



LEARNING **FIRST** ALLIANCE

DISTRICTWIDE SUPPORT AND SCHOOL-LEVEL FLEXIBILITY:

**RAISING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN THE ALDINE INDEPENDENT
SCHOOL DISTRICT**

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The Learning First Alliance

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Prologue

The Aldine Independent School District case study is one of five case studies that stem from a two-year study of improving high poverty districts conducted by the Learning First Alliance. The five case studies culminated in an analytical report entitled *Beyond Islands of Excellence: What Districts Can Do to Improve Instruction and Achievement in All Schools*. The report looks at how districtwide strategies to improve instruction have helped the five study districts raise student achievement across races and ethnicities.

More specifically, the study sought to address the following questions:

- How did the districts create the will to begin instructional reform?
- What strategies guided these reform efforts?
- In what ways did districts change their approaches to professional development?
- How did interactions among the stakeholders facilitate or hinder instructional reform?
- How was leadership distributed across stakeholders to facilitate improvement?

To explore the questions, we studied five school districts: the Aldine Independent School District (Texas); the Chula Vista Elementary School District (California); the Kent County Public Schools (Maryland); the Minneapolis Public Schools (Minnesota); and the Providence Public Schools (Rhode Island). We selected the districts based on their ability to exhibit at least three years of improvement in student achievement in mathematics and/or reading across multiple grades and across all races and ethnicities. We also sought districts that represented a cross section of characteristics, including size, region, urbanicity, and union affiliation.

While this case study is largely a story of improvement, a few caveats are in order. First, although the district demonstrated improvements, all students had not achieved high levels of proficiency; instead, the district was on an upward trajectory toward improving student achievement. Second, this study concentrated on district efforts to improve instruction. The district employed additional strategies that may have contributed to academic success but were beyond the scope of this study. Finally, this case study represents a snapshot of the district in 2001-2002 and not a longitudinal study of district progress.

We do not presume that Aldine Independent School District or any of the districts in this study has all the answers. Stakeholders we interviewed were candid about the challenges they faced. Nonetheless, we believe this case study and the report of which it is a part provide valuable lessons for districts interested in improving teaching and learning across entire systems.

The individual case studies of the five districts we studied, as well as two reports synthesizing the analysis across the districts—*Beyond Islands of Excellence: What Districts Can Do to Improve Instruction and Achievement in All Schools* and *Beyond Islands of Excellence: What Districts Can Do to Improve Instruction and Achievement in All Schools—A Leadership Brief*—can be downloaded or ordered at <http://www.learningfirst.org/bie/bie.html>.

Introduction

In the mid-1990s the Aldine Independent School District in Houston, Texas, began an instructional transformation that would bring dramatic change to teaching and learning in the district. In 1995, results from the newly implemented state accountability test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), began to reveal that Aldine students were performing well below average in the state. Prior to the implementation of the state test, district administrators had not looked at student achievement in an organized way. They held an unchecked belief that students were performing well. Yet when TAAS results came out in the early 1990s, they told a different story. Overall, they showed that Aldine ranked near the bottom of the state. The results also revealed that there were substantial gaps in achievement: although white students scored relatively well, African American and Hispanic students scored much lower. Noted previous superintendent Sonny Donaldson in 1999,

[Eight to 10 years ago,] we didn't have the data that showed that not everybody was performing at the level they're performing today. We never disaggregated test scores 10 years ago. We had a black valedictorian at Aldine High School. . . . We had Hispanic kids that were just outstanding students and we would look at that and say, well, yeah, Hispanic kids are getting a fair shake in Aldine because we've got Hispanic kids that are doing great. But no they weren't, because we didn't look at the data. (Koschoreck, N.D.)

Deeply concerned about these low levels of achievement, the board and the central office determined that they needed to dramatically change the way they approached teaching and learning. As a first step toward defining its new strategy, Aldine administrators and principals visited other districts whose students were performing well on the TAAS. Leaders gleaned much from their peers and decided to focus differently on three key areas: curriculum alignment, instructional strategies, and data-driven decisionmaking.

To spearhead this effort, Mr. Donaldson appointed Nadine Kujawa to become deputy superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Under the direction of Mrs. Kujawa, the district set upon an intensive course to work with teachers to write curriculum and assessments aligned to the Texas standards and to train staff at every level around the new curriculum, new instructional strategies, and data analysis and use. Over the next several years, the district implemented new strategies to improve student achievement and to take better advantage of existing structures to enhance the capacity of its teachers and administrators.

After only a year of work, Aldine discovered that it had dramatically raised student scores on the TAAS; yet scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) remained stagnant. ITBS scores were important to district officials, as the Iowa test measured students at a higher level of mastery than the TAAS did. Although the TAAS scores had stimulated the district reform efforts, success on the TAAS alone was not enough.

During the subsequent years, Aldine reform efforts would lead it to become among the highest-ranked districts in the state overall. Moreover, the district experienced success in closing the

achievement gap between white students and African American and Hispanic students. Results from the fourth grade TAAS math test illustrate this improvement. In 1994, 49 percent of African American students met minimum expectations compared to 77 percent of whites. By 2002, the percentage of African American students meeting minimum expectations had risen to 95 percent, while the number for white students rose to 98 percent. (See Appendix I for a detailed outline of TAAS results.)

District Statistics

Located 15 miles north of downtown Houston, Aldine Independent School District covers 111 square miles in an urban, industrial corner of Harris County, Texas. The district experienced dramatic population growth in the last decade and a significant shift in demographics. With a student population over 52,000, AISD is home to 64 school campuses. While Aldine was once a majority white district, its population changed significantly in the 1990s. Today, 56 percent of the student population is Hispanic, 32 percent is African American, and almost 8 percent is white. The poverty level of Aldine's students has risen as well, and is reflected in the fact that 74 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. (See Table 1 on page 3 for more district statistics.)

Amidst these changes, however, the district has enjoyed leadership stability. Five school board members have served the district for more than a decade. The previous, highly revered superintendent, Sonny Donaldson, spent 15 years at the helm of the district before retiring in 2001. This stability not only applies to the longevity of individuals, but also to the district's careful attention to leadership succession. In the spring of 2001, for example, the Aldine board appointed Nadine Kujawa to succeed Mr. Donaldson. Mrs. Kujawa, an Aldine employee for over 30 years, was elevated to the superintendency from the role of deputy superintendent—a position she had taken in 1996 at the beginning of the Aldine reform effort. Many staff members point to Mrs. Kujawa as a chief architect behind the district's curriculum reform.

Table 1
Aldine Independent School District Statistical Data
2002-2003 School Year

| | |
|--|---|
| Total Budget (\$) | 355,827,985 |
| Per Pupil Budget (\$) | 6,822 |
| Number of Schools | 64 |
| Number of Students | 52,520 |
| Student Racial/Ethnic Distribution (%) | |
| White | 8 |
| African American | 32 |
| Hispanic | 56 |
| Asian/PI/Filipino | 3 |
| Native American /Alaskan Native | 0 |
| Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligibility (%) | 74 |
| ESL (%) | 23 |
| Number of Full Time Equivalent Teachers | 3,496 |
| Average Salary (\$) | 43,732 |
| Average Years of Teaching Experience | 11 |
| Superintendent – Current and Previous (Tenure in Years) | Nadine Kujawa (2001–Present) Sonny Donaldson (1986–2001) |
| School Board | 7-member board elected at-large |

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

A Look at Improvement in Aldine

How have Aldine’s vision and focus changed it from an average district with marginal student achievement to one in which students and educators have high expectations for themselves and the structures and resources to meet them? It is a story of instructional transformation that we will explore in the coming pages.

