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Houston, TX 77098

September 30, 2020

Honorable Dan Huberty
Texas House Committee on Public Education
1100 Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701

via Electronic Mail: education@house.texas.gov

RE: Interim Charge 1[A] and 1[B]

Dear Chairman Huberty and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to Interim Charge 1: *Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 86th Legislature*. Specifically, we will address Interim Charge 1[A] and 1[B].

[Good Reason Houston](#) champions a bold, city-wide vision that every child, in every neighborhood, excels in a world-class public school and thrives in the Houston of tomorrow. Partnering with school systems to create the conditions for leaders to think, act, and lead courageously, Good Reason Houston acts as a catalyst to drive change and dramatically improve educational outcomes across the Houston community with the mission of increasing the number of students learning in great schools.

Today, far too many children in the greater Houston area lack access to an education that will prepare them for the Houston of tomorrow. Over 50% of Houston students attend a school rated a C, D, or F by the Texas Education Agency.¹ Our reality is unacceptable, and each and every one of the over 514,000 children attending school in the Houston community need us to do better.

¹ See Appendix A.

Interim Charge 1[B]

For our community to better educate every child, it is critical we understand how our schools are performing and growing each year. Good Reason Houston supports a robust and transparent academic accountability system, this includes the A-F performance rating system created through **House Bill 22 (HB 22)**. While no rating system is perfect, A-F is an important tool for school leaders and the community as a whole to understand school quality in our cities. Importantly, Houston parents overwhelmingly support A-F. Good Reason Houston interviewed over a thousand families across our city to understand how families feel about our schools, what they want to see in our schools in the future, and how they see their role in driving change.² On the discussion of academic accountability, 80% of them support an A-F rating system as they believe it gives them an independent source of information to make the best decision for their child.³

An A-F academic rating system is a familiar and measurable way to assess quality across schools. It enables parents to evaluate their children's school and find high quality public schools in their area. We believe the A-F rating system is a snapshot in time, not an ultimate label on the school. It is the transparency of A-F that is a critical first step that sheds light on school performance so that school leaders may prioritize resources to support struggling schools and organizations like ours may provide target support to the district.

However, when extensive efforts break down, we believe longstanding academic failure compels state intervention in order to protect the interests of current and future students. In the 2018-2019 school year, nearly 15% (72,471) of Houston students attended a school rated a D or an F.⁴ Of these students, 94% (68,021) of them were either Black or Latino and 85% (61,953) of them were economically disadvantaged.⁵ Where there is a failure to end a cycle of low academic performance, the pattern of inequity harms low-income, Black and Hispanic students.

House Bill 1842 (HB 1842) state-required intervention, from the campus turnaround plans to the appointment of a board of managers in the more egregious situation of failing students for five consecutive school years, is an opportunity to overhaul ineffective practices, disrupt academic and governance breakdowns, and initiate bold school reforms in the interest of students. A school district does not find itself in the position of HB 1842 state intervention without having crossed certain thresholds over a reasonable period of time. Further, there are opportunities that the state incentivizes, such as **Senate Bill 1882 (SB 1882)**, that support turning around a struggling school campus and other aspects of HB 1842, such as the District of Innovation provisions, that should be maximized by school districts to the greatest extent in order to avoid state intervention. SB

² Good Reason Houston, [Houston Parent Research](#), 2019

³ See Appendix B.

⁴ See Appendix C.

⁵ *Id.*

1882 and DOI afford school districts the opportunity to have the greatest flexibility and autonomy needed to cut through unnecessary bureaucratic barriers that may impede academic success. The replacement of a school district board of trustees with a board of managers is never anyone's first choice. But, a school district's generational failure of our students is absolutely unconscionable.

School systems that struggle to transform low performing schools now have a great opportunity to leverage strategic dollars invested by the Texas Legislature through **House Bill 3 (HB 3)** last year. While we respectfully request that the Legislature preserve its historic investment in its entirety, in our submission we will speak to the Teacher Incentive Allotment, Compensatory Education Allotment, Early Education Allotment and the College Career and Military Readiness Bonus.

