



The 2013 Broad Prize for Urban Education



The \$1 million Broad Prize for Urban Education is the largest award in America given to school districts that have made the greatest improvement in student achievement, particularly among students of color and those from low-income families. Each year, 75 districts are automatically eligible for the prize. Based on a review of student achievement and college-readiness indicators, a panel of education experts whittles down the list to four finalists. A team of researchers then spends a week in each district—exhaustively poring over documents and interviewing more than 300 people—to produce an assessment of the practices behind the progress. A distinguished jury evaluates the quantitative and qualitative data and selects the winning district that will receive \$550,000 in college scholarships for its students, while the three remaining districts will each receive \$150,000 in scholarships. These districts represent progress, not perfection. But they are moving in the right direction, and their achievement offers an example for other districts around the country striving to do the same.

The 2013 Broad Prize Finalists

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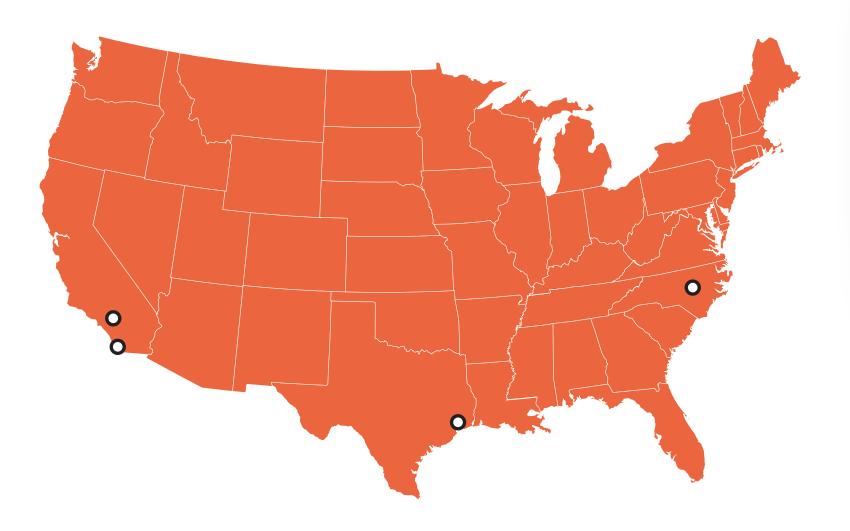
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Houston Independent School District, Texas



When Noelia Longoria was offered the principal job at Daniel Ortiz Middle School in Houston a few years ago, the school was targeted for state takeover because more than half of students were failing in science. But before she could tackle the academic challenges, Longoria first had to deal with a more pressing problem: getting rid of gangs that roamed the hallways. "We focused first on getting the school out of the tank and creating a safe environment," says Longoria, who previously served as assistant principal at a Houston-area high school.

Longoria did the basics—put more adults in hallways and outside the school during arrival, dismissal and between classes, banned running in school and made sure students were in class. "Before, it was a free for all," she says.

To boost academic performance, Longoria made sure teachers were teaching material aligned with state and national standards, introduced biweekly common assessments to identify students

who needed extra support, beefed up science instruction (only 49 percent of students passed state assessments in science when she arrived) and instituted professional learning communities so teachers had in-school time to discuss student data, share effective teaching strategies and differentiate instruction as needed.

Longoria has replaced 75 percent of the school's staff, required students who are performing below grade level to take two periods of math and English every day, and instituted Saturday school.

"We came from being one of the last-place schools to now leading the pack in science," says Longoria. Fifty percent of Ortiz students are now enrolled in pre-Advanced Placement courses and gifted and talented programs. And students feel safe today as they walk college pennant-adorned hallways in an orderly fashion. Longoria has made going to school cool for her students, the majority of whom live in poverty.

In the decentralized Houston Independent School District, principals are given both wide autonomy and deep support from the central office. Principals and teachers in the 276 schools in this sprawling school district—the seventhlargest in the nation—are also tethered by a combination of high expectations to improve student performance and by bountiful district supports—including performance bonuses, envious professional development and data so they can raise their game in order to boost student achievement. It's a challenge in a district where 80 percent of the 203,354 students are from low-income families and nearly 30 percent are English language learners.

Yet HISD has the highest SAT participation rate among other urban districts around the country for all students, and specifically among Hispanic and African-American students. In 2012, 87 percent of Houston's students took the SAT, and 84 percent of Hispanic and 80 percent of African-American students took the exam. The district's overall graduation rate improved by 12 percentage points between 2006 and 2009—twice the rate of other urban school districts around the nation—to 61 percent today, based on an average of three national

graduation rate trend indicators. The district has also narrowed low-income and Hispanic achievement gaps.

By investing in their educators and holding them accountable, encouraging entrepreneurial thinking among school leaders and keeping a vigilant focus on getting students to college and career-ready, Houston is the only district in the country to win The Broad Prize twice—in 2002 and 2013.

A Focus on Accountability and Support

There has been a sense of urgency in Houston schools since Superintendent Terry Grier arrived in 2009 to quicken the pace of school reform. "Students only have one chance in school" is a common refrain. "If you make a mistake, fix it fast," says Grier, who previously spent a short stint in San Diego and eight years leading Guilford County, N.C. schools. "He sets expectations and he sets the bar high and it's truly focused on the kids," says Leo Bobadilla, HISD's chief operations officer, who also served under Grier in Guilford.

To improve student outcomes, Grier instituted a number of changes to hold principals and teachers accountable for school and classroom performance. Principals, for example, are required to identify and report SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound) goals they intend to focus on during a school year. Principals align their budgets to their SMART goals, whether it's hiring more and higher-qualified teachers in a particular subject, investing in technology, boosting security or other needs.

Each year, teachers also identify two improvement areas to work on, such as differentiating instruction and working on higher-order thinking among students. HISD links teacher evaluations to student performance, providing bonuses to topperformers and putting low-performers on growth plans.

Every teacher in the district is placed into one of four performance tiers, and Grier wants to make sure top-performers know that they are the strongest performers on the team,



while those in the bottom are put on notice with growth plans. When Grier arrived, there was no distinction between top- and bottomperformers, and only 4 percent of teachers had growth plans. Today, all teachers in the bottom quartile are on growth plans, and the top teachers mentor others.

