

North Texas Collegiate Academy



A Texas school district is retaining talent and modeling lifelong learning through an investment in a master's degree powered with BloomBoard micro-credentials

INTRODUCTION

Teacher retention is a major issue facing schools today—but never was the problem clearer for superintendent Lisa Stanley than one specific night in the fall of 2018. As the three north Texas charter schools Stanley ran prepared for a back-to-school event with students and parents, she noted that seven classrooms didn't yet have a teacher.

Although she survived the night—thanks to some last-minute hires—Stanley vowed to get to the root of the problem. She quickly realized that while her staff was qualified to teach, they often felt unprepared to connect with the students at [North Texas Collegiate Academy](#). Nearly 100 percent of the students are at-risk.

“They knew how to teach math, but you're not teaching a subject, you're teaching children,” Stanley said.

That same dynamic is playing out across the country. Nationally, 55 percent of educators said this February that they were considering leaving their profession earlier than planned, according to a [survey from the National Education Association](#). This is a marked increase from six months earlier when only 37 percent of respondents felt that way. The top three reasons teachers have considered leaving is inadequate pay or benefits, stress or burnout, and lack of respect.



IMPLEMENTATION

To better prepare her teachers, Stanley partnered with BloomBoard to provide meaningful professional development to her team through a micro-credential-based skill-building program.

Through BloomBoard, Stanley was able to not only offer her teachers the training they needed to deepen their instructional practice, but also put them on the path to earning a master's degree. North Texas Collegiate Academy was able to use a combination of federal funds to help pay for teachers' work, Stanley said.



The fully accredited online [Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction](#) offered in partnership with Oklahoma Christian University, comprises 10 courses and 30 credit hours. The program consists of courses centered on foundational skills for instruction such as Teacher Leadership, Classroom Culture, Student Well-being, and Learning Recovery. Participants can then choose a specialization, including Teaching Students with Disabilities, Teaching English Learners, and Social Emotional Learning.

A micro-credential is a certification of competency in one specific area at a time. BloomBoard's micro-credentials follow an innovative, learn-by-doing approach that begins with self-assessment. Participants then get a set of recommended activities to build knowledge and fill gaps through virtual coaching or by connecting with peers through the online platform.

By doing the needed work in a classroom while they teach, participants create artifacts that provide evidence of their mastery. The teachers then submit a portfolio to BloomBoard and receive feedback from a certified assessor and approver. Once they master a skill, they receive a micro-credential.

A FLEXIBLE AND PRACTICAL APPROACH

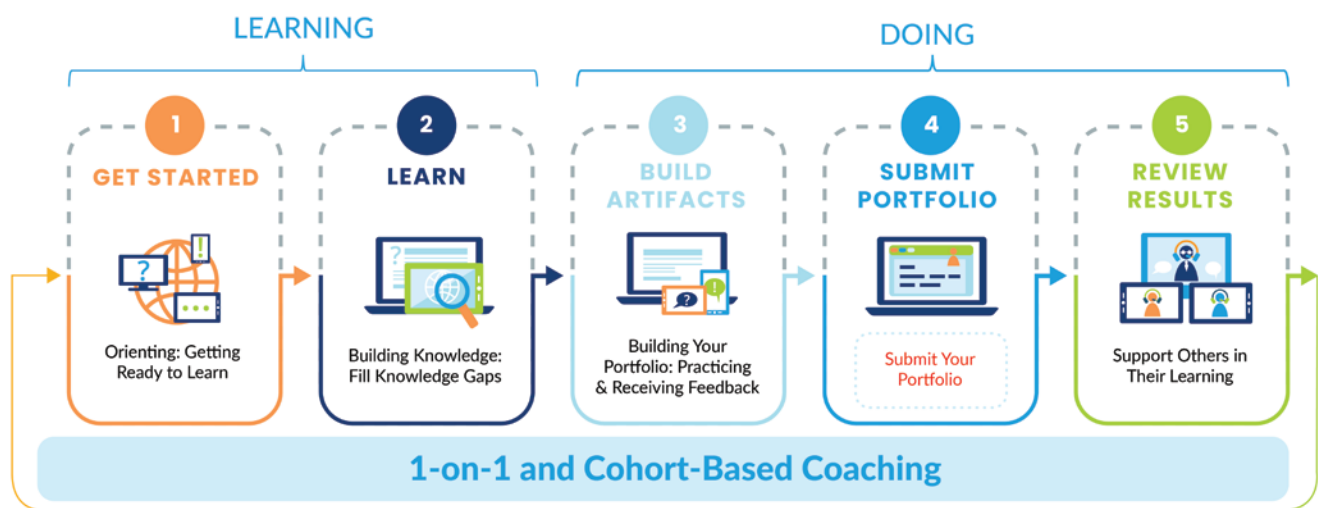
This learn-by-doing approach allows teachers to conduct their studies while teaching in the classroom, dramatically lessening the amount of work they need to do outside of a job that already demands a lot.

