

**A** team of researchers from three Texas universities, The University of Texas at Austin, Rice University and The University of Houston, collaborated to produce the report Transforming Public Schools: The Houston Annenberg Challenge. The research and evaluation study is funded by a grant from The Houston Annenberg Challenge.

Director and Principal Investigator of the study is Pedro Reyes, Associate Director is Joy C. Phillips, and Research Associate is Andrea Rorrer. The study team includes Eileen Coppola, Cheryl Craig, Gary Dworkin, Doug Foley, Jacqueline Hawkins, Linda McNeil, Chandra Muller, Amaury Nora, Kip Tellez, Henry Trueba, Angela Valenzuela, Lonnie Wagstaff, Cylette Willis, Jo Worthy, and graduate research assistants.

The Houston Annenberg Challenge Research and Evaluation Study researchers can be reached at:

Annenberg Research Project  
College of Education  
SZB 310  
The University of Texas at Austin  
Austin, TX 78712-1291  
Phone: 512-475-8577

Requests for additional copies of this summary report should be directed to:

The Houston Annenberg Challenge  
First City Tower  
1001 Fannin, Suite 2210  
Houston, TX 77002-6709  
Phone: 713-658-1881  
Fax: 713-739-0166



**In 1996, the Brown Foundation of Houston and Houston Endowment Incorporated built a coalition of corporate and business leaders, as well as local educators and university personnel, and applied for a matching grant from the national Annenberg Foundation. As a result of this collaboration, The Houston Annenberg Challenge initiative emerged.**



## Introduction

**A**t the White House on December 17, 1993, President Clinton announced a private pledge of \$500 million to public education from Walter Annenberg, a philanthropist and former U.S. ambassador to Great Britain. American school children, particularly underserved children and those living in urban areas, benefited from this gift. In 1996, the Brown Foundation of Houston and Houston Endowment Incorporated built a coalition of corporate and business leaders, as well as local educators and university personnel, and applied for a matching grant from the national Annenberg Foundation. As a result of this collaboration, The Houston Annenberg Challenge initiative emerged. In 1997, The Houston Annenberg Challenge received an Annenberg Foundation matching grant from the national Annenberg Foundation to spend \$60 million during five years to sustain, expand, and generate reform in metropolitan Houston public schools. The Houston Annenberg Challenge based its objective to improve public schools on a belief in America's democratic obligation to educate all children well.

## Theory of Action

Many other national reform efforts emphasize implementing a specific program adopted from another site or generated by a granting organization. In contrast, The Houston Annenberg Challenge leadership encourages local planning and ownership in reform efforts and argues for local program design, believing such an approach leads to more successful and enduring change. The Houston Annenberg Challenge seeks to harness the vision, talents, and energies of those

closest to the schools who know the most about the school's problems and who are most affected by its efforts. Furthermore, The Houston Annenberg Challenge encourages school-based planners to build upon existing reform efforts to create a more comprehensive and coherent effort. Since the planning process for the reform effort requires collaboration, there are multiple interests represented among the planners. As a result of the emphasis on local design, different reform strategies evolved among The Houston Annenberg Challenge schools. Yet, all the schools have four things in common:

- high expectations and improved academic achievement;
- a personalized learning environment;
- a learning community of professionals focused on children's academic needs;
- a collaborative network among schools, parents, and business community.

## Houston's Reform Funding Strategy

The Houston Annenberg Challenge Board of Trustees initiated school reform funding around three major categories: direct support, indirect support, and community support. Direct support includes funding to individual schools, networks of schools, and their community partners to improve student achievement. The Houston Annenberg Challenge funded three types of schools in the direct support category. The first set of funded schools includes 11 individual schools from five school districts in the Greater Houston area. These schools, designated as Beacon schools, receive funding because they already demonstrate the capacity to engage in school reform, particularly academic content reform. The second set of schools, designated as Lamplighter learning

communities, consists of 20 networks from six districts. Floodlight schools are the third and most recent set of funded schools. Unlike the Beacon or Lamplighter schools, Floodlight schools follow a prescribed approach to school reform.

In addition to direct support, The Houston Annenberg Challenge provides indirect funding for technical assistance to reforming schools. This category of funding furnishes publications, teacher and principal training and development opportunities, and planning and evaluation consultants to support the schools. University faculty serve as consultants with schools to address special needs. Finally, The Houston Annenberg Challenge's third type of funding goes to develop community support for reforming schools. By developing support for educational reform, The Houston Annenberg Challenge creates a foundation for school reform that extends beyond the funded schools to the entire Greater Houston area. Funds for community support also build parental and community involvement and create a political and financial climate that enables reforming schools to institutionalize the reforms. Community support remains crucial to creating a sustainable school reform initiative that continues after the termination of national Annenberg dollars.

## Evaluation of the Houston Challenge

The Houston Annenberg Challenge Board of Trustees commissioned a three-year independent evaluation to be conducted by researchers from The University of Texas at Austin, Rice University, and The University of Houston. This first-year evaluation report provides formative feedback to The Houston Annenberg Challenge schools so that strate-

gies currently used may be modified based on evidence of emerging reform outcomes.

