



INNOVATIONS
IN
EDUCATION



CREATING SUCCESSFUL
Magnet Schools Programs

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT



INNOVATIONS
IN
EDUCATION



CREATING SUCCESSFUL
Magnet Schools Programs

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT

This report was produced under U.S. Department of Education Contract No. ED-01-CO-0012, Task Order D010, with WestEd. Sharon Horn served as the contracting officer's representative.

U.S. Department of Education

Rod Paige
Secretary

Office of Innovation and Improvement

Nina S. Rees
Assistant Under Secretary

Michael J. Petrilli
Associate Assistant Secretary for Innovation and Improvement

John Fiegel
Director, Parent Options and Information

Steve Brockhouse
Deputy Director, Parental Option and Information

September 2004

This report is in the public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted. While permission to reprint this publication is not necessary, the citation should be: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, *Innovations in Education: Creating Successful Magnet Schools Programs*, Washington, D.C., 2004.

To order copies of this report,

write to: ED Pubs, Education Publications Center, U.S. Department of Education, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398;

or **fax** your request to: (301) 470-1244;

or **e-mail** your request to: edpubs@inet.ed.gov;

or **call** in your request toll-free: 1-877-433-7827 (1-877-4-ED-PUBS). If 877 service is not yet available in your area, call 1-800-872-5327 (1-800-USA-LEARN). Those who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) or a teletypewriter (TTY), should call 1-800-437-0833;

or **order online** at: www.edpubs.org/.

This report is also available on the Department's Web site at: <http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/magnet/>.

On request, this publication is available in alternate formats, such as Braille, large print, or computer diskette. For more information, please contact the Department's Alternate Format Center at (202) 260-9895 or (202) 205-8113.



Contents

Foreword	v
Introduction	1
Starting a Magnet Program	7
Promoting the Program	15
Making It Easy for Parents	19
Fully Implementing the Program	25
Evaluating and Continually Improving	31
Acknowledgments	37
Appendix A: District Profiles	39
Duval County Public Schools, Florida	(41)
Hamilton County Schools, Tennessee	(43)
Hot Springs School District, Arkansas	(45)
Houston Independent School District, Texas	(47)
Montclair Public Schools, New Jersey	(49)
Wake County Public School System, North Carolina	(51)
Appendix B: Research Methodology	53
Appendix C: Resources	55
Notes	57

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Demographics of Six Profiled School Districts	2
Figure 2. Managing the Magnet Enrollment Mix	4
Figure 3. Montclair Elementary School Guide	10
Figure 4. Duval Memorandum of Agreement for Magnet Lead Teacher	13
Figure 5. Hamilton Billboard Advertisement	16
Figure 6. Wake Marketing and Recruiting Campaigns	17
Figure 7. Montclair School Visit Questions for Parents	18
Figure 8. Houston Magnet Dates and Deadlines	21
Figure 9. Hot Springs Magnet School Application	22
Figure 10. Hot Springs Magnet Program Activity Plan	29
Figure 11. Wake Middle-School Parent Survey	35
Figure 12. Study Scope and Guiding Questions	54

Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the fourth publication in the Innovations in Education series: *Creating Successful Magnet Schools Programs*. This series, published by my Department's Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII), identifies concrete, real-world examples of innovations in six important areas: public school choice, supplemental educational services, charter schools, magnet schools, alternative teacher certification, and routes to school leadership.

Some might argue that magnet schools hardly qualify as innovations. After all, they have been around for almost 40 years, when they were first introduced as a vehicle to increase racial integration and reduce minority group isolation in our schools. For a long time, they were the dominant form of public school choice in America. In many communities, magnets are the highest-performing schools in the system. From our perspective, while magnet schools continue to help schools address the purposes for which they were originally designed, they have taken on a new and promising dimension under *No Child Left Behind*: to provide additional options to children whose current schools are in need of improvement, and to serve as laboratories of successful educational practice.

As is the case with the implementation of any education reform initiative, no one is doing everything 100 percent right and no one has "all the answers." Within these pages, we have identified six school districts whose successful magnet programs offer a range of contexts, experiences, and perspectives that we hope will be helpful to others. The districts featured include two whose experience in implementing magnet schools spans more than a quarter century and one whose magnet schools experience began four short years ago. While all of these school districts have received support through the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program at one time or another, all have also demonstrated a capacity to sustain their schools after the federal funding ended. While working to decrease minority group isolation and offer innovative programs to children and parents, they have kept their primary focus on the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement. And perhaps most importantly, they have developed a way of doing business that allows them to continuously improve over the years.

While these districts should not be seen as "models," and while the case study methodology used herein does not provide the type of information about cause-and-effect that scientifically based research does, we do hope that other school districts can learn from the examples in this book. The common sense "promising practices" described in these chapters can help districts take their magnet school programs to the next level.

This booklet also fulfills the Congressional mandate within Section 5310(c) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by *No Child Left Behind*, to "collect and disseminate to the general public information on successful magnet school programs."

I congratulate the districts highlighted in this book, and express my strong hope that other districts will be able to learn from their experiences and emulate their successes.

Rod Paige, U.S. Secretary of Education
2004





Introduction

Magnet schools gained prominence in education in the 1970s as a tool for achieving voluntary desegregation in lieu of forced busing. An early study of magnet schools sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education¹ found that magnet schools were developed first in large urban school districts seeking to reduce racial isolation in their schools through voluntary means rather than with mandatory student assignment. The educational programs at these magnet schools were modeled on well-established specialty schools that offered advanced programs to selected students, such as Bronx School of Science, Boston Latin School, and Lane Tech in Chicago. Early magnet school curricular programs mirrored specialty school themes such as mathematics, science, and the performing arts. But magnet school programs were designed to be different in one very important way—magnet school enrollment was driven by student choice based on interest rather than selection of students by testing.

Some 30 years later, many districts continue to utilize magnet schools to reduce minority group isolation; however, in the intervening years, the purposes of magnet schools have continued to evolve and expand. When the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program was first authorized in 1985 its intent was twofold: reduce, eliminate, or prevent minority group isolation and provide instruction in magnet schools that would substantially strengthen students' knowledge and skills. Subsequently, expectations for magnet schools have broadened. Today, school districts are using them to accomplish a range of important and related purposes: enhancing student learning and narrowing the achievement gap, giving public school parents more choice in their child's education experience, and incubating innovative educational methods and practices that can raise the bar for all schools.

Magnet schools may be especially appealing to districts with schools in need of improvement under the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*, which specifically acknowledges their value for the purposes stated above.² For local education agencies contemplating adoption or expansion of this powerful education option, this guide presents experiences and lessons learned from six districts with successful magnet programs. (Basic statistics about these districts appear in figure 1.)

The theory behind magnet schools as a desegregation tool is simple: Create a school so distinctive and appealing—so magnetic—that it will draw a diverse range of families from throughout the community eager to enroll their children even if it means having them bused to a different and, perhaps, distant neighborhood. To do so, the school must offer an educational option—

FIGURE 1. Demographics of Six Profiled School Districts

	Districtwide Enrollment	Magnet Enrollment	Total Number of Schools	Number of Magnet Schools	District Size (square miles)	Population Type ³	Student Ethnicity ⁴	English Learners ⁵	Subsidized Meals ⁶	Special Needs ⁷
Duval	126,633	19,927 (16%)	178	61	850	Large Central City	46% White 43% African American 5% Hispanic 3% Asian/Pacific Islander 2% American Indian 3% Multiracial	2%	49%	18%
Hamilton	40,655	6,038 (15%)	80	13	554	Urban Fringe of Mid-Size City	63% White 33% African American 2% Hispanic 2% Asian	1%	46%	16%
Hot Springs	3,555	3,382 (95%)	8	6*	36	Mid-size Central City	50% White 41% African American 7% Hispanic 1% Asian 1% Native	7%	72%	15%
Houston	211,499	37,562 (18%)	307	108	301	Large Central City	57% Hispanic 31% African American 9% White 3% Asian	29%	80%	10%
Montclair	6,340	4,600 (73%)	11	10**	6.25	Urban Fringe of Large City	48% White 42% African American 5% Hispanic 4% Asian	1%	17%	18%
Wake	108,970	25,130 (23%)	127	43	832	Urban Fringe of Large City	60% White 27% African American 6% Hispanic 4% Asian 2% Multiracial	4%	22%	23%

All data was provided by the districts and was current as of June 2004, unless otherwise noted. Totals may equal more than 100% due to rounding.

* Hot Springs is essentially an all magnet district. The two schools that are not magnets are alternative schools for students with special needs.

** Only the high school in Montclair is not a magnet school. However, the high school functions in accordance with the magnet philosophy.

a specialty—that is not available in other area schools. Early magnet school research⁸ identified five common magnet school themes—the fine, applied, or performing arts; the sciences; social studies occupations; general academics; and traditional and fundamental schools. But a look across district magnet programs today reveals a much wider variety of curricular specialties and educational approaches reflecting the idiosyncratic interests and resources of their communities. Among the curricular themes or instructional approaches currently found at magnet schools are aerospace education, communications, culinary arts, environmental science, international studies, International Baccalaureate, language immersion, law enforcement, military science, Montessori, and Paideia.

In recent decades, the school desegregation picture has become more complex. The number of school districts still implementing court-required desegregation plans has been declining, and court cases and policy decisions have narrowed districts' ability to use race as a factor in student assignment decisions. Instead, socioeconomic status has become important in defining student diversity. In some districts, minority students have become the majority across all public schools, and many urban districts have been losing increasing numbers of middle- and upper-class students of all races and ethnicities to private and parochial schools or to surrounding suburbs. Yet throughout this period, magnets have remained a useful tool for reducing, eliminating or preventing racial isolation in schools. (Figure 2 provides information on managing enrollment.)

Beyond desegregation

A more diverse student population is just the beginning of what magnets can accomplish because, as one

researcher has noted, magnet schools are the "off-spring" not just of "the search for racial and ethnic equity in public education" but also of the "quest for improved teaching and learning."⁹ Their theme-based approach promotes many of the factors associated with effective schools, chiefly, innovation in program and practice, staff and curricular coherence, increased parent and community involvement, and greater student engagement. In the best of magnet schools, this adds up to higher student achievement.

Magnet schools can also promote healthy competition among district schools. Faced with the prospect of losing students to magnets, many neighborhood schools examine the competition to understand the attraction while, at the same time, examining their own program to see how they might improve it. The superintendent of one magnet district highlighted in this guide says the belief that "our school is as good as yours" has had a "ripple effect across the district," with traditional schools pushing themselves harder. Some adopt or adapt magnet school principles and practices to better serve their own students. As this happens, magnets, in turn, must ratchet up their own efforts in order to remain distinctive. It is little wonder, then, that many districts that began their magnet program as part of a required or voluntary desegregation effort have come to see it—and expand it—as part of a larger school improvement effort.

While student diversity is still "desirable and sought" in Houston (Texas) Independent School District's extensive magnet program, its manager notes that Houston's "primary concern" today is having "quality programs that will engage students in the learning process, leading to higher achievement. Because students disengage

FIGURE 2. Managing the Magnet Enrollment Mix

Two important tools in a magnet program assignment system, often used in conjunction with one another, are attendance zones and a lottery system. The best way to understand magnet school assignment is to start by thinking of a traditional neighborhood school system, in which each school has an attendance area or “walk zone” and students who live within it are automatically assigned to that school. These students are sometimes called “zone” or “base” students. This guide will generally refer to them as neighborhood students. Magnet schools differ in that many have no attendance zone and if they do have one, it controls only a portion of a school’s enrollment.

At a magnet with no attendance zone, all who want to attend must apply and applicants can live anywhere in the district. (Some district magnet programs also accept applicants from outside the district.) At a magnet school that has an attendance zone, some portion of the school’s enrollment is reserved for students who live in the zone, with the remaining seats open to applicants from outside the neighborhood.

Decisions about whether to create a magnet school with no attendance zone or, instead, to give preference to students who live in an attendance zone with a lottery for other openings are tied to district enrollment goals, location of the school, and neighborhood interest. If a new magnet is planned for a largely low-income Hispanic neighborhood that wants its children to attend the school, the district might use an attendance zone preference so the school can serve neighborhood families while avoiding ethnic or socioeconomic isolation.

A district’s system for choosing from among magnet school applicants is its other tool for managing magnet enrollment. Many magnet schools have their own application criteria. Performing arts schools, for example, tend to require student auditions. But districts need a system for choosing among qualified applicants when their number exceeds available magnet seats. Most magnet programs use a lottery system. In a random lottery system, the district’s marketing efforts are intended to attract an applicant pool for each school that is representative of community demographics. In such circumstances, a random drawing of names or assigned numbers will result in an equally representative student enrollment. If a district isn’t convinced that its applicant pool for a given school is representative, it might use a weighted lottery, which gives added weight (i.e., an extra lottery number or two) to applicants who represent characteristics sought in the enrollment mix, such as students from low-income families. Recent court decisions have limited the use of race in student assignment to attain diversity, making clear, for example, that race-neutral approaches must be seriously considered first.

from learning long before they drop out of school, we are very interested in providing focused programs that will keep them engaged in learning, keep them in school, and prepare them for their future."

To that end, Houston allows individual schools to apply to become magnets, theorizing that when a magnet is "home grown"—conceived and planned by school staff, parents and students, and other stakeholders—engagement is almost a given and, regardless of its enrollment composition, the school contributes to the reduction of racial isolation in the long run. "Segregation in Houston is primarily the result of economics or a language barrier," the administrator explains. "The solution—or at least a partial solution—is increased educational opportunities, the very thing our magnet programs are trying to provide."

Hamilton County (Tennessee) Schools, which serves Chattanooga and surrounding areas, offers an example of how magnets are sometimes used to serve multiple goals. Coinciding with and in support of a city-driven urban renewal effort, the district recently built two magnet schools in low-income neighborhoods of color adjacent to Chattanooga's downtown business center and converted two older downtown neighborhood schools into magnets. All forms of diversity remain a primary goal for the program, and each of the downtown magnets has its own attendance zone, designed to ensure that about half its students are from the neighborhood. But the schools embody some other aims as well.

Like many districts serving urban areas, Hamilton had been steadily losing students to local parochial and private schools and to the surrounding suburbs. Its downtown magnet themes were conceived to

recapture some of these students. Two of the magnet schools are museum schools (a K–5 and a 6–8) that work closely with the area's seven museums. Of the other two, one focuses on classical studies (literature, art, history, architecture, and music) and the other bases its instruction on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences.

In addition to adopting themes thought to be attractive to middle- and upper-income-level families, the district has labeled these magnet programs as "work-site" schools, giving added weight in its lottery to applicants whose parents work in the targeted area. The hope is that the opportunity to have their children nearby during the work day will be an added attraction for suburban commuters who like the idea of spending more time with their children as they commute and want to be involved with their children's school, an experience that would be out of reach, literally, if their children attended a traditional neighborhood school. In this vision, schools and their students benefit from greater volunteerism, the district benefits by stemming the outward flow of higher socioeconomic families, and the downtown benefits from workers who, with their children nearby, are more likely to spend time and money in the area.

