My Brother's Keeper Houston

A City's Collaborative Effort to Improving the Lives of Boys and Young Men of Color

Bloomberg Associates



Emancipation Park
in Third Ward

Credit: © Mark Herboth Photography LLC

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Young MBK Students gather at Middle School Game

Message from Bloomberg Associates

With every challenge comes opportunity. Houston's resiliency has been proven during natural disasters and through economic downturns. This same grit and tenacity is how the City of Houston approached the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Community Challenge- a call from President Obama in 2014 to U. S. cities to work collectively to address the barriers and burdens boys and young men of color disproportionately face within their cities.

Houston seized this opportunity because the city understood the need for such an initiative. With a current population of more than 2.3 million people, the City of Houston is one of the most populous and ethnically diverse cities in the United States of America. Boys and men of color make up 75% of the male youth population. The city's diversity was not lost on the city leadership - whose commitment to improving the lives of all Houstonians made the My Brother's Keeper Initiative an imperative.

Bloomberg Associates - a philanthropic municipal consulting firm - has been working closely with Houston since the city took up the MBK Challenge. Over the past four years, Bloomberg Associates has been providing pro bono consulting services to 25 cities that have taken up the My Brother's Keeper Challenge. Through our work, we have taken note of the cities that have been leading the charge with the My Brother's Keeper Initiative - MBK Houston is one of them. Within the 180-day timeline set by the Obama Administration, Houston produced and launched its Local Action Plan in May of 2015.

Through collaborative partnerships from education to justice reform, MBK Houston has implemented a number of programs and initiatives across the city. While its work is still maturing, we took a moment to pause and asked a series of questions to 32 local stakeholders about how MBK Houston began and the lessons learned as it has evolved.

From inside the halls of city government and in partnership with local organizations and partnering government entities, cities are in a unique position to implement systems change that significantly impacts the lives of boys and men of color. Under the leadership of Mayor Sylvester Turner, Houston illustrates some of the paths cities can take to create real impact.

This brief is intended to offer a glimpse into the inner workings of the MBK Houston efforts and shed light on the efforts needed to champion this work within City Hall. Now, more than ever, we need change agents who are willing to champion the causes of boys and young men of color boldly and unapologetically. Communities across the country have responded to this call to action. Our goal here is to tell the unique story of Houston with the hope that it may inspire others.

Bloomberg Associates Social Service Team,

Linda Gibbs, Principal
Niiobli Armah IV
Mariama N'Diaye



Reading Mentor with young boy at HYPE Freedom Schools 2017 Celebration.

Introduction

The 2012 death of Trayvon Martin was one of several that ignited a broader national consciousness of the risks young men of color face in communities across America. In 2014, following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the death of Trayvon Martin, President Obama spoke to the nation on the need for communities to confront the barriers boys and young men of color disproportionately face every day. That same year, President Obama announced the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Initiative. The initiative challenged jurisdictions to act to ensure that - no matter who you are or where you come from - you have an equal opportunity to thrive in this country and reach your full potential. The initiative sought to address the gaps in success among boys and young men of color (BYMOC) across six life-course milestones from cradle through young adulthood.

As part of this initiative, President Obama put out a call to localities to take up the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Community Challenge by implementing local plans of action focused on six milestones: Entering School Ready to Learn, Reading at Grade Level by Third Grade, Graduating from High School Ready for College and Career, Completing Post- Secondary Education or Training, Successfully Entering the Workforce, and Reducing Crime and Violence and Providing Second Chances.[1] Houston, Texas was one of the first cities to accept the challenge and take on all six milestones. Bloomberg Associates was an early supporter of the MBK Houston work and this work in many other cities. We saw robust planning, a reliance on data and evidence to guide decision-making, and sustained leadership that survived a mayoral transition. MBK Houston's work is also impressive, with a network that is deep and involves the whole community.

The work is hampered, however, by a lack of measurable goals that show how MBK Houston is effecting the lives of children across initiatives. While many initiatives are in their nascent stages, more needs to be done to produce clear metrics for success, a stronger alignment of effort around actions to meet those aspirations, and reporting of data to showcase progress that is directly attributable to MBK Houston. We also believe that the work should be formalized to strengthen its continuation beyond the current leadership, thus increasing the chances that this strong local effort has every possibility of achieving long-term success.

This report documents how MBK Houston built and maintained itself in order to share this knowledge with other localities that have either already taken up the My Brother's Keeper Challenge and are solidifying their efforts or that are seeking to do so.

In preparing this report, all major MBK Houston stakeholders, 32 in total, from strategic planning to implementation, were interviewed.

[1] My Brothers Keeper Task Force: One Year Progress Report to the President, available at https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/053014_mbk_report.pdf.

Accepting the Challenge

Prior to the launch of MBK, much of the BYMOC work around the country was seeded by private philanthropy in nonprofit organizations. A large concentration of this work was in three broad categories: a) advocacy b) cultural manhood development/mentoring, and c) field building for individuals working with BYMOC. The value-add of the MBK Community Challenge was to bring a concentration of efforts to transformational change in public sector systems.

In September 2014, at the urging of the community, Houston accepted the My Brother's Keeper Challenge and Houston held its Local Action Summit two months later in November 2014. Director Stephen Williams, a proponent of the MBK Challenge, as the lead public official, was tasked with drafting the Houston Local Action Plan. Within the original 180-day deadline set by the White House, Director Williams and his team were able to assemble a broad range of stakeholders into work groups to produce the local action plan.

Similar to other cities that accepted the MBK Community Challenge, Houston started with a relatively blank slate. It had no citywide effort focused on improving outcomes for BYMOC. To develop a citywide approach, Director Williams tapped into his agency to appoint a strong team to work across sectors and geographies in Houston. The planning process pulled in allies and champions across the multiple government, nonprofit and community sectors, gathering related activities and likeminded leaders whose work would logically be united in interest and impact.

