



Gregory-Portland Independent School District

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**Melinda Pena hired to serve as T.M. Clark Elementary
Principal beginning next School Year, 2022-23**

Gregory-Portland ISD Superintendent Dr. Michelle Cavazos has announced that Melinda Pena has been hired to serve as T.M. Clark Elementary School Principal beginning with the 2022-23 school year. Pena has been serving as Assistant Principal at the same campus since she joining the G-P family in 2018.

“We have a phenomenal community of learners at T.M. Clark, and I am extremely proud to serve them,” Pena said. “Perhaps the greatest opportunity this position will offer is the chance to empower others to reach their full potential. I have to credit our retiring Principal, Mr. Bobby Rister, for giving me the same opportunity.” Pena said one of the most important commitments she intends to make for her students and her team is to lead by example. “We’re all learners, regardless of age, experience, position, or background,” she said. “Here at T.M. Clark we believe ‘teaching means caring,’ and I intend to live out that model by making decisions with the best interest of others in mind and a heart that remains in the right place.”

Sarah Hodges, Executive Director for School Leadership and supervisor to all G-PISD Principals, said Pena’s level of integrity, talent, compassion, and authenticity make her the ideal candidate for this position. “She’s one of a kind, and has been invaluable to the T.M. Clark family for many years,” Hodges said. “She’s been instrumental as a campus leader there already, and we are excited to see her take the helm next year.”

Dr. Cavazos cited that Pena mentioned being “compelled” to maintain a focus on leadership and learning at T.M. Clark, and said she agrees that both are paramount for any high-performing school environment. “(Pena) mentioned leadership and learning as being ‘indispensable to one another,’ and I couldn’t agree more,” said Dr. Cavazos. “We believe that every one of our students is a leader AND a learner, and we believe that each of our team members are as well. That belief, coupled with the actions that support growth in these areas, will allow us to achieve even more together – as a team, and as individuals.”

She also extended congratulations to Pena, and also thanks to Rister for his leadership as Principal at the campus since 2007. “Several of our current Principals served as Assistant Principals under Mr. Rister before their promotions – a testament to the kind of leader he has been for our school district. We wish him a well-deserved retirement, and thank him for all he’s done to ‘raise leaders’ across G-PISD!” In addition to having served as Principal, Rister was Assistant Principal at T.M. Clark from 2004 to 2007. He was first hired in 2002 as a Special Education Teacher for G-PISD.

Per standard practice when hiring a school principal, the district released a survey to students, families, teachers and staff of T.M. Clark Elementary School earlier this spring requesting their feedback and what they desired to find in the next school leader. This information was compiled into the [Principal Profile \(click to view\)](#) for T.M. Clark, and was used by the hiring committee during interviews.

Pena has 14 years’ experience in the field of education, and has served as a Teacher and Instructional Coach prior to becoming an Assistant Principal, and now a Principal. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies and a Master of Science in Reading from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. She also earned a Principal Certification from the same university. Pena graduated from San Benito High School in San Benito, Texas, and is now extremely proud to call the Gregory-Portland community her home.

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