Understanding the Context

To appreciate the story of Aldine’s change process, it is important to understand the district’s philosophies. Aldine has implemented five overarching strategies to improve instruction:

- Instructional and student-focused vision
- High expectations
- Clear standards and accountability
- Data-based decisionmaking
- Supportive organizational structures and networks

We will introduce the above elements in this section and discuss each in detail throughout this case study.

Instructional and Student-focused Vision

Aldine educators were guided by a strong vision for success. Stakeholders throughout the district readily and easily expressed the district vision: “Our goal is to make sure that all students are achieving on grade level.” Interviewees agreed that one of the hallmarks of working in Aldine was the belief that all students, regardless of social class, ethnicity, family structure, and so on, were capable of learning. Essentially, those interviewed regarded Aldine as a district in which teachers, administrators, and resource personnel accepted responsibility for student failure and success and were committed to finding ways for all students to succeed. The district developed several goals and strategies to operationalize this vision, not the least of which was building and sustaining a high quality teaching staff.

High Expectations

“Hard work and high expectations for students and staff.” This refrain resonated throughout Aldine. District leaders expected high quality work of themselves and others. Of former Superintendent Donaldson’s philosophy, one administrator noted, “He would always say, ‘I don’t want excuses; just make it happen.’”

Coupled with the dedication to hard work was what many teachers described as a “can do” spirit in Aldine. Staff emphasized that their philosophy focused not on restraints and restrictions, but on possibilities. One principal explained,

The only barriers are what you self impose. You are open to innovate within our system. You can't beat to a different drummer. There is a structure. But you are encouraged to color outside the lines.

Clear Standards and Accountability

It is impossible to describe Aldine's approach to instructional transformation without addressing the role of state and local standards and accountability. The Texas accountability system—the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS)—has two components: the state standard system, known as Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and the state testing system, referred to as the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Together, TAAS and TEKS formed the basis of Aldine's curriculum and assessment focus.

As explained earlier, district leaders became concerned in 1995 when the state released the first round of TAAS scores and the Aldine scores were comparatively low. These results hit district leaders like a cold shower and spurred a variety of actions. In 1996, district leaders determined that Aldine needed to build a district curriculum. Teachers and administrators used the curriculum, which became known as the *benchmark targets*, to guide instruction at all levels of the system.

Data-driven Decisionmaking

Monitoring and analyzing student performance through testing was a serious undertaking in Aldine. In addition to state (TAAS) and national (ITBS) normed tests, the district administered locally developed assessments, referred to as the *benchmark assessments*. District leaders continually reviewed test data to monitor student performance and to develop strategic plans for improvement. Also, district leaders expected all staff to use data as a basis for decisionmaking regarding curriculum, instruction, and staff development. To facilitate data use, central office leaders put in place several structures and strategies to support teachers, principals, and central office staff. While the use of data was widely embraced by staff, it also posed challenges and concerns about strong reliance on data. We will address this in greater detail in following sections.

Supportive Organizational Structures and Networks

Aldine's central office implemented a variety of structures to enhance the work of its teachers and principals. One of the most prominent was *vertical alignment*. In 1994, in response to fast-paced growth, Aldine leaders restructured the district into four vertical quadrants, each defined by a high school and its feeder schools. Today, Aldine has five verticals: four traditional feeder-pattern verticals plus a separate vertical strand to support its 13 magnet schools. The vertical structure was used primarily to bring together principals and central office staff to enhance their knowledge and skill in key areas of instructional alignment and improvement. Area superintendents oversaw the work of each vertical. They described their role as collaborating with principals and providing support to ensure that the performance of students was “exemplary.”

In addition to a vertical structure, Aldine used a *horizontal* structure to bring together school leaders in grade-similar or school-similar groupings for collaborative work. The horizontal and vertical structures were essential vehicles to connect ideas and reinforce the vision across the district. While they brought central office leaders and principals together on a regular basis, these two structures were used less frequently as a vehicle to convene teachers.

Aldine also employed many district- and school-based staff to shepherd professional development. A deputy superintendent and a director of curriculum charged with outlining and implementing professional development for all district staff spearheaded the district's *division of curriculum*. A network of *program directors*—more than 30 former teachers with expertise in all major subject areas—designed and implemented professional development activities at both the district and school levels.

In addition, the district employed a unit of six central office staff who were responsible for helping schools recruit and retain high quality teachers. This division oversaw not only recruitment of new teachers but also Aldine's mentor program and induction academy designed to support teachers new to the district. Finally, the district supported the previously established network of school-based *skill specialists*—teacher leaders who worked in schools to provide additional instructional support and to shepherd data analysis.

Interactions and Relationships

The Aldine story is one of cooperation and collegiality. A strong pattern of support stretched the length of the district, from the boardroom to the classroom. As one principal noted, “The district is large enough to serve you but small enough to know you, which is nice.”

What made these connections strong in Aldine? In part, the strong emphasis on children kept most people focused on supporting goals and finding solutions to problems. District leaders also had a reputation for being honest and fair in their treatment of district staff and schools. All schools were held to the same high expectations and operated under the same rules. Principals received significant district support and autonomy over the allocation of their resources. Teachers, particularly at the elementary level, acknowledged a willingness by principals to provide resources for professional development and to respond to teacher requests for additional support.

Supporting Professional Growth: The Aldine Approach

As they focused on improving the district’s standing on TAAS and increasing the overall academic success of their students, Aldine leaders quickly recognized the need for a deeper, more focused effort to improve instruction. Under the direction of then-Deputy Superintendent Nadine Kujawa, the district set upon a course to improve both the instructional skills of and the professional development support provided to teachers.

Like most efforts in Aldine, professional development was governed by a centrally designed framework and enhanced by a variety of structures at the district and school levels. To explore the role of professional development in Aldine’s work, we will examine the components of the district framework as well as a few challenges that district and school leaders faced in building teaching and leading capacity.

Knowing What to Teach: Creating the “Gospel” of Benchmarks

Beginning in 1996, and over the course of the next several years, Aldine set about the task of building a new curriculum that aligned to the state TEKS framework—a curriculum that would become known in Aldine as the *benchmark targets*.

The process began when Mrs. Kujawa brought together principals and language arts teachers to write the language arts curriculum. Mrs. Kujawa told the school teams (one principal and one language arts teacher from each school) at a districtwide meeting that their charge was to go back to their schools and work with colleagues to answer two questions:

- 1) What skills do the students need to have when they enter my room to be successful this year?
- 2) What skills do students need this year to be successful next year?

