

## **It Takes a City Building a High Performance School District in Houston, Part B**

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Houston School Board member Laurie Bricker gazed around the two tables she had purchased for the January 14, 2003, State of the Schools Luncheon. Joining her were some of Houston's most prominent civic and business leaders. Superintendent Kaye Stripling was about to speak before a sell-out crowd.

Bricker was proud of all that had been accomplished in the district. In November 2002, on top of a \$678 million bond issue in 1998, the voters had approved an \$806 million bond issue for renovation, expansion, and new-school construction. The district had recently been awarded the inaugural Broad Prize for Urban Education, a prestigious national award for improvements in student achievement. And everyone knew that Rod Paige had been appointed U.S. Secretary of Education in 2001 primarily because of his success as superintendent of the Houston Independent School District (HISD).

Perhaps Houston really was the best urban district in America. The 2,000-plus people crammed into the new, cavernous Reliant Hall, the largest banquet room in Houston, certainly seemed to think so.

As Dr. Stripling rose to recount the successes of the past year and outline the challenges of the future, Bricker could not help but reflect on the victories of the past and how they were built on the hard-won cooperation of district administrators, the board of education, and community leaders.

So much had happened to HISD and to Houston since 1996, when the voters had rejected a \$390 million bond issue and Texas Comptroller John Sharp reported to Houstonians that a comprehensive performance review had generated 228 recommendations that would save HISD \$116 million. It was clear in 1996 that, despite significant improvements, business leaders and the public generally had little confidence in the school board or Superintendent Paige. The public seemed not just dubious about HISD's improvements: it seemed downright contemptuous. Now almost everyone, it seemed, held HISD in the highest esteem.

It had been a long journey, Bricker thought, casting back even farther in her memory to 1990. As president of the PTO at her daughter's school, she had attended the special board meeting at Lanier Middle School to witness the adoption of *Beliefs and Visions*. She had followed the controversy in the newspapers over the buyout of superintendent Joan Raymond's contract. She had served on the advisory committee that worked with the board to hire Frank Petruzielo, and she even accompanied Petruzielo on his first day as superintendent in 1991 to the annual luncheon meeting of the Greater Houston Partnership (GHP).

In 1995, Superintendent Paige had appointed Bricker to chair a Peer Examination, Evaluation, and Review (PEER) taskforce to recommend new approaches to middle and high school counseling. Then in 1995, when school board member Cathy Minberg announced that she would have to resign her board seat because of a family move, Bricker had won election to the board just in time to work on the bond election of 1996. Now she had six years of experience as an insider. What a ride, she

thought, as the thunderous applause that welcomed Dr. Stripling to the podium died down. How did we do it, and how can we make it last?

### **Response to the Bond Defeat and Sharp Audit**

The bond election in May 1996 and the Sharp audit report the following October were defining moments for HISD, recalled Bricker. The failed bond proved to most HISD-watchers that the public had no confidence in Houston's public schools. The Sharp audit confirmed for most Houstonians that the bond rejection was justified. How should Paige and the board respond?

Even before the week of September 30, when Sharp presented the results of the performance audit in daily press conferences, Paige, in consultation with some board members and Rob Mosbacher, a Houston oil company executive, had developed a four-pronged strategy of how to proceed.

- Accept every Sharp recommendation, whether it made sense or not, and implement the recommendations as quickly as possible
- Shift the focus from management efficiency to school reform by unveiling an aggressive reform agenda in simple language the public could understand, and then stress the district almost to the breaking point if necessary to implement as many reforms as possible
- Build relationships
- Establish an effective media relations program

### **Implementing Sharp**

Implementing Sharp began on October 7, 1996, with a meeting of Paige and his senior staff. By October 11, a steering committee of Paige's top lieutenants had been formed and a plan of work outlined. Ten senior administrators were named champions and given responsibility for implementing recommendations in ten areas. The charge to them was to think "well beyond the Sharp audit"<sup>1</sup> to make HISD operations world class in every possible way. The champions assigned specific Sharp recommendations to 46 action teams comprised of HISD employees and outside experts. Each team had to write a mission statement, agree on ground rules for teamwork, and follow a specific plan for evaluating implementation plans. Technical support from the research and internal audit teams was available on request.

In November, when the board of education voted unanimously to accept or go beyond all of Sharp's 228 recommendations, Paige was able to announce that the district had already completed or implemented 46% of them. By the end of January, Paige was able to announce that HISD was cutting 372 non-instructional positions over the next three years—170 by September 1997—for a total savings of \$21 million.

The steering committee met 25 times between October 1996, and April 1997. The 46 action teams met nearly 1,000 times. And when Sharp conducted his six-months review of implementation, HISD had a report of over 500 pages documenting the complete or partial implementation of 88% of his recommendations. Six months later HISD was able to report complete or partial implementation of 94% of Sharp's recommendations.<sup>2</sup>

Also during 1997, Paige began management training for all administrators in the organization, using Model-Netics, a management training system developed by American General CEO Harold Hook.

Paige and his senior staff trained the layer below them, and layer by layer all HISD administrators, eventually down to assistant principal, were trained in Model-Netics management principles and tools. Building on this training, Paige installed four of Hook's management operating systems throughout the district: a directive and information system, a desk manual program, an approval control program, and a systems control program.

### **A New Beginning for HISD**

Meanwhile, Paige had launched his strategic plan: *New Beginning for HISD*. It was time for a new beginning. *Beliefs and Visions* had served HISD well, but it was six years old. A new wave of school reform, built on introducing market forces into public education, was rolling over the nation. It was time to embrace the principles of competition.

But rather than seek a resolution from the board of education, Paige decided to act alone. "Paige needed to act fast while the bond election and Sharp audit were fresh in the public's memory," said Don McAdams, writing about this period some years later. "The board would require months to write a new vision statement. And a still-divided board would at best embrace competition by a narrow majority. The reform leadership of HISD had moved from the board table to the superintendent's office. If a bold, new reform agenda for HISD were to be put before the city, it would have to come from Paige."<sup>3</sup>

Paige and the reformers on the board had long since embraced the principles of competition. In March 1996, the board had contracted out the workers' compensation claims service, saving taxpayers more than \$2 million per year. In June, heavy waste disposal and recycling services had been outsourced, saving another \$450,000 per year. A small incentive pay program for teachers that linked cash bonuses to improvements in student performance was now in its second year. The district's first four charter schools had been established in June 1995. In August 1996, the board had approved a private school choice program that allowed children from overcrowded schools to attend selected private schools at taxpayer's expense.

On October 16, 1996, Paige unveiled his *New Beginning for HISD* in a whirlwind of staged media events. He said, "I view the bond election in May and the Sharp audit this month as providing us with precisely the right opportunity to outline some very basic, but bold, new principles which can guide this district well into the next century."

Paige's four basic reform principles were accountability, best efforts, choice, and decentralization.

- Accountability. HISD would establish objective, believable measures of accountability so that the community could track progress. Accountability would be built into every HISD operation. Teacher salaries would be augmented by incentive pay based on direct measures of teacher skills, knowledge, and student performance.
- Best Efforts. Where HISD could not perform a business function as cheaply as the private sector, the function would be outsourced. Innovative proposals to manage schools from nontraditional providers would be welcome.

- Choice. All HISD students would have "academic free-agency" and be allowed to attend the school of their choice, as long as space was available. Schools would have to compete for students.
- Decentralization. Over the next three years, HISD would change from a staffing- and program-based budget system to a weighted student funding model, with money following the child. Schools would be free to configure their workforces to meet the needs of their students, to buy services from HISD or other providers, and carry over gains and losses.<sup>4</sup>

In the year that followed, month by month, agenda item by agenda item, by clever scheduling, a great deal of arm twisting, enormous staff work behind the scenes, and close votes at the board table—sometimes fights, as Bricker recalled—HISD began to put Paige's *New Beginning* agenda into place.

