What’s New for Linkage and Verification!

Because there is no Norm-Referenced Test (NRT) this year, only teachers who teach STAAR- or TELPAS-tested courses will need to complete linkage.

Also, all Reading and Language Arts teachers in grades 3-8 will now link for content area “ELA” and will receive an EVAAS analysis based on STAAR Reading results. Writing teachers in grades 4 and 7 will also link for content area “Writing” and will receive an EVAAS analysis based on STAAR Writing results.

Linkage is required for the following grades/subjects:

* Grades 3-8 ELA and Math
* Grades 4 and 7 Writing
* Grades 5 and 8 Science
* Grade 8 Social Studies
* Grades 3-8 TELPAS

Student-teacher linkages used for teacher reports for EVAAS:
- ELA (STAAR Reading) for students in grades 3-8
- Writing (STAAR Writing) for students in grades 4 and 7
- Math (STAAR Math) for students in grades 3-8
- Science (STAAR Science) for students in grades 5 and 8
- Social Studies (STAAR Social Studies) for students in grade 8
- English I (STAAR End-of-Course Exam) typically administered in grade 9, but for all students up to grade 12
- English I (STAAR End-of-Course Exam) typically administered in grade 9, but for all students up to grade 12
- English II (STAAR End-of-Course Exam) typically administered in grade 10, but for all students up to grade 12
- Algebra I (STAAR End-of-Course Exam) typically administered in grade 9, but for all students up to grade 12. This includes students in grades 7 and 8 who take the Algebra I EOC instead of the STAAR Math exam
- Biology (STAAR End-of-Course Exam) typically administered in grade 9, but for all students up to grade 12
- US History (STAAR End-of-Course Exam) typically administered in grade 11, but for all students up to grade 12

Teachers of ELL Students in Grades 3-8:
- TELPAS (Grade 3-8 ELL students in ESL/ELD courses): Student-teacher linkages used to calculate teacher reports for TELPAS Comparative Growth only
- ELA + TELPAS (Grade 3-8 ELL students in ESL or ELD courses): Student-teacher linkages used to calculate teacher reports for ELA EVAAS and TELPAS Comparative Growth
- Writing + TELPAS (Grades 4 and 7 ELL students in ESL or ELD courses): Student-teacher linkages used to calculate teacher reports for Writing EVAAS and TELPAS Comparative Growth
- ELA + Writing + TELPAS (Grade 7 ELL students in ESL or ELD courses): Student-teacher linkages used to calculate teacher reports for ELA EVAAS, Writing EVAAS, and TELPAS Comparative Growth

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2015-2016 Linkage...
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Linkage and Verification for All Campus-Based Employees
Linkage and verification begins on April 25 for all campus-based employees. The linkage process is important because it provides validity and transparency in ensuring that the data that are used to calculate teacher-level value-added reports and comparative growth reports are accurate.

Note: All student–teacher linkages made during this period are final. This information is used, along with test scores, to generate value-added scores and reports, to generate Comparative Growth reports, and to calculate ASPIRE Awards. Value-added scores cannot be recalculated once submitted to SAS EVAAS® shortly thereafter. Value-added and Comparative Growth information is also used in HISD staffing decisions and in the Teacher Appraisal and Development System. It is extremely important, therefore, to complete, review, and correct student-teacher linkages during the stipulated time period.

If you are a core foundation teacher in the above grade levels and subjects and do not complete this process, your value-added report and comparative growth report will be based on the linkage provided by your principal or campus support team after the teacher linkage period closes. If you do not complete this process, you may not meet eligibility criteria for the ASPIRE award, and may not be awarded either the individual award or the campus-level awards.

Linkage data submitted should accurately reflect classroom and campus practices. This means that if a student appears on a teacher's roster, but the teacher was not responsible for instruction of that student in that content area, the student should not be linked. The reverse is also true; if a student does not appear on a teacher's roster, but the teacher was responsible for instruction of that student in that content area, the student should be added to the roster and linked.

If you are not a core foundation teacher in the above grade levels and subjects, your position on the campus does not require student linkages, but you do still need to verify your position on the campus.

