

The Jury selected the Houston Independent School District as the national winner of the inaugural Broad Prize for Urban Education for the following reasons:

Dramatically increasing student achievement.

- Significant increases in student achievement were made in both *reading and math* at the elementary, middle and high school levels over the past three years.
- Gains in student achievement were *made at a faster rate* than expected for districts in Texas with similar poverty levels.
- Students *performed at higher levels* than expected for districts in Texas with similar poverty levels.

Successfully reducing achievement gaps.

- Demonstrable decreases in achievement gaps *across ethnic groups* were greater than any other finalist.
- Demonstrable decreases in achievement gaps *between high and low-income students* were greater than any other finalist.

Results confirmed by expert evaluators.

- *Resources, support and professional development* provide school and district leaders the necessary tools to achieve academic objectives.
- Academic *objectives are clearly defined.*
- School and student performance is regularly monitored.
- Rewards, intervention and adjustments to support schools are *based on student performance.*

Selection Jury:

Lamar Alexander, Former US Secretary of Education

Henry Cisneros, Chairman and CEO of American City Vista

Phil Condit, Chairman and CEO of The Boeing Company

Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund

John Engler, Governor of Michigan

Richard D. Parsons, CEO, AOL Time Warner

Paul Patton, Governor of Kentucky and Chair of the National Governors Association

Hugh Price, President and CEO of the National Urban League

Richard Riley, Former US Secretary of Education

Andrew L. Stern, President of the Service Employees International Union

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Houston made gains in student achievement in reading and math at all grade levels.

- **Reading:** The percentage of elementary students reaching proficiency in reading increased by 8.3 percentage points from 1999 to 2001. The percentage of middle school students reaching proficiency in reading increased by 8.8 percentage points from 1999 to 2001. The percentage of high school students reaching proficiency in reading increased by 5.5 percentage points from 1999 to 2001.
- **Mathematics:** Houston showed even greater gains in mathematics. The percentage of elementary students reaching proficiency in math increased by 15 percentage points from 1999 to 2001. The percentage of middle school students reaching proficiency in math increased by 9 percentage points from 1999 to 2001. The percentage of high school students reaching proficiency in math increased by 7.4 percentage points from 1999 to 2001.

Houston made gains in student achievement at a faster rate than expected for districts in Texas with similar poverty levels.

- A significant factor in the Review Board and Jury's decision was that Houston's test scores increased at a faster rate than the state average for districts with similar poverty levels in reading at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and in math at the elementary and middle school levels.
- For example, from 1999 to 2001, Houston improved in math at the elementary school level by 15 percentile points. This improvement rate was almost double the average improvement rate for districts across the state with similar poverty levels. No other finalist increased at a faster rate than the state average in as many subjects and levels as Houston.

Houston performed at higher levels than expected for districts in Texas with similar poverty levels.

- The Review Board and Jury also found it significant that Houston's test scores demonstrated a performance level higher than the average state performance for districts with similar poverty levels in both reading and math at the elementary and high school levels.
- For example, at the elementary level, the percentage of students reaching proficiency in reading was 7 percentage points higher than the average percent proficient for districts across the state with similar poverty levels.

ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Houston reduced the achievement gaps across ethnic groups and between high and low-income students.

- The Review Board and Selection Jury found it very significant that Houston reduced the achievement gap between high and low income students in both reading and math at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.
- Houston also decreased the achievement gap between White and Hispanic students in both reading and math at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.
- Houston decreased the achievement gap between White and African-American students in both reading and math at the elementary and middle school levels, and in math at the high school level.

No other finalist had demonstrable decreases in achievement gaps in as many categories as Houston.

