Community Engagement Action Plan

General Background.

This Community Engagement Action Plan is recommended by the Community Engagement Committee for consideration by the Board at its regular meeting set for May 9, 2024. It follows the work of the Community Engagement Committee to provide recommendations to the full Board at its Community Engagement Training held April 4, 2024, and receipt and incorporation of comments and suggestions from the Board during that training.

Community Engagement Action Plan

1. **Timeline.**

    1. Consistent with best practice, the Board adopts an overarching community engagement action plan which will take the Board through the end of 2026. Because the plan covers a multi-year period, flexibility has been built into the community engagement action plan, though the general structure of the plan has been set by the Board by the adoption of this Community Engagement Action Plan.
    2. Community engagement periods are set and occur at regular intervals, with intentional engagement periods in the Fall (approx. August-October) and Spring (approx. February-April) of each year. These engagement periods are called "Campaigns" in the attached timeline.
    3. Prior to the end of the 2023-2024 school year, a targeted event to engage with high school students at a unique event will be held in mid-May.

2. **Structure of Committee Work.**

    1. Consistent with the timelines set out in the attached timeline, a new ad hoc Community Engagement Campaign Committee ("CECC") be created for each Campaign.
    2. The first ad hoc CECC will be appointed once this Community Engagement Action Plan is adopted by the Board. The first CECC be appointed by the President and will be comprised of Cassandra Auzenne-Bandy and Rolando Martinez who will serve through the Fall 2024 Campaign.
    3. The CECCs will conduct the work outlined on the attached timeline in advance of, during and after the two Campaigns for which they serve on the CECC.
    4. Each appointment of two Board members to a CECC will be for a period of one calendar year (or two Campaigns). Each CECC will dissolve upon its report to the Board following the second Campaign to which it is assigned, and its recommendation to the President of two committee members for the CECC for the following year.

3. **Information Sharing and Feedback.**

Community engagement is intended to be a two-way communication. As such, each engagement event during a Campaign is intended to be comprised of a report out (progress towards goals and constraints) with feedback and an opportunity for sharing on the work of the Board (specifically, topics of governance or progress monitoring) with feedback.

Community engagement will be conducted by all Board members. Though the CECCs will outline the work of each Campaign, all Board members are expected to and should participate in the implementation. It is the job of the CECC and each Board member to ensure participation.

It is important that the Board speaks with one voice during the community engagement work. As such, we have prepared a recommended script and presentation. These are intended to be modified as appropriate by the CECC to meet the needs of the moment, within the structures of the community engagement action plan.

4. **Stakeholder Engagement.**

Each CECC should consider the Board's goal of ensuring that all stakeholders are engaged, including but not limited to students, teachers, administrators, parents, caretakers and families of students, and community members. In their work, CECCs are to pay special attention to ensure that all stakeholders - whether involved in organized groups or otherwise - are considered in the community engagement processes. A list of community groups for consideration by CECCs may be prepared and updated by the CECCs in their work; any such list is not intended to be a limitation, but a starting point for future CECCs.

Board-led Engagement and Outreach

Suggested Protocol for Executing Meaningful Community Listening Campaigns

Most boards of education rely on the hour or so of public comment during their board meetings as the sole mechanism for engaging with their community. This is problematic for several reasons, including:

1. Public comment is not meaningful two-way community engagement. Because of open meeting laws, there is no opportunity for back-and-forth dialogue.
2. The board represents the vision and values of the district's OWNER community. Most people attending a board meeting or sending comments to the board are not attending or doing so with the "ownership mindset." Rather, their concerns are customer-based.
3. Public speakers are generally self-selected and may not be a representative sample of the community.

It is the board's responsibility to act on behalf of the whole, not just those who take the time or have access to lobby them. The community's diversity must not only be respected but intentionally sought. Further, the board must adopt a protocol to ensure that community engagement is done with a shared voice so that no section of the community receives inconsistent information.