Magnet terminology

Any general discussion about magnet schools requires some clarification of terminology. In addition to different terms being used in different districts, the same terms are sometimes used to mean slightly different things from one district to another. The term magnet program, for example, is used in a variety of very different ways. For discussion's sake, this guide will generally use *magnet program* to refer to the district-level infrastructure

for managing magnet schools and, when the context makes it clear, to a magnet school's instructional program. It will use the terms *magnet school* and *magnets* for all schools or instructional programs that have a unique theme or focus conceived to attract students and parents for the primary goal of creating a representative student population.

Case study sites and methodology

The six districts profiled in this guide are Duval County Public Schools, Florida; Hamilton County Schools, Tennessee; Hot Springs School District, Arkansas; Houston Independent School District, Texas; Montclair Public Schools, New Jersey; and Wake County Public School System, North Carolina. Appendix A presents a narrative summary of each district's context and programs.

This guide is based on a study that was informed by a literature review, interviews with both researchers and educators, and the input of an Advisory Panel consisting of researchers, associations leaders, and educators who work with schools, districts, and states on magnet implementation. The six districts studied and highlighted here were selected from a larger set of 16 possible sites. The exploratory, descriptive approach used

to examine the magnet programs in these districts is adapted from the four-phase benchmarking process used by the American Productivity and Quality Center (see appendix B for further details). This guide is adapted from the full research report and also incorporates information from research literature and other sources. Results from specific district practices, district rationales for what they did, patterns across districts, and common sense, along with the initial framework, led to the themes and actions highlighted in this guide.

This descriptive research process suggests promising practices—ways to do things that others have found helpful or lessons they have learned about what not to do—and practical “how-to” guidance. This is not the kind of experimental research that can yield valid causal claims about what works. Readers should judge for themselves the merits of these practices, based on their understanding of why they should work, how they fit the local context, and what happens when they actually try them.

This guide is organized around five action areas: getting started, promoting the program, making it easy for parents, fully implementing the program, and evaluating and continually improving.



Starting a Magnet Program

While fostering student diversity as a path to equitable education remains the prime reason districts start a magnet program, as already noted, magnet schools have matured in practice to become much more than remedial tools for desegregation. Among other things, well-developed and locally supported magnets can, in Dentler's words, "provide courses of study that barely existed before the magnet's establishment," "offer districts local demonstrations of quality that may then be emulated by regular schools," and, "contribute substantially to a district's attainment of full racial and ethnic equity."¹⁰

Putting together an attractive instructional program that can accomplish these aims at an individual school is a complex, multistep undertaking. It requires creating a focused vision and program mission that will drive a robust implementation plan and sustain commitment. It requires dealing with issues of funds and transportation, selecting strong leaders and quality staff willing to work long hours, getting people in the community involved, and recruiting resources.

Some districts with long-standing programs have created a structure that enables individual school communities (i.e., some combination of principal, teachers, parents, students, and other site-specific stakeholders) to transform their school into a magnet. But a district initiating a magnet program with multiple schools will profit from centralizing the planning process in a "magnet office." In developing their magnet school programs, most of the districts highlighted here also created a magnet school research task force to get things started.

A good first step for such planning groups is to learn from others. By researching successful magnet programs and schools, by finding out what themes have been particularly successful elsewhere, a district—and any school that wishes to become a magnet—can often avoid having to "reinvent the wheel." It can also be helpful to obtain copies of magnet program or magnet school plans from other districts, if possible, or consult with members of their magnet teams.

Magnet Schools of America¹¹ suggests that a comprehensive magnet school plan include vision and mission statements, educational goals, objectives and strategies, curriculum or theme design, implementation steps, marketing and recruitment strategies, budget and funding plans, timelines, policies, professional development plans, and monitoring and evaluation plans.

Districts can also benefit from contacting superintendents, magnet specialists, and magnet principals

in districts of similar size and circumstances who can share lessons learned about which themes have worked best and why, how to set up data infrastructures, parent communication processes, and transportation. Hamilton sent staff and other stakeholders to magnet schools in other districts, both near and far, to get ideas and solicit help in planning their own magnet schools.

Choose appealing and sustainable themes

How do you go about identifying magnet themes that will each attract substantial numbers of students of different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds and that, collectively, will help create what one magnet program director calls “a workable system of choice, instructional success, and thriving community partnerships, with the added benefit of racially integrated schools”? Whatever the catalyst for a district magnet program—whether resistance to integration, the need to improve poorly performing schools, parent dissatisfaction with existing choices, declining enrollments, or anything else—the search for effective themes should always start in the same way: with research. It’s a process of looking and listening, says one district administrator: “Look at the data —city and school demographics, school performance, available capacity, teacher turnover, etc.—to find focal points. Then listen to parents, specifically underrepresented parents.” Good ideas can also flow from existing advisory groups and networks, chambers of commerce, local colleges and universities, magnet school experts, and other districts that operate magnet schools. But if parents aren’t on board, individual magnet schools and a district’s magnet program might take off, but they won’t go anywhere. Get parents interested, then follow through by delivering high-quality educational programs to build and sustain that initial interest and excitement.

Prior to starting its magnet program in 2000, Hot Springs had been hemorrhaging students at an average rate of about 100 a year since 1969, its enrollment dropping from 6,000 to 2,800. Magnets have helped reverse that trend. In 2003, the district gained 134 students. Today Hot Springs serves 3,555 students, of which some 3,300 attend a magnet school. Key to its success are themes embraced by parents. The district initially consulted with a magnet school expert—the former director of the nonprofit Magnet Schools of America—to identify distinctive curricular or instructional themes that had been successful in other districts. But knowing what has worked in another community doesn’t guarantee local success. To be more certain that its magnet schools would appeal to its hometown audience, Hot Springs surveyed local elementary school parents to gauge their relative interest in the various themes proposed by the consultant. Survey results guided the final decisions.

“Start with the customer,” advises one magnet program administrator. In fact, districts studied for this guide have typically sought broad community input, through surveys—some, like Hot Springs, offering a particular list of themes to react to, others asking more open-ended questions—and through interviews and focus groups. During a year of research and planning for its magnet program, Duval surveyed every parent in the county, asking what types of programs they were interested in for their children and what factors might prompt them to move their children away from their neighborhood school. Duval used survey results, along with other information, to create school themes; it also used the results to inform its marketing effort for the program.

In Montclair, which had tried and abandoned several desegregation plans before embracing the magnet concept,

the initial survey yielded some pretty straightforward results. Polling parents to determine what type of school would serve their needs showed that residents in the city's predominantly minority south end wanted a "back to basics" theme, while parents in the north end, most of whom were European American, wanted a "gifted and talented" focus. The district responded by placing a gifted and talented school in the south end to draw white students to a school that had been populated mostly by students of color, and placing a "back to basics" program in the north end to attract youngsters to what had been a predominantly white school. Eventually, the entire district went the magnet route, creating an array of choices. (See figure 3 for Montclair's descriptions of its magnet elementary schools.)

In picking themes, parent and student interest is just part of the picture. Identifying a curricular or instructional magnet that, as one administrator says, "will make them want to come" is of little use if a district doesn't have the wherewithal, including teacher interest and expertise, to sustain the theme and use it to raise student achievement. A central question in setting up a magnet school must always be, can you deliver? Answering that question requires looking internally at interest and resources. Hot Springs gave up plans to open a language school when it became clear it would have a difficult time finding enough qualified teachers in the district. It's also important to assess and recruit expertise in the community. In setting up their museum magnet schools, both Hamilton and Wake County profited from museum staff who worked with school staff to develop and flesh out their curriculum.

However winning a chosen curricular theme—ecological futures and global issues, fine arts, or science

and technology—in every case that theme must be grounded in a school vision and mission with educational goals and objectives, a set of shared values, and guiding principles that shape the entire program and help keep it on track.

Select and develop quality staff

Research reveals that while the magnet theme is important to the success and viability of a school, the more critical factor is having teachers, administrators, and board members committed to the theme, bringing "conviction, enthusiasm, and readiness to contribute."¹² All six districts have a district-level administrator focused either completely on the magnet program or on magnet schools as part of a broader choice program. Each also has an internal decision-making structure to coordinate and support the magnet effort. In one district the prime mover is the superintendent. But however the particular district's infrastructure is set up to support magnets, all involved in these magnet programs agree that success depends to a great extent on choosing the right principal for each school: a strong instructional leader who is passionate, committed, and hard working, who can cultivate teacher buy-in and ownership, establishing a culture of collaboration, while reaching out to the community. "That relationship with the community is so critical, and to build it, you've got to believe in what you're doing," says one district administrator. Parents, in fact, often list the principal as a major reason for choosing a given magnet school.

In many, although not all, instances, magnet schools are developed to take the place of an existing, fully staffed neighborhood school. In the process, the district often reconstitutes the neighborhood school and requires

FIGURE 3. Montclair Elementary School Guide

<p>Bradford School</p> <p>Theme: Communication Arts and Sciences</p> <p>K-5</p> <p>Hours: 8:50 AM to 3:05 PM</p> <p>Early Dismissal: 1:40 PM</p> <p>87 Mt. Hebron Road Upper Montclair, NJ (973) 509-4155</p> <p>Ms. Catherine Vitone, Principal</p> <p>School size: 360 students</p> <p>Offers students a communication-rich environment through the innovative use of technology. Strives to enhance child's ability to gather information, communicate, problem solve, think critically, and develop life-long learning skills.</p> <p>Notes:</p>	<p>Edgemont Montessori</p> <p>Theme: Montessori School</p> <p>K-5</p> <p>Hours: 8:20 AM to 2:35 PM</p> <p>Early Dismissal: 1:10 PM</p> <p>20 Edgemont Road Montclair, NJ (973) 509-4162</p> <p>Dr. Aduinni Anderson, Principal</p> <p>School size: 306 students</p> <p>The only public Montessori school in the State of New Jersey. Offers 13 "prepared" learning environments. Each class is characterized by a multi-graded/mixed-aged approach designed to meet the development needs and capabilities of each child.</p> <p>Notes: *English as a second language school</p>	<p>Northeast School</p> <p>Theme: Global Studies</p> <p>K-5</p> <p>Hours: 8:20 AM to 2:35 PM</p> <p>Early Dismissal: 1:10 PM</p> <p>603 Grove Street Upper Montclair, NJ (973) 509-4242</p> <p>Mrs. Kathy Lindsay, Principal</p> <p>School size: 418 students</p> <p>Program features three main components: Core Academic Subjects, Global Studies, and World Language. Program stresses cultural diversity, global economy politics, environmental concerns and knowledge of global trends and issues.</p> <p>Notes: *English as a second language school</p>	<p>Rand School</p> <p>Theme: Family and Environment</p> <p>K-5</p> <p>Hours: 8:50 AM to 3:05 PM</p> <p>Early Dismissal: 1:40 PM</p> <p>176 N. Fullerton Ave. Montclair, NJ (973) 509-4255</p> <p>Mrs. Evelyn Gonzalez-Spiwey, Interim Principal</p> <p>School size: 380 students</p> <p>Recognizes the uniqueness and diversity of all families and works to include this philosophy into the development of the whole child. Draws upon strengths of its families and sees them as partners in and out of the school setting. Families encouraged to share talents.</p> <p>Notes:</p>	<p>Watchung School</p> <p>Theme: Science and Technology</p> <p>K-5</p> <p>Hours: 8:50 AM to 3:05 PM</p> <p>Early Dismissal: 1:40 PM</p> <p>14 Garden Street Montclair, NJ (973) 509-4259</p> <p>Mrs. Rita Miragliotta, Principal</p> <p>School size: 422 students</p> <p>Offers an applied learning, inquiry-based program that encourages children to learn through active exploration. Students are given knowledge to negotiate a world where technology and science are the tools utilized to retrieve, interpret, and manipulate information.</p> <p>Notes:</p>	<p>Nishuane School</p> <p>Theme: Gifted and Talented</p> <p>K-2</p> <p>Hours: 9:20 AM to 3:35 PM</p> <p>Early Dismissal: 2:10 PM</p> <p>32 Cedar Avenue Montclair, NJ (973) 509-4222</p> <p>Mrs. Felice Harrison, Principal</p> <p>School size: 584 students</p> <p>School's responsibility is to identify and nurture children's special abilities based on belief that all have special gifts and talents. Offers a wide variety of choices so students of varying abilities, interests, and backgrounds discover areas of interest particular to their talents.</p> <p>Notes:</p>	<p>Hillside School</p> <p>Theme: Gifted and Talented</p> <p>3-5</p> <p>Hours: 9:20 AM to 3:35 PM</p> <p>Early Dismissal: 2:10 PM</p> <p>54 Orange Road Montclair, NJ (973) 509-4200</p> <p>Mr. Michael Chiles, Principal</p> <p>School size: 583 students</p> <p>Continuation of the Gifted and Talented theme, school presumes all students have special abilities. School provides students with a positive environment where responsibility and maturity are stressed. Strong performing arts program and academic program offered.</p> <p>Notes:</p>
--	---	--	--	--	--	--

2003-2004

the existing principal and staff to reapply if they want to work at the magnet. The principal at a new magnet school is typically afforded a measure of autonomy not found in traditional schools, given the freedom he or she needs to recruit and hire teachers—disregarding seniority, for example—who are a good match to the school's theme and programmatic philosophy, including having the requisite motivation, commitment, and knowledge to fully implement the theme.

To achieve the innovative goals of magnets, teachers in turn often have more autonomy than their local counterparts in shaping curriculum and instruction, a collective effort that requires adequate planning time. The aim in Hot Springs, says an administrator, is to have "school staffs that are integrated, experienced, committed, capable, and willing to spend extra time with students, and who believe that all children can learn to high standards." Hamilton principals are quick to credit teachers for the success of the program. Says one principal, "I try to empower teachers, to get good people dedicated to students and our philosophy, and just let them go." A Montclair administrator says of the magnet teachers, "If you throw an idea at them they run with it." In these schools, leadership is not the role solely of the principal; leadership functions are clearly expected from other staff.

In any new school, a principal and teachers are likely to need to spend more time planning and coordinating than do their counterparts at a more established school. Add in the need to hone expertise in a particular theme and to align thematic standards with required state standards, and the time demands grow even more intense. Yet districts included in this study do not offer financial incentives for staff to participate in these schools. The

attraction seems to be the intrinsic value in the freedom created by the program theme—that and, in some cases, the rare opportunity to share personal enthusiasm or expertise with students and fellow educators on a daily basis. Magnet schools have no difficulty recruiting teacher applicants. Teachers in Hamilton County drive over 40 miles, some from neighboring Georgia, to teach there. One principal recently received 39 applications for two openings, despite the fact that in many instances, and especially in a school's start-up phase, magnet teachers work longer hours. As one teacher expressed it, "For magnet teachers, it's a passion, not a job." Some districts allow schools to involve teachers themselves in the hiring process, an important step toward building the cohesive culture essential for success.