Interim Charge 1[A]

Houston has a teacher shortage crisis. As an example, three of our highest-poverty districts experience between 25 percent to 30 percent annual teacher turnover.⁶ Teacher retention issues disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged communities and negatively impact low performing schools.⁷ The transformational work needed to improve student outcomes at these low performing schools requires transformational teachers. Fortunately, with HB 3's **Teacher Incentive Allotment** (TIA) school systems are now greatly incentivized to identify their highly effective teachers and place them at high needs campuses. Through TIA these highly effective educators will have their hard work rewarded and students at struggling campuses will have the excellent teacher they deserve.

TIA is a multi-step, multi-year development and implementation process that takes significant financial and staff resources. Several Houston districts have received approval of their TIA designation systems and many more are engaged in the process of developing their system for approval.⁸ Any type of pause on TIA funding would be a significant loss to these districts, teachers, and students. Further, while a pause may sound benign, doing so creates a risk of continuing to delay the funding down the road. Further, it also creates a disincentive for districts who may become cautious about moving forward with redesigning their teacher evaluation system for fear of investing time and resources without knowing the TIA funding will be there to reward their educators. We ask that the Texas Legislature continue with its commitment to teachers and students with its full and continued funding of TIA.

The increase in the **Compensatory Education Allotment** (Comp Ed), and the nuanced and equity driven method for computing Comp Ed, is more critical now in the era of COVID-19 than ever,

⁶ See Appendix D. Houston Chronicle, [Revolving door: Teachers, principals churn through HISD's lowest-performing schools](#), Aug. 5, 2019.

⁷ Houston Chronicle, [Revolving door: Teachers, principals churn through HISD's lowest-performing schools](#), Aug. 5, 2019.

⁸ Texas Education Agency, [Teacher Incentive Allotment Participating Districts](#).

especially for Houston where 80% of our student population come from economically disadvantaged homes.⁹ As the global pandemic continues to upend the lives of our communities, we know that the students that will experience the greatest learning loss are those students with the greatest needs.¹⁰ It is imperative that Texas stay the course in directing more resources towards this vulnerable student population. This includes ensuring that the funding generated by these students goes back to closing the achievement back for these students. To do otherwise shifts the intent of these dollars and precludes us from learning the effectiveness of this funding.

Across Houston, only 37 percent of students are reading on grade level by the time they reach 3rd grade.¹¹ For economically disadvantaged students this falls to an abysmal 33 percent and Black students fair worse at 28 percent.¹² Aimed at improving these student outcomes, the **Early Education Allotment** (Early Ed Allotment) directs critical resources to our youngest learners. We are already seeing the Early Ed Allotment in action with some Houston districts transitioning from a mix of half-day and full-day pre-kindergarten to all full-day. Some districts, such as Aldine ISD have hired an Executive Director of Early Childhood Education to champion and implement a vision for high-quality pre-kindergarten throughout the district. The ability to invest in district infrastructure to support the development and implementation of an early learning strategy is foundational to an early childhood education program's success and we will see the positive impact in student outcomes in the later grades. This is possible through the Early Ed Allotment and similar to Comp Ed, it is critical that these funds are directed in the manner in which they are intended - improving student outcomes in pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade.

At the other end of the spectrum, only 47% of Houston students are college ready.¹³ We support the rigorous standard implemented by the **College, Career, Military Readiness Bonus (CCMR Bonus)** as it will work towards ensuring students complete a successful postsecondary transition after they graduate. The CCMR Bonus provides districts with a carrot to go above and beyond in preparing our students and rewards them for that achievement with additional funding to be investing towards improving student outcomes. It is critical to our state meeting its expressed 60X30 goal. Both districts and students will benefit greatly from the CCMR Bonus- and with the increase in students' readiness for postsecondary success,, our economy will as well.

