

**NTC PARTNERS WITH TEXAS' CLINT ISD TO
ALIGN INSTRUCTIONAL CULTURE AND PRACTICE**

Sharing Roles, Language, and Stories

PHOTO CREDIT: Clint ISD



JULY 2021

Profile At A Glance



11,800 students
(~95 percent Latinx)



700 teachers
(~88 percent Latinx)



87 percent of students
receive Free or Reduced
Price Lunch, district-wide
62 percent of students
are identified as “At-Risk”



33 percent of households in
the city of Clint have
incomes below the poverty
level

A spotlight on Clint ISD, Texas

Clint ISD covers nearly 400 square miles just east of El Paso, Texas. The district’s 11,800 students fall into two of NTC’s priority communities: English language learners and students experiencing poverty. Clint is overwhelmingly Hispanic, with a high population of English language learners. One-third of Clint’s families have incomes below the poverty level and over 80 percent are identified as economically disadvantaged.

Clint ISD began working with NTC in 2016. Assistant Superintendent James Littlejohn describes Clint ISD as “a heavy coaching district.” In 2019, the district successfully applied for a District of Innovation exemption from the Texas Education Agency, which enabled Clint ISD to apply funds to two new NTC training initiatives: new teacher induction programs; and tailored instructional coaching for veteran teachers who were transitioning to new content and new grade assignments.

Opportunities

NTC and Clint ISD co-created and increased coaching resources for both new and established teacher pathways. It soon became clear that Clint ISD also needed professional learning opportunities to:

- clarify and emphasize the role and practice of coaches for leaders and administrators throughout the district
- center on students and advance equity by heightening educator awareness of the critical importance of English-language learning (ELL) in a largely Spanish speaking community
- improve overall teacher retention, which was about 67 percent



PHOTO CREDIT: Clint ISD

Targeted Challenges

Building a coaching culture, elevating ELL

Centering Coaching

It became clear that the district as a whole needed to work toward clarity and emphasis on the role of coaches generally. Because coaches were natural intermediaries between teachers and administrators, urgent administrative tasks often fell to coaches, pushing their vital work as coaches to the back burner. School leaders and administrators needed a better understanding of the centrality of coaching to Clint ISD's overall educational culture.

Elevating ELL

NTC's thorough study of district performance showed that student achievement gaps were strongly correlated with ELL challenges. Yet many of Clint ISD's teachers — nearly all native Spanish speakers, like their students — didn't have the resources to do more than work around the issue of language learning. Years of coping had made some of them less able to connect ELL to in-class learning challenges. Addressing the issue explicitly was necessary.

Teacher Retention

With a 67 percent teacher retention rate, Clint ISD experienced a faulty cycle that continuously put the district in the position of resetting and restarting schools' instructional cultures. Many new teachers came in each year; most weren't getting the training they needed, and many didn't stay. More new teachers arrived to take their places, and the cycle repeated. In order to increase teacher retention in Clint ISD, strengthening support for new teachers was essential.

