

HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 86TH SESSION LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

REFORM SCHOOL FINANCE AND REDUCE RECAPTURE

A well-funded and highly effective school finance system is critical to the continued economic vitality of the state of Texas. Houston ISD is the largest school district in Texas and 7th largest in the nation, serving nearly 213,000 students at 281 campuses. About 75% of students in Houston ISD are economically disadvantaged. A 21st century Texas workforce requires a 21st century system for funding Texas public school districts, and this was stated in the 2016 Texas Supreme Court ruling on school finance. Many components of today's school finance system are about 35 years old. Houston ISD's recapture dilemma proves the current finance system needs drastic reform. HISD's 2018-19 recapture payment is estimated to be \$272 million.

To meet the local workforce demands and create global graduates, HISD encourages the 86th Texas Legislature to improve and update the existing school finance system. Strategic investments must be made from Pre-Kindergarten to 12th Grade. HISD urges the state to place greater emphasis on early childhood education, reading and writing skills, special education and post-secondary readiness.

In addition, HISD urges the state to reduce recapture, fully fund full day Pre-K and provide Hurricane Harvey relief funds for public schools. To accomplish these goals and reform school finance, the Legislature must create new revenue sources for public education.

HISD Supports:

- Lowering the burden on local property tax payers to fund schools to no more than 50% by replacing those dollars with General Revenue from the state.
- Identifying new state revenue sources designed to allocate funds to school districts.
- Eliminating recapture on Tier II copper pennies above the compressed tax rate.
- Increasing the basic allotment to adjust for inflation.
- Counting students enrolled in full-day Pre-Kindergarten in a school district's weighted average daily attendance (WADA).
- Allowing Chapter 41 districts paying recapture to receive the transportation allotment.
- Increasing funding weights for unique student populations like compensatory education, bilingual education, and special education.
- Providing full funding for full-day Pre-Kindergarten through the state's funding formula.
- Providing full funding for increased special education enrollment resulting from the federal order requiring Texas to provide services to all students who qualify under federal law.
- Withdrawing Hurricane Harvey recovery funding for schools from the state's Economic Stabilization Fund (ESF).

IMPROVE SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY

The safety and well-being of Houston's children is a top priority. Texans mourned after the tragic school shooting in Santa Fe. School systems and state officials must ensure all children feel safe at school. No parent should ever feel uneasy sending their child to school and no child or teacher should ever feel unsafe on campus.

HISD's best practices are closely aligned with the safety proposals from the Governor and the Legislature. However, HISD is using local dollars to fund these efforts. Like many school districts across Texas, HISD's local safety budget would enjoy additional support from the state.

Additional state funds would allow HISD to:

1. Increase active shooter emergency and intruder drills at campuses and facilities;
2. Conduct additional hands-on training for HISD's police officers;
3. Train campus staff on best practices to keep schools secure;
4. Provide officers with additional safety equipment to be used in the event of an emergency;
5. Implement standing Emergency Response Team to respond to threats districtwide;
6. Provide mental health supports for students and trained school personnel;
7. Install security entrance vestibules and one-button emergency lockdown systems.

A state-mandated, "one-size-fits-all" approach to school safety will not work at every campus. Flexibility in local-decision making is critical.

HISD Supports:

- New state funding to staff a campus police officer at every school in HISD.
- Targeted funding for capital improvements and safety enhancements to better secure facilities, and flexibility around local decision-making.
- Ongoing funding for critical campus safety and mental health personnel, as well as programming designed to support the needs of the whole child.

ADDRESS ACCOUNTABILITY RATINGS AND SANCTIONS

HISD embraces the highest academic standards and level of accountability. In 2018, 91% of HISD's rated campuses "Met Standard." The district was not rated in 2018 because of Hurricane Harvey; however, HISD would have received a "B" rating under the new accountability system. A consistent and fair accountability rating system is an important tool for truly measuring student achievement. Texas also needs an accountability system that does not rely heavily on standardized testing.

Since 2012, HISD lowered the number of campuses not meeting state standards from 58 to 12 – this is the lowest number in the last seven years and includes 15 campuses that remained "Improvement Required," but were not rated because of Hurricane Harvey. The new A-F rating system requires additional improvements to fully account for challenges in large, urban school systems, including high concentrations of poverty, high mobility rates and high percentages of English Language Learners.

In addition, House Bill 1842 (84R) triggers a state-appointed board of managers or campus closure if one school is rated Improvement Required for five or more consecutive school years. To be clear, any number of Improvement Required campuses is unacceptable to HISD. However, a numerical threshold for triggering sanctions is unfair to a district the size of HISD. The threshold for state-imposed takeovers or closures should be percentage-based. One campus out of 281 should not trigger a state-appointed board of managers.

HISD Supports:

- An accountability system that considers the unique factors and culture of each district and campus population in the state of Texas.
- At a minimum, reasonable and fair revisions to HB 1842 and a percentage-based threshold to trigger a state-appointed board of managers. Limiting the state's assignment of a board of managers to districts with more than 10% of schools identified as 'Unacceptable' for multiple years.
- Clearer statutory timelines, targets, and constraints for the Texas Education Agency to meet when drafting the Accountability Manual and agency rules pertaining to accountability. Publishing the accountability manual by September 30 of the current school year.

- The elimination of an accountability system so heavily weighed on a multiple-choice test. Limiting STAAR results to 50% of the calculation in each domain score or include non-test-based indicators for elementary and middle schools.
- Elimination of the “3 out of 4” rule that creates “forced failures” by reducing overall campus and district accountability scores based on the number of underlying scores that are below 60.
- Allowing students who achieve the equivalency standard on a substitute assessment for the STAAR exam (PSAT, SAT, ACT, AP, IB, and TSI) be counted at the “Masters Grade Level” rather than the “Meets Grade Level” standard for accountability purposes.
- From an academic and economic perspective, preserving high school cosmetology courses because of the long-term benefits they provide to students.