In addition to creating a curriculum, this massive undertaking was also a considerable staff development exercise. Teachers first met in grade-level groups and then across grade levels at their schools to develop their answers to these questions. That summer, a group of 40 language arts teachers convened at the district table, bringing with them the responses from the school-level meetings. During an intensive two-week effort, this team produced a K–12 language arts scope and sequence aligned to the TEKS. As the benchmarks evolved, they became specified in six- or nine-week curricular sequences. Although these sequences were not part of the original district goal, they became an important foundation for teachers in the classroom. Explained one administrator,

In our first attempt at creating benchmarks, we designed them by semester. But the teachers said ... “we want it by six weeks.” They felt more specification helped them pace their classes better. We found that the specification was tremendously helpful with mobility with students moving from campus to campus.

During the first year, teams of math and language arts teachers began the effort to create districtwide curriculum. In the second year, the district brought together science and social studies teachers to begin the work of curriculum standardization in those content areas. Today, benchmarks exist in all core subject areas as well as art, music, and foreign language.

In addition to knowing the benchmarks within their own content areas, all teachers were responsible for incorporating appropriate reading and math benchmarks into their work. In this way, the benchmark strategy included an interdisciplinary dimension that encouraged teachers to collaborate across subjects.

Teachers and principals expressed considerable support for the benchmarks. One administrator explained, “We really push the benchmarks and we have not backed off. The benchmarks drive everything we do.” The following remarks from an elementary school teacher speak for many. She stated,

I personally think the benchmarks are the best thing we have done in Aldine. Benchmarks tell you exactly what to teach. And the units allow you creativity. They are more fun for teachers and kids. You can be creative with benchmarks, but [they give] you exactly what students should learn.

As teachers became more comfortable with the benchmark curriculum, administrators and teachers agreed that it would be helpful to provide teachers with interim tests to assess student progress throughout the year. As a result, the district convened teachers to write benchmark assessments—tests that teachers could choose to administer to check student progress. These tests were administered either at the end of a semester or the end of a nine-week grading period. In addition, school-based assessments, known as mini-benchmark assessments, were given every two to three weeks and were written by teachers on each campus. While the benchmarks themselves were mandatory, the accompanying assessments were optional and their use varied from school to school.

Providing Professional Development: Creating Focus

Once the benchmarks were in place it was clear to district leaders that the next step was to ensure teachers knew how to effectively incorporate the benchmarks into their classroom instruction. This called for intensive staff development, which the district accomplished through a variety of new structures and strategies.

Prior to the reform efforts of the mid-1990s, professional development was not tied to district goals, nor did it address weaknesses revealed in the data. As Aldine’s instructional reform strategy progressed, district leaders became increasingly focused on multiple strategies, including:

- Using data to drive instruction
- Making coherent use of districtwide professional development days

- Creating networks of teacher leaders to increase instructional support
- Obtaining and using external resources to augment professional development

A discussion of these strategies follows.

Refocusing District Professional Development

As a major strategy to improve instruction, Aldine sought to refocus the use of its district-sanctioned professional development days. As the district reforms moved forward in the late 1990s, central office leaders seized upon the professional development days as an important vehicle for conveying district goals and providing instructional support to help teachers meet the demands of teaching the district's new benchmarks.

The district had nine professional development days at its disposal. These days had previously been used for a series of short-term workshops on a variety of topics. The topics had not been chosen based on district goals or on data-revealed needs. Aldine's new strategy for professional development ensured that the district reviewed student achievement data, teacher survey data, and other information to determine its professional development focus.

The strategy also sought to increase both school-level collaboration and the focus of professional development on key needs.

To accomplish these goals, the central office restructured the professional development days. Under the new structure, three and one-half days were dedicated to districtwide staff development, while five and one-half days were set aside for school-based training. As a result of the shift, teachers from throughout the district met to learn about the goals and strategies endorsed by the district. Teachers then returned to their schools to incorporate district goals into their specific school settings. When teachers met as a full district staff, they were grouped in several ways—by subject matter, grade level, or vertical alignment—to maximize sharing. Regardless of whether teachers were meeting in school-based or district-level groupings, attendance at these staff development activities was considered mandatory. Noted one administrator,

Teachers have to make up the training if they miss it. We can't legally make them make it up—and we don't want to hold it over their heads in a negative way—but we offer make-up sessions and principals can send their teachers to that. . . . If you are sick and you miss staff development, then you miss the district focus.

At the beginning of the reform effort, professional development days were used primarily to explain the TAAS, the reasons for the benchmarks, and the need for the district to work together as a unit to create success. As teachers became more comfortable with the benchmarks, the district program shifted to focus on strategies to support their implementation. For example, there was a major effort over the past several years to introduce and support the use of a variety

of general instructional strategies across subject areas and grade levels, such as flexible grouping, cooperative learning, and text-dependent reading.

The district-level focus was usually sustained throughout the entire school year and typically involved a specific content area. For example, in 2001, the district focused on writing and on building the skills of teachers to work with diverse groups of students. Schools also were asked to address the district focus through school-based professional development.

In addition to the district professional development days, the central office planned and implemented a series of optional weekly workshops and seminars throughout the year. The topics ranged from content-specific lesson planning and pedagogical skill development to broader issues of time management and classroom management. Like the district professional development days, the workshop topics were determined based on data. The district reviewed principal and teacher requests, test data, teacher needs assessments, and teacher evaluations to determine areas of need. Workshops were held during the day and after school and were open to all teachers in the district at no cost. District leaders encouraged principals to use these workshops to augment school-level staff development efforts and to provide additional assistance for struggling teachers.

Program Directors

Much of the district professional development was created and delivered by a cohort of teacher leaders—the district employed 31 *program directors* whose expertise was in specific content areas and grade levels. In general, program directors were recent classroom teachers who showed exemplary teaching and leadership skills. They provided a wide array of assistance. At the district level, they facilitated the implementation of state- and district-mandated assessments—especially in language arts and math. Program directors trained school-based skill specialists and teachers to administer the assessments and to use the results to diagnose student needs and plan instruction. Program directors were also in charge of designing and implementing the district’s series of professional development workshops, as well as the training provided during the district-level professional development days. In addition, school leaders called upon program directors to provide direct professional development assistance within their schools. A district leader described program directors as follows,

In Aldine, good professional development is ongoing and is provided by competent, knowledgeable experts in their field. . . . [Program directors] are the true experts in their field, in social studies, mathematics, science, reading. . . . They are the beavers that are running, trying to stay one step ahead. They’re attending national conventions and staying on the cutting edge, and then coming back to spread the knowledge to us.

Skill Specialists

Another component of the district’s professional development structure was its cohort of *skill specialists*, who were school-based teacher leaders. The district provided funding for every school to hire a full-time skill specialist in math and/or reading. Skill specialists were usually veteran teachers willing to take on leadership positions within their schools. While their work varied from school to school, in all schools, skill specialists created an extra layer of instructional support for teachers. Specialists led workshops, modeled lessons, helped teachers secure needed materials, and the like. They also provided personal support, lending an ear or taking over a classroom for a short time when teachers needed respite on an especially difficult day. One skill specialist explained that while she worked hard to provide support, she never entered a classroom to observe or model lessons unless invited. She noted, however, that she would try to get herself invited into classrooms. “After talking with a teacher about her needs, I might say, ‘Oh, I have just the tool that might help you out. I can come in and model it.’”

The skill specialists have a significant impact on student achievement, and teachers know they are not alone.

