

Transforming Public Schools



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Special assistance in production of this report provided by Jennifer Ellen Cook and Amanda Masterson, editors, and Kristina Schlegel, designer.

Cover art by Alex, Jennifer, Jessica, Luis, Maria, Ofelia, and Raul, students from a Houston Annenberg Challenge elementary school.

Transforming Public Schools

Year Two Summary Report / August 2001

Introduction

At the White House on December 17, 1993, President Bill Clinton announced a private pledge of \$500 million to public education from Walter Annenberg, a philanthropist and former United States ambassador to Great Britain. American school children, particularly under-served 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 (HAC) initiative emerged. In 1997, the Houston Annenberg Challenge received a 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's leadership encourages local planning and ownership in reform efforts and argues for local program design, believing that a local approach leads to more successful and enduring change. The Houston Annenberg Challenge seeks to harness the visions, talents, and energies of those closest to schools, those who know the most about the school's problems and are most affected by its efforts. Furthermore, HAC 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, multiple interests are represented among the planners. As a result of the emphasis on local design, different reform strategies evolved among HAC schools. Yet all the schools have four common objectives:

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

THE BABY TREE

I moved to a
new house
last
August.

I left the
beautiful, baby
tree that I
planted
in the back yard
of that house.

When the weather
was
flaming hot
outside,
the lovely
leaves
the color of
St. Patrick's Day
green,
slowly started turning
from green, to yellow,
to red, and
finally, brown
and then, it looked away
from the
world,
DEAD.

After that happened, the
leaves
started
falling
off
my wonderful,
brilliant,
baby tree.

A newborn
in the world,
one
by
one,
falling
on the
ugly, black
ground.

Ambereen Ali
Annenberg-funded middle school
sixth grader

“For 25 years I taught, and I never went anywhere. I never, ever was able to share with other educators the ideas that I knew would work. With Annenberg, a whole new doorway was opened for us. We can be a voice, go places, and present what we know works. We can exchange ideas so we can start bending other people’s minds.

Typically, everything comes from the top down. Education comes from the university, as professors tell us how to develop a program. Or the Board of Education tells us what to do. But what we really need to do comes from us, from our home school, from the ground up. Here at Cochrane, we create our own curriculum; we design our own programs. We look at the needs of the students, and every year we re-evaluate what we are doing.

The children come first.”

Elementary school teacher

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 have already demonstrated 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 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 members consult 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 Year Two evaluation provides formative feedback to HAC schools so that strategies currently used may be modified based on evidence of emerging reform outcomes.

The overarching purposes of the research and evaluation study include determining how the funded schools put the reform initiative in place, what the schools are doing as a result of the initiative, and what apparent impact the initiative has had upon schools and – most critically – upon students’ academic performance. 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. Certain questions direct the evaluation in these areas.

Student Learning : How are the three types of schools doing in terms of student achievement? Do they show relative gains from one year to the next within their school district? Are they closing the achievement gap? 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 HAC 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?

In this formative report, we continue to answer questions on the impact of Houston Annenberg on public schools. We focus particularly on the emerging evidence that reform supported by Annenberg funding has begun to result in changing school environments and improved student achievement.

Data Sources

This evaluation report draws upon multiple sources of evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, to evaluate progress on reform efforts. The evaluation design includes two major strategies, a macroanalysis of all funded schools and a microanalysis of a subset of schools. At a macro level, we used test data to compare Annenberg-funded schools with their own academic performance in prior years and with the academic performance of comparable peers. Comparable groups included all Houston Independent School District schools. We made these comparisons because HISD shares the demographic characteristics of Annenberg-funded schools. We made all comparisons within the school level; for instance, Annenberg-funded elementary schools were compared with other elementary schools within HISD. In addition to investigating data at the macro level, we examined evidence of school change at the micro level. We selected 12 schools from Beacon, Lamplighter, and Floodlight schools for intensive study. These schools include six elementary, three middle, and three high schools. We conducted interviews, focus groups, and observations at this small sample of funded schools.

We 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. Analyses of these survey data are contained in the Year Two Evaluation Report. In the following section, we describe specific data sources used for evaluation of student outcomes, school development, and building support for systemic reform.

COLORS IN MY MIND

In my mind
I see
colors dancing and leaping across
my head
as if they are trying to spell words
with no letters.
In my mind
I see
the color blue. In my mind this is a
sad but
deep color trying to talk but never
having the right words
to describe the feeling.
In my mind
I see
the color yellow. In my mind this is a
bright and cheerful
color, always happy and light. Yellow
is like the sun
when it comes out on a rainy day.
In my mind
I see
the color red. In my mind this is a
bold and serious color.
Red is like a soldier that has much
pride and struts around
the land to show the great honor
and trust that he holds.
In my mind
I see
the color green. In my mind this is a
gentle, caring color.
Like Mother Earth who is always
nurturing the many
creatures that God gave to Her.
In my mind
I see
the color black. In my mind this is a
lost, deep, solemn
color. It travels like a lost soul
wandering forever
in darkness.
In my mind
I see
colors dancing and leaping in my
mind as if
they are trying to spell words with
no letters.

Brittany Kouri
Annenberg-funded middle school
sixth grader

“The Critical Friends Group has been a very powerful reflective tool for me.... For instance, last spring I went to the National Council of the Teachers of Mathematics meeting in Chicago. One of the sessions emphasized project-based learning. For my geometry class this fall, I tried getting students to work on a project where they went out into the real world and found examples of different types of quadrilaterals.... Most of the projects were superficial. The kids weren’t used to working on projects. So I brought some samples to the Critical Friends Group.... In the group, I was able to improve the overall lesson. They helped me to reword it to elicit a stronger, deeper response from the students.... The students have responded very positively to this. I’ve had a lot of comments like ‘I’m so excited to come to class.’ To hear a high school student say that about math class is really unusual.”

High school mathematics teacher

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Student Learning: Data for this section use the Texas Learning Index (TLI) score that describes how well a student has mastered the academic knowledge in 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, parents, and school partners. Whereas other analyses use test score averages, we used the TLI as the standard for comparing school performance. The TLI minimum standard for assessing grade-level performance is a score of 70 or above, and a TLI of 85 or above indicates mastery of the subject matter. Mastery is defined as the level at which a student actually understands a subject such as mathematics. We chose to use the TLI mastery measure to address criticism of the TAAS minimum level measurement. Generally, a campus with a TLI of 85 or above would be designated as high performing by the Texas Education Agency.

School Development: 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 reports generated by Houston Annenberg Challenge personnel.

Building Support for Systemic Change: 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. School Accountability Reports prepared annually by the funded schools for HAC also provide data useful for examining activities in progress and assessing the extent to which those activities lay a foundation for long-term engagement in education reform. The full Year Two Evaluation Report contains detailed information and analyses of Year Two research quantitative and qualitative data.

Progress on Student Learning

The Houston Annenberg Challenge expects all funded schools to show significant gains in student academic achievement after three years of funding. Beacon schools have received four years of funding, Lamplighter schools have been funded for three consecutive years, and Floodlight schools have received only two years of funding. Thus, we make two sets of comparisons. First, we trace the academic improvement of the group of schools over time. Second, we compare the funded schools to the overall academic performance of the Houston Independent School District (HISD). We use this district because the sociopolitical and economic context, the student population, and other demographics are similar to those of the funded schools.

As the benchmark for academic achievement, we use the Texas Learning Index (TLI), which is based on the students’ performance on the state-mandated TAAS test. This test measures basic skills in core areas such as reading and mathematics. While these standardized assessments fall short of measuring the depth of academic achievement and the range of student outcomes, they do provide a common yardstick for evaluating academic outcomes of the Houston Annenberg Challenge schools.

At Year Two, we are evaluating trends in schools' performance on the Texas Learning Index based on four years of test data, including 2001. To evaluate the progress of the funded schools, we examine:

- Beacon, Lamplighter, and Floodlight schools' average gains over time by elementary, middle, and high school levels;
- The academic gains of funded schools as compared to the gains of all HISD schools generally; and
- The extent to which funded schools show progress in closing the achievement gap between students of different economic, language, and ethnic groups.

In general, our evaluation found that Annenberg-funded schools usually outperformed non-Annenberg-funded HISD schools. Specifically, Beacon schools lead all other Annenberg-funded and non-Annenberg-funded HISD schools in reading and mathematics achievement. Students in Lamplighter schools exhibited significant positive increases toward mastery, while students in Floodlight schools have shown varied progress.

