

2012 HISD Houston Schools Bond Frequently Asked Questions

(Please see one-pager “2012 Houston Schools Bond At-a-Glance”
for summary of proposal and list of schools)

GENERAL

Does the physical condition of a school building affect student learning?

Yes. Recent research by the Environmental Protection Agency suggests that a school’s physical environment can play a major role in academic performance. Leaky roofs, and problems with heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems can trigger a host of health problems — including asthma and allergies — that increase absenteeism and reduce academic performance. Research links key environmental factors to health outcomes and students’ ability to perform.

How did HISD determine which schools would be proposed for construction?

HISD hired Parsons, an independent engineering, construction, technical, and management services firm, in March 2012 to update the comprehensive facilities assessment that was conducted in 2007. Because recent building programs have focused on building new elementary schools, Parsons was instructed to pay particular attention to the unaddressed needs on the high school level. The engineers rated the schools based on their physical condition and educational suitability, and the facilities with the greatest needs were given highest priority.

Why is HISD proposing to spend more money on some schools than others? This doesn’t seem fair to some neighborhoods.

All schools within the proposed 2012 bond are going to be rebuilt to the same level of quality. There are several variables that may affect the total projected cost for each school, such as

- Differences in the student capacity planned for each site. Larger schools with more students require more classrooms, which require larger budgets to build.

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- Differences in instructional programs. Career and Technical Education programs, for example, require more space than regular classrooms.
- Differences in the amount of demolition work that may be required.
- Differences in the amount of funding that is necessary for temporary facilities to accommodate phased construction on certain sites.

Every school included in the 2012 bond proposal would be built to the same quality standards. Those common standards include:

- New high school projected costs were calculated using a formula that allocates 140 square feet per student at a cost of \$160 per square foot. Renovation costs are projected using a \$100 per square foot formula.
- HISD utilizes an Educational Suitability & Technology Readiness Reference Guide ([click here](#) to view) that stipulates the size and content of instructional program spaces. This assures uniformity through the district.
- Allocations for furniture and equipment are all based on a standardized formula for all district schools.
- While HISD may have multiple design firms working for the district, they are all given the same standards and guidelines that they are required to follow.
- HISD staff and school-based Project Advisory Teams meet regularly with the architects to assure adherence to the standards HISD sets for each project. The Project Advisory Teams are composed of school staff, parents, community leaders and, in the case of high schools, students.

What will happen to my property taxes if the bond is approved?

Based on current assumptions and the current bond authorization presented, it is projected that taxes will increase from the current rate of \$1.1567 per \$100 value to \$1.2052 by the year 2017. The following table shows the tax impact based on an assessed home value of \$198,936. The increase shown below will be phased in beginning in 2014 with a 1-cent increase. Another penny would be added to the property tax rate two years later in 2016. Five years from now, in 2017, the tax rate would increase an additional 2.85 cents. By 2017, the projected annual cost to the average tax payer will be approximately \$70.

Average Market Value	\$198,936
Homestead Exemption	(\$15,000)
Homestead Exemption – 20% Local	(\$39,787)
Average Taxable Value	\$144,149
\$0.0485 increase in tax rate =	\$69.91

Would this bond referendum have any impact on the taxes paid by homeowners age 65 and older?

NO. The property taxes of those 65 and older with a homestead exemption would not be affected if the bond referendum passes. Taxes of those receiving the 65 and older homestead exemption are frozen at their present rate for as long as they maintain their homestead.

What will happen if the bond is not approved by voters?

The district would not have money to cover the cost of the projects as identified by Parsons, an independent facilities assessment firm. The cost of maintaining the high school facilities identified in the Parsons report, which have an average age of 50 years, would increase each year.

If the bond proposal does not pass, where would HISD find the money to finance increased building maintenance costs?

Without bond money, the District would need to redirect educational funds used for instructional programs and services to fund increased building maintenance costs.

