

HISD PRESS RELEASE

HISD Board approves \$41 million budget amendment

\$2.3 million in grants for mental health, afterschool supports also approved

October 8, 2020 –The Houston Independent School District Board of Education voted 8-0 with one abstention to approve a \$41 million budget amendment to fund additional supports for special education, pay for personal protective equipment (PPE), enhanced cleaning services and supplies, and computer devices and hotspots.

The extra funding for special education amounts to \$17 million and has been under consideration since August of 2020. The funding will pay primarily for assigning speech language pathologists to campuses where students in need have been identified and allow for expansion of the number of existing Intensive Intervention Teams. The funding will also pay for the addition of mental health specialists to address students' emotional and behavioral challenges. The district will also use the additional funding to increase the number of occupational and physical therapists and assistive technology specialists.

The board also adopted by a vote of 9-0 the district's 2020 tax rate of \$1.1331 per \$100 of taxable property value to allow the Harris County Tax Assessor-Collector to begin the preparation of 2020 tax bills.

Also at its Thursday meeting, board members voted 8-1 to appoint 15 members to HISD's District of Innovation (DOI) Plan Committee. This committee is responsible for developing a comprehensive educational plan that would allow the district to set an earlier school start date, have flexibility from the state's 90% attendance rule, and increase the district's ability to hire teachers specifically for Career and Technical Education courses that are difficult to staff due to certification requirements.

The board will vote on a final DOI plan at a public meeting after the plan has been approved by a majority vote of the District Advisory Committee (DAC), and posted online for 30 calendar days. HISD would join 893 other districts across Texas in becoming a District of Innovation. The designation would take effect in time for the 2021-2022 school year.

Trustees approved school-based staff such as principals, assistant principals and deans who have met the local appraiser recertification and certification requirements to be able to appraise teachers for the 2020–2021 academic year.

The board also accepted a total of \$2.3 million in grants to fund mental health supports and quality afterschool programs at schools throughout the district. The funding comes from various agencies – the Centers for Disease Control, the Texas Education Agency, and the Center for Afterschool, Summer, and Enrichment for Kids. Funded programs include:

- Training to equip school officials and teachers on 15 pilot campuses to respond to traumatic or mental health crises that may precipitate violent attacks on school grounds
- Addressing the social and emotional impacts of disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic on HISD students, families, and staff
- Providing academic enrichment opportunities and social-emotional skills for children who attend high-need, high-poverty, low-performing schools to help them meet state and local student standards in core academic subjects
- Providing out-of-school activities for Chavez High School students such as academic enrichment, fitness, counseling programs, art, music, technology, and character education programs

Additionally, the board approved almost \$1.3 million for the construction of a new agricultural education facility on Riceville School Road for Lamar High School and \$3.1 million for a new sports field and auditorium upgrades at Booker T. Washington High School. Both jobs are part of the 2012 Bond Program and were in the original construction project but were removed from the original contractor and sent out as separate bid items for cost and time considerations. Construction will be completed in the spring of 2021.

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The Houston Independent School District is the largest school district in Texas and the seventh-largest in the United States, with 280 schools and more than 209,772 students. The 333-square-mile district is one of the largest employers in the Houston metropolitan area, with more than 27,000 employees.

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