



# *A Declaration of Beliefs and Visions*

by the 2010 Board of Education

## FOREWORD

In recognition of the essential role that public education plays in the Houston community, we, the Board of Education of the Houston Independent School District, firmly recommit ourselves to providing all children with a high-quality education that aspires to the highest academic standards. In doing so, we acknowledge, respect, and appreciate the many educational reforms and restructure methods of previous boards and administrations to improve student performance in HISD. However, the work is far from finished. Effective reform is an ongoing process that requires constant attention and assessment, given the dynamic social and economic environment that is public education. To that end—after significant deliberation and review of current research and progress—we reaffirm our commitment to the children of Houston by establishing a *2010 Declaration of Beliefs and Visions*.

We view this *Declaration of Beliefs and Visions* as the next iteration of change in HISD as we address the many challenges in education that we face today. In 1990, the Board of Education first released *A Declaration of Beliefs and Visions*, which established the guiding principles for HISD's significant academic progress and organizational restructuring. We gratefully acknowledge this foundational work that formally put our schools front and center by focusing on the student-teacher relationship, decentralization, performance over compliance, a common core of academic subjects for all students, accountability, empowerment, and capacity.

We believe that successful educational reform requires the entire Houston community—business, labor, civic leaders, parents, educators, and school boards—to come together as a coalition to support public schools. Active engagement and involvement are required. The Board of Education pledges to work openly with the community to implement a shared vision for HISD. We agree that it takes a city to reform an urban school district. Accordingly, we invite all who care about children and the future of this great city to join us in making the education of Houston's children our highest civic responsibility.

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# 2010 Declaration of Beliefs and Visions

## For the Houston Independent School District

The importance of a high-quality education in an individual's success cannot be overstated. The world is changing rapidly, and students must be prepared to live and work productively in a new economy with new technology, new competition, and new expectations. The Houston Independent School District is recognized as one of the premier large urban school districts in the nation; therefore, in light of its past record of progress, we believe that it can and must do even more to keep pace with change. Many of our schools are not yet performing to the high academic standards we expect them to meet.

Our diverse, vibrant student population, reflecting Houston's international standing, is an asset. We must ensure that every student, regardless of culture, ethnicity, language, or economic status, has both equal opportunity and equal access to high-quality education evidenced through results of growth and accountability ratings.

### **That promise is based on the beliefs that:**

- The overall student-achievement level must be improved so that after each school year, every student makes, at a minimum, one year of instructional progress.
- There can be no achievement gap between socioeconomic groups and/or children of ethnic diversity.
- Recruitment and retention of highly effective teachers are the keys to enhancing the quality of education and increasing student achievement.
- The dropout rate is unacceptably high and must be reduced.
- Our schools must be able to earn autonomy.
- The level of meaningful parental engagement must be increased.
- The community has a legitimate voice in reform, and responsiveness to community concerns must be improved.

**These beliefs shape our vision of what the Houston Independent School District should be—an educational system that:**

- Empowers schools to be autonomous and accountable for performance
- Offers school choice while ensuring equity of resources
- Values and cultivates the knowledge and skills of personnel
- Seeks meaningful engagement with the community in all major decisions

It will require an unwavering commitment to a shared course of action to make our beliefs and visions a reality. Above all, the results of all reform must have a positive impact on the important relationship between the teacher and the student.

## MANDATE FOR CHANGE

**I. HISD's greatest strength is its human capital.** The personal, face-to-face contact between teacher and child will always be the central event in education. Changes in the district's structure, governance, and policies underscore the importance of this relationship; that is, through reform, they exist to support the relationship. In addition, HISD sets high expectations for school leadership to inspire creative thinking and innovative approaches that lead to instructional and operational excellence.

- Employees identified as high performers by using value-added data should be rewarded. HISD must establish levels of compensation and differentiated salaries driven by performance, value-added data, and accountability for all employees.
- Reform measures must focus on higher standards for recruitment and selection, job performance and compensation, and professional development and career planning, and provide employees viable career paths within the organization.

**II. Schools must be empowered to develop and implement the methods that best achieve their unique and individual instructional goals.** HISD is fully committed to a decentralized system of schools, giving principals the authority over the educational and operational systems. In such a system, the Board of Education remains accountable to the public for high-quality educational services for all children. The board provides guidance and support to schools by establishing clear, consistent districtwide goals, high standards and expectations, and effective systems of evaluation; but the individual school is held accountable for innovation and instructional results within those districtwide parameters.

- Principals are the leaders of the decision-making process affecting their schools, and their leadership is measured not only by results but also by their collaboration with teachers, parents, and the community.
- Recognizing that schools are where decisions should be made and that successful decentralization is a function of leadership capacity at the school level, the district will establish a tiered system of differentiated autonomy focusing on instructional competencies, budgets, and business operational systems. Schools demonstrating higher levels of student performance, innovation, and operational excellence (including school safety) are further empowered with greater autonomy and decision-making flexibility. However, other schools may need greater support and guidance; and until they reach acceptable levels of performance, the district must manage for them critical areas such as curriculum, professional development, and operational systems. When guidance over decision-making is needed, structured interventions will help develop the competencies toward greater autonomy. Annual performance monitoring of instruction, operations, and attractiveness to the community served will determine the level of principal autonomy or central-office intervention at the school.

**III. School choice must remain an integral part of the HISD system.** School choice ignites the spirit of competition, motivates excellence, promotes innovation, and empowers parents to match their children with the schools that best meet their children's needs. It is important for HISD to focus more on developing, improving, and using innovative educational tools so that every child at every school has access to the instructional program that best suits his or her unique interests.

Equal access to instructional excellence requires adequate and equitable allocation of resources. That, in turn, requires fair funding formulas. For decades, HISD has been a district of choice and a system of schools rather than a school system where every campus offers the same programs.

