

## A Legacy of Literacy



### Kathy Stewart's Retirement:

Dr. Kathy Stewart, our State TLI Director, retired on July 31 after serving 30 years as an educator in Texas. Throughout her career, she made a positive impact on the lives of Texas boys and girls. Her dedication for excellence and for making a difference in literacy is reflected throughout. Kathy graduated from Southwest Texas State University in 1983 with a degree in education and a specialization in reading. She began teaching in 1984 at East Elementary School in Taft ISD. A decade later she earned a Masters Degree in educational administration and mid-management from Texas A&M University Corpus Christi and moved to Austin where she served as a teacher and Language Arts department chair at Webb Middle School in Austin ISD. Kathy's leadership skills were evident as she became Director of Professional Development for the Elementary Division of the Texas Mentor School Network and served as Statewide Initiatives Liaison at the Texas Education Agency, beginning in 1994. In 1997, she moved with the Statewide Initiatives division to ESC XIII where she served until 2003 as the Coordinator for the Governor's Initiatives and Special Projects. It was during those years that Kathy managed the implementation of the Texas Teacher Reading Academies, providing professional development in evidence-based reading instruction to almost 100,000 teachers. During that same time, she focused on her own professional learning, completing a doctorate in educational administration from Texas A&M University. Her leadership skills brought her back to TEA in 2004 where she led the Texas Reading First Initiative and transitioned into the Texas Literacy Initiative. Kathy's focus has always been on the instructional needs of all boys and girls in our state, and on behalf of them, we thank her for her service and her dedication. We wish Kathy and her young family the best as they move to Boerne to spend more time together.

## 30 TLI Grantees

- Alice ISD
- Arlington ISD
- Austin ISD
- Bartlett ISD
- Bastrop ISD
- Brooks County ISD/  
Ramirez CSD
- Brownsville ISD
- Chilton ISD
- Como-Pickton CISD
- Connally ISD
- Edinburg CISD
- El Paso ISD
- Greenville ISD
- La Marque ISD
- La Vega ISD
- Lubbock ISD
- Manor ISD
- McAllen ISD
- Mercedes ISD
- Nixon-Smiley CISD
- Odem-Edroy ISD
- Pilot Point ISD
- Raul Yzaguirre School  
for Success
- San Antonio ISD
- San Saba ISD
- Sinton ISD
- Taft ISD
- Taylor ISD
- Tenaha ISD
- Tornillo ISD

## TLI Tidbits

### 2014 Summits

#### Attendance:

Houston	170
Dallas	145
Total	315

### 2014 Institutes

#### Attendance:

Houston	747
Dallas	770
Total	1,517

## In This Issue

- **LaVega ISD** shares action steps taken to create a culture of high expectations and accountability for all stakeholders. ["Read Full Story"](#)
- **Bastrop ISD** communicates attribution for substantial gains on 4<sup>th</sup> grade STAAR writing assessment during the 2012-2013 year: professional development focused on cultivating authentic writers, continuous reflection on improvement by all, and intentional planning of instructional vertical alignment. ["Read Full Story"](#)
- A group of Texas Literacy Initiative (TLI) grantees supported by the UTHealth TLI team have joined together to form a "**Coaching Collaborative**" group: Houston area (**La Marque ISD and Raul Yzaguirre School for Success**) and Corpus Christi area (**Brooks-Ramirez, Odem-Edroy, Sinton, and Taft**). This article introduces readers to the innovative partnership of the Coaching Collaborative in the Corpus Christi area. ["Read Full Story"](#)



## LaVega Elementary: Sustaining Excellence

On a crisp November morning in 2010, I found myself in a beautiful Washington D.C. hotel ecstatically preparing to accept the honor of becoming a National Blue Ribbon School. How did a group of teachers and administrators from a school of economically disadvantaged students in Texas get to this level of success? Almost immediately, however, my feelings of elation and pride turned to fear. With the rumblings of more rigorous testing in the near future, how would we be able to sustain our success? The story of LaVega Elementary didn't begin on this November morning. It started many years before.

