

# WHEN TEACHERS DREAM

Innovative School Models to Elevate  
Teacher and Student Potential



## INTRODUCTION

The Teach Plus Texas Fellows are a group of diverse professional educators working across the Lone Star State, educating children in many school districts and contexts from suburban, rural, and urban communities. Several of us work at innovative schools or have innovated in our classrooms, and we have all observed the positive effects of this on students, other teachers, and our communities. Innovative schools give students and teachers more opportunities to grow and develop their own interests. Teachers often have an elevated role and more autonomy at these schools, which leads to teachers trying new things and a better experience for students.

Students who attend schools with empowered teachers are given the tools to empower themselves. Students who attend schools that align with their interests are more likely to be invested in their learning. The concept of innovative schools is not only to prepare students for college and career, but also to help foster the development of children as whole people and give them a say in what their education looks like. **With the passage of SB 1882, Texas created an important new opportunity to engage teachers, students, and parents to offer new, innovative methods of teaching and learning.**

The Teach Plus Texas Policy Fellows conducted design-thinking workshops across the state. The school models they designed are described below in the section titled, "Profiles of School Models Created by Teachers."

# OVERVIEW OF SB 1882

Texas Senate Bill (SB) 1882 was passed in 2017 during the 85th Legislature. It allows for the creation of innovative partnerships between school districts and charter schools or nonprofits, with the goal of allowing more students to access high-quality schools, regardless of type. The bill focuses on collaboration between district schools, charter schools, and nonprofits to generate successful student outcomes on various measures. By creating collaborative agreements, the bill creates space to generate innovative solutions and school turnaround supports.<sup>1</sup> It gives school leaders and partners greater autonomy in providing students access to successful school models, and it provides districts with unique opportunities to turn around underperforming school campuses.

## HOW SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE USING SB 1882

Under SB 1882, three types of partnerships can be created between a public school district and an eligible partner: Turnaround partnerships, innovation partnerships, and new campus partnerships. In the 2018-2019 school year, there were 19 unique partnerships around the state of Texas.<sup>2</sup>

Turnaround Partnership	Innovation Partnership	New Campus Partnership
Between a school district campus that is in Improvement Required (IR) status and an eligible open-enrollment charter school or partner.	A school district contracts with a partner to innovate at an existing non-IR campus.	The district contracts with a partner to launch a brand new campus/school model.

Examples of successful partnerships under SB 1882 include:

- + Austin ISD has collaborated with Mainspring Schools to create an in-district charter that provides high-quality NAEYC-accredited preschool for low-income students.<sup>3</sup>
- + San Antonio ISD (SAISD) has leveraged SB 1882 and currently has five unique partner campuses which utilize all three types of partnerships. The district has three turnaround campuses in partnership with Relay Lab Schools and Democracy Prep, an innovation partnership at their CAST Tech campus, and a new campus partnership with Texans Can Academy.<sup>4</sup> (For details on these and other partnerships, see Appendix.)

## HOW STUDENTS ARE BENEFITING

All across the state, students are able to access high-quality partnerships while staying in their local public schools. This is especially true in early childhood education. Some current examples of such innovative partnerships include Austin ISD and Galveston ISD, which provide high-quality pre-K instruction to low-income students and proactively address the achievement gap.<sup>5</sup> In San Antonio, Edgewood ISD students benefit from new partnerships that provide early childhood opportunities through pre-K.<sup>6</sup>

In SAISD, innovative partnerships that span the K-12 continuum are having an impact in numerous ways. Through the partnership with Democracy Prep Public Schools (DPPS), students at P.F. Stewart Elementary School experience an increased focus on civics and participate in the SAISD restorative justice model for discipline. CAST Tech High School employs an innovative curriculum to provide students choice through personalized and project-based learning.<sup>7</sup> SAISD is also working to reduce its dropout rate at Highlands High School through their partnership with Texas Can Academies.<sup>8</sup>

The partnership between Grand Prairie ISD and the Uplift Charter School network recognizes students' multilingual assets. The school offers a dual-language education program and an international baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. As a result, students and families have access to choice and a globally-minded curriculum within the same building.<sup>9</sup>