This evaluation contains specific information on The Houston Annenberg Challenge's impact on schools and stakeholders in the Greater Houston area. This report assesses The Houston Annenberg Challenge's accomplishments and efforts in three broad areas: student outcomes, school development, and building support for systemic change. The overarching questions directing the evaluation in these areas include:

**Student Outcomes:** How are Beacon and Lamplighter schools doing in terms of student achievement? Do they show relative gains from one year to the next, within their school district itself, and within the state? Are the schools progressing in crucial non-academic areas such as nurturing student aspirations and decreasing dropout rates?

**School Development:** What lies behind the improvement of The Houston Annenberg Challenge's schools? What lessons have we learned about their teachers? What lessons have we learned about collaboration with the community? What structural changes have taken place within schools to develop personalized student environments?

**Building Support for Systemic Change:** How is The Houston Annenberg Challenge helping districts reshape policies to support reforming schools? How is The Houston Annenberg Challenge progressing to build an infrastructure of support for education reform in the Greater Houston area?

## Data Sources

This evaluation report draws upon multiple sources of evidence. We used both qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate progress on reform efforts. At a macro level,

The Houston Annenberg Challenge Board of Trustees commissioned a three-year independent evaluation to be conducted by researchers from The University of Texas at Austin, Rice University, and The University of Houston.

we used test data to compare Annenberg-funded schools with their own academic performance in prior years and with the academic performance of comparable statewide peers. Comparable groups, designated by the state, include 40 demographically similar schools based on ethnicity, percent of economically disadvantaged students, percent of limited English proficient students, and student mobility. In addition to investigating data at the macro level, we examined evidence of school change at the micro level. We selected 12 schools from among the Beacon, Lamplighter, and Floodlight schools for intensive study. The case study schools include elementary, middle, and high schools. We conducted interviews, focus groups, and observations at this small sample of funded schools.

**W**e designed a set of surveys for administrators, principals, teachers, students, parents, and community members from across all funded schools. In the surveys, these stakeholders provide perceptual data regarding the implementation of The Houston Annenberg Challenge reform initiative. Since the data provide information from across Annenberg schools, we are able to begin assessing the impact of the reform on the Greater Houston area. In the following section, we describe specific data sources used for evaluation of student outcomes, school development, and building support for systemic reform.

**Student Outcomes:** The data for this section uses the Texas Learning Index (TLI) score that describes a student's performance on the State of Texas' standardized testing program (TAAS) in reading and mathematics. We also obtained data from documents and observations to report alternative forms of academic

assessment. Data on student outcomes also include survey data collected from students, teachers, and school partners.

While other analyses use test score averages, we used the TLI as the standard for comparing school performance. The TLI, which is more stable than test scores, measures student or school performance. The TLI minimum standard for assessing grade level performance is a score of 70 or above. A TLI of 85 or above indicates mastery of the subject matter. For example, schools with an average TLI of 85 or above demonstrate that students in that school mastered the skills required for a specific content area such as mathematics. Generally, a campus with a TLI of 85 or above would be designated as high-performing by the Texas Education Agency.

**School Development:** The data on school changes, such as school structure and relationships within and among communities of schools, come from a significant number of individual interviews, focus group interviews, and extensive observations of the 12 case study schools. Also, the data include information contained in The Houston Annenberg Challenge School Accountability Reports and data generated by planning and evaluation consultants.

#### **Building Support for Systemic**

**Change:** The evaluation of The Houston Annenberg Challenge's impact on the Greater Houston area draws from survey responses, observations, and interviews with key stakeholders and partners. The School Accountability Reports also provide a source of data for examining activities in progress and assessing the extent to which those activities lay a foundation for long-term engagement in education reform.

## Progress on Student Outcomes

### How are Beacon and Lamplighter schools doing in improving academic outcomes? What other non-academic outcomes exist in these schools?

The Houston Annenberg Challenge expects all funded schools to produce gains in student achievement after three years of funding. After only two years, most of the schools demonstrate gains in student achievement. The Beacon schools were awarded funding for 1997-1998, with funds distributed in March 1998. Student achievement scores were highest for the Beacon schools, which is to be expected since they represent shining examples of principals, teachers, parents, and students who embrace and implement the Annenberg philosophy with great success.

In doing this analysis, we assessed achievement gains beginning with the 1997-1998 school year as a reference point. We also calculated the growth in academic gains of comparable schools,<sup>1</sup> as designated by the Texas Education Agency, for comparison purposes. We divided the analysis between school levels to discourage any misinterpretations of the data. Thus, we compared Beacon elementary schools to comparable elementary schools within the state, and compared middle and high schools

<sup>1</sup>The comparable group comparisons should be interpreted with caution. Comparable group scores represent an average performance for schools that are similar to the Annenberg school group across six criteria: ethnicity (percent White, percent African American, and percent Hispanic), percent of students who are economically disadvantaged, student mobility, and students with limited English proficiency. The average reported could be either an overestimate or underestimate of real school performance.

against comparable middle and high schools respectively.

### Beacon School Analysis

Beacon schools as a group are doing better than schools in comparable groups throughout Texas in reading and mathematics achievement.