Student achievement is at the core of determining the most effective teachers. The district uses a comprehensive and user-friendly system for assessing and reporting multiple measures of student performance and growth. With a "no excuses" culture, more than 900 low-performing teachers, or 54 percent of all ineffective teachers, have been exited in the last two years.

High-performing teachers are rewarded. Between the 2008-09 and 2011-12 school year, HISD paid a total of \$136 million in bonuses to highly effective teachers, helping the district retain more than 90 percent of its best teachers.

Crystal Xu, an eighth-grade science teacher at Ortiz Middle School, is one of those effective teachers. When she arrived more than two years ago from Teach For America, fewer than half of Ortiz students passed the state science assessment test; today 79 percent do. "Our scores are pretty rocking," says Xu, who received a several thousand dollar bonus last year.

While district officials put a premium on accountability and performance, they don't leave employees without support or guidance. HISD floods teachers and principals with resources so they can succeed, from teacher mentors (both instructional and pedagogy specialists), online "exemplar videos" that showcase effective practices from HISD classrooms, easy-to-access data systems to quickly assess student achievement and lots of professional development.

"I've never been told no," says Xu about requests for support, professional development or trying something new in the classroom. That support has translated into improved student performance, she says. "I have an amazing team; we work together," says Xu, who meets with the science teacher team daily in their professional learning community to examine student assessments, plan and tweak lessons, as well as differentiate teaching. "We talk with one another about what is working and what is not, and I can make changes right there."

Thanks to plentiful professional development, including attending the Sally Ride Institute for hands-on science professional development last summer, Xu has students build rockets in class, read about careers in science to harness their classroom interests, and memorize the periodic table by applying elements to alien characteristics. "I love science," says Ortiz

eighth-grader Airiel, who has an infectious smile and wants to be a pediatrician. "The teachers and staff always help you, and they care about you."

The focus on accountability has helped HISD boost student performance in many areas. For example, HISD has seen double-digit gains in state accountability tests in third-grade and fifth-grade reading, doubled the percentage of advanced bilingual science students compared to the statewide average, and narrowed achievement gaps between HISD and the state's low-income students, as well as between its Hispanic students and the state's white students in elementary, middle and high school reading and math.

Innovations and Strategic Marketing for Principals

The district also wants its educators to think outside the box in their efforts to boost student gains. "We're really trying to build entrepreneurs," says Grier. To that end, HISD sends principals to strategic marketing classes at Rice University so that principals can identify each school's unique market, specialty areas and things to improve to meet the needs of its "customers"—the families served by each school.

The district's flair for innovation is evident in the eclectic mix of schools in this openenrollment district, which includes specialty programs like early college high schools, career and technical education programs, Montessori schools, International Baccalaureate programs, STEM schools, twilight high schools for one-time dropouts, charter schools (42 and counting), all-boys and all-girls schools, and magnet schools (some are merit-based enrollment). Twenty low-performing schools across the district now have longer school days and a longer school year.

Ultimately, the marketing classes are intended to help principals enhance their school's performance. The marketing classes, for example, spurred one high school principal and his staff to contact each of the 260 eighthgraders living in the school's attendance zone to find out how many planned to attend the high school. When they discovered a third said no, they developed a plan to encourage higher local enrollment. The #I answer given by students was the perception that the school was unsafe. The principal then used that information—along with academic and performance data—to develop a strategy for addressing the students' concerns.

A Focus on College- and Career-Readiness

HISD's focus on college-readiness is evident in schools like Michael E. DeBakey High School for Health Professions—and in students like 17-year-old Acara. The wide-eyed high school senior has already received a conditional



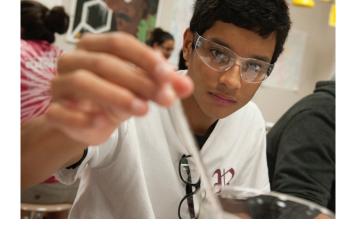
acceptance to Baylor College of Medicine, provided she maintains a 3.5 grade point average at the University of Houston, where she will major in mathematical biology on her way to becoming a plastic surgeon.

Acara took 10 Advanced Placement (AP) classes and spent eight weeks during her sophomore and senior years at the Texas Medical Center. where her teachers were doctors, scientists and health professionals. "They teach as though they wrote the textbooks," she says. Her assignments included taking patients' vital signs, going on rounds with nurses and making dental models, "just like orthodontists do in their office."

DeBakey is one of HISD's magnet schools, where nearly half of graduates enroll in medical schools. All graduates are prepped for college after taking a pre-college curricula, designed in partnership with the Baylor College of Medicine. "We have the highest number of African-Americans passing AP calculus with a 3 or above in the nation," says DeBakey Principal Agnes Perry, who sees 100 percent of her students graduate and 94 percent go to college.

HISD has adopted several strategies to increase the number of students who are college-ready and now requires all high schools to offer at least 15 AP courses. HISD also pays the cost of its students to take SAT and ACT exams, and the tests are administered during school hours. "We don't want someone's socioeconomic background to determine whether they take an exam or not," says Grier.

To boost college-readiness, many middle and high schools adopted the SpringBoard program for pre-AP and AP. Every high school offers dual-enrollment courses and some middle and high schools provide the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program to help students become better prepared for college by acquiring study skills and the confidence needed for college success. The Career Technical Education (CTE) program was updated in 2011-12 to increase the number of career pathways available to students that lead to high-growth, high-demand jobs in the Houston region. Business partnerships in these



programs are innovative and spark increased engagement among students. In many of these programs students earn not only industry certifications in key industries, but also an associate's degree the summer following high school graduation.

Grier also created an assistant superintendent position for college-readiness, which focuses on getting low-income students of color ready for universities. HISD middle school students take college field trips and all students have personalized graduation plans. Rigor and college-readiness is infused at an early age with such offerings as an early childhood center focusing on math, science and literacy, full-day pre-K and kindergarten, and other programs. These efforts seem to be paying off. In middle school, the number of students completing Algebra I jumped nearly 10 percent between 2007-08 and 2010-11. At the high school level, the number of HISD students taking AP classes increased 127 percent versus 57 percent nationwide, between 2010 and 2012.

