

Austin Blueprint Schools Initiative

To Leave No Child Behind

Middle Schools Three-Year Summary Report

Submitted to:

Austin Independent School District

Submitted by:

Nancy Scammacca, Ph.D.

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Executive Summary

In the spring of 2002, Austin Independent School District Superintendent Dr. Pat Forgione was directed by Austin's school board to develop a comprehensive intervention plan for addressing the chronic academic needs in Austin's underperforming schools. The Blueprint Schools Initiative was the result of the development of this plan. Four elementary schools and two middle schools with a history of low performance were identified as Blueprint Schools. These schools were: Edward L. Blackshear Elementary, Thomas G. Harris Elementary, Oak Springs Elementary, Mary Jane Sims Elementary, J. Frank Dobie Middle School and James E. Pearce Middle School.

The Blueprint Schools Initiative, which was launched in the fall of the 2002-03 school year, focused on ten components:

1. Guaranteed improved student achievement to meet rigorous state standards.
2. More time for Reading, Writing, Grammar, and Math every day for every child.
3. Required, rigorous, and proven curricula in Mathematics, Reading and Writing.
4. Every new teacher with at least two years' experience. All teachers certified in the subjects they are teaching.
5. Required, targeted training – including 10 additional days – and on-going support for teachers.
6. Strong, experienced principals under the direction of a Master Principal.
7. Frequent assessment of students and immediate interventions.
8. Enhanced technology to monitor and improve student achievement.
9. Partnerships with parents and community to assure student success.
10. Signed compacts with principals, teachers, parents, and students.

The initial time frame established for this first phase of the Blueprint Schools Initiative was three years. The 2004-2005 school year marks the end of this period. This summary report seeks to review the changes that have occurred over the past three years at Dobie and Pearce Middle Schools (changes at the Blueprint Elementary Schools are described in a separate report).

Academic progress is a critical indicator of the success of the Blueprint Initiative. Results to date indicate that substantial progress has been made. The 2004-05 TAKS data indicate a strong positive effect of the Blueprint Initiative on TAKS passing scores. Gains are evident for all sub-groups of students at both Blueprint Middle Schools in nearly every subject area. Reading and Writing scores were particularly strong, showing substantial gains over scores from 2002-03. Smaller gains were evident in Mathematics. One likely reason for the gains in Reading, Math, and Writing scores is the additional time devoted to these core subjects each day at all Blueprint Middle Schools.

Other key findings of this report provide evidence for the success of this first phase of the Blueprint Initiative. The percent of teachers requesting a transfer at the end of their three-year commitment to the Blueprint Schools is below 10% at Dobie, which is notable given that the teachers were not offered incentives to remain. Frequent assessment of students and interventions based on assessment results have created a climate at the Blueprint Schools where students are well-informed about their academic progress and the areas where they need help to improve their achievement. Behavioral interventions have made classrooms places where teachers can focus on teaching and students can focus on learning. Evidence for the stabilization of the campus and the success of the behavioral interventions is seen in a decrease of discipline reports and an increase in attendance rates from before Blueprint Initiative began to the present school year.

Some parent and community resistance was initially encountered when the Blueprint Initiative was announced, but it has been overcome. Results from parent surveys at Dobie Middle School indicate that parents of students have a more positive assessment of their child's school than do parents of students at other AISD middle schools. The community has contributed time and material resources to help the Blueprint Schools succeed. In a yearly student survey, students at the Blueprint Middle Schools rated the academic environment at their schools as the same or better than the average at all middle schools.

A high level of trust exists among the teachers, administrators, students, and parents at the Blueprint Middle Schools. This trust has helped to create momentum for positive change for both campuses. The Blueprint Initiative set out to create a rigorous, positive learning environment and the findings of this report suggest they were successful in doing so.

Introduction

In August 1999, The Austin Independent School District (AISD) named Dr. Pat Forgione as its new Superintendent. Dr. Forgione was the seventh Superintendent named within 10 years. At the time that Dr. Forgione assumed leadership of the district, AISD was facing significant obstacles to success. Among these obstacles were a lack of a common curriculum, a decentralized culture, a lack of agreement on how to help struggling learners, haphazard professional development for teachers and administration, and significant distrust in district leadership. During the first two years of Dr. Forgione's tenure, he addressed these obstacles in multiple ways, including the implementation of a district-wide strategy for reform and the launching of coherent and comprehensive effort-based and standards-based reform initiatives.

These initiatives brought an increase in student achievement, but the public demanded a more urgent and aggressive attention to poor performance and the persistent achievement gaps in consistently underperforming schools. The broad, district-wide strategies that had been implemented to date had not been adequate to bring about significant change in schools that were characterized by persistent under-performance. Chronically underperforming schools required a more aggressive and focused intervention education plan. In the spring of 2002, after researching several alternatives for reform (including contracting with the Edison Project or with KIPP), seeking the advice of Austin's best educators, and visiting Edison Schools in Dallas ISD, the Superintendent was directed by Austin's school board to develop a comprehensive intervention plan for addressing the chronic academic needs in Austin's underperforming schools.

The Blueprint Schools Initiative was the result of the development of this plan. With the help of Claudia Tousek (who became the Master Principal for the Blueprint Schools) many other

Austin educators, the Superintendent formulated, ten elements or components to this intervention. The ten components of the Blueprint Initiative are:

11. Guaranteed improved student achievement to meet rigorous state standards.
12. More time for Reading, Writing, Grammar, and Math every day for every child.
13. Required, rigorous, and proven curricula in Mathematics, Reading and Writing.
14. Every new teacher with at least two years' experience. All teachers certified in the subjects they are teaching.
15. Required, targeted training – including 10 additional days – and on-going support for teachers.
16. Strong, experienced principals under the direction of a Master Principal.
17. Frequent assessment of students and immediate interventions.
18. Enhanced technology to monitor and improve student achievement.
19. Partnerships with parents and community to assure student success.
20. Signed compacts with principals, teachers, parents, and students.

After these elements were developed, the Superintendent, working with his cabinet, identified the four elementary schools and the two middle schools where the needs were greatest.

The schools were selected based on:

- Current status in the state accountability system
- Current student performance based on campus results on the 2001 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test, including the percentage failing Reading, Math, and/or Writing, the number of 2001 TAAS performance data cells that were below 70% passing, and the percentage of third-grade students failing TAAS Reading

- Performance over time, based on degree of improvement in TAAS Reading, Math, and Writing and on the school’s history of accountability ratings

The two middle schools selected based on these criteria were the J. Frank Dobie and James E. Pearce Middle Schools. These schools were named “Austin Schools for Excellence” and became part of the Blueprint Schools Initiative, which was launched in the fall of the 2002 school year. The demographics of Dobie and Pearce in Fall 2002 are listed in the table below.

