Equity-Driven Achievement-Focused School Districts

A Report on Systemic School Success in Four Texas School Districts Serving Diverse Student Populations

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This report is based on research conducted in four Texas public school districts:

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Introduction

In 1994, six out of every ten African American students in one 50,000 student urban Texas school district failed the state achievement test in mathematics. Five years later in this same district, eight out of every ten African American students passed this same math test. In another district in the Rio Grande Valley, one in which 97% of the students are Hispanic, one in eight high school students successfully completed the academically rigorous Recommended High School Program, a percentage more than double the state rate for Hispanic students and higher than the state average for all students. At the opposite end of the state, in a third school district, mean scores for Hispanic students on the SAT I college entrance examination were 105 points higher than state average. In a fourth district that serves a diverse rural and small town student population, more than 90% of all students and more than 90% of each racial and socio-economic group of students passed all sections (reading, writing, and mathematics) of the state achievement test for the third consecutive year in 1999-2000. These four Texas public school districts serve as outstanding examples of broad-based and equitable academic success for literally all children. They also serve as the "existence proofs" that such districtwide success is possible.

For the past two decades, beginning with Ronald Edmonds' (1979, 1982, 1984, 1986) studies of effective schools, educational research literature has featured numerous success stories about individual U.S. public schools in which all students, regardless of race or family income, were succeeding academically. However, these stories have been almost exclusively about single campuses. In other words, many examples exist of remarkable individual schools—schools most often regarded as "miracles" or "mavericks"—that have achieved academic results that far exceed public stereotypes or general expectations for high poverty schools (Stringfield & Teddlie, 1989). Unfortunately, few examples of more broadly based school success for children of color and/or low socioeconomic status (SES) students exist. As Kofi Lomotey (1990) summarized, "One cannot identify a particular region of the country, a state, a city, or a school district that has been successful for any period of time in educating the majority of African-Americans in their charge" (p. 2). The same could be said to be true about the historic track record for widespread school success for African American, Hispanic American, Native American, and some Asian American children.

> ***Credible claims of remarkable progress [in closing the achievement gap] for a few students, a few classrooms, or a few schools are common enough. Such successes are regarded as special cases, dependent on a few talented leaders. The more interesting and formidable challenge is to replicate success for many students in many classrooms across many schools, by improving the performance of many average teachers and administrators. (Ronald Ferguson, 1998, pp. 342-343)***

In order to meet democratic responsibilities to the children of color and children from low income homes who persistently have been and continue to be under-served by U.S. schools, broader academic success for all children is essential. What is needed are entire school districts and, ideally, regions and states in which all schools, not just isolated campuses, are places in which children of color and children from low SES homes experience the same kind of school success that most white children and children from middle- and upper-class homes have always enjoyed.

Little research has been done on this type of larger-scale school success. For example, scant research exists on the effects of school district (as opposed to school campus) organization, operation, and leadership on student achievement (Berry & Achilles, 1999). The vast majority of school reform and school improvement literature has focused on individual campuses as the site of change. This has lead many scholars to conclude that there is not sufficient knowledge about the school district level in any area, especially not in the area of creating districtwide equitable academic success (e.g., Björk, 1993; Bredeson, 1996; Leithwood, 1992; Peterson, 1998; Wissler & Ortiz, 1988; Wirt, 1990). Some researchers, Elmore (1997) for example, have even begun to question the necessity of having schools organized into districts at all, if such an arrangement does not contribute significantly to student learning. Without research on academically successful school districts, whether or not district arrangements can or should contribute to student learning remains an unanswered question.

> ***Rather than focusing reform efforts primarily upon the building as the focus of school change, a district-level approach acknowledges the critical role of the central office and school board in making learning improvement. The strategic linking together of many institutional elements can support improved learning outcomes. (James Berry and Charles Achilles, 1999)***

Recently, however, a few examples of sustained, districtwide academic success for children of color and children from low-income homes have appeared in states such as New York, North Carolina, and Texas. These states have highly developed and stable state accountability systems. Through these systems, it is now possible to identify districts that have large clusters of schools achieving at high levels that serve primarily low SES students and/or students of color. These school districts have created the conditions districtwide in which school success for all children, including the children with whom most school districts are not being successful, is not only possible but is a reality (see, for example, Elmore, 1997; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2000; Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999).

Texas has played a prominent role in the unfolding story of districtwide equitable academic success. In 1997, eleven Texas public school districts were identified by researchers at the Charles A. Dana Center and the Department of Educational Administration at The University of Texas at Austin as being among the best examples of districtwide academic success for low SES children. These districts had more than 5,000 pupils, and more than one-third of their high poverty campuses (schools in which 50% or more of students meet federal free or reduced price lunch criteria) were rated Recognized or Exemplary. To earn a Recognized rating in the Texas accountability system at least 80% of all students, as well as 80% of African American, Hispanic, White, and low-income students, must pass each section (reading, writing, and mathematics) of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). To be rated Exemplary, schools and districts must have a 90% pass rate on the same measures.

In 1998, only 15% of all Texas schools were rated Exemplary, and another 25% were rated Recognized. Thus, these districts had at least one-third (and in some cases all) of their high-poverty schools achieving at a level beyond 60% of the schools in the state. Researchers from the Dana Center and The University of Texas at Austin Department of Educational Administration made site visits to ten of the eleven districts (Amarillo ISD, Beaumont ISD,

Brazosport ISD, Houston ISD, Laredo ISD, Los Fresnos ISD, Mission CISD, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, Weslaco ISD, and Ysleta ISD) to conduct a preliminary study during the 1997-98 school year. This research project served as the pilot study for a more comprehensive study of four districts that followed (see Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999, for a complete report on the pilot study).

The Study Districts

In 1999, four school districts were selected for in-depth study as some of the "best of the best" in terms of widespread academic success for children from low income homes and children of color. A multi-step process was used to determine which four Texas public school districts would be studied. The first level of the selection process mirrored that of the pilot study. Based on 1997-98 AEIS data, all Texas districts that had more than 5,000 students and more than one-third of high poverty campuses rated Recognized or Exemplary were identified. In the 1997-1998 pilot study this screening process produced eleven districts, but two years later the same screening produced thirty-six school districts. This indicated that the phenomenon of districts with many high-achieving, high-poverty schools was spreading across Texas. However, the vast majority of the high poverty campuses receiving Recognized or Exemplary ratings statewide were elementary schools. If success for all children is to be considered districtwide, it cannot stop at the end of sixth grade. Therefore, the research team decided that districts selected for study must have at least two secondary (middle school or high school) campuses rated Recognized or Exemplary. This lowered the number of districts still under consideration to fifteen. The third level of the selection process involved eliminating any districts that had excessively high (above state average for similar schools) exemptions from testing for students receiving special education or students with limited English proficiency (LEP), excessive dropout rates, or excessive ninth grade retention rates.

This left eleven districts under consideration for the fourth level of the selection process, which involved analysis of longitudinal performance data on high academic measures such as SAT/ACT, Algebra End of Course tests, and Advanced Placement (AP) tests. Following this analysis, which identified those districts that were making the greatest gains on the so-called high academic measures, seven finalist districts remained. The final four districts ultimately selected for study were chosen to represent the greatest diversity (geographic, district size, and racial/ethnic composition) possible (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Characteristics of Districts Selected for Study

District	Total Students	# of Schools	% African American	% Hispanic	% White	% Low Income	1999-2000 Rating	Location
Aldine	49,453	56	36	47	14	71	Recog.	Metro Houston
Brazosport	13,247	19	9	33	56	39	Exemp.	Gulf Coast
San Benito	8,697	17	0	97	3	87	Recog.	Rio Grande Valley
Wichita Falls	15,293	31	16	18	63	46	Recog.	Northwest Texas

The districts chosen were Aldine ISD, Brazosport ISD, San Benito CISD, and Wichita Falls ISD. Only one district (Brazosport) chosen for study was also included in the pilot study. (Aldine was identified as one of the 11 high-success districts in 1997-1998 but did not participate in the pilot phase of the project.) Thus, the four districts selected for study had multiple indicators of widespread, equitable success. All four districts demonstrated impressive gains in passing rates for all student groups on all TAAS tests over six years (see Appendix A). Additionally, other compelling evidence of widespread improvement in academic performance for all student groups was present in these districts. Brief profiles of the four districts follow.

Aldine ISD

Aldine ISD is one of the twelve largest school districts in Texas, with 56 campuses and almost 50,000 students. It is located in the northwest Houston metropolitan area about 15 miles from downtown and encompasses the main Houston airport, Bush Intercontinental. The Aldine school district covers 111 square miles and has undergone rapid and dramatic growth and demographic shifts in the past two decades. Its schools serve a variety of communities including rural, suburban, commercial, and industrial areas. The student population is 47% Hispanic, 36% African American, 14% white, and 71% economically disadvantaged. The district earned a Recognized accountability rating in 1999-2000 for the fourth consecutive year. Although urban high schools with Recognized ratings are still rare in Texas, four Aldine high schools earned a Recognized rating in the 1999-2000 school year.

Brazosport ISD

Brazosport Independent School District is located on the Texas gulf coast 50 miles southwest of Houston and serves a diverse group of small towns and communities including Clute, Freeport, Jones Creek, Lake Jackson, Oyster Creek, Richwood, Surfside Beach, and Quintana. Brazosport has a popular deep-water seaport and is home to the world's largest chemical complex, Dow Chemical. About 50,000 residents live in the area, and the school districts serves 13,247 students. The children in BISD are 56% white, 33% Hispanic, 9% African American, and 39% economically disadvantaged. Brazosport has been rated Exemplary for the past three years and was rated Recognized for the two previous years.

San Benito CISD

San Benito Consolidated Independent School District is located in the Rio Grande Valley area of South Texas, seven miles east of the small city of Harlingen. The town of San Benito has a population of 26,350; the school district serves 8,697 pupils. The primary industry for the area is agriculture, made possible by an irrigation system that originated in 1906 and the mild winter climate. The students in San Benito CISD are 97% Hispanic, 3% white, and 87% economically disadvantaged. The district has held a Recognized accreditation rating for five consecutive years, beginning in 1995-96.

Wichita Falls ISD

Wichita Falls Independent School District is located in northwest Texas, approximately 100 miles north of the Dallas-Forth Worth metroplex in an area originally settled by the Wichita Tribe of Native Americans. Since the early 1900s, Wichita Falls has been a center for agriculture, petroleum, and commerce in the northwest Texas area. The city of Wichita Falls has approximately 100,000 residents and is home to Sheppard Air Force Base and Midwestern State University. Wichita Falls ISD has 15,293 students; 63% are White, 18% are Hispanic, 16% are African American, and 46% are economically disadvantaged. In 1999-2000 WFISD earned an Recognized rating for the first time.

The Research Process

According to Harvard researcher Thomas Hatch (1998), "Stories about successful and sustained school improvement are rare, but the tales of unrealized expectations and failure in reform efforts are legion" (p. 4). Hatch attributed the high failure rate of even the best school reform models to inadequate understanding of the complexities that drive the behavior of individuals and groups in schools. Research in education, unfortunately, has all too often relied on surface-level analyses of schooling and the complex human behaviors that drive it. Thus, such research has produced innumerable models, programs, checklists, recipes, correlates, and trendy reforms that generally have not lead to meaningful, lasting changes in schools. Therefore, the research team for the current study was committed to achieving in-depth understanding of the ways in which the four study districts organized and operated to educate all children to high levels of success.

The team of six researchers made two, three-day site visits to Aldine, San Benito, and Wichita Falls. A single three-day visit was made to Brazosport, since this district had been part of the pilot study. While in the districts, the researchers interviewed board members, superintendents, central office staff, principals, teachers, parents, community members, and business leaders. Also, many central office support staff and principals were shadowed, numerous classrooms were observed, and some community functions were attended.

The data collection phase of this study began in early fall 1999 and ended in spring 2000. The research team tape recorded over 200 individual and group interviews and collected thousands of pages of district-generated documents and observation notes.

Data analysis began on the first day of the first site visit and continued until the completion of this final report. The research team met each day while on site visits for lunch and met again during evening hours to debrief and conduct preliminary analysis of the data collected. Following the completion of the site visits, the team met regularly for six months to discuss and analyze the data, and each individual researcher completed analyses of assigned segments of the data. Qualitative research software (FolioViews 4) was utilized to assist in the development of thematic findings from the large quantity of interview transcripts.

The Research Findings

The major findings of this research study have been distilled into five areas, or themes listed below. An expanded explanation of all five themes follows in subsequent sections.

- **State Context of Accountability for Achievement and Equity**
  - Texas made a change from inputs-driven accountability to results-driven accountability. The change required schools to get a specific percentage of students to pass a state assessment of reading, writing, and mathematics skills in order to maintain state accreditation.
  - The changed accountability system also required schools to get the same percentage of students from each racial and income group to pass the assessment in order to maintain state accreditation.
  - The combination of these two changes radically altered expectations for schools and districts the Texas public educational system.
  - These radical changes became the basis or the initiation of the successful changes in the four study districts.

