Strategic Direction Initiative Report

Core Initiative: 1. Effective Teacher in Every Classroom

What was our progress over the previous semester?

Recruitment, Selection, and Retention

In this period, we have focused our efforts on supporting displaced employees impacted by the reduction in force as well as recruiting and placing highly effective teachers in critical shortage areas and other instructional positions for the first day of school. Efforts to support displaced employees and instructional positions have included: 7 information sessions, 4 placement events, 40+ twitter updates, the creation of a dedicated email address to answer questions from displaced employees, development of a Google website to serve as a central resource for placement events, workshops, and vacancies, 100+ recruiter referrals for open positions as well as 17 targeted workshops on social media, resume development, interview practices and online portfolio creation. Recruiters worked directly with principals to ensure that top candidates were strategically matched by principal preference to increase efficiency and effectiveness in the hiring process.

Teacher Support and Professional Development

During this semester, we have implemented a delivery structure for providing professional development to support teachers where they need it most – in their classrooms. We have hired, trained, and deployed to campuses, 129 Teacher Development Specialists to work with School Improvement Officers and appraisers to support all teachers through observation, feedback and connection with meaningful learning experiences aligned to our instructional practice rubric and our district curriculum.

To compliment this larger field-based team’s work, we’ve created a smaller Professional Development Central Support Team to provide centralized coordination and design of district-wide tools and development opportunities. This team will also focus on improving the quality and ease of access to online learning opportunities in the short term with the use of PD360 and over the long term with the development of a custom online PD delivery platform. The team is currently focused on designing exemplars, resources, tools, and trainings aligned with the instructional practice rubric from the new appraisal system to support appraisers and TDS in their campus based, individualized support for teachers.

We are responding to the expressed need from teachers to better understand EVAAS and how the value-added data and information can be used to inform and improve instruction. In addition, we are partnering with the Curriculum department to design and deliver content-specific to STAAR.
Period: January-August 2011

Teacher Appraisal System

We have made significant progress over the past semester in the design, approval and rollout of our new appraisal system for teachers. Throughout the winter we worked with thousands of stakeholders to develop the core elements of the system, create tools to support it, and capture feedback. Following Board approval in May, we trained roughly 900 appraisers, and all teachers received training at their August in-service.

Career Pathways and Differentiated Compensation

We have begun to define teacher leadership pathways, through conducting focus groups of teachers and piloting some roles in schools. We have also begun to collect key historical data that will help us analyze our existing compensation system, how it is structured, and how it aligns with factors we know are tied to student achievement.

Where do we stand today?

We have successfully recruited, hired, and provided 6 weeks of training to 129 Teacher Development Specialists. In the first month of school they have completed and logged over 900 observations and post observation conversations with teachers in every grade level and content area. Our Design and Media and Online Learning Team has built a custom website to connect teachers and appraisers with meaningful learning experiences aligned with the instructional practice rubric, including resources from PD 360, which will launch on September 30th. We have provided content-specific STAAR training to over 2,000 teachers and should touch over 4,000 teachers by the middle of October.

Appraisers are conducting observations and walkthroughs, as well as goal-setting conferences, as the initial steps in the new appraisal system. We have established processes in place to collect feedback, which we will use to provide additional supports as needed.

What have we learned?

Many school leaders have expressed their satisfaction with the new level of tailored support that their Teacher Development Specialists are providing to their teachers. In an informal survey of more than 30 principals and SIOs, the majority of respondents expressed their satisfaction with the TDS model and the support they are receiving. We have also identified a need to accelerate our production of video exemplars aligned with each of the instructional practice criteria and will be exploring how to make this happen.

Thus far in the development and implementation of this new appraisal system, we have learned that stakeholder engagement early on and throughout the design process served us well in being able to ultimately communicate and roll out the new system. Many teachers and
period: January-August 2011

Principals already knew of the system and participated in the design process in some way. Thus far, we have seen that the use of the Instructional Practice rubric to provide feedback to teachers has proven to be a very powerful tool in driving a positive conversation around teaching and learning. We have struggled with the technology platform to support this new system, and so we are working on a better solution so that data and feedback can be captured electronically in a way that is user friendly and as streamlined as possible.

We recognize that creating a new salary structure for teachers is a major undertaking. We have also learned from our success in engaging stakeholders through the creation of the new appraisal and development system. So, we built a timeline and resource plan that allows us significant opportunity to communicate with teachers, principals and others about this new system and roll it out in phases. Like with the teacher appraisal system, we will hold a series of public events throughout the development process, organize working groups and focus groups, and survey stakeholders.

What are our priorities for the next semester?

We are continuing to train and support users, both appraisers and teachers, on the new evaluation system. We are also continuing to develop the supports for the Measures of Student Learning, to be phased in formally in the evaluation system in the 2012-13 school year, including building a technology solution to support this piece of the system. We have identified a campus representative at each school, known as the Effective Teacher Initiative Rep, who will help disseminate information at each school beginning this semester. Finally, we are continuing to capture feedback and develop additional tools and resources in response to user needs.

For next period, we will focus on analysis and improvements on the teacher selection process as well as embark on the 2011-2012 recruitment season. We will also begin the data analysis phase of the Career Pathways project in October, and hope to bring forward to the board a contract with a compensation firm to support our efforts in this work. We will develop financial models, recognizing that much of the success of this project will hinge on fiscal viability. We will also research best practices from across the country, working with The New Teacher Project (TNTP) and others. We will also start the engagement process, pulling in teachers and others through working groups. At the end of this semester we hope to have begun the process of outlining potential compensation and career pathways models.
Period: January-August 2011

Strategic Direction Initiative Report

Core Initiative: 2. Effective Principal in Every School

What was our progress over the previous semester?

Over the previous semester we have continued the development of the new appraisal system for school leaders. Over the course of this period, we engaged a variety of stakeholders, including SIOs, principals, assistant principals, SDMCs, the District Advisory Committee, and others to capture their input on the system. Through our partnership with the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), we conducted a field test of the new appraisal instrument in 18 schools. We have also captured feedback on potential measures of student learning to be incorporated in the new system.

