



CASE STUDY

**Ector County ISD:
Overcoming 350 Teacher Vacancies
Through Coaching**

Ector County ISD At-a-Glance

- **33,600** Students
- **45** Schools
- **85.7%** Graduation Rate
- **67%** Economically Disadvantaged

The Challenge

With a diverse student population of 33,600 in 45 campuses spread across 902 square miles, Ector County Independent School District (ECISD) is the largest public school district in its region, and just a few years ago, that large size came with a Texas-sized problem: in 2019, on the first day of the new school year, ECISD faced 350 teacher vacancies.

Students, teachers, and support staff faced massive disruptions. Parents were frustrated, and the district was already contending with a district accountability rating of "F." Miller says, "We knew we had to do better."

And almost as if by fate, it was that same school year a new superintendent came to town—a person with a vision for what ECISD could be for teachers and students alike.

The Solution

Superintendent Dr. Scott Muri encapsulates his leadership style in a famous quote: "Every organization is perfectly designed to achieve the results they are achieving."

"Dr. Muri still says that to us today—that the results we're getting are because we're designed to get these results," says Miller. "If we don't change the design, we're going to keep getting those results."

When Dr. Muri arrived in ECISD, administrators were working on the district's strategic plan for the year ahead. However, Dr. Muri, seeing where the district currently was and where he wanted it to be, recognized that if ECISD were to achieve the district's vision, the district had to change its design.

That vision, Miller lays out, is their students. "We believe our students are the future. But to reach that, we have to have a high-quality teacher in every single classroom," she says.

Under the new strategic plan, Dr. Muri's first initiative was to establish ECISD's first-ever Talent Development Department. Only with the proper supports in place could ECISD then tackle its most significant problem: those 350 teacher vacancies.

Implementing Talent Development

Before Dr. Muri, "Talent Development" at ECISD was a single person. To begin tackling the district's 350 teacher vacancies—ultimately, a symptom of a much larger retention problem—the new Talent Development Department worked with Dr. Muri on a variety of tasks.

These initiatives ranged from placing high-performing principals in underperforming schools to staffing stipends and more. However, arguably the most notable changes under the new plan were the district's investment into three major initiatives:

- The **Opportunity Culture** initiative provides stipends to teachers to become team mentors and Multi-Classroom Leaders (MCLs).
- The **Teacher Incentive Allotment** (TIA) initiative, which provides teachers a pathway to earn designations and achieve higher earnings.
- The **"Grow Your Own Pipelines"** initiative, where Ector County boasts a variety of programs, pathways, and apprenticeships to cultivate more teachers.

Using Grow in ECISD

Mindy Rogers, ECISD's Director of Talent Development Pipelines, describes how the district uses Grow to facilitate their coaching processes.

"Our district is a big fan of the running record," she explains. "We use that frequently for observations in the classroom and for time stamping."

As Rogers further adds, there are numerous other features the district uses most for their coaching processes and to make their lives easier:

- **District-Specific Forms:** "We appreciate the personalization Grow offers. We have an MCL rubric, where we hold MCLs accountable to their role as coaches, outside of themselves as classroom teachers. And principals have a different rubric they can use to support their MCLs." This personalization allows each group to be supported in the way they need.
- **One Stop for All Coaching Cycle Documentation:** "All of our MCLs, MTRTs, and instructional coaches document their coaching cycles in Grow." Coaches, mentors, school admin, different departments—everybody is in one spot.
- **Quick Feedback:** "We use quick feedback frequently, especially when we're starting out and getting everyone used to Glows and Grows." This feature is great for warming teachers up to feedback and building a culture of coaching.
- **Sentence Stems:** "We use the See It, Name It, Do It coaching observation piece for coaching scripting." Grow builds in sentence stems so leaders don't need to memorize every piece of the ECISD coaching model; it's all embedded in the platform.
- **File Upload:** "We use the file upload feature frequently for PLC documentation. Coaches can upload PowerPoint presentations or any DDI backward planning documentation that the Curriculum and Instruction Department or principal might want."
- **Absence Tracking in Meetings:** "You can mark absenteeism and see who attended and who didn't. We can see what barriers might be in place for that coaching cycle—such as if their team teacher doesn't show up or if they're pulled to do something else on the campus—document that, and add in comments."

- **Coaching the Coaches:** “Even if we’re not on campus with an MCL, we can go into Grow, look at an observation, and give the MCL feedback. Just as they’re giving their team teachers action steps, I’m giving them action steps for their own role.”
- **Analytics:** Grow’s analytics ensure coaching is actually happening across ECISD, which supports their accountability focus. The analytics also identify gaps in instruction, areas of transferable success, and if teachers are progressing to more rigorous instructional strategies.

Note: the above quotes from Mindy Rogers were obtained during an interview conducted in October 2023. Rogers has since departed ECISD.

The Results

ECISD’s establishment of a robust coaching and professional development program has paid dividends for the district. Through their focused efforts on teacher growth and retention, ECISD has witnessed a remarkable transformation since Fall 2019.



Reduced teacher vacancies from 350 to 36 (a 90% decrease)



Achieved major NWEA MAP Growth



Improved TEA accountability rating from an F (2019–20) to a B (2022–23)



Earned 258 teacher designations through the TIA, equating to \$2,400,000 in incentive pay

1. Improving Teacher Retention Through Coaching

Speaking on their efforts to improve teacher retention at ECISD as well as reduce vacancies, Miller explains, “Dr. Muri often talks about what makes teachers want to stay. And yes, we can offer money. We can give stipends. We can do all that.

