

The Impact of Academic, Social, and Emotional Programming for Disadvantaged Youth

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Executive Summary

Houston Independent School District (HISD) and 8 Million Stories (8MS), a non-profit organization dedicated to "transform[ing] the lives of vulnerable youth through education, skills training, employment, and authentic relationships," have joined forces to form The HISD REAL Program. The HISD REAL Program stands for Reimagining MY Education and Life.

The HISD REAL Program does not have a systematic system for collecting and analyzing data about its impact and student support. Stakeholder input is sought to address different student needs. Without understanding its impact, the program cannot ensure its objectives are met, particularly with respect to the decline in young people, particularly among young men of color, and the increase in school-to-prison pipelines. The HISD REAL Program aims to create a student-centered learning environment, distinct from traditional schools' one-size-fits-all approach. Data collection is essential to provide targeted support and prevent adverse outcomes for youth. The program has been implemented for four months, and a systematic assessment is needed. Through the results of this program, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) can influence changes in the school system and encourage other districts to implement similar programs.

The success of The REAL Program depends on a wide range of factors, including program goals, mission, vision, student involvement, participation, and the program environment. The HISD REAL Program was analyzed and compared with similar initiatives in the field using the conceptual framework, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which provided a framework for understanding and improving the program. SDT emphasizes intrinsic motivation and the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness to foster student engagement and success. By implementing SDT principles, educators can create an environment that promotes student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. Aligning The HISD REAL Program with SDT can help optimize its impact on students.

The three research questions addressed include; How effectively does The HISD REAL Program, as designed and delivered, align with its stated mission, vision, and goals?; How, if at all, does a student's perception of school change due to participating in The HISD REAL Program?; What factors impact a student's choice of being involved in The HISD REAL Program?

Three surveys were developed by The HISD REAL Program to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to share their perceptions of the program. Surveys were developed and distributed to students, parents, and staff. There were a total of 49 survey responses; 33 students, seven parents, and nine staff. We analyzed the surveys based on the research questions to see where the areas of improvement were. In addition, the organization provided documents for analysis. These documents included job descriptions, websites, the Operating Policies and Procedures Manual, professional development session agendas, an impact overview, emails, pictures, social media posts, and more.

Through data analysis, our findings included:

- There is not yet a full alignment of The HISD REAL Program with the stated mission and vision.
- The Human Resources department has a strong approach to diversity, but structural gaps remain.
- The HISD REAL Program is developing a practice of using data to establish and progress monitor improvement efforts and strategic priorities at multiple levels.
- The HISD REAL Program, community and partner engagement, is strong. However, communication with parents and the community must be more proactive and informative.
- Students in The HISD REAL Program motivation has increased due to the program components and support from staff.

Based on the findings, the recommendations proposed are as follows:

- Establish collective accountability systems and structures to ensure progress toward the desired future state based on a shared understanding of and investment in The HISD REAL Program's mission, vision, and theory of change.
- Improve recruitment, hiring, and retention of staff across all positions by developing new strategies.
- Ensure staff feedback and evaluation structures are aligned with organizational priorities by providing opportunities for professional learning, development, and ongoing support.
- Develop an equity-centered, data-informed culture throughout the organization by developing data management plans, key performance indicators, and practices.
- Develop a communication system that fosters relationships with all parents, particularly marginalized populations.
- Develop a Student Motivation Plan to increase student academic and social-emotional success.

As a result of the study's findings and recommendations, The HISD REAL Program will be able to strategically plan its second year based on immediate, short-term, and long-term suggestions.

Introduction

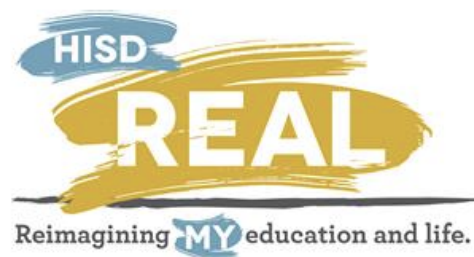
The partnering organizations for this project include Eight Million Stories (8MS) and the Houston Independent School District (HISD). 8MS and HISD have joined together to develop The HISD REAL Program (Reimagining My Education and Life), hoping to impact and support students academically, emotionally, and mentally that are close to graduation or graduation equivalency, but struggle due to various circumstances. The HISD REAL Program requires insight into the program's progress since it does not have a data tracking source. The purpose of this project was to develop a systematic approach to monitor progress and improve the program.

Organizational Context

Eight Million Stories (8MS), founded in 2017, is an independent 503c organization that aims to "transform the lives of vulnerable youth through education, skills training, employment, and authentic relationships" and "deconstruct" the school-to-prison pipeline (8 Million Stories, 2022). The main focus of 8MS is for students grades 9 through 12, including those in the justice system, homeless, foster care, etc., to be college and career ready, receive social/emotional support, and break generational poverty. Various programs within 8MS focus on the unique needs of the community and, in particular, the members within that program. Some 8MS programs include 8MS Ed, 8MS Works, Sons of Promise, REACH, and The HISD REAL Program.

The HISD (Houston Independent School District) REAL Program (Reimagining my Education and Life), also referred to as The HISD REAL Academy, motivates and inspires students who wish to attend college while acknowledging that some are likely to start their careers

right after school. The HISD REAL Program prepares students for high-paying, high-demand jobs with



upward mobility upon graduation. The HISD REAL Program currently partners with six high schools (Madison, Yates, Worthing, Wheatley, Milby, and Chavez) located on Houston, Texas's East and South sides. Graduation coaches and counselors from high schools identify students who may need extra support or different educational environments to be in the program. After referrals, the students complete an interview and must be part of all the extracurricular and enrichment programs. There are also a couple of open houses where students can come in and self-select into the program.

The HISD REAL Program has gone from serving 12 to almost 70 students, with hopes of continuously increasing enrollment. The HISD REAL Program hit max capacity in enrollment within its first four months and exceeded the district's expectations. They are in the early stages of conversations around scaling to serve more students in the coming years, and they have begun discussions of bringing this learning model into other Texas districts.

Houston Independent School District's (HISD) mission is "to provide all students with the tools necessary to reach their full potential," but it has had recent challenges re-engaging disconnected students. HISD defines disconnected students as those at the greatest risk of dropping out or have already dropped out of school. In August 2021, 5,440 high school students did not return to HISD. As of April 2022, 2,067 of the students were still unaccounted for. This large number of unaccounted students is a key motivator for The HISD REAL Program implementation.

HISD saw that 8MS was having success through their program 8MS Ed, which aims to "complete [student] education, embark on job readiness and career training, and [offer] various wraparound services that may be needed for youth in transition or at risk" (8 Million Stories, 2022). From this, HISD contacted 8MS to develop The HISD REAL Program.

A partnership between 8MS and HISD launched The HISD REAL Program in the Summer of 2022. The goals of this program are to support students through a holistic learning experience by completing their high school equivalency (diploma or GED) through personalized graduation plans, receiving job

training, social and emotional services, college and career advising, full-scope wraparound services, up to two years of support post-graduation, and more. The target grade level participants are 11th and 12th-grade students. The average high school student requires between 22 and 26 credits to graduate. Currently, students who enter the program have between zero and 12 credits, with most having between six and eight credits.

HISD PRESS RELEASE

HISD announces accelerated diploma program HISD REAL

Aug. 17, 2022 – Houston Independent School District, in partnership with Eight Million Stories, Inc., will be offering a new education option called HISD REAL. The primary goal of HISD REAL is to support disconnected students in earning their high school diploma through re-engagement strategies and innovative ways of learning.

