

Houston Schools for a New Society: Theory to Action in Urban School Reform

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Houston Independent School District

- HISD 301 square miles and serving 202,936 students in 295 schools (HISD, 2007).
- HISD has 12,721 teachers
- 600 school administrators.
- 117 administrators at its central and district offices

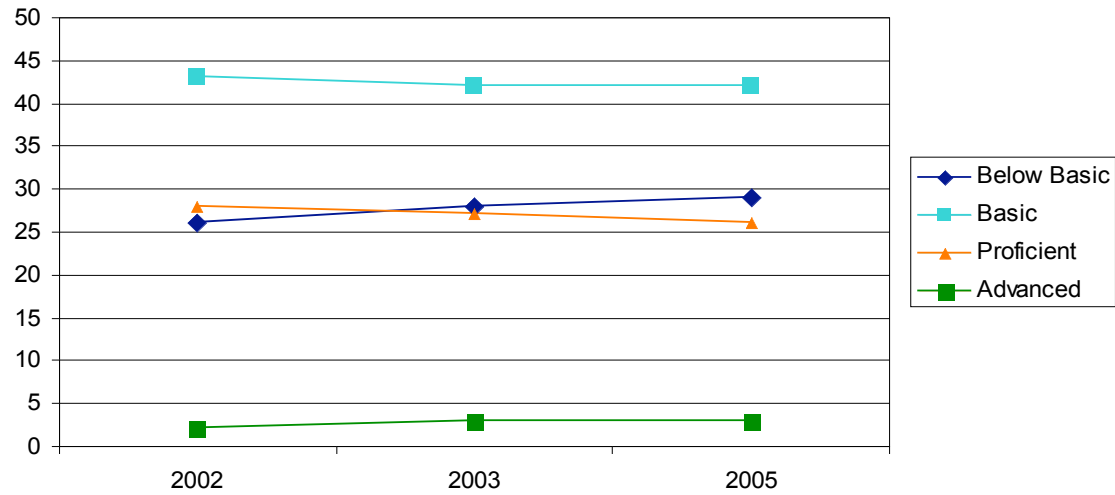
Houston Independent School District

The student population:

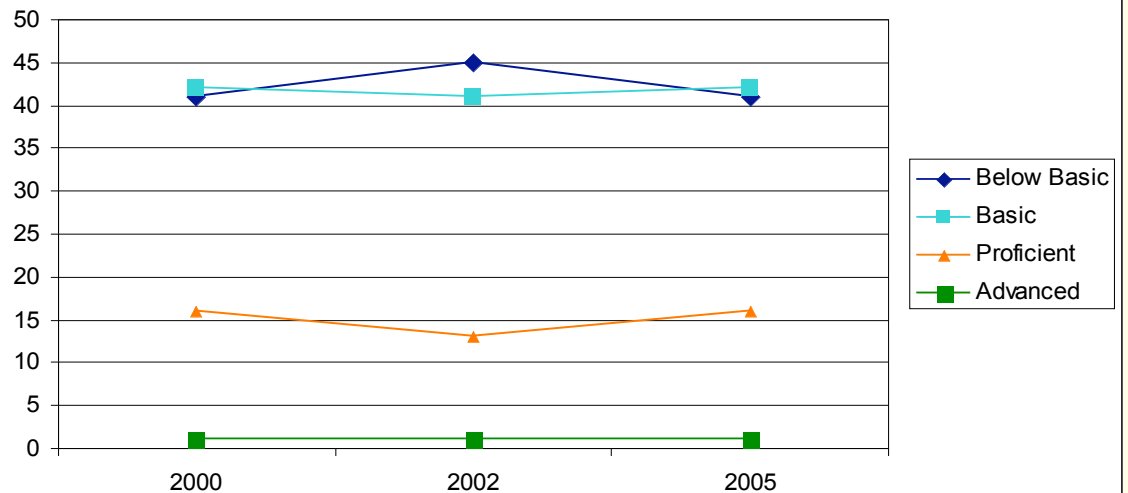
- 91.7% minority students,
 - 59.3% Latino/a students and
 - 29.2% African American students.
 - 3.1% Asians,
 - 0.1%, Native Americans
- 8.3% White students
- 78% of the student population is economically disadvantaged
- 60 different languages spoken in the district.