- **Local Equity Catalysts**
  - Local catalysts used evidence of inequitable student achievement to pressure the districts into improving.
  - These local catalysts included 1) revitalized federal desegregation orders, 2) monitors assigned to districts by the state due to dysfunctional district governance, and 3) local activists or community groups concerned about accountability data evidence of inequitable student achievement.

- **Ethical Response of District Leadership**
  - In response to the new state accountability system and to local catalysts, a group of local district leaders, including the superintendent, decided to develop a district in which literally all student groups achieve at high levels.
  - While the superintendent was one of these local leaders, in all cases there were others, including district-level educators, school board members, and representatives from the community.
  - At its roots, this leadership response was an ethical or moral one in support of schools that pursued high and equitable achievement for all groups of students.

- **District Transformation**
  - The study districts developed the key understanding that to be successful they had to change teaching and learning practices in the classroom.
  - The districts developed and promulgated a set of shared equity beliefs regarding the districts' in-common commitment to the achievement success of all children.
  - Specific processes, practices, programs, actions, and structures--focused equity practices--were instituted to achieve success for all students.
  - One key strategy used was proactive redundancy; this meant that the districts had multiple ways to achieve specific learning goals.

- These districts understood that to get their professional staff to radically change their beliefs and practices about teaching and learning, the staff had to be treated in a positive, supportive way, what is here called positive support.
- These new directions for the district meant new role definitions for the superintendent, the school board, district staff, principals, teachers, and other staff.

♦ **Everyday Equity**

- Changes in equity beliefs and practices occurred through time and profoundly changed the educators working in these districts.
- The pursuit of educational equity and excellence became the new focus of everyday schooling.

State Context of Accountability and Equity

The context or environment created by the Texas accountability system, which began with sweeping, even revolutionary, policy reforms in the mid 1980s, was absolutely central to the development of academic success in the four study districts. In fact, without the immense changes wrought by this accountability system—this particular accountability system—it is doubtful, even by the account of the district leadership, principals, teachers, and community activists in the study districts, that these four districts would have been as successful as they have been.

A Policy Revolution

The state level education system in Texas prior to 1984 was dominated by what former Commissioner of Education Lionel "Skip" Meno described as "the old way of doing things" that predicted students' success based on their parents, neighborhoods, and economic circumstances (L. Meno, personal communication, April 7, 2000).

This old way was a deficit model that assumed a bell curve for student achievement. That children of color and children from low-income homes were overwhelmingly on the low-performing end of the curve was seen as a natural and inevitable consequence. The new system, though, completely changed this, almost totally reversing course toward expectations of equally high academic success for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status or their race. Indeed, given the power and pervasiveness of the "old way" in the thinking of both educators and the general public, this reversal was a veritable revolution for public education.

> ***I think state accountability has been a good thing. That is has gotten everyone focused and showed people where we are or where we were and where we need to be. I think it's unfortunate that it took that to have to accomplish what should be accomplished anyway. There is no doubt in my mind that this district would not be where it is without it because we suddenly decided we were not where we needed to be and that we were going to get there. (Central Office Administrator)***

In addition, the state education system pre-1984 was almost exclusively based on process or input variables, dominated by efficiency concerns. What accountability existed was based on such variables as teacher certification, approved courses of study, approved textbooks, number of

minutes courses were to be taught, number of books in the library, etc. In addition, in the absence of state curriculum standards, curriculum by default was largely determined by textbook publishers. Thus, successful superintendents, principals, and teachers were evaluated by the degree to which districts, schools, classrooms were orderly and efficient, i.e., low taxes, clean buildings, well behaved students. Again, given the decades of this input-oriented system and its deep institutionalization throughout public education, including within organizational structures, teacher and administrator mindsets, and district policies, the new accountability system was a revolutionary development.

In 1984, the groundwork was laid for a new approach in Texas when "the Texas Legislature for the first time sought to emphasize student achievement as the basis for accountability. That year, House Bill 72 called for a system of accountability based primarily on student performance" (TEA, 2000). In addition to laying the groundwork for the accountability system with H.B. 72, the legislature that year also passed numerous other key education reforms, including competency testing for teachers, mandatory small class sizes (22 students in grades K-4), and "no pass, no play" rules for extracurricular participation by students (Brooks, 1999). The state also instituted funding for pre-Kindergarten education for 4 year olds who were either economically disadvantaged or second language learners in English. (Both the reduction in class size and the provision of pre-K schooling have been cited as significant sources of improved achievement among all student groups in Texas, though with the exaggerated focus on testing, these reforms are often overlooked [see Grissmer & Flanagan, 1998, and Grissmer, Flanagan, Kawata, & Williamson, 2000]).

House Bill 72 in 1984 was, thus, the first of a new generation of educational policy in Texas reflective of new, fairly revolutionary beliefs, supported by a broad range of individuals and groups, that literally all children must be taught to and can achieve at higher levels. Both Democrat and Republican governors, key legislators of both parties, and State Board of Education members were instrumental in articulating these new beliefs, as was the business community, especially larger corporations, and influential leaders of color, such as José Cárdenas, Director Emeritus of the Intercultural Development Research Association. And, importantly, most of these individuals and groups have maintained this support, often in the face of criticism from all across the political spectrum, for over 15 years. However, the new state educational system that began in the mid-80s has continued to evolve at all levels, but always with a primary focus on results rather than input variables and always with a focus on equally high success for all students. Consequently, success for administrators and teachers began to be assessed by student learning and by the learning of all students, including those students with whom the old system had not succeeded.

Another significant area of state reform was new curriculum standards. These were established in a politically astute manner by drawing on broad-based input and by focusing on a rational process for development of, first, the Essential Elements and, later, the second generation, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. State accreditation changed from an inspection-based process to a support-based process through efforts such as the Texas School Improvement Initiative (TSII) and District Effectiveness Compliance (DEC). The state agency's geographically decentralized Regional Education Service Centers changed roles likewise from distributing films and providing business services to assistance with planning, improvement efforts, and staff

development. High school graduation requirements were increased, and lower-level courses, such as Fundamentals of Math and Correlated Language Arts, into which children of color and children of all races from low income homes were disproportionately tracked, were dropped from the state curriculum.

Furthermore, overly bureaucratic, specific, detail-oriented requirements and instructional arrangements were dropped, site based decision making-groups were required, and campus and district improvement planning processes were mandated. Dropout data were collected and reported more realistically (though problems in this data eventually appeared, which recently spurred substantial improvements in this system, including tracking of individuals statewide). In addition, of high importance to statewide academic improvements, funding equalization between rich and poor districts went through several iterations, and disparities closed considerably (this is a truly important change that also is often underestimated or totally overlooked in national discussions of the Texas accountability system and its results). Additionally, teacher appraisal systems evolved from none to the Texas Teacher Appraisal System to the current, much improved, developmentally focused Professional Development Appraisal System.

High Performance, Results, and Data Accessibility

Thus, the changes in educational policy in Texas have been both wide and deep, contrary to much of the national discussion on Texas and accountability, which has focused almost exclusively on tests and their effects. In truth, these changes have been so counter to prior, almost foundational, assumptions that it is not difficult to call these changes a revolution. There were three major features to this revolution. First, there was the change from deficit-model, low academic expectations for children from low SES homes and children of color to a state mandate for all schools and districts to succeed at equally high levels with all children and with all groups by race and socioeconomic status (what some have called a high performance model). Second, there was the change from input or process-driven schooling and educational accountability (focusing on issues like the number of books in the library) to results- driven educational accountability, focused primarily on learning. This was a revolutionary change from expected inequity (that former commissioner Meno called a "vestige of historically segregated public schooling in Texas") with no accountability for results to mandated equity with very specific, public accountability for results. The third change was public access to disaggregated school and district performance data.

From deficit model to high-performance equity. The first of these major changes—the transformation from the deficit model to the high performance equity model—was supported by four aspects of the new accountability system. One was that criterion-referenced tests were chosen over norm-referenced tests, as some states use for accountability. Criterion-referenced means that there is one, fixed performance standard for all students and all student groups. Norm-referenced means that performance is measured against the performance of other test takers so that the standard is the median performance of all test takers. Thus, half of the population is expected to perform below the norm (traditionally children from low income

The Texas accountability system, which tracks performance of students from various backgrounds, has enabled the state to target help to those students who need it most. (Jim Nelson, Texas Commissioner of Education)

situations and children of color) while the other half is expected to perform above the norm. Norm-referenced tests could be argued to be deficit- oriented or even racially biased because they have reinforced the notion that educators cannot do equally well with all children.

A second aspect was disaggregation of data (test scores, dropout data, number enrolled in advanced placement courses, etc.). Performance data had to be disaggregated by race (African American, Hispanic American, and white) and by socioeconomic status (economically "disadvantaged" and economically "advantaged"). Third, and critical to the system and the ways districts responded to the system, was the requirement for each school and each district to be academically successful with each disaggregated group. This meant that even if a majority of the school's or district's students were doing well on the tests, but one of the disaggregated groups was not, the school would be held accountable (restricted to a lower rating) for that low performing group. This moved students from low SES homes and students of color, groups that public education has traditionally been unsuccessful with, to the center of educators' attentions. A fourth aspect of the accountability system was the provision of support and on-site technical assistance to low-performing schools. Peer review teams led by representatives of the state education agency visited low-performing schools and provided on-site assistance that helped schools move beyond deficit-model approaches and consider ways to ensure higher levels of achievement for all groups of students.

From input-driven to results-driven accountability. The second of these major changes—the transformation from input-driven to results-driven accountability—was supported by six aspects of the new policy system. First was the tests. Virtually no one would argue that these were the best tests possible, and virtually everyone would like to improve them, especially in the direction of being more "authentically" connected to real world tasks and being more integrated with state curriculum standards. Nevertheless, the new assessments were far more rigorous than those previously administered by the state. Second, the test questions are constantly “vetted” for cultural bias. This is not to say they are totally culture-free. No test is totally culture-free because all human activity occurs within a culture, but in this case, there is a constant effort to delete as much as possible of the more obvious examples of cultural bias. Third was that when the system was started, a reasonable standard was chosen for passing. If too high of a standard had been chosen, many individuals and groups, once they saw that high percentages of schools and districts were failing, would have turned against accountability. If too low a standard was chosen, no one would pay attention because all schools and districts, even the ones everyone knew were unsuccessful, would be passing. Fourth, the passing standard increased over time. Each year the system required schools to get a higher percentage of students (and a higher percentage of each disaggregated group of students) to pass the state assessments. Continual learning became a facet of the new system. Schools and districts had to learn to succeed with students they had not succeeded with in the past. Once improvements were achieved, schools and school districts were not allowed to relax improvement efforts. The system was pushing them higher and higher. Fifth, the quality of the tests was constantly being examined, critiqued, and improved. Problems have been publicly noted, which then drove efforts for improvement. In addition, the high school passing exam has in the past been basically an eighth grade test (due to the previously mentioned low-track curriculum that was in place in high schools), but it will be replaced by a substantially more difficult passing exam in 2003. Finally, while the state gave increasing attention to academic results, less attention was given to processes. The state

education agency told school districts that the academic expectations for students were not negotiable; however, how schools and school districts got their students to achieve those expectations was often negotiable. Energy that schools had given to compliance functions could be transferred to focus on improving achievement. In the early 1990s, the state provided flexibility by waiving state requirements for districts that were willing to be accountable for specific results. In the mid-1990s, the focus on flexibility with accountability was increased with a re-write of the entire state education code that substantially reduced the number of process-oriented mandates and increased accountability for results.

Public access to school and school district disaggregated performance data. A third aspect of the system, an aspect that supported both of the major changes, has already been mentioned here, but needs to be focused on separately. All of the data were made very public. On one hand, there was the publication of the data, disaggregated by race, socioeconomic status, grade, and test subject in the mass media, including typically printed in local newspapers. On the other hand, but not so well known to the broader public, is the fact that a vast array—everything in the media but much, much more—is openly available on the TEA website and can easily be downloaded for anyone to analyze. In fact, there is over five years of this data, totally disaggregated, for each school and for each district. Of course, this was not technologically possible ten years ago when far fewer people were connected to and were using the web. Part of this change, therefore, is directly related to this major change in technology. But it can also be said that the Texas Education Agency, under the leadership of former Commissioner Mike Moses, took a leadership role in maximizing the public availability of a large range and depth of data on each school and district. This kind of radical openness is a major benefit to democracy itself and serves specific purposes in eliciting school and district transformations.

Thus, as a result of almost two decades worth of sweeping, even revolutionary, educational policy changes through the implementation of the Texas accountability system, the 7,162 schools, the 1,042 public school districts, and the 100+ charter schools in Texas, since 1991, have had the academic performance of their students publicly reported. They have also been held accountable for certain levels of academic attainment for the school or district as a whole and for all student racial groups and students from low-income homes. This state context of educational accountability played a vitally important role, a substantial role, in the individual stories of transformation in the four study districts. Within this broader state context of accountability, each of the study districts experienced specific events and circumstances that served as catalysts for dramatic change.