—Aldine principal

In addition to helping teachers, skill specialists provided vital administrative support to principals, taking on a variety of roles including designing school-based professional development. Skill specialists were also the primary data managers in many schools; they administered the assessments and collected, disaggregated, and analyzed the data for the entire staff. A teacher explained how skill specialists helped improve instruction and achievement:

Our [skill specialist] knows all the children. She can look at [the] data and tell us ‘I know in this class last year [a student] did this; let’s try this.’ She’s very much aware of what the kids need to do... and she may bring a special lesson to us in our team meeting... She can tell us what she’s seeing. She goes to all the classes and does skills lessons also.

Growing, Supporting, and Sustaining New Teachers

As part of its commitment to building a diverse, well-qualified teaching force, Aldine implemented several programs to “grow its own” teachers. As one strategy, district leaders drafted non-certified teacher candidates whom they deemed had potential to become effective teachers. Taking advantage of a state waiver program, Aldine created what it called the *Aldine Permit*, which allowed these non-certified recruits to teach in Aldine. Each recruit needed to have a college degree in the field they would teach and meet minimum state requirements. In addition, the district required these new teachers to participate in a mandatory 19-week professional development program taught by Aldine program directors and principals. The sessions focused on topics deemed crucial to first-year teachers, such as learning and

understanding the Aldine benchmarks, using effective classroom management techniques, and using multiple instructional approaches to address diverse student learning styles. The district also encouraged permit candidates to pursue full university certification.

Aldine leaders were enthusiastic about the program. One administrator noted,

It's hard for me to believe that someone who's been a chemist for 13 years can't teach if I show him how to do it. He has the content so that's one component we don't have to be concerned with. I can teach him how to be a good teacher. I can teach him discipline and management, instructional strategies, and text and all of those [kinds] of things.... We run these people through this program, and ironically—and we have the test data to show this—these teachers' contracts are renewed at a higher rate than our regular teachers and the kids' test scores are equal to or greater than [those of] the kids who had certified teachers. So we know that program is working.

The district also attempted to attract its own graduates back to Aldine to teach, focusing particularly on graduates who had been members of the district's local chapter of the Texas Association of Future Educators (TAFE) club. All high school students who participated in TAFE and obtained a college degree and teacher certificate were guaranteed a valid contract to teach in Aldine. The district had some success with the endeavor. To date, of the 300 graduates who participated in TAFE, about 20 have become teachers in Aldine.

As the end of the 1990s neared, the district also implemented efforts to attract its top graduates. Today, Aldine hands a teaching contract to all students who graduate in the top 25 percent of their high school class. District leaders noted that the district has had less success with attracting these graduates back. Through all their local efforts, the district recruited about 20 new teachers annually, although their goal is to increase this number to 40–50 new teachers each year.

The district also sought to increase its minority and bilingual teaching force by partnering with a local university to train paraprofessionals to become bilingual teachers. As part of the program, paraprofessionals were paid a full salary, but worked at the school half time and attended school half time. The district also paid for the cost of tuition and books. The program, which was supported in part by district funds and in part by a state grant, provided the district with approximately eight new bilingual teachers every year.

These multiple efforts to recruit new teachers were possible in part because the district faced few constraints from the board, union, or state with regard to recruitment. Because the state allowed the district to hire non-certified teachers, the district recruited teachers from various fields outside education. In addition, Aldine could offer teaching contracts at any time during the school year without addressing issues of seniority.

Retaining Teachers—The Aldine Mentor Program

Once recruited, how did Aldine seek to keep new teachers? To address this issue, district leaders looked carefully at their data, which revealed that on average, Aldine teachers left the district

after seven years. District leaders knew that while they were able to retain approximately 85 percent of teachers recruited from Texas universities, out-of-state graduates were more likely to leave after five years. To help reduce the attrition, the district instituted an intensive mentor program to provide support to new teachers.

The Aldine mentor program was established in 1994 in response to a broad state mandate that all new teachers in Texas have mentors. As the district began to step up its efforts to retain high quality teachers, the district saw opportunity in the mandate and committed a high-level staff person to coordinate the mentor program. As a result, the program grew steadily.

In developing the mentor program, the district first established guidelines for mentors. Mentors were to have three years of teaching experience, have a positive evaluation, and commit to a full year as a mentor. In the first two years, the district provided some minimal training for mentors. As the program developed and Aldine assessed its impact, district leaders found that mentors had little connection to each other and did not always feel empowered to assist mentees with such things as obtaining release time for observation. To address this challenge, the district revised the program and required that every school have a mentor coordinator to facilitate communication and guide the program at the school level.

Over time, the district provided a greater level of support for the mentoring program. A district-level coordinator developed a training manual for mentors and an intensive guide of monthly topics for mentor-mentee pairs to address. In addition, to increase sharing of ideas districtwide, the district coordinator began to bring school-level mentor coordinators together several times a year.

While overall the mentor program was well established throughout the district, a few challenges remained. The depth of implementation of the mentoring program depended heavily on the commitment of principals to the program and their ability to recruit and mentor coordinators. The district did not provide principals with funds for schools to pay mentor coordinators, which some viewed as an obstacle to success.

* * *

In general, teachers expressed considerable support for their professional growth. Many leaders and teachers noted that if a teacher felt strongly about taking part in a professional development experience that matched district goals, principals worked hard to find the money and substitutes for release time. Interestingly, Texas certification and the Aldine salary scale offered limited incentive to upgrade skills, as teachers received only marginally more in salary for holding a master's degree.

Brokering External Resources

The central office played a significant role in promoting and brokering the use of external resources—funds and expertise—to support professional growth. District leaders were keen observers of good practice, readers of research, and seekers of funding to help bring their visions

to fruition. They were not ambivalent about their mission and purpose, nor were they hesitant to seek input from groups outside the district, including universities and educators in other jurisdictions.

At the district level, a central office staff member was charged with helping to obtain school-based and districtwide grants. The district encouraged school leaders to apply for grants for staff development and supported their efforts by sharing information about grant opportunities and helping with grant writing and administration. The district also forged coalitions among schools across the district to bring in grants. One example of this effort was a \$7.5 million grant from the Annenberg Foundation to implement magnet school programs. A significant portion of the funding allowed the district and participating schools to enhance their professional development efforts.

In addition to garnering outside financial support for professional development, the district tapped into external expertise. Aldine brought in education experts to work with principals on instructional leadership issues and to enhance the district's capacity to provide training on data-driven decisionmaking. Principals and teachers were also encouraged to visit other districts with reputations for doing exemplary work and to bring in experts to address key needs. As one administrator explained, "What we do is look for people who can take our goals to a next step."

Aldine also relied on the Texas Region IV Education Service Center to enhance its professional development efforts. The Region IV service center is the largest of 20 state service centers established by the Texas legislature in 1967 to provide school districts with professional development training and technical assistance to support statewide goals for school improvement. While the centers receive only a small portion of their funds through the state, they operate in part as an outreach arm for the Texas Education Agency. The service center provided Aldine with information on state and federal policies; offered professional development on state initiatives; and provided an array of professional development services based on school needs such as summer academies for K–3 teachers in reading and for middle school math teachers.