Academic Achievement Growth

Elementary Schools

Beacon elementary schools are leading all Annenberg-funded and non-Annenberg-funded elementary schools in academic achievement in reading and mathematics over the last four years.

Out of all the funded elementary schools, the Beacon elementary group leads the other two groups in academic reading achievement. Over the last four years the students from Beacon schools have outperformed the students from Lamplighter and Floodlight schools. Indeed, every year the students from Beacon schools have mastered all the reading objectives tested in the state-mandated test. The Lamplighter schools also have maintained their level of performance for the last three years. These schools have steadily approached the mastery level in reading achievement, reaching that level in 2001. On the other hand, the Floodlight schools started off in 1999 with a passing average score. During the last two years, Floodlight schools as a group have moved upward at least 5 TLI points. As a group of funded elementary schools, they are performing well in improving children's reading skills, as indicated in Figure 1.

Beacon and Lamplighter schools have outperformed comparable HISD schools in reading. The average TLI score for the HISD schools is 84.2. The only exception is the Floodlight schools, which scored 3.5 TLI points lower than the HISD elementary schools as a whole.

Analysis of mathematics achievement reveals a similar pattern. Beacon elementary schools lead all the other funded schools. Indeed, Beacon schools have almost achieved the mastery standard during the 2001 academic year. These schools have consistently raised their TLI scores since Annenberg funding. Similarly, the Lamplighter schools have continued to increase their TLI averages in mathematics since Annenberg funding. They have not yet reached the performance of Beacon schools in this area. They are, however, narrowing the achievement gap between these two sets of schools.

ART

Four plain pictures that are black and white.

circles and lines, painting, no heads and arms

Kids in one picture and men in another,

people's feet, rusted houses

Newspaper clippings, photo album made of white rocks and the picture shining down on it.

pictures covered in colored paper, hanging from the ceiling

Pictures of the Holocaust.

Christy Barker
Annenberg-funded middle school sixth grader

“Those seminars made me think, ‘What are we actually teaching? What are those outdated practices that are not making a connection with our students?’ I had to go back and change everything. I knew their verbal skills were low. I knew their vocabulary skills were lacking. I knew they did not know how to study, that they didn’t really know what it meant to learn. They’d make the scores for the test, but if you asked them to reproduce the information in another form, they could not do it. I came up with the idea of having the students apply for their final grade by presenting an ‘oral defense’ project. I designed categories to make sure all the basic information was included. Each student has to address a problem, connect it to prior knowledge, show a visual and demonstrate the principle in a laboratory setting. Then the students have to answer questions from three assessors. I was amazed to see the quality of the work. If I look at the projects, I cannot tell which came from an honor student and which from a special education student.”

Chemistry teacher

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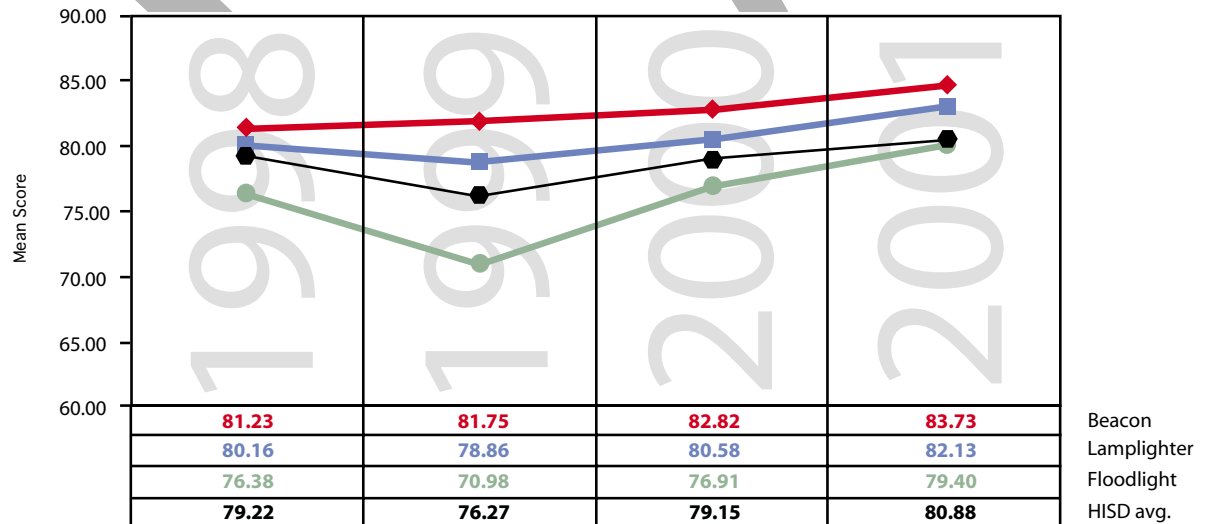
Figure 1: Elementary School Reading Scores



While the Floodlight schools have made progress since Annenberg funding, that progress has been slow. Only 2.5 TLI points have been added since Annenberg funding. In fact, Floodlight schools underperform the rest of the HISD elementary schools as a group in terms of mathematics scores.

In conclusion, when comparing Annenberg-funded schools against all other HISD elementary schools, the Beacon and Lamplighter schools outperform the comparison schools in mathematics (see Figure 2). Indeed, both sets of schools are fairly close to achieving mastery of the state test. Only the Floodlight schools are achieving at a rate lower than those of all HISD elementary schools.

Figure 2: Elementary School Mathematics Scores



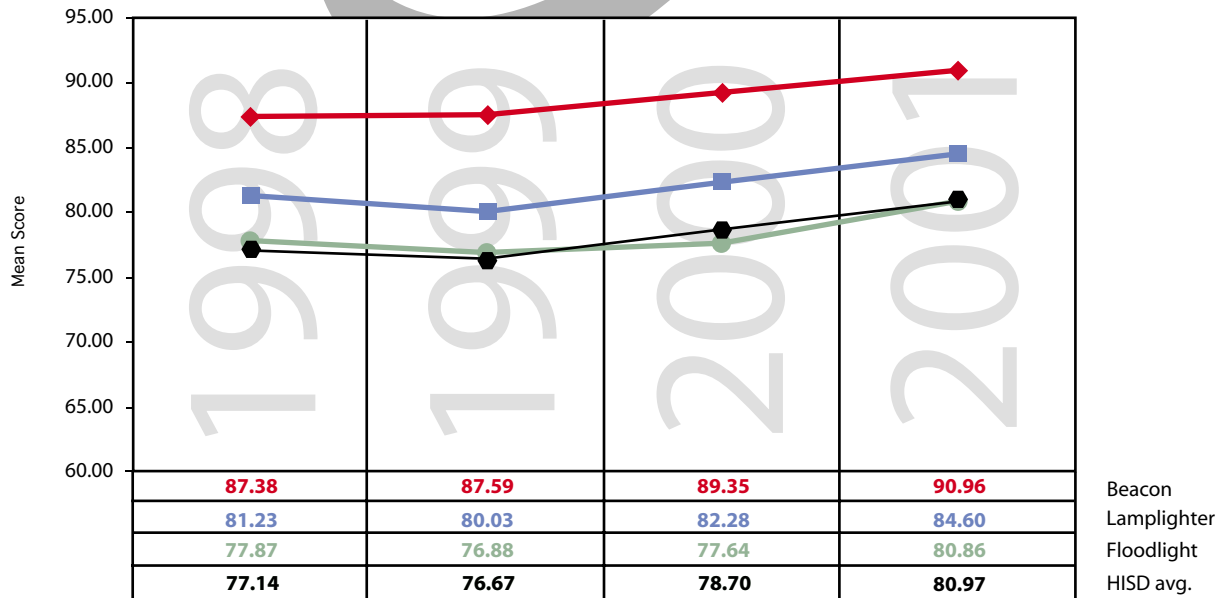
Middle Schools

Beacon middle schools continue to outperform other Annenberg-funded schools and HISD middle schools in reading and mathematics achievement.

Beacon middle schools continue to lead all other middle schools in reading achievement, as illustrated in Figure 3. Beacon middle schools have achieved mastery levels on the reading test. In fact, Beacon middle schools have outperformed both Annenberg-funded (Lamplighter and Floodlight) and non-Annenberg-funded HISD schools by 10 or more TLI points. Lamplighter middle schools also have performed well since Annenberg funding was implemented in these schools. Lamplighter schools have gained 4 or more TLI points since they obtained funding from Houston Annenberg, and these schools as a group are approaching mastery of the reading test. Finally, the Floodlight schools have also gained 3 TLI points from its first year of funding to the current academic year (2001). They scored an average of 84.86 TLI points as a group of middle schools.

