

Houston Independent School District
 Principals' Advisory Committee
 Accolades, Concerns and Recommendations
 for December 2017 (No Ad Hoc in December)

Accolades:

- Thank you to Superintendent Carranza for always allowing us to have a voice that is allowed to be transparent and for creating a district where it is okay to disagree as long as we are working to improve us all. Thanks Sup!
- Thank you to Luis Gavito who truly ALWAYS answers a call (he did it when I was an AP, too) and gives sage advice and meaningful support to help our students.

Chief Academic Officer – Chief Dr. Grenita Lathan

Concerns:

1. Special Education seems to be reverting to a lack of urgency. Specifically, responding to parent needs and not staffing immediately. I have had a scholar with the appropriate documentation since the first day of school from the doctor who has yet to have an ARD. The LSSP and Diag are having concerns and the program specialist is trying to keep the focus, but she can't do it by herself.

It is a great hindrance when our time is consumed with scholars that are not in the proper setting. It is unfair for all parties, the teacher, students in that class and most of all the student that is not in the correct setting. How is it that in some schools kids receive services immediately but other schools it takes months?

For example, the first day of school in September the parent brings in a request and the child is still not being addressed and it is November. The parents depend on us to do what is best. Let's reset! We can get this right, but we have to work together.

Suggestion:

There should be a consistent structure and timelines need to be reported weekly based on scholar, parent and campus needs. Perhaps having a kid watch would definitely crest the focus.

Inquiry: Does SPED have a data room in HMW, where they are tracking the length of time it takes to assist our families? What can Principal's do better to improve the level of support?

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Response: The OSES has put in place three initiatives:

- (A) Repurpose of senior diagnostician to monitor the timeliness of evaluations from IAT Referral to IEP Meeting. The diagnostician who began the position the last week in November is part of a newly formed compliance group.
 - (B) The compliance group made up of members of the Office of Special Education was created to not only ensure compliance with PEIMS-related data but referrals for Special Education and Section 504 as well. This compliance group engaged a variety of resource which include a SharePoint site that the monitoring diagnostician will use as a close to real-time documentation and alert system for initial evaluations. The second most significant resources are the PCG request and referral features in Easy IEP.
 - (C) The request and referral features in Easy IEP were developed to assist the campus IAT to capture requests as they are received, respond to the request within 15 school days, and referrals for evaluation within 45 school days, and response to parental requests within 15 days. The request and referral features will be released in January 2018.
2. One I have is that we are being bombarded with work requests from central offices. It is overwhelming and I am having trouble keeping my head above water. I talked to about six experienced principals to see if it was just me and everyone is feeling the pinch.

As an example, our CTC had to complete a seven-page testing plan that was way over the top. Why? There are numerous examples of other departments doing this but that one comes to mind. It seems we are providing justification for their jobs. If we complete a bunch of reports, someone has to collect them and review them. It is hard for many principals to find time to be instructional leaders when we are inundated with bureaucratic paperwork. Most elementary schools have lean administrative and clerical staffs and we can only delegate so much before we burn out our people. It would be nice if someone reviewed all of these work requests and viewed the request from the lens of “What does this do to improve teaching and learning?” and “Is this necessary?”

Response: Starting in January we will streamline requests from the various Academics departments to ensure requests are reasonable, serve a purpose to drive instruction and can't be completed at district level. If a request can be completed at district level we will generate it locally.

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3. TADS Tool - The TADS tool is still having issues on the Student Performance side. Our teachers have submitted goal sheets, have had them approved by the administrator, we've made hard copies to show this, and then a few days later it appears as if it has never been done and has to be redone. We've been doing and redoing these for the past several years, reporting this, only to be told it works perfectly. It does not.

Response: There are a few potential issues that could result in the appearance of lost data. The TADS Student Performance Tool does not lose data that has been saved into the system; however, connectivity issues may cause the user to not see data that was previously entered. Most of the time, logging out and logging back in will cause the data to reappear. It is recommended that users connect to the TADS Student Performance Tool via hardwire rather than wi-fi. For support with the TADS Student Performance tool, please contact your Performance Continuous Improvement Manager (PCIM) or Abigail Taylor, Assistant Superintendent for Talent Development and Performance.