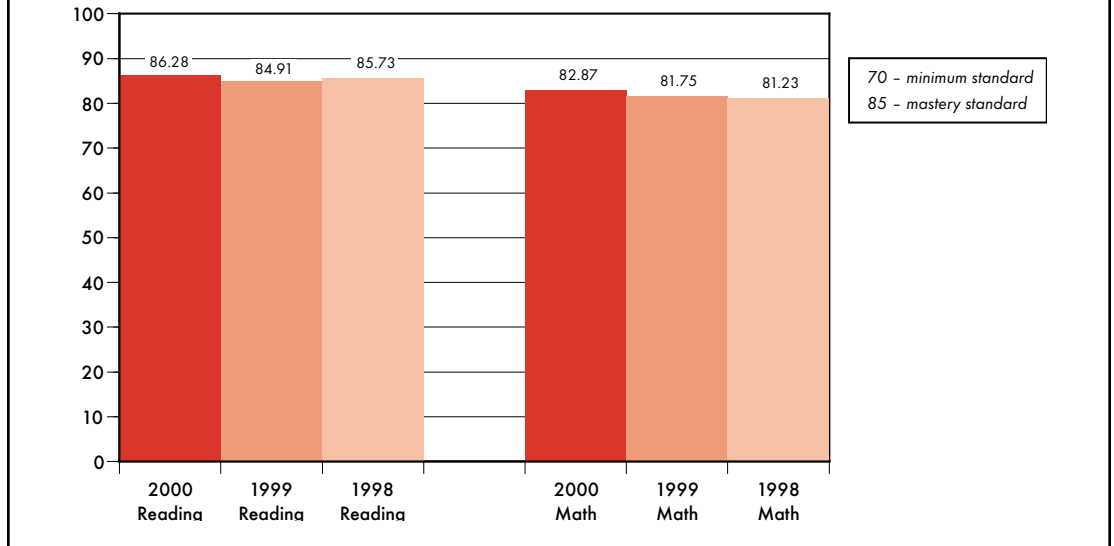
**Elementary Beacon schools** have achieved and maintained their high level of reading achievement for the last three years, as Figure 1 illustrates. In fact, Beacon elementary schools as a group outperformed schools in their 2000 comparable group by nine TLI points. The mean TLI score for comparable schools was 77.42. In addition to surpassing their 1999 performance, these schools exceeded the standard of mastery during the 2000 school year.

Beacon elementary schools also have maintained and increased their average mathematics achievement since 1997-98. Beacon schools outperformed their comparable group schools by a margin of four TLI points in 2000. The mean TLI score in mathematics for comparable schools was 79.48.

**Student achievement scores were highest for the Beacon schools, which is to be expected since they represent shining examples of principals, teachers, parents, and students who embrace and implement the Annenberg philosophy with great success.**

**The Houston Annenberg Challenge expects all funded schools to produce gains in student achievement after three years of funding.**

**Figure 1. TLI mean scores for Beacon elementary schools.**

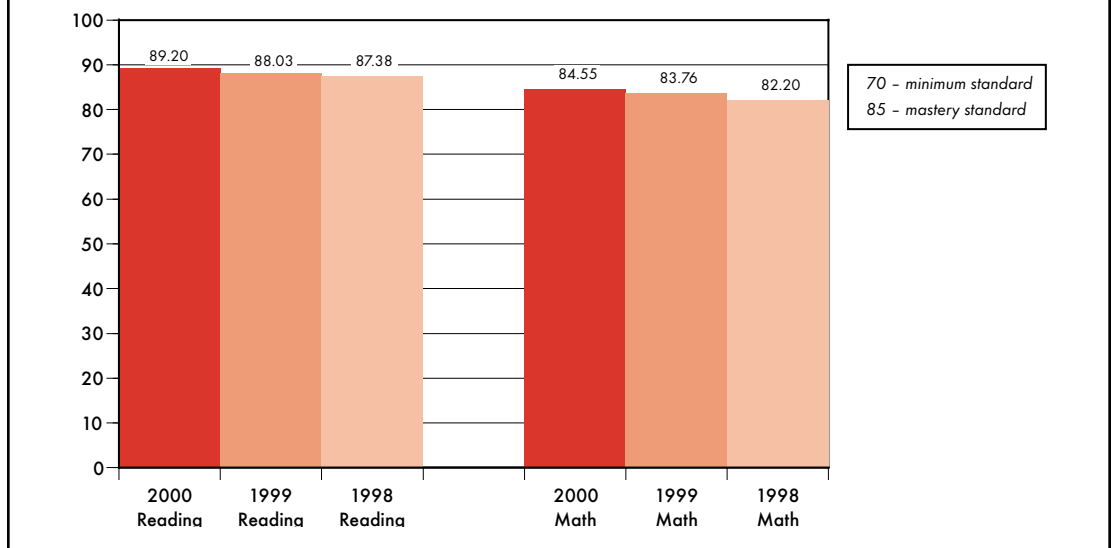


Mathematics performance in the Beacon elementary schools improved by one TLI point from 1999 to 2000. As Figure 1 reveals, mathematics performance reached within two TLI points of achieving the goal of mastery this past year.

**The Beacon middle schools** increased their reading performance over the last three years. Beacon middle schools outperformed

their comparable group schools by 14 TLI points in 2000. The mean TLI score for comparable group schools was 75 in reading. In fact, Figure 2 illustrates that Beacon middle schools surpassed the standard of mastery or high performance in reading consistently since 1998. In 2000, Beacon middle schools exceeded the minimum state standard by 19 TLI points.