“There are no textbooks, no lectures, and no 20-page papers,” Stanley said. Instead, her teachers got coaches who helped them incorporate their work right into their classroom teaching and preparation. Teachers report spending one hour a week with their BloomBoard advisor and group and another two hours creating their weekly lesson plans.

For pre-K teacher Tabatha Griffith, the job-embedded nature of the program is the reason she enrolled, she told the Denton Record-Chronicle in an [article](#) published in March 2022.



“Personally, I probably wouldn’t have done this unless it was job-embedded,” she said. “It’s good for me, and it’s also good for my family. Being able to work and parent without having to go into a classroom was what made this something I could do.”



This model helps both the teachers and the schools, Stanley said. While her staff can accumulate credit toward a master’s degree, her schools attract and retain teachers who are better prepared to meet the demands of their students. In fact, because this outcome is so important to the North Texas schools, the district will pay for 100 percent of the teachers’ tuition if they agree to teach at the school for two years.

Because BloomBoard’s course offerings allow teachers to personalize their training, Stanley has been able to avoid the problem of offering a one-size-fits-all training to teachers who are both new and veteran. “Our whole staff doesn’t need to sit in the same room and hear the same words,” she said.

“The work is so practical and job-embedded, how can student achievement scores not increase?” Stanley said.

The micro-credentials also mirror the school’s mastery-based teaching philosophy, Stanley said. Teachers only earn their credential and credit when they master a skill. This allows them to advance at their own pace and takes away the worry of failing a class.

Presently, all but 1 of the 19 teachers participating in the program to earn a master's degree are first-generation college graduates. Serving a high population of at-risk students in pre-K through eighth grade, participating teachers are modeling a career path made possible through lifelong learning, Stanley said.

For Griffith, achieving a master's degree is more than a personal accomplishment, she told the Denton Record-Chronicle.

“

“I look at it this way,” she said. “I’m doing this, and my kids see me doing it, and they learn that they can do it, too.”

IMPACT ON TEACHER RETENTION

Before implementing other incentives and offering the master's degree program, North Texas Collegiate Academy was losing nearly one-third of its teaching staff each year, according to Stanley. A concerted effort to celebrate teachers and advance their profession, beginning in August of 2018, has enabled staff to better support at-risk students and lessen the impact of pandemic-related disruptions.

For example, in February of 2022, Stanley and staff celebrated the teachers who signed on to participate in the program during a social event in downtown Denton, Texas. Stanley believes that these special ways to recognize teachers are critical for building a strong sense of community.

Stanley marvels at the progress the district has been able to make in such a short time. Three years ago, Stanley's schools had about 70 percent teacher retention. Today, the mark stands at 93 percent.

“Culture wins,” she said. Even though public schools in the area pay more, Stanley finds that not only are her teachers more satisfied with their jobs than they had been, but they are also recruiting their friends to come teach with them.



Learn more about how BloomBoard's programs address today's challenges [here](#).