Suggested Protocol Includes:

- **Engaging as Pairs-** Board members should facilitate conversations with a partner whenever engaging on behalf of the board. In fact, the board has a responsibility to be clear that individual board members aren't put in a position where their comments may be construed as an official board position.
- **A Shared Script-** The board's shared voice should center the reason for the school system existing in the first place (improving student outcomes) with questions that elicit information about what the community wants its students to know and be able to do (vision/goals) and the non-negotiable community values that must be honored (values/constraints).
- **A Shared Definition of Community—**The board engages the community to have owner conversations about student outcomes. These conversations are about the organization's long-term alignment. The Houston ISD board agrees that the community is comprised of students, families, teachers, administrators, community members, taxpayers, and others who have an interest in supporting positive outcomes for students in Houston.
- **A Common Mechanism for Feedback-** Demonstrating that feedback is taken seriously and acted upon shows transparency and accountability to the community. It is critical that the community actually see the board use the information in the decision-making process.

Boards who want to create a deliberate cadence of accountability with the community can do so by adopting a community engagement plan and timeline. This allows the board to set expectations with the community, staff, and each other as to how often and in what manner they can engage with the board.

In addition to a community engagement plan, the board should also use the recommended protocol to establish processes for consistent community outreach.

ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE

BEFORE FIRST SESSION:

6 Weeks- Decide campaign length, how many sessions to hold, and target audience.

5 weeks- Identify materials needed, accommodations, draft script and agenda, feedback collection process.

4 weeks- Schedule dates, times, and locations. Send sign-up sheet to board, invite groups.

3 weeks- finalize script, slides, handouts, and agenda.

2 weeks- finalize scheduling, practice script.

1 week- practice, practice, practice.

AFTER FINAL SESSION:

Immediately- synthesize and summarize feedback

1 Month After- report summary to the board

RESOURCES

Community Group List- review and update for each campaign

Campaign Plan Template

Sample Slide Deck and Handout

Spring 2024- Planning
Board establishes consistent protocol and timeline for board lead community engagement.

Summer 2024 Campaign Goal
1. Hosts a unique engagement session for students (all future engagements should include students).

Fall 2024 Campaign Goal:
1. Communicate and feedback on goals/constraints progress; and
2. Discuss and feedback on progress monitoring process.

Spring 2025 Campaign Goal:
1. Communicate and feedback on goals/constraints progress; and
2. Discuss and feedback on best governance practices.

Fall 2025 Campaign Goal:
1. Communicate and feedback on goals/constraints progress; and
2. Discuss and feedback on progress monitoring process.

Spring 2026 Campaign Goal:
1. Communicate and feedback on goals/constraints progress; and
2. Discuss and feedback on best governance practices.

Fall 2026 Campaign Goal:
1. Communicate and feedback on goals/constraints progress; and
2. Discuss and feedback on progress monitoring process.

Community Engagement Protocol

Community Engagement: Two-way communication between the board and community members that focuses on the community's vision and values and that occurs at a meeting hosted by the board.

Each time the board conducts an engagement campaign a two-person ad hoc committee should be formed for the purpose of high-level planning on behalf of the board. The committee shall identify the scope and subject of each campaign.

Who should be involved in community engagement and for what purpose?
The board will engage the community as owners - individuals who are engaged in the long-term success of the district - for the purpose of deepening their understanding of community vision and values, reporting progress toward realizing that vision and honoring those values, and to educate the community on how to engage in the work of the board.

How will the board identify who should be engaged and at what times?
The board will maintain a running list of organizations and interest groups. Upon being appointed, the committee members shall review the list to identify who should be included in the next round of community engagement. The committee shall make every effort to include stakeholders who have not traditionally been part of the engagement process to the extent possible.

What format will the board use to engage the community?
Engagement sessions should be held in smaller sessions of 10-20 attendees by invitation. Sessions should be held at the Hattie Mae White Educational Complex in the board conference room by default, but the board may opt at times to hold meetings at alternative locations when the group being engaged has unique communication needs. The board may also opt to hold engagement sessions online in small groups. Keeping group sizes manageable is important to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak if they wish.

How will board members divide up the engagement work during this campaign?
The board should utilize a sign-up sheet that is maintained by the board office. All board members are expected to participate in community engagement activities.

How will board members ensure that expectations are clear around owner issues vs customer issues?
The district should have a staff member available for individuals to address customer service issues with, and a process should be laid out for how the board should respond.

What guardrails will the board put around engagement behaviors? (e.g. not making commitments on behalf of the board, not sharing personal opinions on issues on which the board hasn't taken official action or in conflict with official board action, redirecting around customer focused matters, etc.)