Additionally, we continued our work to implement quality assurance standards and recommended practices to guide principals’ decision-making with the goal of high expectations and clear accountability. Principals and assistant principals participated in over 76 days of professional development, involving over 2,790 administrators during the period May 1 to August 18, 2011. (See Figure I) Currently, specific training is either planned or underway related to: Staff Documentation and Investigations, Staff Review and Teacher Appraisal and Development. A total of 24 schools participated in a Strategic Marketing Management course offered by Rice University. (See Figure II). School leaders and their teams were advised on marketing strategies such as segmentation, positioning, and using an appropriate marketing mix that would position their school to benefit a desired brand and target population. Additional sessions are scheduled with community representatives to be invited to participate.

The 2010-11 school year was HISD’s first venture to strategically recruit leadership from universities, as well as conferences and leadership organizations at the national and state level. As such, the experiences gleaned through these recruitment efforts are being used to identify those visits that yielded the best talent. Understanding that recruitment is a process of building and developing relationships, the 2011-12 school year will provide the opportunity to strengthen those recently established communication networks. During this time period, the Human Capital Talent Acquisition Team, now known as the Recruitment and Selection Team, effective August 1, 2011, received over 1,400 applications for Assistant Principal, Dean and Principal positions. These candidates were put through a rigorous screening, selection and hiring process, resulting in 150 new leaders for the District.

Also during the previous semester, multiple HISD departments worked together to conceptualize and implement program enhancements to assist in developing knowledge, skills, strategies and leader behaviors needed to become effective school-based leaders focused on increasing student achievement.
Period: January-August 2011

- Leadership Development Department, the School Offices and Human Resources worked together to launch the School Leader Academy. The School Leader Academy is designed to train the district’s most promising teachers and prepare them for leadership positions. The new cohort consists of 28 teachers from elementary, middle and high school who will spend nine months training for a school leadership position. At the end of the nine month period, these individuals will be expected to interview and earn positions as assistant principals for the 2012-13 school year.

- We began recruiting and screening for the Aspiring Principal Internship Program which will launch in October 2011. Chiefs and Improvement Officers have identified approximately 25 high potential administrators who will work with their principals and train for principal positions in 2012-2013 school year. Twenty-five campus based leaders will participate in the program. The internship experience is designed to provide interns with accelerated opportunities of increasing complexity and focus. Leaders will be prepared to be both managers and instructional leaders. As a capstone activity for the internship program, participants will enroll in the Rice Education Entrepreneurship Program (REEP). The REEP Entrepreneurship Summer Institute is a three week program taught by nationally recognized, accomplished national and local scholars, policy makers and practitioners. Rice University will collaborate with HISD to develop close curricular alignment with district expectations.

- A cohort of approximately 25 HISD employees will enroll in the University of St. Thomas (UST) MBA Program in January, 2012. These employees are expected to complete the program in two years and qualify for the principal pool. The UST MBA program requires a minimum of 48 hours of course work. The majority of hours will be taught by Cameron School of Business faculty. An additional 18 hours will be taught by faculty from the Graduate School of Education at UST. At the end of the two year program, participants will have earned principal certification and a Masters in Business Administration.

In addition to focusing on school leadership we all worked together to ensure we are creating a healthy, safe and secure environment conducive to learning in all schools. During this period we developed trainings for school leaders and student support personnel on the collaboration, implementation and monitoring of intervention plans for students including behavior and attendance. We developed the content for a Chancery panel to facilitate the assignment and tracking of interventions as well as a Student Information System report for the flagging of students in need of intervention. We collaborated on the training needs of multiple staff members on the topic of Bullying Prevention and facilitated certain campus events featuring guest speakers targeting students.

Safe schools also mean providing healthy choices for our students. The district continues to receive local and national recognition of our efforts. HISD was recognized by the United States Department of Agriculture for the district’s First Class Breakfast initiative and the Houston Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association (HFFVA) for the introduction of salad bars to the district’s schools. Food Services has also introduced more fresh options and features labels for whole grain, heart healthy, vegetarian, and Texas grown menu items. In addition, the district eliminated strawberry-flavored milk and now only offers 1% regular, Skim regular and reduced-sugar Skim chocolate milk (which
contains only natural sugar, not high-fructose corn syrup). In order to address concerns about breakfast food waste, Food Services offered a revised delivery model to all interested schools with First Class Breakfast. To date, over 60 schools across HISD have signed up! This “offer versus serve” method offers students more choices and only requires them to choose a minimum of two items. Although this method may take a few extra minutes per classroom, it drastically reduces food waste. During July and August, Chef Brandon Lee and “Big Mac” McGowan from the Texas Department of Agriculture made personal visits to local farmers in an effort to identify growers who could help the district offer more locally grown produce. Currently, about 11% of all produce purchased by Food Services is Texas grown. Our goal is to increase that to 25%.

Where do we stand today?

We have achieved our goals for the year although more work is needed to meet our long-range goals. We met our goal of ensuring a candidate talent pool of 65 Principals and 75 Assistant Principals by July 15, 2011 and implemented a “grow-your-own” model for leadership development. We are also receiving constant feedback from principals, School Improvement Officers, Chief School Officers, the Leadership Advisory Panel representing a cross section of expertise and experience to inform our decision-making. Our program offerings are evolving so that we can better assess needs and respond with customized support.

What have we learned?

We have captured feedback that has enabled us to streamline the new appraisal system and roll it out in alignment with other key initiatives this school year. With everything expected of our school leaders, this alignment and coherence is critical to the success of this initiative. We have learned that, given the phasing in of student measures for the teacher appraisal system and the introduction of STAAR this year, it makes sense to phase in the measures of student learning for the school leader appraisal as well. Regarding implementation of quality assurance standards and recommended practices, we learned a higher quality product and greater achievement of goals and outcomes is attained when district guidelines and expectations are explicit. School Improvement Officer and principal attendance in the Rice Marketing course is mandatory. Participants have learned how to create an action learning project designed to increase enrollment and meet the needs of their customer base.

