

## MULTI-YEAR PROGRAMS

### **A+ Unlimited Potential (A+UP)**

- About: A+UP is a personalized learning micro-school serving middle-grades students in Houston's Museum District, and was launched by Houston A+ Challenge in partnership with the Museum of Fine Arts, Health Science Museum, Children's Museum, Holocaust Museum, and Houston Zoo.
- Scope: A+UP served 40 students per year for three years, 2013-2016.
- Legacy: Positive academic and personal outcomes for the 40+ students served; first model in Greater Houston of personalized learning, an approach that is redefining education nationally; model set to open as a charter school run by A+UP, an independent nonprofit.

### **Baylor College of Medicine Summer Science Internship**

- About: An idea born of the Regional Faculty and funded by the McGovern Foundation, the BCM Summer Science Internship was an intensive six-week research experience for student-teacher pairs from low-income schools designed to foster students' interest in science careers and increase teachers' understanding of science in practice.
- Scope: The program served three to six student-teacher pairs per year during the program's run, 2002-2008.
- Legacy: Though the program was ultimately ended due to its small scope and high cost, it uniquely provided dozens of teachers with experience as working scientists, an experience that impacted their work with hundreds of students annually.
- See also: Regional Faculty

### **Beacon Schools**

- About: As one of Houston Annenberg Challenge's original projects, Beacon Schools undertook multi-year, whole-school reform projects supported by The Annenberg Foundation and served as examples of quality and reform for surrounding Lamplighter schools.
- Scope: 11 schools in five districts were designated as Beacons in 1997 and pursued their reform projects with Annenberg support through 2001.
- Legacy: Many Beacon Schools continue to set the standard for excellence and innovation for Houston-area public schools.
- See also: Lamplighter Schools

### **Challenge Early College High School**

- About: Modeled on LaGuardia Middle College, this school was the first in Texas to offer the early college model of high school, where students pursue a high school diploma and Associate's degree concurrently. Challenge Early College was co-founded by Houston ISD, Houston A+ Challenge, and Houston Community

College, and was part of the Houston Schools for a New Society partnership supported by the Carnegie Foundation.

- Scope: Launched in 2003 with 100 students, CECHS now serves 450 students.
- Legacy: The early college model has been replicated in several other Houston schools and in dozens of early college high schools across the state. CECHS continues to be among the best district high schools in Houston, earning a gold medal and a ranking of 78<sup>th</sup> in the nation in US News and World Report's 2016 Best High Schools list.
- See also: Houston Schools for a New Society

## **Challenge Network**

- About: In response to research indicating that middle school is a crucial point of intervention to ensure students are on track for college and careers, A+ launched the Challenge Network to strengthen instruction and leadership at partner schools, which received two years of intensive coaching in literacy, numeracy and leadership.
- Scope: Over four school years (2010-2015), A+ partnered with 25 schools serving more than 30,000 students across six districts.
- Legacy: Many schools saw increased test scores in literacy and numeracy; hundreds of coached teachers and leaders grew in their professional skills and their growth mindsets; development of Professional Learning Community culture created lasting collaboration culture at many schools; A+ continues to work with Challenge Network schools on literacy, numeracy and leadership through our Strengthen program area.
- See also: Middle School Leadership Academy (MSLA)

## **Critical Friends Groups**

- About: Developed by the National School Reform Faculty through the Annenberg Center for School Reform, Critical Friends Group protocols for collaboration within and among schools helped educators approach the vast, messy, necessary work of reforming schools.
- Scope: More than 1,000 educators and administrators – and even a handful of students – were trained in CFG protocols over the training program's 12-year run. Houston Annenberg/A+ was one of hundreds of organizations around the world offering CFG training.
- Legacy: CFG training cracked open the problem of isolation within and among schools in Houston and strengthened educators' willingness to welcome external eyes. The protocol was baked into all concurrent Houston Annenberg/A+ work (Beacon & Lamplighter Schools, Summer Institute), gave birth to initiatives like Teacher as Researcher Grants and the Executive Leadership Council, and laid groundwork for reforms like on-campus instructional coaching and teacher collaboration time built in to school schedules.
- See also: Fondren Reforming Schools Summer Institute, Executive Leadership Council/Regional Senior Fellows, Regional Faculty, CFG as Research Team/Teacher as Researcher Grants

