

Houston Independent School District

Program Name:	Weighted Student Formula
Implemented:	2000-2001 School Year
Program Type:	District-Wide
Legal Authorization:	School Board Policy

School Empowerment Benchmarks		
1.	School budgets based on students not staffing	yes
2.	Charge schools actual versus average salaries	no
3.	School choice and open-enrollment policies	yes
4.	Principal autonomy over budgets	yes
5.	Principal autonomy over hiring	yes
6.	School-level management support	yes
7.	Published transparent school-level budgets	yes
8.	Published transparent school-level outcomes	yes
9.	Explicit accountability goals	yes
10.	Collective bargaining relief—flat contracts, etc.	yes
Houston met 9 out of 10 school empowerment benchmarks.		



I. Program Overview

Houston Independent School District (HISD) educates approximately 202,000 students within the greater Houston metropolitan area. The district serves a diverse student population, which is 58 percent Hispanic, 30 percent African-American, 9 percent white and 3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander.

Approximately 78 percent of HISD students participate in free or reduced-price meal programs. HISD also serves more than 55,000 limited-English-proficient students who, combined, speak more than 90 different native languages.

To improve instruction and student achievement and to make the district more streamlined and efficient, schools are organized within five regions (North, East, South, West and Central) by feeder patterns composed of specific elementary, middle and high schools. Each regional office is managed by a regional superintendent who coordinates a team of executive principals to ensure the quality of instruction throughout the region's feeder patterns.

In 1990, the Houston Board of Education issued a Declaration of Beliefs and Visions for HISD that called for a "new educational structure...that...is decentralized and features shared decision-making."¹ The 1990 Beliefs and Visions statement also said that schools should have the maximum freedom to develop and implement the methods that best achieve the goal of high student achievement. In 1991, the school district implemented Shared Decision-Making Committees (SDMC) at the school level to help advise principals and allow the local school community to begin making decisions with reduced central office

control. In 1994, when Superintendent Rod Paige was hired, the district began to more aggressively decentralize decision-making to the school level and give principals control over school budgets. By the 2000-2001 school year, principals had decision-making authority over their school-level budgets.

In 2009 HISD remains committed to the decentralization of resources and decision-making authority to the school level, where student academic success is the highest priority. In Houston, schools have been given direct authority for approximately 60 percent of all district funds, making HISD one of the few school districts in the nation with such a high level of decentralization. HISD has also reorganized other departments to provide services to schools on a fee-for-service basis.

Back in 1987, 70 percent of HISD schools were on the state's list of lowest-performing schools.² But in 2009, despite three major increases in accountability standards at the state level, only 5 percent of Houston's schools are in the state's lowest performing category. Those significant, steady gains were the result of a commitment to accountability, decentralization, competition and, more recently, a change in focus from passing a test to a focus on solid academic-achievement growth for every student, every year.³

II. Student Based Budgeting Formula

The district has formulated a school budgeting process that includes a weighted student formula. The process begins with a base grade-level formula for every student.⁴

Base grade level weights for 2009-2010 are:

- Elementary school \$3,390
- Middle school \$3,415
- High school \$3,379
- Early childhood special education and pre-k units are weighted at 0.5.
- K-12 students are weighted at 1.0.

The base formula is allocated on 100 percent average daily attendance or in essence each school's total enrollment if every student attended every day. The formula also provides additional resources for special populations based on student characteristics.

Weights for Special Populations 2009-2010

- Mobility (> than 40 percent) .10
- Special education .15
- State compensatory education (poverty and at-risk) .15
- Gifted and talented .12
- Vocational education .35
- English language learner .10

1. Mobility is determined by counting the number of students determined to be mobile. A student is considered to be mobile if he or she has been enrolled at the school for less than 83 percent of the school year (has missed six weeks or more at a school). Schools with mobility less than 40 percent are given a weight of 0. Schools with mobility more than 40 percent are given a weight of 0.10.
2. Special education students are students a school serves with an individualized education plan (IEP). The weighting provides discretionary non-payroll resources to the students. The central office still allocates special education

teachers. Multiply the number of eligible students by the weight of .15 to get the weighted special education units.

