



Friendship Elementary School, Keller Independent School District, Texas



When David Rische joined Friendship Elementary School as Principal in 2011, he knew that Thinking Maps would be part of the equation. Having used the Maps successfully in his previous school, he already knew how the Maps can transform teaching and learning.

*“I’m a one-hit wonder, and Thinking Maps is my hit!” he says.
“The longer I see them in use, the more power I find in them.”*

To help support his teachers in the transition, he introduced the Thinking Maps Learning Community (TMLC) in 2014.

SNAPSHOT

FRIENDSHIP ELEMENTARY

- K-4
- 550 Students
- 45 Teachers
- 35% Disadvantaged
- High Diversity

TMLC is an online professional learning hub built to help teachers expand their understanding of Thinking Maps and find new ideas for classroom practice. It includes online courses for extended learning, a gallery of example Maps, an interactive Map Builder, and other resources focused on improving student achievement through the effective use of Thinking Maps.

SUPPORTING LASTING SCHOOL CHANGE

David knew that effective school change would require ongoing support and reinforcement. *“One-time Professional Development just doesn’t cut it,”* he says. *“It needs to be continually reinforced if you want to make a lasting difference in classroom practice and school culture.”*

Teachers were doing well with Thinking Maps, but they weren’t using them to their full advantage. They needed new ideas to take the Maps to the next level. David was also worried because he was losing teachers and Thinking Maps trainers to attrition. He wanted everyone in the

school to be continually learning, so they could maintain a strong community of Thinking Maps teachers who could support each other and train newcomers on the staff.

“My biggest goal for TMLC was to build the capacity of the entire staff. I wanted everyone to be a potential Thinking Maps trainer.” David explains. *“TMLC lets everyone dig as deep as they can so they can get really fluid with the Maps and understand how to apply across grade levels and subject areas. It sparks new ideas that allow them to leverage the full power of the Maps.”*

BUILDING TEACHER CAPACITY



David wanted to do more than simply make TMLC available to teachers for individual study. He wanted to use TMLC to build a community of teacher learners. He also wanted teachers to be very intentional about choosing learning paths that were tied to the needs they saw at the school.

To support focused, intentional learning, David worked through the TMLC courses along with small groups of teachers. Each grade level group selected a TMLC course and worked through the modules together during regular meetings in their planning periods. David sat in on the meetings with each grade level and learned right alongside his staff. Each group was able to work through two or three modules over the course of the school year.

David was impressed with the quality of the modules. *“This is high quality PD. It’s interactive, not too long or too short—it’s just a really good system.”* Working through the modules together with their peers encouraged deeper engagement with the materials. Instead of rushing through, teachers were discussing the ideas, challenging each other and thinking about ways to apply what they learned in the classroom.

“Even after using Thinking Maps for years, there is always something new to learn. TMLC lets us go deeper with the Maps and find new ways to use them in our school.” - David Rische, Principal



FACILITATING DEEP CONVERSATION ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING

TMLC has helped teachers at Friendship Elementary deepen their understanding of the Maps and find new ways to use them. Teachers especially love the Gallery, where they can discover new ways of using the Maps that they didn't realize were possible. David says that TMLC has helped to support and sustain use of the Maps across all grade levels and expanded the ways teachers are using them in their classrooms.

But the biggest change he sees is in the quality of conversations he is having with his teachers. *“When we get together, we’re having discussions that we wouldn’t have had without this tool,”* he says. *“It’s not just discussing how to use the Maps. We have deep conversations about teaching and learning. TMLC is a springboard for more intentional staff development and a frame to talk about deeper issues in our school.”*



Teachers using Thinking Maps at Friendship Elementary School



Use TMLC courses as
springboards for deep
discussion

Implement a system
of accountability for
everyone, including
leaders

Start slowly so
teachers don't get
overwhelmed

**Tips for Success
with TMLC**

Consider doing it
together in grade
level groups

Start with simple features,
like the Thinking Maps
Gallery

Aim for 2 or 3
courses per year

Let teachers
choose their own
training paths