“REAL is an accelerated diploma program that meets students where they are and allows them to reimagine what they can become by focusing on academics, workforce and life-readiness skills in a non-traditional school setting,” said Bianca Clark, REAL Program Manager.

Students must have at least 12 credits or be classified as 11th grade and zoned to one of the following high schools: Chavez, Milby, Wheatley, Sterling, Worthing, or Yates to participate. Eligible students will receive accelerated credit recovery, internship opportunities, College and Career Readiness advising, full wraparound services, and many more services to bolster their academic and post-high school graduation success.

“Our wraparound services reflect a program that ‘wraps its arms around’ students, providing them, not just with a great education, but with support and the extra services they need to be made whole,” said Marvin Pierre, Eight Million Stories Executive Director.

Unlike traditional education options, students in the HISD Real program attend a shortened school day from 9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. with accelerated learning to achieve positive outcomes.

About Eight Million Stories, Inc.

Eight Million Stories (8MS) is a nonprofit founded in 2017 to support disconnected youth in Houston, Texas. For more information, visit www.eightmillionstories.org.

The Houston Independent School District is the largest school district in Texas and the eighth-largest in the United States, with 276 schools and nearly 197,000 students. The 333-square-mile district is one of the largest employers in the Houston metropolitan area, with more than 27,000 employees.

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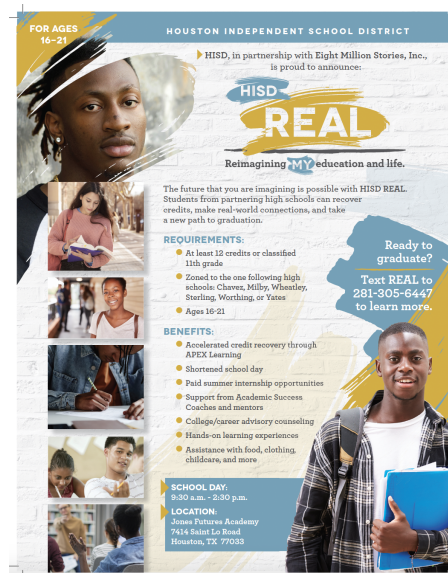
HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

The HISD REAL Program Press Release

We are partnering and analyzing the status of The HISD REAL Program, a collaboration between HISD and 8MS. Our primary contact is Marvin Pierre, the Co-Founder and Executive Director of 8MS. This project aims to analyze The HISD REAL Program, using HISD as a sample of the population of schools utilizing the program.

Strategic Approach/Pillars

One of the key aspects of The HISD REAL Program is its organizational strategy and approach. It is based on the belief that “the future you imagine is possible with The HISD REAL Program” (Virtual learning options / The HISD REAL Program). The program's primary goals are students' ability to recover credits, make The HISD REAL Program-life connections, and take another path to graduation. During the discussion with Mr. Pierre, he highlighted the importance of “*Love is the foundation*” and “*Meet students where they are*” (Eninger et al., M, Personal Communication, August 27, 2022).



The HISD REAL Program Flyer

Problem of Practice

The HISD REAL Program does not currently have a systematic process to collaborate, identify, collect, and analyze data regarding proof points of impact and support of student needs. The goal of this project was to obtain feedback from major stakeholders to see where improvements could be made within the program to best meet student needs in all areas (i.e., academic, social, emotional, etc.).

Without a clear understanding of the program's impact on young people, The HISD REAL Program cannot be certain that it is meeting its objectives. The school-to-prison pipeline is sweeping disproportionately high numbers of youth into the criminal justice system resulting in schools, communities, and the workplace losing young people, especially young men of color, due to zero-tolerance policies and in-school policing (8 Million Stories). Consequently, many juveniles on probation or parole are sent to prison for life, thus beginning a lifelong cycle of poverty and incarceration. Youth in juvenile justice who lack support struggle with employment prospects after their release from prison, struggle to integrate back into society, and have a high recidivism rate. Collecting data will allow us to see how we can positively and more accurately provide needs to prevent youth from entering the justice system, becoming homeless, entering foster care, not being college and career-ready, not receiving social/emotional support, and being in poverty.

When speaking with Mr. Pierre, he explained that The HISD REAL Program aims not to be a one size fits all model and wishes to create an environment where students can learn to be leaders and enjoy learning. Unfortunately, schools continue to teach in a one size fits all model, which makes learning less engaging and fun for students. We hope to learn through The HISD REAL Program where changes need to be made in school systems to reach disconnected and disengaged students.

The HISD REAL Program has only been implemented since Summer 2022, and 8MS has yet to be able to assess its progress adequately. In addition, they need a systematic approach to collecting and analyzing data. If 8MS can determine their impact, they will be able to make changes to better provide an alternative pathway for students who might not succeed in our traditional schools. Mr. Pierre also communicated that he would utilize our findings to help the school district rethink what is being learned in schools and for the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to see the program and create grants and policies allowing other school districts to create more programs like theirs.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders for this project are dispersed among three groups: students, parents, and staff. Students are the core stakeholders in this program. Past, present, and future students take leadership responsibilities in decision-making within The HISD REAL Program. As a result, their voices play a pivotal role in how the program is run.

Staff included as stakeholders associated with this project are the teachers, administrative staff, board of directors, program manager, director of operations, operations associate, parent and student engagement specialist, student support manager, director of education and job readiness, academic case managers, and transition coordinator. These key stakeholders help determine how the program will run to meet its goals best while adhering to proper rules and regulations. An outline of the staff stakeholders is shown in Figure 1.

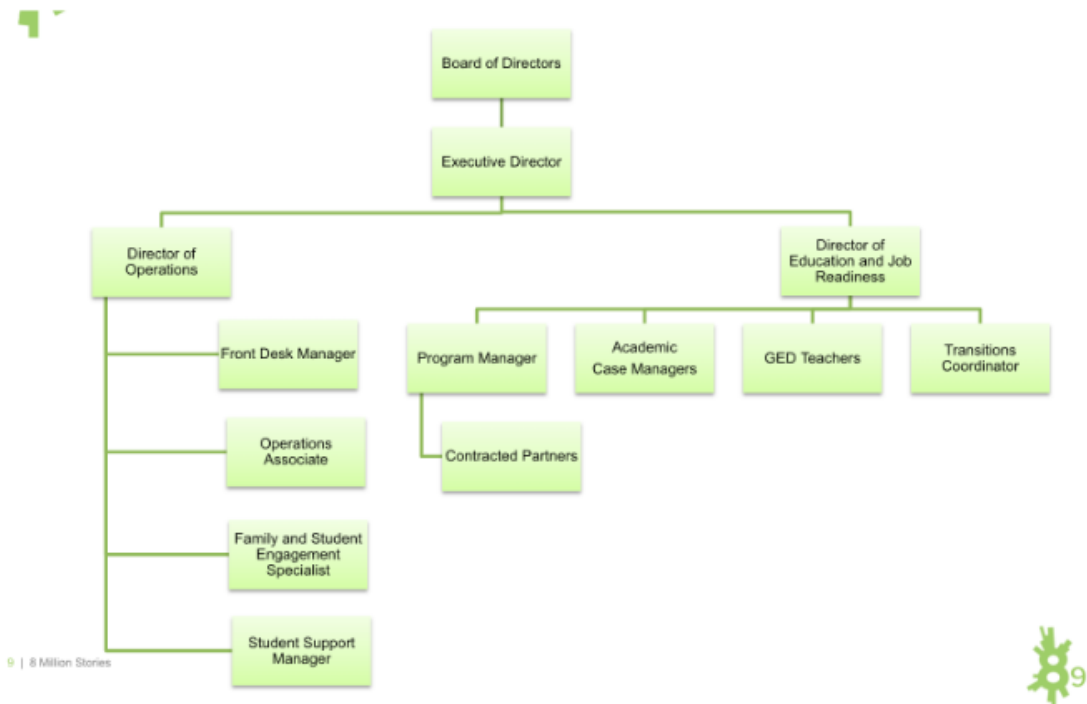


Figure 1: 8MS Organization Chart

Parents were included among the stakeholders to understand how they hoped the program would succeed. Acknowledging parents allowed for a better understanding of the background information of the students and the potential purpose of involvement with The HISD REAL Program.