Cultivate community resources

The process of getting people involved in a magnet school begins in the early stages of creating the curricular or instructional focus. Community partners not only serve as excellent resources in developing the magnet theme, as did the staff at Hamilton's and Wake's various museums, but they can become indispensable in implementing the theme, offering time, equipment, space, services, and money. Wake created a number of university-themed magnet schools that are set up to collaborate with North Carolina State's 10 colleges. One of the magnet middle schools is actually located on a campus. Across all of the university-theme schools, students, parents, and teachers have frequent opportunities to engage with college faculty and students and to use college facilities. Similarly, Wake's museum magnet school partners with several area museums that provide students with opportunities to learn from interacting with curators and setting up exhibits with museum

personnel. As in Hamilton, local museum staff members also work with teachers, reviewing the standard curriculum to see how art, science, or history exhibits might be integrated into it. In fact, staff at a small museum that focuses on African American history from the Civil War to civil rights developed a curriculum that the school plans to use for its eighth-graders.

One Hot Springs magnet is an "Explorer School," one of 50 in the country that is closely connected to the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA). NASA supports the school's aerospace education and environmental studies theme by offering opportunities and resources that would be beyond the reach of most magnet schools, let alone most traditional schools. For example, students get to attend space camp in Alabama.

Getting people involved early also includes recruiting parents. Latch on to key parents to assist and serve as active supporters. One Duval parent advises finding the "worker-bee parents."

A key role of magnet school leaders, then, is to engage the community, recruit partners, and bring in community resources. Says one district administrator, "Especially for magnets, the principal has to have a passion for the theme and a willingness to be out and about 'selling' the program, to be highly interactive with parents and local businesses." Hamilton has found that principals who can't do this are not effective leaders. Principals who can are invaluable. One magnet school principal in Hamilton solicited the involvement of a local Best Buy store, which initially provided a \$2,400 grant to buy digital cameras for the school, which has a math, science, and technology theme. The partnership has grown from there, with Best Buy employees

now volunteering to help conduct seminars for the principal's book club, in which students are invited to read common books and attend a seminar and party each month. The store also has donated CD players to use as incentives for students.

In turn, principals must pass this entrepreneurial, marketing mind-set on to their staff. This principal told her teachers, "Anyone who walks in the building has something to offer, and it's our job to find out what that is." The challenge for a district, of course, is to identify and recruit such leaders for their magnet schools.

Define special roles

A school's "magnet" function requires giving serious thought and definition to the special positions needed to carry out its theme. Depending on the theme (e.g., performing arts, aeronautical science), the school might require on-site experts. But some of the nontraditional tasks necessary in operating magnet schools, such as marketing, can be decentralized to individual schools, centralized at the district level, or shared between district and sites. As a district's magnet program grows, so may the need for more specialized roles.

Overall, districts and school sites agree that having someone serve as magnet coordinator in each school is important, whether that individual serves as a full-time coordinator or is a lead teacher who does part-time coordination work. There is growing recognition in education that if principals, in general, are to be effective instructional leaders, other leadership and administrative responsibilities traditionally expected of them must be shared. This is especially true for magnet school principals who, in addition to their general administrative responsibilities, must ensure that their

FIGURE 4. Duval Memorandum of Agreement for Magnet Lead Teacher (Page 1 of 3)

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

This Memorandum of Agreement intends to define the partnership to be entered into between a *Magnet Lead Teacher* and the Duval County Public Schools. The purpose of this agreement is to further the successful implementation of magnet schools and programs in Duval County Public Schools. This document describes the scope of the work and specific performance goals that the person selected to fill the role of a Magnet Lead Teacher may elect to achieve. Any magnet school is eligible to participate in this agreement.

General Statement of the Scope of the Work

The Magnet Lead Teacher position is intended to provide support and assistance to the principal of a magnet school. It is recognized that the Magnet Lead Teacher's primary area of responsibility is in the area of marketing and recruitment, but that other skills related to curriculum development and magnet program implementation will be incorporated into the expectations of the role. As such, during the time that is dedicated to the fulfillment of responsibilities related to this contract, the Magnet Lead Teacher's role will include the following overall tasks:

- 1. MARKETING**
The Magnet Lead Teacher prepares and executes a marketing plan to inform the public about the specific magnet program at the school. The marketing plan includes specific goals, tasks, dates, and responsibilities. It should include all district-initiated marketing efforts, as well as those tailored to the specific needs of the magnet school.
- 2. RECRUITMENT**
The Magnet Lead Teacher executes the marketing plan so that students are encouraged to enroll in the program.
- 3. COMMUNICATION**
The Magnet Lead Teacher coordinates communication about magnet program activities, both within the school community and with the Magnet Office. Communication channels include presentations at faculty meetings, publication of a magnet newsletter, briefings to parent groups, service on the School Improvement Team and/or School Advisory Council, and attendance at district-level Magnet Lead Teacher meetings.
- 4. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT/MANAGEMENT**
The Magnet Lead Teacher assists in the development of understanding of the program, works to strengthen its curriculum, and assists the principal in its management. This aspect of the lead teacher role is to be shared with the principal and other staff, and though it is not the major component for compensation, it may be critical to the health of the program.

school's theme-focused curriculum aligns with state academic standards, must market the school to parents and the community, and must generate supportive partnerships. A magnet coordinator can help with marketing, transportation issues, volunteer coordination, parent communication and other tasks that are especially important in magnet schools.

In Hot Springs, magnet coordinators at the various schools work with each other to help ensure thematic coherence as students move from one campus up to the next, progressing from elementary school through high school. They also assist with the student application and recruitment process. Duval's magnet coordinator oversees application logistics. Hot Springs High School, whose themes are arranged in "Career Clusters," has a technical education coordinator who focuses solely on student interests in careers, job shadowing, and other career-related activities. Each Duval magnet school identifies a magnet lead teacher who commits to assisting the principal in four areas: marketing, recruitment, communication, and program development and management. These expectations are formalized

and detailed in a Memorandum of Agreement signed by the teacher and the district (see figure 4).

Build district support

Districts stress that sustaining quality leadership and staff commitment at magnet schools requires a culture of support from the highest levels of the district. "One of the big reasons we're able to be so successful," says one principal, "is that we're in a school system that really supports the magnet program. When I was hired the superintendent let us reconstitute the school so I was able to hand pick the staff, which is incredible." In each of the districts in this guide the school board's strong commitment, even if it has had to be cultivated, is cited as critical to magnet success. Montclair's school board, for example, has demonstrated support by making the very difficult decision to eliminate the pre-kindergarten program in order to free space and funds to help preserve the magnet program. In Houston, the school board has adopted specific magnet school policies, including such details as entrance, probation, and exit procedures.

SUMMARY FOR Starting a Magnet Program

- » Choose appealing and sustainable themes
- » Select and develop quality staff
- » Cultivate community resources
- » Define special roles
- » Build district support



Promoting the Program

Many consider parent access to information the most critical variable in achieving diversity in and across magnet schools. Studies¹³ document differential access or use of information by parents. The more aware parents are of options, the more likely they are to pursue them. Thus race-neutral recruitment targeted to those community sectors from which a magnet wants to draw students is absolutely key. Every district develops aggressive strategies for promoting and marketing their schools, and schools are expected to do the same. Duval advises schools to "scream your theme." Such efforts typically include developing descriptive brochures, distributing magnet program information to students, mailing information to parents, offering magnet school tours, and hosting large-scale, multischool recruitment events such as a magnet fair.

Market your schools

Duval partners with an outside marketing firm, which works closely with site staff in preparing a brochure for each magnet school. One of the first tasks each year for Duval's marketing specialist is to consult with the lead teacher at each magnet school, who in addition to having program development responsibilities, is charged with formulating and executing a marketing plan for the school. Duval's district-level marketing effort focuses on two major events. The first is "Magnet Mania," an annual trade show of sorts for its magnet schools where students and parents can learn about the various options. Magnet Mania began in 1991, with much thought given to finding a convenient location that would attract and accommodate the most attendees. It is held on the Jacksonville Fairgrounds, which has enough parking to serve the 10,000–12,000 people who attend annually. As a complement to Magnet

Mania, the district also produces a catalog containing extensive information about each magnet school. It is structured similarly to college catalogs with their thorough description of various programs.

Duval's second major marketing effort is aimed at eighth graders as they make decisions about where to attend high school. Over a three-day period, the district buses each eighth-grader to a 20-minute session at three different magnet schools of his or her choice. Students complete an interest inventory in advance to help them narrow their choices of which schools to investigate during this period. Other Duval marketing efforts include approximately six parent information sessions a year, print advertising, and informational videos. Duval also has its guidance counselors visit each magnet school so they can accurately advise students and parents from the regular schools.

FIGURE 5. Hamilton Billboard Advertisement



Hamilton hired an agency to teach principals marketing techniques and to help them conduct focus groups and surveys. It also uses every possible avenue to lure parents and their students: producing shopping-mall recruitment fairs, offering free speakers to civic and religious groups, and providing magnet staff for guest spots on talk-radio programs. It also uses local billboard advertising (see figure 5).

Wake uses an extensive marketing campaign to inform the public about its distinguished magnet program options. Two magnet program staff plan recruiting activities throughout the school year. These activities include organizing and advertising the application acceptance period, a magnet school fair, magnet school open house sessions, evening magnet information sessions, and monthly parent information sessions. The marketing and recruitment staff also network with local businesses, real estate agencies, and government organizations, present at local childcare centers and moms groups, and participate in local camp and education fairs and festivals.

The magnet marketing and recruitment staff work closely with Wake's Communications Department to create and produce a magnet brochure, a magnet web page, a video, a monthly magnet newsletter, flyers, posters, direct mailings, news releases, media advisories, and television and radio interviews. Figure 6 lists Wake's various marketing and recruitment efforts.

Montclair's choice department conducts separate magnet program orientation sessions for elementary and middle school parents, which are followed by school visits during both regular school and evening hours. Each school also has a unique pamphlet describing its theme, core curriculum, special programs, and other highlights. The schools also publish catalogues with more extensive views of what they offer.

Houston produces a magnet program open house at the district administration building, followed by "Magnet Awareness Week," whose activities include scheduled tours of prospective schools.

FIGURE 6. Wake Marketing and Recruiting Campaigns

Target specific organizations	Present at meetings and events	Create and distribute marketing materials
Child care centers	Festivals and fairs	Fliers
Public libraries	Pre-K information sessions	Magnet newsletters
Grocery stores	Parent/Teacher Association meetings	Newspaper ads
Doctor's offices	Systemwide conferences	Marketing videos
Churches	Annual Magnet Fair	TV and radio interviews
Women's organizations, mother's groups		Magnet Web site/ intranet
Chamber of commerce		
Visitor's bureau		
Education foundations		
Realtors' association		

Involve others as co-promoters

Some districts form local advisory councils as a means of getting folks involved and spreading the word. To generate more parent involvement in the magnet program, Wake created a parents' advisory council, with one member serving as a liaison to the district's magnet office. This volunteer is trained by the district in key magnet-related issues such as school budgets and transportation and, in turn, shares this information with other members of the advisory council. The council meets once every four to six weeks with the magnet recruiter to brainstorm and share ideas about how to reach other parents and students. Wake has also created a speaker's bureau, with 40 speakers available to make presentations about the magnet

program. The Montclair Council of Parent-Teacher Associations developed a guide, included in orientation packets, to help parents navigate the school selection process. It proposes specific questions for parents to ask on their site visits, ranging from school hours and transportation to learning approaches and areas of study (see figure 7).

Word-of-mouth is one of the more effective ways to create awareness and draw parent interest. Magnet schools make sure that teachers and counselors are well versed in their school program and are prepared to answer any questions parents or community members might have. Schools have found that if teachers and staff members share their success stories with others in the district, interest and participation increase.

SUMMARY FOR Promoting the Program

» Market your schools

» Involve others as co-promoters

FIGURE 7. Montclair School Visit Questions for Parents (Page 1 of 2)

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE SCHOOL VISIT

Here are some sample questions to ask at the school visits. Some of the information may be in the written materials or tours provided by the schools. Put a check next to the questions that you would like answered when you visit the schools.

Mission and Community

- Does this school have a particular educational philosophy or mission?
- How is the school's magnet theme incorporated into the school environment?
- How does this school encourage and monitor students' progress toward meeting grade-level standards?
- Do the children work in small groups on various tasks or spend most of their time in large group instruction?
- Are classes self-contained or do children move from class to class for each subject?
- What is this school's approach to student discipline and safety?
- What professional development opportunities do teachers have? In what ways do teachers work together with other teachers? With parents/caregivers?

Resources and extra-curricular opportunities

- What are some highlights of this school's curriculum in reading, math, science and social studies?
- What kinds of library resources are available to students?
- How is reading encouraged at school (e.g., incentive programs, contests, read-a-thons)?
- How is technology used to support teaching and learning at this school?
- How do the arts fit into the curriculum? Is there a school choir or instrumental music group? A school play or talent show? Art classes?
- What materials are available in the classrooms to support learning (e.g., visual tools, hands-on tools, technological tools)?
- What world languages are offered? How much time is devoted to world language at each grade level?
- Are there opportunities for different grade levels to interact in a supervised way (reading buddies, etc.)?
- Is there an after school enrichment program?
- Is childcare available before or after school?

Special Needs

- How does this school support students who have academic, social or emotional difficulties?
- If your child has any medical problems, speak to the nurse during your tour. For example, how are food allergies, asthma, or diabetes managed at school? What paperwork is required before next September?
- Is the school building handicapped accessible with ramps, a lift and/or an elevator? (This is important for non-ambulatory students and non-ambulatory parents/caregivers)



Making It Easy for Parents

The unique “magnet” goal, attracting students away from their neighborhood attendance zone, requires special effort based on careful and informed planning. To motivate parents to abandon their traditional role of accepting an assigned slot for their student and, instead, to actively seek out information about the best choice for their child, and to prompt them to grapple with requirements and application steps, districts need to make the whole process as easy as possible. Appealing to choice is key here. “When people choose to be somewhere, their attitude is different,” observes a Hot Springs magnet coordinator. Yet at the same time, enrollment must be regulated to ensure that attendance is balanced demographically. Districts go about managing this tension in different ways. As noted earlier, some districts allow schools to establish selective admission criteria—minimum grade-point average, test scores, behavioral history, auditions, or portfolio presentations. But the basic approach, varying across districts and particular schools according to specific recruitment needs and goals, is to use a random selection process, guaranteeing fairness. The promotional activities described earlier should spell out both the application steps and the criteria for acceptance.

Streamline the application process

The application process should be consistent, predictable, and transparent. Procedures should be simple, user-friendly, and disseminated to every parent. In Hamilton and Wake, parents can apply online or they can pick up applications at any magnet school or at the Department of Education. By calling Magnet School Services (at Wake, it’s the Magnet Resource Center) they can request that an application be mailed to them. The annual application process varies from district to

district. Parents receive a letter of confirmation within 10 working days, including a confirmation number to keep for future reference.