Students within an additional five districts in the state currently benefit from such partnerships, and another eight are researching ways to develop partnerships for their local districts.<sup>10</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION TO ADVANCE EFFECTIVE INNOVATIVE SCHOOL MODELS

Working with and learning from teacher leaders across the state of Texas, we recognize the advantage of having teacher voices present when creating schools. We believe that teachers should be given the power and platform to help create innovative schools. **We recommend that the Texas Education Agency require every SB 1882 school design team to include current classroom teachers from the region where the school will be located.** Teachers should be included at every step of the decision-making process in the design of innovative schools. Their expertise about everything from scheduling and school structures to classroom furniture affects their lives and those of their students, and they can make important contributions to decisions.

The Advanced Learning Academy (ALA) in San Antonio ISD is a perfect example of the power of including teachers in school design. School leadership engaged teachers in the creation of the vision and design of the school. As a result, teachers feel more empowered to take on and create various leadership roles, the school model engages students, and the school is thriving.

# PROFILES OF SCHOOL MODELS CREATED BY TEACHERS

The Teach Plus Texas Policy Fellows conducted five design-thinking workshops across the state of Texas with a total of 53 educators from a wide array of grades, subjects, and school types. The workshops gave teachers the space to create a school that would foster teacher leadership and student learning, and to tie it to a particular, innovative partnership. The models they designed are described below.

## **Whole Child, Whole Family**

One innovative school model identified by teachers emphasizes the need to provide students with developmentally and academically-appropriate learning environments and opportunities. This school would provide and adequately advertise wrap-around services to ensure that families and students can access them.

Specifically, this school would equally emphasize the social, emotional, and academic development of each child. It would not assume that every child is developmentally ready for the exact same material at the same age or that students master concepts in the same prescribed amount of time. Rather, students would learn content based on fewer, and broader, standards. This would give students the opportunity to learn through hands-on project-based learning and to connect learning with real-world experiences. Assessing student understanding and growth would be fluid and ongoing. Through the continual use of digital portfolios, this school would emphasize both process and product, thereby reducing the emphasis placed on standardized testing.

Teacher leadership would be fundamental to this school model. Teachers would have more autonomy to incorporate project-based learning, flexible groupings, and student interests into their lessons. They would use few and broad standards to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of every student. In addition to teacher-led activities, this school model would provide extended student and family supports through the structure of year-round school. The school could form partnerships with museums, libraries, parks, and various forms of transportation to ensure that families can access valuable experiences during breaks.

## **Going Places: Community Service, Travel, and Student Support Systems**

The innovative school model entitled “Going Places” would focus on the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of students and teachers. It would focus on improving teacher quality through collaboration and partnerships, while developing student interests through community service, travel, and internships. This school would partner with universities, local businesses, and foundations with the goal of creating a place where future teachers can train and learn, and where students can try out different jobs and see where their interests lead them. The school would start later in the day and have flexible schedules or rotating block schedules.

This school would partner with community health organizations to ensure that students have access to healthcare. There would be counselors, social workers, and family liaisons to meet the needs of students and their families. There would be a community center open before and after school hours to support families at their convenience. Students would have access to technology throughout the school day.

This school would be a place where teachers work together as facilitators in classrooms. In each classroom, there would be at least three teachers. Teachers would team-teach and classes could have college education students as observers who would subsequently move into more structured roles. Teachers would have long blocks for planning, grading, and giving feedback on student work. Teachers would use interdisciplinary project-based learning approach. Teachers would be given the space to explore, try out new ideas, and collaborate. Teachers would be given the opportunity to attend professional development for their content to help them stay on top of new practices and changes in their curriculum. Teachers would use standards-based grading, which focuses on the learning that take places over the course of the year instead of on a specific timeline and allows students opportunities to try again when they fail.

## **Real Arts: Real-World Arts Education**

This innovative school model would focus on arts and humanities. Major programs of study would include music, theater, dance, culture, and culinary/visual/language arts. Music, theater, dance, and culture classes would integrate song writing, conducting, and production while also instructing students on the use and the purpose of different instruments and realms of music. The arts classes would see a melding of graphic design, technical writing, menu development, and business management that would teach students real-world skills that would be of help in starting their own restaurant or company.