Synthesis of Evidence

In the following section, we examined relevant literature pertaining to student needs, student motivation, and its relationship to engagement in high school completion. We leveraged these bodies of literature to utilize the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework that guided our research. The researched topics explored the various factors influencing why students struggle with not completing high school.

High-Risk Youths Not Completing High School or Equivalent

StatisticBrain.com (2014) found that 8,300 students drop out of high school each day, equaling 3,030,000 students annually, with 36% dropping out in ninth grade (Williams, 2019, p.77). In 2009, the national dropout rate was between 22-25% and was higher among Black and Hispanic students (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Nationally, students who traditionally attend alternative high schools are described as at-risk or wounded, who, by their circumstances, are statistically more likely than others to fail academically or who are beyond the point of “at-risk” and “suffer from hopelessness” (Williams, 2019, p.77). Typical characteristics of high school dropouts or disengaged students include students that are quiet, jaded, uninvolved, have personal challenges, have had negative experiences, and have ineffective or nonexistent support (Bowers & Sprott, 2012; Flores & Brown, 2019). Other characteristics include “retention in grade level, poor attendance, behavioral problems, low socioeconomic status or poverty, unsatisfactory achievement, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy... ethnic minorities, academically disadvantaged, disabled, characterized by low socioeconomic status, experienced trauma, or on a

probationary condition over past behavioral issues” (Williams, 2019, p.77). Other variables included when addressing students on the verge of dropping out are mobility and attitude toward school (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Incorporating inclusive practices will give students equal opportunities and support to decrease minority disparities (Dunning-Lozano, 2016). Alternative education opportunities also raise awareness of social justice and social inequality issues (Mills et al., 2016). Christenson and Thurlow (2004) found five critical considerations to prevent dropouts, including:

1. understanding dropout as a process that occurs over time,
2. considering the role of context and various risk and protective factors,
3. focusing on alterable variables that educators can influence,
4. promoting engagement and a positive orientation toward completion, and
5. relying on empirical evidence to determine the effectiveness of interventions.

Alternative education programs help students at risk of dropping out of school by providing personalized instruction, allowing for flexible learning schedules, supporting student needs, and giving individualized support (Nada et al., 2020). There is an increasing demand to meet our students' needs in the best way that will allow them to succeed, and this has led to the development of many different studies and programs being opened to meet the needs of students (De la Ossa, 2005). When environments are designed for disadvantaged and struggling students, students are given the ability to build self-confidence, foster agency, and obtain active participation in their educational process (McGregor et al., 2015).

Student Needs

Alternative high schools “provide opportunities for a unique population of students who do not find success in traditional schools” (Williams, 2019, p.77). Researchers found that programs with limited access to resources and support systems for students result in educational inequality for students of

minorities (Dunning-Lozano, 2016). The educational success of all students requires attention to both social and emotional learning and academics through cognitive, psychological, and behavioral engagement (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). "Effective alternative high schools service the whole child - academically, socially, emotionally, and developmentally" (Williams, 2019, p. 77). Focusing on the whole child and incorporating Social Emotional Learning (SEL) gives students a better ability to "acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (Domitrovich et al., 2017, p. 408). Social and emotional support must be provided, such as coping skills, promoting positive social interactions, and focusing on mental health issues (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015).

Williams (2019) explained that wrap-around services are vital to the success of students and their needs in order to be successful. Wrap-around services include positive relationships, supportive safety nets, counseling services, a food pantry, a toiletry pantry, laundry services, a bus pass bank, and post-secondary plans. Positive relationships mean there are meaningful, positive, and caring members to give students access, support, and opportunity (emotionally and instructional) in a positive, healthy, and trusting manner. Those who struggle in school benefit from access to individualized education, flexibility, support, and resources to meet their unique needs academically, socially, emotionally, and mentally (McGregor et al., 2015). Supportive safety nets include daily monitoring of attendance, offering online and traditional classes, providing rigorous and engaging practices, tutoring, counseling, cultural activities, college and career exposure, and giving students the ability to make schooling a priority through flexible class schedules in order for them to attend and thrive in school (Williams, 2019, p.78). Students' sense of belonging should be supported through relationships with other students and teachers, inclusive activities, and a comfortable learning environment, which enhances their sense of being part of a team and pride in learning (Hofer et al., 2021). The feeling of belonging and being

connected enhances students' motivation and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Counseling services would include students have social workers, psychologists, counselors, behavior interventionists, and specialists available when needed (Williams, 2019, p. 78). Focusing on post-secondary plans includes providing waivers for college application fees, giving opportunities to attend college visits and tours, having a Federal Student Aid Day (where assistance filling out forms would be available), and ensuring exam (SAT, ACT, GED) help is available (Williams, 2019, p.78).

Programs and Alternative Routes to Achieve Graduation or Equivalency

Bowers and Spratt (2012) suggest that the typical approach to receiving a high school diploma or equivalency might be difficult for high-risk youths. Christenson and Thurlow (2004) found that the most effective intervention programs identify and track youth at risk for school failure, maintain a focus on students' progress toward educational standards across the school years, and are designed to address indicators of student engagement and impact enrollment status. Different intervention strategies, such as academic tutoring, positive ways to connect with school, flexible schedules, and alternative graduation routes, have shown success in high-risk youths (Bowers & Spratt, 2012). Alternative schools possess factors such as the ability to develop better relationships, have relevant and meaningful curricula, provide personalized approaches to student learning, have supportive environments, teach accountability, and give opportunities to empower students (Lind, 2013). However, programs throughout the country have started to achieve the mission of best meeting student needs and ensuring opportunities for success. Regarding our study, we have found that many essential pieces contribute to a successful program.

To meet participant needs best, alternative programs should have close mentoring and monitoring of students, parent outreach, and attention to students' out-of-school problems as critical components of successful alternative programs (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Some programs involve early

and sustained intervention, addressing student, parent, school, and community factors, emphasizing student engagement and competencies, and being comprehensive and personalized (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Multiple programs have also focused on building relationships with teachers, parents, and peers and include systematic monitoring of the student's performance, problem-solving skills, opportunities for success in schoolwork, a caring and supportive environment, and help with personal problems (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

In one study, students communicated that school size, class size, personal attention, relationships, and public perceptions significantly influenced their perceptions of their education (De la Ossa, 2005). Hofer et al. (2021) found that students generally felt that their needs were being met if their program fostered basic psychological needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence, positively impacting their relationships, well-being, and learning. Students having social belonging and school connectedness decreased student exclusion and loneliness, which influences a student's overall well-being (Tomova et al., 2021). Giving students a flexible schedule, allowing them to work at their own pace, and having teachers be supportive and able to work one-on-one with students, ensuring they are respected as individuals, has proven successful in alternative programs (Speckhard, 1993). A study found that giving students a choice led to enhanced respect among students and teachers, reduced stress, and increased motivation for school (Hofer et al., 2021). Student choice seems to be an important factor associated with them achieving success in many aspects of their lives. Alternative high school settings allow students to have a voice and allow them to further develop their abilities, skills, knowledge, and agency to succeed in academic and personal settings (Lind, 2013).

