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Here's how DISD can achieve its goal, says The Broad Foundation's **KEVIN HALL**

Transforming public education is one of the most important — and most difficult — tasks facing cities across the country. The challenges are stark, as urban achievement gaps between income and ethnic groups continue to grow.

Yet success is possible. For the past five years, The Broad Foundation has awarded the \$1 million Broad Prize for Urban Education to recognize the school districts that are making the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement.

As Dallas embarks on an aggressive plan to provide a world-class education for every student, it is important to keep in mind that there is no silver bullet. But there are five elements that are critical to a school district's success:

1. Clear and focused academic goals: The best districts set the bar high. Students will rise to meet high expectations; smart districts use these expectations to drive instruction, allocate resources, and ensure that the entire organization is aligned in a clear direction.

Norfolk Public Schools in Virginia, the 2005 Broad Prize winner, developed a citywide mantra of "All Means All" to ensure that every child would receive a world-class education — no exceptions. Over a five-year period, elementary students increased their reading and math proficiency by 14 percentage points, while middle school math scores jumped 23 points.

2. Rich and deep staff selection systems: Talent is critical. From teachers to principals to district administrators, the best districts have specific strategies to ensure the recruitment, selection and development of educational talent. Boston Public Schools, last year's Broad Prize winner, invested significant resources to develop an academy to recruit, select and grow leaders.

Boston is extremely selective to ensure that teachers and principals are matched with individual school cultures and needs. Boston consistently outperforms Massachusetts districts with similar demographics in elementary, middle and high school reading and math.

3. Well-aligned instructional resources and programs:

A district must have top-to-bottom alignment. Curriculum, instructional resources and professional development must be tied to a district's academic objectives. When 2003 Broad Prize winner Long Beach Unified School District made math a priority, the academic focus was integrated throughout the district: pre-algebra learning began in the sixth grade, students who scored below proficient were required to take summer school, and the district offered online math activities so parents could work with their children.

4. Deep use of data to drive instruction, operations and interventions:

Successful districts are obsessive about data, infusing numbers in every conversation about the performance of students and adults in the system. To measure the effectiveness of classroom instruction, these districts use interim benchmark assessments to ensure that their students are on track, which enables real-time interventions for individual students. In California's Garden Grove Unified School District, the 2004 Broad Prize winner, teachers and administrators regularly review assessments to shape lesson plans and modify curriculum — and students are part of the review, so they know if they are proficient or advanced.

5. Strong leadership and stable governance:

The most successful systems have strong leaders in place who develop a culture of high expectations for everyone — students, teachers, parents, administrators and the community. Although there are persistent views that every city is unique and one district's success can't be replicated elsewhere, we see leaders and their teams adopting a "no excuses" philosophy and demanding higher performance throughout the organization.

Many of the Broad Prize winners also have very stable governance systems, either through mayoral control of the district or a long-standing school board that provides high-level policy direction and support but stays out of the day-to-day decisions of the district.

Improving a city's school system requires the commitment and support of an entire community. It is admirable that DISD Superintendent Michael Hinojosa has set the goal of winning The Broad Prize. But the ultimate prize is a high-quality education for every child in Dallas.



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