A note from Information Technology - After doing a poll of the TADS tickets, the TADS Support group, and the TADS Development group, we have had no reports of this occurring this school year. We would have to see examples in order to assess what was happening. Please submit a service desk ticket and a member of the TADS team will be in contact to resolve the issue.

<https://servicedesk.houstonisd.org>

4. TADS Tool - Please reconsider the timing out function while writing observation reports. The tool still times out even while we are actively typing. I can remember most of the time to hit save constantly but we are principals and assistant principals and are constantly interrupted. It is incredibly frustrating to lose 30 minutes worth of work. We don't have 30 extra minutes. Ever.

Response: At the server level, the application times out after twenty minutes. As a result of this function of the server, this is not something that can be modified within the TADS Feedback and Development Tool. When the user is typing in the TADS Feedback and Development Tool, there is no communication with the server. After twenty minutes of no communication, the session is cleared. The twenty minutes restarts when the user presses save.

A note from Information Technology - We understand the time constraints that everyone is under. However, the time-outs are outside the control of the District; there is a 30-minute timeout which we cannot control/configure. The system is

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setup to give warnings however that should not be ignored. Always save your work so you can return to it at a later time.

5. Special Education Staffing on Campus: SpED is filling our programs to the max but not giving us the required numbers of TAs to support. They are simply telling us they don't have the budget. This isn't going over well with our parents, or teachers who are burnt out. If this is the type of centralized staffing model, we should expect as the HMW administration continues its slow crawl away from decentralization then our students will be massively underserved, and teacher exhaustion will escalate.

Recommendation: Revisit the SpED staffing model to make sure it is current with relevant educational settings and strategies as opposed to still operating in the same archaic staffing model from years ago. Kids have changed and their needs have become more complex – a staffing model should reflect that.

Response: Special education senior managers receive the Authorization Position Reports and review them to see where vacancies exist and if those vacancies can be repurposed and/or transferred to meet a specific need. This school year, the School Board allocated additional money to staff two teachers and two teacher assistants to meet the growing needs of students with autism at two high schools. The department did not receive any other new positions so staffing requests must be filled with vacant positions when it is feasible to do so.

6. Universal screener.... monthly progress monitoring is excessive. We are going back to the days of I station. There are also only three weeks of school between November and December monitoring. How will this be a valid measure of growth?

Response: Progress Monitoring Assessments will assess the effectiveness of student interventions. The window for the Beginning of the Year Assessments was September 18th to October 13th and interventions addressing students' deficits should have been provided over the course of 30 days. The progress Monitoring window is from November 27th to December 15th.

The District and the Board are closely monitoring the percentage of growth of students in Tier 2 and Tier 3. The Progress Monitoring data will assist in making the necessary adjustments to ensure academic growth for all students.

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7. Principals would like an Excel spreadsheet to which we could export data with dropdown menus of interventions, allowable accommodations and accessibility.

Response: We will work on an excel format that will be available by the end of January

8. IAT intervention support for teachers on campuses – specific trainings and real-time coaching.

Response: Campus based liaisons are to serve as trainers for teachers on their campus, however, if campus specific training is needed for teachers the principal can always contact the IAT Manager to schedule this.

9. Limit unreasonable IAT documentation expectations for campus personnel. Prolonged process and campuses required to change systems that are already in place and working!

Response: IAT documentation will be captured primarily in Infinite Campus next year, this will help alleviate some of the paperwork. Additionally, there is no requirement for the number of students that have to be documented through the IAT. This decision is made by the campus. Additionally, intervention documentation can be captured through the intervention tool being used, there is no need to create additional data sheets if you are already tracking the data for your students receiving interventions in another format.

