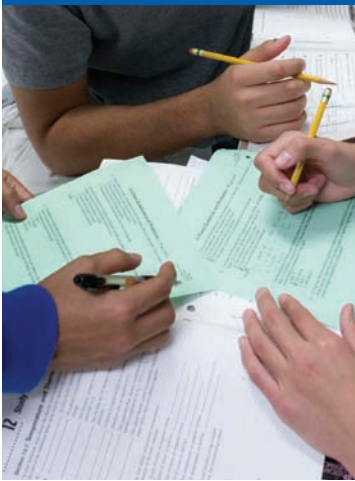


# 2011

## Texas High School Project Site Report: **North Side High School** Fort Worth ISD ■ Fort Worth, Texas

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## NORTH SIDE HIGH SCHOOL

Between 2004 and 2009, the Texas High School Project (THSP) began an extensive, statewide effort to restructure and revitalize struggling schools through the administration of grants and the provision of expert assistance. Following the conclusion of the grant period, THSP identified four schools as having made meaningful gains in student performance on standardized tests. This report provides an in-depth review of the recent reform efforts made at one of those campuses - North Side High School in the Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) - and highlights how THSP funding may have contributed to this improvement.

THSP contracted with a research team at the Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin to review North Side High School's leadership structure and practices, the effectiveness of its teachers, the learning systems that affect instruction and student performance, and the school's performance management systems that allow for data-driven decision-making. These four impact areas - education leadership, teacher effectiveness, learning systems, and performance management - serve as the framework for this report, as well as for THSP's reform efforts aimed at ensuring all students graduate from high school "college ready, career ready, life ready."<sup>1</sup>

### TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT

*Created in 2003, the Texas High School Project is a public-private alliance that includes: the Texas Education Agency; Office of the Governor; Texas Legislature; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Michael & Susan Dell Foundation; Communities Foundation of Texas; National Instruments; Greater Texas Foundation; and the Meadows Foundation. THSP strives to share and scale what is working in the areas of education leadership, teacher effectiveness, learning systems, and performance management. THSP's work promotes postsecondary access, success, and completion for all students - with a focus on those who are low-income and first-generation college applicants.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since it opened in Fort Worth's historic North Side neighborhood in 1937, North Side High School has traditionally served a high-needs population. Today, the campus is comprised of 1,400 students, 95% of whom are Latino, and 82% are economically disadvantaged.<sup>2</sup> In the surrounding neighborhood, 70% of adults have less than a high school education.<sup>3</sup>

The effects of these challenges became particularly clear beginning in 2000. From 2000-2005, an average of only 73% of incoming freshman students graduated within four years and 15% dropped out at some point. The remaining students obtained a G.E.D. or took longer than four years to graduate.<sup>4</sup>

Campus administrators responded the following school year with a family outreach plan. Assistant principals began making daily phone calls to parents of absentees. The school assigned students to detention for unexcused absences and held conferences with the parents of students who had excessive absences. Attendance and graduation rates have since improved to 92% and 81%, respectively.<sup>5</sup>

When it became clear that North Side was making progress in getting students through the school system, the focus began to shift to improving the quality of education students received. According to a report conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) in 2005, part of the problem behind the low student performance at North Side was an environment of low expectations. Some teachers stated that they doubted all students could learn at a high level. Students at North Side were not expected to take any additional courses to complete an academic or career concentration. None of the three types of diplomas granted by the school required four years of mathematics, and there were concerns that the senior English classes were not meeting college- and career-readiness standards.

Additionally, a gap in achievement existed between Latinos and other subgroups, especially when it came to college readiness. Only 32% of Latino seniors in 2004 took the SAT, compared with 41% of African Americans and nearly 73% of white students. Moreover, only 6.5% of Latino students met the college readiness criterion on the SAT, compared with 62.5% of white and 40% of African American students.<sup>6</sup>

## PARTNERSHIP WITH THE TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT


In 2005, then Principal Cathleen Richardson and a small leadership team comprised of counselors and teachers, successfully applied for a grant from the Texas High School Project to continue their school's progress. The THSP grant, which included assistance from SREB's High Schools That Work (HSTW) initiative, was specifically designed to help the campus reinvent itself as a group of cohesive small learning communities.<sup>7</sup>

Principal Richardson left after the first year of the grant (2005-2006) with little progress made, and Virginia Dean, formerly the principal at a nearby middle school, took over as the new principal. New assistant principals, including one who had worked with Principal Dean previously, also joined the North Side staff the same year. Although the new administration faced an environment in which many teachers were not supportive of the new direction, Principal Dean and her staff persisted with implementing the plans designed with the help of THSP and HSTW.

In 2006-2007 - Principal Dean's first year at North Side - the 9th grade was divided into four teams. Each team of students shared common math, science, language arts, and social studies teachers. With the team structure, a set of core teachers was able to communicate daily about a common group of students.