Local Equity Catalysts

As mentioned in the preceding section, beginning in the early 90s, all schools and school districts in the state of Texas had access to student performance data that was consistently measured across the entire state. Not only did schools and districts have access to their own data, they had access to the data from other schools and districts. Advances in technology made accessing such data increasingly simple. Of specific importance is that a wide range of accountability data was available not only to school personnel and officials, but also to the general public, to newspapers, to parents, to federal judges, to community activists, to competing schools and districts, to job seekers—in short to anyone who had an interest in how students in any particular school or

district were performing. And not only were raw student performance data widely accessible, state ratings for schools and districts were available as well. Thus, it became common knowledge whose schools were Low Performing, Acceptable, Recognized, or Exemplary. This widespread, publicly available data played a significant role in catalytic events that spurred the changes in each of the four study districts.

All four districts saw marked, rapid, and continuous improvement in student performance beginning in 1994 or 1995 through to the present that district interviewees tied to particular catalytic events or circumstances. In some cases, it was a single event; in others, it was a combination of circumstances. For example, in Brazosport, the most often mentioned catalytic event that marked the beginning of the change in the district was the presentation by a group of community activists at a school board meeting. As one district administrator put it, "[The superintendent] will tell you the first week he was here, the Hispanic people put together a little welcome….that really challenged Dr. Anderson [the superintendent]. The activists said, 'Why are the kids on the North side doing better than the kids on the South side?' " This group of Hispanic community members brought their own charts and graphs, drawn from the accountability data discussed above, to the very first board meeting over which the new superintendent presided. They showed the large performance gap that existed between schools that served primarily families that were affluent and those that served primarily families that had low incomes. The leaders of the business community in Brazosport were similarly dissatisfied by the district's performance, based again on the data from the accountability system.

In Aldine, the public visibility of the district's performance, based on accountability data, compared to other Houston area districts also became a public issue. Internal comparisons among Aldine schools, based on the same data, also became an issue for both the superintendent and the school board. The superintendent put it this way: "I got tired of our name in the paper being at the bottom of the list [when accountability data was released publicly]. But what I got tired of hearing is that we were minority, that we were poor. That that's the best we could do. . . . And I said, 'Well, enough is enough.' " According to one board member, the board of trustees became similarly dissatisfied with the performance of Aldine students:

> The board members sat down in a study session with Mr. Donaldson [the superintendent], and we talked about that we wanted to see the test scores go up. We have a school [Orange Grove Elementary, which is one of the district's schools that primarily serves low-income children of color] that had been great with the TAAS scores. We said that if that school can do it, we feel like all the schools can do it. And this is what we want, we want every school to bring the test scores up. We feel that we have given you the money to go out and get the teachers, and we feel like if they are qualified, then they need to teach those children, and those TAAS scores need to come up.

Both the superintendent and the board in Aldine pointed to the same time period, about five years earlier, when dissatisfaction levels with student performance levels, based on state accountability data, became significantly high to trigger a change.

An additional catalytic factor for Aldine was the fact that the district remained under a federal desegregation order for which an agreement was reached in 1977. The agreement was modified

several times in intervening years as the district's racial composition shifted. This desegregation order was mentioned repeatedly by interviewees at all levels as something that kept equity issues at the forefront of awareness in Aldine ISD. Thus, heightened awareness, based on the state accountability system data showing low performance and large achievement gaps for African American and Hispanic students compared to white students, brought increased pressure on the school board and on the district's leadership.

A second district for which a federal desegregation order and heightened awareness of district inequities played catalytic roles was Wichita Falls. A board member described how the desegregation order interacted with the low performing status of a middle school to create a community uproar:

> At that campus there was a lot of resentment that they got branded "Low-Performing," especially since they would say it was one population [African American math scores]. …They said, 'Look at this, look at this, look at this. Look at all these areas we're doing well in.' Unfortunately, or fortunately, from our viewpoint I think the newspaper sensationalized somewhat. And there were some local factors going on. We had been under this desegregation order for a long time. There was a need to do some changes in our school either through re-districting or choice or something. The demographics of our city had changed, but nothing had changed really with how our schools were going in. That was part of the group [of newly elected school board members] that I kind of came in with in saying that it's time to make some changes. But all of that played to the emotion of it. [The school staff] was saying, "Well, look at our population compared to this population." And all of these other factors. They all fed together to keep [that campus] in the headlines. That was the most turbulent times I've seen in a long time and I've grown up here. It was a tough time.

Those tough, turbulent times led to proactive responses on the part of the district superintendent and board to create solutions for both the performance issues and unbalanced attendance zones that violated the attendance bands for campuses specified by the desegregation order.

In the fourth study district, community activism also played a key role, but the primary catalyst cited by most informants in this district was intervention from the Texas Education Agency in response to persistent school board dysfunction and conflict that was contributing to low student achievement. A community member described it this way:

> The situation escalated to the point that the board could not agree on who should be named superintendent. I think TEA was watching the situation closely because ultimately they sent, they informed, the school district that a monitor would be placed in the district to run all portions of the school district…The newspaper covered it, exposed all the situations that were petty politics….Those board members were voted out, new board members were voted in.

Similarly, a board member who served during this time described the degree of dysfunction and low expectations that existed on the school board before the state monitor was assigned:

> Our focus was on one thing, and that was 'Make sure that your tax rate is the lowest that can sustain a system that can provide minimal service for kids that can keep us in right with state whatever.' That meant even the atmosphere kids would study in, their learning environments….This is the mentality that existed – not by all, but evidently by a majority, because that's the way it was.

Though this was a dismal picture the board member painted, it served as a catalyst for positive change. San Benito, with a new school board and a TEA monitor, set out to hire a superintendent who would be an instructional leader. According to the same board member,

> We were able to end up with Felipe [Alaniz] to come down and work with us. He took us to another level. Felipe had a very strong conviction on the ability of kids to learn. …. He came on and our focus immediately became on student achievement.

Thus, the catalytic event of the TEA board monitor spurred positive change and resulted in the selection of an instructionally-oriented superintendent in a district whose previous focus had been low taxes and minimal compliance with the law.

Within the context of a new state accountability system that provided readily available student performance data, disaggregated by race and income level, all four districts participating in this study experienced significant catalytic events or circumstances that marked the change from what a one principal called TWWADT (the way we've always done things) toward a new focus on much higher levels of academic success for literally all children. But it was the particular way the district leadership, especially the superintendent, responded to these catalytic events that was critical to the positive transformation of these districts.

Ethical Response of District Leadership

There are over one thousand school districts in Texas, and all of them experienced the implementation of the new state accountability system in 1991. Furthermore, many or most of them experienced local catalytic events or circumstances similar to those in the study districts. However, the critical point here is that all districts did not respond to the state accountability system or local catalysts in the same way. In the four districts studied, the ethical response of district leadership (primarily the leadership of the superintendent but also including leadership by other key individuals such as school board members, central office administrators, principals, and teachers) to the state accountability system's performance data and local catalysts was an extremely important factor that lead to the district's eventual success.

Also noteworthy is the fact that only two of the study districts had the same superintendent throughout their entire transformation from low performing or average districts into high performing districts. Sonny Donaldson had been superintendent in Aldine for 17 years at the time of the study. Gerald Anderson came to Brazosport in 1991 and was still there when the data for this study were collected. In San Benito, the transformation began under Felipe Alaniz, who served as superintendent before leaving to assume duties as a Deputy Commissioner of Education for the state. Alaniz's successor in San Benito was Joe D. González, who is the current superintendent. In Wichita Falls, Leslie Carnine was the superintendent when the changes began. He took a superintendency in Arkansas in 1997, and the board hired Connie

Welsh, who is still in that role. So, while the initial response of the superintendent is a critical piece of these districts' stories, it should not be assumed that the kind of widespread and equitable success the districts have achieved is dependent on a single person in the role of superintendent. Clearly, impressive progress, as has occurred in the four districts discussed here, can be sustained even in the face of superintendent turnover.

Regardless of whether the same superintendent was in place throughout the change or whether a second superintendent was building on prior work, the words of the superintendents themselves illustrate vividly their guiding philosophies in responding to the challenges posed by the new state accountability system and local catalytic circumstances in their districts:

> [I decided] if it [high and equitable student performance] was going to happen, it was going to happen here….Our first task was to go out and make them [the district's staff and students] believers that they could compete, to set the expectations. (Felipe Alaniz, former San Benito Superintendent)

> I am a natural competitor. And I am my worst critic, so nobody has to evaluate me….I am very, very competitive, and I hold very high expectation of our kids. I don't believe that they're going to flop, and I don't let anybody believe that that's going to work with them. (Joe D. González, San Benito Superintendent)

> There was among the business community a belief that we were a bloated bureaucracy and that we were not delivering results and that our kids couldn't even fill out the [employment] applications. There was a general level of dissatisfaction with our schools. As you well know, the publication of the TAAS data and the public's awareness of that created an issue in our district where people became very aware of the difference of student performance in our school district. … I went to the [business community] and I listened to them. The most significant thing that came out of that was "Jerry, don't make excuses. Deliver results." It sounds so simple but when you think about it, …What is it that we find in schools that have these huge gaps in student performance among African-American, Hispanic, white, economically disadvantaged—what are they [the district's staff] saying to you? "Those parents. We can't do it if the parents don't help us." That's the most frequently used excuse. You know they [the district staff] believe it. They believe it. I'm not bad-mouthing those people, they truly believe it. We did too…[but] that's criminal. That is morally wrong. Whether we think the system is good or not, it pushes us to do a better job of teaching these kids. When we say we don't want to do that because of the pressure it puts on us, there's something very morally wrong about that. That's morally wrong. We're not talking about chemicals, we're not talking about automobiles, we're talking about human beings. What we do in our business is going to determine the quality of life they're [the students are] going to have as adults. (Gerald Anderson, Brazosport Superintendent)

> I see this role [the superintendency] as—we have to do what's best for kids. I said in my speech when I accepted the job here to the entire community, I said, if there's ever a question as to which side I'm going to be on, the big people or the little people – it's going to be the little people. Just know this from the get-go…I have very little tolerance for whiners, for people who say "Ohhh, the way it used to be…" Today is not the way it

> used to be. Tomorrow won't be the way it is today. Get off of it, move on….You see, you've got a group of kids—and I use the analogy—there's a whole group of kids that come to our door that learn in spite of us, not because of us. That's that top group, they're learning in spite of us. You just have to throw it out there and they feed on it. But then you've got this other group of children that does take a very focused effort and a real strong plan in order to get them to move. But they can. That's really going to be the success of our entire society. We have to do it. I've been at this for 35 years, and there's a piece of me that—if nothing else on my tombstone I want somebody to say, I was able to make a difference, at least for a critical mass of a group of kids, and I had some influence over them….High expectations is the only way. (Connie Welsh, Wichita Falls Superintendent)

> The main thing is the main thing, and that's student performance. You need to keep that above all else…I think there are consequences when you don't do things right…I think we have a moral responsibility to make every child successful regardless of where they came from, what their color is. I believe in that. (Sonny Donaldson, Aldine Superintendent)

It is important to note that these superintendents did not choose to try to explain away the poor performance of groups of students. They did not endeavor to baffle their critics with confusing, jargon-filled explanations of low achievement. They did not blame low performance on parents, social service agencies, or anyone outside the district. They did not attempt to finesse the system by finding quick-fix substitutes for real improvements in student learning. They responded to both the state accountability system and to their local constituents with a sincere commitment to improve the learning of all students.

Of course, it can be said that many, if not most, Texas superintendents and superintendents across the country now speak the language of "high expectations" and "success for all students." High expectations is certainly one of the Effective Schools Correlates developed by the late Ron Edmonds and popularized by Larry Lezotte. In fact, "high expectations" and "success for all" have become two of the most popular mantras in education. However, these superintendents did not just say it; they actually lived high expectations and achieved success for all. What they did can be divided into two parts, sincere belief in learning for all children and concrete actions based on that belief.

Sincere Belief in Learning for All

First, they had to really believe all children can learn. This did not mean, though, that these superintendents in the beginning of the transformation believed their districts could achieve to the same high levels as they have now. As will be discussed later, as they achieved each goal, they set, and achieved, higher and higher ones. But in the beginning they believed that they could succeed *districtwide*, at all their schools, at substantially higher levels than they were before the transformation.

To believe this, these superintendents had to go against a very strong historic tide that educators could not be successful with certain groups of children, especially children from low income homes and children of color. Even though the phrases "high expectations" and "all children can

learn" have been repeated constantly in educational circles for over twenty years, the reality of what these superintendents (and other educators including board members, central office staff, principals, and teachers) had experienced was much different. This "tide" or discourse of actual practice in schools, which has dominated public school educators for literally decades, has been that some children cannot or do not learn well. This has been viewed as almost exclusively the fault of the children, their parents, their neighborhoods, their race, their genes, or some other factor external to what educators can control. However, these superintendents, and their co-leaders on the school board and among the district-level staff, the principals, and the teachers, stood against and then moved against this powerful tide. They decided that public school educators could accomplish what the dominant educator discourse said they could not, and they were supported by similar assumptions about educating equally all children that were built into the state accountability system.