Developing the Plan

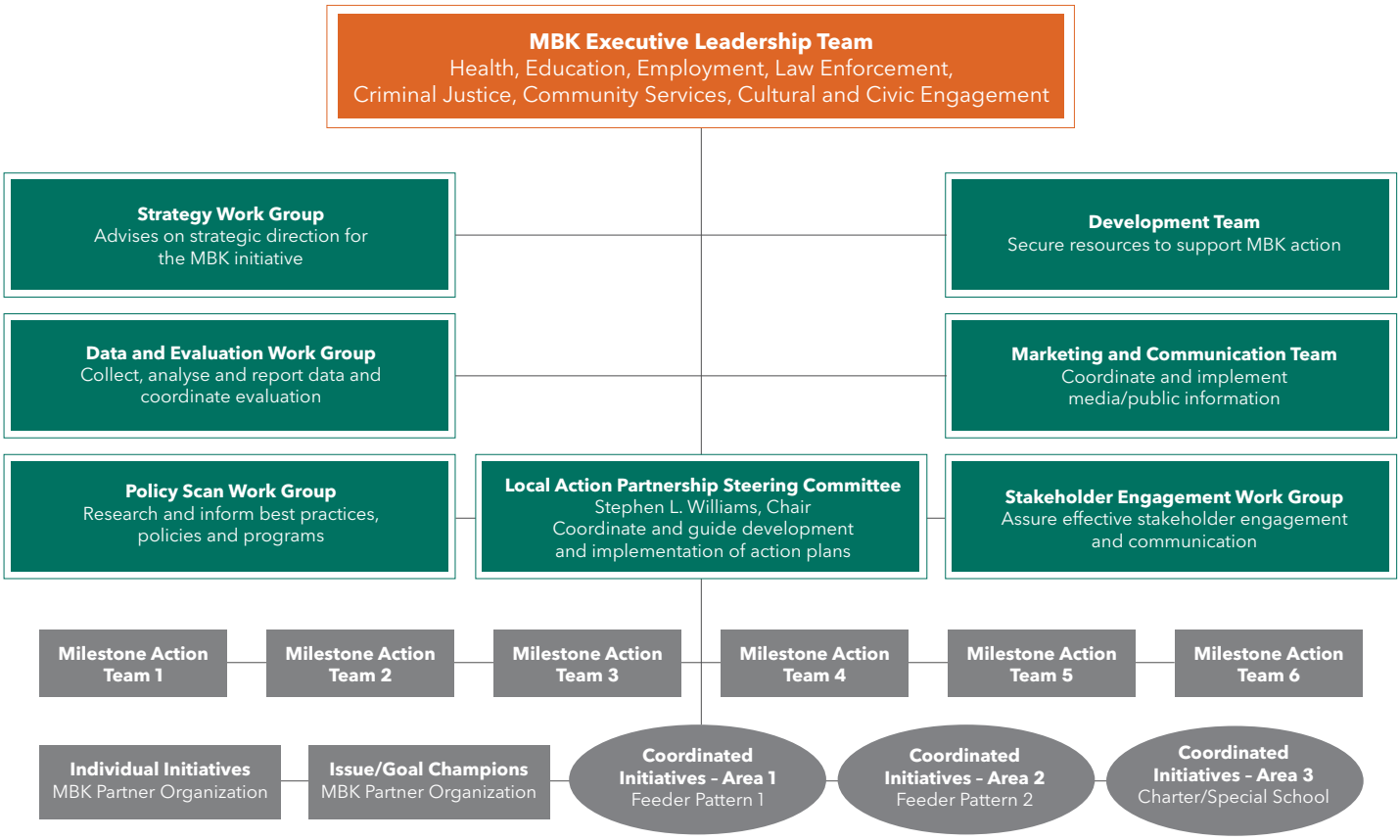
The Health Department staff provided the structure and executive oversight of a city agency, while staying well connected to the Mayor's Office. Without new funding to build a MBK team, this ensured that the initiative also had borrowed resources to support the effort. Director Williams tasked his executive leadership to conduct the initial scan and develop a plan. Health Department Chief of Staff Judy Harris was given the responsibility of leading the early day-to-day activities. Harris identified resources enabling two temporary hires, set weekly check-in meetings with the MBK Houston planning team, and skillfully managed the project, ensuring that the plan was completed on time. Harris was able to rely heavily on an existing knowledge base in the department, which proved to be an asset to the process.

The team implemented a 180-day all hands on deck planning sprint. This core group within the department in turn networked and engaged the broader community. The Health Department did not label the effort a "backbone" structure, but the entire planning process was a version of a collective impact framework.



Young Boy Enjoys MBK Houston Community event.

My Brother's Keeper Local Action Plan Structure

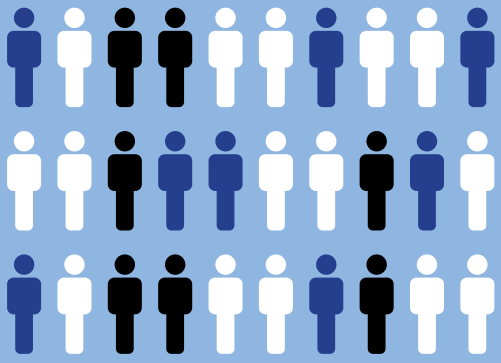


MBK Individual Partners
Undertake individual actions that support local MBK goals and agree to share data in order to monitor progress towards goals

MBK Coordinated Initiatives
Organizations that formally agree to take collective action to impact designated service areas

The initial governance structure implemented by the Health Department was comprised of three work groups: Data and Evaluation, Policy Scan, and Stakeholder Engagement. The Data and Evaluation work group set out immediately to collect data relevant to BYMOC within the justice, education, and health domains. The Policy Scan work group was subdivided into four domains: health, education, justice, and employment - each of which mapped existing efforts and gaps in services. The Stakeholder Engagement group held focus groups in the community and conducted key informant interviews with leaders across the city.

The work groups included individuals from a range of organizations and institutions across the city. Several organizations were early adopters and supported the vision. A few of these organizations were the Houston Galveston Area Council Workforce Board, the nonprofit Fifth Ward Enrichment Program, nonprofit AVANCE, and Communities-in-Schools, Inc. Other government agencies such as the Parks Department and the Houston Public Library were some of the first to agree to participate. In addition, MBK Houston had the support of several county agencies, including Harris County Protective Services and the Harris County Juvenile Probation department. Finally, the Houston Independent School District Superintendent was an early supporter of MBK Houston as were a wide variety of individuals from community-based groups.



