

## MEMORANDUM

February 17, 2017

TO: Board Members

FROM: Richard A. Carranza  
Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: **TEACHER INCENTIVE FUND, COHORT 3--LOOKING BACK, AROUND, AND AHEAD: HISD'S VIEWFINDER FOR TEACHER AND LEADER EFFECTIVENESS**

CONTACT: Carla Stevens, (713) 556-6700

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) received a five-year Teacher Incentive Fund, Cohort 3 (TIF3) grant from the U.S. Department of Education in October 2010. The purpose of the federal TIF grant program was to strengthen the education profession by rewarding excellence, attracting teachers and principals to high-need and hard-to-staff areas, and providing all teachers and principals with the feedback and support they need to succeed. This aligned with the district's implementation of the Effective Teachers Initiative with the focus on improving recruitment efforts, developing a rigorous and fair appraisal system, providing effective individual supports for teachers, and offering differentiated compensation to attract and retain effective teachers.

The attached report provides context for where the district was prior to the implementation of the Effective Teachers Initiative and the receipt of the TIF3 grant, documents progress that was made in achieving the five goals of the grant, and presents opportunities and challenges for this work going forward.

Should you have further questions, please contact Carla Stevens in the Department of Research and Accountability at (713) 556-6700.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
RAC

### Attachment

cc: Superintendent's Direct Reports  
Chief School Officers  
Audrey Gomez  
Dawn DuBose-Randle  
Annetra Piper  
Lauren Price



# LOOKING BACK, AROUND, AND AHEAD: HISD'S VIEWFINDER FOR TEACHER AND LEADER EFFECTIVENESS

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## TEACHER INCENTIVE FUND GRANT, COHORT 3





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# CONTENTS

**3**

## INTRODUCTION

- 4. Sharpening the Focus
- 6. A Talent View: Effective Teacher Initiative
- 7. Foreshadowing

**8**

## OUR GOALS: A CLOSER LOOK AT OUR WORK

- 9. Goal 1: Increase teacher and principal effectiveness and thereby improve student achievement.
- 15. Goal 2: Reform teacher and principal appraisal and compensation systems so that teachers and principals are rewarded for increases in student achievement.
- 18. Goal 3: Increase teacher and principal effectiveness.
- 21. Goal 4: Increase the number of effective teachers teaching poor, minority, and disadvantaged students in hard-to-staff subjects such as mathematics and science.
- 26. Goal 5: Create a sustainable performance-based compensation system.

**29**

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

- 29. Delivering on the Vision
- 29. Envisioning Tomorrow
- 30. Conclusion

**31**

## REFERENCES

## INTRODUCTION

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) has long been a leader in thinking differently about meeting the needs of its students. As the seventh-largest district in the country, HISD operates 283 schools serving 215,000+ students. Children in HISD schools speak more than 100 languages and are from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. Across HISD, 3 in 4 students are economically disadvantaged (HISD, 2016).

HISD teachers, leaders and staff harness their abundant knowledge and skills to address the varied needs of students, recognizing how much of a difference educators make for student growth. To accelerate student learning, HISD made intentional investments in its human capital by developing people, practices, routines, and incentives.

Attracting, developing and retaining **effective teachers in every classroom**, and **effective leaders in every school**, became a central theme to a series of strategic initiatives that unfolded over a decade at HISD. Effectiveness efforts were initiated by HISD leadership, and the work was often catalyzed by external funding sources such as three cohorts of Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grants, along with grants from the Eli Broad, Bill & Melinda Gates, and Laura and John Arnold Foundations. These initiatives established the foundation necessary to improve **student growth** and **achievement**.

To chronicle the activities and accomplishments that came about as a result of HISD's investment in time and resources focused on teacher and leader effectiveness, the district conducted individual and group interviews, and reviewed published literature and internal research reports. Throughout this report, information is presented as a view of:



**YESTERDAY**, as the impetus for change,

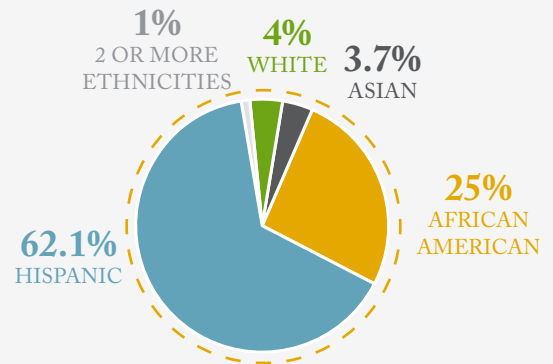


**FROM YESTERDAY TO TODAY**, the progress made to date, and



**TOMORROW**, the opportunities to optimize programs and maximize impact.

Figure 1



Speaking more than 100 languages, HISD students are both racially and culturally diverse (HISD, 2015-16).



THE CRITERION OF THE VALUE OF SCHOOL EDUCATION IS THE EXTENT IN WHICH IT CREATES A DESIRE FOR CONTINUED GROWTH... ”

—JOHN DEWEY, DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

## SHARPENING THE FOCUS

Pioneering for positive change, in June 2005 Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra and Board of Education President Dianne Johnson adopted a model of measuring teaching success inclusive of student growth—in addition to measures such as student attendance, achievement, and overall school performance.

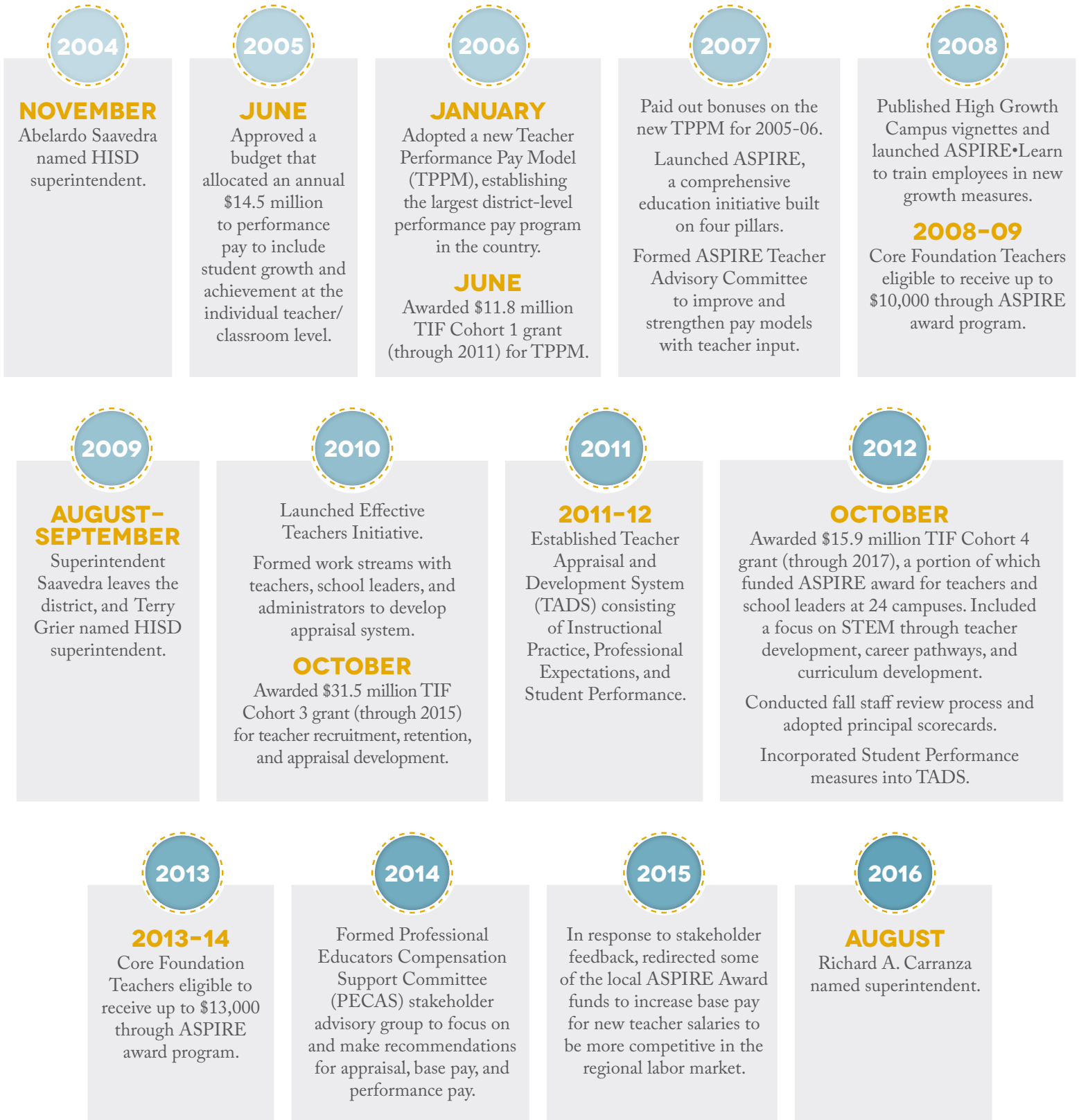
While student achievement is important, research shows that student achievement measures are strongly related to socio-economic status, with schools in wealthier neighborhoods traditionally receiving the highest praise and rewards through a narrow system of measurement. Student learning and growth are equally important. Students who enter below grade-level or with deficits—those who were typically overlooked in the achievement-only model—may be making great strides. HISD changed its collective way of thinking, expanding from an emphasis on achievement to include measures of student growth. Another way to think about this is not to just measure “who you get,” but instead to measure “what you do with who you get.”