10. Renaissance tiers 2 and 3 are overwhelming teachers and administrators.

Response: Students in Tiers 2 and 3 have scored below the 25th percentile on the Renaissance assessments. Our goal is that all students will meet at or above standard and it will take additional time, support and resources to help our struggling students meet this goal. Please contact Dr. Mouton at 713-556-6317 for additional support. We have two Renaissance trainers that can come and assist with testing, data analysis and much more. We want everyone to be successful.

11. School GT Coordinators are being given additional students to test for the Vanguard Magnet program who have not applied through our campus, many are not even enrolled in our schools, and who are only interested in Vanguard Magnet programs. This was not previously discussed with principals and we had

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no input on this additional workload being put on our faculty. This is adding unnecessary burden onto our campuses for coordinators who wear MANY hats other than GT. I do not have time to add work onto their already overflowing plates and will make testing exponentially more difficult by adding more scheduling components. If we block off time for testing our students and a child we have on campus is sick, we have the flexibility to move the testing to a more convenient time. But if additional children are coming from off campus, that removes the flexibility for people who are already juggling discipline issues, lunch duty, tutoring, unexpected parent meetings, CTC duties, LEP data analysis, PLC's, etc... and will likely add many hours of additional testing time. Furthermore, we have no extra spaces on campus to handle testing larger groups of students. There are not additional classrooms on our campus, and we already struggle to find space to test even a small number of students. Adding more students will require shutting down our library or computer lab, or testing outside the school day. Magnet schools get Magnet funding PLUS additional GT funding which can be used to pay for testing outside the school day, but neighborhood schools do not get this extra funding. Quite simply, our campuses should not be required to handle Magnet GT testing, just as Fine Arts Magnets do not expect us to handle their auditions. These are MAGNET applications and the subsequent information gathering to make those decisions including testing should be completed by the Magnet schools. Literally no other Magnet programs place work expectations on the neighborhood schools. Why is it suddenly acceptable to expect us to do all the Vanguard Magnet testing? The district has placed many new compliance requirements on the schools this year. As principals it is our job to manage the workloads of our support staff, and our campus responsibilities were already evaluated and in place long before someone arbitrarily decided to add additional work for other schools onto our coordinators without consulting us. It is unfair to arbitrarily place GT Magnet testing on the neighborhood schools when systems and staff have been in place for decades to handle such tasks at the Magnet schools.

Response: In the past, schools relied on hub testing to identify GT students who fell outside the universal screening window and who were interested in attending a magnet school. This included students who were enrolled at the school, and those students who were zoned to HISD but were attending other schools. This allowed students to qualify for GT without their current campus being involved in the process and at the same time created a gap in gifted services for those students who were identified and remained at their home school. As a way to help ensure that schools were aware of the needs of all students on their campuses the decision was made to have all students tested at their current

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school. We will revisit the practice of testing out of school students using HUB schools as a part of the vanguard committee this year.

12. Home Language Survey Demand: Principals were sent an email asking for the languages spoken in the home of our students and a count for each language. And we were given 48 hours to submit the information. There is a report in Chancery that gives you this exact information, so every principal consulted that report.

Recommendation: If the source for each principal is Chancery and the district has access to Chancery, isn't that type of demanded report something that the HMW could have generated themselves? It would be helpful to principals to ask Area offices to see what data they can access themselves so as to not add to the already lengthy to-do list that principals have.

Response: The West Area office needed information regarding languages being spoken on our campuses so that we could have the information for a meeting with the multilingual department. Originally the information was requested from the SSO's. The SSO's reached out to the campuses to get the information. Chancery does have a report that list all the languages and numbers of students on campuses, but it is a PDF document and cannot be manipulated. It was important for us to have this information in one document so that we could give accurate numbers when discussing assistance for the schools. Anytime we need information we try to make it as easy as possible for the schools to complete the task. This may be by creating a form with dropdowns for easy selections or a google document to easily compile everything together. We apologize for any confusion this may have caused the campuses and will make every effort to gather new information centrally before requesting from campuses.