**Figure 2. TLI mean scores for Beacon middle schools.**



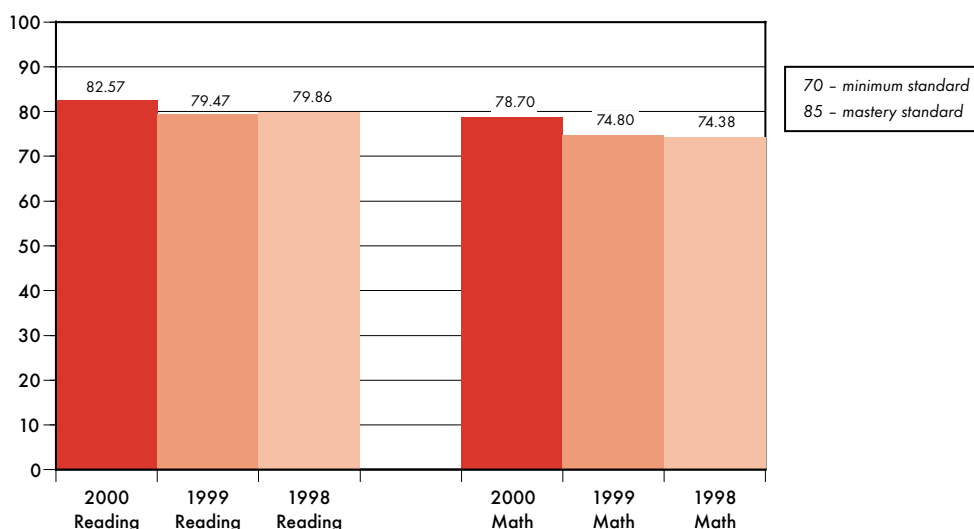
**S**ince 1998, the Beacon middle schools also have increased their performance on mathematics achievement. Beacon middle schools outperformed their comparable group by approximately eight TLI points in 2000. The mean TLI score for comparable schools was 76.15 in mathematics. Mathematics growth in the Beacon middle schools is evidenced by rising TLI scores and their ability this year to meet the state mastery standard, a one-point TLI growth from the previous year.

**The Beacon high schools** also experienced growth on average TLI in reading from 1998 to 2000. After two years of no growth, these schools experienced a growth of three TLI points from 1999 to 2000. TLI performance of Beacon high schools was higher than the performance of schools in their comparable groups in 2000. The mean TLI score for comparable schools was 76.03. However, Beacon high schools performed within two TLI points of achieving the state standard of mastery in 2000.

**Mathematics growth in the Beacon middle schools is evidenced by rising TLI scores and their ability this year to meet the state mastery standard, a one-point TLI growth from the previous year.**

**T**he Beacon high schools' performance in mathematics increased from 1999 to 2000 by four TLI points. This exceeds the minimum state standard. The Beacon high schools slightly outperformed their comparable group in 2000; the average growth for Beacon high schools was four TLI points. The mean TLI score for comparable schools was 76.15 in 2000.

**Figure 3. TLI mean scores for Beacon high schools.**



## Lamplighter School Analysis

Lamplighter schools as a group are doing better than schools in comparable groups throughout Texas in reading and mathematics achievement.

The Lamplighter communities first received implementation grants from The Houston Annenberg Challenge for the 1998-1999 academic year. These learning communities organize in a feeder system or another configuration of collaborative campuses. The number of schools within each learning community varies. For example, the largest learning community serves 13 schools, and the smallest has two schools. Funding to each community varies. We tracked student achievement growth for the past two years in the Lamplighter communities.