School	Total Students	African American	Hispanic	White/ Other	Economically Disadvantaged
Dobie	755	32.3%	60.7%	7.0%	77%
Pearce	856	43.9%	52.9%	3.2%	78%

	Dobie		Pearce	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Grade 6	60%	75%	62%	74%
Grade 7	73%	76%	76%	63%
Grade 8	75%	68%	75%	71%

Dobie Middle School had a state rating of Low Performing based on Spring 2001 TAAS results. It had been a low-performing school for five of the preceding seven years. Among all AISD middle schools, Dobie had the highest percentage of students failing one or more subjects on the TAAS, the highest percentage of students failing Reading and Math on the TAAS, and of 25 TAAS cells, 20 were below 70% passing and 9 were below 60% passing. Over the five years preceding the implementation of the Blueprint, the school’s performance had been flat in Reading, with White students (who comprised 7% of the student body) having significantly higher performance. TAAS Math scores had increased approximately 10 points since 1995 for all

students, but performance for African-American students was low. Writing scores had declined for all groups over the five years preceding the introduction of the Blueprint.

Pearce Middle School had an Acceptable rating in Spring 2001, but had been low performing for three of the seven years prior to the implementation of Blueprint. Among all AISD middle schools, Pearce had the second highest percentage of students failing one or more subjects on the TAAS, the second highest percentage of students failing TAAS Reading and Math, and of 25 TAAS cells, 18 were below 70% passing and 5 were below 60% passing. Over the five years before Blueprint was implemented, Pearce students had shown relatively flat performance in Reading, steady increased in Math, and mixed performance (increases and decreases) in Writing.

Funding Resources for the first year only, including funding for both Blueprint Middle Schools and Blueprint Elementary Schools, totaled \$2,024,575. All Blueprint Schools received local budget and Title I funding according to local and federal funding guidelines. Moreover, the Superintendent provided the following additional resources funded by Title I and II to the Blueprint Schools in the first year:

- Math Coach - 1 per school.
- Reading Intervention Teacher - 1 per school.
- Cadre of Permanent Subs for Training - 1 per school – to allow additional time for training and planning during the school day.
- Lead Teacher Stipends - \$3000 each - 2 teachers per elementary school; Harris received 3 due to size.
- Replacement books and equipment and Special Education materials.

- Staff Training – stipend of \$150 per day for 10 days in summer 2002; 2 days of training during school year.

For the two subsequent years, no additional funding was provided for training and curriculum materials. However, funding was provided for Math Coaches and Permanent Subs. Title III funds provided a \$3000 per year stipend for all bilingual teachers for the first three years of the Blueprint.

The initial time frame established for this first phase of the Blueprint Schools Initiative was three years. The 2004-2005 school year marks the end of this period. Therefore, this summary report seeks to review the changes that have occurred over the past three years at Dobie and Pearce Middle Schools. The implementation of each of the ten components of the Blueprint and gains made related to each will be described.

Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered for this report from a number of sources. These sources include:

- A review of documents concerning the history and implementation of the Blueprint Initiative from the Blueprint Schools office
- Interviews with district administration and with principals and staff members at the Blueprint schools
- Student, parent, and school climate survey results provided by the district
- Data from human resources on staffing at the Blueprint schools
- Data on student achievement gathered from the district and from the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS)

- Data from district records on discipline referrals and student participation in afterschool programs.
- Information about community involvement in the Blueprint schools from the Partners in Education office

Under each of the ten components of the Blueprint Initiative, the relevant qualitative information has been woven with descriptive statistics calculated on the quantitative data to provide an overall description of how each component was implemented and the evidence for positive change at each campus.

Component 1: Guaranteed improved student achievement to meet rigorous state standards.

The focus for improving student achievement was on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). In the spring of 2002, each school developed a Campus Improvement Plan with training and assistance from the district. Training needs for teachers were assessed and a system to provide intensive assistance for teachers and principals was developed. Instructional coaches were trained by the district curriculum office in helping to oversee implementation of the curriculum and alignment to the TEKS. From the beginning of the 2002-03 school year, Master Principal Claudia Tousek set clear expectations and provided close monitoring and support for teachers and principals in the first year of Blueprint (in year 2, Ms. Tousek focused on supporting the elementary schools and Dr. Peggy Gordon took on oversight of the middle schools; in year 3, Dr. Marcus Nelson assumed leadership for the middle schools). When students or teachers were found not to be progressing as expected, intervention plans were established to facilitate greater progress.

Both Pearce and Dobie had Academically Acceptable accountability ratings in 2004—a major achievement for schools with a long history of low-performing status. Also, both schools met the Reading and Math annual yearly progress goals set by the No Child Left Behind federal educational reform legislation.

The charts below show the progress made in percent of students passing TAKS in Reading and Math from the first to the third year of implementation of the Blueprint Initiative. Results are broken out separately for each school. Because of the state-wide change from the TAAS test to the TAKS test beginning in 2002-03, results cannot be compared to those from before the implementation of the Blueprint Initiative. It should be noted that the standard is raised each year, which increases the difficulty of passing from year to year. Therefore, changes in performance also reflect (in part) the effect of raising the standard. Without the Blueprint Initiative, it is likely that dramatic declines in the percent of students passing the TAKS would have been seen over the past three years. Another factor to consider in reviewing these results is the high student mobility rate at the Blueprint Middle Schools (all have mobility rates that are among the highest in the district). Students who experienced the interventions associated with the Blueprint in an earlier grade aren't necessarily present in the results for the next year in the later grade, and many students in each grade were not present for the first and second year of the Blueprint. As a result, the cumulative effect of the intervention over multiple years is very difficult to detect.

