

From Hire to Higher: Commitment to Excellence

Arturo Gonzalez — Clear Creek ISD
Tracy Washington — Pasadena ISD

Growing In or Growing Out Culture

The Mindset Shift

Fixing retention with training	→	Developing people intentionally
Managing people reactively	→	Leading proactively with purpose
Filling roles, not developing people	→	Building a culture of excellence

The Commitment to Excellence Framework

Our structure for building consistency, developing people, and defining excellence.

Consistency	Development	Excellence
Standards · Expectations · Accountability	Growth Pathways · Coaching · Certification	Defined · Visible · Consistent

What It Looks Like in Practice

• Structured Onboarding • Technician Profile • Feedback Loops	• Communication Expectations • Cross-Training • Values-Tied Recognition
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Who Was Impacted

Technicians:	Campuses & Principals:	The Organization:
• Felt seen, supported, developed • Clearer expectations • Growth pathways created purpose	• More consistent technician quality • Stronger campus relationships • Principals gained confidence	• Increased trust • Shared language around excellence • Culture people could feel

The Honest Truth

What Improved:

- Improved culture and morale
- Clear, consistent expectations
- Stronger communication
- Better onboarding
- Increased sense of belonging
- Staff felt developed, not just managed

What's Still True:

- We still lose people to industry
- The pay gap still exists
- Not every transition is easy

Reflection Questions

1. Are you developing people or filling roles?
2. Is your onboarding a checklist or a genuine investment in someone's growth?
3. What does excellence look like in your organization?
4. Have you clearly defined what excellent performance looks like at every level?
5. Does your onboarding build culture?
6. Does your process reflect your values, or just your logistics?

Notes:

Every person who grows, whether they stay or move on, is evidence that your culture is working.
From Hire to Higher: Commitment to Excellence | Arturo Gonzalez & Tracy Washington

From Hire to Higher: Commitment to Excellence

A framework for building a "**Growing In or Growing Out**" culture for school district leaders. It goes beyond onboarding to intentionally develop people, teams, and future leaders.

Who We Are

Arturo Gonzalez

Director of Networking and Tech Services Clear Creek ISD
- League City, TX

- Large suburban K-12 public school district south of Houston
- 39,000 Students - 53 Sites
- 4,200 Staff
- 73 Technology Staff
- 76,000+ Support Tickets Annually

Tracy Washington

Director of Technology Support Services Pasadena ISD -
Pasadena, TX

- Large suburban K-12 public school district south of Houston
- 43,700 Students - 77 Sites
- 8,000 Staff
- 116 Technology staff
- 91,000+ Support Tickets Annually

Our Story - Why We're Here

Real Operational Leadership

Lessons from the field, not a textbook

Real Retention Challenges

Competing against industries we can't outpay

Culture Transformation

A framework built from necessity and belief

Where We Started

From Principals:

- "Don't move my good technician"
- Fear of losing strong support staff
- Inconsistent technician quality across campuses

From Technicians:

- Lack of communication
- Lack of growth opportunities
- Feeling disconnected
- Feeling unsupported
- Low morale
- Lack of belonging
- Disconnect between central office and campus staff

What Needed to Change

The Challenge — Compensation, Competition & Culture

K-12 salaries cannot always compete with private industry. Some technicians could increase their salary by 30–70% simply by leaving. And the competition is real.

We Compete Against:

NASA

Aerospace Contractors

Petrochemical
Industry

Energy Sector

Healthcare Systems

Managed Service Providers

Corporate IT

- ❑ Turnover isn't always a failure — sometimes it's the natural result of developing people who become more valuable.

"If we cannot always win with compensation... how do we win with culture?"

What We Changed

Mindset Shift

Fixing retention with training



Developing people intentionally

Managing people reactively



Leading proactively with purpose

Filling roles, not developing people



Building a culture of excellence

Leadership Partnership



This wasn't a program we rolled out — this was a shift in how we led together.

Tracy brought: IT leadership experience, classroom and instructional background, industry certifications and training pathways — and a deep belief that we don't just support systems, we develop people.

The Commitment to Excellence Framework

Consistency

Standards · Expectations · Accountability

Development

Growth Pathways · Coaching · Certification

Excellence

Defined · Visible · Consistent



What Was Impacted — Operations

The framework only matters if it shows up in daily operations.

Structured Onboarding

Clear expectations, values, and identity from Day One

Technician Profile

Defined standards for what excellence looks like in the role

Feedback Committee

Regular, structured feedback from campus techs, giving them a voice in the decisions that affect their work

Communication Expectations

Clear norms for how we communicate across teams and campuses

Cross-Training

Staff build skills beyond their role, strengthening team resilience

Values-Tied Recognition

Recognition reflects culture and pillars, not just output or seniority

"This is where culture became visible."

Who Was Impacted — People

Stronger Relationships. Increased Trust. Better Consistency.

Technicians

- Felt seen, supported, and developed
- Clearer expectations reduced frustration
- Growth pathways created purpose and direction

Campuses & Principals

- More consistent technician quality across campuses
- Stronger relationships between campus staff and central office
- Principals gained confidence in their support teams

The Organization Overall

- Increased trust between leadership and staff
- A shared language around excellence and growth
- Culture became something people could feel — not just describe

The Honest Truth — Benefits & Reality

What Changed. What Didn't. Why That's Okay.

What Improved:

- ✓ Improved culture and morale
- ✓ Clear, consistent expectations
- ✓ Stronger communication across teams
- ✓ Better onboarding experience
- ✓ Increased sense of belonging
- ✓ Staff felt developed, not just managed

What's Still True:

- ! We still lose people to industry
- ! The pay gap still exists
- ! Not every transition is easy

"Systems don't transform organizations. People do. Hire to higher is about leaving people better than we found them."

How This Applies to Others...YOU

 These questions are most powerful when asked honestly — and revisited regularly as your culture evolves.

Are you developing people or filling roles?

Is your onboarding a checklist — or a genuine investment in someone's professional identity and growth?

What does excellence look like in your organization?

Have you clearly defined and consistently communicated what excellent performance, communication, and leadership look like at every level?

Does your onboarding build culture?

Does your process reflect your values — or just your logistics?

From Hire to Higher

"From Hire to Higher is about leaving people better than we found them. Because at the end of the day... systems don't transform organizations — people do."

01

Develop People

Not just employees —
professionals and future leaders

02

Define Excellence

Make it visible, consistent, and
tied to real values

03

Act Consistently

Vision without action changes
nothing. Culture is built daily.

Questions

We'd love to hear your questions, challenges, and ideas.
What resonates with your organization?

Download the Presentation

Scan the QR code to access the slides and
resources.

