

Together We Can...Whatever It Takes...No Excuses.

Apollo 20 ELEMENTARY PROGRAM

Houston Independent School District

“Every student will have the rigorous instructional program required for college and career success.”

—**HISD Board of Education Strategic Direction**

“We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard.”

—**President John F. Kennedy, speaking in Houston in 1962**

The Apollo 20 elementary program is a bold turnaround strategy outlined in HISD’s Strategic Direction. It is designed to accelerate HISD’s work to improve the academic achievement of all students and prepare them for college and career success. This is a partnership with EdLabs at Harvard University that incorporates best practices from successful public and charter schools across the nation.

A CALL TO ACTION: Our schools are letting down far too many of Houston’s children. One-third of HISD students are performing below grade level in math. Seventy thousand HISD students are behind in reading. Only 11 percent of HISD African American students and 7 percent of Hispanic students eventually earn college degrees. More than 27,000 children of color living in the Houston region failed to graduate with their classmates in 2008, costing the local economy \$180 million. Research shows that the foundation for higher learning is laid in elementary school. Students who are not reading on grade level by the third grade are less likely to graduate from high school and attend college.

Meanwhile, more than 40 percent of U.S. manufacturing jobs next year will require some college or postsecondary education. Quality neighborhood schools boost civic pride, home values, and the surrounding economy. Weak schools, on the other hand, lead to neighborhood decay and drive out businesses. Our city, our parents, and our children cannot afford for this situation to continue unaddressed. We must take immediate, thoughtful, and aggressive action to save Houston’s children before another generation is lost.

THE PLAN: Houston is a city of innovation. President John F. Kennedy came here to proclaim our nation’s intent to land the first man on the moon. The plan for achieving the similarly ambitious goals for Apollo 20 schools is based on sound research at the best public and charter schools in the nation. All Apollo elementary students will receive an extra 90 hours of reading and math instruction during the year. In addition, HISD is dispatching a corps of well-trained math tutors to work with all fourth-graders, helping those who are ready to move ahead as well as those who may be struggling. Apollo 20 teachers and principals must demonstrate a commitment to the belief that all children are college material. Their work is driven by student data and a “no-excuses” attitude.

THE EARLY RESULTS: Although it is a three-year program, the Apollo 20 approach is showing early signs of success at the five middle schools and four high schools where it was implemented in the fall of 2010. Midway through the school year, high school students had posted 26 to 41 percentage point gains in math. At Lee High School, about half of the senior class had been accepted into a four-year university as of January. Only 19 percent of Lee’s graduates in 2009 later enrolled in a four-year university. In middle school, the gains ranged from nearly 22 percentage points to more than 32 percentage points. Student attendance rates are up at all Apollo 20 schools and the number of disciplinary suspensions has declined.