Regarding Recruitment and Selection, the following recommended changes will be put in place for next year:

1) Due to the continued growing need for bilingual leaders, one of the goals for 2011-12 will be that 25% of the eligible candidates are bilingual (Spanish speaking). In September, 2011, an experienced recruiter, who has been a bilingual educator, was hired for the position of Leadership Recruiter.
Period: January-August 2011

2) Understanding the critical role that skills and competencies play in the role of leadership selection, more emphasis will be placed on the candidate's readiness for leadership, as demonstrated in the “Skills Demonstration/In-Basket Exercise.” In the past, this step in the selection process followed the structured interview. The sequence of these steps is being reversed so that the Skills Demonstration precedes the in-person interview.

3) Due to the collaborative effort to identify new leaders for the District, members of the Recruitment and Selection Team will meet regularly with Leadership Development to coordinate and effectively communicate regarding staffing needs.

Especially in preparing Readiness candidates, we learned candidate’s learning experiences should, to the greatest extent possible, align with leadership experiences and be differentiated according to skill development, needs and goals. We also learned a great deal about the kind of customized learning needed to ensure candidates are prepared for the rigors of leading HISD’s complex schools and communities. There is a need for greater frequency of needs assessment surveys to include a broad spectrum of district job functions and experience levels.

Food Services learned “salad bar etiquette” is a key educational component to the implementation of salad bars, especially at elementary schools. Students need to learn how to use serving utensils, how to “take only what you will eat”, and how to “wait for your turn”. These are skills that students can use for a lifetime. Highland Heights ES, which starts its salad bar on October 4, will use a presentation created by Food Services to teach students about these skills in the days prior to implementation. Students are learning to accept the taste of healthier menu items which have lower salt, fat, and sugar. Here is a great quote from a student who ate our new homemade chili at Horn Elementary: “I fell in love with your chili. It was so good, I can still feel it kissing my stomach.”

Due to the overwhelmingly positive response to the new fresh food stations at five high schools, Food Service learned that similar dining concepts needed to be developed for those high schools that may have lower enrollment and facility limitations. For example, we are developing a new “made-to-order” sandwich line that will be piloted at Scarborough HS for possible expansion to other smaller high schools.

*What are our priorities for the next semester?*

This semester will be focused on training around the new indicators that outline the new School Leader Appraisal System. This system is built on the Balanced Leadership Framework developed by McREL, and we will be working hard to roll out this framework to our school leaders so that they can become familiar with it prior to it formally being incorporated in their evaluation. Doing so will also help us align this system, and the indicators included within it, to the other key leadership development initiatives underway this year. The Talent Management Team will continue to aggressively recruit strong internal and external candidates, keeping in mind the critical need to identify Spanish speaking applicants. We will continue to expand the “offer versus serve” delivery method for First Class Breakfast. This method
will drastically reduce food waste, offers students more options and ensure instructional time is not adversely affected. Expansion of the healthy schools strategy will include “green” efforts. A pilot styrofoam recycling efforts will begin at Horn Elementary. We will be testing a heat compactor that melts the styrofoam into solid blocks which can then be converted into fuel or other products, including planters that students could possibly decorate and sell as a fundraiser.

**Figure I.**

![Bar chart showing total attendees at appraisal training from June 2011 to August 2011, with 2,790 attendees.](chart)

**Figure II. Rice Strategic Marketing Cohorts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort I</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcott ES</td>
<td>Kashmere HS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black MS</td>
<td>Leadership Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burrus ES</td>
<td>N. Q. Henderson ES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communications Dept.</td>
<td>School Offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Patterson ES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elrod ES</td>
<td>Pleasantville ES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fondren ES</td>
<td>Young Men's College Prep</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Ryan MS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>School Office Personnel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sterling HS</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Period: January-August 2011

Strategic Direction Initiative Report

Core Initiative: 3.0 Rigorous Instructional Standards and Supports

What was our progress over the previous semester?

Equity in access to educational programs

Three HISD high schools earned a place on the 2011 Newsweek Best High Schools list. Out of 1,100 high schools reviewed, Newsweek chose only 500 nationwide. HISD’s Carnegie Vanguard High School placed at number 11; DeBakey High School for Health Professions came in at number 30 and Challenge Early College High School placed at number 327. Furr High School became one of only three high schools in the country to win a 2011 College Board Inspiration Award for helping under-served students achieve equitable access to higher education. Districtwide, there has been an 81% increase in the number of AP exams taken in HISD over the past two years. In the 2009 school year 11,594 exams were administered whereas during this reporting period in 2011 20,930 exams were taken.

One third, roughly 68,082, of the district’s 204,245 student population is English language learners. The number of English language learners (ELL) students who achieved English language proficiency and met criteria for exit from ELL status in the 2010-2011 school year was 7,326. This was 35% higher than the number of students exited in 2009-2010 (5,418 students). This success was achieved through careful monitoring of all exit criteria and specific instruction in ELL classrooms to assure that this population of students was exited as quickly as possible from sheltered programs in an effort to increase their access to quality educational programs. This marks the first year that there was a statistically significant improvement in the number of exited students pointing to a cultural shift of performance expectations for this group of students.
Period: January-August 2011

To increase the rigor of instruction across the district, Montessori, International Baccalaureate, and Advanced Placement staff development has been ongoing over the past six months and reflects support for the program expansion that is taking place in each of these areas. HISD has won a three-year, $11.4 million Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) grant from the U.S. Department of Education to fund five new magnet programs. The grant will fund three programs at the elementary level, one at the middle school level, and one at the high school level. Two whole-school Montessori Magnets will be funded from the grant—one on the northeast side of Houston at Garden Oaks Elementary School and one on the southeast side of the city at Dodson Elementary School. The Montessori Program at Garden Oaks will include an environmental science theme. The funds will also be used for a health science magnet at Whidby Elementary, which is located near the Texas Medical Center and the DeBakey High School for Health Professions. At the secondary level, Fondren Middle School will become an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (IB MYP) magnet school and Jones High School will become a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) magnet with an emphasis on green renewable energy and technology.