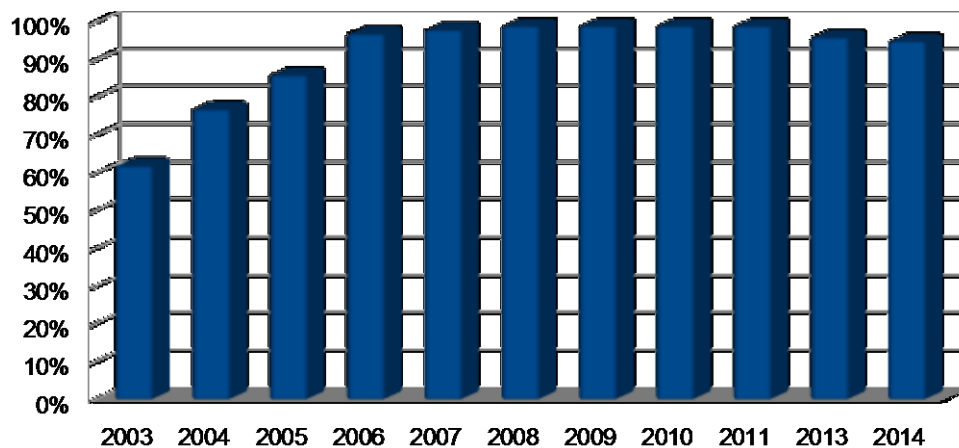
### Snapshot of LaVega Elementary

- Approximately 700 students in grades 1-3
- 58% Hispanic
- 19% African American
- 19% White
- 4% Other
- 33% LEP
- 92% Economically Disadvantaged



These demographics might indicate that our children at LaVega Elementary don't possess all of the amenities and advantages that other communities have. We believe that with high expectations for our children and staff and highly effective instruction, these children will be successful.

History of State Assessments for LaVega Elementary  
TEA Accountability Data Table



This table represents the percent passing on the state reading and math assessments for the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

In 2003 we had an acceptable accountability rating. Little did we realize we were on the brink of achieving academic excellence which most people thought was impossible. The following year new administration came on board. The Reading First initiative was implemented and a new culture of accountability began filling the hallways of our campus.

The paradigm shift began and so did our journey towards academic excellence. A strategic plan was put in place. Following are some of the elements of that plan. The Reading First Initiative brought with it many of these elements that now align with the TLI LASERS Action Steps.

**Leadership 3:**

- Three Tier Model of RtI which has been in place for 10 years
- Dyslexic and ESL students are pulled out for Tier II and Tier III instruction

**Leadership 6:**

- The same Literacy Coach has been in place for over 9 years to support instructional staff with full support from the different principals.

**Assessment 3:**

- The Literacy coach creates the weekly and benchmark assessments for grades 1-3.
- Weekly data grids are completed by classroom teachers and e-mailed to all administrators and adjustments made to lesson plans.
- Teachers use the weekly data grids to guide instruction in their classrooms.

**Effective Instructional Framework 2:**

- Reading interventionists are used in all phases of the three tier model. They are utilized in Tier 1 3rd grade classrooms during small group instruction to give instruction to the most struggling readers in those classrooms.
- The 90 minute Tier 1 interventionist classroom is comprised of 12 students that have been identified as the most struggling students in our 3rd grade classrooms. These students have intensive small group instruction given by 2 of our reading interventionists during the 90 minute block. They are rotated in and out of this classroom as they show improvement.
- The most struggling ESL students are pulled out from various classrooms for intensive instruction given by our ESL specialists during the 90 minute block.

**Reporting and Accountability 2:**

- A data meeting that we used to call the "War Room" is held each six weeks after each major assessment. This year it was renamed the "STAAR Room".
- Assessment data is posted by classroom teacher on the dry erase board.
- Areas of strengths and weaknesses are discussed by grade level.
- A plan of action is discussed along with implementation timelines.
- All stakeholders are present including the administrators, literacy coach, classroom teachers, interventionists, ESL specialists, dyslexia specialist, and special education teacher.

Even with all of these elements in place, we must continue to make sure we have the right people on the bus and in the right teaching and administrative positions in order to sustain excellence at our school. We must never forget where we came from and how we got there. The following quote is posted in my room and serves as a reminder as to how we got to where we are today and are able to sustain excellence.

*"Those who drink the water must remember those who dug the well."*

John Maxwell

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## Bastrop ISD's New Approach to Elementary Literacy Nights

Two of Bastrop ISD's elementary campus TLI teams, Emile Elementary and Bluebonnet Elementary, have been focusing on the E6 Action Step of the Texas State Literacy Plan – empowering families and students to participate in the literacy development process. Their main goal was to “provide parents and families with strategies for developing a literacy- and language-rich home environment, including in home languages other than English.” (TSLP, Version 1.0). Both campuses decided to host Family Literacy Nights in a different way than they have in past years, which proved to be extremely successful for both campuses.