Such efforts helped HISD lead the nation's urban school districts in terms of its increase in AP exam participation for all students, and specifically for Hispanic students. Between 2009 and 2012, the average annual increase in the AP participation rate by Houston's Hispanic students was five times greater than the average among the 75 Broad Prize-eligible districts.

"We're balancing our ability to customize with a high degree of coherence," says Grier. "We give more flexibility to schools that do well. Accountability is key." And Grier is pushing hard to get his high-poverty district to achieve, because "the road out of poverty runs through the school house door."



Corona-Norco Unified School District, California

2013 Broad Prize Finalist

Here's something uncommon: teachers overwhelmingly agreeing to a pay cut. Then again, the Corona-Norco Unified School District in Riverside County, Calif., is not your typical school district. At the depth of the Great Recession in 2008, 85 percent of teachers and 92 percent of classified workers voted to cut their salaries nearly 5 percent—and then freeze them for five years.

"I didn't want to take a pay cut, but it was the right thing to do," says Julie Moreland, a fifth-grade teacher at Parkridge Elementary in Corona. "There was not too much question on it passing. The kids are worth it." Without the pay cut, 250 people would have lost their jobs. Instead, the shared sacrifice enabled CNUSD to cover half the \$30 million shortfall it faced in the 2008og school year.

The cost-cutting move by teachers and staff enabled the district to avoid painful reductions in the classroom and to keep its focus on students. The result has been a boost in academic performance—in reading, math and science at all school levels—that earned the district recognition as a two-time Broad Prize finalist.

"Collaboration," says first-year CNUSD Superintendent Michael Lin, "is what drives our success." Lin is continuing the relationshipbuilding and collaborative style of his predecessor—the recently retired Kent Bechler, a thoughtful and reflective leader, who oversaw California's ninth-largest school district from July 2007 to June 2012. During Bechler's tenure, CNUSD focused on cultivating respect, establishing positive climates in schools and achieving steady academic improvement.

The result has been impressive: a greater percentage of Hispanic students in CNUSD reached advanced academic levels faster than in other districts in California. For example, Corona-Norco has narrowed achievement gaps between Hispanic and white students overall and at each grade level in reading, math and science as measured by state assessments.

In this sleepy bedroom community 45 miles east of Los Angeles, once filled with orange groves, ranches and farms, CNUSD today draws its students from the cities of Corona, Norco, Eastvale and Jurupa Valley, where 44 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. In addition to fiscally sound practices, district-wide gains are attributable to the cultivation of strong instructional leaders who engage students and a focus on college- and career-readiness.

Emphasis on Relationships, Student Engagement

Success in CNUSD classrooms is shaped by instructional leaders, who viewed the fiscal challenges as an opportunity to rally the focus on student achievement. The district's emphasis on relationships and collaboration led to a common way of increasing instructional rigor and critical thinking and promoting high levels of student engagement in academic content.

To raise the rigor of instruction in their classrooms, CNUSD teachers have been trained to use an instructional approach developed by educator John Antonetti, called the Engagement Cube. The approach, which integrates Marzano's high-yield instructional strategies, Bloom's Taxonomy and Schlechty's engaging qualities of student work, is designed to engage students so they become active participants in their own learning to prompt teachers to find the most effective instructional strategies for their students.

For example, Ryan Garcia is a veteran teacher who has a long track record of engaging students with lively and creative instructional techniques. The district has placed teachers like him on special assignment to work with others and help them be more effective in the classroom. With a third-grade teacher, Garcia suggests playing a game of "Jeopardy" to help teach math concepts. Or for a fifth-grade lesson on calculating the area of a triangle, he recommends encouraging students to think about how that skill might be relevant for a carpenter who is laying tile on a kitchen floor.

"If kids don't know how this is useful, they won't be interested," Garcia says. To encourage more interaction between students, Garcia suggests to a second-grade teacher that students write a few sentences about how prefixes and suffixes can make writing more engaging—and then pair up the students to compare their answers and come up with a combined statement. "The teacher is no longer the leader of the classroom but the facilitator," says Garcia.

This way of teaching has been bolstered by substantial amounts of professional development, by using classroom walkthrough tools like Look2Learn protocols, and by ensuring teachers have time to plan during the school day. Five years ago, for example, CNUSD and the teachers union modified the teacher work schedule to allow for weekly common planning time, or "professional collaboration time," so that teachers did not have to do so after school. Students in kindergarten through eighth-grade go home early on Wednesdays so teachers have common planning time to work collectively on lesson plans and share ideas about how to teach concepts, while high school students arrive late



once a week so teachers have time to collaborate. Half of these sessions are planned by teachers, and the other half are developed together by teachers and administrators. Teacher committees develop curriculum-related pacing guidelines that are then presented to teachers for further input.

Despite the salary trim, teachers want to come and stay in CNUSD—primarily because the salaries are still higher than in neighboring districts. But high teacher retention rates mean a stable teaching force that benefits the students and leads to boosts in achievement.

A Focus on College- and **Career-Readiness**

When Mexican immigrant Juana started at Centennial High School in Corona-Norco, the ninth-grader had trouble reading and writing in English. Four years later, the poised high school senior is headed to Embry Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Ariz., to study aerospace engineering on a full-ride scholarship as a Gates Millennium Scholar.

"I hadn't developed my potential," says Juana. Her trajectory changed through Corona-Norco's Puente Program, which is designed to motivate Hispanic students to go on to college and then consider returning to the community as mentors and leaders. In addition to four years of academic

counseling, the program also offers ninth- and 10th-graders a rigorous college-preparatory English class using multicultural literature. Puente's academic and personal mentoring combination gave Juana the extra support to achieve more than she thought possible. The program is one of several ways in which CNUSD is preparing its students for college and beyond.

In recent years, CNUSD has introduced or increased the number of programs aimed at bolstering college- and career-readiness for all students. In 2011, the district formalized its offerings under an initiative called Passport to Success, which heightens the college- and career-readiness focus to better prepare students. Besides Puente, the district offers career technical education courses, International Baccalaureate, Honors, Advanced Placement. Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and dual enrollment with community colleges.

