



ABOUT THE MAGNA AWARDS:

For more information about the awards, the judging criteria, past winners, and how to enter your district, go to www.nsba.org/magna.

VISION INTO ACTION

The 2016 Magna Grand Prize winners responded to school and community needs with creative solutions

Kathleen Vail



VIDEO EXTRA: Learn more about the Grand Prize-winning districts and the awards program by viewing the Magna Awards video by NSBA's Multimedia Manager Connor Toomy at www.nsba.org/newsroom/video-gallery on April 10.

When school leaders create a vision and work with their districts to put that vision into action, great things happen: Under-served children achieve to their potential, communities support and engage with their schools, and students graduate well-prepared for their lives beyond high school.

For more than 20 years, the Magna Awards have been recognizing excellent school district programs supported by excellent board governance. This year's Grand Prize-winning districts are narrowing equity and access gaps through a mobile preschool program, easing high school transition for at-risk students, and

running a leadership academy for potential school board members—all with the help and support of their school leaders.

Each year, one district from each of the three enrollment categories—under 5,000 students, 5,000 to 20,000 students, and 20,000 and above students—earns the Magna Grand Prize. In addition, five award winners and five honorable mention districts are chosen for each category. These districts and their school boards will be honored by the editors of *ASBJ* and Magna program sponsor Sodexo at NSBA's annual conference in April in Boston.

PREVENTING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Fremont County School District No. 6

PAVILION, WYOMING



Grand Prize
 Winner,
 under 5,000
 enrollment

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FREMONT COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT in western Wyoming is 2,481 square miles, or roughly the size of the state of Delaware. The Wind River Indian Reservation with Shoshone and Arapaho tribes takes up 61 percent of the district. One quarter of the students in the district are Native Americans.

In this far-flung, high-poverty region, there are no licensed day care programs, preschools, or medical service providers.

To help address the costly social and academic gaps in children showing up for kindergarten with low vocabularies and little to no exposure to books, the district started a preschool at Wind River Elementary School in 2002. “It was going well,” says Fremont Superintendent Diana Clapp, “but it was not reaching the families that we needed.”

Transportation was a major barrier to attendance. Because district funds could not be used for preschool buses, families had to drive their children to school—a hardship for some families in this isolated region who lived 20 to 40 miles from school.

If the families couldn’t come to preschool, then the preschool would come to them. Fremont’s mobile preschool program earned the district a 2016 Magna Award Grand Prize in the under 5,000 enrollment category.

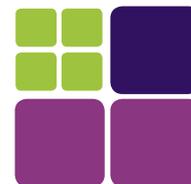
The idea to bring preschool to isolated families stemmed from a suggestion to use a book mobile model. The district overhauled an old school bus,

painted it purple, removed the seats, and installed carpeting, furniture, and supplies, says Wind River Principal Barney Lacock.

School staff made phone calls and bus drivers on rural routes suggested families with young children. The program started as a pilot in the spring of 2013 with a driver and teacher going to children’s homes. The 30-minute session takes place on the bus, with or without the child’s parent or caretaker. “We immediately began to find students who were well behind developmentally,” says Lacock. “We got them in touch with other school services.”

The teacher discusses ways that parents can help with literacy and language skills, as well as how to recognize if their child is meeting developmental benchmarks. “The goal is to educate the student and the parent,” says school board member Kristen Benson. “Education is not limited to students.”

In fact, the mobile preschool addresses another barrier to participation: trust. Many people in the region did not have positive school experiences as children. Native Americans, in particular, are wary of the public schools, with the history of forced boarding schools weighing heavily on them. “We can’t ignore that historical trauma,” says Clapp. “They follow and look to their past. We have to honor that with our students and families.” These families might find it difficult to bring their vulnerable young children



to a public preschool program.

Part of the preschool bus's mission is to create a bond between the district and the families. "Thirty minutes twice a week is not adequate for preschool literacy for children. But it's invaluable for building relationships," says Clapp. The hope is that these positive relationships last throughout the child's K-12 years.

The district recently received a grant to start providing immunization and other medical services—another desperate need in the community. The preschool bus will be part of the campaign to get the information out to parents.

Results for the past three years show that the percentage of students reaching age-appropriate benchmarks has increased overall by 12 percent, with 85 percent of students entering kindergarten at or above kindergarten readiness benchmarks.

The Fremont School Board set a vision that says the district "will be known for academic excellence and preparing students to lead in the 21st century." The policy governance of the board is important, says Clapp, adding that board members are supportive of the administration to meet the goals of the district's strategic plan. "Board members are serious about reaching the goals but realistic about the challenges. Those are big conversations for the board," she says.

CROWN POINT HIGH SCHOOL SUMMER ENGAGE

Crown Point Community School Corporation
CROWN POINT, INDIANA

WHEN MARK GIANFERMI STARTED

his job as assistant principal of Crown Point High School, it was July. Summer school, mandatory for students who had failed core subjects during the year, was in full swing. "I asked teachers, 'Is this fun for you?'" he says. "They said, 'No, it's really hard.'"

Gianfermi met with the teachers to see if they could come up with a better way to do summer school so that the teachers and the students would want to be there. Their program, Summer Engage, earned the district a 2016 Magna Award Grand Prize in the 5,000 to 20,000 enrollment category.

Crown Point, in a rapidly growing area near the Illinois border, is



Grand Prize Winner, 5,000 to 20,000 enrollment

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a data-driven district, according to Superintendent Teresa Eineman. "Programs must show data over time to show success. We have a continuous improvement mentality. We modify or let it go if it isn't





working for our students.”

Crown Point High School had a large number of eighth-graders coming during the summer to take physical education classes. Gianfermi and his teachers wanted to combine the fun aspects of PE with English and math instruction and provide a much-needed transition for at-risk incoming ninth-graders.

Summer Engage is a six-week program, and it runs from 7 a.m. to 12:20 p.m. The group of about 70 students is divided, with one group going to academics—math, English, and reading—while the other group goes to PE. Then the groups switch during a 20-minute break.

“We noticed that it’s a good time to build relationships with the adults and other kids. Some are awkward and don’t know how to act toward adults. By the end of six weeks, they are acting more how we expect,” says Gianfermi.