More than **50%** of Houston's youth aged 10-24 years are Hispanic and a quarter are Black.

Out-of-school suspension rates for serious offenses are 2x higher among black **male youth** compared to the white male youth

Black males are **7x** more likely to have an encounter with law enforcement than white males.

Hispanic males are almost 3x more likely to be **uninsured** than white males.

While the work groups were holding meetings, the MBK planning team was synthesizing the findings into a crosswalk document - a compendium that compared the recommendations and proposed solutions from the White House MBK Task Force with the findings of the local work groups. The team also incorporated a scan of reports from other collective impact roundtables in the city, seeking to align priorities and opportunities for collaboration. In the Policy Scan work group convening, the participants prioritized all of the recommendations presented based on importance, feasibility, and potential for impact. Those with the highest ratings overall were chosen as the priorities for action.

The Data and Evaluation work group produced a preliminary data report. Based on data availability, the work group decided to stratify data by age, gender, race, and ethnicity.

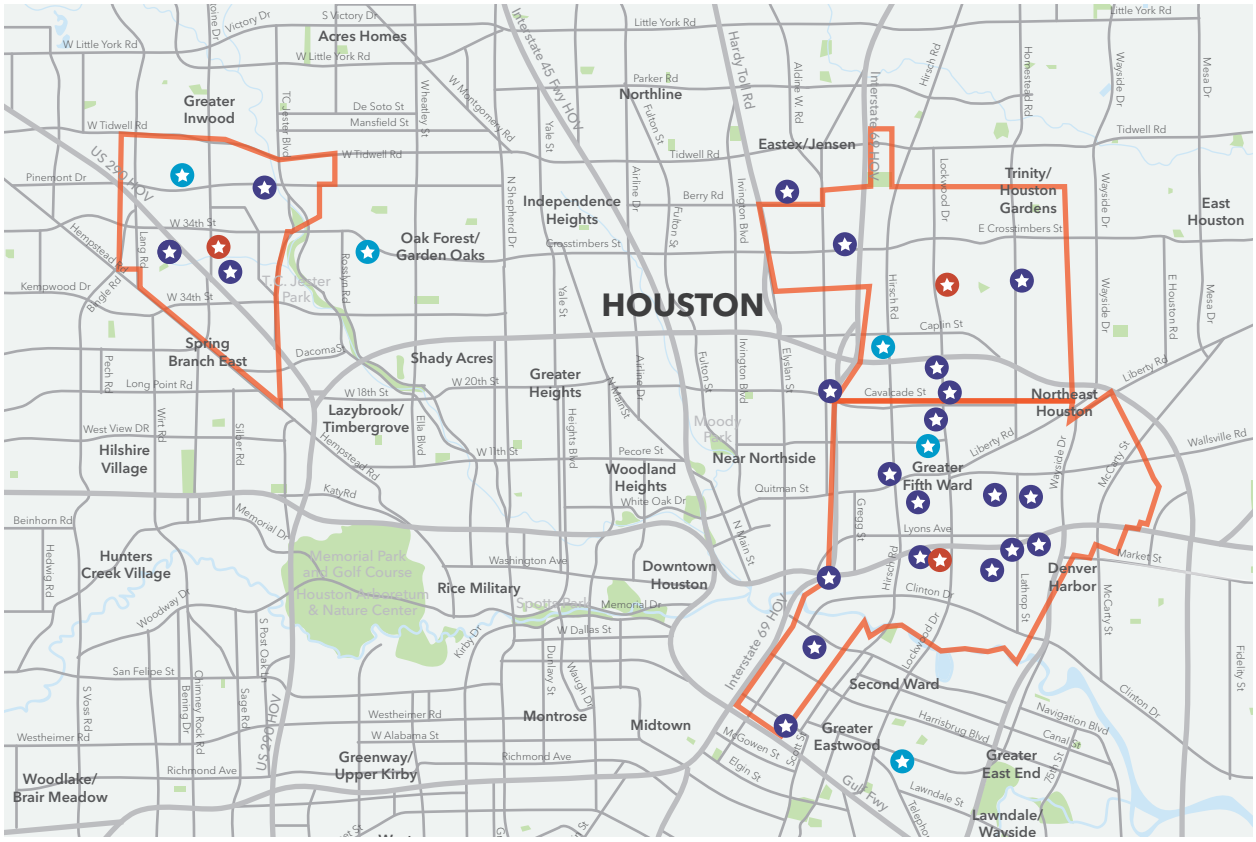
Demographic data from the American Community Survey was analyzed to measure access to health insurance by disaggregating the data of uninsured males by age, race, and ethnicity. Substantial data in the education domain was also provided by the Houston Independent School District (HISD). Key indicators of importance were graduation rates, dropout rates, suspension rates for Pre-K, Kindergarten, and High School, 3rd-grade STAAR reading scores, violent crimes, and juvenile detention. This data was constantly fed into the deliberative process to inform decision-making.

The Stakeholder Engagement group reached more than 150 individuals during 12 focus groups and a number of key informant interviews. The goal was to engage different groups of boys and young men of color and assess their perspectives and experiences. The focus groups were held in community venues located in different neighborhoods with diverse populations.



Early on, MBK Houston committed to making sure the programs and actions that would result from the Local Action Plan would resonate with BYMOC in an authentic manner. The focus groups were the first step to putting the voices of BYMOC at the forefront of MBK Houston.

Throughout the planning process, focus group participants recommended that MBK Houston concentrate its efforts in defined neighborhoods. The Health Department decided to enlist the support of the Barbara Jordan- Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs at Texas Southern University to assess the landscape of the city. A team of faculty worked through different data sources to map the demographics and the social and economic needs of 15 high-need communities.



Three Feeder Patterns of MBK Houston: Kashmere, Wheatley, and Scarborough.

After extensive research and planning, the team recommended to start efforts in three "feeder pattern" communities. Feeder patterns are clusters of neighborhood schools that allow children to transition from a large number of elementary schools to a smaller number of middle schools, and finally to one or two large high schools. This approach would allow the community to adopt a whole-child approach that addressed life-course events from early childhood through adulthood, with an emphasis on early warning indicators and preventive interventions.