Board member meddling in administration, especially personnel decisions, was significantly reduced by board actions in late 1996 and early 1997. Board members wrote policies that prohibited them from engaging in activities that interfered with the administrative responsibilities of the superintendent and the administrative staff. A formal process was established to investigate and resolve complaints against board members. Board meetings were reduced from two a month to one. And the superintendent was given the authority to hire, promote, and transfer employees at his discretion without having to wait for board approval. Ad hoc committees of the board developed most of these policy changes for recommendation to the board.

The district's ability to manage the workplace and hold employees accountable for performance was enhanced by other policy changes. New employee contracts and policies governing termination hearings and grievances were approved. The new policies, made possible by changes in the Texas Education Code in 1995 and based on the recommendations of a PEER task force, made terminating incompetent employees easier and kept grievances from becoming adversarial and disruptive. A whistleblower policy, also based on a PEER task force report, facilitated the uncovering of employee mismanagement, unethical conduct, theft, and fraud.

Instructional management and accountability were improved by the approval of a December 1996 policy designating the Stanford 9 Achievement Test program or the Spanish language *Aprenda 2* as the district's core assessment for all students in grades 1 through 11. The Stanford and *Aprenda* gave HISD, for the first time since 1991, a nationally-normed instrument for assessing student achievement. This recommendation came from management, based on work by a staff/parent committee, but it was reviewed and significantly modified by an ad hoc committee of board members, the ones who had been pushing the issue for two years.

During the spring and summer of 1997, the management of most of HISD's major business support services was contracted out to private vendors. All these initiatives came to the board as recommendations from Superintendent Paige.

In June, the board approved a contract with ServiceMaster Management Services Company to maintain and operate HISD's 270-plus campuses and other facilities. Facilities Management and Operations, a \$40 million per year business, employed 1,053 full-time equivalent employees.

Maintenance and custodial workers continued to be employees of the district, but ServiceMaster committed to reduce the workforce substantially over four years, by attrition and retirement. Net savings for HISD over five years would be \$20.5 million.

In July, the board approved a contract with Aramark Corporation to manage HISD's food service operations, a business with an annual operating budget of more than \$66 million. Food service workers also continued to be employees of the district. Aramark guaranteed that reductions in force would be made only through attrition and retirement. The contract guaranteed HISD improvements in quality and significant net savings.

Among the most significant reforms of 1997 were the board actions to broaden the application of the principles of competition in HISD's core business—teaching and learning. These recommendations also came to the board as recommendations of Superintendent Paige, who was acting on his own convictions, but they supported the strong and repeated requests of some board members that HISD leverage the incentives created by an internal marketplace to improve teaching and learning.

In January, the board, on the recommendation of Superintendent Paige, approved a contract with Community Education Partners, a private company, to educate 450 middle and high school students with behavior and academic problems. For \$7,500 per pupil per year, much less than the cost of operating HISD's alternative middle school for problem adolescents, Community Education Partners guaranteed to improve each student's achievement by at least one grade level per year or waive the charge to HISD.

In February, on the recommendation of Superintendent Paige, the board approved a choice plan to allow any HISD student to attend any HISD school with available space. Students zoned to neighborhood schools would receive priority admission to their zoned schools. Specialized programs, such as magnet and gifted programs, continued to maintain specific entry criteria.

Also in February, the board committed HISD to the active promotion of charter schools. The district already had four charter schools. By mid-July, the board had granted 18 new charters: eight whole school charters, four school-within-a-school charters, and six external charters. Every charter was innovative; some were ground-breaking. The Pathway School-Academy of Academic Achievement focused on high school students who needed more guidance and less structure. The Knowledge Is Power Program Academy (KIPP) provided a rigorous curriculum with a focus on character development for children in grades five through eight, with extended academic hours. The Dawn School, the first of its kind in the nation, would be a residential school for homeless children.

### **Building Relationships**

On May 29, 1996, the day after the defeat of the bonds, Rod Paige addressed the HISD board. “From this moment on,” he said, “we’re not going to be building schools; we’re going to be building relationships.” And immediately he began to do so.

In an op-ed article in the *Houston Chronicle* a few days later, he pointed out the district’s recent successes, citing improvements in TAAS scores, a reduced dropout rate, and the large numbers of

college scholarships earned by HISD graduates. Giving credit to teachers, administrators, students, and parents, he asserted his pride in the district.<sup>5</sup>

Relationship building moved forward on many fronts. Paige asked all area superintendents and school principals to “look out, not just down.” He directed them to develop relationships with local chambers of commerce and civic associations and offer school facilities for community events.

Principals began sending notices to neighborhood residents about special events at the schools and providing names and addresses to district offices for district newsletters. The district mailing lists rolled up to become Paige’s master *Key Communicators* mailing list. Soon area civic leaders were receiving district newsletters, and people of influence in Houston were receiving information on HISD directly from Paige.<sup>6</sup>

HISD’s most important relationship was with parents. To build on this relationship, Paige launched a comprehensive parental involvement program called Project Reconnect. The first step was the creation of parent centers, known as Project Reconnect Centers, at 33 different campuses. At each center, a parent educator was responsible for coordinating activities, including seminars and workshops on parenting, in both English and Spanish. Eventually, parental involvement specialists were assigned to each administrative district, and community participation teams to promote volunteerism were established at every school.<sup>7</sup>

### **Media Relations at Last**

Ever since *Beliefs and Visions* in 1990, board members had been pushing successive superintendents to develop an effective media relations program. Board member Ron Franklin had pushed the hardest on this point, but Joan Raymond, Frank Petruzielo, and even Paige, had not acted. But after the disasters of 1996 the board was unwilling to be put off any longer. Franklin demanded that something be done. Board members concurred that whatever the cost, HISD had to have a politically savvy press secretary. Business leader Mosbacher agreed, and through his political contacts came up with a candidate.

In December 1996, HISD hired Terry Abbott, former press secretary to the governor of Alabama, to help “shape the district’s messages to the public, handle media, and correct misinformation about the district.”<sup>8</sup> To attract Abbott to Houston, the board approved a salary of \$110,000, which made Abbott one of the highest-paid employees of the district.

Employee groups and many of HISD’s critics complained about this “excessive” wage, but Paige and the board believed that effective media relations and communications management were so important that it was worth the short-term hit to retain a seasoned professional. Abbot counseled Paige to hold weekly press conferences, managed a brilliant media strategy built on camera-friendly events on slow news days, and became one of Paige’s closest advisors on all matters of interest to the public.

One of Abbott’s most successful initiatives was to transform the annual superintendent’s state of the schools speech into a major media event. For years the speech had been nothing more than an address by the superintendent to the board at the beginning of the year. School administrators packed the gallery, but that was about it.

But in 1997, Paige's speech was a major event at a school auditorium with a large audience of administrators, principals, elected officials, civic leaders, and parents. The next year, Paige gave a luncheon address at the Hyatt Regency Hotel Ballroom to 1,200 business leaders, parents and school officials.<sup>9</sup> In 1999 and 2000, approximately 1,800 community leaders, businessmen and educators attended the event, which was moved to the largest venue in Houston, the George R. Brown Convention Center. Paige's state of the schools addresses were now drawing more people than the mayor's annual state of the city address. By 2003, the state of the schools address had outgrown the convention center and had to meet in Reliant Hall, part of Houston's new NFL stadium.

