

Upcoming Events:

For All Schools:

Coaches Only

November 3, 2005

4:00 pm: Renaissance

7th Annual Conference

See below, right

Principals & Coaches'

Leadership Seminar

December 8, 2005

Coaches' Only Seminar

December 9, 2005

For 2004 and 2005 Cohorts:

Governance and Inquiry/ Cadre Leader

October 10-11, 2005

October 12-13, 2005

November 14-15, 2005

Powerful Learning II

December 6-7, 2005

2004 Cohort only

Powerful Learning II

January 23-24,
2006

2005 Cohort and

Redesign & Restructuring:

Powerful Learning II

January 26-27, 2006

Trust the Process: One School's Journey To Excellence

"Teachers would be dragged away kicking and screaming," say Leadership Team members if the faculty at John G. Hardin Elementary School were ever asked to transfer to another campus.

Such high spirits and pride in their school were not evident in August of 2001. Hardin Elementary had an image problem in Burkburnett ISD. Principal Don Fritsche depicted a community that viewed the campus as downtrodden and disheartened. It certainly was not the elementary school of choice in the district.



But exciting things happened along Hardin's journey to becoming a demonstrated Accelerated School. Kids started enjoying school and learning. Parents noticed and became interested in participating in their child's education. Teachers fell in love with their work again. And now, Hardin Elementary has become a school which parents take pride in sending their students.

What were the keys to the success of this small school on the Texas-Oklahoma border? How did the Accelerated Schools process help turn this school around?

Bumpy Beginnings

At first the faculty and staff were unsure about becoming an Accelerated School. Many teachers recalled living through countless education reforms in their careers and thought "this too shall pass." Internal Facilitator, Diane Hill, described the frustration of some members because they wanted a quick fix of their problems and it didn't look like the Accelerated Schools Process would provide a speedy remedy. "It seemed like every time we accomplished something such as Taking Stock or Vision, we would go to training and find out there was more to do." (Continued on Page 4)

Whatever it Takes

Make plans now to attend the **Seventh Annual Conference at the Renaissance Austin Hotel November 4th and 5th, 2005**. This year's event features five pre-conference clinics (Friday, November 4) and numerous concurrent sessions, all of which are exceptional opportunities for Accelerated Schools' colleagues to share successful classroom practices and powerful learning strategies. Our guest speakers are Henry Levin (Accelerated Schools founder), Darrell Andrews (Friday Evening) and LaVietta Prichard (Saturday Luncheon).

For more information, contact your External Coach and visit <http://www.swacceleratedschools.net/>. Go to the Upcoming Events page and select the link for "Seventh Annual Conference," and browse through the conference pages.





Greetings From the Director...

Frequently I gain insight when I read what notable people have to say about human behavior. Recently I came across a statement from Napoleon Hill. He said, "The majority of men meet with failure because of their lack of persistence in creating new plans to take the place of those which fail." Some people connote persistence as obstinacy or stubbornness while I view persistence as one of the most important characteristics of a successful Accelerated School. All of our successful schools have had a dream of what they wanted to become. They did not give up even though they faced many challenges along the way. Those that persisted and held on to their dreams, became dream schools that we all want for our own children.

The Rand Corporation will soon be releasing a book on whole school reform. One chapter of the book describes 12 schools in Texas and Florida, which used one of four reform models. The models were Accelerated Schools (note: all three schools were part of the Southwest Center's network), Direct Instruction, Success for All and Core Knowledge. For three years, they followed these twelve demographically similar schools as they implemented their selected model. There are many interesting findings but the following comments, about the three Accelerated Schools in this study, triggered a connection to the quote above. "Although frustrated by the length and deliberate pace of the process, staff had generally favorable views of the outcomes. Staff in all three schools felt that the process made their school more reflective, leading to significant changes in school vision and culture. One school indicated that, in addition to the specific improvements mentioned above, it had shifted from a focus on discipline to a focus on academics. Staff at all schools felt that the process had increased interaction across grades and facilitated grade-level coordination.

Another positive outcome for all schools was a change from a top-down to a collaborative decision-making process that increased cohesion, trust, and the sharing of ideas." Further, "teachers spoke positively of the effect of Powerful Learning instruction on students, stating that it 'gets kids more involved in learning,' 'helps kids communicate,' and 'increases students' involvement and motivation.'"

In the eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson stated, "Great works are performed not by strength, but perseverance." This school year will take perseverance and a willingness to commit to your school's vision. However, the result will be well worth the effort.