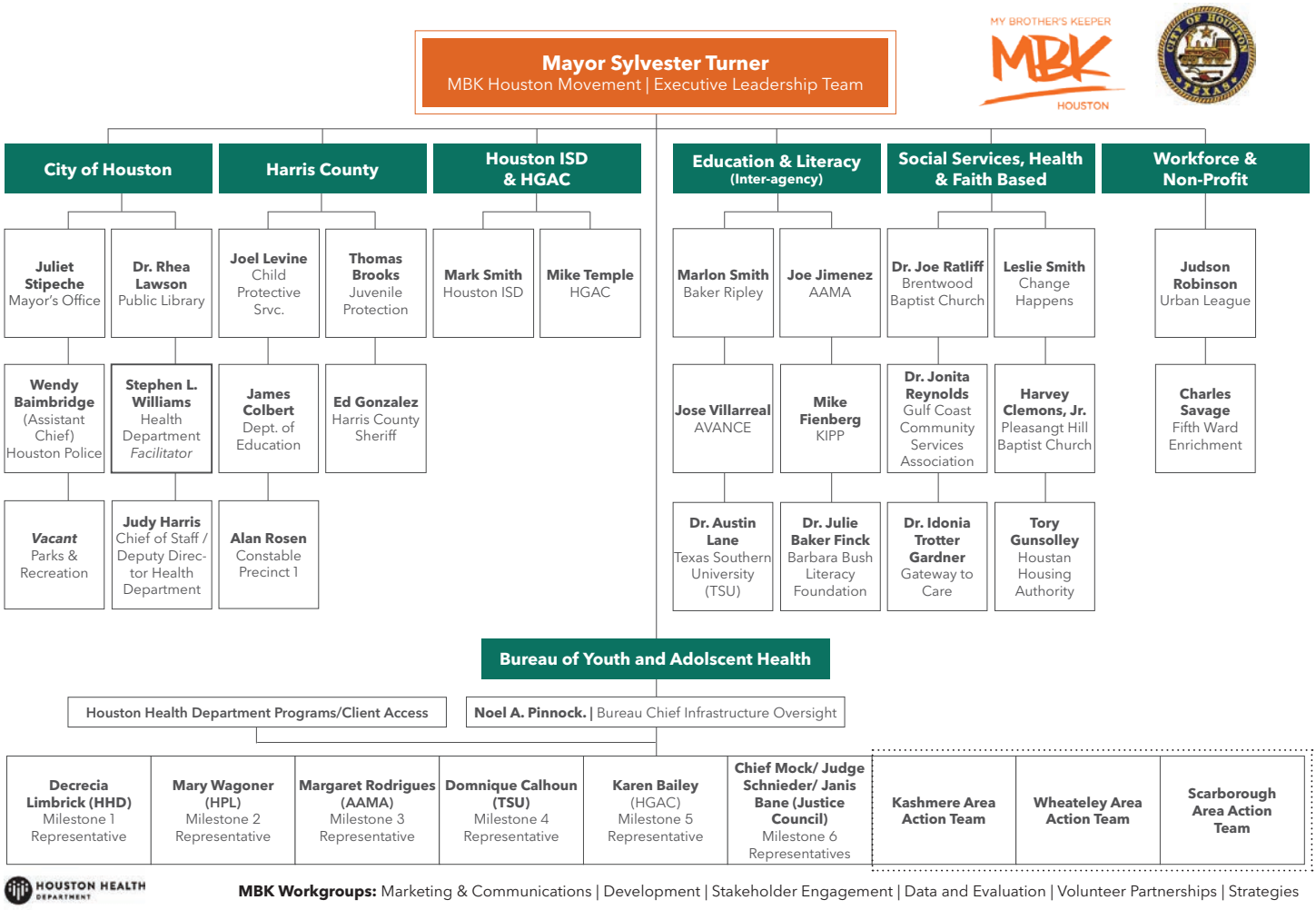
Agreeing on Priorities

Using the MBK Milestone framework presented by the White House, the work groups built consensus around the final plan recommendations. The findings were reported up to Judy Harris and Director Williams who then presented the information to a high-level group of advisors, comprised of leaders across the participating systems. (This group would later become the executive committee of MBK Houston.) The public agencies in this group would be responsible for leading implementation of the bulk of the recommendations.

Planning process for Houston resulted in 23 recommendations that cut across all six of the national MBK Milestones. The Mayor released the report, titled "Improving the Quality of Life for Young Men of Color in Houston Local Action Plan 2015" in the summer of 2015 and the transition to implementation began.

My Brother's Keeper Houston Governance Structure

Executive Leadership & Operations Work Teams
Faith Based, Health, Education, Employment, Law Enforcement, Criminal Justice, Community Services, Cultural and Civic Engagement Collaboration



HOUSTON HEALTH DEPARTMENT

MBK Workgroups: Marketing & Communications | Development | Stakeholder Engagement | Data and Evaluation | Volunteer Partnerships | Strategies



Kashmere
MultiService
Center.

Credit: © Kirksey Architecture

Implementation

The governance structure of MBK Houston has been pinnacle to its success- beginning with strong mayoral support. Originally launched during the tenure of Mayor Annise Parker, MBK Houston gained new traction with the election of Mayor Sylvester Turner in 2016.

Mayor Turner's support of the My Brother's Keeper efforts marked an important moment for the durability of the MBK Houston structure across transitions in mayoral administrations.

In addition to the creation of the Executive Leadership Team, Director Williams and Judy Harris brought in dedicated full-time staff to serve as a linchpin for all of the current cross-functional programs and interventions across the six milestones. A unit within the Houston Health Department was created, to be led by Noel Pinnock, and supported by an eight member team. Milestone Action Teams were created to coordinate the implementation and provide a solid governance structure through which to execute the work.

In addition, a year into programming and evaluation of MBK Houston, the Houston Health Department merged the efforts of the Adolescent Health Division with MBK Houston. This resulted in an alignment of the work of youth violence and teen dating violence, positive youth development, and the Tier 1 health and wellness service with the MBK milestones. These changes are reflected in the current governance structure.