This was no small accomplishment, especially given the immense and long-standing power of the discourse about the persistent academic failure of some groups of children that was even more dominant when they started their transformations than it is now. In fact, it can reasonably be argued that the combination of, on the one hand, the state accountability system and its mandated requirements that public schools will succeed with all children, no matter their socioeconomic status or their race and home-culture, and, on the other, the ethical leadership response of the district leadership to the academic failure of these students was truly revolutionary, given the context they faced. While they did not typically see their stand against the dominant discourse, especially at the time, in such an elevated fashion, in retrospect it was an outstanding accomplishment, an accomplishment that needs to be recognized for its exceptional value and worth. Though they likely did not know it at the time and though they tended to view themselves as ordinary educators in ordinary circumstances, they were, with the midwifery support of the state accountability system, birthing a revolution, a sea change, in the assumptions about what educators could accomplish with all children.

Integral to taking this stance against the dominant discourse for these superintendents and the other district leaders was that they saw this stance as a "moral responsibility." Common throughout the interviews with the district leadership was the use of different phrases that repeated this responsibility. Some referenced religious beliefs; some referenced "educational" beliefs; some referenced ethical principles; some referenced beliefs about democracy and equality. But all the superintendents and many other leaders in their districts spoke of a moral foundation that they drew upon that supported them in the stance they took that was so contrary to traditional educator beliefs about educating everybody's children.

Acting on Beliefs

The second part of these superintendents' commitment to high expectations was in moving from belief and talk to action. They not only really believed that literally all children can learn, they decided that they could accomplish this in their districts and in the immediate future rather than in some distant, mythic future. As has been aptly noted, speaking and doing, words and actions, are different things. The critical fact about the superintendents that led the transformations is that they did not just say it and believe it, they also acted. The saying and believing were important, but equally so was the acting to ensure that the high expectations were realized in their own districts. However, when they acted, it was not just tinkering with changing the

organization that they saw as the way to realize their goals. All the superintendents, over fairly short periods of time, initiated changes that moved the districts from a collection of loosely coupled, individual campuses to coherent, focused districtwide organizations, a change that was almost as revolutionary as their stance against the old belief that schools could not succeed with some groups of children.

District Transformation

Consequently, the problem faced by the district leadership was to move an entire district, a complex system, from the old ways, a set of deeply held assumptions, beliefs, and practices to the new way, an almost totally opposite set of assumptions, beliefs, and practices. The old set, as discussed above, consisted of input accountability and inequitable bell-curve academic results, with middleclass whites predominantly at the high end children from low SES homes and children of color predominantly at the low end. The new set reversed this: accountability would now be focused on academic results, and the bell curve was to be replaced with equally high performance by all students, including equally high performance by all student groups. For example, Sonny Donaldson, the superintendent of Aldine, said that what he repeated over and over everywhere he spoke was, "the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." This was his way of saying to all his constituents, internal and external to the district, that the primary focus of district as an organization was learning and keeping it learning, and by learning he meant the learning of all students and student groups at equally high levels.

The sheer difficulty of this transformation, though, cannot be underestimated. Organizational research has long shown that a conversion of a complex organization from one deeply held set of beliefs and practices to a very different one is not easy to accomplish. Indeed, the organizational research literature is replete with examples of organized efforts to accomplish such a transformation, but most commonly the result is a failure to achieve a transformation this extensive. However, with these four districts there is strong evidence that they did succeed or, at least, have substantially succeeded in achieving the necessary transformation.

How did these districts do it? How did they get *both* beliefs *and* practices to change, most importantly the beliefs and practices of teachers? The answer to this is divided into six parts—changing classroom teaching and learning, equity beliefs, focused practices, proactive redundancy, positive support, and new role directions. Each of these areas is explored in detail below.

Changing Classroom Teaching and Learning

In these districts, leaders quickly determined that the focus of the transformation had to be on changes in the classroom. They did not necessarily immediately know this with certainty, but they soon figured it out. They acknowledged that learning occurs in the classroom; therefore, the classroom ought to be the focus of reform efforts. In the past teachers were not generally successful in teaching children who lived in low-income situations and children of color, and this lack of success was acceptable in the old system. However, to be successful now, under the new accountability system, teachers would have to become successful with these same children. This meant that teachers' beliefs and practices had to change.

> ***Accountability has made people more responsible….So we have seen a dramatic improvement that our kids have made, and it's also that whole system has also made us accountable for every child. And you know it's made us turn our attention toward meeting the needs of all those kids. It's just really raised our level of awareness and heightened our level of awareness…. And when we first started looking very carefully at the accountability system suddenly everybody realized the need for staff development. So we have used that as the impetus to make changes.(Central Office Administrator)***

Studies of the history of education have repeatedly shown that while schools often change numerous facets of education, teaching and learning rarely change. Even when the goal is to change teaching and learning, though, schools often fail to do so. Some of this failure is based on the fact that the change is focused at a distance from actual teaching, like moving from the traditional schedule to a block schedule at the secondary level. This changes the amount of time students spend with a teacher at one time, but it does not necessarily directly affect how teachers teach and who learns. Another reason teaching practices fail to change is that the traditional practices, and the assumptions underlying traditional practices, have been constantly supported and reinforced in the old system. In that old system, traditional teaching practices yielded, and were expected to yield, a distribution of academic success that could be depicted by a bell curve. In that distribution, the high end of the curve was disproportionately occupied by upper middleclass white children, and the low end of the curve was disproportionately occupied by students of all races from low SES homes and by students of color.

Since the new accountability system literally required academic success with all student groups, teachers had to learn how to be successful with the student groups with whom they were previously not successful. This meant that for districts to have the academic success now required by the accountability system, districts would have to figure out how to help teachers become successful with literally all students. This, in turn, meant that the districts had to figure out how to get both the underlying beliefs and the teaching practices of teachers to change. What follows will address what these districts did, but it is crucial that it be understood that the "first" part of the change was that they figured out that to be successful under the new accountability system *required* that what happens in the classroom had to change. This means that both a deep (fundamental beliefs about how to teach and which students succeed) and a broad (actual teaching practices) transformation had to occur.

Shared Equity Beliefs

In each of the four districts studied, district leaders sought to ingrain three shared beliefs about educational equity throughout all levels of the school district. Clearly, each of the superintendents and others in the leadership of the transformation held or came to hold these beliefs. But, in order to get an entire district to respond in the ways that were necessary to meet the educational needs of all children, school board members, central office staff, principals, and teachers needed to be operating out of a common or shared set of beliefs. One high school teacher succinctly described the districtwide move toward common beliefs in educational equity this way:

> I think that one of the things that really has happened in the last five years or so, and it is something that we have always believed in, but I think that more and more we have been

> working hard on improving the belief that *every kid* will be successful. And it is our job as a whole team, and when I'm talking about whole teams I'm talking about administration, teachers, everyone that's involved in providing education for the child and their environment. We do everything that's possible to provide a situation that will encourage learning and enrich environments to facilitate that. [emphasis added]

This teacher saw the shared nature of the belief in the goal of all children being successful as an important part of his district's transformation.

Three shared beliefs in educational equity were articulated with remarkable sameness in each of the four districts studied. Although the districts were located in geographically diverse sites around Texas and although they had significantly different degrees and types of diversity among their student populations, the beliefs were very similar. Table 2 below summarizes the core shared beliefs that were found in these districts.

Equity Beliefs
§ All children, regardless of their racial and SES differences, have the capability to learn and succeed at equally high academic levels . § It is the responsibility of all of the adults in the district to insure that all of the children succeed academically. § Equitable and excellent classroom learning is the primary focus of district operations.

Table 2

All children, regardless of their racial and SES differences, have the capability to learn and succeed at equally high academic levels. The new state accountability system established this new assumption about learning as the primary focus of schooling and about the expectation that race and socioeconomic differences in academic achievement would no longer be acceptable. In the four study districts, local catalysts ignited the attention of the district to these new assumptions. The district leadership responded ethically by repetitively promulgating the central belief that all children, regardless of differences, would learn at equally high academic levels. For example, in San Benito, before the current and prior superintendents, it was commonly accepted both by professionals and by the community that their Hispanic children from low-income homes would not do well in school. In fact, the only children who were commonly expected to do well were the middleclass Hispanic children who were the children of the local professionals and major business people. In Brazosport, the schools in the geographical areas dominated by children of color in low-income situations were not expected to do well, while in the areas dominated by middleclass whites, schools were expected to do well. However, with the transformations in these four districts, through their persistent efforts, the belief in equally high academic performance of all children came to be shared by virtually all of the professional staff. A central office administrator described this shared philosophy of high and equitable student performance in her district:

> An overall philosophy of this district has changed in the last six years, certainly, is that the expectation is that all students can be successful on the same assessment test and

> that's how we do our job and that's how we, how we justify our credibility to taxpayers is that that happens….We have an elementary school that's over sixty-percent economically disadvantaged and white students are the minority population there, and they're an Exemplary school…So we don't have any campuses or any staffs or any principals saying "we can't do it because of our population" because we have all these examples of campuses that are getting the job done. So I would say, in the last years from when state assessment started, it's a matter of expectation and philosophy and the fact that we actually have schools that have done it, so now there's no falling back on, you know, "I can't do it" because the expectation and the examples are there.

Part of the change [in this district] obviously is accountability. I think that's one positive thing about the assessment system in Texas is that people have, finally, are being held accountable for teaching kids that are in poverty. If there's anything positive that has come out of TAAS testing that would be it. That there is a yardstick that's going to measure all kids and that's going to not take the excuse that "Well, their home situation isn't the same so we're not going to have the expectation from them." I know when I moved here and taught math my first year at, I went in, and there were only 20 textbooks. They said, "That's all you need. You just have a classroom set." I said, "No, I want a book for every child." They said, "We don't send home homework because it doesn't come back." I said, "We will send homework. We will have homework every day. I want a book for every child. They'll check out a book so they'll be responsible for it, and if they don't come back, that's fine. They will come back. If you expect them to come back they will come back. If you have expectations…" It was that – I think that has changed. The expectations are there….[A]nd I would say that has changed districtwide. (Middle School Principal)

Thus, as this interviewee emphasized, both the expectations of and examples of high academic success for all children contributed to the transformations taking place in these school districts.

It is the responsibility of all of the adults in the district to insure that all of the children succeed academically. The state accountability system established that high academic results for all racial and socio-economic groups of students would be the new measure of school success. The four study districts responded by spreading accountability and thus responsibility to all staff. That is, the whole district—at all levels and through all staff—were now focused on and responsible for improving learning for all groups of children. As one elementary teacher eloquently described:

> As an African-American in this district, I am very proud of what our district has accomplished. Because it was very heartbreaking ten years back when scores were put up and you saw your students. And you saw that anywhere from 70% to 80% of African American students in this district were failing that TAAS test and even making low scores on any type of achievement test. And I think there is a different attitude that we have to teach all students. That attitude is what has really changed in this district. That you cannot afford to have one student in your classroom, no matter the color of their skin or anything, their creed or religion, not one reason shall you have for a child sitting in your classroom failing. No more excuses.

This change in attitude was evidenced in a variety of ways in each of the four districts. In Brazosport, the administrators and teachers began to use accountability data to improve instruction schoolwide. In Wichita Falls, a website available to all staff was created for each specific aspect of the state tests, and this was integrated with potential test questions and

exemplary ways to teach the specific skill. Aldine suffused throughout the district the assumption that the whole district was committed to student success through intensive, districtwide staff development on common instructional practices and through the development of benchmark targets in core academic areas. San Benito began with an intensive curriculum alignment project to ensure that students at all grade levels were receiving instruction in the curriculum measured by the state achievement tests. Thus, all staff were soon engaged with the idea that each and every one of them was responsible.

Equitable and excellent classroom learning is the primary focus of district operations. As has been discussed, prior to the accountability system, classroom learning, what was happening in the classroom in terms of teaching and learning, was attended to in terms of inputs, like teacher certification and in terms of the expectation that the academic results would resemble a bell curve. Whether teachers were successfully teaching all children was not typically of major concern, that is, the specific quality of the teaching largely was ignored by the district and even by the principal and, unfortunately, in many cases, by the teachers themselves. All teachers were good teachers; district and campus leaders were not responsible for instruction; and, academic success was largely (and correctly, according to the assumptions of the time) race and SES based. However, with the new accountability system, classroom teaching and learning became the primary focus. The classroom moved from an almost invisible one behind shut doors to the center of all district and campus action. As a result, all teachers had to assume the responsibility for achieving equitable and excellent learning in their classrooms. A high school teacher talked about how this new view of teachers' primary responsibility for equitably high student achievement replaced the former view:

> We just banded together and decided that we needed to have higher expectations for the kids. And we looked at test scores, we were looking at standardized test scores, and the scores were low. A lot of people had the idea that our kids don't have the scheme, they don't have the background, they don't have the abilities to do this. We just got together and said, "These are the expectations and our students can do it." As soon as you realize that they can could do it, and you started accepting that this is what's going to happen, the scores started going up….I think that probably all the teachers in here [at the interview] felt that years ago even before the district embraced it. But I think that the district embracing it at a higher level, at a higher administration level—then it came down. From the principals, from the leadership of our school district, from the superintendent on down, said, "This is what's expected, and our students can do this." And so the people who had always felt that felt very encouraged. And the people that didn't feel that way were kind of on the outs because this is the philosophy we're having and those really strong teachers who always expected that of their kids really overpowered the people that weren't interested. So it became the accepted thing to do was have the high expectations. And the unaccepted thing to do would be the slacker teacher.