Starting in 2011-12, as part of Passport to Success, all students are required to take the sequence of courses—and obtain at least a C in each—needed to gain entry into California state colleges and universities. CNUSD 10th-graders must also take and pass with at least a score of 350 (scale score range is 275-450) the state high school exit exam in English language arts and in math, and score at least 1550 on the SAT or 21 on the ACT in order to get their "passports" stamped.

CNUSD partners with local colleges and universities so students can take dual-enrollment courses that provide them concurrent credit for high school and community college. For example, John F. Kennedy Middle College High School students actually attend classes on the nearby Norco College campus, where they can take up to two years of college courses and graduate with both a high school diploma and an Associate of Arts degree.

"The district is always trying to get better," says Paul Parnell, president of Norco College. "We want to increase our (high school) graduation rates and we want students to succeed in college."

As part of Passport to Success, CNUSD promotes college- and career-readiness skills for eighth-grade students, including a required "Success for High School, College, and Careers" course, developed in 2010 to introduce them to fundamentals of researching and selecting a future career and to help determine the courses they must take in high school and college to meet their academic and professional goals.

"Starting in kindergarten, we tell them what college is," says Cassandra Willis, principal of Home Gardens Academy—a campus that feels more like a college-prep school than a K-8 school. But this broom-swept school with college pennants adorning hallways and classrooms serves a high-poverty student population, where half of its 800 students are English language

learners. Home Gardens students take several trips to area colleges, often with their parents in tow. That's important because so many CNUSD parents aren't college-educated. In fact, Riverside County has among the lowest rates of college-educated parents of the nation's urban districts—fewer than 20 percent of parents have a college degree. "It's a lot of exposure and it's setting high expectations," says Willis. Home Gardens also started a Parents University, designed to help parents obtain a GED, teach parenting skills and assist parents in learning about the college application and financial aid processes early on.

With student writing scores unacceptably low a few years ago, CNUSD began to enhance its focus on writing with programs like Step Up to Writing, which helps K-12 students become proficient in the areas of informational, explanatory, narrative writing and personal narrative, and opinion pieces. The strategies foster critical thinking, reading comprehension, and other key skills needed for college success—and complement CNUSD's move to adopt the Common Core State Standards.

The district's focus on writing paid off: 89 percent of CNUSD fourth-graders were proficient or advanced based on the California State Standards writing assessment in 2012, up from 67 percent in 2008. The crowning achievement: 97 percent of the district's seventh-graders were proficient or advanced on the state writing test.





Creating a Caring Environment

The district has a strong emphasis on meeting children's needs and takes a "whole child" approach by addressing the social and emotional growth of students, as well as their educational development. Safety and wellness are priorities for CNUSD, and the district provides different types of behavioral supports for students. Capturing Kids' Hearts, for example, is a popular program in district elementary schools that promotes mutual respect and bonding. The district also has stepped up anti-bullying efforts in recent years.

The district has targeted programs that serve various student populations, like a father mentoring program for African-American boys and school support teams that work with students who have disabilities. To help English language learners, the district has teachers certified in using the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), a researchbased model that helps teachers plan lessons so students learn while developing English language proficiency.

Corona High School student Luisa was put in a SIOP class when she enrolled in the ninth grade. After coming to CNUSD from Mexico in fifth grade, Luisa bounced around foster homes she attended three schools during seventh and eighth grades. At Corona, she was matched

with an "amazing" ELA teacher, who worked with her during and after school to boost her English skills. "I was in the sheltered program for one year and came out proficient the next year," says Luisa, one of 53 Corona High students who "graduated" from ELL into regular classes last year. "I love writing," she adds, and says she wants to work on the school newspaper this coming school year.

SIOP, AVID and Puente are just a sampling of district programs that are helping boost overall student performance and narrowing the achievement gap in CNUSD. For example, in 2012, the percentage of CNUSD's Hispanic elementary school students performing at the highest achievement level (advanced) in reading, math and science ranked in the top 30 percent statewide. Corona-Norco's African-American students performing at the highest achievement level in elementary and middle school reading and math ranked in the top 20 percent statewide.

In a district with high poverty and large numbers of students learning English, creating a caring environment is key to reaching the kids, says Derek Nino, English learners coordinator and math teacher at Corona High School. "You have to take care of the person first," says Nino, "and when you do, the academics follow along."■



Cumberland County Schools, North Carolina

2013 Broad Prize Finalist

Just before the school year starts in Cumberland County Schools (CCS), North Carolina's fifth-largest school system, all 6,600 certified and classified school employees stream into Cumberland County's Crown Center Coliseum. A student drum line pulses into the arena, stoking a celebratory air. Teachers, custodians and principals hear from a mix of motivational speakers and renowned educators who passionately espouse the importance of learning, leadership and teaching in high-poverty areas.

Then, each of the district's 87 schools are boisterously recognized for attaining coveted state-defined "high growth" status or another laudable success during the previous school year. Egged on by the drum line, everyone cheers for one another's achievements—but they also cooperatively and competitively look to find the



practices that are working and vow to incorporate them in their own schools and classrooms to produce even higher results.

While the event is part pep rally, part districtwide professional development, it's also a symbolic event started by Superintendent Frank Till, Jr. to remind everyone "to reset their compass to 'True North,'" a guiding set of principles that reminds all staff they have a responsibility to help every student make academic growth each year. "And all means all," Till says. Based on North Carolina's ABC Accountability model for schools, which sets academic growth goals for each school, 91 percent of CCS schools met or exceeded their growth goals—compared to 80 percent statewide.

The result is a coherent system, where strategies, policies and practices all progress in the same direction

That unity is particularly notable in a district where six of every 10 students live in poverty and nearly one-third of Cumberland's 52,778 students come from families connected to the Airborne and Special Operations Forces at nearby Fort Bragg.