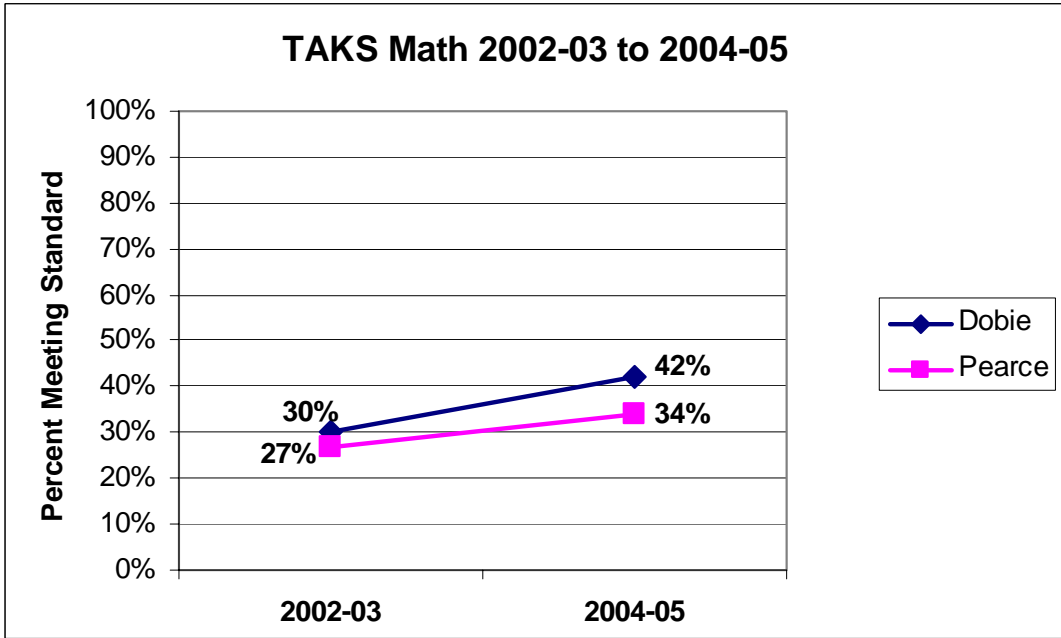
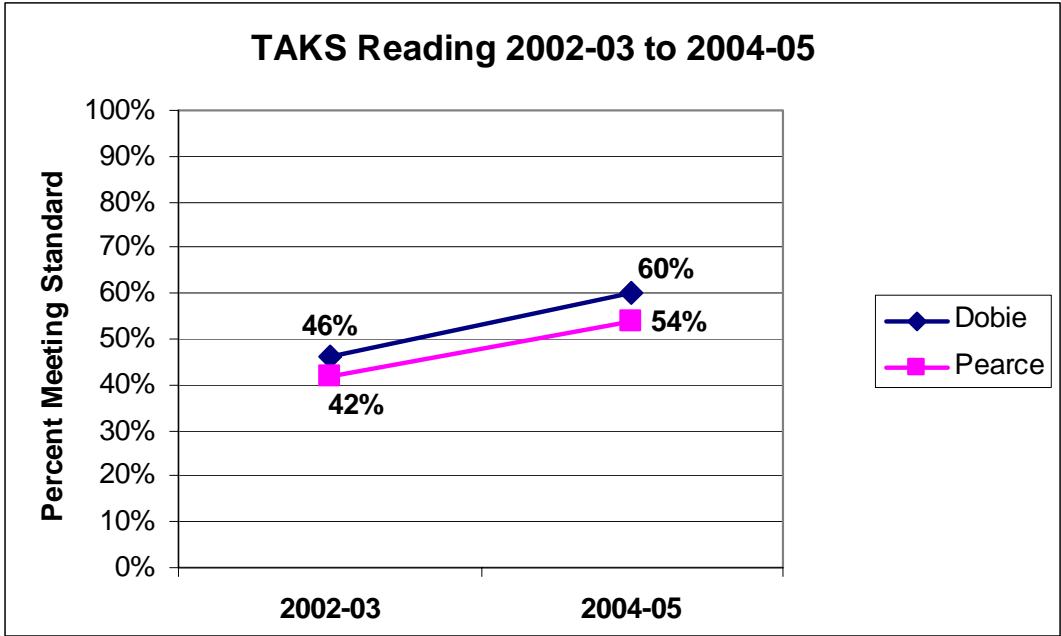


Table 3 lists the 2002-03 and 2004-05 TAKS results by sub-group at each school.

Table 3: TAKS Scores 2002-03 to 2004-05 at Blueprint Elementary Schools by Sub-Group											
School	Subject	Overall		African American		Hispanic		White		Economically Disadvantaged	
		2003	2005	2003	2005	2003	2005	2003	2005	2003	2005
Dobie											
	Reading	46%	60%	45%	61%	46%	58%	59%	75%	44%	59%
	Math	30%	42%	23%	34%	33%	44%	18%	47%	29%	42%
	Writing	49%	80%	42%	84%	52%	78%	60%	100%	47%	80%
	Social Studies	62%	72%	64%	71%	59%	71%	71%	75%	59%	71%
Pearce											
	Reading	42%	54%	43%	58%	41%	51%	38%	73%	39%	53%
	Math	27%	34%	24%	28%	30%	38%	19%	33%	26%	33%
	Writing	44%	64%	49%	70%	39%	60%	*	67%	41%	65%
	Social Studies	56%	65%	56%	69%	53%	61%	99%	75%	53%	63%

*No data were reported due to the small number of students in this group

The data indicate a strong positive effect of the Blueprint Initiative on TAKS scores.

Gains were made by every sub-group in every subject area. Most notable are the improvements in Reading and Writing across all groups. Smaller gains were made in Math, which remains an area where attention must be focused to encourage further success. Again, it is important to realize that all gains are especially noteworthy given that the scores required to meet the standard were increased each year between the 2002-03 school year and the 2004-05 school year. One possible reason for the gains in TAKS scores is the second component of the Blueprint Initiative.

Component 2: More time for Reading, Writing, Grammar, and Math every day for every child.

One global change made at all Blueprint Schools was an increase in the time set aside for the core areas of Reading, Writing, Grammar, and Math. At Dobie and Pearce, this change doubled the time students spent in language arts and Mathematics. A 90-minute block period was set aside each day for both subjects. In the first year of the Blueprint, a corrective Reading period was included to help all students bring their Reading up to grade level. An additional period

remains available for students who needed extra support in Math or Language Arts. The additional time for Math and Language Arts was added without lengthening the school day by reducing the time given for electives. Also, all teachers at Pearce were trained in teaching Reading so that teachers outside the language arts department could assist struggling readers in their classrooms while teaching other subjects. At both middle schools, an additional certified teacher was hired to provide at least 30 minutes of intensive extra instruction each day in smaller groups for students who were determined to need extra help based on on-going assessments.

Making more time during the regular school day for Language Arts and Math had the added benefit of giving teachers and students new opportunities for exploring these subjects in more depth. Teachers promoted lifelong reading by creating incentive programs to encourage students to read more and to write about what they were reading. In Mathematics, teachers had more time for exploring real-world applications of Mathematics through creative activities that engaged students' interest and challenged them at a higher level than was possible under the old schedule. Students also benefited from seeing fewer teachers each day and losing less of the school day to moving between classes.

Outside of the regular school day, tutorials were offered Monday through Thursday after school and special camps on Saturday mornings to provide additional help in the core areas. More than half the teachers were involved in providing the tutorials and camps. Other programs in place on the two campuses this year, such as Project SMART's Power Math program and the afterschool tutoring provided by the 21st Century Program, provided additional support for students in Math and Language Arts.

Component 3: Required, rigorous, and proven curricula in Mathematics, Reading, and Writing.

One problem facing AISD as a whole at the time that Dr. Forgione assumed leadership of the district was a lack of a common curriculum across campuses. This problem was addressed district-wide prior to the start of the Blueprint Initiative, but the Blueprint sought to strengthen the curriculum further in these core areas. After visiting the Aldine and Fort Worth school districts to see how these districts have brought about high levels of student achievement in schools with similar populations to the Blueprint Schools, the specific curriculum for Reading, Writing, and Math that would be implemented at both middle schools was selected.

The decision was made to introduce the Read 180 Reading intervention program for use during the extra Reading period. Read 180 is a well researched program that has been shown to be effective in increasing the Reading ability of middle school students who are struggling in Reading. In other large urban districts, including Houston ISD, students involved in Read 180 have made substantial gains in Reading scores after participating in the program.