During academic time, the students get up and move through different classes. “It’s a different perspective. It breaks up the monotony. At least it keeps their energy up, moving teacher to teacher,” says school board President Scott Angel. “We are doing what’s best for them, not just to enhance academics, but make it as fun as we can, while sticking to the rigor.”

Students are grouped into teams by the teachers, and they receive T-shirts with their team names. On Fridays, thanks to a partnership with a local business, the students go bowling at a nearby bowling alley.

The students are asked to be in the program based on a middle school teacher survey of their academic achievement, organization skills, and rate of work completion, among other items. Along with the academic boost, the program eases the high school transition. Students meet their teachers and their peers, and they become familiar with the high school building, all before the first day of school in the fall.

Other ninth-grade teachers take advantage of the time to meet their incoming students. “The biology teacher understands how important it is to get to know them, so he’ll come to show the kids the critters in the biology room,” says Gianfermi. The students also get to know some of the upperclassmen. National Honor society students and peer tutors come in to help and play games with them.

Crown Point High School has seen an increase in the graduation rate since Summer Engage started in 2010. The graduation rate has moved from the middle 80 percentile to be consistently over 95 percent. The students who attend the program have a greater chance of graduating in four years than their peers who choose not to attend the program.

“The results have been phenomenal and overwhelming,” Eineman says. “Students who struggle the most are achieving the most. Discipline referrals for freshman are down. The positive behaviors increase, and negative decreases.”

BOARD LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Hurst-Eules-Bedford
Independent School
District

BEDFORD, TEXAS



Grand Prize
Winner,
over 20,000
enrollment

CONTACT

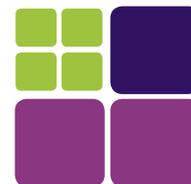
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THE HURST-EULESS-BEDFORD

school district, near the Dallas-Fort Worth airport, is a diverse, minority-majority system with 74 languages spoken. School district leaders subscribe to Malcom Baldrige’s philosophy of continuous improvement. Succession planning is part of that process. School board members realized that, while the superintendent and others in the district had succession plans, the board did not.

“We wanted to do something to train a cadre of people who might not run for the board, but who had



the knowledge and understanding of district operations to do so,” says Faye Beaulieu, a 21-year veteran of the school board.

The Board Leadership Academy, which earned the district a Magna Grand Prize in the over 20,000 category, is a six-month program for community members to learn more about the inner operations of the school district and the school board’s governance role. The group meets once a month, and each session covers a different topic:

1. An overview of board member roles and work
2. The district and board approach and philosophy
3. Educational operations
4. Business operations
5. District tour
6. Questions and answers about board service.

“We recognized that, in the community, people didn’t understand what our job was,” says school board President Ellen Jones. “It’s an opportunity to empower people to be ambassadors for us.”

When the program started in 2010, the board asked principals and other staff to recommend participants from the community. Now enrollment is open, and board members will ask people they believe would benefit. An effort is made to invite naysayers in the community.

“Some people who have come through have had the potential to be anti-public schools and now see from a different perspective,” says Jones. “They get so focused on an issue. We want them to see a bigger picture, and this is a wonderful platform for them to see it.”

The academy gives participants an insider’s view of the district. “They see the good, bad, and ugly. They see the warts,” says Beaulieu. “We show them where our challenges are, our successes, and what we need to work on.”

This level of understanding translates to community support, and bolsters community members to tell their friends, neighbors, and colleagues about what’s going on the school system, says Superintendent Steven Chapman. “It’s important to arm individuals with information and allow them to tell our story,” he says. “There’s lots of good things going on in our district.”

Another benefit of the program has been to increase diversity and minority representation on the board. “We wouldn’t have gotten there if we had waited for them to run for the board,” says Beaulieu. “We now look like our community.”

Since the academy’s inception, 90 people have gone through the program. Four have been elected to the school board. Other graduates serve on district committees and a foundation that helps with school bond elections.

The program’s goal is not to pick and choose school board members. However, academy graduates definitely have an advantage when they run for office.

“You can’t control who runs for the board,” says Beaulieu. “That is not how democracy works. But when you are in a candidate forum, and some of our leadership academy people are speaking, it becomes obvious who is knowledgeable.”

Kathleen Vail (kvail@nsba.org) is editor-in-chief of American School Board Journal.

Balsz Promise Neighborhood

Balsz Elementary School District, Phoenix, Arizona

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The 2,600 students in the Balsz School District face challenges including poverty, homelessness, parent incarceration, and a lack of resources to meet their most basic needs. Several years ago, the district and a coalition of partners applied for federal funds to create a Promise Neighborhood, which supports cradle-to-career services for students in distressed urban and rural neighborhoods. Although Balsz did not receive funding, the school board brought together diverse groups and agreed that the district would follow the Promise Neighborhood model. Through generous local business support, a community liaison is now dedicated to integrating the model into the community. Over the past three years, the Balsz Promise Neighborhood has leveraged over \$450,000 in resources through in-kind donations, services, volunteerism, and grants to support the overall health and wellness of students and their families.

RESULTS

Many successes have emerged through the Balsz Promise Neighborhood. It created a new Boys & Girls Club branch serving more than 300 youths daily. The Promise Field is a renovated multi-use sports and recreation space for youth and adults. The Youth Advisory Council promotes leadership, civic engagement, and community service for teens. The district hosts events like World Refugee Day that unite and celebrate the diverse community. Community gardens are thriving through the support of Arizona State University, classroom teachers, and community volunteers. Partnerships with several health centers assist the community in accessing

high-quality affordable health care. A mobile market delivers fresh produce to food deserts. A volunteer income tax assistance program provides free tax preparation services and has brought over \$300,000 back into the community. Multiple organizations provide financial coaching and help individuals secure employment. Balsz now has vibrant community hubs where people gather, learn, and celebrate together. “Believe in Balsz ... Balsz Believes in You” permeates the community.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

The school board recognized that what happens in its students' lives outside of school impacts their ability to be engaged and successful in school. Board leadership and expertise has been invaluable to the sustainability of the program. Board members are connected to the community and committed to building the partnerships needed to secure resources that will

help realize the goals of the various work groups. Through the board's continued support, the program has experienced significant progress in creating opportunities for youth and the community to engage in meaningful activities outside of school. The board understands that these successes are a shared responsibility. Today Balsz has schools, residents, families, businesses, institutions of higher learning, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, government, and health and human services all working together to ensure that students and their families have the resources necessary to succeed in school and in life.

