

## The 2009 **Broad Prize** for Urban Education



Celebrating Excellence in America's Public Schools



The Broad Prize for Urban Education sculpture, designed by artist Tom Otterness, resides at the U.S. Department of Education and is inscribed each year with the name of the winning district. The winning school district also receives a bronze sculpture for its central office, and each finalist school district receives a stone sculpture. Sculpture © Tom Otterness, 2002.

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The \$2 million Broad Prize for Urban Education, the nation's largest K-12 public education award, is given annually by The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation to five large urban school districts that demonstrate the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while reducing income and ethnic achievement gaps.

One hundred of the largest urban American school districts—serving more than 9 million students—are eligible for The Broad Prize each year. Graduating high school seniors in the winning district will receive \$1 million in college scholarships; students in each of the four finalist districts will receive \$250,000 in scholarships.

## The 2009 Broad Prize Finalists:

Aldine Independent School District, Texas

Broward County Public Schools, Florida

Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia

Long Beach Unified School District, California

Socorro Independent School District, Texas

Even as our country suffers from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, there are signs of hope and change everywhere from the nation's highest office to our public school systems. While this year's Broad Prize finalist districts and the students they serve have not been immune to numerous resource challenges, these school systems have proven that there are bright spots of success and achievement among urban American youth.

Each of this year's finalist districts has surpassed its peers statewide in narrowing achievement gaps among minority and low-income students.

In Long Beach and Socorro, one in four students is learning to speak English. In Gwinnett, nearly half of the students are African-American or Hispanic; and in Broward, 64 percent. In Aldine, 80 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, 64 percent are Hispanic and 30 percent are African-American.

Each of these districts has shown significant improvement in helping all students—no matter their background—prepare for and attend college. In a society where opportunities are diminishing for all but the most prepared, the successful practices underway in these districts serve as a beacon for other urban American districts seeking to improve achievement for all students.



66

Rank Among U.S. School  
Districts (by size)

67

Number of Schools

60,083

Number of Students

80%

Students Eligible for Free and  
Reduced-Price School Lunch

31%

Students Designated as English  
Language Learners

4,011

Number of Teachers

\$453.6

Annual Budget (in millions)





## Aldine Independent School District

At 7:15 a.m., shortly after students at Aldine Ninth Grade School recite their twin pledges—to the United States and to Texas—they hear this message from Principal Walter Stewart:

“Students, you are here for one reason and one reason only, and that is to learn. If you are not here for that reason there will be consequences for your actions. . . . Failure is not an option.”

No student knows that better than 16-year-old Daniela Vela, who later that day will take a 60-question test on world geography (her third attempt to pass) that will determine whether she becomes a sophomore next year. If she fails, she falls one credit short and faces the embarrassing prospect of moving to the high school as a “repeat” ninth-grader.

“I’ll do my best to get the credits,” says Daniela. “Some of the words are really hard. . . . If they put the questions into big words, I don’t get that.”

The push by teachers and school leaders here to encourage students like Daniela to keep trying illustrates why Houston’s Aldine Independent School District is a three-time Broad Prize finalist (2004, 2005, 2008) and winner of the 2009 Broad Prize. What makes Aldine distinctive is its steady academic progress and ability to close gaps—despite the fact that 80 percent of area families are low-income, compared to 55 percent across Texas.

“The thing that makes what we do so special is the fact that we have so many economically disadvantaged students,” says Superintendent Wanda Bamberg.

Between 2005 and 2008, reading achievement gaps between white students across Texas and Aldine’s Hispanic and African-American students narrowed in all grades. In math, the gap for those students narrowed in elementary and middle schools. For Aldine’s Hispanic middle school students, that gap narrowed by 10 percentage points. Further, in 2008, Aldine’s Hispanic and low-income students achieved higher average proficiency rates than their counterparts statewide in elementary, middle and high school reading and math. Aldine’s African-American students also achieved higher proficiency rates than their counterparts statewide in math at all school levels and in reading at the middle and high school levels.

Behind that success lie many strategic district-wide efforts put in place over the last decade, including a sophisticated online



curriculum and assessment database allowing teachers to access proven model lessons designed by other teachers, frequent assessments providing teachers and instructional leaders with current data on each student, and an aggressive teacher recruiting program enabling the district to attract high-quality teachers who are likely to stay in the district.

Those drivers are apparent here at Aldine Ninth Grade School, a school designed to support ninth-graders during their transition year, where highly motivated teachers have taken to heart the district’s mandate not to let low-performing students slip between the cracks. Teachers here encourage—no, demand—that students make up lost credits. The school offers after-school classes and Saturday school. Here, and in all the ninth-grade schools in Aldine, students who fall behind in algebra can take dual-track algebra, which combines refresher algebra and regular course algebra, so they can get back on par with their peers.

Daniela is an example of this intense effort. She needed to earn at least a 70 percent on her final exam to secure the last credit required to become a sophomore. Her world geography teacher, Adelle Pratt, has been overseeing her “recovery”: twice-a-week after-school sessions and four hours on Saturdays for the previous month. With only days left in the school year,



Pratt has whittled the number of failing students from 69 to 26 and hasn't given up on the remaining.

After Daniela took the test later that day, Pratt sent this email: "I am absolutely thrilled to let you know that not only did Daniela pass—she earned an 82 percent...These kids will be successful past a point that they can even envision right now and I refuse to believe otherwise."

Those recovery efforts continue to expand. Drawing on the district's elaborate data system, Aldine Ninth has identified 120 current eighth-graders due to arrive next school year that are "at risk" based on grades, behavior, truancy or all of the above. Those students will be guided into a voluntary 10-day summer camp designed to teach them leadership and study skills—all to avoid the dreaded "failure" Stewart warns his students about three times a day over the school's public address system.

