



News Release

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Region One Educators Graduate from National Leadership Program

To further demonstrate their commitment to increase access to higher education for low-income students through advocacy, training, and research, Region One area educators took part in a 10-month program, District Leadership Institute (DLI), offered by the National Council of Community and Education Partnerships (NCEEP). According to NCEEP, the DLI program is a professional learning undertaking designed to empower educators to create, sustain, and strengthen the college-going culture in their school districts. The group of regional educators, including Region One GEAR UP staff, graduated from the program this past May.

The DLI program consisted of five days of professional learning and participation in problem-solving discussions. The class also investigated case studies, current research, advocacy strategies, and leadership applications created to develop them into agents of system change of behalf of students, according to a NCEEP press release. Much of the 10-month program required participants to work together in different activities with directors and district leaders of GEAR UP programs across the nation. For many of the participants, the most valuable learning component was the ability to learn from peers and share experiences.

“Having the opportunity to learn from some of the best educators in the education world was phenomenal. DLI meant that I would learn best practices and gain new ideas that could be implemented in my program and in the district. Most importantly, it was an opportunity to grow as an effective leader,” remarked Barbara Gonzales, DLI graduate and GEAR UP Director at Vanguard Academy.

“My experience was a continuation of my mantra, of lifelong learning,” revealed Dr. Susana Garza, Superintendent of Schools, Jim Hogg County ISD. “It was amazing to be in this cohort and have candid professional conversations. The training allowed me to network with individuals around the country and in turn validate that we are basically all dealing with the same successes and deficiencies.”

The 2020 DLI graduating class is made up of 45 senior education leaders from across the United States including Irma Andrade, *Assistant Director for Student Accountability, Rio Grande City CISD*; David Canales, *Executive Director of Middle School Instruction, United ISD*; Carmen Esquivel, *College & Career Readiness Supervisor, Edinburg CISD*; Dr. Susana Garza, *Superintendent of Schools, Jim Hogg County ISD*, Barbara Gonzales, *GEAR UP Director, Vanguard Academy*; and Alejos Salazar, *Superintendent of Schools, La Villa ISD*. In addition, three Region One ESC members of the Office of College, Career, and Life Readiness team participated and graduated from the program, Alma Cavazos, *GEAR UP Project Director*; Ricardo Lee Lopez, Jr. *Education Specialist*; and Nicole Saenz, *GEAR UP Project Director*, joined 45 other

Region One Education Service Center (www.esc1.net) serves over 439,000 students and educators in eight counties in south Texas including Brooks, 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.

graduates from across the United States. All of the program graduates are affiliated in some capacity within their own school districts.

“Many times, we learn from the same people over and over, not realizing there are multiple truths out in the world, but for us to see the difference, we must venture out of our comfort zone and experience the world. Consequently, this DLI experience allowed me to listen and learn from others who have different truths,” offered David Canales, DLI graduate and Executive Director of Middle School Instruction, United ISD.

“We are extremely proud of these educators who challenged themselves during this arduous 10-month learning program,” shared Melissa Lopez, Administrator, Region One ESC Office of College, Career, and Life Readiness. “The completion of this program demonstrates not only a commitment to students, but to a desire to build capacity within themselves as effective leaders and educators, and a willingness to share their knowledge with their peers and colleagues. Their graduation is truly a celebration for all!”

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