3. State compensatory education (SCE) student counts are based on the 50 percent of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch at a school and 50 percent of students at risk, as determined by multiple factors including test scores and dropout status. These two counts are combined to get the total student population that will receive the SCE weight. In other words, this weight multiplies the total number of free lunch students by .50 and the total number of at-risk students by .50 and then funds the new population that was created based on one-half of the free lunch and at-risk population at the school.
4. The gifted and talented student population is determined by the number of students at each school that have been designated as GATE students.
5. Vocational education weight is determined by the number of hours each student is enrolled in vocational education courses. The unit for each course is computed based on contact hours multiplied by 175 instructional days. Multiply the weight of .35 by the units.
6. English language learner weight is multiplied by the number of students at each school designated as English language learners.

In addition to the student weights, each school receives a capital allocation of \$10 per enrolled student. HISD also maintains a small school subsidy. The per-student allocation for the small school subsidy is \$1,116. The small school subsidy

distribution is calculated based on a school's enrollment.

The threshold enrollment levels are as follow:

- Elementary school - 500
- Middle School - 750
- High School - 1,000

III. Autonomy

HISD provides schools with approximately 60 percent of the district's operating budget in the form of weighted student allocations. At the school level the total weighted allocation is approximately 80 percent of the school's overall resources. The principal has discretion over these funds and the only mandated school position is the principal.

In Houston principals also have discretion over hiring decisions. Collective bargaining is illegal in the state of Texas and school boards set personnel practices. In Houston, the school board policy gives principals significant discretion over personnel decisions and the design and organization of each school.

IV. School-Level Management Support

HISD runs an Aspiring Principal's Institute that provides each principal five training components:

- Six-week summer intensive
- Harvard Graduate School of Education coursework
- Year-long paid school-based API internship

- API seminar
- Job-embedded, personalized coaching and support.

In addition, HISD provides principals with support from budget analysts during the yearly budgeting process at each regional office.

V. School Site Councils

HISD schools operate under a site-based-management concept with each school having a Shared Decision-Making Committee (SDMC). This school-level planning and decision-making process was established in 1992 by the Board of Education to involve professional and non-professional staff members, parents, community members and business representatives in public education. Participants at each school review the district's educational goals, objectives and instructional programs. The school principal determines the size of the committee and nominates members from the public sphere.

VI. School Choice Component

Most schools have specifically defined attendance zones that include residential areas that each school serves. On the basis of a student's home address, HISD assigns each student to a "feeder pattern" composed of a specific elementary, middle and high school.

HISD also offers parents the option of sending their child to a school other than the "home" or "zoned" campus, provided that the school of choice has sufficient space available to accept additional students. When the school of choice accepts a

student from outside its attendance zone, HISD requires that the parents agree to keep the student at the chosen school for the entire school year and parents must assume responsibility for the student's transportation.

If the demand for space-available seats exceeds the space available at an individual school, a lottery is used to determine which students are selected to enroll in the school.

VII. Accountability

In 2008 the Houston Independent School District implemented a new accountability process called the ASPIRE (Accelerating Student Progress and Increasing Results and Expectations) model. This overarching initiative connects all of HISD's educational improvement efforts and encompasses innovative technology solutions, professional development and communications. ASPIRE's system of value-added analysis helped HISD increase student achievement and reward those who help students make strong academic progress. As one of the largest performance-pay plans in the nation, in 2008 the ASPIRE Award Program recognized more than 10,000 teachers and other school personnel with more than \$23 million in bonuses. The district also broadened performance management, making everyone in the central office more accountable for the quality of support provided to ensure successful teaching and learning in every classroom.

Through ASPIRE, HISD is providing teachers and principals with training and support to ensure they have the knowledge, skills and tools they need to help all of the district's students to succeed. ASPIRE uses the latest technology and information

systems to provide principals, teachers and other staff with the most reliable data to make important decisions about student performance.