The executive team meets quarterly to discuss current and new strategies related to MBK Houston. The Milestone Action Team leads meet monthly to align the work of each milestone. Each milestone has two co-leads and works with internal staff to implement projects within their milestone. In addition, a MBK Houston leadership team meeting is held biweekly to track program performance outcomes. The Steering Committee also meets biweekly to review current projects, to monitor progress, and to re-align if necessary. Significantly, MBK Houston also has a Youth Advisory Council, which meets monthly to engage youth on milestone-related topics in order to influence interventions and services targeted to youth and their communities. Finally, several other meetings occur that focus on the inter-agency MBK wraparound services network within the feeder schools.

In terms of collecting and disseminating the status of all projects to all of those touched by the MBK Houston initiative, a monthly newsletter highlights current projects and upcoming events.

Three years later, MBK Houston continues to build and sustain itself in large part due to this solid framework built out during the first 180 days and re-evaluated over the years.



Mayor Turner with a student and Beatrice Garza, former CEO of the Association for Advancement of Mexican-Americans at MBK Summit 2016.

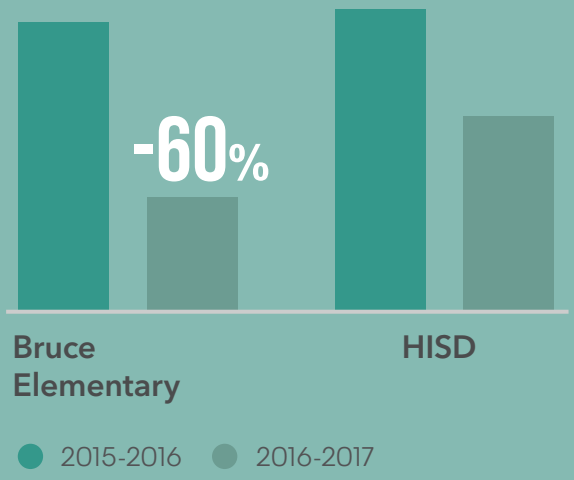
Program Spotlight – Systems of Care

MBK Houston has placed strong emphasis on implementing systems of care/wraparound services within schools in the MBK feeder pattern. In partnership with eight agencies, MBK Houston implemented an early warning system and inter-agency systems of care model in three MBK feeder schools. The MBK Houston Systems of Care provides alternatives to in-school suspensions or conventional timeouts as well as supported policy change to ban out-of-school suspensions for students in second grade or lower. MBK Houston also provided Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 services to students. Tier 1 services are services that touch the entire population, such as school-wide events. Tier 2 students are given case management and supportive counseling services. Tier 3 students are the most at-risk students and receive crisis intervention services. Qualifying indicators for Tier 2 or Tier 3 services are excessive absences, excessive disciplinary referrals, students who are overage for their grade, homeless students, multiple course failures, and retained students. Within the feeder pattern, MBK Houston has focused its efforts on three schools and significant improvements have been seen in both Bruce Elementary School and Fleming Middle School.

Progress Report

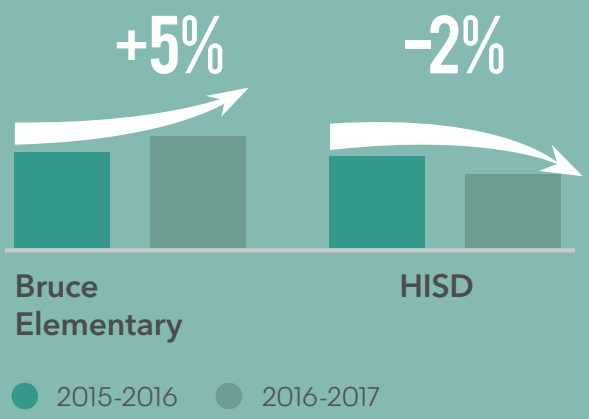
- 25,000+ students impacted by Tier 1 Services
- 376 boys in grades K, 3, 6, and 9 received a comprehensive needs assessment
- 194 youth received Tier 2 Case Management & Support Counseling services
- 50 youth have received Tier 3 case management services
- In 2017, Fleming Middle School met all four standards for the Texas Education Agency on student progress, closing performance gaps, postsecondary readiness, and standard achievement with a notable increase in three out of four standards in comparison with 2015. Fleming Middle School also achieved for the first time distinctions in Mathematics, Science, Top 25 Percent Student Progress, and in Postsecondary Readiness.

Out-of-School Suspensions in HISD Elementary Schools - Bruce Elementary



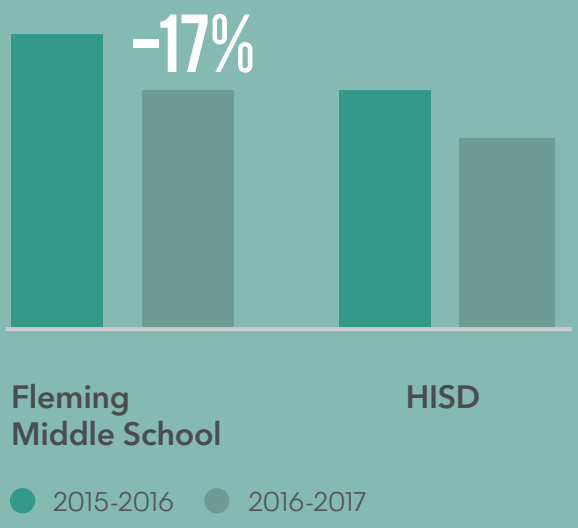
Out-of-school suspensions in Bruce Elementary School were reduced by 60% in 2016-2017 compared to 2015-16

