

INSIDE The Annenberg Challenge

A public-private partnership improving education for 1.5 million urban and rural public school students



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“We began this journey five years ago with a generous Challenge grant from Ambassador Walter Annenberg and the Annenberg Foundation. In those five years, we have . . . seen some incredible results and are looking forward to what the next five years will bring.”

Harry Reasoner, incoming Chairman of the Board, Houston A+ Challenge

“The bottom line on . . . education reform is that schools and school systems should be held accountable for their contributions to student learning. . . . Working together in a coordinated fashion is critical.”

Rick Damelio, Director of District Reform, BASRC

Inside the *Annenberg Challenge* highlights recent accomplishments in the eighteen sites across the country that were awarded funds under Ambassador Walter H. Annenberg’s \$500-million “Challenge to the Nation” to improve its public schools, especially for underserved urban and rural students.

Up Front

▶ **The Houston Annenberg Challenge has begun its next stage of fund raising with new five-year grants totaling \$42 million** from the Annenberg Foundation, the Brown Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and aims to raise an additional \$18 million. Over the past five years, the Houston Challenge (which changed its name to the Houston A+ Challenge in January 2003) has poured \$60 million into whole-school reform in the greater Houston Area. Many of the initiatives begun during the first phase of the Challenge will continue, including the New Visions for Leadership Academy for School Leaders, Partnership for Quality Education, teacher professional development, a K–5 mathematics initiative, and the redesign of Houston ISD’s 24 comprehensive high schools. A new fine arts initiative for elementary schools is in the planning stages.

For information: Tel: (713) 658-1881; Web: www.houstonaplus.org

▶ **The Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) has developed a new school district research initiative to focus on the needs of principals and district-level reform.** The project aims to merge district and school reforms into a coordinated, coherent effort to raise student achievement and close the achievement gap. Working intensively with superintendents and key staff in four districts, BASRC hopes to develop strategies and test ideas that will later be extended to all 26 BASRC schools. Superintendents in the four districts will begin working with “executive coaches” – superintendents with hands-on experience in district reform – and will meet regularly to share insights and ideas, while Local Collaborative Coaches and outside technical experts work at the school level.

For information: Tel: (415) 348-5500; Web: www.basrc.org

▶ **A model for in-school professional development designed and piloted by the Boston Plan for Excellence last year was officially endorsed by Superintendent Thomas Payzant in August.** Collaborative Coaching and Learning provides intensive eight-week cycles during which a team of teachers, with help from a coach, studies an instructional strategy and practices it with students while team members observe. To extend the model to all schools, the district hired, trained, and is now supporting more than 75 literacy coaches for 97 schools. The Boston Plan for Excellence supports 12 coaches who work with an additional 22 schools. Over and above the private funds it has raised with the Boston Plan, the Boston Public Schools has allocated \$5.8 million for coaching from its general school funds – a significant commitment.

For information: Tel: (617) 227-8055; Web: www.bpe.org

▼ Impacting Students, ▼ Schools & Systems

“Using fine arts as a tool for teaching other subjects can transform the learning environment for both teacher and student. Research shows that the arts can provide new challenges for those students already considered successful, and it can reach those students who are not otherwise being reached.”

Linda Clarke, Executive Director
Houston A+ Challenge

“The brain trust here is just tremendous. We go away with wonderful ideas. That’s important because principals are so often isolated. We need to see that we’re not alone with issues and problems, and there’s tremendous comfort in knowing that there’s something we can do differently.”

Fredella Stewart, Principal at
Santa Teresa High School, on the
BASRC Principals’ Network

The Rural School and Community Trust has been named one of *Worth* magazine’s 100 Best Charities, the only rural education group selected by the magazine. Candidates in six categories – health, human services, environment, education, relief/development, and arts/culture – go through a rigorous application process, providing a detailed work description, financial statements, and supporting materials. A link to the article can be found on the Rural Trust’s Web site. Tel: (202) 955-7177; Web: www.ruraledu.org

The Beacon Hill Institute recently recognized the Chelsea Public Schools for achievement significantly beyond expectations for schools in impoverished urban districts. In compliance with the No Child Left Behind act, all Chelsea schools met their performance targets for the year, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests. Overall student achievement, as measured by the MCAS, improved districtwide. Average daily attendance continued to increase, as did parent involvement, and the Chelsea High School dropout rate decreased by nearly 3 percent. Tel: (617) 889-8414; Web: www.chelsea.mec.edu

The Center for Arts Education received New York State’s highest honor for the arts, the Governor’s Arts Award, in November 2002. The ceremony was held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and was attended by more than 750 people, including New York State First Lady Libby Pataki and Gail Levin, Executive Director of the Annenberg Foundation. Laurie Tisch Sussman, the Center’s Board chair, and Hollis Headrick, its Executive Director, accepted the honor. Tel: (877) 434-ARTS; Web: www.cae-nyc.org

