As reported in the January-March 2016 edition of ASPIRE eNews, the ASPIRE Linkage and Verification period began on April 25, 2016. This followed a campus set-up period where principals and support team members initially reviewed campus rosters to ensure all staff and core classes needing linkage were accounted for.

At this time, all campus-based staff need to do the following:
1. Log on to the ASPIRE portal: HTTP://bfk.me/ASPIRE
2. Click on “Link”
3. Review your tentative eligibility and award categorization; take note of the information in the “Tentative Eligibility Status” article on page 2. If you have any concerns with information in that area, contact your principal and support team immediately. Only they have the ability to request overrides at this time.
4. Click on the “Acknowledge” button. If you are NOT a core teacher of STAAR-, EOC-, or TELPAS-tested classes in grades 3 and up, you are done! Otherwise, proceed to #5.
5. Core teachers (teachers of STAAR-, EOC-, or TELPAS-tested classes in grades 3 and up), review your Class Rosters and complete Student Linkages. If you are missing a class roster, contact your principal and support team immediately. Only they have the ability to add (or delete) class rosters.
6. If you need assistance, please see the resources listed on the article below or send an email to ASPIREaward@houstonisd.org.

The deadline to complete linkage and verification is May 13, 2016.

**ASPIRE Linkage & Verification Assistance**

For personal assistance in the linkage and verification process, optional in-person workgroups and call-in WebEx sessions will be held. Please see [http://portal.battelleforkids.org/Aspire/linkage-verification/aspire-rv/workgroups](http://portal.battelleforkids.org/Aspire/linkage-verification/aspire-rv/workgroups) for the schedule, locations, and registration instructions. We highly encourage you to attend one of these sessions if you have never completed the linkage process in the past.

If you are unable to attend a workgroup or WebEx session, video tutorials with linkage and verification instructions are also available this year at [http://portal.battelleforkids.org/Aspire/linkage-verification/aspire-rv/tutorials-video](http://portal.battelleforkids.org/Aspire/linkage-verification/aspire-rv/tutorials-video):
- Linkage QuickStart (for Teachers and Campus-Based Staff)
- Verifying your ASPIRE Award Information
- Linkage QuickStart (for Principals and Support Teams)
- Campus Setup
- Monitoring Teacher Completion
- Review and Approval

In addition, the following support resources, among others, are located on the ASPIRE portal at [http://portal.battelleforkids.org/Aspire/linkage-verification/aspire-rv/resources](http://portal.battelleforkids.org/Aspire/linkage-verification/aspire-rv/resources). These documents include detailed step-by-step instructions for completing each step in the linkage and verification process:

- Linkage and Verification Principal Information
- Principal Checklist
- Principal QuickStart Guide
- Principal User Guide
- Teacher and Staff QuickStart Guide
- Teacher and Staff User Guide
- Linkage Enhancement Guide
- Special Cases

**Important Upcoming Dates**

- **Friday, May 13, 2016:** Teacher Linkage and Verification Period ends
- **Monday, May 16, 2016:** Principal Confirmation Period begins
- **Friday, May 20, 2016:** Principal Confirmation Period ends

**Inside this issue:**

- Tentative Eligibility Status
- ASPIRE Portal Refreshed
- ASPIRE & FML
- Leaving HISD
Tentative Eligibility Status Explained

During the Linkage and Verification period, employees are encouraged to review their ASPIRE eligibility status by going to the Tentative Award Information section of their Link page. This section will show a red X or a green check to indicate tentative eligibility status.

Why is the eligibility status tentative, and when will it be final?

There are 14 general eligibility requirements and one payout requirement for the ASPIRE program. You can access this list and how you stand against each requirement by clicking on the “View Details” link beside your eligibility status indicator.

All 14 requirements rely on data from multiple systems. Data is initially pulled a few weeks before the Linkage and Verification period begins and is used to determine whether or not an employee meets each requirement. Some eligibility points are set after this initial data pull. For example, an employee’s start date for the school year, job title, and full-time status are set by the ASPIRE cut-off date, Sept. 8, 2015. However, some eligibility points can be determined only after the school year ends:

- **Employees must be continuously employed through the last day of school.** Employees must be in a campus-based eligible position through May 26, 2016.
- **Employees cannot take a leave of absence during the eligibility period.** The eligibility period runs through the last instructional day; employees who take a leave of absence during the school year will not be eligible.

