

Story of Success

SLATON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT,
SLATON, TEXAS

District Context

In a town of about 6,000 people, Slaton Independent School District (ISD) has an outsized role in the community, and educators say their peers feel more like family than coworkers. Slaton ISD is located about 30 minutes southeast of Lubbock in the panhandle of Texas and serves 1,270 students. Over 70% of students in Slaton ISD are minorities, and 81% are economically disadvantaged. The district consists of four schools: two elementary schools, one junior high school, and one high school.

Although the sense of community in the district is overwhelmingly positive, Slaton ISD does face challenges as a small district. District leadership has long been committed to providing high-quality academic opportunities to students but has sometimes struggled with how to make that a reality. One of Slaton ISD's longstanding and most persistent challenges was attracting and retaining high-quality teachers while surrounded by larger school districts that boast higher pay and more resources.

To combat this challenge, Slaton ISD began a partnership with NIET in 2014. This collaboration provided district leadership with the structure to introduce new career pathway options via teacher leadership. No longer did teachers need to look to neighboring school districts for opportunities to advance their careers. Instead, these

teachers now had opportunities to become a mentor or master teacher, taking on responsibility for leading job-embedded professional learning for their peers, as well as the opportunity to earn additional compensation based on effectiveness. These roles and responsibilities have provided incentives for new teachers to join Slaton ISD and for current teachers to remain in the district - attracting and retaining highly effective educators, all while maintaining the community feel that makes the district unique.

Key Lessons

Five years after introducing teacher leadership roles, Slaton ISD now has a strong pipeline of instructionally focused leaders. Teachers have moved from classroom teacher to teacher leader roles, and from teacher leader roles to the principalship and district administration. Here are four lessons learned from Slaton ISD's experience creating its leadership pipeline:

PROVIDE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHERS:

Highly effective teachers are a valuable resource to any district, but especially to a smaller district like Slaton ISD. The district has learned that career advancement opportunities can be a powerful incentive to retain teachers who want to advance their careers and earn additional compensation but may not necessarily be interested in an administrative role.



DELIVER HIGH LEVELS OF CUSTOMIZED SUPPORT:

Now that Slaton ISD has a strong cadre of teacher leaders and instructionally focused school leaders, the support given to teachers is both high-quality and highly customized. Teachers benefit from a level of individualized support that may not be offered in a larger school district, or one that does not have a structure of teacher leadership.

CREATE A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP FOR TEACHERS:

Teachers in Slaton ISD have a strong sense of ownership in the district and trust in its leadership. This is in large part due to the fact that they have seen some of their peers move into leadership roles. Teachers know their school

and district leaders have an in-depth understanding of the students in their classrooms and the level of instruction that they aim to provide.

FOSTER A GROWTH MINDSET:

Educators in Slaton ISD know they can always reach out to each other to collaborate and discuss best practices. Everyone is committed to a growth mindset that encourages continued learning and developing their skills as educators. From the career teacher who applied to be a teacher leader instead of retiring, to the master teacher who earned her master's degree through a district-sponsored program to become a principal, Slaton ISD has prioritized teacher growth to benefit its students.

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Slaton ISD Mentor Teacher Sherri Rodriguez (right) and Master Teacher Katie Negen (middle) collaborate during NIET's 2019 annual conference.



Students gathered at Slaton Junior High School; Slaton Independent School District; Slaton, Texas



What's Next?

As Slaton ISD continues to develop its leadership pipeline, district leadership has identified an area for additional growth: The district is expanding its partnership with NIET to provide on-the-job training and support for principals.

Principals are working to build highly effective school leadership teams in which administrators and teacher leaders work together to increase instructional capacity across the building. Training for principals is also focused on how they can best support the teaching faculty to implement high-quality curricula and differentiate instruction to help ensure all students are on a path to meet college and career standards. ●