### EMILE ELEMENTARY

On Thursday, October 24, 2013, the TLI team and staff at Emile Elementary in Bastrop ISD successfully hosted a school-wide event called “Raising a Reader”. The campus TLI team started planning months before the event. They involved their entire staff in the planning and facilitation of the event. They involved their entire community by contacting local businesses and their campus PTA for help and support. A local group of youth skateboarders, many of which were former Emile Elementary students, also volunteered to help with the event.

To promote their event, the staff had all students get involved by creating a personal invitation to their parents encouraging them to come to the big reading event. The classroom teachers provided literacy instruction on advertisements which guided the students to be successful. The team also provided flyers to the local child care centers and placed an ad in the local newspaper promoting their event. All communications were done in both English and Spanish to support the home languages of the families.



Based on the theme for the night, “reading happens in every room and some places in between”, classroom teachers and staff set up areas in and around the cafeteria to represent a house: areas included a

kitchen, a bedroom, a bathroom, a family room, and a living room. During the event, teachers were in each area and modeled literacy mini-lessons to families to show how literacy could be learned and reinforced in various rooms at home. Lost Pines Toyota donated a car for the evening that was parked outside the cafeteria so that parents could experience a lesson on how to practice some reading skills in the family car. Another area outside of the cafeteria was set up like a backyard to model lessons on literacy activities to do in the backyard.



As the event began, everyone who attended was encouraged to sign in and take a ticket at the door for a chance to win a book bag. Families then rotated throughout the stations every 15-20 minutes. At each rotation, a ticket was drawn and a bag of books given away. A total of 15 bags were given out, each stuffed with books that were appropriate for a specific grade level. At the end of the rotation, pizza was served and families were entertained with an oral reading, performed by a teacher, while they all enjoyed some food, family, and friends.

Throughout the event, parents were encouraged to ask questions and were given immediate feedback to their inquiries. Teachers and staff provided handouts on their mini-lessons, which included websites to provide additional resources, and other literature was made available to parents as they rotated through the stations.

Even though this event occurred on the same night and time as the Bastrop High School Homecoming Parade, over 100 people attended. This was very gratifying to all of those who worked so hard to make the event a success. Emile's TLI team planned their next reading event for May 2014 called “A Night Under the Stars.”

## BLUEBONNET ELEMENTARY

Bluebonnet's "Read-to-Go" Literacy Night was created based on data presented at the District TLI Beginning of the Year Data meeting in October. At this meeting, the district data showed a need for phonics instruction at all grade levels across the district. After seeing the data, the Bluebonnet TLI team decided to use Environmental Print to teach parents and students different ways to utilize letter/sound recognition while out and about in the community, such as in a car, at a restaurant, or at the grocery store. The "Read-to-Go" event was held on February 20, 2014.

To prepare for their event, the campus TLI team joined forces with the campus Reading Committee and began planning. They involved the community by contacting a local car dealership, Lost Pines Toyota, the local McDonald's and Sonic restaurants, and their campus PTA for help and support at their event. They motivated the rest of the campus staff to pitch in and help by offering incentives for staying late on a school night, like a "wear jeans for a day" pass. The teachers, in-turn, motivated their students to attend by awarding Buckaroo Bucks, a campus incentive, and "no homework" passes. To support a community of low socio-economic families who lack transportation, the committee paid for the use of a school bus to pick up families before the event and return them after the event to a local church that was centrally located in that neighborhood. All communications about the event and handouts given during the event were in English and Spanish to accommodate the language needs of all families.



The night of the event, the staff set up three main stations in the gym. They drove both of the donated vehicles from Lost Pines Toyota into the gym, and had them set up facing a screen which showed a PowerPoint slideshow that gave participants the feeling that they were moving down the road seeing all the signs and environmental print. Students were given age appropriate learning activities to do in the car and parents were taught how to turn a simple car ride into a literacy learning experience for their child. The other two stations were set up to represent a restaurant using props, such as tables, chairs, menus and other printed paper items that were donated from McDonald's and Sonic, etc., and a grocery store using recycled food boxes and grocery carts. At the grocery store and restaurant stations, parents were shown ways to encourage students to use their phonics skills to read the menus, signs, box labels and more.