In wealthy school districts, such dire warnings might be easily dismissed as unnecessary. But this school serves low-income families, many of whom speak little English. Evidence of the success of the district's strategies to support traditionally disadvantaged students emerged in a recent school awards ceremony. The student who raked in the most honors—Presidential Award for Education Excellence, perfect attendance, "all A's"

honor roll and special honors in world geography—was 14-year-old Karen Reyes Lara, whose family moved here from Mexico only a year and a half ago, with none of the family members (including Karen) speaking English. Her father paints houses; her mother is a cook in a local market.

The push here in Aldine to beat the odds of poverty dates back to the early 1990s when Aldine schools were not distinguishing themselves in the Texas school rankings.

"The board and the superintendent just said this is not going to work. We've had enough of being on the bottom," recalls Superintendent Bamberg, who at the time was the district's program director of middle school language arts.

The biggest reason for the miserable test scores, they concluded, was the high mobility of their students (that mobility rate has remained high, 24 percent overall and up to 38 percent at some schools). "Because of that mobility, we had a skills gap, so we reached an agreement that everyone needed to understand what was being taught and when," Bamberg says.

Teams of educators pulled together to hammer out math and reading curricula. "It wasn't voluntary," says Bamberg. "It was a matter of saying, 'here's the curriculum and here's the order you're going to teach it.' A lot of people didn't like it,



because [they thought] we were taking away their autonomy and creativity.”

Teacher training got an equally rigorous scrubbing. No more big-name speakers would be delivering general lectures in the school auditorium. Instead, teacher training turned sharply inward, with teachers receiving specific skill development aligned with and driven by test data showing exactly where students were weak—that told them what to teach, when to teach it and the best way to teach it.

Finally, the district moved to upgrade the complexity of its course offerings, including turning a network of schools into International Baccalaureate (IB) schools. That’s how Shotwell Academy, a high-poverty, mostly African-American middle school, ended up an IB school.

The directive—you will become an IB school—didn’t go down well with some Shotwell teachers, says Principal Wanda Walker. “Some teachers, when they saw the rigor of the IB program, chose not to stay at the school. They thought the program should be for elite students.”

To the contrary, the two years spent ramping up for the IB program produced considerable dividends. Three years ago, only 56 percent of the seventh- and eighth-graders at the school scored proficient on the state math test. This year, math proficiency rates jumped to 84 percent. Proficient reading scores similarly rose from 74 to 89 percent.

The jump in rigor transformed all of Shotwell’s classrooms. Five years ago, students in seventh-grade reading might have been handed a few paragraphs of material about George Washington and then been challenged to a simple multiple-choice quiz: Was George Washington the first, second or third president?

“Today,” says seventh-grade reading teacher Melanie Jones, “a unit on George Washington asks students to predict the benefits of George Washington being president today. In order to respond they would have to research Washington and consider the problems of today.”

The more challenging schoolwork appears to have engaged some borderline students, such as 13-year-old Deionishia Johnson, a “problem student” in intermediate school who was suspended several times. “I had a bad attitude. There was no program to keep me focused.”



All that changed with the more challenging IB middle school curriculum. “My mom has been impressed with my behavior. She noticed the small stuff. I used to come home and lie down on the sofa and watch TV. Now I bring home papers and want to discuss them with her.”

While many reforms start at the district level, school-based pilot programs designed to meet district-wide student improvement targets are encouraged. At Carroll Academy, a K-4 school where nearly all incoming students speak only Spanish, kindergarten teacher Angelica Deleon was part of the team that recommended a shift away from traditional bilingual and ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. The new program is called “50–50.” Starting in kindergarten, some topics, like math, are taught in Spanish and others, such as science, are taught in English. After kindergarten, the balance favors English instruction.

“At this age, the kids are like little sponges,” says Deleon. “They pick up English quickly.”

Carroll Academy began the 50–50 program three years ago. Today, it exceeds expectations.

“Now, because of the 50–50 initiative, when these children are ready to go to third grade we will have only one class of students that will have to take the test in Spanish,” says Carroll Principal Resie Wilson. “We have been an exemplary [rated] school for two years in a row now, and we attribute a lot of that to this [homegrown program].” ■ ■ ■







6

Rank Among U.S. School  
Districts (by size)

280

Number of Schools

258,904

Number of Students

44%

Students Eligible for Free and  
Reduced-Price School Lunch

9%

Students Designated as English  
Language Learners

16,530

Number of Teachers

\$5,630.4

Annual Budget (in millions)



## Broward County Public Schools

Eighth-grader Alleeyah Wade-Lester didn't raise her hand to volunteer to read her expository writing lesson aloud, but when tapped by writing coach Linda Foster, she proved more than ready. With a confident voice complemented by oversized earrings and trendy black glasses, Alleeyah gave a performance that left the other students in her class hungry for more.

The writing task that day at Broward County, Florida's William Dandy Middle School: Where would you want to take your family on vacation and why? Alleeyah's answer: Jamaica, with its "beautiful watermelons...famous curry chicken falling off the bone and you can smell the spices a mile away...Jamaican beef patties made from scratch...and last but not least the rice and beans."

Her class that day was part of the school's "Success Days" initiative where electives are set aside and core subjects, including writing, get double time with spare teachers acting as coaches. While Success Days are a tool invented at Dandy, they arose because the district tapped schools like Dandy to implement a district-wide effort—part of Broward County's seven-goal strategic plan—to push research-based instructional strategies into the classroom.

Meeting the district's student achievement goals was a non-negotiable for the school. But how to get there was a decision left to school leaders and classroom teachers—those closest to students. Empowering schools to come up with creative strategies to meet specific district-level student performance targets is one reason Broward County Public Schools shows up at or near the top of rankings for Florida's big school districts.

For the second year in a row, Broward County is a Broad Prize finalist, once again demonstrating not just overall academic progress but gap-closing success. Between 2005 and 2008, Broward narrowed achievement gaps between African-American and white students in math at all levels and in middle school reading. The gap closures achieved by African-American students are among the top half of fastest closing gaps in the state. The district accomplished the same for its low-income students as compared to the state averages for non-low-income students.