Chief Human Resources Officer – Gloria Cavazos

Concern:

1. Job Postings: Is it now the case that any job postings must first secure approval from the Area Superintendent? If so then that is slowing down the hiring process. And when were principals going to be notified about this change? I don't see it anywhere within the Academic Services Memos.

Recommendation: Clarify whether this is now the expectation to all Principals. And if so then perhaps some rationale could be included. Right now, we are learning as needed.

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Response: The process of requiring Area Superintendent approval for the posting of teaching positions has been lifted. This temporary system was put into place to ensure that all teachers in need of reassignments, were relocated within the district prior to vacancies being posted.

Chief Student Support Officer - Chief Mark Smith

Concerns:

1. This school year has been quite stressful for teachers and students, and principals. Hurricane Harvey has had many ripple effects and we are definitely still feeling these effects in the school. Not among the students, but also among the staff.

I understand the reason for extending to early release days. However, this has had a detrimental effect on morale. We have not had time to get together as a school. Meeting with staff after school when everyone is tired is not very effective. Another negative effect is that teachers don't get to really hear their leader. They need continued inspiration and celebration among their peers. They need clarity of directives and activities that must be put into practice. They need that from their Leader. The daytime PLC meetings per grade level and the monthly after school faculty meeting is not enough.

Recommendation: I would like to put in a request to re-establish the early release days that were on the original school calendar: January 23, 2018 and February 23, 2018.

Response: The decision to convert early release days to full instructional days was thoughtfully debated and ultimately approved by the Board. Recapturing those minutes was necessary to meet the annual total of 75,600 minutes in order to qualify for full-funding, as required by state law. Your points are well-taken and the drain you describe is a burden shared by us all. Thank you for your service and for making the recommendation; unfortunately, it simply is not feasible.

2. Barbara Jordan High School is in the process of converting to a career center to partner with 9 campuses for elective career classes as well as math and science. This will serve to provide more opportunities to have students graduate with an endorsement. This year's seniors represent the last formal graduating class of Barbara Jordan High School as we convert from a magnet school to a career center. Construction of our new building has already begun. Currently, each of the 9 schools operate under different start/end times, lunch times, and different

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master schedules. This has affected efforts to schedule students into classes with appropriate seat time at the career center from all of our partner schools.

Recommendation:

Begin to centralize some of the processes at least at our 9 partner campuses so that master schedules and times match with the Barbara Jordan Career Center. Campuses would still have some flexibility in the types of schedules they can utilize (straight 8 or block or hybrid of two).

Response: Master schedules and individual student schedules are created at the campus level and principals are free to work together to create schedules that compliment joint access to the Jordan Career Center. This is a great opportunity for the 10 leaders to get together and showcase their collaboration.

3. Magnet Program Evaluation Committee: This committee has been formed & has been meeting since October 12. The recommendations that come from this committee and are presented to the Board could heavily impact many district schools. The committee has 29 members and only 7 work in schools, and only 5 of the 29 are principals. And of those five principals, four of them are in campus-wide magnet schools (i.e. HSPVA, Carnegie, etc). There is only one comprehensive high school with a magnet program included. The current composition of the committee does not seem inclusive when not even $\frac{1}{4}$ of a committee works directly with students and communities. Additionally, there have been no minutes presented and no updates offered to any principals. Finally, these conversations are occurring as parent's research and apply to magnet programs.

Recommendation: Publish and share minutes from each meeting. Add to the current composition of the committee so that principals at all levels are included and so that the majority of the committee is school-based.

Response: The Superintendent charged the Office of School Choice to form a committee in order to review and evaluate HISD magnet programs. The committee members selected were reviewed by a cross-functional team that ensured diversity and districtwide representation. The Superintendent is updated during this process and the findings will be provided to the Superintendent and the board at the conclusion of all meetings.

The purpose of the Magnet PERC is to review and make recommendations regarding selected Magnet program policies and/or procedures that will help fulfill

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the Houston Independent School District's (HISD) Magnet programs' goal of providing all HISD students equal access to quality educational programs

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Response: We agree, please forward to skaler@houstonisd.org the email wherein the 48-hour turnaround was requested so that we can follow-up with the sender.

