

1

Here We Are

Well, after all this time and studying, including obtaining your master's degree, it is time to prepare that glorious thing we call the 068 Principal TExES Exam. This is not a preparation book. For that, get a copy of my *Passing the Principal TExES Exam: Keys to Certification and School Leadership*, 2nd edition. There is an assumption that you have thoroughly read and studied that book before doing the practice tests that are in this book.

This book does, however, give a broad review of the three domains and, later, reviews test-taking strategies. But there will be a *review*. For a detailed analysis of the domains, competencies, and test-taking strategies, you really need to read and study my *Passing the Principal TExES Exam: Keys to Certification and School Leadership*, 2nd edition, which is also available from Corwin.

■ BOOK RATIONALE

This book was written to provide students field-tested practice tests that not only provide the answers but connect the answers to the competency and the subcompetency. In other words, it aligns the correct answers with the competencies and subcompetencies so you can understand why you got a certain question right or wrong. This will tell you the areas in which you need to focus further study.

■ THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework around which the test is built is based on stated legislated standards that translate into three domains and nine competencies. Again, each of these is gone over in great detail in *Passing the Principal TExES Exam: Keys to Certification and School Leadership*, 2nd

edition. But I provide an overview of the three domains here to start everyone off thinking like the test developers think *before* you start the practice tests. Think of it as School Leadership 101: Everything You Learned in Graduate School.

DOMAIN I: SCHOOL COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP ■

There are three main concepts in school community leadership. These are the concepts they will be testing to see if you know them. They regard the following:

- School culture
- School climate
- School vision

The school culture is the things we value at our school. Each school is different, has different demographics, and a different blending of cultures. Therefore, each will have a different campus culture. However, the one thing they should all have in common is *high expectations* for *all* students. Remember, you reap what you sow. Therefore, if you do not expect much productivity from your students, that is exactly what you are going to get. Not much.

However, if you expect all your students to learn, to be productive, and to behave respectfully, you will set expectations and rules that address these purposes/goals. Always reach higher than you think you and your students can possibly achieve. It has been said to reach for the moon personally and professionally. If you miss, you will still land among the stars. Never deviate from this. Always stay positive, and always have high expectations. A school culture that reaches for the moon is a school culture that will be successful.

School Climate

The school climate is how it feels inside a school. Whether in business, in education, or in life in general, people like being treated well and with respect. This starts at the top, and on the campus level, guess who is the top. You are! You are the principal. Therefore, you set the *tone* for how everyone else is going to act. Start with the faculty and staff. They should exemplify the same quality, never-give-up attitudes and dispositions that you do. They should believe in every student, as you do. They should *happily* be differentiating instruction to meet the individual needs of every child. As the proverb says, they may grow tired, but not weary in doing the right things at all times.

How does it feel in the ideal school? Is there a feeling of warmth and caring? Or is there a feeling of “Whatever. Some of the students will pass. Some won’t. Whatever.” No! In an ideal school, every adult cares about every student. In competency 003, it says the principal is an advocate for *all* students. It does not say just the ones who are easy to teach or who speak English.

That is the climate of the school you wish to create, and it is definitely the climate you wish to select answers for on this test.

School Vision

The vision is everything. Without a vision, we have no goals and no road map that shows us how to get from where we are (reality) to where we want to be (the vision). Schools that are content to stay where they are, regardless of what level that may be, are stuck in quicksand. We do not want to be stuck in quicksand. We want to collaboratively discuss issues, find common ground, and determine what our vision of excellence is for this year. Next, we determine what goals will get us from where we are (reality) to the vision (ideal). After that, we determine the strategies for each of the goals that we will do on a daily/weekly/monthly basis to help us get to that specific goal. We do that for *every* goal. We also continuously assess how we are making progress toward each of the goals. If we are not making progress toward a goal, we need to modify and adjust what we are doing because what we are currently doing is obviously not working. It will suddenly not start working. However, we would not know that if we were not continuously assessing what we are doing in *all* areas.

Remember, the vision is everything. Without a vision, we fail. Our vision is where we are marching onward toward every single day, making progress, sometimes by baby steps to get where we want to be. We want each and every one of our students to be successful, even the ones who are hard to teach or do not care about learning. Thus, we want *all* our students to be successful.

Until all our students are successful, we are not there yet.

■ DOMAIN II: INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

The three main concepts that the test developers want to know that you know how to do and apply are these:

- Curriculum (what we teach)
- Instruction (how we differentiate to teach it)
- Staff evaluation and development

Curriculum

In Texas, our curriculum is largely test driven. We are not saying we like it that way. We are just saying that is largely the way it is. Our state has many high-stakes tests that drive both students and teachers to early insanity. Many teachers “teach to the test” because the test is how students are measured and, often, how the teachers themselves are measured.