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teamASAP

Evanston Township High School District 202, Evanston, Illinois

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Team Access and Success in Advanced Placement, or teamASAP, is a comprehensive support for Advanced Placement (AP) students. Limited access to AP courses for students of color was a driver in developing this program. An analysis of AP enrollment and test scores revealed that, while the percentage of successful AP students was high, participation and diversity in AP courses was low. This was problematic given district demographics: 30 percent African American, 16 percent Latino, and 43 percent white. This analysis allowed the district to restructure ninth grade, increase communication around AP, and provide students with support once in AP courses. Ninth-grade English, history, and biology courses were aligned to AP expectations, and in doing so re-envisioned ninth grade as a springboard to advanced course work. Along with increased rigor came the need to provide appropriate academic and emotional supports. teamASAP was created by AP students to empower all students with the tools and belief that they can successfully navigate the most challenging course work. With more than 250 members from diverse backgrounds, teamASAP's mission is to support fellow students to move into and through AP courses. Students meet bi-weekly to discuss successes and challenges. Members also tutor AP students. In addition, it runs a series of events focused on increasing student awareness, access, and success. These events parallel the process of learning about, enrolling in, and being successful in AP courses.

RESULTS

Access to and success in AP has grown significantly in a short time. In 2014, the district had more scores of 3+ on AP exams (1,480) than on total exams in 2010 (1,384). In 2011, 29 percent of black and 28 percent of Latino juniors and seniors were enrolled in AP. In 2014, 38 percent of black and 51 percent of Latino juniors and seniors were enrolled in AP. In 2011, 65 percent of all district students had taken at least one AP course prior to graduation. Last spring, 73 percent of all students had done the same. The percent of scores of 3 or higher rose, moving from 65 percent in 2011 to 71 percent in 2014.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

The school board made three key policy decisions that drove the creation of teamASAP. First, it adopted an Equity and Excellence statement to guide the district's work: "Embracing its diversity, Evanston Township High School dedicates itself to educating all students to their fullest potential." Second, the board voted unanimously to restructure ninth grade so that more students could have access to and be successful in AP and honors level courses as they progress through high school. Third, the board adopted AP enrollment and success on AP exams as measurements for one of the district's goals. By articulating beliefs, taking action, and establishing clear measures of success, the board provided the context and the need for teamASAP.



PHOTOS BY LYNN TRAUTMANN

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Gallery Walk

Hanover Park Regional High School District, East Hanover, New Jersey

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Hanover Park Regional High School District is a caring community. School-wide service learning initiatives aimed at helping others have been a constant between both high school campuses. Through the high schools' Genocide Studies programs, a powerful Gallery Walk focuses on various genocides throughout history and the senseless acts of violence and hatred associated with them. Using the layout of the campus, student work is arranged and positioned throughout a wing of the building. The audience begins the walk by entering the building under a replica of the Auschwitz "Arbeit macht frei" gate, continues by weaving in and out of classrooms dedicated to various genocides, and ends in the theater with a closing performance. A capstone to the genocide studies gallery walk program has been Holocaust survivor, Maud Dahme, who tells her story to the audience. The walk is open to all students

during the school day and community members in the evening. Student participation in the gallery walk raises civic awareness. They develop compassion for people suffering throughout the world where current conflicts are ravaging specific populations.

RESULTS

The impact on the school community has been widespread. The project has reconnected many students with their own family history regarding these atrocities and brought to the forefront members of the community who have suffered as well. In doing so, students have felt a sense of unity with the community at large and a greater connection to the whole. The walk has raised student and community awareness of current areas of conflict and cultivated an environment in which students discuss and engage on these difficult topics with one another and at home. Furthermore, it has created crosscurricular discussions

and activities that have led to important interdisciplinary work. The walk also has inspired other student-generated service learning.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

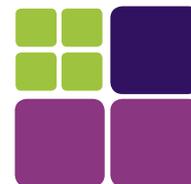
The school board has been supportive from the inception to implementation of this program. It has supported new electives entering into the program of study, such as the Genocide Studies course. Through board support for increasing curricular elective programs, students are able to gain additional experiences which in turn raise their civic and cultural awareness.

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Students First

Kelliher School, Kelliher, Minnesota

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Kelliher School is located in a very rural setting in a high-poverty part of the county. More than half of the students reside on the Red Lake Indian Reservation and 84 percent qualify for free or reduced-price meals. A large number of students live in generational poverty. Many students, especially those living on the reservation, do not trust adults who are not part of their immediate family. Many struggle even to put faith in members of their own family. Students living in trauma often perpetuate the patterns of living a day-to-day existence with goals that are short-sighted and related to immediate gratification instead of long-term learning goals. This program pairs middle school students with adult Success Coaches who meet with their mentees each month, developing a strong relationship or bond. Success Coaches inquire how their students are doing in school. They provide solutions to problems and can share how they have dealt with similar struggles. These connections help students believe in themselves and develop a sense of personal autonomy and hope for their futures.

RESULTS

The district has documented improvements in a number of areas, including behaviors, discipline referrals, and attendance. Student surveys indicate improved attitudes and perceptions regarding the culture and climate. Since the inception of the program, the number of incidents has been reduced. Attendance has improved while incidents of truancy have dropped. Students are self-reporting that they are more engaged in school and in learning. An annual Hope Survey has served as a reliable tool for measuring the growth of student hope indexes between fall and spring. According to this survey, student hope has increased since the program started.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

Initially, the school board's leadership role included authorizing the program, both in principle and in terms of the costs associated with launch and maintenance. In addition, all five board members serve as Success Coaches. Such participation provides a strong and positive leadership example for the school staff and the surrounding community. The board has consistently supported efforts by administration and faculty to remove social-emotional-behavioral barriers to learning and improving the culture of learning within the school.