Findings have contributed to SDT research by giving equal weight to psychological needs, examining how basic psychological needs can be met through participation in alternative programs, and giving students a voice and opportunity to communicate their perspectives (Hofer et al., 2021). Alternative schools can create a supportive environment, climate, and culture, which can help students

develop a sense of belonging, connection, understanding, ownership, motivation, engagement, academic achievement, involvement, well-being, and interest in their learning (Duke & Tenuto, 2020; Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Flores & Brown, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

De la Ossa (2005) explained that alternative schools should be a key component in restructuring public education for all students to "have a fighting chance to succeed in school." Alternative schools should focus on these three questions, How do alternative high schools approach meet the needs of students?, How do alternative high school students perceive their educational experience?, and How can alternative high schools impact student reform, including public perceptions?.

Many factors, concepts, and variables play critical roles in ensuring The HISD REAL Program is successful, including program goals, mission, vision, student involvement, participation, and the environment in which the program occurs. It is appropriate to use conceptual frameworks to understand the area of inquiry so relationships between these variables can be used to analyze and compare The HISD REAL Program with similar initiatives in the field. Identifying the components of a successful student program through the conceptual framework gave insight into how The HISD REAL Program could be improved to better meet its goals and to succeed in becoming a more effective program.

The major conceptual framework selected for this study was Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Niemiec, 2009). This framework directly correlates to the student and The HISD REAL Program's achievement in obtaining goals. This framework influences how The HISD REAL Program is designed to run, the participation and involvement of students, the program environment, and how student perceptions of education and their futures are influenced and changed through this program.

An important part of SDT is the idea that individuals are intrinsically motivated to engage in rewarding, enjoyable, and fulfilling activities. SDT states that individuals must be able to experience

autonomous, competent, and related motives in order to experience intrinsic motivation. Autonomy is defined as the feeling of control over one's own life and decisions. Individuals feel competent when they feel they can perform tasks and achieve goals. Individuals desire a sense of belonging and a sense of connection to others, which aligns with relatedness.

SDT recommends that to foster intrinsic motivation in students and teachers, an environment that fosters autonomy, competence, and relatedness is required. Students can be more engaged and perform better in their learning when teachers provide them with a sense of control, choice, voice, and provide opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge (Ryan & Niemiec, 2009). As students experience mastery and accomplishment, their effort and feeling of being supported will sustain further effort (Ryan & Niemiec, 2009). Teachers who implement SDT principles to motivate students in a classroom are more likely to see them engaged in their learning, achieve greater academic success, be happier, build confidence, encourage decision-making, and build competence, positively influencing the student's "identity, goal-setting, and educational pursuits" (Mortimer, 2023; Taylor et al., 2012, p. 625). SDT is a model that can help educators understand and promote motivation. Figure 2 shows how SDT and The HISD REAL Program align to best impact the student.

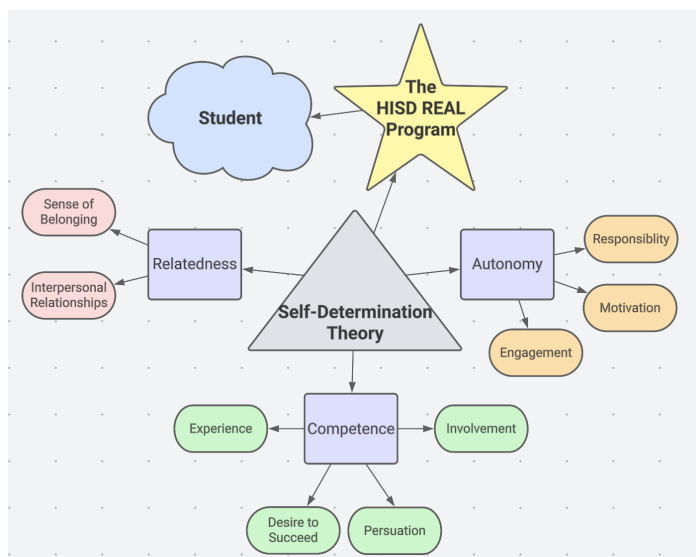


Figure 2: *Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and The HISD REAL Program Connection*

Project Questions

During the analysis of The HISD REAL Program, project questions were designed to guide the project to determine whether the program met its mission, vision, and goals, developed by the 8MS lead team, to the fullest extent possible. In addition to helping to determine the program's impact on students' perceptions of school and mental health, the questions provided insight into what factors influenced the involvement of students in the program. Analyzing and using the responses to the questions allowed the organization to gain valuable insights into The HISD REAL Program and identified areas for improvement, allowing them to assess the program's effectiveness and identified areas for improvement. This project was framed with the literature and framework by providing a basis for comparing similar programs, determining best practices for student programs, and defining an effective student program. As a result, the organization can make informed decisions about how to improve The HISD REAL Program in a way that helps it achieve its goals, mission, and vision best.

According to the SDT, intrinsic motivation and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are crucial factors for improving educational outcomes. Students need opportunities to feel autonomous, competent, and connected in a motivating learning environment. Therefore, the SDT framework led us to the following project questions:

- **How effectively does The HISD REAL Program, as designed and delivered, align with its stated mission, vision, and goals?** The answer to this question is relevant because the program's mission, vision, and goals directly correlate to the student's experience in the program, which aligns with the SDT framework regarding student motivation.
- **How, if at all, does a student's perception of school change due to participating in The HISD REAL Program?** This question is relevant because the SDT framework suggests that a motivating learning environment can positively impact students' intrinsic motivation.

- **What factors impact a student's choice of being involved in The HISD REAL Program?** This question is relevant because the SDT framework highlights the importance of basic psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, in promoting intrinsic motivation. Understanding the factors that impact students' motivation can help educators create a more motivating learning environment.

Project Design

The leaders of The HISD REAL Program communicated that they wanted to understand what aspects of the program were going well and where changes could be made to best meet the student's needs in all areas. They developed surveys to better understand the perspectives of students, parents, and staff stakeholders within the organization (See Appendix A, B, and C). While gathering this data, they wanted us to analyze certain trends to determine the program's next steps.

The program distributed the surveys, and responses were passed on and analyzed by us as unbiased participants. We looked at the responses to see if, eventually, the program obtained its desired outcome of having students develop into contributing members of society. When all data was collected and evaluated, we developed an outline of implementation to where improvements can be made within the program.

Data Collection

To best answer our research questions, we utilized the data received from online surveys that The HISD REAL Program facilitated to students, parents, and staff regarding the program. We used participatory research and ethnography by analyzing the surveys for our data collection. If we were unable to gather enough information or needed more details, our contingency plan was to conduct

interviews with staff members. However, interviews were not our first data resource and were not done because they would limit the number of responses and data gathered in our given timeframe.

The HISD REAL Program created and administered surveys to distribute to students, staff, and parents to gather information and feedback regarding the program. There were three versions of the surveys: student, parent, or staff. The survey window was from Tuesday, March 28th, 2023, to Friday, April 14, 2023. Students were given the opportunity to complete the survey during schooling hours. Of the 53 registered students, 33 participated in the survey, yielding a 62.26% response rate. The staff and parent surveys were emailed, with nine staff and seven parent responses. Staff members were given the option to complete the emailed survey during a meeting.

Each survey took approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. The HISD REAL Program agreed to only share aggregate data with us to analyze and determine findings and recommendations on improving the organization's overall success by providing better implementation programs, practices, and initiatives.

In order to collect responses to the survey, Google Forms was used as the tool of choice, which is a secure cloud-based survey platform that can be accessed by any internet-connected device to record responses to the survey. The directions on the survey reminded students, parents, and staff that participation was voluntary and that their responses would remain confidential.