The math intervention that was selected for the middle schools was a combination of elements of intervention materials from Region 4 and from the Dana Center. The best of each was selected to address the math learning needs of students at Pearce and Dobie. More focus on math interventions and staff development in mathematics instruction will be implemented in the 2005-06 school year.

Extra teaching time and extra training for teachers was a key element in implementing the chosen curriculum. Some of this training occurred during the 10 days of training provided to all teachers at the beginning of the Blueprint Initiative. Additionally, a cadre of permanent substitute teachers was hired to allow teachers to have time to attend training and work with instructional coaches on curriculum.

Instructional program guides (IPGs) also were introduced across the district at the same time that the Blueprint Initiative was being launched. The IPGs are and aligned, articulated curriculum that promotes continuity and cumulative acquisition of knowledge and skills. They provide detailed instructional guidance regarding pacing of instruction, research-based best practices (including the Principles of Learning), methodologies, instructional resources, assessment strategies, descriptions of student work, and discipline/course specific teacher notes for every subject area at every grade level. The IPGs align classroom instruction with the TEKS and guide lesson planning in every school.

Additionally, a three-tier model of intervention has been developed for use district-wide. The first of intervention involves modifying regular classroom instruction to help students who are struggling to catch up. If this level of intervention is not successful, small group instruction outside the regular classroom is used as the second tier intervention. If students continue to have difficulties, a third-tier intervention involving placement of the student in a summer program or retention is considered and the appropriate adjustment is made.

Component 4: Every new teacher with at least two years' experience. All teachers certified in the subjects they are teaching.

Staffing Dobie and Pearce with qualified, experienced teachers was another key component of the Blueprint Initiative. In the spring of 2002, the district publicized the project and encouraged highly qualified teachers to request transfers to the Blueprint Schools. Current staff at the Blueprint Schools attended presentations where the project was announced and the expectations and incentives involved were made clear and non-negotiable. Teachers and other staff were given extra duty pay for after school, Saturday, and summer school classes and for participating in additional professional development.

The interview process for all teachers applying to the Blueprint schools was rigorous. Highly qualified unassigned teachers were hired and held to be interviewed by the Blueprint schools first. Except in unusual circumstances, only certified teachers with two or more years of experience were assigned to the Blueprint Schools. Transfers to other AISD schools were provided for teachers who were not a good fit for the Blueprint Initiative or who were not willing to satisfy the non-negotiables of the teacher compact. The expected result of this process of staffing the schools was a stable, highly qualified, committed group of teachers and staff members who would help to create a rigorous and supportive learning environment for students at the Blueprint Schools.

The minimum of two years of teaching experience was greatly exceeded by the group of teachers who were hired at the Blueprint Schools. Teachers at Dobie averaged 8.6 years of teaching experience. Teachers at Pearce on average have 10.3 years of experience.

Prior to the implementation of the Blueprint Initiative, both Dobie and Pearce experienced very high levels of staff turnover (26.1% for Dobie at the end of 2000-2001; 23.5% for Pearce). These turnover rates were higher than all but one of the other 15 middle schools in the district. Table 4 shows the rate of staff turnover over the three years of the Blueprint.

Table 4. Staff Turnover from the beginning of 2002-03 through the end of 2004-05

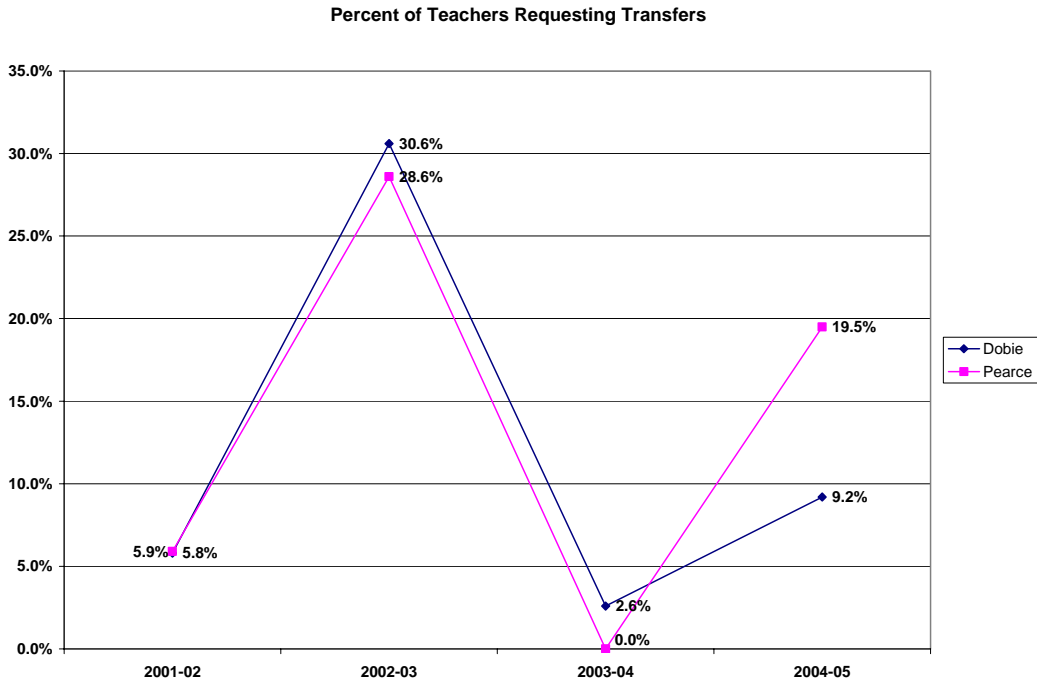
Dobie Middle School

Total staff positions	Number/percent remaining	Number/percent that left	Reason for Leaving			Transfers Number / % of Teachers Requesting Transfers at the End of the 3 Years
			Budget / %	Retired / %	Other / % (i.e. resigned, relocate, medical, etc.)	
87	51 / 59%	36 / 41%	6 / 17%	5 / 14%	25 / 69%	8 / 9.2%

Pearce Middle School

Number of Staff Positions	Number/percent remaining	Number/percent that left	Reason for Leaving			Number / % of Teachers Requesting Transfers at the End of the 3 Years
			Budget / %	Retired / %	Other (i.e. Resigned, Relocate, Medical,etc.) / %	
87	54 / 62%	33 / 38%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	33 / 100%	17 / 19.5%

The number of teachers requesting a transfer is indicative of the turnover rate of teachers who are choosing to leave the Blueprint Schools for a reason other than budget cuts, retirement, medical concerns, relocation, or other reasons that are not closely related to the Blueprint Initiative itself. The chart below shows the turnover rate due to transfers for the 2000-01 school year (before Blueprint) and the rates for the three years of the Blueprint Initiative. Note that the rate is high in 2001-02 because of the transfers required for teachers who did not meet the criteria for participating in Blueprint and those who chose not to participate. Increases are seen also in 2004-05 because the three-year commitment period that all staff agreed to has ended, and staff were not given incentives to stay at the Blueprint Schools.