Bonnie Hamill

Welcome Coaches

Since our last publication several new coaches have joined the Southwest Center for Accelerated Schools.

Judy LeUnes, a veteran elementary teacher who taught in College Station ISD and Hearn ISD. She is a part-time coach in Central Texas

MJ Garcia has relocated from Sul Ross State University, Rio Grande College in Eagle Pass to become the coach for several schools in the San Antonio area.

Lina Flores joins the Southwest Center and is also coaching San Antonio area schools. In the past, Lina has worked as a teacher, principal and educational consultant.

Both Paul Rudnik and Roberto Rodriguez are coaching in the Brownsville area. Paul is formerly a district coordinator of Science in Brownsville ISD and Roberto is an experienced superintendent in the Santa Rosa ISD.

Serving as the new coach for the East Texas schools, is Ray Deason. Ray has served many years as a principal.

Mike Vega comes to the Southwest Center from San Benito CISD where he has been facilitating staff development, managing grants and developing distance learning opportunities.

All of us at the Southwest Center look forward to the expertise and fresh ideas these newest team members will add to the program. Combined with the diverse and dynamic abilities possessed by our returning coaches, the prospect for continued exceptional service is tremendous.

Everyone has easy access to this newsletter on our website at www.swacceleratedschools.net.

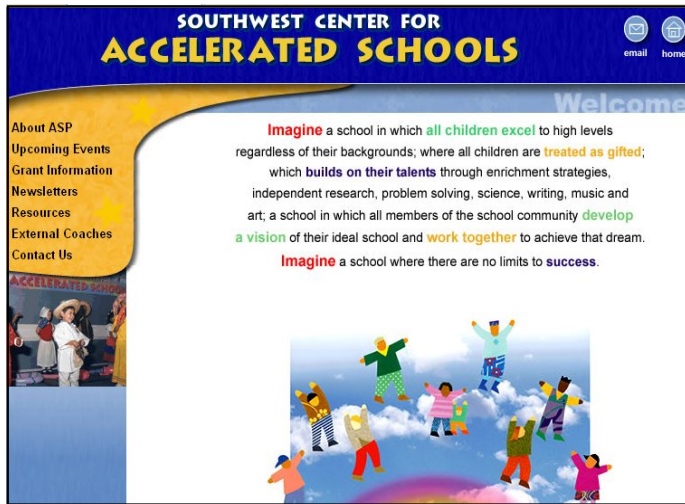
Feel free to duplicate this newsletter for all staff members, community partners, parent groups and district personnel involved with Accelerated Schools

Tour the Southwest Center's Web Pages

If you haven't surfed the Southwest Center's pages you are missing out on links to numerous tools to assist your school's journey through the Accelerated Schools Process. Visit www.swacceleratedschools.net.

Looking for lesson plans with Powerful Learning? We have links in the Resources section. Just click on the word "Resources," fill in the user name and password (provided by your leadership team) and browse through the numerous links under "Lesson Plans." If you see a lesson you think you want to bring to the classroom, refer to the Powerful Learning Framework to ensure the lesson meets Powerful Learning Standards.

Do you have a Powerful Learning lesson you would like to share? In the "Lesson Plans," section you will see "Spotlight on Powerful Learning." Select that link then select the "Submit a lesson/unit plan" There you will find the instructions on how to publish your creations on the Southwest Center's pages. Southwest Center staff will preview the lesson plan prior to its placement on the site.



There are plenty of links related to other components of Accelerated Schools. You can find lists of videos, books and periodicals to assist in your staff's professional development. There are also materials dedicated to new staff orientation, students and parents.

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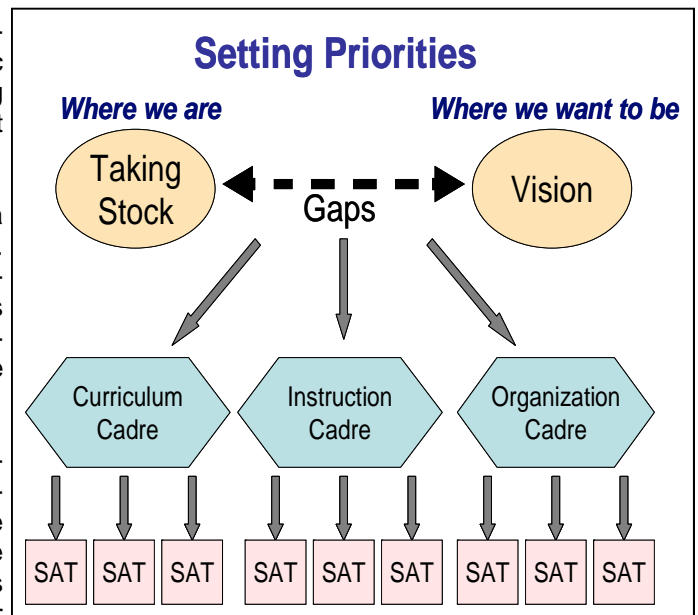
There is more to the Southwest Center's site than just the resource pages. Keep up with training dates and other happenings in the "Upcoming Events," section. You can read descriptions of the various workshops offered by the Southwest Center and sign up for your preferred dates. Each cohort has its own calendar posted with a listing of the offered trainings.

