



Lucilla Landin, center, meets with 3rd grade teachers Latasha Bell, left, and Monica Delgado. They are discussing recent student assessment data and how the data will determine teachers' instructional decisions for the next two weeks.

Lessons of business apply to work with teachers

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

For Lucilla Landin, the third time may be the charm.

At age 46, Landin is in the midst of her third career as a reading coach for the Dallas Independent School District. “I really enjoy working with adults. You get the same sense of accomplishment with adults that you do when you work with students. But, sometimes, it’s more immediate than with students,” she said.

Landin, who has undergraduate degrees in sociology and criminal justice and a master’s in

urban affairs, worked in business management and as a social worker for almost 20 years before becoming a teacher. “I wanted to stay in public service but I was burned out with social service,” she said.

DISD hired Landin, who is bilingual in English and Spanish, after she completed a year-long alternative certification process. She spent 11 years as a kindergarten teacher before becoming a Reading First coach at Henderson Elementary School in spring 2004. Reading First coaches serve at a variety of DISD schools, typi-

cally with one coach per school.

The federal Reading First program provides grants to states and local districts to improve reading ability. But Reading First also specifies that grantees must use reading programs based on scientifically based research. Reading First programs must ensure that students are systematically and explicitly taught five key early reading skills:

Phonemic awareness — the ability to hear, identify, and play with individual sounds (or phonemes) — in spoken words.

Phonics — the relationship between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language.

Fluency — the capacity to read text accurately and quickly.

Vocabulary — the words students must know to communicate effectively.

Comprehension — the ability to understand and gain meaning from what has been read.

Dallas requires every K-3 teacher on a Reading First campus to complete an online professional development program that includes four-hour modules that focus on the five components of literacy skills.

Providing the basic training ensures that every teacher has the same foundational learning about literacy, Landin said. Adding the reading coaches ensures a greater degree of faithful implementation in the classroom, she said.

Coaches are available to demonstrate, co-teach and follow-up on lessons and strategies that were discussed as part of the coursework.

After two years, Landin can point to increases although she believes it's too early to expect substantial changes. When the Reading First coaching program began, she estimates that one-third of Henderson's early elementary students were reading on grade-level. After two years, between 30% and 60% of the early elementary students are on track at mid-year. "Our expectation is that all of them should be on grade-level by the end of the year," she said.

"The goal of a coach is to help teachers to work smarter, not harder. Our teachers were tutoring before school, after school, on Saturdays. They got tired, and the kids got tired. That's not an easy situation because nobody wins

in that situation," she said.

Since Reading First began, the amount of tutoring has decreased somewhat which has given everybody a healthy break and the energy they need to focus on reading during regular school hours, she said.

Landin's challenges are significant. Virtually all of Henderson's 860 students live in poverty. The student population is about 80% Hispanic, 18% black, and about 1% white.

About 45% of the students have limited English proficiency. Because of the diversity of students, Henderson uses three different reading programs: one for students who speak predominantly in English, one for students who speak predominantly in Spanish, and one for native Spanish speakers who have limited ability to speak in English.

Equally as daunting as the poverty and the language readiness of the students are the varying degrees of teacher preparation.

Several years ago, Texas provided alternative certification as a way to increase the number of bilingual education teachers in schools like Henderson. Although those teachers bring a wealth of knowledge and experiences to the classroom, they also bring different needs from teachers who have undergone a more traditional pre-service program. "With those teachers, we really have to start with classroom management, routines, and procedures, and then work into instructional issues," she said.

Landin has found that her business experience has provided some significant lessons for working with teachers. "Education has become much more goal-oriented, much more like the way businesses are run. Teachers need to learn how to work backwards, how to work with the goal in mind. They have to ask themselves, 'If I want student achievement to be at a certain level, then how will I get my students to that level?'" she said.

Most of Landin's time is spent visiting classrooms. She estimates that she spends 60% of her time in classrooms. "I could be demonstrating. I could be co-teaching or I could just be observing. How I spend my time depends on each teacher's needs," she said. The rest of her time is spent analyzing data, using the data to design instruc-

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— *Lucilla Landin*

5 KEY EARLY READING SKILLS
under Reading First

1. Phonemic awareness
2. Phonics
3. Fluency
4. Vocabulary
5. Comprehension

tional focus for small group intervention, conferencing with teachers, and developing other learning opportunities for teachers.

She meets once a week with each grade-level planning group to walk through their lessons for the next week. “This helps them see all of the components and maybe pull out some areas where they need to concentrate,” she said.

“If we know that kids are weak in phonemic awareness, for example, then we’ll try to focus on that component. We’ll really walk through that lesson with fine-tooth comb,” she said.

LUCILLA LANDIN

Position: Reading First Campus Coach

School district: Dallas Independent School District, Dallas, Texas

Professional history: Had a career in business management and as a social worker before becoming a kindergarten teacher in 1991. Worked as a kindergarten teacher for 11 years before becoming a master reading teacher at Henderson Elementary School, a position which involved working with other teachers on reading instruction. Became Reading First coach at Henderson in spring 2004.

Education: Earned her bachelor’s degree in sociology and criminal justice from Southern Methodist University and her master’s degree in urban affairs from University of Texas at Arlington. Completed Texas’ alternative certification process to become a teacher. Later earned certificates in reading, bilingual/ELS, and mentoring.

Honors/accomplishments: Twice selected Henderson Teacher of the Year.

Professional service: Served as national trainer for Edison Schools in several curricular areas, grade-level chair, district textbook adoption committee, and frequent presenter on topics related to reading, data analysis, and English Language Learners.

To continue this conversation, e-mail Landin at lulandin@dallasisd.org.

Teachers will leave with the plan developed and with the materials to teach the lesson.

In addition, the Henderson teachers have agreed to devote one of their grade-level planning periods each week to doing the online training which Landin facilitates. This means that every teacher sees her at least twice each week.

The support for the work of the Reading First coaches is substantial, although it didn’t begin that way. Dallas’ Reading First coaches began working in spring 2004 before they had had much training for the job. For several months, they scrambled as they learned the many elements of their work.

Kathy Kee, a veteran Texas educator who coaches the Reading First coaches, puts their task this way: “They had a huge list of assessments that they were supposed to know and a huge bank of instructional tools that they were supposed to master and when you put it all together, it was literally thousands of pieces of information. And, once they had that content knowledge, they had to learn how to work with other people.”

During the summers of 2004 and 2005, however, all of the Reading First coaches came together for an intensive period of learning about literacy development as well as coaching skills. “We lived in each other’s back pockets during both summers,” Landin said.

Now, during the school year, the coaches meet every Thursday afternoon for 4½ hours. “It is our sacred time. We know that we just don’t schedule anything in our building for that time,” she said.

That weekly professional development time for the coaches continues to be focused on literacy development and coaching skills. But it also provides time to bounce ideas off each other and to share the challenges of the job, she said.

Like most coaches, Landin can point to a mix of attitudes toward coaching among the teachers in her building. “I have a few who are uncomfortable with the idea of coaching. They see it as an intrusion in their classrooms. It’s very difficult to change that mindset,” she said.

“That’s what we commiserate about the most,” she said, with a laugh. ♦

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