Also, please keep in mind that principals are only accountable for action items from central office departments that are communicated through an Academic Service Memo (ASM). One of the purposes of the ASM system is help ensure deadlines are communicated at least two weeks in advance. If you receive a central office action item through another mechanism, you are encouraged to redirect the sender to utilize the ASM system.

Chief Information Technology Officer – Chief Lenny Schad

Concerns:

1. We are having a major problem with the reliability of the internet on my campus. At least every 3 weeks my campus is without the internet and phones for the entire day. With so many lessons coming from technology, it is extremely frustrating. The problem is made even worse when technology is called from our cell phones and we're told their systems show no problems even though we had been without internet for over 5 hours on a payroll approval day. Finally, after numerous phone calls a technician was sent out and 8 hours after the outage began, it was working again. As I stated at the beginning, this problem of over 8 hours at a time of no internet and phones is a regular occurrence and it must be fixed. It is not safe and it's unproductive when the teachers can't access components of their lessons.

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Response: Response: We agree that these types of outages are not acceptable. The HISD IT team works to never schedule maintenance on our systems during the times when you need it most (Mon.-Fri. 5am-10pm). Some service interruptions however, cannot be avoided like in situations where there have been power outages in the area or damage to power poles or fiber cuts in the street due to construction.

We request that the issues are reported to the IT Service Desk, 713-892-7378 (<https://servicedesk.houstonisd.org>) as quickly as possible so the cause can be identified and resolved in a timely manner.

If there is ever an issue that is not resolved to your satisfaction, please contact Preeti Burns, IT Director, Technology Customer Service – 713-556-8854 or Scott Gilhousen, IT Director, Infrastructure, Engineering & Operations – 713-556-6200

2. IOS Devices - Is there a way for our IT department to fix One Source, Connect Apps, and other sources so that they will work with IOS (Apple) devices. Many of us use iPhones, iPads, and Macbooks as our computing devices and cannot access things we need to access remotely. Many things don't work properly even when on the network.

Response: We recognize that mobile is becoming more pervasive in the way we interact and work. Some vendors will offer full support for different browsers (Internet Edge, Chrome, Safari) and platforms (Microsoft, Google, Apple) and some do not. We are working with our vendors to roadmap that functionality in some of the future releases above which is not native today in the current systems.

Chief Operating Officer – Chief Brian Busby

Concerns:

1. Standardized School Start Times: This topic was discussed at the November 1 Ad Hoc Meeting. A recommendation was made to survey faculty/staff since every single one of them (and their families) will be impacted. Additionally, it was recommended that a survey be sent out to the students (at least at the secondary level). It was agreed upon and we were told the survey would be forthcoming. However, it has not been shared or distributed as of this email.

Recommendation: Create and share the student survey to high schools as well as the faculty/staff survey to all employees.

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Response: School Start times have been surveyed and the responses totaled over 17,000 respondents that overwhelmingly selected Option 4. Cabinet was presented with the results and the Superintendent will be announcing the direction for 2018-2019, in the coming weeks.

2. **Transportation Costs Misrepresented:** At the November 1 Ad Hoc meetings there was data shared that would seem to indicate the transportation costs associated with travel for zoned students, magnet students, and Principal Agreement(PA) transfers. The data is misleading in terms of costs associated with principal agreement transfers as they are not bringing a single dollar of additional expense to the HISD. Principal Agreement transfers are not guaranteed transportation and are only allowed on to already existing routes that have space. Thus, any bus that has a PA student on it is already driving that route with their required gas and is not making any additional stops. Thus, the recommendation from HMW to kick PA transfer kids off the routes in January is unwarranted – and pretty darn mean. Some of those students, at least in our community, have been displaced by Harvey and have relied upon transportation to come & go to school. Kicking them off midyear is unconscionable. Especially since they are not costing a penny more to the district.