Comparing the funded schools to all HISD middle schools, Beacon middle schools outperformed all other middle schools by 10 TLI points. Also, the Beacon middle schools outperformed the Lamplighter middle schools by approximately 6 TLI points. Lamplighter middle schools outperformed HISD middle schools by approximately 3.5 TLI points. Floodlight middle schools performed at the same level as the rest of the HISD middle schools.

Figure 3: Middle School Reading Scores



DOWNTOWN

In downtown the air is as painful as a kick
in the butt. The road is as green as dew.
I keep my hands in my shoes.
I try to make myself fat. I try to imagine
moving through a heaving crowd of
rabbits without
touching a single flea.

In downtown strange feet are below.
Under my head is fire.
A kid sings into a hole in a tree, his feet
nearly missing me as I pass by.
This is nighttime, but in daytime
the seats and cabs are smaller.
Two infants sit on great whales by the
dull teeth of fish, as if they feel pain. A
baby yells out that she is selling
candied sand apples on a stick. A crowd
of drunken birds swells out of a
doghouse and crashes into the
hard pillow of clouds above.
The smell of dog poop.
Tape, tape, tape.

Books, like mine, thrown against the cold.
We leave downtown on a purple day.
We ride the carpets through fire.
We leave the tears that surround Hong
Kong. We leave the brick people and
hay-like, crying
grass of American streets.

People speed by. Dogs fly and fall by.
And I am yelling very softly, but not softly
enough for Carlos, who
is dozing off on the toilet to listen. "I smell
you, land. I smell you downtown."

The firelog stacks and mudyards recede
on the water. Goodbye, happy people.
Goodbye, happy, happy
people.

Erika Davila
Annenberg-funded middle school
sixth grader

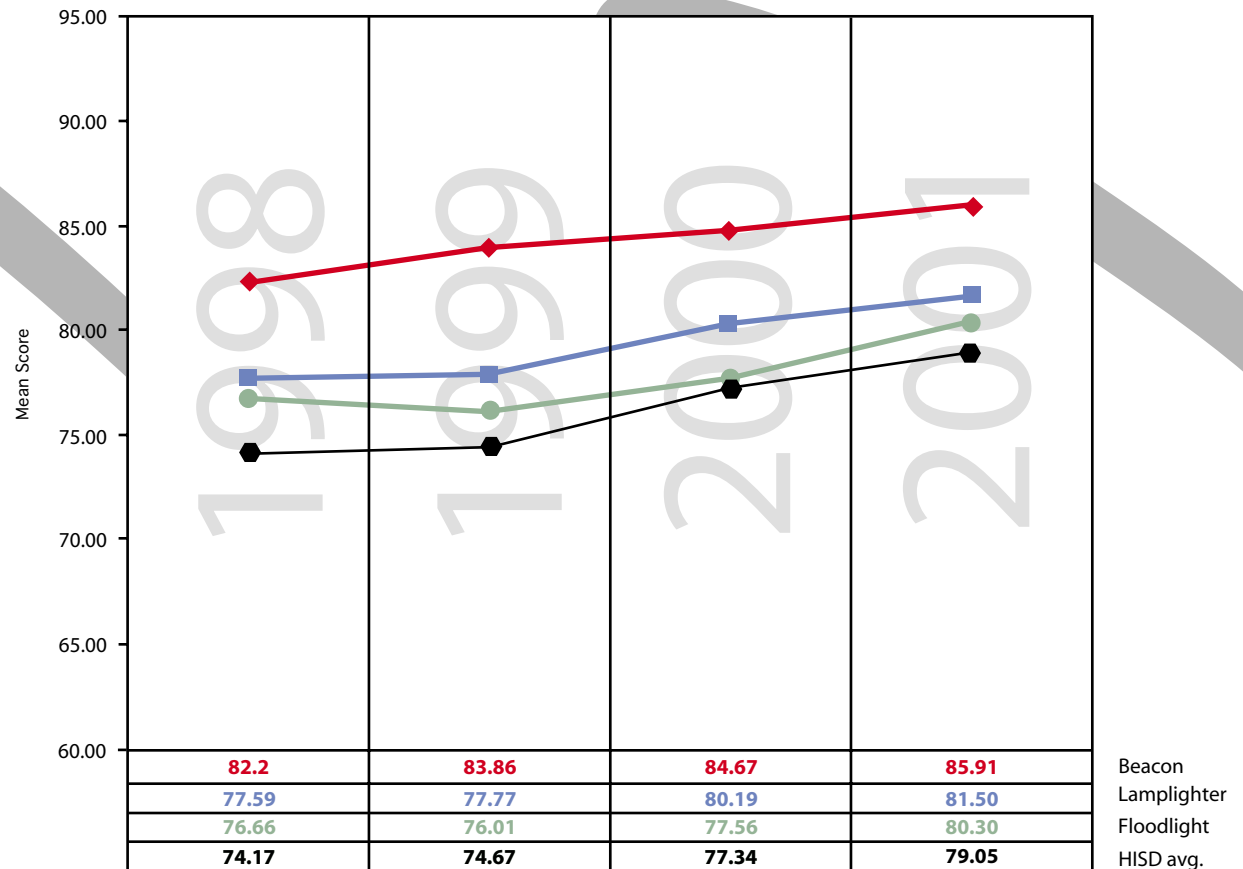
“Critical Friends Group has given me the opportunity to actively extend my own awareness. In the group we think and question together; we approach a problem situation as a team of consultants. The same can happen in a teacher-student classroom and in teacher-administrator situations.”

High school English teacher

The data on mathematics achievement gains for middle schools also reveal a significant difference among the various groups being compared in this report. The average TLI scores for Beacon middle schools have increased steadily for the last four years. Indeed, during the current academic year, these schools, as a group, have achieved mastery in mathematics (85.91 TLI) as gauged by the state exam. Similarly, Lamplighter middle schools have experienced significant positive increases in TLI scores since becoming part of the Houston Annenberg Challenge program. Although these schools have not achieved the mastery standard, they are beginning to narrow that gap. These schools scored, on average, 81.5 TLI points as a group of schools. Floodlight middle schools also experienced positive growth since receiving funding from the Houston Annenberg Challenge. Last year these schools scored 77.5 TLI points. This year these schools grew by approximately 3 TLI points.

In conclusion, in our comparison of all the funded schools against all HISD middle schools, the data show that the funded middle schools outperform all other HISD middle schools (See Figure 4). Beacon middle schools lead the other schools with an average of 85.91 TLI points. Lamplighter and Floodlight middle schools outperform all other HISD middle schools by 1 or 2 TLI points.

Figure 4: Middle School Mathematics Scores

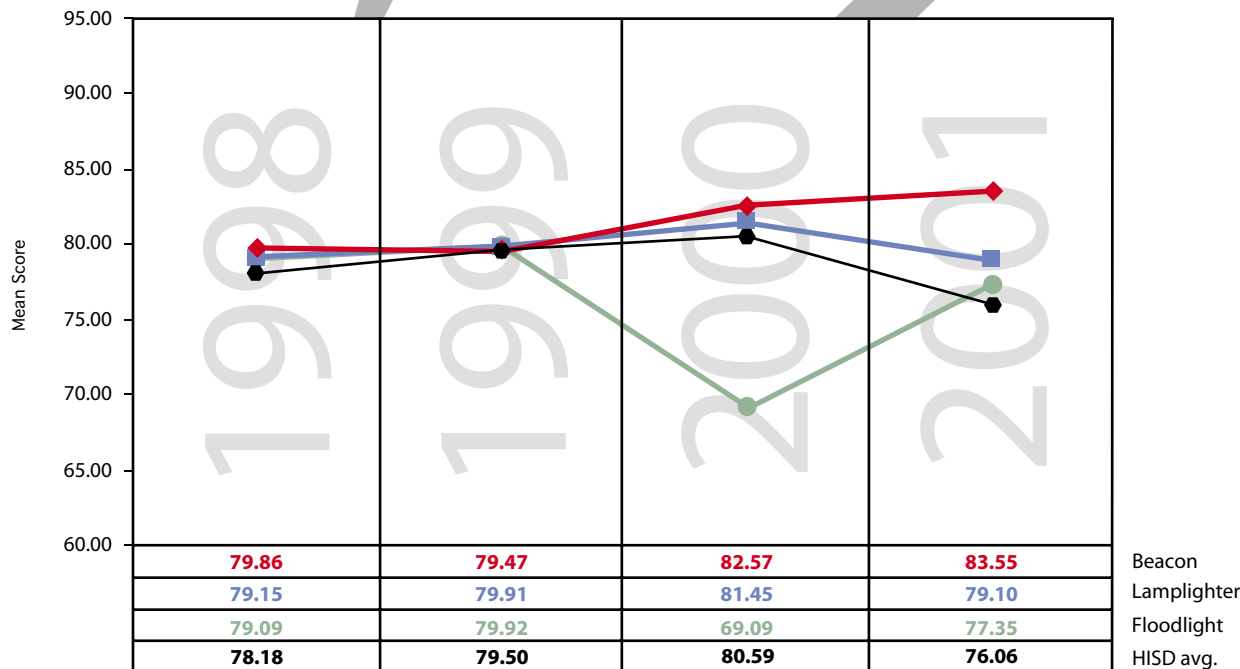


High Schools

Beacon high schools also continue to outperform other Annenberg-funded schools and HISD schools in reading and mathematics achievement.