In addition to moving beyond measures historically used in Houston and other districts, HISD wanted to transition past the school aggregate of performance and adopt new measures of the contribution of individual classroom teachers. This paradigm shift set the stage for more than a decade of effort to improve, recognize, and reward individual teacher effectiveness, rather than solely campus performance.

This vision became the viewfinder for the district’s work. To further sharpen the focus on student success, HISD chose to recognize and reward excellence through the ASPIRE (Accelerating Student Progress. Increasing Results and Expectations) program which included pay incentives for both growth and achievement including the highest pay-levels for individual teacher contribution. By early 2006, the district adopted what would become the largest district-level performance pay program in the country. With \$14.5 million dedicated to the Teacher Performance Pay Model beginning in 2005, an \$11.8 million TIF grant received in June 2006 expanded the rigor of measurement with the introduction of growth measures, eventually increasing the award levels available to teachers to \$13,000, the maximum 2013–14 amount for core foundation teachers.

Figure 2

## A LOOK BACK



## A TALENT VIEW: EFFECTIVE TEACHER INITIATIVE

Research has and continues to indicate that the single largest school-based factor influencing student growth and achievement is the classroom teacher (Branch et al., 2013; Chetty et al., 2014; Marzano & Toth, 2013). Driven by this focus, former Superintendent Grier prioritized the need to maximize talent, with a clear vision of an effective teacher in every classroom, and an effective leader in every school.

“

NO LONGER CAN WE THINK ABOUT EDUCATION IN THE MANNER IN WHICH WE EXPERIENCED IT. IT'S A WHOLE NEW WORLD, AND WE ARE PART OF LEADING IT. THERE IS INNOVATION IN OUR CLASSROOMS, NEW THOUGHTS IN OUR APPROACHES, AND NEW WAYS TO LOOK AT THE FUTURE.”

—DR. TERRY GRIER, HISD SUPERINTENDENT (SEPTEMBER 2009–FEBRUARY 2016)

This laser-sharp view of human capital and talent served as the basis for the reforms the district was about to undertake. HISD set out to establish clear standards for teachers and leaders, to refine evaluation systems that looked for and provided feedback to staff on how well they met the standards (instructional practice, professional expectations, and student performance), support systems for development and improvement, and expanded ways to provide equity in access to opportunities for students. By launching its Effective Teachers Initiative (ETI) in 2010, HISD communicated its dedication to supporting student, teacher, and leader success, through this theory of action:







## FORESHADOWING

With a focus on student growth and a new view on teacher and school leader talent, HISD established a systems perspective on effectiveness. This became a system of support and development for teachers and leaders during their time in the district. Over the past five years, with funding via TIF most significantly, the district has effectively invested in its people, systems, and processes—to benefit its students.

The report represents a focus on the realities of the present and the promise for the future based on lessons learned from the past. To transform the idea of effective teaching and leading into opportunities for students, HISD seized the opportunity to build and grow systems for more efficient and effective ways of reaching its students. The final section of the report focuses on realizing the potential of gains made during the course of the past 10 years.

## OUR GOALS: A CLOSER LOOK AT OUR WORK

Informed by lessons learned along the way, a close look at HISD's system of teacher and principal effectiveness helps inform a deeper understanding of how far the district has come and gives insight into future opportunities. In this section of the report, we will examine HISD's history of progress through the lens of the five goals of the TIF Cohort 3 Grant:

Figure 4

### **FIVE TEACHER AND LEADER EFFECTIVENESS GOALS** **TIF COHORT 3 GRANT**

**1**

**INCREASE TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS AND  
THEREBY IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

**2**

**REFORM TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL APPRAISAL AND  
COMPENSATION SYSTEMS SO THAT TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS  
ARE REWARDED FOR INCREASES IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

**3**

**INCREASE TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS**

**4**

**INCREASE THE NUMBER OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS TEACHING POOR,  
MINORITY, AND DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS IN HARD-TO-STAFF  
SUBJECTS SUCH AS MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE**

**5**

**CREATE A SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE-BASED  
COMPENSATION SYSTEM**

## GOAL 1

### INCREASE TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS AND THEREBY IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT.

The premise of the Effective Teachers Initiative (ETI) is that focusing on teacher and principal excellence will lead to student achievement and growth. Goal 1 speaks to the connection between what the district does and the impact it makes. Work within this goal focuses on the Teacher Appraisal and Development System (TADS), the principal appraisal system, recruitment, and retention.



#### YESTERDAY

HISD has always sought to improve challenging areas of performance, but past efforts were often limited to targeted schools. In other words, the district lacked a systematic approach to grow student achievement through teacher and principal efforts. In a review of the district's workforce conducted during 2010, it was found that:

HISD's highest poverty schools have a significantly lower percentage of high-performing teachers as compared to more affluent schools within HISD, demonstrating the need to provide them with incentives to attract effective teachers and better tools to remove low performers. In addition, survey analysis of transfers between 2006–07 and 2009–10 shows that highly effective teachers are less likely (36 percent compared to 28 percent) to transfer to a high-poverty school as based on FRL [free and reduced lunch] eligibility (HISD, 2010, p. 4).

The district's teacher turnover rate hovered at 11.7 percent, with the highest-performing teachers reporting that they did not intend to stay with HISD longer than their lower-performing peers. Compounding the effects of this turnover were deficiencies in the leadership development and incoming pipeline of principals for HISD (HISD, 2010, p. 5).

Based on the Board of Education's published Goals from its Declaration of Beliefs & Vision, HISD began taking steps to make a change.

Figure 5

#### BOARD OF EDUCATION GOALS FOR HISD FROM THE DECLARATION OF BELIEFS & VISION

Effective Teacher in Every Classroom	Effective Principal in Every School	Rigorous Instructional Standards & Supports	Data Driven Accountability	Culture of Trust through Action
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## FROM YESTERDAY TO TODAY

Meaningful change takes time, but HISD has seen the impact of its ongoing investment in teacher and principal effectiveness. This section of the report includes highlights from staff interviews, as well as indicators of change tracked for annual TIF reporting requirements across the four key strategies explained in the introduction.

### RECRUITMENT

Knowing that so much of a student's progress is supported by teacher and leader input—both measurably and immeasurably—recruitment and retention of the best educators is a logical area of focus for any urban district. With HISD's decentralized process of teacher recruitment and selection for hiring approximately 2,000 teachers every year, there was no consistent framework for recruiting or selecting talent aligned to effectiveness.

Recruiting and hiring has traditionally been difficult for HISD with many positions remaining unfilled when the school year begins. To address this, the district successfully accelerated its hiring process to begin earlier in the year. This enabled schools to make more timely hiring decisions and fill positions more quickly, minimizing the loss of qualified candidates to other districts based on timing.