Teacher and staff satisfaction is an important element to creating the kind of learning environment that the Blueprint Initiative sought to produce. In 2003 and 2004, the district administered the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) to survey staff at the Blueprint Schools about factors related to the school’s climate (survey results from the current year are not yet available). The OHI is designed to measure six dimensions of school climate including:

- *Institutional Integrity* (the extent to which teachers are protected from unreasonable community and parental demands)
- *Collegial Leadership* (the degree to which the principal is friendly, supportive, open, and guided by norms of equality while setting the tone for high performance by letting people know what is expected of them)
- *Principal Influence* (the degree to which principals are persuasive with superiors, get additional consideration, and proceed relatively unimpeded by the hierarchy)

- *Resource Support* (the degree to which classroom supplies and instructional materials are readily available and extra materials are supplied if requested)
- *Teacher Affiliation* (the degree to which teachers feel good about each other, their job, and their students, and how much they are committed to both their students and their colleagues and accomplish their jobs with enthusiasm)
- *Academic Emphasis* (the degree to which high but achievable academic goals are set for students, the learning environment is orderly and serious, teachers believe in their students' ability to achieve, and students work hard and respect those who do well academically)

Sub-scores for each of these dimensions as well as an overall organizational health score were calculated.

The OHI allows for comparisons of Dobie and Pearce to a large, diverse sample of schools that have taken the survey in the past. Percentile scores were calculated to show how the Blueprint Schools compare to this sample. Table 5 lists the percentile scores for Dobie and Pearce for each year of the Blueprint Initiative. (The survey was not administered prior to the implementation of the Blueprint Initiative; therefore, no baseline data are available.) A percentile indicates the percentage of schools in the comparison sample who scored at or below the score obtained by the Blueprint School. For example, in overall organization health, Dobie's staff ratings in 2005 were higher than 73.7% of the schools in the comparison sample.

Table 5. Organizational Health Inventory Results**Dobie Middle School**

Year	Overall Organizational Health	Institutional Integrity	Collegial Leadership	Principal Influence	Resource Support	Teacher Affiliation	Academic Emphasis
2003	83.5	96.1	96.1	95.1	74.6	28.5	71.7
2004	81.0	96.2	94.3	97.1	63.0	26.5	62.1
2005	73.7	93.9	88.1	87.2	58.9	15.7	76.7

Pearce Middle School

Year	Overall Organizational Health	Institutional Integrity	Collegial Leadership	Principal Influence	Resource Support	Teacher Affiliation	Academic Emphasis
2003	34.4	58.7	8.4	83.3	67.9	6.4	30.6
2004	29.5	68.4	18.2	62.3	45.7	2.0	17.2
2005	49.7	82.0	13.5	81.2	56.0	9.4	66.5

One growth area for both schools over the three years of the Blueprint Initiative was academic emphasis. Changing the climate of a chronically low-performing school to one where students highly value academics is a noteworthy transformation. Pearce in particular showed a great deal of change in this area. Both schools also were seen as strong in institutional integrity by year three. It appears that the Blueprint plan was successful in creating a stable environment where teachers and staff did not feel great pressure from parents and the community to constantly be changing direction.

The decline in resource support may be reflecting the special resources that were made available at the start of the Blueprint Initiative (for example, the 10 paid days of training) that were not provided again at the start of the second or third year. Collegial leadership and principal influence were seen as particular strengths at Dobie over the first two years of the Blueprint. The decline in principal influence for Pearce may be attributable to the change in master principals

from the first to the second year of Blueprint (it would be expected that this change also would have affected Dobie, though from the data it does not appear to have had much effect). Teacher affiliation was the weakest of all areas of organizational health at both schools. Since the teachers at both schools were new to one another at the start of the Blueprint, it seems reasonable that it would take some time for strong relationships between them to be built. However, little growth was seen in this area over time.

Component 5: Required, targeted training—including 10 additional days—and on-going support for teachers.

Two weeks of content-specific, non-negotiable professional development for all teachers and staff was conducted before the start of the 2001-02 school year. As planning for the Blueprint Initiative got underway in the spring and summer of 2002, administrators worked to determine the training needs of teachers and staff. The training that was provided included instruction in the Principles of Learning, time for team-building and establishing systems procedures, and structures within each school, and training in the new curricula that had been selected and the new procedures that were involved in the Blueprint. Cultural diversity training and training in using technology was conducted as well. Additional training in behavior management was also provided at the beginning of the implementation of the Blueprint. The Positive Behavior Support (PBS) system was selected as the program of choice for the Blueprint Schools. PBS is a research-based system of behavior management that focuses on rewarding good behavior and providing appropriate consequences for misbehavior.

Feedback from those who attended the 10 days of training was very positive. Many teachers appreciated having the opportunity to gather, bond, and network as a team. Of the curriculum training provided, participants expressed that the time spent on the IPG's, TAKS, the

Principles of Learning, Region XIII's PBS system, and the Rewards Reading intervention was particularly helpful. Middle school teachers had high praise for the cultural diversity training and considered it a highlight. In general, teachers felt the training was well-organized, thoughtfully planned and presented, and an enriching learning experience. Teachers suggested that future training should be broken out into smaller affinity groups, such as by grade level, subject area, support area, and new and returning teachers. Additional training was requested in technology, Language Arts and Writing, Math, Science, English as a second language, and discipline.

Training continued beyond those first 10 days as each school and teacher discovered the need for it. The cadre of permanent substitute teachers assigned to the Blueprint Schools made it possible for teachers to attend training during the school day. The cadre of substitutes also allowed teachers to meet with instructional coaches and receive on-going training and support. Instructional coaches for literacy and math were placed at each campus as part of the Blueprint. The coaches train and support teachers, help create activities and lesson plans, and gather materials for teachers. They also observe teachers on a regular basis and provide feedback, review assessment data with teachers, and demonstrate teaching techniques and specific lessons in the classroom.

Component 6: Strong, experienced principals under the direction of a Master Principal.

To lead the Blueprint Initiative, Dr. Forgione appointed a proven, experienced Master Principal. For this position he selected Claudia Tousek, who as principal of Hart Elementary School had taken the school to Exemplary status in four short years. Dr. Forgione then appointed successful, experienced principals to lead each of the schools selected to become Blueprint Schools. The principal who was currently serving at Sims Elementary School volunteered to stay

in her position. To attract qualified candidates, a \$6000 stipend was provided for the principals of the Blueprint Schools. Expectations for principals were specified in the principal compact. The principals worked with Ms. Tousek to select the administrative team for each campus. Principals received training prior to the start of the 2002-03 school year on non-negotiable curriculum and how to monitor student progress and performance. Consistent systems, procedures, and organizational structures were created by the principals working with their instructional coaches and Ms. Tousek.