3rd Grade Reading in HISD Elementary Schools - Bruce Elementary



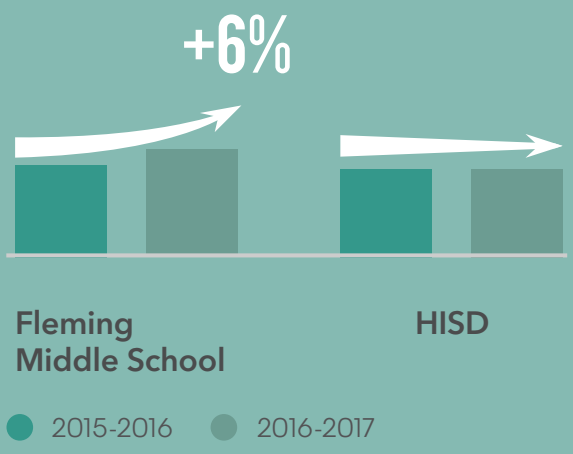
5% increase of 3rd grade students "at or above, Approaches, Meets, and Masters" grade level in Reading at Bruce Elementary School compared to 2016 - in comparison, there has been a 2% decrease in 3rd graders "at or above, Approaches, Meets, and Masters" amongst all HISD 3rd graders

Out-of-Schools Suspension in HISD Middle Schools - Fleming Middle School



Out-of-school suspensions in Fleming Middle School were reduced by -17% in 2016-2017 compared with 2015-16

6th Grade Math in HISD Elementary Schools - Fleming Middle School



6% pt increase of 6th grade students "at or above Approaches, Meets, and Masters" grade level in Math at Fleming Middle school compared to 2016 - in comparison, there was no change in math Fleming Middle HISD outcomes amongst all HISD 6th graders

Lessons Learned

Throughout the past four years, MBK Houston has been iterating to reach success. To do so, there were key aspects of its model that served as the bedrock of this initiative.

The purpose of this case study was to delve into the bedrock of MBK Houston and unveil those key aspects of the MBK Houston model through robust and engaged stakeholder interviews. The 32 stakeholders interviewed for this study's candid feedback brought us to 6 key lessons.

The Key Lessons:

Ensure Leadership

Develop Trust

Create Synergies

Build Internal Capacity

Leverage and Strengthen External Capacity

Adopt a Manageable Approach

As we dive into each lesson, we hope to inspire jurisdictions that have sought to learn from MBK Houston and those that are beginning their own MBK story.



MBK Houston children at HYPE Freedom Summer program.

Ensure Leadership

Across jurisdictions, we have witnessed many different and equally viable approaches to organizing the MBK work. Many elements can vary, but one is vital - the presence of a passionate and committed leader with the ability to organize and the credibility to get people to act.

Stephen Williams is such a leader. His knowledge of governmental operations, as well as his connections beyond city government allowed him to tap into the experts in a variety of fields and bring together an unprecedented collaborative table. One core stakeholder described Director Williams; "He has to be the most-connected person in the world." This description was echoed throughout many of our conversations. When it came time to assembling a strategic committee, his stellar reputation was integral to bringing people to the table. Director Williams brought relationships to the MBK table from city and county agencies, nonprofit organizations, the independent school district, and civic organizations. He had a strong management track record that engendered commitment and respect.

In addition, Mayor Parker's support helped solidify Director Williams' initial convening power – allowing him to draw people to the table. This was strengthened and reinforced by the strong affirmation of the effort by then newly elected Mayor Sylvester Turner who expressed his desire to deepen and expand the effort.



Stephen L. Williams, Director of the Houston Health Department speaks at MBK Houston 2016 Summit.

Program Spotlight – Increasing Student Use of Library

In the 2015-2016 school year, out of the entire population of Fleming Middle School students, only 5 books were checked out. Fleming Middle School focused its resources, including the systems of care counseling, college fairs, and onsite supportive groups to promote students utilizing the library – shifting the culture around reading.

Progress Report

Fleming Middle School

Total Number of Books checked out in 2016-2017 was 1,172, up from 5 in 2015-2016.



Develop Trust

MBK Houston was able to build trust amongst those brought together by setting out a strong vision of the goal and creating a process that put the participants in the driver's seat. This allowed busy individuals to lean into the unknown with faith in the commitment of MBK Houston's leadership. One stakeholder described Director Williams as "really good at selling a vision; you can feel it, touch it."

When building the Executive Board, MBK Houston was intentional on who to approach knowing that their work and passions aligned with the values of MBK. The same intentionality was brought to building the internal team.

The assembled team approached the work with a commitment to community driven action and a recognition that the effort would be a long-term one. When working on the ground, there was a constant reaffirmation of the importance in authentic trust within communities. This was achieved by listening carefully to partners, working thoughtfully to define the work, granting them their agency, and having a willingness to learn through trial-and-error. The MBK Houston team members strove to support the efforts with options and recommendations aligned with the needs of each of the initiatives.

This has been an important approach for MBK Houston as many communities harbored some resentment over prior reformers who they felt imposed external solutions on them and did not persevere to refine approaches and ensure success. MBK Houston has also learned how particularly important this approach is when working within Houston's decentralized school system. MBK Houston worked directly with schools within the catchment areas recognizing that schools best directly serve the targeted population. Given that public schools in Houston function on a "site decision-making" model where principals make operational decisions for their school, MBK Houston had to build strong relationships with principals directly, as well as learn how to best serve by asking the right questions. MBK Houston has built these relationships with its community partners by engaging them where they are and by co-creating efforts built on trust and resource allocation.



MBK Houston Youth Prepare Food Drop at Clifton Middle School.

Create Synergies

The concept of synergy continually appeared throughout our conversations. One core stakeholder noted that these stakeholder meetings created a "culture of commitment." In order to do so, people were physically in the same room, sharing best practices and challenges, and most importantly, holding a shared set of goals and objectives. A sense of urgency to collaborate and passion to support boys and young men of color allowed people to align their thoughts based on a common consensus. One county-level stakeholder noted,

> **"We are used to collaboration because we don't believe we can do it all by ourselves."**

Throughout MBK Houston, people continuously seek to leverage each other's expertise to increase and sharpen their impact.

One staff coordinator of a schools-based initiative mentioned that he would come to the school every day at the same time as the Principal and stayed there until all staff left so the students and the staff saw him as a fully integrated team member, not simply as a member of a co-located program. Another counselor became so intertwined with the teaching staff that he was granted a coveted workstation in the student support office.