Chattanooga’s Public Education Foundation studied 92 outstanding elementary and middle school teachers whose students outperformed national gains in standardized tests. The three-strand research on these “Highly Effective Teachers” was conducted during the 2001–2002 school year. In the initial phase, interviews, surveys, classroom observations, and personality inventories were used to identify the strengths, beliefs, and talents of highly effective teachers. After analyzing the teachers’ postsecondary experiences and videotaping their classroom techniques, PEF used the collected material to create training packages for new teachers, principals, and school officials. Tel: (423) 265-9403; Web: www.pefchattanooga.org

The Houston A+ Challenge is forming a new fine arts initiative for local elementary schools. A fine arts focus group has already conducted local site visits and plans to visit New York’s Center for Arts Education and Minneapolis’s Arts for Academic Achievement. Combining these experiences with research, they will develop an arts-integration model for local schools that will include a plan for developing partnerships, designing an advocacy campaign, identifying fund-raising opportunities, and planning for ongoing professional development. Tel: (713) 658-1881; Web: www.houstonaplus.org

The South Florida Annenberg Challenge’s Urban Academy program is credited by Stranahan High School for its selection as a “Pathways” site by the National College Board. The Broward County high school is one of only six high schools chosen for the Pathways program, which examines the success of schools in encouraging and placing at-risk students (many of whom are the first

in their families to attend college) in Advanced Placement and high-level programs. The Urban Academy, which raises the bar for at-risk students and provides the resources they need to succeed, has been awarded an SFAC Achievement Grant. Tel: (954) 727-9909; Web: www.sfannenberg.org

Families in Schools, a successor to the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project, has launched a Web site for its Mother/Daughter College Preparation Program. The two-year program, which begins in either fifth or sixth grade, encourages and supports girls who would be the first in their family to graduate from college by creating mother/daughter partnerships to value education, improve academic and life skills, develop leadership qualities, and pursue professional careers. It also helps both parent and student make decisions in middle and high school that will lead toward a college education. Seventeen schools and approximately 425 mother/daughter teams are currently involved. Tel: (213) 484-2870; Web: www.familiesinschools.org/html/md/mdweb.htm

The Bay Area School Reform Collaborative held the opening meeting of its 2002-03 Principals Network in October. The Network helps principals from all BASRC schools learn about tools and strategies for spreading positive change. The principals work together to develop and practice the kind of leadership skills needed for inquiry-oriented reform. In groups, the principals are developing case histories about their schools, which they will use to diagnose chronic problems and propose strategic interventions in the coming year. They also began to identify processes, structures, and beliefs that were inhibiting their schools’ equity work. The network will meet four times during the school year and hold an additional two sessions on literacy. Tel: (415) 348-5500; Web: www.basrc.org

▼ Building Expertise ▼ & New Partnerships

Salt Lake City's Eccles/Annenberg Challenge has used a strategic planning approach to improve student achievement and the quality of teaching in all of the district's schools. Modeled after successful business methods, the three-step approach asked each school community to conduct a situation analysis, use data to develop a strategic School Improvement Plan, and monitor and measure the effectiveness of the plan following implementation. Notable results include dramatically improved SAT-9 and CRT test scores among elementary school students, a substantial decrease in the middle and high school dropout rate, and improved professional development. Tel: (801) 578-8305; Web: www.slc.k12.ut.us/annenberg

Arts for Academic Achievement in Minneapolis is continuing its successful Visual Thinking Strategies program in Phase II of its work. VTS uses the visual arts to teach critical thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy at the elementary level. After receiving training, teachers conduct ten hour-long VTS lessons during the school year. In grades 4 and 5, the lesson series culminates with a trip to an art museum. Four guided debriefings allow participants to share their teaching and practice experiences with colleagues. AAA will have trained 500 teachers and principals in 30 VTS school sites by the end of this school year. Tel: (612) 668-5333; Web: www.mpls.k12.mn.us/annenberg

Detroit's Schools of the 21st Century has published a guide for parent involvement programs. *The Parent/School Connection: Successful Strategies for Improving Student Achievement* provides a summary of activities that were implemented successfully in its 40 Leader-

ship Schools over the 2001–2002 academic year. Drawing on a parent involvement framework developed by Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins, the S21C program focused on eight categories, including parent support, learning outside and within the school environment, communication, and influencing policy. Tel: (313) 871-3515; Web: www.s21c-detroit.org

The Rural School and Community Trust has released the first of a two-part report giving public voice to school leaders in the south. *Rural School Leadership in the Deep South: The Double-Edged Legacy of School Desegregation* is based on discussions with the Rural School Leaders Working Group – 20 principals, superintendents, and instructional supervisors from Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The group offered their individual and collective experiences and insights on the issues for school leadership in what are arguably among the most difficult places in the country to operate a school. The report was funded through a Ventures in Leadership grant from the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds. Tel: (202) 955-7177; Web: www.ruraledu.org