Additionally, the district has provided a more rigorous and supportive process at the central office level to improve the school-level selection process. HISD made changes to how it tracks applicants, recruits, and extends job offers by using an industry-leading Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software tool to track recruitment efforts. In addition, competency-based selection models and the new role of recruitment specialists demonstrate intentionality at the central level to support all schools.



In order to hire quality candidates, HISD needs a pool of applicants that exceeds the hiring demand. Application volume has consistently exceeded internal targets set by the district. In preparation for the 2015–16 school year, HISD received 8,911 teacher applications to fill slightly more than 1,900 teacher vacancies. However, HISD discovered quality applicants taking jobs in neighboring districts with one cause being the hiring timeline. When faced with a certain job offer earlier in the year, candidates would commit elsewhere. Therefore, improving the hiring timeline became a priority for HISD. In addition, the district hires nearly 40 principals per year. Therefore, a concerted effort to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of recruiting, hiring, and onboarding teachers and leaders was necessary.

Over time, the percentage of new hires processed before August 1 has increased, putting the district in a much more stable position to begin the new school year with qualified candidates in their positions. In 2013–14, only 30 percent of new hires were processed by July 1, while by 2015–16 the percentage grew to 50 percent (HISD, 2016, HR Annual Review, slide 14).



## APPRAISAL AND DEVELOPMENT

Prior to TIF, HISD used the state Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) with nearly 99 percent of teachers rated satisfactory. This brought little value to teacher development. For example, PDAS did not allow differentiation so that individual teachers could be supported according to their unique professional needs. Additionally, it did not set clear expectations ensuring every classroom was led by a highly effective teacher.

As a result, HISD formed work streams of teachers and district and school leaders to examine the state PDAS model and develop new standards of what teachers and leaders are expected to do. These standards were based on national research with careful consideration of the local context and became the basis for the **Instructional Practice** and **Professional Expectations** components of HISD's appraisal system. As expressed by Principal Ben Hernandez, "Now, everyone is reading from the same book. Everyone is talking about instruction and the areas that teachers must master."



EVERYONE IS READING FROM THE SAME BOOK. EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT INSTRUCTION AND THE AREAS THAT TEACHERS MUST MASTER.”

—BEN HERNANDEZ, SHERMAN ES PRINCIPAL

HISD, with input from the teacher and leader work streams, every campus Site-Based Decision-Making Committee (SDMC), and the District Advisory Committee (DAC), developed its own teacher appraisal system to best meet the needs of the district.

In addition to Instructional Practice and Professional Expectations components, the **Student Performance** component of HISD's Teacher Appraisal and Development System (TADS) was designed to set clear goals in the classroom to ensure alignment between teacher performance and student outcomes.

There are five Student Performance measures approved for use in TADS as listed in Figure 6.

Figure 6



### THE FIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE MEASURES APPROVED FOR USE IN TADS ARE:

- 1 Value-Added Growth
- 2 Comparative Growth on district-wide assessments
- 3 Student Progress on district-wide, pre-approved, or appraiser-approved summative assessments
- 4 Student Progress on district-wide, pre-approved, or appraiser-approved summative performance tasks or work products
- 5 Student Attainment on district-wide, pre-approved, or appraiser-approved summative assessments (Currently, Student Attainment applies only to literacy and numeracy objectives on the district-wide Pre-K assessment.)





Some of the approved student performance measures are required for teachers who have them, while others are optional. Teachers of tested subjects with value-added were required to use value-added as their Student Performance measure, but also had the option of using other measures in addition to value-added. For example, teachers of non-tested subjects could not be assigned value-added or comparative growth measures, but had to select from a remaining approved student performance measure. Furthering the emphasis on growth, Student Performance measures are also included in the appraisal of principals and other campus administrators.



With the three elements of appraisal—Instructional Practice (IP), Professional Expectations (PE) and Student Performance (SP)—HISD needed to combine these measures to create a summative (overall) evaluation rating. Initially, summative ratings were determined using a series of “lookup tables” which weighted Student Performance at nearly 50 percent of the overall evaluation. These lookup tables also varied depending on the type of teacher (e.g., with or without value-added growth measures). This caused confusion as similar ratings could yield different summative evaluation ratings. While mathematically correct when taking into consideration different measures that had different levels of uncertainty or error, this was confusing for staff to understand without highly technical [explanations](#). Visit HISD’s [Research and Accountability Web site](#) to learn more about the lookup table process.



In the 2014–15 school year, HISD simplified the calculation for teacher appraisal ratings in TADS. The multiple “lookup tables” were replaced by a more simplistic method. The Instructional Practice component was weighted at 50 percent and provided the most direct feedback to teachers on how to change instructional practices for improvement. Professional expectations became 20 percent while the Student Performance component was reduced to 30 percent. This significant change was made in response to stakeholder feedback from teachers, and also supported by research from the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) study.



Despite offering a more comprehensive and customized system for teacher appraisal and development, TADS still received mixed reviews, in particular for the reliability of its digital systems (e.g., online tools and processes), and perceptions of rater consistency. For example, with more than 12,000 users on the TADS Student Performance (SP) tool when it launched at the start of the 2012–13 school year, system issues resulted in a delay in implementation of Student Performance with only 35 percent of teachers district-wide having those indicators available for their summative rating.



Beginning in the 2013–14 school year, HISD put a plan in place to address the previous year's system reliability issues and make additional improvements to the functionality of the software for Student Performance. With each subsequent year, HISD has continued to increase the number of teachers with a Student Performance component using district pre-approved assessments and improve the teacher and appraiser user experience with software enhancements.

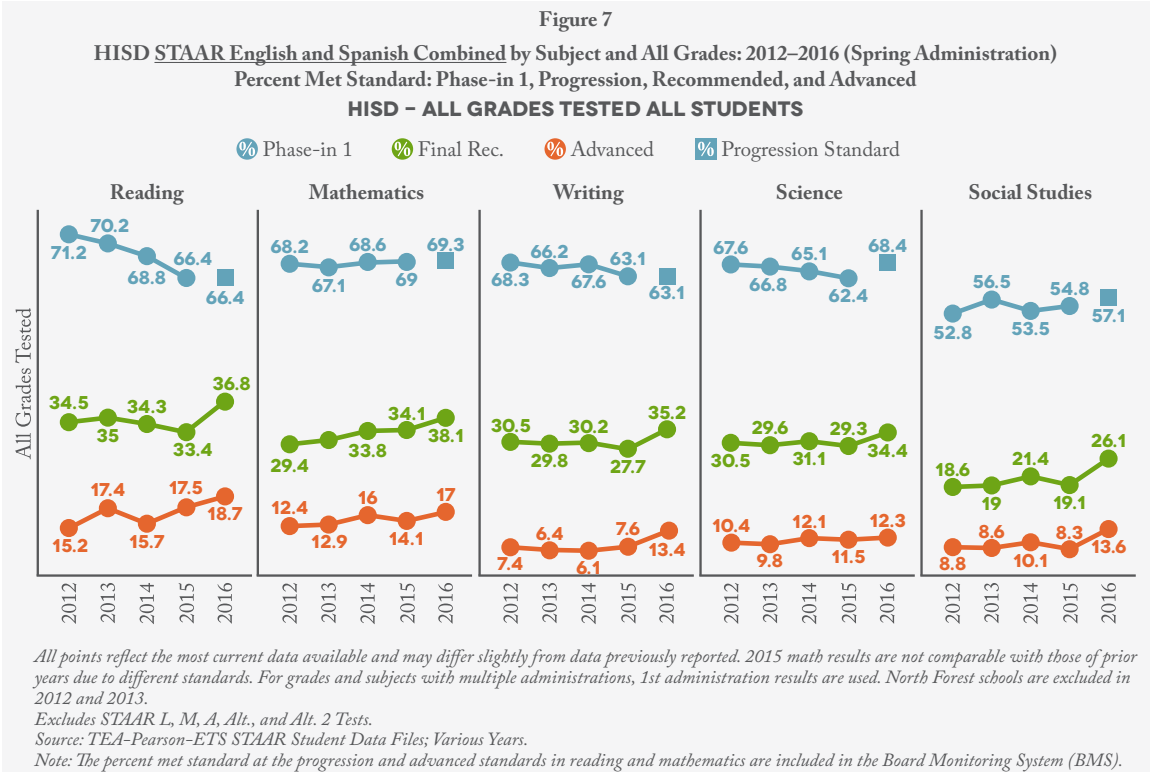
To better understand rater consistency, outside analysis of the reliability of HISD's 2013–2014 appraiser observations gave the district confirmation for the observable elements of its teacher appraisal. Specifically, the statistical characteristics of HISD's teacher observation data illustrate that HISD is doing as well as or significantly better than other comparably large districts for which data are available (Chaplin et al., 2014; Education Analytics, 2014; Ho & Kane, 2013).