Sample Community Engagement Script

Title: Enhancing Student Outcomes through Lonestar Governance: A Dialogue Between HISD Board Members and Community Focus Groups

[Scene: A conference room at the Houston Independent School District (HISD) headquarters. Members of the HISD Board of Managers, Board Member 1 and Board Member 2, sit at the head of the table. Representatives from community focus groups, including parents, teachers, students, and local leaders, are gathered around.]

Board Member 1: Good evening, everyone. We appreciate your presence today as we discuss how the HISD Board of Managers is dedicated to improving student outcomes by implementing the Lonestar Governance Framework. This framework guides our efforts to enhance school board effectiveness and, ultimately, student success. Before diving into more details, I'd like to introduce other board members here today. Other board members can be found on the screen. (references slide of all board members)

Board Member 2: Absolutely. The Lonestar Governance Framework emphasizes key behaviors proven to drive improvements in student outcomes. These behaviors include setting clear student outcome goals, establishing constraints for the superintendent, monitoring progress monthly, and implementing systems and processes that will cause the board to establish a culture prioritizing student success over adult convenience.

Board Member 1: Last Fall, the board met with people all over Houston for roughly four months to ensure that we engaged a representative cross-section of the community. This was a critical first step in ensuring we have a good pulse on the community's vision for students and values that must be protected along the way. We had to engage the community as district owners whose interests are on the long-term systemwide success of HISD. (Vision Statement on Screen) During these conversations, the following themes emerged:

Board Member 2: (Vision Statement and Goals on screen) Vision for improved student outcomes— The community wanted to see literate and numerate students with solid critical thinking and problem-solving skills who would prepare them for success after high school. This vision was used to identify a set of four student outcome goals.

(Share List of Goals)

Board Member 1: (Superintendent Constraints on Screen) Values to be protected by constraints— The community clearly wants this intervention to end as quickly as possible, and they strongly desire to preserve a broad range of educational program options. These values were used to identify three constraints for superintendent behavior.

Board Member 2: These goals and constraints are the board's priorities. These are supposed to be the first stop for all resource allocations and strategic initiatives. Causing improvements in these areas is critical and requires focus. The more of these priorities that the board adopts, the less focused that the system is allowed to be.

Board Member 1: Certainly. One of our first steps is setting specific and measurable student outcome goals that align with our vision for academic excellence. These goals serve as a roadmap for our district's success and guide our decision-making processes.

For the second half of this gathering, we have about 3 questions that will guide our conversations. One of our Board Members will take notes of all your responses and at the conclusion of all our sessions, we will identify themes that provide feedback on how well the board is doing in representing the vision and values of our community.

Board member 2.
Question 1: Turning your attention to the slide that lists these priorities (Goals on Screen), how aligned are these with your expectations for District. Are they attainable?

As you answer this question, we want you to think about the you have had during your education. Regardless of whether those needs were met today, let's start out by naming them. What needs have you had to be successful as a student in HISD?

Let's regroup and share your thoughts. We will begin with group/table #1.

Accountability is key to our governance approach. We conduct monthly reviews to track our progress, identify areas for improvement, and celebrate successes. By regularly assessing our performance against our goals, we can make data-informed decisions that benefit our students and community.

Continued

Question #2.

In what ways has HISD prepared or not prepared you for life after graduation?

In answering this question, we also what you to think about how your peers would respond. Let's come back and share your thoughts.

- Let's start off with elementary…
- Now, lets continue with middle and high school students.

(Board Member may need to ask to follow up questions or seek clarification)

(Share list of Constraints)

Board Member 1: By implementing the Lonestar Governance Framework, we create a culture of clarity, high expectations, and student-centered leadership within our district. Our focus is on improving student outcomes and providing every child the opportunity to succeed academically and beyond.

Question#3. In what ways has the Board represented the values of the community as displayed on the screen well. Now that you have had time to speak to each other, who would like to volunteer to share your thoughts? (Board Member may need to ask to follow up questions or seek clarification)

Board Member 2: Thank you all for participating in this session. As noted earlier, your feedback will be gathered to identify area of success and improvement needed and shared with the rest of the board members. Community engagement is vital to our success. We encourage parents, teachers, students, and local leaders to participate in our governance processes, provide feedback, and hold us accountable for delivering on our commitments. Together, we can ensure that every student in HISD receives a high-quality education.