On the ground level, this synergy is formed through constant reaffirmation that, "We are here. We aren't going anywhere. We believe in you and we will do everything that we can for you to believe in us." This commitment to listen and then act is crucial. We have seen this flow of ideas and support in multiple MBK projects.



Noel A. Pinnock, Chief of Bureau of Youth and Adolescent Health and MBK Houston Lead speaks at MBK Houston 2016 Summit.

Program Spotlight - Clean Slate Cooperative

This Clean Slate initiative aims to give persons arrested for a crime a 'clean slate' by having their arrest and conviction records expunged. The goal of the initiative is to reduce the barriers to work and services that can result from a criminal record.

MBK Houston's Involvement

Houston launched the Clean Slate Cooperative in 2017 to provide pro bono record expunction, sealing, and nondisclosure services to individuals with an open criminal record stemming from situations that occurred as a juvenile or young adult. There were 3 Clean Slate Events operated within the City of Houston Multi-service community centers in 2017.

Clean Slate Cooperative

82%

82% of participants qualified for expungement, sealing, non-disclosure, or identification restoration services, and received such services.

As a result, 34 people now have a clean and clear criminal record, 75 people have sealed their record, and 194 people have restored their ID.

Build Internal Capacity

We have seen across jurisdictions that dedicating staff resources to managing the MBK effort is essential to building momentum and supporting implementation success. Without a strong internal MBK staff, lines of communication dissipate and the vision can lose focus. Breaking down silos is a necessity with system reform work, and keeping the governance structure intact and functioning is a task that requires time and effort. That is very difficult to accomplish without full time staff support.

Embedded in the Health Department, MBK Houston has eight members who work exclusive on MBK. The internal staff is the nucleus of the operation, tasked with connecting all of the information to and from all of the stakeholders. The internal staff also works on the ground, which allows them to have a direct touch with the other organizations involved in MBK Houston.

Another strong element was the range of skills on the team. Throughout our interviews, we noticed that many were asked to join MBK Houston because they had expertise in a given field or had a lengthy history in community organizing. Many also came in with evidence-based practice experience. This is important because the building of the internal staff was as crucial as the building of the executive team. Similar to MBK Houston's commitment to lift up the work of organizations that were already doing this work in Houston, MBK Houston staff had the same intentionality by hiring those who were already doing the work on-the-ground and who often had a deep knowledge of the communities within the feeder pattern. One internal staff member described it as

> **"community coordinators need to understand the importance of finding the tempo and pulse of the communities."**

This affirmation attests to the experience of the MBK Houston staff and their commitment to uplifting the champions on the ground.



MBK Houston Milestone 6 Co-Lead with Wheatley High-school Youth in WIN-WIN.

Finally, none of this could have been done without financial resources. The original funding came from the existing budget, meaning that at the onset of this initiative no new funding was allocated to MBK. Mayor Parker and the City Council subsequently passed a resolution to support MBK Houston, which included an allocation of $1.3 million as funds become available. MBK Houston is benefiting from an array of in-kind services from partners as well. To name a few, the Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD has committed behavioral therapists to support the Systems of Care work within the MBK feeder pattern schools. The Houston-Galveston Area Council has also issued a workforce RFP to train and employ 100 18-29 year-old youth of color in the Kashmere, Scarborough, and Wheatley impact areas. The use of in-kind services from external partners illustrates the importance of having strong and committed partners.



MBK Houston, Judy Harris, speaking at the 2016 MBK Summit.

Program Spotlight – Boston Basics

The Boston Basics campaign seeks to address skill gaps during the first three years of life between socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups. The Boston Basics are five evidence-based parenting and care-giving principles that encompass much of what experts find is important for children from birth to age three.

MBK Houston's Involvement

In partnership with the Houston Children's Museum, MBK Houston launched this model to promote brain development for 0-3 year old babies living in MBK catchment communities.

While taking up this campaign, MBK Houston also realized that there was a strong need for increased parental engagement. While working closely with the Children's Museum parenting program, MBK Houston also partnered with HUD and WIC clinics to target parents re-applying for public housing as well as parents receiving WIC benefits.

Progress Report

With the goal of implementing the Houston Basics education campaign and reaching 25,000 individuals, the campaign has now reached 26,064 individuals.

Program Spotlight -TAPS

TAPS Academy is an 11-week curriculum for youth and police officers that covers topics associated with Children and Youth. TAPS Academy has strong roots in Houston, previously working with 15-17 high school and juvenile facilities in the Houston area. SB30- the Community Safety Act Curriculum, which is similar to TAPS Academy, was signed into Texas state law on June 9, 2017 requiring all Texas state students, police officers, and individuals applying for a driver's license to take an abbreviated version of the TAPS curriculum.

MBK Houston's Involvement

MBK Houston collaborated with TAPS Academy's Dr. Penn of the University of Houston-Clear Lake in 2016 to pilot a deep-dive curriculum in the MBK feeder pattern school, Wheatley High School. The curriculum also included a Police Mentoring program in which each member of the program was partnered with a police officer who had been tested and trained to become a mentor.

Progress Report

- TAPS Academy is being implemented in 27 schools within MBK feeder pattern

Over two school semesters in a pilot MBK Houston school, youth who participated in the program reported positive shifts in their perception and behavior.

- Perception of Youth towards the law enforcement positively increased significantly post-intervention
- Significant decrease in reported unfavorable behaviors of youth involved in the program

Senate Bill 30 Community Safety Act Curriculum



5,300

5300 Houston police personnel will each go through four hours of training in the S.B. 30 curriculum

Leverage and Strengthen External Capacity

MBK Houston staff consistently reaffirmed the need to not "spin the wheels on what is already happening." To do so, MBK Houston engaged with established organizations. Many internal and external staff utilized evidence-based practices from within Houston or throughout the country. The importance of having an evidence-based practice model allowed MBK Houston to be more effective in its use of time as well as creating a space for innovation as staff aimed to build and shape what has been proven to work.

MBK Houston's strong and strategic partnerships allowed it to leverage external skills and resources to bring together the most promising ideas. MBK Houston made sure that the organizations it worked with aligned with MBK Houston's mission, goals, and objectives. In order to work with various organizations, MBK Houston also had to align with the existing structures of those organizations. The iteration of program design to meet local needs has been a defining success in the work of MBK Houston.