The threads behind the strategy that accomplished these gains date back roughly five years to when district leaders realized their sprawling school district—the sixth largest in the nation—wasn't all it was cracked up to be. Students coming in the door were high-tech; the district wasn't. With more than 36,000 employees, the district should have been run like a Fortune 500 company, only it wasn't. And while select urban districts in other parts of the state and country were making gains with diverse, low-income student populations, Broward wasn't as successful.

"Broward's reality was no different than the challenges faced by urban districts across the nation," says Katherine Blasik, who oversees research and evaluation for the district. "For example, in 2005, we saw a jump in the number of 'F' schools based on the state accountability formula. We still had students who were not proficient in reading and mathematics. We still had students dropping out of school. We had students who had graduated but still required remediation in college. We had students who were ill-prepared for entering the workforce."

Essentially, district leaders, led by Superintendent James Notter, executed a corporate takeover of their own district. Anyone listening to Notter might assume he came from the business





world rather than education. Part of that may be influenced by two years of training at the University of Virginia's Partnership for Leaders in Education, which draws from both the business and education schools there.

Within a few years, the district had put in place a two-pronged turnaround strategy—using technology to engage students and employing sophisticated data analysis to drive teaching and learning—and it began paying dividends. Says Notter: “Our kids live in a tetherless world; we have to meet them there.”

In the sprawling Broward district, neighborhoods are referred to by their ZIP codes. The ZIP known as the poorest and toughest is 33311, home to Dillard High School, the type of school rewarded first by the district with the best technology. In order to meet Notter's goal of reaching students in that “tetherless world,” Broward turned Dillard into a high-tech, performing arts magnet school that draws a mix of students, both from around the district and from the local neighborhood.

Dillard and other Broward magnets, which accept only modest numbers of out-of-neighborhood students, are not elitist schools. But here, and elsewhere in Broward, these high-tech-themed schools do draw academically hungry students

who help to inspire their neighborhood student peers. By their junior year at Dillard, the two groups are barely distinguishable, school leaders report, because non-neighborhood students often encourage others to aim high and attempt more academically ambitious classes.

Enter Dillard's music composition room and you will find specialized computers and recording equipment—which, like other new technology in the district, is paid for by a combination of capital funds and grant money—that rivals professional recording studios in Nashville and Los Angeles. In a classroom for students with poor reading scores, every student has an Internet-connected laptop. And in the multimedia lab, ninth-graders learn how to build websites—part of the district's strategy to appeal to students in the tech-heavy world in which they live.

“I didn't come in here expecting to do web design,” says 18-year-old senior William Ollivierre, recalling his ninth-grade year. “But once I started, I couldn't stop. I built more than one. This got me hooked.” The hook also worked for senior Jose Rodriguez, who arrived at Dillard not thinking of himself as an Advanced Placement (AP) student but ended up taking





four AP courses—and passing all of them. “Labs like this help students find out what they want to be in the future.”

Broward’s cutting-edge technology doesn’t stop there. Teachers across the district are equipped with computer-driven, interactive whiteboards and an online teacher-focused database with 11,000 pre-vetted lesson plans. An online-only “virtual university” for teachers provides more than 200 teacher training courses ranging from classroom management to technology integration. “Anytime, anyplace” learning makes it easy for busy teachers to engage in professional development at convenient times.

Similarly, homebound or traveling students, ranging from the severely disabled to budding artists who are on the road, are able to remotely “attend” Broward’s virtual high school that draws 300 students.

The district-inspired technology push is highly visible to parents.

At Nova Blanche Forman Elementary School, students have video camera-equipped laptops and iPods loaded with instructional materials that they take home with them. One teacher, experimenting with video teacher-parent conferences

for parents who can’t come to the school, sits with a student for a conference, which is recorded by the laptop camera. Then, the student takes home the conference loaded on the iPod. As a result of this technology, teachers have found that parents become more closely connected to the school and more likely to support their children at home.

Better yet, as a result, more family members get involved in overseeing the child’s school performance. Parental forms confirming at-home viewing of video conferences often come back to the school signed by extended family members as well.

During the years of its recent academic growth, Broward’s strategy to boost technology worked hand-in-hand with the district’s simultaneous effort to ramp up reliance on sophisticated student data when making key decisions on teaching and learning.

Take Alleeyah’s essay on Jamaican food. Her Success Days writing class grew out of the district’s emphasis on using data to pinpoint student weaknesses. Only a few years ago, William Dandy was a D-rated school. That school turned around by tapping into rich data sources provided by the district. At the





beginning of the year, at the click of a mouse, teachers at Dandy and elsewhere in Broward accessed achievement data on every student through the district’s “virtual counselor” interface, learning exactly where each student stands on individual skills. Teachers then set year-long student achievement goals—by class and by student—based on their incoming students’ prior achievement data. The district similarly targeted teacher professional development to help teachers meet those goals, with all professional development courses designed and approved based on proven data and teaching strategies.

Then during the year, teachers continued tracking student data with mini-assessments, which were analyzed for ways to tinker with the academic calendar to quickly adjust teaching as needed before the more important benchmark tests. Broward teachers carry around bar-graph charts telling them where their class (and individual students) stands.

All that analysis led Dandy leaders to a solution for the school’s failing status: offer students Success Days to focus on a handful of key skills on which they need to work. Classes combine for team teaching (if a child didn’t adjust to one teacher’s style, perhaps the lessons will stick when taught by another teacher).

The Success Days become more intense—as many as three or four days a week—as the FCATs (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) approach in March.

District leaders credit that one move with turning Dandy from a “D” school to an “A” school in just a few years. “We went from collecting the data to analyzing it,” says Dandy Principal Casandra Robinson. And so more Broward students can benefit from Dandy’s solution, the district is now offering “Success Days” training to other Broward schools so they can duplicate what Dandy accomplished.