For principal appraisal and development, HISD began using the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL®) Principal Evaluation System that relies upon school support officers to both coach and appraise principals. The district also developed its own scorecard to report and measure student outcomes and has continued to revisit and revise the school leader appraisal system. As an example, in spring of 2015, a group of schools—including three TIF Cohort 3 schools—began a pilot of the Tripod™ survey to provide teachers and principals with more holistic feedback to inform their practice and improve teacher and student experiences. Work continues to be done on the school leader appraisal system and the scorecards of student outcomes to strengthen measures and to provide feedback for improvement.

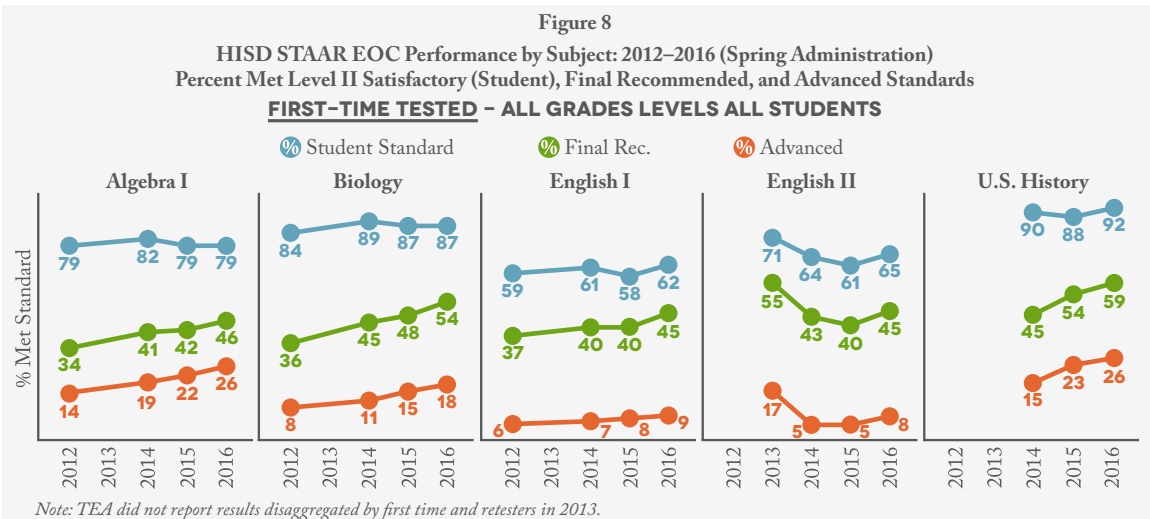


## STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

District-wide performance on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) has shown improvement in grades 3–8 from 2012 to 2016. These improvements occurred in all subject areas at the higher standards of Final Recommended Satisfactory performance (●) and Advanced Performance (●). The phase-in Satisfactory performance has varied across the five years as the standard has changed. Nevertheless, mathematics, science, and social studies showed improvement from 2012 to 2016.



From 2012 to 2016, district-wide performance for first-time testers on high school end-of-course exams has also improved at the higher Final Recommended Satisfactory (●) and Advanced standards (●) for algebra I, biology, English I, and U.S. history. Over the last five years of the phase-in Satisfactory Standards, biology, English I, and U.S. history have also shown increases.





## GOAL 2

### REFORM TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL APPRAISAL AND COMPENSATION SYSTEMS SO THAT TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS ARE REWARDED FOR INCREASES IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT.

With a clear focus on increasing student achievement and growth through improved teacher and leader effectiveness, HISD next set its sights on improving the appraisal and compensation system. This began with the premise that teachers and leaders should be recognized for increases in student achievement.



#### YESTERDAY

Understanding that the existing state-provided model (PDAS) for teacher appraisal did not adequately differentiate performance, identify areas for growth, or support the needs of the educator, HISD committed to establishing a rigorous, fair, and research-based model.

By launching ASPIRE (Accelerating Student Progress. Increasing Results & Expectations), HISD's educational-improvement model and performance-based compensation system for teachers, HISD began focusing on teacher effectiveness and growth in student learning at both the campus and educator levels.



**BEFORE TIF, THERE WAS ONE APPRAISAL SYSTEM STATEWIDE. THE NEW SYSTEM MARRIES APPRAISAL AND EVALUATION TO DEVELOPMENT. THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL LEADERS AND THE SYSTEM IS TO IMPROVE AND GROW OUR TEACHERS. ”**

—JOCELYN MOUTON, CHIEF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OFFICER



#### FROM YESTERDAY TO TODAY

In the first years of the work, the successful design and implementation of the new teacher and school leader appraisal and development systems allowed HISD to better align appraisals with the professional growth of employees. HISD's approach was designed to provide effective individualized support and professional development to educators, while offering meaningful career pathways and differentiated compensation to help retain the best and the brightest teachers and leaders.

Noteworthy improvements are listed below.

- As a result of the changes accelerated by HISD's leadership and the TIF investment, professional development is now linked to appraisal, and it is more tailored to meet the needs of teachers. For example, every teacher must select two areas for development on their development plan and appraisers are required to provide actionable feedback.
- In addition, Teacher Development Specialists provide personalized instructional coaching through job-embedded professional learning and support, including facilitation of collaborative planning sessions in high-need, targeted schools.



- Rather than developing an exact replica of existing frameworks, HISD's Teacher Appraisal and Development System (TADS) was created by the district, for the district, and is tailored to district needs.
- Teacher effectiveness metrics were added by the HISD Board of Education to its Board Monitoring System to keep this important work top-of-mind for both school leaders and the community.
- A comprehensive school leader appraisal system was also created and implemented specifically to help principals meet the multifaceted needs of their school teams. Human capital decisions for a principal are based on whether their school's performance data is trending in a positive direction. These trends are especially important in key metrics on student progress and student performance, as well as campus graduation rates for high school principals. These quantitative indicators are captured on a principal scorecard, which differs slightly across school levels to allow for appropriate indicators of college-level readiness for the middle and high school principals. During observations conducted by the five school Chiefs, principals are also appraised on a rubric of specific leadership practices (adapted from McREL®). These McREL® practices are not included in their scorecard calculations, but are included in their overall appraisal.
- The ASPIRE Award was increased to, at one point, a maximum payout of \$13,000 per year for core teachers based on the academic growth of students in their classroom.
- The ASPIRE Award for both teachers and school leaders was aligned to the appraisal system so that teachers and school leaders rated as ineffective or developing would not be eligible for the award.

## TEACHER LEADERS

The Teacher Leaders program is another way (in addition to the ASPIRE Award) that HISD teachers can be rewarded for their effectiveness. HISD initially launched a pilot program for differentiated compensation with 10 TIF Cohort 3 schools using four Teacher Leader roles, each of which had a clear, consistent, and detailed role description, a rigorous bar for selection, and high quality, year-long professional development.

These Teacher Leaders have supported teachers on their campuses during the school day without having to abandon their work as classroom teachers. They also received high-quality professional development to support their roles. Principals and teachers have responded positively in regard to the implementation of the new leadership roles on their campuses.

