

LEARNER-CENTERED SCHOOLS FOR TEXAS

A VISION OF TEXAS EDUCATORS

PREFACE

In 1993, 10,000 Texas educators were surveyed to determine the proficiencies which are important for all educators to possess as the 21st century begins. Participating in the survey were public school teachers and administrators, and university faculty preparing future teachers. The proficiencies on the survey were rated by approximately 95 percent of the public school teachers as of “great importance” or “very great importance.” Administrators and university faculty judged each of the proficiencies similarly. The proficiencies for teachers, counselors, and administrators included in this document, *Learner-Centered Schools for Texas, A Vision of Texas Educators*, reflect the judgment of educators of the skills and knowledge needed by all educators to enhance student learning.

The teacher and administrator proficiencies were adopted by the State Board of Education in 1994 as the foundation for the preparation of all teachers and administrators. Simultaneously, the State Advisory Committee on Teacher Appraisal recommended that these proficiencies be the foundation for a new appraisal system for Texas teachers. In 1995, the Texas Counseling Association, after completing a broad-based study of the role of school counselors, developed a set of proficiencies and requested that the Commission on Standards for the Teaching Profession recognize the importance of these proficiencies for training future school counselors and the continuing professional development of counselors now working in the public schools.

The State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) was created in 1995 by the 74th Legislature to govern the standards of the education profession. SBEC approved and adopted the proficiencies for teachers, administrators and counselors in 1997. These proficiencies are integrated into the educator preparation program approval process.

The teacher and administrator proficiencies were drafted over a period of two years with extensive involvement of educators, including focus groups held in several locations across the state. The sets of proficiencies included in this document reflect many months of deliberation and debate about Texas public schools and the knowledge and skills needed by educators for students to become productive citizens. A learner-centered climate in which learners, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community all have responsibility for the learners’ success was a central theme of the discussions and is now reflected in the five proficiencies for teachers, as well as those for administrators, and counselors.

The proficiencies are described so that educators and other readers will have a vision of a learning community in which success for students is paramount. A brief statement of proficiency is followed by a description which elaborates upon what an educator should know and be able to do. The parallel content of the three sets of proficiencies reflects the desire of the

three groups of educators to work together to build learner-centered schools in which all educators and students are focused on learning.

PROFICIENCIES FOR TEACHERS LEARNER-CENTERED SCHOOLS

LEARNER-CENTERED KNOWLEDGE

The teacher possesses and draws on a rich knowledge base of content, pedagogy, and technology to provide relevant and meaningful learning experiences for all students.

The teacher exhibits a strong working knowledge of subject matter and enables students to better understand patterns of thinking specific to a discipline. The teacher stays abreast of current knowledge and practice within the content area, related disciplines, and technology; participates in professional development activities; and collaborates with other professionals. Moreover, the teacher contributes to the knowledge base and understands the pedagogy of the discipline.

As the teacher guides learners to construct knowledge through experiences, they learn about relationships among and within the central themes of various disciplines while also learning how to learn. Recognizing the dynamic nature of knowledge, the teacher selects and organizes topics so students make clear connections between what is taught in the classroom and what they experience outside the classroom. As students probe these relationships, the teacher encourages discussion in which both the teacher's and the students' opinions are valued. To further develop multiple perspectives, the teacher integrates other disciplines, learners' interests, and technological resources so that learners consider the central themes of the subject matter from as many different cultural and intellectual viewpoints as possible.

LEARNER-CENTERED INSTRUCTION

To create a learner-centered community, the teacher collaboratively identifies needs; and plans, implements, and assesses instruction using technology and other resources.

The teacher is a leader of a learner-centered community, in which an atmosphere of trust and openness produces a stimulating exchange of ideas and mutual respect. The teacher is a critical thinker and problem solver who plays a variety of roles when teaching. As a coach, the teacher observes, evaluates, and changes directions and strategies whenever necessary. As a facilitator, the teacher helps students link ideas in the content area to familiar ideas, to prior experiences, and to relevant problems. As a manager, the teacher effectively acquires, allocates, and conserves resources. By encouraging self-directed learning and by modeling respectful behavior, the teacher effectively manages the learning environment so that optimal learning occurs.