In conclusion, we submit our response to Interim Charge 1 with respect and strongly urge this Committee to protect a strong and transparent academic accountability system and preserve the historic, strategic investment of HB 3. The legislation addressed within this response, given the impact of COVID-19 on our communities and our students, holds even greater weight and impact

⁹ [Good Reason Houston Data Dashboard.](#)

¹⁰ EmpowerK12, *Modeling the Impact of COVID-19 School Closures on Greater Houston Student Proficiency*, June 29, 2020.

¹¹ [Good Reason Houston Data Dashboard.](#)

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

on driving positive student outcomes. We appreciate that the Texas Legislature will have to make difficult budgetary decisions next legislative session; we implore you to protect your wise investment in our youngest Texans who are the future of our great state. As this Committee, and the Legislature as a whole, deliberates on crucial matters, we request that driving towards equitable student outcomes remains your North Star.

Should you have any questions or would like to discuss these matters please contact me. Thank you for your public service and for your commitment to all Texas students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alexandra Hales Elizondo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alexandra Hales Elizondo
Chief Executive Officer
Good Reason Houston

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Appendix A¹⁴

A-F Ratings - Summary

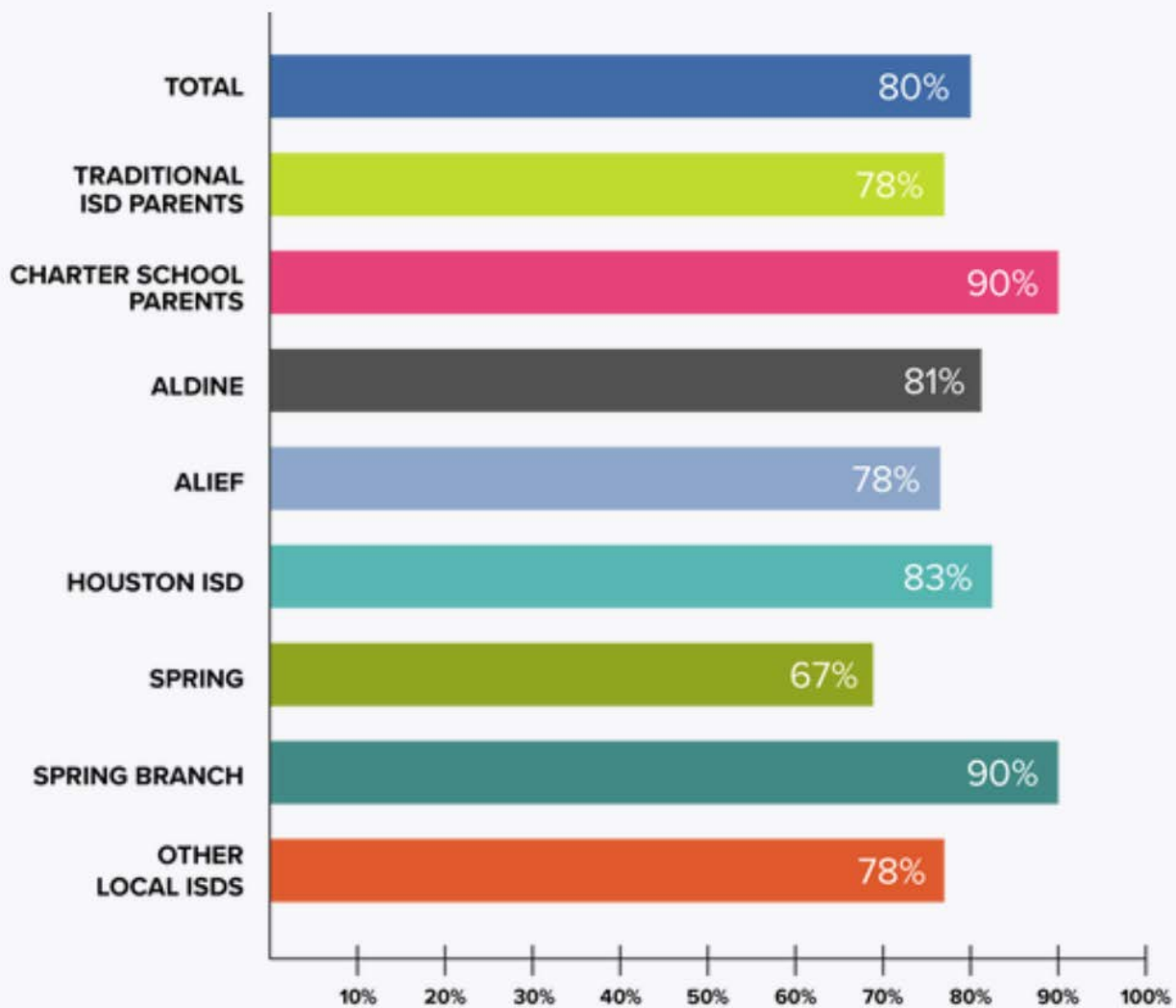
Overall Grade (group)	All	Black	Hispanic	White	Asian	Other (Race)	EcoDis	Non-EcoDis	ELL	Non-ELL
A & B	49%	36%	49%	69%	69%	55%	45%	63%	43%	51%
C	37%	41%	39%	25%	27%	30%	40%	26%	42%	35%
D & F	14%	24%	12%	6%	5%	15%	15%	10%	15%	14%