Houston’s “Magnet Programs” folder contains application information in both English and Spanish. Parents can also obtain applications online or at individual campuses or by calling the district. As in many districts, the process of exploring and then applying to schools starts in November with applications due in January. Applicants

are notified of their status by April 1 and must commit by April 15. To help ensure that parents know all the important dates, Houston produces a one-page information sheet, "Magnet Dates and Deadlines" (see figure 8).

As in many magnet districts, the Hot Springs magnet application asks parents to provide and rank their top three choices (see figure 9). Because there are only four elementary school magnets (with one middle and one high school), this approach effectively identifies parents' least favorite option as well. Montclair has taken a similar approach, asking parents to rank schools in order of preference from their first to their last choice. This way parents are also indicating the school they least want their child to attend, and the magnet office can take that into consideration as it makes assignments. This revised process has reportedly increased satisfaction among parents.

Make decision-making clear and consistent

Complete fairness and strict guidelines are also imperative in the admission process. Looking across an entire district, selection criteria can seem complicated. That's because the criteria can vary from school to school and the selection dynamic is not one-dimensional but complex. A magnet school, by definition, seeks at least some voluntary enrollment from beyond regular attendance zones, resulting in a school population that is racially, ethnically, or otherwise representative of the district. But a school's definition of that diversity is determined by a host of factors, ranging from district priorities (eliminating a particular socioeconomic imbalance, for instance) to the nature of the magnet school's quest for academic excellence. Hamilton, for example, has been struggling to maintain a base of students from middle-class families, using magnets in part to draw

students back from upper-middle-class private or parochial schools. Wake defines "appropriate and reasonable" diversity as ensuring that individual schools will not reflect a free or reduced lunch ratio higher than 40 percent and that fewer than 25 percent of students will be achieving below grade level.

In Houston, the only qualification requirement for students seeking entrance into one of its 43 regular elementary school magnets is that they have a record of satisfactory conduct. Each secondary school uses a matrix developed to reflect the requirements of the individual program. Minimally, the matrix includes grades, test results, and conduct history. To qualify to audition for the secondary fine arts programs, students must have both satisfactory conduct and a 78 grade average over the previous two years. The results of the audition determine if a student is accepted. Vanguard programs at the elementary, middle, and high school levels are for students identified as being gifted and talented, so students must qualify on the gifted and talented matrix.

Wake's magnet program differs from many in that it offers a range of magnet types (which it calls programs), some of which, although not all, are implemented at multiple schools. For example, among its elementary schools, eight are designated as "gifted and talented" magnets, nine offer a year-round calendar, and two are identified as creative arts and science magnets. Applicants must request a program type (e.g., year-round) rather than a specific school. With the exception of one program type, there are no special admissions requirements. Assignments are based on the following criteria: date of postmark on application, transportation patterns, sibling priorities, school capacity, classroom capacity, socioeconomic diversity, and present magnet status of applicant.

FIGURE 8. Houston Magnet Dates and Deadlines

MAGNET DATES AND DEADLINES

AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

- November 1, 2003 **MAGNET OPEN HOUSE**
- For interested parents and students
 - Hattie Mae White Administration Building Mall
 - Middle School from 9 am until 10:30 am
 - Elementary School from 11:00 am until 12:30 pm
 - High School from 1:00 pm until 2:30 pm
- November 3-7, 2003 **MAGNET AWARENESS WEEK**
- Tours daily for parents available at each Magnet Program
 - 9:00 am daily
- October, 2003
Through
January, 2004 **MAGNET SCHOOL CAREER DAYS**
- Magnet high school coordinators present @ all middle schools

APPLICATIONS ACCEPTED BEGINNING

- November 3, 2003 - All Magnet programs

APPLICATION DEADLINES FOR 1ST ROUND OF SCREENING

- January 14, 2004 - All Magnet programs
(Postmarked)

APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AFTER THE ABOVE DATE WILL BE ACCEPTED ON A SPACE AVAILABLE BASIS.


MAGNET NOTIFICATION DAY

- April 1, 2004 - Parents notified by mail of status of student's application(s).

MAGNET "INTENT TO ATTEND" DEADLINE

- April 14, 2004 - Parent notifies Magnet school of choice of student "intent to attend."

FIGURE 9. Hot Springs Magnet School Application



HSSD
HOT SPRINGS SCHOOL DISTRICT

For Office Use Only:

Date Received: _____

Time: _____

Application #: _____

**ELEMENTARY
MAGNET SCHOOL
APPLICATION**
(Please Print or Type)

Student Name: _____

Last
First
Middle

Social Security #: _____ Date of Birth: ____/____/____

School Currently Attending: _____ Current Grade: _____

Grade Level as of **SEPTEMBER 2003**: _____

Ethnicity: Asian Black Hispanic Am. Indian White

Gender: Female Male

Street Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Actual residence street address - no P.O. Boxes

Mailing Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
(if different from above)

Home Phone: _____ Business Phone: _____
Please indicate which parent works at number.

Magnet Programs Desired <small>(Please number your choices 1, 2, and 3)</small>	
Gardner Math-Science-Technology Magnet School (K-5)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sibling attends
Langston Aerospace & Environmental Studies Magnet School (K-5)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sibling attends
Oaklawn Visual and Performing Arts Magnet School (K-5)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sibling attends
Park International Studies Magnet School (K-5) (pending IB auth.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sibling attends

Does this student receive services under P. L. 94-142 (Special Education)? Yes No

Will your child require bus transportation? Yes No

I give permission to the current school my child attends to release any information needed to complete processing of this application.

PARENT'S SIGNATURE _____

Please mail to:
Hot Springs School District
P. O. Box 6473
Hot Springs, Arkansas 71902-6473

For any questions or additional information, call:
(501) 624-3372 or any Magnet School

You will be notified by letter of your child's school assignment.

In Montclair, all schools operate as magnets, which means all parents must apply on behalf of their children. The Montclair assignment system gives priority to certain applicants: students residing in the neighborhood surrounding a magnet school, those who have a sibling already attending the school, or those from one of the magnet school's "feeder" schools. Such priorities counter the impression that magnet schools unfairly limit access to neighborhood students. Once all priority students have been placed in a particular magnet school, its remaining seats are filled strictly by lottery.

Although some parents may become frustrated when their child is not admitted to their first choice school, making exceptions can be hazardous for a district. Duval maintains careful records, making sure all necessary dates and other application information are documented. The district's logic is that if it makes one exception, the floodgates will open for subsequent requests. Similarly, Wake offers no appeal for a denial. While Hamilton still receives a few complaints each year, its lottery process has generated positive feedback for its fairness from most community members.

Work out transportation

Getting the word out about a compelling theme and providing a consistent equitable application and assignment process, while key, are only part of the equation for getting the desired student enrollment mix. Parents also make choices based on such factors as their child's need for individualized or special help, safety concerns, starting times, location, the reputation of a school's principal and staff, and high on the list, the availability and reliability of transportation. Most of the magnet school districts in this guide have developed a system

to aid parents in transporting their children to school—a massive task often easier said than done—requiring funds, careful planning, cooperation across schools, and some ingenuity.

Transportation is a huge challenge for Montclair, costing the district \$2.5 million more than it gets back from the state. Duval's goal of providing transportation to any magnet school student in the 850-square-mile district requires an extensive busing system. The task is complicated by the fact that a river runs through the area, limiting the possible routes to get a child from one location to another. Duval maximized its available buses by pairing schools together to share a bus route and by creating hub schools where students can be dropped off to catch another bus to their final destination.

This hub system is a prime example of how teacher and staff collaboration is integral to the success of the district's magnet program. Getting buy-in from teachers and other school staff who work at the hub schools is crucial because it is these teachers and staff members who must make the hub system work, ensuring that all children make an easy and secure transfer to their buses. Because these students do not attend the hub school, the adults who help them make their bus connection are assuming extra responsibility, going beyond their primary job duties. Clearly, teachers and staff members across the district must be completely committed to the hub system in order for this type of transportation option to be effective.

Some Duval magnet students travel long distances to attend a particular magnet school, and many travel into portions of the inner city that may be perceived as dangerous whether or not they really are. Duval recognizes the importance of addressing parental concerns about

their child's daily journey, understanding that safety is the number one concern of all parents. In addition to providing catalogs and brochures to address as many transportation questions as possible, district staff contact each magnet school family upon their child's acceptance to inform them about bus stop locations and pick-up and drop-off times and to answer any questions.

Transportation for Houston's programs is an equally large-scale effort requiring the cooperation and ingenuity of several departments, including the Magnet Department and Pupil Transfer and Transportation Services, and school-based administrators. Houston receives approximately \$19 million from the state from desegregation busing funds that cover 50 percent of the district's transportation-related costs. Each school day, the 1,100-bus fleet travels 900 routes to 280 campuses serving approximately 40,000 students, 16,000 of them magnet students.

Before each school year begins, Houston parents and administrators are informed of each student's transportation route. Magnet program students who live more than two miles away from their campus are eligible for round-trip transportation between district-designated centralized bus stops and their assigned campuses. To ensure that all students arrive at their assigned school without missing instructional time, the district operates on a staggered bell schedule.

Four years ago, Houston set up an online transportation information system, jointly developed by its transportation and technology departments. It features route sheets by motor pool and school, bus stop locations for all schools, student registration forms, and bus roster data. On Mondays, Transportation Department updates are posted and on Wednesdays any changes are made to routes, schedules, and other transportation events. District and school administrators are able to request transportation, check on the status of buses and routes, view particular student routes, and make other inquiries online directly to the transportation department.

Wake offers two transportation options to students living more than 1.5 miles from school, as well as to students with special needs. One option is door-to-door service, which, like a traditional country bus system, picks students up at home and returns them there at the end of the day. The other option is express transportation. In this system, parents are responsible for getting students to a collection point, such as another school, a library, or the YMCA, and picking them up there at day's end. The district then transports students back and forth between this collection point and their assigned school. Wake parents can also fill out a transportation service request form to appeal for a bus stop location or inclusion on a specific route.

SUMMARY FOR Making It Easy for Parents

- » Streamline the application process
- » Make decision-making clear and consistent

- » Work out transportation



Fully Implementing the Program

Creating magnet schools, getting them up and running and serving the right student mix, takes a lot of upfront time and effort. But the enduring challenge is making them work: keeping the organizational eye fixed squarely on the prize, being relentless about staying the course, sustaining momentum and keeping commitment alive. This covers a lot of territory, but the districts in this guide focused on the following keys to successful implementation.

Build in time for teacher collaboration

Successful school innovation, Fullan⁸ stresses, is about time: making time, taking time, finding more useful ways to spend time. This is especially true for magnets where an entire school is focusing on a particular theme and extra time is needed to develop and sustain it. Many traditional schools suffer from a tradition that isolates teachers behind their classroom walls and that is stingy with time for working and learning together. Successful magnet programs help their schools break from tradition and eliminate these barriers. These districts and their schools have been creative in rethinking and restructuring time for teachers to work together and with experts to implement their themes. Faculty meetings are recast to get the most out of them, and available professional development time is structured to make it serve schoolwide goals.

Schools make teachers' protected planning time available in several ways. Houston school leaders support common planning periods and enrichment activities, both formal and informal. The High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, for example, employs a meeting cycle in

which once every six weeks a specific group of teachers from similar disciplines and different grade levels meets to deal with issues and events prevalent in their field. Once all six groups have met, a full faculty meeting is held, at which participants share key points and any recommendations from their respective meetings. Then, in the last session of the cycle, joint decisions are finalized. This repeated process allows all parties to provide input and work collaboratively across all disciplines. In Hamilton, Battle Academy relies so heavily on full-day quarterly planning meetings to evaluate progress toward goals that many consider these "the heart and soul of this school." Teachers take a half day the week before the meeting to plan for it. To give teachers more time for joint planning, the principal at another Hamilton school has cut back on the number of faculty meetings, using e-mail to communicate much of the information that was traditionally communicated at the faculty meetings.

Some districts find ways to increase time. Hot Springs, for example, added five days of staff development to the teacher's contract to support teacher learning and

program implementation. At the district's Gardner Elementary School, teachers have a common planning time across grade levels, and all principals meet with teams once a week to discuss themes, address instructional and assessment issues, develop future plans, and meet with support staff to hear their concerns. Wake added quarterly core team meetings as a new step in its magnet implementation process, and staff members say they wish they had always done this. These meetings "help steer the course" by giving staff a structured opportunity to identify and resolve problems or issues. School administrators try to be sensitive to teachers' time by allowing for planning during school hours.

A major challenge in ensuring effective professional development is to get people together in the same physical space. Montclair surmounts this challenge by providing professional development to groups of teachers from clusters of magnet schools that are on the same schedule. The district also practices "alignment" of professional development so that teachers become familiar with what teachers in the grade before them and the grade following them are doing. In some cases, time to collaborate is fostered through organizational arrangements, by creating sheer proximity. Montclair's Glenfield Middle School was organized into "houses" so that all of the grade level teachers can meet daily to discuss student needs and curriculum or theme integration issues.

Restructuring the school day or student learning time can free up blocks of time for teachers to plan and collaborate. Some literally shave minutes. One Hamilton school administrator reports coming up with extra time for teacher planning by moving the school start time ahead five minutes, reducing time allocated for students to change classes, and making the lunch period slightly shorter. Without changing any one thing a

huge amount, the principal captured 40 minutes that had previously been "dead time."

Provide high-quality professional development

As part of their implementation plan, all these magnet schools tap outside expertise to some degree. They do so through such traditional learning opportunities as workshops, inservice activities, and conferences, but they also recognize the importance of school-based professional development that is embedded as part of the school culture and driven by program goals and student needs. Two Hamilton schools, for example, have hired a literacy consultant who serves in an ongoing capacity rather than delivering a one-shot training.

Given the highly specialized curriculum of magnets, teachers often need extra training in the theme itself, whether it's the Montessori method or earth science. Before any of Hamilton's art schools opened, every teacher in those schools went through two weeks of discipline-based arts education. The training helped classroom teachers understand how the various arts could be integrated into their curriculum from the standpoint of such folks as the art specialist, the visual artist, and the performing artist. Arts experts stay involved after the training, continuing to work with classroom teachers on content integration because, explains one district representative, neither the district nor the schools wanted two separate faculties, one an arts faculty and one an academic faculty. Hot Springs encourages both school faculty and district personnel to visit other magnet programs to bring back "the best information out there."

Professional development is driven by school goals. To promote high student performance, five of Wake's magnets integrate a triad of educational reform

approaches: effective schools philosophy and research; Total Quality Management theory and practice; and Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence. Teachers at Hamilton's Paideia-based magnet schools naturally receive special training in the Paideia approach, which integrates three teaching methods (didactic instruction, personal coaching of academic skills, and weekly seminars) that enhance literacy along with problem-solving and other higher-level skills. In addition to bringing in trainers, the schools rely on their more-experienced educators to mentor new teachers. The schools also arrange release time so new teachers can sit in on Paideia seminars.