This may be reality, but it is not ideal. In an ideal situation, teachers are differentiating for each student regardless of how many students they have. They are individualizing. They are strongly addressing problem solving and higher-order thinking skills every day. They are actively engaging students in learning. They know and care about every student.

They are teaching *ideally*.

The test will be assessing you to see if you know how to instruct ideally, not just traditionally or, worse, easily. Consider the needs of *every* student and modify and differentiate the curriculum accordingly.

Instruction

Whereas curriculum is what we teach, instruction is how we teach it. Two teachers could teach Algebra I next door to each other. They could have the same type students. They definitely have the same Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) to address for the high-stakes testing.

But the two teachers could be teaching the same concepts in completely different ways. One could be very traditional, “stand and deliver,” or “drill and kill.” Whereas, the other could be actively engaging each student, differentiating instruction for each student, and frankly, making learning interesting and, horror of horrors, fun! You may think this second teacher does not exist. But they do. They exist all over America. They are our unsung heroes, not making a dime more than the “drill and kill” teachers next door. These teachers are giving their all for the needs of students. They are working to fulfill the campus vision.

They are working to do right by every child every day. *That* is differentiated instruction! Differentiated instruction is what the test developers are seeking to see that you know.

Staff Development and Evaluation

These are two connected but independent issues. A teacher’s staff development should be individual and based on two things:

- The teacher’s evaluation
- The needs of the teacher’s students

Usually, these two things are connected. Teachers who are teaching appropriately are the ones whose students are learning the most. This will show up in testing.

This brings us to the disaggregation of data. It is imperative that you study your testing data, your Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), and any other data you have to determine your individual and campuswide strengths and weaknesses. High scores mean strengths. Low scores indicate weaknesses. For some students, a strength may be the same score that is a weakness for another student because all students are different.

Regardless, each teacher should have *meaningful* evaluations as characterized in Domain II. Low teacher performance will be an indicator of low student performance—which is exactly what we do not want. Formal evaluations are important. Walk-throughs are just as important. Teacher development should be based on the teacher’s areas of low performance. Staff development is not “one size fits all.” It should be individualized to meet the needs of the teachers to thus meet the needs of the students.

DOMAIN III: ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP

Administrative leadership is about the management of the school. It is only indirectly related to teaching and learning in that everyone must have a safe facility in which to teach and learn. The three main concepts they expect you to know from this domain are the following:

- School facilities (the buildings and grounds)
- School safety
- Finance

School Facilities

The school facilities are the buildings, grounds, air-conditioning, heating, and everything else that goes into making the campus a safe and healthy place to learn. This is where the test developers will ask you questions regarding what to do if the roof blows off the building, the bathrooms overflow, and the like. (Answer: Follow district policy.)

If students do not have a safe and effective place to learn, they won't. School bond issues are built around these issues, but that is not your problem. It will be next year when you take the superintendent exam.

School Safety

Student safety is tied closely to the facilities, but it goes on to things such as who has custody of a child, to whom you can release a child from school, what medications a child should receive, and things of this nature. If the parents are divorced, you should know who has legal custody. If the noncustodial parent arrives and just tells you the custodial parent says it is OK to let him or her pick up the child, unless you have it in writing, that OK doesn't exist. The judge's ruling stands. Talk is cheap. Legal papers are legal papers. They rule.

This is also the area regarding the safety of the facilities, which can include tornadoes and other bad weather, and worst of all, people with weapons who enter a building (including students) with an intent to harm. You must have a crisis management plan, practice it, and not be afraid to make the decision to use it, if needed. It is always best to err on the side of caution than to bear the consequences of not doing so.

Finance

Each district has its own ways of developing budgets, but some things are always the same:

- It should be developed collaboratively based on the needs of the students.
- Once the board has adopted a budget for your campus and you have received it, *stay in it*. Plan ahead! It is going to be a long year if you spend everything before Christmas. While there are some, not all, instances where monies can be moved around, the basic idea is to use the budget you were dealt. If you continuously make too many "mistakes," the superintendent may decide to replace you with someone who can add and subtract.

■ IT'S YOUR TURN

Now it is your turn to study the strategies of how to apply this theoretical framework on your own. That is not the purpose of this book. Remember all this is explained in significant detail in *Passing the Principal TExES Exam: Keys to Certification and School Leadership*, 2nd edition. If you do not have it, get it *now* from Corwin or your local college bookstore.