Figure 9



### TEACHER LEADER POSITIONS INCLUDE:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>1</b> Instructional Excellence Coach          | <b>5</b> Teach Like A Champion (TLAC) Specialist |
| <b>2</b> Data Tracking and Assessment Specialist | <b>6</b> Classroom Culture Specialist            |
| <b>3</b> Instructional Technology Specialist     |  |
| <b>4</b> STEM Instructional Specialist           |  |



For the 2015–2016 school year, the program expanded to incorporate roles that supported teachers from induction through Highly Effective status. The programmatic framework includes three levels. Each level focuses on activities that promote individualized development and resources for teachers at all levels of experience and expertise. Teacher Leaders participate in a rigorous selection process, receive robust stipends, and are responsible for meeting measurable outcomes in their roles. Additionally, they receive consistent support from the Teacher Leader team through training, professional learning communities, and a focused career trajectory.

Since the program pilot, HISD has increased the number of participating schools from 10 to 83, and from 58 to 284 teachers district-wide. This differentiation of roles is accompanied by differentiation of compensation. Through the program, HISD has paid more than 560 teachers an additional \$2.1 million in performance-based compensation.

Teacher Leaders benefit their schools in more than one way. They offer instructional support and leadership to their peers—often very important for new teachers. Beyond this, they complement the role of the principal and serve as an additional instructional leadership voice in schools.

## COMPENSATION

With more than 66 local education agencies (LEAs) in Harris County, Houston is an extremely competitive market for teachers. With nearby districts and charter schools offering significantly higher starting salaries, HISD has been continually challenged to balance the district's need to provide competitive base salaries and meaningful performance-based compensation models in order to attract, recruit, and select high-quality candidates.

Changes in teacher and principal compensation have been underway. Over the past two years, they include:

- An increase in starting teacher salary from \$49,100 in 2014–15 to \$51,500 in 2015–16. Based on stakeholder feedback, HISD made this change to be more competitive in the region.
- Teacher Leader compensation based upon skill level, degree of accountability, and expected outcomes for their roles.
- Stepped increases for Teacher Leader roles as incentives for those who teach untested subjects.

The district has analyzed and reviewed multiple models for differentiated compensation for both teachers and principals. The biggest challenge is securing sustained funding for any proposed changes, due in part to antiquated Texas education funding formulas and budget cuts. Despite these challenges, HISD is committed to ongoing refinements to both teacher and principal compensation.



## GOAL 3

### INCREASE TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS.

While Goal 1 sets its focus on effectiveness for the end goal of *student* achievement, Goal 3 centers on effectiveness itself within the profession of educators at HISD. Effectiveness as an expectation to drive student success has created more supports and opportunities for educators.



**YESTERDAY**

According to many HISD staff, expectations differed across schools prior to ASPIRE, the Effective Teachers Initiative, or TADS. Teachers were held to various expectations—all based upon the subjective lens of observation. Additionally, development for teachers and principals was not linked to the appraisal system.

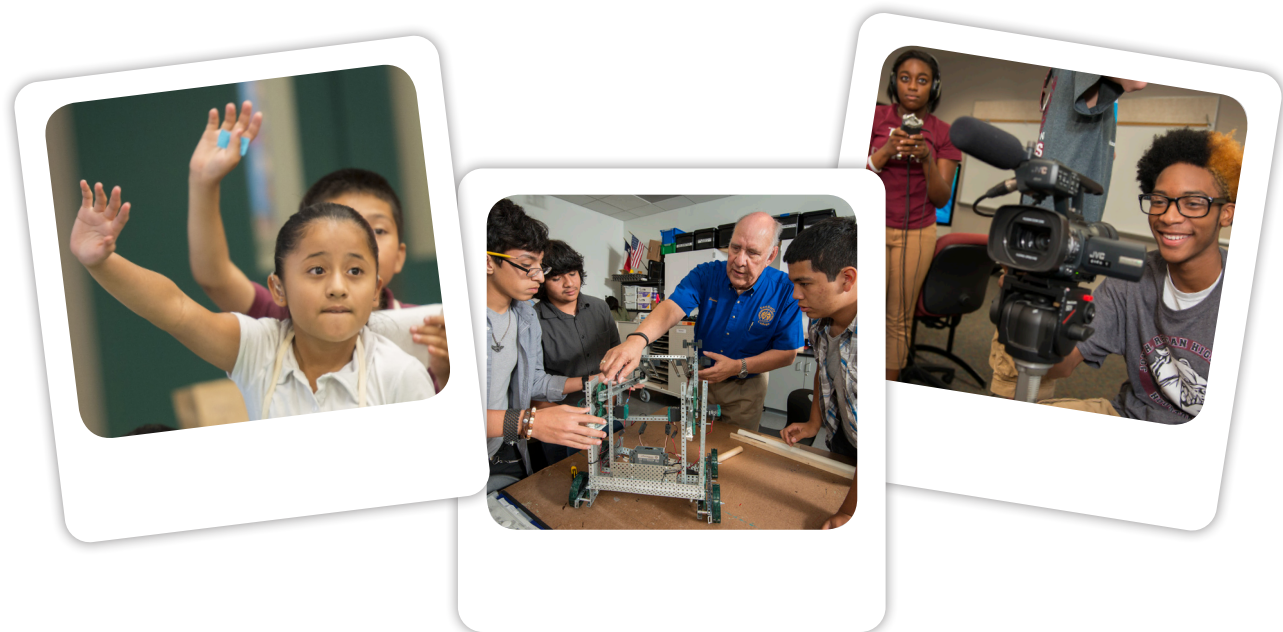


**FROM  
YESTERDAY  
TO TODAY**

#### STATE-OF-THE-ART SOFTWARE

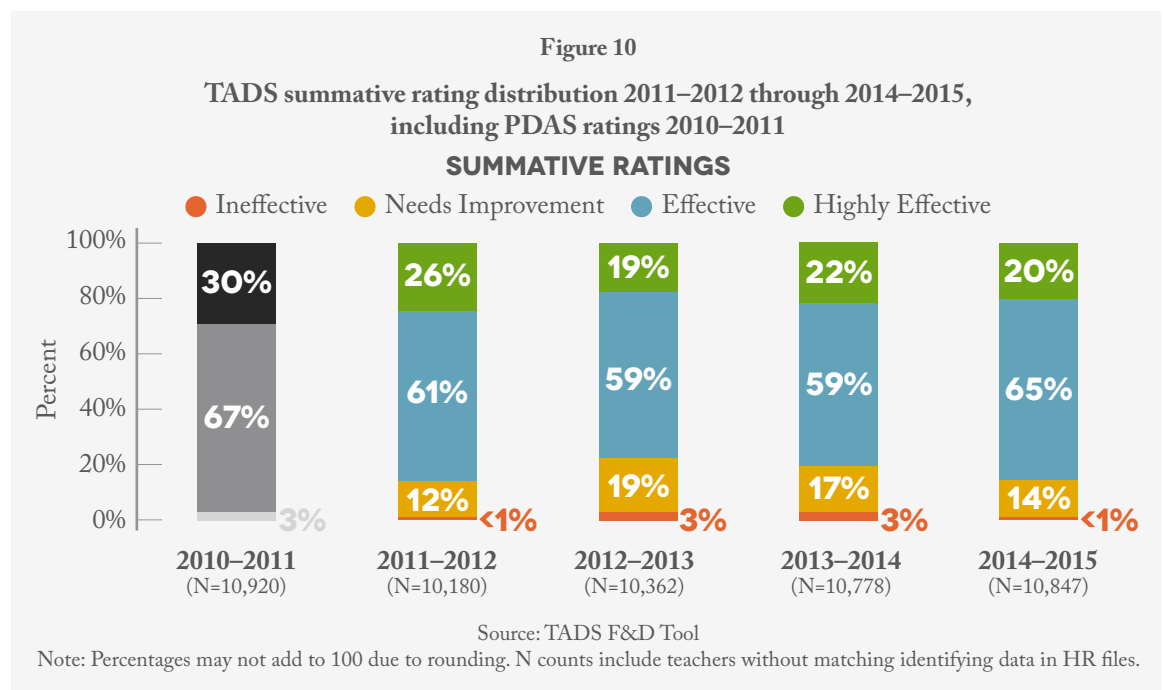
To screen thousands of applications and reduce work at the school level to vet a pool of applicants, HISD now has an easy-to-use, cloud-based applicant tracking system with robust search capabilities and unique user profiles. Implemented in November 2012 and initially funded with TIF dollars, AppliTrack® has now been transitioned to the district's general fund budget. Designed by former school administrators for K–12 organizations, AppliTrack provides automated posting through partnerships with nationally ranked education sites such as K12JobSpot.com, Teach.org, and Teachers-Teachers.com. HISD can even customize the application experience for identified job postings to ensure the best screening tools are seamless to the application process.

