



Homepage For Texas School Administrators

Last Updated: Mar 5th, 2004 - 09:11:29

Today's News

- [TexasISD General News](#)
- [SuperSearch Page](#)
- [Accountability/Accreditation](#)
- [Construction/Bond Issues](#)
- [Central Office](#)
- [Construction](#)
- [Governance](#)
- [Grants](#)
- [Health/Safety](#)
- [Legal](#)
- [Legislative](#)
- [National News](#)
- [Personnel](#)
- [Property Tax](#)
- [Regional Service Centers](#)
- [Risk Management](#)
- [School Finance](#)
- [Special Articles](#)
- [The Lone Finalist](#)
- [State Board of Education](#)
- [Technology in Education](#)
- [Newspapers](#)
- [Preventive Law](#)

Search

All Categories ▼

[Advanced Search](#)

SPECIAL ARTICLES

Read Right Systems: Texas's High School Principal of the Year

By Rhonda Stone - ReadRight Systems
Mar 5, 2004, 08:31

[Email this article](#)
[Printer friendly page](#)

A high school principal who transformed her school from Low-Performing to Exemplary in just a few years says five simple but significant steps contributed to the school's success. Decatur High School Principal Melinda Reeves was recognized at the recent TASA conference as the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals' High School Principal of the Year for 2004.

Reeves is in her eighth year at the helm of Decatur High School in Decatur, Texas. Months after taking the top job in Decatur, Reeves's school was handed a "Low-Performing" rating by the Texas Education Agency.

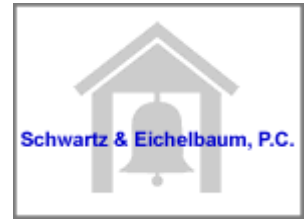
"I knew I either had to get with it or be a one-year principal in that job," she said.

She "got with it," all right. Since assuming her leadership role, Reeves and the school have received several state and national honors, including an "Exemplary" rating from the Texas Education Agency; a National Blue Ribbon Award for Excellence from the U.S. Department of Education; and a third place award two consecutive years in the University Interscholastic League Lone Star Cup for outstanding athletic and academic performance.

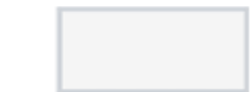
Reading failure was only one of many issues that needed to be addressed at Decatur High School in 1996. Poverty and a sense of disconnection from the world of education plagued students. To address all three issues, Reeves undertook five initiatives.

First, she engaged her staff in a book study of Ruby Paine's Framework for Understanding Poverty (Aha! Process Inc., 1995). Reeves said the book was eye-opening for the mostly middle-income educators who were unfamiliar with the myriad of challenges posed by poverty.

Our Sponsors



Schwartz & Eichelbaum, P.C.



TPRI

Tejas Lee
Content Mastery



Second, Reeves and members of her staff sought a few key programs to help turn the tide of academic failure. They sought a reading intervention grounded in accepted brain science and learning theory and located READ RIGHT®. A former reading teacher, Reeves found it to be unlike any program she had previously tried. The school applied for and received Texas's ninth grade initiative funds to purchase the program and others.

Third, Reeves led a second book study within the school's departments on recent brain research and how the brain works, including the formation of neural networks to guide processes. For the study, they used Eric Jensen's book *Brain-Based Learning* (Brain Store Inc., 2000). They found information in the book to be consistent with READ RIGHT's theoretical constructs for eliminating reading problems. As a result of the study, the staff modified the school environment to be more conducive to the physical and mental needs of students, including encouraging students to bring water to class and using lighting and decorative color to help students feel more comfortable in classrooms.

Fourth, Reeves encouraged faculty members to pursue training in Advanced Placement course strategies, assuming that the associated approaches would be beneficial to all students. "Those kinds of expectations and (constructivist) models of learning are good for all kids," said Reeves. To this day at Decatur, teachers are sent for additional AP training every four years.

Finally, Reeves and her staff took on the school's high dropout rate by re-organizing the school environment and class schedules to create an atmosphere in which close personal relationships could be built and maintained between students and teachers. The school adopted a complex modified accelerated block schedule that provides classroom time ranging from 50 to 105 minutes per class, depending upon the class and annual schedule. The modified schedule provides teachers with the opportunity to spend half of the school year with half as many students—for example, 75 instead of 150.

While all of the changes together have transformed the school, Reeves acknowledges that READ RIGHT has transformed individual student's lives.

"Most of the kids in READ RIGHT do not have a history of being successful in school," Reeves said of the tutor-based reading



intervention with a 1-to-4 tutor to student ratio. "The program is very effective. It supports our goal of building relationships between students and staff, ties into brain research, and transforms kids' lives. We receive letters from parents telling us so, and the kids really are not shy about admitting it. We actually have kids in our AP-type courses who struggle with reading and ask if they can be in the program because of the difference they have seen it make in other kids. Teachers will tell you about kids who never, ever participated in classroom activities before and who suddenly start participating in class because of READ RIGHT.

Reeves enthusiastically recommends READ RIGHT to other schools. "I'm in a small district and I don't have a lot of funds. I have to tell you there was no way I was going to let this program slip by our kids. We have testimony from parent after parent—parents who spent tons of money on reading programs and nothing was making their kids successful readers. We have parents with kids in college now who know their kids probably wouldn't be there if it wasn't for READ RIGHT. I am definitely an advocate."

© Copyright 2001 by TexasISD.com

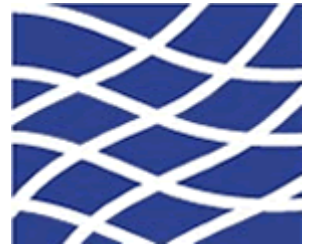
[Top of Page](#)

HOSTED BY THE
TASB FUND



ARCHITECTS







AAA+

Consulting

512-422-5528