

Lubbock ISD superintendent homing in on perfecting her schools to boost student outcomes

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In a large, diverse district like Lubbock Independent School District, some may call trying to communicate with every family a fool's errand, but not Dr. Kathy Rollo.

Since taking on the role as superintendent just two years ago, Dr. Rollo has worked to ensure Lubbock ISD is using its resources responsibly, and that any and all problems the district faces are being solved with input from all those impacted by her decisions.

"Communication is the absolute most important part of my job, really," Dr. Rollo says. "We want to make sure we're engaging, building and nurturing strong relationships within the community. Communication and collaboration and thinking both critically and outside the box is what will take the district to the next level."

Dr. Rollo and Lubbock ISD trustees recently announced new goals to be achieved by 2024. Among them: all students will be served in high-rated schools; and all classrooms will be staffed by highly effective teachers.

Every district in the country wants high-quality teachers staffing high-quality schools, but Dr. Rollo says Lubbock ISD will reach their goals, firstly by supporting the teachers and administrators at each campus—something she knows from her own time working in the classroom is vital.

"Having had that experience, especially at the campus-level as a principal, has been really helpful in this job because they're the ones interacting every day with the children and their parents," Dr. Rollo says. "So having been there and done that I know how important it is, and I can help and coach our principals on different little things they can do to help encourage their teachers, families and kids."

Still, it doesn't matter how impressive a campus or its teachers are if students are not in class to fully participate.



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Although there isn't an attendance crisis in Lubbock, Dr. Rollo found it could be better.

Attendance in the district usually hovers at a rate between 96 and 97 percent, but there are pockets of schools that struggle with attendance more than others, and rates tend to be lower in high school and in pre-K and kindergarten.

It became clear, Dr. Rollo said, that the district needed to do a better job of tracking attendance, freeing up school staff to better support kids, and communicating to parents early and often about the importance of attendance if Lubbock is to reach its goals.

Susan Cook, COO and Leadership Coach at School Innovations & Achievement—which is now working with the district improve student attendance by streamlining attendance tracking and increasing meaningful communication with families—says Dr. Rollo's perseverance is what sets her apart.

"We so often see leaders who say average is good enough, but not Dr. Rollo," Cook says. "It is clear through her communication, support, engagement and goal-setting that she understands how to create a culture of continuous improvement. We are proud to partner with districts that have incredible leaders like Dr. Rollo who set the tone for what can be accomplished."

Dr. Rollo has spent a lifetime working toward improving her community, which begins with "ensuring that every child has equal access to great opportunities to learn and be prepared for college and jobs and whatever it is they want to pursue."

The work may not always be easy, but working to make Lubbock into a place of opportunity for all kids just seems to make sense when there is a personal connection.

"This is the town I grew up in—it's home to me," Dr. Rollo says.