HISD Teachers and Campus Staff Earn $35 Million for Boosting Student Achievement

Superintendent Terry Grier will Visit Two Top Teachers on Wednesday

January 24, 2012 – Students across the Houston Independent School District achieved unprecedented success in the classroom in 2010-2011, and the educators most responsible for the gains will receive their financial awards on Wednesday.

HISD is paying a total of $35 million to 12,390 campus employees under the ASPIRE Award program that aims to recognize those whose hard work resulted in students making more progress in one year than their peers elsewhere.

HISD students showed significant academic progress in 2010-2011. The number of students not just passing, but scoring at the tougher “commended” level on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills has never been higher. The district’s dropout rate has never been lower under the state’s current reporting system, and the percentage of students graduating from high school on time has never been higher.

Classroom teachers in HISD are receiving the bulk of the ASPIRE Award money – $30.5 million spread among 9,162 teachers. The average ASPIRE Award for teachers is $3,324.26.

This year, four teachers at four different campuses received the highest payout of $10,300. Those teachers are Debra Bunton (Highland Heights Elementary), Marcos Giannotti (Hobby Elementary), Chavis Mitchell (Osborne Elementary), and Stephanie Spurling (Hartsfield Elementary).

“These teachers personify the firmly held belief shared by all members of Team HISD that every child has the ability to excel in the classroom under the guidance of quality teachers working in schools led by great principals,” said HISD Superintendent Terry Grier. “The value that HISD educators bring to our city is immeasurable and these ASPIRE Awards are one way of recognizing the impact they have on our children.”

On Wednesday, Jan. 25, 2012, Dr. Grier will visit classrooms of two of the four highest-earning teachers, both of whom work in schools located in the Acres Homes community. At 10 a.m., Dr. Grier will spend time in the classroom with teacher Chavis Mitchell at Osborne Elementary (800 Ringold). A fifth-year Osborne teacher, Mitchell is the school’s lead writing teacher. Principal Jacqueline Parnell says Mitchell is known for engaging...
his students with his creative use of classroom technology and his ability to make even the most mundane tasks, such as spelling tests, interesting. Mitchell’s students conduct funerals for “dead words” such as “mad,” “sad,” and “glad.” He instead encourages them to use more descriptive and colorful words in their writing.

At 10:35 a.m., Dr. Grier will visit the classroom of Highland Heights Elementary (865 Paul Quinn) teacher Debra Bunton. Bunton is also in her fifth year at Highland Heights, where she teaches students who are learning English as a second language. A graduate of HISD’s Wheatley High School, Bunton said she meets weekly with Principal Kettisha Jones to review each individual student’s progress and design instructional approaches geared toward meeting each student’s needs.

Top Campuses

The ASPIRE Award payouts for teachers in core subjects, such as math, science, social studies, and language arts, are based on their students’ academic gains compared to their peers. Other ASPIRE Award amounts were based on campuswide academic performance.

Schools with the highest average core teacher awards for 2010-2011 are:

Elementary Schools

- Hartsfield $7,610.00
- Osborne $7,275.36
- Highland Heights $7,053.39
- Hobby $7,025.49
- Felix Cook $6,678.28

Middle Schools

- Kaleidoscope $7,975.00
- Grady $7,514.71
- Pin Oak $6,750.00
- Fondren $6,568.75
- Burbank $6,302.08

High Schools

- Eastwood Academy $7,612.82
- DeBakey $7,454.42
- Sharpstown $7,140.31
- North Houston Early College $7,055.56
- Lee $6,697.69
Changes were made to the 2010-2011 ASPIRE Award system in an effort to make the criteria more rigorous. Employees with more than 10 days absent from work are disqualified from consideration. In addition, only employees who are considered to be in good standing are eligible. Those who resigned or retired in lieu of termination no longer receive awards. In addition, employees who were on a growth plan or intervention plan based on results of their appraisal or the staff review process determined by multiple measures at any time during the school year could not receive an award.

Due largely to these changes, the number of teachers receiving ASPIRE Award payments this year was 9,162, compared to 11,212 a year ago, an 18 percent decrease. The total number of campus-based employees receiving an ASPIRE Award was 12,390, compared to 16,515 last year, a 25 percent decrease.

ASPIRE Awards are paid from a combination of funding sources. This year, a state grant covered nearly $12 million of the cost. A federal grant covered $4.5 million. The remaining $18.5 million in award money came from HISD’s general fund.