



# Klein ISD News

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## More Than a Rating: Epps Island Elementary

KLEIN, TX – “When I walk into Epps Island, all my senses are activated,” said Aida Interiano, Klein ISD multilingual program coordinator. “I see classrooms that are set up intentionally to foster learning. The love for children is palpable, and I see teachers creating concrete pathways for students to experience opportunity, and that leaves a sweet taste in my mouth.”

Over a three-year period, Epps Island Elementary has made significant strides both academically and in its school culture with LaToya Wynne at the helm as the school’s principal.

“Three years ago, I was charged with leading Epps Island Elementary,” said Wynne. “We were in Improvement Required, which means that, a state representative was here that worked with our campus.”

Though coming into a challenging situation, Wynne and the Epps Island staff were ready to embrace a change that would place the focus on students.

“We truly embody the Professional Learning Community (PLC) structure,” said Wynne. “We know that we want to add value to every student that crosses the threshold of our school.”

PLCs consist of educators that meet regularly to share expertise and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of their students. Epps Island initiated PLCs campus-wide for each grade level to assist in enhancing student achievement.

“We’re all dependent on each other and it helps that we are always focused on a target,” said Epps Island Elementary teacher, Evelynn Cornejo. “Our PLC is just a great channel for that because we’re able to have discussions with our peers and we’re able to learn from each other so we can strive for better instruction.”

Through dedicated PLCs, placing students first, and a shift in the culture at the campus, Epps Island marked a milestone during the 2016 accountability testing.

“This year we earned our first distinction with an accountability system Index 2 for student growth and student progress,” said Wynne.

Index 2 measures how the campus works to close the achievement gaps between various student groups while also improving the overall campus score.

The student-focus and culture shift permeates throughout the entire building. Every student, teacher, and parent that enter the campus are in one accord – success for every child at Epps Island.

“We are all about kids and any decision that’s made at Epps Island is about students,” said Vicki Varga, Epps Island assistant principal. “We consider what’s best for our kids before we do anything else.”

During this three-year period, the campus has reached out to students and parents by hosting various academic and community activities.

“We support them in multiple ways and instilling a love for academics through our literacy programs and through our other scholar programs,” said Tasha James, Epps Island librarian.

The Klein Independent School District (ISD) is located in north Harris County and has more than 50,600 students in its 31 elementary, one early childhood/pre-K center, nine intermediate, and four high schools. Visit the district online at [www.kleinisd.net](http://www.kleinisd.net), and follow Klein ISD on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or through [KleINTOUCH](#).

Because of the regular push from the campus as it works to connect with the community, Epps Island is experiencing growth with its community relationships.

“Within the community, we have academics and action monthly meetings,” said Epps Island special education teacher, Todd Carrigan. “It’s always focusing on academics whether it’s Math Night, Reading, or Fine Arts. It’s things along those lines to help bring in (community members), and it seems like every time they tally up the number of visitors we have a record number.”

During the last 36 months, Epps Island has seen exponential growth however, the new rating system passed by the 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature in 2015, has the potential to diminish this current success. House Bill 2804 made significant changes to the state public school accountability system, moving the ratings from either Met Standard or Improvement Required to the creation of an A-F rating system for district and campus performance. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) Commissioner must submit a report to the Legislature by Jan. 1, 2017, exhibiting the grade each district and campus would have received for the 2016 testing period.

Like all the other measures used to evaluate schools, Epps Island principal Wynne further explained how the A-F ratings offer only a portion of the total picture of a school or district.

“The A-F rating system cannot embody the greatness that is here every single day with our teachers and with our students,” said Wynne. “And it really can dampen the heart of a school. Look at growth, look at the great things that are happening at the school that can be measured. We cannot be measured on one day or one test.”

The ratings assigned to each district and campus will include five domains:

- Domain I Meeting standards at satisfactory and college readiness levels on State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR).
- Domain II STAAR annual improvement at satisfactory and college readiness levels.
- Domain III Reducing “academic achievement gaps among students with different racial and ethnic groups or socioeconomic backgrounds.”
- Domain IV Academic attainments (other than STAAR)
  - High School: including dropout and graduation rates, Career and Technical Education (CTE) sequence completion, Advanced Placement (AP) course completion, Texas Success Initiative (TSI) benchmarks and more for high schools;
  - Middle School: chronic absenteeism rate, dropout rates, and college and career preparatory instruction for middle schools;
  - Elementary schools attendance.
- Domain V Three self-selected categories of the Community and Student Engagement (CASE) ratings.

The overall grade of A-F will be calculated using the following percentages: Domains I-III equals 55 percent of the grade, Domain IV equals 35 percent, and Domain V equals 10 percent. The new rating system will be formally applied to campuses and districts starting in the 2017-2018 school year.

For more information about the A-F rating system and a complete list of all indicators, please visit, [http://tea.texas.gov/About\\_TEA/News\\_and\\_Multimedia/Correspondence/TAA\\_Letters/Indicators\\_for\\_A-F\\_Academic\\_Accountability\\_System/](http://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/News_and_Multimedia/Correspondence/TAA_Letters/Indicators_for_A-F_Academic_Accountability_System/).

Many employees at the campus feel as strongly as Principal Wynne about the A-F rating system and what it could possibly mean for the campus and other schools throughout the state.

Epps Island assistant principal, Tonya Brain said, “Epps Island is more than just a rating because this is home for all of us.”

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“We are more than just a grade letter,” said Epps Island teacher Amanda Deeds. “Here at Epps Island and even in the Klein district, because we make connections with our children.”

Any accountability label is a comma, not a period. The A-F rating is one indicator of performance, but there are many others that are equally important and Epps Island is more than a rating. Epps Island is a caring learning community where students thrive, teachers and staff care and work hard, and the parents and community partnerships provide support.

**Image Copy: Epps Island earns its first distinction on the STAAR test.**

**Image Copy 2: Epps Island holds monthly activities for parents.**

**Image Copy 3: Epps Island hosts student and parent Math, Reading, and Fine Arts nights throughout the school year.**

**Image Copy 4: Epps Island is located in the Klein ISD.**

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