

# 2015–16 Reward Schools Case Study Report Glenmore Elementary School

San Angelo Independent School District, Region 15

November 2016



## Acknowledgments

This publication is part of a series of reports produced in 2016–17 about seven Reward School campuses that participated in a case study project. This publication was developed with collaboration from the Texas Comprehensive Center (TXCC) at American Institutes for Research, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and the Texas Center for District and School Support (TCDSS) at the Region 13 Education Service Center (ESC). The following staff collaborated on this project: Mark Baxter (TEA), Deborah Brennan (TCDSS), Grace Fleming (TXCC), Lisa Gonzales (TEA), Angelica Herrera (TXCC), Cody Huie (TCDSS), Allison Ivey (TCDSS), Barry Link (TCDSS), CoCo Massengale (TXCC), Anne Post (Region 16 ESC), and Trent Sharp (TXCC). For additional information about the case study project, please contact Lisa Gonzales at [Lisa.Gonzales@tea.texas.gov](mailto:Lisa.Gonzales@tea.texas.gov).

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## Overview of the Reward Schools Case Studies Project

The state of Texas is home to more than 5 million primary and secondary public school students. From districts in major urban centers such as Houston and Dallas to those in rural areas far from cities, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) serves schools and students of all backgrounds. Similar to schools across the country, many Texas schools face difficult circumstances, including poverty and high rates of student mobility. Schools that receive Title I funding are especially likely to face these and other challenges. The objective of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is for the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to help address the greater educational challenges facing high-poverty communities by targeting additional resources to school districts and schools with high concentrations of poverty (ESEA of 1965). Decades of research have shown that poverty has a strong and negative impact on student academic performance (Arnold & Doctoroff, 2003; Herbers et al., 2012).

Despite significant obstacles, 6 percent of Title I public schools in Texas have gone beyond meeting state standards to earning the distinction of Reward School status. Reward Schools share many similarities with low-performing schools in terms of student socioeconomic status and other demographic characteristics. However, Reward Schools have implemented practices that have allowed the schools to overcome these challenges and become high-performing learning institutions. TEA and the Texas Comprehensive Center (TXCC) developed an initiative in 2014–15 to implement a best practices case study project, with the goal of recognizing the extraordinary accomplishments of Reward Schools and providing an opportunity for them to share their success stories with the state and other local educational agencies.

When the project began in 2014–15, eleven schools participated as case study sites (TEA, 2015). In 2015–16, seven new schools were selected to participate in the project. The purpose of this report is to present the findings from one of the seven newly participating schools. In addition to staff from TEA and TXCC, staff from the Texas Center for District and School Support (TCDSS) at the Region 13 Education Service Center (ESC) joined the project and assisted with the fieldwork at the case study schools. TCDSS representatives also interviewed or videotaped school staff and students from three of the participating Reward School case study sites.<sup>1</sup>

This report presents the findings from Glenmore Elementary School in Region 15. The report details the systems and structures Glenmore Elementary uses to increase academic performance, apply quality data to drive instruction, and improve teacher quality. It also describes the ways San Angelo Independent School District (ISD) supports the school in its efforts. For more details about the 2015–16 Reward Schools Case Studies Project, including aggregate findings of the analysis from the seven participating schools, with all seven Texas Accountability Intervention System critical success factors (CSFs) represented, please refer to the *2015–16 Reward Schools Statewide Report*.<sup>2</sup> The Statewide Report also includes the findings from the analysis of the aggregated student interview and school climate walkthrough data.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clips from the videos are available at <http://www.taisresources.net>. They are under the heading “Critical Success Factors” and are titled “Teacher Quality,” “Academic Performance,” “School Climate,” and “Use of Quality Data to Drive Instruction.”

<sup>2</sup> The *2015–16 Reward Schools Statewide Report* is available at [\[insert URL here\]](#)

<sup>3</sup> Because of the small sample size of student participants and data gathered using the school walkthrough tool, the results of the analyses of the student interviews and school walkthrough appear in aggregate form in the *2015–16 Reward Schools Statewide Report*. School-level results are not included.

## Snapshot of Glenmore Elementary School

2014–15 demographics:

- 464 students
- Grade span: PK–5
- 58% economically disadvantaged (i.e., students eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch)
- 6% English language learners
- 26% student mobility rate
- 5% African American
- 49% Hispanic
- 38% White
- 2% other ethnicity

In 2014–15, the state accountability ratings for the school were:

- Met standard
- Top 25 percent: student progress
- Top 25 percent: closing performance gaps
- Academic achievement in reading/English language arts
- Academic achievement in science
- Postsecondary readiness

## Overview of Glenmore Elementary School

Glenmore Elementary School is part of San Angelo ISD in West Texas, which is supported by the Region 15 ESC. The city of San Angelo is in a river valley in a part of the state where multiple geographic influences meet, such as plains to the north, desert to the south, and hill country to the east. Angelo State University is located in this city, as is Goodfellow Air Force Base.