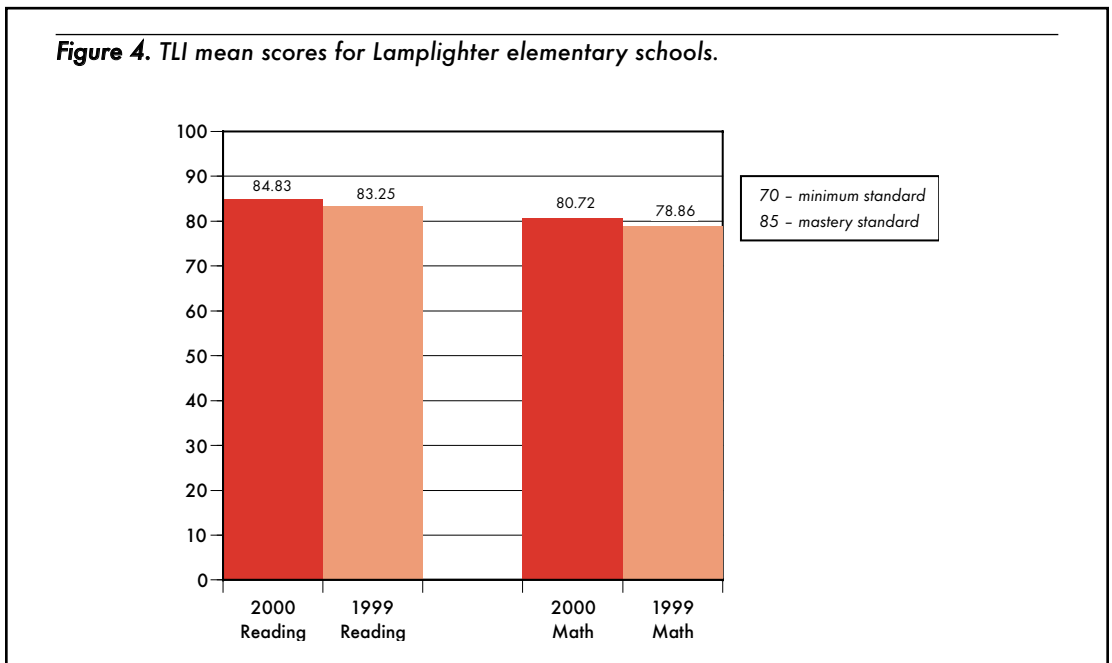
### **Lamplighter elementary schools**

increased their average TLI score from 1999 to 2000 by 1.5 TLI points. Even though the

growth was not substantial for the two-year period, Lamplighter elementary schools outperformed their comparison group by seven TLI points in 2000. The mean TLI score for the comparison groups was 76.91 in 2000. Furthermore, Figure 4 shows that these schools had a mean score of 85 TLI points in 2000. Thus, Lamplighter elementary schools reached the mastery standard in reading this year.

Lamplighter elementary schools increased their performance by two TLI points from 1999 to 2000 in mathematics achievement. Lamplighter elementary schools outperformed their comparison group by two TLI points in mathematics in 2000. The 2000 comparable group mean TLI score was 78.47 in mathematics. Figure 4 shows that these schools averaged 81 TLI points in 2000 and are only four TLI points from achieving the state standard for mastery in mathematics.

**Figure 4.** TLI mean scores for Lamplighter elementary schools.



Similarly, **Lamplighter middle schools** increased their reading performance slightly from 1999 to 2000. The Lamplighter middle schools outperformed schools in their comparable group by seven TLI points in 2000. The mean TLI score for the comparison schools was 74.47 in 2000. As Figure 5 illustrates, TLI performance growth was small for the two-year period; these schools are within 2.5 TLI points of achieving the standard of mastery.

**F**igure 5 also shows the TLI mean scores in mathematics for Lamplighter middle schools. Lamplighter middle schools outperformed schools in their comparable group by five TLI points in 2000. The mean TLI score for the comparable group schools was 75.36. Lamplighter schools increased their mathematics performance by three TLI points from the 1999 to 2000 school year.

**Lamplighter high schools** increased their performance in reading achievement slightly from 1999 to 2000. Figure 6 shows that

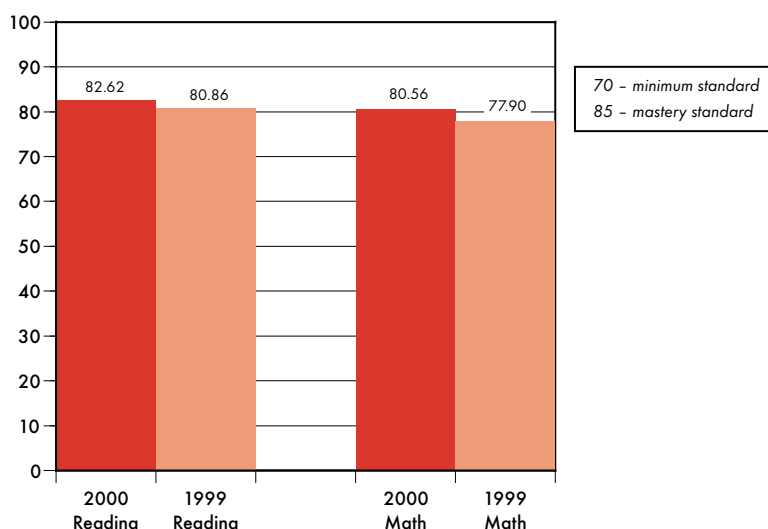
**The Lamplighter middle schools outperformed schools in their comparable group by seven TLI points in reading in 2000.**

Lamplighter high schools grew approximately two TLI points in reading. These high schools outperformed their comparison group by four TLI points in 2000. The mean TLI score for the schools in the comparable groups was 76.5 in 2000. Although the change from 1999 to 2000 is small, these schools improved their reading performance and remain above the state minimum standard.

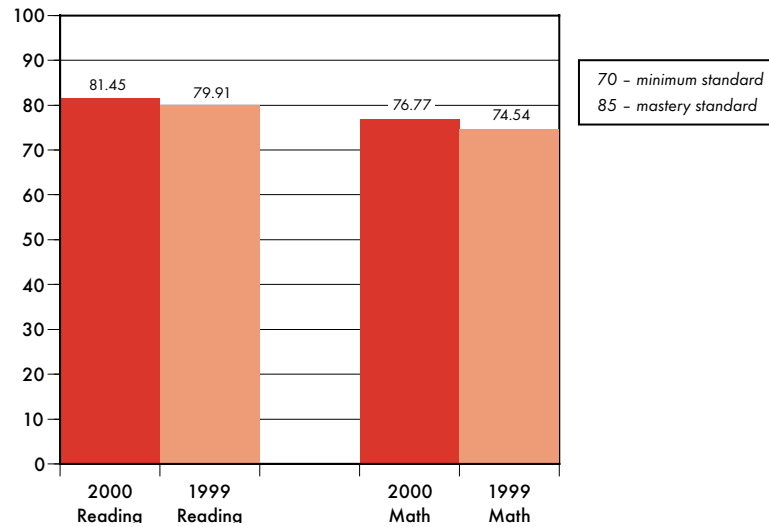
Figure 6 shows the TLI mean scores in mathematics for Lamplighter high schools.

