

Houston Independent School District



Creating a College-Bound Culture

Announcement of Position Opening for Superintendent of Schools

Organization, Position, and Person Profile

HEIDRICK & STRUGGLES

Heidrick & Struggles advises HISD on the basis of an exclusive consulting assignment.

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The Organization

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) is the largest school system in Texas and the seventh-largest in the nation. Nearly 30,000 employees serve a diverse student population of 200,000 students in nearly 300 schools spread across 312 square miles.

Winner in 2002 of the Broad Prize for Urban Education as the best big-city school district in America, HISD is committed to and has succeeded in producing sustained, measurable academic growth in every student. This focus on progress has produced record-high scores on the TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) this year, with 84 percent of schools improving in social studies, 79 percent improving in science, and 70 percent improving in math. The number of students reaching the TAKS "commended" level has risen in just two years by 87 percent in science, 36 percent in math, and 35 percent in reading and social studies. The number of schools ranked Exemplary or Recognized by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) rose from 84 in 2007 to an all-time high of 157 in 2008. This extraordinary growth continued through 2009, with an estimated projection of three out of four schools being Exemplary or Recognized. Because of HISD's progress in student achievement, the district has been hailed by President Barack Obama as an example of a highly successful urban public school system.

The district's commitment to creating a college-bound culture in every school and household has also resulted in record numbers of students taking dual-credit and Advanced Placement courses, which gives them the opportunity to earn college credits while still in high school.

On the business side, funding for HISD schools has steadily increased, and budget reserves have more than doubled since 2002, resulting in a general fund of \$1.689 billion, a special revenue fund of \$306 million, and a capital renovation fund of \$715 million. The Board of Education has implemented the first pay-as-you-go maintenance program in 20 years, committing \$232 million over six years to repair facilities. This was accomplished without increasing the district's tax rate, which helped earn HISD a coveted A+ bond rating.

ABOUT HOUSTON

Houston is the fourth-largest city in the nation and was named America's best city to live in by the *Kiplinger Report* last year. Home to the Texas Medical Center (largest in the world), Port of Houston (largest in the U.S.), NASA, 29 Fortune 500 companies, and more energy-industry corporate headquarters than anywhere in the world, it comes as no surprise that the Houston metropolitan area led the nation in job growth last year.

Houston is ranked third in *fDi Magazine's* 2009/10 North American City of the Future Awards, based in part on the large number of foreign direct investment (FDI) projects into and out of the city, the number of megaprojects associated with the city, and a large base of postsecondary students. *fDi Magazine* also ranked Houston first for business friendliness, second for best FDI strategy, and fifth for best economic potential and best human resources.

Further contributing to Houston's attractiveness is a cost of living well below the national average and housing prices nearly half those of other metropolitan areas its size (approximately 6 million people). Area colleges and universities include the University of Houston System, Rice University, the University of St. Thomas, Texas Southern University, Houston Baptist University, and several dynamic community-college systems.

State-of-the-art sports stadiums for the city's professional baseball and basketball teams and a new light-rail system have revitalized the downtown area, home to the 12-acre Discovery Green park and such nationally acclaimed arts organizations as Houston Grand Opera, Houston Ballet, Houston Symphony, Theatre Under the Stars, and the Tony Award-winning Alley Theatre. The Reliant Stadium complex south of downtown houses the city's football team and the popular Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.

Houston's cultural climate is further enriched by a thriving Museum District, home to the Museum of Fine Arts, Menil Collection, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston Museum of Natural Science, Children's Museum, Holocaust Museum, and several others. Additional amenities include year-round golfing, easy access to Clear Lake and Galveston Bay for water sports, and a wide variety of nationally recognized restaurants catering to every taste and budget.

ABOUT HISD

Throughout its history, HISD has worked to strengthen the social and economic foundation of Houston by providing the highest-quality education through an intensive core curriculum and specialized, challenging instructional and career programs.

HISD schools are organized into five geographic regions: North, East, South, West, and Central. An Alternative and Charter Schools Office oversees nontraditional types of schools within the district. Each regional office is managed by a regional superintendent who coordinates a team of executive principals to ensure the quality of instruction throughout the region's feeder patterns. Regional managers strengthen the district's outreach to parents by addressing their concerns and working to improve parent, volunteer, and business-partner programs.

HISD's organization is designed to emphasize teaching and learning, align school goals and programs for sustained improvement, eliminate duplicated services, and provide greater oversight of data and compliance with state laws and regulations.

HISD operates under the auspices of the Texas Education Agency, using a core curriculum based on state guidelines for prekindergarten through twelfth grade. Instructional offerings include Magnet and Vanguard programs, charter schools, and alternative programs that use innovative instruction to help students who are at risk of dropping out of school. HISD also offers programs in early-childhood education, Special Education, multilingual education, career and technical/vocational education, and dual-credit/advanced academics.

BOND PROGRAM

HISD is committed to providing Houston's children with safe, state-of-the-art schools and has created a districtwide facilities standards program to repair, renovate, and build schools with funds from bond issues.