PHOTOS BY ERIC CARLSON

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Freshman Focus

Milton-Union Exempt Village Schools, West Milton, Ohio



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Freshmen Focus is a dropout prevention program using student mentors at the district's small rural secondary school. Through the Freshmen Focus Camp, Focus curriculum, and the pairing of freshmen with upperclassmen mentors, each year approximately 130 students have the opportunity to become more successful in their high school experience. The program is divided into two parts: orientation camp and specific curriculum used daily throughout the school year. Camp, held two days before the start of school, is run by student leaders. The leaders help the freshmen acclimate to the high school. Throughout the school year, the freshmen meet daily with their student leaders. Two days a week, they cover lessons focused on coping skills for the many new stressors freshmen may face. Student leaders coordinate and execute the lesson activities, with many of the lessons authored by the student leaders.

RESULTS

To date, 1,050 freshmen have been served by the program while 350 student leaders have been trained in leadership skills. There has been a 14 percent increase in the graduation rate since the program started. Students came to the program expecting homework help, acclimation assistance, and emotional support. Their expectations were surpassed throughout the course of the program through the efforts of the student-mentors. The student leaders themselves benefit from the program. They realize the influence they have over their freshmen. According to one senior mentor, "There's nothing like touching a person's life in a positive way." Another student leader says, "As a mentor, you learn a lot about yourself and how to handle tough situations." As a result of their Freshmen Focus experience, many of the student leaders have gone on to major in education, psychology, or social work.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

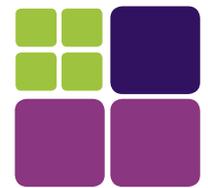
The program is overwhelmingly supported by the administration and the school board. Administrators have given the counselors flexibility and support throughout the development of and constant revisions to the program. In order to implement the program with fidelity, high school administrators added a specific time slot. Because of its demonstrated success, the program has prompted organizers of several out-of-state national conferences to request presentations from counselors and student leaders for which the school board granted permission and funded travel and lodging expenses.



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5,000 to 20,000 Enrollment

Iowa BIG

Cedar Rapids Community School District, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Iowa Big is a competency-based, community-integrated high school program. Several years ago, 60 community leaders returned to high school to experience it with adult eyes and experiences. Afterward, they were asked to gather in small groups to design a system based on what they experienced. Three key themes emerged: Passion drives deep learning and resilience; community projects allow for authentic learning; and content knowledge is context dependent and integrated. This criteria was used to create the program, which provides high school students with two- to four-hour blocks of time each day to self-organize around community and business problems, opportunities, and projects. The teaching staff, certified in all core academic areas, then coach and facilitate the teams, requiring the students to demonstrate their attainment of the Common Core standards in order to receive academic credit. Businesses, community organizations, and local government are finding that students bring fresh and effective ideas and energy to the work, benefiting not only the student but also the community.



RESULTS

In the first year of the program, 12 students participated in four projects. Last year, the second year, 72 students participated in 38 projects. Student surveys showed that 95 percent had a greater sense of ownership over their learning; 100 percent of students said they felt very or pretty confident in their ability to design solutions to real-world problems and in managing their time. All of them also said they found joy in the initiatives

and projects that they worked on over the year. In the parents' survey, all said they were satisfied with their child's overall experience. Best student exit quote: "You showed me that I mattered."

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

The school board took a major leadership role in developing the program. Initially, the process was led by a local media company. Once the design was completed and the designers were

looking for a place to start, the board stepped up and said, "We want to help lead this and provide a space for it to grow." The board and the president and the co-creators of BIG reached out to another district and asked them to partner. Both boards quickly and enthusiastically approved and set forth a budget and plan for working together. Board members are regularly seen in the Iowa BIG space and ask for ongoing reports from both staff and students.

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Students at the Helm

Meriden Public Schools, Meriden, Connecticut



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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Students at the Helm provides opportunities for students to design their own learning experiences for credit. Meriden Public Schools' diverse enrollment of more than 9,000 students is 47 percent Hispanic, 35 percent white, 15 percent black, and 3 percent Asian. Many students face challenges, with 70 percent of families eligible for free and reduced-price meals. Student voice, greater choice, real-world experience, and anytime, anywhere learning are the building blocks of student-centered practices. But high school schedule constraints and limited in-school offerings were barriers. Recognizing the need for an innovative solution, the district created the Personalized Learning Experience (PLE) program. Students create their own personalized learning experiences for credit, pursuing an area of interest or investigation of a possible career option outside the traditional classroom setting. Activities take place before, during, and after school, and on nights and weekends. With grant funding, two part-time PLE Coordinator positions were established at each high school. They are certified teachers who devote two periods a day to work with students on their projects. They also build awareness of the program in the community, recruiting local businesses and community agencies to provide real-world experiences.

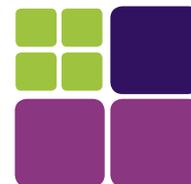
RESULTS

Student participation has increased dramatically. Hundreds of students earned PLE credits last year, with a 20 percent increase anticipated in 2015-16. These students designed their own programs that take place at school, at local businesses, at community agencies, online, and at home. Student PLEs run the gamut from chairing a Go-Green Committee at the local Sheraton Hotel, raising trout for release into local waters with the Quinnipiac River Watershed Association, providing technical support at the district courthouse, to studying Latin or advanced piano or directing a student play.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

The school board provided the leadership and commitment needed to successfully launch the program. In August 2014, the board added four goals to its student-centered learning policy, one of which addresses anytime, anywhere learning: "Provide opportunities from learning outside the traditional classroom," which helped continue the impetus to offer a personalized learning experience program. The board ensured that central office staff met with leaders from both teachers and administrators unions for their support. The board recognized that, for the program to be sustainable, community partners and local businesses needed to offer on-site learning opportunities for students. To support this endeavor, it created a Community Support Award to recognize these key partners monthly.





