



Inspiring minds. Shaping lives.

News Release

955 Campbell Road, Houston, Texas 77024
(713) 464-1511, ext. 2272
Fax: (713) 365-4855

Dec. 6, 2011 – For Immediate Release

School District and Public Charter Schools Enter New Partnership to Boost Achievement for All Students

District-Charter Collaboration Compact Supported by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Education leaders in Spring Branch (Houston, TX) are proud to announce a new, three-way collaboration between Spring Branch Independent School District (SBISD), and two public charter school organizations, KIPP Houston (KIPP) and YES Prep Public Schools (YES Prep).

On Tuesday, Dec. 6, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation congratulated the newly formed SKY Partnership (SBISD, KIPP, and YES Prep) and welcomed them as the newest members of the District-Charter Collaboration Compact cities.

Spring Branch joins Chicago, which also announced its Compact today, and 12 additional public school systems – Baltimore, Denver, Hartford, Conn., Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Nashville, Tenn., New Orleans, New York City, Rochester, N.Y., Sacramento, Calif., Central Falls, R.I., and Boston – that have signed compacts in the past year.

SBISD enrolls about 33,000 students who live in Houston’s west side neighborhoods. The District-Charter Collaboration Compact is part of an ongoing commitment and dialogue between traditional public schools and charter schools to work together to share their best practices and provide all children in their communities with a public school education that prepares them with the skills and knowledge to succeed in college and the workforce.

The SKY Partnership’s effort to build a national model for cooperation within a traditional public school district will now be eligible for up to \$100,000 in grant funding from the foundation, as well as the opportunity to compete for significant additional funding for ongoing collaboration and improved student achievement.

“Spring Branch is setting an example for school districts and charter school leaders across the country to work collaboratively, learn from each another and build upon successful practices,” said Vicki L. Phillips, director of Education, College Ready, at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “Ultimately, they all have the same goal—to ensure every student succeeds – so it just makes sense for them to be on the same team. We applaud Spring Branch for publicly committing to work together and do whatever it takes to radically increase the number students prepared for college and career.”

Leaders in all three groups signed the SKY Partnership Compact, which is a general “roadmap” for continued collaboration and planning that capitalizes on the strengths of each organization to enhance

educational choice and options for SBISD secondary students. Leaders of the three groups are: Duncan F. Klussmann, Ed.D., SBISD Superintendent of Schools; Mike Feinberg, KIPP Houston Co-founder and Superintendent; and Jason Bernal, YES Prep Public Schools President.

Among the goals of the partnership is to launch the first year of a KIPP and YES Prep school-within-a-school program for the 2012-2013 school year at Landrum and Northbrook middle schools, respectively, in SBISD.

The school district has two, self-created public charter schools, both of which the Texas Education Agency (TEA) rates as Exemplary, the state's highest rating. They are Cornerstone Academy, a middle school serving about 380 students, and Westchester Academy for International Studies, a 6th-12th grade charter school that focuses on global studies and international relations.

Westchester Academy, with about 1,000 enrolled students, offers the highly prestigious and world recognized International Baccalaureate Diploma program. In November, the U.S. Department of Education named the secondary school as a national Blue Ribbon School Award recipient, the highest federal honor that an American school can earn.

These two district public charter schools are enormously popular. More than 200 Spring Branch families currently have students on waiting lists in the hopes of attending either school, one of the reasons that Superintendent Klussmann has worked to provide new options under the SKY Partnership plan.

Another driving force is SBISD's new five year plan, The Spring Branch Plan, 2012-2017, under which district leaders have proposed an ambitious goal for all high school graduates to earn some form of higher education in the field or area of their choosing.

"We believe in this partnership and its ability to benefit all students. Under SBISD's five-year goal of doubling the number of its graduates who earn a technical degree, a two-year associate's degree or a four-year bachelor's degree from a college or university, we must have strong partnerships. Together, these three high-performing organizations have the proven ability of providing highly valued school choice options," SBISD Superintendent of Schools Duncan F. Klussmann, Ed.D., said.

"We believe that we have much to learn from KIPP and YES Prep, and they have much to learn from us, as we all move forward together," he also said.

"I believe this unique partnership between a successful traditional public school system and high-performing charter school systems will serve as a model for what is possible not just in Houston, Texas, but across the nation when educators collaborate and focus on the sacred promises that we have made to the children and community," KIPP Houston Co-founder and Superintendent Mike Feinberg said.

"It is an incredible honor to partner with two organizations who believe that demographics need not define destiny and that one day *all* children will have access to a college education and the success of a college diploma," Feinberg also said.

"YES Prep has always been open to innovative practices in efforts to increase the number of low income students who graduate from high school college-ready and prepared to persist through college. YES Prep, Spring Branch, and KIPP will each bring to the partnership their best practices. The partnership will maximize these strengths and leverage them to serve students at the highest level, and I firmly believe that the partnership will serve as a national model to meet the needs of underserved students across the nation," said Jason Bernal, President of YES Prep.

Bernal added, “I am personally excited to be able to be part of this groundbreaking work and am committed to making sure that the partnership succeeds for the sake of the YES Prep, Spring Branch, and KIPP students that are all *our* children.”

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people’s health and giving the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people – especially those with the fewest resources – have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett. To read more about the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s education strategy: www.gatesfoundation.org/education

KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program). KIPP Houston’s mission is to develop in underserved students the academic skills, intellectual habits and qualities of character necessary to succeed at all levels – prekindergarten through 12th grade, college and the competitive world beyond. Guiding the work of KIPP is a commitment established by its Co-Founder Mike Feinberg to teach students to “Work Hard and Be Nice.” To read more about KIPP Houston, please visit: <http://kipphouston.org/>

Spring Branch Independent School District (SBISD). Since the 1950s, SBISD has been nationally recognized as a top performing public school district in Texas and the nation. This highly diverse school district serves 33,000 students, including 57 percent who are impoverished or reside in low-income families. On the 2010 SAT, students in SBISD outpaced the state and nation in Reading scores. For the past decade, SBISD has offered families several schooling options, including district public charter schools Cornerstone Academy, a middle school, and Westchester Academy for International Studies (WAIS), a combined middle and high school. This fall, WAIS was named a national Blue Ribbon School. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has rated Cornerstone as Exemplary, the state’s highest campus rating, since it opened. To read more about SBISD, please visit: www.springbranchisd.com

YES Prep. YES Prep’s mission is to dramatically increase the number of Houston low-income students who graduate from four-year colleges prepared to compete in the global marketplace and to give back to their communities. Under the direction of President Jason Bernal, YES Prep takes a comprehensive view of student development with an aim to prepare students for college graduation, while at the same time instilling core values of community service and good citizenship. To read more about YES Prep, please visit: <http://yesprep.org/>