Lamplighter high school mathematics performance matched the performance of com-

**Figure 5. TLI mean scores for Lamplighter middle schools.**



**Figure 6.** TLI mean scores for Lamplighter high schools.



parison schools in 2000. The mean TLI score for comparison schools was 76.34 in 2000. Lamplighter high school mathematics performance improved from 1999 to 2000 by two TLI points. While lower than their reading performance, mathematics achievement at Lamplighter high schools remains above the minimum standard.

### Floodlight Schools

The Houston Annenberg Challenge funded Floodlight schools in 1999-2000. During this first year of funding, Floodlight schools engaged in implementation of the blended Project GRAD/Houston Annenberg Challenge reform initiative. Project GRAD was established in the Houston Independent School District (HISD) in 1993 at Jeff Davis High School. The Project GRAD reform initiative uses a vertical feeder pattern approach to change schools and to improve student achievement. Project GRAD uses established curriculum models to train teachers on specific mathematics, reading, and discipline management programs—a more prescribed

method of school reform. Student achievement data from the 2000 year will serve as the baseline information for achievement analysis in the second year evaluation report.

### Alternative Measures of Student Performance

Standardized testing represents one method of assessing student academic performance; however, many Annenberg-funded schools supplement these methods with alternative assessment methods including portfolios, problem based projects, and “Graduation by Exhibition.” Newmann, Secada, and Wehlage (1995) refer to these types of appraisals as “authentic assessment” projects. Authentic assessments use student-generated academic work as a demonstration of student knowledge and skills in specific areas. For example, a high school uses “Graduation by Exhibition” as a part of the school’s graduation criteria. “Graduation by Exhibition” requires each student to conduct an in-depth project consistent with established school-based criteria. Another

Annenberg-funded high school uses a “service learning” approach to the implementation of its “Graduation by Exhibition.” The student project must integrate a research-based examination of a community problem with a plausible solution to the problem.

## Progress on School Development

**What lies behind the improvement of The Houston Annenberg Challenge’s schools? What lessons have we learned about their teachers? What lessons have we learned about collaboration with the community? What structural changes have taken place within schools to develop personalized student environments?**

The Houston Annenberg Challenge provides substantial support for improving teacher learning. Annenberg assumes that school change occurs and strong professional communities develop as educators engage in reviewing their own practices to strengthen student learning. Annenberg also believes that school reform can be sustained by building caring learning environments for students. Annenberg further stipulates that reducing isolation among teachers, parents, and the larger community leads to coherent support for school reform. Yet, Annenberg does not expect all schools to be at the same level at the same time. However, they do expect all schools to become stronger in implementing change in schools and in raising children’s academic performance as sufficient time elapses.

Thus, we look for evidence of school development by investigating the changes that occurred in funded schools in the areas of the Houston Annenberg imperatives: teacher

learning, personalizing the student learning environment, and reducing isolation.

### Teacher Learning

The Houston Annenberg Challenge theory of action maintains that successful school reform requires development of a strong professional community. In strong professional communities, faculty become better teachers because they have clear consensus on learning goals for their schools, and they share information, collaborate, and take collective responsibility for achieving school goals. Furthermore, teachers in strong professional communities develop norms that place a high value on research, evidence, and up-to-date research and expertise. All of these conditions lead teachers to develop a high degree of trust, making it safe for staff to disagree and to learn from intellectual conflict.

**T**he Houston Annenberg Challenge invests heavily in teacher learning. More than 40 percent of The Houston Annenberg Challenge’s direct funding has been targeted to teacher learning. The funded schools provide a range of activities to foster teacher learning. The Houston Annenberg Challenge schools developed strategies such as creating within school activities and programs, employing external sources of expertise for professional development, and building partnerships with local university faculty. Additionally, the Annenberg schools procured new teaching materials and curriculum, restructured the school day, and encouraged the leadership of talented teachers already in the schools. Increased opportunities for teacher learning is perhaps the most notable school change accomplished thus far in this reform effort. Beacon schools and Lamplighter communities devoted considerable time, energy, and funding to improve opportunities for teacher learning.

**In strong professional communities, faculty become better teachers because they have clear consensus on learning goals for their schools, and they share information, collaborate, and take collective responsibility for achieving school goals.**

**Principals note that teachers highly value reflective inquiry, up-to-date research, and academic expertise.**

In the 12 case study schools, principals and case researchers report that teachers indeed create professional communities at their schools. Case study schools use Critical Friends Groups, Departmental Study Groups, and Learning Academies as activities to promote supportive learning communities for teachers. Teachers use these organized structures as opportunities to gather and to discuss their teaching practices and their students' work. Principals note that teachers highly value reflective inquiry, up-to-date research, and academic expertise. Principals also report a high degree of trust among staff, suggesting that schools are safe places for teachers to disagree and to learn from those disagreements. We observed teachers participating in detailed discussions about the quality of their teaching and about student work. Teachers share information with each other and take collective responsibility for achieving school goals. Based on the case study evidence, these developments support the sustainability of professional communities within the funded schools.

