



## News Release

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### **Region One Project RISE and UTRGV Create Unique Teacher Leadership Degree *Total Investment of over \$500-Thousand in Local School Districts***

With the stroke of a pen a new chapter in educational leadership studies in the Region One area was initiated today at the Region One Education Service Center. The Region One Education Service Center Project *RISE* and UTRGV solidified a partnership in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Signing Ceremony held on December 12, 2018, at the Region One Education Service Center in Edinburg, Texas.

The MOU ceremony cemented a partnership between Region One Project *RISE* and UTRGV as the two entities moved forward with a newly developed Master of Education in Teacher Leadership degree designed to prepare teachers as instructional leaders, instructional coaches, and mentors based upon national standards. The program was designed specifically by UTRGV for the Project *RISE* program with extensive participation of the Project *RISE* staff in the development of the degree plan, delivery of the course work, and opportunities for job-embedded internships has already been approved, explains Dr. Socorro Espinoza, Director of the Region One Project *RISE* program.

The first cohort group of 30 identified teachers in mostly small and rural school districts served by Project *RISE* will begin classes in the Spring of 2019. Over the life of the master's degree program, 90 teachers will receive their advanced degree. As members of the Region One Project *RISE* initiative, these teachers will have all tuition and fees paid by the program. UTRGV has agreed to waive all application and graduation fees for the cohort group of students. This is a total investment by both Project *RISE* and UTRGV of \$550-thousand.

Project *RISE* is a Region One grant funded initiative that works with 31 campuses in 16 urban/rural Priority school districts and charter schools to help recruit, support, and retain highly-effective teachers, leaders and educators. The Project *RISE* goal is to create a K-12 grade pipeline of highly-effective teachers to increase all students' academic achievement, graduation rates and college enrollment. To meet the ever-changing needs of the educational system, Project *RISE* administrators contend that based on research a paradigm shift of school leadership was necessary to meet the new demands. In this case, says Espinoza, the idea was to utilize an untapped resource, the campus teacher, to assume a more active role in the decision-making process and effectively improve student learning. Project *RISE* developed the role of the Master and Mentor Teacher to lead campuses and school districts.

**Region One Education Service Center** ([www.esc1.net](http://www.esc1.net)) serves over 433,000 students and educators in seven counties in south Texas including Cameron, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Starr, Webb, Willacy and Zapata counties. Region One works to assist school districts in improving student performance, assist districts to operate more efficiently and economically, and implement initiatives assigned by the legislature or the Commissioner of Education.

To fill these teacher-leader positions, Project RISE developed a Master/Mentor teacher profile with a requirement that the Master/Mentor teacher possess a master's degree. However, data indicated that at the rural school districts served by Project RISE, the teacher retention rate was low, the average tenure for a school principal being 3 years, as was the number of teachers with master's degrees. This is how the newly developed Master's program came to be, explains Dr. Espinoza, "we recognized the need to empower, prepare, and develop teachers' competencies to lead and support the school change required to meet the current educational challenges."

Dr. Espinoza recounts that she approached the university with the idea and received an overwhelming positive response to develop the Master of Education in Teacher Leadership degree. The opportunity to apply for the coveted 30 available slots in the first cohort group was presented to Project RISE teachers. To apply for the program, candidates were required to meet minimum admission requirements:

- have earned a bachelor's degree with at least a 3.0 GPA
- provide transcripts
- submit a statement detailing professional goals, campus leadership experience and reasons for wanting to pursue Master's in Education in Teacher Leadership
- provide a resume including educational background and work experience
- possess a teaching certificate with a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience.

Teachers accepted into the program must commit to remain at their school campus for three years after completing the master's program.

"We are very proud to offer this educational experience to educators through the Project RISE program," said Dr. Cornelio Gonzalez, Region One ESC Executive Director. "These teachers have demonstrated a willingness to continue learning and have dedicated themselves to improving educational opportunities for their students and enriching their communities. Additionally, we are most grateful to our colleagues at UTRGV who when approached with the idea of developing this program, were so willing to work with our team. We know that together we have made a wise investment in the future of the region."



Members of the first cohort group of the Master of Education in Teacher Leadership Degree, along with Project RISE, Region One, and UTRGV partners.