

**THE HOUSTON **A<sup>+</sup>** CHALLENGE**  
*formerly The Houston Annenberg Challenge*

**Focus on Quality Teaching and Learning:  
Partnerships in Learning Communities**

**July 26-28, 2005**

University of Houston  
Hilton Hotel

Do all of the members of your school community agree on what quality teaching and learning look like?

Are your learning communities meeting but not really improving student learning?

Do you want deeper, more effective improvement and ways to document your school's progress?

Bring your team to the summer conference!

**Registration**

Return registrations by July 1, 2005

**(There is no fee for the Institute)**

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DRAFT

# Fondren Reforming Schools Summer Institute IX

The annual **Fondren Reforming Schools Summer Institute IX**, sponsored by The Houston A+ Challenge (formerly Houston Annenberg Challenge), will be held at the University of Houston, Hilton Hotel, July 26-28, 2005. The Institute provides opportunities to interact and learn with others about making sustainable change in our schools and learning communities. The Institute brings together teachers, administrators, university faculty, parents, students, and community members to share their successful strategies and to dialogue with each other about the dynamic and complex environment of public education—pre-K through high school graduation.

## **Theme and outcomes**

The theme of this year's institute is "Focus on Quality Teaching and Learning: Partnerships in Learning Communities." Schools regularly seek out ways to improve teaching and learning. This year's Institute will give participants an in-depth look at one of the most effective powerful approaches – building effective learning communities.

While most schools have some form of learning community meetings, many have not achieved the level of collaboration and depth of dialog that lead to real improvement in teaching and learning. This institute is the first of a series of year-long learning opportunities designed to improve learning communities and unleash their power to ensure quality teaching and learning.

As a participant in this institute, you will find yourself asking:

- What does quality teaching and learning look like?
- How do learning communities help improve quality teaching and learning?
- How do learning communities build my leadership capacity?
- How can learning communities help my student succeed?
- How do learning communities improve my classroom experience?
- How will my voice be heard in a learning community?

## **New format!**

We all know that learning does not occur in single, brief, didactic sessions without follow-up or connection to the real world in which you work. This institute is designed to model what we know about learning and professional development in the following ways:

- **Learning teams**  
You are invited to attend as part of a team from your school in order to deepen your shared learning and provide mutual support for using what you learn throughout the coming year. If you do not belong to a school team, we will help you find others with similar interests.
- **Interactive seminars**  
There are fewer seminars this year, but all of them will be longer—to give you more time for deeper learning—and interactive—to support active, not passive learning.
- **Guided practice**  
You will be placed in a small institute learning community guided by a skilled facilitator to practice and experience the skills you are learning in the seminars.
- **Series of learning opportunities**  
This summer institute is the first of a series of learning opportunities to be provided by the Houston A+ Challenge throughout the coming school year. We will have:
  - A follow-up day-long session in the fall to allow you and your team to refocus your commitment for practicing what you are learning.

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- A series of half-day Saturday seminars that will allow you to deepen your learning in some of the same areas addressed in the seminars during the summer institute.
- A commitment from leaders of the other A+ initiatives with which you may be involved that all of our activities will model these practices.
- Opportunities for you to join cohort groups that will meet throughout the year, sign on to e-groups that will stay in touch electronically, or contribute to the institute blog.

## Interactive Seminars

You will have an opportunity to participate in two interactive seminars during this institute, each one 3 hours in length. More information about each seminar will be provided with your registration confirmation, but the following list describes each one briefly:

- A. What does my students' work tell me about their learning and my teaching? (Looking at student work)** The National School Reform Faculty has developed a process that allows teams to use samples of student work as a focus for deep professional dialog about the quality of the work being performed and its implications for instructional practice.
- B. How can I use data I have to improve my teaching—and my students' learning? (Using data to inform instruction)** In this age of accountability, we collect not only TAKS data but a variety of other student data that frequently is reviewed but not used. This process helps teams get a better understanding of the array of data they can be using and how they can use it to improve instruction and student learning.
- C. How can we respond systemically to students who aren't learning? (Whatever it takes—responding when kids don't learn)** We are very good at teaching the students who are learning, but we are frequently stumped when some students just aren't getting it. The school must develop a collective, systemic response to assist classroom teachers in ensuring that every student achieve high standards of learning.
- D. How can my team ensure that we are all aligning instruction and assessment with our curriculum? (Curriculum mapping—a tool for continuous quality improvement)** The state and national emphasis on accountability makes alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment even more critical—within each classroom, across the school, and throughout the district. Curriculum mapping is a tool that teams can use to ensure that all students are provided learning opportunities in all of the essential standards—and that we are assessing to ensure that the students are learning what we teach.
- E. How can we document our school's improvement in teaching and learning? (Portfolios for looking at school progress)** The TAKS and other state measures provide a quantitative view of the school's progress, but the school's quality of teaching and learning should be measured in a variety of other ways, too. Building on the processes for creating and using student portfolios, school teams can create a school portfolio that adds to the deeper understanding of our progress and points us toward more effective improvement.
- F. How can we learn from each other? (Peer coaching and peer observation)** Reducing isolation has been a hallmark of school reform, and yet most teachers have not visited a colleague's classroom since student teaching. Peer observation and peer coaching techniques can help ensure a focused, meaningful experience in an atmosphere of trust that will greatly expand our mutual learning.
- G. How do I improve my leadership and facilitation of learning communities? (Facilitating and leading learning communities)** All but the most evolved learning communities rely heavily on the skills of a leader or facilitator. The success and impact of the learning community can be greatly enhanced through focused planning and the use of key techniques and tools.
- H. How can we practice collective inquiry and make our learning communities action oriented? (Developing and implementing teacher research projects)** Many of us think research is something accomplished by professors and statisticians, but the most effective research is conducted

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by people who are in the middle of practicing the very ideas being researched. Teacher research can be a powerful individual or team tool for focusing the efforts of a learning community on practices and strategies that are proven to be most effective.

**I. How can parents and community members have meaningful roles in school learning communities? (Involving parents and community members in school decision-making)**

Shared decision-making is a hallmark of school reform, and learning how to involve parents and community members in the process will enhance the learning of both the school and the participants. The school will gain valuable insights into how it is perceived and will be presented with out-of-the box thinking. The parents and community members will gain valuable insight into the complexity of the educational process and the broader community, economic, and political issues faced by the school.

**J. How can we move from mere cooperation to authentic collaboration? (Deepening community collaboration)** Authentic collaboration is more than meeting on a regular basis and agreeing to cooperate or compromise to accommodate our individual needs and understandings. When a team practices authentic collaboration, there is a synergy that results in exciting new learning for both the individuals and the learning community as an entity itself. The whole really does become greater than the sum of its parts.

## FRSSI Institute Schedule

- The institute will meet for two and a half days, July 26<sup>th</sup> through July 28<sup>th</sup>.
- Continental breakfast and registration will be available each morning from 7:30 to 8:30.
- Institute activities will start each day at 8:30.
- Lunch will be provided all three days.
- Institute activities will end at 4:00 p.m. on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, and at 1:00 p.m. on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

## Continuing Education/Professional Development

Each participant will receive documentation at the end of the conference indicating sessions attended and length of professional development received.

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## Registration: School Teams (page 1 of 2)

All participants who are members of a school team should register below. (If you are attending the conference as an individual, please complete the registration on the following page.) Teams may include administrators, teachers, other school staff members, parents, community members, or students.

School: \_\_\_\_\_ District: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade levels: \_\_\_Pre-K \_\_\_Elementary \_\_\_Middle School \_\_\_High School

School address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street City ZIP

School phone with area code: \_\_\_\_\_ FAX: \_\_\_\_\_

Name 1 (please print): \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Day phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Summer phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Summer address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email (checked in the summer): \_\_\_\_\_

Name 2 (please print): \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Day phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Summer phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Summer address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email (checked in the summer): \_\_\_\_\_

Name 3 (please print): \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Day phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Summer phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Summer address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email (checked in the summer): \_\_\_\_\_

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## Registration: School Teams (page 2 of 2)

Name 4 (please print): \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Day phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Summer phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Summer address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email (checked in the summer): \_\_\_\_\_

Name 5 (please print): \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Day phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Summer phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Summer address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email (checked in the summer): \_\_\_\_\_

Name 6 (please print): \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Day phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Summer phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Summer address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email (checked in the summer): \_\_\_\_\_

Name 7 (please print): \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Day phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Summer phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Summer address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email (checked in the summer): \_\_\_\_\_

Copy this form for additional enrollments:

Return the registration form by **July 1, 2005**:

By mail to:  
*The Houston A+ Challenge*  
*FRSSI*  
*1415 Louisiana, Box 9*  
*Houston, Texas 77002*

By fax to:  
*FRSSI*  
*713-739-0166*

By email to:  
**[rsvp@houstonaplus.org](mailto:rsvp@houstonaplus.org)**

