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Independent
School
District**

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REFORM GOVERNANCE IN ACTION

A Dallas ISD Board of Trustees Report

JUNE 2009



Introduction

THE DALLAS ISD is one of six districts nationwide selected in May 2007 by the Center for Reform of School Systems to participate in the Reform Governance in Action training. Reform Governance in Action is a two-year training program for school boards and superintendents. The training helps school district leaders forge a functional team ready to apply key lessons learned from major reform efforts at other school districts to boost student achievement at their own district.

Districts are chosen to participate in the program based on such criteria as the quality, unity, and commitment of the school board; the district's leadership focus on improving student achievement; and stable leadership.

By accepting this invitation, trustees and the superintendent of schools committed to full and active participation in the program. Training costs for the Dallas ISD trustees were underwritten by the Meadows Foundation in conjunction with The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation.

During RGA training sessions conducted from July 2007 through February 2009, Dallas ISD school leaders used case studies and other tools to work on ways to improve school governance and administration. They learned best practices and gained inspiration to govern strategically and set the stage for improved student achievement.



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IMPROVING GOVERNANCE AND REFORMING LEADERSHIP

Based on the Reform Governance in Action training, the Dallas ISD Board of Trustees has taken a number of steps that are directly or indirectly affecting student achievement in the district. Among their first actions, in January 2008, was to develop a set of beliefs and commitments to guide them as they work to achieve their stated vision of the Dallas ISD as the best urban district in the United States.

The Dallas ISD Board of Trustees also began an in-depth review of the district's complete policy manual with a goal of eliminating outdated policies, identifying and developing new policies, and making revisions where necessary. Their review has resulted in strong policies that regulate various aspects and operations of the district and the school board itself, including a clarification of their own responsibilities as trustees.

THEORY OF ACTION POLICY

In addition to making their new vision, beliefs, and commitments part of district policy, the Board of Trustees put into policy a Theory of Action. Referred to as Managed Instruction with Earned Empowerment, this policy sets out the means for achieving the vision: placing the focus on students, not the adults, and aligning district goals, strategies, policies, budgets, and administrative actions.

The value of this policy can be seen in improved student achievement and recognition by the Brookings Institution for having narrowed the achievement gap from 2000 to 2007 more than any other urban school district in Texas and more than all but one urban district in the country.



MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT POLICIES

Trustees established management oversight policies to ensure that district employees and others engaged in district business follow all relevant laws and regulations in letter and in spirit and to ensure the integrity and performance of major district business systems. The superintendent of schools enforces the policies and provides status reports to the board.

CONSTITUENT SERVICES

The Dallas ISD Board of Trustees has a responsibility to help citizens obtain the information and services the state intends for districts to provide. The superintendent is responsible for an automated system to track, respond to, and report constituent inquiries, requests, issues, complaints, and administrative conclusions to the board.

The system includes a single phone number, (972) 925-5555, and an e-mail address, comments@dallasisd.org, where parents/guardians and the public can get responses to questions or express their concerns about a variety of subjects. In addition, online policies, meeting agendas, and videos of board meetings have been made available to help citizens stay informed.

Vision, Beliefs, and Commitments

VISION

To be the best urban district in the United States

BELIEFS AND COMMITMENTS

- **We believe that every student can perform at or above grade level and graduate college and workforce ready to compete in the global economy; therefore we commit to:**
 - Support the learning conditions and provide the resources needed for all students to reach high academic levels.
 - Setting college readiness as the standard preK-12 for all students.
- **We believe that educators have the most powerful impact on student achievement; therefore we commit to:**
 - Support the efforts to recruit, retain, and reward highly effective teachers and principals to ensure that students have access to expert instruction.
 - Allocate the resources needed to equip principals and teachers with the skills to provide effective leadership and instruction that results in student achievement.
- **We believe that educational equity and excellence will eliminate the achievement gap; therefore we commit to:**
 - Provide all students with equal access to a rigorous and challenging academic curriculum.
 - Promote an educational system that supports targeted effort toward academically rigorous learning for all students and student groups.
 - Allocate the necessary resources to ensure equitable access to rigorous learning, thus eliminating the achievement gap.

- **We believe that every student must be educated in a safe, welcoming, effective and innovative learning environment; therefore we commit to:**
 - Provide for safe and secure learning environments that support civility, respect, and academic achievement of all students.
 - Adopt a code of conduct and ensure policies and procedures are followed.
- **We believe our school district must be a model for integrity and fiscal responsibility; therefore we commit to:**
 - Support staff training on the ethical practices and the investigation of all reported ethical issues.
 - Adopt sound legal and fiscal policies governing the management of the district.
 - Require and monitor fiscal controls and hold all staff, vendors, and contractors accountable.
- **We believe that engaged parents and guardians impact a student's academic and personal development; therefore we commit to:**
 - Support programs that inform and engage parents in the academic and social development of their children (students).
 - Adopt a framework for public school parental choice at the secondary level.
- **We believe that a supportive community is fundamental to achieving and sustaining our success; therefore we commit to:**
 - Support partnerships with community, business, and civic and faith-based organizations for achieving excellence.
 - Engage the community's support in achieving the district's vision.

THE MISSION

The mission of the Dallas Independent School District is to prepare all students to graduate with the knowledge and skills to become productive and responsible citizens.