We utilized the data collected from The HISD REAL Program surveys because it focused on the desired focus areas brought to our attention by the organization. The survey results provided adequate information along with the documents submitted for us to properly evaluate whether the program was aligned with its mission, values, and goals. There was no change from the original plan related to data collection. Since The HISD REAL Program provided data and documents, we faced no challenges related to data collection impacting the validity of our findings.

There were also documents submitted by The HISD REAL Program which reflected the program's vision, mission, and goals, as well as the components of the program and the student curriculum for The HISD REAL Program. This included websites, policies, job descriptions, parent communication, academic calendar, school day schedule, student artifacts, photos, films, flyers, and school social media posts.

Project Question	Rationale	Data Collection Plan
How effectively does The HISD REAL Program, as designed and delivered, align with its stated mission, vision, and goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How and if the mission, vision, and goals are being executed. ● This program is new; therefore, no evaluation has been done to see the effectiveness of implementation. 	Surveys and Documents from the organization
How, if at all, does a student's perception of school change due to participating in The HISD REAL Program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If and how the inputs put in place impact the desired outcomes. ● We want to see if this is making a difference. 	Surveys and Documents from the organization
What factors impact a student's choice of being involved in The HISD REAL Program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Better understanding of the reasoning behind why the students are in the program. 	Surveys and Documents from the organization

Participant Recruitment and Sample

As of February 2023, The HISD REAL Program had 53 students enrolled between the ages of 16 and 21. All students had six to ten credits or less, and there were six personnel. The staff consisted of eight teachers, two academic success coaches focusing on credit recovery, one guidance counselor focusing on social-emotional learning support and groups, one career coach to ensure the students are job ready, and a director of programs who oversees the entirety of The HISD REAL Program. In addition, parents were given surveys to give input on how they have seen the program impacting students. These individuals were given a survey to evaluate how The HISD REAL Program was being run and individual perceptions of the current components of the program.

Data Instruments

Three surveys were developed by the leaders of The HISD REAL Program, including Mr. Pierre. A survey was created for three category groups: students, parents, and staff. Participants completed a survey with questions regarding their individual demographics and perceptions regarding The HISD REAL Program. Aggregate results were communicated to the consulting team to evaluate where potential changes could be made within the program to develop the program further.

Each survey (See Appendix A, B, and C) consisted of multiple choice, short answer, and Likert scale questions. Multiple choice questions focused on the demographics of the individual. The short answer questions asked participants to elaborate on their perceptions of The HISD REAL Program. The short answer questions focused on involvement, ideas on improvements, favorite components, change, and alignment with The HISD REAL Program's vision, mission, and goals. The Likert scale questions focused on student motivation and more simplistic questions about the overall perspective of the students and the program.

The student survey (See Appendix A) included 40 questions that were chosen to assess the three study variables. Of the 40 questions, 28 were multiple choice, and 12 were short answer. 75% (21) of the multiple-choice questions asked students to rate their personal perceptions of school and their experiences on a Likert Scale. These questions were similarly adapted to the parent and staff surveys to see the alignment.

The parent survey (See Appendix B) included 38 questions that were chosen to assess the three study variables. Of the 38 questions, 26 were multiple-choice, and 12 were short answer. 73.10% (19) of the multiple choice questions were ratings on a Likert Scale relating to the student survey questions about the parent's perspectives of their student's motivation and inclusion of The HISD REAL Program.

The staff survey (See Appendix C) items included 30 questions that were chosen to assess the three study variables. Of the 30 questions, 20 were multiple choice, and 10 were short answer. 65% (13)

of the multiple choice questions were staff ratings on a Likert Scale relating to the questions from the student surveys, answering about the staff's perspectives of their student's motivation and inclusion of The HISD REAL Program.

The surveys comprised three measures: demographics, program evaluation, and motivation, which were altered to fit the appropriate group of participants. For the student survey, the program evaluation measure contained six questions. An example item was *"How do you feel about the REAL program? What are you excited about? What are you not excited about?"* For the parent survey, the program evaluation measure contained 11 questions. An example item from the Likert question portion was *"My student will graduate from high school or a graduation equivalency."* For the staff survey, the program evaluation measure contained seven questions. An example item was *"What components or activities have been most influential for The HISD REAL Program?"* (See Appendix A, B, and C)

For the student survey, the student motivation evaluation measure contained 14 questions. An example item was *"By attending The HISD REAL Program, how has your educational experience been affected?"* For the parent survey, the student motivation evaluation measure contained 12 questions. An example item was *"How have you seen a difference in your student since he or she started attending the REAL program?"* For the staff survey, the student motivation evaluation measure contained ten questions. An example item was *"How do you motivate your students?"* (See Appendix A, B, and C).

Within each survey, we evaluated all variables with open responses, interval measures, and a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree. As a result of the compiled questions from all surveys, we were able to make a proper analysis regarding an evaluation of The HISD REAL Program and student motivation. In addition to the measurement survey questions, we collected student, parent, and staff demographic data as self-reported information, including race, gender identity, employment status, and age (See Appendix A, B, and C).

Documents were shared with us, including overviews, agendas, job descriptions, flyers, social media, etc., to assist our evaluation. The artifacts were shared via email and Google Drive to ensure we would have adequate access to all helpful documents to use in our analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis Timeline

An outline of the data collection and analysis timeline is shown in Figure 3. Our team was able to stick to the timeline accurately throughout the entirety of the process.

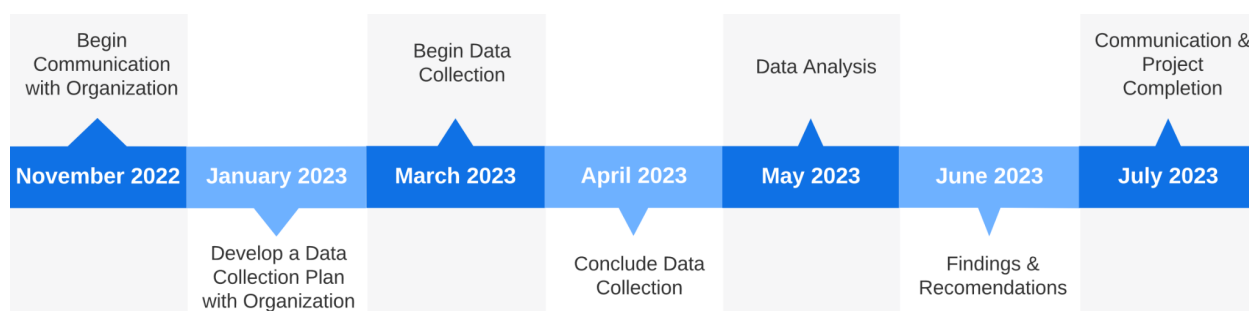


Figure 3: *Data Collection and Analysis Timeline*

Data Analysis and Results

The survey analysis depended on the responses obtained. All perspectives and input were analyzed to determine how The HISD REAL Program meets its desired outcomes. The evaluation specifically looked at the program's running and how it met various needs of the students to best prepare them for the future.

We looked for evidence supporting that The HISD REAL Program was adequately and appropriately designed and aligned to meet the mission, vision, and goals, seeing how student perceptions were changing due to participation in the program and what factors were impacting students' involvement with the program. Focusing on these ideals, we used deductive reasoning while

analyzing the data. We looked for major themes in the documents and surveys and developed specific conclusions based on the findings.

When analyzing the surveys, we categorized qualitative short-response questions and color-coded them based on how the responses aligned with our three research questions (See Appendix D). Once the questions were organized, we looked for common themes and reasonings to support the research questions. We also considered how the questions related to Self-Determination Theory.