“But if teachers aren’t successful in the classroom, if their students aren’t successful in the classroom, they’re not going to stay. And we live in a place where oil and gas pay very well. So, how we retain teachers is through coaching.

“By documenting that coaching—having accountability, helping them move forward, and having them see their growth and action steps within Grow—they can look at their PLCs and see where they’ve come in the data-driven instruction process.”

2. Gaining Shared Visibility Into Classrooms

Speaking on how Grow has provided ECISD with visibility across the district, Miller says, "I was a campus principal. From that perspective, something huge about Grow is how easily you can look things up. I can see what one of my teachers is being coached on, what feedback they've been given, and what their barriers are—all before I walk into that classroom.

"To see those action steps beforehand makes the biggest difference. We can be sure we're not giving too many action steps to a teacher, and everyone, even the people working in administration, can see what people are working on and have perspective before we walk into a classroom."

3. Increasing Transparency Across Departments

From the administrative office to each of ECISD's 45 campuses, Grow has given the district a level of coordination that would be impossible without a centralized platform. Miller emphasized this was a crucial shift, as the district previously operated in silos:

"With Grow, everybody can see what's going on at a particular campus. It's been a huge win for the district. Before Grow, it was like, 'Well, the Curriculum and Instruction Department will give them this action step. Next, Talent Development will give them this action step. And then the principal will give them another action step.' When a teacher is receiving multiple action steps they can't meet, does that make them want to stay in a classroom?"

Grow has helped eliminate these silos, and now all of the district's coaching groups are on the platform—speaking to each other, holding each other accountable, and collaborating to fulfill the district's vision.

4. Creating a Culture of Coaching

On the subject of how teachers in ECISD feel about coaching, Miller's face lights up with excitement. "We're working on TIA right now, and it's going to be amazing. We're very excited for those report cards to go out," she says.

"I know teachers now want to be coached; they want to grow. But it's not just for TIA. We have set a culture that our students have to grow, because they deserve this. And so the question becomes, what do we have to do in Grow to ensure our kids graduate?"

"Everything we do goes back to coaching," she adds. "How do we ensure every student, every day, has a high-quality teacher? Because we're not going to do that with 350 vacancies. We're going to do that by having those high-quality teachers in front of us, in front of every student.

"Without Grow, without the accountability it provides, this work wouldn't be possible. You have to have it pulled together. There would be no way, especially with a district of our size, to maintain that."

Continued Commitment to Grow

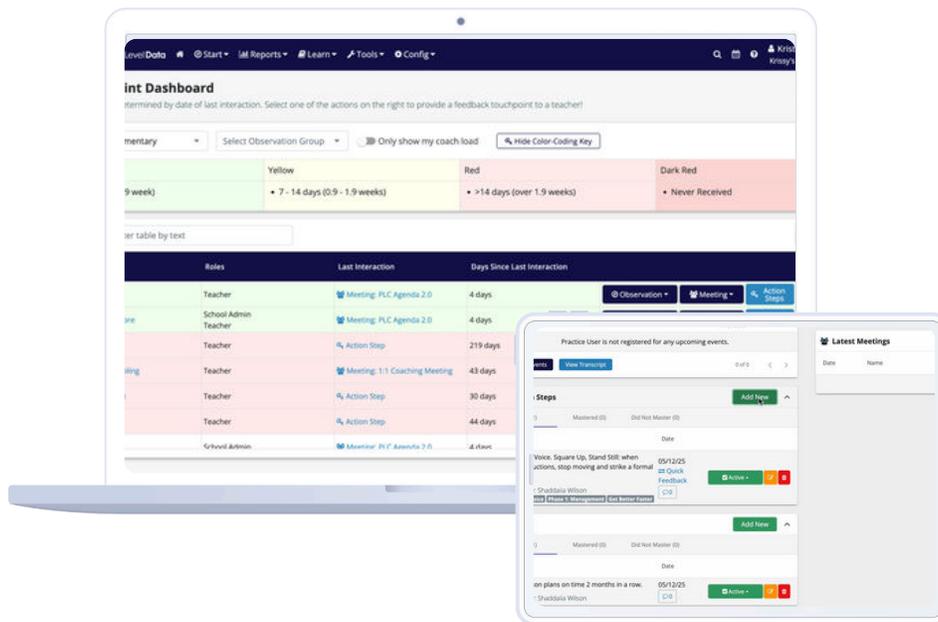
As ECISD continues its journey toward further growing its educators and improving student outcomes, the district remains committed to Grow as a central piece of its coaching culture and success.

"Grow can be used in so many ways that'll help your district improve. In fact, I had the opportunity to listen to another district talking about a platform they use for the same purpose as Grow—but it didn't have all the same features as Grow," Miller says.

"I was like, you know, it's not going to give you the results you need to make that huge growth of the district. Grow has the features you need to pull data and move forward."

And with a sly smile, she adds, "I can't imagine going back to not having Grow. If I ever moved to another district and they didn't use Grow, I'd tell myself, 'Oh, no. You'll have to go back.'"

Discover how Grow can be customized to fit your district's needs, foster a culture of coaching that drives teaching excellence in your schools, and, ultimately, support your journey toward improved teacher retention and student success!



Level Data provides powerful, easy-to-use solutions that remove the complexity from K-12 data management, enabling schools to make better decisions and focus on what matters most—students and their success.