

# Success Story

## Colquitt County Schools Systematic Process and Stakeholder Input Helps District Solve Challenging Enrollment Issues



### Recap/Key Points

- Using best thinking of stakeholders regarding the enrollment process, changes were recommended that resulted in an increase of 50 students in the first year
- With potential problems analyzed and planned for, formal complaints decreased to zero
- Using a clear-cut process to gather and utilize information resulted in innovative solutions

### District Information

Located in South Georgia, Colquitt County School System serves over 9,000 students in ten elementary schools, a middle school, one junior high, and one high school. Seventy five percent of students are eligible for free/reduced lunch. Located in an agricultural region, Colquitt has a large and growing migrant population. The District and the community have worked hard to provide maximum supports for all children in the community.

### Problem/Challenge

Colquitt County is in the enviable position of offering a robust universal pre-K program for every eligible four-year-old in the district. The district prides itself on ensuring pre-K students receive the same high-quality resources available in K-12 classrooms.

At one point, pre-K averaged about the same number of students as the average numbers in other grades—about 700 students per grade level. By the 2018–19 school year pre-K enrollment had declined to 470 students. Fewer students in pre-K led to more students being retained in Kindergarten. This result affected the system achievement gap and caused a disproportionate status in special education.

Despite the advantages of universal pre-K, the program was perceived negatively by a large percentage of Colquitt County citizens. Angry phone calls, rants in the local paper, and complaints to board members were commonplace.

Further exploration uncovered that the primary source of frustration was with the enrollment process. Each elementary school housed its own pre-K program. Enrollment was on a first-come, first-served basis and parents would wait in long lines in the parking lot—sometimes overnight—to get their students into the school of their choice. Anger and disappointment resulted if someone did not get their chosen school. In addition, this system penalized the many people who, with work or other obligations, were not able to commit this much time to waiting in line. Each time enrollment procedures were tweaked due to significant complaints, it just added further complications, confusion and frustration.

## Solution

The District leaders charged with addressing the issues started by collecting data and researching pre-K enrollment in Georgia and exploring other programs, issues, etc. Using Situation Appraisal, a process for gaining deeper understanding of complex issues, leaders were able to collect input and issues from key stakeholders—individually and in groups. Stakeholders included parents who had had a negative pre-K enrollment experience, parents whose children would soon be eligible for pre-K principals, district leaders, pre-K teachers and staff. Using TregoED’s Potential Problem Analysis, leaders were able to glean participant reaction and input to various options and possibilities.

Based on information gathered and prioritized, an elegant and simple solution was developed: have students attend pre-K in the same elementary school their elementary attendance boundaries designate. Pre-K students would be enrolled with a similar registration process as other grades. This eliminated the competition for different schools and allowed the schools to build relationships with pre-K students and their families (and vice versa). It was also fair and easy to understand as it used the same existing attendance boundaries as elementary grades. An in-depth Potential Problem Analysis was completed on this solution resulting in a clear implementation plan with actions to prevent a multitude of problems and procedures to address those that arise.

A new, clear-cut registration process allows parents to enroll their students on one of several enrollment dates, eliminating overnight lines and people losing time at work. In addition, there is a fair delineated process for handling over enrollment or exceptions.

Once the Superintendent approved the recommendation, the new process was communicated and rolled out to the community.

Using TregoED strategies and stakeholder involvement to examine and understand a complex systemic problem, the district leadership team was able to develop a better alternative, and successfully prepare for and execute implementation.

## Results

In the first year of the new enrollment process, enrollment is up by 50 students. In addition, public perception seems better and there have been no formal complaints lodged with the pre-K office. Principals and others involved clearly understand and support the process. There is a better perception of the pre-K program in the community and less anxiety for pre-K staff. It also helped shift thinking and practices within buildings and encouraged grade level staff to begin building connections with students and families earlier as well as building connections across grade levels. Assistant principals began creating a multi-tiered system of support that stretched from pre-K to 5<sup>th</sup> and pre-K teachers are now included in school level activities.

“Use of TregoED process helped us understand a thorny issue—and develop a superior solution that produced widespread acceptance and better results.”

Nick Chastain, Director of Early Learning  
Colquitt County Schools