Despite high poverty and the frequent moves of military families, Cumberland County's graduation rate has increased an average of 4 percent annually in recent years, or about

twice that of the 75 largest school districts in the country. In a district where African-Americans comprise 45 percent of students, African-American and low-income achievement gaps have narrowed in elementary, middle and high school reading, math and science. Specifically, a greater percentage of the district's African-American students in 2012 reached advanced academic levels in reading, math and science than in other North Carolina school districts, placing them in the top 30 percent statewide among African-American students.

A unified focus on student growth, fueled by a strong and visionary superintendent, support for teachers, the widespread use of performance data and the innovative implementation of classroom technology has fueled the district's trajectory to become a first-time Broad Prize finalist.

A Focus on Growth

When he arrived in Cumberland in 2009, Superintendent Till implemented the cohesive focus on ensuring every student improves every year. Till came from Florida's Broward County Public Schools—a district that was a Broad Prize finalist three times for the progress made under his leadership.

Till and his staff reviewed all district policies, many in place since 1985, and changed or dropped those that prevented progress toward student or school growth. The team also took a deep look at data. Under the ABCs, students received a developmental scale score on the end-of-grade and end-of-course assessments. That score was matched with an achievement level: I, II, III or IV. Levels III and IV met proficiency.

"For years we celebrated proficiency increases," says Ron Phipps, associate superintendent for evaluation and testing. But after digging into the data, "we realized that, yes, it was important to show an increase in proficiency, but even some students who had an increase in proficiency did not reach their expected growth."

It was an eye-opening revelation. Students who only maintained their developmental scale score each year could not reach growth. Instead, they had to show an increase of five or six points. "If a student maintained a score of a 350, for example, over four years, he or she would be a level IV in grade 3, but by grade 7 would be a level II," says Phipps.

"The point was we cannot simply be satisfied with maintaining a score," said Phipps. "We must address each student and their individual expectation." Thus, the focus turned to student growth. To support that, the district improved its ability to access, store and analyze data in 2010, invested heavily in professional development and technology, and reinforced the focus on student growth in every conversation across the district. Student data was shared immediately with principals and teachers. Principals could see how teachers were moving each student to growth. Teachers could see their progress in advancing students academically and see how they compared with their peers so instructional leaders could share effective practices with one another. Just like the district-wide pep rally, CCS leaders focus on achieving growth through collaboration.

One particularly helpful resource CCS uses to provide data to support growth is the Educational Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS), which uses a student's past testing data to project future performance and sets markers for individual growth for every student and every test.

Data from EVAAS and other sources provide each school administrator with a digital "principal

playbook" that includes testing data, projection data, scatterplot information, ACT results, and end-of-grade and end-of-course results pertinent to their own school.

"The playbook allows me to identify where our children are before instruction even begins," says Jane Fields, principal of Pine Forest High School, designated as a high-growth school. "I share the information with the teachers so they can target who may need remediation early on. We have experienced greater success because we do not wait until the end to remediate students." Teachers meet weekly to plan collaboratively. They also give weekly growth assessments. The teachers know how students are progressing toward the score projected in the playbook. "We are constantly looking for ways to ensure growth for all of our children," says Fields.

The district's focus on growth and student data helps Long Hill Elementary second-grade teacher Susan Thompson be a more effective instructor. "I personally look at it to see what I can do better," says Thompson, who shares with her colleagues during regular collaborative planning sessions ways they can boost student academic growth. For example, Thompson no longer rushes to finish "Charlotte's Web" with her class. Instead, she beams pages of the book on the white board so the class can break down passages to do guided reading and identify character traits. She also focuses more heavily on differentiating instruction. When she asks her students to identify character traits in the book, Thompson then groups the students by ability. Skillful readers may read ahead and identify more character traits on their own, or be grouped with others who need more practice. Thompson spends one-on-one time with those having trouble and gives others more basic books to identify character traits. "I feel like I can target the specific area they need so every child feels they are more successful," she says.

Between 2008 and 2012, CCS had one of the most impressive student improvement trajectories among urban school districts nationwide. The focus on growth has contributed to the district narrowing gaps between its low-income students and the state's non-lowincome students in elementary, middle and high school math and science.

Support for Teachers and Principals

To support its focus on student academic growth, the district provides copious amounts of support for its educators. In recent years, professional development has been focused on helping teachers use data and technology to support student growth. Training also has focused on teaching toward the Common Core State Standards and on pedagogies, such as differentiated instruction and providing emotionally positive classroom environments.

The district also offers multiple levels of coaching and mentoring for new and struggling teachers. That support helped boost the confidence and ability of first-year South View High School French teacher Felicia Neill. "I was scared, insecure, unsure and unprepared," she says.

But a host of supports helped to ultimately get her nominated as teacher of the week by the end of the school year. Her own growth was fueled by the advice and listening ear she got from a veteran South View language teacher, moral support and resources from a Spanish teacher, and classroom management and behavioral tips from another teacher as well as South View's "safe schools coordinator." Every new teacher in the district also gets paired with a Peer Assistant Learning Specialist (PALS) mentor. Teachers in high-need schools receive mentors for three years.

Meanwhile, Neill's departmental administrator had her shadow a veteran French teacher at another school. "That fueled the turning point in my first year," she says. "This was the moment where I gained confidence in teaching. It allowed me to reflect on what I had been doing and adapt new strategies." One mentor "took me under her wing like a daughter," Neill says, adding another "shared activities and came up with a cool-down system for students exhibiting challenging or difficult behavior."

"We take care of our teachers," says Martha Carter, a retired teacher, who now serves as one of the district's Intensive Care by A Retired Teacher (ICARE) mentors to new teachers and those needing intensive one-on-one support. CCS also takes care of its principals. For example, the monthly leadership institute

provides a forum where principals learn how to help their teachers grow, as well as stay abreast of district processes and policies.

Innovative Use of Technology

Cumberland teachers leverage their data to take full advantage of the technology provided by the district. Cumberland received a federal Race to the Top grant and invested most of the \$8 million to modernize teaching and learning by giving all schools wireless technology, laptops, document cameras and interactive assessment tools that enable teachers to instantly track student quiz results.

To ensure students are prepared for college, teleconferencing technology now allows all students in every high school to access a full range of Advanced Placement (AP) classes.