The new approach appears to be working for Alleeyah. She scored high on the writing FCAT, more than enough to bolster her dreams of becoming a University of Florida “Gator.” ■ ■ ■





15

Rank Among U.S. School  
Districts (by size)

110

Number of Schools

155,618

Number of Students

41%

Students Eligible for Free and  
Reduced-Price School Lunch

15%

Students Designated as English  
Language Learners

11,760

Number of Teachers

\$1,700

Annual Budget (in millions)



## Gwinnett County Public Schools

Meet “stretch” student Tyshane Shannon, an 18-year-old high school senior with a quick smile and an honest sense of his pluses and minuses. Tyshane is a self-described so-so student who rarely studies. Often, his time is taken up working a landscaping job.

Tyshane, however, knows something else about himself. When he hears or reads something just once, he remembers it. Thinking that meant he could tackle challenging coursework in high school despite his lackluster grades, he inquired about taking an Advanced Placement (AP) class—and was welcomed.

At Berkmar High School in Georgia’s Gwinnett County Public Schools, Tyshane is considered an ideal candidate for a district-wide initiative that persuades students to stretch themselves academically. While many American high schools talk about encouraging students to challenge themselves with AP courses, Berkmar and other Gwinnett high schools use velvet hammers to aggressively steer students into advanced classes.

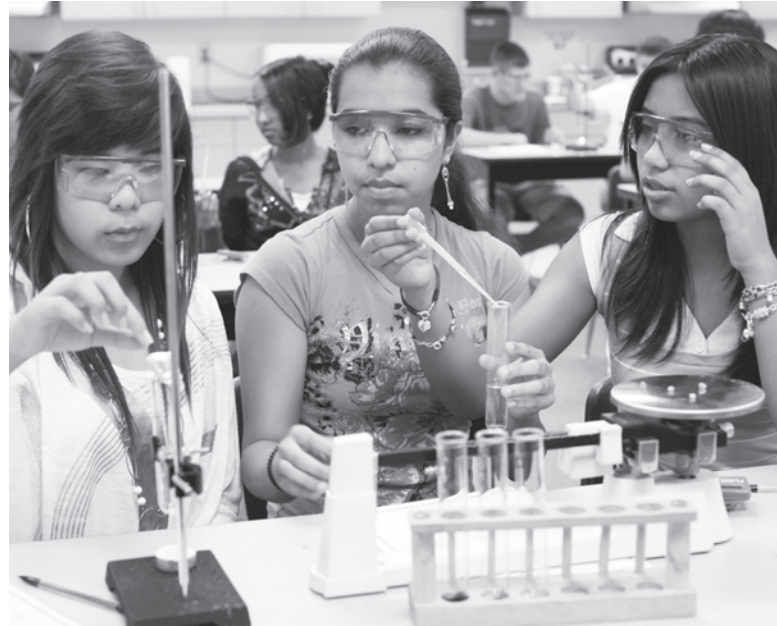
That stretch strategy, launched in 2004, starts with encouraging all ninth-graders to take AP human geography. “It’s all part of the strategy of taking incoming ninth-graders wary of failure and figuring out ways they can experience success in the classroom,” says Berkmar Principal Kendall Johnson.

The approach also calls for turning teachers into recruiters.

AP physics teacher Walt Snow describes his recruitment efforts as “redefining what failure means.” He looks for students with academic profiles that predict they would score no higher than a 1 on an AP test, the lowest score on a five-point scale, and encourages them to give AP physics a try. “If I can get that student up to a 2, for me that’s a victory,” Snow says. “I’m as proud of that kid as someone who gets a 5 but was predicted to get a 5.”

Although it may sound counter-intuitive, the strategy works. A substantial number of non-traditional AP students end up scoring a 3 or higher on the AP exams, earning advanced credit. Those who fall short still develop confidence and prove they can learn rigorous college preparatory material.

“I’m working with students who would never make the cut in other [districts],” says Snow. “We don’t cut them. We do just the reverse. If they want out they have to fight their way out. If



they want to drop out, we get other teachers involved, plus the parents.”

Fast-rising participation rates among African-American and Hispanic students taking the SAT, ACT and AP exams illustrates one reason why Gwinnett County Public Schools, where 29 percent of the students are African-American and 22 percent are Hispanic, is a first-time finalist for The Broad Prize. Another indicator: In 2008, in reading and math at all grade levels, Gwinnett schools—where 40 percent of the students at that time qualified for subsidized lunches—outperformed other districts in Georgia that serve low-income students.

Gwinnett’s strategy of pushing low-performing students to stretch academically started with top district leadership. “I don’t know why schools ever got so far into remediation,” says Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks. “Unless we get students that are behind into higher level classes, such as AP, you’re never going to close the gaps. Forget remediation; talk acceleration.”

Anyone trying to understand how Gwinnett County Public Schools manages to post impressive academic results despite steadily rising numbers of poor and minority students



needs to look back into history a bit to study the collision of two forces.

In the 1980s, this suburban Atlanta district was one of the fastest growing counties in the country, well on its way to becoming the nation's 15th largest school district it is today. But by the early 1990s, it became clear that the Gwinnett district was going to be more than just big; it was going to be very diverse, which is exactly what happened.

At about that time, Georgia adopted statewide “outcome-based” learning standards—defining skills required at each grade level—for all Georgia students. In Gwinnett County and elsewhere, many parents viewed the changes with suspicion. Given the rapid demographic changes, with more low-income and minority students moving into the district, would these be “minimum” standards, dragging down expectations for all students?

“There was some legitimate fear and concern,” says School Board Chairman Daniel Seckinger. Parents didn’t like the “feel good” lessons their children brought home. “Speaking just for me, it was a matter of common sense. The only way to change things was to get involved, which I did,” says Seckinger, explaining why he ran for the school board.

Seckinger and the rest of the school board teamed up with Wilbanks to launch Gwinnett in a different direction. Hundreds of hours of efforts by teachers, parents and school officials led eventually to Gwinnett adopting its own academic standards, far tougher than anything offered by the state. The new standards nailed down rigorous learning objectives for every grade and every subject.