Some schools on the proposed list for the 2012 bond had significant work done as part of the 2007 bond program. Why are those schools listed in the schedule of proposed projects?

While the 2007 bond program addressed many issues, many other campuses still have outstanding needs that were not fully addressed in that program. The proposed 2012 program will address many of those outstanding needs and seeks to provide the proper learning environment for the HISD schools in the proposal. Areas renovated or added as part of the 2007 program will be worked around and/or integrated into the design for the new proposed work. For example, if a school received a new wing, that wing will remain and be incorporated into the new design. Some of the campus renovation projects covered by the 2007 bond program, such as plumbing and heating/cooling system improvements, were necessary to keep those buildings habitable for the next few years until long-term facility solutions are implemented.

When would construction begin at schools included in the 2012 bond proposal? How soon would they open?

Design, engineering and architectural work on the proposed 2012 projects would begin soon after receiving voter approval. This is a process that typically lasts 12-18 months, depending on the size and scope of the project. Actual construction of many projects would likely begin in 2014. Construction will take approximately 12 – 24 months. Some site-specific conditions may require phasing in a project over a longer period of time in order to accommodate ongoing school programs.

NEW FEATURES

What is included in the bond proposal for high schools?

High schools designed to meet the needs of modern teaching methods have some of these characteristics:

- Greater classroom flexibility – Classrooms aren't bound by rows of desks, allowing teachers to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of each child.
- Collaborative learning through group rooms and common spaces throughout the building
- Hands-on science learning through lab spaces integrated with outdoor classrooms
- Access to master teachers through technology, interactive group learning assignments
- Improved access to the building for after-hours activities
- Students can take courses in a theater-style room with electronic integration, similar to a college setting.
- Infrastructure for specialty programs, such as modern career and technical education programs, which require breakout rooms and practice rooms
- Wireless connectivity improvements and adequate wiring that will support the use of iPads, online educational resources, and distance-learning tools.

SIZE OF NEW SCHOOLS

Some of the individual schools HISD has proposed rebuilding or renovating would have capacity for more students than their current enrollment. Why is that?

In HISD, parents have a wide range of options when the time comes to choose a school for their children to attend. This makes it more difficult to predict future enrollment for schools in HISD than in other school districts.

However, history tells us that when HISD opens new schools, the neighborhoods they serve tend to embrace those schools. This is especially true when these schools offer rigorous instruction, quality teachers and strong campus leadership. The last two new comprehensive high schools that HISD opened – Chavez and Westside – are full with more than 2,600 students each. Reagan High School, which was fully rebuilt in 2007 with a capacity for 1,781 students, now enrolls 2,000 students. The number of students transferring into Reagan (about 950) is triple the number of students transferring out of the school.

Are all schools being rebuilt to their current size and capacity?

No. Many of the schools that HISD has proposed rebuilding under the 2012 bond program would be rebuilt with lower capacity than their current campuses. These decisions were based largely on multi-year enrollment trends. For instance, the present Yates High School was built to accommodate 2,325 students. Because the Yates student body is not projected to return to that size, the proposed new building would hold a maximum 1,500 students. Other schools that have outgrown their current capacity will be rebuilt larger. For example, Bellaire and Lamar high schools would be built at a capacity for 3,100 students each. Their current buildings were built to accommodate 2,606 and 2,194 students, respectively.

HOW BOND MONEY IS SPENT

How can bond money be used?

Proceeds from a bond issue can only be used for the costs associated with construction and renovation of facilities, the acquisition of land and the purchase of long-lasting items such as equipment. Bond proceeds cannot be used to pay teacher salaries.

What safeguards does HISD have in place to ensure that the bond program is run efficiently and ethically?

Oversight of the HISD bond program is multi-layered to ensure many checks and balances. In addition, HISD has taken many steps to ensure the public is fully informed regarding the status of all projects:

Bond Oversight Committee

The Bond Oversight Committee consists of HISD parents and business experts (architects, CPAs, and attorneys, for example) who have no financial stake in the district's bond program. Chaired by a past president of the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, this body meets quarterly to review detailed status reports on all HISD building and renovation projects. These reports are posted on the HISD website for public inspection.