## **CFG as Research Team (CART) Grants (aka Teacher as Researcher Grants)**

- About: Seeking to quantify the impact of Critical Friends Group trainings, A+ invited CFG teams of teachers and district administrators to partner with professional researchers from local universities to undertake two-year studies of local reforms in literacy, fine arts, English language learner support, and other topics.
- Scope: Two-year grants of \$10,000 were made to 5-10 research teams in 2004, 2006 and 2007.
- Legacy: The program strengthened participating teachers' understanding of measuring impact, gave all Houston educators valuable insight into the success of various reforms around the city, and raised awareness of this work when teams presented their findings at Houston's Reforming Schools Summer Institute and the National School Reform Faculty's annual Research Forum.
- See also: Critical Friends Groups

## **Empowerment High School**

- About: One of four schools founded as part of the Houston Schools for a New Society program and inspired by the work of the Coalition of Essential Schools, Empowerment High School was co-founded by Houston ISD and Houston A+ Challenge to be a small school for Houston's Third Ward neighborhood modeled on the successful Quest High School in Humble ISD.
- Scope: EHS launched in 2005 with 100 ninth grade students. In 2010, it merged with South Early College High School and currently operates as an academy serving 75 students on the campus of HISD's Jones Futures Academy.
- Legacy: Empowerment High School, its successor, South Early College, and its host, Jones Futures Academy (formerly Jones High School) have all struggled to increase student achievement and maintain enrollment – a testament to the difficulty of reforming high schools to better serve those communities most in need of radical improvement and top-quality educational opportunities.
- See also: Houston Schools for a New Society, Houston Academy for International Studies, Challenge Early College High School, Sharpstown International School

## **Executive Leadership Council (formerly: Regional Senior Fellows)**

- About: Beginning in 2006-2007, A+ convened the region's sub-superintendent district executives for networking and collaboration.
- Scope: At its height, the Council drew 35-50 leaders to three annual gatherings facilitated by a national leadership consultant. A smaller version of the program continues today.
- Legacy: Relationships forged among the region's top education leaders continue to bear fruitful collaborations.
- See also: Critical Friends Groups

## **ExxonMobil K-5 Math Initiative**

- ExxonMobil and Houston A+ Challenge worked together to place and train full-time math coaches at elementary and middle schools in Houston ISD.
- Scope: The program ran from 2003 to 2010 and brought math coaches to 20 elementary and middle schools.
- Legacy: The addition of math coaches in grades K-8 led to phenomenal gains - sometimes as high as 20 points – at schools serving thousands of students. Though ExxonMobil eventually decided to steer its education dollars toward technologies that personalize math instruction for students, the K-5 Math Initiative still stands as a powerful proof point for on-campus instructional coaching.

## **Focused Impact Grants (aka Challenge School Network)**

- About: Houston A+ Challenge chose to continue to invest in work begun by Beacon and Lamplighter schools by awarding grants supporting continued reform in math, literacy and fine arts. Grantees participated in ongoing professional development and networking with A+.
- Scope: Fourteen schools received five-year grants in 2003-04.
- Legacy: With support from A+, some of the region's top schools – including Quest in Humble ISD and Poe Elementary in Houston ISD – were able to continue leading the region in innovation, collaboration, and instruction.
- See also: Beacon Schools, Lamplighter Schools

## **Fondren Reforming Schools Summer Institute**

- About: An early addition to Houston Annenberg Challenge's signature programs, Summer Institute convened program participants and other reform-minded educators from the Houston region for three to five days of learning, collaboration and networking.
- Scope: The Institute was held each summer from 1998 to 2010 and drew around 400 participants each year.
- Legacy: As the annual hub for all Houston Annenberg/A+ programs and partners, the institute stoked all reform work in Houston for more than a decade.

