

UT Elementary

Shares Best Practices



The University of Texas Elementary School (UTES) is now officially part of the DDCE portfolio. If you have ever visited the school, located in east Austin, you know that it is an exciting place that positively affects its students, their families, and the wider community in a profound way. Founding principal and CEO Dr. Ramona Treviño successfully guides the school in connecting research from the university to practice in the classroom. In addition to partnering with UT faculty to provide one of the most cutting-edge, innovative programs in elementary education today, the school has dozens of community partners—individuals and organizations—that support and enhance its programs.

Principal Melissa Chavez is proud of the school's accomplishments, teachers, and students, and rightly so. Last spring, UTES earned the highly coveted Exemplary rating from the Texas Education Agency. It was one of only three schools in east Austin to earn the Exemplary rating, which is based on outstanding performance on the Texas Academic Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test.

Also last year, the school's mission to disseminate best practices to the wider education community has become a reality. The Urban Education Pilot Program, a collaboration among UTES, UT Austin's College of Education, and the Austin Independent School District, prepares pre-service teachers for the unique challenges they will face in urban schools. The program is made possible with the support of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, the RGK Foundation, the Powell Foundation, and individual donors Suzan and Julius Glickman.

“With the support of the DDCE, the pilot program launched this year. With it, we are building on what we have learned in our first six years and taking advantage of our role as a demonstration site for research-based practices,” said Treviño.

“Growing up in my family, we did not discuss going to college. At UT Elementary, my daughters now have been introduced to all things Longhorn. But it's not just the name or the uniforms that the kids wear. It's the regular involvement of UT and the high expectations and examples that their teachers set. Now, college is a part of our daily family discussions.”

— DAVID CRIST, UT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARENT

Twenty-one students from the UT College of Education are participating in the first cohort of the Urban Education Pilot Program. The UT students take specific sections of required education courses that have been adapted by participating UT faculty to reflect the best practices used at UTES. The students are assigned to UT Elementary School, Metz Elementary, or Govalle Elementary for their field experiences. Preceding the start of Austin ISD's 2008–2009 academic year, UTES teachers provided training to cooperating teachers and principals at Metz and Govalle. UTES staff serve as mentors to both the UT students and the staff at Metz and Govalle. UT Elementary faculty and staff have also just completed a best-practices manual that will be used as a textbook for future groups of UT students in the program.

Amber Rector, a senior in the College of Education, said, “If I weren't a part of this cohort, I would be missing useful intervention strategies . . . I am able to apply what I've learned to help each individual child reach their goals. I will leave this program much more knowledgeable about approaches to intervention for urban students than my peers in other cohorts who are missing out on these strategies.”

Angela Worley, a kindergarten teacher at Govalle Elementary, sees firsthand how the UT students are implementing the powerful experience and training they receive. “The response that the Urban Education Pilot Project is receiving from the east Austin community is evident throughout our campus,” she said. “You will see student interns collaboratively communicating with parents and families, in order to set higher standards for student achievement. The interns at Govalle Elementary have gone beyond the student teaching experience—they have built strong, meaningful relationships with parents, students, and faculty, who will help mentor them in their future teaching careers.”

In public schools throughout Texas, there can be a disconnection between what teachers learn in college and what they actually use in the classroom. A major objective of the Urban Education Pilot Program is to bridge that gap between theory and practice. “It's a good learning experience for everybody, all the way around,” said Worley. “The teachers learn from it; the UT professors learn from it. I think it's incredibly valuable for professors to come into our classrooms, rather than just the other way around.” ■