

AUSL CASE STUDY

TRANSFORMATION WACO

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP
CREATES SYSTEMIC
APPROACH TO TALENT
DEVELOPMENT IN WACO
EMPOWERMENT ZONE



BACKGROUND

Waco Independent School District (Waco ISD) serves nearly 15,000 students, PK-12.

As of the 2018-2019 school year, 77% of students were economically disadvantaged, nearly 90% were LatinX or African American, and 20% had limited English proficiency.¹

At the time, 70% of students were considered at risk of dropping out with significant equity gaps particularly in the highest poverty schools in the district.

In 2017, Waco ISD leadership identified a high potential opportunity when the Texas Legislature signed Senate Bill 1882 into law. The Bill offered school districts financial assistance to work collaboratively with new and existing partners to promote innovation and dramatically improve student outcomes. Leveraging SB 1882, district leader, Dr. Robin McDurham, worked with Waco ISD leadership and established a team to form Transformation Waco, an autonomous zone of five historically

underperforming schools working in partnership with Waco ISD. Dr. McDurham and her team's vision with Transformation Waco was to increase access to high quality, equitable education for all students in these 5 schools by:

- Providing robust wraparound supports.
- Leveraging strategic partnerships to support school turnaround and innovation.
- Empowering high quality school leaders with greater autonomy.

The Transformation Waco team also envisioned the creation of sustainable talent development structures that would serve as proof points for the rest of Waco ISD and other schools in the region.

Following a comprehensive search to identify a qualified partner, Transformation Waco selected the **Academy for Urban School Leadership's (AUSL)** – a leading school management organization and provider of strategic consulting to K-12 school districts. On-site visits by Transformation Waco leadership to specifically observe AUSL practices in action at several of their 31 Chicago schools of excellence helped cement the decision.

CHALLENGE

AUSL was selected to partner with **Transformation Waco** in 2019 in order to provide a combination of strategic supports Transformation Waco's five schools. Transformation Waco's five schools had received among the lowest ratings through the state accountability system, and had been designated as IR or "Improvement Required". AUSL's work in partnership with Transformation Waco centered on addressing the following needs:

- Clearly defining and norming on what equitable instruction looked like in practice.
- Providing high quality new teacher professional learning and incentives to cultivate skilled, diverse educators who could consistently facilitate the rigorous and equitable learning environment that all Waco students deserved.
- Developing and implementing an effective coaching model for teachers and a parallel set of expectations and coaching for school leaders.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE²

WE BELIEVE...

- All students, regardless of zip code or race are capable of changing the world.
- Great teachers are critical for unlocking that potential.
- Teachers require strategic and differentiated professional growth to be great.

SO WE WILL...

- Help districts serving low-income students and students of color build reliable, research-based systems for teacher growth.
- Through these systems, every teacher and those that support them, will know:
 - What equitable instruction looks like in practice.
 - Where they are in their development toward that goal.
 - The highest leverage areas to focus on next.

WHICH LEADS TO...

- Rapid and intentional teacher growth in the areas that matter most for students.
- Retention of great teachers.
- Accelerated student growth to proficiency.



"The residency program helped me keep my students engaged and increased their test scores as reflected in our 2019-2020 District-based assessment. It gave me the skills to look at the data to differentiate instruction, create engaging lessons, and help maintain a productive classroom environment."

— Kristin Prewitt, 8th Grade English Language Arts teacher, George Carver Middle School

SOLUTION

Starting in the summer of 2019, AUSL worked with Transformation Waco leadership to launch and support the following set of strategic initiatives that aligned with the Zone's needs:

- **Co-created a network-wide theory of change**, instructional vision, and priorities to guide the next two years of the work.
- **Implemented the Transformation Waco Urban Educator Residency Program:**
 - Recruited alternatively certified teachers committed to working in Waco ISD for multiple years.
 - Provided teachers with professional learning and customized coaching support from AUSL.
 - Helped first year teachers efficiently build the foundational sets of skills needed to deliver equitable instruction in an urban school setting.



RESULTS

A PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF INTERIM RESULTS FROM THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF THE PROGRAM'S TWO-YEAR TIMEFRAME IDENTIFIED SEVERAL LEADING INDICATORS:

- First year-teacher retention and instructional practice has improved.
- Of the 17 residents enrolled in the Urban Educator Residency Program, 16, or 94% of them, are planning to continue with the program next year.
- Resident feedback on the quality and impact of their professional learning and coaching is overwhelmingly positive.
- School leaders now have a common understanding – and language – for what instructional equity looks like in practice, and how to ensure the teacher coaching structures are there to make it a reality for students. Additionally, procedures and routines have been established that are now catalysts for a classroom culture of high expectations.
- Based on resident teacher observations, teacher-student interactions have improved substantially.

- **Designed and normed around a Transformation Waco-specific Teacher Development Roadmap:**
 - Grounded in research-based best practices for equitable instruction.
 - Designed and calibrated around a network-wide, student-centered classroom observation tool coherently aligned with the teacher evaluation system.
 - Established a growth-focused coaching roadmap that serves as a playbook of strategies and resources for supporting teachers at varying stages of development.
 - Created a data-driven system and supporting structures to inform and catalyze effective professional learning and coaching decisions at the network, school, and coach level.
- **Established a Development Roadmap for Principals,** including network-specific leadership competencies, and a differentiated professional learning and coaching approach.

“With the support of our state commissioner, we formed Transformation Waco to create a systemic approach to turning around our lowest performing schools. Our goal was to ensure that all of our students are productively accessing grade-level content every day. AUSL’s deep experience in school improvement, and its coherent approach to teacher development have played a key role in helping us institutionalize our vision.”

—Dr. Robin McDurham, CEO of Transformation Waco

NEXT STEPS

AUSL will continue to build on the growth already achieved in partnership with Transformation Waco through the balance of this school year, and into SY 20-21. This experience has provided a realistic initial proof point for other school districts that coherent talent development systems, with thoughtful implementation and change management, can provide a platform for school improvement and increased access to equitable learning environments for all students.



ABOUT AUSL ADVISORY SERVICES

Advisory Services provides strategic consulting to K-12 school districts. Our goal is to build district capacity to source, grow, and retain diverse, high-quality teachers who transform schools by providing consistent access to equitable, high-quality, learning experiences.

WE PARTNER COLLABORATIVELY WITH DISTRICTS TO:

- Establish and calibrate on a common, readily observable language for excellent, equitable instruction.
- Develop growth-focused learning trajectories and supporting structures that take the guesswork out of how to design and implement differentiated professional learning and coaching for teachers and school leaders.
- Provide differentiated professional learning and coaching experiences to accelerate teacher and school leader growth.

INTERESTED IN PARTNERING WITH US?

 Visit us at auslchicago.org

 Call: Martin Green, General Manager of Advisory Services: 773-534-0397

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AUSL is a school management organization that works tirelessly to deliver on the promise that all students have access to an excellent education, right in their own neighborhoods.

Source: ¹Texas Tribune (<https://schools.texastribune.org/districts/waco-isd/>). 2018-2019 School Year. ²Academy for Urban School Leadership, May, 2020.

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