



Central Texas Leaders Step Forward to Champion Critical Improvements in Region's Education System

Austin (December 9, 2008) -- Eight respected business and community leaders were announced today as the Champion Team Captains of the four priority goals identified in The Blueprint for Educational Change™ as critical to building the nation's most successful education pipeline here in Central Texas.

Sam Bryant and Ellen Balthazar will lead Goal 1: Children enter kindergarten school ready. Arnold Garcia, Jr. and Vicki Baldwin will lead Goal 2: Eliminate achievement gaps for all students while improving overall performance. Eliseo Elizondo and Dr. Ed Sharpe will lead Goal 3: All students graduate college-and-career ready and prepared for a lifetime of learning. John Sharp and Carlos Salinas will champion Goal 4: Central Texas as a community prepares children to succeed. They are joined by 10 superintendents and college presidents and over 30 prominent Central Texas leaders, including Martha Smiley, Sylvia Acevedo, Rev. Sterling Lands, Earl Maxwell, Ray Almgren, Rodney Gibbs, Elizabeth Christian, Janet Harman, and others in leading the charge to implement The Blueprint.

“Great community leadership is essential for the success of The Blueprint for Educational Change, and ultimately, for the success of our education system and our economy,” said Susan Dawson, executive director of the E3 Alliance, the regional collaborative that facilitated development of The Blueprint for Educational Change. “With the naming of these champions, we are confident that we are on the path to achieving the priorities our community has identified.”

About 150 Central Texas leaders established the priorities in January 2008 after conducting extensive research and thousands of hours of community dialogues on the status of the region's educational infrastructure and needs. The Blueprint for Educational Change, which was launched in May 2008, is an unprecedented regional strategic plan that aims to align educational resources to help all students maximize their potential and contribute to a strong economy.

Each goal will have a Champion Team that works with education institutions, community agencies and organizations, businesses, and individuals across the region. The Champion Team Leaders will serve as leading advocates for the work done on each goal.

“We are living in an increasingly globally competitive world where the strength of the U.S. is waning, and our education systems are not preparing us for a future of economic strength,” said Former Comptroller and Goal 4 Co-Captain John Sharp. “We can't keep trying incremental changes. No one institution or program can solve this problem alone. We need systemic change across the interdependent economic region. The Blueprint is the strategic plan for our region to drive that systemic change.”

The Blueprint's priorities and their champions:

**Goal 1 -- Children Enter Kindergarten School Ready
Champion Captains -- Sam Bryant and Ellen Balthazar**

Sam Bryant is president of Bryant Wealth Investment Group, a financial service firm allied with Maxwell, Locke and Ritter's Wealth Management Group. He holds leadership positions in diverse education programs, including United Way Capital Area's Success By 6 initiative, Texas Southern University Board of Regents, the Austin Independent School District, Austin Area Research Organization, and Mt. Sinai Christian Academy. His service also includes board memberships with The Boys and Girls Club of the Capital Area, The Austin Community Foundation, and Communities in Schools Advisory Board.

Ellen Balthazar joined Any Baby Can in 2005 following a 25-year career in corporate marketing and community volunteerism. She has been a member of the Eanes Independent School District Board of Trustees since 2001 and recently completed a term as chair of the Basic Needs Coalition, a collaboration of 40 service providers dedicated to improving community systems for housing stability and food security.

**Goal 2 -- Eliminate Achievement Gaps for All Students while Improving Overall Performance
Champion Captains -- Arnold Garcia, Jr. and Vicki Baldwin**

Arnold Garcia, Jr. has been a reporter and editor at the *Austin American Statesman* for nearly 35 years and has served as editorial page editor for the last 17 years. Before coming to Austin, Mr. Garcia worked at the *San Angelo Standard-Times* and served two tours of duty in the U.S. Army. His community involvement includes the board of directors of the Greater Austin Crime Commission, trustee of the Headliners Foundation, and past service to the Headliners Club, Crime Prevention Institute, Celebrate Texas and the First Tee of Greater Austin.

Vicki Baldwin recently retired from the Austin Independent School District after 41 distinguished years in public education. Known for her visionary approach to middle level education when principal of Fulmore Middle School, she was named Principal in Residence in 1995-96, to serve the U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, in the Clinton Administration. In 1997, Ms. Baldwin was asked by AISD to design and create an academic school of choice for juniors and seniors, which "removed the traditional barriers". This school is the internationally, nationally and state recognized Gonzalo Garza High School.

**Goal 3 -- Students Graduate College-and-Career Ready and Prepared for a Lifetime of Learning
Champion Captains -- Eliseo Elizondo and Dr. Ed Sharpe**

Eliseo Elizondo has held executive positions at several Austin technology firms and currently serves as Chemical Gas Commodity Manager for Freescale Semiconductor. He is an active supporter of St. Edward's University and its College Assistance Migrant Program, which provided support for his own college education as a first generation college-goer. He also serves on the East Williamson County Higher Education advisory council and chairs the American Diabetes Association Tour for the Cure bike ride.

Dr. Ed Sharpe is a faculty member in the University of Texas Department of Educational Administration; Chairman of the U. T. Elementary School Management Board; and Senior Advisor to the Provost. In over 30 years at U.T., he has previously served in administrative positions including U.T. System Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, U.T. Austin Vice President for Administration, and Interim President of the University of Texas of the Permian Basin. He is actively involved in numerous community efforts focused on education and leadership.

Goal 4 -- Central Texas as a Community Prepares Children to Succeed Champions -- John Sharp and Carlos Salinas

Former Texas Comptroller **John Sharp** currently serves as principal of Ryan & Company, a Dallas-based tax consulting firm, and chairs the Texas Tax Reform Commission as an appointee of Gov. Rick Perry. His public service includes terms in the Texas House of Representatives, Texas Senate, and Texas Railroad Commission. As Comptroller of Public Accounts from 1990-1998, he initiated innovative programs like the Texas Performance Review, the Texas School Performance Review, the Texas Tomorrow Fund and the Lone Star Card.

Carlos Salinas has enjoyed a long career with State Farm Insurance Companies and currently serves as Operations Section Manager of the Homeowner Division headquartered in Round Rock. He previously worked for State Farm in Michigan and Illinois. Mr. Salinas has lived in Round Rock since 1994 and has held leadership positions in numerous community and civic organizations.

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About The Blueprint for Educational Change™

The Blueprint for Educational Change is Central Texas' commitment to build the most successful educational pipeline in the country. It is an unprecedented, comprehensive strategic plan that is regional in scope, based on objective data, which spans the entire continuum from early childhood to workforce success. The Blueprint is a living document backed by a coalition of community, business and education leaders, to align our work, our resources, our volunteers and our assets around the success of students. Four strategic goals, along with detailed action strategies and data indicators, have been identified as being crucial to making sure that all students reach their highest potential and in turn secure our economic competitiveness and quality of life.