Glenmore Elementary School regularly achieves state expectations for the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tests. For the past several years, Glenmore Elementary has met state accountability standards (i.e., earned the designation “met standard”) and earned distinction designations in core subjects and other school improvement areas. For example, in 2014–15, the school met five out of six distinctions, including academic achievement in both reading and mathematics, as well as recognition for being in the top 25 percent of Texas schools for both student progress and closing performance gaps. The school snapshot (left) shows the school’s 2014–15 distinctions, along with detailed demographic data.

The research team visited Glenmore in February 2016 and spent two days at the school interviewing two staff members from the district superintendent’s office and the principal. The team also conducted two focus groups with teachers from fourth and fifth grades representing multiple subjects. The focus groups lasted about an hour, and teachers shared stories and best practices from their school. Team members interviewed eight students from second through fifth grade and conducted a school walkthrough.

This report presents the results of qualitative analyses of the interviews with district leadership and the principal, as well as the two teacher focus groups. The analysis captured information about the CSFs highlighted in this case study (Academic Performance, Use of Quality Data to Drive Instruction, and Teacher Quality). To show how districts support the Reward Schools in this case study project, findings from an analysis of the district staff interviews are presented at the end of the report, as is a summary of the case study of Glenmore Elementary School. To maintain the participants’ privacy and confidentiality, participants are not named.

## Critical Success Factor 1: Academic Performance

Academic Performance is the foundational CSF. By supporting the CSFs of Teacher Quality, Leadership Effectiveness, Use of Quality Data to Drive Instruction, Family and Community Engagement, Increased Learning Time, and School Climate, campuses can

increase performance for all students. TEA considers academic performance to be a foundational factor aligned with the ESEA turnaround principle requiring schools to strengthen their instructional program based on student needs and to ensure that the instructional program is research based, rigorous, and aligned with state academic content standards (ED, 2012; TEA & TCDSS, n.d.). School turnaround literature asserts that successful implementation of schoolwide instructional practices should lead to improvements in student academic performance (Lutterloh, Cornier, & Hassel, 2016). Data from the site visits show that the participating Reward Schools espouse the importance of academic performance on their respective campuses. The district leaders, principal, and teachers all provided clear examples of the practices that reflect this CSF. The Academic Performance themes that demonstrate this CSF at Glenmore are:

- Schoolwide instructional strategies and
- High expectations.

### Schoolwide Instructional Strategies

District leaders credit the principal at Glenmore with being one of the first principals in the district to discuss and implement anchor charts and processes as well as to establish rubrics and vertical alignment for all subjects across grade levels. The implementation of effective instructional practices across the campus has been thorough, and the teachers are now called on to bring their practices to professional development opportunities at other schools in the district. The principal explained that before she became Glenmore's principal, each grade level had its own acronym for how it taught reading, which meant students started each school year learning what the grade-level acronym meant. Now the school has one acronym: RAP (read, again, prove). The principal brought head teachers together to develop one acronym for all of the grade levels to use so students have continuity as they move from one grade level to the next. RAP represents the process of reading a selection through and then reading again and finding proof for answers to questions about the selection.

Teachers also described the use of stations as one of their schoolwide strategies. The stations have activities that pertain to concepts the students are learning each week, and as much as 50 percent of class time involves students working in groups at stations. The principal stressed the importance of these small groups as *"absolutely critical, because even your highest student that you think gets everything you ever teach, if you do a full-group mini teach, sometimes they don't get it. You may not know that they don't get it because you're not honed in on checking on that kid every time. When you have them in a small group, you can't miss that."*

#### Best Practice: RAP for Reading

*"Read the story. Read it again. Take some margin notes. Then go back and prove where you got your answers. In the upper grades, a lot of questions are inferred-type questions. If it's the entire passage that made you think that, you would put WP for 'It was the whole passage. I had to read everything and just glean from what I read to answer.' If it was an area or a paragraph that made you think that was the answer, then you would mark, 'That paragraph is where I found question number 2.'"*

–Principal

### Best Practice: High Expectations

*“Honestly, our goal when these kiddos leave us at the end of fifth grade, we want them to be the absolute strongest students they could possibly be in middle school. We show them, and we talk to them time and time again. Glenmore students will go to their middle school, and they’ll be the leaders. They’ll be the student council, they’ll be the cheerleaders and the athletes and the head of the orchestra.”*