The majority of the Annenberg schools use funds to support costs for external professional development activities. Teachers attend local, state, and national conferences to present and listen to, as well as to interact with renowned educational scholars and practitioners. These conferences provide teachers opportunities to deepen their knowledge in specific areas such as dual language, small schools, integrating art into science and math, and literacy curricula. By attending these conferences, teachers build networks of professional colleagues, locally and nationally, who are interested in the same curriculum topics. Through these networks, teachers expand their sources for new knowledge, reduce their

sense of professional isolation, and are recognized for their own personal expertise.

Some schools developed extensive working relationships with faculty from local universities. These partnerships result in university classrooms on-site at several schools, dual language programs, literacy and science laboratories, and unique writing projects. The university partnerships also provide a source for new teacher recruitment as pre-service teachers complete their education and move into the workforce.

**A**dministrators often use funds to purchase teaching materials and curriculum supplies. As a result of this investment, teachers received on-grade-level books and on-site training in such areas as literacy intervention and technology. At many schools, teachers identify their own professional development needs and use Annenberg funds to provide support for teachers to attend workshops and classes of their own choosing. Funds also pay for substitute teachers to allow staff time to attend professional development activities.

Administrators also experimented with ways to "capture" time to enable staff to participate in professional development activities and to "capture" talent as it emerges from expert teachers in the schools. Several schools developed alternative schedules to build in time for daily or weekly staff development. Some middle and high schools use the weekly staff development time as an opportunity for students to engage in community service projects.

Other teachers from across the state recognize Annenberg teachers as educational leaders in the Greater Houston area. For example, content specialists provide regular

training and support to classroom teachers and work with teachers in schools across the feeder pattern. Content specialists support classroom teachers by giving individual attention to students. This individualized instruction occurs within the classroom and may be given to students who are struggling to understand a concept or to students who have mastered the concept and need to stretch their skills. Also, some Annenberg teachers are recognized at the national level as they present information on dual language acquisition, literacy intervention, and portfolio development at national conferences.

### **Significant Restructuring of Student Learning Environments**

Schools that create small structures often know and understand children better. Teachers in smaller schools possess valuable knowledge about children and their families. This knowledge helps teachers to be effective in the classroom and provides opportunities for children to perform at high levels academically. In the case study schools, we observed that schools engaged in significant restructuring, adopted new curricula approaches, and created supportive learning environments for children. All of these strategies helped schools create personalized learning environments.

**R**esearchers saw evidence of restructuring, particularly in secondary schools. Both middle and high schools often are regarded as large and impersonal places for children. However, many of the case study schools reorganized to create smaller units. Schools rearranged schedules to meet the needs of students. Principals assigned specific personnel, such as content specialists, to work with a small number of students in targeting specific learning areas. Teachers implemented advisory

***In the case study schools, we observed that schools engaged in significant restructuring, adopted new curricula approaches, and created supportive learning environments for children.***

periods and tutorial support programs to provide individualized attention to students. Also, teachers adopted specific curricular approaches to enhance student-teacher relationships. These programs personalize the student learning environment.

In general, these activities create a learning environment friendly to students, teachers, parents, and others involved in the education of children. Given the short amount of time for reform implementation, these schools significantly restructured to build a more personalized school and student learning environment. In The Houston Annenberg Challenge survey analysis, the majority of students indicated that teachers care and treat them with respect and fairness. Students also report that they enjoy attending school. In fact, 80 percent of the middle and high school students surveyed expect to stay and graduate from high school. In contrast, middle and high school students across the country drop out of school at high rates. The Texas annual longitudinal dropout rate was 14.7 percent in 1998-99. This finding suggests that students in Annenberg schools are engaged in learning and have high educational aspirations.

## New Forms to Reduce Isolation

To reduce isolation, teachers collaborate with each other to improve their instructional practice and the quality of student outcomes. Moreover, collaboration improves staff trust and produces new avenues for sharing information about student needs. The case study schools developed structures to foster collaboration among teachers.

Case study schools used different strategies such as Critical Friends Groups to form teams to review their practices and student work. Teachers in case study schools also used Tribes, a nationally-known process that helps teachers reduce isolation within schools. Other schools implemented school families to reduce teacher isolation. In school families, a teacher works with four other teachers within the same area of the building. Families of students and teachers remain together for the academic year. Teachers share their expertise and assume leadership positions in some schools, particularly at Beacon schools. These teachers share their expertise at district, regional, state, and national professional development conferences.

In the survey, all teachers reported that collaboration increased. The mean score on the item assessing collaboration was 3.5 on a five point scale. Teachers also reported high levels of interaction and discussion among peers. Moreover, principals concurred that teachers worked together throughout the school and between schools. Case study interviews and observations also indicate that schools engaged in significant activity to reduce isolation within their schools.

The following table demonstrates the mean scores on collaboration and professional development among teachers.