A central component of ASPIRE is school-level, value-added reports to provide information about performance/progress by the campus overall and at each grade level. These reports give information about specific subjects, including reading, math, language arts, science and social studies.

In addition, the district's research and accountability office also provides parents with school-level profiles that include school enrollment and demographic information, special programs and school performance data.

HISD is also more transparent about the budgeting process than many districts that report school-level budgets. While most school-level budgets using student-based budgeting provide overall school allocations, HISD breaks the school-level budget down by individual student counts and the weights these student populations generate. In addition, HISD's school-level budgets also report student achievement data for each school.

VIII. Performance Outcomes

Since decentralization efforts began in the 1990s, HISD has been working on continuous improvement for student performance. In 2002, HISD won the Broad Prize for being a top-performing urban school district. The prize is awarded annually for outstanding overall improvement while narrowing the achievement gap between economic and ethnic groups.

Some of HISD's specific achievements

include:

- Even with the state raising accountability standards, the number of HISD schools earning an “exemplary” rating from the state increased from 15 to 38 and the number of “recognized” schools rose from 69 to 119—for a record total of 157, an 87-percent gain since 2007. The number of “academically unacceptable” schools remained at 15. This is the highest rate among large urban districts in the state.
- The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills is the state’s central assessment of student achievement and students must pass it to be promoted to the next grade level or to graduate from high school. In 2008, 84 percent of schools improved in passing rates in social studies, 79 percent in science. Seventy percent of schools improved in math and 61 percent of schools improved in English language arts.
- Dual-credit and advanced placement (AP) courses give students the opportunity to earn high-school and college credits at the same time. Record numbers of HISD students took these classes, giving them a head start as college freshmen and saving their parents thousands of dollars in college tuition. The number of students enrolled in dual-credit courses rose 47 percent from 2007 to 2008, with a passing rate for all students at 95.1 percent.
- Nearly 7,900 students were enrolled in AP classes in 2007–2008 representing an increase of 34.8 percent since 2003. From 2003 to 2007, the number of students taking AP exams increased 77.8 percent.

- Houston’s graduation rate has declined from 80.9 percent in 2006 to 76.8 percent in 2007.

IX. Lessons Learned

1. Use performance pay in connection with the weighted student formula to encourage principals and teachers to meet the goals they outline in their academic plans as part of their discretion over budgets.
2. Use value-added analysis in addition to static achievement data to analyze how schools and teachers are changing student performance over time. Offer parents transparent school profiles that include both value-added data and overall school performance data.
3. Report detailed school-level budgets that include each school’s student populations and the weights and budget allocations attached to those students. Also report student achievement data on school-level budget reports.

Resources

2008-2009 Adopted Budget, Houston Independent School District.

Resource Allocation Handbook: Recommended 2009-2010, Houston Independent School District, http://www.houstonisd.org/BudgetingFinancialPlanning/Home/School%20Resource%20Handbook/2009-2010_Resource_Allocation_Handbook.pdf

State of the Schools 2008 Annual Report, Houston Independent School District, <http://www.houstonisd.org/>

HISDConnectEnglish/Images/PDF/AR_08_SOS.pdf

For school-level weighted pupil budgets go here: http://www.houstonisd.org/BudgetingFinancialPlanning/Home/District%20Budget%20Books/2008-2009_Schools_Section.pdf

Contact Information

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Endnotes

1. *Preliminary Resource Allocation Handbook, 2001-2002*, Houston Independent School District.
2. *State of the Schools 2008 Annual Report*, Houston Independent School District, http://www.houstonisd.org/HISDConnectEnglish/Images/PDF/AR_08_SOS.pdf
3. Ibid.
4. *Resource Allocation Handbook: Recommended 2009-2010*, Houston Independent School District, http://www.houstonisd.org/BudgetingFinancialPlanning/Home/School%20Resource%20Handbook/2009-2010_Resource_Allocation_Handbook.pdf