Bond Program Website

HISD launched a 2007 Bond Program website (www.houstonisd.org/bond) that includes easily accessible information on all projects. This project information includes:

- Project descriptions
- Work schedules and completion statuses
- Budget information
- Links to detailed quarterly reports that are provided to the Bond Oversight Committee

Project Advisory Teams

In February 2011, HISD created Project Advisory Teams for every campus project. These teams – made up of the campus principal, staff, parents and community members – work directly with the project managers to give input and track progress.

Construction Audit Group

HISD employs an independent construction audit group that regularly reviews projects by following industry-mandated auditing standards. Working within HISD's Office of Inspector General, this group files reports directly to the elected Board of Education's audit committee.

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Bid Evaluation and Accounting

The construction bid evaluation and award process is now handled by HISD's procurement department, which adds an additional check and balance to the system. Financial accounting responsibilities are handled by the HISD Controller, reporting to the Chief Financial Officer.

In 2007, HISD promised to increase the opportunities for businesses owned by minorities and women to participate in the bond program. Was that promise kept?

Participation of minority- and woman-owned business enterprises (MWBEs) in HISD's bond construction program recently hit an all-time high – 32 percent. There are 17 percent more MWBE's registered to do business with HISD today and the number of minority-owned businesses receiving contracts is up 10 percent. At the same time, the number of woman-owned businesses winning HISD contracts is up 7 percent. These participation rates exceed the goals the HISD Board of Education set for the program.

THE DIRECTION OF HISD

What are the enrollment trends in HISD?

HISD's overall student enrollment has remained relatively constant for 20 years. In the 1991-1992 school year, HISD's enrollment was 197,413 students. In 2011-2012, HISD had 203,066 students. Unlike many urban school districts in America, HISD's overall enrollment is not declining.

What is HISD doing to raise the level of academic achievement for all students?

To address the need to raise the level of academic rigor in all schools, HISD worked with the community in 2010 to devise a Strategic Direction that drives every initiative happening in the district. The five Core Initiatives of HISD's Strategic Direction are:

- An effective teacher in every classroom
- An effective principal in every school
- Rigorous instructional standards and supports
- Data-driven accountability
- A culture of trust through action

Under the Board of Education's direction, HISD has taken aggressive measures to raise the level of academic rigor at all schools across the city. These actions include:

- Implementing new appraisal and development systems for principals and teachers that, for the first time, use student academic achievement as a significant factor.
- Requiring that all HISD high schools offer a broad range of college-level Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The district also covers the cost for students who take AP exams that help them earn college credit.
- Opening Grad Labs at all HISD high schools where students who are in danger of dropping out take computer-based courses to catch up academically.
- Launching modern career and technical education programs in partnership with Houston Community College at six HISD schools – Furr, Kashmere, Booker T. Washington, Sterling, Scarborough and Long. Graduates of these programs will leave high school with associate's degrees and valuable professional certifications to help them land high-paying jobs.
- Partnering with teachers to overhaul the district's academic curriculum to help students meet tougher standards.
- Unveiling the nation's most ambitious school-turnaround program that aims to transform 20 of the district's struggling schools. Using research-based methods that

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have proven to be successful at America's best charter schools, HISD's Apollo 20 schools offer increased instructional time, intensive tutoring, and most importantly, strong teachers and principals.

Are these academic initiatives working?

There are many encouraging signs of the progress being made by Houston students. Among them:

- HISD's graduation rate has increased for four consecutive years, while the dropout rate has declined for four consecutive years.
- HISD schools are retaining 92 percent of highly-rated teachers each year, compared to 45 percent of low-performing teachers.
- The number of college-level Advanced Placement exams passed by HISD students has increased 45 percent since 2009.
- The total value of scholarships offered to HISD graduates in 2012 topped \$180 million, compared to \$51 million in 2009.
- Students in Apollo 20 schools, previously our lowest performing schools, are catching up with their peers in other HISD schools.
- This year, HISD is the only school district in Texas to be named among the four national finalists for the Broad Prize for Urban Education. This is the most prestigious honor in education, recognizing school districts that make the most progress toward raising academic achievement for all students.