An \$805-million bond issue was approved by voters in November 2007 and is the third in a series of bond issues. With a total of \$1.5 billion approved in 1998 and 2002, HISD built 41 new schools and renovated more than 100 others over a nine-year period. The new program scheduled for completion in 2012–13, calls for the construction of 24 new schools and renovations at 134 others, major safety and security upgrades at every school, and new and improved science labs at all middle and high schools in the district.

DISTRICT PERSONNEL AND GOALS

HISD has approximately 29,300 employees, many with long years of service. Most HISD personnel are assigned to schools and deliver services directly to students on a day-to-day basis.

HISD also employs approximately 120 administrators in its central and district offices and nearly 10,830 full- and part-time employees who serve as substitute teachers or furnish specialized support services such as technology, transportation, food services, and crafts and trades.

HISD exists to strengthen the social and economic foundation of Houston by assuring its youth the highest-quality elementary and secondary education available anywhere. Its six primary goals are:

1. Increase Student Achievement and Growth
2. Provide a Safe Environment
3. Increase Management Efficiency
4. Improve Public Support and Confidence in Schools
5. Create a Positive District Culture
6. Provide a Facilities-to-Standard Program

BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Board of Education, the governing body of HISD, is composed of nine trustees, elected to serve staggered four-year terms and represent single-member, geographic districts. The progressive, reform-driven board's innovative ideas and successful initiatives have placed HISD in the national spotlight. Strong commitment and a unified vision have produced dramatic achievements.

The HISD board is led by Lawrence Marshall, the unanimous choice to serve a second term as president since joining the board in 1997; his first term as president was in 2000. A former HISD educator, Marshall received the Benjamin Elijah Mays Lifetime Achievement Award from the Council of Urban Boards of Education in 2006.

A Declaration of Beliefs and Visions was created by the trustees in 1990 and laid the groundwork for the districtwide reform movement that has established critical decision-making and accountability at the campus level. Trustees determined that the overall achievement level of students must be improved, the dropout rate was unacceptably high, and schools were being overly regulated. They resolved to improve school safety, increase the level of parental involvement, reach out to the community, and improve the image of the district. Trustees called for a new educational structure that fostered the relationship between teacher and student through a decentralized system that focused on performance rather than compliance and offered a common core of academic subjects for all students.

A Board Monitoring System implemented in 2003 provides comprehensive, data-driven reporting systems that allow citizens to know more about their public schools than ever before. In 2007, the board established the ASPIRE (Accelerating Student Progress, Increasing Results and Expectations) Program, which incorporated all of HISD's educational-improvement initiatives with new technology to track individual student progress and reward teachers for increasing student achievement. Over the past three years, teachers and staff have been awarded nearly \$70 million in performance pay based on student achievement. The board was recognized for the success of ASPIRE by receiving the Magna Award from the National School Board Association in April 2009. Other awards include co-winning the National School Boards Association's Urban School Board Excellence Award in 2007 and the Greater Houston Partnership's "*Houston's Greatest*" award in the nonprofit business organization category in 2008 for its role in advancing the greater Houston region as a business magnet.

The 2008 next generation of ASPIRE expands performance management: the alignment of goals and the utilization of data to develop people to all levels of the organization for continuous learning and improvement that produces optimum results.

The Position

The HISD superintendent of schools will report to the HISD Board of Education. He or she is responsible for providing leadership and strategic planning for a large, complex, urban school system serving a culturally, ethnically, and economically diverse student body.

Working with the board and the school system's senior management, the superintendent is responsible for the overall leadership of HISD, including the recommendation of policy to the board and day-to-day operations, and is ultimately accountable for the district's academic success.

The successful candidate is a visionary and skilled executive who can bring to life his or her vision through HISD's *Beliefs and Visions*. This person is an accomplished and confident advocate for progress, reform, and accountability.

He or she will be committed to continuing progress toward HISD's six primary strategic goals and will consistently measure progress toward those goals and other aspects of the board's agenda.

This person will serve as a passionate advocate for the mission of HISD, forging coalitions with all of the district's diverse stakeholders.

Through leadership, his or her administration will improve the quality of education in the district and hold teachers and administrators accountable for student performance, while giving teachers and administrators the autonomy they need to operate schools that reflect the needs and requirements of their communities, from academically oriented programs to vocational training.

The new superintendent will lead this successful school system toward even higher academic standards and increased student growth and will guide and oversee the renovation of facilities to the highest possible standards, thereby ensuring a safe and productive learning environment for students.

The new superintendent will be an effective communicator, one who can work with the district's various entities and communities and keep them well informed of the district's goals, strategies, challenges, and successes.

In addition, the superintendent will work with the Board of Education to coalesce support for programs and educational initiatives. He or she will be a major liaison between HISD and the communities it serves.

The superintendent will inspire, integrate, and support efforts to provide an environment that encourages academic growth and creativity for students, teachers, and staff.