All of these classes would seamlessly flow together to create a curriculum that views arts and humanities education with a bigger and broader mindset. In this “dream school,” each educator would be able to focus on one or more concepts and weave them carefully together. Teachers would have the opportunity to collaborate and create more meaningful and relevant lessons. For example, students could design a theatrical production that could include every single educational component from the school. With everything from music to choreography to food sold at concessions and program design, an arts and humanities school would be the perfect outlet for an arts-minded student.

## **Civic Engagement**

This innovative school model would focus on civic engagement. This group of teacher leaders felt that there is a lack of civic engagement by adults; therefore, developing a school that focuses on civic engagement would lead to positive outcomes for students today and in the future. This school would implement culturally-responsive curriculum, civic engagement curriculum, and service learning.

The teachers would adopt and develop the curriculum to support their student populations and guide their classes through the service learning process to work towards solutions to problems from the local to the global. The school would partner with local government representatives, MOVE Texas, the Texas Organizing Project, and/or other service learning organizations. Partnerships with these organizations would equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to develop students' understanding of how they can use their voice to improve their community and beyond.

## Additional Innovative School Design Recommendations

Additional design-thinking groups focused on common themes such as the whole child, family, and community engagement, and integration of the arts, technology, and career exploration. They pointed to valuable strategies such as leveraging teacher leadership, and incorporating smaller class sizes, teacher assistants, real-world learning, and academic and social emotional supports. Groups also proposed alternative methods of student assessment, such as portfolios, standards-based grading, and ongoing, less test-focused, assessment.

In addition to the models described above, participants in the workshops proposed the following school models:

- + **Global Citizenship:** One design-thinking group selected the theme of global citizenship for their innovative school model. Providing students with access to resources and curriculum that supports global thinking will improve student outcomes and understanding of the world around them. The school would partner with the World Savvy organization to support teachers as leaders in the school to supplement the school's curriculum with a global perspective. The teachers would help students engage in discussions, projects, and events related to global citizenship.
- + **Healthy Eating:** This school would be focused around food and healthy eating. The school would partner with restaurants, culinary schools, gardens, and local farmers. Students would learn about nutrition standards, vegan and vegetarian foods, foods from different cultures, and what food should be eaten by season and by region.
- + **Restorative Practices:** This school would be focused around restorative practices and academic success. There would be no suspensions, but instead peace rooms and conflict resolution rooms. The school would emphasize mindfulness for teachers and students. Classes would have emotional and academic differentiation. The school would partner with My Brother's Keeper and yoga studios.
- + **Family Engagement and Education:** Participants in one workshop designed a school focused on partnerships between families and the school. The school would partner with children's health organizations (CHIP, WIC, AVANCE) and parent involvement organizations (Parent Resource Network, Parents Anonymous, Parents as Teachers Texas) to build a stronger relationship between parents and schools. The teachers would work to develop stronger relationships with the families of the school to improve academics as well as overall health and wellness.

# CONCLUSION

Innovative schools represent the growing need for students to learn in a manner which allows them choice in their method of learning while also fostering their creativity. When teachers are allowed to have autonomy in the classroom, everyone benefits. An innovative school model can allow teachers to establish themselves as teacher leaders in the design and implementation of curriculum which results in an increase in student engagement. These same proven teacher leaders can then pass on their newfound confidence and passion for design thinking to the pre-service teachers they mentor.