The opening of the Boys and Girls Preparatory Academies, as well as the DeVry Advantage Academy at H. P. Carter, provide ongoing evidence of the expansion of new opportunities for our parents to have new access to quality, innovative new schools within HISD. The Twilight High School initiative, which allows students to take online courses for high-school credit during the evening and weekend hours, appealed to students who dropped out of high school in order to work and support their families. A postcard mailed to their homes prompted them to come back to the district in early 2011, and since then, they have managed to earn enough credits to graduate this summer. Since the first student graduated from a Twilight School last December, 14 more students have earned their diplomas through the program, and 22 more are on track to do so shortly.

**Develop and implement an aligned standards-based curriculum and assessment system**

The district is working hard on a standards-based curriculum, as called for in the original strategic planning implementation guide, is within reach in the 2011-2012 school year. District-wide Kilgo training for all administrators is evidence of the importance of managing the curriculum and data analysis for results.

**Implement Response to Intervention model district-wide to provide early, effective assistance to children who are experiencing behavior issues, and are having difficulty learning**

The most significant action taken last semester was in July 2011 when leadership for Response to Intervention (RTI) was transferred from the Department of School Support and into the Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment. This is a logical move since student academic success is contingent on many factors that include both academic and behavioral interventions. Starting in July, the new team began the process to develop an online data platform to house the intervention documentation on students in the district. Completion is estimated to be in October 2011. In September, the team completed the first draft of a districtwide framework for implementation of RTI at the district support level and a campus-based guide for RTI implementation. Revisions are presently being made in response to review comments from stakeholder groups.
Period: January-August 2011

**Transformation Plan**
The Apollo 20 program is a bold initiative to transform public education in Houston and improve the academic achievement of all students. Apollo schools use strategies and best practices from successful public and charter schools across the nation. Five strategies have been identified by Harvard University’s Education Innovation Laboratory, HISD’s partner in the Apollo 20 program. Those strategies include: Effective Principals and Effective Teachers, More Instructional Time, Use of Data to Drive Instruction, In-School Tutoring, and Culture of High Expectations. In the 2010-2011 school year the Apollo schools represented 100% of HISD’s Academically Unacceptable (AU) schools. In the 2011-2012 school year, after one year of the Apollo program administration, the first cohort of Apollo schools account for only 12% of the district’s Academically Unacceptability (AU) schools. This three-year program was launched in four high schools and five middle schools at the start of the 2010-2011 school year. It was been expanded to eleven elementary schools. The board also accepted a $950,000 donation to the HISD Foundation from the Brown Foundation in support of the Apollo 20 Math Fellows Program.

**Implement a comprehensive literacy (reading) program in grades pre-k through 12**
To meet the reading needs of all students, HISD must provide districtwide rigorous instructional reading standards and support for students as they transition from grade to grade. During this period, the district hired a Director of Literacy and completed Phase 1 of the Literacy Plan. Informal feedback from the principals and teachers of the district is positive. The foundation for a comprehensive PK-12 literacy plan has been developed outlining the expectations for what is needed for quality literacy instructional programs. This research-based, data-informed framework was developed in collaboration with expert reading consultants and a district committee representing the diversity of the district. The literacy plan has been vetted through instructional departments, principal advisory committee, campus literacy coaches, and leaders of the Academic Services division.

The district has launched ongoing training initiatives to facilitate quality implementation of the new reading adoption. Also, a districtwide textbook adoption selection committee was created and developed a process for new reading adoption beginning in the fall of 2011. The Neuhaus Education Project, a reading readiness program, has been launched to teach background skills and knowledge to educators. This ambitious program has already trained hundreds of educators in the district and will be extended to all of our teachers.

**Implement a comprehensive numeracy/mathematics program in grades pre-k through 12**
New scope and sequence documents for Math PK-12 have been developed for math and disseminated district-wide to support a comprehensive approach to math instruction. In addition, we have implemented Renzulli Learning Program at all elementary campuses. Further the district has developed Phase 1 of PK-12 mathematics plan. This plan also enjoys full support from our buildings principals and teachers as they were developed collaboratively. Instructional specialists in math are coaching teachers: modeling lessons, co-teaching, assisting in lesson plan development. Curriculum managers and specialists are supporting schools with the implementation of intervention
programs. We have also begun ongoing teacher leadership training for math lead teachers and department chair’s in order to maximize impact of a standardized math curriculum.

*Where do we stand today?*

**Equity in access to educational programs**
HISD student and parent access to quality educational programs has improved significantly over the last two years. The expansion of school choice options is significant, with new schools being added to that option list each year. Students in our high school and middle school now have much broader access to AP and IB offering and a real push has been implemented by HISD to make sure we have trained our staff to be prepared to offer these advanced classes. An 81% increase over the last two years of the numbers of AP exams taken stands as evidence to the improved access to high quality, demanding courses for middle and high school students. Alternative schools and alternative options for non-traditional students continue to expand access as well. The success rate of our Twilight Campus Program is just one example of the extended options available to our students.

![Number of AP Tests Administered](chart.png)

**Develop and implement an aligned standards-based curriculum and assessment system**
Curriculum development included the revisions to current district instructional planning guides, the creation of scope and sequence documents for core courses at all grade levels, and the introduction of a districtwide course catalog. In addition, curriculum resources called “Blueprints” have been developed for reading and math grades kindergarten-high school. These Blueprints define the critical standards all
students must master to be prepared for the next grade level and have been vetted with teachers and principals. In addition, comprehensive curriculum professional development offerings were attended by thousands of teachers.