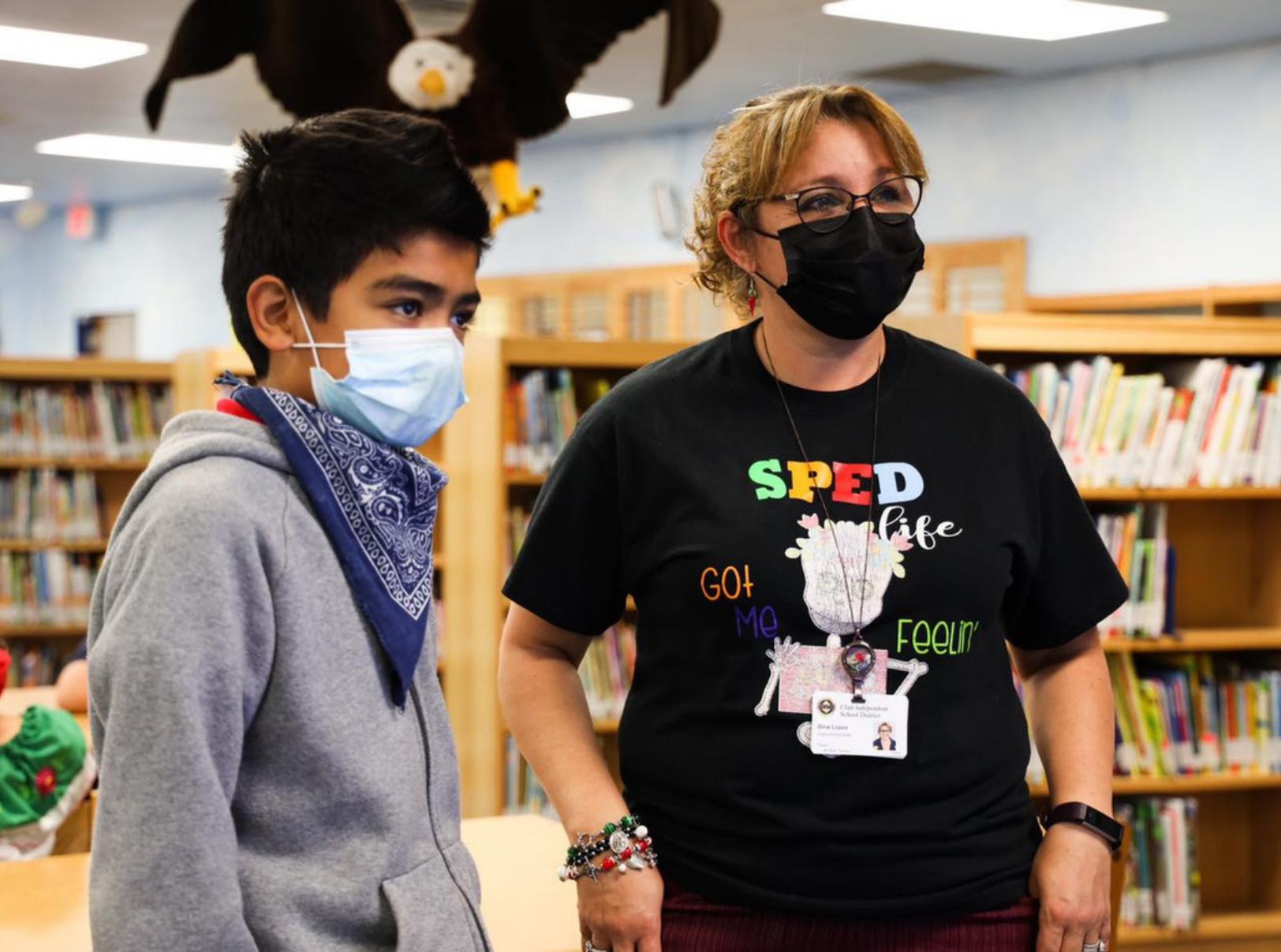


PHOTO CREDIT: Clint ISD



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“The conventional thinking is that because you have a degree and you have a certification from the state, you're ready to walk into a classroom and teach. What New Teacher Center has done for us is opened our eyes to a holistic approach to coaching a teacher through their first couple of years of the profession and letting them be comfortable in trying things, and then reflecting on it and using the cycle of tools, so that at the end of the school year they've truly had support all along.”

James Littlejohn

Assistant District Superintendent of Secondary
Curriculum & Instruction, Clint ISD



PHOTO CREDIT: Clint ISD

Inside the district

67%

teacher retention rate (2015)

40%

of students identified as English language learners

~150

new teachers in 2016

"We are a coaching district, and we have a philosophy of coaching: It's not just about coaching our teachers, but also coaching our administrators," said Littlejohn. "New Teacher Center has been a big part of that, because as our administrators have learned the tools to work with their teachers, I've also heard them using it with custodians, instructional aides, even cafeteria staff. When you get in a coaching mode and you get comfortable with it, you do it all the time. I do it with my own family."

About our approach

NTC partners with educators across the country — from Pre K to high school, in districts big and small — to develop localized solutions to their biggest challenges. Our services aren't one-size-fits-all; they're collaborative and customized to meet the unique needs of each school and district. Our work starts with listening and leads to a collaborative plan on how to make real change happen for students.

Our Approach

Building cohesion by sharing roles, language, and stories

ABOUT PLCS

Professional Learning Communities: Supporting teachers, centering students

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are a space for teachers to make decisions. Within this collective space they decide as a team HOW they are going to teach a curriculum. These important decisions can either boost a student's support, or become an unintentional roadblock. We focus on fostering a PLC space where students are placed at the forefront of the conversation, and decisions are based on data, not assumptions.

NTC implemented new teacher induction support services, as well as coaching strategies for established teachers in role transition. To address issues of role clarity, ELL, and language instruction practices, we collaborated to take the following action steps:

Everyone coaches

Clint ISD and NTC co-created professional learning sessions in which coaches trained administrators and leaders in the tools of coaching. In essence, they made coaches of all their educators. The effect was to change mindsets about coaching by integrating it into Clint ISD's entire educational ecosystem. Leaders and administrators understood the critical importance of coaching to the overall success of each campus.

Raise awareness of the importance of ELL to student outcomes

Clint ISD implemented NTC's professional learning series devoted to language acquisition. By telling and hearing stories, especially about their own childhood ELL experiences, the issue became personal for many teachers. They were able to start looking through the lens of English-language learners and more clearly recognize implicit bias.