Beacon high schools have continued to improve their performance on reading achievement tests over the last four years. Their growth has put these schools fairly close to achieving the mastery standard in reading. From 1998 to 1999, the data show a slight decrease in performance. However, the years 2000 and 2001 show significant increases. On the other hand, Lamplighter high schools showed a slight decline in reading TLI scores from year 2000 to year 2001. In spite of that trend, the Lamplighter high schools still show an above-average score of 79.1 TLI points in reading. Similarly, Floodlight high schools began with an average of 69.09 TLI points in the year 2000, and ended with an overall average of 77.35 TLI in the 2001 academic year. Thus, these schools experienced a growth of 7 TLI points from one year to the next. As shown in Figure 5, all the funded schools are outperforming the rest of the HISD high schools.

Figure 5: High School Reading Scores



THE POEM IS CALLING

The poem is calling.
It calls in your heart.
It calls when you talk.
It calls to your brain.

The poem lies
In the hands of people.
It seeps through,
Like water in a paper towel.
Or like water easily flowing
through dirt.

Only people know what they
feel like.
People see the sights,
Feel the words,
They know the meaning,
And they feel the love.

If only people could follow
The lead of poetry,
It would be
A whole new world.

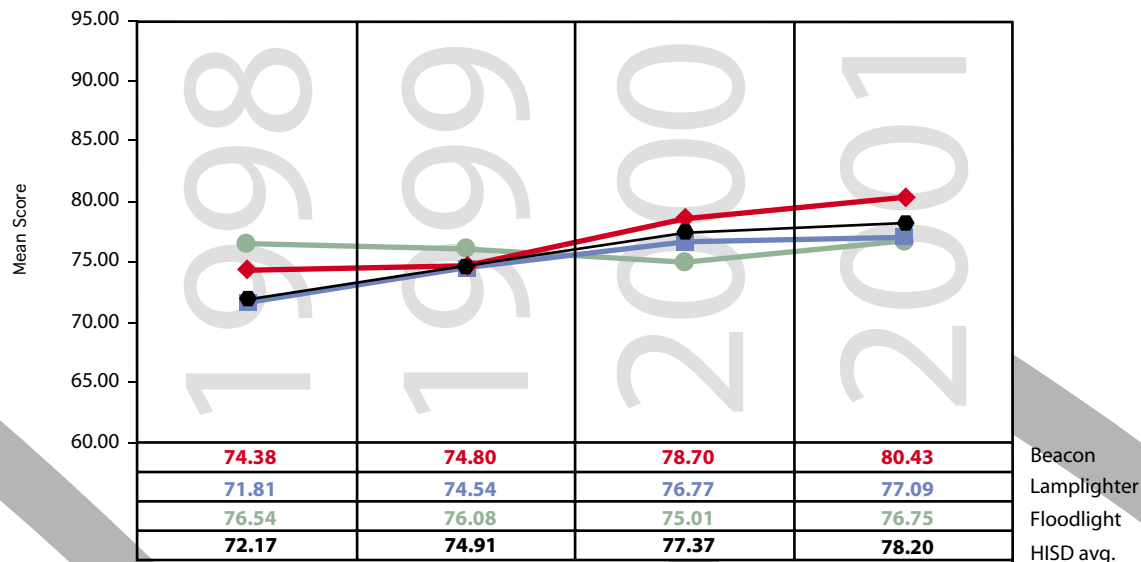
Kala Batiste
Annenberg-funded middle school
sixth grader

“For me personally, the best thing about our Annenberg funding is that we were able to establish planning days. The planning days are great because we’re departmentalized in the fifth grade. Now I can talk with the fifth-grade teacher who does reading. I correlate what she’s doing in reading with what I’m doing in language arts and writing....I make a point of reading the books that I know she’s going to use. I can see the excitement in the kids because I’ve read the same books.”

Elementary school teacher

The trend analysis in mathematics shows that the Beacon high schools again outperformed all HISD high schools. Beacon high schools have increased their performance over the last four years. During the academic year 2001, these schools scored 80.43 TLI points as a group. Lamplighter high schools have increased their level of performance over the funding years. They began with a baseline score of 74.54 during the 1999 academic year and ended up with an average of 77.09 TLI points during the 2001 academic year. Floodlight high schools have maintained their scores, with a slight increase from 75.01 TLI points to 76.75 TLI points during the 2001 academic year. This growth is small but adequate, since these high schools only began receiving funds last year. In summary, Beacon high schools lead all other funded and non-funded high schools in the Houston Independent School District. Lamplighter and Floodlight high schools were outperformed by the HISD high schools in mathematics achievement. Figure 6 shows four-year trends for each set of schools.

Figure 6: High School Mathematics Scores



Dropout Rate

An important non-academic component of assessing how well Annenberg-funded schools are impacting student achievement is examining changes in high school dropout rates. In theory, students engaged in their work learn at high levels, feel connected to their schools, and thus will make it all the way to graduation. A variety of methods exist to calculate the dropout rate. We used the Texas Education Agency figures as a starting point and compared the Annenberg-funded high schools to other high schools in HISD. We found that dropout rates were declining in both groups at about the same rate.

In Year Three of our evaluation, we intend to examine dropout rates in more detail as we assess the impact of two related Houston Annenberg initiatives, Transforming High Schools and Schools for a New Society project. The Transforming High Schools initiative, begun two years ago, aims to create a model for restructuring a high school into a 21st-century learning center. Schools for a New Society, which begins in the fall of 2001, is a partnership project with HISD to restructure all 24 comprehensive school district high schools along similar lines.

Closing the Achievement Gap

We also looked at how Houston Annenberg succeeded in changing the achievement gap between students of different ethnicities, socioeconomic status, and language backgrounds.

The trend data analysis on Beacon and Lamplighter schools indicates that these schools have narrowed, in some cases considerably, the gap between minority and non-minority students in reading and mathematics. As for socioeconomic status (SES), the Beacon and Lamplighter schools also have narrowed, in some cases considerably again, the achievement gap in reading and mathematics. We saw little, if any, change, however, in closing the gap between students whose native language is not English and native English speakers.

**Table: Annenberg Elementary Schools
Reading by Ethnicity, SES, Language Status**

	Beacon			Lamplighter			Floodlight		
	1999	2000	growth	1999	2000	growth	1999	2000	growth
Minority	76.6	84.0	7.4	81.4	83.3	1.9	*	*	*
Non-Minority	90.6	91.5	.9	90.4	90.7	.3	*	*	*
Low SES	78.7	83.8	5.1	79.7	82.3	2.6	73.7	80.3	6.6
Non-Low SES	88.2	89.3	1.1	87.9	88.8	.9	79.0	83.2	4.2
Non-Native English Speakers	78.6	80.4	1.6	75.8	77.7	1.9	68.4	77.7	9.3
Native English Speakers	85.6	87.2	1.6	84.4	85.8	1.4	76.3	81.2	4.9

TLI average scores for years 1999 and 2000.

* Data not available.

WRITING LIKE JAZZ

Writing
is like jazz.
Words
are the lyrics
of improvisation.
Jazz
so blaring,
yet mild.
You just can't
get enough of it.
It is soothing
and cool.
The beat
of the pencil
hitting the paper
as I go along
writing,
and writing,
and writing.
The rhythm
going through my head
as I write.
The only word that explains it
is
Jazz.

Michael Nieto
Annenberg-funded middle school
sixth grader

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 changes have taken place within targeted schools?

The Houston Annenberg Challenge theory of action maintains that successful school reform requires development of a strong professional community. In strong professional communities, faculty members 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.

