

Remarks by HISD Superintendent of Schools Abelardo Saavedra
News Conference—Wednesday, February 4, 2009, 10:00 a.m.

In the past five years, the Houston Independent School District has looked squarely into the face of major challenges to make astonishing progress. By virtually any measure, this massive, complex, imperfect, stubborn, dedicated, irrepressible organization of wonderful people has done what many critics of public education have said could not be done: HISD has helped inner-city children make real, measurable, and sustained progress in the classroom.

Working alongside our hard-working Board of Education and our incredibly dedicated teachers and staff has been a joy for me for the last five years. I have been blessed to work in public education for 36 years, starting as a classroom teacher in 1972 in my hometown of Corpus Christi and eventually leading the seventh-largest school district in America.

While we have made much progress in the last five years, the work is not yet done. As a matter of fact, the work is never done—it is never complete. So you see, there is never a good time for this announcement. I have recently informed the school board of my intention to retire within the next year. I want to make sure that the board has adequate time to conduct a thorough and complete national search for my successor. Selecting a superintendent is the most important decision that a board makes. Making the right decision ensures that the progress that we have made as a district, as a community, will continue forward. I have full confidence the board will select an individual who will take this district to the next level of performance.

My parents taught me to leave a place better than it was when I arrived. I think I will be doing that when I leave HISD sometime within the next year. With the support of the board and the dedication and hard work of our central and regional administrators and their staffs, the tenacity and brilliant work of our principals, and the unwavering dedication and extraordinary work that our teachers perform in their classrooms every day, I am able to leave behind a school district that five years ago had nine Exemplary schools and today has 38, a district where being an Exemplary or Recognized school is the norm and not the exception, a district that beats the state by 10 percentage points in the percentage of Exemplary/Recognized schools, a district that improved commended performance in science by 87 percent, in math by 36 percent, and in reading and social studies by 35 percent—and this occurred in a period of just two years. During the same two years, HISD's growth in college-readiness has surpassed the state's, closing the gap between the district and the state to just five points in English and one point in math.

While I am proud of the successes of our students, teachers, and staff, I am most proud of having had the opportunity to have worked with such a dedicated, hard-working group of people who truly put children first.

As I enter my final year with HISD, we have much work to do in continuing the academic progress of our students. I look forward to continuing the work with our board, administrators, principals, teachers, and staff. When I started as superintendent on July 8, 2004, my first five months were as an interim, but frankly my behavior was never the behavior of an interim superintendent. With the support of the board and staff, we started immediately to transform this district. That pace for improving opportunities for our students will continue until my last working day. This superintendent simply does not know the meaning of interim, or lame duck!

Thank you for being with us.