

Houston ISD Co-Hosts Symposium for State and National Dialogue on Performance Pay in Education

[The Houston Independent School District](#) (HISD), [Battelle for Kids](#), and [The University of Texas System Institute for Public School Initiatives](#) recently hosted a national [Differentiated Compensation in Education Symposium](#) to explore practical applications and lessons learned by leading differentiated compensation programs across the country.

More than 200 individuals, representing 24 states, engaged in learning sessions and dialogue about a school improvement strategy that clearly evokes strong positions.



Educational professionals, including teachers, district-, state-, and national-level officials hear lessons learned from pioneering districts.



Held November 9 and 10 in Houston, the symposium was made possible with support from the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) and the [National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University](#).

HISD's program has been recognized by President Barack Obama, and the U.S. Department of Education is now tying a portion of education stimulus funding to the establishment of such programs.

In 2007, HISD launched the largest performance-pay program in the nation, called the [ASPIRE Award Program](#). In January 2009, HISD paid out \$31.5 million in bonuses to 15,800 campus-based employees through the ASPIRE Award Program to recognize their excellence in raising students' academic progress in the 2007–2008 school year. The top bonus for a core teacher was \$8,580, and the average bonus was \$2,749.



Since its inception, the ASPIRE Award Program has paid out more than \$70 million in performance pay to employees who produced the highest levels of student academic growth and achievement. The program is based largely on achievement data and value-added analysis as measured by SAS® EVAAS®—a statistical method used to measure teachers' and schools' impact on students' academic progress rates from year to year. HISD developed and began implementing the ASPIRE Awards as one of the components of its [ASPIRE](#) (*Accelerating Student Progress. Increasing Results & Expectations*) model in the 2007–2008 school year.

This comprehensive model connects all of HISD's educational-improvement and performance-management efforts and serves as a decision-making framework for new or existing initiatives across the district. ASPIRE's four core components—*Developing Human Capital, Improving Teaching and Learning, Informing Practice, and Recognizing Excellence*—serve as the catalysts to focus HISD's work and achieve the district's mission.

Through ASPIRE, HISD has achieved record-breaking successes. For example, in 2005, only 12 percent of HISD schools were rated either Exemplary or Recognized by the Texas Education Agency, making it one of the lowest-performing districts in Harris County. Now, in 2009, 73 percent of HISD schools have earned the state's highest ratings, meaning nearly three out of every four schools are rated either "Exemplary" or "Recognized." For more information about ASPIRE, visit www.houstonisd.org/ASPIRE.

A Symposium on Practical Applications and Lessons Learned, November 9–10

HISD, with co-hosts brought together a robust agenda, with key content experts bringing the national, state and district perspectives to share lessons learned, practical information, performance-pay model design options and offer advice to other districts.

Jo Anderson Jr., Senior Advisor to the Secretary of Education, along with other USDOE staff, held two interactive sessions, and Jerel Booker, Associate Commissioner of Educator Quality, Standards, and Initiatives, Texas Education Agency presented on improving student learning in high-needs schools.



Carla Stevens, HISD's Assistant Superintendent for Research and Accountability, discusses the successes of the ASPIRE Award Program with symposium attendees.

In addition to the strong line-up of presenters, panel discussions and dialogue leaders, the symposium provided networking opportunities and drilled down sessions on core topics, such as engaging unions, and financing and sustaining awards programs.

In addition to the continued exchange of ideas on this timely topic, Battelle for Kids will be hosting post-meeting webinars, discussion forums, and ongoing educational opportunities for the attendees.

About Houston Independent School District

The Houston Independent School District is the largest school district in Texas and the seventh-largest in the U.S. with 296 schools and more than 200,000 students. The 301-square-mile district is one of the largest employers in the Houston metropolitan area with nearly 30,000 employees. As a result of tremendous academic gains in recent years, a record 205 HISD schools achieved Texas' top ratings of Exemplary or Recognized in 2009. For more information about HISD, visit <http://www.houstonisd.org>.