During the first year of the Blueprint Initiative, Ms. Tousek had oversight of both the elementary schools and the middle schools. Weekly meetings with all the principals and Ms. Tousek were held during the first year of Blueprint. This time was used for training, planning, and monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the major components of the Blueprint Initiative. Ms. Tousek visited each campus every week and provided consultation for each principal. Ms. Tousek, the principals, and the instructional coaches also conducted classroom observations and Learning Walks and provided feedback. The principals also consulted with Ms. Tousek to review each teacher's 6 or 9 week assessments and disaggregated data from benchmark test results and to discuss intervention strategies. The middle school principals view the time they spent with Ms. Tousek that first year as invaluable and critical to the success of the transition to the Blueprint. Her assistance in making decisions based on assessment and other data was seen as particularly helpful.

In the second year of the Blueprint, the middle schools came under the leadership of Dr. Peggy Gordon, the Associate Superintendent for Middle Schools. Dr. Gordon had oversight of all 17 middle schools at that time. As a result, less time was available for the middle school principals to consult with her than they'd had the previous year with Ms. Tousek. The middle

school principals met quarterly with Dr. Gordon for planning and consultation. In year three of the Blueprint Initiative, Dr. Marcus Nelson was named Master Principal for secondary schools. Dr. Nelson is overseeing two other schools besides Pearce and Dobie. The principals continue to meet quarterly with Dr. Nelson. They appreciate the support he provides and his willingness to make sure they have the resources they need to be successful. Both middle school principals felt that the lack of a consistent master principal for all three years of the Blueprint was somewhat of a hindrance. Overall, however, this component of the Blueprint Initiative resulted in a successful change in paradigms for principals—rather than working in isolation, principals work as a team with a focused leader.

Component 7: Frequent assessment of students and immediate interventions.

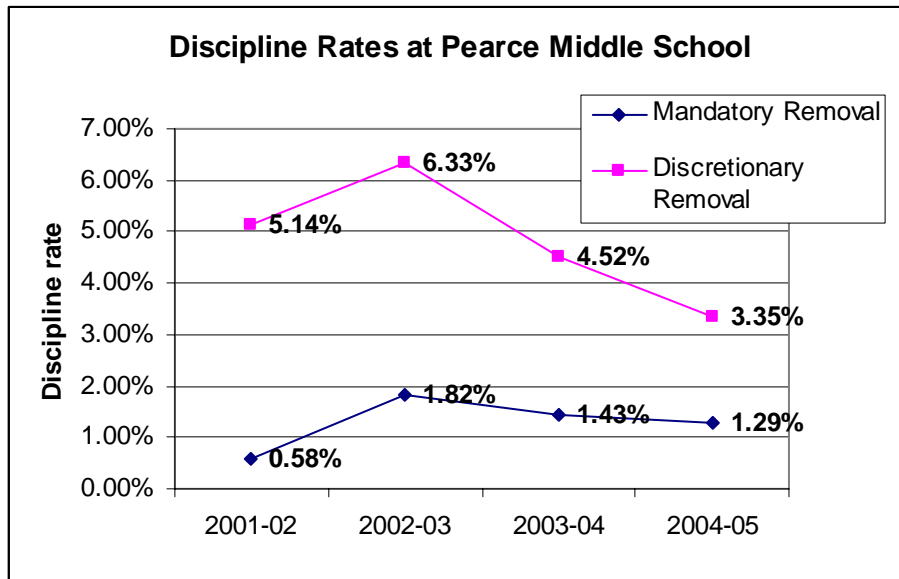
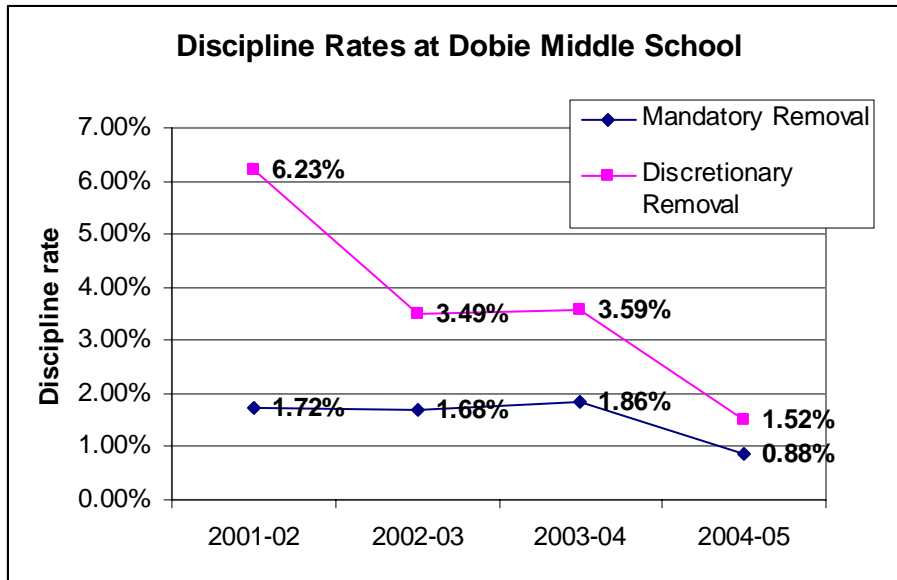
Data-based decision-making was a vital component of the Blueprint Initiative. The data were to come from frequent assessments of students, and interventions were to be developed for students who were struggling academically or behaviorally. Before the start of the first year of the Blueprint, early intervention programs were selected for implementation in the Blueprint Schools. Every teacher was given the 2002 TAAS scores and summer school scores for each student. Teachers knew exactly where each student was academically without having to wait for the students' cumulative folders to arrive from other schools. In August and September 2002, every student was assessed in Reading and Math. Most were found to be below grade level. Students were grouped for intervention based on their assessment results, but the groups were flexible so that students could move on as they attained mastery.

Each student is assessed as often as weekly and no less frequently than every 6 to 9 weeks, in addition to the TAKS benchmark assessments. Teachers meet with coaches and

principals to discuss the 6 to 9-week assessment results and the results of the benchmark tests. Disaggregated data from benchmark reports are reviewed at grade level and subject-area meetings. When new students transferred into a Blueprint School, they are immediately assessed in Reading and Math so that the appropriate intervention could be provided. Teachers of lower-performing students are given immediate and appropriate interventions, such as help from an instructional coach, spending time observing in another classroom, and additional training. Immediate and appropriate interventions provided to students have included tutorials, peer tutoring, one-on-one assistance, mentoring, referral to the school's IMPACT team, phone calls with parents and parent conferences, home visits, warning letters for students with frequent absences or tardiness, counseling, and other more serious interventions such as taking a parent to court if needed.

Principals and other staff at both middle schools point to the behavioral interventions used in the PBS system as one of the best aspects of the Blueprint for their campuses. Previously, teachers and staff struggled to get students out of the hallways and into the classroom. Truancy and tardiness were chronic problems that contributed to a chaotic learning environment. Both middle schools now report that their campuses are quiet and stable and students are generally on time to school and to their classes. Classrooms have become places where teachers can focus on teaching and students can focus on learning. This change was seen as one of the greatest achievements accomplished to date under Blueprint. Evidence for the stabilization of the campus and the success of the behavioral interventions is seen in the decrease of discipline referrals from before Blueprint Initiative began to the present school year. The charts below show the improvement at both middle schools. Additionally, attendance rates were up at both campuses,

increasing from 92.7% to 93.8% at Dobie and from 91.9% to 93.8% at Pearce. With the campus stabilized, students are primed for academic achievement.