The final standards were codified in a living document dubbed “AKS,” for Academic Knowledge and Skills. Unlike most school improvement master plans, this one never drew dust on the shelf. The district annually revisits the AKS to ensure they are continually aligned to state and local standards, and every five years or so the district conducts a deeper review by subject area. Today, in part because of the AKS, Gwinnett County schools are on a far different trajectory than neighboring districts.

What’s unusual about the AKS is that the acronym is so widely known in this sprawling county. Anyone stopping to chat with parents at the Mall of Georgia or at the AAA Gwinnett Braves stadium would discover that those parents not only recognize the acronym but know a fair amount



about what those standards demand of their own children. Where else in the United States does that happen?

The learning standards embraced by Gwinnettians—yes, that’s what they call themselves—are a main reason why these county schools are the pride of the state. “Gwinnett County Public Schools has grown larger, poorer and more diverse; yet levels of student performance are higher than ever,” explains Area Superintendent John Green.

In addition to the AKS standards, Gwinnett has adopted a performance-based culture, where everyone from the superintendent to teachers is held accountable for student achievement. Moreover, “living” school improvement plans, which are regularly updated and tracked for results, ensure that schools continuously strive for gains in student achievement.

The district’s success provides social glue for the county, easing some concerns that arose across socio-economic groups from rapid demographic changes. Today, even though one in seven students receives some type of English-as-a-second-language assistance, Gwinnett schools succeed.

The percentage of African-American and Hispanic students taking and passing AP and college exams exceeds that of their

peers statewide. For example, 12 percent of the African-American high school students in Gwinnett took at least one AP course in the spring of 2008. Among those, 47 percent scored a passing 3 or above on the exam. In contrast, in Georgia only 8 percent of African-American students take AP courses, and only 23 percent of those pass the test

Teachers at Berkmar High School are baffled by the national debate about whether admitting all takers into Advanced Placement courses dumps down the curriculum. Look at our success record, they say—this 90 percent minority urban high school will administer 1,400 AP exams to more than 700 students this year.

Poor and minority students are not the only beneficiaries of district-wide reforms. Gwinnett also aligned special education instruction to the AKS standards so special education students would be held to the same high standards as all children. “You won’t see teachers teaching off-grade-level content,” says Special Education Executive Director Susan White.

High school senior Anthony Roden is one beneficiary of that shift. After entering the ninth grade with a third-grade reading level, Anthony is graduating this year after passing all five









parts of the Georgia high school graduation exam. “I’ve seen some dramatic improvements,” says Roden. “It has really amazed me.” Midway through his senior year, Roden tested as an eleventh-grade reader.

Both Anthony and Tyshane, the “stretch” student taking AP courses, are living examples that Gwinnett’s policy of reaching out to often overlooked students is working.

In his junior year at Berkmar Tyshane took AP U.S. history and scored a 3. In his senior year, he’s taking two AP economics classes as well as AP world history.

“Here at Berkmar, they have a doctrine that if you put kids into advanced classes they will rise to the occasion. We proved that,” says Tyshane. “Look at me. Academically, I had been written off. Nobody expected me to succeed.” ■ ■ ■



32

Rank Among U.S. School  
Districts (by size)

93

Number of Schools

87,499

Number of Students

68%

Students Eligible for Free and  
Reduced-Price School Lunch

24%

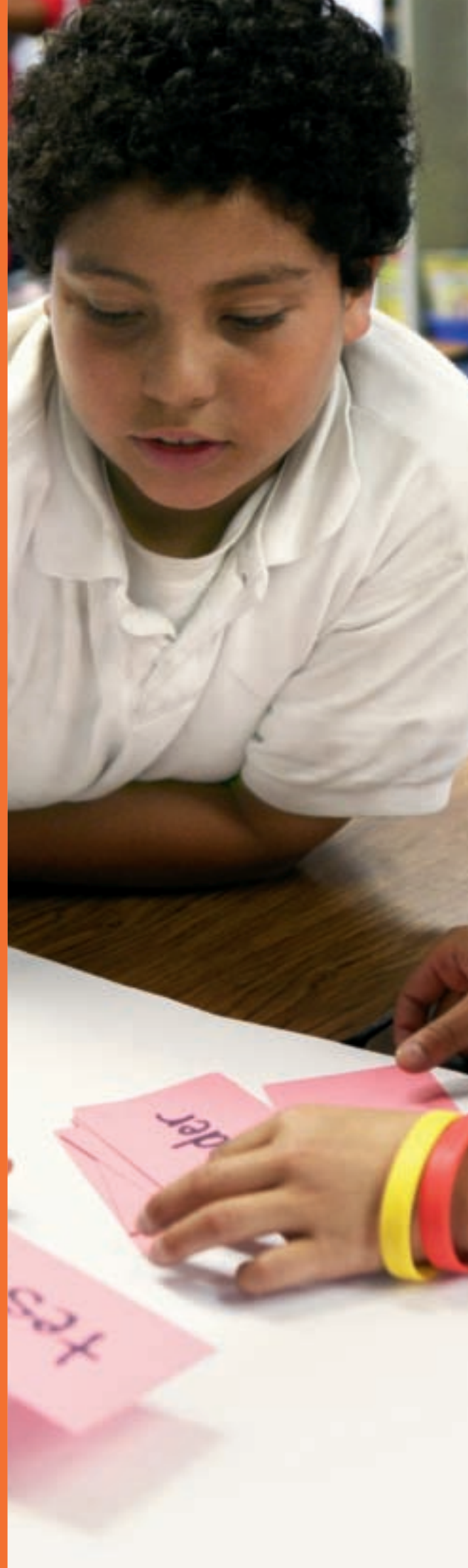
Students Designated as English  
Language Learners

4,076

Number of Teachers

\$909.2

Annual Budget (in millions)



## Long Beach Unified School District

Here in Long Beach, Calif., Redondo Avenue runs directly to the beach, neatly splitting the city into east and west. The east side has long enjoyed cool California bungalows, trendy restaurants and great schools. In contrast, the west side has housed an oil refinery, low-income apartments, and until recently, largely unsuccessful schools.