ESL program

Piscataway Township Schools, Piscataway, New Jersey

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Piscataway's English as a Second Language (ESL) program is for preschool through high school and provides opportunities for success in mainstream classrooms, develops academic strengths, and increases participation in honors and Advanced Placement classes. Within the district, more than 62 primary languages are spoken. Immersing students into both conversational and academic language, and providing cultural guidance to their families, is essential. The preschool program offers language immersion, health services, and community connections for parents. The elementary program embeds more than 60 ESL-endorsed teachers, allowing more students to remain in mainstream classrooms. The high school ESL Academy builds upon services available during the regular school day. After school and on Saturdays, classroom work is reviewed to identify language deficiencies. The academy offers families English classes, field trips, job application help, and interviewing skills—and assists parents in navigating the education system and college application process.

RESULTS

Hard measurements—graduation rates, test scores, and AP participation and test scores—are very positive and climbing higher. Soft results—family immersion into the school community, cross-cultural friendships, and leadership roles for ESL students—are equally important. The district consistently reaches its goal of having preschool ESL students exit the program for mainstream classes by the end of first grade. In just two years,

Piscataway doubled its percentage of Hispanic students taking AP courses from 9 percent in 2013 to 18 percent in 2015. Hispanic students also saw a rise in AP overall scores from 3.38 to 3.81, with 56 percent of these students scoring in this qualifying range. Just this year, the district was named a Bright Spot in Hispanic Education by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

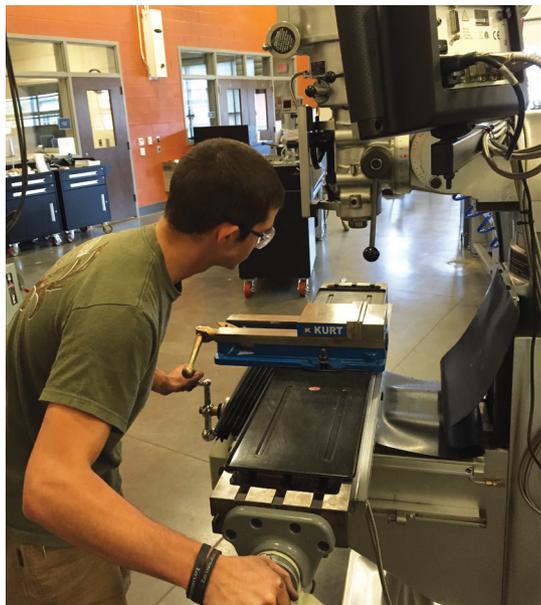
In building the ESL program, the school board made early intervention for language acquisition a priority, supporting ESL teachers within its preschools, direct mail community outreach to announce grant programs aimed at low-income families, Title III Immigrant Funds to support preschool for 3-year-old students along with those who qualify for free and reduced-price meals. The board supports ongoing on-site professional development for ESL-endorsed teachers and additional student instruction after school, on Saturdays, and in summer programs, including immersion camps for ESL students. Knowing that transportation can be an issue, the board approved free busing for Saturday programs for students as well as for their families.

CONTACT

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The Center for Advanced Technical Studies

School District Five of Lexington and Richland Counties, Irmo, South Carolina

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Center for Advanced Technical Studies was created from a vision of district and community leaders to bring career-focused academic programs to high school students. It opened in 2012 after a series of planning sessions with parents, students, businesses, and community leaders to offer academic pathways not found in traditional high schools. Students remain enrolled in their high school and take their major course of study at the center by attending in the morning or afternoon in a block schedule. Transportation is provided along with career guidance and counseling by some of the most highly qualified instructors with real-world experience in the fields in which they teach. Every student completes a capstone project focused on solving real-world problems. Students use their imagination and creativity to develop potential solutions to problems as part of completing the program of study.

RESULTS

In the three years since the center opened, annual enrollment has grown steadily from 600 students to 1,075 students across 18 different programs of study. Last school year, 250 students earned completion requirements and earned their Workkeys Certificate that can be presented to an employer certifying their credentials. In 2014, the center received the prestigious High Schools That Work Platinum Award from the

Southern Regional Education Board. It also received international attention when three separate delegations from China's Beijing Day School toured to learn how they can replicate its programs and instructional strategies.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

The school board communicated the vision for the center to the community as early as 2008, when a bond referendum of nearly \$270 million passed, which has since allowed the district to renovate seven schools and construct three new schools, including the center. The board's leadership was pivotal during this phase in garnering widespread community support for a financial investment of this size. The board guided and approved the center's mission: to offer high-wage and high-tech courses and programs that meet global academic and technical standards, integrate academic and technical studies, provide students a seamless transition through a PK-20 educational pathway with dual credit opportunities, and prepare every student to be college- and career-ready.

CONTACT

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21st Century Innovation Team

Wallingford Public Schools, Wallingford, Connecticut

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Wallingford Public Schools is a suburban district that does not receive significant state funding. The idea emerged as part of a district business think tank to distinguish Wallingford through innovation. This became the catalyst for the 21st Century Innovation Team. The initiative provides educators a sabbatical to research, design, and develop the next best practices to increase student outcomes and place the district on the map for innovation. District business partners stepped up to fund the program. As a result of providing district teachers time to investigate innovative practices, the program reinvigorated staff and increased leadership capacity. An implementation plan was established based on the first team's research supporting mastery-based learning districtwide.

RESULTS

Now in its fourth year, the program is the linchpin to the implementation of mastery-based learning in the district. The teams of teachers are viewed as the experts engaging their colleagues, parents, and administrators in the movement. In addition to the development and implementation of mastery-based learning, the team is viewed as a community resource by officials and business leaders. It is a pride point for the town. The first initiative—Wallingford 100—continues to thrive across town. With signs in all of the business windows and flags displaying the logo at all schools and municipal buildings, the initial goal of the first team has never been stronger. Most importantly, graduation rates have steadily increased each year to over 92 percent.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

The school board has a history of supporting innovation. The 21st Century Innovation Team helped the board meet its goal of having the district be a leader in instructional strategies for students. A school board member is part of the group that meets four times a year to review updates and plans for the application and acceptance process for new teams. This past school year, the board dedicated funds to implement a second team. Now with two teams, one funded by business and one funded by the school board, the district is seeing a positive impact on the implementation of its strategic plan.