For 10th through 12th grade students, THSP helped the school establish four small learning communities, each with a separate theme: Medical; Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM); Service (hospitality management and education); and Business. The goals of the small learning communities were to improve student achievement, increase attendance rates, and decrease dropout rates by providing students with a more intimate educational setting, as well as an opportunity to focus on content that interested them.

The first year of the implementation of small learning communities was tumultuous for North Side. Many teachers felt that too much was changing at once, and as Principal Dean pushed through with the new initiatives, she struggled to maintain teacher support. By the beginning of the following school year, 70% of the teachers had retired or left the school. North Side also experienced a spike in its dropout rate during this first year. THSP's and North Side's leadership were faced with the dilemma of either continuing the small learning communities after replacing the majority of the school's staff or changing to another model.



As a result, North Side has since moved away from the small learning communities model and instead adopted a district initiative called Student Interest Programs (SIPs). These SIPs are clusters of courses which include a college- or career-readiness theme; the themes are medical, hospitality, tourism, and graphic design. The SIP program was piloted at North Side and is now being turned into a district-wide initiative for all high schools.

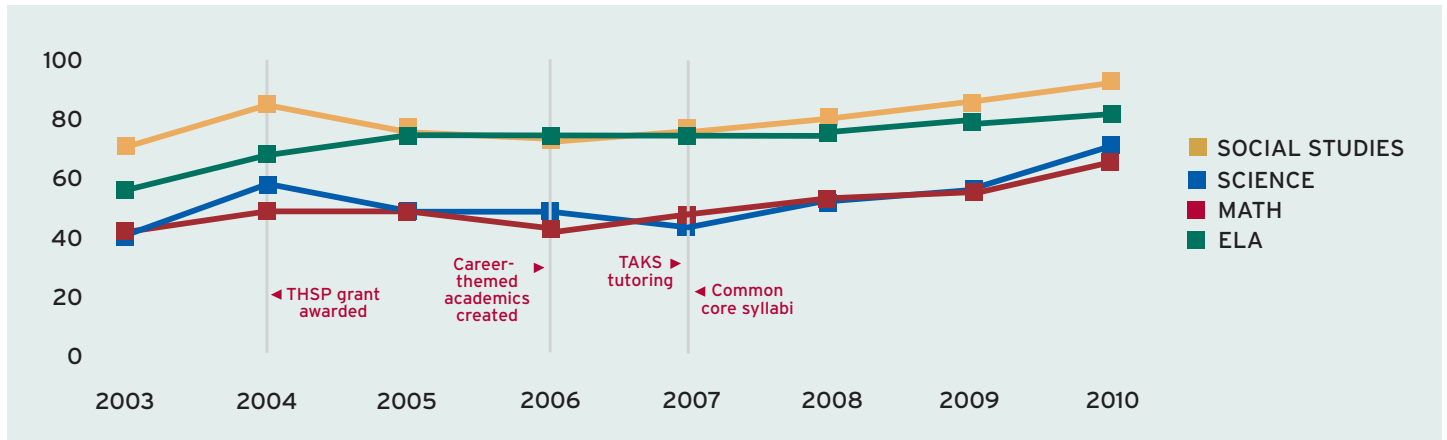
Starting in 2011-2012, SIPs will be renamed Programs of Choice and will offer high school students in Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) a variety of options for study plans. Each high school will offer a minimum of three Programs of Choice, and attract students with interests in those areas. In addition to the Programs of Choice and SIP models, North Side currently offers Programs of Study elective clusters in which students may graduate with advanced training in automotive technology, cosmetology, or education.

An expansion of teaming to 10th grade also occurred during the creation of the SIP program. Similar to what was already being done in 9th grade, a team of core subject teachers shared a set of 10th grade students, and an assistant principal was assigned exclusively to each grade level. This new structure enabled more efficient collaborative planning and communication between teachers and administrators.

Throughout the duration of the grant period, which ended after the 2009-2010 school year, the financial and personnel resources THSP and HSTW provided North Side allowed for an on-site coach who mentored administrators on best leadership practices, as well as professional development for all staff. Additionally, grant funding allowed North Side to provide tutoring services after school and on Saturdays and to structure the class schedule so that teachers could have common team planning and conference periods.

FIGURE 1. TEST SCORE TRENDS  
AT NORTH SIDE HIGH SCHOOL  
FROM 2003-2010

As seen in Figure 1, North Side experienced significant improvement in student performance across each grade level and subject area. Specifically, North Side has seen improved Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores, a declining dropout rate, and improved student attendance.<sup>8</sup> In addition, by their own accounts, staff and faculty members are happier and have better relationships with each other, their administrators, and their students following the THSP grant.



