

2014 TERREL H. BELL RECIPIENT

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A former teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal, and elementary ELA coordinator, Britani Moses has led LaVace Stewart Elementary for the past six years. Her background and personal warmth equipped her well to deal with her school's challenges, among them a persistent achievement gap for minority and economically disadvantaged students, a lack of high quality early childhood opportunities—and Hurricane Ike.

To help close the achievement gap, Dr. Moses drew on her doctoral thesis on the cognitive benefits of second language learning, to create a two-way dual language program in which native English and native Spanish speakers receive instruction

together, in both languages, to promote second language acquisition. After three years of implementation, students are scoring at the fluent level in their first language and limited-to-fluent in their second. This program has become a model for other bilingual campuses; more than 20 school visit annually. Dr. Moses also organized the district's first ever Bilingual Institute.

Dr. Moses and her team implemented a pre-kindergarten program for three- and four-year-olds who qualify under federal at-risk guidelines. Students who have participated in the Stewart program enter kindergarten with greater linguistic and literacy skills, including limited reading and writing skills, as well as a basic understanding of numbers, shapes, measurements, and patterns. Nearly all are on or above grade level in reading and math.

After Hurricane Ike, which left the school a watery ruin, Stewart staff opened a free storefront for students and families for basic supplies and social support. Dr. Moses visited families the day after the storm, offering food, clothing, and information, and brought in a social worker to meet both the new physical and economic needs many students faced. Within two weeks, Stewart Elementary was functioning, adapting the gym as a cafeteria, importing food from other local schools, distributing library books, and finding dry space for all the students.

Today, nine out of ten students at Stewart pass the state assessments and exceed federal indicators. Success factors include a shared philosophy that all children can learn; research-based, personalized instruction; and a common instructional language, which allows students to build on prior knowledge. Students are expected to play an active role in their own learning and meaning-making. Student leadership teams help organize bully prevention activities, create digital citizenship codes, and run the school store. Stewart's latest initiative is a proposed summer "Jump Start" program: a ten-day summer science and literacy program for current fourth grade Limited English Proficient (LEP) and at-risk students, a group that historically struggles with the science STAAR test. Dr. Moses has also expanded learning opportunities by engaging community members, businesses, and organizations as mentors for at-risk students.

Dr. Moses built teacher capacity through training in best practices, instructional coaching, and developing teacher leaders, and staff commitment has grown. Stewart Elementary also offers extensive after-school classes to first year teachers as well as veteran teachers in math, literacy, and science. Alongside instructional coaches in those subjects, Dr. Moses provides team and individual support to teachers.

The Stewart team has engaged parents and the community through volunteer opportunities; adult classes (including ESL and family literacy), and community events such as literacy, math, and science nights; dances, movie nights; and cultural celebrations. The school library is open for family use during the summer and a partnership with the University of Houston at Clear Lake School of Education offers parents opportunities in their home languages.