HAC also believes that school reform can be sustained by building caring, learning environments for students. Reducing isolation among teachers, parents, and the larger community leads to coherent support for school reform. Yet HAC does not expect all schools to be at the same level at the same time. However, all schools are expected 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. This year we concentrated on teacher learning, the outcomes of teacher learning, curriculum and instructional innovations, parents and the community, and progress in building support for reform.

To fully capture the progress Annenberg-funded schools have made, we documented 26 hours of classroom instruction at six Beacon schools during the second year of our evaluation. From that footage, we compiled a 51-minute documentary, "Sounds of Learning." The documentary demonstrates the substantial difference between traditional instruction and the teaching methods employed at Houston Annenberg Challenge schools. These include dual language instruction, integrated curriculum, and arts-infused curriculum. Students in the documentary demonstrate three complementary methods of learning: collaborative, contextualized, and active in-depth learning.

Teacher Learning

Teachers at HAC schools report that prior to Annenberg their greatest need was for intellectual and professional resources. Teachers believe that traditional district or campus training programs do not meet their needs. These training programs generally are selected by the district office or campus administrators and offer "one-shot" presentations or workshops with little follow-up support. Teachers seeking specific types of pertinent training frequently find it necessary to use personal funds.

"Now we have such a nice variety of materials and the leveled set of books.

We can teach the children the strategies they need instead of just 'I want to get to level 12 or 13.'

We want to keep building on the strategies that we've taught them so they gradually become stronger readers and can handle the tougher material that is coming up. In the last year and a half I've seen a lot more time spent on teaching students useful strategies. This is how I can get them to that independent level where they can pick up any book in the classroom and read it."

Elementary school teacher

By contrast, the Houston Annenberg Challenge invests heavily in teacher learning. Teachers must know pedagogy if they are to connect children effectively with academic content, adapting their teaching modes in response to students. Thus, many Annenberg schools focus their professional development on areas of greatest need. For example, elementary schools work to improve students' early literacy skills. Middle schools focus on engaging older, "reluctant" readers in sustained reading and writing activities. As a result, participating HAC schools use approximately 90% of their Annenberg funds on professional development. Teachers report these funds give them the necessary role models, research literature, and collegial support to master their craft. By encouraging professional development and by providing administrators and teachers access to ongoing programs, the Houston Annenberg Challenge exposes practicing educators to the latest research on effective teaching tools and methods. These educators share their expertise with their peers, identify problems, and collectively search for effective teaching strategies.

Substantial evidence demonstrates that the Houston Annenberg Challenge investment in professional development is positively impacting teaching and learning in funded schools. For example, our researchers report that one of the most effective teacher learning programs is the New Jersey Writing Project. After one Annenberg-funded school began using the New Jersey Writing Project, students' reading and writing scores increased dramatically. Sixth and seventh graders' Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores increased by two to three grade levels in just one year. Moreover, this school was the only middle school in its district to show improved TAAS writing scores in 2000.

Annenberg schools provide a range of activities to foster teacher learning. Teachers participate in professional training both on- and off-campus. Annenberg funds help teachers with travel expenses and conference registration fees, enabling them to attend high-quality professional development activities that would otherwise be cost-prohibitive. Entire school faculties attend training on specific curriculum approaches being implemented campus-wide. Additionally, teachers self-select training to meet their specific needs. Sometimes schools bring in consultants to provide training on-campus; this approach allows consultants to customize the material to a school's particular needs.

Teachers report that these conferences have helped them "raise the bar" in their teaching, forcing them to think on a conceptual level and to assist their students in doing the same. As a result of attending high-quality professional development programs and activities, teachers change the way they teach. Teachers collaborate with each other to improve their instructional practices and to create innovative, integrated curriculum lessons. Teachers engage students with active learning strategies by encouraging them to explore and experiment in natural settings. Teachers use familiar and relevant examples drawn from students' daily lives to connect students to new knowledge. Teachers expose students to complex subject matter and skills while holding them to high achievement standards. By using these strategies, teachers help students develop critical thinking skills that ultimately deepen students' understanding and expand their knowledge.

A LITTLE SEED

You say that I'm useless.
You think I'm "uncool."
You've always made fun of me,
Since the first day of school.

I'm a little seed.
Your help, I need.
I can't touch the ceiling,
Not a basketball goal.
I feel like my body
Is made out of coal.

I'm a little seed.

Some day I might grow
Into a tree, you'll see.
And when I grow up,
You won't make fun of me.

I swear, you'll see,
So stop picking on me.

Blake Allison
Annenberg-funded middle school
sixth grader

“This year I am trying to incorporate Accelerated Reading as much as possible because I think it really benefits the kids. At the beginning of the year, their reading comprehension ranged from first-grade level to fifth-grade level. By the end of the year, those kids were going to seventh- and eighth-grade level books and succeeding because they felt enabled.”

Elementary school teacher on an Annenberg-funded reading program

Building Learning Communities

As teachers in Annenberg-funded schools engage in professional development activities, they create peer networks within schools, between schools in the same district, and among schools in regional, state, and national levels. For example, one Annenberg middle school plans to fund New Jersey Writing Project training for 12 teachers from other schools through the district, a practice that is virtually unheard of locally in public education. Traditionally, teachers work in virtual isolation alone in classrooms with their students. In contrast, Annenberg funding has enabled teachers to develop mechanisms that allow them to collaborate effectively with their peers. Through collaboration, teachers observe each other’s classroom instruction, videotape lessons, analyze student needs, investigate teaching problems, and generate ideas for new teaching strategies.

Teachers from Annenberg schools collaborate actively in Critical Friends Groups, Literature Study Circles, Professional Academies, Teacher Writing Groups, and Teacher Action Research Teams. From these activities expert teachers emerge as peer leaders in roles such as Critical Friends Group Coaches, Content Specialists, and Reading Learning Facilitators. Furthermore, a number of teachers have become certified as curriculum trainers in national programs including the Coalition of Essential Schools and the New Jersey Writing Project.

Annenberg school administrators and faculties design creative schedules so that teachers can share pedagogy and content knowledge learned at conferences with others at their campus. They change their schedules to incorporate daily professional development time. School administrators plan quarterly professional development forums. Teachers in middle schools and high schools meet weekly to review and revise curriculum and instruction programs. Many schools share their knowledge with other campuses in the district or region. One high school developed a monthly newsletter. A group of elementary, middle, and high schools collaborated to conduct an Epiphany Series of lectures and special events featuring national speakers. All of these teacher-led activities have had the effect of developing learning communities within and among Annenberg schools. Moreover, many of these activities are open to the public, thus enabling teachers and administrators from non-Annenberg schools to learn from the reforming schools. Research suggests that the heart of these activities lies in the creation of small, collegial communities of teachers focused on improving their instructional practices.

Teachers believe that the benefits of professional learning communities are innumerable. Participating teachers report feeling empowered and having the confidence to contribute in informed and creative new ways to their school. Ultimately, teachers believe their students benefit from their teachers’ participation in these professional groups. Teachers in Annenberg schools see their primary research goal as examining the ways that teachers in high-poverty schools can promote the success of individual students. In addition, teachers think that their own practice as researchers and writers allows them to support the development of these skills in their students. Teachers from these professional learning groups present their findings regularly at national and even international conferences.

Curriculum Innovations

With Annenberg funds teachers receive training on the best curriculum programs and practices. Additionally, schools purchase the latest curriculum materials in subject areas such as language arts, math, science, and technology. Annenberg funds also support additional program areas such as social studies and fine arts. Using knowledge gained from this training and quality resource materials, teachers enhance their classroom instruction. What follows is an example of curriculum innovation.

Many elementary schools use Annenberg funds to focus on literacy. Reading is a complex developmental process, and students begin as “emergent” readers, passing through various stages of development to become “independent” readers. Annenberg schools emphasize teacher training on literacy, exposing teachers to the latest methods of reading instruction and ways to increase accuracy of individual student reading level assessment. Teachers identified book purchasing as a top priority, actively adding a wide assortment of fiction and nonfiction books to their school and classroom libraries. In contrast to the traditional “basal readers,” single texts intended for use by the entire class, teachers and students use whole libraries of books. Given a choice of an array of “leveled” books, children are more likely to select books geared to their appropriate reading level. This puts books into children’s hands early, ensuring that all children are actively reading, not simply waiting for their next turn to participate. Annenberg funds supported the curriculum programs described in this section of the report.

