



Cynthia A. Cockrell Elementary

1075 Escalante Trail, Prosper, TX 75078, Prosper ISD

Principal: Natalie Gasmire nsgasmire@prosper-isd.net, 469-219-2130

Overview & Background:

Cockrell Elementary School is a place for learning that was built on pride and an excitement towards continuing to advance the legacy of Prosper ISD...working to keep traditions alive as well as soaring to new beginnings through the education of each of our children. Cockrell opened in the Fall of 2012 and was the 4th elementary school to open in Prosper ISD. The city of Prosper at the time was a smaller (comparatively) family town with approximately 5,500 students enrolled in Prosper ISD at the time that Cockrell became a school. Currently, Prosper ISD is the fastest growing district in the state of Texas with an approximate enrollment of 30,600 students. The rapid growth rate of the district is a distinguishing factor, drawing many families to the town of Prosper specifically due to the excellence of the schools. We are successfully transforming learning at Cockrell through affirming our commitment to the mindset that all students can and will learn at high levels through "Our Champion Standard", and navigating challenges together through trust and reflection, with a clear focus on learning, collaboration, and results.. In July of 2021, the beginning of this journey began simply by developing deep connections between the campus staff and priming the environment to re-establish and set the purpose for our school. Cockrell was already a place of community pride and engagement, and students were coming to school ready to learn. The most important step was to together determine our specific mission, vision, goals, and values to drive the intentional work of ensuring all students would learn at high levels where they would be challenged and engaged appropriately. At that time, a visitor might have seen a rough outline of a mission statement that was posted in a hallway in the office, however, the results and feedback that was discovered aligned with the notion that there was a lack of direction for learning that needed to be created. At this time, Cockrell did not have a compelling mission, a clear vision, aligned campus goals, or team-developed and secured commitments. There was no outline for what the campus believed in or how the campus operated to develop and sustain a culture of high expectations for students. Students were "happy" at Cockrell, parents wanted "more" in terms of student learning and communication related to their child's educational journey, staff surveys revealed that many of them wanted streamlined operations, focus, and direction. As these observations were made, we made a decision to start the journey of transformation. We got clear with each other that how we use the term "PLC" really matters. Everyone needed to know that together we were the professional learning community, and that we would be successful when we learned how to engage in ongoing cycles of inquiry and collaboration with each other to achieve the best results for students. To do this, we needed a compelling vision and mission, and we needed to outline our processes that would direct the focus of learning, collaboration, and results. We needed true organizational transformation.

Focus Areas:

The first premise of Article V of *Creating a New Vision for Public Education in Texas states*, "Excellence emanates from a shared commitment to values and standards, high levels of engagement, and strong leadership". We started with the basics. We needed to work from the ground up (and as Michael Fullan writes about...we needed to "lead with the team"), and we were able to use noticings and trends to guide our next steps to increase engagement and challenge in learning. The campus instructional expectations were developed, outlining the focus on learning, focus on collaboration, and focus on results. Our campus goals were simple in nature, but provided the foundational focuses for the staff to support the beginning of streamlining learning. Our vision was developed out of hours and hours of input and feedback, and finally the vision was agreed upon, which is: "Together, we write the stories of Champions!" This not only aligned with the original "Cockrell Champions" name that was given at the opening of the school in 2012, it also clearly encapsulated the vision of the collective focus that would be needed to support our students not only academically and not only at Cockrell, but to instill in each of our students' the learning necessary to write their overall life, Champion, story. Premise V.m of *Creating a New Vision for Public Education in Texas states*, "Operating and social systems exist in all organizations including schools. Transforming these systems is the only way to transform schools into the type of organization needed." Our Cockrell standard of operating was being built collectively.

The Work

We developed a leadership team who would be our guiding coalition, and at Cockrell we decided to call this leadership team our "Cockrell Team Coaches". The goal of this team was not to focus on logistics of the school or planning parties, but rather to develop leadership skills within each other to move the campus forward for student success. The idea in the word

“coaches” was to build on our understanding that not one person will have all of the answers, and to begin the work of shared leadership that we wanted to start infiltrating the campus from the set out. Agendas were created to guide the focuses of the Team Coach Leadership Team with General Education and Special Education represented. Agreed upon commitments were developed for daily collaboration which we named “Cockrell Collaboration” or “CC” for short. Together, we revamped our master schedule to provide additional time within the work day every two weeks for teacher team collaboration, which became known as “Collaborative Learning” where the mission was learning, collaboration, and results. Our Specials Team championed the campus vision through becoming more flexible in their approach to their daily schedules, and began starting the day each morning in grade level classrooms rather than their own Specials settings, greeting students at the doors and beginning morning meetings, while grade level teacher teams were in “CL”. Slowly the climate and culture of the campus began to shift as everyone saw that the word “Together” at the start of our vision statement was coming to life, that it was being lived out each day.