The verification process ensures that no campus-based employee is inadvertently left off the campus roster for award purposes and that employees' eligibility and award grouping status are calculated accurately. Although it happens concurrently with Linkage, Verification is a totally separate process and has a different purpose. The purpose of the verification process is two-fold:

• Review and verify your ASPIRE eligibility, especially attendance
• Review and verify your award grouping

The ASPIRE system determines eligibility and award categorization based on rules and data from multiple systems. While the application of these rules are straightforward for most staff, some staff members work outside of their job descriptions and may end up with an eligibility status or award group that is incorrect. Your task is to review the information and discuss problems or corrections with your principal for resolution. This is not your final ASPIRE award eligibility, as some factors affecting eligibility can only be computed upon completion of the school year. However, it is important that you review your ASPIRE information so that you can still take action during the school year, especially for the following issues listed below.

Eligibility issues
During the 2014-2015 ASPIRE Award inquiry periods, 246 employees submitted inquiries because they were not eligible due to absences. Most of the inquiries were due to the following:

• Family Medical Leave (FML): If you need to take time off for medical reasons either for family or self, it is your responsibility to seek Family Medical Leave (FML) if needed; discuss this with your HR Business Partner immediately. FML can be intermittent or continuous. Some common examples of FML are as follows: care of parent, surgery, birth of child, intermittent chemotherapy treatment, etc. FML must be approved by Human Resources. Providing a doctor's note does not meet the threshold of FML.

If you need to take time off periodically as part of continuing treatment plans, you should discuss taking an intermittent FML with your HR Business Partner. Similar to regular FML, intermittent FML must be approved by Human Resources.

If you already applied and were approved for FML and have returned to work, you can check your eligibility status to make sure your absences under FML were held harmless.

If you were out under Workman’s Compensation, you need to check whether your absences were covered under FML as well. Workman’s Compensation absences are not automatically held harmless; the absences have to be taken concurrently with FML protection to be considered harmless.

• Absence Codes: If you believe you were absent for less than 10 days but your ASPIRE eligibility indicates otherwise, it may be due to incorrectly entered absence codes. Employees need to monitor their absence information through the employee portal or pay advice documents. If any discrepancy is found, they need to work with their campus time keeper immediately; it is best to make these corrections during the school year when the absences were taken.

Categorization issues
ASPIRE Award groupings are calculated using data from PeopleSoft and Chancery. Sometimes, an employee’s award group is an inaccurate reflection of the employee’s actual responsibilities on campus. You need to review your award grouping and discuss any concerns with your current principal while you are still on the campus upon which your award grouping is based.

Job titles are a major factor in the calculation of an employee’s ASPIRE Award group. You need to review the job title upon which your ASPIRE award grouping is based. If the job title on record is not the job title you believe you have, you need to discuss and resolve the matter with your principal before the school year ends.

Once you have reviewed your tentative ASPIRE eligibility and award grouping, you will need to check the box stating you have reviewed your ASPIRE information to indicate you have completed the Verification process.
ASPIRE Linkage and Verification Timeline

Dates have been set for all parts of the ASPIRE linkage process, as follows:

April 18–22: Campus Setup Period

This is an opportunity for the principal and/or support team members at a campus to ensure that all teachers of core foundation courses have the appropriate courses for which to provide linkages. Principals and support team members also take this opportunity to review tentative eligibility and award categorization for all staff at the campus, and submit override requests to make any changes that are necessary.

April 25–May 13: Teacher Linkage and Verification Period

Campus-based staff are required to log in to the ASPIRE portal during this period and verify their tentative award categorization and eligibility. Teachers of core foundation classes that require linkage (see below) are required to review their rosters, add students, and provide percentage of instructional time for their students. Teachers are responsible for the accuracy of the linkages they have provided.

May 16–20: Principal Confirmation Period

Principals are required to log in to the ASPIRE portal during this period and confirm the linkages that were provided by their core foundation teachers. Principals are also asked to review award eligibility and award categorization for the staff at their campuses. Principals are ultimately responsible for all student-teacher linkages submitted by the teachers at their campus.

Assistance is available!

User Guides

User guides for principals and support team members as well as for teachers will be posted on the ASPIRE portal. These user guides include step-by-step instructions for completing linkage.

Workgroups

The ASPIRE team from the Research & Accountability department is pleased to once again offer in-person workgroups to teachers, support team members, and principals to assist with the linkage process. The workgroups will be held at locations across the district during after-school hours until 5:30 p.m. so as not to interfere with instruction. These opportunities for assistance are optional for principals, support team members, and campus-based staff who would like assistance in completing the campus setup, teacher linkage, and/or principal confirmation process.

Workgroups will be scheduled twice each week during the School Setup Period (April 18–22), the Teacher Linkage Period (April 25–May 13), and the Principal Confirmation Period (May 16–20).