When looking at the Likert scale questions within the surveys, we first organized the number of responses by each survey. For example, we looked at the student survey responses and saw how many students answered for each category: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree (See Appendix E). We then took those numbers, calculated the means for each stakeholder group, and calculated the overall means for all participants (See Appendix E). Some overall participant means from the Likert scale questions from the surveys are found in Figure 4.

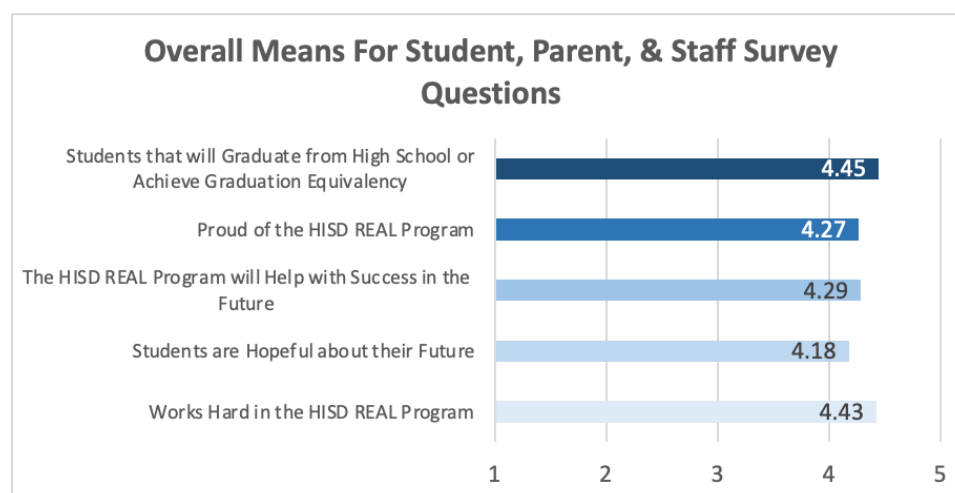


Figure 4: Overall Means from Student, Parent, and Staff Surveys to Similar Likert Scale Questions

While doing our document analysis, we sorted the documents into categories based on the research questions. The categories included mission and vision, student motivation, and factors and impact. We considered the conceptual framework when placing documents into various categories. We looked at each document and took notes on takeaways that would assist with our findings. One

prominent commonality we found while comparing documents was that they were not current and had some inconsistencies. For example, the Academic Success Coach Job Description (See Appendix F) says they would serve students 16-21 years old, the Managing Director of Programming Job Description (See Appendix G) said they would serve 9-21-year-olds, and the Operations Associate Job Description (See Appendix H) said they would serve 10-21-year-olds. Another example is that the HISD website refers to it as The HISD REAL Academy (See Appendix I), while most other documents refer to it as The HISD REAL Program, such as the Program Overview (See Appendix J).

Findings

A number of themes and takeaways emerged across various sources of evidence (e.g., data, surveys, and artifacts) as well as across various perspectives (e.g., students, parents, and staff). In addition to describing The HISD REAL Program's current strengths and investments, this section also outlines the key initiatives and investments that are being made or developed to improve equity, access, and opportunity for all students, staff, and parents, as well as areas that need to be improved by The HISD REAL Program, such as areas where equitable policies, practices, or structures require more work. Each finding is summarized in text and graphic form, with references to artifacts, surveys, and program data.

Finding 1

There is not yet a full alignment of The HISD REAL Program with the stated mission and vision.

(Aligned to Research Question 1)

The HISD REAL Program's dedicated educators and leaders have prioritized success for all students, regardless of demographic or ability, through a clear mission and vision.

- **Mission:** Our mission is to provide a network of support and access that closes the opportunity

gap for traditionally underserved youth.

- **Vision:** Through our holistic services and core programming, we give our youth the opportunity to build relationships, develop new skills, and establish goals that will put them on a trajectory to success and self-sufficiency in adulthood.

The mission, vision, problem statement, and theory of change are explicitly posted on the 8MS website (See Appendix K). The 8MS website states, “Our theory of change is that by providing disconnected youth who have been pushed out of our school system with an opportunity to complete their education and obtain meaningful employment, we will drastically reduce the recidivism rates of justice-involved youth in the city of Houston. Furthermore, the success of our program will assist school districts and the juvenile justice system in finding alternative pathways for students who are not succeeding in traditional school settings.” The Program Overview provided by the organization lists the current program goals and objectives below.

- In Year 1 (2022-2023), 80 students either (a) at risk of dropping out or (b) who have dropped out in the last two years will reenroll with HISD.
- In Year 1 (2022-2023), at least 60% of all program participants will graduate. This will be scaled up by five percentage points each school year— 65% in Year 2 (2023-2024) and 70% in Year 3 (2024-2025).
- Students will have equitable access to wraparound services. The satisfaction rate with non-academic support provided will be at least 90%. 100% of all students leaving The HISD REAL Program will have at least one job credential/certification.
- The average daily attendance for all participants will be at least 85%.

However, the mission, vision, theory of change, and problem statement are not explicitly listed on The HISD REAL Program’s website resulting in misalignment between the two organizations.

When surveyed across the organization and community, as shown below, the results indicated a

strong understanding from those working in the organization and a moderate amount of understanding from parents regarding students meeting the graduation requirements. In responses to the student survey prompt, "I will graduate from high school or achieve a graduation equivalency," 67% Strongly Agreed, 18% Agreed, 9% Neutral, and 6% Strongly Disagreed. In response to the parent survey prompt, "My student will graduate from high school or achieve a graduation equivalency," 71% Strongly Agreed, and 29% Agreed. When converted to means, parents ($M = 4.71$) were more likely to believe their student was going to graduate than the students ($M = 4.39$) themselves. Based on this data, there is a lack of student efficacy, which is aligned with the competence part of SDT, focusing on engagement, involvement, persuasion, and feeling that they can perform tasks and achieve goals. Having 6% of students strongly disagree that they will graduate high school or achieve a graduation equivalency shows a lack of alignment with the program's vision, missions, and goals. The percentages are broken down and shown in Figure 5.

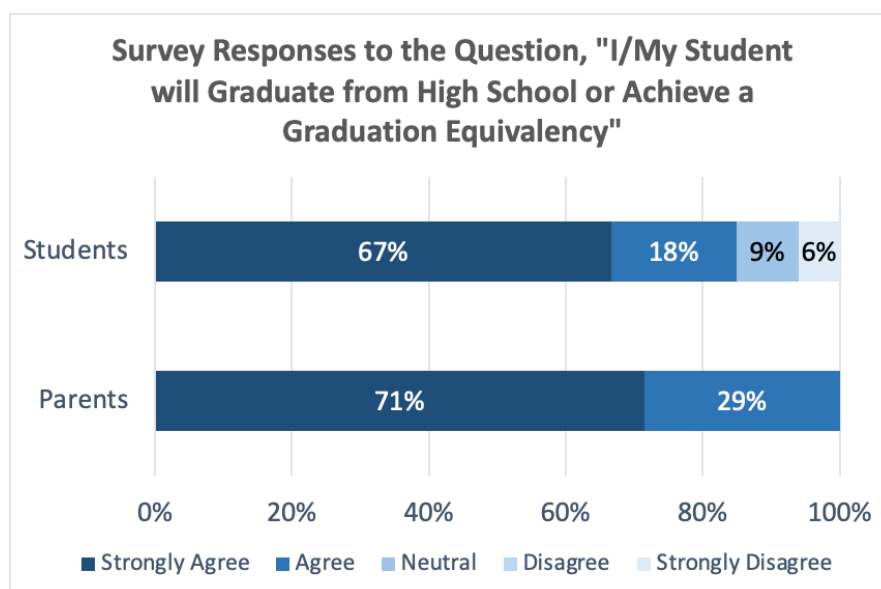


Figure 5: Student, Parent, and Overall Survey Responses

A significant component of the organization's work towards its vision and mission is aligning on a shared understanding of what it takes to be successful in The HISD REAL Program. As shown in Figure 6,