Source: Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System database  
Note: Appendix 1 provides a comprehensive timeline covering the full reform effort.

In the 2010-2011 school year, North Side welcomed a new principal, Antonio Martinez. Martinez, who himself is a product of Fort Worth schools and previously led a nearby elementary school, remains committed to North Side's new approach. Though he was not involved with the THSP grant, Principal Martinez stated that the structures put in place by his predecessors positioned the school well for pursuing further reforms.

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## METHODOLOGY

The Texas High School Project (THSP) administered grants to a number of high schools in Texas interested in creating small learning communities on their campuses. Following a review of the progress made at all schools receiving grants, THSP identified North Side and three other campuses as successful reform efforts because of meaningful increases in standardized test scores over the grant period. Graduate students, under the direction of Professor Cynthia Osborne from the LBJ School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin, were then tasked with investigating the specific changes that led to improvements at North Side High School.

After reviewing internal THSP documents, LBJ School researchers interviewed the current principal, two assistant principals, three lead content teachers, and a representative from North Side's alumni association. This report identifies the policy changes at North Side that led to its transition into a consistently "Acceptable" ranked school that continues to improve each year. The findings are presented through a framework adopted by THSP, which include four impact areas related to school performance: education leadership, teacher effectiveness, learning systems, and performance management. Beginning with a brief discussion of each impact area, we describe specific reform measures that teachers and administrators at North Side claim led to improvements in their school.

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## EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

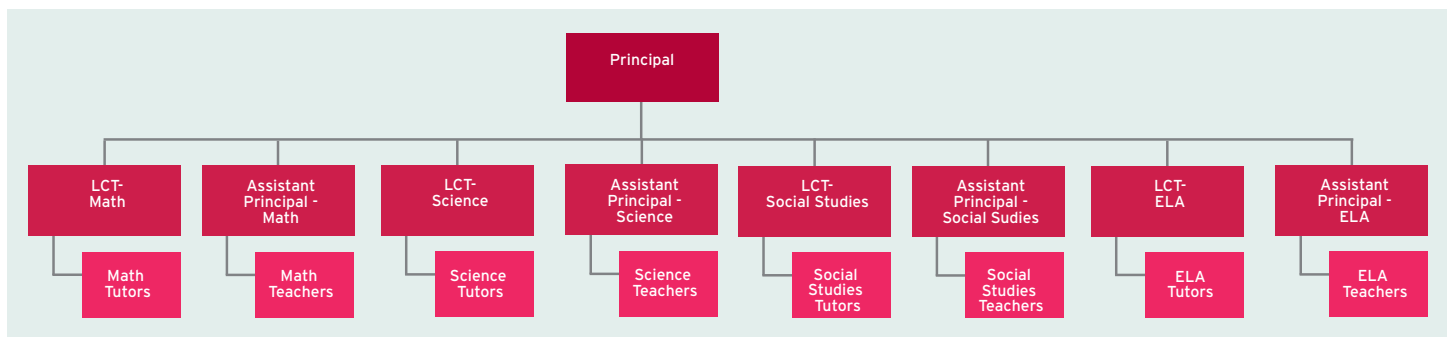
The Texas High School Project (THSP) describes education leadership as “campus leaders who are focused on effective instruction and efficient operations.”<sup>9</sup> Education leadership is embodied not only in principals and superintendents, but in teachers as well.<sup>10</sup> Whereas teacher effectiveness and curriculum have traditionally been the focus of improving student performance, today a growing body of literature focuses on the role that leaders play in helping students excel. Recent studies indicate that school leadership can have a positive and significant effect on student learning - through direct means, such as influencing campus culture, and indirect means, such as improving the quality of teachers on the campus.<sup>11</sup>

An extensive review of education leadership at North Side High School shows that the implementation of strategic leadership structures contributed to improved student performance by setting high expectations for staff and students, establishing a distributive leadership model, creating an environment of collaboration among teachers, and engaging the surrounding community in decisions for the school.

## IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES

Leadership at North Side is distributed among the principal, assistant principals, and lead content teachers (LCTs). There are four core content areas that the LCTs oversee. Each assistant principal oversees the teachers in one of the four content areas. LCTs assign tutors to work with specific teachers to aid lagging students. Tutors report to teachers, and both LCTs and assistant principals report directly to the principal. Figure 2 illustrates the leadership structure at North Side.


FIGURE 2. LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE AT NORTH SIDE HIGH SCHOOL



## SETTING HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Setting high expectations across the school had been a consistent problem at North Side, and student performance reflected low expectations. As shown in Figure 1, in the 2005-2006 school year, math scores on the TAKS were 43% passing; the following year showed meager improvement to 46%.<sup>12</sup> Over the 2005-2007 school years, administrators noted that the number of dropouts increased, which was a reversal of their previous declining trend. The number of students who dropped out almost doubled, from 31 to 61 students.