Align educators in instructional transition

As the district underwent an instructional shift from bilingual education to a dual-language model, NTC helped Clint ISD's administration ensure that all educators knew the difference between those two approaches. Previously, not everyone did.

Impact

Teacher retention rate +25 percent (67→92, 2016–2020)



STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) Testing Program Results, Dec 2017–Dec 2019

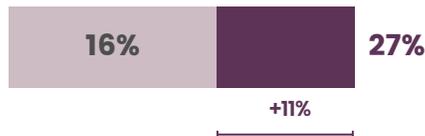
Algebra I: Meets Grade Level Standard: +36 percent (20% → 56%)



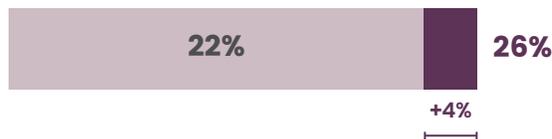
Biology: Meets Grade Level Standard: +21 percent (31% → 52%)



English I: Meets Grade Level Standard: +11 percent (16% → 27%)



English II: Meets Grade Level Standard: +4 percent (22% → 26%)



Career College and Military Readiness rating



The role of a coach was clarified for school leaders and coaching was integrated into the educational mindset

A collective recognition of the importance of ELL in learner outcomes was achieved and articulated

Teacher retention rose from 67 percent to 92 percent



PHOTO CREDIT: Clint ISD

Looking Ahead

Future forward plan

- The power of coaching must be both broadly understood and individually experienced by all educators. Ongoing sessions devoted to teaching coaching tools to school administrators and leaders can maintain a strong, shared coaching culture across the district.
- Ongoing understanding of the critical importance of ELL to student achievement should be fostered among all teachers. Continued community-learning sessions devoted to language acquisition can help new teachers gain this understanding early in their careers.
- Making issues personal for educators — whether appreciating what coaching is by learning how to do it, or connecting the issue of language learning to one's own experience, is critical to building both a strong educational ecosystem and student success in the classroom.



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“NTC’s program content speaks to what coaching should be.”

Nadia Tellez, New Teacher Mentor Coordinator,
Clint ISD

Stories From The Field

Relearning the Language

In West Texas, NTC spreads fluency in instructional coaching, and reconnects teachers to the challenges facing English-language learners

In 2016, Nadia Tellez was the elementary English Language Arts Coordinator of the Clint ISD, near El Paso, Texas. Among the “Other Duties as Assigned” at the bottom of her contract was coordinating the training of new teachers.

Nadia quickly discovered that Clint ISD’s summer training programs “weren’t cutting it.” The proof of that was plain. The district’s teacher retention rate was only 67 percent, and a faulty cycle was in place: new teachers came in each year to replace those who had departed; these new hires didn’t receive sufficient training; and many soon left. More new teachers were hired. Repeat cycle.

Poking around online for a better way forward, Nadia found an intriguing piece of promotional literature for a training program. After identifying its source, New Teacher Center, she discovered that NTC had an upcoming symposium scheduled. On a whim, she attended it.

“At first, I was completely confused,” she says. “It was something completely different.” But different, she quickly recognized, was exactly what Clint ISD needed. Nadia “fell in love” with the programs and tools she learned about at the symposium. She was so head over heels that when she got back to Clint, instead of going home, she went straight to the office and proposed that the district start working with NTC immediately. She also proposed creating a new role to facilitate that work, which she would fill: New Teacher Mentor Coordinator.

Nadia still occupies that position, and Clint ISD continues to deepen its engagement with NTC. Much of that engagement also owes to James Littlejohn, Clint ISD's assistant district superintendent of secondary curriculum and instruction. A former classroom teacher himself, he has been a fixture in the system for nearly 30 years, and his lineage in Clint ISD goes back to his grandmother, who was a teacher and counselor in the district for over 40 years ("the family business," he jokes). James was quick to respond to Nadia's enthusiasm for NTC's programs. He recognized that her passion for what she learned there could spread throughout Clint ISD's educational culture under his influence.



PHOTO CREDIT: Clint ISD

It wasn't only Nadia's enthusiasm that drew James to NTC's programs. It was the quality of NTC's model and approach. "The conventional thinking is that because you have a degree and you have a certification from the state, you're ready to walk into a classroom and teach," he said.

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What New Teacher Center has done for us is opened our eyes to a holistic approach to coaching a teacher through their first couple of years of the profession and letting them be comfortable in trying things, and then reflecting on it and using the cycle of tools, so that at the end of the school year they've truly had support all along.”