## **Gulf Coast PASS**

- About: A collaboration among the University of Texas-Austin, Houston A+ Challenge, and the Institute for Evidence-Based Change, Gulf Coast PASS sought to strengthen the high school to college graduation pipeline and address the growing demand for 'middle skills' professionals (some post-high school education) by partnering community colleges and high schools to work on college readiness, college counseling, curriculum alignment, remedial education, and college student support services.
- Scope: Nine community college districts and 13 ISDs participated in the program, which included three annual day-long convenings, from 2011 to 2015.
- Legacy: Gulf Coast PASS was the first network of its kind and served as a model for collaborations across the country at a time when interest in community

colleges and middle skills is growing. In addition to the program's real-time successes – one participating high school reported a 300% increase in students applying to college – participants are equipped with research, proven strategies and local relationships to continue making change.

- See also: Preparing to Dream

## **Houston Academy for International Studies**

- About: Founded in partnership with Asia Society of Houston, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Houston ISD, Houston Academy for International Studies is one of four small high schools founded as part of the Houston Schools for a New Society initiative. In addition to foreign language study, the program integrates internships, service learning and independent study.
- Scope: The school opened in 2007 with 100 students and now serves around 430 students.
- Legacy: Houston Academy for International Studies continues to be one of the city's highest-performing district high schools, earning a silver medal and ranking of 94<sup>th</sup> in Texas on US News and World Report's 2016 Best High Schools list. It serves as a model for other public international schools around the state.
- See also: Houston Schools for a New Society, Sharpstown International High School, Empowerment High School, Challenge Early College High School

## **Houston Schools for a New Society (HSNS; formerly High School Redesign)**

- About: HSNS was a massive initiative to restructure Houston's comprehensive high schools to be more personalized for students. With leadership funding from the Carnegie Foundation, additional funding from eight local foundations and contributions from dozens of partners, HSNS worked with schools to implement a range of reforms: creating small academies within larger schools; founding small, focused schools; implementing adult advocate programs that gave students four-year mentor relationships; increasing teacher collaboration through Critical Friend Group protocols; adding full-time literacy coaches to school faculties; re-engaging dropouts; expanding teachers' real-world understanding through externships; redesigning master schedules to include advisory periods and teacher collaboration time; and increasing collaboration and instructional support at the district level.
- Scope: With 23 of Houston's 24 comprehensive high schools participating for most of the program's nine-year run (2001-2008), HSNS involved thousands of teachers and administrators and impacted tens of thousands of students.
- Legacy: Though many participating schools saw some positive results – increases in reading scores and attendance and decreases in disciplinary referrals were commonly reported – the initiative did not achieve its vision of revolutionary, whole-system reform. It did, however, effect a system-wide adoption of on-campus literacy coaches, pushing responsibility for instructional leadership from district to campus, and spin off several successful programs including three successful small high schools and a similar initiative for the districts surrounding HISD.

- See also: Critical Friends Group, Challenge Early College High School, Sharpstown International High School, Houston Academy for International Studies, Regional High School Network, Reach Out to Dropouts

## **K-5 Fine Arts Initiative**

- About: This program sought to weave fine arts work into core academic curriculum, particularly math and science, in elementary schools.
- Scope: Four Houston ISD schools participated during the program's run from 2003 to 2008.
- Legacy: The program sought to push back against the trend away from holistic education and toward core subject drilling, but ultimately fell victim to the standards and testing zeitgeist. However, it forged a fruitful and lasting relationship between Houston A+ Challenge and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

## **Lamplighter Schools**

- About: As part of the original Houston Annenberg Challenge work, schools designated as Lamplighters worked together in clusters of 2-13 schools to implement a variety of reforms, often in partnership with - or modeled by - Beacon schools.
- Scope: 65 schools received Lamplighter grants for reform work taking place between 1997 and 2001.
- Legacy: As with most multi-school initiatives, increases in student achievement and other success indicators varied by campus. Lamplighter Schools were a "first wave" of sorts for school reform in Houston, opening the door to on-campus instructional coaches, STEAM integration, professional development in instruction and instructional leadership, and many other strategies that have had widespread impact on Houston-area schools.
- See also: Beacon Schools, Focused Impact Grants, Fondren Reforming Schools Summer Institute

