

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

LESSONS LEARNED FROM ANN RICHARDS SCHOOL FOR YOUNG WOMEN LEADERS
AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



Date / Time: July 25, 2011, 3:30-5:00pm

Attendees: DRE/CAC – Ginger Gossman, Natalia Ibanez, Holly Williams (Geoff Rips was invited, but unable to attend). Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders (ARSYWL) – Melina Berduo, Jeanne Goka, Kristina Waugh (Texanna Turner was invited, but unable to attend).

Recommendations for single-sex school

- A principal should be on board from the beginning.
- Teachers' commitment and investment in the mission statement and the curriculum are paramount. This commitment was fostered via teachers' contributions to the school model. Teachers helped design the mission statement and worked collaboratively to generate the curriculum.
 - Teachers created a list of goals for students, then used those goals to design the school's mission statement.
 - Every summer, teachers revisit curriculum and make improvements. This acts as a booster for teachers' commitment and also improved the curriculum.
- Teachers need to teach to the specified gender, not just be a single-sex school.
- Planners should visit model or example schools.
- Instead of using a "canned model," a model should be designed that meets the needs of the district.
- A public relations (PR) campaign should be started at least one year before the school opens. Positive PR can be used to encourage staff and student recruitment. Community outreach should be engaged to attract staff and students.
- A niche should be found for the school mission. Why would parents want to send their child to this school? What is it about this school that will attract committed students, aside from it being an all-boy campus? Something else needs to be identified that will make the school unique (e.g., sports, technology, science). ARSYWL selected a STEM model. For example, consider feeding into the local job market and find an industry (or projected industry) in Central Texas that needs employees and use SYM to create qualified people for that industry. This strategy would likely lead to partnerships and sponsorships with local businesses.
- The application process for SYM should be similar to that used by ARSYWL and Kealing Magnet (i.e., application form, deadlines, lottery structure). ARSYM coordinated with Kealing Magnet to share application processes. This allows students to apply to several schools at once, without burdening them (and their parents) with multiple applications. NOTE: The lottery structure for ARSYWL resulted in 75% of students coming from a Title I school and 25% of students from a non-Title I school.
- The hiring process for teachers needs to be rigorous. ARSYWL's initial interview process included having teachers prepare a homework assignment and tie it to research on girl-only schools. The current hiring process includes a three-tiered interview: (1) with the content department, (2) with the school administration, and (3) with students.
 - SYM will need teachers who are open to a new school and a new model; just being a good teacher is not enough.
- Boys' developmental stages should be considered when determining grade levels for implementation. Boys may need an earlier start than would girls in a single-sex school.

- Implementation should be roll-out, not all at once. The school should be “grown,” starting with one or two grades, and then populating the higher grades as students matriculate up.
- The location of the campus will be a reflection of the “quality” of the campus in the eye of the community. ARSYWL chose a “politically neutral” location that was not associated with an attendance zone with a negative image. ARSYWL also was chosen purposefully to be centrally located.
- The political value of the name of the school is just as important as its location. ARSYWL garnered immediate recognition and positive imaging because its name.

Recommended Models for SYM

- [St. Marks](#) in Dallas
- Guilford County Schools [Minority Male Initiative](#): The Brotherhood
- Montessori methods for boys