### **Staying on Track**

The board elections in November 1997 resulted in three new members. Two of the *Beliefs and Visions* board, Ron Franklin and Paula Arnold, chose not to seek third terms. Franklin was replaced by Jeff Shadwick, a white attorney; Arnold, by Gabriel Vasquez, an Hispanic professor of communications at the University of Houston; and Clyde Lemon was defeated in a close election by Larry Marshall, a retired HISD assistant superintendent, who, like Lemon, was African American.

The reforms of 1997 had stirred up considerable opposition to Paige among the HISD workforce, which was evident in the elections. This, plus personal agendas among some board members, placed Paige's reform agenda at risk. Shadwick ran as a strong supporter of Paige, but Vasquez and Marshall appeared to join Olga Gallegos and Esther Campos, both Hispanic, and Carol Galloway, African American, as critics of Paige.

The new board had a five—or perhaps with Arthur Gaines—six-vote majority intent on turning back the clock on some of the key reforms of 1997. At the first board meeting of 1998, in a slam dunk election of officers, Olga Gallegos was elected board president and all other officer positions were filled with Paige critics. For a few months in early 1998, it seemed that the reform of HISD had come to an end.

The old *Beliefs and Visions* board members had *powered down the board*—that was the phrase the new majority used. Superintendent Paige was too powerful. The board had become a rubber stamp. It was time to reassert the board's authority over major personnel decisions. Other policy reversals would follow. Paige was quietly talking about leaving.

### **A New Board Majority Emerges**

But on March 19, after a furious behind-the-scenes battle for votes, the move to reassert the board's control over major personnel decisions was defeated at the board table 5-4. At the last minute Gaines and Vasquez switched sides and voted with McAdams, Bricker, and Shadwick to defeat the motion.

Within a month Marshall also had abandoned Gallegos, Campos, and Galloway. A reform majority was once again effectively controlling the board. As Bricker remembered it, she, McAdams, and Shadwick gave an enormous amount of time to listening, explaining, and building personal relationships with Marshall and Vasquez, but it was mostly Paige who won them over. And it was Paige who finally convinced Gaines that the election of 1995 was history; that despite Paige's attempt to unseat Gaines, they could be friends again.

With the board and superintendent working together again, reform was back on track. In the spring of 1998, the board approved a comprehensive no-social-promotion policy. Starting in 1998-99, all students in grades K-8 had to meet promotion standards based on classroom performance, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, and the Stanford Achievement Test 9 (or *Aprenda* for Spanish speakers). Students who performed below standard on any of the assessments were required to attend summer school. Students who refused to attend summer school or failed to show satisfactory improvement during summer school were not promoted to the next grade. This policy was conceived by board members and presented in outline form to Paige, who turned it into a comprehensive policy recommendation for the full board.

Also in the spring of 1998, following the same policy development process, the board made the first major change to the HISD accountability system since its establishment in 1994. Responding to a loophole in the system, the board voted to tighten the standard for exemptions. Principals all over the state were exempting large numbers of students from the TAAS, mostly students enrolled in bilingual education. Some HISD schools had exempted 60% to 70% of their students from the TAAS.

The board solved this problem with a simple policy change. Henceforth, with very limited exemptions (for children who could not speak English and had been in the United States less than a year and severely disabled students who could not be tested) every child counted. As Paige put it, “Every child who can hold a pencil will be tested.”

In response to this policy change, school performance in 1998-99 dropped for the first time since the establishment of the system. But Bricker recalled that the board had no regrets; it was worth taking the performance hit to tighten up the system.

### **The 1998 Bond Election**

HISD did the best it could after the failed 1996 bond election to make the most needed repairs and renovations to HISD’s aging schools and to relieve overcrowding by reassigning students and providing more temporary buildings. But the need for a massive capital improvement bond program did not go away. What had needed to be done in 1996 remained undone. Overcrowding got worse, and additional facility needs continually presented themselves.

In October 1997, in preparation for a bond election that he knew had to come sooner or later, Paige initiated a district-wide facility review. Teams of engineers and professionals from outside firms began a school-by-school assessment of classroom adequacy and the physical condition of buildings. This information would be combined with input from school employees, parents, students and community leaders to prioritize needs.<sup>10</sup>

The report, released in August 1998, identified more than \$1.3 billion in facility needs. “The teams studied the condition of every floor, every wall, equipment and everything in between,” Paige reported. “We believe it is time to ask for additional investment in our facilities.”<sup>11</sup> “This is not a wish list,” said Bricker to the *Houston Chronicle*. “This is what needs to be done to make our buildings safe and functional and serve students we already have.”<sup>12</sup>



HISD's positive and rapid response to the Sharp audit, the reforms of 1997 and 1998, Paige's aggressive outreach programs, and Terry Abbott's proactive media strategy appeared to have changed a lot of minds in Houston. HISD was even beginning to be recognized nationally for its improvements. Was it time to ask the public once again to approve debt and taxes for Houston's public schools?

A poll of registered voters at the time showed 2-1 support for a bond issue of about the size of the one rejected in 1996.<sup>13</sup> The *Houston Chronicle* called a proposed 1998 tax increase "not at all unreasonable." The editorial stated that HISD, "given the issues it has to overcome, has done a remarkable job."<sup>14</sup> State Comptroller Sharp told an assembly of HISD teachers in August 1998 that they were "setting a standard for other urban school districts."<sup>15</sup>

With a strong case for facilities renovation and signs of public support, Paige and the board determined to put a request for bonding authority before the voters. The bond proposal was for \$678 million to be spent over the next three years. Rather than ask for more than a billion dollars to meet all the needs identified in the facility review, the board said it would ask for half now, give voters the opportunity to judge the district's ability to manage the project, and then ask for the rest. Completing the bond project on time and on budget, along with continuing to improve student achievement and district operations, would build voter confidence for future bond projects. To oversee planning, financing, construction, and the establishment of operations and maintenance standards, Paige established a blue ribbon committee that included some of the top construction executives in the city.

This time, politics would have no place in the spending plan. Buildings were prioritized for renovation based on a complex formula designed by architects and engineers to make certain that the most serious needs would be met first and public monies would be spent in the most efficient way. As Bricker later put it:

This was not Phase B of Project Renewal. That was a political document. We kept the promise given to the voters when Phase A of Project Renewal was approved in 1989. When the voters said no in 1996, they said no to Phase B. This was a new plan based entirely on prioritized need. Some communities got a lot, some nothing. So be it. There was no politics in this bond proposal.

The board also determined to place the question on the November general election ballot. Rather than minimize the vote and rely on parents, as had been done with the May 1996 election, the board wanted the maximum amount of public exposure and the highest possible number of voters.

Popular former Mayor Bob Lanier agreed to chair the campaign. The GHP, the Houston Federation of Teachers, Mayor Lee Brown, City Council members, and virtually every other civic and business group in the city, even the Harris County Republican Party Executive Committee, endorsed the bonds. Board members and district administrators went to neighborhood meetings to provide information on the bond proposal to parents and community leaders. Paige and some board members averaged three or four speaking engagements a day. A majority of the board members, building on the extensive community networks they had developed over the years, made working for success of the bonds a full-time job for the two months leading up to the vote.

On November 4, the voters spoke. Seventy-two percent said yes. “Having lost a bond election and having won a bond election, believe me, winning is better,” said Bricker.<sup>16</sup>

### **Replacing Paige**

Following the November 1998 bond election, it seemed to Bricker, Houstonians embraced HISD. Where in the past the *Houston Chronicle* had bashed, now it praised. Houstonians seemed to notice, for the first time, the improvements that had been taking place since 1991.