CONTACT

Superintendent Salvatore Menzo
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www.wallingford.k12.ct.us



Anoka-Hennepin Technical High School

Anoka-Hennepin School District, Anoka, Minnesota



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Anoka-Hennepin Technical High School moved to the Anoka-Hennepin Technical College campus in fall 2015, giving students full access to college classes and resources. This allows students to create a five-year education plan running through high school and postsecondary training at the same campus. They can earn college credit for free while completing high school requirements. The high school creates an environment that honors and invites students of diverse backgrounds to be part of an inclusive learning community. It offers individualized schedules and online options with a daily advisory to promote academic progress and support social and emotional growth. After-school credit makeup each week helps students stay on top of their school work. Small class sizes allow students to form important relationships that not only help academic success, but promote students' gifts and talents as they plan for their future career and college pursuits. Transportation within the school district is provided along with free

breakfast and lunch. Child care is free as well, making attending school much easier for students with children.

RESULTS

The high school has seen an enrollment increase. Students have increased participation in postsecondary education options (concurrent enrollment), improved their graduation rate, and increased participation in business mentorships. All students have a postsecondary education plan. Students are eager to complete their high school diploma as a means to completing their postsecondary education. One recent student experience exemplifies what program officials are seeing. A young man who was close to graduation participated in a tour of the college, unsure of a profession. He wasn't initially interested in taking the tour but did so as part of his graduation plan. After learning about the golf course management program, and his ability to take the initial courses for free, he is now enrolled in the program and will start his intern-

ship this spring. This is taking place while he is still supported by his high school counselor, advisor, and principal.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

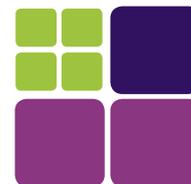
The school board set goals for student achievement that drove the decision-making process in creating the program. The board was seeking better college and career results for students who remain in the system beyond their graduation year. This program is intended to increase the overall graduation rate and to successfully place students in area colleges and technical programs. These goals aligned with the school board's vision. Board members have supported the development of this program. Officials at the Minnesota Department of Education have toured the program, enthusiastically supporting the district's work and praising the school board for its approval.



CONTACT

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#SaveFCPS

Fairfax County Public Schools, Fairfax, Virginia

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Student enrollment in Fairfax County Public Schools has increased by more than 22,000 since 2008. Expenses for salaries, health care, and retirement have risen faster than available revenues. During this time, the school budget has been reduced by nearly half a billion dollars. With no significant increase in funding, a deficit of up to \$75 million was projected for FY 2017. An unprecedented level of community engagement was used as part of the FY 2017 budget process. The engagement campaign is called #SaveFCPS. Three program components have been designed to maximize citizen involvement: (1) UserVoice, an online tool that allows citizens to post budget suggestions; (2) a Budget Task Force that provides budget recommendations; and (3) an online Budget Proposal Tool that gathers specific proposals from users who may select different options to close the deficit. The input shows the level of public support for various options.

RESULTS

Efforts to enhance community involvement in the budget process are yielding positive results. The 35 members of the task force learned much about FCPS budget issues and, as a result, are now able to disseminate this knowledge to their communities and constituent groups. Many members will remain active on budget issues. To date, hundreds of citizens have used UserVoice to post suggestions on programs that should be saved, eliminated, reduced, or redesigned. More than 3,500 submitted proposals using the Budget Proposal Tool. Survey results of about one-third of the users indicated that 93 percent found the tool to be moderately to very easy to use. The FY 2017 proposed budget included many of these recommendations.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

The school board believes that the community must have a voice in creating the budget. In its strategic plan, it explicitly states that effective stewardship requires clear communication with stakeholders and requests staff to explore and review options to gather stakeholder feedback. It has been active in the development and implementation of each of the #SaveFCPS engagement tools. The board approved using the task force as an enhanced method to gather public input, and each board member appointed a person to it. Board members promoted



the use of the Budget Proposed Tool at community meetings and in newsletters. The board used the data generated by the tools to seriously evaluate all of the ideas collected.

CONTACT

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Literacy By 3

Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

As the largest urban school district in Texas and the seventh largest in the country, Houston Independent School District serves 215,000 students, with an ethnic breakdown of 24.9 percent African American, 62.1 percent Hispanic, 8.2 percent white, and 3.6 percent Asian. More than 75 percent of district students are economically disadvantaged, nearly 30 percent are Limited English Proficient (LEP), and 8 percent are learning English as a Second Language (ESL). Literacy By 3 engages students, teachers, parents, and the community around a common goal of having 100 percent of third-graders reading at or above grade level by 2019. It includes two programs. Guided Reading provides students with high-quality leveled texts. The 180 district elementary schools received 15,000 books organized by Lexile level. The books are matched with individuals needs in each classroom, and students are permitted to take books home. Read Houston Read is a districtwide program in which volunteers read to first-graders once a week for 30 minutes, either face-to-face or online. District employees were asked to enlist family and friends to address the literacy crisis. The relationship that volunteers form with students makes a lasting impression on the students' self-esteem, ability to learn, and success as readers.

RESULTS

Although it has been less than a year since Guided Reading and Read Houston Read were implemented, students' reading scores have improved. On the 2015 NAEP, 54 percent of fourth-grade

ers scored at or above the basic level in reading, an increase of 2 percent, and 23 percent performed at or above standard, up 4 percent. On the 2015 STAAR reading test, 70 percent of third-graders passed at the current standard, up 4 percent, and 35 percent passed at the state's final recommended standard, up 4 percent, as well.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

When Literacy By 3 came before the school board with the Guided Reading component, all nine members voted unanimously to approve the \$8.5 million purchase from Scholastic of multicultural books and the professional development. Research showed that the Guided Reading method works best with economically disadvantaged students from book-free homes. All trustees are strongly behind Read Houston Read as well. In her 2015 State of the Schools address, board President Rhonda Skillern-Jones asked everyone to become a district partner: "Show your support; sign up for Read Houston Read, mentor a student, speak to a class, sponsor an activity. The return on the investment is immeasurable."