MBK Houston Youth visiting University of Houston-Downtown.

Adopt a Manageable Approach

The partnerships MBK Houston has with the school district, county-level officials, nonprofits, and the Public Library to name a few, required a manageable scope. MBK Houston first identified its target population and then went further and identified a particular feeder pattern community in which to concentrate its work. The direct and targeted nature of MBK Houston allows them to evaluate, innovate, and reiterate. This also allows MBK Houston to scale up what works and to re-think what does not work. One core stakeholder described it as,

> **"Little successes along the way allow you to get to the big ones."**

By constantly reminding themselves of this, MBK Houston is able to stay on-target. Certain milestones within MBK Houston have taken up work outside of the feeder patterns realizing that there are places outside of those feeder patterns that equally need the assistance. On the other hand, there are certain milestones that aspire to expand their work outside of the feeder patterns only after they are assured that the projects they have piloted are ready to be scaled. In both cases, the guiding principles of MBK Houston and the meetings across the governance structure help to ensure that the mission of MBK Houston does not waver as programming evolves.

Program Spotlight – Momentum Academy

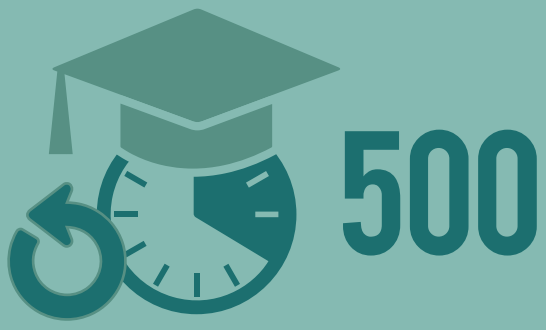
Momentum Academy is a partnership with HISD and the City of Houston's multi-service centers. Currently operating in seven sites, Momentum Academy provides an alternative learning experience, which focuses on the academic, economic, and socio-emotional needs of students. Through accredited credit recovery courses, standardized test prep, and service learning, students are put back on the path towards expected high school graduation.

Students involved are referred by their home high school, and their placement is based on whether the student is behind 1 year or more than 6 credits, at-risk of dropping out, has an acceptable attendance record, and whether the student has personal/family issues that complicates attending a traditional high school.

Progress Report

- Within first year of programming, 145 students were enrolled by the end of December 2017
- All students received a needs assessment to tailor their education curriculum
- Momentum is partnering with HISD to track behavior, attendance, and performance of Momentum Academy students when they return to their home school

Momentum Academy



As of December 2017, a total of 500 school credit hours have been recovered

Understanding the Challenges

Permanence

While participation is wide and support is deep, it is unclear what would happen to the fabric of MBK Houston if leadership were to shift. The unit in the Health Department, the governance structure, and network activities all lack legal mandate or protection. It may be valuable to consider whether the City of Houston should create a permanent office and director. It would also be wise to identify a MBK ambassador within City Hall to leverage the convening power of the Mayor, notably as MBK Houston brings in for-profit and philanthropy partners to help expand its limited budget.

Information Sharing and Communication

MBK Houston put significant effort into developing a rigorous management structure, which has been good for inclusion, but less successful in ongoing, collaborative engagement.

A lively newsletter provides updates, but lacks capacity for problem solving. Re-designing meeting times from updates to collective problem solving opportunities would help to engage partners across the full range of activities and add greater value to the precious time devoted to this work.

There is also a need to etch the clear vision and mission into all messaging involving MBK Houston. Identifying a process for new partners, employees and initiatives to understand the broader mission and see how they fit within it would create the foundation for ongoing collaborative work.

Setting and Achieving Measurable Outcomes

MBK Houston started strong on data in framing the issue but has lagged on keeping it fresh with milestone outcome reporting on shared indicators of progress. In fact, a shared set of data can be the glue that allows various programs and participants to see their relationship to one another, and assess their impact on outcomes.

By having the data behind each project evaluated consistently and a method of disseminating that data throughout all of MBK Houston in a manner that is reader-friendly and accessible, the Steering Committee can better realign and redirect efforts to keep the work focused and successful.



Mentor with young mentee at HYPE Freedom School.

What Lies Ahead

As one staff member says, "At the end of the day, we move, we go." This consistent momentous desire to get the work done fuels the creativity and collaborative nature that defines MBK Houston.

As one of the most advanced MBK sites in the country that has successfully navigated a mayoral transition, the work of MBK Houston is notable. While the work is housed in the Health Department, the success of the initiative is attributed in part to the many innovative, and collaborative partners in other government agencies, school districts, and the many nonprofit leaders who are on the ground in the community.

MBK Houston is comprised of champions who believe in the purpose of MBK Houston and have an unwavering desire to transform lives. One core stakeholder said,

> **"This is heart work and because of that, it's great work and hard work."**

A school leader noted that, "We don't have time to waste." This sense of urgency and dedication - fueled by MBK Houston's culture of commitment - is nothing short of admirable. A strong visionary leader who can make their own power and bind the organization together has also played an integral role in ensuring the success of MBK Houston. Next steps would be more consistent communication internally and externally backed by standardized data tracking in order to maintain buy-in from all stakeholders and increase self-accountability. In addition, learning to better navigate spaces on the ground will help MBK Houston's model thrive and inspire the work of other MBK jurisdictions.

Houston's work is cross-sectional and deep. Houston is in the middle of its "story"; the actions and work done there today will be part of a larger narrative told five or ten years from now. Houston will be the place the country looks to when it needs a concrete example of how to provide long lasting opportunities for Boys and Young Men of Color.



Parents signing up with MBK Houston at Mayor Turner's 2015 Back2School Event

Rather than duplicating Houston's model, it best serves as a reference point for cities and jurisdictions thinking about structure and sustainability.

These lessons can serve as a strong basis for jurisdictions that want to take on the My Brother's Keeper Challenge and that are seeking guidance on where to start. These lessons can also be used amongst cities who have already taken on the My Brother's Keeper Challenge and are looking to their future.

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