## **Middle School Leadership Academy (MSLA)**

- About: Drawing upon leadership principles and protocols developed through earlier leadership academies, MSLA offered middle school principals professional development, mentorship, and space to problem-solve with peers as they worked to transform their schools into professional learning communities focused on preparing students for postsecondary success. MSLA was a prerequisite for schools hoping to join the Challenge Network.
- Scope: 250 school leaders participated in the program between 2011 and 2014, meeting monthly as part of three one-year cohorts.
- Legacy: Beginning in 2015, A+ broadened its leadership academy strategy, offering more academies that targeted grade levels, leadership roles and regions.
- See also: The Challenge Network, New Visions Leadership Academy, Regional Principal Leadership Academy

## **National Board Certification**

- About: A+ partnered with University of Houston – Clear Lake to offer the region’s first program to prepare teachers for National Board Certification, a credential certifying teachers’ very high skill level and considered comparable in rigor to board exams for engineers, architects, doctors and lawyers. A+ also worked with local districts to secure pay incentives for board certification.
- Scope: A+ supported two cohorts of ~20 educators between 2007 and 2009.
- Legacy: A handful of teachers earned certification, but A+ was unable to sustain the program when grant funding was discontinued.

## **Speaker Series**

- About: First as a component of leadership academies and Summer Institute, and later as an independent program supported by Chevron, the speaker series brings national and international leaders in education to share groundbreaking ideas with a wide variety of Houston’s education stakeholders at free, open-to-the-public events.
- Scope: Since 2003, the series has brought ~100 speakers to Houston, and has grown to reach around 1,000 individuals annually at events that range in size from 75 to 300 attendees, including educators, school and district leaders, business and philanthropy leaders, parents and students.
- Legacy: The series remains one of the organization’s most popular programs, and ideas shared by its speakers directly influence the work of schools, districts and organizations as well as the investments of local philanthropists.

## **New Visions in Leadership Academy (NVLA; aka McGovern Fellows)**

- About: This popular two-year academy for seated school leaders offered mentorship, networking, collaborative problem-solving and professional development based on the guiding principles of the National Association of Secondary School Principals.
- Scope: NVLA ran from 1999 to 2010. Annual cohorts numbered between 30 and 55 participants.
- Legacy: Academies for seated principals were a key lever for driving the development of professional learning communities in schools and gave principals crucial support for whole-school reform initiatives. Many academy graduates returned as mentors, strengthening Houston’s educator network. NVLA wound down when A+ narrowed its focus to middle school and launched the Middle School Leadership Academy.
- See also: Middle School Leadership Academy, Regional Principal Leadership Academy

## **Pasadena Path to College**

- About: Together with FACE (Family and Community Engagement) Consultants, A+ worked with Pasadena ISD to implement nationally-tested best practices in breaking down barriers between families and schools. Strategies included an annual conference on parent engagement, training school staff to engage

parents as assets and partners, and sharing best practices in at-home academic and college readiness support through informal, parent-led meetings called *charlas*.

- Scope: The program launched with two middle grades schools and expanded to all of the middle grades schools in the feeder pattern for two Pasadena high schools.
- Legacy: Though lack of grant funding brought an end to A+ involvement in the program, Pasadena continues to pursue family engagement as one of the district's five strategic priorities and has added family engagement specialists at the campus and district level that will continue to have an impact.

## **Preparing to Dream (PTD)**

- About: In partnership with the National College Access Network (NCAN), A+ worked with districts and high schools to assess and strengthen college-going culture. PTD participants worked to strengthen the quality and completion rate of college preparatory curriculum (honors, AP), increase early college credit opportunities, and increase the use of FAFSA and entrance exam prep, particularly among low-income students and students of color.
- Scope: Five districts participated in the initiative, which ran from 2007-2011.
- Legacy: Goals, strategies and results varied by district; many districts saw a doubling of students in target demographics testing at the college-ready level, and all reported strengthening of college-going culture and intentions to continue the work. A+ followed up this work with the Gulf Coast PASS initiative.
- See also: Gulf Coast Partners Achieving Student Success (Gulf Coast PASS)

## **Reach Out to Dropouts Day**

- About: A component of Houston Schools for a New Society, this annual event rallied school staff and volunteers to visit the homes of high school dropouts and persuade them to return to school.
- Scope: In the four years that Houston A+ Challenge partnered on this event (2005-2008), it grew from 500 to 1,400 participants in three school districts.
- Legacy: Over four years, around 350 students returned to school immediately following the outreach effort and around 90% stayed through the end of the school year. Though this personal outreach surely made graduation possible for some of these returnees, its impact on Houston's dropout rate as a whole was small, and Houston ISD has discontinued the annual event.
- See also: Houston Schools for a New Society

## **Regional Faculty**

- About: The Regional Faculty convened local superintendents and other senior district staff together with higher education officials and community members to align education efforts from pre-Kindergarten through college graduation.
- Scope: the program was founded in 2006 and, through 2008-2009, had 19 active members meeting several times per year.