THE 2007 BOND

When was HISD's last bond referendum?

In 2007, the community approved an \$805 million bond. The primary focus of the 2007 bond was construction of new elementary schools and completion of technology and safety/security areas. For more information on the 2007 bond projects, please visit:

<http://blogs.houstonisd.org/bond>.

What is the status of the projects included in the 2007 bond proposal?

The 2007 bond program included construction and renovation projects at 180 schools. Work has been completed at 135 schools and the remaining 45 projects are on schedule for completion by 2014 or sooner. Because the bond program is under budget, HISD was able to add one more new school – Lockhart Elementary -- to the number of new schools included in the program. So far, HISD has opened 20 of the new schools and the remaining three are on schedule for completion in 2013.

Why weren't all the 2007 bond projects finished sooner?

HISD issued the 2007 bond debt in phases in order to avoid impacting the property tax rate. In addition, the 2007 bond program was designed so that some projects would be financed with proceeds from the sale of surplus HISD property. Those projects could not begin until the properties were sold. HISD delayed selling some properties until the real estate market improved in order to get the most value. .

Why is HISD pursuing another bond before all of the 2007 work is finished?

All of the 2007 bond work is scheduled to be completed before any of the 2012 bond construction would begin. Meanwhile, previous bond building programs have not addressed significant facility needs that remain among HISD's 279 schools as identified by Parsons.

CONSTRUCTION

Was every HISD school personally inspected during the 2012 facilities assessment?

No. Just five years ago, HISD hired another firm, Magellan, to send facility assessment crews to each and every school in the district. This assessment cost HISD \$4 million. Much of the work conducted then remains valid because many of the facility problems identified at that time still have not been addressed. This year, HISD instructed Parsons to update the comprehensive analysis conducted by Magellan, taking into account all facility work undertaken since 2007. This is the long-standing process that HISD uses for evaluating facilities. Before the 1998 bond, HISD conducted a comprehensive assessment of all schools. This assessment was updated in preparation for the 2002 bond package. In 2007, HISD paid for a comprehensive facilities assessment, which was updated in 2012.

How did HISD calculate construction costs for building new high schools?

HISD calculated high school construction costs using a formula that grants 140 square feet per student at a cost of \$160 per square foot. Both of these figures are well below average for the Houston region, which are \$212.77 per square foot and 160 square feet per student, according to the 2012 Annual School Construction Report from School Planning & Management Magazine (www.planning4education.com).

High school construction costs in our region have increased 93 percent in the past decade, according to the magazine's research.

Does HISD solicit competitive bids from architects, which would ensure the lowest cost and best value for design services?

HISD follows a selection process prescribed by state law. The first step in this process is to select architects based on qualifications including demonstrated competence and experience on similar projects. The second step in the process is to negotiate a fair and reasonable fee for those services.

Does HISD use competitive bids for construction projects?

HISD follows a bidding process prescribed by state law. The selection process for contractors is competitive and allows the district to select contractors on the basis of best value to the district.

Is HISD building environmentally responsible facilities?

As with the 2007 bond program, all new schools in the 2012 program will be designed to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building standards. These facilities will be energy efficient and environmentally responsible, resulting in lower operating costs for the district.

How will needs at schools not on the bond project list be addressed?

The district-wide middle school restroom improvements and the district-wide technology improvements will address some of the outstanding deficiencies existing at campuses not otherwise included in the bond proposal. The recently completed third-party facilities assessment also brought many maintenance needs to light that will be addressed through HISD's regular maintenance program instead of the bond program. Other needs identified in the assessment will be addressed through a long range capital improvement plan. HISD recognizes that there are many needs across the district. It is simply not practical to attempt to address all facility needs in one bond program.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

What is HISD's current financial condition?