Montclair benefits from the proximity of Montclair State University, which has provided magnet teachers with training in critical skills for successfully teaching diverse learners, such as differentiated instruction.

Professional development is also driven by student performance data. For example, before Hot Springs arranges for professional development at its magnet schools, the district reviews state assessment results and benchmark testing and uses that analysis to identify and focus the professional development. One problem with professional development, Hamilton educators believe, is that too often it begins with what teachers do rather than what students need. The district's Critical Friends Groups begin, instead, with what students do. Each group brings together six to ten teachers within a school over a period of at least two years. After getting a solid grounding in group-process skills, members focus on designing learning goals for students that can be stated specifically enough that others can understand them. With those goals in mind, members then look at student work and explore how they can improve their own teaching practices and their students' academic achievement.

Coordinate the curriculum with state and district standards

Since many, although not all, magnets have their own curricular focus (e.g., criminal justice, environmental science), one important task is to make sure they nonetheless cover all key state academic standards. This is a greater challenge for older schools that started before their state adopted academic standards. Today all Montclair magnet schools teach the same core curriculum because they must incorporate content standards established by the New Jersey State Department of Education. What makes each a magnet school is the specialized, theme-based program it uses to deliver that curriculum. But Montclair's superintendent explains that the standards movement makes it harder for schools to differentiate themselves since they must all implement the same curriculum standards that, for some schools, were not in place when they started. The challenge is to maintain qualities that make them distinctive while offering the same core content with high standards.

In Wake, the curriculum that is developed for specific themes undergoes careful scrutiny to ensure that it is aligned with the state and county Standard Course of Study (ScoS) goals and objectives. Beginning at the proposal level, the magnet curriculum guides are reviewed and revised by both the Magnet Department and the Curriculum and Instruction Department for adherence to the particular magnet theme and alignment with the ScoS. Communication between the two departments has aided the Wake magnet system in its accountability to the district's Goal 2008: 95 percent of students in grades 3 through 12 will be at or above grade level as measured by the state of North Carolina End-of-Grade or Course tests, and all student groups will demonstrate high growth.

Newer magnet schools profit by knowing in advance that regardless of their curricular focus, whether aviation science or music, as they plan their curriculum they must align it with state content standards.

The Hot Springs superintendent believes that like all good schools, successful magnet schools are guided by four points: knowing what students are expected to learn, knowing whether they learned it, intervening and changing the system based on what schools know about student performance, and building staff development around student achievement results. Thus, Hot Springs principals and teachers are expected to align their instructional objectives with the state assessment; review benchmark tests to evaluate student, teacher, and school performance; and build intervention strategies and professional development around the areas of weakness. While themes are essential to the magnet schools, the instructional foci on all campuses are mathematics and literacy. This is because the district's magnet program is intended to align with the Arkansas Curriculum Framework in which all schools follow a strict scope and sequence of instruction in mathematics and literacy. This ensures comprehensive coverage of all standards dictated by the state and evaluated through both district and state assessment programs. To establish standards for all the themes, Hot Springs used state standards for the math strand and brought in consultants to help ensure that the remaining themes were being infused into core curriculum and that appropriate electives were being established. To make sure all players in this system know their part, the district uses "magnet program activity plans," which identify what needs to be done and who is responsible (see figure 10).

Use outside resources, especially parents, to implement the program

Perhaps more than any other kind of school, magnets depend on community participation—for thematic expertise, for facilities, and, not least, for donations of equipment and funds. Each magnet school uses multiple strategies for engaging stakeholders. Some, as mentioned above, form groups to aid in the process. Duval's Magnet Advisory Council, consisting of district staff, teachers, principals, and members from the community, higher education, and private industry, is funded through the magnet office and organizes events such as a party honoring magnet teachers. The council's primary purpose is to act as a communication tool for the magnet program. The districtwide Wake Educational Partnership was conceived as a means of bringing private sector support to the public school system for such things as student scholarships, funding for teachers, and student internships.

Houston maintains a community relations department that reaches out to the business community in hopes of generating business-school partnerships. When it identifies a business interested in offering its time, services, or money, the department pairs the business with a school in need of the resources offered. One of the district's biggest business partners is the Houston Rockets basketball team. Several players, including Yao Ming, visit 10 Houston schools to encourage students to meet their goals in the district's "Read to Achieve" program. The team also provides the schools with sports equipment, rewards, and incentives that are a part of the program.

As noted earlier, Hamilton's seven local museums, spanning an array of subject areas including American art, nature, sea life, and African American culture, collaborate with two of the district's magnet schools. School and

FIGURE 10. Hot Springs Magnet Program Activity Plan (Sample)

MAGNET PROGRAM ACTIVITY PLAN

4.0a By June of each project year (2002, 2003 and 2004), each magnet school will substantially strengthen students' knowledge of academic subjects, as measured by a two percent growth in students' test scores using the Stanford Achievement Test/9 and/or equivalent growth using State performance-based assessments: reading and math benchmarks.

TASK/RESPONSIBILITY	D	P	SC	M	T	E
4.1a Develop and implement distinctive, unique instructional programs at each site.	1	2	3	4	2	4
4.2a Purchase appropriate books, materials, supplies, and equipment.	1	2	2	4	2	4
4.3a Implement systemic reforms.	4	2	3	4	2	4
4.4a Implement innovative educational methods and practices.	4	2	3	4	2	4
4.5a Test students using SAT/9.	4	2	2	4	2	3
4.6a Evaluate test results.	4	3	3	4	3	2
4.7a Monitor alternative assessment practices and their degree of implementation, including benchmarks and standards.	4	4	4	4	4	2
4.8a Evaluate alternative assessment practices.	1	2	2	4	2	3
4.9a Modify curriculum to meet student needs.						

<u>Staff</u> <u>Responsible</u>	(Magnet Office)	<u>Responsibility</u> <u>Level</u>
D = Director	SC = Site Coordinator	1 = Approve
P = Principal	M = Marketing/ Recruitment Specialist	2 = Implement
	T = Teachers	3 = Involve
	E = Evaluator	4 = Notify

museum educators work together to develop the curriculum, which emphasizes students displaying their learning through such hands-on activities as actually building exhibits. The museums make all their resources and exhibits available to the schools. Normal Park Museum Magnet is a good illustration of how students benefit from the commitment to diversity. The school serves students from all over Hamilton County; about 55 percent are white and 45 percent African American. The museum exhibits that students build, which are displayed quarterly at an exhibit night, are proof that all students are capable of quality work when afforded the same opportunities. "If you look at their exhibits, you won't know which kids are rich and which kids are poor, or where they come from," says one teacher. "That's because they all have access to the same resources. It's different from a school where they assign take-home projects. Everything is done here, at the school, so the projects are all of equal quality."

All Hamilton magnet schools require parents of magnet students (i.e., those from outside the school's attendance zone) to volunteer a minimum of 18 hours per school year. The district employs a full-time parent coordinator on each campus to assist parents in meeting the 18-hour obligation and act as a point of contact for the volunteers. Although parents of neighborhood students are not required to volunteer, through encouragement their school participation has also

increased. During the school year 2003–04, Hamilton parents logged over 70,000 hours of volunteer service, saving the district an estimated \$360,500. Because the requirement brings more parents into each school, communication has improved, taking place as often as not through informal meetings in the hallway.

In Montclair, says the assistant superintendent, "There is an army of parents who are there when we need them." Parents are instrumental in lobbying for money, she said, crediting them with helping to pass several school budgets through the approval process recently. In hopes of increasing involvement by parents of children who receive free and reduced lunch, the district has begun offering childcare, food, and transportation for school meetings and events.

Parents are involved in the schools in other ways, as well. At one magnet school, for example, willing parents receive six weeks of training so they can help support the school's writing program for third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders.

In Montclair, one magnet principal keeps a "book of talents" that lists parents and what they can offer and be called on to do in class. One parent, for example, is a dinosaur expert. Another parent put together an extensive glossary of important holidays from around the world so children could learn the real meaning of them, rather than a stereotypical rendition.

SUMMARY FOR Fully Implementing the Program

- » Build in time for teacher collaboration
- » Provide high-quality professional development
- » Coordinate the curriculum with state and district standards
- » Use outside resources, especially parents, to implement the program



Evaluating and Continually Improving

In this era of accountability, all school districts are struggling with how best to evaluate the effectiveness of their schools and how to use assessment and evaluation results to continually improve the quality of teaching and learning. For districts with magnet schools, which by definition are trying something unique or innovative, evaluation is all the more critical. Resulting data provide their schools with guidance for achieving their mission and education objectives, helping them iron out possible kinks, and identifying and correcting what's not working. And, according to several districts in this study, as magnet schools continue to improve, they raise the bar for all schools in a district.

To keep their magnet schools both effective and relevant, districts have found it important to use data to guide improvements in teaching and learning, to revisit and evaluate magnet themes over time, and to keep parents and community stakeholders involved in the process of evaluation and improvement.

Use data as a basis for improving teaching and learning

Evaluation of magnet schools and subsequent efforts for improvement must be data driven. Knowing what data to collect and how to utilize that information to improve the magnet schools is essential.

Many factors affect choices about what data should be collected to evaluate magnet programs. Some districts must collect certain data to meet state or funding institution reporting requirements; others have developed

comprehensive evaluation plans that outline the data to be collected and used in assessing various aspects of magnet schools. The important thing to remember is that data collected for evaluation purposes should ultimately be utilized to improve teaching and learning.

Districts that receive funding from the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) must meet certain reporting requirements, and these often form the foundation for the data collection process. But many districts find it is important to collect other information as well. For example, for MSAP-funded schools, Hamilton's and Wake's magnet schools directors collect information about professional development programs, alignment of the curriculum with state and local standards, infusion of the magnet theme into the curriculum, and parental involvement. The data collection process includes surveying parents, students, and teachers at the school to gauge their feelings about such things as the

school's student diversity and integration of its magnet theme. For schools not supported by MSAP funds, the director uses a different evaluation process, analyzing data from the five disciplines tested by the district and looking at attendance and graduation rates, which tend to be higher in magnets than in other schools. The director of magnet schools in Hamilton also meets with principals and curriculum facilitators to discuss strengths and weaknesses.

Hot Springs uses state-mandated assessments to evaluate student progress and make adjustments to its academic programs. In addition, the district employs its own thrice-yearly standardized tests with a rational and easily interpretable growth measure to gauge student progress throughout the year. These measures are used in evaluating teacher efficacy and the success and failure of curriculum implementation at the district level. All student achievement and attendance data and other relevant information are collected and stored in a comprehensive student database maintained and utilized by the district's Office of Research and Evaluation. The district uses an outside evaluator to determine on an annual basis if it is meeting its objectives. The evaluator visits every classroom in the elementary magnets and several of the middle- and high-school magnets to assess programs. Additionally, consultants are hired to determine whether themes are being effectively implemented and infused in the curriculum and instruction at each magnet school.

Most districts, even those no longer under a desegregation order, remain committed to a diverse enrollment in their magnet schools and track their student population mix at each site. This allows Duval to report that when it operated under a desegregation order,

46 percent of its magnet schools were racially balanced. Now, even though the district no longer factors race into school assignments, 42 percent of Duval's magnet schools have a student mix reflecting districtwide student demographics. Montclair is still under a compliance order from the 1970s that says its schools must be balanced racially within 10 percent of the population. However, in evaluating its magnet program, the district considers equally important the elimination of the achievement gap between students of color and white students, and the district has managed to reduce that persistent performance discrepancy in the course of improving student achievement overall.

Knowing who is responsible for data collection and dissemination is also important. Having a central office for research and evaluation, such as that in Hot Springs, is one way to ensure that data collection is a priority. Hot Springs' office uses a wide array of reporting and data analysis software to continually monitor district, school, teacher, and student progress. For example, the district reviews the results of benchmark assessments to evaluate schools, teachers, and students, using the information they find to plan professional development and other interventions around areas of weakness.

Wake has also centralized its data collection efforts. The mission of its Evaluation and Research Department is "to improve the effectiveness of the Wake County Public School System for all students by: providing objective, accurate, and timely information on system, school, and program outcomes, management practices, cost effectiveness, and compliance; collaborating with others to ensure high-quality data collection, interpretation, and data-based decision making; and ensuring grant-based programs are developed, implemented, and managed in

ways consistent with district priorities, research findings, and applicable regulations.”¹⁴ The department consists of four offices: Testing, Program Accountability, School Accountability, and Grants Administration and Compliance Reporting. The Program Accountability office promotes continuous improvement and accountability through evaluations of district programs, including the magnet program. This office also supports individual schools through analysis of local assessment results and interpretation of school performance data. Among the evaluation-related activities of Program Accountability staff are monitoring program participation; monitoring program implementation and effectiveness through surveys, interviews, and site visits; analyzing achievement test results as well as other data on desired outcomes; and developing needs assessments and evaluation plans for grant applications.

The highly decentralized Houston Independent School District also has a district-level Department of Research and Accountability that in 2002–03 conducted a review to capture baseline data to use in evaluating Houston’s magnet schools. However, the district magnet office is continually engaged in monitoring and evaluating the overall magnet program, especially on an informal level. For example, the Magnet Department monitors program implementation at both the district and the school level through site visits and technical support. The Magnet Department routinely requests application, transfer, and enrollment information from individual magnet coordinators and conducts informal surveys to monitor magnets’ impact on diversity, equity, accessibility, and school improvement.

Other districts without central evaluation and research offices have developed means to collect, disseminate,

and review magnet school data. As previously noted, Hot Springs employs an outside evaluator. For its part, Duval has conducted peer reviews in the past, and the director of school choice and pupil assignment recommends this practice to other districts. During this process, a team of peers would visit a school over the course of one to two days, interview everyone involved, and then provide feedback.

Perhaps the most crucial piece of any magnet school evaluation is understanding how to utilize the available data to improve teaching and learning, not just in magnet schools, but across the district. Montclair’s assistant superintendent puts it this way: “Getting the data is one thing. Understanding what it is trying to tell you [is another]. And using it as a blueprint for change—that’s where [data] can help.” With this in mind, Montclair has trained its principals in how to utilize data. Guided by the results from standardized tests, for example, they look to see if certain skills were taught. They also look for patterns in report card grades that teachers are giving. The superintendent notes that being able to analyze and use data in more sophisticated ways has allowed district and school staff to see that schools are making some progress in addressing the achievement gap. The district has been following a cohort of students between 4th and 8th grade and has seen the gap in reading narrow to 6 percent.

Revisit and reinvent magnet themes to ensure appeal and relevance

As part of the evaluation process, districts must revisit and, as needed, make changes to magnet themes to ensure that themes remain relevant and appealing to the community. The attraction of a technology theme initially implemented at a time when it was still rare

to find district teachers and students using technology for teaching and learning may diminish as schools throughout the district improve in integrating technology. It may be time to change the theme entirely or, instead, to ratchet up the curriculum by instituting new, specialized classes, in computer animation, for example. Thematic review is a necessary step in ensuring the long-term quality and sustainability of magnet schools. One way Duval evaluates its magnet program and schools is monitoring how parents “vote with their feet.” In other words, if a magnet school no longer meets the needs of students, parents will choose other alternatives, such as private schools.