Students who learn from innovative teachers in innovative schools have the mindset, problem-solving skills, and high expectations required to become the best version of themselves that they can be. Innovative thinking is not a new trend in education, it is a fundamental skill that should be instilled in all students so they can possess the level of excellence needed for their success in their future career.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Texas Partnerships. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2019, from <https://txpartnerships.org/>
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- <sup>3</sup> Mainspring Schools. (2017). Mainspring Schools: Learning Starts Here. Retrieved March 16, 2019, from <https://www.mainspringschools.org/>
- <sup>4</sup> See footnote two.
- <sup>5</sup> Dawson, D. (2019, February 12). Texas Partnerships (SB 1882). Retrieved March 16, 2019, from [https://tea.texas.gov/Texas\\_Schools/District\\_Initiatives/Texas\\_Partnerships\\_\(SB\\_1882\)/](https://tea.texas.gov/Texas_Schools/District_Initiatives/Texas_Partnerships_(SB_1882)/)
- <sup>6</sup> Partnership Spotlights. (n.d.). Retrieved March 16, 2019, from <https://txpartnerships.org/partnership-spotlight/>
- <sup>7</sup> Edgewood ISD and Pre-K for SA. (2019, February 19). Pre-K 4 SA formalizes partnership with Edgewood ISD to create early learning destination [Press release]. Retrieved March 16, 2019, from <https://www.eisd.net/cms/lib/TX01001208/Centricity/ModuleInstance/4228/Pre-K%204%20SA%20Partners%20with%20EISD%20FINAL%202%2019%2019.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> Donaldson, E. Rivard Report. Retrieved April 22, 2019 from <https://therivardreport.com/texans-can-academies-pilot-program-will-target-saisds-struggling-students/>
- <sup>9</sup> Uplift Education. (n.d.). See Us In Action. Retrieved March 16, 2019, from <https://www.uplifteducation.org/upliftlee1> & Grand Prairie ISD. (n.d.). Collegiate / Elementary Collegiate: GPISD Uplift Lee Preparatory. Retrieved March 16, 2019, from <https://www.gpisd.org/Page/39283>
- <sup>10</sup> Texas Aspires. (n.d.). District-Charter Partnership Resources (SB 1882). Retrieved March 16, 2019, from <https://www.texasaspire.org/resources/sb-1882/>

# TEACH PLUS TEXAS POLICY FELLOWS 2018-19

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# APPENDIX

## **Profiles of Existing Innovative School Models**

The following are the innovative school ideas that teacher leaders shared with us through the design-thinking workshops we conducted across the state.

### **Grand Prairie ISD & Uplift Education**

**School Theme:** Education Energized (E2)

**SB 1882 Partner:** Uplift Education is a charter school network in North Texas, currently operating 20 campuses and serving 18,000 students. They provide a college-prep curriculum at all campuses, with a goal to close the achievement gap. One-hundred percent of their campuses utilize the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum and program, making it one of the top five districts in the nation to use the IB curriculum.

**How it Serves Students:** The Uplift Lee and Grand Prairie ISD Partnership focuses on creating a unique public school district and charter network partnership and hopes to be a model for other schools in North Texas. It operates with a school-within-a-school system. Both campuses are housed at Lee Elementary School in GPISD. Both schools share space and resources.

Lee Elementary School will continue to offer their dual-language program for students and students who are enrolled at Uplift Lee will be utilizing the IB curriculum model. Uplift Lee has opened its part of campus for K-2nd grade, with the hopes of adding additional grades through 5th to match Lee Elementary throughout the next few years.

**Role of Teacher Leadership:** Collaboration is essential to this model, and teachers from both GPISD and Uplift Lee will work together and share joint training. When teachers have the ability to work together, share best practices, and learn from each other, the dual language and IB models will assist all students to be more successful at Lee Elementary School. Teachers on this campus share a unique opportunity to collaborate between GPISD and Uplift Charter Schools giving them greater access to be involved in leadership roles.

### **San Antonio ISD & Center for Applied Science & Technology (CAST)**

**School Theme:** Technology, Business, and Industry Readiness

**SB 1882 School Partnership:** The Center for Applied Science & Technology is an innovative partnership between San Antonio ISD, industry partners, and institutes of higher education. CAST currently partners with several San Antonio-based companies, including H-E-B, Tech Bloc, Whataburger, and AT&T. CAST also partners with San Antonio College and the University of Texas at San Antonio to provide students with college credits.

**How it Serves Students:** CAST Tech is an in-district charter school housed at the Fox Tech High School campus in San Antonio. CAST Tech works in collaboration with industry partners to prepare students for high-demand careers in technology and business. The school aims to give students access to careers in San Antonio's burgeoning tech industry by providing three pathways. One path is geared toward careers in cybersecurity, coding, and information technology. A second pathway prepares students for careers in user experience (UX) and includes web design, digital media, and animation. The last pathway focuses on business analytics, administration, banking, and informatics.