Every time she heard a business or civic leader describe his or her important role in HISD’s improvement, Bricker was reminded of the saying attributed to John Maynard Keynes: “Defeat is an orphan. Victory has a hundred fathers.” But Bricker knew it was good politics for HISD leaders to share the credit. And, for the most part, it was true that HISD’s success involved hundreds of individuals. It was good politics, and to a large extent, true. At the 1999 state of the schools address, Paige credited strong board leadership and public-private sector partnerships as key elements in improving Houston’s schools.<sup>17</sup>

The same improvements that boosted HISD’s reputation with Houstonians were beginning to attract national attention to HISD and Paige. In subsequent years, Paige received two of the most prestigious awards given to urban educators—the Council of Great City Schools’ Richard R. Green Award and the McGraw Prize. In December 2000, President-Elect George W. Bush named Paige as U.S. Secretary of Education.

The announcement that Paige was leaving HISD brought forth calls from Hispanic activists that the next superintendent must be Hispanic. Bad feelings persisted over the selection of Paige as superintendent in 1994. The view of many Hispanics was that now “it’s our turn.”<sup>18</sup> The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) began at once to pressure the board to replace Paige with a Hispanic.

Most board members concurred that it would be great if the next superintendent were Hispanic, but they affirmed their commitment to appoint the most qualified candidate, regardless of ethnicity. The *Houston Chronicle* said, “What Hispanic students most need in the HISD is a superintendent who best knows how to provide the tops in education for them, and such an educator does not have to be Hispanic himself or herself.”<sup>19</sup> Many board members believed that most Houstonians, and perhaps even most Hispanics, shared this view.

The first decision for the board was whether or not to conduct a national search. Board members agreed that the highest priority was finding a candidate who understood and shared the theory of action for change implicit in *Beliefs and Visions* and who could effectively move the district forward on its current reform trajectory.<sup>20</sup> As Bricker remembered, “HISD didn’t want a knight in shining armor to come in and change things. We wanted to stay the course.”

When Paige was confirmed as Secretary of Education in January 2001, the board unanimously named Kaye Stripling, superintendent of HISD’s Southwest District, to be interim superintendent. Within weeks, a search process had been approved and a search firm hired.

The board's direction to the search firm was clear. The board wanted someone who accepted the Houston "deal." The Houston deal was that the board would give the superintendent total control of management and provide political cover for tough management decisions, but the board would provide the leadership for reform. The board would establish the vision and theory of action for change and oversee and actively participate in the strategic development of reform policies. An effective administrator who knew the city and shared the board's *Beliefs and Vision* was preferred. Bricker said: "We don't want someone else's leftovers." Her question to the search firm was, "How often do you have searches when the board doesn't want to change the course of the district?" "Almost never," was the reply.

Although community input was solicited over the six-month search process and 48 people were recommended to the search firm, in June 2001, the board named Stripling superintendent.<sup>21</sup> Her acceptance of the board's vision, her familiarity with the city and the district, and her strong performance as interim superintendent made her selection uncontroversial.

A 37-year veteran of HISD, Stripling was enormously popular and highly regarded across the district. "Everyone in the system respects her. She is the finest administrator in the system. It puts the district in good hands," said Gayle Fallon, Houston Federation of Teachers president.<sup>22</sup> Even Hispanic leaders supported Stripling's appointment. She had spent most of her teaching and administrative career in schools in Hispanic neighborhoods. Many Hispanic elected officials were long-time family friends. Stripling said,

I'm not bilingual and I'm not Hispanic, but I have an enormous amount of pride and obligation to the Hispanic heritage, and maintaining that heritage, and teaching our children. But I have to say, I have pretty much the same compassion for African-American and Anglo and Asian children. I just find my heart's out there for all of them.<sup>23</sup>

### **Weighted Student Funding**

The first issue facing Stripling immediately upon her appointment as interim superintendent was the budget for 2001-02. The HISD budget preparation cycle began in February, and in February 2001, HISD was entering year two of a three-year phase-in of a weighted student funding budget and management system. Weighted student funding, rather than program, or staff-based funding, had first been proposed by McAdams in 1994. In late 1998, Paige had appointed a PEER task force to prepare a recommendation for the board.

Al Haines, formerly chair of the Chamber of Commerce Division of the GHP and now chief administrative officer for Mayor Lee Brown, chaired the task force of community leaders and school administrators. Working with Haines was Harold Hook, now retired from the chairmanship of American General. Hook and Haines had led the design of HISD's decentralization plan in 1994 and saw weighted student funding as an extension of their earlier work. The weighted student funding task force presented its report to the board in June 1999, and, after much study by management, the proposal was approved by the board in early 2000.

The board action called for a three-year phase-in of a system that would:

- Increase the percentage of HISD dollars spent at schools from 62% to 82%
- Replace budgeting for programs and staff with budgeting based on weighted student dollars, with the money following the child
- Give principals significantly more control over school budgets

HISD principals, who already had considerable control over budgets and personnel, were now to be given the freedom, almost, of a charter school. Principals would be given a budget based on weighted dollars (the board's view was that unequal needs required unequal resources) sufficient to cover all school operating costs, including personnel but excluding utilities and building maintenance. Principals would be free to set schedules, purchase goods and services from within or without the district (within guidelines), carry over gains and losses, and configure the workforce of their schools to meet the needs of their students.

This new budgeting system required major changes in central office operations, new internal auditing systems, training for principals, and even the establishment of a training program for new school business managers. Also, because the new budgeting system exposed significant inequities in school funding, the new system required significant transfers of money from some schools to others. For all of these reasons, the administration proposed, and the board accepted, a three-year phase-in.

The first phase-in year was 2000-01. But after one year, principals and central office administrators reported that the transition was confusing. Stripling recommended a budget for 2001-02 that completed the last two years of the "phase-in" over one year. Significant amounts of money were shifted from "over-funded" to "under-funded" schools, with predictable outcries from several middle-class communities.

### **Accountability**

In February 2001, just as Paige was departing for Washington, the board approved a significant change in the HISD accountability system. The new system added a second measure of school performance, student achievement on the norm-referenced Stanford 9 or *Aprenda 2*, to the criterion-referenced Texas assessment (TAAS). For high schools, the percentage of seniors taking either the recommended or advanced Texas curriculum and the percentage of juniors taking the PSAT were added as performance measures.

These changes were developed by the board, acting as a committee of the whole, with support from district administrators, researchers, and school principals. Numbers were produced in the summer of 2001 to show schools how they would perform under the new system, but the new system did not officially take effect until 2002. The changes to the accountability system, as expected, depressed school performance, but again, recalled Bricker, looking good was not as important raising the bar.

If schools are to be accountable, so must be the functional departments that support schools. This principle went back to *Beliefs and Visions*. But it was not until Paige's last years as superintendent that accountability spread to every functional department in the district. Performance dials flowed from PEER, the comprehensive systems improvement strategy launched by Paige in his first year as superintendent, HISD's response to the Sharp audit, and the implementation of Harold Hook's management operating systems.

By the late 1990s, every operating unit of the district had developed performance dials that recorded measures of performance. Typically, the metrics included measures of productivity, quality, timeliness, customer satisfaction, or safety, and showed performance against expectations. These performance measures of functional units became a significant part of personnel evaluations.

To further support individual accountability, Paige launched the Campus Improvement Incentive Program in 1997. This program provided cash awards to campus-level employees. Schools that were rated exemplary or recognized on the Texas Education Agency Accountability System as well as those that demonstrated exemplary growth on the HISD Accountability System received a campus improvement incentive.<sup>24</sup> All campus employees who met baseline eligibility requirements shared in the award.

