

Slide: Philanthropic Funding

In 1995, several key individuals in the city of Houston expressed concern about the quality of public education in the Greater Houston area. The Brown Foundation, Inc., took the lead in bringing the funding community together to discuss a joint effort to improve public schools in the city of Houston. The Houston Endowment Inc., joined the Brown Foundation, and these two foundations invited participation from other major foundations, including Fondren Foundation, Wortham Foundation, Hobby Foundation, and the Greater Houston Community Foundation.

This group created a vision for a public school reform initiative and in March 1996 formed a nonprofit organization named *The Child-Centered School Initiative of the Greater Houston Area*. The mission of this newly formed organization was “to promote an academically rich and purposeful education for more of our children and to demonstrate how such an education could become possible for all children.” The founders envisioned that the accomplishment of this mission depended on a major infusion of public and private dollars.

When they received the Annenberg funding, the organization changed its name to Houston Annenberg Challenge.

Because Houston was the largest urban district selected, Carnegie Corporation joined forces with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to fund Houston at a higher level than the other six cities. Houston received \$12 million, \$8 million from Carnegie Corporation and \$4 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, in Fall 2001 to implement their local initiative, the Houston Schools for a New Society (HSNS) project. Upon receipt of the new funding streams the Houston Annenberg Challenge organization

continued in the capacity of an intermediary organization, but changed their name to Houston A+ Challenge. Houston A+ Challenge raised matching funds of \$12 million from the Annenberg and Brown Foundations (1 for 1 match) for a total of \$24 million for HISD alone for the Carnegie Schools for a New Society project. Again, Houston A+ Challenge served as the fiscal agent for funds.

In reviewing HA+C's relationship with HISD in August 2004, the HA+C staff identified three key roles they had as an intermediary organization supporting district reform: resource, steward, and accountability agent (according to a 2004 HA+C internal document):

1. First, As a "steward (fiscal) agent for funds to serve students," HA+C commits to raising matching funds, aligning existing resources, and providing accountability for funds received.

2. as "a key resource to improving instruction in a holistic approach (K-20)," HA+C staff provide at least seven functions: (a) coach or change facilitator, (b) advocate, (c) reform knowledge and experience source, (d) research clearinghouse, (e) business and community networker, (f) national connector, and (g) general change support agent.

3. As "an accountability agent," HA+C pledges to conduct peer reviews in which goals are aligned with student achievement, align multiple initiatives, maintain a focused effort, and ensure an external evaluation. Finally, all these functions are to be carried out in a spirit of reciprocity built on mutual respect and impact through collaboration.