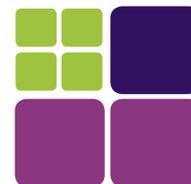
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PHOTOS COURTESY OF HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



SPARK: Summer Program for Arts, Recreation, and Knowledge

Newport News Public Schools, Newport News, Virginia

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

With 64 percent of Newport News students qualifying as economically disadvantaged, summer can present issues of hunger, learning loss, and security. The summer program SPARK brought together the district in partnership with corporate, nonprofit, state, federal, and city organizations to provide free summer learning for 2,000 K-12 students. The district provided transportation, meals, and academic coursework in the morning. Community partners joined in the afternoon to provide museum field trips, swimming lessons, career education, leadership training, financial literacy workshops, recreational activities, STEM projects, art, music, and more. To focus effort where the need was greatest, SPARK was implemented in an area where students were most likely to qualify for the federal meals program.

RESULTS

SPARK had three goals: 1) curb summer learning loss and prepare students for the upcoming school year; 2) address food insecurity; and 3) enhance student safety and reduce youth violence. The program accomplished these goals. Students received 10 hours of learning and enrichment four days a week for six weeks in a nurturing environment. They received three healthy meals per day, for a total of approximately 144,000 meals. They enjoyed six weeks of education and enrichment in a safe environment. No student was a victim of or became involved with criminal activity while enrolled in the program. Asked to name what they liked about SPARK, students had a lot to say, including: “I liked it because we got to do STEM projects and I like learning new

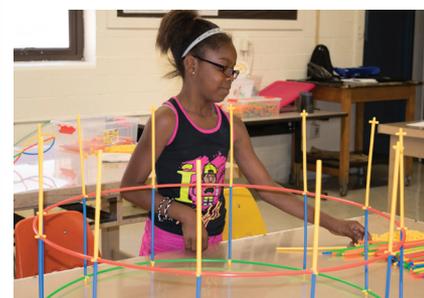


information.” “Now when school starts back up I can use the skills I learned here.” “We have three meals a day!”

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

SPARK began with a commitment from the superintendent and the school board to seek community partners to make this program a reality. It was clear that students would have a more enriching experience if multiple community organizations were involved. Then, despite a budget that is \$20 million lower than in 2008, the school board and superintendent took the bold step of announcing that they would find the funding needed to make SPARK a reality for the 2015 summer. Following that announcement, the board and staff held a series of meetings with key business, city, and nonprofit leaders to invite them to participate in SPARK. Through these and other actions, the school board and staff motivated more

than 30 organizations to provide financial, programmatic, volunteer, and in-kind support for SPARK. Members continued their support by attending SPARK sessions and participating in an appreciation luncheon for SPARK partners.



CONTACT

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Fab Lab

West Contra Costa Unified School District,
 Richmond, California



CONTACT

**Superintendent
 Bruce Harter**

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 www.wccusd.net

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The district created a Fab Lab to provide a space for students to pursue science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) interests and demonstrate the need for a mathematics basis for STEM education. The Fab Lab is a small-scale digital workshop equipped with computer-controlled tools, such as 3D printers, scanners, and milling machines, and laser-cutters, routing machines, and programming tools. Students can create different types of projects and products. Located at a high school with a concentration of high-needs students, the lab serves the entire district. The curriculum model starts with mathematics content, links the content to science or engineering concepts, and provides a culminating hands-on project lesson. Full-time mathematics and science coaches model best-practice STEM lessons for teachers. The program includes a mobile Fab Lab, which travels throughout the district. Partners include the Fab Foundation and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, with start-up funding from Chevron.

RESULTS

The California Department of Education state evaluator has documented that students who are supported by teachers using the Mathematics Coaching Consortium model outperform students whose teachers are not. This advanced performance holds true for subgroups, e.g., English language learners, African Americans, Latinos, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and girls. District benchmark assessment results show

continued student improvement over the last five years. As the district implemented more rigorous mathematics assessments, students have improved at every grade level. More than 450 teachers participate in Saturday workshops. The lab's web presence has expanded and is accessed by thousands of teachers and educators nationally and internationally. The websites, with hundreds of lessons and other resources online, are located at www.wccusd.net/math, www.wccusd.net/science, and www.wccusd.net/fablab.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

The school board provided the funding to refurbish the outmoded auto shop and turn it into a 4,000 square-foot state-of-the-art lab. The board approved grants provided by Chevron to expand STEM education, including funding for full-time mathematics and science coaches and community STEM centers throughout the district, and extending the initiative by including a mobile and hybrid lab. The board has approved local funding for districtwide mathematics and science professional development, Saturday and after-school professional development sessions, the expansion of the Mathematics Coaching Consortium partnership, and the support of a huge web presence, with free and open resources, for mathematics, science, and Fab Labs. With new state funding streams for high-need districts, the board has continued to support community interests in strengthening STEM education and Fab Labs.

Honorable Mentions

Building a Positive School Culture

Bethel Park School District
Bethel Park, Pennsylvania

In the past 30 years, the district endured five major teacher strikes. When contracts were due, a lengthy and contentious strike was expected. In the fall of 2014, with a new superintendent and new union leadership, steps were taken to heal the damage to the school community. The superintendent and school board accepted an invitation from the new teachers union executive board to meet for conversation. The board took the invitation a step farther and hosted a dinner for the union leadership. That began a year-long effort to improve relationships between the groups and to establish a new level of respect from the community for the teachers and the district.

Contact Superintendent Nancy Aloï Rose at rose.nancy@bphawks.org. Website: www.bpsd.org.

Learning that WORKS for Butler County

Butler County School System
Greenville, Alabama

An unskilled and undereducated workforce led to a high unemployment rate in Butler County. The district replaced outdated career-tech courses with career tracks that better matched the local market. The rebranded Butler County Career Academy now features health care, information technology, industrial maintenance, business, JROTC, and welding academies. All of these have industry credentialing, apprenticeship opportunities, and dual technical school enrollment opportunities to provide comprehensive career training. Staff secured \$500,000 in grants. Local and state industries donated more than \$70,000 in equipment and materials for student use.

Contact Superintendent Amy Bryan at amy.bryan@butlerco.k12.al.us. Website: www.butlerco.k12.al.us.