We were learning at an efficient pace, due to a growing sense of urgency and collective responsibility, within the newly instilled campus processes for learning, collaboration, and results. It was imperative that through this important and paced work that we were simultaneously connecting to each other in order to truly build a culture of learning, reflection, feedback, and most importantly- trust. We made the book *Heart* by Timothy Kinold, the cornerstone of our reflection at the time. The efforts to link the hard and emotional work of the educator to our “why” in our somewhat-rapid campus PLC revision process was proving to be successful, as the educators that were aligned with the vision and goals of the campus became more vulnerable with each other, which led to doors significantly opening for student growth. To support the idea and need for working towards individualizing learning to increase engagement with our students, we started using the phrase “growth over achievement” just very naturally. To us, this meant that each child’s growth in all areas of learning was more important to us collectively than simply high achievement, because most of our students were coming into Cockrell achieving at higher levels already, but were in desperate need of challenge and engagement in learning. This phrase matters because it became the heartbeat of our mission statement. We shifted from, “Who are we and what do we need to teach?” into...“Who are our Cockrell students and what do they need to know and be able to do?” Our daily mission became apparent: “Intentional progress is our pathway to excellence.” In the semantics, this is followed by our vision, “Together, we write the stories of Champions!” The focus of collective efforts and individualized practices to impact the entire life of each child is clearly communicated in our proudly proclaimed, and student-known, Cockrell mission and vision.

We developed our commitments, our values, to each other simply by asking, “What are we doing together that sets us apart from the rest? What are we committed to at Cockrell that is apparent in our collective behaviors?” This led to open and honest dialogue that was easily crafted into our campus collective commitments. There are 8 of them, and we proudly refer to them as our “Champion Standard”. One of the most strategic actions that took place throughout the first 2 years of our PLC journey was the commitment to celebrating successes (both students and adults) as well as sharing professional practices. Additionally, simply uplifting anything and everything that aligned to our Champion Standard, and therefore showcasing active student engagement and intentional learning opportunities through small group instruction, was highlighted consistently. The climate and culture continued to develop, and not due to snack carts or jeans passes, but due to the celebration as it aligned to students’ intentional progress and high standards for how we operated as a team. Parents were initiating contact more and more regarding the learning environments their children were not only in but experiencing, and community members on many occasions made comments such as, “We see what you all are doing.” This in itself was evidence of intentional progress. In fact, a parent called the office one day for the purpose of feedback, and she stated, “Everything is a breath of fresh air. There seemed like there used to be a cloud of darkness, and now it is drastically different.” She was explaining the environment that her own children were now experiencing...engagement in learning and clearly defined instructional learning opportunities. It was just another example of how authentic engagement with the teachers led to direct engagement with the students.

Results:

Due to the level of teaming and leadership development over the course of 3 years so far, our collaborative teams are at a sustainment level of operating. Our team leadership is of course instrumental in this, however, the main factor that perpetuates this success is that every person in the building at Cockrell views each child as ours. If someone were to step into Cockrell, they would see students moving between classrooms to get additional support for their learning goals. (academic, behavioral, and social emotional). They would see teacher teams involved in data protocols to review data and make necessary adjustments to instructional practices. They would see general education and special education teachers collaborating and building a level of inclusivity that would be relished for students. They would hear educators talking about students individually and with an “It can be done!” attitude. They would even see Cockrell’s very own school secretary making her way outside to a car door to work through a positive behavioral support system with a child each morning! In fact, our workplace environment results for the 2023-2024 school year came in at the top of the district, with zero regression results from the past years, and only significantly improved progression results, even 15 to 20 points above where we were prior. We attribute this level of culture to the standard that has been collectively created for how we work in our commitment to our mission and vision. This level of culture happens due to the strength of the team of committed individuals who work together interdependently to achieve a common goal...high levels of student learning (and intentional progress) for every child.