While the economic dividing line in Long Beach remains as steady as ever, school reputations have not remained the same. Today, schools such as Webster and Roosevelt elementary schools on the poorer west side are the academic superstars, surpassing many of the schools on the more affluent east side.

Not many cities in America have seen as dramatic a turnaround in their schools, which explains why Long Beach is once again a Broad Prize finalist, its fifth year as a finalist for an honor it won in 2003. Just the latest example of its ongoing success: Between 2005 and 2008, both participation rates and passing rates for African-American and Hispanic students taking Advanced Placement exams in core subjects increased in Long Beach—typically, these two rates move in opposite directions. Hispanic students now also make up the largest subgroup of Long Beach students taking the AP.

To grasp the turnaround requires understanding what people at all levels of the district commonly refer to as the “Long Beach Way,” a unique bottom-up, top-down relationship where the district office never tries radical reforms, never pushes beyond what local school staff can realistically absorb. Instead, reforms are deliberately selected based on proven results in the field and always paired with intensive professional development.

Although many school districts often rapidly introduce new programs without the necessary wraparound support—simultaneous teacher training, allowing sufficient time for teachers to fulfill new expectations or seeking teacher buy-in or on-the-ground feedback—in Long Beach it’s all about methodical, data-driven, supported improvement.

Take Long Beach’s Signal Hill Elementary as an example of how this all works.



Perched high above the city on the grounds where oil was first discovered in California, the school is surrounded by rusting oil derricks and wrapped in a tall metal security fence.

The odds are against these students—nearly every child comes from a high-poverty family. Among the parents of the more than 700 students there, maybe a dozen graduated from a four-year college. However, measured by the state’s Academic Performance Index, Signal Hill is the 11th best-ranked school within this 93-school district. On a list of the most-alike schools in California—schools with the same profile of poverty and ethnic mix—Signal Hill ranks first...by a comfortable margin.

During a school walk-through, the Long Beach Way starts to become visible as you see the implementation of academic initiatives that grew organically in one or more Long Beach schools years ago and then were harnessed by the district and gradually introduced in low-performing schools like Signal Hill.

For example, in Nicole Kelly’s fifth-grade class, students are engaged in MAP2D (Math Achievement Program Professional Development), the district’s signature math instruction





sequence. Developed by a Long Beach elementary school teacher, MAP2D was first tried in five low-performing elementary schools in 2004–05 and has since been expanded throughout the district.

Kelly’s lesson today is a review of multiplication and division of fractions. She models the instruction using an overhead projector and then weaves her way into small group instruction, where students reach a consensus on the correct way to solve a problem. Finally, Kelly randomly selects one student to present that group’s solution in front of the entire class.

What Kelly does sounds deceptively simple. But when properly implemented, MAP2D draws on nationally acclaimed best practices of collaborative learning, heterogeneous grouping and public presentation (valuable for English-learner students)—and propels math scores upward.

The secret to success is proper implementation. In Long Beach, that’s not left to chance. Similar to many high-performing districts, Long Beach invests heavily in establishing data-driven instruction. But unique in Long Beach is the use of data to drive refinements to professional development. Kelly’s teach-

ing method—everything from the problem chosen, to the time spent teaching it, to the exact questions she asks of the class—has been informed by data, starting with isolating missed math questions on tests.

“When we collect data that a particular math standard is not being learned by our students, we will commonly write an instructional strategy for it,” says math curriculum leader Becky Afghani. “This is especially important if we find that the approach the textbook has taken to teach the concept is confusing to students and/or teachers. Our instructional strategies break down how to teach a concept or skill. The strategies are taught to teachers in our professional development sessions, especially when they are new, and then posted on our district intranet for all teachers to access.”

Using the same professional development strategy—slow and steady, always trying for continuous improvements revealed by data—the district is now working to broaden the impact of MAP2D to the middle school level by training middle school teachers to deploy a version of it appropriate for higher grades.

Down the hall from Kelly’s class, teacher Jamaica Ross takes her fourth-grade students through an advanced lesson on “academic vocabulary,” another game-changing district-wide





effort, for which teachers were provided extensive professional development to learn how to infuse rigor in student learning. Words that Ross regularly weaves into her teaching—such as inference, cause, effect, consequences, sequences, classify, contrast, summary—are words these young children don’t typically hear at home. But in the academic world, these words challenge them to use higher order thinking skills or propel them to learn to higher standards.

Signal Hill Principal Karen Williams is aware of the national debate over whether schools can truly educate poor and minority children absent dramatic social improvements in community and family life. She just shakes her head at the thought of waiting for society to improve. “It’s just crazy. We have living proof of children we get results from.” At Signal Hill, teachers succeed with the kids who walk in the door.

The Long Beach Way dates back to a period of turmoil in the mid 1990s when the district was yo-yoing between being a bottom-up district (site-based control) and top down (superintendent-controlled). Adding to the stress were these developments: California began to have doubts about

“whole reading” instruction (where students were expected to absorb literacy skills absent extensive phonics instruction), local universities began complaining that Long Beach students were unprepared for college and local business leaders began worrying about losing Navy and aircraft assembly jobs in this port town that was home to a McDonnell Douglas aircraft manufacturing plant.

The future of the city lies in the education of our children, community leaders concluded. That meant schools like Signal Hill, which at that time was the district’s second-worst performing school, were not acceptable.

The district’s response, designed to wring better performance from all schools, began with new discipline policies like school uniforms in K-8 schools (one of the first in the country to do so), a K-3 literacy push that eventually led to district-wide adoption of Open Court (a phonics-heavy reading program considered the antithesis of whole language), intensive data-driven professional development, and a push for “seamless education”—a relentless curricular alignment from kindergarten through college and classroom lesson pacing so that every topic was covered in every school with roughly the same teaching rigor, style and timing.