The LinkedIn Recruitment Platform aids the recruitment of candidates who might be strong applicants for the district. Additionally, a new customer relationship management (CRM) platform called Salesforce® now supports HR's cultivation of potential leads to viable applicants. This system offers analytics on which recruitment strategies yield the highest return for HISD's highest-need campuses. The initial use of these tools by the Talent Acquisition team in HR has been funded with TIF dollars, and before the end of the grant period will be transitioned to the district's general fund budget.



## APPRAISAL RATINGS

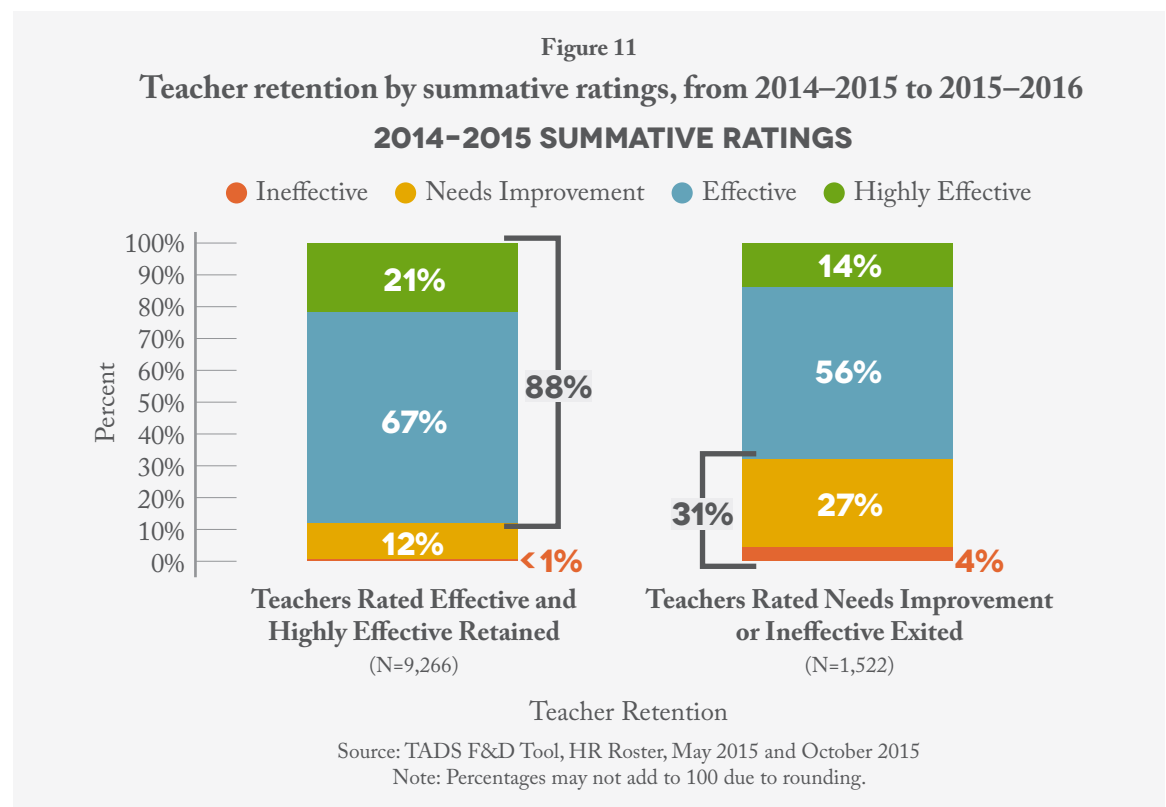
As described in Goal 1, HISD implemented TADS as the district-wide teacher appraisal system to better differentiate and support teachers based on their effectiveness in the classroom.





## RETENTION

Perhaps the most telling statistic about increased effectiveness relates to retention improvements. Prior to establishing a more rigorous appraisal methodology, HISD could only track the number of teachers it retained. Now, HISD has visibility into retaining effective teachers, and better insights to exit ineffective teachers. Across the district, HISD has consistently posted an annual overall teacher retention rate of 83–84 percent since Year One of the TIF Cohort 3 grant in 2010. Based on summative appraisal data from the past two school years, the retention of highly effective teachers across the district has held at 88 percent (Years 4 and 5 of the TIF Cohort 3 Grant). Related to Goal 1, students taught by these highly effective teachers experience more than one year of academic growth in a single year—making both their recruitment and retention so critical for HISD. For SY 2015–16, HISD retained 88 percent of its SY 2014–15 effective teachers. This metric is important and included in the Board Monitoring Scorecard Report annually to ensure HISD continues to keep its top talent. Additionally, as reported in the district’s SY2015–16 Human Resources Annual Review, 59 percent of the previous year’s hires were rated either effective or highly effective in Instructional Practice (HISD, 2016).



“

THROUGH THE TIF GRANT, WE HAVE LEVERAGED SYSTEMS TO FIND AND CULTIVATE TALENT.”

—PATRA BRANNON, GENERAL MANAGER, TALENT ACQUISITION



## GOAL 4

### INCREASE THE NUMBER OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS TEACHING POOR, MINORITY, AND DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS IN HARD-TO-STAFF SUBJECTS SUCH AS MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE.

With Goal 3 focused on overall teacher and leader effectiveness, Goal 4 goes even deeper by putting the effectiveness emphasis on hard-to-staff subjects and schools. This area of focus reaches HISD's most in-need students in subjects typically more difficult to teach. A hard-to-staff campus is defined by a prior year's low accountability rating, percent of vacancies, geographic location, principal turnover, teacher turnover, student demographics, and student achievement. Offering differentiated support for hard-to-staff campuses provides a unique opportunity for these schools to highlight campus offerings, while becoming more conscientious of selecting candidates who will be a strong fit.



#### YESTERDAY

As noted in Goal 3, there were different measures of excellence across HISD schools prior to the grant funding. A number of the district's under-performing schools were identified as hard-to-staff. Among these schools, a number are hard-to-staff specifically in the subject areas of math and science, as well as bilingual and special education. This brought into focus the need to improve recruiting, staffing, developing and supporting teachers for these schools.



#### FROM YESTERDAY TO TODAY

Now, with TADS and the principal appraisal and development system, there are multiple measures for excellence across hard-to-staff subjects—with integration for ongoing development. What's more, HISD teachers who wish to enter leadership roles have an opportunity to be rewarded based on their effectiveness and share expertise with other educators.

Through TIF Cohort 3, HISD supported teachers with professional development targeted to those at under-performing campuses and in specific subject areas. The Rice University School Mathematics Project and the Baylor College of Medicine provided professional development opportunities to TIF Cohort 3 campus teachers in the summer to improve content knowledge and pedagogical skills.

Additionally, teachers have taken on more leadership roles, which has helped to standardize practices across schools. For example, all TIF Cohort 4 STEM schools receive the support of a STEM Teacher Development Specialist (TDS) to provide job-embedded professional development support for all math, science, technology, and STEM teachers. The TDSs also partner with campus leadership teams to plan and influence campus instructional decisions. Also, all TIF Cohort 4 campuses receive supplemental curricula and professional development opportunities for the support of implementation.