- HISD will offer a portfolio of schools to meet the needs of its diverse community of students. All schools, whether they are specialty, Magnet, or neighborhood, will be accountable to identified educational and programmatic standards, including a common core of academic subjects, approved by the administration and the Board of Education. All students are expected to meet those standards.
- Achievement gaps between student groups are unacceptable. Closing achievement gaps requires unequal resources for unequal needs. Weighted funding allocations address individual differences, allowing the money to follow the child in accordance with his or her unique instructional needs and thereby ensuring access to the resources that enhance student achievement.

- HISD must be proactive in the early identification of schools that may have too few students enrolled to provide adequate resources. The district must be ready to provide the school with appropriate interventions.

**IV. Meaningful engagement is defined as actively listening to constructive input, collecting and exchanging information, and sharing outcomes.** The Board of Education understands and appreciates the need for constructive engagement with both the community and district employees and will aggressively solicit their opinions and ideas without relinquishing its responsibility as an elected body. As a publicly funded entity, HISD must maintain open and respectful relationships, both internally and externally, and be a model for a service-oriented culture. Schools belong to the people; communities will be engaged in the decision-making process.

- Everyone in HISD, including the board and the superintendent, shall be responsive to the district's diverse communities. Consistent, meaningful two-way communication with those who support the district as well as those with differing philosophies is essential to establishing public trust and confidence. HISD shall provide parents and the public (and, where appropriate, students) with formal, structured systems for input into decision-making that sets high achievement standards for all children.
- All employees shall be encouraged to play a more active, visible role in representing the district to the community.

## THE CHANGE PROCESS

For nearly two decades, the Houston Independent School District's Board of Education has been guided successfully by an uncompromising statement of its beliefs and its visions for improving education in Houston. We, the 2010 Board of Education, will continue to move the district forward. We will work openly and creatively with administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders to put into action this new mandate for change.

Change is essential if we are to make our children's education our very highest priority. We, alone, cannot effect school reform; and we, alone, cannot simply demand it. As our predecessors clearly understood, meaningful improvement is not a top-down exercise. It must include and involve everyone at all levels of the organization and the community. We pledge to seek input and ownership by those who will be most affected by reform and restructuring in HISD, and we will guide the superintendent to ensure that HISD is collaborative on issues of such importance to the entire community. This is a solemn pledge, and it is a privilege to accept this great responsibility on behalf of the children of Houston.

# Houston Independent School District

**PURPOSE** The **Houston Independent School District** exists to strengthen the social and economic foundation of Houston by assuring its youth the highest-quality elementary and secondary education available anywhere.

**STRATEGIC INTENT** To earn so much respect from the citizens of Houston that HISD becomes their prekindergarten through grade 12 educational system of choice

**GOALS** *The district's primary goal is to increase student achievement.*

**Primary Goal 1: Increase Student Achievement**—HISD student performance will demonstrate gains as evidenced by scores on TAKS, SAT, and other state and national tests, thus narrowing the achievement gap, and graduating students who are college- and career-ready.

*Additional goals are established in support of increasing student achievement, as follows:*

**Goal 2: Improve Human Capital**—The district seeks to create a performance culture that values employees who are results-oriented, talented, innovative thinkers; individuals who strive to increase student achievement and contribute to the reformation of public education.

**Goal 3: Provide a Safe Environment**—The district shall create a safe environment conducive to learning for all students and provide safety and security measures at district schools and facilities, and while attending district-related events.

**Goal 4: Increase Management Effectiveness and Efficiency**—The district shall have a decentralized organizational structure that will promote autonomy and innovation in schools. With a districtwide commitment to performance over compliance and a shared accountability system in place, the district shall employ best practices of administrative principles to make optimal use of district resources and taxpayer dollars.

**Goal 5: Improve Public Support and Confidence in Schools**—The schools belong to the people; hence, the board, administration, and support staff are public servants who exist to support the schools and the relationship between teachers, students, and parents. Public confidence will increase as the district increases transparency, accountability at all levels, and meaningful engagement of the community.

**Goal 6: Create a Positive District Culture**—The district's clearly articulated purpose will serve as the catalyst for creating a powerful sense of community and a shared direction among personnel, parents, students, and the public. Because the district realizes the value of investing in human capital, the district will work to attract and retain the best teachers and staff members, and create working conditions in which their talents can flourish.

## CORE VALUES

**Safety Above All Else:** Safety takes precedence over all else. A safe environment must be provided for every student and employee.

**Student Learning is the Main Thing:** All decisions and actions, at any level, focus on and support “the main thing”: effective student learning.

**Focus on Results and Excellence:** Each employee focuses on results and excellence in individual and organizational efforts.

**Parents are Partners:** Parents are valued partners in the educational process, serving as the child's teacher in the home. All school and district activities will give proper consideration to the involvement of parents.

**Common Decency:** The district shall be responsive and accountable to the public and its employees. Community members and employees shall receive respectful and courteous treatment.

**Human Capital:** Through recruitment, retention, dismissal and professional-development programs, the district will work to make sure students are served by the top talent available, from teachers to superintendents.



For more information about HISD, visit [www.houstonisd.org](http://www.houstonisd.org) or call the HISD Information Center at 713-556-6005. Sign up for eNews: [www.houstonisd.org/subscribe](http://www.houstonisd.org/subscribe); Follow us on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/HoustonISD](http://www.twitter.com/HoustonISD)

**HISD is an equal opportunity employer.** It is the policy of the Houston Independent School District not to discriminate on the basis of age, color, handicap or disability, ancestry, national origin, marital status, race, religion, sex, veteran status, or political affiliation in its educational or employment programs and activities.