- **Employees cannot be absent for more than 10 instructional days during the “instructional school year.”** Total absent hours cannot be calculated until after the end of the school year. This is why, for some employees with issues on attendance (Time Correction, FML), final eligibility cannot be calculated despite having the time correction or FML issues resolved.
- **Employees who receive a final summative rating of “Ineffective” or “Needs Improvement” … are not eligible to receive an ASPIRE award payment.** Summative rating data is not available until Fall 2016. For many teachers, final summative ratings include student performance ratings which may include value-added scores that are calculated over the summer.
- **Employees who were on a Prescriptive Plan of Assistance (PPA) based on the 2015-2016 information… and whose performance goals were not met prior to the first instructional day of the following school year are not eligible.** Data for this eligibility point is not finalized until after the first day of 2016-2017 school year.
- **Employees who retire in lieu of termination or resign in lieu of termination are not eligible to receive an award payment.** The final list of employees leaving the district and the manner by which they left the district at the end of the school year will not be available until after the end of the school year.
- **ASPIRE Pending HR Review** This eligibility point is dependent on the completion and results of an employee’s HR investigation. Should an employee be found clear of all allegations and reinstated to their campus-based eligible position, they will be considered eligible to receive an award payment.

Employees will have an opportunity to review their final eligibility status on the ASPIRE portal in September. Employees who leave the district will continue to have access to the ASPIRE portal through February 2017.

Check your Tentative Eligibility Status Now!

Raise any concerns with your principal or campus support team so they may submit an override request if appropriate.
ASPIRE Portal Refreshed

If you’ve been to the ASPIRE portal lately, you’ve noticed a brand new homepage! With this portal update, you can now:

1. Easily access Growth Data and materials to understand calculations and interpret reports.
2. Complete Linkage and Verification and easily find resources to navigate and understand the process.
3. Seamlessly access information on awards program eligibility and rules and pursue the inquiry process.
4. Leverage learning opportunities.
5. Easily connect with support to answer questions.

To log in to your My Resources page, click on the green box on the upper right corner of the homepage that says “My Resources Login.”

Leaving HISD?

Don’t leave your ASPIRE Award behind!

Did you know that you could still receive a 2015-2016 ASPIRE Award even if you leave the district? As long as you meet all ASPIRE eligibility requirements, leaving the district does not disqualify you from receiving your ASPIRE Award.

To stay informed about the 2015-2016 ASPIRE Award program, you must:

- Confirm your correct mailing address now on the Employee Self Service page, accessible through the HISD Employee Portal. If you need to change your address after you leave the district, email HRanswerline@houstonisd.org with your new address. The ASPIRE team will send reminder postcards via regular mail to former employees in September and December.

- Mark your calendars for the 2015-2016 inquiry periods. The eligibility inquiry period is tentatively scheduled to start on 9/19/16 and end on 10/7/16. The eligibility inquiry period is the only opportunity to appeal your eligibility status; no appeals about eligibility will be processed during the final award inquiry period. Final award inquiry period is tentatively scheduled to start on 11/16/16 and end on 12/9/16. Once the final award inquiry period closes, final award amounts will be calculated and appeals will no longer be accepted through the ASPIRE portal.

- Check the ASPIRE portal for information regularly. Although former employees will no longer have access to the HISD Employee Portal or to their HISD email address, former employees will still have access to their ASPIRE accounts throughout the 2015-2016 ASPIRE Award period, which lasts through February 2017.

Current and former employees will be held to the same ASPIRE deadlines.

ASPIRE & Family Medical Leave (FML)

As in previous years, the 2015-2016 ASPIRE Award program has an attendance requirement. Employees may not be absent for more than 10 days. Some absences do not count against ASPIRE eligibility. Funeral leave, military leave, assault leave, jury duty, religious holidays, vacation pay, compensatory time, authorized off-campus duty, and approved Family Medical Leave (FML) are among the absences that are held harmless against ASPIRE eligibility.

If there is any uncertainty whether an absence is covered under FML, or if they wish to apply for leave benefits, or if there are any concerns about FML start and end dates used in calculating your ASPIRE eligibility, employees should contact the Houston ISD Absence Management Service Center. HISD’s Human Resources department also is still available to support employees who may have additional questions.

Houston ISD Absence Management Service Center
PO Box 34890
Louisville, KY 40232

Phone: 877-780-4473 (7 a.m.-7 p.m., Monday-Friday)
Fax: 866-568-6444
Website: https://absence.adp.com