Stripling built on this incentive by instituting a performance incentive program for principals and area superintendents in 2001. Incentive pay was tied to accountability ratings and outstanding progress toward meeting student performance objectives. Area superintendents could earn awards of up to \$20,000. Principals could earn awards up to \$5,000.

### **PASS and Project CLEAR**

Weighted student funding increased equity and further empowered schools. Accountability gave the employees of HISD additional incentives to perform. PASS and Project CLEAR built additional capacity for instructional excellence. Both PASS and Project CLEAR were started under Paige's leadership. Stripling, a master instructional leader, put extraordinary energy into their development and implementation.

PASS—for Profiler for Academic Success of Students—was a comprehensive student information management system. It enabled teachers and administrators to obtain on-demand data on student achievement sliced and diced any way needed.

Project CLEAR—for Clarifying Learning to Enhance Achievement Results—was a comprehensive district curriculum. Its major components were:

- *Syllabus Planner*: Interactive materials provided details on the scope, sequence, and pacing of units for the entire curriculum. Additional instructional resources, tools, and concepts were also available online.
- *Model Lessons in Core Subjects*: Closely aligned with Texas standards, model lessons included assessment strategies and curriculum activities. Model lessons for 13 core courses were developed in 2002-03. An additional 14 content areas/courses were scheduled for availability in 2003-04.
- *Professional Development*: Lead teachers were trained during the summer of 2002. They then trained their peers in the schools. In addition, multimedia online-linked training modules were available. Teachers could use district-provided laptops to access the training system during off-hours.
- *Curriculum-based Snapshots*: Student assessments were available for diagnostic purposes. Through the district's web portal, HISD teachers could download and administer these interim assessments to measure student mastery of the syllabus materials.

## **Bilingual Education**

Stripling also had the responsibility to implement a comprehensive board policy on multilingual education. This policy was developed by a board committee of the whole. After intense negotiations with Hispanic leaders and a great deal of public controversy, the policy was approved by the full board in July 1999.

The policy required children with limited English proficiency to “learn to read, write, and speak English as quickly as individually possible without sacrificing long-term academic success.” English reading proficiency was the standard for transition to academic instruction in English, and once the transition was made, all academic instruction was to be in English.

The policy also committed HISD to encourage mastery of a second language by all students. Students whose first language was not English would be given the opportunity to continue language study in their first language through high school. English speakers were to be given the opportunity to study a second language, starting in the elementary grades.

Bricker, who had chaired the committee, remembered the controversy and the ensuing frustration of board members when progress dragged. One of Stripling’s first priorities as superintendent was to implement fully the policy.

## **Reaffirming Beliefs and Visions**

One of the highlights of 2001 was the board’s reaffirmation of *Beliefs and Visions*. With Paige gone and only two board members, McAdams and Gallegos, remaining from the board that had adopted *Beliefs and Visions* in 1990, board members decided it was time to re-examine the document that had guided action for over a decade. A board committee, chaired by McAdams, was asked to review *Beliefs and Visions* and suggest revisions.

The committee determined that no change was required. The beliefs had stood the test of time. But the board had learned from research and experience. To reflect this, the committee suggested and the board approved an addendum that committed the board to managed instruction along with principal empowerment for school operations as the board’s theory of action and explicitly committed the board to three new goals: modern facilities for all HISD students, a significant investment in early childhood education, and elimination of the achievement gap.

To celebrate this reaffirmation, Secretary Paige and members of the *Beliefs and Visions* board were invited to attend the June meeting of the board for the vote of reaffirmation and then adjourn to the atrium of the administration building for a reception. Many of Houston’s leading citizens came to show their support for the reform achievements and renewed reform vision of the board.

## **The 2002 Bond Election**

With the continued improvement of HISD and the national spotlight on Houston following Paige’s move to Washington, there was not much doubt that voters would approve a bond election in 2002. It had been four years since the last bond election, and the board had told voters there would be an election in 2002. So, despite some fears that a slow economy would make approval more difficult, in early 2002, Stripling and the board decided to go forward with a November election for \$806.6 million.

Bricker was board president in 2002. The 1998 bond election script was the one everyone wanted to follow in 2002, and Bricker had been one of the scriptwriters. She was now a senior board member. McAdams had decided that 12 years on the board was enough and had not sought re-election in 2001. His replacement was Dianne Johnson, a long-time school activist.

Johnson's election had been so positive, thought Bricker. Several good candidates had run, and not one had run against the district, demanding a new direction. Rather, the claim of each candidate was that he or she would be the most effective one to continue the work of McAdams. Bricker knew that it was her job in 2002 not only to get the bonds passed, but also to mentor Johnson, just as McAdams and others had mentored her.

As expected, the bond campaign went without a hitch. Everybody who was anybody, it seemed, supported the bonds, and on Election Day, 66% of the voters gave their approval.

### **What Next?**

HISD had come so far, thought Bricker, as Stripling's words brought her back to reality. They rang out with authority, pride, and Stripling's natural humility and humor. "I stand before you both humbled and proud as the leader of the best urban school district in the country," she said. "What a year it has been so far. HISD was the first-ever winner of The Broad Prize for Urban Education, and then the children of Houston won on election night as voters approved our \$808.6 million bond package, the largest in the district's history.

Stripling went on to lay out the challenges facing the district. She mentioned the funding shortfall that HISD faced due to reduced state aid, and the new, more difficult state tests that would be given for the first time in Spring 2003.<sup>25</sup>

The challenges ahead were enormous, thought Bricker. But she was not thinking of the challenges Stripling was enumerating to the leaders of Houston. She was thinking about conflicts among board members, a growing tendency of some board members to micromanage, HISD's inability to develop an effective information management system to track student dropouts, the delayed implementation of the new district accountability system, talk of falsified reporting of student dropouts at a high school, and the district's slipping media relations program.

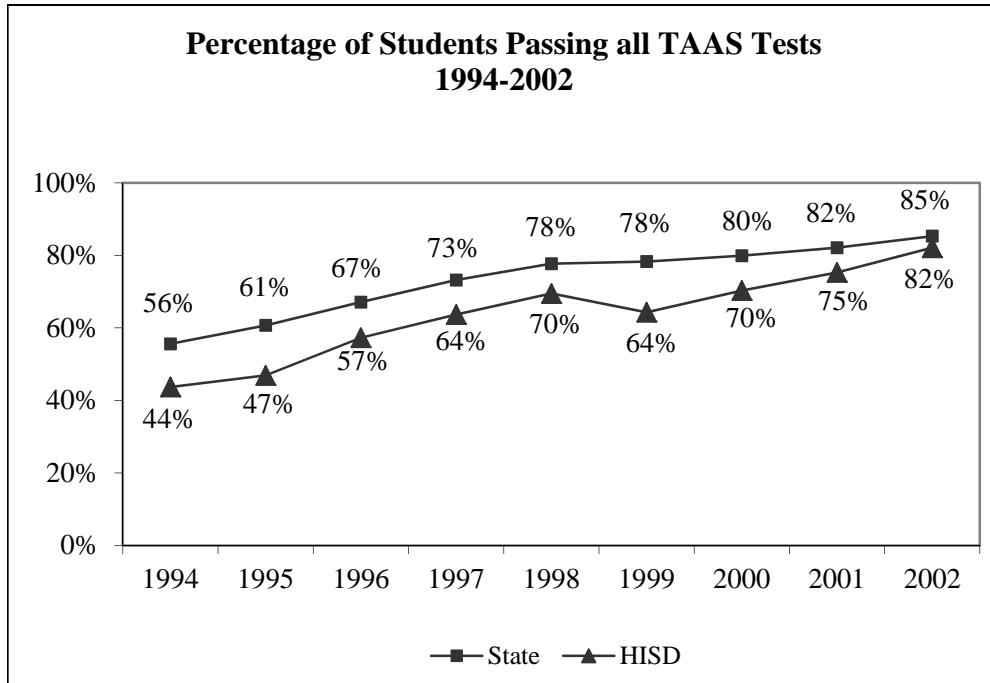
Houston had experienced a period of continued reform and progress rarely seen in a major urban school district. A succession of board members, superintendents, and civic and community leaders had worked—sometimes at cross-purposes and sometimes in rough alignment—to improve Houston's public schools.