Areas of Professional Development	Mean Score
Perceived gains in their professional development	3.57
Fostering collaboration among teachers	3.46
Enhancing discussion and interaction among teachers on teaching and learning issues	3.33
Engaging in peer interactions for professional growth	2.15

## New Partnerships with Parents and Community Members

The Houston Annenberg Challenge requires schools to develop partnerships with parents and community members. Furthermore, The Houston Annenberg Challenge suggests that schools engage a multitude of stakeholders as equal partners in the reform efforts. We examined partnerships with two groups: parents and community members at-large.

The 12 case study schools made significant progress on developing partnerships with parents and community members. All 12 principals indicated that their schools developed meaningful relationships with parents. In fact, most of the case study schools created physical spaces for parents to meet and work with teachers, other parents, and students at the school. Principals report that parents actively engage in improving both the education of their child and their own education. In fact, the most effective parent involvement takes place in the classroom where parents become teachers and learners simultaneously.

Case study schools created programs to pair adults as mentors with students in need of academic, social, and emotional support.

Campus advisory teams also produced school policies that require parents to volunteer their time inside the classroom. Furthermore, evening classes, which provide information to parents about academic areas or provide skill development, attract more parents to school. In fact, one school reported parental involvement increased over 2,275 hours from the previous year's participation.

**W**hile participation has risen among elementary and middle schools, parent participation in high schools seems to be struggling. Secondary schools report minimal parent participation in the classroom. However, principals report ongoing efforts to increase parent participation in schools.

### **Partnerships with the Community**

All 12 case study schools engage in partnerships with the community. Case researchers reported seeing evidence of significant progress in increasing community participation in schools. Principals and teachers from these schools write proposals and invite community businesses to participate in the school's reform efforts. These school leaders engage in successful collaborations with a variety of businesses, cultural institutions, and other community organizations. For instance, some of these schools developed working partnerships with Houston museums such as the Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum of Natural Science, and the Museum of Health and Medicine. Other schools engaged support from hospitals, universities, and oil companies for their schools. Grant programs such as Adopt-a-School and expertise from other resources provided by local organizations represent most of the school and community partnerships. In summary, the case schools made significant progress in incorporating

parents, community members, and businesses to support Houston's school reform.


## **Progress on Building Support for Reform**

### **How is The Houston Annenberg Challenge helping districts reshape policies to support reforming schools? How is The Houston Annenberg Challenge progressing to build an infrastructure of support for education reform in the Greater Houston area?**

The Houston Annenberg Challenge believes that to change an institutionalized system like public schools, an independent organization must attain access to policymakers and exert leverage in systems where change is difficult. The Houston Annenberg Challenge provides the vision, the support systems, and the political strength to transform public education in the Greater Houston area. Moreover, this group serves a critical role in assisting schools to accomplish the reform goals.


Based on superintendent interviews, we found that The Houston Annenberg Challenge creates a vision of school reform by working with educators, community leaders, and businesses to engage the larger community, to promote understanding, and to support Houston reforms in public education. The Houston Annenberg Challenge maintains pressure and support to preserve student achievement as the focus of the reform. Principals report that schools receive status and visibility within their communities. Furthermore, documents and activities engaged by The Houston Annenberg Challenge provide information and training on reform efforts. Examples of The Houston Annenberg Challenge's role in developing programs include the Summer Institutes, the

**The Houston Annenberg Challenge provides the vision, the support systems, and the political strength to transform public education in the Greater Houston area.**



**"We had heard that Bethune Academy was the model. I have been in and out of hundreds of schools and it is clearly the best all-around elementary school I have seen."**

**Dr. Larry Sullivan,  
superintendent of  
the Texarkana  
Independent School  
District**



Principals' Leadership Academy, the High School Initiative, and the Higher Education Pre-Service Enhancement Initiative.

### **Framework to Manage Change**

The Houston Annenberg theory of action includes tools to manage the change process. The use of the School Accountability Report permits funded schools to analyze their own theories of action by presenting detailed reports of programmatic activities. Planning and evaluation consultants provide expertise and on-site technical assistance to Beacon schools. These consultants actively engage the schools in reflection on their work in progress by providing current research literature, identifying professional training opportunities, and facilitating study groups.

### **Summary**

At year one of this evaluation, researchers discovered that the Annenberg-funded schools made significant progress in school reform. While some schools progressed faster and further than others, reform in all funded schools moved forward in areas such as increasing teacher learning, reducing iso-

lation, building smaller educational places for children, and improving student academic progress. This progress is consistent with the overall theory of action espoused by The Houston Annenberg Challenge.

Our research and evaluation of reform efforts reveal that teachers and administrators created structures to expand their content knowledge and teaching practices that may improve student learning. Moreover, administrators restructured significantly large schools into smaller units to improve teacher-student relationships and the learning climate. Furthermore, teachers and administrators engaged new partners in the education of children. Parents, business leaders, corporate leaders, university leaders, and leaders of cultural organizations participated actively to support school reform in Houston.

**F**inally, Annenberg schools continue to improve student learning. Trend data indicate that Annenberg schools are doing well academically in both reading and mathematics achievement. In fact, all schools increased their performance from 1999 to 2000 in reading and mathematics.