"Teleconferencing definitely provided classes I wouldn't have been able to take," says Christopher, a Gray's Creek High School senior, who will attend North Carolina State University to study electrical and computer engineering. Through teleconferencing, he was able to take AP world history and AP statistics, even though the courses were not offered at his school.

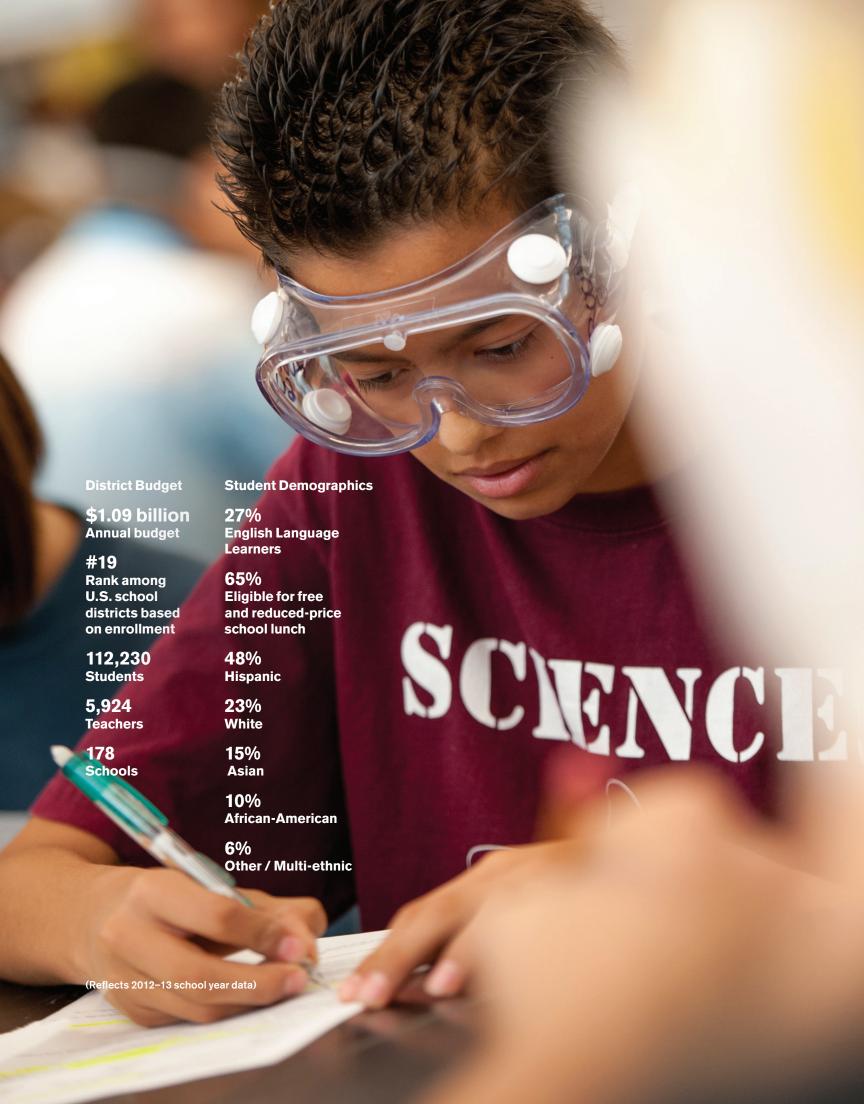
"It is eye-opening," says Jonathan Frantz, who teaches AP world history and AP European history at Seventy-First High School—and to students throughout the district with the use of teleconferencing. Normally, in AP classes, "the only stranger in the room is the teacher," says Frantz, as the same cohort of students typically take AP classes. But, Frantz taught 18 students from five schools. "Everybody was upping their game," he says. "I also had to step up my game and use all of my skills to engage them because I was a talking head and couldn't check in over their shoulder."

At Pine Forest High School, science teacher Ben Jones reaches his students with the tools they already use on a daily basis. When teaching plate tectonics to his earth science class, Jones posts YouTube videos of recent earthquakes, asking students via CCS' electronic student message board what plate boundaries were at play. Students weigh in after school hours and after monitoring the lively online discussion. Jones advances the lesson at the start of the next class.

But when Jones and teachers across CCS start the school year, they already know the ability and potential of every student in their classes, thanks to achievement data the district provides on every student. Armed with that data, Jones places each student into one of four levels, from low-performing to distinguished learner. Through the semester he grades assignments on a r-to-4 scale, forgoing traditional letter

grades. Jones' grading reflects individual student performance on a specific test or assignment, while also factoring in a student's individual ability or potential—based on previous data. Jones, along with CCS, is seeking growth from every student, no matter their ability. "It gives them confidence," says Jones. "They see they are getting better and they are more likely to put in the extra effort."





San Diego Unified **School District, California**

2013 Broad Prize Finalist

Just before her last class ends on a late May school day, San Diego seventh-grade pre-algebra teacher Julie Garcia "flips" her classroom, assigning her students a project they'll do mostly during after school hours using online resources. Pupils are organized into four-person teams and are given a hypothetical \$350 budget and a few days to create a landscaping company and design self-contained, raised gardens.

Garcia instructs her Innovation Middle School students to watch a video she created to help them calculate the area, perimeter and volume of the garden, use their iPads to snap a picture of where their garden would be planted, plot the location on Google Earth, check pricing of materials on the websites of home and garden suppliers, name their company and propose a mini-business plan.

"This is an important skill as students learn to define themselves and brand themselves as students and later professionals," says Garcia, whose students check in with her when they need guidance. The teams then submit their proposal to the eighth-grade geometry class, which will select a winner. When her seventh-graders become eighth-graders they'll begin the school year building the winning team's design.

"These types of projects and the flipped classroom have transformed my classroom," says the veteran teacher. "I see an increase in student motivation, decrease in failing students and improvement in standardized test scores."

Next door in the eighth-grade U.S. history class, students are writing blog-like journal entries on their e-notebooks and laptops about what it's like to be a solider in the Civil War. The students are reading "Shiloh" in their English class, and doing cross-disciplinary learning in the social studies class, which includes writing daily entries to create a Prezi, video or blog on weapons of the Civil War or some other germane topic.