Board Member 1: In conclusion, we are committed to leading with clarity, high expectations, and a relentless focus on student outcomes. We thank each of you for your partnership and look forward to working together to create a brighter future for the children of Houston.

Sample Engagement Session Agenda

Setting the stage:

Community engagement meetings should include between 12-18 participants from the community for a round table like discussion. The board should use a shared slide deck to share critical student performance data that is specific to the board's goals and data on key operational areas that is specific to the board's constraints. The board must use a shared script to ensure that every participant is the beneficiary of the same information regardless of what session they attend. There should be a clearly defined process for directing concerns about superintendent work, and a section in the script that provides direction on how to respond to customer service issues.

Proposed Session Agenda:

Welcome Participants and introductions (Three Sentences- My name is..., My role in the community is..., My wish for HISD students is..."

Review Agenda/Session Goals

Share what will happen with the information collected from this session Question 1-

What is currently going well in HISD?

Review data or problem statements

Ask questions specific to data (Upon reviewing this information, how do these results align with your vision for district improvement?)

Review board processes (board priorities, progress monitoring, etc.)

Ask questions specific to board processes and record their feedback. (What steps can the board take to ensure that community members are engaged in these processes?
i.e. following along with progress monitoring)

- It's okay to ask people to slow down as they are sharing so you can record their feedback. "I want to make sure I'm capturing exactly what you are sharing. Could you please speak a bit louder/more slowly." This will likely have a positive effect on your participants.

Gratitude and Next Steps

Community Outreach Protocol

Community Outreach: Two-way communication between the board and community members that focuses on the community's vision and values and that occurs at a meeting hosted by community members. (Events where any other entity controls the agenda.)

Questions this protocol should answer include:

How can community organizations request the board host an outreach session with their group?

How will board members divide up the work of community outreach (outreach must still be done in pairs)?

How will board members ensure that organizations understand that individual board member participation is not engagement on behalf of the board?

What guardrails will the board put around outreach behaviors? (e.g. not making commitments on behalf of the board, only speaking to items that the board has taken official action on, only engaging around specific topics, etc.)

Owner Community Focus Groups

The HISD Board of Managers considers their "owner" community everyone who lives within the boundaries of Houston Independent School District. There is no section of this community that bears more significance than any other. Still, the board recognizes the need to seek out engagement opportunities with individuals who have less access to traditional methods of communication and interest groups who have a particular interest in the district's long-term success.

Some of these focus groups include:
- **Students-** not just the all-star students, although their feedback is important too, but also the students who have traditionally had less access to educational justice.
- **Communities with Underperforming Campuses-** The board is accountable to the community for the outcomes of the school district.
- **Who are we NOT hearing from? -** The board has shared that they would like to prioritize parts of the community who are not the most historically engaged. This includes- International Newcomers and representatives of Houston's most marginalized communities with an effort to include members of those communities themselves rather than representatives to the extent possible. The board acknowledges that this is an iterative process and building engagement relies on the establishment of trust.

The board office will maintain lists of community group representatives and individuals who should be included in engagement sessions, outreach sessions, and who would like to be included in future efforts or routine outreach. These lists shall include contact information, regular meeting information, and the most recent date that each group was included in engagement/outreach efforts.

These lists should be updated, to the extent possible, by the ad hoc outreach committee at the beginning of each engagement/outreach campaign.

SPRING 2024 Community Engagement

HISD Student Engagement Session

May 21 @ 10:30 am - 12:30 pm
Hattie Mae White Auditorium
Lunch Provided

The board will engage with HISD graduating seniors to discuss what their needs have been, how the board's goals and constraints align with those needs, and how they can advocate for their schools to the board beyond graduation.

Logistics:
The district will send buses to pick up students beginning at 9:45 am for a 10:30 am start time. The session will last from 10:30-12:00. The district will provide lunch for all participants. Buses will leave Hattie Mae White so students may arrive back on their campuses by 1:30 pm.

Because this session involves students, and their privacy is of the utmost importance, sessions will not be posted publicly for all board members to attend. As such, a maximum of 4 board members will be able to attend. A report will be given to the full board at the June board meeting.