Overall Grade (group)	All	Black	Hispanic	White	Asian	Other (Race)	EcoDis	Non-EcoDis	ELL	Non-ELL
A & B	249,552	39,702	163,826	27,259	14,337	4,428	183,903	65,649	71,930	177,622
C	192,153	45,094	129,290	9,718	5,620	2,431	164,783	27,370	69,512	122,641
D & F	72,471	26,324	41,697	2,312	946	1,192	61,953	10,518	24,650	47,821

¹⁴ TEA Accountability, 2018-2019 reports. Note: (1) All districts within Harris County are included. (2) Campuses in Harris County for the following charter networks are included: KIPP Texas, YES Prep, School of Science and Technology, Harmony Science Academy, Harmony School of Excellence. This excludes Early Childhood/Pre-K campuses, campuses that serve up to second grade only and Alternative Education Campuses.

Appendix B¹⁵

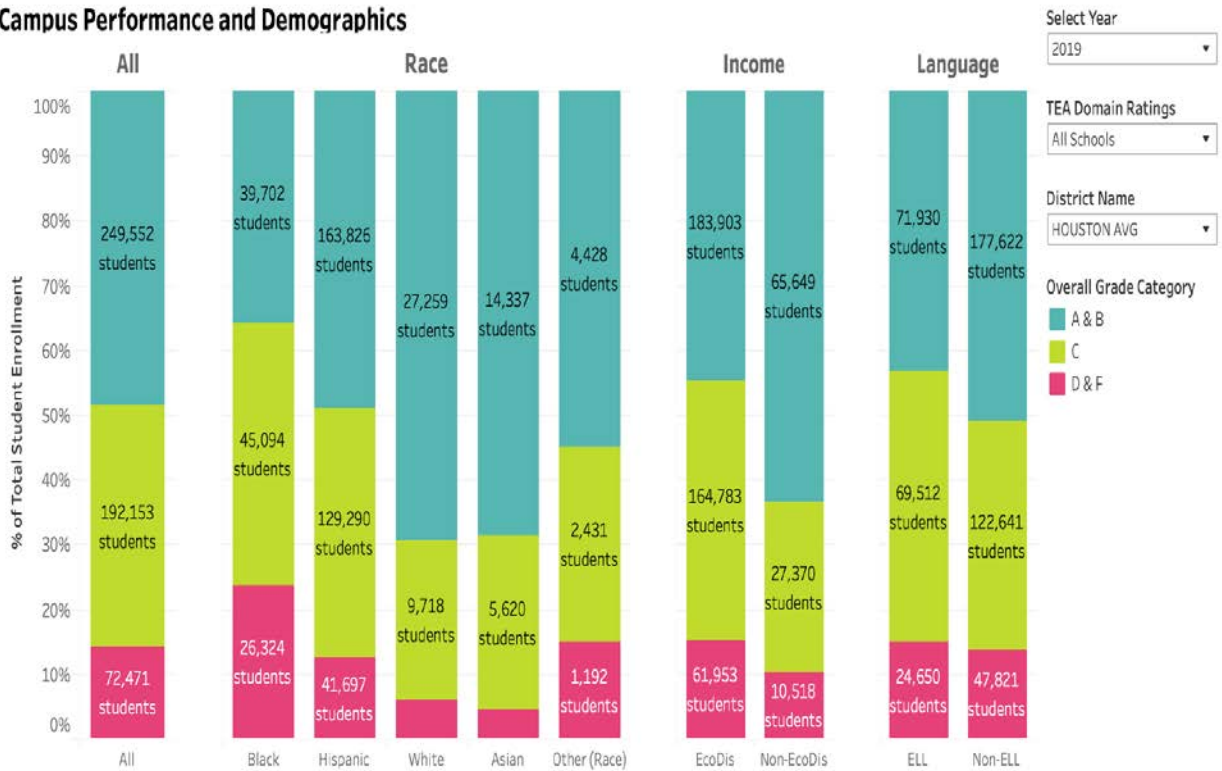