But what lay ahead? Bricker knew that school reform was a journey without an end. The district had transitioned from Paige and the board leaders who had written *Beliefs and Visions* to Stripling and a new cohort of board leaders. But four board seats would be up for election in November 2003, and there was a good possibility that two, even four board members would not seek re-election. Stripling would be ready to retire within a year or two. And some of the business and community leaders who had been so pivotal in the reform of HISD had already retired.

Some people in Houston were taking HISD's success for granted, but many battles remained to be fought. With the graduation rate way too low and the achievement gap still way too large, there was much to be done. Would new leaders step forward to serve on the board, in the downtown office towers, in the schools, and throughout the city? Could HISD build on what had been achieved and continue the reform journey?



**Attachment A**  
**HISD Student Achievement Data 1994-2002**



Note: 1999 results for HISD reflect a significant reduction in exemptions.

Source: *Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) History Report*, Texas Education Agency.

**Attachment B  
Houston Independent School District Student Performance**

<b>Texas Assessment of Academic Skills—Reading</b>										
<b>Percent Passing</b>										
	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
Houston	3	72.4	75.0	77.6	79.4	85.4	78.8	84.2	83.5	86.3
Texas	3	77.9	79.5	80.5	81.5	86.2	88.0	87.9	86.8	88.0
Houston	4	71.2	74.4	78.1	82.0	89.7	81.2	89.4	89.1	92.1
Texas	4	75.5	80.1	78.3	82.5	89.7	88.8	89.9	90.8	92.5
Houston	5	71.2	76.3	82.9	84.6	88.9	76.9	83.8	90.3	92.2
Texas	5	77.5	79.3	83.0	84.8	88.4	86.4	87.8	90.2	92.7
Houston	6	59.4	68.5	65.5	73.9	75.1	71.3	74.5	76.1	84.3
Texas	6	74.1	78.9	78.4	84.6	85.6	84.9	86.0	85.6	88.2
Houston	7	59.1	65.3	72.5	74.9	75.2	72.2	72.9	81.9	88.6
Texas	7	75.9	78.7	82.6	84.5	85.5	83.6	83.5	89.4	91.3
Houston	8	61.4	61.8	64.7	75.0	76.1	79.1	84.3	88.8	92.6
Texas	8	77.2	75.5	78.3	83.9	85.3	88.2	89.6	91.9	94.3
Houston	10	65.7	63.9	71.1	79.7	81.5	82.8	85.9	85.6	92.1
Texas	10	77.7	76.4	81.9	86.1	88.3	88.8	90.3	90.0	94.5

<b>Texas Assessment of Academic Skills—Mathematics</b>										
<b>Percent Passing</b>										
	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
Houston	3	56.9	64.7	74.7	76.1	77.5	66.9	71.8	75.8	85.0
Texas	3	63.0	73.3	76.7	81.7	81.0	83.1	80.6	83.1	87.4
Houston	4	52.6	61.9	78.0	77.7	84.2	75.4	82.7	88.8	92.5
Texas	4	59.4	71.1	78.5	82.6	86.3	87.6	87.1	91.3	94.1
Houston	5	57.0	65.7	76.9	84.1	88.8	81.7	88.9	94.9	96.9
Texas	5	62.6	72.6	79.0	86.2	89.6	90.1	92.1	94.6	96.2
Houston	6	46.9	47.8	65.7	70.0	75.8	72.1	77.2	83.7	90.9
Texas	6	61.1	64.6	77.8	81.8	86.1	86.9	88.5	91.4	93.8
Houston	7	42.7	41.7	56.1	67.1	71.8	71.9	78.5	83.1	89.2
Texas	7	59.7	62.3	71.5	79.7	83.7	84.9	88.1	89.6	92.2
Houston	8	40.6	35.7	53.3	63.1	72.7	75.1	83.1	88.0	91.1
Texas	8	58.6	57.3	69.0	76.3	83.8	86.3	90.2	92.4	92.9
Houston	10	47.6	45.1	53.3	60.7	69.6	76.0	82.3	85.3	88.9
Texas	10	58.4	60.2	66.5	72.6	78.4	81.6	86.8	89.3	92.2

Source: *Beating the Odds*, Council of the Great City Schools, March 2003.

**Attachment B (continued)**

<b>Texas Assessment of Academic Skills—Reading</b>										
		<b>Percent Passing</b>								
	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
Houston	4									
African American		64.5	67.3	73.9	77.1	86.6	77.1	86.5	86.4	89.9
<i>Gap</i>		<b>-25.4</b>	<b>-25.6</b>	<b>-17.8</b>	<b>-17.8</b>	<b>-11.2</b>	<b>-18.6</b>	<b>-10.1</b>	<b>-10.9</b>	<b>-7.3</b>
White		89.9	92.9	91.7	94.9	97.8	95.7	96.6	97.3	97.2
<i>Gap</i>		<b>-20.9</b>	<b>-19.3</b>	<b>-16.3</b>	<b>-13.4</b>	<b>-8.2</b>	<b>-16.5</b>	<b>-7.5</b>	<b>-8.8</b>	<b>-5.0</b>
Hispanic		69.0	73.6	75.4	81.5	89.6	79.2	89.1	88.5	92.2
Texas	4									
African American		57.8	63.2	63.0	69.5	80.3	79.2	82.8	83.8	86.8
<i>Gap</i>		<b>-27.4</b>	<b>-25.5</b>	<b>-23.8</b>	<b>-20.7</b>	<b>-14.7</b>	<b>-15.1</b>	<b>-12.3</b>	<b>-12.0</b>	<b>-9.7</b>
White		85.2	88.7	86.8	90.2	95.0	94.3	95.1	95.8	96.5
<i>Gap</i>		<b>-19.2</b>	<b>-16.3</b>	<b>-16.5</b>	<b>-14.7</b>	<b>-9.7</b>	<b>-9.9</b>	<b>-9.3</b>	<b>-8.5</b>	<b>-6.8</b>
Hispanic		66.0	72.4	70.3	75.5	85.3	84.4	85.8	87.3	89.7
Houston	8									
African American		57.1	59.8	65.0	75.0	76.9	79.7	85.9	89.5	94.3
<i>Gap</i>		<b>-32.2</b>	<b>-32.3</b>	<b>-29.2</b>	<b>-20.6</b>	<b>-19.4</b>	<b>-15.7</b>	<b>-11.2</b>	<b>-9.0</b>	<b>-3.8</b>
White		89.3	92.1	94.2	95.6	96.3	95.4	97.1	98.5	98.1
<i>Gap</i>		<b>-34.6</b>	<b>-37.8</b>	<b>-37.0</b>	<b>-26.3</b>	<b>-25.8</b>	<b>-20.7</b>	<b>-17.0</b>	<b>-12.3</b>	<b>-7.9</b>
Hispanic		54.7	54.3	57.2	69.3	70.5	74.7	80.1	86.2	90.2
Texas	8									
African American		60.9	59.7	63.6	74.0	76.2	81.8	83.6	88.0	92.1
<i>Gap</i>		<b>-27.8</b>	<b>-27.4</b>	<b>-26.2</b>	<b>-19.0</b>	<b>-18.0</b>	<b>-12.2</b>	<b>-11.5</b>	<b>-8.4</b>	<b>-5.4</b>
White		88.7	87.1	89.8	93.0	94.2	94.0	95.0	96.4	97.5
<i>Gap</i>		<b>-24.6</b>	<b>-24.4</b>	<b>-23.9</b>	<b>-18.8</b>	<b>-18.4</b>	<b>-12.1</b>	<b>-11.1</b>	<b>-9.0</b>	<b>-6.5</b>
Hispanic		64.1	62.7	65.9	74.2	75.8	81.9	84.0	87.4	91.0
Houston	10									
African American		63.4	61.2	71.8	83.5	84.9	86.4	88.6	86.2	94.8
<i>Gap</i>		<b>-28.0</b>	<b>-31.9</b>	<b>-21.8</b>	<b>-12.2</b>	<b>-12.2</b>	<b>-10.7</b>	<b>-9.2</b>	<b>-11.5</b>	<b>-3.5</b>
White		91.4	93.1	93.6	95.7	97.1	97.1	97.8	97.7	98.3
<i>Gap</i>		<b>-34.2</b>	<b>-39.0</b>	<b>-31.2</b>	<b>-24.1</b>	<b>-22.1</b>	<b>-21.0</b>	<b>-18.3</b>	<b>-17.0</b>	<b>-10.3</b>
Hispanic		57.2	54.1	62.4	71.6	75.0	76.1	79.5	80.7	88.0
Texas	10									
African American		62.9	60.5	71.3	78.9	81.5	83.1	85.9	84.1	92.5
<i>Gap</i>		<b>-26.2</b>	<b>-27.7</b>	<b>-20.4</b>	<b>-15.5</b>	<b>-13.9</b>	<b>-12.4</b>	<b>-10.2</b>	<b>-11.9</b>	<b>-5.4</b>
White		89.1	88.2	91.7	94.4	95.4	95.5	96.1	96.0	97.9
<i>Gap</i>		<b>-25.6</b>	<b>-25.4</b>	<b>-22.0</b>	<b>-18.7</b>	<b>-15.4</b>	<b>-15.0</b>	<b>-13.0</b>	<b>-12.5</b>	<b>-7.4</b>
Hispanic		63.5	62.8	69.7	75.7	80.0	80.5	83.1	83.5	90.5