–Teacher

### Best Practice: Reviewing Data During Professional Learning Community Meetings

*“They take that to their [professional learning community] teams. They’re looking at data from maybe a test they gave last week. They’re saying ‘Okay, how did your kids do on this skill? My kids did really well. They did better than your kids. Okay, then how did you teach it?’ They’re sharing teaching strategies with each other, when they see that one teacher is doing better with a skill than another. It’s just constantly looking at every single kid.”*

–Principal

## High Expectations

District staff indicated that the high expectations in their district begin with the school board, whose members discuss topics such as how to help students plan for college and careers beginning in early grades. Teachers described their contribution to this element in the classroom in terms of building student confidence by stating openly what the goals are and reinforcing that the students will become fully equipped to reach the stated goals. They repeated that they are goal oriented *“all across the board.”* They also engage in competitions in classes and across the school for academic performance, attendance, and other themes—not because of a need to be number one but to be the strongest students possible. One teacher explained, *“We’re only as good as the people we compete against, and we only get better when we’re competing against people who think they are smarter than you or tougher than you.”*

## Critical Success Factor 2: Use of Quality Data to Drive Instruction

The Glenmore principal and teachers constantly generate data as students complete assignments and exams. The data are analyzed to guide subsequent instruction and activities. Research has shown that frequent examination of student data facilitates both educator accountability and improvements in student learning (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2007). Existing literature on data use for instructional improvement asserts that providing teachers with easily accessible, timely student data and promoting its use through supported analysis helps teachers improve student achievement (Kerr, Marsh, Ikemoto, Darilek, & Barney, 2006). They demonstrated examples of this CSF by discussing data in terms of the following:

- Schoolwide data use,
- Classroom data use, and
- Multiple data sources and varieties.

### Schoolwide Data Use

When asked how teachers are expected to use data at Glenmore, the principal simply answered, *“They should constantly be looking at everything students are doing.”* The teachers expressed an awareness of this expectation, and the principal modeled it. Several times during the interviews, there were references to the principal’s “big book,” where she keeps extensive data on each student in the school regarding lessons, tests, and other items such as attendance

and discipline. The principal tracks various kinds of data for every student. Teachers begin every school year with an assessment in which they “look at areas that students were weak on, maybe on the STAAR results from our students.... Our current students, we look at that, and we kind of put it together to come up with a plan that we can work with, that we can start with.”

### Classroom Data Use

Most of the data used at Glenmore is generated in the classrooms and analyzed by teachers who then make adaptations and revisions to their instruction according to their findings. As one teacher explained, “It might change how students are grouped. What table they’re at. Do you want them grouped with the other low kids so you can sit with them, or do you want two highs on the table so you’ve got a tutor for each one?” Another teacher explained, “With writing whatever they write for me, whatever I read, whenever I see them struggling, that’s what we do next week. Last week all teachers went to admin, we took our essays, other teachers rated them. I came back and I said, ‘Okay, Children, this is what we were lacking on.’ This week I added some figurative language stations because we didn’t have figurative language. Whatever they’re lacking, whatever they’re weak on, that’s next week. That’s how I teach.”

### Multiple Data Sources and Variety

San Angelo ISD created benchmarks for reading and mathematics in recent years. The Glenmore teachers use these benchmarks to create their own tests, particularly short tests to assess learning. They also develop formative assessments to help check learning on a regular basis. Each year, teachers begin with the benchmark data for students coming into their classes, along with writing samples to familiarize the teacher with each student. The writing samples focus on material from all subject areas, which gives all teachers of all subjects usable data about their incoming students. The teachers then spend the school year generating and analyzing data in their classrooms. The principal also uses a variety of data sources and, as previously described, combines them in her “big book” with extensive data on each student.

## Critical Success Factor 7: Teacher Quality

Classroom instruction is the school-level factor with the greatest impact on student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Recent literature on the topic of teacher quality asserts that the most successful schools attract effective teachers,

### Best Practice: Ongoing Data Use

*“We look at all kids and any kids that started the first six weeks that we see we’re going to have trouble with, or we think we might; we’re talking about every kid in every class in every subject, what we need to do. We’re looking for those that might have fallen through the cracks. New kids, trying to do all that. We do that every six weeks.”*

–Teacher

### Best Practice: Reviewing Data

*“If I see on my Eduphoria reports that there’s an area that’s not looking so great, then I may say, ‘What are we doing here? What do we need to do, to get this going a little better?’ I just pulled up their report and I’m like, ‘Ooh, this one class has too many kids that are not being as successful as they need to be.’ I picked up the phone and called my coach and said, ‘Go, get in this classroom and see what’s going on, because we have too many kids that aren’t being successful. I don’t know what’s going on with that. We got to go in there and look.”*