Despite the bleak picture that these numbers painted, Virginia Dean, the principal of North Side at the time, met with teachers to instill a “can-do” attitude, to inspire success, and to raise expectations. Principal Dean called every faculty member into the school’s library, where she had posted pictures of the students who did not pass TAKS the prior year. She handed teachers a list of the names of non-passing students and asked, “What can we do to help them? What is your connection with these students?”



During our interviews, teachers recalled that day vividly. From that day forward, a new type of accountability was introduced at North Side. Teachers were expected not just to teach their lessons, but to be part of a school-wide solution. Empowering teachers in such a way motivated them to volunteer ideas and share strategies. One idea that came out of this meeting was intensive tutoring, which would become an integral part of North Side's progress over the next few years.

North Side continues to exemplify an environment of high expectations. Through frequent data analysis, North Side leadership raised teachers' expectations. During teacher meetings, leaders review school performance based on data reports. Teachers are expected to know their students' performance and plan accordingly. A LCT said, "I know I'm much more sensitive to data than I was eight years ago." He continued, "[Now] our teachers are expected to know much more about our students."

### **ESTABLISHING A DISTRIBUTIVE LEADERSHIP MODEL**

In the second year of the THSP grant, North Side was able to restructure the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades into three themed academies. Ninth grade was divided into four small learning communities. LCTs were chosen to direct the efforts of their team of teachers. The principal gave them decision-making authority and considerable flexibility in managing their teams.

For example, after speaking with the teachers in their team, an LCT might assign a tutor to work with a class that needs assistance. In the words of one assistant principal, "[LCTs] make about 80% of the decisions for the school. In the other 20%, their ideas are taken into consideration."

## CREATING A COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT

North Side leadership ensures the school enjoys a collaborative environment by purposefully hiring teachers committed to teamwork. Since 2007-2008, North Side administrators have ensured that recruited teachers are team players. During our interviews, we found that what North Side leaders value the most in a teacher is his or her willingness to collaborate.

Also, North Side's unique summer planning structure promotes a culture of teamwork. Starting in the 2006 school year, North Side held Summer Planning Academies (SPAs). Due in part to the THSP grant and the coordinated efforts between the principal and the lead content teachers, North Side staff go on a three-day summer retreat where they plan for the coming year, attend professional development sessions, set expectations, discuss students' needs, and learn more about their co-workers.

According to school administrators, about 90% of North Side teachers attended the last SPA. The planning of the SPA and its execution reflect the importance that North Side leadership gives to creating a collaborative atmosphere.

## ENGAGING THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY

North Side leadership makes a concerted effort to engage the community to help create a sense of pride in North Side High School. Approximately once a month, Principal Martinez meets with members of Legacy, an alumni organization that raises funds for the school from local businesses and families, to discuss projects that will make the students feel proud of their school. These projects include activities such as fixing the baseball diamond, buying instruments for the mariachi band, and beautifying the landscape of the school. Through community engagement, North Side leadership ensures its students take pride in their school and feel it is successful.

## TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

Research shows that high quality, effective teachers can have a positive and significant impact on student achievement.<sup>13</sup> As such, the Texas High School Project (THSP) is dedicated to the impact area of teacher effectiveness, which focuses on the ability to “hire and develop teachers who help students perform better.”<sup>14</sup> During the course of our investigation, we used the extant body of research on teacher effectiveness as a guiding framework for analysis. This section describes the findings from North Side High School based on themes which are critical to investments in teacher effectiveness; these include recruitment and retention, teacher evaluation, professional development, and collaboration.<sup>15</sup> We also discuss how teacher buy-in and involvement was instrumental in the school's reform process.

### DEFINING TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS AT NORTH SIDE HIGH SCHOOL

One of the biggest challenges that public high school administrators face across the state of Texas is recruiting, training, and retaining qualified and effective teachers.<sup>16</sup> North Side is no exception, and over the last several years the school has struggled to retain teachers, promote collaboration, and provide necessary support for continuing teachers. To North Side, teacher effectiveness is defined in terms of hiring teachers who are willing to work hard, learn while doing the job, and remain at the campus from year to year.

With the help of THSP, North Side High School has been able to make some significant, positive changes in its ability to hire and retain effective teachers. These changes include a lower teacher turnover rate, a stronger sense of purpose as team players, and a renewed investment in teacher development.

## HIRING AND RETAINING EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

With a history of high teacher turnover rates, maintaining an effective, consistent hiring process is a top priority. Principal Martinez explained that subject matter knowledge and teaching experience were not the most important or critical factors affecting his hiring decisions. He emphasized that the most important factor when considering whether to hire a new teacher is his or her ability to be a “team player” and buy into new reforms.