Thus, for these districts, a shared belief emerged that teaching and learning were appropriately the most important focus of the district and that the primary responsibility for this had to be in the teachers' hands.

Focused Equity Practices

Beliefs in educational equity, no matter how powerful or how compelling, make little difference in the absence of practices that translate those beliefs into day-to-day reality. All four of the districts developed multiple practices, processes, actions, procedures, policies, and programs designed to deliver on the promise of high expectations. Specifically, the districts engaged in practices designed to change classroom instruction in ways that were consistent with the beliefs described above. While many of the beliefs listed in the previous section were consistent with the Correlates of Effective schools, the findings having to do with practices tracked more closely to the literature on Total Quality Management or TQM. Two of the districts, in fact, Brazosport and Aldine, used the language of TQM and were involved in ongoing quality activities.

The beliefs and practices, however, do not operate in these districts in isolation from one another. They are highly consistent, strongly interactive, and mutually reinforcing. Gerald Anderson in Brazosport has even described his district's story as "Effective Schools meets Total Quality." An important distinction needs to be made here, though. The Correlates of Effective Schools do not offer much specificity about how to deliver the product, equitably high student success. TQM, on the other hand, is long on specifics about the systematic delivery of performance, but short on specificity about how "quality" should be defined. In other words, it would be possible to use TQM principles quite successfully to perpetuate the stratification of student success along race and income lines—if that is how the leadership saw and defined quality. Thus, the combination of these two sets of principles shaped district-wide efforts to pursue both excellence and equity in student achievement.

The research team identified eight groups of practices (see Table 3) that were shaped to influence, create, support, or reinforce improved instruction for all students. In all cases, though, these practices were integrated with the shared beliefs so that neither shared beliefs alone nor practices alone was sufficient. These two were always intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

Focused Equity Practices
§ Generating, directing, and maintaining focus § Developing and aligning curriculum and delivering instruction § Building and supporting capacity in people to contribute and lead § Acquiring, allocating, and aligning fiscal, human, and material resources § Collecting, interpreting, and using data and monitoring results § Supervising, evaluating, and holding people accountable § Refocusing energies, refining efforts, and ensuring continuous performance § Creating and nurturing alliances

Table 3

These practices are common in many school districts; however, in these four districts, the practices took on special meaning. They became tools for infusing equity beliefs into the daily work of schools and classrooms. Without these practices, the beliefs would have been little more than empty slogans. Without the equity beliefs, these practices would have been implemented as

bureaucratic processes that would have only maintained the status quo without influencing the achievement of diverse groups of students.

Generating, directing, and maintaining focus. In all four districts, there was a clear sense of direction and focus. Teachers, principals, and support personnel all seemed to share a common sense of mission. Not only had boards established goals, but also superintendents and other district leaders articulated those goals with such regularity and such conviction that board goals actually found life in schools. Mission statements were backed by a true sense of commitment. District employees did not have to guess much about what was important to district leaders – it was improved academic achievement for all groups of students.

A group of teachers in Brazosport explained, "We've become more focused on what it is we want to achieve." Teachers and principals in the other districts echoed this sentiment. The sense of focus did not develop by chance. District leaders used a variety of strategies to generate, direct, and maintain this sense of focus. For instance, in San Benito, a very inclusive curriculum alignment process engaged teachers and principals in an effort that generated a common understanding of what students needed to be taught. In Aldine, a system of vertical and horizontal leadership team meetings kept all district and school level administrators focused on accomplishing common goals. In Brazosport, focus was developed and maintained through an eight-step process for which they used disaggregated student achievement data to focus educators on specific areas that required instructional improvement. Wichita Falls developed a similar approach, patterned directly upon the Brazosport model.

Within each district, there was a remarkable consistency in the messages transmitted to educators, parents, students, and community members. Consistency was apparent not simply in the spoken messages of district leaders; it was also apparent in the decisions made by those leaders. Specifically, the message made clear the need to improve academic achievement for all groups of children. This consistency helped reinforce a sense of focus. Furthermore, district leaders used a variety of approaches to maintain the focus and prevent distractions that might draw time and energy away from efforts to improve academic achievement. For example, the detailed review of benchmark assessment data was a common strategy for keeping principals tuned into the needs of students and teachers.

Developing and aligning curriculum and delivering instruction. In the past and still today, in many districts, specific alignment of the curriculum has not been achieved. Teachers in one subject in one grade do not know what teachers in the same subject in prior grades or subsequent grades are teaching. This is especially true between the three levels, elementary, middle, and high schools. However, all four of the study districts had aligned their curriculum and had developed focused and coherent practices for the delivery of instruction within that curriculum. That is, each district had developed and aligned curricula throughout the district and linked it with appropriate instructional strategies and assessments.

Aldine, in the first year of their transformation, developed an elaborate set of benchmark targets for all grades in core subjects. Brazosport developed a much-imitated eight-step instructional process. A central office administrator described the eight steps in this process:

> The very first part is where you take your data where you tested your children to see your starting point. Now we have [computer] programs. Of course, principals were doing it by hand [before]—disaggregating all that data and looking at all the subgroups, seeing how they performed….From there you take that information and look at your weakest areas. And you develop an instructional calendar based on that. You start with your weak objectives. And you know you need to spend more time possibly on those. And you build from there to where you go to your stronger objectives, which you should not have to spend as much time. And then, really, there is almost a spiraling effect because while you are teaching weak objectives or any objectives, at the same time you have to maintain what you have taught, so you always are addressing your objectives. And you develop instructional focuses for your campus. That is so everybody is on the same page. The instructional calendar is developed by the teachers. The instructional coordinator will sit down with the English teachers and we will come up with a calendar for Reading and Writing. And then I will sit down with the Math. Math is done a little bit differently because we can't always go from weakest to strongest objective because it may not mathematically make sense. It doesn't always work like that. And so they have to go with the natural flow with math. And from there they have their time frames that they work on particular objectives. And after that, we assess and we track. And I think tracking is a key point in all of this is that we look at every child and see how they are performing. And we have constant feedback with that child's teacher, with that child, the administrator and myself. And I think the important thing here is that it is very easy to say that all children can learn. And I think that is very common for educators to say. But to truly believe it and to do it, not every child is going to learn with the same learning style. Or just in the same time frame. And so you have to afford that child the necessary tools, whether it is through re-teaching him or tutorials. But you have to provide for him. And I think that is probably where it is all at.

The other two districts also had very specific practices for strengthening curriculum and instruction in their schools. San Benito began with a curriculum alignment project coordinated with the Evans Newton Corporation and then continued to develop local curriculum materials. Wichita Falls came up with a locally developed curriculum that was available to all teachers through the district intranet and was aligned to not only state standards but also to local district standards, such as multicultural components. Wichita Falls also used an instructional process, which was called "Focus," patterned after Brazosport's eight steps.

One elementary teacher described the value of having a clear and consistent district framework for the instruction in her classroom:

> I feel like [the district's instructional framework] is like a road map. In 1976 when I came to the district straight out of college, there wasn't a road map for a new teacher. You came in the classroom, and you had a classroom, and you had some books on the shelf that you had to teach. And, yes, you had your curriculum guides. But you just didn't necessarily have a road map. The [district framework] is going to walk you through everything that you need to do. And it doesn't just carry over in TAAS subjects. It carries over in your spelling, your reading. It's a road map that is going to help new and not so new instructors in our district to go where we need to go and be successful.

Teachers in these districts were not left to flounder under increased expectations; pressure to perform according to the new accountability expectations was always accompanied by support. The districts developed practices that increased the likelihood that each and every teacher would be able to get their students to achieve expected results.

Building and supporting the capacity of people to contribute and lead. Leaders in the four districts devoted substantial amounts of time and resources to helping teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary in order to improve instruction for all groups of students. Furthermore, they devoted substantial amounts of time and resources to helping administrators develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary in order to support teachers as they worked to improve instruction for all groups of students. An example of one of the mechanisms for delivering this type of support to classroom teachers was provided by an elementary principal:

> They are [central office] resource individuals that come out to assist at the campus level whenever a principal requests it. I need to go through the [assistant superintendent] and say, "Look, I need help in Science, I need help in Reading or Math. Can you send somebody to help one of my teachers?" We set it up, they come over, the model lessons. It's usually for teachers who are first year teachers, your rookie teachers, or just teachers that are new to the district but have not been used to this type of teaching system that we have….I've got some teachers that will request it, "Can you call one of the coaches to come over and assist in this and that, I need to look at new ways to teach this," or whatever. They're very open to it.

In addition to the capacity building support provided directly by central office staff, there were numerous other practices at work in these four districts that provided consistent, high quality development for people at all levels in the district. A common practice described by several districts was for the superintendents' meetings with principals to be primarily focused on instruction and the professional development of the principals themselves. This professional development or capacity building orientation toward principals' meetings was strictly adhered to, and the routine and procedure items that commonly consume the bulk of time in principals' meetings in the past were dealt with in other ways. Dozens of other examples were evident in the interview transcripts to illustrate the focused practices for building the capacity of people to contribute to and lead the transformation underway in these districts.

Acquiring, allocating, and aligning fiscal, human, and material resources. Another striking example of practices that had evolved to support the new beliefs in place that all students could be successful at high levels were the processes for resource utilization. The change in the way these processes worked as opposed to the way they operated under earlier beliefs can be illustrated by the ways in which principals (an important human resource) were hired, promoted, and evaluated. From a superintendent:

> We had one high school principal leave. Good friend of mine….I hate to see him go. He was a [talker] from the word go, all day long. Parents loved him, thought he was great. But I will tell you that whatever way the wind was blowing, that was that day. He was a principal that was hired back in the old days…. Good guy! But as far as being able to set

an agenda instructionally and set that jaw and say "This is how it's going to be done," he couldn't do it.

Clearly, the processes in place for determining the principal's appropriate role were very different from the older system in place when the above principal was hired. This was an important change because personnel decisions, especially those about high school principals, are among the most politically problematic decisions superintendents face. Under the new way of doing things, superintendents were resisting political pressures to choose based on community popularity and making choices, instead, based on student performance.

I already require them at principal's meetings to have 2/3 of the agenda to be instructional, not management issues…. I tell them, "You can use it to get caught up with discussing what you're going to do and every little thing, and not discuss any issues relative to curriculum and instruction. What an opportunity when you have the entire staff there to talk curriculum and instruction. Not a fun topic sometimes to talk to, but it's one that's going to make us or break us." (Joe D. González, San Benito Superintendent)

In fact, resources commonly are the focus of contention in the day-to-day operations of schools. Decisions about resource use have often in the past been made politically, expediently, or randomly. However, in the four study districts, decisions involving resource use were made with a clear focus on improving learning for all the students in the district. For example, one commonly mentioned practice that had changed to support equity and academic success was the way the districts developed and operated campus budgets. Each district had moved within the past 5-8 years to some form of site-based budgeting that allowed campus principals more control over their financial resources. However, principals and school decision-making committees were trained and expected to use their decision-making authority in ways that resulted in improved achievement for all groups of students.

Collecting, interpreting, and using data and monitoring results. The terms "data" and "monitoring" were repeated with great regularity throughout the research in all four districts. However, each of the four districts had developed its own ways of systematizing the use of student performance data. A typical comment along these lines came from a central office staff person:

> We targeted our central office resources and staff on schools that needed the most help monitoring and assessing. Everybody knew how to put something together to plan to work on things that they didn't do well on. Everybody understood that. What they didn't understand though was that what you said you were going to do might not be what you actually do unless you go check and see if they are doing it. And so we had to help them. I never came in and said, 'I want you to do such and such. We don't have that kind of a role because we are staff people. What we did say is, 'Have you considered such and such?' I would go in and say let me see your plan. And then I would say 'This is very creative; it's very ambitions; it looks really supper—now who is going to monitor it to make sure it happens? If you are not sure that people are doing what you ask them to do and close the door, the program could end up being a failure. Not because it was a bad plan, but because it wasn't implemented.

This person's comment reflected the widespread systematization of data use that was pervasive in the study districts. Superintendents and boards discussed student achievement regularly in board meetings. Principals discussed with teachers data for the campus and for each teacher, and the teachers discussed it with each other. Central office personnel helped campus leaders and teachers use data to focus, plan, and monitor the implementation of their plans. In all of these cases, the data were used to drive improvement efforts.

Supervising, evaluating, and holding people accountable. Accountability was a term heard frequently in every school in every district the research team visited. The impact of the state accountability system in these districts was enormous, as was discussed in earlier sections. Each study district, however, had developed specific, local accountability practices that ensured that everyone involved in the instructional program was held accountable for educational equity and student achievement. Indeed, it was a common practice in these districts to tie performance evaluations and salary increases for principals and central office staff to the performance of students in the schools they served. Several districts also offered bonuses that were available to teachers and other campus staff based on the performance ratings of the campuses where they worked.

