

**Brooks:** I just have a lot of experience with kids and I just love being around them and helping them grow and knowing that one day, they’re going to take what I’ve taught them and use it for something is really amazing.

**Host:** What are you taking from these classes specifically as you prepare to become a teacher?

**Brooks:** I’m learning about all the things that a teacher needs to run a classroom. For example, I’ve learned how to write a lesson plan. I’ve learned how to be comfortable up in front of the students and engage them and assess them and teach all of them in different ways. We even taught in an ICAP classroom for special needs kids, so we have experience working with all different types of children and getting comfortable in that environment I feel is very helpful.

**Eberwine:** Yeah, and the second level class, I do give them the opportunity, they can do either elementary or middle school, so I do have students this year who are going to be going into, like she was saying, an ICAP class. I did, we were talking about special education at the beginning of this year, I have them go into the ICAP class for several class periods, and the ICAP teacher was extremely complimentary of them and how engaging they were with the students because I want them to see – maybe, maybe that is something that they want to do, maybe they want to work in special education. There is such a need for special education teachers and that’s something also very rewarding is seeing those kids that work with, especially special needs, because I feel like that is a special type of person who has that knack or that ability to just bond with those kids and work with those kids.
Host: If you were to talk to students at another district, educators at another district, who didn’t have a program like this established or in place, what’s the benefit for each of you of having your Grow Your Own teaching program established at your campus and in your district?

Eberwine: I know Leander ISD is extremely supportive of this program – so much so that they came and talked to our Instructional Practice students last year to just let them know that they are adding to their application to be a teacher in the district a box, a check box, that if you took one of our Ready, Set, Teach programs that you are guaranteed an interview. So, and I tell them, I know that’s not a guaranteed job, but with a stack of resumes and applications, that’s huge. And so they asked me for a list of any students I had that were currently in college to let them know, to give them the names, and so – because they want those students back, because they have seen the success in the programs with those particular students who have come back already to the district and are teaching here already, so...

Brooks: It sets you up for success in teaching. I feel like it gives you all of the basic knowledge that you need in order to become a teacher and it really helps just set up your future career in teaching.

Host: Thank you both again so much for joining us at TEA Time. Again, we’ve been here with Stacy Eberwine, a Family and Consumer Science Teacher, and Sylvia Brooks, a junior in her Instructional Practices course at Vista Ridge High School in the Leander ISD. They are part of their district’s Grow Your Own teaching program. If you missed our Grow Your Own podcast from a few weeks ago, you’ll find that on our website at tea.texas.gov/podcast.

Just as a reminder, TEA is offering grants for the Grow Your Own program – for the Grow Your Own teaching program. Those grant applications are on our website and are open until November 13th. Ladies, thank you again for joining us.

Eberwine: Thank you.

Brooks: Thank you.

Narrator: For more on this and other education issues, visit our website at tea.texas.gov. For more TEA Time episodes, visit tea.texas.gov/podcast or look for us where you download your other podcasts. Join us again soon for another episode of TEA Time, a podcast from the Texas Education Agency.