Principal Martinez believes that teachers can be taught on the job and that a positive attitude can make all the difference for teacher success. He said he has passed on many teachers who have demonstrated an ability to raise student test scores or who have a lot of experience in the classroom simply because they did not present themselves as team players.

## PROVIDING EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

Teachers at North Side - as well as those across Texas - are evaluated based on the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) form. The PDAS evaluation process includes a minimum of one 45-minute observation and completion of the “Teacher Self-Report” form. Every teacher is advised ahead of time as to when PDAS will be performed and has time to prepare for the evaluation.

Though it is relatively extensive, PDAS does not give timely feedback to teachers to foster changes in classroom procedures or learning, thus the school also uses more informal evaluation methods. Principal Martinez and other administrative personnel perform “walk-throughs,” or small in-class evaluations. Each administrator is required to perform walk-through evaluations and each assistant principal is assigned specific academic departments to monitor.

These walk-through observations last approximately 10 minutes, but provide timely feedback on what teachers are doing in the classroom. Walk-throughs occur throughout the year and are completed at random, which helps to keep teachers ready at all times for interactions with their administrators and evaluators.

Apart from observations, teachers are also evaluated on their students’ test score data. These scores are used to gauge teacher effectiveness and work in tandem with evaluation efforts to better understand teachers’ pedagogical process and plan for future learning opportunities.

## EXPANDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers and administrators consistently mentioned North Side's professional development initiatives as being instrumental to the school's progress. With THSP grant funds, the school created the North Side Teacher University in the 2006-2007 school year. This was a yearlong program that allowed teachers to meet every six weeks on a Saturday and invite experts in the teaching profession as well as North Side's own staff to come and model new teaching methods. Food was always provided and the program was a huge success among teachers.

During the 2008-2009 school year, THSP funds were redirected to other priorities and the program was discontinued. Interviewees often stated that professional development opportunities, like those provided by THSP, have given teachers support for expanding their pedagogical knowledge and have helped teachers feel as though their continued training is important to North Side administrative staff.

## SUPPORTING COLLEGIALITY AND COLLABORATION

Teachers mentioned that, in addition to professional development, the teaching culture and environment were improved with the introduction of teaming across a grade level. Today, teachers feel comfortable going to each other and testing out ideas. They are also sources of support for one another because they share similar experiences. One teacher said that teaming allows her to have "someone to vent to" about frustrating challenges.

Lead content teachers have also helped foster a positive culture because they have been able to acclimate new teachers to the norms and expectations of the school, as well as support teachers based on their content or department. This new culture has fostered even greater opportunities for sharing and collaboration.

## CREATING TEACHER BUY-IN FOR REFORM

In the first years of the grant, North Side struggled to keep teachers. For example, 73 teachers left the school after the 2006-2007 school year - a dramatic reduction in staff. During our visit to North Side High School in spring 2011, however, Principal Martinez explained that this drastic cut might actually have helped the administration hire a group of teachers that share a common philosophy of reform and success. For the 2010 school year, only 13 new teachers joined a staff of 151 teachers.

## LEARNING SYSTEMS

The Texas High School Project (THSP) defines learning systems as structures put in place to “support administrative and learning environments that encourage rigorous and personalized learning.”<sup>17</sup> Changes made to the learning systems at North Side High School proved to be crucial to increased student performance and overall success. Investments in learning systems have been central to sustaining success at North Side after the redesign process was complete. Systems that encourage rigorous and personalized learning for students at North Side include altering school structures, aligning curriculum and standardizing assessments, and implementing strategic interventions.

### ALTERING SCHOOL STRUCTURES

#### *Small Learning Communities*

The research behind academy-based small learning communities suggests that they provide a smaller setting than comprehensive high schools, allowing students to link their learning to college and career aspirations. The approach has been found to be especially useful with students traditionally considered “at risk” of leaving school or dropping out.<sup>18</sup> North Side initially used its THSP grant to create four academies through the High Schools That Work (HSTW) model. Later, North Side changed from the original HSTW model to align with the Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) initiative, first called Student Interest Programs (SIPs), and then rebranded as Programs of Choice.

This program is a district-wide effort based on the research behind academic academies; its goal is to bring career and postsecondary relevance to classrooms for students of varying abilities and interests.<sup>19</sup> North Side’s SIPs/Programs of Choice are: culinary, hospitality, and event management; graphic design, illustration, and video animation; and medical professions. Programs of Choice encourage students to think about their postsecondary plans and allow teachers to work with students to help them become college and career ready.

The school also offers additional initiatives, which they called Programs of Study. These programs included automotive technology, cosmetology, and education, and are available to 10th through 12th grade students.