> ***I think TAAS has been good for the state, and even as a teacher I felt that way. It made us look at whom we were teaching and those that we weren't….There was a time when we gave the test and if somebody passed it, great, and if they didn't maybe they'll get it next year. It was that type of thing. Now we can't think that way because the world is changing. Everything is changing. (Central Office Administrator)***

All four districts had thus developed practices for supervising, evaluating, and holding people accountable for practices that contributed positively to the instructional mission of the district. One elementary principal described how she stayed informed about learning that was happening in the classrooms in her building:

> I will make time to visit with each teacher and we're going to go through the assessment folders [for each student]. They visit with me about where each child is and what the remediation plan is. What they're going to do to make sure that whatever that child is weak in is strengthened and mastered by the end of the year. That's part of it. That happens probably about every six weeks, between a month and six weeks. I also try to go into the classroom daily, even if it's just for a short period of time, and observe the children as they participate in the lessons and activities to get an idea of how they're doing.

Another example of how teachers were evaluated and held accountable was provided by a high school principal who talked about the importance he placed on teachers acting in ways that were consistent with the best interests of the children on his campus:

> [The teachers here represent what] I think that adults in a building need to be….If they don't move into that general direction, and they don't want to change, then they don't need to be here. We have to be kid oriented, and the first priority that we have is for student success. We have to do things differently because of our demographics, because of our socioeconomic condition that our kids are. I want people in this building that are compassionate. They care for kids, and they know their stuff. They have to be able to be

> in those classrooms, and they've got to be able to do what it takes to get these kids successful, because I'm not going to have them [the students] lost in the streets. [If teachers cannot do that], they won't be here. One way or another I'm going to move them. If they will not do what is right for kids, whether that's how they talk to them, how they deal with them, and that doesn't mean that you water down the curriculum because you don't. You do that you're going to get in trouble. You set these extremely high expectations for these kids and then you make them go do it. You do it in an attitude and an atmosphere that they are fair, it's consistent from person to person to person. You don't play games with these kids. They know what they're expected to do and they go ahead and do it.

Clearly, for this principal, his evaluation of teacher competence was based on success in teaching the children on his campus. His decisions were not based on seniority or personality, but rather on the willingness to pursue excellence and equity in teaching and learning. These examples, then, are evidence of the practices for supervising, evaluating, and holding people accountable that supported the districts' efforts to educate all children to high levels of success.

Refocusing energies, refining efforts, and ensuring continuous performance. One characteristic of traditional schooling that has been mentioned earlier is the striking lack of significant change in classroom practices, despite wave after wave of school reform. One contributing fact to the enduring nature of ineffective teaching practices has been a widespread inattention to serious program evaluation. In other words, traditionally schools have adopted many instructional programs, but generally they have little idea if the programs actually are contributing to student learning. Thus, programs implemented are seldom discontinued due to ineffectiveness.

In the four study districts, however, this was not the case. All the districts paid careful attention to ensuring that the work of their teachers was paying off in terms of increased student performance. An elementary principal provided an illustration of this practice at work when she explained why a particular reading program had been discontinued in her school:

> I am a data-driven type of person. I studied the data, and [a reading program with a high profile nationally] got you to a certain point, but you had very few kids leaving the school on grade level. We did away with that program. My concern with [the program] was that it kept expectations low in that [if I were a student] I might have been successful reading at a second grade level, but I was going to be tested on TAAS fourth grade. That really wasn't doing much for me if I didn't get any fourth grade instruction in reading at all during the day. So you know, [I'm] doing well as a second grade reader, but I'm a fourth grader. Eventually [the reading program] was supposed to get me there, but it didn't move kids quickly enough in the program.

For this principal, the lack of success generated by a reading program, despite its national profile and major investment of district funds and teacher training, was obvious grounds for discontinuance. It was strongly characteristic of these four districts that they continually sought to refine and improve their practices and, thus, improve student performance. They celebrated successes, but they did not rest on them.

Creating and nurturing alliances. District leaders created alliances with various organizations and entities who could assist schools in improving instruction for all groups of students or who could help emphasize the importance of improving instruction for all groups of students. These alliances broadened the districts' ability to encourage and support improved classroom instruction. All four districts had formed numerous, active alliances with businesses, community groups and organizations, government agencies, and other educational organizations.

For instance, "parent and community involvement" has been a popular phrase in school reform literature for the past twenty years or longer. There was, however, a qualitative difference in the alliances these districts formed. For example, Wichita Falls ISD maintained close ties with personnel at Sheppard Air Force Base, which one interviewee described as mutually beneficial for both the district and the base.

> A large portion of our volunteers, probably 1/3 of our mentors come from Sheppard Air Force Base. It's wonderful. We have several squadrons actually adopt schools. Mostly they are just providing mentors. But some of them will do activities with the school as needed. I know one of the schools they were needing some of the outside equipment painted, so some of the squadron came out, I think on the weekend and helped paint, clean up around the school. But what was so neat about that is that these are kids that have come from all around the country and they are missing their families and it's really working out well because they get to be part of a school system and they may have left their brothers and sisters, or something. And the kids just love seeing a uniform. So it's really an equal thing now. There are not long-term mentors, but at the time [they are here], they really are saying that we are meeting their needs, but they certainly are meeting our needs.

This same informant also described the way partnership programs were formally evaluated in her district to maintain focus on academic success. There were literally hundreds of similar examples of productive alliances at work in the four districts.

Proactive Redundancy

Although "proactive redundancy" could be considered an aspect of the practices that the districts used, it is separated out here because of its importance and because it is new to most understanding of how schools work. Proactive is taken to mean acting before a need emerges, and redundancy is taken to mean more than one process (i.e., practice, program, procedure, action, or structure) that targets a change of the same practice. Thus, proactive redundancy means designing two or more "processes" whose goal is to change a same specific practice. This type of redundancy is similar to the protective processes of "dangerous" industries, such as nuclear production plants. Because of the seriousness of an emergency, these plants have redundancy built in to protect against such emergencies. Similarly, because of the importance to these districts of attaining academic success with all students, they proactively develop redundancies in their processes to ensure that all students are learning.

For example, if a district wants to ensure that teachers are being successful with the children in their classes, it may require principals to visit classes weekly to examine teaching. In addition, they may do targeted monthly testing of some sort to check whether children are learning. This

provides two focused processes to ensure that the specified goal—teachers' success with students, in this case—is being accomplished. This is proactive redundancy.

Another example has to do with ensuring that principals are facilitating success on their campuses. A district may require monthly testing of some sort of learning in the classroom and require that principals monthly report these testing results. District personnel, such as an area superintendent, make monthly visit classrooms in the principal's building to check on teaching. In addition, the district may require that instructional specialists, whether housed at the district or the campus level, report monthly to district personnel on teaching practices and efforts to improve those practices on a campus. These multiple measures, then, help to ensure that success is achieved.

The four districts used proactive redundancy to provide support to teachers as they worked to get all of their students to achieve more challenging academic expectations. For example, the area superintendents in Aldine expected principals to use data to help teachers identify students who had not yet mastered objectives and refine teaching practices accordingly. At the same time, however, the curriculum director supervised a team of instructional specialists who reviewed the same data. When teachers or groups of teachers were not achieving expected results with all of their students, the instructional specialists were assigned to work with the teachers (along with the principal) to help the teachers improve student performance. The provision of support to teachers was simply too important to be the responsibility of only one person or one part of the system. This proactive redundancy helped ensure that teachers would receive the support they needed in order to succeed.

Similarly, proactive redundancy was used to provide principals the support they needed to be effective instructional leaders. In one district the principals are organized in vertical teams (all of the elementary and secondary schools in a feeder pattern) and meet once a month in their vertical groups for leadership capacity building and for delivery of district information. At the same time, these principals are organized at levels—elementary, middle, and high school—and meet once a month in these groups, again, for leadership capacity building and for delivery of district information. Again, there are two simultaneous lines of action focused on the same result.

For the most part, examples of proactive redundancy were used to change classroom teaching practices and student learning. District leaders understood that changes in classroom teaching and learning were critical in order to meet the expectations of the accountability system and their own high expectations. Proactive redundancy was used as an insurance policy to make certain that classroom instruction would result in learning for all groups of students.

Positive Support

A key ingredient in accomplishing the transformation that these districts have undergone is not understood in many districts. If both fundamental beliefs and teaching practices need to be changed, will this transformation be accomplished primarily through punitive pressures and negative consequences or will it be done primarily through appreciative respect and positive, caring support for those undertaking the change? Districts in Texas under the new accountability system have chosen both extremes and all points in between, but the four study districts made a

clear choice. Following what has become obvious in research in organizational studies, these districts understood that an orientation of positive support and caring toward their staff would more likely yield the change that they sought. However, an orientation of positive support and appreciation toward staff by itself is not sufficient. The shared beliefs and the focused practices discussed in prior sections are equally necessary.

Another aspect of this positive support is what is called in TQM, "no blame." When an organization is trying to change at a deep level, as these districts have accomplished, some efforts will not succeed. In addition, teachers themselves will initiate new strategies that will not work. In this climate of positive support, the fact that some efforts will fail is understood, but no blame is assigned. These districts have learned that blame undermines and defeats successful change. These districts have learned that a caring orientation of support, respect, and appreciation toward the staff was more likely to yield the changes they needed.

I think something else that's really important is that, say, for example, a teacher is having trouble with teaching or method or that type of thing. The approach to bring that to that particular teacher's attention is done in a very positive way as opposed to something negative, something that would tear them down in terms of esteem. The whole monitoring process helping them to develop as a better teacher is very positive, very encouraging, very motivating. (High School Teacher)

For example, the Aldine superintendent and his deputies would constantly say both to staff and to the public that the district's success was totally dependent on their teachers, that they owed their success to their teachers, that the district had wonderful teachers. Similarly, in this district, those chosen or hired at the district level to assist teachers in learning to be successful with all children had to have strong people skills; they had to be seen by staff as respectful, supportive, and appreciative.

Principals were expected to have the same skills. When instructional and curricular assistance were provided to teachers, such as in professional development, district leaders expected this assistance to be provided in a positive, caring way. This caring approach to teacher supervision was illustrated in the following quote from an elementary school principal:

> Even when teachers are in trouble, I try not to beat them over the head with whatever it was that was out of line, or I didn't agree with or whatever. But I bring it to their attention, and I remind them that they are wonderful, and I do respect them, and I do love them, but "Don't do it like this next time if you can help it because this is what happened when you do it like that. Maybe you can try doing it this way, but I don't have all the answers, and you are your own unique self and you can figure it out. But if you have difficulty figuring it out, then I will help you figure it out." I try not to beat up on anybody. As [our superintendent] says, "If you have to go around beating people over the head telling them that you are the boss, then you're not." I believe that, so I try not to beat anybody over the head to tell them, "I am your Principal."

As this principal's words demonstrate, persons in leadership, from the superintendent through the district staff to the principals were expected to create an environment of caring support, encouragement, and assistance to ensure that the teachers could be equally successful with all children. This orientation, thus, became part of the culture of these districts.

New Role Directions

The four study districts obviously had operated functionally as school districts long before their recent transformations. In fact, before the advent of the state accountability system, the districts generally held positive views of the success of students in their districts, even though in general students of color and students from low income homes did not do well. As was described in earlier sections, the “old way” of doing things supported a district operation focused on inputs and efficiency. The “new way” of doing things in these districts, however was focused on accountability and equity, and this "new way" thus required roles of district personnel to shift substantially.

The superintendent’s new primary role is to keep the main focus of the district and the community on equitable and excellent learning. In the research literature this is often called the superintendent as the instructional leader. However, based on the four study districts, this does not need to mean that the superintendent is the most knowledgeable or the most skillful about teaching or learning. What it does mean is that the superintendent keeps both the community and the district staff focused on learning as the primary activity and goal of the school district. The superintendent must literally sell this and continue to sell it to the community. She or he must also continually sell it to the district staff. Communities and districts are complex and dynamic. Something new is always emerging. New problems sweep up everyone's attention. But the superintendent must always bring everyone's attention back to learning being the primary business of the district. Sonny Donaldson's "the main thing is to keep the main thing [student learning] the main thing" is the clearest example of this. It is not as if, though, that this is some secret agenda of the superintendent. The new role for the superintendent is that his or her primary focus is maintaining learning as the primary business of the district.

The principal’s chief role is leadership for equitable and excellent learning. Under the old input-oriented accountability system, the principal was primarily a manager of order and efficiency. She or he handled ultimate student discipline. He or she made sure the heating worked and the building got cleaned. She or he dealt with parent complaints. He or she made sure all proper procedures and processes were followed correctly. Under the new accountability system, the principal is primarily an instructional leader. As befits the new system, the main focus is now teaching and learning. The principal's work, in the four study districts, is to help her or his teachers be academically successful with all students. As one middle school principal concluded,

> Before state accountability came in it was sort of a hit and miss situation. It was just, it was more that the principal was more of a manager. I mean I kept the keys, I opened the building, I closed building. And now I see the transition where the principal is no longer, well, he’s still that to a certain extent, but now he’s more the instructional leader of the campus where he’s held accountable for instruction and for the learning that is taking place. In years past you could judge a principal by basically is his building clean? Are his kids behaving? And if the answer is yes it didn’t really matter whether they were scoring high or scoring low. Nowadays that is not the case.