Assessment is used to guide the learner community. By using assessment as an integral part of instruction, the teacher responds to the needs of all learners. In addition, the teacher guides learners to develop personally meaningful forms of self-assessment.

The teacher selects materials, technology, activities, and space that are developmentally appropriate and designed to engage interest in learning. As a result, learners work independently and cooperatively in a positive and stimulating learning climate fueled by self-discipline and motivation.

Although the teacher has a vision for the destination of learning, students set individual goals and plan how to reach the destination. As a result, they take responsibility for their own learning, develop a sense of the importance of learning for understanding, and begin to understand themselves as learners. The teacher's plans integrate learning experiences and various forms of assessment that take into consideration the unique characteristics of the learner community. The teacher shares responsibility for the results of this process with all members of the learning community.

Together, learners and teachers take risks in trying out innovative ideas for learning. To facilitate learning, the teacher encourages various types of learners to shape their own learning through active engagement, manipulation, and examination of ideas and materials. Critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving spark further learning. Consequently, there is an appreciation of learning as a life-long process that builds a greater understanding of the world and a feeling of responsibility toward it.

EQUITY IN EXCELLENCE FOR ALL LEARNERS

The teacher responds appropriately to diverse groups of learners.

The teacher not only respects and is sensitive to all learners but also encourages the use of all their skills and talents. As the facilitator of learning, the teacher models and encourages appreciation for students' cultural heritage, unique endowments, learning styles, interests, and needs. The teacher also designs learning experiences that show consideration for these student characteristics.

Because the teacher views differences as opportunities for learning, cross-cultural experiences are an integral part of the learner-centered community. In addition, the teacher establishes a relationship between the curriculum and community cultures. While making this connection, the teacher and students explore attitudes that foster unity. As a result, the teacher creates an environment in which learners work cooperatively and purposefully using a variety of resources to understand themselves, their immediate community, and the global society in which they live.

LEARNER-CENTERED COMMUNICATION

While acting as an advocate for all students and the school, the teacher demonstrates effective professional and interpersonal communication skills.

As a leader, the teacher communicates the mission of the school with learners, professionals, families, and community members. With colleagues, the teacher works to create an environment

in which taking risks, sharing new ideas, and innovative problem solving are supported and encouraged. With citizens, the teacher works to establish strong and positive ties between the school and the community.

Because the teacher is a compelling communicator, students begin to appreciate the importance of expressing their views clearly. The teacher uses verbal, nonverbal, and media techniques so that students explore ideas collaboratively, pose questions, and support one another in their learning. The teacher and students listen, speak, read, and write in a variety of contexts; give multimedia and artistic presentations; and use technology as a resource for building communication skills. The teacher incorporates techniques of inquiry that enable students to use different levels of thinking.

The teacher also communicates effectively as an advocate for each learner. The teacher is sensitive to concerns that affect learners and takes advantage of community strengths and resources for the learners' welfare.

LEARNER-CENTERED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The teacher, as a reflective practitioner dedicated to all students' success demonstrates a commitment to learn, to improve the profession, and to maintain professional ethics and personal integrity.

As a learner, the teacher works within a framework of clearly defined professional goals to plan for and profit from a wide variety of relevant learning opportunities. The teacher develops an identity as a professional, interacts effectively with colleagues, and takes a role in setting standards for teacher accountability. In addition, the teacher uses technological and other resources to facilitate continual professional growth.

To strengthen the effectiveness and quality of teaching, the teacher actively engages in an exchange of ideas with colleagues, observes peers, and encourages feedback from learners to establish a successful learning community. As a member of a collaborative team, the teacher identifies and uses group processes to make decisions and solve problems.

The teacher exhibits the highest standard of professionalism and bases daily decisions on ethical principles. To support the needs of learners, the teacher knows and uses community resources, school services, and laws relating to teacher responsibilities and student rights. Through these activities, the teacher contributes to the improvement of comprehensive educational programs as well as programs within specific disciplines.

Source: SBEC publication, Learner-Centered Schools for Texas, A Vision of Texas Educators, July 1997