Montclair officials acknowledge that implementing magnet themes that make each school unique is a challenge they must meet if their magnet schools are to remain viable and true to the magnet school philosophy. Broad community input is part of the current effort to revise and improve Montclair’s themes. “The changes will not be top down,” the superintendent says, “they will start with parents and teachers.”

This reinventing process has happened before in Montclair. For example, Bradford was identified as the “back-to-basics” school when it was set up in the 1970s. But back-to-basics eventually lost its appeal and Bradford enrollment began to drop. For two years the district tried unsuccessfully to re-market the school. Eventually, the theme was changed to communication arts and sciences and enrollment began climbing. Teachers and parents worked together to develop and enhance the new program. In the reinvention process, says the principal, it was “critical to keep what was working and to hear everyone’s voice.” Bradford’s enrollment has once again begun flagging and as part of the current

revisiting process, its theme is likely to change again. One possibility is that it will become a “university” magnet affiliated with Montclair State University.

Another example of Montclair’s emphasis on formative evaluation of its magnet schools is Northeast Elementary School. When this school first became a magnet it had an “international” theme, primarily because much of its enrollment consisted of English-as-a-Second Language students. When the current principal came to Northeast in 2002, she surveyed students, parents, and teachers and found that few seemed to like the theme. “It was one day a week and too focused on the adult experts,” the principal reported. “Many students said, ‘I hated it. I never got to be a part of it!’ Parents were unhappy, too.” Using this information, the principal wrote a rationale for a new theme and presented it to district officials. The school now has a Global Studies theme.

Wake also takes steps to assess application numbers for its magnet schools. If numbers are low for a particular magnet school, the magnet office sends an internal survey to the campus, goes to the school, talks to the faculty, and, based on collected information, decides on another theme that might rejuvenate the school. As part of this process, the schools themselves conduct meetings with parents to seek their feedback.


Keep parents and community stakeholders involved in evaluation and improvement

All of the same school stakeholders and community partners that are such an important part of creating, implementing, and promoting magnet schools should be included in their evaluation and improvement. As mentioned, parents are a critical resource for the reinventing or revamping of magnet themes. Paying attention to

FIGURE 11. Wake Middle-School Parent Survey

WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

PARENT SURVEY - MIDDLE SCHOOL

 USE PENCIL ONLY

Please use a pencil to darken the bubble beside your child's school name.

<input type="radio"/> Apex	<input type="radio"/> Durant Road	<input type="radio"/> Leesville Road	<input type="radio"/> Wake Forest-Rolesville
<input type="radio"/> Carriage	<input type="radio"/> East Cary	<input type="radio"/> Ligon	<input type="radio"/> Wakefield
<input type="radio"/> Carroll	<input type="radio"/> East Garner	<input type="radio"/> Lufkin Road	<input type="radio"/> West Cary
<input type="radio"/> Centennial Campus	<input type="radio"/> East Millbrook	<input type="radio"/> Martin	<input type="radio"/> West Lake
<input type="radio"/> Daniels	<input type="radio"/> East Wake	<input type="radio"/> Mt. Vernon	<input type="radio"/> West Millbrook
<input type="radio"/> Davis Drive	<input type="radio"/> Fuquay-Varina	<input type="radio"/> North Garner	<input type="radio"/> Zebulon
<input type="radio"/> Dillard Drive			

Please use a pencil to darken the bubble indicating whether you strongly agree (SA) or agree (A) or disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD) with the following statements. Leave responses blank if you do not know how to respond or have no opinion

	SA	A	D	SD
1. My child's school is a safe place to learn.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. My child's school provides a high quality educational program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. My child is given challenging work in all classes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. If I call the school, I receive courteous attention.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Students in my child's school are well behaved overall.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. The rules of this school are fair.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Teachers in this school really seem to care about the students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. This school promotes understanding among students from various backgrounds.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Discipline of my child has been handled fairly at this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. My child does some homework almost every school night.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. When I have concerns about my child, I can count on the school for support.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. I receive enough communication from the school to keep me informed of its activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. I would like to communicate with my child's teachers via e-mail.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. The buildings and grounds at my child's school are clean and safe.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. Does your child have home access to the Internet?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. Does your child use a home computer for schoolwork?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. Are you aware of the school district's goal that 95% of students will be at or above grade level by 2003?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. Are you aware of the WAVE Save A Friend telephone hotline?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. Rate the school in helping your child acquire skills or knowledge about:

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
mathematics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
social studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
science	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
visual and/or performing arts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
computers and technology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
health and physical education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
character education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
dangers of drug abuse	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. How often during the past year did you do the following things:

	Daily	Weekly	Occasionally	Not at all
Made sure reading material was available for your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discussed homework or read with your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Placed limits on your child's use of TV	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Placed limits on non-instructional computer usage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. Students are often given grades of A, B, C, D, Fail to denote the quality of their work. What grade would you give your child's school if it were graded in the same manner?

A B C D Fail

R17868-PF1-54321

parents and other stakeholders can inform evaluation and improvement efforts in other ways as well.

Most of the districts in this study collect data from stakeholders to use in their assessment of magnet schools. In Hot Springs, the schools keep records of parental participation in school activities, which is interpreted as an indication of parental satisfaction. Parents are also surveyed as to their satisfaction with after-school programs. Montclair currently is developing a parent survey instrument that will allow the district to learn more about what parents think of the school system and what their needs are. Wake surveys parents, students; and staff annually (see figure 11). In addition to these districtwide surveys, each magnet school can survey parents, students, and faculty to get feedback about its program. Hamilton also surveys teachers, students, and parents to gauge their feelings about diversity in the school, alignment of curriculum with state standards, integration of the school's theme, and parent involvement. Teachers are also asked about

their professional development experiences. Survey results are analyzed at Brown University. In doing these surveys, the district intends to generate more data to inform school improvement efforts.

Stakeholders from outside the district management structure can also be involved directly in evaluation activities. One of the responsibilities of the Magnet Advisory Council in Duval—a diverse group including members from the community, higher education, private industry, district staff, teachers, and principals—is to “review program evaluations concerning the effectiveness of magnet programs and ... [to make] recommendations to the school system regarding the effectiveness of these programs.”

In this district and elsewhere, ongoing review helps stakeholders identify and build on the strengths of their program and understand and address the areas in need of improvement. In this way, their magnet schools remain vital and effective.

SUMMARY FOR Evaluating and Continually Improving

- » Use data as a basis for improving teaching and learning
- » Revisit and reinvent magnet themes to ensure appeal and relevance
- » Keep parents and community stakeholders involved in evaluation and improvement

Acknowledgments

The development of this guide was initiated and directed by Nina S. Rees, deputy under secretary of the Office of Innovation and Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education. Sharon Horn was the project manager.

An external advisory panel provided feedback to refine the study scope and prioritize issues to investigate. Members included Barbara DeMaster, director of curriculum, instruction and assessment, St. Louis Park Public Schools; Phyllis DuBois, consultant; Joe Hairston, superintendent, Baltimore County Public Schools; Caroline Massengill, senior director, Wake County Public School System and president-elect, Magnet Schools of America; and Diann Taylor, principal, Kirby Junior High Math-Science-Technology Magnet School, Wichita Falls, Texas. Drafts of the guide were also reviewed by district staff of the six districts included in the study.

Staff in the Department who reviewed drafts include: Tom Corwin, Michael Petrilli, Steve Brockhouse, Cynthia Dorfman, Stacy Kotzin, Meredith Miller, Susan Wilhelm, John Gibbons, Jeff Sims, Alexander Choi, Adina Kole, Jodie Badgley, Courtney Philips, and Margaret West Guenther.

This guide was written, designed, and based on a report by WestEd.

WestEd is a nonprofit research, development, and service agency committed to improving learning at all stages of life, both in school and out. WestEd has offices across the United States and also serves as one of the nation's ten regional educational laboratories.

WestEd's partner in developing this series of research reports and innovation guides is Edvance. Created by the American Productivity and Quality Center, Edvance is a resource for process and performance improvement with a focus on benchmarking, knowledge management, performance measurement, and quality improvement initiatives in education.

The six districts cooperating in the development of this guide and the report from which it is drawn were generous with both their time and attention to the project. We would like to thank the district superintendents and the many district staff members who were instrumental in coordinating and participating in the site visits that inform the report and this guide.

Duval County Public Schools

1701 Prudential Drive
Jacksonville, FL 32207-8182
<http://www.educationcentral.org/>

John C. Fryer, Jr.
Superintendent

Dr. Sally Hague
*General Director
School Choice/Pupil Assignment
Operations*

Hamilton County Schools

6703 Bonny Oaks Drive
Chattanooga, TN 37421
<http://www.hcde.org/>

Dr. Jesse B. Register
Superintendent

Joanne Smith
Director of Magnet Schools

Hot Springs School District

400 Linwood
Hot Springs, AR 71913
<http://hsprings.dsc.k12.ar.us/>

Roy Rowe
Superintendent

Don Waldrip
Magnet Director

Houston Independent School District

3830 Richmond Avenue
Houston, TX 77027
<http://www.houstonisd.org/>

Dr. Kaye Stripling
Superintendent

Dottie Bonner
Manager of Magnet Programs

Montclair Public Schools

22 Valley Road
Montclair, NJ 07042
<http://www.montclair.k12.nj.us/>

Dr. Frank R. Alvarez, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Dr. Jeanne Pryor
Assistant Superintendent

Wake County Public School System

3600 Wake Forest Road
Raleigh, NC 27609
<http://www.wcpss.net/>

William R. McNeal
Superintendent

Caroline Massengill
Senior Director, Magnet Programs

WestEd

730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
<http://www.wested.org/>

Glen Harvey
Chief Executive Officer

Nikola Filby
*Associate Director,
Regional Laboratory Program*

Edvance

123 Post Oak Lane, Floor 3
Houston, TX 77024
<http://www.edvance.org/>

C. Jackson Grayson Jr.
Chief Executive Officer

Kristin Arnold
Project Director





Appendix A: District Profiles

Duval County Public Schools	41
Hamilton County Schools	43
Hot Springs School District	45
Houston Independent School District	47
Montclair Public Schools	49
Wake County Public School System	51



Duval County Public Schools, Florida

Districtwide Enrollment	Magnet Enrollment	Total Number of Schools	Number of Magnet Schools	District Size (in square miles)	Population Type
126,633	19,927 (16%)	178	61	850	Large Central City

Duval County Public Schools, serving Jacksonville, Florida, has been home to two magnet high schools since the 1980s. But like many other districts engaged in magnet programming, Duval's magnet initiatives increased dramatically as a result of a court-ordered desegregation plan. The plan outlining the use of magnet schools took effect in the 1991–92 school year as an alternative to a forced busing plan implemented in 1969. Although in 1999 the district achieved unitary status, ending the court mandate for its magnet program, Duval has continued to grow its magnet program in order to continue its efforts to decrease racial isolation in schools as well as to provide a system of choice.

Duval's magnet schools fall into two categories: dedicated and school-within-a-school. Virtually all of Duval's school-within-a-school magnets serve students schoolwide, irrespective of their status as magnet or neighborhood students. The district sees this as the best way to eliminate one of the potential problems associated with the school-within-a-school model: that it can create a distinction between the magnet students and neighborhood students as the "haves" and the "have-nots," respectively.

Primary responsibility for the magnet schools falls under the Office of School Choice and Pupil Assignment. The district magnet office, housed within School Choice, employs a general director, a magnet coordinator, and a magnet marketing and recruiting specialist. One of the main tasks of the magnet coordinator is working closely with each magnet school to ensure that all of the schools' needs are being met. The magnet coordinator also oversees the student application process.

Duval's magnet program is intended to create an environment in which students can excel by choosing what best meets their needs. Therefore, the magnet program in this district is diverse and academically focused. Some of its schools offer students a combination of vocational and college preparatory courses. One example is the Frank H. Petersen Academy of Technology, from which students graduate with both a diploma and a license in a particular vocational area. The local Chamber of Commerce has been a strong advocate for career academies such as Petersen. The Chamber has identified work fields that have a high need for graduates with certain skills and talents, and the district has responded by implementing complementary magnet themes. Another success story is the Andrew Jackson Medical Professions and Criminal Justice High School. Its enrollment, which is approximately 85 percent African American, represents one of the lowest average family incomes in the district. Because its high-quality vocational programs enable graduates to proceed directly into the work force, the school has been very popular. The district also fosters a culture of quality academic standards by offering students the opportunity to take college-level classes in some of the magnet high schools.

Admission into most Duval magnet schools is handled by lottery. The exceptions are the International Baccalaureate schools, which base admission on merit, and the schools of the arts, which require an audition. However, the lottery system assigns some degree of priority to certain categories of student: those residing in the magnet school's surrounding neighborhood, those with a sibling attending the school to which they apply, and

those who have attended a feeder school for the magnet. Also, students who attend a Title I school receive a priority in the magnet lottery when they apply to a magnet program in a school that is not a Title I school. Similarly, students who attend a school that is not Title I receive a priority in the magnet lottery when they apply to a magnet program in a school that is Title I.

Funding has been a critical factor in the evolution of Duval County's ambitious magnet program. A federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) grant funded its start-up years, beginning in 1991-92. Then, in 1995 a second MSAP grant allowed it to revamp 21 existing schools. Improving the appearance and infrastructure of schools in lower income neighborhoods has been important in creating a magnetizing effect. The district has sustained its magnet schools without the aid of any federal funds, dedicating \$2 million per year to the program, money required to offset the higher costs of running some magnet themes. For example, a performing arts school requires more instruments than a neighborhood school that simply offers a music elective.

Achievement scores in the district have risen as well; by 2002-03, 54 percent of Duval schools had achieved a grade of B or better from the Florida State Department of Education.

Demand for admission to Duval's magnet schools is high; for the 2002-03 school year, 7,699 students were put on the waiting list. District representatives have identified several key factors that contribute to the success of their magnet program:

- » **Open lines of communication between administration, staff, and parents.** As examples, the district points to the use of lead magnet school teachers, the advisory council, and its parent-focused telephone hotline and Web site.
- » **Initial research on the themes.** Early research conducted with parents to determine attractive magnet themes resulted in well-chosen themes, and it also laid a foundation for the district's marketing program, which is also a key success factor.
- » **"Scream Your Theme."** This is the mantra of the magnet office, indicating that each magnet school is responsible for making the whole campus and community aware of its magnet content.
- » **Strong Leaders.** Strong principals and teachers, who have committed to the magnet theme and are willing to face all of the accompanying challenges, are vital to the program's longevity.