Clearly, this principal did not frame his role in old-style managerial terms. Whereas before districts sought good managers to be principals, in the four districts the superintendents now sought good instructional leaders for the principalship, individuals who could lead improvements in instruction and thus student achievement. Consequently, while the prior assumption was that a principal would manage well, the new assumption in these districts is that the principal knows how to motivate positively and assist teachers to improve instruction and thus learning. In addition, this new assumption also includes that the principal knows how to assist teachers in being successful with all students at equally high academic levels.

The new role of the central office is to support and assist principals and teachers in educating all students. Prior to their transformations, the function of the central office personnel was rule and procedure specification, monitoring, and enforcement, especially as these related to inputs. Central office budgets for instructional support were typically closely controlled by program directors, a situation one of the superintendents described as a major obstacle to improving student success.

> When I was a principal …you'd have to go beg the federal programs director or the curriculum director and beg them for things that you wanted to do for your campus that were good for kids. And that, I thought, was one of the major, major obstacles that was hurting our district…. [That was] the biggest thing that I would say I would break if I ever got into a [district] leadership position.

As a function of their transformations, the focus of the central office in the four study districts became student learning. These districts understood that the way that district personnel could improve student learning was to provide support and assistance to teachers and principals. For example, in Aldine, budgets were moved from the district level to the school level so that each school could best use its budget to teach its students. In San Benito, it was made clear that it was the principals and the teachers who were central to student learning and that the district must provide support for them. This, then, became another assumption: the function of central office was no longer to be the "center," as in central office, but to center on providing support for teachers and principals.

The primary role of board members is to set goals and establish policies that promote equitable and excellent learning. In the study districts, school boards played an important role by establishing goals that articulated strong beliefs about the importance of getting all students to achieve challenging academic standards. School boards made clear to superintendents that change in student performance was necessary, possible, and expected. Once goals were established, the board monitored progress toward the achievement of the goals. The most common type of discussion at board meetings was the academic achievement of the students. These four school boards set goals and established policies, but then they tried to leave management decisions to the superintendent and her or his leadership team. In each of the districts, there has developed a history of board members staying out of specific management of the district, leaving the latter to the superintendent. In fact, in two of these districts, the board has been selected as outstanding school board for the state. The San Benito board won this prestigious award in 1997, and the Aldine board won in 1998. However, not only are these exemplary boards, they have assumed responsibility, to be pursued through their goals and

policies, to ensure that equitable learning is occurring. The following quote from a Wichita Falls board member was reflective of beliefs that were expressed over and over by board members of all races, both genders, and all ranges of experience from 20+ year veterans to brand new members:

> When it gets down to the meat of the issue, I want a kid to be able to enter our system at whatever level they're at, and I know that varies. We've got some kids that are ready for Kindergarten when it comes that time; we've got some that are not, but I want them to be able to enter our system at whatever point that is and for this education system to be able to take them all the way through the graduation part of it and that, sure enough, when they graduate they are a graduate….I think one of the things that we really cheat our young people out of is allowing them to graduate and think that they're graduates and think that they have the skills to go on to college if that's what they want to do, or go into the working world, and unfortunately a lot of them hit that brick wall when they get out. We've either watered down the curriculum at some point in time or we've given up on those kids at some point in time and just passed them through….I want a kid to be able to get out of our system and be prepared to go to college if that's what they choose to do, or be prepared to go into the working world if that's what they choose to do. That's every kid, regardless of race, creed, color, religion or what their social background is.

This same board member went on later in the interview to elaborate on his recommendations for how board members can best work to support the accomplishment of this vision for equitable academic success:

> [Board members should] be patient and not be overzealous and think that this is a short-term fix. I think if your district is in a position that you're convinced it needs to turn it up a notch, it didn't get that way overnight and it's not going to be fixed overnight. I think you have to sit back and develop a plan, develop this vision among the superintendent and the board members. Once you get the plan developed, be patient with development of that plan….I guess the other thing is from a board member's standpoint is understand that you as an individual board member are not going to be able to get anything done. You're going to have to work with six other board members and that superintendent. You're not going to always get your way.

The board members in these four districts worked as a team. They modeled for the entire district a commitment to work together for the benefit of the students. Often they described how they might set aside their personal agendas in the interest of helping the board establish policies that were likely to promote equitable and excellent learning.

The school district and community are integral to each other and must work together to support equitable student learning. In many districts, the schools and the community are fairly separated. In fact, many districts try to protect themselves from the parents and the other members of their communities or, at least, to maintain a controlled distance from parents. In the typical district all kind of barriers are established to keep the community out of the schools except in carefully prescribed ways. For the most part, this is not true in the four study districts. Indeed, in these four districts the district leadership and the school leadership persistently seek

the participation of their communities. A veteran parent educator in one of the districts described this persistent outreach toward parents this way:

> Your target population is going to be all those parents that think they're a nothing, all the parents that think they have nothing to offer, all those parents who think their children can't learn, all those parents that have given up….They're going to be polite, and so they'll give you excuses. So you knock down the barriers. In my model, we knock down the barriers. There's going to be transportation for them, childcare. At the parent's center they can go ahead and bring the children….You knock down the barriers.

This commitment to full participation in the schooling process by parents and community members was illustrated by a wide range of programs in the four study districts. For example, San Benito ISD has won awards for its well organized, highly active, and well attended parent program. Wichita Falls also demonstrates a belief in inclusivity through its magnet programs and other community outreach activities like its "Explosion of Excellence," an elaborate celebration of and showcase for the district's programs. Aldine ISD does not have a "city" called Aldine that is its community. Aldine's community is a geographical area within the larger Houston metropolitan area. In response to this lack of an identified community, the leadership of Aldine worked to create a community for the district, including organizing community groups, like a Chamber of Commerce, which did not previously exist. Thus, to various degrees for these four districts, a shared belief emerged that the district and its community, actual or created, must unite to deliver equitable learning.

Everyday Equity

The new accountability system has changed the nature of education in Texas. Under the old system a lower level of achievement was expected of children from low-income homes and children of color. Under the new system, schools and districts are expected to do equally well with literally all children. The four study districts are among the first and most successful at this task, and their success has surprisingly changed them at a deeper than expected level.

When these districts first launched their change efforts, they were spurred on by the local catalysts of community groups or activists or by a judge overseeing their desegregation orders. This catalytic activity in every case was based on using the new accountability system to show that there were achievement inequities by race and SES student groups. Then, the response of the leadership, including the superintendent, was predicated on ethically accepting this new challenge to obtain equity and excellence in achievement results.

Thus, when these districts started their transformations, they were typically focused on the immediate and reachable target of getting all schools off the "low performing" list. Once they accomplished this, they then focused their new goals on getting a Recognized rating as a district. As they had success at each step of the way, they would re-set their goals at a higher level. But they did not know when they started that these higher levels were even possible. These districts "learned" to have higher and higher goals based on their success with lower ones.

Of course, part of this was caused by the accountability system. State accountability requirements have increased year by year, but the four study districts set higher goals, many of which exceeded the state requirements. Whereas at the beginning, these districts were pursuing just the targets set by the new system, their success transformed them and their understanding of what they could accomplish.

Under the old system, the assumption was that certain student groups were not expected to do well in school. This was reversed by the new system. As teachers and other educational professionals began to learn they could succeed with children they had failed with in the past, they began to raise their goals. If they could teach children to read that they had not succeeded with in the past, perhaps they could teach these same children to read even better. Maybe they could get them to grade level; maybe they could get them to read higher than grade level. Whereas before, many children of color did not even take Algebra, now they were passing Algebra End-of-Course tests at higher rates them the state average for white children (see Appendix B). Whereas in the past few children of color and children from low SES homes went to post-secondary education, now the district was getting them to go at higher and higher percentages. A high school teacher put it this way:

> Success encourages success too. We see more and more of our kids going to college. And that helps to realize these kids can go to college. When our TAAS scores came up a little bit, they can come up more. I think it snowballs.

The snowball of rising expectations was evident in other areas as well. Whereas in the past few took advanced placement classes, now more and more of them were taking such classes. Now district personnel were even beginning to consider what could be done to raise these children's SAT scores, as illustrated by the following quote from a central office administrator:

> Our schools have pretty well figured out what it takes to be successful on TAAS math….But if you're not tending to Algebra I, that is the gatekeeper course. If you're not tending to Algebra I, then your upper level indicators are not being tended to. You are never going to get calculus students, you're never going to get SAT scores, never going to get National Merit Scholars, that sort of thing unless you're building a good solid mathematics program. So, my focus has been on Algebra I.

Clearly SAT performance and National Merit Scholars are higher level goals than having students just pass TAAS. This, thus, belies the widespread suspicion that focusing attention on state standardized assessments automatically and permanently collapses the curriculum focus to only what is measured by the state test.

An unexpected thing happened to the educators in these districts, though, on their way to this progressive success. It changed the educators. Under the old system, educators constantly saw and heard that there was racial inequality in society, and this was verified and reproduced in school achievement results. However, most educators knew that adults of color, some of whom were community activists, had accused the schools of racism because of how poorly children of color did in school. Whether the educators agreed or not, inequitable academic success by race was endemic to the schools, even though it was sometimes criticized.

A similar process occurred in the Rio Grande Valley area, but, in this case, the focus was SES not race, since the overwhelming percentage of the children are Hispanic. In San Benito, it was widely accepted that the poor kids, who were a high percentage in the district, would not succeed. However, in the process of becoming successful, the San Benito educators learned that poor Hispanic children could succeed academically just as well as middleclass Hispanic children.

In the study districts, under the new system, the assumptions about children of color and poor children began to change. As educators experienced new success with these children, the educators began to see that they could accomplish even higher success. One teacher's description of her own transformation serves as an eloquent illustration:

> The first few years, not days, first few years, I cried a lot, which means like 3 years. It was hard. I didn't know what a main idea was, what context clues were, I didn't know anything. I had to educate myself….enough to be able to pass that along to the children and make them successful. My [TAAS] scores at the beginning …weren't very good and I wasn't very proud of that. I was so embarrassed, really, that they weren't very good. So then I just kept working, and working, and working and reading and going to workshops and in-services and things that would help me help the children be successful.

The same teacher went on to talk about how her initial success lead to ever higher goals for herself and her children, to the point that she cannot now imagine having students who are unsuccessful academically or being part of campus with a rating less than Exemplary.

> I went to a meeting this summer in Austin. You think this [high success] is happening everywhere, so you're sitting there as a teacher and you're listening to administrators [from other school districts] and you're going, "Oh my gosh. I'm glad we are where we are. What do they mean they're just trying to get to Recognized? What's the problem? Why aren't they above that?" Because it's like the mentality or the thinking. I wouldn't even think to be down there [below Exemplary performance]….I just don't allow [poverty] to be one of the stumbling blocks for my children. Okay, yes, they don't have enough money. Yes, they live in poor conditions. Yes, you know…they don't get Christmas gifts. Too bad. I can teach these children because they are just like everybody else. They just have a little bit less money, or a little less exposure to things. They don't go as much. But that doesn't mean they can't learn…When I'm in that classroom I expect a lot. *When I'm teaching I take them beyond what they need to know to be successful on TAAS. So when TAAS comes it's like a piece of cake, because I have taken them beyond that so that they can be successful*. Personally if one of my kids fails, I feel very responsible…How can I allow a child to not be successful? I just can't allow myself to let that child not be successful. I don't care what….It's my fault if that child wasn't successful. [emphasis added]

This elementary teacher moved from having low student scores to a position where she feels personally responsible if each and every one of her students do not succeed. Because of her and her school's success, she has learned to think differently, to make different assumptions about who can succeed academically.

This new ability to teach all children resonated for the educators in the study districts with societal beliefs about democracy and equity. Whereas in the past, these educators had been a part of a schooling system that yielded inequitable achievement, they were now part of a system that was yielding equity. This experience began to affect them. It began to change them. They began to see that they were now actually doing something positive about race and economic inequities. In a very real sense, they had begun to pursue equity and excellence on a daily or everyday basis.

We have labeled this phenomenon "everyday equity." By changing beliefs and practices, the educators at all levels in these districts were producing, day-by-day, educational equity and excellence for all racial and economic groups of students.

Conclusion

The story of the transformations of Aldine ISD, Brazosport ISD, San Benito CISD, and Wichita Falls ISD is not a story of "miracles" or "mavericks" or impossibly exceptional people or circumstances. It is the story of everyday educators—albeit talented, hardworking, and committed educators—who have changed their everyday beliefs and practices to produce equitable educational success for literally all the children in their districts. These districts have met the challenge set out by Ferguson (1998) to "replicate success for many students in many classrooms across many schools, by improving the performance of many average teachers and administrators" (pp. 342-343).

If this improvement can happen in the four school districts that were the focus of this study, it can happen anywhere. What is needed is for school district leadership to reject the old, entrenched, previously dominant model of deficit schooling for children of color and children from low-income homes and to adopt, instead, the model found operating in the four districts studied, a model focused on everyday equity and the pursuit of educational excellence.