You will be able to sign up for workgroups through eTRAIN. Sessions will be added to eTRAIN as locations are selected and confirmed. Workgroup dates and times will also be posted prominently on the ASPIRE portal and will be sent out through an Academic Services Memo. We look forward to assisting you at a workgroup held near you.

WebEx

The ASPIRE team from the Research & Accountability department will also host live WebEx sessions twice each week during the School Setup Period (April 18–22), the Teacher Linkage Period (April 25–May 13), and the Principal Confirmation Period (May 16–20). These sessions allow campus-based staff to call in with questions and receive answers without having to travel to an in-person workgroup session. WebEx sessions will be held during after-school hours until 5:30 p.m. on the days when there is no workgroup session.

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, 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

2015 ACT and SAT Student Projections Available on SAS EVAAS® Website

Currently, there is updated enrollment information for students for the 2015–2016 school year; you can continue to search for students based on where they are currently enrolled. Student Projection reports for STAAR, STAAR EOC, SAT, and ACT have been available through the EVAAS® website since Sept. 20, 2015.

Starting in May, student enrollment and projections will be based on expected campus enrollment for the 2016–2017 school year.

Direct access to the EVAAS® website is available by clicking here.
The ASPIRE Award inquiry period allows employees to raise questions and concerns about their ASPIRE eligibility and/or award estimates through a support ticket submitted within the ASPIRE portal. For the 2014-2015 ASPIRE Award program year, two inquiry periods were held. The intent was to have an inquiry period solely for concerns about eligibility and award grouping status first and another inquiry period solely for concerns about award calculation later in the fall. This allowed employees more time to gather documentation they might have needed to support their inquiries.

Current employees were sent emails and School Messenger callouts while former employees were sent postcards and School Messenger callouts informing them about the two inquiry periods.

The Eligibility Confirmation period started on Sept. 21, 2015, and lasted through midnight of Oct. 9, 2015. After the Eligibility Confirmation period ended, awards were calculated for those who were found eligible. The preliminary award estimates were posted on the ASPIRE portal on Dec. 2, 2015. The Final Inquiry period was open from this date through midnight of Dec. 16, 2015.

A total of 672 inquiries were submitted during both inquiry periods: 318 during the Eligibility Confirmation period and 354 during the Final Inquiry period. This is 36 percent less than last year’s total number of inquiries. Out of the 672 inquiries, 507 (75 percent) were resolved without any changes, 133 (20 percent) were resolved with changes to their eligibility status, 22 (3 percent) were resolved with changes to award grouping information, 7 (1 percent) were resolved with changes to miscellaneous information that did not affect ASPIRE eligibility, and 3 (0.5 percent) were withdrawn. Of the 133 resolved with eligibility changes, the reasons for the inquiry were broken down into the following:

- 78 percent: attendance
- 10 percent: PPA status
- 12 percent: other eligibility factors

Attendance issues still make up the majority of inquiries that lead to changes in ASPIRE information. Given this information, employees should continue to monitor their attendance information throughout the school year. If an employee is absent due to serious health issues (either their own or that of their immediate family member), they should consider applying for Family Medical Leave and contact the district’s Absence Management Service Center run by ADP and their HR Business Partner as soon as possible. If any errors are found in the pay stubs in terms of reported absences, the employee needs to work with their campus timekeeper to make corrections to their time. Keeping track of attendance during the school year will prevent errors in ASPIRE eligibility calculation.

### 2014-2015 ASPIRE Award Payout Summary

HISD paid a total of $17.1 million to 5,424 campus-based teachers and staff under the ASPIRE Award Program. The following HISD employee groups received ASPIRE awards:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award Group</th>
<th>Number Awarded</th>
<th>Minimum-Maximum Award</th>
<th>Average Award</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core foundation teachers</td>
<td>3,576</td>
<td>$187.50-$9,750</td>
<td>$4,079.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-core foundation teachers</td>
<td>619</td>
<td>$187.50-$2,250</td>
<td>$1,514.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional support staff</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>$110.25-$1,012.50</td>
<td>$559.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching assistants</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>$150-$862.50</td>
<td>$484.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational support staff</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>$250-$500</td>
<td>$498.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>$1,875-$11,250</td>
<td>$6,529.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Principals/Deans</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>$937.50-$5,625</td>
<td>$4,008.62</td>
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Questions or concerns about any information in this newsletter may be sent to: ASPIREaward@houstonisd.org.