Hamilton County Schools, Tennessee

Districtwide Enrollment	Magnet Enrollment	Total Number of Schools	Number of Magnet Schools	District Size (in square miles)	Population Type
40,655	6,038 (15%)	80	13	554	Urban Fringe of Mid-Size City

Hamilton began operating some magnet schools in the 1980s, but its program really began to flourish following the 1997 merger of the Hamilton County School System and the Chattanooga, Tennessee, City School System. Before the merger, the county district primarily served non-minority students, while the city system largely served minority students. The superintendent of the newly combined district championed creation of magnet schools to reduce, eliminate, or prevent minority group isolation within the schools.

To oversee its program, Hamilton created a district magnet office headed by the Director of Magnet Schools. The district further supports magnet schools through magnet resource facilitators. Some are specialists (e.g., technology coordinators, museum liaisons) who help teachers integrate particular theme-based content or instructional practices. There are also curriculum facilitators who assist teachers in developing standards-based instruction related to the magnet theme and who provide professional development opportunities.

Like many districts, Hamilton was able to grow its magnet program through the use of federal funds. A 1998 MSAP grant of \$8.1 million allowed the district to open six new magnet schools, and a second MSAP grant of \$6.5 million in 2001 supported creation of four additional magnets. Following expiration of the second grant in June 2004, the district was planning to sustain the existing magnet schools without federal dollars.

One way Hamilton has increased magnet school sustainability is by requiring parents whose child attends a magnet school outside their neighborhood to volunteer

a minimum of 18 hours a year at school. The result is increased parent involvement—a key to the success of magnet schools in general—and fiscal savings. Hamilton has also developed several successful community partnerships, which provide funding and other support, and the district encourages individual magnet school principals to forge community partnerships as well.

Many Hamilton magnet schools have typical themes, such as Fine Arts, Math and Science, and Technology. But several magnets are organized around specific pedagogies, such as the two Paideia schools, which use unique approaches to student learning, including a focus on seminar discussions and coaching of academic skills.

Beyond their efforts to attract a representative student population, Hamilton magnet schools maintain their commitment to diversity by grouping students heterogeneously and setting a high standard of achievement for all students. Students with special needs and students with records of bad behavior are neither screened out in the application process nor separated in the classrooms.

The admissions process for Hamilton's magnet schools varies by school. Two of the original magnet schools are open to students from throughout the district and offer admission on a first-come, first-served basis. The 6–12-grade fine arts school requires student auditions. Students with good audition results receive preference; any remaining seats are then assigned using the lottery system the district has developed for its other magnet schools. The work-site schools offer priority to students whose parents work in the designated zones around

the schools, as well as to neighborhood students wishing to attend. If more students apply than there are seats available, the district uses the lottery.

In the lottery, an applicant pool is determined for each grade level at each school. The Information Services office analyzes each pool to see how its socioeconomic breakdown compares to the district's overall student population and then uses a mathematical formula to award extra lottery numbers to students from under-represented groups. For example, in the 2003–04 school year, 46 percent of district students qualified for free and reduced lunch. If only 40 percent of the applicant pool for a particular grade that year qualified for free and reduced lunch, those applicants may have received one or two extra lottery numbers to maintain a balance. The district may also award extra numbers to suburban applicants to maintain a balance between students who live within the city limits and those who do not. Finally, the district saves about 15 percent of available seats at each school for siblings of current students.

The lottery system has been critical in helping ensure that the magnet schools meet their desegregation goals. For example, in 1998, Barger Academy had a minority population of 96 percent; since becoming a magnet school, minority students account for 76 percent of the student body. Likewise, Chattanooga High School Center for the Creative Arts has gone from having a minority population of 71 percent in 1998 to 40 percent in 2004.

The magnet program is also helping the district turn around low-performing schools and meet the requirements of NCLB. Three low-performing high schools have recently been targeted for inclusion in the

magnet program to improve the quality of teaching and instruction. The district's experience with magnets suggests that parents will support this approach. Many middle-class students who once attended private schools are now returning to the public schools, the district reports.

The district attributes the success of its magnet school program to several factors:

- » **The right personnel.** For its magnet schools, the district looks for leaders who are passionate, committed, hard working, and capable of establishing a culture of collaboration.
- » **A focus on professional development.** District leaders look for multiple ways to support teachers' professional development.
- » **Marketing and recruiting.** The district and its schools use multiple avenues to recruit students. The district also contracts with a marketing firm to teach principals marketing techniques and to help them conduct focus groups and surveys.
- » **Magnet-savvy board members.** The district sees school board support as pivotal in the success of the magnet program.
- » **Learning from other magnets.** Principals, magnet resource personnel, and community members visit other schools to get ideas and to solicit help in planning.
- » **Parent volunteer requirement.** The district requires parents to volunteer, and schools offer creative ways to volunteer, including weekend events.

Hot Springs School District, Arkansas

Districtwide Enrollment	Magnet Enrollment	Total Number of Schools	Number of Magnet Schools	District Size (in square miles)	Population Type
3,555	3,382 (95%)	8	6	36	Mid-size Central City

Hot Springs School District is an all-magnet district; its only nonmagnet schools are alternative schools serving court-involved or emotionally challenged youth. Yet Hot Springs' magnet program began only in 2000–01 after a federal district court ordered it as part of a multidistrict desegregation plan. Arkansas law says that students may attend school in other districts if their transfer will improve racial integration, and Hot Springs' magnet program serves students from 12 other districts along with its own. Regional superintendents from 7 of the 12 districts in this plan, along with the NAACP, had agreed to the magnet plan before the court made its orders official.

With its magnet program, Hot Springs also hoped to reverse a declining enrollment; it had been losing an average of more than 100 students a year since 1969 to private schools or to public schools in other districts. Since the inception of its magnet schools the district has gained students every year.

Support for the initial year of the magnet program came from state and local operating funds. But the following year, 2001–02, Hot Springs received a three-year, \$6 million MSAP grant, which it used to renovate buildings, hire theme specialists and literacy coaches, and purchase supplies.

Hot Springs now has four magnet elementary schools, one magnet middle school, and one magnet high school. To implement the elementary magnets, the original elementary structure was altered: The district moved from having three pre-K–3 schools and one 4–5 school to four K–5 campuses. In its initial planning, Hot

Springs considered establishing a K–12 theme based on language immersion, but abandoned the idea due to concern that it would be unable to find and keep enough staff with the requisite language skills.

The district's magnet themes are aligned vertically from the elementary level to the high school level (where they are called career academies). Within these themes are various strands across several grade levels. While the themes are essential to the magnet programs, the instructional focus on all campuses, driven by state academic standards, is twofold: mathematics and literacy. The themes, says the Hot Springs superintendent, are used to "build a better vehicle for learning" the core content.

Hot Springs Middle School houses three academies under one roof and organizes instruction using the "teaming" and "looping" concepts. Each academy consists of five core teachers who stay with the same students for students' entire middle school experience (from sixth to eighth grade). This creates small and supportive learning communities for the students and teachers.

Hot Springs High School sorts each of the four middle school academy themes into five "Career Academies": business/technology, communications/humanities/law, creative and performing arts, health sciences/human services, and mathematics/engineering/sciences.

The magnet school admissions policies in Hot Springs are influenced by the fact that the schools are part of an interdistrict program. Out-of-district and in-district applicants are given the same opportunity to enter a Hot Springs magnet school. However, priority is given

to students returning to a school or a theme and to those who have siblings in the school to which they are applying. A computerized lottery has been established in the event that a grade level at a particular school has been over-subscribed, but the district has yet to use this system. Ninety-five percent of applicants are placed in their first choice school and, to date, no one has been placed in his or her third choice.

To support the teachers, students, and overall program, each school has a magnet coordinator responsible for maintaining the integrity of the theme and supporting the core curriculum. The magnet coordinators work with each other to align the programs and experiences from one campus to the next as students progress from elementary to high school. They also monitor students to ensure that they are in the right program and are successful. Magnet coordinators also assist with the application process and recruitment of students. An additional avenue of support for each campus is a math and/or literacy focus teacher who works with teachers and students to improve achievement in those areas. The district also has a magnet director, a position originally funded by the district's MSAP grant.

The district reports having made significant progress toward its goal of reducing and preventing minority group isolation in its schools. However, the district is aware of and is carefully monitoring two campuses that are at risk of racial isolation. The district also reports that since the inception of its magnet program, it has found some indicators of student achievement gains. For example, across the district results on benchmark assessments in mathematics for the 6th and 8th grades have improved markedly.

The achievement gap is also closing: Minority students made greater gains than non-minority students over a two-year period in four of five comparisons. This success gives the district another angle on increasing enrollment—it has opened Hot Springs schools to students throughout Garland County who are eligible to transfer under NCLB.

The magnet director identifies the following factors as keys to magnet program success thus far:

- » **Use of data.** Hot Springs has built greater district and school capacity to administer assessments and access data to drive instruction and professional development.
- » **Identification of an especially appealing theme.** The district has found its K-12 International Baccalaureate Program to be especially popular.
- » **Research.** Sending teachers, principals, counselors, and coordinators to visit successful magnet programs across the country has paid off in multiple ways.
- » **Use of outside expertise.** Seeking out specialists and other experts in particular magnet themes has helped ensure their success.
- » **An all-magnet approach.** Creating a district in which all schools have a magnet theme has infused energy and interest districtwide.

Houston Independent School District, Texas

Districtwide Enrollment	Magnet Enrollment	Total Number of Schools	Number of Magnet Schools	District Size (in square miles)	Population Type
211,499	37,562 (18%)	307	108	301	Large Central City

In 1975, Houston Independent School District received a court order to desegregate. It decided early on to use a magnet program as its tool for desegregation. So, in the 1975-76 school year, the district opened 32 magnet schools. In 1980, Houston successfully petitioned to be declared unitary, thus ending the court mandate for desegregation. As part of this process, the Texas Education Agency accepted Houston's Voluntary Interdistrict Education Plan with the goal of educational enrichment for both urban and suburban students. Houston's magnet program was included as an integral part of this voluntary plan.

Houston now supports 54 magnet elementary schools, 28 magnet middle schools, and 27 magnet high schools. These magnets are tasked with meeting two objectives: to provide academic programs whose quality and special focus will attract students from across the district and to increase the percentage of students attending integrated schools. However, Houston does not use race as an admissions factor. Each magnet campus or theme may have different entrance requirements. Secondary campuses use a matrix that helps to determine students' qualifying status.

DeBakey High School for Health Professions, located in the renowned Texas Medical Center, is an example of a magnet with a unique theme strong enough to attract excellent students from all over this huge district. The school provides a rigorous and comprehensive pre-college program for students pursuing careers in medicine, health care, and the sciences. Students apply for admission to DeBakey and are selected based on past academic performance, nationally normed test scores,

conduct, past attendance and merit. DeBakey students consistently perform above district and statewide averages on the SAT and ACT examinations.

The district oversees magnet schools through its Magnet Department, which operates under the Assistant Superintendent of School Support Services and Athletics. Staffed by a manager, a specialist, and an administrative assistant, this department assists schools in the design, development, implementation, and/or modification of new and established magnet themes. Department staff also facilitate curriculum development for specialized courses, coordinate staff development for magnet coordinators, and plan and implement awareness and recruitment activities. In addition, the department monitors the types of programs offered at various levels and locations and seeks to maintain a balance among a variety of programs offered and the needs expressed by the community.

To ensure quality, continuity of services, and on-site technical assistance, all magnet schools have the option to have a magnet coordinator placed on their campus. This position is paid for by site funds and is assigned at the discretion of the campus administrator. Magnet coordinators perform the following duties: develop magnet program goals and objectives; recruit students for the school's magnet program; maintain program quality; assist with curriculum development and/or revision; and assist with the magnet budget to maintain financial reports, requisitions, and inventory.

Houston received a grant from the Magnet Schools of America Program for the 1985-88 period. Since then,

the district itself has funded the schools. Houston is highly decentralized and each school has control of its own budget, though magnet schools may apply to the district magnet office for additional funds for special projects. Many magnet schools also receive additional support from local businesses and other community sources. From the state's desegregation busing funds, Houston also receives approximately \$19 million, which covers 50 percent of the district's transportation-related operating costs.

Students from outside the school district may attend Houston's magnet programs, but they are required to pay tuition equal to the difference in the cost to educate a student in Houston and the funding that is reimbursed by the state. Houston's magnet schools receive applications from all over the country and world, from people intending to relocate to Houston and who want their children to attend a magnet school. Its widespread appeal is a testament to the success of Houston's magnet program. Testing data routinely show magnet students outperforming other students in the district.

Administrators in Houston attribute their success with magnets to the following factors:

- » **Magnet coordinator position.** This on-campus position has as its first priority successful implementation of the magnet theme.
- » **Regular meetings.** The Magnet Department meets on a monthly basis with all magnet coordinators. The magnet coordinators also meet monthly in theme and grade-level clusters.
- » **Commitment from top levels at district.** School board members, superintendents, and central office staff are all supportive of magnet schools.
- » **Formal, established policies and procedures.** The district has adopted and monitors non-negotiable policies and procedures that support the continuity of services and opportunities at its magnet schools.
- » **Rich variety of choices.** Parents and students can choose from dozens of themes in 108 schools and can apply to as many programs as they wish.

Montclair Public Schools, New Jersey

Districtwide Enrollment	Magnet Enrollment	Total Number of Schools	Number of Magnet Schools	District Size (in square miles)	Population Type
6,340	4,600 (73%)	11	10	6.25	Urban Fringe of Large City

The Montclair Public Schools has over 30 years of experience in the planning and implementation of magnet schools. Like so many other districts, Montclair began its program as a desegregation solution. Since then, Montclair has become essentially an all-magnet district, providing a high level of choice for Montclair families.

The district's one comprehensive high school is not considered a magnet school although it has programs to complement all middle school magnet themes. It has developed several Small Learning Communities that have specific themes and function in accordance with magnet philosophy. The Small Learning Communities were recently selected by the U.S. Department of Education as a national model and were awarded a federal grant.

Montclair's Assistant Superintendent and the Assistant to the Superintendent share responsibility for conducting elementary and middle school orientations annually to provide parents with information about registration procedures, districtwide curriculum and academic standards, and the specific unique features of each school's magnet theme. Montclair also has a Parent Coordinator who spearheads the provision of a variety of parent classes throughout the school year. The district attributes a great deal of its success to the high level of parental involvement in the schools.

When parents register their children for school in Montclair, they must rank their school selection choices in order of preference from first to last choice. This ranking provides more flexibility for district staff

in student placement in the event that a child is not assigned to either the first or second choice of a magnet school. Ultimately, student assignment to an individual magnet school is predicated upon space availability. All of the magnet schools are popular and draw considerable interest from Montclair's parents. The fact that all of the magnet schools are popular helps alleviate the possibility of having an inordinate number of requests for one school, requests that cannot be accommodated because of lack of space. Special consideration is given to students who already have a sibling enrolled in a particular school or who have special education or English-as-a-second-language needs. After these considerations have been addressed, a computerized lottery system is utilized to fill remaining seats in each school.

The district has received federal funding for magnet programs linked to school integration efforts since the 1970s. Over the years, Montclair has received three multiyear federal grants from the highly competitive Magnet Schools Assistance Program. The last grant awarded in 1998 provided \$1.8 million to improve the overall quality of the three middle schools over a three-year period.