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Appendix A

Selected AEIS District Data
A Multi-Year History

DISTRICT: 101902
DISTRICT NAME: **ALDINE ISD** 1999 DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY RATING: Recognized
COUNTY NAME: HARRIS

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999 *	DISTRICT CHG: 94-99	STATE CHG: 94-99
TAAS ALL TESTS TAKEN								
ALL STUDENTS	50.7%	57.2%	64.4%	75.7%	80.1%	78.4%	+27.7%	+22.7%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	36.9%	44.5%	52.3%	67.4%	74.9%	72.5%	+35.6%	+30.7%
HISPANIC	48.9%	56.4%	64.6%	76.0%	79.6%	79.5%	+30.6%	+29.0%
WHITE	67.7%	73.6%	80.9%	88.3%	90.6%	87.4%	+19.7%	+18.5%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	42.9%	52.3%	60.0%	73.0%	77.8%	76.1%	+33.2%	+28.9%
TAAS READING								
ALL STUDENTS	73.3%	78.7%	79.7%	86.1%	88.6%	86.5%	+13.2%	+10.0%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	65.0%	71.3%	72.5%	82.0%	87.0%	84.1%	+19.1%	+18.0%
HISPANIC	71.1%	78.6%	79.2%	85.4%	87.2%	85.9%	+14.8%	+14.6%
WHITE	85.3%	88.6%	91.0%	94.0%	95.0%	93.1%	+7.8%	+6.5%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	66.5%	75.1%	75.9%	83.3%	86.8%	84.3%	+17.8%	+15.3%
TAAS MATHEMATICS								
ALL STUDENTS	56.2%	62.1%	72.0%	82.8%	87.0%	87.3%	+31.1%	+25.2%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	42.2%	49.5%	60.6%	75.5%	81.6%	81.6%	+39.4%	+34.7%
HISPANIC	55.0%	61.3%	73.1%	83.5%	87.8%	89.3%	+34.3%	+33.6%
WHITE	72.0%	78.0%	85.6%	92.7%	95.0%	92.9%	+20.9%	+19.2%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	49.4%	57.9%	69.1%	81.2%	85.8%	86.1%	+36.7%	+33.7%
TAAS WRITING								
ALL STUDENTS	76.2%	82.2%	81.5%	85.6%	88.5%	87.8%	+11.6%	+9.2%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	69.1%	76.3%	76.2%	81.9%	87.9%	85.9%	+16.8%	+16.1%
HISPANIC	73.4%	81.8%	79.1%	84.2%	85.9%	86.8%	+13.4%	+13.5%
WHITE	88.1%	90.0%	92.4%	94.0%	95.7%	93.7%	+5.6%	+5.5%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	70.3%	78.7%	78.2%	83.1%	86.8%	86.0%	+15.7%	+13.7%
ATTENDANCE RATE,GRADES 1-12								
ALL STUDENTS	94.3%	94.3%	94.6%	94.9%	94.8%	95.1%	+0.8%	+0.4%
DISTRICT STUDENT COMPOSITION								
AFRICAN AMERICAN	34.6%	35.0%	35.4%	36.0%	36.0%	35.7%		
HISPANIC	36.4%	38.1%	40.4%	42.7%	45.0%	47.3%		
WHITE	24.7%	22.6%	20.2%	17.5%	15.4%	13.6%		
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	54.7%	58.0%	61.8%	63.5%	67.5%	70.5%		

* Beginning in 1999, results also include special education test takers and Spanish, grades 3 & 4, reading and mathematics test takers.

Selected AEIS District Data
A Multi-Year History

DISTRICT: 020905
DISTRICT NAME: **BRAZOSPORT ISD** 1999 DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY RATING: Exemplary
COUNTY NAME: BRAZORIA

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999 *	DISTRICT CHG: 94-99	STATE CHG: 94-99
TAAS ALL TESTS TAKEN								
ALL STUDENTS	67.8%	73.0%	83.1%	89.6%	93.4%	92.3%	+24.5%	+22.7%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	42.9%	51.1%	63.7%	73.8%	86.2%	83.2%	+40.3%	+30.7%
HISPANIC	52.0%	56.9%	73.3%	81.8%	89.2%	88.1%	+36.1%	+29.0%
WHITE	76.8%	82.1%	89.9%	95.0%	96.4%	95.8%	+19.0%	+18.5%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	49.2%	55.5%	71.3%	80.8%	87.2%	86.5%	+37.3%	+28.9%
TAAS READING								
ALL STUDENTS	83.2%	86.8%	90.9%	94.5%	96.2%	95.2%	+12.0%	+10.0%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	67.5%	72.3%	79.1%	86.6%	92.1%	91.2%	+23.7%	+18.0%
HISPANIC	71.2%	76.2%	83.9%	88.8%	92.8%	91.5%	+20.3%	+14.6%
WHITE	89.8%	92.8%	95.4%	98.1%	98.3%	97.8%	+8.0%	+6.5%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	68.1%	73.8%	81.3%	88.1%	91.8%	90.8%	+22.7%	+15.3%
TAAS MATHEMATICS								
ALL STUDENTS	73.1%	78.0%	88.1%	93.9%	97.0%	96.4%	+23.3%	+25.2%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	48.6%	57.4%	71.3%	83.3%	91.9%	91.1%	+42.5%	+34.7%
HISPANIC	58.8%	63.9%	80.7%	90.3%	95.6%	94.7%	+35.9%	+33.6%
WHITE	81.4%	86.0%	93.3%	96.8%	98.3%	98.0%	+16.6%	+19.2%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	56.6%	63.5%	79.0%	90.1%	94.0%	93.4%	+36.8%	+33.7%
TAAS WRITING								
ALL STUDENTS	84.4%	87.9%	91.9%	94.5%	95.8%	97.0%	+12.6%	+9.2%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	69.2%	78.3%	85.4%	88.9%	93.4%	93.2%	+24.0%	+16.1%
HISPANIC	76.6%	79.8%	83.8%	88.8%	92.4%	95.3%	+18.7%	+13.5%
WHITE	89.7%	92.1%	96.4%	97.5%	97.6%	98.4%	+8.7%	+5.5%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	72.4%	76.3%	83.7%	88.6%	91.8%	93.6%	+21.2%	+13.7%
ATTENDANCE RATE,GRADES 1-12								
ALL STUDENTS	95.0%	95.5%	95.5%	95.9%	96.0%	96.2%	+1.2%	+0.4%
DISTRICT STUDENT COMPOSITION								
AFRICAN AMERICAN	8.2%	8.2%	8.5%	8.4%	9.0%	8.9%		
HISPANIC	30.1%	30.8%	31.2%	32.0%	32.5%	33.4%		
WHITE	60.4%	59.7%	58.8%	58.0%	57.0%	56.3%		
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	32.0%	33.7%	33.1%	35.7%	36.4%	38.9%		

* Beginning in 1999, results also include special education test takers and Spanish, grades 3 & 4, reading and mathematics test takers.

Selected AEIS District Data
A Multi-Year History

DISTRICT: 031912
DISTRICT NAME**: SAN BENITO CONS ISD** 1999 DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY RATING: Recognized
COUNTY NAME: CAMERON

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999 *	DISTRICT CHG: 94-99	STATE CHG: 94-99
TAAS ALL TESTS TAKEN								
ALL STUDENTS	45.7%	52.3%	64.6%	73.5%	81.1%	79.2%	+33.5%	+22.7%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	28.6%	83.3%	80.0%	75.0%	50.0%	-	-	+30.7%
HISPANIC	45.0%	51.6%	64.0%	73.0%	80.9%	78.9%	+33.9%	+29.0%
WHITE	64.3%	67.5%	78.7%	84.0%	87.1%	89.6%	+25.3%	+18.5%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	41.6%	48.2%	61.9%	71.2%	79.7%	77.3%	+35.7%	+28.9%
TAAS READING								
ALL STUDENTS	71.2%	74.7%	78.0%	83.8%	89.1%	88.2%	+17.0%	+10.0%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	-	-	+18.0%
HISPANIC	70.3%	74.0%	77.3%	83.3%	88.9%	88.0%	+17.7%	+14.6%
WHITE	88.0%	89.6%	93.5%	94.3%	94.0%	93.6%	+5.6%	+6.5%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	67.8%	1.4%	75.3%	81.6%	88.1%	87.0%	+19.2%	+15.3%
TAAS MATHEMATICS								
ALL STUDENTS	51.0%	8.7%	75.0%	82.4%	87.4%	86.8%	+35.8%	+25.2%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	28.6%	3.3%	80.0%	75.0%	50.0%	-	-	+34.7%
HISPANIC	50.3%	7.9%	74.6%	82.2%	87.2%	86.7%	+36.4%	+33.6%
WHITE	67.2%	5.0%	85.2%	86.5%	91.1%	90.9%	+23.7%	+19.2%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	47.1%	5.2%	73.4%	81.4%	86.5%	85.5%	+38.4%	+33.7%
TAAS WRITING								
ALL STUDENTS	75.3%	7.4%	80.6%	86.2%	92.3%	88.3%	+13.0%	+9.2%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	-	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	-	-	+16.1%
HISPANIC	74.9%	77.1%	80.2%	85.8%	92.4%	88.0%	+13.1%	+13.5%
WHITE	83.0%	82.4%	88.4%	93.6%	90.0%	94.7%	+11.7%	+5.5%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	72.5%	74.4%	79.0%	85.4%	92.4%	87.3%	+14.8%	+13.7%
ATTENDANCE RATE,GRADES 1-12								
ALL STUDENTS	94.1%	94.5%	94.0%	93.9%	94.4%	95.3%	+1.2%	+0.4%
DISTRICT STUDENT COMPOSITION								
AFRICAN AMERICAN	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%		
HISPANIC	96.2%	96.3%	96.5%	96.6%	96.9%	96.8%		
WHITE	3.6%	3.5%	3.3%	3.2%	2.8%	3.0%		
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	79.3%	80.8%	82.5%	85.0%	85.3%	86.7%		

* Beginning in 1999, results also include special education test takers and Spanish, grades 3 & 4, reading and mathematics test takers.

Selected AEIS District Data
A Multi-Year History

DISTRICT: 243905
DISTRICT NAME: **WICHITA FALLS ISD** 1999 DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY RATING: Academically Acceptable
COUNTY NAME: WICHITA

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999 *	DISTRICT CHG: 94-99	STATE CHG: 94-99
TAAS ALL TESTS TAKEN								
ALL STUDENTS	55.7%	68.6%	75.5%	82.0%	84.5%	83.1%	+27.4%	+22.7%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	29.0%	44.7%	54.4%	64.1%	67.7%	66.9%	+37.9%	+30.7%
HISPANIC	35.9%	50.2%	61.3%	68.4%	74.7%	77.6%	+41.7%	+29.0%
WHITE	64.5%	77.1%	82.3%	88.5%	90.3%	87.8%	+23.3%	+18.5%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	37.6%	52.5%	62.5%	70.8%	74.8%	73.5%	+35.9%	+28.9%
TAAS READING								
ALL STUDENTS	76.7%	83.5%	85.6%	89.4%	91.3%	89.8%	+13.1%	+10.0%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	53.6%	65.7%	70.4%	76.3%	79.7%	78.3%	+24.7%	+18.0%
HISPANIC	64.3%	70.9%	73.6%	79.9%	84.8%	85.2%	+20.9%	+14.6%
WHITE	83.5%	89.7%	91.0%	94.1%	95.4%	93.3%	+9.8%	+6.5%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	60.8%	71.2%	75.3%	81.4%	84.5%	82.8%	+22.0%	+15.3%
TAAS MATHEMATICS								
ALL STUDENTS	60.0%	73.8%	82.6%	88.4%	89.8%	90.2%	+30.2%	+25.2%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	33.8%	52.1%	63.8%	74.5%	77.0%	79.1%	+45.3%	+34.7%
HISPANIC	40.7%	57.2%	73.1%	79.1%	83.4%	87.2%	+46.5%	+33.6%
WHITE	68.5%	81.3%	87.9%	92.9%	93.7%	93.1%	+24.6%	+19.2%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	43.0%	59.9%	73.2%	80.7%	83.1%	84.3%	+41.3%	+33.7%
TAAS WRITING								
ALL STUDENTS	82.9%	84.6%	88.4%	89.7%	91.5%	89.4%	+6.5%	+9.2%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	67.5%	70.5%	74.5%	74.9%	81.1%	79.8%	+12.3%	+16.1%
HISPANIC	69.8%	71.3%	79.7%	82.7%	84.1%	85.2%	+15.4%	+13.5%
WHITE	88.4%	90.5%	92.4%	94.1%	95.1%	92.3%	+3.9%	+5.5%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	70.2%	74.3%	78.9%	80.3%	83.5%	82.7%	+12.5%	+13.7%
ATTENDANCE RATE,GRADES 1-12								
ALL STUDENTS	94.8%	95.0%	95.2%	95.2%	95.3%	95.9%	+1.1%	+0.4%
DISTRICT STUDENT COMPOSITION								
AFRICAN AMERICAN	15.2%	15.7%	16.2%	16.1%	16.1%	16.2%		
HISPANIC	15.5%	16.0%	16.2%	17.0%	17.5%	18.3%		
WHITE	66.7%	65.7%	64.7%	63.9%	63.4%	62.6%		
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	43.2%	44.2%	43.8%	45.8%	45.8%	45.7%		

* Beginning in 1999, results also include special education test takers and Spanish, grades 3 & 4, reading and mathematics test takers.

Appendix B