Universities, too, were important external partners. In addition to partnering with local universities to increase the number of bilingual teachers in the district, Aldine also worked closely with researchers from the University of Houston (UH) to conduct a teacher survey that provided the district with important feedback on teacher beliefs and concerns. UH researchers also worked with district leaders to conduct a detailed seven-year comparison of TAAS performance in Aldine. As another example, the district partnered with Rice University to provide yearlong training to math and science teachers in both content and pedagogy.

Professional Development at the School Level

The district recognized early in its reform effort that to implement the benchmarks, to affect teaching, and to ultimately improve student achievement, it needed to provide support for professional development at the school level. The district did this in two important ways. First, it helped create an infrastructure of instructional supports, such as funding skill specialists,

providing training for principals to become strong instructional leaders, and altering the role of the assistant principal to provide greater instructional support. Second, the central office provided schools with significant freedom to assess their own needs and to create school-specific fixes to challenges that emerged. Many schools were able to harness the district supports and build collaborative cultures focused on improving instruction and achievement. This was particularly evident in schools that made productive use of assistant principals and skill specialists to analyze data and provide an additional layer of instructional support.

Collaboration and Cooperation

Many central office administrators, principals, and teachers described a strong collaborative culture in Aldine schools. Teachers readily worked together, and principals spoke of spending significant amounts of time observing classroom instruction. This was particularly true at the elementary level. While formalized structures for peer observation were limited, most teachers interviewed noted that they were comfortable being observed by administrators and began to welcome the feedback from their principals.

In addition to individual observation, principals in many schools found ways to provide teachers with at least one hour of shared planning time per week. Teachers in each school collaborated through a variety of mechanisms, including subject and grade-level teams, classroom observation, interdisciplinary and cross-grade vertical teams, department heads meetings, administrator–staff planning groups, and school committees.

There’s a collaboration that is so tightly knit in our building that people talk automatically. It’s not because we have to, it’s not because it’s required or because there’s a meeting that’s set aside. —Aldine Teacher

Some schools—particularly the middle schools— created “families” of teachers across core subject areas that worked closely with a small cohort of students. These family structures created opportunities for cross-team sharing, learning, and camaraderie. Noted one teacher of her “family”: “We have planning time together, we eat lunch together, we celebrate birthdays together. This really helps us build bonds.”

Informal activities complemented a system of formal structures and increased collegiality among teachers. However, these support networks were used in varying capacities across schools. Some schools had strong traditions of collaboration that permeated the culture.

Explained one teacher,

In my school, we readily share what works in the classroom. We not only get a chance to share with our own departments but with other departments in the school. During meetings and professional development, a teacher would generally say, “in my class this week I tried this strategy and it worked” [or] “this strategy didn’t work well with many students because. . . .” Teachers are very comfortable sharing ideas.

In other schools, traditional role norms impeded the collaboration process. This variability across schools remained a scaling-up challenge for the district.

Using Data: Assessing Success

While the district did not have a formalized process of assessing the impact of professional development, it had created a variety of processes to monitor its work. Central office leaders relied on two groups to assess professional development: principals and teacher leaders. Both groups used surveys and observations as the primary tools of determining whether and how much teachers used the professional development practices. For example, at the conclusion of each district workshop, program directors reviewed teacher and principal feedback. Program directors then used this anecdotal input when planning future professional development activities.

In addition, the district strongly encouraged principals to observe classroom practice and continually assess teachers’ use of the instructional strategies introduced at professional development sessions. To facilitate this effort, the district trained principals to use several strategies to formally observe teaching practice. These strategies, including “learning walks” designed by the University of Pittsburgh’s Institute for Learning, provided many principals with rubrics and tools to guide their observation and assessment.

Aldine’s instructional reform efforts were guided by data. Stakeholders at all levels of the system used data to diagnose student and teacher strengths and weaknesses, to plan for professional development, and to make general decisions about district and school needs. At the district level, senior administrators and district staff used multiple forms of data as the basis for decisions about budget priorities, district and school staffing, and professional development. Surveys of teacher satisfaction, principals’ observation feedback, recruitment and retention statistics, and test scores all formed the foundation for central office and board decisionmaking.

Aldine does something with their data. They don’t just sit on [data] and say, “Let’s wait until next year and hopefully it’s better.” They actually do things with it. —Aldine teacher

Like central office staff, school staff and administrators used data regularly to guide their work. It is worth noting that although the district pushed for the use of multiple forms of data, test data

provided the primary source of information on which school improvement decisions were based. In most schools the emphasis on data use was facilitated by assistant principals and skill specialists. These instructional leaders established a calendar to guide the administration of assessments and took the lead on disaggregating their data and providing analysis of the outcomes to teachers. Teachers, particularly at the elementary level, cited the importance of this assistance; many noted that they regularly reviewed student data and used them as a basis for adjusting their own instructional practices.

Challenges of Instructional Reform

While Aldine had made considerable progress in shifting the focus and administration of professional development to match research-promoted ideals, the rigor of professional development varied from building to building. The district also struggled to determine how to provide professional development that addressed the needs of both veteran teachers and the large cohorts of teachers new to the system.

Finding Time

While principals in many schools found ways to increase time for teachers to work together, the time available remained insufficient to allow teachers to meet the growing demands of their work. Teachers expressed a desire to meet the new demands but also indicated a sense of being overwhelmed by the pressure. In general the extra hour or two a week to work together seemed insufficient to enable teachers to analyze data, research best practices, and share ideas. This time crunch was also an obstacle for the work of skill specialists. Despite the best intentions of specialists to train whole staffs in new instructional strategies, time was often inadequate to allow for extensive on-site training and follow-up. Therefore, specialists relied on attending grade-level meetings or individual classrooms to provide professional development activities.

Differentiating Professional Development

In addition, Aldine faced the challenge of providing rigorous professional development to veteran teachers while continuing to acculturate new teachers to a variety of instructional practices. To some extent, Aldine distinguished between the professional development needs of new teachers and veteran teachers and put in place several structures to differentiate their professional development. The mentoring program and the Aldine permit program attest to the district's efforts to differentiate. However, stakeholders from all levels acknowledged the difficulty of providing new and engaging professional development for veteran teachers. An example of this struggle was illustrated when the district sought to provide professional development around an instructional strategy known as KWL (Know, Want to Know, Learned).¹

¹ Ogle, D. S. (1986). K-W-L group instructional strategy. In A. S. Palincsar, D. S. Ogle, B. F. Jones, & E. G. Carr (Eds.), *Teaching reading as thinking* (Teleconference Resource Guide, pp. 11-17). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Many language arts teachers at the middle and secondary school levels were already familiar with this instructional strategy and were frustrated by the district’s insistence that they take part in sessions focused on its use. Many agreed that there was a need to develop opportunities that would take experienced teachers to the next level of professional expertise in teaching.

Dealing with Demands

While many teachers, particularly at the elementary level, expressed a sense of efficacy and excitement for their work, several also articulated a sense of being overwhelmed by the pressures that had increased as a result of TAAS. While principals and district leaders attempted to mitigate the pressure through increased professional development, more opportunities for teacher involvement in decisionmaking, and increased time for collaboration, it appeared that the demands of the teaching job were greater than the supports provided.