New Governance Structure

Participants who attended the August 8th and 9th Setting Priorities and Governance workshop will recognize this graphic as the organizational structure that is born from the Setting Priorities process. Mature school personnel will see a different structure from what has been employed in the past.

This new structure includes limiting the number of Cadres to a maximum of three: Curriculum, Instruction and Organization. Schools with one to 15 teachers will have only one Cadre, either Curriculum or Instruction. Schools with 16 to 45 teachers will have two to three Cadres. (If only two, they will be Curriculum and Instruction.) Larger schools have two or three Cadres of their choice.

A Strategic Action Team (SAT) has six to eight members representing a cross-section of the school community. SAT's respond swiftly to the school's major challenge areas using the inquiry process to identify the basis of the challenge. Once the source of the challenge is identified, the team researches scientifically-based solutions and develops an action plan for implementation and evaluation. The number of SAT's per Cadre depends on the size of the school and number of priorities chosen to be addressed. This streamlined structure will help schools address the issues in an efficient, time capturing manner.



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Continued from page 1.

The Hardin School community stayed with the process and used what they learned through taking stock and writing their vision to determine what priorities they should begin to address. “The more we followed the process the clearer our outcomes became. Then things began to snowball in a positive way,” said Mr. Fritsche.

Successes Emerge

Once the cadres formed the snowball continued to grow. Internal Coach Teresa Zelner praised the Inquiry process as allowing the faculty and parents to be able to identify what “we can do something about and what would be a waste of time,” in order to focus and improve student achievement. “There were a lot of ‘Aha!’ moments,” said Mr. Fritsche.

The Accelerated School's governance structure provided Hardin's faculty new opportunities for free flow of thoughts and ideas. This collegial environment resulted in positive, productive and focused classroom atmospheres.



Fifth-grade students provide entertainment for Parents University.

Consider the faculty's modification of the Accelerated Reader program. Typically Accelerated Reader participants read books and take computer based quizzes to gain points and earn prizes. On its own Accelerated Reader does not meet the standards of Powerful Learning. By applying the Powerful Learning framework, however, teachers developed ways to adapt the program such that it provided more meaningful learning. Modifying Accelerated Reader to align with Powerful Learning resulted in more students scoring higher on the quizzes, consequently earning more awards.

Recently students read the book *Trapped in Death Cave* by Bill Wallace. The story is set in nearby Lawton, Oklahoma. Classes took field trips to Lawton thus making the students' reading more significant. While field trips are not possible with each book, classes always have group discussions and a variety of activities associated with their reading in order to provide differentiated learning opportunities.

Engaging Parents

Parents as well as their children benefit from the Accelerated Schools Process. When the faculty learned that some parents were frustrated by language familiar to educators but not to parents or community volunteers, the school hosted Parents University. This event brought educational research to parents to help them help their children with homework or school projects. Children provided entertainment and community members such as police officers discussed topics relating to school safety. As parents became more comfortable in the school environment, they became aware of their own strengths and started leading some workshops themselves.

Now, Hardin Elementary is the school of choice in BISD. More students have been identified as Gifted and Talented than at other schools in the districts. Internal facilitator Dianne Hill has a reason for it. “That's because we treat them *all* that way.”

Advice to New Accelerated Schools

The leadership team at Hardin recommend that to find successes through the Accelerated Schools Process new schools should, “Never give up. There will be times when things seem confusing, but trust the process.” One suggestion the team shared is to take the time to meet or communicate with other Accelerated Schools in your area and share information together. “You will find out you are not alone,” and will learn beneficial strategies from each other.

No, the path to these successes was not an easy one, but it was well worth it, according to Mr. Fritsche. At times there were struggles with the process. But many times they find the process to be greatly enjoyable. The teachers, students, parents and community have all grown in their respect for one another.

Most important, by keeping their hearts and minds focused on what's best for their students, the students have received the best from the entire Hardin Elementary School community.