the response to the survey prompt, "I am proud of the REAL program," we see that 67% of students, 71% of parents, and 22% of staff strongly agree that they are proud of The HISD REAL Program. 6% of students and 22% of staff said they strongly disagree that they are proud of The HISD REAL Program. Staff had the lowest mean of being proud of The HISD REAL Program ($M = 3.44$), while parents had the highest ($M = 4.71$). Based on this data, the mission and vision are not being fully met or else more stakeholders would be proud of the program. One staff member stated: *"To have more staff, to understand boundaries, to understand the importance of working with students one-on-one, and to realize that the mission is only as great as the effort put into it. To increase the number of students who graduate from the program."* Since 33% of staff fall into the neutral to strongly disagree range of being proud of The HISD REAL Program, SDT states that staff may not be likely to invest in the program since they are not proud of it (Liu et al., 2020). Liu et al. (2020) found that teachers who feel autonomous, competent, and connected are more likely to implement effective motivational strategies that engage and motivate their students and that they themselves will be more connected and invested in their work. This could impact the execution of the program's components, which impedes the progress toward goals that are aligned with the program's mission and vision.

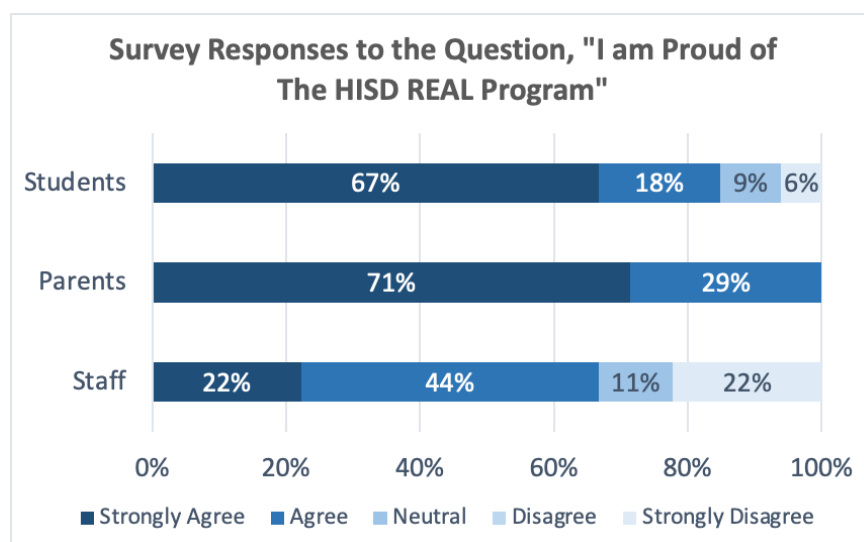


Figure 6: Student, Parent, Staff, and Overall Survey Responses

A strength of The HISD REAL Program is the parents' and students' perception of The HISD REAL Program. Based on the survey prompt, "How do you feel about the REAL program? What are you excited about?" 91% of students said they are excited and happy about The HISD REAL Program. Based on the survey prompt, "What components or activities (ex., field trips, visits, work learning, etc.) from the REAL program have been most influential?" 70% said that field trips and guest speakers were the most influential components/activities of The HISD REAL Program. 100% of parents said the program provided better support, including parents mentioning small classroom settings, care, better meals, and teachers and counselors were more hands-on. A parent shared, *"They've given my child a reason to want to attend school, and I'm GRATEFUL."* Students expressed a sense of excitement about the program, especially in relation to preparing for the future. One student said, *"I really like the program because they really care about you, give you the push you need and they keep it real with us."* Another student shared, *"I feel like this is a great program. Overall, I have seen a lot of students improve in their apex, and most students have improved in the way they speak and act. The program has taught a lot of us how to be and speak professionally. It has taught us how to fill out job applications and have prepared us for future job interviews. They offer to help find jobs, help you fill out FASFA applications, and help you with any personal problems you might have. I am excited to see how many other ways the program will improve I think it is great the way it is now."*

Although staff largely agreed on being proud of The HISD REAL Program, staff were more varied in their perceptions of what The HISD REAL Program needs to improve. Staff expressed the need for program expansion, exposure, parental involvement, and better scheduling. A staff member shared that *"The only issue I am having is helping those students who are not interested in getting help. So, to do this, I would need more in-class support, and a disciplinary program should be established."* Another staff member mentioned needing *"Better organization, policy, and procedures guidelines for the program."*

A significant component of The HISD REAL Program's mission, vision, and goals is for students to gain various supports. Effective alternative route opportunities focus on the student academically, socially, emotionally, and developmentally (Williams, 2019, p. 77). We found that 67% of students strongly agree that they are proud of The HISD REAL Program, but 6% of students strongly disagreed. This could indicate that The HISD REAL Program has not connected with each student, which could impact success rates (Bowers & Spratt, 2012). There needs to be consistency in monitoring students, building relationships, having supportive environments, and clear communication within the program (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Most successful organizations know the importance of an inspiring vision and common values and the instrumental role of stakeholders in ensuring those values are aligned and followed (Blokland & Reniers, 2021). Employee commitment, trust, purpose, and dynamic cultural and organizational alignment assists in aligning stakeholders with the organization's vision, mission, and goals (Blokland & Reniers, 2021).

Finding 2

The Human Resources department has a strong approach to diversity, but structural gaps remain.

(Aligned to Research Question 1)

An analysis of the recruitment, hiring, development, and retention structures was conducted to assess the emphasis placed on attracting diverse staff to The HISD REAL Program and providing ongoing professional learning opportunities aligning with the program's values and needs. To cultivate a skilled and diverse workforce, the program has prioritized enhancing recruitment, hiring, and development processes, in the Operating Policies and Procedures Manual, which they started developing at the beginning of the school year, but it is still incomplete. This manual comprises the referral and enrollment process, programs, academics, data management, operations, branding, job duties, and essential functions (See Appendix L). The HISD REAL Program has started analyzing its current hiring processes by

switching to a new platform called Bamboo HR and revamping its applications. In the staff survey, employees expressed a need for coherence and strategic alignment of plans to effectively support the program's goal of developing a highly qualified and culturally diverse workforce.

The HISD REAL Program, in its first year, was able to hire majority of staff with educational experience. From survey data provided by the program, 66% of staff had two or more years in education, as shown in Figure 7.

