



# Assistant Principals Academy is part of a 'grow your own' effort



By Raven L. Hill

Copperas Cove ISD Superintendent Rose Cameron characterizes her first assistant principal job as “baptism by fire.” She and the principal she worked with at the time exercised what she describes as the “divide and conquer” approach at their 800-student school.

“[The principal] would take on certain things and I would take on certain things,” she recalls, “but I almost never dealt with her things.”

Years later, when she moved up to the principal’s job, Cameron says she could have benefited from more exposure to academic, financial and personnel matters — the duties only her principal had taken care of in the past.

That experience (or lack thereof) is what inspired Cameron last year to help her district establish an Assistant Principals Academy as part of Copperas Cove ISD’s overall grow-your-own approach to improving administrator quality.

Participants — not only assistant principals, but aspiring administrators — spend one morning each month learning the ropes of their would-be next job over the course of the school year. Every Thursday at 7:30 a.m., they head over to the district’s central office to spend a couple of hours in workshops. The topics they delve into include assisting teachers with classroom management and the finer details of accountability goals. Meetings often include presentations from high-level district officials.

Cameron says it would have been nice to have that kind of training back in the day.

“[As an assistant principal], I never did any of the hiring. I never did any of the budgeting. I did get to go into the classroom, but as far as making an impact on curriculum and instruction, that just didn’t happen,” Cameron recalls. “It’s very hard for

an AP if they’ve never had that exposure prior to moving into the principal’s job.”

Copperas Cove ISD’s proximity to the Fort Hood military base makes it difficult for the 7,900-student district to retain quality teachers and administrators. Approximately 20 percent of teachers have military ties, says Cameron. The percentage is slightly lower for administrators. This puts the district somewhat at the mercy of a workforce that comes and goes, depending on deployments and assignments to other bases.

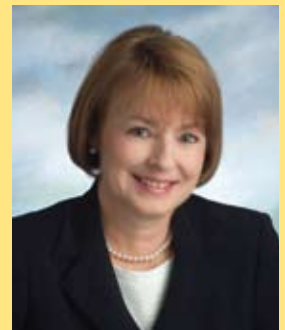
The idea for the academy came during an administrators’ retreat. The district had been using a variety of methods to encourage employees to aim for higher-level jobs, such as pushing graduate programs and advanced certifications and allowing aspiring administrators to fill in for existing administrators who were on extended leave.

Still, employees aiming for the principal’s post expressed that they needed a better understanding of what the job entails.

“APs usually handle discipline and bus issues; principals deal with budgeting and personnel. They have to be an instructional leader,” Cameron says.

Through more discussion at the retreat, the idea of an academy took shape. By the next fall, an academy was up and running and it had clear goals: to close in the aspiring principals’ knowledge gaps, polish their potential and provide networking opportunities.

Participants toured the central office and met school board members; they also had workshops on improving leadership skills. Academy instructors shared presentations on classroom management that participants could then use on



Superintendent  
Rose Cameron

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Copperas Cove High School assistant principals collaborate on an assignment during the Assistant Principals Academy. Pictured left to right are Miguel Timarky, Michael Haase, Cynthia Kostroun and Earl Parcell.

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their campuses with teachers needing guidance on procedural matters and discipline referrals. Other academy topics included accountability and how to track program effectiveness. Participants were able to suggest topics to explore as well, such as interview preparation and time management skills.

In short, the district designed the academy to boost the confidence levels of its participants, as well as to encourage principals to diversify their responsibilities, Cameron says.

Up to 25 staffers participated during the 2008-2009 school year. Based on comments from that class, the participants in this year's academy will receive a more in-depth lesson on budgeting and additional time to network with their peers.

So far, so good, Cameron says.

"We're building the academy as we go, but it has been so successful. It has snowballed," she says. "Principals have asked if teachers who are working on their administrative certification can go."

This fall, Cameron filled vacancies for four principal posts and five assistant principal posts with graduates of the academy.

"That's the by-product of this," she says. "They know my expectations. They know my vision. They know my work ethic, and I can say the same for them."

To encourage participation in the academy, Copperas Cove ISD principals allow other staffers to cover for their assistant principals while

they are in class. Consequently, staffers with aspirations to be assistant principal get an idea of what it's like to serve in that post.



**Jack Brown**

Academy graduate Jack Brown, one of the new hires who recently became principal at Walker Brown Elementary, had been an assistant principal in Copperas Cove ISD for nine years before his recent promotion. He says the academy offered practical knowledge in budgeting and finance, skills for which he admits he needed more training.

"The academy provides a lot of information that a new principal can use right off the bat," Brown says, adding that his experience at the academy is partially what inspired him to pursue the principal post when it became available.

"I realized I could do more," the 30-year education veteran says.

He credits Cameron for taking the initiative to start the Assistant Principals Academy.

"She realizes we have people out here who can do the job, and she's doing her best to cultivate them," says Brown, who encouraged his assistant principal to attend this year's academy.



**Mary Derrick**

Like Brown, academy graduate Mary Derrick had been an assistant principal for many years prior to applying in the fall for the principal's job at Halstead Elementary School.

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"Even after being in administration at different levels, I still came away from the academy with something new and relevant to my job," says Derrick, listing budgeting and personnel management as two training topics that were particularly helpful to her.



Graduate Kayleen Love, newly hired principal of Lee Junior High School, says she "got off to a great start" in her job because of the academy. She adds

that assistant principals can play an important role in helping the academy grow.

"The current APs can best help the academy improve by speaking up when they have a need; they will do themselves the biggest favor by letting the central office know their needs," she says.



Jonathan Bever and Marla Barrick, assistant principals at Clements-Parsons Elementary School, participate in a lesson during the Assistant Principals Academy.

Cameron expects the academy to become a central piece of the district's administrator-quality improvement efforts.

"A lot of times, people think of professional development as 'yuck,'" she says, laughing. "We've tried to put a whole new spin on it. I never thought we'd have people calling and asking to come."

RAVEN L. HILL is a former education reporter for the *Austin American-Statesman*.



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