As always, however, the changes occurred “The Long Beach Way.” The new reading program, for example, started as a collaborative effort between teachers and administrators, narrowing five phonics programs to one. And even though they eventually settled on Open Court, based on teacher and administrator weigh-in, the district added whole language elements to enrich learning.

But to have a true impact on college remediation and workplace readiness, the district had to make major progress with its 10 high schools as well. For that task, Long Beach embraced AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) programs, which build student interest in and preparedness for college at a relatively young age. Originally launched in the district’s secondary schools, AVID targets the forgotten student-in-the-middle, namely C- and B-average low-income students whose parents never went to college—a pretty apt description of many Long Beach students.

While many districts adopt AVID to scoop up neglected students, the Long Beach Way is once again revealed by the district’s unique use of AVID. The program includes elective classes as well as school-wide instructional strategies, such as how to use the two-column Cornell Notes, a tool for absorbing information in a class lecture where notes are divided into

two sections, with the actual notes on the right side and “key points” on the left. In Long Beach, based on the demonstrable improvement AVID strategies have yielded, teachers in non-AVID classes are trained to use these teaching techniques. Similarly, the district makes gifted teaching strategies available to all teachers—regardless of whether the students being taught are gifted, regular or remediation.

Some districts might consider the AVID and gifted programs at odds, serving students at opposite ends of the learning spectrum. But in Long Beach, teaching techniques such as differentiated instruction are considered key components of both programs. How that works can be seen in Edmee Myrick’s first-grade class at Tincher Preparatory School, a K-8 school in Long Beach.

“I give individual spelling lessons to all my students,” Myrick says in a focus group of teachers. Not a teacher there raised an eyebrow in response—an indication of how routine that is considered. “It’s something I was taught by the district to do in gifted training. You’re meeting kids at their level.”

A visit to her classroom bore that out. After displaying a stack of spelling tests, each geared to the level of that student, Myrick launched into a reading lesson, dividing the group by abilities.

By 2006, the district was piloting AVID classes—with the combined AVID/gifted training—down to fourth and fifth grades. Again, that’s The Long Beach Way. Settle on a solution and then slowly expand it while deepening professional development to ensure that staff who are critical to successful execution come along on the ride.

One of Long Beach’s long-time educators, who both witnessed and then helped engineer the district’s significant transformation (including coining “The Long Beach Way”), is Superintendent Christopher Steinhauser. He attended Long Beach schools as a child, student-taught here and then made his first mark as leader after turning around Signal Hill back in the year when it was a struggling school, the first of many low-income schools here that underwent transformations.

As recently as seven years ago, Redondo Avenue still served as the dividing line between good and bad schools. No more. Says Steinhauser, “Today, that distinction is totally lost...You can go to every quadrant of this district and find a distinguished school.” ■ ■ ■







146

Rank Among U.S. School  
Districts (by size)

40

Number of Schools

38,878

Number of Students

73%

Students Eligible for Free and  
Reduced-Price School Lunch

26%

Students Designated as English  
Language Learners

2,451

Number of Teachers

\$348.5

Annual Budget (in millions)



## Socorro Independent School District

Excited about the prospect of helping other students, third-grader Lorene Pinales squirms in her seat as literacy coach Matthew Gorges spins through lessons for struggling second-graders. Lorene is the big kid, the role model in this catch-up tutoring class held during the school day.

Lorene expounds on the travails these second-graders can expect next year. “They will have to pass a [state] test to go to fourth grade,” says Lorene, 9, her eyes growing wide with mock horror. But Lorene has been there, done that—and she’s safely on her way to fourth grade.

Only a year ago, Lorene herself was a struggling reader, but thanks to boosts from school tutors and other district-level reforms, she now serves as a role model at Escontrias Elementary, a high-poverty school located only a mile from the Mexican border in the hard-pressed lower valley region outside El Paso, Texas.

In previous years, Escontrias and other schools in the Socorro Independent School District scraped the test score bottom. No longer is this the case. In 2008, Socorro schools outperformed other Texas schools serving students with similar income levels in reading and math at all grade levels. Between 2005 and 2008, Socorro schools were more successful than the state at increasing the percentage of students overall—and low-income and Hispanic students taken separately—who achieved proficiency in reading and math at all levels.

Today, the Socorro district stands as one of the most improved urban districts in the United States, making it a proud first-time finalist for The Broad Prize.

But what changes in this border district’s history explain such gains?

What happened at Escontrias is a window into a district-wide reform. Before the 2007-08 school year, this elementary school offered little support for teaching and learning. There was no pullout class for poor readers, little help for struggling teachers and no effective accountability system. When the bell rang, teachers simply closed their doors: visitors of any kind were not expected.

Today, by contrast, Escontrias teachers embrace the district’s relatively new approach to accountability. Not only have



they become accustomed to a new open-door policy, but they also expect visitors with feedback and welcome the extra help. Escontrias Principal Magdalena Aguilar, who in 2007 was strategically placed in her school by district leadership looking for a strong new leader who could infuse fresh ideas and strategies, quickly pulled together a team of seasoned administrators and tasked them with providing teachers with specific support. Similarly, she surrounded struggling students with literacy coaches who would provide them with adequate help. Indeed, in every nook of this school, quick-stop tutoring is underway.

The results show: In just one year after she took over the school, science scores at Escontrias rose dramatically by 29 percent, math scores by 27 percent and reading scores by 16 percent, all part of a district-led effort to help faltering students recover and thrive.

Aguilar is not the only school leader newly appointed by district leaders in 2007. In fact, top district leadership was determined to match strong, proven effective leaders to school needs in order to introduce dramatic changes necessary to boost student performance.



Socorro High School, for example, struggled for several years to make its adequate yearly progress goals. The high school is 98 percent Hispanic, and 85 percent of students come from low-income families. In 2007, Miguel Serrano was promoted from assistant principal to principal. As it turned out, Serrano, like Aguilar, came in bubbling with ideas he had never before been able to implement.