One of the Programs of Study in particular - cosmetology - has a 100% high school graduation rate and all students earn their cosmetology licenses. The program is rigorous and highly selective. Because of its small size, the cosmetology director can monitor her students’ performance across all content areas, and she has developed close relationships with her students and encourages and pushes them to strive for academic excellence. In fact, she requires that her students pass their other classes to participate in cosmetology.

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North Side further sought to create a sense of closeness and continuity among grades by assigning a dedicated assistant principal to a cohort of students. That assistant principal follows students for four years, giving the students a consistent contact throughout their high school experience.

#### *Building Relationships Through Teaming*

Although North Side moved from career academies to Student Interest Programs (SIPs) in their third year of the THSP grant, the idea of small learning communities was still important. With SIPs came an emphasis on teaming. THSP helped North Side to establish 9th and 10th grade teams at the school. Each team consists of one teacher from each of the four core areas: math, science, social studies, and English, and is responsible for approximately 100 to 125 students.

Teaming is instrumental for curriculum enhancement and for targeting “bubble” students - those students wavering between acceptable and below-level performance. Teams also encourage camaraderie among students, who are able to get to know a smaller group of classmates more intimately. An added benefit has been teacher morale: teachers reported enjoying working closely and collaboratively with a small group of their peers and students and felt it was beneficial for student learning. This finding fits with the extant literature on teaming, which suggests the practice recognizes the complexity of the teaching process and addresses the interdependence of teachers when trying to achieve broader goals.<sup>20</sup>

At North Side, lead content teachers (LCTs) received training from HSTW through a dedicated on-site “coach.” The LCTs we interviewed credited the professional development that the coach provided with helping to enhance teaming efforts at the school, improve communication between teachers and administrators, and build strong collaborative relationships between teachers.

#### *Creating a Safe Learning Environment*

Creating an environment that was conducive to learning was a deliberate endeavor at North Side. Even outside the classroom, the school took efforts to create a stable and safe environment. FWISD provides hall monitors to schools in its district, but North Side teachers also stand at their doors between periods. Interviewees claimed that this proactive approach to discipline greatly reduced overall rowdiness in the hallways, allowing students to focus on learning.

## ALIGNING CURRICULUM AND STANDARDIZING ASSESSMENTS

Individual departments at North Side made efforts to vertically align curriculum by starting with skills students should have mastered by graduation and working backwards to ensure they are able to build up to those skills through incremental steps in each grade. These alignment efforts, however, were largely nonstandard and varied by department.

The extra planning period provided to teamed teachers led to common planning periods for the 9th and 10th grade teams and departments. Teachers use this time to work on curriculum, discuss classroom issues, and create plans to reach students in danger of failing. Departments in the 9th and 10th grades meet one day per week during common planning periods to focus on horizontal curriculum alignment, or aligning content in a subject area across classrooms to ensure all students in a given grade are learning the same material. These meetings include each department's head and associated LCTs. One assistant principal specifically credited this content focus with improving student performance in algebra.

Teachers also align curriculum through the use of strategic "Sponge Activities" in their lessons. Sponge Activities are based on objectives defined by teachers in certain areas, like chemistry, and are used as refreshers for students who were exposed to the material in previous years. Sponge Activities are designed to reinforce skills that students may have mastered, but forgotten. This helps students build a stronger foundation in the basics while allowing teachers to spend more time teaching new material.

## IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS

### *Supporting Student Learning*

Inside the classroom, former Principal Dean, who received coaching from HSTW and THSP, was instrumental in encouraging teachers not to let students “fall through the cracks.” As mentioned earlier, in our interviews teachers described one meeting in the library where Principal Dean had posted pictures of students who were failing or in danger of failing in each content area. There was a sense of urgency that motivated teachers to work together to help individual students become more than just names and numbers after that meeting.

North Side has also worked to build a strong volunteer base of parents of students at the school that can be called on for a variety of tasks. Volunteer parents are particularly helpful as translators during parent-teacher conferences and in making phone calls home to inquire about students. The translators have allowed teachers to communicate more effectively with parents who do not speak English. Having volunteers call parents allowed teachers to focus on academic efforts with students and also support students through maintaining a strong scholastic connection between school and home.

### *Tutoring*

After the dropout rate spiked during the 2006-2007 school year, North Side doubled its efforts with respect to tutoring. Before the THSP grant, tutoring was done in an ad hoc manner. The grant provided funding for a formal Saturday and after-school tutoring program. Teachers encourage students in danger of failing to attend the tutoring sessions by showing them classroom data and by providing prizes, food and beverages, and other incentives to participants.

As a result of teachers' efforts, the Saturday tutoring program attracted hundreds of students and has been very successful, both in the attendance record and in affecting state assessment test scores. The year after the Saturday tutoring program began, the dropout rate steeply declined and Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test scores improved (see Figure 1).