Families were encouraged to flow through each station at their own pace. In addition to the three main activities in the gym, other areas throughout the campus were set up to help students and families to be motivated to read. There was an area for games like Book Bingo and a Book Walk (similar to a cake walk game) in which families were allowed to play for books as prizes. Approximately 200 free books that had been donated from the bookstore, Half Priced Books, were given out that night as prizes. Families were also given opportunities to create bookmarks and participate in a Reader's Theatre.

Bastrop ISD Technology representatives were present to educate parents on educational literacy apps for cellphones, iPads and tablets. A Scholastic Book Fair was open in the library for families to purchase books and other literacy materials. Families were given food tickets when they arrived which could be turned in for hot dogs and drinks that were being served by the PTA in the cafeteria. To encourage families to participate in every station, cards were given to each family when they arrived. As families participated in each station, they received a stamp on their card. At the end of the event, families who had filled their card with stamps from every station turned in the card to be put into a raffle for a free Bluebonnet Elementary t-shirt for the student.



The Bluebonnet Elementary "Read-to-Go" Literacy Night was attended by over 200 students and their families. The campus TLI team was so encouraged by the success of the event that they are planning to hold two events next school year, one in the fall and one in the spring, and anticipate adjusting the themes to show families how literacy fits into all content areas, including math, science and social studies.

## Texas Literacy Initiative “Coaching Collaborative”

### Highlighted TLI Effective Literacy Practice:

#### Leadership Action Step:

Establish a coaching model aimed at fulfilling the goals of the Data-informed Plan

The Corpus Christi area Coaching Collaborative has proven to be a major success for the participating districts: Brooks County ISD-Ramirez CSD, Odem-Edroy ISD, Sinton ISD, and Taft ISD. The partnership provides a series of monthly meetings, strategically planned to coincide with district TLI professional development (PD) and follow-up sessions. The vision of the participating literacy leaders is to collaborate as they each work toward full implementation of the Texas State Literacy Plan (TSLP) and toward achievement of the TLI goals.

Through the Coaching Collaborative, TLI Project Managers and Literacy Coaches work together to refine their particular TLI goals, and focus on instructional improvement in targeted areas of need. Taft ISD coaches expressed how beneficial it has been for them to meet and share ideas. “We have emailed and called other coaches several times to ask for advice and ideas,” wrote Taft literacy coach, Carol Mauch. In addition, the TLI Project Managers from the four grantees have built strong relationships with each other through their monthly meetings. Even outside of collaborative meetings, the project managers communicate regularly, and feel comfortable picking up the phone any time to ask questions or solicit input from their counterparts in other districts.

The monthly meetings of the Coaching Collaborative include a variety of recurring activities. During the meetings, participants:

- celebrate and share the successes of PD implementation in classrooms;
- share challenges related to PD implementation;
- develop the skills of coaches to work effectively with teachers;
- improve their own mastery of TLI strategies/routines through training-of-trainer opportunities and practice; and
- plan for sustaining TLI practices in their schools.

The focus of the meetings also incorporates the TLI PD priorities of the participating districts. Some areas of PD focus have included:

- planning effective comprehension purpose questions;
- developing think, turn, talk opportunities in the classroom;
- promoting effective literacy workstations to foster small group instruction; and
- supporting direct, explicit, and systematic instruction through the use of cognitive strategy routines.

The Coaching Collaborative meetings are designed to support coaches so that coaches are prepared to support campus implementation of the TLI PD offered to teachers. The strategies and ideas learned in collaborative meetings strengthen the delivery of follow-up training, and help district teams to conduct classroom walk-throughs to better support teachers.