NAEP

National NAEP Reading 8th Grade Public Schools
--Percentage AT Each Level



Houston NAEP Reading 8th Grade
--Percentage AT Each Level



Issue: Money and School Reform

- School reform debates about best practices.
- Hanushek's statement "we are throwing money at schools." (1981)
- Hess (2006)– "While it is vital to recognize how limited are foundation resources compared with the vast governmental expenditures on K-12 schooling, it would be a mistake to assume that education philanthropy is not influential."

Philanthropic Funding

- 1993 – Walter Annenberg pledged \$500 million over 5 years to improve the most troubled public schools.
- In January of 1997, a Houston non-profit group received a 5 year, \$20 million grant from Annenberg Foundation called "Challenge to the Nation to Reform Public School."
- Local funds were raised to match the Annenberg grant 1-for-2, resulting in a total of \$60 million available to finance school reform in the Houston **area** over five years.
- HISD and the Houston Annenberg Challenge **intermediary** organization applied jointly for a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.
- In October 2001, Carnegie selected the Houston proposal as one of **seven** funded plans; thus, the multiyear national Schools for a New Society initiative was launched.

Schools for a New Society

HSNS is part of the Carnegie Corporation's national high school redesign initiative in seven urban cities-

Providence, RI (# HS Students = 6,000);

Worcester, MA (# HS Students = 7,500);

Chattanooga, TN (# HS Students = 12,300);

Sacramento, CA (# HS Students = 12,952);

Boston, MA (# HS Students = 13,000);

San Diego, CA (# HS Students = 34,000);

Houston, TX (# HS Students = 49,000).

Work of Schools for a New Society

The work of the reform was implementation of three key reform elements:

- (1) restructuring into smaller learning communities (SLCs),
- (2) installing literacy across the curriculum,
- (3) creating an adult advocacy network.

New Concept: Intermediary Organization

- limited literature on: *intermediary organizations* (Honig, 2003; Honig, 2004, McLaughlin, 2006),
- Other terms: *organizational relationships* (Warren, 2005), *community organizing groups* (Fruchter, 2007), *civic capacity or civic mobilization* (Stone, 2001; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001), and *reform support organizations* (Kronley, R.A. & Handley, C., 2003).
- The common thread in all-is organizations involved in supporting education reform.

Annenberg Challenge-Intermediary

Prior to the Carnegie funding there was Annenberg:

- The Annenberg Challenge grants required school districts to work with intermediary organizations in private partnerships.
- The Challenge wanted to rely on *intermediary organizations* as *agents of change* to encourage groups to convene a coalition of individuals with diverse civic interests that would make plans together, raise matching funds together, receive funds, and carry out the reform. The coalition was to include foundations, local corporations, reform activists, school leaders, and union and political leaders.

Carnegie Corporation-Intermediary

- Carnegie Corporation required recipients of funding to have a *school–community partnership*.
- Planners sought to change city’s high schools, the district board of trustees said, “by moving away from a factory model of instruction to one where students are prepared to thrive in the 21st century.”
- Houston A+ Challenge and HISD—engaged school, community, business, and higher education partners in the design plan.
- HSNS planners developed a comprehensive district reform plan that was noteworthy for its breadth, depth, and collaborative nature. Formally began Jan. 2002.

Many Changes within the Reform Environment

- Houston Schools for a New Society formally began in January 2002.
- Amidst the State change from TAAS to TAKS
- And the Federal *No Child Left Behind Act*