In carrying out the role and responsibilities of the position, the successful candidate will:

- Work with the Board of Education and a full range of HISD stakeholders to develop and implement long- and short-range strategic plans, methods for implementing them, and milestones for measuring success.
- Shape, refine, and provide insight on the district's mission, its core educational values, and the safe learning environment it seeks to provide for its students.
- Listen and respond to the concerns, goals, and interests of the board, parents, teachers, students, business, government, and the system's other constituencies in a culturally, ethnically, and economically diverse community and enlist them as collaborators to advance school-system performance.
- Understand the competitive role of HISD and clearly communicate the value of an HISD education to all constituencies.

- Cultivate a positive atmosphere of respect and cultural sensitivity for a diverse community.
- Oversee and be ultimately accountable for effective implementation of strategies that increase student achievement, increase graduation rates, and will keep children in school.
- Provide insight into and oversight of the school system's financial and management practices, adapting and adopting procedures and policies that result in more-efficient and -effective operations.
- Nurture and support an atmosphere of transparency, accountability, control, and responsibility in the day-to-day administration of HISD.
- Work collegially with education's most important and influential stakeholders, including students, teachers, administrators, parents, city and state government, business leaders, and the Board of Education, to develop and promote a successful educational system that serves the academic and vocational needs of the community and the children it educates.
- Become a valued partner in the city of Houston's revitalization.
- Create a shared vision of excellence to inspire and motivate staff, teachers, parents, and especially students to maintain community confidence in HISD.
- Monitor the school system's successes and promote them to the community and media, helping to enhance its image.
- Consistently demonstrate a commitment to diversity throughout the school system and embrace this diversity as an asset to reflect a global (or international) community.

The Person

The Houston Independent School District welcomes candidates with experience as a school superintendent in a large, complex, urban school system.

Nontraditional candidates with impeccable executive backgrounds in business and demonstrable understanding of and involvement with public education are also welcome. A Ph.D. or Ed.D. is highly desirable.

The successful candidate to become superintendent of the Houston Independent School District should have a proven track record as a decisive, visionary leader who translates vision into action. He or she should also be:

- A savvy manager who recognizes, nurtures, and promotes strong management skills within the central administration as well as among principals and the regional offices.
- A strategic thinker who has effectively implemented programs and policies that resulted in outstanding academic performance and engagement of students in order to keep them in school.
- A leader who thrives on challenge, promotes excellence at all levels of the organization, and demands accountability in himself/herself as well as those he or she leads.
- A change agent who successfully transforms static bureaucracies into nimble, responsive organizations that get maximum benefits from every available resource.
- A life-long learner and creative thinker who seeks out new solutions to old problems and who is not tied to conventional thinking.
- A consensus-builder who has demonstrable commitment to and success in developing strong relationships with a variety of ethnically, culturally, and racially diverse constituencies.
- An educator who looks beyond standardized test scores; he or she fully understands and embraces the challenge of educating children to participate successfully in a diverse and changing society and compete effectively in a global economy.

- A seasoned executive who has proved his or her ability to successfully advocate for funding with a variety of governmental organizations and other constituents.
- A decision-maker and problem-solver who takes decisive action on issues as they arise, but who is politically sensitive.
- A strong manager who can effectively lead a large, complex organization and be fully accountable for all of its functional levels, including academics, finances, and other business functions.
- A persuasive communicator who is an articulate and forceful advocate for the system and is effective dealing with the media, parents, civic groups, government officials, community leaders, and other stakeholders.
- A strategic innovator who is able to see the system's strengths and capitalize on them, and who effectively motivates teachers and students to strive for academic excellence.
- An experienced educator who understands the challenges and opportunities provided by a wide range of competing educational providers, including private and charter schools.
- A realist who recognizes his or her areas of needed support and aggressively recruits people with complementary skills and talents.
- A strong practitioner of accountability; someone who measures the effectiveness of his or her own performance and who demands accountability from others at every level of the organization.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will possess the following personal characteristics:

- An impeccable reputation for honesty and absolute integrity.
- A student-centric attitude; he or she understands that what really matters is how well HISD prepares its students for success in life and work.
- An approachable leadership style that encourages interaction and exchange of ideas.
- A charismatic, collaborative leader who relates to and motivates others.
- A demonstrable commitment to high-quality public education delivered consistently and equitably throughout the entire school system.
- An understanding of and belief in the value of transparency in the operations of a public agency at all levels.
- A collaborator who respects the viewpoints of others and builds trust.
- A good listener who considers the opinions and suggestions of others.
- Extraordinary communication skills; the ability to communicate directly and effectively with all constituencies.
- Sound judgment, common sense, and self-confidence.
- Dedication to improving education for all children.
- An active intellect and understanding of key educational trends and programs.
- The ability to recruit, retain, and motivate talented people.
- A deep personal commitment to the success of teachers, administrators, and students.
- The ability to size up problems, quickly identify their core causes, and craft effective, sometimes unconventional, solutions.
- A proven passion for effective public education and public service.

Qualified candidates of all backgrounds and cultures are welcome and encouraged to apply.

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