Overall, the percentage of HISD students passing all subjects tested by the TAKS grew by 9 percentage points to 72 percent. The percentage of students scoring at the “Commended” level in all subjects on the TAKS or TAKS-Accommodated exams now stands at 15 percent, a 5-point increase from a year ago. While this is tremendous progress the district is preparing for the transition to the new STAAR system.

**Implement Response to Intervention model district-wide to provide early, effective assistance to children who are experiencing behavior issues, and are having difficulty learning**

A collaboration among several departments is working together to move RTI forward in the district. Representatives from School Support Services, Child Study, Student Information Systems, and School Offices are working together under the leadership of the Curriculum Department. One challenge in Response to Intervention in our district is our size and student mobility. The success of an intervention implemented to accelerate a student’s learning between campuses is dependent upon the exchange of information between the campuses during the student transfer process. In order to address this challenge, we have developed an online data system within the Student Information System called the RTI Intervention Platform. Starting in October, teachers and Intervention Assistance Teams will be able to go online into a student’s file and document the actual academic and/or behavioral interventions that are being used, the progress that the student is making and the changes in instruction that are recommended. Therefore, if a student transfers, the new campus can ensure that successful interventions continue and those that have proven ineffective for the child are not implemented. Last, we have begun training new principals and assistant principals on the concept of Response to Intervention as a school-wide priority. Professional resources have been purchased and shared at these trainings to provide campus leaders with research-based interventions that they can use right away.

**Transformation Plan**

Twenty Apollo schools have shown significant progress. The Apollo program had a 60% success rate of moving its schools from an AU status to AA during the first year of implementation. Seven of the original nine Apollo schools were labeled Academically Unacceptability by the state of Texas in the first year of implementation however, by the end of 2011-2012 school year, only three of the Apollo schools maintained the AU status. The district has worked hard to increase the results at those remaining schools and is expecting another report in the next reporting period. External support of the district’s transformation efforts continues to remain strong. The HISD Foundation has raised $14,370,000 over the past 14 months. The most recent gift was $1,000,000 from The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. A member of their board will participate on the Apollo Fund Oversight Committee.

**Implement a comprehensive literacy and numeracy program in grades pre-k through 12**

A literacy plan has been widely distributed through instructional departments, principals, campus literacy coaches, and leaders of the Academic Services division. The plan has acceptance at the district level which is a critical first step. The Neuhaus Project will set a
dramatic groundwork for literacy growth in the district. HISD continues to develop teacher capacity to provide high quality, differentiated instruction in mathematics. Instructional Specialists were hired to provide coaching and mentoring at the campus level. Specialists assist teachers in analyzing results of the interim assessments and in determining instructional next steps.

What have we learned?

**Develop and implement an aligned standards-based curriculum and assessment system**
Involving more teachers in the development process has resulted in improved documents that are respected and appreciated by teachers and principals. Collaboration with other instructional departments has helped to strengthen communication and the quality of the products produced. The urgency of providing managed curriculum tools is critical to the success of the School’s Chief and School Improvement Offices as they work providing better assurance of learning and accuracy of remedial effort. For accountability results from schools and teaching tools of curriculum support and guidance for teachers, formative assessment information is the way forward.

**Implement Response to Intervention model district-wide to provide early, effective assistance to children who are experiencing behavior issues, and are having difficulty learning**
Before moving Response to Intervention into the Curriculum department, there was confusion on how to create a campus-based team, whose purpose was to assist teachers in reviewing student data, and exploring research-based interventions was conducted in isolation. We have learned that Response to Intervention is the practice of providing high quality instruction and interventions and monitoring progress to adjust instruction. The Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) is the mechanism within RTI to evaluate a student’s response on tiered levels of support. Current trainings are focusing on the relationship of both and how they work together to promote student success and accelerate learning.

**Transformation Efforts**
We have seen leadership changes within the Apollo program but have found the external support coming from Harvard Ed Labs. The district was able to increase the capacity of support to accommodate the additional elementary schools. We continue to learn from our efforts and now have two years work of data to inform our decisions.

**Implement a comprehensive literacy and numeracy program in grades pre-k through 12**
Critical to our success is our ability to continually engage our teachers and administrators throughout the process. The groundwork has been laid but the effort requires extensive focus. Evaluation of various programs is underway and this will conclude with a more standardized method of literacy. A comprehensive plan incorporating the work of multiple departments will impact the learning and achievement across the district. We have learned that collaborating with multiple departments has strengthened the development of the plan. We have also
learned that we need to increase awareness of the IB program. Also, we need to identify additional funding in order extend AP training to additional AP teachers.

What are our priorities for the next semester?

Equity in access to educational programs
The primary focus for the district will be on preparing for the TAKS to STAAR transition. The district will be conducting various board workshops, present draft policies and work at the state level so our parents, teachers and students understand the implications of the various changes the district will need to make.

Implement Response to Intervention model district-wide to provide early, effective assistance to children who are experiencing behavior issues, and are having difficulty learning
We will be focusing on leveraging our existing Student Information System to increase information sharing across the district. Therefore, a key priority for this semester is to continue training leaders and teachers in RTI. The district will need to reinforce that intervention is broader than the domain of one or two teachers on a campus. A priority is to ensure that all teachers recognize that interventions must be occurring in all classrooms. The progress of students in response to these interventions must be monitored and documented. Parents need to be able to ask “How is my child progressing?” and the district must be able to provide data-documented answers.
Strategic Direction Initiative Report

Core Initiative: 4. Ensure data-driven accountability

Build robust systems and processes that enable easy access to and use of key data to inform decisions and manage high levels of performance district-wide.