Content Specialists at Angelou* Elementary School helped the administration decide which of several possible math programs to adopt school-wide. After careful consideration, the group selected “Everyday Math.” During 1999–2000, the Content Specialists conducted workshops for the teachers and helped them to plan units, gather lesson materials, and introduce the program to the students. Content Specialists gathered materials including manipulatives (hands-on learning materials) and organized grade-level team planning and assessments for all students. The Angelou teachers believe that the Content Specialists’ assistance gives them time to focus on the most important part of teaching—direct instruction. Angelou teachers share their learning with others at the school and in the district. Because of faculty knowledge of Everyday Math, Angelou is considered a district leader in the curriculum. Angelou teachers have helped teachers at other schools implement the curriculum, and now the program is widely used in this district.

In many Annenberg schools, art teachers are deeply involved in school-wide curriculum development. Emerging research supports integrating art into the curriculum. Researchers believe that an arts-infused curriculum allows students to expand their cognitive development significantly. By integrating art into the curriculum, teachers encourage students to engage in visual, kinesthetic, and auditory ways of learning. Additionally, students learn to develop new methods of communication through poetry, music, visual art, and dance.

These curriculum innovations are aligned in multiple ways. Schools integrate curriculum within and between grade levels. As teachers from elementary, middle, and high schools initiate discussions, further alignment occurs across feeder patterns. State and national standards also are taken into account.

**School names in this report are pseudonyms*

ODE TO MY NEIGHBORHOOD

The tin cans in my
neighborhood look
really bad in
the ditches.
Many of them are
beer cans.
I see men
picking them up
from trash cans and
anywhere else they see them.
Maybe they need them
for money.
I just hope
I don't
ever need to do that.
Graffiti on the walls
of stores.
I hear
people yelling and laughing
because they are drunk.
I smell the beer
that people leave outside.
I see gangsters
messing with drug dealers.
I feel that this is all going
to come to an
end soon,
because they are buying
the old houses
in my neighborhood
and building big, new
houses,
in my neighborhood.

Edward Garcia
Annenberg-funded middle school
sixth grader

“The goal with Latino boys is to draw them into the school community. The boys who participate in the Latino Boys Writing Group are those kids who sit back in the classroom, the ones who kind of fade into the background if you don’t engage them. Mario is an eighth grader now, and he’s very involved with our writing group. But last year when the bell rang at 8 in the morning, well, Mario would get here at 8:30. He’d come with his hair all messed up – maybe he’d just woken up – wearing the same clothes he wore yesterday. Then he started coming to our writing group. He’s a really bright student, and he loves to write. We chose a line from one of Mario’s poems as the title of our initial anthology. We have chosen him to read at literary meetings. He was awarded a hundred-dollar gift certificate for his writing. I think that if it weren’t for the Latino Boys writing club, he would just come to school and do his own thing and leave and maybe not even come back.”

Middle school teacher

With Annenberg funds, middle school teachers have created a variety of excellent programs designed specifically to engage previously low-performing students in reading and writing activities. In one long-term professional development program, a University of Houston professor guides teachers to develop curriculum interventions for “reluctant” readers. A young Latino seventh-grade teacher designed and implemented an after-school program for Latino boys considered at risk of dropping out of school.

One middle school targeted its Annenberg funds toward students with lower academic achievement. The school’s administrators and faculty have learned to use multiple data sources to identify individual student instructional needs and develop innovative intervention strategies. Student achievement scores reveal a substantial upward trend for all student groups.

At another middle school, teachers initiated a special program in collaboration with a nearby high school that gives interested eighth graders access to a ninth-grade algebra course. The students’ math scores have improved significantly, along with student interest in algebra. This increases the likelihood that students will enroll in college-prep courses.

New Teaching and Learning Environments

Annenberg school administrators and teachers ground their innovative work in research on how people learn. New instructional practices developed from this research enable more people to be successful in educational environments than in traditional classrooms. The new science of learning emphasizes learning with understanding. Teachers using traditional instructional practices focus students on memorizing facts. Research on learning shows that instead, teachers should first build on students’ prior knowledge, then guide students to make sense out of the new facts and data, to assess their own work, and to study their successes and failures. The end result: students who can transfer new knowledge to different settings.

Teachers in these reforming schools use an array of instructional strategies and practices, many of which they learned by using Annenberg funding to attend professional development activities. Teachers have developed or invented other innovative instructional strategies as a result of peer support such as Critical Friends Groups. Clearly, students benefit from these teaching strategies, as demonstrated by higher academic achievement in many Annenberg schools, especially Beacon schools. Indeed, students from all ethnic groups are achieving higher academic success than ever before.

For example, one Annenberg elementary school provides *dual language instruction* in English and Spanish. Children whose native language is Spanish are in the same classroom as children whose native language is English. The students learn the two languages simultaneously. Through this approach, students achieve academic bi-literacy and genuine bilingualism.

Other Annenberg schools infuse art across all subject areas. This *arts-infused instruction* gives students multiple opportunities to develop and perfect methods of expression. Students must develop the cognitive ability to judge quality by paying attention to patterns and configurations rather than discrete items. These complex tasks help students develop sophisticated cognitive skills that they can apply to all their studies, as well as to their daily lives outside of school.

Additionally, teachers collaborate to integrate the curriculum so that students are exposed to many content areas in one or a set of lessons. Using *integrated curriculum instruction*, teachers develop lessons placing important content knowledge in real-life contexts. Researchers believe that students find an integrated curriculum more meaningful, thus increasing students' motivation and engagement in school.

Our research in Houston Annenberg schools reveals that students are learning with deep understanding. Why? Because they are participating in authentic, culturally relevant environments with rich resource materials that allow students to develop collaboration skills to work effectively with each other. These students alternately serve as learners and mentors. They are engaging in *active, in-depth learning* and are connecting prior knowledge to new knowledge as their teachers *contextualize* instruction. Students in participating schools are not likely to be found in long, straight rows facing a teacher sitting behind a desk in front of the room. Instead, students are likely to be working in *collaborative* groups of four to six. Many Annenberg schools extend learning beyond the classroom – students engage in hands-on learning projects such as creating outdoor learning environments

The impact of teacher learning is illustrated by the story of "Irineo," a ninth grader in HISD. Irineo has a reputation as a disruptive student not engaged in his schoolwork. However, Irineo revealed his writing promise in drama class, auditioning his classmates for roles in a play he had written himself. Irineo's English teacher asked the drama teacher how she had gotten Irineo to write. The drama teacher shared techniques from the Rice Writing Project. Several weeks later, in a dramatic turnaround, Irineo produced a 23-page modernization of Julius Caesar as an English class assignment.

Parents and Community Members Involved in Literacy

Annenberg schools continue to create significant links with both parents and the community. The schools' efforts target parental literacy, using the community as a resource. Schools developed outreach centers to work with parents and others in the community. In general, schools use Annenberg funds to strengthen their relationships with parents and other members of the community and to focus on educating families and students.

A significant influx of new immigrants to Houston makes literacy development a priority for area schools. Annenberg schools recruit community volunteers to help students lacking literacy skills. For example, one school adopted the program BEARS (Buddies Engaged in Academic Reading Success). BEARS provides in-school tutoring and individualized instructional attention to first- and second-grade students who are struggling to learn to read. Testing showed that children in the BEARS tutoring program demonstrated larger gain scores than the other students in the class.

DIFFERENT FOR A REASON

The disgust of racism haunts me. The hate people have for you is hard to believe. "Your style is dumb," they say, "Your skin color is different."

But I know God made me different for a reason. My ethnicity, my look is hated by them. It's hard to believe. But I know my skin color is different for a reason.

Dawn Dalcour
Annenberg-funded middle school
sixth grader

18 “I am an art teacher and I meet with the math teachers, for example, to talk about the objectives they plan to cover in the next week or so. Then we brainstorm a lesson that directly integrates art into their objectives. After we’ve prepared a lesson, we teach it together. I’ve worked with the language arts teachers on lessons about prediction, cause and effect. In science class, we’ve made fossil models out of clay. We’ve also made buildings with clay to demonstrate physical change. And we’ve done math lessons where we viewed art masterpieces and looked for lines, shapes, angles and direction.”