- Reductions in Income-Based Achievement Gaps: In 1996, there was a 5.0% gap in the percentage of elementary students at proficiency in reading between high- and low-income students. This gap was reduced by 51% to 2.4% in 2001. A gap of 6.3% in elementary mathematics in 1996 was reduced by 65% to 2.2% in 2001. At the middle school level, the gaps were reduced by 54% (from 7.0% to 3.2%) in reading and by 69% (from 6.8% to 2.1%) in math. At the high school level, the gaps were reduced by 46% (from 10.3% to 5.6%) in reading and by 66% (from 8.7% to 3.1%) in math.
- Reductions in Achievement Gaps between White and Hispanic Students: In 1996, there was a 16.5% gap in the percentage of elementary students at proficiency in reading between White and Hispanic students. This gap was reduced by 41% to 9.8% in 2001. A similar gap of 15.3% in elementary mathematics in 1996 was reduced by 41% to 9.1% in 2001. At the middle school level, the gaps were reduced by 44% (from 33.2% to 18.5%) in reading and by 67% (from 36.3% to 11.8%) in math. At the high school level, the gaps were reduced by 46% (from 31.2% to 17.0%) in reading and by 61% (from 37.2% to 14.6%) in math.
- Reductions in Achievement Gaps between White and African-American Students: In 1996, there was an 18.1% gap in the percentage of elementary students at proficiency in reading between White and African-American students. This gap was reduced by 43% to 10.3% in 2001. A similar gap of 22.2% in elementary mathematics in 1996 was reduced by 45% to 12.1% in 2001. At the middle school level, the gaps were reduced by 50% (from 26.1% to 13.0%) in reading and by 65% (from 36.4% to 12.8%) in math. At the high school level, the gaps were reduced by 47% (from 21.8% to 11.5%) in reading and by 38% (from 36.5% to 13.9%) in math.

SITE VISITS

The site visits to each finalist district were designed to look for evidence of four district-level practices that have been linked to student achievement through research conducted by the National Center for Educational Accountability. These best practices are:

1. The district has clear and specific academic objectives.
2. The district provides its leaders with the resources, support and professional development to achieve academic objectives.
3. The district regularly monitors school and student performance.
4. The district rewards, intervenes and/or adjusts its support to schools based on student performance.

Houston provided clear evidence to the site visit team that demonstrated strong practices in each of these four areas.

Houston has clear and specific academic objectives. The site visit teams were particularly impressed with Houston's curriculum clarity. The principals and teachers know what to teach – by grade and by subject – and they collaborate regularly with district leadership. Each week, elementary school teachers submit lesson plans to their respective principals. These plans are very detailed, and explain each lesson's objective, teaching strategies and assessment items. They also show how the lesson is aligned with district goals and with the specific objectives designed for that particular week. The principal signs the lesson plans and makes them available in each school's front office. Other staff and community members are welcome to review the plans.

Houston provides its leaders with the resources, support and professional development to achieve academic objectives. The site visit team concluded that Houston provides district and school leaders with rigorous, ongoing training programs emphasizing the use of data and an online data system called the Program for Academic Student Success (PASS) that allows principals to monitor and review multiple year trend data on academic performance for each classroom. The district also provides targeted professional development to low-performing schools.

Houston regularly monitors school and student performance. The site visit team found that principals across the Houston district make monitoring student performance a priority. Principals estimate that they spend an impressive 65 to 75 percent of the time in an average day monitoring instruction in the classroom. This is in addition to time spent in the classroom by assistant principals, lead teachers and mentor teachers. The principal monitors and reviews assessment results from teacher-made tests, school benchmarking tests, teacher observation logs, lesson plans, grade level meeting agendas, cross-grade level meeting agendas, and standardized state tests.

Houston rewards, intervenes and/or adjusts its support to schools based on student performance. The site visit teams found evidence that Houston has developed an effective system to address low performance at all grade levels. A school site with low-test scores in any one classroom or grade level will trigger a comprehensive review of the situation by a targeted assistance leadership team. The team, composed of the main district, sub district and local school leadership, analyzes all school data and determines what adjustments need to be made. The adjustments may include targeted staff development, grade level changes in teaching assignments, lead teacher interventions, mentor teacher interventions, peer coaching, team teaching and a reallocation of the necessary resources. In addition, specific intervention plans are in place for every classroom. Every student is tested every year in every subject in addition to periodic benchmarking tests for diagnostic purposes. If any student is having trouble meeting the academic objectives, a specific instructional intervention takes place.