Federal and State Accountability Environment

Comparison of Federal and State Ratings of Case Study Schools

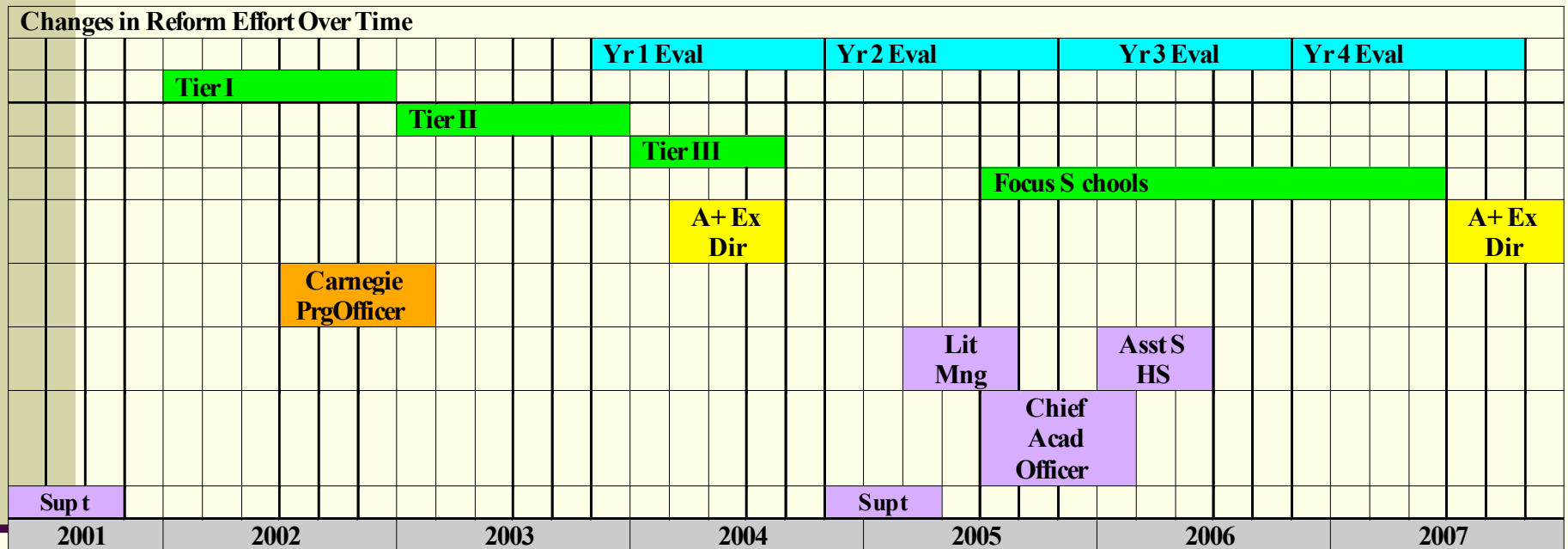
School and rating type	TAAS		TAKS			
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Creative						
State rating	— ^a	— ^a	Recognized	AA	AA	Recognized
Federal AYP status	— ^a	— ^a	— ^a	Met AYP	Met AYP	Met AYP
Roosevelt						
State rating	Low Performing	— ^b	AA	AA	AU	AA
Federal AYP status	—	Met AYP	Missed AYP	Missed AYP	Met AYP	Met AYP
Walters						
State rating	Low Performing	— ^b	AA	AA	AA	AA
Federal AYP status	—	Missed AYP	Met AYP	Missed AYP	Met AYP	Missed A YP
Oakes						
State rating	Low Performing	— ^b	AA	AU	AU	AA
Federal AYP status	—	Missed AYP	Missed AYP	Met AYP	Missed AYP	Missed AYP
Eastern						
State rating	Low Performing	— ^b	AA	AA	AA	AA
Federal AYP status	—	Missed AYP	Met AYP	Met AYP	Missed AYP	Met AYP

Note. AA = Academically Acceptable; AU = Academically Unacceptable; AYP = annual yearly progress; TAAS = Texas Assessment of Academic Skill; TAKS = Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills

^a Creative Early College High School opened Fall 2003; new campus not evaluated

^b No data; new state accountability system implemented.

Evaluation and Evolution of the Reform



Turnover at All Levels

- *Leadership turnover*
 - National
 - District
 - Intermediary
 - Campuses
 - Principals
 - One study campus had 5 principals between 2002-2007.
 - Teachers
 - Almost 70% teacher turnover in 5 years

