



Background

In November 2007, the National College Access Network, Houston A+ Challenge and teams from five Houston-area school districts (Aldine, Cypress-Fairbanks, Goose Creek, Houston and Spring Branch) launched the four-year *Preparing to Dream* initiative – a data-driven effort to help school districts transform policies and priorities toward a stronger college-going culture, especially for low-income and first generation students.

Financial support comes from Houston Endowment, a local philanthropy that has also heavily invested in *Achieving the Dream*, a nationwide initiative to improve access, persistence and attainment at the community college level for the same student populations.

Methods

During the 2007-08 school year, each school district assembled vertical teams consisting of district officials, principals, teachers, parents and students to analyze student achievement data, college-going rates and trends, district demographics and current college access programs. Teams were assisted by nationally recognized data coaches and core team coaches of Texas educational leaders. Data was used to identify problems, establish priorities, and develop implementation plans for three-year initiatives aimed at improving student outcomes and transforming district culture. As of 2008-09, these plans are now being put into action.

Logistics

During the first year, each district received a \$25,000 planning grant to assist their work, in addition to support through coaching, conferences and sharing of best practices. Three-year 'investment' grants of \$225,000 will allow them to enact their diverse action plans. District matching funds are also used.

Partnerships

In addition to cross-district collaboration, a region-wide coordinating board engages business, civic and higher educational leadership in the initiative. The coordinating board includes representation from the Greater Houston P-16+ Council, the Center for Houston's Future and the Greater Houston Partnership, NCAN and Houston A+ Challenge.

Intended Outcomes

Through the course of the initiative, school districts aim to increase rates of postsecondary enrollment (especially for low-income, first-generation students) and chart intermediate student outcomes, including:

- Successful completion of college preparatory curriculum
- Completion of accelerated learning courses (honors, AP and dual credit/enrollment)
- Attainment of high-quality scores on college entrance exams
- Completion of the FAFSA in time to take advantage of financial aid opportunities
- Qualify, while in high school, to be able to take credit-bearing courses in college, by passing rigorous high school courses, especially in English and Math, and college placement tests

More Information

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**National
College Access
Network**

www.preparingtodream.org

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THE HOUSTON **A+** CHALLENGE