TAKS scores continue to improve each year because North Side staff systematically identify struggling students and build specialized tutoring plans for each one. There are two types of tutoring offered: core area and content-specific tutoring for students who have failed one or more section of the TAKS test. The Saturday tutorials provide both types, as well as tutoring for students working on credit recovery. A small cadre of teachers provides the tutoring, and THSP/HSTW funds enabled these teachers to be paid for their work.

## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Effective decision-making depends on the availability, timeliness, and quality of data, both quantitative and qualitative. The Texas High School Project (THSP) aims to help schools “create the infrastructure and processes to identify, track, and analyze data critical to key decision-making.”<sup>21</sup> Critical data range from standardized test and classroom assessment scores to attendance and discipline records. Although educational data move constantly between classrooms, campuses, districts, and the state, this report focuses on the data being analyzed and the decisions being made within North Side High School at the classroom and campus levels.

Further, data collection and management are just a small piece of effective performance management. Research shows that using data purposefully to identify strengths and weaknesses among students and within the school and responding to findings through interventions or new school policies is critical to meaningful improvement.<sup>22</sup> This section explores the ways North Side focused its performance management around informed decisions from a variety of data.

Over the five-year grant period, North Side High School used the resources provided by THSP and High Schools That Work (HSTW) to implement three key changes in the area of performance and data management. The school has committed to purposeful data use, provided time and opportunities for staff to collaboratively analyze data and plan accordingly, and tracked student performance to develop specific learning and intervention plans based on data.

### ANALYZING DATA PURPOSEFULLY

As part of Fort Worth ISD (FWISD), North Side has used a variety of district-based technology and data systems over the years. Earlier systems allowed teachers to simply access their students’ benchmark assessment scores, but more recent systems, such as *Data Smart*, have expanded to provide many more data points, including weekly assessments broken down by each objective. Not all computer data management systems are as helpful. For example, North Side staff described the current *Connects* student data management system as being slow to update and an obstacle to more efficient performance management.

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Regardless of the computer system used, North Side leadership is committed to expanding the number of decisions made based on specific data. At the campus level, principals and counselors are quick to identify students who are failing one or more TAKS tests on their first try. Individual conferences with the student, parents, teachers, counselors, and principals are immediately scheduled. At the department level, lead content teachers use benchmark and weekly assessment scores to develop tutoring plans with their teachers. Additionally, in the past years, teachers and administrators at North Side have begun to require students to track their own performance using real-time assessment data.

#### **BUILDING DATA REVIEW INTO TEACHER SCHEDULES**

Computer-based systems for data management evolved during THSP's grant process primarily due to district initiatives. FWISD provided the systems, technology, and some training to its campus personnel as it introduced new software and systems. Without time to truly learn, collaborate, and effectively use the data, these new systems could have become simply another item placed on teachers' and administrators' already full plate.

THSP, through its funding and technical assistance, provided the time and money for North Side's staff to meet, understand, and plan their instruction based on specific data. Beginning in the summer of 2004, North Side's teachers, counselors, and administrators met during the weeks before the students arrived to analyze individual student performance and demographic data. By the first day of the new school year, each teacher had information about each student that went beyond grades and previous teachers' comments.

Over the years of the THSP grant, the summer collaborative meetings expanded. In the summer of 2007, North Side used a portion of the grant money to pay for additional summer planning days. During both the summer of 2008 and 2009, funds were used to hold the three-day Summer Planning Academies (SPAs) off campus. In addition to being a time for staff to reflect and get to know one another better, teachers, administrators, and counselors credited the additional paid planning time with increasing their knowledge of how data could be used to plan instruction that addressed specific student needs.

## DESIGNING DATA-BASED STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS

During the 2007-2008 school year, North Side began holding individual meetings with students who were failing or at risk of failing. School staff worked together to identify the appropriate students based on prior and current TAKS and local benchmark scores, weekly assessment and work sample grades, and classroom attendance. These meetings, which are attended by the student, student's parents, teachers, principals, and counselors, continue today.

Teachers and administrators at North Side have credited the meetings and the subsequent data monitoring with an increase in overall student performance and a greater number of students passing the TAKS after initially failing. During the meeting, the participants share specific data on state and local assessments, attendance, and behavior to create an individualized intervention and tutorial plan for the student. All stakeholders in the student's education are involved and made aware of how progress is tracked and how expectations will be measured going forward.

In the fall of 2006, HSTW consultants worked with the teachers in each subject area to divide the struggling students into small groups based on the students' particular weaknesses according to benchmark and TAKS results. The tutorial groups changed throughout the year according to assessment data that were collected and tracked. Teachers were able to focus on specific objectives with each group instead of re-teaching blindly based on assumptions about the students' knowledge. The planning and instruction became "more intentional," according to one assistant principal, which led to an almost immediate improvement in TAKS scores across all subjects.