The school has flexible schedules and teaches students to solve real-world problems through project-based learning. It also offers students college coursework, job-shadowing, mentoring, and summer job opportunities. Students graduate from CAST with at least 30 hours of college coursework, an associate degree in computer science, and guaranteed job interviews.

**Role of Teacher Leadership:** CAST Tech employs a mix of traditional educators and industry experts. Because the campus utilizes project-based learning, teachers have the ability to write curriculum and forge partnerships with industry experts. As a lab school with UTSA, teachers are also mentor teachers to clinical teachers. Most teachers are Master Teachers through San Antonio ISD's Master Teacher program.

### **Ogden Elementary School & Relay Graduate School of Education**

**School Theme:** College and Career Readiness

**SB 1882 Partner:** Relay Graduate School of Education is an accredited institution of higher education that serves over 5,000 students, teachers, and school leader across 18 campuses in the United States. In addition to training school personnel, Relay partners with urban public school districts to manage and turn around their lowest-performing schools.

**How it Serves Students:** In 2016, Ogden Elementary School received its fourth consecutive rating of "improvement required" and faced a state-enforced shut-down. San Antonio ISD invited Relay Graduate School of Education to help reimagine the school. In 2017, Relay partnered with SAISD to provide support to Ogden Elementary school. Relay trained and coached the school principal, placed 25 resident teachers at Ogden, and selected a new curriculum. In 2018, the San Antonio school board voted to give Relay Lab Schools operational authority over Ogden, which includes management responsibilities.

**Role of Teacher Leadership:** As a Relay Lab School, Ogden has 21 Master Teachers, who each have a teaching resident in their classrooms. One-third of teaching residents come from the district, one-third come from the state, and the last third come from around the country. The resident teacher program is free, as long as graduates work for San Antonio ISD for three years. All of Ogden's teachers, including resident teachers, are school district employees.

### **San Antonio ISD & Texans Can Academies**

**School Theme:** Additional supports for at-risk students who have struggled in the traditional high school setting

**SB 1882 Partner:** Texans Can Academies is a network of 14 charter schools that provide a second chance to students who have struggled in the traditional high school setting. The schools remove barriers to learning by providing basic student needs like day care services, clothes, eyeglasses, a 24/7 confidential counseling hotline, and access to free off-campus counseling appointments.

**How it Serves Students:** In March 2018, SAISD voted to bring Texans Can Academies to Highlands High School to support students who had dropped out or were behind by one or more years. The Texans Can Academy in San Antonio is unique, as it is located within the walls of Highlands High. This model, which is the first of its kind, allows Highland High students to stay active in their high school community. Students who opt into enrollment at Texans

Can are able to participate in extracurricular activities at Highlands like athletics, arts, and JROTC.

**Role of Teacher Leadership:** Texans Can Academies does not use a set curriculum, and as a result, teachers have the opportunity to be more creative in their lessons. Experienced teachers at Texans Can Academies serve as mentors to new teachers, and all teachers participate in staff development.

**Galveston ISD & Moody Early Childhood Center**

**School Theme:** Innovation in early childhood education

**SB 1882 Partner:** The Center is a public-private-family partnership between Galveston ISD and the Moody Foundation. The Center is part of the Generation Moody Education Initiative, a Moody Foundation signature project that seeks to ignite educational opportunities in Galveston. The Center is one of the initiative's four major grant recipients.

**How it Serves Students:** The Center is an in-district charter school in Galveston ISD. The Center markets itself as "more than a traditional childcare center," and "a school with highly qualified staff trained in early childhood methods." The Center works with a wide range of students between the ages of six weeks and three years old and employs a play-based curriculum. In addition to day-care and early childhood classrooms, the Center has a therapy room with certified staff for children who require services like speech therapy. The school also has family advocates, who help parents access community resources and strengthen parenting skills, as well as a parent room equipped with computers.

**Role of Teacher Leadership:** All teachers are "highly qualified" and must be Infant/Toddler CDA certified, or AA/BA certified in Early Childhood Education.