



News from Redesign
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Travis High School Turns Around *In First Year of Redesign, Travis Rated Academically Acceptable*

How did Travis High School, with so many high level challenges, turn itself around in its first year of Redesign?

Principal Rene Garganta credits his teachers for the academic turnaround of Travis High School. And he recognizes that this education progress would not have been possible without the fundamental changes that were implemented at Travis beginning in August 2007 when the campus implemented the First Things First reform model as part of its campus Redesign.

Just one year earlier, Travis High School failed to meet the state standards on TAKS and was rated Academically Unacceptable by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). As an urban high school with multiple challenges such as poverty, language barriers, and student mobility, Travis faced an uphill battle to achieve an Acceptable rating in 2008. Failure to hit that bar would result in serious state sanctions imposed by TEA.

Despite these significant challenges, Travis High School met the state standard on TAKS in 2008 and was rated Academically Acceptable, increasing student performance across the board.

“Creating small learning communities under the First Things First model was key,” said Garganta. “Breaking students into smaller learning environments allowed us to see the students and their needs and provided the systems and tools necessary to respond to these needs.”

“While new structures were needed, structural change alone is insufficient to transform a high school. It is the structure, coupled with an emphasis on improving the quality of instruction through professional learning communities, that has the greatest impact on student performance,” added Garganta.

Garganta understands the difficulties faced by traditional urban high schools. “How can a teacher take responsibility for the 150 students he or she teaches every day in a comprehensive high school?” he asks. “It’s just too many and too impersonal.”

“With the Small Learning Communities and Family Advocacy System created as part of our Redesign plan, teachers and administrators have collective



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responsibility for students,” he explained. “These smaller environments make it possible for teachers to know each student, and they are vested in the success of every student. Most importantly, we now have the structures in place to take action before problems become a crisis and to monitor our progress every day. SLC's allow us to do things differently at Travis.”

Garganta gives credit to his parents, community members, teachers, instructional coaches, and the partnership with First Things First for the success of Travis in 2008. Dr. Glenn Nolly, Associate Superintendent of High Schools, gives Garganta high praise as well. “Successful reform of a large comprehensive high school isn’t possible without strong, decisive leadership, and Rene has provided that leadership on his campus. He is an instructional leader who understands the teaching and learning process and provides the necessary support for teachers and students.”