With the realization that they were putting an enormous amount of time and effort into students who were already failing, administrators began Program of Study conferences for all incoming freshmen. In a style similar to the meetings for failing students, teachers involve the students themselves in planning their learning experiences based on individual strengths and weaknesses. Students are shown explicitly how their progress is tracked based on assessments, work samples, behavior, and attendance. During the conferences and throughout the year, all staff members speak with the students and their families about their future college and career plans, aiming to help the students create a long-term outlook.

## MOVING FORWARD

Using what they have learned from HSTW and other professional development paid for by the THSP grant, many teachers at North Side have now stepped up as leaders in performance management within their departments. For example, a new math department initiative for the 2010-2011 school year included a four-week “shutdown period” in which all students rotated among the teachers to focus on each TAKS standard. High-performing students assist the teachers as peer tutors, and the struggling students’ performance is tracked via a database built by one of the math teachers. Each teacher in the department was taught how to effectively use the database to view and enter the required data.

By the end of the shutdown period, each teacher has instructed all 1,400 students - grouped across grade levels - in one specific TAKS standard. The math department is confident that this scheduling and tracking system made teachers’ planning and instruction more efficient during the crucial weeks leading up to the TAKS, and other departments are sharing their expertise and resources to develop similar systems.

Although once unorganized and lacking in meaningful student data, staff members at North Side now have embraced the role of performance management in their daily work. Very few decisions are made today without the use of specific data by a team of teachers, counselors, and administrators. The teachers, counselors, and administrators we interviewed all agreed that the consulting and professional development provided by THSP laid the foundation for stable and effective performance management systems.

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## CONCLUSION

The Texas High School Project (THSP) provided an opportunity for North Side High School to improve student learning through funds for an on-site leadership coach, relevant professional development for teachers, a successful tutoring program, and summer planning retreats. The funding also indirectly sparked more changes at North Side. For example, teachers have taken lessons learned from professional development and are trying innovative strategies to continue improving student academic achievement.

The policies and reforms implemented at North Side were analyzed through the four impact areas of education leadership, teacher effectiveness, learning systems, and performance management. To understand the impact of the reforms, it is necessary to look at the four impact areas as parts of a larger whole. No single reform measure could have changed school performance alone. North Side's tutoring program is both an example of purposeful data analysis to identify at-risk students and a learning system designed to create a rigorous, personalized learning experience for students. Therefore, in seeking to replicate this success at another campus, it is important to develop policies that will affect student learning through all four areas and build a strong school community from every angle.

Our research ultimately showed that specific policies are not the most important part of North Side's high school redesign efforts. Though good policies were an important element of the redesign at North Side, it was smart, dedicated people who felt empowered to share ideas, focused on student learning, and thoughtfully implemented reforms that were the catalyst for long-term changes in staff and students' approach to school.

## APPENDIX 1: NORTH SIDE HIGH SCHOOL REFORM TIMELINE

SCHOOL YEAR	ACCOUNTABILITY RATING	THSP FUNDING AND EVENTS	OTHER IMPORTANT EVENTS
2004-2005	Acceptable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• THSP grant application completed by Principal Richardson</li> <li>• THSP grant awarded: \$1000 per student for 5 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start accessing student data in the summer to prepare for school year</li> </ul>
2005-2006	Acceptable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• THSP grant year 1</li> <li>• HSTW technical assistance begins on campus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership team attends a High School Redesign professional development conference</li> <li>• Vertical planning time starts on campus</li> </ul>
2006-2007	Acceptable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• THSP grant year 2</li> <li>• 11th and 12th grades restructured into 4 themed academies: 1) Medical, 2) Science, Technology, Math, and Science (STEM), 3) Service, including education and hospitality, and 4) Business</li> <li>• 9th and 10th Grade separated into small learning communities complete with teaming of core teachers (80-90% of students teamed)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virginia Dean becomes Principal, Arnulfo Martinez also joins staff</li> <li>• High rate of turnover and retirees as school year ends</li> <li>• Tutoring program for dropout prevention starts</li> <li>• North Side Teacher University begins - a teacher-led professional development conference</li> <li>• Common core syllabi are created</li> <li>• Student Interest Programs (SIPs) are piloted</li> </ul>
2007-2008	Acceptable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• THSP Grant Year 3</li> <li>• Summer Planning Retreat (SPA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New FWISD curriculum rolled out</li> <li>• New FWISD Curriculum Based Assessments (CBAs) rolled out</li> <li>• New Data Smart data warehouse rolled out</li> </ul>
2008-2009	Acceptable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• THSP grant year 4</li> <li>• Summer Planning Retreat (SPA)</li> </ul>	
2009-2010	Unavailable		
2010-2011	Unavailable		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Programs of Choice" will become a district wide program</li> </ul>

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## NOTES



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