The Montclair Board of Education has demonstrated support for the magnet program by providing adequate budgets in the absence of federal funding. This is not an easy task. The Montclair Board of Education was forced to eliminate a popular pre-kindergarten program due to lack of space and rising program costs that were negatively impacting the K-12 program.

The township does not have an abundance of ratables to ease the property taxes of Montclair residents. Approximately 86 percent of school budget costs are derived from local taxes. Despite the considerable tax burden, Montclair parents have lobbied for and are supportive of the school budget.

The local community also assists in providing financial support for the magnet schools. In addition to local nonprofit organizations, such as the Montclair Fund for Educational Excellence, the district is fortunate to have several resident philanthropists who have donated considerable funds to the schools for a variety of academic programs, as well as the renovation of athletics facilities.

Although significant national attention is now focused on the “achievement gap,” Montclair has been focused on this issue for 15 years or more. A 1989 independent evaluation of its magnet program found that racial balance had been attained but that the achievement of students of color was considerably lower than that of white students in the district. As the only charter member from New Jersey in the national Minority Student Achievement Network, Montclair has been focusing considerable attention on closing this achievement gap and is attaining incremental success. The gap persists, but is smaller in many cases. Although six of Montclair’s eleven schools are Title I schools, none of them have been designated as low performing under NCLB. Overall, 93 percent of the district’s high school graduates attend college, including 87 percent of its African American students.

Montclair attributes the success of its magnet program to five key factors:

- » **High-quality teachers and administrators.** Montclair has made it a priority to have well-chosen, well-prepared principals working with an

integrated staff of well-trained, committed teachers. It is revisiting its approach to teacher supervision and evaluation, recognizing that teachers with different levels of experience (e.g., a veteran master teacher vs. a newcomer) require different kinds of support and development.

- » **Rigorous standards-based curriculum.** To support a partnership among all stakeholders in the system, Montclair disseminates a series of brochures that outline what every student is expected to know and be able to do at each grade level in core subjects.
- » **Continuous parental involvement.** The district has successfully marshaled parent support to help in the classroom and in other ways on-site, as well as to raise money through direct fund-raising and through lobbying for public funds. In addition to identifying key contacts and explaining question and complaint procedures, Montclair’s “Parent’s/ Caregiver’s Quick Guide to Navigating Through the School System” lists ways in which parents can get involved in their child’s education.
- » **Voluntary (not mandatory) busing.** Montclair offers bus transportation to elementary students who live 1.25 miles or more from school, middle-grade students who live 1.5 miles or more from school, and high school students who live more than 2.5 miles away. Each bus route is designed to take only 18-20 minutes to complete. Over the past several years the district has been able to bus students who live one mile from the school they attend.
- » **Staggered school opening and dismissal schedules.** This approach helps ensure that students don’t miss instructional times due to the complex busing schedule.

Wake County Public School System, North Carolina

Districtwide Enrollment	Magnet Enrollment	Total Number of Schools	Number of Magnet Schools	District Size (in square miles)	Population Type
108,970	25,130 (23%)	127	43	832	Urban Fringe of Large City

In 1976, the predominantly minority urban school district in Raleigh, North Carolina merged with the Wake County Public School System, a predominantly non-minority rural district. The new district implemented a magnet school program in 1982 as part of a voluntary desegregation plan, beginning with 13 schools. Since then the magnet program has grown quickly, to 50 magnet schools in 2004–05. This rapid growth is partially due to very high growth rates in the district in general. The district has been growing by approximately 3,500 students every year and is projected to have a student population of approximately 160,000 by 2020.

Wake takes an unusual approach to its magnet program. Instead of each magnet school having a unique theme within the district, a number of individual themes are available at more than one school. For example, a number of schools offer the “magnet” of a year-round school calendar. So instead of applying to a specific school, a student essentially applies for a particular theme and is then assigned to whichever school offering this theme is nearest to his or her home address.

In 1997, Wake schools began using a computer selection model to manage the admissions process for magnet schools. Applicants to magnet programs are selected through a weighted lottery. While diversity is still a criterion for selection, in 1997 race was removed from the selection process and the district now uses socioeconomic status as a key indicator for diversity. The last 10 percent of available seats at any magnet school are chosen totally at random after the “weighted” priority list.

Some members of the community served by Wake do not support the magnet school program and would like to see a return to a neighborhood school system. However, a computer model designed to model what would happen if Wake returned to such a system revealed that the schools would become resegregated.

Despite the criticism some community members have, there continues to be a very high demand for the magnet program. For the 2004–05 school year, Wake received 6,883 applications for the magnet programs; 42.9 percent were accepted and 57.1 percent denied. The year-round schools received 4,299 applications; 40.6 percent were accepted and 59.4 were denied. Second round offers are made to students if space is available.

As in many other districts, community partnerships have greatly impacted magnet schools. The Centennial Magnet Middle School, for example, is actually located on the campus of North Carolina State University. The students, parents, and teachers of this magnet school frequently interact with the faculty and students and make use of the facilities of the university.

Wake County has a magnet office with a staff of 11 people. The senior director of magnet programs is responsible for the entire magnet program. The senior administrator of magnet curriculum works with all magnet schools to help them develop curriculum and implement their themes. This person meets regularly with magnet program coordinators at each campus to address all magnet issues. The magnet marketing and communications coordinator designs marketing and recruiting strategies.

While the magnet office has direct responsibility for the magnet program and magnet school operations, constant collaboration between the magnet office and other district departments, such as the office of growth management, curriculum and instruction, evaluation and research, human resources, and transportation, is critical to the program's success. The curriculum and instruction office ensures that magnet courses address state standards, and the communications department assists with magnet marketing and recruitment efforts by coordinating media outreach. The student selection process is run through the office of growth management, which is completely disconnected from the magnet office.

The magnet program has its own budget and disperses money to the schools. Magnet schools can also write their own grants and solicit community partnerships to help bring in more funding. The schools also seek parental support to create alternative funding mechanisms. Federal grants, Title V money, and limited local contributions have helped support the magnet program to date.

The Wake superintendent sees the district's magnet schools as incubators of innovation. He credits the magnets with having had a positive impact on the entire district because they have created a culture of healthy competition between schools within the district, which he believes has made all schools stronger. As a testament to this belief, the district cites the fact that in 2003, 91.3 percent of students tested at or above grade level, up from 81.9 percent in 1998. Also, the gap in achievement scores between white, African American, and Native American students is narrowing, especially for K–8 students.

According to the superintendent, the success of Wake's magnet program can be attributed to the following:

- » **Commitment by district leadership.** Both the school board and top district administrators support the program.
- » **Dedicated magnet program office.** Having a magnet-focused administrative structure has facilitated magnet implementation.



Appendix B: Research Methodology

The project methodology is an adaptation of the four-phase benchmarking process used by the American Productivity and Quality Center, along with case descriptions of individual districts and cross-site analysis of key findings. A brief description of this project's adapted methodology follows.

Plan

First, a conceptual framework was developed based on a review of the magnet school literature, interviews with researchers and educators, and the input of an advisory panel consisting of researchers, association leaders, and educators who work with schools, districts, and states on magnet school implementation. The resulting study scope guided all aspects of the study (see figure 12).

Site selection was a multistep process to ensure that the guide would feature strong districts with evidence of success and an array of practices covering the elements of the framework. An initial list of 30 magnet school districts was compiled through primary and secondary research by WestEd with suggestions from the expert advisory panel. Sixteen districts provided enough data for the screening process, with six then chosen for further study. In making this selection, priority was given to districts that could show improvements over time in both student learning and school integration. It was also important that districts, while perhaps using federal funds to start their magnet program or ramp it up, had committed to sustaining it without further federal dollars. In addition,

researchers looked for districts that offered at least three different magnet themes and that had adopted aggressive marketing efforts. Finally, districts were selected to represent a variety of geographic locations and contexts with which district administrators could identify.

Collect Data

Collecting detailed descriptive information from project participants was key to understanding the district's practices, the outcomes or impact achieved, and lessons learned in implementation from which others could benefit. The major steps to this phase were finalizing the site-visit interview guide and arranging and conducting site visits to the innovation sites.

Each of the six innovation sites hosted a two-day site visit that included interviews with district staff, magnet school principals, parents, and others to obtain multiple perspectives on the questions in the site-visit interview guide. In addition to these semi-structured interviews, the researchers also held more informal conversations with a range of stakeholders. They also collected artifacts from the sites, such as magnet program or school

FIGURE 12. Study Scope and Guiding Questions

Organizing Profile

What is the overall goal of the district magnet program and how did the program get started? What are the funding sources for the district magnet program and how are they sustained over time?

Create Effective Leadership, Strategy, and Culture

How does the district magnet program contribute to meeting the state, district, and NCLB Act goals? How do leaders support the culture of the district magnet schools and themes?

Support School to Fully Implement the Program

How does the district determine magnet school theme/standards? How does the district implement content of the themes?

Involve Stakeholders

How does the district involve parents in the magnet program? How does the district involve local business and community partners in the magnet program?

Carefully Select and Develop Human Resources

What is the process for selecting principals and teachers for a magnet school or theme? What are the special professional development activities at the school/theme level?

Evaluate and Ensure Accountability

How does the district evaluate the effectiveness of the communication relationship with stakeholders? How does the district monitor program implementation and ensure sustainability of the magnet program?

brochures, marketing materials, teacher contracts, and letters to parents, to provide concrete examples of district practices. The study team collated the information collected during the site visits and developed a case study for each site.

Analyze and Report

Once all the information was collected, the project team analyzed the data to understand the promising practices uncovered throughout the benchmarking project, both within and across sites. Key findings emerged from this cross-site analysis.

Two products resulted from this research: a report of findings and this practitioner's guide. The report of findings provides an analysis of key findings across sites, a detailed profile of each site, a collection of artifacts, and key project documents. The practitioner's guide excerpts from and summarizes the findings and case studies and is intended for broad distribution.

Adapt

Ultimately, readers of this guide will need to select, adapt, and implement practices that meet their individual needs and contexts. Dissemination will take place through a variety of channels. The guide will be broadly distributed around the country through presentations at national and regional conferences, as well as through national associations and networks.

Districts coming together in learning communities may continue the study, using the ideas and practices from these sites as a springboard for their own action research. In this way, a pool of promising practices will grow, and districts can support each other in implementation and learning.



Appendix C: Resources

The Web resources listed below that were not developed by the U.S. Department of Education are provided as examples of materials that may be helpful to the reader. The listings should not imply an endorsement by the Department of the resources or the Web sites. There may be many other useful Web sites on these topics.

The Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) of the U.S. Department of Education provides grants to districts whose magnet program is implemented under a mandatory (e.g., court-ordered) or federally approved voluntary desegregation plan. The MSAP Web site provides details of the grants competition, including eligibility criteria, as well as abstracts of sample programs and a detailed "Frequently Asked Questions" section. <http://www.ed.gov/programs/magnet/index.html> .

The Policy and Program Studies Service of the U.S. Department of Education contracted an evaluation of the Magnet Schools Assistance Program 1998 Grantees. The final report of this study conducted by the American Institutes for Research and published in 2003 includes both a cross-site report and case studies of eight districts. <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ods/ppss/reports.html> .

Magnet Schools of America is a membership organization that: promotes goals of desegregation, equity, and excellence through the expansion and improvement of magnet schools, encourages the passage of legislation at both the state and national levels that will promote the development and improvement of magnet schools, and promotes networking among magnet schools. It

hosts an annual conference and publishes books and resources, including the Blueprint CD-ROM described below. <http://www.magnet.edu/>.

Blueprint for Understanding and Operating Successful Magnet and Theme-Based Schools. Authors: Drs. Judith S. Stein, Phyllis M. Olmstead; Editors: Dr. Robert G. Brooks, Mr. Phale D. Hale. This Multimedia PC CD-ROM provides a "how to" approach to understanding, planning, and operating magnet and theme-based educational programs. Specific guidelines for designing an academic program, staffing, budgeting, and marketing are offered.

The Education Commission of the States includes magnet schools as one of the key issues in K-12 education on its Web site. The site presents the issue and provides references and links. <http://www.ecs.org/>.

There are ten regional Equity Assistance Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. They provide assistance to public schools in the areas of race, gender, and national origin to promote equal educational opportunities. <http://www.edgateway.net/pub/docs/eacn/home.html> .



Notes

¹ Blank, R. K., Dentler, R. A., Baltzell, D. C., & Chabotar, K. (1983). *Survey of magnet schools: Analyzing a model for quality integrated education*. Prepared by James H. Lowry and Associates and Abt Associates for U. S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

² The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Title V, Part C, Section 5301. Available online: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html> .

³ From the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data public school district data for the 2002–03 school year.

⁴ Data for Duval, Hot Springs, and Montclair are from 2003–04 and are taken from the Florida, Arkansas, and New Jersey State Department of Education Web sites, respectively. Data for Hamilton, Houston, and Wake are from 2002–03. Hamilton data are from the State of Tennessee Department of Education Web site, Houston data were supplied by the district, and Wake data are from the district Web site.

⁵ Data for Duval and Hot Springs are from 2003–04 and are taken from the Florida and Arkansas State Department of Education Web sites, respectively. Data for Hamilton, Houston, and Wake are from 2002–03. Hamilton data are from the State of Tennessee Department of Education Web site, Houston data were supplied by the district, and Wake data are from the district Web site. No data were available for Montclair.

⁶ Data for Duval, Hot Springs, and Montclair are from 2003–04 and are taken from the Florida, Arkansas, and New Jersey State Department of Education Web sites, respectively. Data for Hamilton are also from 2003–04 and were supplied by the district. Data for Houston and Wake are from 2002–03. Houston data were supplied by the district and Wake data are from the district Web site.

⁷ Data for Duval and Hot Springs are from 2003–04 and are taken from the Florida and Arkansas State Department of Education Web sites, respectively. Data for Hamilton, Houston, Montclair, and Wake are from 2002–03. Hamilton data are from the State of Tennessee Department of Education Web site, Houston data were supplied by the district, Wake data are from the district Web site, and Montclair data are from the NCES Web site.

⁸ Dentler, R. A. (1991). *The national evidence on magnet schools* (Occasional Paper Series). Los Alamitos, CA: Southwest Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, p. 6.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 13.

¹¹ Brooks, R. G., Kammel, L., Olmstead, P. M., Pack, G., & Stein, J. S. (2004). *Blueprint for understanding and operating successful magnet and theme-based schools, 2nd edition: Voluntary public school choice*. Washington, D.C.: Magnet Schools of America.

¹² Dentler, p. 7.

¹³ See, for example, Fullan, M. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. London: Falmer Press; Fuller, B. & Elmore, R. (Eds.). (1996). *Who chooses, who loses? Culture, institutions, and the unequal effects of school choice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

¹⁴ Wake County Public School System Web site, Evaluation and Research, mission statement: http://www.wcps.net/evaluation-research/mission_stment.pdf .