Source: *Beating the Odds*, Council of the Great City Schools, March 2003.

**Attachment B (continued)**

<b>Texas Assessment of Academic Skills—Mathematics</b>										
										<b>Percent Passing</b>
	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
<b>Houston</b>	4									
African American		42.2	51.2	71.3	69.5	77.9	66.8	75.1	84.9	89.6
<b>Gap</b>		<b>-35.5</b>	<b>-35.2</b>	<b>-20.1</b>	<b>-25.2</b>	<b>-17.8</b>	<b>-26.0</b>	<b>-20.1</b>	<b>-11.2</b>	<b>-7.3</b>
White		77.7	86.4	91.4	94.7	95.7	92.8	95.2	96.1	96.9
<b>Gap</b>		<b>-27.6</b>	<b>-24.2</b>	<b>-13.1</b>	<b>-15.6</b>	<b>-9.7</b>	<b>-16.0</b>	<b>-10.3</b>	<b>-6.7</b>	<b>-3.4</b>
Hispanic		50.1	62.2	78.3	79.1	86.0	76.8	84.9	89.4	93.5
<b>Texas</b>	4									
African American		38.0	49.5	60.7	66.3	73.3	74.1	75.7	83.0	88.6
<b>Gap</b>		<b>-32.4</b>	<b>-32.1</b>	<b>-26.1</b>	<b>-23.9</b>	<b>-18.8</b>	<b>-19.0</b>	<b>-17.7</b>	<b>-12.7</b>	<b>-8.5</b>
White		70.4	81.6	86.8	90.2	92.1	93.1	93.4	95.7	97.1
<b>Gap</b>		<b>-21.6</b>	<b>-20.1</b>	<b>-15.1</b>	<b>-13.1</b>	<b>-9.7</b>	<b>-8.5</b>	<b>-10.3</b>	<b>-6.7</b>	<b>-4.6</b>
Hispanic		48.8	61.5	71.7	77.1	82.4	84.6	83.1	89.0	92.5
<b>Houston</b>	8									
African American		30.2	28.4	47.0	58.8	68.3	69.3	79.8	85.5	89.7
<b>Gap</b>		<b>-47.9</b>	<b>-50.2</b>	<b>-39.9</b>	<b>-32.2</b>	<b>-24.3</b>	<b>-24.0</b>	<b>-15.3</b>	<b>-11.8</b>	<b>-8.0</b>
White		78.1	78.6	86.9	91.0	92.6	93.3	95.1	97.3	97.7
<b>Gap</b>		<b>-43.3</b>	<b>-51.1</b>	<b>-39.5</b>	<b>-33.4</b>	<b>-22.6</b>	<b>-19.6</b>	<b>-13.2</b>	<b>-10.0</b>	<b>-7.5</b>
Hispanic		34.8	27.5	47.4	57.6	70.0	73.7	81.9	87.3	90.2
<b>Texas</b>	8									
African American		34.2	32.6	47.4	58.8	71.6	74.7	81.8	85.6	86.8
<b>Gap</b>		<b>-39.6</b>	<b>-41.4</b>	<b>-35.2</b>	<b>-29.1</b>	<b>-20.6</b>	<b>-18.2</b>	<b>-13.4</b>	<b>-11.1</b>	<b>-9.8</b>
White		73.8	74.0	82.6	87.9	92.2	92.9	95.2	96.7	96.6
<b>Gap</b>		<b>-31.6</b>	<b>-34.9</b>	<b>-27.2</b>	<b>-22.7</b>	<b>-16.4</b>	<b>-12.4</b>	<b>-9.1</b>	<b>-7.5</b>	<b>-6.4</b>
Hispanic		42.2	39.1	55.4	65.2	75.8	80.5	86.1	89.2	90.2
<b>Houston</b>	10									
African American		39.8	37.2	46.8	57.8	67.3	73.3	77.7	82.8	87.6
<b>Gap</b>		<b>-37.4</b>	<b>-42.3</b>	<b>-36.5</b>	<b>-31.3</b>	<b>-23.6</b>	<b>-19.4</b>	<b>-17.5</b>	<b>-13.9</b>	<b>-9.0</b>
White		77.2	79.5	83.3	89.1	90.9	92.7	95.2	96.7	96.6
<b>Gap</b>		<b>-37.5</b>	<b>-44.3</b>	<b>-37.2</b>	<b>-37.5</b>	<b>-27.3</b>	<b>-21.0</b>	<b>-15.3</b>	<b>-14.6</b>	<b>-10.0</b>
Hispanic		39.7	35.2	46.1	51.6	63.6	71.7	79.9	82.1	86.6
<b>Texas</b>	10									
African American		34.6	37.1	45.1	54.0	61.8	67.4	75.0	80.2	85.9
<b>Gap</b>		<b>-37.3</b>	<b>-37.6</b>	<b>-33.9</b>	<b>-30.9</b>	<b>-26.7</b>	<b>-22.4</b>	<b>-18.2</b>	<b>-14.6</b>	<b>-10.6</b>
White		71.9	74.7	79.0	84.9	88.5	89.8	93.2	94.8	96.5
<b>Gap</b>		<b>-29.3</b>	<b>-31.2</b>	<b>-25.9</b>	<b>-25.7</b>	<b>-20.5</b>	<b>-16.1</b>	<b>-12.4</b>	<b>-10.7</b>	<b>-8.5</b>
Hispanic		42.6	43.5	53.1	59.2	68.0	73.7	80.8	84.1	88.0

Source: *Beating the Odds*, Council of the Great City Schools, March 2003.