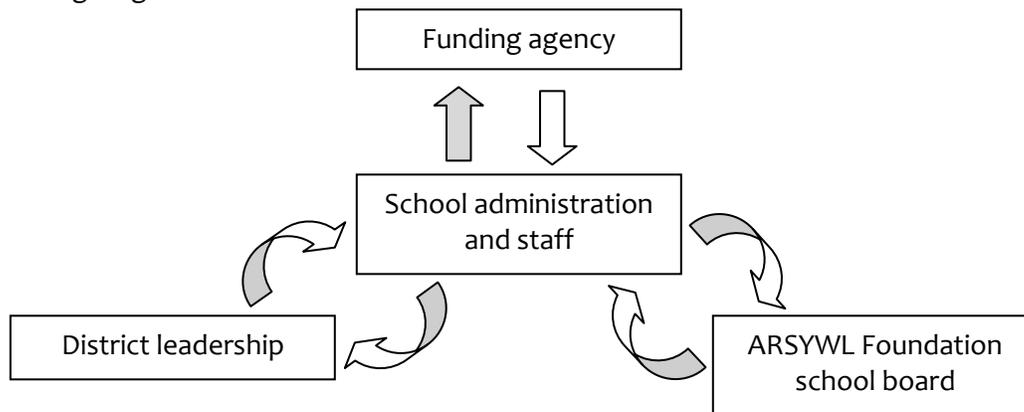
Lessons Learned

- Initially, parents will send their children to the school; that is, parents will be the momentum behind applications. Eventually, however, students will want to attend the school if it is successful.
- ARSYWL focused on 21st Century Skills, and that has worked well.
- [UT Center for Women’s Studies](#) helped ARSYWL with professional development opportunities for teachers. A comparable center could be identified that is available to help with professional development opportunities for an all-boys school.
 - UT Austin sponsored a [Latino Male Symposium](#) in June 2011. Several of the speakers who were in attendance might be interested in developing professional development opportunities for teachers in an all-boys school.
 - [Patrick L. Valdez](#), [Project Males](#)
 - [Victor B. Sáenz](#), UT Austin
 - [Sarah Rodriguez](#), [Project Males](#)
 - ARSYWL traded help with professional development opportunities for research and evaluation opportunities for UT professors and students.
- Retention at the high school level can be a challenge. ARSYWL is finding that some girls want a co-ed environment for high school because they want to attend dances, go to sports events (football games), and socialize with boys. This might be the case for boys, too. Consider the following questions: What about an all-boy school might convince boys to stay during high school? Will the school have sports teams? Will it have dances?
- A campus-to-campus relationship between ARSYWL and Moody SYM might be developed such that their students could engage in shared events (e.g., have dances together, support each others’ sports teams). If this is a point of interest, the physical proximity of Moody and ARSYWL should be considered.
- ARSYWL is one of six schools funded by the same foundation, and all are in partnerships. Students from these schools can visit other campuses. This has been a great experience for students.
- Initially, many community organizations and stakeholders offer to partner with a new school. Not all of them will be useful partners for the first year. It is important to figure out how to maintain positive PR , while selecting only those partners who can add value to the school, mission statement, and so on.

- A memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the funding agency was a vital document. It became the contract to which ARSYWL could refer to hold the funder *and the district* to commitments made to the program.

Challenges

- The first year of implementation was hard on teachers. Although teachers were paid for attending professional development activities in the summer, these activities took most of the summer, so teachers did not have a break before the first year of teaching at ARSYWL. However, no feasible alternatives were available. Professional development activities were necessary, and that first year was critical to teacher buy-in to the school model.
- Teachers' contributions to curriculum were vital, but having a curriculum specialist on site might have helped manage teacher stress during the first year. At the same time, teachers' ownership of the curriculum led to their long-term commitment, so a curriculum specialist might have made it more difficult to develop that commitment.
- Striking a balance and managing communication between primary stakeholders was not easy for ARSYWL. Having someone aside from the principal be responsible for managing this communication might have been helpful. The four primary stakeholders are illustrated in the following diagram:



- Creating the MOU with Lee Posey, founder of the Foundation for the Education of Young Women, was not easy. It would have helped to have someone manage this process.
- Managing PR was a lot of work. Having a full-time person responsible for this task might have been helpful.

About the Department of Program Evaluation. The Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) was established in 1972 to support program decision and strategic planning in the district. The department is housed in the Office of Accountability and is charged with evaluating federal, state, and locally funded programs in AISD. DPE staff integrate best and innovative evaluation practices with educational and institutional knowledge. DPE staff work with program staff throughout the district to design and conduct formative and summative program evaluations. DPE's methods for evaluating programs vary depending on the research question, program design, and reporting requirements. The evaluations report objectively about program implementation and outcomes, and serve to inform program staff, decision makers, and planners in the district. [DPE reports can be accessed online.](#)

About the Author. Ginger Gossman completed a Ph.D. in demography at the University of Texas at Austin in 2006. Her academic interests include maternal and child health, secondary education, infectious disease, and obesity research. She has presented her research findings at regional and national conferences and has been a member of the American Evaluation Association since 2007. Ginger joined the Program Evaluation team in September 2008.

Funding Sources. Funding for this report was provided by district local funds.

District Strategic Plan. Implementation of all all-boys school would address the entirety of the Strategic Plan.

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