Developing Instructional Leadership

Over the course of their reform efforts, Aldine leaders determined that improving instruction would require redefining leadership and finding ways for all stakeholders to drive that improvement. No single group was expected to tackle instructional reform alone. Instead, leadership was shared by the board, central office, principals, and teachers.

An important tenant of leadership in Aldine is what education reform expert Michael Fullan calls *moral purpose*. Senior district leaders brought moral purpose to the work of all the educators in Aldine by emphasizing the importance of reaching all children and of closing the achievement gap between racial groups. Throughout the district, leaders conveyed the notion that everyone must work to make all children successful and that “no excuses” would be tolerated. Explained one board member,

Everything we do is based on what’s best for the children above all, period.
Whether you are dealing with an administrative issue or student issue, we ask,
“What’s best for the children?”

The board and superintendent set this tone, and their consistency in delivering this message did not waiver. As a result, it was not surprising that stakeholders throughout the district echoed this purpose.

Another philosophy that drove improvement in Aldine was the proviso that leaders at all levels of the system lead what they were best positioned to lead. Education professor/researcher Richard Elmore calls this principle the *theory of comparative advantage*. In his model, policymakers should set performance targets and hold leaders accountable for reaching such targets, central office staff should design systems that assist school-based educators in implementing high quality education, and so on. In this section, we will explore how Elmore’s concept of “comparative advantage” was consistent with the way stakeholders worked throughout Aldine.

Clarifying Roles

A closer look at individual stakeholder groups provides a deeper view of how Aldine leaders engaged in roles they were best positioned to lead.

The Board and Central Office

As noted earlier in our story, when poor test scores first came to light in 1995, former Superintendent Donaldson and his board convened to talk about how the district should proceed. Over the course of the next few years, then-Deputy Superintendent Kujawa engineered several innovative structural and curricular changes, including the benchmarking process and vertical alignment. The board encouraged these initiatives and at the same time recognized its own role in holding the district more accountable for academic progress. As a policymaking body, the board did not see its role as devising improvement strategies, but rather as setting goals for success, monitoring progress, and promoting innovation. Explained one board member, “I am not an administrator. That is not my job. I am not a professional educator. . . . [The superintendent and her staff] are, and we say to them, ‘This is what we want to see. You are in charge of how to do it.’”

Like the board, Aldine’s central office focused on areas it believed it was best positioned to lead. While Superintendents Kujawa and Donaldson made it their work, and the work of their staffs, to design structures to support instructional improvement—such as the benchmark curriculum and the benchmark assessments—they did not attempt to dictate how principals implemented such reforms. Rather, implementation was the responsibility of principals, and district leaders placed high expectations on principals to design and implement school-based systems to ensure that the curriculum was well-taught.

As a result, the central office worked to create an infrastructure of support for school-level practitioners. Central office leaders believed that investing in high quality teachers and providing significant support would produce teachers who were more effective, more rooted in the Aldine culture, and ultimately more likely to stay in the district.

The Reconfigured Principalship

District leaders asserted that in a district of more than 50,000 students, the only way to ensure successful teaching and learning was through careful nurturing of the principalship. It was this role that district leaders recognized as providing the strongest translation and adaptation of district goals.

Aldine district leaders viewed principals as *instructional leaders* and provided multiple supports to help principals build their leadership skills. It is not surprising, then, that many principals expressed their role as emulating the district goals. Principals explained that they regularly observed classes and monitored instruction and student progress. They spoke of how they used data to analyze student performance and teaching strategies. Furthermore, principals

acknowledged that they encouraged teachers to engage in professional development activities inside and outside the schools.

Principals provided strong leadership in Aldine, and their work as instructional leaders took on many forms. Notably, principals were *key translators* of the district message. An elementary school principal summed up a common refrain heard throughout interviews, noting, “The district sets the focus for what occurs in the buildings. The principal’s role is to implement this vision and make certain that other staff members in the building are aware of what the goal is.” Another principal explained how principals molded the district goals to address school-specific priorities:

In each faculty meeting, we revisit our vision and discuss the culture of the campus, which is high expectations for all children. We look at what good curriculum looks like. We let them know all of the goals of the district and how these goals affect us at the campus level and how important they are in carrying out our mission and goals for the campus.

Principals also described their role as extremely *data-driven*. Aldine principals worked closely with assistant principals and skill specialists to disaggregate and analyze data. Data then formed the basis for their discussions with teachers around instructional strengths and weaknesses. The principals noted that they encouraged data use in all teacher meetings—particularly grade-level or departmental meetings and faculty meetings.

[Principals] make you feel valued, like you are a professional. They’ll say, “Tell me what it is that you need and I will try to meet those needs.” —Aldine teacher

Principals also explained that a large part of their role was *creating opportunities* and an environment in which teachers could share and collaborate. While most principals noted that teachers did not have formal time every day to collaborate, elementary and middle school principals made a concerted effort to create structures that increased teacher communication. Principals sought to embed time into the school week for teachers to meet in various groupings—by grade level, by subject matter, in cross-discipline teams, and in whole faculty meetings. Principals also attempted to identify expertise within their buildings and to develop mechanisms that allowed best practices to be shared. One principal explained how increasing classroom observation time assisted his efforts to spread good practice:

We spend a lot of time in the classroom. We have to. That’s the only way that you are going to ensure that [teachers are] actually teaching what they’re supposed to be teaching. I encourage peer coaching or teaming with veteran teachers and new teachers. The veteran teachers have a lot to offer, but the new teacher comes with new innovations. So I encourage even my veteran teachers to take a look at new teachers and for them to share ideas and strategies. [I give] my new teachers... a list of teachers whom I want them to see.

Teachers and principals also noted that principals motivated teachers by supporting their engagement in professional growth activities. To support professional development, principals worked hard to find money, release time, and substitute teachers.

In general, there appeared to be a strong and positive interaction between the central office leaders and the principals. Principals felt clear in their directive and secure in the latitude they were given to perform their functions and meet expectations. According to one principal,

The district is very focused on student achievement. They make sure that principals understand the expectations. We are given the expectations and our budgets. There's a lot of room in what a principal does with that. We are given guidance, parameters, and oversight. But we decide what is in the best interest of our students.

Principal Development

Aldine leaders recognized early in the reform that the district could not increase student achievement and accomplish its strategies without a highly trained corps of principals working intensively with teachers. As a result, the district set about creating processes and structures to train and develop new and veteran principals.

Aldine's vertical and horizontal structures formed the foundation of principal support. Using these two structures, the central office convened principals weekly to share ideas and address district goals. The regular meetings helped principals create informal networks of peers. Many principals spoke of communicating daily with a small group of trusted colleagues. When asked how the vertical and horizontal meetings affected performance in schools, one principal responded,

Tremendously as far as I'm concerned. Because of these meetings we're communicating. [The verticals and horizontals] allow us to collaborate with our fellow principals and see what they're doing.

While the vertical and horizontal meetings were a key strategy, central office leaders supplemented these structures with a variety of other supports. Aldine principals came together every summer for a four-day Administrators' Conference. One administrator noted, "It used to be that we brought in motivational speakers. Now we are extremely focused in these institutes around district goals." Key external experts are brought in to help build principals' skills during these institutes. In addition, area superintendents met regularly with principals to provide guidance. District leaders also encouraged principals to take part in additional training to build their instructional leadership skills.

