

## BUILDING GOLD RIBBON SCHOOLS



### HOW CAN YOU HELP?

It is possible for all students to attend a high quality school regardless of race, location, or economic background. It takes perseverance, time, and hard work, which educators should not have to do alone. You can support your school community by having conversations with school principals and administrators, donating your time or money to school programs and special events, advocating to the district's school board, joining or starting a Parent-Teacher Association and encouraging your local and state policymakers to pass policies that benefit and improve opportunities for all students in Texas.

For more ways to support your school community, go to [childrenatrisk.org/get-involved](http://childrenatrisk.org/get-involved).

## THANK YOU

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CHILDREN AT RISK serves as a catalyst for change to improve the quality of life for children through strategic research, public policy analysis, education, collaboration, and advocacy. For more information please contact [info@childrenatrisk.org](mailto:info@childrenatrisk.org) or 713-869-7740

# BUILDING GOLD RIBBON SCHOOLS

A Blueprint for  
Success in  
High-Poverty  
Schools



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# BUILDING GOLD RIBBON SCHOOLS: A Blueprint for Success in High-Poverty Schools

To understand school quality, each year CHILDREN AT RISK (C@R) ranks and grades schools across Texas. C@R celebrates schools that rise beyond expectations and excel academically. Gold Ribbon Schools are an example of these campuses that outperform their peers. More than 75% of a Gold Ribbon School campus' students are low-income and they receive an A or a B in C@R's annual school rankings.\*



For many years, Gold Ribbon Schools have been nonexistent or rare. However, poverty is not an excuse for low-performing schools; the rise in Gold Ribbon Schools across the state is proof. In order to better understand what makes these schools successful, C@R interviewed Principals of Gold Ribbon Schools across five school districts in the Greater Houston Area. From these conversations, C@R identified common themes and practices that can be easily adopted by campuses and concrete practices that parents can advocate for. A blueprint of best practices for other campuses, the following recommendations may help lead to improved academic performance.

\* For more information on C@R's school rankings visit [TexasSchoolGuide.org](http://TexasSchoolGuide.org)

## SET A CULTURE OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Gold Ribbon Schools have a high bar of success for students no matter who they are or where they live. When expectations are high, students often rise to meet them. Similarly, when expectations are low, students will frequently fail to raise the bar, even when they are capable of more. Instead of lowering expectations or making excuses, administrators, teachers, support staff, and parents reinforce the belief that all students can and will perform well in school. In most cases, administrators lead the charge in setting and keeping expectations high. When hiring staff, principals should look for teachers committed to the students they serve with a proven track record of academic growth and perseverance. Gold Ribbon Schools also empower and invest in parents to reinforce those high expectations at home.



**Field Elementary's** philosophy is "everything is negotiable--except student achievement." This philosophy is the foundation of everything they do, from hiring to non-academic activities. As a result, staff expectations and community engagement provide high-quality experiences to all students.

## COMMUNICATE CONTINUOUSLY WITH FAMILIES

Gold Ribbon Schools recognize the importance of meaningful communication with parents often and in a variety of ways. Transparency and clarity are necessary to help parents feel welcome, understand the progress of their students, and know how to engage in the school setting. On at least a weekly basis, Gold Ribbon Schools relay campus-wide information through multiple platforms including emails, text messages, phone calls, in-person meetings, carpool lines, school events, and online platforms. Beyond mass communication, Gold Ribbon Schools emphasize a belief that frequent and consistent touch points with parents build stronger relationships and engagement among families. Parents are actively updated on their child's unique needs and academic performance. They receive regular contact from teachers and administrators, not just when students miss an assignment or misbehave, but to celebrate success and accomplishments.



**Milton Cooper Elementary** recognizes that schools must build and maintain valuable relationships with parents. Parent communication and engagement are key to both a student's and school's success. Milton Cooper created a survey seeking parent input on the type of communication, events, and support they wanted and would be most helpful from their child's school. Taking those survey responses into consideration, Milton Cooper has been able to engage with and meet the needs of students, parents, and families in ways that are most helpful to everyone at their campus.

## USE DATA TO DRIVE INSTRUCTION

Faculty and staff at all schools have a great deal of data accessible to them including STAAR scores, formative assessment data, attendance rates, and more. Gold Ribbon Schools do a great job of utilizing this data as an integral part of administrator strategies, teacher-led interventions, and student buy-in. A best practice many Gold Ribbon Schools have established is educating both teachers and students on how to use the data available to them. Teachers can use data to identify gaps in student learning and inform teaching strategies. Students can use data to set their own learning goals and track progress. Giving teachers and students data tools and capacity to identify what works for them is critical to giving them a sense of ownership and implementing what works in classrooms.



**Park Place Elementary** finds value in collecting data and teaching students and parents how to use, analyze, and interpret it. Through a collaborative effort, teachers compile data on students before the start of the school year. Then throughout the year this effort is paired with ongoing assessments, practice exams, and student goal setting. Data-informed instruction provides both teachers and students the opportunity to understand their growth and plans for future learning.

## SUPPORT THE WHOLE CHILD

Gold Ribbon Schools recognize the importance of addressing the needs of the whole child. They implement innovative programs and supports to ensure students are present, ready, and able to learn each day. The needs of students and communities are unique and directly impact student's well-being and ability to fully engage in the classroom; these needs do not go away when students walk through the school doors. Students from low-income communities are more likely to experience challenges such as being hungry from limited food access, having a toothache they cannot get fixed, not getting a good night's sleep because they share a room with multiple family members, or a variety of other difficult experiences. Offering robust after-school programming, providing three meals a day, and using school social workers or wrap around support specialists to connect parents to resources, are just a few of the ways Gold Ribbon Schools are working to improve student and family well-being.



**Frazier Elementary** turned the devastation of Hurricane Harvey into an opportunity for serving the whole child. School staff, community members, and donors served families through a donation store to provide home-goods, meals, clothing, and other resources to those impacted. During this time of rebuilding, the school addressed the importance of home life for each student and continues to build on these efforts more than one year after Harvey.

## REACH OUTSIDE THE BOX FOR RESOURCES

Under current Texas funding formulas, many high poverty schools struggle to make ends meet, let alone implement new, innovative strategies and proven best-practices. Gold Ribbon Schools frequently find creative opportunities to fund special initiatives and programs. Teachers, staff, and community members rally around their students to provide additional resources. Whether it be through engaging individual donors, applying for foundation funds, or using technology platforms like Donor's Choose or Facebook, Gold Ribbon Schools find a way to bring in the additional funds needed.



**Crenshaw Elementary & Middle** utilizes their community to best meet the needs of their students. Crenshaw engages community members, small business owners, and local philanthropic leaders to address needs and provide resources for opportunities that support student learning. Intentional partnerships and innovative funding sources have led to multiple annual fundraisers that have resulted in university and trade-school scholarships, parent GED classes, school supplies for every student, winter coats for students and more.