



## NEWS RELEASE

05.12.20

### Contact:

Annette S. Garcia, Communications Officer  
956.984.6011    angarcia@esc1.net

---

### **Region One Project *RISE* and UTRGV Graduate First Cohort of Masters Students Partnership Program Created First-of-its Kind Teacher Leadership Degree**

For twenty classroom teachers participating in the Region One Project *RISE* program, the past year has been spent in their classroom as teachers and as students in the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Master of Education in Teacher Leadership program. Their hard work has paid off as now these students will be receiving their Master's degree from the UTRGV this May. The advanced level degree program was designed specifically by UTRGV for the Region One Project *RISE* program to prepare teachers as instructional leaders, instructional coaches, and mentors based upon national standards.

Project *RISE*, an initiative of the Region One Education Service Center was made possible through a 5-year \$48.5 million grant, to create a K-12 grade pipeline of highly-effective teachers to increase all students' academic achievement, graduation rates and college enrollment. The first cohort of teachers consisting initially of 30 identified teachers in mostly small and rural school districts began their educational journey in the spring of 2019. To qualify for the program teachers were required to meet minimum admission requirements and commit to remain at their school for three years after completing the master's program. As participants of the Region One Project *RISE* initiative, all tuition and fees for the teachers were paid by the program.

"These teachers have demonstrated a willingness to improve educational opportunities for their students and enriching their communities. 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," said Dr. Cornelio Gonzalez, Region One ESC Executive Director.

As Master and Mentor teachers, the graduates are prepared to assume a more active role in their campus' decision-making process and effectively improve student learning, explains Dr. Socorro Espinoza, Director of the Region One Project *RISE* program. The need to empower, prepare, and develop teachers' competencies to lead and support the school change required to meet current educational challenges was the leading catalyst in developing the program, recalls Dr. Espinoza.

"Master and mentor teachers are significant in promoting teacher leadership development at the campus level which directly impacts the levels of educator effectiveness. The Masters of Education in Teacher Leadership provides the knowledge and skills set for teachers to take on active roles in decision-making, leading learning, and intentional leadership for student achievement," added Dr. Velma Menchaca, Professor and Coordinator of M. Ed in Teacher Leadership.

The enormity of their accomplishment was not lost on the graduates, each understanding that their advanced degree has equipped them with new tools in their teaching and learning giving them the chance to make a positive impact on their students and their colleagues.

“I am most grateful for the “a-ha” moments and the opportunities it has given me. This program has allowed me to acquire the knowledge needed to take strategic actions in building an equitable education system for students, culturally relevant curriculums, and create Professional Learning networks among our classmates and professors,” said Abigail Rodriguez, Tony Gonzalez Elementary, Santa Maria ISD.

“As a teacher leader on my campus, I hope to be a catalyst for positive change. My next step is to share what I have learned with the teachers on my campus. The mark of a true leader is their ability to inspire others who lead,” Joanie Aparicio, San Perlita Elementary, San Perlita ISD.

Graduates of the Project *RISE*/UTRGV Master of Education in Teacher Leadership program include Dianerica Almanza, *Tony Gonzalez Elementary, Santa Maria ISD*; Joanie Aparicio, San Perlita Elementary, San Perlita ISD; Karim Briseno, Juarez-Lincoln High School, La Joya ISD; Alma Espinoza, *Hebbronville Elementary, Jim Hogg County ISD*; Anna Garcia, Travis Middle School, McAllen ISD; Isela Garcia, *Juarez-Lincoln High School, La Joya ISD*; Rosalinda Gomez, *Tony Gonzalez Elementary, Santa Maria ISD*; Denisse Gonzalez, *Ann Richards Middle School, La Joya ISD*; Nilsa Guzman, *Progreso North Elementary, Progreso ISD*; Melisa Morales, *Travis Middle School, McAllen ISD*; Rose Mary Maldonado, *Hebbronville Elementary, Jim Hogg County ISD*; Maida Moreno, *Palmview High School, La Joya ISD*; Maria Rebecca Moreno, *3D Academy, Donna ISD*; Emmanuel Pacheco, *Juarez-Lincoln High School, La Joya ISD*; Samuel Ramirez, Jr., *Faulk Middle School, Brownsville ISD*; Robert Rivera, *Faulk Middle School, Brownsville ISD*; Abigail Rodriguez, *Santa Maria Middle School, Santa Maria ISD*; Maria Rodriguez, *San Perlita Elementary, San Perlita ISD*; Odette Rodriguez, *M. Rivas Elementary, Donna ISD*; and Clara Villarreal, *M. Rivas Elementary, Donna ISD*.

“We are extremely proud of our Project *RISE* graduates for their dedication to their profession and for their commitment to learning,” exclaimed Dr. Espinoza, “We understand that it was a challenging time to retain their full-time teaching positions in their respective districts and to attend classes simultaneously. Their determination in both areas demonstrates the high-level, quality teachers that they are and speaks volumes as to why they were selected for the program in the first place. The impact that they will have on student learning is promising!”