Component 8: Enhanced technology to monitor and improve student achievement.

Technology was incorporated into the Blueprint plan to facilitate communication, to provide a technology-rich environment at each campus, to keep the public with information

about the project, and to analyze assessment results. At the beginning of the Blueprint Initiative, a Project Technology Specialist was hired to work with district and campus instructional technology specialists at Blueprint Schools. The Project Technology Specialist established an email listserv for campus administrators and project team members to facilitate communication and provided training and mentoring for the Campus Technology Leadership Teams. The Technology Specialists provided technology training for all staff in using email and other district software. Email is now used as the primary means of communication within and among campuses and between district administration and campuses.

The EduTest and Scholar data management systems were employed by the Blueprint Schools to enhance the schools' ability to analyze assessment data and plan instruction accordingly. EduTest provides a means for analyzing benchmark assessment results for the current school year at the classroom level. Each student's benchmark results were able to be tracked in EduTest. Scholar allowed for analysis of benchmark assessment results along with TAKS data and data from Reading assessments. Data could be aggregated or disaggregated for analysis and examined by demographic groups. Scholar also provided capacity for analyzing student and classroom data for the current year and over multiple years. Individual student assessment histories also can be tracked in Scholar.

The use of both the EduTest and Scholar systems was one way that technology was utilized to improve academic achievement at the middle schools. Technology also was incorporated into learning activities. Interdisciplinary learning projects were created with multiple subject-area teachers working together to map out objectives and student deliverables. The projects were attractive to students because they showed the students the relevancy of what they were learning in the classroom to real life. Most projects required the use of technology to

find reference sources and create aspects of the project deliverables. Additionally, eighth-grade students used the Ignite software program for enhanced instruction in social studies, which is tested at eighth grade on the TAKS.

Component 9: Partnerships with parents and community to assure student success.

Parental involvement and community partnerships are known to be important ingredients in school success. Although some parent and community resistance was initially encountered when the Blueprint Initiative was announced, it was quickly overcome. To solicit parent and community support, principals and teachers conducted neighborhood walks and involved parents in site-based decision-making through the PTA and the Campus Advisory Council (CAC). Starting in the fall of 2002, parent support specialists at each campus facilitated a family support team. At least one bilingual staff member was placed in each school's front office and office staff were trained in communication, conflict resolution, mediation, facilitation, and customer service skills. Specific staff members and groups were coached in the specific skills as needed in order to build the school staff's capacity to prevent problems and address issues where internal and external customers are not satisfied. Diversity issues were addressed with the school staff as well.

To enhance community partnerships with the schools, mentors and volunteer tutors were recruited along with Partners in Education for each of the Blueprint Schools. In all, 67 Partners in Education teamed up with Dobie and Pearce Middle Schools. In-kind donations totaled nearly \$180,000 and cash donations totaled approximately \$4,000. Mentors, tutors, and other volunteers at the schools devoted 1,741 hours to serving the students at Dobie and Pearce over the three years of the Blueprint Initiative. Adding the value of the volunteers' time to the cash and in-kind

donations given results in a total community contribution of \$213,729 to the Blueprint Middle Schools.

The needs of students and families at all of the Blueprint Schools are significant. Parent Support Specialists were charged with identifying, securing, and coordinating resources to ensure success for every child. Parent training sessions also were conducted by the Parent Support Specialists. On-site after-school programs are offered at the Blueprint Schools to meet the needs of working parents. Dobie began offering after-school programming through the 21st Century Program in fall 2003 and Pearce in summer 2004. At both campuses, a wide variety of academic and extra-curricular programs are offered to students. As of the end of the fall semester, there have been 491 participations in the program by Pearce students and 552 by Dobie students.

Parents and student satisfaction has been measured throughout the Blueprint Initiative through annual surveys. The same surveys are conducted at all AISD middle schools, allowing for comparison to be made between responses from parents and students at the Blueprint Schools and at all other AISD middle schools. These surveys were not conducted prior to the start of the Blueprint; therefore, no baseline data are available. Also, the parent survey questions were modified somewhat each year. Data reported here are from the 2004-05 administration. In every case, results that Dobie parents have a very positive assessment of their child's school, more positive than that of parents of students at other AISD middle schools. Results from Pearce are not as positive; however, only 15 parents at Pearce completed the survey in 2004-05 (compared to 115 at Dobie). Therefore, the results from Pearce likely do not represent the views of Pearce parents as a group.

Table 6. Parent Survey Results, 2004-05

Percent of parents who strongly agree or agree that:	Dobie	Pearce	All MSs
School staff treats parents with courtesy and respect <i>(average of ratings for teachers, office staff, counselors, assistant principal and principal)</i>	98%	91%	94%
School staff provide me with opportunities for two-way communication <i>(average of ratings for teachers, office staff, counselors, assistant principal and principal)</i>	97%	91%	91%
School staff help parents be more involved in child's education <i>(average of ratings for teachers, office staff, counselors, assistant principal and principal)</i>	97%	71%	85%
School staff welcome parent input in academic decisions about my child <i>(average of ratings for teachers, office staff, counselors, assistant principal and principal)</i>	98%	92%	90%
School staff treat child fairly <i>(average of ratings for teachers, office staff, counselors, assistant principal and principal)</i>	96%	90%	94%
Benchmark testing is helping to improve child's academic achievement	95%	22%	72%
Child's school is a safe learning environment.	95%	57%	89%
Parent is aware of AISD Ombudsman.	85%	22%	56%
School provides information about state academic testing.	96%	86%	92%
School provides information about attendance policy.	98%	86%	95%
School provides information about dress code.	98%	85%	95%
School provides information about immunization policy.	98%	77%	94%
School provides information about behavior expectations.	99%	92%	96%
School provides information about required curriculum.	98%	57%	91%
School provides information about course selection.	92%	25%	91%
School provides information about special education programs.	89%	33%	80%
School provides information about bilingual/ESL programs.	83%	26%	74%
School provides information about gifted and talented programs.	89%	40%	75%
School provides information about tutoring.	97%	53%	86%
School provides information about Advanced Placement courses.	90%	20%	80%
School provides information about dual credit courses.	86%	18%	66%
School provides information about child's progress.	96%	64%	93%
School provides information about child's plans/goals.	92%	36%	71%
School provides information about child's preparedness for TAKS.	99%	41%	75%
School provides information about risk of failing a grade.	97%	77%	88%
School provides information about child's behavior.	98%	57%	90%
School provides information about high school graduation requirements and plans.	84%	20%	68%
School provides information about personal graduation plans.	80%	20%	61%
School provides information about financial aid and scholarships.	75%	20%	59%
School provides information about college opportunities.	77%	20%	61%
School provides information about career opportunities.	76%	20%	63%

Students also were surveyed using a slightly different survey each year. On the 2004-05 survey, the items produced sub-scores for three elements of school climate: behavioral environment, adult/student interactions, and academic environment. The Behavioral Environment dimension is the social and physical school environment, including peer interactions, expectations about school rules and their enforcement, and school safety and cleanliness. The Adult/Student Interactions dimension represents the relationships between students and adults on campus, both inside and outside the classroom. The Academic Environment dimension describes the rigor of the students' academic expectations and their sense of academic efficacy. The same survey was administered at all AISD elementary schools, allowing for a comparison between results at the Blueprint Schools and the district's elementary schools as a whole. Results from The Blueprint Elementary Schools compared to the average score for all AISD elementary schools are shown in the table below. Each dimension is scored on a scale of 1 to 4. Higher ratings indicate a more positive view of the school. Results from Dobie and Pearce compared to the average score for all AISD middle schools are shown in Table 7. Higher ratings indicate a more positive view of the school.