Ophir Elementary STEAM Academy

Loomis Union Elementary School District
Loomis, California

Because of a continued declining enrollment, Ophir Elementary

school was facing the likelihood of school closure going into the 2012-13 school year. The Loomis Union School Board began working with the Ophir community and staff to investigate possible options that would help to address the enrollment crisis. The staff and community came to the overwhelming consensus that the STEAM program provided the best fit. The program is expanding into computer coding and robotics. Over the past three years, enrollment has increased in each successive year.

Contact Principal Kevin Roche at kroche@loomis-usd.k12.ca.us. Website: www.loomis-usd.k12.ca.us.

Creating Connections and Doing it Right: Sauk Rapids-Rice to Changchun, China

Sauk Rapids-Rice School District (ISD 47)
Sauk Rapids, Minnesota

To increasing global competencies, the district provides Chinese language and culture instruction and establishes relationships with students of the same age in Asia through its sister school in Changchun. High school students have the opportunity to travel to China for two weeks at little or no cost to their families.

Contact Superintendent Daniel Bittman at daniel.bittman@isd47.org. Website: www.isd47.org.

The Library Media SERVICE Center

Swan Valley School District
Saginaw, Michigan

The district's high school library has evolved into a center where the students serve as engineers, mentors, tutors, and primary service providers. When funding cut preschool access to the public library, the high school library created a young children's section, and high school students now teach literacy lessons to 3- and 4-year-olds. When the district purchased an iPad for every student, the media center became the hub for a student-run iPad repair team, taking service calls on software and hardware problems throughout the district.

Contact Library Media Specialist Kay Wejrowski at kwejrow@swanvalley.k12.mi.us. Website: www.swanvalleyschools.com.

5,000 to 20,000 Enrollment

Honorable Mentions

WiFi on Wheels

Coachella Valley Unified School District
Thermal, California

The district is located in a rural area that has limited access to connectivity and serves a large number of families with socioeconomic challenges. It equipped 100 school buses with wireless routers that provide the average student over 200 learning hours or 30 extra learning days over the course of the year. One bus was parked in a mobile home park with no connectivity, providing Internet access to 500 students and families.

Contact Educational Technology Coordinator Edward Simoneau at edward.simoneau@cvusd.us. Website: www.cvusd.us.

The GROW Program

Craven County Schools
New Bern, North Carolina

The program builds the leadership capacity of teacher-leaders designed to identify, recruit, and develop a diverse pool of future school leaders. Program implementation included 10 monthly hands-on, competency-based sessions with authentic opportunities to lead, make mistakes, and grow the candidates. More than 40 percent of participants have transitioned to assistant principalships and 32 percent are now teacher-leaders.

Contact Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Wendy A. Miller at wendy.miller@cravenk12.org. Website: www.craven.k12.nc.us.

E Pluribus Unum: Out of Many, One

Encinitas Union School District
Encinitas, California

This program provides a foundation of understanding highlighting how the rule of law, case law, court systems, and current

events have impacted civil rights and responsibilities. By engaging students at a young age, within multileveled, multiperspective units, they discover the value of civic involvement and responsibility.

Contact Assistant Superintendent Educational Services Leighangela Brady at leighangela.brady@eusd.net. Website: www.eusd.net.

Engaging the School Community via Social Media

Henry County Public Schools
Collinsville, Virginia

Key goals of the district's strategic plan included engaging families and the community to ensure open communication and student success. Sharing student successes with the school community via Facebook, Twitter, and blogs has led to greater interaction and support for programs and school activities from families and school community partners.

Contact Coordinator for Family and Community Engagement Monica Hatchett at mhatchet@henry.k12.va.us. Website: www.henry.k12.va.us.

Livermore High School Green Engineering Academy

Livermore Valley Joint Unified School District
Livermore, California

The program focuses on careers in clean technology and renewable energy, created to provide students throughout the district with exposure to, and experience in, the fields of engineering and technology. Particular attention is paid to the participation of at-risk students, who might otherwise fall through the cracks academically.

Contact Teacher Susan Johnston at susanjohnston@lvjUSD.k12.ca.us. Website: www.livermoreschools.com.

Youth Leadership Summit

ABC Unified School District
Cerritos, California

The summit was developed in 2010 to empower the underrepresented secondary students as leaders who were charged with being agents of change by promoting a positive school climate, educating their peers on high-risk behavior interventions, and teaching conflict resolution strategies.

Contact Superintendent Mary Sieu at mary.sieu@abcusd.k12.ca.us. Website: www.abcusd.k12.ca.us.

NKY MakerSpace

Boone County Schools
Florence, Kentucky

This Makerspace is open to all students and their families in Northern Kentucky and includes six stations: make your own, robotics, design, engineering, and video and audio production. There are also spaces outside for large-scale activities. Volunteers from the community and many businesses and nonprofit organizations provide leadership. Many workshops have targeted those who haven't traditionally gone into STEAM careers, such as girls and Latino students.

Contact Chief Academic Officer Karen Cheser at karen.cheser@boone.kyschools.us. Website: www.boone.kyschools.us.

JA Inspire

Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District
Houston, Texas

The program promotes career awareness for 8,000 eighth-graders, equipping them to make informed choices for mapping out high school coursework, encouraging them to examine postsecondary possibilities, and giving them a vision for a brighter future.

Contact Associate Superintendent Linda Macias at linda.macias@cfisd.net.

The Un-Initiative

Henrico County Public Schools
Henrico, Virginia

The school board and superintendent asked all current employees to submit ideas on things they thought the district could stop doing and still be an efficient and effective organization. This program created a way to make the best possible use of the resources, while involving the frontline employees who best understand how to increase their own job efficiency. These ideas are saving staff time and in some cases, money, while also contributing to the district's history of academic excellence.

Contact Communications Specialist Chris O'Brien at csobrion@henrico.k12.va.us. Website: www.henricoschools.us.

Diploma+

Kansas City Kansas Public Schools
Kansas City, Kansas

Diploma+ provides clear expectations for all, pre-K through 12th grade, along with a promise to students, parents, and the community. It has allowed the district to align all work around a single focus: college and career preparation. The key indicators include strong literacy and academic skills at elementary school, high-school-ready benchmarks at middle school, and Diploma+ benchmarks at high school.

Contact Chief of Communications and Governmental Relations David Smith at david.smith@kckps.org. Website: www.kckps.org.