

Trevor Hance

TEEA 2016 Winner: Individual



Inspiring elementary students to be part of a legacy of environmental protection.

Between the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve and Laurel Mountain Elementary is a small tract of school-owned, undeveloped land that was previously used by one teacher to give lessons to a handful of students. Thanks to Mr. Trevor Hance, the school's nature preserve now hosts 150 fifth-grade students who learn the state's required education standards while embracing their role as environmental stewards.

Mr. Hance's core teaching philosophy is the *constructivist learning theory* where students learn by exploring, discussing, and solving real-world situations. So, instead of asking students to calculate the volumes of objects on a worksheet, he gives his students a problem like: how many bags of soil do we need to cover this barren part of our nature preserve and help our native plant seedlings grow? The students actively participate, brainstorm ideas, take measurements, calculate a value, and then implement.

At the forefront of Mr. Hance's curriculum is The Legacy Project—actually, a series of projects where students expand on the work of previous-years' students. Students select a project that interests them, creating a sense of ownership and a desire to learn. One of the newest projects is The Bike Shop, where students refurbish old bicycles while developing their math and science skills. At the same time, the project's students calculate the emissions savings from riding a bicycle instead of taking a vehicle, and then report their findings to the class. From this project, students learn about air emissions, how they can reduce them, and a method for reducing waste by reusing older bicycles. In addition, Mr. Hance's students give back to the community by donating repaired bicycles to keep our air clean by increasing bicycle ridership.

Other projects include a rainwater-harvesting collection system that promotes water conservation as it saves thousands of gallons of water when ponds in the school's nature preserve need refilling. There are also wildlife projects, like one that studies frogs' preference for running or still water. Through the Legacy Project and Mr. Hance's teaching philosophy, students become mentors and inspiration for future fifth-graders, their families, and their community to preserve our natural resources. Among all of those who inspire future generations of Texans, Trevor Hance can most certainly be counted as a leader.