Recommendation: Revisit the data table to remove any associated cost for PA transfer students and rework the per unit cost with a higher overall numerator. This will be clearer for the Board and anyone else looking to take action on the data. And let the PA kids ride the bus through the spring and make adjustments in the summer for Fall 2018.

Response: Riders for Principal Agreements are not supposed to be on any routes, based on the procedures of the Office of School Choice, as this agreement has the student being allowed to attend, based on the student being able to get to the campus. The ridership for this group will not be removed in January 2018, as announced in the previous ad-hoc meeting.

Chief Financial Officer – Rene Barajas

Concern:

1. Why is the benefits enrollment window so short this year?

Response: The Houston ISD annual enrollment for employee benefits this year was from November 2 through November 16. Employee Benefits annual enrollment is typically two weeks long. Last year, the annual enrollment period was from November 3 through November 17.

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All benefit-eligible employees should have received a confirmation statement of the benefits they are enrolled for in 2018. If an employee needs to make a correction to their 2018 benefit elections, they can do so by calling HISD Benefits Customer Service at 713-780-4473 by December 29. IRS and plan requirements prohibit making benefit changes after January 1, unless it is within the rules of a qualified life event.

Chief of Staff – Cynthia Wilson

Concerns:

1. Superintendent Listen & Learn: The superintendent committed last school year to make himself available to principals to discuss Special Education – the entire program. This was well received and principals felt respected, empowered, and informed. We would recommend that the superintendent make this same commitment to hear from principals about decentralization. There aren't many of us still around when the entire shift began in the very late 90s yet there is great knowledge for him to understand. Most of the institutional memory has left and we worry that, perhaps some voices are getting access while they have never (or not anytime recently) served in the role of campus principal.

Response: While there have been ongoing conversations about the funding model for schools, no decisions have been made about the funding model for 2018-2019. The superintendent requested we develop a calendar of meetings with principals and other entities to discuss the changes that may be made to the funding formula. These meetings will begin in January and will include principals. The board will ultimately determine what funding formula will be implemented moving forward. That approval will be a part of the budget adoption process that will occur in May/June.

Recommendation: Voluntary meetings be set up similar to last year whereby interested principals can meet with Mr. Carranza and share their concerns while also hearing from him what exactly might be on the way. The continued mystery and vague assurances leave principals unsettled.

2. Based on comments by the Superintendent, action from the area schools offices, and the recent Chief of Staff Leadership Survey, there seems to be growing interest in shifting how schools are funded/organized. Specifically, a change from a decentralized structure to a centralized organization (i.e. staffing model for schools instead of the current structure). For principals with a deep history in the district this is alarming. When will a frank and honest conversation occur

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regarding this major/disruptive change that may be looming for HISD? Similar to last year when the Superintendent held open meetings with principals regarding special education, I would suggest that a similar structure be planned for principals. This would allow for those with a full history of the decentralization model to be given the chance to share their experiences. Otherwise there remains a fear that a very small group of individuals at HMW may be choosing their own “facts” about how decentralization can/should/does work well.

Response: The request for input was sent to staff members representing different levels and divisions throughout the district. The survey served as a vehicle to gain insight related to their understanding of where we are in the process for 12 areas in the portfolio of change happening at HISD. These changes are in various stages of consideration and implementation and we are exploring our options. As stated, the Superintendent and some Trustees have made comments about the current funding formula and are interested in reviewing data related to funding schools, programs and departments; and whether it is equitable and meeting the needs of our underserved students. The district embarked on the current funding model more than 20 years ago and there are leaders who have experienced one or both the Weighted Student Model (PUA) and the Staffing Model (FTE) during their careers in the district. Our model is unique among Texas districts and has been questioned by different superintendents, trustees and school leaders over the years. At this time, we are experiencing a budget deficit for a number of reasons. One of which is our status as a Recapture District. This reality has posed a budget challenge for us and will continue to present challenges as those payments increase annually. The district is exercising the option to study all budget options to address our financial position.

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