The integration of technology into truly personalized learning for students at Innovations Middle, which serves primarily low-income students and students of color, has led not only to an increase in academic performance but also to 90 percent of its

students attending from the surrounding neighborhood. Across the decentralized San Diego Unified School District, school choice has historically encouraged students to travel far to the campus of their choice.

Since 2009, San Diego Unified—a first-time Broad Prize finalist—has taken a communitybased approach to school reform, with an emphasis on revitalizing neighborhood schools. In this district where two-thirds of students are low-income and nearly 60 percent are students of color, school leaders view a system of neighborhood schools, where every school is a quality school, as an issue of equity. San Diego Unified has also made a commitment to equip classrooms with 21st century teaching techniques and technology. The district has worked hard to cultivate a positive climate in district schools—bridging stronger ties to parents and other stakeholders—and boosted supports for at-risk students like English language learners.

The focus is paying off. In 2012, San Diego students performed better than those in other California districts with similar demographics in elementary, middle and high school reading, math and science. In addition, San Diego narrowed achievement gaps between its Hispanic students and the state's white students in reading, math and science at all school levels



in recent years. For example, the gap in high school science scores between Hispanic students in San Diego and California's white students declined from 33 points in 2010 to 26 points in 2012.

Making Every School a Great School

As part of its Quality Schools initiative to make every neighborhood school an attractive option for families, the school board in 2009 directed Superintendent William Kowba to ensure that the bulk of decision-making rested at the school level, with an emphasis on strong principal leadership, regular assessments and comprehensive support for school-based staff.

San Diego Unified put in place a more discerning vetting process for principal candidates, beefed up efforts to develop internal talent to build a deeper leadership bench—for example, it sends 100 aspiring administrators to leaderships programs at San Diego State University and the University of San Diego—involved local parents and community members in the interview process, and made the superintendent accountable for principal performance on improving student achievement.

Only 64 percent of district students attend their neighborhood school. "The school is the center of the neighborhood," says Kowba, adding that if every school is a quality school, parents will want to send their children to their local campus. iMiddle is a model for the neighborhood school approach. Neighborhood schools also are financially prudent for a district that has suffered deep budget cuts and eliminated bus service for 4,000 students.

Principals and teachers here have a toolbox of supports and interventions—including a robust system for assessing and reporting student performance, substantial professional development, classroom technology, English learner support teachers and parent assistance they can pull from to boost school performance. "Every school is responsible for coming up with its own instructional focus and it's tied to the school's student performance data," says iMiddle Principal Harlan Klein.

To that end, summative, benchmark and formative assessments are all administered and reviewed on a routine basis. San Diego Unified administers three levels of assessments: federal- and state-mandated assessments. district assessments and common formative assessments. Data is easy for administrators, teachers, students and parents to access, with multiple systems available that feature userfriendly reports and results.

The district offers in-depth professional development to help educators learn how to use the assessment system. As additional support, a data- and assessment-savvy "angel" is available on every campus to help staff members with the system. Data are routinely accessed and used by district- and school-level administrators and teachers. An achievement gap taskforce also is deployed in many schools to help teachers understand how to access and interpret data.

Student, teacher and school performance data are religiously monitored and supports and instructions are routinely altered or finetuned to boost overall and achievement gap performance. For example, third-grade teachers at Edison Elementary rallied in their professional learning community (PLC) after only 30 percent of students scored in the proficient or advanced range in English language arts on the 2011 California Standards Test (CST).

"The third-grade team developed an intervention plan to address reading comprehension and response to literature," says Tavga Bustani, former Edison principal who now is a district mentor principal. The team developed a pre-assessment to determine a baseline of their current students, and the PLC developed a plan, crafted a series of lessons, created formative assessments and analyzed writing samples to guide their instruction.

"We collaborated every two weeks to analyze reading data and student writing samples," says Bustani, who also provided release time for teachers to observe one another. The PLC met to debrief the lessons and made needed adjustments based on observations in the classroom. The result: after the 12-week intervention, 53 percent of students scored in the proficient/advanced range on the 2012 CST in English language arts.

A Strong Emphasis on Positive Climate

In decentralized San Diego Unified, the success of its schools lies in the hands of principals like Kearny Digital Media & Design High School's Cheryl Hibbeln. Principals are expected to create a positive learning environment, where students feel supported and at home.

Kearny ninth-grader Eduardo—who joined a gang in middle school and has been conflicted between his dreams of becoming an architect and the camaraderie he finds in a gang—is one of the students Hibbeln thinks of when she talks about creating a safe, welcoming school environment.

A day after a gang member was killed off campus, Hibbeln asked a counselor from the district's Office of Race/Human Relations and Advocacy "to take Eduardo's pulse." As counselor Rodolfo Parra met Eduardo just off campus for lunch, a truck approached with young men who tried to coax the teen to join them. "I kind of felt like going, but at the same time I wanted to go back to school," says Eduardo, who resisted the gang's pull and went to class.

"Adults in our school changed the way they interact with students, and now the students are exceeding our expectations," says Hibbeln, who drove a recent Kearny graduate to San Francisco State University to start college because the student had no other ride.

Principals receive support from district leaders, their peers and local parents. In San Diego Unified which is organized into "clusters"—a pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade community of schools with established feeder patterns—councils of the schools' principals, parents and community representatives meet regularly to discuss challenges and ways to ensure every campus meets student needs.

"The clusters' power is in engaging the broader community to support neighborhood schools," says School Board President John Evans. For example, an anti-bullying effort led by a high school was highlighted at one cluster meeting, and the initiative was then expanded to middle and elementary schools within the that cluster.

Parents also have a voice in the running of schools and can weigh in on school-level budgeting, instructional and other issues. For example, when parents in one cluster were concerned that start times for middle and high schools were too far apart, they successfully urged the district to address the issue.

The district offers parent engagement programs designed to involve parents not only in their child's education but also in advancing their own education. Furthermore, each school has a parent center, typically staffed by a family center coordinator or a PTA parent, where parents can come during school hours to volunteer, seek answers to questions or to better understand the college process.