Table 7. Student Climate Survey Results, 2004-05

	Dobie	Pearce	All MSs
Behavioral Environment	2.49	2.35	2.51
Peer Behavior	2.20	2.17	2.28
Behavioral Expectations	2.90	2.75	2.73
School Safety/Cleanliness	2.48	2.23	2.61
Adult/Student Interactions	2.76	2.61	2.67
Teacher Support and Engagement	2.79	2.71	2.65
Adult Fairness and Respect	2.74	2.55	2.68
Academic Environment	2.99	2.93	2.94
Academic Standards	3.32	3.25	3.24
Academic Self-Confidence	2.89	2.84	2.85

As seen in Table 7, results for the school climate surveys are comparable between the Blueprint middle schools and the average of all AISD middle schools. Considering the history of behavioral and other problems at the Blueprint Schools, it is remarkable that by the end of the second year of the Initiative, the school climate was as good at these schools as the average of all schools. Even more remarkable is the results for academic environment Students at both Dobie and Pearce rated the academic environment at their schools very close to the average at all middle schools. Ratings were higher than average on the sub-score for academic standards. The Blueprint Initiative set out to create a rigorous, positive learning environment at Dobie and Pearce, and the survey results from Year 3 suggest they were successful in doing so, at least from the perspective of the students.

Component 10: Signed compacts with principals, teachers, parents, and students.

When they were hired, the principals and staff for the Blueprint Schools were required to sign compacts agreeing to meet the expectations set by the district administration. The Principal Compact and the Staff Compact set forth the following expectations:

- A 3-year commitment to the program
- Work closely with the Austin Blueprint team
- Treat all staff members fairly and with respect
- Make all decisions in the best interest of students first; think about the impact of your decision on the entire school
- Adhere strictly to the *Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators*
- Be a positive public relations agent for your campus
- Be flexible and willing to change to do what is in the best interest of children
- Ensure a positive learning environment

- Work, plan, and share willingly with your team
- Offer a recommendation for improvement with every concern expressed

Principals noted that the compacts were helpful to the success of the Blueprint Schools because they created a stability that had been lacking at the schools in the past. As noted earlier in this report, staff turnover was high in the past at the Blueprint Schools. Teachers sometimes even left mid-year, creating a sense of abandonment in students and adding to their unwillingness to be committed to academics. The three-year agreement helped to reduce staff turnover significantly and the shared set of expectations created unity among the staff.

When the Blueprint Initiative was announced, Dr. Forgione and Ms. Tousek conducted presentations for parents and the community at each of the project campuses, making expectations clear and non-negotiable. These expectations were also communicated to parents and students through a Parent-Student-Teacher Compact that all three groups were required to sign. Students committed to:

- showing respect for themselves, their teachers, school staff, other students and school property
- believing in themselves, being honest, and accepting responsibility for their actions
- communicating what they learn with their family and asking for help in and out of class
- showing that their education is important to them by attending class every day, being prepared to learn, completing work, and doing their best.

Parents committed to:

- teaching their child to be respectful by demonstrating respect for themselves, teachers, school staff, their children and school property
- supporting their child's education by asking how they can be involved, ensuring regular and punctual attendance, setting aside time to read and study outside school hours, and asking the teacher to help them help their child

In turn, teachers committed to:

- showing respect for individual differences and learning styles of students and families
- providing a rigorous curriculum in a safe and positive environment and guiding students to follow rules and resolve conflicts
- encouraging dialog with families and students, helping families help their children by providing clear and frequent information on student progress, clear instruction regarding assignments, and guidance to resources and support services

Principals and teachers communicated these expectations to students and families on Back-to-School night. Principals at the Blueprint middle schools noted that the Parent-Student-Teacher Compacts have been somewhat helpful, especially at the beginning of the Blueprint Initiative. However, their sense was that the Compacts needed to be re-visited with parents more frequently if they were to truly be effective in accomplishing their purpose. Additionally, the Compacts might be better received now that the schools have earned the trust of parents. Nevertheless, students are much better informed about their progress than in the past. Teachers hold one-on-one conferences with students to review their benchmark assessment results. Students are aware of what their weakness and strengths are in each subject area and know what they need to work on to improve. The schools receive few parent complaints and see parents

becoming more involved in school functions such as science fairs, concerts, ethnic celebrations, parent breakfasts and suppers, and PTA.

Conclusions

The Blueprint Initiative targeted chronically under-performing schools and set out to transform them into positive learning environments. After three years of implementation, indicators suggest that a great deal of positive change has occurred. Substantial academic gains are evident in TAKS score improvement in core subjects. Students at Blueprint Schools rate the academic environment at that their school as highly as do students at other AISD elementary schools. Nearly all teachers have stayed on at the Blueprint Elementary Schools for the past three years and most are returning next year, as are their principals. Academic and behavioral interventions based on assessment results have helped to create a school climate where teachers can focus on teaching and students are aware of their strengths and of the areas where they need to improve. Partnerships with parents and the community have been forged successfully. Trust among all members of the school community appears to be high.

As the Blueprint Middle Schools continue to aim for excellence, it is important that the Blueprint components continue to be stressed and that their underlying support structure remains in place. While excellent progress has been made, there is much yet to be done. The needs of these schools remain high due to the population of students that they serve. Further investment is needed in attracting and retaining qualified teachers who desire to teach within the Blueprint framework. The relationships among the Blueprint Schools principals and their relationship with the Master Principal should be maintained in order to provide the support and accountability system that helps fuel their success. More progress must be made in Mathematics achievement.

Continued frequent assessment and immediate intervention is needed due to the high mobility rates of students at these schools and in order to track and target students' needs. More can be done to fully utilize technology to improve achievement. A great deal of support is needed for parents as the schools continue to seek them out as partners in encouraging the success of their students.

Based on the information gathered for this summary report, it appears that a great deal of progress has been made at the Blueprint Middle Schools. They are a far different place today than they were in the spring of 2002 when the Blueprint Initiative was developed. With continued attention to the ten components of the Blueprint plan and given sufficient resources, the Blueprint Middle Schools are poised for success.