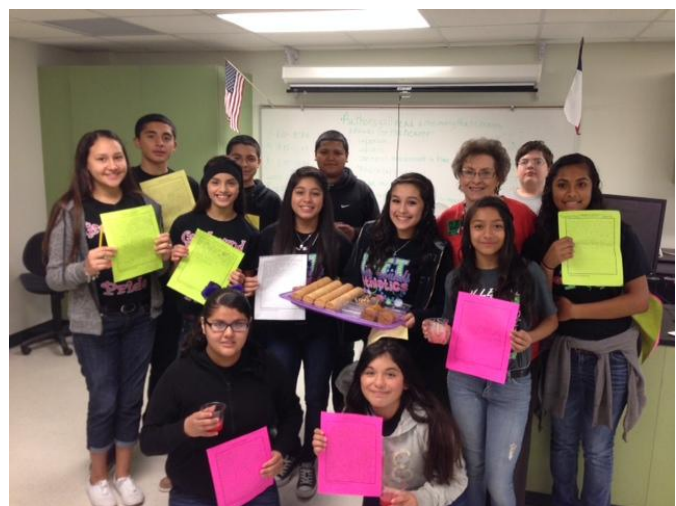


The Coaching Collaborative meetings provide participants with precious time to reflect, and to engage in thoughtful discussions and planning about how to best support teachers with the implementation of various PDs. Heather Cohea, manager of the TLI grant in Taft ISD, points out that “sometimes you don’t think of the right questions until later, and when we come back [to the Coaching Collaborative] this allows us to team together with UTHealth and other districts going through the same training to ask for support. I know this will continue even at the end of the grant period because of the bonds we have developed.”



In addition to the regularly scheduled professional learning opportunities for TLI Project Managers and literacy coaches, the Coaching Collaborative has also inspired additional opportunities for support and collaboration. Two of the most significant were sessions on instructional coaching with Dr. Jan Hasbrouck (planned and delivered in partnership between UTHealth, IPSI, and VGC, and including participants from additional TLI grantees), and an upcoming “TLI Summer Literacy Bootcamp.” The “Boot Camp” will allow project managers and TLI coaches an opportunity to come together to provide professional development sessions for teachers from Brooks-Ramirez, Odem-Edroy, Sinton and Taft, targeting new teachers, teachers moving to a new grade level, and teachers who would benefit from a refresher PD. This cleverly planned opportunity is purposefully designed to take place at the beginning of the school year for an effective and efficient transition into the new school year.

As TLI moves beyond its first few years, the Coaching Collaborative is becoming a regular part of district practice for its members. For the TLI leaders who comprise it, the Coaching Collaborative serves as a catalyst to obtain the skills necessary to support teachers, and to sustain beyond the life of the grant what has been learned and implemented. Students in the Corpus Christi area surely have benefitted from the partnership of districts, the group problem-solving and reflection, and the sharing of best practices.



## Highlighting TLI Effective Practices

We would like to thank the following people and their districts for submitting their articles about practices they have put in place and feel are effective for their TLI Literacy Lines:

- **Cynthia Denmark, LaVega ISD Literacy Coach**
- **Allison Higginbotham, Bastrop ISD TLI Director**
- **Corpus Christi TLI Coaching Collaborative: Brooks County ISD-Ramirez CSD, Odem-Edroy ISD, Sinton ISD, and Taft ISD**

## 2014 Leadership Summits and Institutes

The theme for the 2014 Leadership Summit was *District Level Support of the Texas State Literacy Plan*. Approximately 315 participants attended the Leadership Summit, and the main objectives were to (1) review the spring online course content and (2) define the work of the Grant Implementation Team based on the site/campus work.

During the spring 2014 Texas State Literacy Plan online course, each site/campus completed the *TSLP Implementation Plan Planning Pages* and selected one Effective Instructional Framework Action Step and one Indicator to focus on. While reviewing these Action Steps and Indicators at the Leadership Summit, the Grant Implementation Team completed, or began working on, the *Support for TSLP Implementation* worksheet to outline their actions and accountability to support site/campus work. During a future meeting, the TLI Leadership Team will ask each district to describe their follow-up activities from the Leadership Summit including their district's literacy priority and needs, support of the Effective Instructional Framework Action Steps and Indicators at each site/campus, and accountability actions for each Grant Implementation Team member.

The theme for the two-day Texas Literacy Initiative Institute was *Explicit Instruction for Diverse Learners* with over 1,500 participants. Day One consisted of sessions such as lesson design, instructional delivery, small group instruction, and implementing the Infant and Toddler Guidelines. Some of the sessions presented on Day Two included planning for Tier I, II, and III, as well as brain development in language acquisition and letter walls. Although only a small percentage of district- and/or campus-level administrators and educators participated, it is expected that those who did attend return to their respective sites/campuses and deliver the professional development modules.

Special thanks goes to Heather Cohea and Brenda Meyer, Taft ISD; Allison Higginbotham, Bastrop ISD; Michael Bohensky, San Saba ISD; and Jaime Hernandez, El Paso ISD for presenting during the Opening Session. And, as a reminder, all 2014 Leadership Summit and Institute presentations are accessible in the TLI Grantees PLC Group Drop Box in Project Share.

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