What was our progress over the previous semester?
Accomplished foundational work in each key strategy so next steps can focus on further integration with the initiative and implementation:

Build easily accessible and accurate data architecture, warehouse, and technology infrastructure
Preliminary review of data on student and teacher performance indicates that some critical data elements are stored in various internal and off-site locations. The extensive manual effort and time to pull together useful reports to inform decision makers has begun with the data identification process. HISD plans to create a central repository (data warehouse) where all critical data will be stored. In August of 2011, a reorganization of the Information Technology department resulted in the creation of the Information, Assessment, and Analytics team that will support the data warehouse and Business Intelligence (BI) project. Additionally, the inclusion of Research & Accountability in the Information Technology department provides a cohesive organization structure to support the integration of many data sources used in defining performance metrics. Work has begun on the creating of Operation Data Stores containing current and longitudinal data in four key performance areas: Student, Personnel, Finance, and Operations. Exhibit A shows the status of student-related data integration in the last three reporting cycles. Since the last Management Report, an estimated cost for Phase 1 of the data warehouse development had been prepared for Board’s review and approval in September 2011. The estimate contains the user and developer licenses for Business Intelligence and Extract, Transform, and Load tools, both of which are necessary to manage data integration, ensure data integrity, and support district-wide usage of the dashboards. This cost also includes upgrades and redesign of the Information Technology infrastructure to support the increasing demand for access to electronically transmitted information.

In order to support the transition to new IT architectures, HISD plans to upgrade its existing IT architecture in areas such as network connectivity and information security to ensure that the supporting infrastructure in place is safe, secure, and accessible. A high-level network design and architecture for a new network was completed and RFPs (requests for proposal) to support were released. Work continues to secure federal (eRate) funding in order to support this effort. Part of the Information Security Program plan is to hire an Information Security Officer which is in the process of being filled.
Exhibit A
Percentage of Data Extracted, Transformed and Loaded into the Operational Data Store (ODS)

Develop and implement performance management tools and practices for decision-making
As the data warehouse and dashboard reports are being planned, the team has begun a review of Board Monitoring System metrics and other performance metrics to define the collection and presentation of data on the district’s progress towards meeting these goals. Additionally, local, state, and national data have been identified and will be collected in order to provide comparisons of key performance indicators. The priority for dashboard development will be considered based on role, decision criteria, availability of accurate data, and other factors. Owners of performance metrics from various departments will be asked to document their expectations of the reporting tools, including report content and target audience.

Design effective and efficient business processes and procedures for optimization of resources and results
The focus of this semester has been to launch the Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) procurement module within the SAP landscape and to define process and solution requirements specifically around the procurement of Instructional Products and Services. These activities include an evaluation process for vetting and documenting the Instructional Products and Services Evaluation business process that includes the registration of the Instructional Products and Services supplier, qualifying them through a questionnaire, bringing the products into the District to purchase, and finally evaluating those products and services through follow up scorecard evaluation.

The business process finalization led to the completion of the content and design of the program questionnaires to do discovery and qualification of instructional material suppliers, as well as, the design and development on the District’s ScoreCard application. The current version of both of these products can be found on the Procurement Services website along with the Registration form and process that was launched as a result of this initiative.

Finally, the District leadership also approved the District-wide roll-out of the new SAP-SRM procurement module that will create an online catalog and shopping cart experience for schools and departments. The catalogs contain descriptions and pricing information about purchasable items that are contracted through the District's bid process. When selected from the catalog for purchase and approved by the school or department Fund Approver, these items are placed on an automatically generated purchase order, requiring minimal interaction from the buyer. Once volume increases for purchases on catalog items, the buyers will be freed up to focus on more strategic level sourcing needs such as RFPs, contracts and catalog building.

*Where do we stand today?*

**Build easily accessible and accurate data architecture, warehouse, and technology infrastructure**

A preliminary scope of work has been identified and will be submitted for Board approval in September 2011. To augment existing Information Technology personnel, coupled with the intensity of the development work in the first two years, an RFP process was conducted to find the vendor(s) that can optimize the use of scarce resources to achieve the vision of the data warehouse project. The suitable vendor(s) will be selected by the next reporting period.

Information Technology initiatives currently underway are in the planning stages. The Data Warehouse project has been funded and efforts to obtain qualified resources are underway. The District needs to initiate a data quality program in support of creating a central data repository that will be used to pull together relevant and useful reports to inform decision making by leadership across the district. The first phase of the Information Security Program has been completed with documented deliverables of a Security Architecture Framework and Security Action Plan. The IT Department has made an investment into upgrading its IT Service Management capabilities to actively track incidents, change and assets. The District has increased its Internet bandwidth connection to support more web based instructional applications and content.
Figure B. Internet Bandwidth Usage

Develop and implement performance management tools and practices for decision-making
Using the Board Monitoring System metrics as a basis for identifying the district’s priorities, all performance metrics will be reviewed and assigned a dashboard development schedule based on importance, usefulness, complexity, and other factors. Most metrics are quantifiable which will lend themselves well to objective reporting with pre-set goals and targets.

Design effective and efficient business processes and procedures for optimization of resources and results
The rollout of the SRM procurement module within the District's finance system, SAP, has continued to better streamline the Procurement processes. The design and development of the Instructional Products and Services solutions have been put on hold due to the change in leadership. Figure C below demonstrates how the roll-out is progressing. Figure D shows the product category makeup of the internal purchasing catalog.
Figure C. Number of Users on SRM to Date

Note: Total targeted training population equals 1200 employees

Figure D: Number of Contracted Items in Catalog

Note: 48% of 43K items are Classroom Related
Period: January-August 2011

What have we learned?

**Build easily accessible and accurate data architecture, warehouse, and technology infrastructure**
Previous report indicated that it will take approximately 1-2 years to clean and structure data in order for a sustainable and accessible data repository to be built. Data quality within and across disparate systems presents an ongoing challenge for data integration, data governance, and data integrity. Initial assessment of the data systems uncovers instances of duplicate reporting that require multiple extracts of the same data by IT personnel. It is clear that a data governance framework will be essential for an accurate and accessible data warehouse. It is imperative that HISD revamp its existing Information Technology architecture in areas such as network connectivity and information security to ensure that the supporting infrastructure in place is safe, secure, and accessible. We now understand what issues exist regarding the security of the existing network infrastructure.