The Bay Area School Reform Collaborative has completed a report on how local school boards can support reform. The report features four policies that are particularly effective in supporting reform. Interviews with trustees in nine randomly selected districts provide insights about their beliefs on the effectiveness of board policies. Surprisingly, many of the interviewees didn't believe that board policy drives reform, and the majority felt that reform was supported through a combination of culture and policy. Many also noted the struggle to find the appropriate level of board involve-

ment. The full report is available at BASRC's Web site; further research and reports are planned. Tel: (415) 348-5500; Web: www.basrc.org

Chattanooga's Public Education Fund will host the Carnegie Schools for a New Society (SNS) Institute in March. Teams of teachers, principals, school board members, superintendents, and students will represent Carnegie schools from Boston, Houston, Providence, Sacramento, San Diego, and Worcester (MA). Participants will visit several Chattanooga schools that have adjusted their teaching methods and resources since the PEF began distributing their Carnegie funds last fall. Each school has emphasized particular areas for improvement, such as literacy, retention of ninth-graders, Critical Friends Group networks for teachers, and building relationships among students, teachers, and administrators. Tel: (423) 265-9403; Web: www.pefchattanooga.org

The New York Center for Arts Education's Career Development Program, connecting students with arts and arts-related businesses, has expanded this year to ten schools. The program offers school-to-career activities through internships ranging from performing-arts groups and museums to the entertainment industry. Since 1999, more than 325 students and 50 work sites have participated, including Sony Music Entertainment and the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater. Tel: (877) 434-ARTS; Web: www.cae-nyc.org

The South Florida Annenberg Challenge's PrincipalPortal.net Web site is being scaled up to a statewide platform, thanks to a grant from the Florida Department of Education. The Web site makes programs developed in South Florida school districts available throughout the region and the state. Tel: (954) 727-9909; Web: www.sfannenberg.org

“What's been so wonderful about our training, funded by the Eccles/Annenberg Challenge, is that it's taken the guesswork out of teaching. We know methods that work – with all students, no matter what their educational challenge. Students now say 'I'll try' rather than 'I can't.'”

Tom Brown, Teacher at
Washington Elementary
Salt Lake City

“It is impossible to understand the dynamics of contemporary Southern rural education without examining the double-edged legacy of segregation and the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. . . . The move drastically shifted the social, political, and cultural underpinnings of education and of southern society overall, so much so until, even today, there is uncertainty about how to construct an educational foundation that avoids the perils of this legacy.”

from *Rural School Leadership in the Deep South*, published by the Rural School and Community Trust

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▼ Collaborating ▼ Across Projects

The Annenberg Institute hosted a meeting in December on Transforming High Schools with a focus on the role that district offices and intermediary organizations can play in supporting high school reform. Some 80 participants met in San Francisco to share ways that educators in large urban districts are transforming high schools to increase achievement for all students, particularly children of color and those from low-income families. The conference featured visits to schools in the Bay Area, team planning sessions, paired-district consultancies, and inquiry sessions on a variety of topics. Teams from ten Challenge sites attended the meeting: Bay Area, Boston, Chattanooga, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York Arts,

Salt Lake City, and South Florida.
Web: www.annenberginstitute.org/mediacenter/THS_overview.html

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Two final cross-site Challenge reports examine the impact of arts education projects and the relationship between site staff and independent evaluators.

The Arts and School Reform: Lessons and Possibilities from the Annenberg Challenge Arts Projects draws upon the programs and insights of the three Challenge Arts programs – New York’s Center for Arts Education, Minneapolis’s Arts for Academic Achievement, and the national Transforming Education through the Arts Challenge – as a basis for reflections on what arts education teaches us about the

hard questions of school reform and what the Challenge arts projects learned from their involvement in standards-based whole-school change. *Research Perspectives on School Reform: Lessons from the Annenberg Challenge* presents seven essays, most written collaboratively by evaluators and staff members of a Challenge site. The authors consider how well their projects succeeded in what they intended to accomplish and how the partnerships-in-learning between researchers and Challenge program staff evolved and helped shape the work over time. Both reports will be released in March 2003 by the Annenberg Institute. Tel: (401) 863-3833; Web: www.annenbergchallenge.org

“Because future reformers and researchers will inevitably face many of the issues and struggles described here, we have sought to record both the conceptual framework and the practical solutions these authors created. [Their] experiences . . . present intriguing images of research-reform partnerships suited to ambitious, evolving reform efforts.”

from *Research Perspectives on School Reform: Lessons from the Annenberg Challenge*,
Introduction by Brenda Turnbull,
Policy Research Associates

This is the final issue of *Inside the Annenberg Challenge*. Over the past five years, we have highlighted the accomplishments of the eighteen sites that were funded by the Annenberg Challenge. Some of these programs concluded with the end of their Challenge funding, others have spawned successor organizations or have received additional funding to continue their work. To learn about continuing work at individual sites, use the contact information given with each news item; many of these sites have newsletters and e-mail updates to which you can subscribe. Site contact information will continue to be available at the Annenberg Challenge Web site: www.annenbergchallenge.org.