Elementary school teacher describing the restructuring of her school day as result of Annenberg funding

Schools also open their facilities to parents and community members for nontraditional educational programs. For example, Nixon is open in the evenings for a variety of parent and student activities. The school organizes and sponsors events such as Family Literacy Nights, ESL/Bilingual Family Nights, Pre-K “Make and Takes,” “Open Evenings,” and Project PRAISE (Parents Recruited for Active Involvement in Students’ Education). The “Open Evenings” Program began in the spring of 1999, continued every Monday evening from September through May of the 1999–2000 school year, and operated during the spring semester 2001. Nixon staff members received a stipend to teach and assist on these evenings, and parents in attendance received books and other instructional materials. Parents and students participated in classes in art, computers, crochet, pottery, physical fitness, reading, math skills, and library checkout. Nixon staff members believe the evening events help to form partnerships among students, staff, family, and community, enriching student achievement.

Partnerships with the Community

Annenberg-funded schools are increasing their partnerships with the community. For example, one of the learning communities used Annenberg funds to increase community outreach efforts. The initial planning grant for Annenberg allowed one Lamplighter Learning Community to complete a needs assessment. This assessment, conducted in eight apartment complexes in the schools’ attendance zones, sparked the implementation of various parental involvement efforts. Two notable programs are an outreach center and a job-training center for parents.

Cochrane Elementary also uses its community as a resource in order to introduce students to a variety of enriching experiences. Cochrane students have the opportunity to learn teamwork and build relationships not only with other students, but also with wonderful role models, their teachers, and experts in their community. Educators at Cochrane strive to build a bridge between the school and the community through its Grounds for Learning Project. There is still much work to be done with the community, but Cochrane has made great efforts this year to meet the needs of a diverse culture by giving students a variety of meaningful, high-quality experiences relevant to the world in which they live.

Another highly successful program at Sunnyvale Middle School reaches individual students, as well as expanding the school’s community. The SNAPP program (Students Needing a Pat and a Push) is a mentoring program organized by Sunnyvale’s community liaison. Two days a week after school, students struggling academically or personally pair up with staff and community volunteers. These volunteers tutor the students in individual subjects and support the students’ personal educational goals. Community volunteers come from all walks of life, and include school faculty, stay-at-home parents, university students, and local business professionals. Their time and interest in the personal achievement of struggling students is often the extra bit of individual attention that students need to overcome personal and academic challenges. A university student who mentored a group of young boys struggling with math noted that several of the students’ math grades/scores had increased; the volunteer felt that this was not so much a change in ability as a change in attitude. The students recognized that she was taking the time to take an interest in them, and they knew that week after week, she would be back to check on and encourage them. No excuses! A student herself, she was a model of what they could achieve.

To address the isolation between the school and the community Sunnyvale created a full-time position and hired a member of the community as a “liaison.” As a staff member and school representative, the liaison worked in a small office on campus. He developed and planned parent and community activities, met with both parents and faculty, and worked to open the lines of communication between the two. The liaison’s main goal was to create activities that provided educational opportunities for parents as well as a supportive base for student learning. In addition, partnerships with members of the community support student learning and strengthen the community’s positive relationship with the school. However, parents at this school did not respond en masse to several of these efforts. There is still work to be done to raise parental interest and to fully incorporate parents into the “community of learners” on a more involved and consistent basis.

Progress on Building Support for Reform

The Houston Annenberg Challenge continues to develop an infrastructure to introduce and sustain school reform in the Houston metropolitan area. Annenberg Challenge leaders use different strategies to accomplish systemic change. For example, they use specific training programs such as Critical Friends, they maintain partnerships with higher education institutions, and they have connected with school districts to improve high schools through proposals to restructure schools. The following descriptions serve as evidence of these continued efforts.

Critical Friends Study Groups

The Houston Annenberg Challenge provides support to Critical Friends Study Groups in the metropolitan Houston area. Critical Friends Study Groups provide an avenue for teachers and administrators to create what researchers call “professional learning communities.” In the program, teachers collaborate with each other to deepen their knowledge of academic subject matter and examine their teaching practices. In addition, the Houston Annenberg Challenge offers Critical Friends Group training to Houston area schools and universities. This training is not limited to schools that have received direct funding from the initiative. Houston Annenberg provides training for coaches, principals, and Critical Friends Group members. To date approximately 100 metropolitan schools have introduced the Critical Friends program on their campuses. The Houston Annenberg Challenge has trained 300 coaches in both Annenberg-funded and non-Annenberg-funded schools. Teachers and other educators attend New Coaches’ Seminars to learn how to form a Critical Friends Group. Principals attend seminars to learn how to support Critical Friends Groups in their schools. Members of Critical Friends Groups attend training sessions during the school year and in the summer to learn how to address individual group needs and to explore a range of topics related to integrating Critical Friends activities with the mission and vision of the schools.

K–5 Mathematics Specialist Program

Funded by a partnership between the Houston Annenberg Challenge, ExxonMobil, and the Houston Independent School District, the K–5 Mathematics Specialist Program seeks to improve student learning in mathematics by strengthening teachers’ grasp of content, their understanding of how children learn, and their abilities to best gather evidence about student learning. Piloted in eight elementary schools in HISD in 2000–2001, the initiative will expand to 13 schools in the district in 2001–2002.

VERSAS ME GUSTA

en la puerta de mi casa
tengo una mata de calabaza
las mujeres que tu cargas
son las escobas de mi casa

pajarito coloradito aletea
de terciopelo
di me si ya no me quieres
abientame al basurero si para ti
sere basura y para otro sere lucero

suspiro sobre suspiro
suspiro sobre llorar
suspiro porque te quiero
y no te puedo olvidar

mi madre es una rosa
mi padre es un clavel
tu eres una mosca
pegada en la pared

Guadalupe Romero
Annenberg-funded middle school
sixth grader

“If you’re going to be an engineer, you’re going to be better and stronger in your subject if you can relate to how things are created. If you’re going to be a scientist, you have to have the ability to see and understand what you are seeing. If you have the creative visual literacy to interpret what is in front of you, you are going to be more dynamic. It’s a whole different approach to education.”

Elementary school teacher

Partnership for Quality Education

The Houston Annenberg Challenge, four local universities, six school districts, and one community college have joined forces to create a partnership for the purpose of restructuring teacher preparation programs. The goal of the initiative is to create a unified, seamless approach to developing skills and content knowledge for teachers, beginning with their college years and carrying through the first two years of teaching and beyond. The partnership also will create a regional faculty of outstanding educators, business partners, and members of the community; integrate technology into teacher preparation; and involve content specialists as equal partners in teacher preparation.

Partner colleges and universities include Houston Community College System, Texas Southern University, University of Houston, University of Houston–Downtown, and the University of St. Thomas. The six participating independent school districts are Aldine, Alief, Houston, Humble, North Forest, and Spring Branch.

During 2000–2001, teams of faculty from the Colleges of Education and Arts and Sciences worked as collaborative teams with representatives from the six partner school districts to revise curricula and courses in the teacher preparation programs of the participating institutions of higher learning. The first redesigned courses will be piloted in the fall of 2001. Professors from the partner colleges and universities will teach the freshman and sophomore level courses while modeling the teaching techniques they wish the students to learn.

Reforming Schools Initiative

As the Houston Annenberg Challenge moved into Phase II of its implementation in early 2000, the organization moved beyond individual participating schools to create programs to initiate systemic change. The Transforming High Schools initiative envisioned a restructuring of metropolitan Houston high schools to enhance learning and to provide students with the skills and knowledge they need for the 21st century. In January 2000, the Houston Annenberg Challenge began a partnership with the Houston Independent School District to develop a pilot program in one HISD high school.

During Spring 2000, a team of parents, faculty, and community members joined Houston Annenberg staff in planning the pilot program for the high school. By the end of the 2000–2001 school year, the planning team—which now included students—had created an implementation process model, established a set of project goals, defined organizing principles, identified areas of needed improvement, and shared lessons learned.

At the same time the work at the Houston high school was taking place, the Carnegie Corporation of New York invited the Houston Independent School District to apply for a grant to restructure all secondary schools in the district. Since the aim of both initiatives was the same, the pilot project at the high school became the pilot project for the Carnegie Corporation grant. From the experience at this school, Houston Annenberg Challenge staff created a planning document for the remaining 23 high schools in HISD to use to prepare their individual Carnegie grant proposals.

Schools for a New Society: Rethinking High Schools

The Houston Annenberg Challenge and the Houston Independent School District formed a partnership to improve the district's 24 comprehensive high schools. With funding from the Carnegie Corporation for planning, schools are engaging in the first phase of the initiative—developing plans to manage and implement changes within the schools, including creating smaller units on each campus. In the second phase of the initiative schools will formally apply for implementation grants from the Carnegie Corporation.