**Develop and implement performance management tools and practices for decision-making**
The district needs a data governance structure to provide guidance and resolution for issues that accompany data integration efforts. Development and/or acquisition of new performance management tools/applications should be reviewed against set standards by the data governance panel. This will ensure interoperability of any new systems to the district data warehouse standards and minimize duplication of efforts.

**Design effective and efficient business processes and procedures for optimization of resources and results**
The collaboration between Procurement, Curriculum and Information Technology teams has created a mutual understanding of all the moving parts that it takes to purchase items, specifically around what our schools need to perform at their very best. In addition, we know the route we need to take to create and implement a proper business process when selecting a supplier to do business with the District.

What are our priorities for the next semester?

**Build easily accessible and accurate data architecture, warehouse, and technology infrastructure**
With the Board’s approval of the budget for the development of the data warehouse and improvement of the infrastructure, the district will conduct the request for proposals through its procurement process. The providers of tools and services relating to data integration, data warehouse, and business intelligence resources will be determined.

Increase the network security for all users by updating and implementing a supported version of Active Directory, which manages all users and computing devices on the network. Additionally we will release a RFP around Identity and Access Management to address Security intelligence, administration, authentication and authorization of employees, parents and students. The rollout of the Network supported
Period: January-August 2011

infrastructure components to give access and coverage to employees and students is in the planning stage. The consolidation of the current server infrastructure to create more efficiencies and high utilization of hardware by adopting virtualization which will reduce data center costs will be planned and designed.

**Develop and implement performance management tools and practices for decision-making**

With clarity on the Board Monitoring System, revision to existing metrics can begin. Additionally, the Performance Management employee evaluation pilot will conclude and be launched for use districtwide.

**Design effective and efficient business processes and procedures for optimization of resources and results**

In the next period, we plan to vet, verify and get approved the existing processes and solution requirements for Instructional Products and Services with Curriculum and Procurement leadership so that additional progress can be made. Additionally, in support of the districtwide roll out of SAP-SRM procurement module, efforts will continue between Procurement and the SAP team to continue to streamline the procurement process from RFP to purchase of items from the preferred vendors.
Period: January-August 2011

Strategic Direction Initiative Report

Core Initiative: 5. Culture of Trust Through Action

What was our progress over the previous semester?

We are continuing to develop and drive communications processes that are inclusive, interactive and transparent. Several enhancements are fostering two-way communication for internal and external audiences. Also, we are making a concerted effort to connect subject matter with our Strategic Direction – pointing to our Core Initiatives to build understanding around how our ongoing efforts relate to our district’s vision and goals.

Core Initiative 5 calls for enhanced efforts to disseminate information to and from stakeholders using a variety of media. Last year, we redesigned the main pages of our Web portal to make information easier to locate and to provide more opportunities for two-way communication.

Several accomplishments made in HISD TV relate to Core Initiative 5. These efforts are being distributed on multiple channels to maximize our reach. We created a weekly Spanish newscast to complement our English-language newscast. In addition to airing on the cable access channel, the program is posted on the HISD website and the Spanish HISD YouTube channel. We also began posting the HISD Board President show and an HISD Board Vice President show (in English and Spanish) on our website and YouTube channels. All video projects are being posted to YouTube, and links are being sent to featured subjects and schools to encourage sharing among wider circles.

In response to feedback from parents, staff, students and community members who said they need access to relevant and timely information, we created several informational videos regarding districtwide initiatives. Among those projects: 2011 Team HISD Overview, Strategic Direction 2011 update, Team HISD Welcome Back 2011, Effective Teacher Initiative, and HISD Behind the Scenes. These videos can be used for multiple purposes and audiences – helping community members truly engage with the district.

To that point, we began production of daily “news story” packages covering district and schools events and press conferences for posting on district website. These daily features correspond with a matching article and with a banner encouraging website visitors to “watch video”. We began covering all district and school related press conferences “cover to cover” for immediate broadcast on HISD’s cable access channel and on the website. Also, all HISD School Board meetings are now broken down by agenda item to facilitate easier viewing on the HISD website.
Period: January-August 2011

In anticipation of the migration to STAAR standardized testing, we created a Web page and pointed external URLs (STAARwatcher.com/.org/.net) to our online information hub, which includes an overview of the new assessments and outlines key differences between STAAR and TAKS. We also distributed blurbs in summer newsletters and eNews; posted a STAAR presentation on the Principal’s Resource page; published a web article; aired a report on HISD-TV; and distributed a flier in English and Spanish at the Back-to-School Fest.

We served approximately 45,000 students at the Back to School Fest, providing free backpacks, school supplies, uniforms, immunizations, fresh produce, and other resources. This inaugural undertaking in partnership with the City of Houston was held at the George R. Brown Convention Center. Approximately $1.5 million in-kind donations and $158,000 in corporate sponsorships were raised. Plans are already under way for next year’s event.

Where do we stand today?

The following results show our growth in social media and the effectiveness of our continued reach through traditional channels:

- Our social media presence is steadily growing: Twitter followers in English grew by 179 to 2,211 followers. Facebook fans grew from 460 to 545. Followers of our Spanish Twitter feed grew from 52 to 66; fans of our Spanish Facebook page grew from 174 to 200.

- Also, more parents and community members are seeing messages about HISD from teachers, TV, our website, eNews and other channels. According to a community survey, 70 percent of parents and 67 percent of the general population have seen or heard a message regarding HISD in the past six months. This marked a significant increase from 2009, when 46 percent of parents and 40 percent of community members had seen or heard a message regarding HISD in the past six months.

- For the period of January 1, 2011, to August 31, 2011, there were 2,024,488 unique visitors to the website. Visitors spent an average of 1:44 on the site, and viewed an average of 2.57 pages. During the same time period in 2010, there were 1,905,800 unique visitors. The average time spent on the site was 1:29 and visitors viewed an average of 2.49 pages.

- As of August 31, 2011, there were 60 videos featured on HISD’s YouTube channel and 277 videos featured on HISD’s Video channel.

