



PRESS RELEASE

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Early-Start Bill for Houston ISD Turnaround Schools Wins Approval

Legislation that would allow HISD turnaround schools to start the year early wins bi-partisan support

May 2, 2011 – The Texas Senate gave approval Monday to a bill sponsored by Houston’s Senator Rodney Ellis and Representative Senfronia Thompson that would allow HISD schools that are undergoing a comprehensive turnaround to begin the school year early.

This is the first education bill to pass both chambers this legislative session. Another version of the bill won approval in the House of Representatives. The bills now move on to a conference committee, where the final language will be drafted.

The legislation would apply to any HISD school undergoing a turnaround program approved by the Board of Education, including Apollo 20 secondary schools. HISD plans for those nine schools to begin the 2011-2012 school year a week early, on August 15, 2011.

The Apollo 20 model is built on five key tenets, one of which is giving students more instructional time.

Paula Harris, president of the HISD Board of Education, thanked Senator Ellis and Representative Thompson for their support of Houston children.

“Senator Ellis and Representative Thompson have stepped up for Houston’s children in a big way,” Harris said. “Giving HISD the flexibility to start the school year early at schools where the help is most needed sends a strong message that the entire community believes that, given a fair shot, all children can succeed.”

Speaking on the Senate floor today, Senator Ellis said the bill’s passage “sends a strong signal to the private sector: Don’t give up on our kids in the public schools. ... This is a perfect example of how thinking outside the box can make a difference.”

Senator Dan Patrick, also of Houston, publicly stated his support for the bill and the Apollo 20 program.

Senator Florence Shapiro of Plano, who chairs the Senate Education Committee, applauded HISD’s school turnaround work.

“The future of public education is going to be driven by communities like the Houston Independent School District who find a niche and find a way to solve problems and that’s what this bill does and that’s what the Apollo program does,” she said.

The **Houston Independent School District** is the largest school district in Texas and the seventh-largest in the United States with 298 schools and more than 200,000 students. The 301-square-mile district is one of the largest employers in the Houston metropolitan area with nearly 30,000 employees.

For more information, visit the HISD Web site at www.houstonisd.org