**Attachment B (continued)**

<b>Texas Assessment of Academic Skills—Reading Economically Disadvantaged</b>										
<b>Percent Passing</b>										
	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
Houston	4	65.5	68.7	73.5	78.0	87.5	75.3	86.9	86.9	90.7
Texas	4	63.3	69.2	67.5	73.0	83.4	82.3	84.3	85.8	88.4
Houston	8	50.5	52.2	57.1	67.9	70.3	72.6	80.6	86.3	91.3
Texas	8	61.9	60.5	64.3	72.7	74.8	80.7	82.7	86.5	90.5
Houston	10	51.9	51.2	60.8	68.7	75.6	74.5	81.0	80.0	89.4
Texas	10	60.2	59.8	67.1	73.9	78.3	79.4	82.0	82.0	90.1
<b>Texas Assessment of Academic Skills—Mathematics Economically Disadvantaged</b>										
<b>Percent Passing</b>										
	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
Houston	4	45.2	55.1	73.8	73.8	81.4	69.6	79.3	87.0	91.3
Texas	4	45.7	58.2	68.3	73.9	79.5	81.3	80.7	87.0	91.2
Houston	8	29.8	25.7	45.9	57.0	68.4	70.3	80.4	86.0	89.9
Texas	8	39.9	37.8	53.4	63.6	74.6	78.7	84.5	87.9	88.8
Houston	10	37.4	35.4	44.6	51.9	65.5	69.8	79.5	82.2	86.4
Texas	10	40.7	42.4	51.3	57.9	66.6	72.0	79.2	83.0	87.4

Source: *Beating the Odds*, Council of the Great City Schools, March 2003

## **Attachment C**

### **Addendum to Beliefs and Visions**

Since 1990, this statement of *Beliefs and Visions* has been the policy of the Houston Independent School District. With this vision illuminating the way, successive boards of education, two superintendents, community and business leaders, and the people of HISD have tried to build a new educational structure. We have not yet created the district we envisioned in 1990, but we have started HISD down a new path.

We still have a long way to go. It is time for us, the Board of Education, to reaffirm our commitment to *Beliefs and Visions*. With this addendum, we make this pledge. We also, in the light of our experience and the learning of others, wish to expand our vision and clarify our theory of reform.

Our vision, implicit in *Beliefs and Visions*, is that American democracy promises equal opportunity for all and that as long as there is any achievement gap between rich and poor, between white children and children of color, the American promise has not been kept. We want to make explicit our vision that however broadly student achievement is defined and by whatever methods it is measured, any statistically significant gap between student groups is unacceptable. We accept the responsibility for high levels of achievement for all students.

We know this will require, in addition to everything outlined in *Beliefs and Visions*, unequal resources for unequal needs, a significant investment in prekindergarten education, and safe, modern, well-equipped schools for all children. We also know that HISD must focus more sharply on building, continuously improving, and effectively using a precision instructional management system. Every child deserves instruction designed to meet his or her unique learning needs.

*Beliefs and Visions* implies a theory of reform for improving Houston's public schools. We wish to make explicit our belief that the enduring reform of urban schools requires the reform of school districts with a focus on whole systems change.

We believe this is most effectively done by focusing on results and aligning policies and management systems to support accountability, empowerment, and capacity. Accountability starts with rigorous curriculum standards, high performance standards, and high-stakes tests; and includes school accountability, employee accountability, and promotion standards. Empowerment aligns authority and resources with responsibility and places a high value on choice. Building capacity gives everyone the resources needed to perform at high levels.

In 1990, the Board of Education concluded *Beliefs and Visions* with a pledge to work openly with administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders to implement change. We reaffirm that pledge, with an even greater recognition that it takes a city to reform an urban school district. Accordingly, we invite all who care about children and the future of this great city to join us in making the education of Houston's children our highest civic responsibility. We still have a long journey before us.

Board of Education, 2001

Signed:

Laurie Bricker  
Esther Campos  
Karla Cisneros

Arthur M. Gaines, Jr.  
Olga Gallegos  
Kevin Hoffman

Lawrence Marshall  
Don McAdams  
Jeff Shadwick

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- <sup>1</sup> Melanie Markley, "Paige asks 2 businessmen to assess HISD's performance," *Houston Chronicle*, 16 November 1996.
- <sup>2</sup> For the years 1996 and 1997, this case borrows freely without citations from Donald R. McAdams, *Fighting to Save Our Urban Schools . . . and Winning! Lessons from Houston* (New York: Columbia University Teachers College Press, 2000).
- <sup>3</sup> Donald R. McAdams, "Lessons from Houston," *Brooking Papers on Education Policy 1999*, ed. D. Ravitch (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution), p. 149.
- <sup>4</sup> Rod Paige to community leaders, 18 October 1996.
- <sup>5</sup> Rod Paige, "By any measure, a banner year for Houston schools," *Houston Chronicle*, 9 June 1996.
- <sup>6</sup> Laurie Bricker interview, 14 March 2003. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes from Ms. Bricker are taken from this interview.
- <sup>7</sup> HISD web site, <http://dept.houstonisd.org/Reconnect/ProjReconnect.htm>, accessed 28 March 2003.
- <sup>8</sup> Jason Snipes, Fred Doolittle, and Corinne Herlihy, "Houston Case Study," *Foundations for Success*, MDRC for the Council of Great City Schools, September 2002.
- <sup>9</sup> Carlos Byars, "Test exemptions may end," *Houston Chronicle*, 13 March 1998.
- <sup>10</sup> Melanie Markley, "Facility specialists check HISD schools for repairs," *Houston Chronicle*, 29 October 1997.
- <sup>11</sup> Salatheia Bryant, "HISD mulls bond election to fund repairs," *Houston Chronicle*, 6 August 1998.
- <sup>12</sup> Salatheia Bryant, "School bond proposal favored 2-to-1 in poll," *Houston Chronicle*, 5 August 1998.
- <sup>13</sup> Bryant, "School bond proposal favored."
- <sup>14</sup> Staff report, "HISD Budget," *Houston Chronicle*, 23 July 1998.
- <sup>15</sup> Salatheia Bryant, "Paige hails past year's successes," *Houston Chronicle*, 13 August 1998.
- <sup>16</sup> Melanie Markley, "Election '98," *Houston Chronicle*, 5 November 1998.
- <sup>17</sup> Melanie Markley, "Paige applauds HISD's progress," *Houston Chronicle*, 10 March 1999.
- <sup>18</sup> Salatheia Bryant, "Replacing Paige," *Houston Chronicle*, 30 December 2000.
- <sup>19</sup> Jane Ely, "Opportunity for good politics at HISD," *Houston Chronicle*, 3 January 2001.
- <sup>20</sup> Melanie Markley and Salatheia Bryant, "HISD weighs external vs. internal hunt for top exec," *Houston Chronicle*, 3 January 2001.
- <sup>21</sup> Melanie Markley, "'Best choice for us," *Houston Chronicle*, 8 June 2001.
- <sup>22</sup> Salatheia Bryant, "HISD names acting superintendent," *Houston Chronicle*, 5 January 2001.
- <sup>23</sup> Melanie Markley, "Lifelong Educator . . . a natural at leading HISD," *Houston Chronicle*, 20 May 2001.
- <sup>24</sup> Houston Independent School Compensation Manual 2002-03.
- <sup>25</sup> "Stripling Delivers Annual Address," 14 January 2003, [www.hisd.org](http://www.hisd.org), accessed 29 March 2003.