- Among those videos are a new series – “I am HISD” – profiling notable alumni.
• The Hispanic Advisory Committee was formed to advise and support HISD in strengthening and encouraging public support of HISD schools, improving student achievement, and increasing parental and community involvement. The Strategic Partnerships Department conducted the first meeting of its Hispanic Advisory Committee at the district’s headquarters on August 16, and almost a dozen Hispanic business and community leaders—along with Superintendent Terry Grier and Board of Education members Manuel Rodriguez and Juliet Stipeche—came to discuss how they could help HISD become the best school district in America.

• Superintendent Grier attended the launch of the African American Advisory Council, whose purpose is to strengthen public support of HISD schools, increase student achievement, and encourage parental and community involvement within the African-American community. The committee began meeting on a quarterly basis in July 2011 and provides feedback on important district issues, particularly those impacting the district’s African-American student population.

What have we learned?

In the Spring, more than 1,300 community members, including 300 HISD parents, were interviewed as part of a Community Satisfaction Survey. The survey found that 60 percent of the general population and 76 percent of the parents agree with the statement “HISD strives to create a culture of trust by being open and transparent.”

At least 74 percent of respondents agreed with the following statements: “I know how to connect with someone at my child’s school when I have questions and concerns;” “I am satisfied with the communication between school and home;” and “I am satisfied with opportunities for parent input on school initiatives.”

Of the parents and community members who were aware of the changes to the district’s website, 66 percent had a positive impression. On the topic of communications, 25 percent of parents said they were interested in direct mail communication from HISD (in addition to the 15 percent who already receive it.) In a smaller survey conducted in April, respondents appreciated the current and frequent updates to the website and Twitter feeds, and emphasized the importance of swiftly communicating news to parents so they can “mobilize and support HISD, and make decisions for the welfare of their children.”

At the first meeting of the Hispanic advisory committee, attendees offered insights into what will help engage community members and external stakeholders. They said: “your answer is this committee,” explaining that obtaining feedback and advice from community leaders on new district initiatives would help build trust in the community. The group said it would help “incubate these ideas and move forward with them.”
We included postage-paid feedback card in the Welcome to HISD publication – as those are returned, we will report on the feedback we receive.

**What are our priorities for the next semester?**

We are laying the groundwork for a content-rich multimedia communications strategy around the STAAR test, which is replacing the TAKS test and includes rules that impact 9th graders (as well as some middle school students) in the 2011-2012 school year. As the district’s interpretation of those rules is finalized, we will launch a multifaceted effort that begins with building understanding at the school level. We are creating a communications kit for principals – with video, a PowerPoint presentation, talking points and handouts – to both ease the communications process and ensure a complete and consistent message is shared with internal and external audiences. Principals will utilize those resources as needed and schedule meetings with parents to go over the changes and answer questions. Additionally, STAAR explainer videos will be featured on the webpage and YouTube, and shared via eNews and social media channels.

To ensure access to all, a second STAAR mail-out – targeted to 8th- and 9th-graders’ families – will explain in greater detail the local policy on the state-mandated “15 percent rule.”

All content related to the STAAR test will be organized and available on houstonisd.org/STAAR. We are also creating a STAAR blog to facilitate frequent updates about the test, as well as the option to allow reader comments and conversation. Blog updates and site updates will be tweeted and shared on Facebook. We are also positioning HISD representatives to serve as thought leaders on STAAR during press conferences and segments on public affairs talk shows and Univision.

Other upcoming activities include:

- We are creating a bi-monthly superintendent show for distribution on HISD TV, website, and YouTube channels, as well as a live “Student Town Hall Meeting” in the HISD TV studio with Superintendent Grier.

- We are in the process of redesigning the Friday eNews publication. We will incorporate a video player in the design of the newsletter to increase visibility of our multimedia projects, and shift toward more links and less text. We are also evaluating processes that will enable better metrics so we can maximize the use of this vehicle.

- We have scheduled a series of Community Conversations to provide a status report on the Strategic Direction and allow audiences to speak directly to Superintendent Terry Grier. This forum has so far been promoted through multiple channels – we created a video to promote the event on our website, distributed press releases and sent postcards home with every student. The event allows multiple ways for people to participate – if they can’t attend in person, questions can be emailed to the
superintendent. In addition to being interactive, the event also exemplifies a transparent communications approach as the sessions will be broadcast live, tweeted and recapped on our webpage.

- During the planning process for our WOW (Within Our Walls) videos, we will select subjects that illustrate the core initiatives in our Strategic Direction. We will be clearly connecting these multimedia projects to actions that exemplify the five core initiatives.

- The Communications Department is taking an active role in the Strategic Communications Group, which is providing support to the Effective Teachers Initiative’s key strategies. We will continue our efforts to communicate these strategies to internal and external stakeholders.

- We are forming a cross-functional workgroup to meet monthly with representatives from various departments. This group will help integrate our efforts to communicate the Strategic Direction and other initiatives in a cohesive, consistent way and ensure that limited communications resources are used most effectively.

- We are continuing to migrate school websites to SchoolWires, with 80 schools scheduled for implementation. There are 26 schools that now have live SchoolWires websites, and many are ready to launch in the next few weeks. The SchoolWires websites provide a more focused place for parents, students, and the local community to find information and communicate with the individual schools. The school website provides faster access to the school-specific information, enabling us to build community at the local level where people are more involved and feel they can make a difference.

- For the first time, HISD Connect-ED/Blackboard Connect is going to offer Connect-ED webinar trainings for principals and new Connect-ED users. We are doing this as a special service for our employees, whose time is extremely valuable. Rather than having to travel to the HMWESC for the training, our participants will be able to conveniently access the training from their workplaces. The webinars will be a series of three on-demand webinars (each about 20 minutes and focusing on different tasks). The trainings are scheduled to commence in October 2011. A tracking mechanism will allow the Info Center to track what Principal has completed the training.