% WHO FEEL THE A-F RATING SYSTEM IS VERY OR EXTREMELY VALUABLE



¹⁵ Good Reason Houston, [Houston Parent Research](#), 2019.

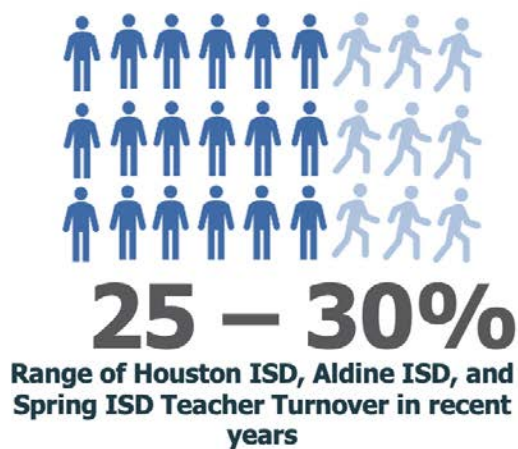
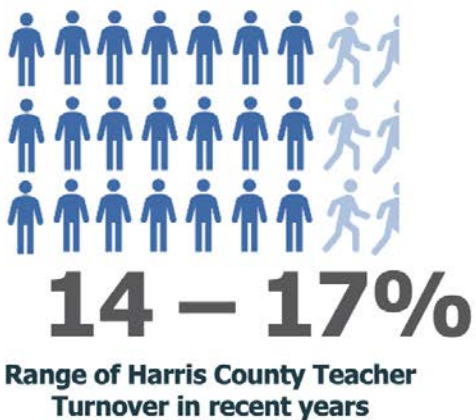
Appendix C¹⁶

Campus Performance and Demographics



¹⁶ TEA Accountability, 2018-2019 reports. Note: (1) All districts within Harris County are included. (2) Campuses in Harris County for the following charter networks are included: KIPP Texas, YES Prep, School of Science and Technology, Harmony Science Academy, Harmony School of Excellence. This excludes Early Childhood/PreK campuses, campuses that serve up to second grade only and Alternative Education Campuses.

Appendix D¹⁷



¹⁷ 2012 - 2017 TAPR data, Houston Chronicle, [Revolving door: Teachers, principals churn through HISD's lowest-performing schools](#), Aug. 5, 2019.