In August 2001, the Steering Committee submitted to the Carnegie Corporation a proposal for Phase II funding of this high school initiative. This proposal details a formal plan of action and a blueprint for changing HISD high schools. To prepare the proposal, the Steering Committee met with principals, teachers, students, parents, and representatives from the community and area businesses to identify the necessary skills and knowledge needed for high school graduates to compete in the 21st-century workforce and to pursue their higher education. Additionally, the Steering Committee held extensive focus groups with members of institutions of higher education, business, and educational service organizations to determine how to develop the necessary knowledge and skills.

Ultimately, the Steering Committee produced a document entitled the Graduate Profile. According to this document, all high school graduates must be effective communicators, proficient problem solvers, independent workers/thinkers, cooperative team members, efficient technology users, and contributing citizens who are knowledgeable about global issues.

Passport to Success

The Houston Annenberg Challenge designed an after-school program called Passport to Success that is intended to provide an outstanding opportunity to improve academic performance of participating children in the Houston metropolitan area. From 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. each school day, children will participate in activities ranging from homework and computer labs to art projects, journal writing, and leisure reading. This program is being piloted at eight elementary and middle schools located in Houston and North Forest Independent School Districts. Funding for this pilot initiative comes from the Annenberg Foundation and the United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast.

The Passport to Success initiative provides an enriched learning environment, not simply an extension of the school day. Goals of this program include helping students develop intrinsic motivation to complete assignments and helping them develop habits needed to become life-long learners. Each participating campus customizes the program to meet specific needs; however, each site must include at least one of the following program components: pre-assessment, homework lab, literacy lab, computer lab, team-building activities, art, journal writing, mentor e-mail, leisure reading, and micro-society. The program also includes monthly field trips, twice-a-year whole family retreats, and parent classes.

THE NIGHT

It's quiet outside. It's only me.
The wind is blowing and it's
sweeping my hair with it; it looks
like a flag on a windy day
trying to escape
from the pole.
I can hear
the trees shuffling
with the wind, the grasses
rubbing against one another,
and the crickets chirping.
If you look up from all of this
you can see a sheet
of dark blue with
tiny glittering stars spread out.
Then, if you mix all of this together,
it is like a slow song,
and it makes you want to sleep.

Katie Garcia
Annenberg-funded middle school
sixth grader

“In the two years that we’ve had Curriculum Alignment Team meetings, I’ve gotten to know elementary and high school science teachers. Now that we know each other we can put our heads together to learn what each is doing and how we can help each other. We always used to say, ‘These middle school kids should know this topic. They don’t know it because those elementary teachers didn’t teach it to them!’ Then the high school teachers blame the middle school teachers and so on. Well, since we started meeting as a group, we’ve cleared the air of that kind of talk.”

Middle school teacher

Leadership Academy

In the summer of 2000, the Houston Annenberg Challenge implemented the Leadership Academy, a two-year program for principals. Modeled after the Harvard Graduate School of Education Principals’ Center, the Leadership Academy gives working principals from the metropolitan Houston area an opportunity to create personal professional development plans and to develop leadership skills.

During 2000–2001, 23 elementary, middle, and high school principals from three Houston area school districts committed to the two-year intensive process. In the first year of the Leadership Academy, the principal “fellows” attended a series of intensive institutes with nationally recognized speakers on leadership skills and issues in school reform, revolving around the Annenberg philosophy of whole-school reform. The fellows participated in an assessment of their leadership qualities by the Texas Assessment Center and developed personal professional development plans. They also attended monthly meetings facilitated by principal coaches and other leadership experts to examine principles of leadership, change, knowledge management, and technology. By the completion of the Leadership Academy, each fellow is expected to meet the state of Texas Principal Certification Standards.

Family Literacy

Research suggests that home literacy, which takes advantage of everyday activities to develop the skills children need to become successful readers, is key to preparing them for school. As part of its Phase II efforts, the Houston Annenberg Challenge is working with the Neuhaus Education Center to create Family Literacy Programs at four elementary schools in Houston ISD. Funded in part by a \$300,000 grant from the Cullen Foundation, the programs seek to improve student achievement by involving the entire family in literacy-based activities.

Summary

When we analyze the history of reform in the United States, we are often disappointed with the results of attempts to redefine public schools. Since the 1960s, fads have come and gone, seldom altering the essence of public education. Programs and activities are imported into schools and classrooms. As soon as the school leader goes, all the reform effort goes away as well. Fortunately, the Houston Annenberg Challenge theory of action begins with the teacher. This theory of action includes all stakeholders to achieve consensus about educating disenfranchised children and children who first learn a language other than English. In general, our Year Two research finds that this theory of action is indeed transforming the schools in the Houston Annenberg network from the ground up. Annenberg-funded schools have made progress – in the case of Beacon schools, considerable progress – raising academic achievement levels for their students. For example, Beacon middle school students average a TAAS score of 91 in reading, where mastery is 85, compared to 81 for their HISD counterparts. Middle school mathematics shows a similar picture, with Beacon students scoring an average of 86, compared to 79 for their HISD counterparts.

Looking at the data more closely reveals a significant trend with broad implications for Houston urban public schools with high concentrations of students who are economically disadvantaged or non-native English speakers. Many of the Houston Annenberg schools are closing the achievement gap. Students of all backgrounds are achieving well, often at the mastery level, both in reading and mathematics. For example, in Beacon middle schools, the 7.9 point gap between minority and non-minority student TAAS mathematics scores in 1998 narrowed 42 % to 4.6 points in 2000. In the same time frame at Beacon middle schools, the 10.2 point gap between the mathematics scores of economically disadvantaged children and non-economically disadvantaged children dropped 49 % to 5.1 points.

The exception to this finding is in children whose native language is not English. Our research shows profound achievement gaps in all areas between native English speakers and those who are not. Even more troubling is the fact that these gaps are widening in the majority of grade levels.

Initial high school dropout data from the Texas Education Agency show little difference between Houston Annenberg schools and others in HISD. Dropout rates are decreasing in both sets of schools. We will look more closely at this issue in Year Three of our evaluation.

A third area in which Annenberg schools have shown progress is creating additional links with both parents and the community. These schools and communities are working together to improve literacy and support student learning

Collectively, the documented benefits of the Annenberg investment in professional development reveal these schools are creating highly effective learning environments, in contrast to traditional classrooms where teachers lecture and students memorize. This research suggests that when public schools invest in high-quality professional development and resource-rich instructional materials, the result will be well-trained teachers who engage in excellent teaching practices and students who are committed to in-depth academic study.

Annenberg teachers use innovative instructional practices to help their students develop deep understanding of academic content and social issues. Through arts-infused, dual language, and integrated curriculum instruction, teachers engage in practices supported by the latest research on the science of learning. Furthermore, Annenberg teachers create learning environments that allow students to take more responsibility for their own learning. In these learning environments, students collaborate with each other and participate in in-depth, active learning activities. Additionally, students learn in contextualized environments that allow them to connect their prior knowledge, language, and culture to new subject knowledge and skills. Ultimately, our research in Houston Annenberg schools confirms that this array of teaching and learning strategies leads students to deeper levels of understanding and raises their academic achievement.

Perhaps more importantly for those interested in the long-term effects of reform, the Annenberg network has united teachers, administrators, students, and families to provide excellent education for all children. We have evidence that

AMONG THE HIDDEN

inside this attic
lies a boy never speaks
never been seen

he's hiding

he sleeps and wakes
in the dark
hearing people
but won't come out
won't do anything but hide

even when the sunlight
comes out
he won't see the light
hiding in the dark
is not his dream

what will he do all day
he won't sleep
won't talk
won't be loved
but he won't see light

maybe he can
but now he can't be seen
he wants love and light
can he get it
yes he can

Britthaney Smith
Annenberg-funded middle school
sixth grader

teachers have become learners themselves. This evidence provides hope for the future of public schools in the Houston metropolitan area.

Over the next year, we will track the progress of the Houston Annenberg Challenge toward reaching its goal of sustaining school reform in the Houston metropolitan area. We will pay careful attention to indicators that the vision of school reform has become institutionalized across the city. This evidence will contribute to our understanding of the likelihood that the reform will be sustained after the funding from the national Annenberg Foundation ends.

THE MIRROR

I look in the mirror,
but what I see I don't like.
All I see in my reflection is
darkness, no colors at all.
So I long for the rainbow,
but it never comes. So I
shout, and shout, and shout.
I turn away from the mirror,
and I look inside myself.
I fill with joy because
the colors are there.
All you have to do is look.

Omar Garcia
Annenberg-funded middle school
sixth grader