James Littlejohn

Assistant District Superintendent of Secondary Curriculum and Instruction, Clint ISD

The district quickly adopted NTC's program content. In 2019–2020, Clint ISD successfully applied for a Texas District of Innovation waiver, which gave them the flexibility to add new NTC programs to those already in place. In addition to new teacher induction support, Clint ISD needed coaching for established teachers transitioning to new curricular content and/or grade levels. The challenges of shifting teaching focus called for strong support. By empowering teachers through coaching dedicated to supporting them in their new roles, the likelihood of them staying in the profession grew.

To increase and intensify coaching on its campuses, James and Nadia recognized that the district as a whole needed to work toward alignment and emphasis on the role of coaches generally. Nadia notes that coaches had always been “a great intermediary between teachers and administration” with urgent administrative tasks frequently falling to them to do and pushing coaching work to the back burner. Nadia organized a session with school leaders and had them “percentage out what they thought their coaches did, versus what they actually did,” she said. “And it was eye-opening to the principals to really see: ‘Here I am calling this person a coach, but they don't get to coach as often as they should.’”

Now understanding that gap, James and Nadia recognized that the way to center coaching in the school culture was not by preaching its importance to school leaders. “It wasn't that they didn't value coaching,” Tellz said. “It was that they didn't quite understand it.” Instead, they took a bold step. Together, they created a professional learning session in which Clint ISD's coaches trained their administrators and leaders in the tools of coaching: they made coaches of all their educators.



PHOTO CREDIT: Clint ISD

The effect was transformational. Coaching was no longer an auxiliary practice pushed aside when more urgent needs arose. Nor was it a siloed approach, distinct from the daily life of Clint ISD’s campuses. Instead, coaching was integrated into the district’s very way of thinking and doing, absolutely central – indeed urgent – to the educational ecosystem.

“We’re a heavy coaching district,” James said. “NTC has been a big part of that, because as our administrators have learned the tools to work with our teachers, I’ve also heard them using the tools with custodians, instructional aides, even cafeteria staff. When you get in a coaching mode and you get comfortable with it, you do it all the time. I do it with my own family.”

With that new mindset developing as the year progressed, NTC and Clint ISD collaborated on research into student achievement gaps. The data showed a strong correlation with English language learning. Clint ISD is 90 percent Latinx, with “probably 97 percent bilingual English-language learners at some point in their educational careers,” James estimated. Yet years of workarounds had seemed to make many educators less able to connect ELL to in-class learning challenges. And they were perhaps too close to perceive it in another way, as well: Nearly all of Clint ISD’s teachers are native Spanish speakers, like their students, and many acquired English in their youth. “So maybe you start to project that,” Nadia said, and, as a consequence, to distance yourself from it.

Nadia took advantage of one of NTC’s professional learning series devoted to language acquisition to address the issue. Participants were able to “start looking through the lens of English-language learners and then talk about implicit bias,” she said “Even if we grew up in the area, even if we all have the same culture and heritage, what’s the implicit bias that may be there? And those were conversations that I don’t ever think that we had had before.”

Meanwhile, as the district shifted from bilingual education to a dual-language model, NTC helped Clint ISD’s administration ensure that all educators knew the difference between those two approaches.

The key result was that the critical issue of language acquisition became personal for many more teachers, just as the importance of coaching had become personal for Clint ISD's administrators and leaders. Between those two professional learning series, the district saw a profound strengthening of its overall educational culture.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of that is in the data itself. Three years after starting NTC programs, Clint ISD's teacher retention rate jumped from 67 to 92 percent. Post-pandemic numbers may influence that increase — many teachers retired in response to the shutdown in Texas and nationwide — but James sees more improvement on the horizon, even in a district that faces steep challenges every day.

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“We have students that don't have electricity at home, that don't have running water and come to school to shower. We serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner; all kids in our district eat free, and we prepackage a dinner to go home on the weekend. We had families tell us during the pandemic that they could not have made ends meet if we weren't providing breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We have to provide those resources for our kids here.”

James Littlejohn

Assistant District Superintendent of Secondary Curriculum and Instruction, Clint ISD

And resources for their grownups, as well. Clint ISD has no public library; the local schools are the community libraries, with public hours set aside after school. The district's campuses also double as clean water facilities for citizens without access at home.

Clint ISD serves more than its students. It's a civic pillar, and James feels the weight of that responsibility. Yet he's driven by his dedication, and NTC's programs are helping him keep moving forward while supporting everyone who depends on the ecosystem his schools maintain.

“We carry the needs of our community in our pocket all the time,” he says. “Do I think we have bias? Sure, whether it's a bias about poverty or second language learners, or even boys versus girls. But I think effective coaching and the tools that we have from NTC to share with teachers, to give teachers that ability to change their lens and then adjust what they're doing for all populations — that's our duty as educators, regardless of what we deal with in our district. It's very important that we coach our teachers to be able to take the kids they have and move them along as far as they can.”



newteachercenter.org