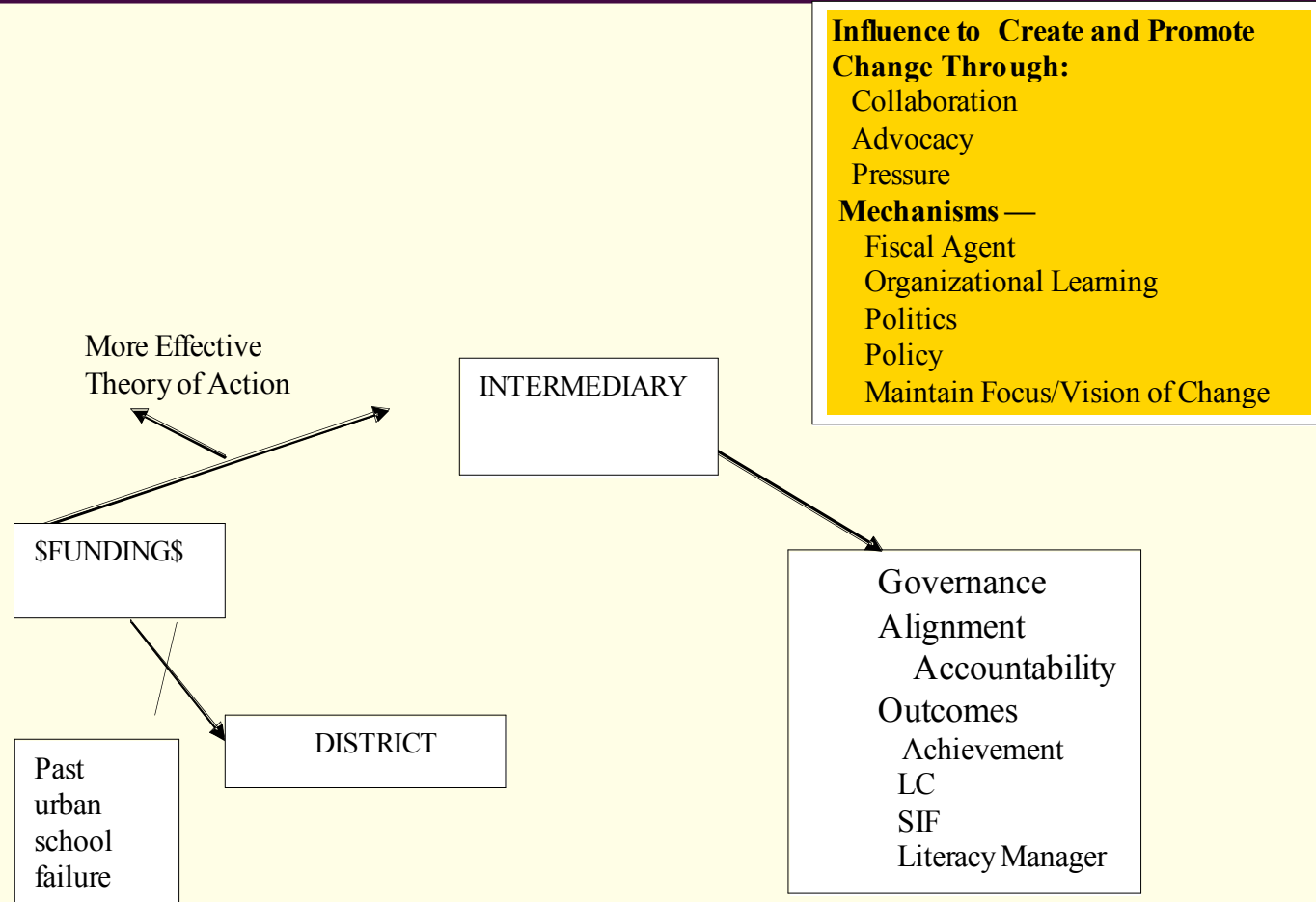
HA+C Leadership

- HA+C executive director left the organization soon after HSNS implementation began,
- Successor was a long-term HA+C staff member who shared the original reform vision.
 - Able to maintain focus on HSNS goals, objectives, and strategies,
 - Her consistent leadership may have been the only stabilizing force during the HSNS initiative.

School	2002-	2003-	2004-	2005-	2006-	5 Year	Cumulative
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Avg	5 Year
Roosevelt HS	23.7	17.5	26.2	19.6	26.9	22.8	69.5
HISD Comparison	24.4	22.0	16.9	19.7	22.2	21.0	61.3
State Comparison	17.7	19.0	18.3	18.9	21.8	19.1	58.5
Eastern HS	20.2	18.8	27.7	20.4	29.9	23.4	65.0
HISD Comparison	18.3	19.1	15.0	14.4	15.8	16.5	50.7
State Comparison	19.2	19.6	20.1	16.3	23.1	19.7	56.8
Oakes HS	27.1	25.9	18.3	18.6	25.2	23.0	63.5
HISD Comparison	31.4	18.0	20.7	44.5	27.6	28.4	80.2
State Comparison	20.7	23.3	21.8	16.1	23.3	21.0	57.9
Walters HS	23.3	20.3	8.6	16.4	17.5	17.2	47.9
HISD Comparison	12.6	15.9	11.1	22.5	29.3	18.3	48.3
State Comparison	20.1	16.9	19.3	18.3	26.2	20.1	60.3
Creative HS*			0.0	10.4	39.6	16.7	

* Creative HS opened in 2003

Intermediary = Value-Added



Intermediary Added Stability

- Influence through:
 - Collaboration
 - Advocacy
 - Pressure
- Leadership and continually stressing the reform goals.
- Spillane's (2004) discussion of the "telephone game"

Roles and Work – Fiscal Agent

Fiscal Agent:

Funds Filtered through HA+C

HA+A raised matching funds from local contributors.

