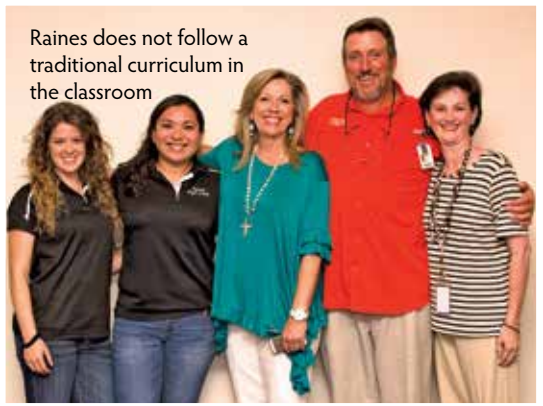


RAINES HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL Becky Bracewell-Tucker

Embracing a unique program that prepares Katy ISD students with real-world experiences and project-based learning



Raines does not follow a traditional curriculum in the classroom



Bracewell-Tucker introduced project-based learning at Raines



Becky Bracewell-Tucker has served as principal of Raines High School since 2008, and prides herself on their unique learning style

Written by Marianne Horton | Photography by Sara Isola

A school where students design golf courses, manage presidential campaigns, and create marketing materials is what Becky Bracewell-Tucker envisioned for Raines High School. When she stepped in as principal in 2008, students spent the entire school day in the computer lab, completing online coursework for graduation. Under her direction, however, the alternative school transitioned to project-based learning, which she said has not only increased test scores but also student enthusiasm, motivation, teamwork, and success.

“When you talk about creating kids for the future, it isn’t about creating kids who know a bunch of stuff,” Bracewell-Tucker says. “Employers want to hire kids with grit who know how to solve problems.”

No Lesson Plans

In each subject area, students work on designated group projects for about two weeks. In geometry, for example, students learn about slopes and angles by building full-sized putting greens. In social studies, they run presidential campaigns, which require them to not only learn current issues, but also how to debate their viewpoints.

While the school follows the state’s educational guidelines and the district’s curriculum, Bracewell-Tucker gives her teachers free reign to design and implement whatever projects they see fit for their classrooms, which differs from Bracewell-Tucker’s previous districts where she has taught.

“My teachers make a huge commitment when they come here,” she says. “Unlike other schools, there is no lesson plan or rubric to follow.”

Small Class Sizes

Asrar Maye began teaching science at Raines last August. She specifically wanted a small classroom environment for her new school, which she found at Raines where the largest class had 16 students. “[At a small school], you get to know the students one-on-one,” says Maye.

“Mrs. Tucker has taken this school to a whole new level with project-based learning (PBL) and the PBL culture,” she says. “She treats all of the kids with respect. They are treated as adults - they are given freedom, but there is also discipline and structure.”

Maddie Williams was one of those students. Her sophomore year, she transferred from Taylor High School to Raines after researching the school’s alternative teaching methods. “The first time I met Ms. Bracewell-Tucker, she knew my name, and I didn’t really know who she was,” Williams says. “By about the third week of school, she has every student’s name memorized.”

Hands-on Approach

Raines’ learning system immediately clicked for Williams who previously struggled with academics. Because of her success, she worked on the school’s student-led marketing team to reach out to other students in Katy ISD until she graduated.

Bracewell-Tucker, who has seven children and eight grandchildren of her own adds, “What is going on at Raines is something I wish and hope somebody is doing for my kids every day.” KM

MARIANNE HORTON a Taylor High School graduate, wrote and edited for newspapers and magazines before returning to Katy to raise her family.

WHAT IS RAINES?

Many district residents may have a misconception of what Raines is all about. “For whatever reason, the community seems to believe Raines is where the bad kids or the kids who can’t handle regular classes go, but that is not true,” says Bracewell-Tucker. “In actuality, kids *apply* to Raines. These are kids who just learn better with a hands-on approach. We don’t lecture here. It’s just not part of our instructional model.”



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