Assistant Principals and Aspiring Principals

In addition to supports for existing principals, central office leaders established mechanisms to nurture new leaders. District leaders reconceptualized the role of assistant principals to be strong

instructional leaders. Viewing the assistant principalship as a critical training ground for principals, the district implemented a variety of supports for extant assistant principals. For example, in 1999, the district began Project LEAD (Leadership, Experience, Academic, and Determination)—a one-year program for experienced assistant principals who aspired to be principals. Like principals, assistant principals met in horizontal and vertical configurations—sometimes with the principal cohort and sometimes as a separate group.

In addition to its efforts to develop assistant principals, the district sought to nurture cadres of new leaders. The district instituted a two-year Assistant Principal Academy, which provided courses and workshops designed for new assistant principals who had been identified by principals or central office leaders as having the potential to become principals. Collectively, these academies and networking strategies enhanced the sustainability, continuity, and effectiveness of principals and assistant principals as instructional leaders in their schools. Such a matrix of leadership development support structures created a culture of collaboration among school administrators.

Teacher Leaders

Teacher leader structures were not new to Aldine, but as the district became more focused around its vision and strategic process, teacher leaders—skill specialists and program directors—were given a new and elevated role. Explained one Aldine administrator about the shift,

We began to look at the role of the program director. We asked questions of teachers and the directors. What should be the expectation for the program director? What are the things [teachers] would like to see them doing? Should they be in classes? Should they provide staff development that is specifically designed for individual schools? We really thought about how program directors could be most effective to teachers and principals.

The district determined that program directors as well as their school-based partners—skill specialists—needed to provide professional development directly related to weaknesses revealed by student achievement and other data. Moreover, these two teacher leader cohorts would need to work both at a district level and school-based level to increase the degree of targeted instructional support. Today, the district relies heavily on skill specialists and program directors to spread good practice across the district and decrease mixed messages about the district goals. This reliance on highly trained teacher leaders as intermediaries between teachers and administrators distinguishes Aldine’s approach to building instructional capacity.

The district used several strategies to fund this cohort of leaders. Local district-level funds paid the salaries of program directors and of one school-based skill specialist per school. Furthermore, principals were encouraged to set aside other school-based funds, such as state or federal compensatory dollars, to pay for additional specialists. In addition to district-supported teacher leaders, most Aldine schools relied on multiple teacher leaders, including department or grade-level chairs and teacher mentors to deepen the level of instructional support to teachers.

Leadership from the Outside

Aldine invited and welcomed the participation of those outside the district in its efforts to reform instruction and improve student achievement. From the state legislature to the local community, everyone with a stake in Aldine's education system was encouraged to get involved. The imprints of many actors were seen throughout the district.

State Involvement

Perhaps the most compelling external driver in the Aldine reform was the state: the state legislature and the state department of education. Yet the role of the state in the Aldine story would not have been strong had Aldine leaders not viewed these state organizations as productive partners and the state mandates as opportunities to further district goals. For example:

- When testing brought to light the poor performance of students on the state assessment, the district leaders saw the information as a catalyst for improvement.
- When the state senate passed a law requiring districts to implement mentoring programs, the district took this directive as a push to implement a program to better support its large influx of new teachers. District leaders did not seek to minimally satisfy the policy, but rather worked to create the most productive program possible.
- When the state mandated that primary grade teachers be trained in literacy instruction, district leaders viewed this as an opportunity to help the district reach its goals to improve reading proficiency.

Furthermore, Aldine educators did not view themselves as passive observers of state policies, but rather as partners who helped to shape state policy. The superintendent sat on state-level committees, board members worked closely with the state school boards association, and the district designated a staff member charged with staying abreast of legislative action.

Community and Parents

A small and committed number of community members and parents played an intense role in the district's instructional reform. Community and parent leaders were particularly active in bringing in external resources. Parents worked tirelessly to get bond issues passed, and community leaders contributed significant monetary and in-kind resources.

Despite the engagement of some parent leaders, Aldine leaders expressed the need to involve more community and family members in issues related to teaching and learning. Stakeholders at all levels acknowledged that in spite of newsletters sent home and regular teacher-parent conferences, it was difficult to develop meaningful parent involvement.

Conclusion

How can we characterize instructional reform in Aldine? A close look reveals an interesting combination of a district-led plan for improvement and school-based flexibility for addressing school-specific needs. Under the Aldine plan, the central office set the vision, created a districtwide curriculum, and implemented clear outcome goals. Principals and their staffs were responsible for meeting these targets but had significant flexibility in how they delivered the curriculum, who they hired, how they assigned personnel, and how they distributed their resources. This balance between central office control and school-level flexibility produced a widely understood vision and a diverse set of strategies to accomplish that vision.

For all stakeholders, the Aldine vision was clear. School board members and central office leaders expected all children to receive the instruction they needed to achieve on grade level. To accomplish this goal, leaders charged school-level staff with using data to determine student learning needs, reviewing instructional practices, and adjusting instruction as needed. Yet central office leaders did not expect school staff to tackle reform alone. To support schools, central office leaders put in place several sophisticated structures to increase communication across the district and to facilitate networking and collaboration among stakeholders. One set of structures—vertical and horizontal meetings—ensured that principals, assistant principals, central office staff, and teacher leaders met several times a month to share ideas and address challenges. Furthermore, the central office supported a large cohort of district- and school-based teacher leaders who were employed to deepen the level of instructional support for teachers.

In addition, Aldine viewed professional development as a major vehicle for achieving the district's goals of improving teaching and raising student achievement. District leaders worked with central office administrators and principals to bring professional development practice in line with research-based principles. At the district level, leaders sought to connect training to data-revealed needs. In addition, school and district leaders collaborated to increase the follow-through and connection of district- and school-level professional development efforts. When the district conducted training on certain content areas or pedagogical techniques, leaders expected school staff to deepen the training by implementing and collectively reflecting on these practices at the school site.

As Aldine pushed aggressively down the road of higher standards and accountability, district leaders created a climate of shared vision, high expectations, and clear objectives for teaching and learning. Yet the process of change and improvement within Aldine also involved several challenges. Most notably, stakeholders felt pressure to reach the high standards set by the board and superintendent. While most interviewees spoke about the district vision with pride, some also expressed concern about the intense pressure it created. District leaders pushed teachers and principals to regularly identify students who weren't succeeding, to implement interventions to increase their success, and to try and try again when students did not succeed. On the one hand, this accountability for student achievement was the cornerstone of Aldine's success. On the other hand, it was a source of incredible stress on teachers. Nobody wanted to be identified as having a classroom, a grade level, or a school where kids were not achieving to expected standards.

Despite the challenges, over the past decade Aldine has made significant progress in raising student achievement. District leaders have built a climate of trust, an ethos of pride and hard work, and a clearly articulated vision that puts increasing student achievement at the center of everyone's efforts.