–Principal

and the leadership thoughtfully assigns new teachers to appropriate students and classes (Loeb, Kalogrides, & Béteille, 2012). According to the research, the most effective professional development opportunities for teachers focus on content knowledge and incorporate active learning strategies (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). The Teacher Quality CSF has to do with the need to recruit and retain effective teachers while supporting and enhancing the knowledge and skills of current staff with job-embedded professional development. Local education agencies and campuses can have a direct impact on student achievement through the effective implementation of a comprehensive teacher quality program. The Glenmore teachers and principal offered many examples of this CSF, along with strong examples of practices that achieve teacher retention, an informal and vibrant professional culture that constantly fosters job-embedded professional development, and robust district support. In particular, the staff have used creativity and ingenuity to establish highly effective practices such as the following:

- Classroom observations,
- Support for new staff, and
- Professional development.

### **Classroom Observations**

The Glenmore principal had a rare opportunity in recent years when the district funded a major physical remodeling of the school. She was asked to make recommendations about the design of the classrooms and, after researching the idea, recommended a layout in which all students have their backs to the door to avoid distractions from the hallway and doorway. Students now face an instructional wall with two screens. The principal can stand at the doorway of each classroom and view the instructional wall without disrupting the lesson the teacher is presenting. The principal uses this unique layout to conduct regular classroom observations. The principal and teachers rely on the principal's observations as professional development. Usually, the principal provides teachers with written feedback or an informal conversation about her observations. The observations serve as a foundation for ongoing professional development in which the principal guides the teachers or orchestrates opportunities for teachers to learn from each other by going into each other's classrooms while the principal covers a class.

### **Support for New Staff**

The district leaders attributed the high quality of Glenmore's teachers partially to the principal's professional network. With her connections across the state, people in other districts recommend their best teachers to Glenmore when teachers are moving into the San Angelo district. Teachers also described networking as key to the high teacher quality in the school. One teacher described the practice this way: *"If she thinks there's going to be an opening, she is working to fill that spot with the absolute very best person possible."* The principal explained that she looks not only at teacher knowledge and experience but also at an applicant's potential for connecting and communicating with kids. Her philosophy is that she can teach someone how to teach, and she works hard to help new teachers. When she is interviewing, however, she also looks for strengths in terms of good communication, amicability, and flexibility to be able to work with children effectively in the classroom.

### **Professional Development**

As part of their ongoing learning, the principal and teachers engage in a book study every year. The principal chooses the books according to new practices and structures being established in the school. For example, when the teachers implemented stations in all classrooms, they started with mathematics



stations, which led to studying a book on mathematics stations. When they extended stations to reading, they read a book on reading stations. The book study practice deepened teachers' knowledge about the structures they were implementing, such as the mathematics and reading stations. Another common opportunity for teachers is observing each other in the classrooms. The principal may see something in one classroom that needs to be strengthened. If she knows another teacher has mastered that technique, she sends the teacher in need to observe the other teacher. To make this possible, the principal covers the classroom while the teacher is out of the room. At other times, the principal models for the teacher within the classroom.

## District Support

District leaders expressed high confidence in the leadership and achievement at Glenmore to the extent that the principal is granted significant latitude for decision making and implementation at her school. A best practice in the district is to allow principals who demonstrate effective leadership and strong academic performance significant autonomy for their school. One leader represented the district's view of the principal this way: *"We see the synergy she brings to the work that her teachers do, the focus that she brings with her teachers and on the kids, so we provide her a lot of room to do the things that she needs to."* The district stays informed about the principal's plans and offers support for their implementation. In addition, district staff members conduct walkthroughs of the campus three times each year and report the results to the school.

The teachers expressed a sense of district support for their instructional practice. One example was that teachers from across the district meet by subject areas, which helps teachers in smaller schools, where there may be only one teacher for certain subjects. This allows the teachers to learn from and with their peers.

## Summary

Glenmore Elementary School has achieved high academic performance by maintaining an effective set of education practices. Among these practices is developing a cadre of high-quality teachers who have a strong commitment to accountability, along with extensively using quality data to drive instruction. These effective strategies and techniques are in place across the school to ensure that all students receive high-quality learning opportunities. The teachers and principal consistently use these practices to give their students a strong foundation for middle school and their education beyond.

### Best Practice: Principal's Role in Professional Development

*"There [are] some very clear expectations about how they engage students, how they use questioning, the mind maps that they have. There are some research practices that she knows are proven over time. If you don't understand those, she will help you learn them. I think hiring well and then training her staff are two key, unique talents specifically within the principal that we can't take any credit for; that I think makes a difference."*

–District Leader

### Best Practice: Campus Autonomy

A district policy allowing empowerment of a campus to make decisions and explore initiatives of its own is based on performance and their growth. Campuses that are highly successful get a lot of autonomy, with some district oversight.

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