

Theory of Action for Fort Worth's World-Class Schools Executive Summary

The Fort Worth Independent School District's Superintendent is leading an initiative to redesign, transform, and revitalize Fort Worth's 13 comprehensive high schools based upon a theory of action to create a portfolio of world-class schools. All of these schools will serve students throughout the attendance area of the District. As a result, students will:

- Be actively engaged as learners in a world-class educational system;
- Receive support in their personal development;
- Achieve technological competence;
- Attend schools that are structured as caring, and supportive learning communities;
- Be known by their teachers in a personalized environment that meets the individual needs of all students;
- Have highly competent teachers; and,
- Graduate from the Fort Worth Independent School District well prepared for post-secondary education and gainful employment through challenging careers, and able to be contributing citizens to Fort Worth and the nation.

Exactly, what is meant by a theory of action? In the report *High-Performing School Districts: Challenge, Support, Alignment, and Choice* published in June 2005, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation defines a theory of action for school districts as a collection of strategies that reflect a conscious choice about the type and quality of schools needed in a community. This would include the essential actions and support the District believes are necessary to move from concept to implementation in redesigning schools.

The Theory of Action for World-Class Schools (Theory of Action) provides the framework for accomplishing the goals outlined above and lays the groundwork for further FWISD reforms at all levels. The *Theory of Action* captures the energy, enthusiasm, vision, and commitment that the Board of Education, the Superintendent, the community, and the schools themselves have marshaled to address the needs of FWISD's students. Further, the *Theory of Action* will serve as the basis for a strategic plan that honors and builds upon the unique character, qualities, and resources of Fort Worth. The strategic plan will evolve from the *Theory of Action* and focus on strong academic rigor, personalized learning communities, and effective, accountable instruction and leadership. The *Theory of Action* will move from a concept paper to a strategic plan, to full implementation through the support of some of the nation's best thinkers and practitioners, the leadership of the schools and Central Administration, and the input and application of the local educational and neighborhood communities.

FWISD's 13 comprehensive high schools are Carter-Riverside, Arlington Heights, South Hills, Diamond Hill-Jarvis, Dunbar, Eastern Hills, North Side, Polytechnic, Paschal, Trimble Technical, Southwest, Western Hills, and Oscar Dean Wyatt.

These schools serve Fort Worth's approximately 19,000 high school students, some whose lives are heavily impacted by poverty, weakened family units, substance abuse, and violence in the larger community. When revitalized, these schools will serve as beacons of hope for all of FWISD's students. The 13 comprehensive high schools will be transformed into personalized learning communities based on current research designs. The school administration and faculty will receive specialized professional development and support focused on successfully implementing the *Theory of Action*. Each of the 13 schools will work in concert with a Central School Executive Committee composed of district and community representatives, under the direction of the Superintendent. The schools will develop individual *memoranda of understanding* that clearly define performance goals and expectations, delineate benefits and consequences for meeting the goals, and outline the resources and support that are required to help them achieve their goals and design necessary program evaluation. The 13 high schools will reflect a diversity of research-based best practices that engage students in learning and support their personal development.

Middle school principals will also participate in all professional development activities focused on school redesign. As the *Theory of Action* is implemented and successes are achieved, FWISD middle schools will begin planning for redesign in order to meet the needs of the District's middle school students.

While designs may differ, there are three over-arching principles that will be used to guide and assess the school reform implementation plan: *academic rigor in a thinking curriculum, personalization leading to an improved culture and climate, and effective, accountable leadership*. Each principle will have a subset of required factors.

Academic Rigor in a Thinking Curriculum

- Develop a culture of high expectations for all students, with a strong focus on reading, writing, mathematics, science, and life skills to meet the threshold needed to do college-level work, be effective citizens, and meet employers' expectations.
- Focus on a rigorous, relevant, standards-driven and effort-based curriculum aligned with state standards, career standards, and life skills, such as problem solving, resource management, and communication.
- Provide a proficiency-based curriculum that provides multiple options and opportunities for students to learn including acceleration, enrichment, and additional time on task for remediation.
- Develop plans to ensure that every student will have access to AP and similarly rigorous courses.
- Ensure that students and staff have access to appropriate technology.
- Create an early-college high school as well as provide extra academic and developmental support to students to enable them to achieve their goals.

Personalization Leading to an Improved Culture and Climate

- Create personalized learning communities where students and teachers are known to each other, where students and a team of teachers are together for core courses, and where physical facilities are of high quality.
- Develop transition strategies driven by best practices to lay a solid foundation for success in, and completion of high school, with special emphasis on the transition into 9th grade and from the 12th grade to college and/or career.
- Create a climate of respect and caring among administrators, teachers, and students that support learning, safety, and personal growth as well as to ensure that students have a role in decision making.
- Establish strong partnerships with researchers, parents, community organizations, employers, and colleges and universities to enrich, guide, and support reform efforts by developing ways to create collective responsibility for student success that is shared across all educational stakeholders – students, families, teachers, staff, administrators, community members, and employers.