- Legacy: The Regional Faculty predicated P-16 Councils, which became a Texas legislative priority, and current efforts around collective impact. With power only to advise and inform the work of schools and universities, however, the Regional Faculty – and P-16 Councils generally – has had a minimal impact on overall school reform.
- See also: Baylor School of Medicine Summer Science Internship

## **Regional High School Network**

- About: With support from the Brown Foundation and the Annenberg Foundation, the Regional High School Network was founded to expand the high school reforms taking place in Houston ISD as part of Houston Schools for a New Society to HISD's neighboring districts. Through professional development, cross-site visits, and an annual conference, RHSN schools worked to improve instruction, engage parents, use data better, and make school a more personal experience for students.
- Scope: Founded in 2003 and continuing through 2008, the network included 14 high schools in four districts.
- Legacy: Similarly to Houston Schools for a New Society, the Regional High School Network saw scattered positive results in some of its component programs - most noticeably, on-campus literacy coaching – but did not achieve the system-wide reform that was its aim. It did, however, create strong, collaborative relationships among Houston's outlying districts.
- See also: Houston Schools for a New Society

## **Regional Principal Leadership Academy (RPLA)**

- About: Launched with leadership funding from the Houston Endowment, RPLA was an intensive leadership preparation program for aspiring principals.
- Scope: Two cohorts of around 20 participants each completed 14 months of professional development followed by two years of leadership.
- Legacy: About half of participants found placements in leadership roles. The program was discontinued as the Endowment directed more funding toward its other school leader development initiative at Rice University and as Houston A+ Challenge narrowed its program focus to improving postsecondary readiness of middle school students.
- See also: New Visions for Leadership Academy, Middle School Leadership Academy

## **Sharpstown International School**

- About: SIS was the fourth and final small high school co-founded by HISD and Houston A+ Challenge as part of Houston Schools for a New Society.
- Scope: The school opened in 2007 with around 100 students and currently enrolls around 1,000 students.
- Legacy: SIS remains one of the strongest public high schools in the region, earning a silver medal and ranking of 50<sup>th</sup> in Texas on US News and World Report's 2016 list of best high schools.

- See also: Houston Schools for a New Society, Challenge Early College High School, Houston Academy for International Studies, Empowerment High School

## **Teacher Externships**

- **About:** With leadership support from Shell, the popular Teacher Externship program offered teachers a one-week job shadow experience, which they integrated into lesson plans that drew career connections to core subject content.
- **Scope:** The program began with eight teachers from three high schools in 2003 and grew to 200+ teachers from six districts in 2008. More than 75 local partners offered externship experiences including Shell, NASA, Texas Children's Hospital, and the Museum of Fine Arts Houston.
- **Legacy:** Taking place at the height of the education community's focus on measurable academic outcomes, the initiative struggled to draw a direct line to student achievement and ceased when funding for the program ran out in 2009. Many former participants tell us informally that the experience re-energized them and continues to influence their teaching.

## **OTHER AFFILIATIONS AND SINGLE-YEAR INITIATIVES**

- 40 Developmental Assets Citywide Conference
- Action Labs
- Collaborators Toolkit
- Convocation on Public Education
- Expectation:GRADUATION
- Give Kids Good Schools Week
- Harvard Change Leadership
- My Degree Counts
- National Charter School Week
- No Child Left Behind Hearings in Austin
- Operation School Work
- Passport to Success
- Parent & Community Engagement Network
- Parent Round Table Discussions
- Partnership for Quality Education
- PEN – Public Education Network
- SCHOOL: The Story of American Public Education
- Science and Math Career Pathways
- Taking the Next Steps Symposia
- Texas High School Project
- Town Hall Meetings

(and many more – these are just the ones mentioned in reports.)