English Language Learner Supports

With more than a quarter of San Diego Unified students who are English language learners (ELL), a big part in boosting interest in neighborhood schools revolves around the district's efforts to advance these students to English proficiency. The district places an English language specialist teacher in every elementary school and secondary school with high concentrations of English learners, and provides systematic professional development around English language development to all staff.

The district also has adopted an instructional framework called the Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL), which emphasizes rigor, high expectations for English language learners and strong teacher-student interaction. The approaches have paid off, as the district has seen gains in the percentage of ELL students scoring proficient in English, from 30 percent in 2008 to 44 percent in 2012, and in math, from 39 percent to 51 percent.

Improving the proficiency of so many students has helped the district improve overall performance and narrow the achievement gaps. San Diego Unified was in the top 30 percent of California districts that increased the percentage of its low-income, Hispanic and African-American high school students who performed at the highest achievement levels on the state science assessment.



i-21 Technology Initiative

The smart use of technology in every classroom has been a focus in San Diego as the district strives to make every school a quality school. In 2009, San Diego Unified initiated the i-21 Interactive Classroom initiative, which connects nearly all 5,000 classrooms and provides iPads, laptops or other devices to district students. The initiative is funded by a \$344 million voterapproved bond measure. The majority of schools have the technology in place, and all will by the 2013-14 school year.

"We paired i-21 with our move to the Common Core State Standards," says Barbara Allen, San Diego Unified's chief information and technology officer. Teachers are trained to shift from lecturing to being facilitators of student learning. Technology allows teachers to more rapidly understand their students' abilities, differentiate learning more easily, and challenge students to go deeper with their coursework.

"By providing tools and resources through technology, my change from direct instruction to coaching allows me to work closer with students to help them gain a deeper understanding of the material," says Innovation Middle School math teacher Julie Garcia, who encourages her students to blog about their math experiences. "I use technology as an alternative form of assessment. Through blogs, I get an insight into my students' thinking, and they see a purpose for writing about their math thinking, knowing they have a greater audience.

"Because I am no longer the teacher in front of the class, I am one of them," says Garcia, who uses the technology to group students based on their skill level and deliver more individualized instruction. "With this personalized approach, my students take ownership of their work and are more motivated to learn. In 18 years of teaching, these last two years have been the best of my career."

The Broad Prize Review Board

A distinguished group of the country's top educational leaders serves as the review board for The Broad Prize. Review board members examine performance indicators, demographic statistics and other information about the urban school districts that are eligible for The Broad Prize. Based on their examination, the review board narrows the list of 75 eligible school districts to the four finalists.

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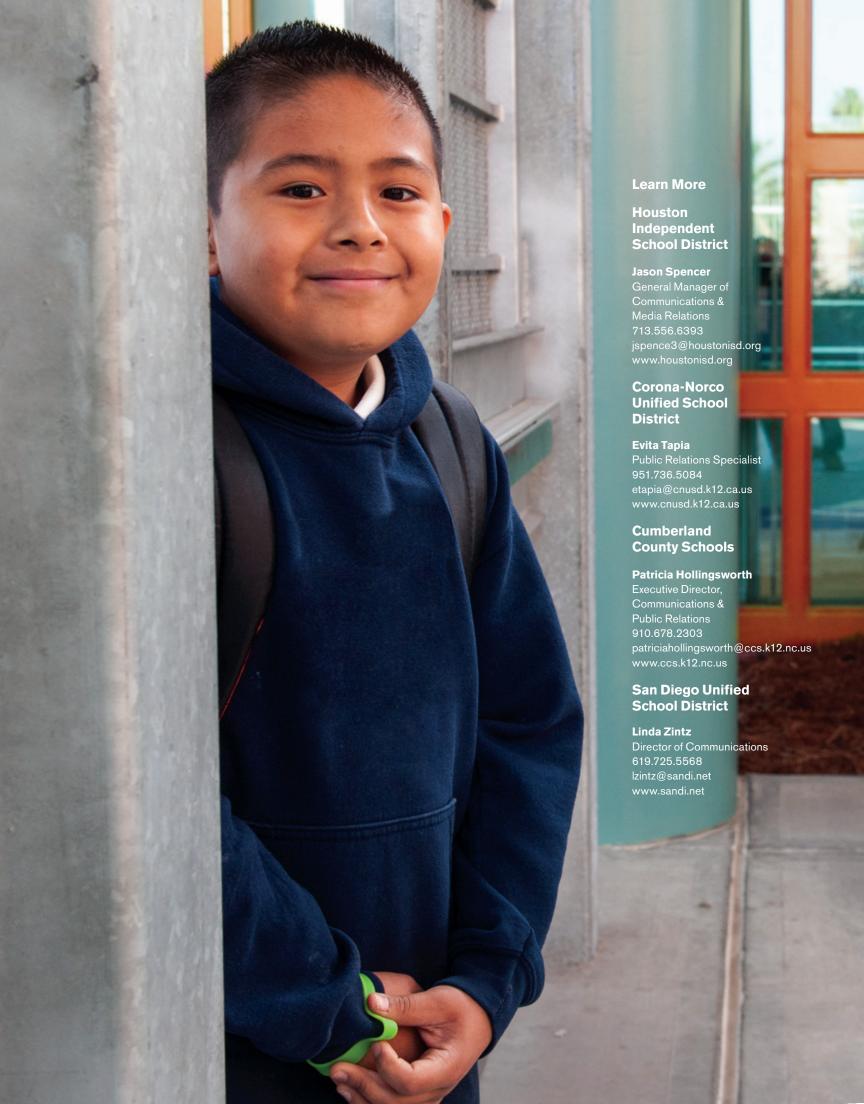
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RMC Research Corporation is a nationally recognized research and professional services organization. Using a research-based rubric for district quality that was developed exclusively for The Broad Prize, RMC leads a site visit team of researchers and practitioners through the collection and analysis of interviews, documents and observations of Broad Prize finalist district practices.



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2003

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2004

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2005

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2006

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2007

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2008

Brownsville Independent School District, Texas

2009

Aldine Independent School District, Texas

2010

Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia

2011

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina

2012

Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Florida

2013

Houston Independent School District, Texas

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