Appendix I

Aldine Independent School District Achievement Data

Table A.1 Aldine Independent School District

Percentage of Students Meeting Minimum Expectations on the
Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS)—Reading—1994–2002

| | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| READING, Grade 3 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 95 | 90 | 95 |
| African American | 67 | 77 | 66 | 79 |
| Hispanic | 78 | 89 | 88 | 91 |
| White | 85 | 87 | 93 | 91 |
| READING, Grade 4 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 90 | 92 | 94 |
| African American | 68 | 76 | 70 | 79 |
| Hispanic | 78 | 88 | 87 | 93 |
| White | 86 | 91 | 91 | 95 |
| READING, Grade 5 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 91 | 97 | 96 |
| African American | 65 | 71 | 75 | 81 |
| Hispanic | 74 | 78 | 87 | 89 |
| White | 84 | 88 | 92 | 95 |
| READING, Grade 6 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 86 | 90 | 95 |
| African American | 59 | 77 | 76 | 88 |
| Hispanic | 68 | 79 | 76 | 86 |
| White | 81 | 91 | 91 | 96 |
| READING, Grade 7 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 90 | 93 | 93 |
| African American | 64 | 68 | 78 | 84 |
| Hispanic | 68 | 76 | 80 | 84 |
| White | 86 | 90 | 90 | 94 |
| READING, Grade 8 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 83 | 80 | 96 |
| African American | 68 | 67 | 69 | 81 |
| Hispanic | 69 | 75 | 72 | 83 |
| White | 88 | 86 | 90 | 94 |
| READING, Grade 10 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 72 | 83 | 86 |
| African American | 65 | 63 | 74 | 82 |
| Hispanic | 64 | 69 | 68 | 75 |
| White | 88 | 88 | 91 | 94 |

| 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | Total % Change |
|------|------|------|------|------|----------------|
| 97 | 89 | 91 | 90 | 93 | -2 |
| 83 | 83 | 83 | 81 | 86 | 19 |
| 86 | 89 | 87 | 86 | 89 | 11 |
| 92 | 92 | 92 | 91 | 94 | 9 |
| 98 | 93 | 91 | 96 | 98 | 8 |
| 88 | 86 | 86 | 89 | 92 | 24 |
| 95 | 89 | 89 | 91 | 95 | 17 |
| 96 | 92 | 93 | 95 | 96 | 10 |
| 98 | 92 | 92 | 95 | 91 | 0 |
| 88 | 77 | 80 | 88 | 86 | 21 |
| 91 | 81 | 83 | 90 | 91 | 17 |
| 93 | 92 | 95 | 93 | 96 | 12 |
| 92 | 93 | 95 | 93 | 99 | 13 |
| 89 | 85 | 87 | 84 | 86 | 27 |
| 85 | 84 | 88 | 87 | 89 | 21 |
| 95 | 91 | 94 | 93 | 95 | 14 |
| 92 | 96 | 89 | 95 | 99 | 9 |
| 83 | 81 | 79 | 86 | 91 | 27 |
| 85 | 84 | 81 | 90 | 93 | 25 |
| 94 | 92 | 92 | 95 | 98 | 12 |
| 90 | 95 | 96 | 98 | 99 | 16 |
| 87 | 88 | 90 | 92 | 94 | 26 |
| 84 | 90 | 91 | 93 | 96 | 27 |
| 95 | 95 | 96 | 93 | 96 | 8 |
| 80 | 87 | 94 | 90 | 93 | 21 |
| 85 | 85 | 89 | 89 | 95 | 30 |
| 80 | 83 | 90 | 87 | 92 | 28 |
| 95 | 95 | 95 | 96 | 96 | 8 |

Notes: NA = Not applicable. In order to meet minimum expectations, a student must answer at least 70 percent of the test questions correctly.

Source: These data were provided by the Aldine Independent School District.

Table A.2 Aldine Independent School District

Percentage of Students Meeting Minimum Expectations on the
Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS)—Mathematics—1994–2002

| | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| MATHEMATICS, Grade 3 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 95 | 96 | 99 |
| African American | 56 | 73 | 68 | 84 |
| Hispanic | 71 | 84 | 86 | 94 |
| White | 77 | 84 | 92 | 94 |
| MATHEMATICS, Grade 4 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 96 | 97 | 96 |
| African American | 49 | 61 | 68 | 81 |
| Hispanic | 71 | 80 | 89 | 93 |
| White | 77 | 83 | 89 | 95 |
| MATHEMATICS, Grade 5 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 87 | 97 | 97 |
| African American | 59 | 52 | 62 | 78 |
| Hispanic | 68 | 70 | 85 | 93 |
| White | 81 | 80 | 87 | 93 |
| MATHEMATICS, Grade 6 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 83 | 93 | 96 |
| African American | 40 | 46 | 73 | 81 |
| Hispanic | 53 | 58 | 81 | 85 |
| White | 70 | 79 | 90 | 94 |
| MATHEMATICS, Grade 7 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 80 | 92 | 97 |
| African American | 40 | 40 | 55 | 73 |
| Hispanic | 47 | 53 | 63 | 82 |
| White | 69 | 74 | 86 | 94 |
| MATHEMATICS, Grade 8 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 78 | 84 | 98 |
| African American | 39 | 37 | 53 | 71 |
| Hispanic | 47 | 45 | 63 | 79 |
| White | 72 | 73 | 80 | 90 |
| MATHEMATICS, Grade 10 | | | | |
| Asian | NA | 75 | 83 | 89 |
| African American | 33 | 40 | 45 | 61 |
| Hispanic | 45 | 50 | 54 | 65 |
| White | 67 | 73 | 76 | 90 |

| 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | Total % Change |
|------|------|------|------|------|----------------|
| 98 | 96 | 97 | 95 | 97 | 2 |
| 79 | 77 | 73 | 80 | 86 | 30 |
| 86 | 87 | 85 | 89 | 93 | 22 |
| 94 | 89 | 87 | 90 | 95 | 18 |
| 98 | 99 | 96 | 99 | 100 | 4 |
| 83 | 86 | 87 | 89 | 95 | 46 |
| 94 | 92 | 91 | 95 | 97 | 26 |
| 96 | 95 | 93 | 96 | 98 | 21 |
| 99 | 99 | 100 | 99 | 97 | 10 |
| 83 | 82 | 85 | 90 | 91 | 32 |
| 93 | 90 | 91 | 94 | 96 | 28 |
| 94 | 92 | 94 | 96 | 98 | 17 |
| 98 | 98 | 98 | 100 | 99 | 16 |
| 87 | 84 | 85 | 89 | 93 | 53 |
| 91 | 89 | 91 | 94 | 96 | 43 |
| 96 | 92 | 92 | 96 | 96 | 26 |
| 93 | 98 | 96 | 99 | 99 | 19 |
| 75 | 81 | 84 | 88 | 91 | 51 |
| 83 | 89 | 92 | 94 | 95 | 48 |
| 93 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 98 | 29 |
| 96 | 99 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 22 |
| 84 | 82 | 88 | 90 | 90 | 51 |
| 85 | 89 | 94 | 95 | 96 | 49 |
| 95 | 95 | 96 | 95 | 95 | 23 |
| 87 | 92 | 97 | 98 | 100 | 25 |
| 69 | 70 | 82 | 87 | 90 | 57 |
| 76 | 82 | 90 | 91 | 96 | 51 |
| 92 | 92 | 94 | 99 | 95 | 28 |

Notes: NA = Not applicable. In order to meet minimum expectations, a student must answer at least 70 percent of the test questions correctly.

Source: These data were provided by the Aldine Independent School District.

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