

**HISD superintendent urges business community, state lawmakers to advocate for changes in public education funding system**

*HISD Board President Rhonda Skillern-Jones says board is committed to strategic and innovative collaboration on behalf of students*

*Feb. 15, 2018* – Speaking before a packed crowd, HISD Superintendent Richard Carranza and HISD Board of Education President Rhonda Skillern-Jones urged business professionals and state lawmakers to work with the district in advocating for changes to the state’s funding system for public education.

 “The last time the state of Texas updated its school funding system, Ronald Reagan was President of the United States. That was 1984, and a lot has changed since 1984,” Carranza said. “We need a school finance system that will reflect the needs of today’s students and does not so heavily rely on local property taxes to fund schools. We continue to do more with less because the state does not give school districts their fair share for public education. We urge lawmakers to support a system that provides a better education for our children in the 21st century.”

 Carranza and Skillern-Jones delivered their messages to more than 1,500 guests at the district’s annual State of the Schools luncheon, held at the Hilton Americas-Houston and hosted by the HISD Foundation. Keeping with the event theme “Rebuild and Reimagine,” both touted the district’s commitment to innovation, ensuring equity within all schools, and creating a world-class school district despite post-Hurricane Harvey challenges.

 “We have a tough year ahead,” Skillern-Jones said. “Harvey wreaked havoc on our employees and students as it did our entire city. The water may be gone, but its devastation remains. We need everyone’s help to rebuild and reimagine.”

 Hosted by the HISD Foundation and sponsored by Chevron, the program highlighted students, teachers, and schools from across the district. Among those participating were the Mickey Leland College Preparatory Academy for Young Men Barbershop Quartet, All-District Honors Jazz Band, Lamar High School cheerleaders, and orators who performed monologues for the Project aDOORe exhibit.

 “The State of the Schools Luncheon is such an exciting opportunity for the community to hear directly from the Superintendent about the priorities of the Houston Independent School District. It’s also a great way for us to showcase some of the innovative and exciting things happening with students on campuses all over the district,” HISD Foundation Executive Director Ann Scott said. “We’re also so grateful to those who have helped the HISD Foundation raise funds to support our Innovation Fund, which allows us to invest in schools and promote innovative opportunities for our students to learn and grow.”

 In his second address since assuming leadership of the district last school year, Carranza addressed some of HISD’s greatest challenges, including a projected $208 million deficit and the state’s school finance system, which has led HISD to recapture. Carranza called recapture today’s most pressing issue for HISD. Although HISD serves 76 percent of economically disadvantaged students, HISD is considered “property-wealthy” and is required to send millions of its local property taxes to the state to distribute to poorer school districts.

 “This year, we’re going to have to write an estimated $260 million check to the state of Texas because of recapture,” Carranza said. “Ironically, if we did not have a recapture payment and the state of Texas would step up to its constitutionally-required duty to properly fund public education, we could eliminate the deficit at HISD and have additional funds to provide resources for our students in the communities that need it most.”

 Despite budget challenges, Carranza says HISD remains more committed than ever to its obligation to educate the whole child and provide the essential services students need to be successful. As part of that commitment, the district is reimagining how it supports students outside the classroom, expanding services such as housing, food, or healthcare through wraparound services.

 Superintendent Carranza also addressed HISD’s status as one the largest employers in the region, with nearly 31,000 employees whose direct constituents are the 214,000 students enrolled in HISD and how important partnership is to the district’s future.

 “Those 214,000 students will soon be in the workforce. So let’s talk about how we can work together to build some academies so we’re infusing the kind of skills and innovation that you want when we graduate those students. Partnership is crucial because together, we are educating the future economic engine of our community. In the face of a more than $200 million deficit and without the investment of people like you, innovative programs will not be available for our students, and that is not fair for our future workforce.”

 The event featured projects funded by the HISD Foundation’s Innovation Fund through funds raised at the 2017 State of the Schools luncheon. Those projects include Hartsfield Elementary School, which used a 3D printer to create a wheelchair cart for a dog that could not use her hind legs. Also, M.C. Williams Middle School students used a 3D printer to make a prosthetic arm for a sixth-grade student at the Mandarin Immersion Magnet School.

During the event, three schools were announced as winners of Innovation Grants. Berry Elementary School will receive a $3,100 grant from the HISD Foundation’s Innovation Fund, McReynolds Middle School will receive a $7,000 grant, and Sharpstown High School will receive a $20,000 grant. Berry will use its grant for supplies and equipment to create a “Makers Space” for its kindergarten students. McReynolds will use the grant for a STEM and literacy program called “Robots and Literature: Rolling in the Genres.” Sharpstown will use the grant to purchase supplies, equipment, and materials for the Sharpstown Storytelling project, a digital storytelling project that will not only help students improve their literacy and communication skills, but allow them to share their stories.

 “This was all made possible because of generous donations to the HISD Foundation’s Innovation Fund,” Carranza said.

 For complete speeches, pictures, and video from today’s event, go to: [HoustonISD.org/StateoftheSchools](http://HoustonISD.org/StateoftheSchools).