The district is recognized for its fiscal responsibility. It has a Standard & Poor's credit rating of AA+ and a Moody's rating of AAA, the highest possible credit rating. HISD has the highest school district bond rating in Texas and one of the highest in the nation.

Are facility bond taxes deductible on my federal tax returns?

Generally, school bond taxes are deductible if you itemize your deduction on your federal tax return. As an itemized deduction, you may get a return of 10% to 35% depending on your income level. Your tax professional will be able to assist you with this deduction.

How do HISD taxes compare to other school district tax rates in the area?

Houston ISD has the LOWEST TAX RATE of the 26 districts located in Harris County. HISD's property tax rate would remain the lowest in Harris County, even with the tax rate increase that would happen if voters approve the bond proposal, based on the 2012 tax rate. In addition, HISD is among the few school districts in Texas that offer homeowners an additional 20 percent homestead exemption. As a result, HISD homeowners pay hundreds of dollars less in annual school district taxes than the owners of similarly valued homes elsewhere.

Will HISD be able to sell its bonds at a favorable rate?

HISD's bonds should receive the highest possible rating due primarily to the guarantee by the Texas Permanent School fund. Because of the high rating and the current low interest rates, the district expects a favorable market for its bonds. HISD's bond ratings put the district in the top tier of Texas' most credit-worthy school districts.

What is the difference between the Maintenance and Operations (M&O), Debt Service, and Total tax rates?

M&O taxes are used for day- to-day operations – salaries, supplies, utilities, insurance, fuel, etc. Revenue from the Debt Service tax rate can only be used to retire bonds sold for specific purposes: construction, renovations, buses, portable buildings, land, technology and the cost of issuing bonds and related fees. The Total tax rate is a combination of the M&O tax rate and the Debt Service tax rate.

TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES

How does HISD plan to use the \$100 million included in this bond proposal for technology?

Technology projects identified in the bond proposal include:

- Instructional delivery devices, such as projectors, interactive television/whiteboards will be installed in classrooms across the district. This will provide teachers with a common ground to share and collaborate with each other through a standard, interactive learning environment. Telephone systems at schools throughout HISD will be updated to ensure that every permanent classroom is equipped with a fully functional telephone. to enhance classroom safety.
- The wireless network at every HISD school will be expanded to provide internet access throughout the campus.
- Outdated network equipment throughout HISD will be upgraded or replaced to ensure that all data traffic travels efficiently within and between all schools and to the internet.
- All HISD schools receive annual funds outside of the bond program that are intended for the purchase of classroom computers and other technology.

Why is the Wi-Fi expansion and implementation needed?

The current Wi-Fi infrastructure installed at all campuses was intended primarily for administrative functions and allows limited instructional use. With the availability of more robust and richer content in online instructional resources, as well as an increased number of mobile devices, there is need for additional secure wireless access.

Each school has tablets and laptops available for use in the classroom, meaning that as many as 30 devices are in use in close proximity. Expanding the district's Wi-Fi capability at all campuses allows us to provide sufficient access for use of a high number of devices and also supports our mobile learning initiative in a cost-effective way.

VOTING

When is the election?

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 6. Early voting is from Oct. 22 through Nov. 2.

The last day to register to vote in the election is Oct. 9.

Voter registration services are available at all HISD high schools, where principals have been deputized since last spring to register voters. For more information on voter registration, click [here](#).

Where will I find the HISD bond proposition on the ballot?

The HISD bond proposition will appear near the bottom of the Nov. 6 ballot. It is important for voters who vote a straight ticket to make sure they take time to vote on propositions listed at the end of the ballot.

I have more questions about the 2012 HISD bond proposal. Where can I get more information?

You can find more information about the 2012 HISD Bond Proposal at www.houstonisd.org. Specific questions may be emailed to bondinfo@houstonisd.org.