Effective, Accountable Leadership

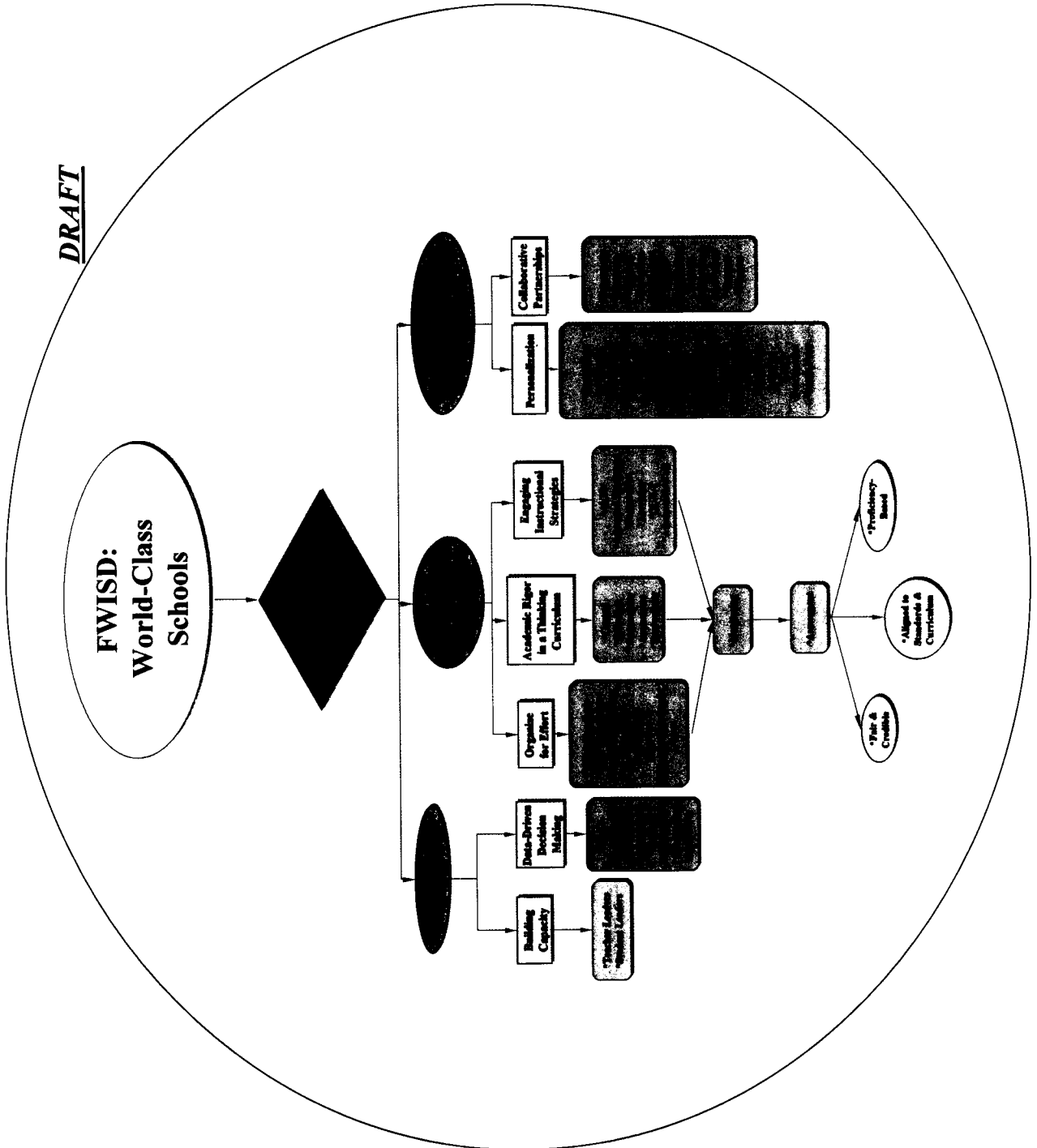
- Ensure that professional development is aligned with core goals, supported by professional learning communities, and strengthened by the belief in effort-based learning that asserts all students can learn at high levels. At a minimum, professional development should address readiness for reform, effective instructional techniques to improve teaching and learning, especially in reading, writing, mathematics, and science, and use of data and student work to drive reforms and support continuous improvement.
- Develop strong teacher leaders at the school level who communicate a clear focus on learning and high expectations for all students.
- Create time for teachers to plan and work together in their disciplines and with their personalized learning community/school teams.
- Establish baseline data, benchmarks for improvement, and procedures for documenting and supporting continuous improvement.
- Utilize technology as a tool to improve instruction, gain access to information, and provide better management and accountability.

In summary, *The Theory of Action for World-Class Schools* is designed to have measurable and sustained impact on the way students are educated within the Fort Worth ISD. The principles identified are not mutually exclusive; rather they must be viewed and implemented together in a way that collectively reinforces the success of each student in the Fort Worth Independent School District.

THEORY OF ACTION FOR WORLD-CLASS SCHOOLS

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