Although their work during the school year is almost entirely focused on the TIF Cohort 4 project schools, the TDS team also shared their expertise with others during the summer and some school-year-Saturdays. This is part of a deliberate strategy to expand the reach of the “lessons learned” from the STEM work of TIF Cohort 4. Examples include:

- Every member of this STEM TDS team presented workshops at NASA’s Space Exploration Educators Conference (SEEC) in February 2016.
- Two of the TDS team served as occasional facilitators for the Teacher Leaders program, working with larger groups of Teacher Leaders on skills like instructional coaching.

The entire team also supported the district-wide elementary mathematics and science summit by presenting workshops.

### STRATEGIC STAFFING INITIATIVE

The Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI) works to improve staffing outcomes at the district’s hardest-to-staff schools. Human Resources works with the Schools Office to identify and select campuses for the program, and then provides targeted professional development for those campus principals and hiring teams in the areas of competency-based interviewing and selection practices, campus marketing, and onboarding programs. There is also a monetary incentive allocation that each participating campus receives to aid their staffing efforts.



For the 2014–15 school year recruitment and hiring season, a program change was made to focus on fewer campuses than in past years to allow a more concentrated effort at these schools and successfully demonstrate improved staffing outcomes. Hiring outcomes showed that campuses participating in the program significantly improved their early hiring efforts by 12 percent from the previous year based on the number of offers extended, while also outpacing those campuses that did not participate in the program. In addition, participating schools increased targeted efforts to extend offers to candidates earlier in the hiring season. For SY 15–16, 15 percent more offers were made prior to July 1. By making offers earlier, HISD is reducing the risk of losing candidates to other districts in a competitive market.



As part of the 2015 initiative, 12 schools were selected, including 11 TIF Cohort 3 project schools. Early hiring efforts decreased in peak season due to significant campus leadership turnover. However, the program continued to impact professional development opportunities for campus leadership and their hiring teams. Rooted in the lessons learned from SSI, for SY 15–16, HISD introduced a bonus program; monetary incentives awarded through this program impacted more than 35 newly hired teachers at these campuses.





Looking back over the past three years of SSI, principal satisfaction in the quality of candidates has increased from 48 to 58 percent between 2013 and 2016. In 2016, principals and their hiring teams engaged in a series of Teacher Staffing Summits focused on improving staffing outcomes at their schools.

### **DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORTS FOR HARD-TO-STAFF CAMPUSES**

HISD Human Resources has worked diligently to provide differentiated selection support in four areas by providing vetted candidate referrals, organizing specific campus recruitment events, working with campus hiring teams to improve the selection model at the campus, and providing tailored assistance to campus hiring staff to maximize use of AppliTrack.

In the summer of 2015, the Superintendent reorganized the Schools Office to better align leadership and resources for the most struggling schools. This reorganization pulled HISD's lowest-performing Improvement Required campuses together with higher performing "demonstration schools" that were demographically similar into Transformation offices. These offices provided strategic recruiting and selection efforts, intensified professional development, and personalized instructional supports to their schools. When the 2016 school ratings were released, 31 out of the 58 campuses rated Improvement Required in 2015 were rated Met Standards in 2016. However, 12 previously rated Met Standards campuses received an Improvement Required rating in 2016.

### **HARD TO STAFF ("CRITICAL SHORTAGE") TEACHER TALENT**

Many districts continue to identify ways to attract more critical shortage talent to serve the nation's most school-dependent urban students. For each vacancy, HISD sought to recruit at least two viable candidates in critical shortage subjects, as defined by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). In 2015—2016, these subjects were: bilingual, secondary mathematics, secondary computer science, career and technical education, and various types of special education.

“

**WE ARE BUILDING A LEGACY TO SUSTAIN A LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE IN TEACHERS TO GROW AND BECOME LIFELONG LEARNERS, BEYOND THEIR AREA OF EXPERTISE.”**

—SABRINA PROVENCHER, TIF 4 STEM MANAGER



## Bilingual

With the aggressive expansion of district Dual Language programs over the past two school years, there continues to be a great need to recruit for a bilingual skill set. With a stretch target to recruit 200 more qualified bilingual teachers to HISD's pipeline than in previous years, Human Resource has worked to:

- Increase the recruitment impact from the Rio Grande Valley, El Paso, and San Antonio;
- Explore new and promising national markets to source experienced bilingual talent;
- Develop a comprehensive international recruitment strategy building on the success of previous year's efforts in partnership with institutions in Spain and Puerto Rico;
- Increase collaboration and advocacy through critical outreach to Hispanic-based organizations; and,
- Partner with HISD's Multilingual Education Department to finalize a program for paraprofessionals to become bilingual certified through university coursework.



In summer 2015, Human Resources, working with the Multilingual Education Department and the University of St. Thomas (UST), piloted the design and implementation of a “grow your own” model for 15 bilingual teachers placed specifically at TIF Cohort 3 Project Schools. In the 2015–16 school year, six of these new “grow your own” teachers were employed as teachers of record in a bilingual role at a TIF campus. During this time, the remaining program participants received ongoing academic support and professional coaching from UST faculty as they finalized their certification and transitioned into their new responsibilities. Peer-reviewed research on this pilot will inform HISD's future partnerships to “grow your own” teachers.

The success of the district's bilingual “grow your own” program is rooted in its theory of action: If HISD already has access to talented individuals who demonstrate success with students in culturally and linguistically diverse school environments, then these individuals could demonstrate additional success if equipped with additional professional skills and certifications. Further supporting this priority, last year HISD was able to make more of an investment in the bilingual role, increasing the stipend from \$1,250 to \$4,000.



## STEM

Finding STEM teachers has been an increasingly critical need for HISD as more high school pathway programs emphasize a STEM focus. Human Resources partnered with district curriculum departments and STEM-affiliated staff to: (a) Develop STEM content area specific recruitment strategies to attract stronger candidates, in part funded by TIF travel funds; (b) Increase cultivation of passive talent through increased attendance at STEM-related conferences; and, (c) Establish corporate partnerships to better inform retirees from STEM-related professions about alternative certification pathways to teaching. Additionally, there are STEM recruiting and retention strategies available to TIF Cohort 4 project schools.

Based on the investment in TIF Cohort 4 targeted schools, every teacher at these schools now has more of a STEM mindset—not just STEM teachers. HISD is building everyone's confidence to do more, including building STEM vertically and making it culturally acceptable across disciplines. Initially, the work in these schools focused on intense math and science coaching. Now, the schools are able to go deeper into more engineering, design, robotics, coding, and computational thinking. Additionally, teachers in STEM schools are seeking more options for funding new ideas and innovations—beyond the normal school budget.



## Special Education

In 2014–2015, HISD supported nearly 16,000 students with disabilities. For the 2015–2016 and coming school years, there is increasingly a need to identify more teachers with content-specific knowledge to support existing curriculum in the classroom as the district continues to support inclusive instructional settings for special education students. In the hiring season to support the past school year, recruitment teams identified better sources of special education talent through:

- Leveraging paraprofessionals currently working with students with disabilities to become teachers;
- Enhancing partnerships with local universities to attract more student teachers in this content area; and,
- Including attendance at special conferences highlighting teaching and working with students with disabilities.

## GOAL 5

### CREATE A SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE-BASED COMPENSATION SYSTEM.

HISD set Goal 5 to ensure that, if beneficial to educators and supporting ongoing student improvement, its process for performance-based compensation would continue over time. Over the years, various indicators point to a path for sustainability.



#### YESTERDAY

When HISD began its performance pay program, hopes were high but a number of implementation challenges in the first year made the process and its promise uncertain. Moving from school to classroom-level data introduced a number of data challenges most notably the attribution of instruction of teachers and students—a focus of study of several researchers including non-profits such as a Data Quality Campaign.

In March 2007, the district discovered a computational error that gave 99 part-time teachers bonuses they should not have received. This came two months after the teachers had received the bonuses—and the district was in the tough position of asking for the money back (Mellon, 2008). Despite the district's intention of creating opportunity for its most effective educators, the initial program launch was impacted and stakeholders' confidence eroded. Convinced student growth and classroom teacher effectiveness was important, HISD chose not to abandon this vision due to mistakes of execution, but rather embarked on engaging researchers, thought-leaders, and technical assistance to support success. That support has made a difference. For the 2014–15 Award program, there were a total of 672 formal inquiries received from across all district campus-based employees: 354 during the first inquiry period and 318 during the second inquiry. Most formal inquiries offered an opportunity to provide additional information about eligibility and the award model. Out of a total of 672 formal inquiries received, 162 (24%) were resolved with changes. The most frequent reasons for changes included eligibility due to attendance (99), award categorization (21), and eligibility due to Prescriptive Plan for Assistance (PPA) status (14).