These local dollars allowed HA+C to continue funding certain HSNS activities (e.g., SIFs, LCs, etc.) during the period in which Carnegie suspended funding.

HA+C staff also kept a steady focus on aligning resources appropriately.

Roles and Work – Professional Development

- provided a range of high-quality professional development strategies including:
 - Critical Friends Group training
 - action labs
 - national speakers series
 - annual Reforming Schools Summer Institute a model for how to engage in authentic, theory-based, reflective practice.
 - local professional networks for SIFS, LCs, and principals.

Results of 5 years of Reform

- (1) restructuring into smaller learning communities (SLCs),
- (2) installing literacy across the curriculum,
- (3) creating an adult advocacy network.

Restructuring into smaller learning communities

- Although the reform planning phase was marked by substantial external support and collaborative decision making, actual campus reform implementation was marked by continuous leadership turnover and changing district priorities.
- Faculty engagement decreased steadily as principal and teacher turnover increased.
- Despite difficulties, some aspects of the reform work has slowly become embedded in to campus culture.

Installing literacy across the curriculum

- Infusing literacy across the curriculum is an unqualified successful outcome of the initiative.
- A detailed district plan was created when HISD and A+ rewrote the HSNS plan for Carnegie in 2004-2005. This included the network formed by the district adolescent literacy manager and campus Literacy Coaches with extensive support from A+.

Creating an adult advocacy network

- Goal was to reduce student isolation and personalize the learning environment.
- Besides the development of the SLCs which helped with this goal, reformers also pushed for the creation of a formal adult advocacy program.
- In the case study schools the types of advocacy and personalization varied widely
 - In one school it depended on the initiative of one teacher or counselor.
 - In another school, it depended on the ways in which incoming teachers and administrators approached the time scheduled for advocacy.
- Overall the implementation of this strategy has had been the least coherent and observable impact.

New District Roles

- (a) a district administrator focused on secondary schools,
- (b) a district-level adolescent literacy manager,
- (c) campus-level SIFs, and
- (d) campus-level LCs.
- All these positions, funded at least partly by the HSNS project, are embedded within the district organizational structure and culture.

Other Results

- The level of interaction with district staff was unprecedented,
- At times HA+C staff struggled to organize meetings and maintain focus on HSNS goals and objectives when they felt responsibility but had no actual authority. Impacting the deeply entrenched district organizational culture was a formidable task.
- As leadership turnover eroded the district HSNS reform knowledge base, HA+C was a stabilizing force
- Despite this, the public–private partnership endured throughout the initiative.

Important Findings

- *Turbulent policy context*
- *Leadership turnover*
- *Putting Spotlight on High School Reform*
- *Creating New District and Campus Roles*
- *Focusing on Literacy Across the Curriculum*
- *Enduring Public–Private Partnerships*

Lessons Learned

- Reform visions cannot be transferred.
- High-quality, multileveled professional development needs to be ongoing.
- All key stakeholders must be included (e.g., assistant principals, counselors and Board).
- Reflective practice enables learning from experience.
- Professional conversations (Rusch, 2005) lead to organizational learning.

Policy Implications

- There has been significant progress in implementing the 3 key reform strategies.
- By far the installation of a literacy program work across the curriculum has been the most successful.
- Restructuring large high schools into SLCs has resulted in visible organizational structures.
- There were some important efforts to improve the quality of relationships in schools.

Policy Implications

- Multiple and constantly shifting program goals/objectives created a more complex implementation path.
- New federal and state accountability policy added to the complexity.
- Whole district buy-in and effort increases probability of success as with literacy.
- The Intermediary Organization could be an important component in philanthropic funded reform for future efforts.

Summative Report

The final summative report will be on this website by the end of December:

<http://www.edb.utexas.edu/hsns/publications.html>