Before Serrano headed the school, struggling students fell between the cracks, teachers feared gang violence and test scores mirrored the unruliness. In just one year, Serrano changed the school culture. For example, students accustomed to not turning in homework found themselves escorted to after-school “No Zero” sessions—as in, let’s get that “zero” grade off the books—where tutors helped them complete homework assignments. On top of that, Serrano put in place Saturday schools for failing students and pull-out programs, where students faltering in certain science skills are gathered during the day for targeted re-teaching.

The entire list of district and locally created programs aimed at turning faltering students into college-ready material at this school takes up two typed pages. And the results resemble what happened at Escontrias. In just one year, science scores on the state test rose by 14 percent, math by 12 percent and

reading by 5 percent. Another payoff: Anyone walking through the high school’s hallways during class changes can observe what teachers report—that the school is orderly and safe.

The change in the school’s expectations and climate happened so fast that students barely knew what to make of it. In previous years, Gilbert Gomez, 17, thought nothing of failing to turn in his homework. Then came the No Zero Zone.

“The first time I got called it was weird. I hadn’t done my science homework. I get kind of lazy sometimes,” says Gilbert. “I thought at first it would be a waste of time until I went more than once. My grade in science went from failing to passing.”

Salvador Perez, 17, was just as shocked when he was told to report to Saturday school for seven weeks from 8 a.m. to noon. “My geometry grade was in the 50s. I was disappointed I had to go, but it helped. I now have an 82 average in geometry.”

Both Aguilar and Serrano are talented school leaders who invented new ways of reaching students. But district leadership also deserves credit for strategically placing them—and others like them—as turnaround principals, and then for having empowered them with reams of data on individual students, classes and entire schools.





“The technology we have is phenomenal,” says Stacy Sonnier, a K-8 principal who, because of district-provided student data is never unprepared when a parent calls to check on a child. In a moment, she can retrieve that student’s academic history through the district’s online database.

Turning Socorro from a just-getting-by district to an academically ambitious district required promoting principals such as Aguilar and Serrano, but those promotions wouldn’t have worked absent district insistence that all Socorro staff abide by open-door collaboration.

In a district where the typical student comes from a low-income family and English is their second language, switching to a collaborative teaching and learning culture was a bumpy ride. Along the way, some principals—and even the superintendent who sparked many of the reforms—departed, along with many teachers who preferred the old way of teaching.

As the data reveal, however, efforts to encourage collaboration among teachers and administrators transformed the culture of Socorro schools for the better. “Expectations changed,” says Lori Springer-Salazar, a special education diagnostician at Socorro High School. “Failure was not tolerated...Our administrative team is never in the office; they’re in the classroom

and they’re here on weekends. You can drive by on Sunday and see the administrators parking lot full. When you see the leadership working so hard how can you not want to join in? And then kids started buying in. It was a total team effort.”

Teachers also found themselves playing new roles—assigned tutoring functions they’d never had. Drama teacher Troy Herbort found his schedule rearranged with mandatory every-other-day tutoring in a ninth-grade reading class. That program (ARMI, for Academic Reinforcement Mentoring Initiative) is district-wide. “It was an adjustment,” concedes Herbort. “Fortunately, our administration didn’t just divide us up and place us in any class. I’m in theater; I make my living with words, so this was nice. I was worried I might end up in chemistry.”

In a freshman biology class, science teacher Mona Abdelfattah helps her colleague teach as students dissect a fetal pig. “Here I’m a co-teacher, helping students who have not done well in the past.” One of those students, Diana Holguin, 17, says the tutoring was the reason she was passing biology. “I especially needed help with the human body system, just getting the bones and names right.”







In addition to the creation of collaborative teaching environments, Socorro's academic gains between 2005 and 2008 also resulted from district leaders' call for all schools to use highly detailed pacing guides for nearly every subject in every grade. The district also made sure schools built in common planning time when teachers could work together to use assessment data. And, Socorro leaders made a district-wide push to reach struggling students through widespread re-teaching and tutoring. In all schools, as soon as students show signs of being at risk of drifting away, teachers and administrators reach out to re-engage them academically.

"It's not about getting kids to pass [the state test] any more. That's not even up for discussion," says Laura Valera, a middle school science teacher, of the new Socorro culture. "It's about how much more you can do for them. We don't allow them to not do well." ■ ■ ■



## The Broad Prize Selection Jury

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The Broad Prize selection jury is comprised of nationally prominent individuals from business and industry, government and public service. The jury reviews the statistical data and site visit reports for each finalist district and chooses the winner of The Broad Prize.

### Henry Cisneros

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Former U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development

### James Hunt, Jr.

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Former Governor of North Carolina

### Shirley Ann Jackson

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### Roderick Paige

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### Richard Riley

Senior Partner, Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP  
Former U.S. Secretary of Education

### Donna Shalala

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### Margaret Spellings

President and CEO, Margaret Spellings and Company  
Former U.S. Secretary of Education

### Andrew Stern

International President, Service Employees International Union

## The Broad Prize Review Board

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A distinguished group of the country's top education 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 100 eligible school districts to the five finalists.

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### MPR Associates

One of the nation's leading education research and consulting firms, Berkeley, Calif.-based MPR Associates manages the rigorous and comprehensive quantitative data collection and analysis process for The Broad Prize.

### SchoolWorks

SchoolWorks is an education consulting company based in Beverly, Mass. Using a research-based rubric for district quality, SchoolWorks 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.

### Richard Whitmire

Richard Whitmire is a veteran education reporter and one of the founding journalists of USA Today, where he was a member of the editorial board and wrote about education issues. In 2004, he concluded a journalism fellowship at the University of Maryland in which he

investigated why boys are falling behind in school. His book, *Why Boys Fail*, will be published in January. Early in his career, Whitmire taught high school English in New York. He currently serves as immediate past president of the National Education Writers Association. Drawing on his dual expertise in journalism and K-12 education issues, Whitmire serves as project journalist for the 2009 Broad Prize, compiling the findings of The Broad Prize process into best practice pieces like this brochure.



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