## FROM YESTERDAY TO TODAY

With its participation in the TIF grants, HISD has been able to engage in a cycle of innovation, improvement, and revision to the ASPIRE Award performance-based compensation system (PBCS). Systems were developed and implemented that assure the accuracy and transparency in the ASPIRE Award program. A web-based portal was developed that allows teachers to:

- verify and correct their linkage to students,
- review their eligibility (and non-eligibility evidence) and preliminary award notices,
- submit an electronic inquiry if they believe there is an error, and
- see their final award notice with performance indicators.

The ASPIRE Award Advisory Committee provided input for refinements and improvements to the model each year. The PECAS committee reviewed and continued to provide stakeholder input. With initial TIF dollars as seed money, HISD's ASPIRE Award has become well established in the district's culture over the course of time. For the 2015–16 ASPIRE Award program, approximately \$10 million in award payouts are projected.

A similar phenomenon is underway with TADS, which has been in place since the 2011–12 school year. Although each year brings refinements to the metrics and improvements to the tools themselves, the system of teacher appraisal built under TIF Cohort 3 and sustained into TIF Cohort 4 is now part of how HISD does things. Additionally, HISD has refined both the supports and compensation aspects of the Teacher Leader program. In Year Five (SY 14–15), HISD made several substantial programmatic changes to support Teacher Leaders across the district.

- HISD began recruitment efforts earlier in the year to take advantage of the time available during summer months for intense professional development.
- The district also further differentiated job descriptions and compensation levels for Teacher Leaders, while reserving peer coaching as a task for the most advanced Teacher Leaders, and requiring schools to share part of the cost of the teachers' stipends in order to make General Fund dollars available to more schools.
- Advanced Teacher Leaders taking part in programming through Professional Learning Opportunity Team (PLOT) focused on supporting teachers across the district through multiple avenues including problem-solving communities for veteran teachers, virtual communities for new and beginning teachers, and the New Teacher Academy.

Teacher Leader recruitment for the 2015–2016 school year began in March 2015. For SY 15–16, Career Pathways diversified to support teachers at every level of effectiveness and every stage of career development. The programmatic framework includes three levels, with each level focusing on activities that promote individualized development and resources for teachers at all levels of experience and expertise. Teacher Leaders participate in a rigorous selection process, receive robust stipends, and are responsible for meeting measurable outcomes in their roles.





With the current Teacher Leader program's stepped stipends continuing into the foreseeable future and implemented district-wide, beyond the subset of TIF schools, performance-based compensation is just part of how HISD does things now.

These compensation changes have further enhanced HISD's competitiveness:

- Teacher Leader compensation based upon skill level, degree of accountability, and expected outcomes for their roles.
- Stepped increases for Teacher Leader roles as incentives for those who teach untested subjects.
- Incorporation of roles supporting teachers from induction through the "Highly Effective" status.
- Further incentive for teachers of untested subjects and bilingual teachers.
- Increased starting salaries for secondary principals

During the past year, HISD has made more than 400 internal teacher promotions across the district with an additional 400 teachers returning to the district. Although the motivation for positive change is multi-faceted and includes factors beyond the compensation changes HISD has made, HISD is making an investment in the human capital for effective classroom instruction and school leadership.

The challenges the district is facing in funding are exacerbated by an unintended consequence of the state funding formula that has caused the district to make difficult budget decisions. While the district has continued to fund Teacher Leader and hard-to-staff stipends, the majority of the funds for the 2016–17 ASPIRE Award were eliminated. HISD continues to explore ways to support teachers through other financial and non-financial means.

# RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

## FROM YESTERDAY TO TOMORROW

### DELIVERING ON THE VISION

Change begins with a vision for hope—a hope that tomorrow will be better than today. During the past decade of reform efforts at HISD, district leaders have inspired others to engage in improving themselves in the interest of those they serve.

HISD educators have strived to deliver on that vision with fidelity. Starting with an expanded view of success to include student growth in addition to achievement and adopting measures at the classroom level, HISD began a series of improvement efforts throughout its system to focus on student success.

Placing student needs at the center, the district has successfully implemented human capital efforts to grow educators' capabilities to best support classroom learning by:

- Defining new and rigorous standards for teachers and leaders,
- Recruiting and filling positions with high-quality candidates, by adjusting hiring cycles and compensation to be competitive,
- Creating observation and evaluation systems that provide feedback to teachers and leaders and incorporating student growth,
- Building instructional supports for coaching and development, and
- Expanding opportunities for increased compensation through career pathways and performance rewards.



### ENVISIONING TOMORROW

HISD has committed to the process of continuous improvement, making significant progress in establishing human capital systems to meet the needs of all staff, but there is more work ahead. Moving forward, opportunities for HISD to sharpen its focus on teacher and principal supports—and on equitable supports for the learner—will accelerate success. Building upon success is not always easy, but until all students achieve, HISD will continue its efforts to challenge the norm and improve educator effectiveness, recruitment and retention, appraisal and development, supports, and compensation systems.

Now that HISD has an established brand to attract and retain talent, the district can seek to deepen its understanding of what attracts educators to the district. Importantly, the district can also better understand why educators choose to leave HISD and pursue other opportunities. With this perspective properly framed, the district can position recruitment efforts to not only attract talented educators, but address cultural and organizational conditions that will retain and grow these educators. After all, educators who are passionately committed to the district and its students are important “ambassadors” to draw in other talented educators to HISD as the regional school system of choice.

HISD's teacher and principal appraisal and development systems provide the standards by which effectiveness is measured. Looking forward, the district can next begin to focus on personalized supports, both inside and outside of the classroom, to ensure effective teaching, learning, and leadership—and thereby increase student gains. Through its systems' management and tracking insights, HISD has the information it needs to understand individual educator strengths and grow opportunities.

By studying and documenting the relationship between classroom and leadership practices and student outcomes, HISD can help educators make connections between their behaviors and their performance related to instructional practice, professional expectations, providing personalized support. As they attain or change necessary behaviors, HISD educators can significantly and positively impact student performance.

Prioritizing problems of practice based on common and unique challenges for individual schools and classrooms will help the district to get more of a return on its investment. HISD made a decision to develop its own systems and tools for managing teacher and principal appraisal and development. Continuing to enhance the software used for appraisal management can point the district forward to a true professional learning and advancement system.

HISD has improved its competitiveness for talent by shifting its hiring cycle, raising base pay for new teachers, and providing financial incentives for educators to work in hard-to-staff schools and subjects, as well as providing bonuses based on standards of effectiveness for teachers and principals. While compensation is not the only driver for educators making a decision to work at HISD and grow their careers with the district, it is an important consideration at critical points in time. To strengthen its position as a school system of choice, the district should continuously monitor educator opinion about what matters most when it comes to cultural conditions for success with students including not only compensation opportunities, but also non-financial incentives. This supports true continuous improvement.



## CONCLUSION

Systemic change is not easy work. Without committed teams of educators, programs alone do not guarantee school improvement success. Even when they have the highest levels of dedication, educators must also be empowered to serve at their best, be supported by district structures and policies, *and* work in alignment with district goals in the interest of student learning.

HISD has boldly taken on the challenge of changing its systems and must continue to nurture its culture. For the future, HISD will continue to see its way forward to mature each program and initiative, find synergies, and focus on talent development. When staff and students are learning, sharing, and growing, HISD succeeds. This priority will help to ensure students have equitable access to the instruction, learning opportunities, and supports they need to be successful in school, college, career, and life.

“

THE SECRET TO CHANGE IS TO FOCUS ALL YOUR ENERGY, NOT ON FIGHTING THE OLD, BUT BUILDING THE NEW.”

—SOCRATES



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