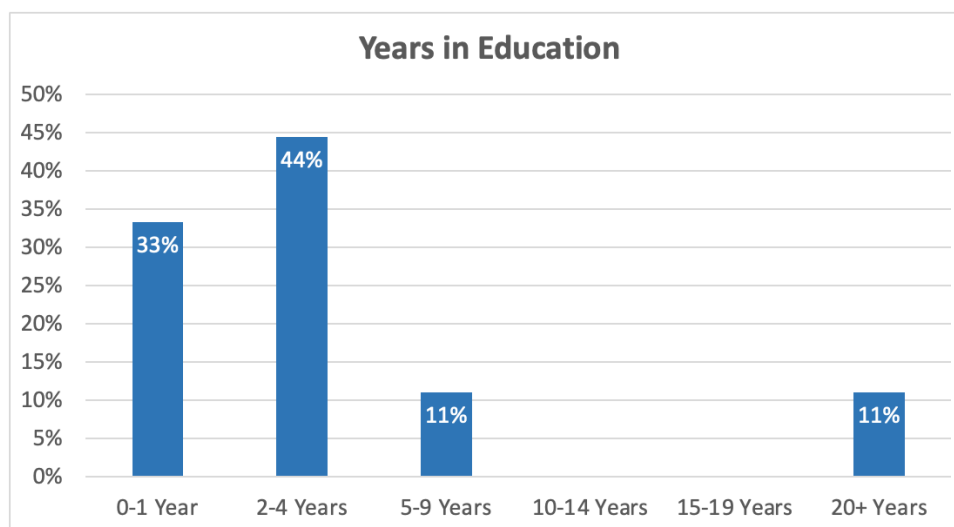


Figure 7: *Percentage of Staff by Years of Experience in the Education Field*

The HISD REAL Program's student population based on survey responses is 79% black, while 89% of the staff is black; 3% white, while 11% of the staff is white; and Hispanic/Latino students account for 18% of the student population, while Hispanic/Latino teachers account for 0% of teachers. Students, especially students of minority, are more motivated, better behaved, communicate better, build relationships, and have higher academic performance when having a teacher of the same race or ethnicity (Hwang et al., 2023; Redding, 2019). Teachers that identify as the same race or ethnicity as their students typically have higher expectations and are more supportive and understanding, which positively impacts academic and nonacademic student performance. The data below in Figure 8 shows the HISD REAL Program's full-time staff who completed the survey by race in the 2022-2023 school year.

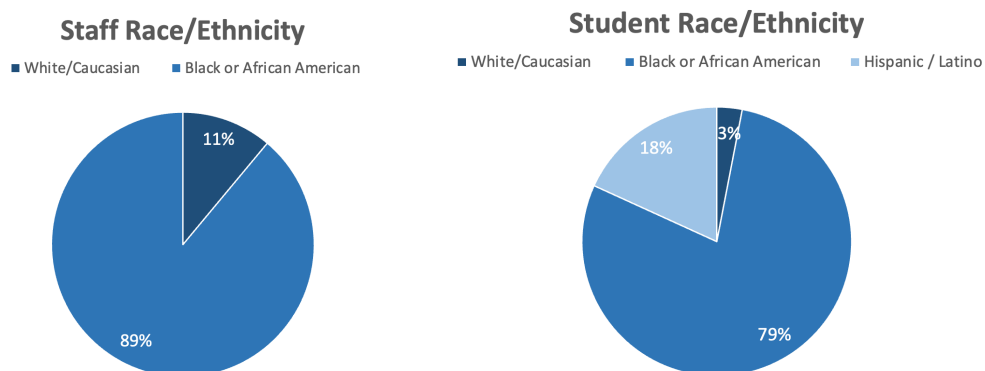


Figure 8: *Student Population and Staff Demographics Based on Survey Responses by Race/Ethnicity*

In partnership with 8MS, The HISD REAL Program has started to outline and understand processes and systems for hiring and recruiting new staff. The 8MS website, where potential candidates go to apply for positions in The HISD REAL Program, includes information regarding open positions, benefits, employee assistance, and additional information for prospective employees. The job description clearly states the program's mission and vision, roles and responsibilities, salary, and benefits. Some of the job descriptions included links to the application to apply. The Executive Director shared that the hiring process begins when there is an open position at an organization. Mr. Pierre creates the posting and completes the necessary paperwork, and the Director of Operations posts the open position in multiple places, including professional organizations, websites, and Bamboo HR.

As candidates submit applications, the leadership teams review candidates' qualifications, experiences, and certifications to select candidates for the interview process. The leadership teams create interview committees and interview activities to determine the candidate offered the position. The interview activities include a phone screening with the Managing Director of Programs, a sample lesson, and a debrief with the leadership. The leadership teams make a recommendation to the executive director, who makes the final hiring decision and completes the hiring process. Once the candidate is hired, they start the onboarding process, which includes spending an entire day with each

department, such as programming, completing paperwork with the Director of Operations, and spending time with the Executive Director to hear about the vision and mission of The HISD REAL Program.

The HISD REAL Program still needs a candidate tracking system for tracking, planning, or evaluating how effective its recruiting and hiring efforts are. Currently, the program emphasizes community and cultural diversity by holding recruitment fairs at regional, local, and online locations and other opportunities to attract domestic talent. The HISD REAL Program started using Bamboo HR in June 2023 to post open positions and has the job positions listed on the website. Although this approach was described on the program website, shared materials, and public resources, no comprehensive data or anecdotes were available for review.

Human Resources incorporated a nondiscrimination statement into its application platform to demonstrate its commitment to equity and created consistent language for all job postings. No candidate tracking system in this program tracks disaggregated data associated with recruiting and selecting candidates. Because of this limitation, the program cannot analyze trends accurately and plan for vacancies, which limits its access to detailed candidate data, such as the number of people who apply for the role, the percentage of people who make it to the next round, or the number of people who identify as a person of color. Having a tracking system that follows this data will allow the organization to develop goals surrounding its hiring process.

According to Mr. Pierre, 85% of staff will be replaced for the 23-24 school year. Therefore, The HISD REAL Program has retained 15% of staff in 2023. According to the survey feedback provided by The HISD REAL Program, multiple staff shared that there needs to be an understanding of boundaries, a focus on the students, improvements in organization, policy, and guidelines, and clarity on role expectations. A staff member explained their *“experience working at REAL has been a struggle, stressful, and draining mentally.”* Another staff member explained, *“There needs to be a conversation about work-life balance and creating healthy boundaries in the workplace. There is an apparent lack of understanding of people*

having lives outside work. Also, there is a lack of classroom support. We cannot teach students about wellness and structure if we do not have that ourselves. Staff members should feel supported, UPPER MANAGEMENT is doing a great job telling us what we need to improve on, but there is no highlight on what we have done right, health and wellness checks, or anything. There is a continuous sense of urgency without consideration or empathy.”

The HISD REAL Program provides professional development opportunities for all staff on topics such as Data 101, Practice Sample Lessons with Academic Coaches, Org-Wide Culture Planning, and REAL, Works, Student Support, and Ops Department Meetings (See Appendix M). In each session, there are opportunities for staff to collaborate. In addition to program-provided opportunities, The HISD REAL Program offers ways for staff and leaders to attend professional learning outside of the program through accelerator programs such as Transcend Education Freedom Lab, Camelback Ventures, and Nike.

The leadership team is committed to supporting their staff in enhancing their professional practice utilizing various means, such as program-provided professional development. When inquired about the availability of support for enhancing staff’s professional practice, staff expressed the needs of their leaders, thereby emphasizing their role in providing necessary support. One staff member stated: *“I need to provide more coaching to staff to build their capacity so that they are proactive instead of reactive.”* There is a need for ongoing and sustained staff development aligned with individual and program priorities, mission, and vision.

The leadership team and staff do not have feedback and evaluation practices that allow them to be held accountable for student achievement. The Executive Director supports and collaborates weekly with leaders as a leadership team. There are no evaluation processes for the leadership team or teachers. According to the Executive Director, he is developing a feedback and evaluation process for the 2023-2024 school year to address those gaps proactively.

As shown in Figure 6, 22% of the staff said they strongly agreed with being proud of the program, while 44% agreed, 11% were neutral, and 22% strongly disagreed. These responses are not necessarily surprising given the responses to the short answer questions described above. Consistency, effectiveness, and clear communication are all factors that assist in recruiting, assigning, developing, and retaining effective teachers (Loeb et al., 2012). With 22% of staff not being proud of the program and 85% not returning next year, this indicates there is an opportunity for growth. Some staff expressed that more organization, policies, procedures, guidelines, and a less stressful environment would help them to be more successful, which are related to the achievement of students and retention of teachers (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Loeb et al., 2012).

Finding 3

The HISD REAL Program is developing a practice of using data to establish and progress monitor improvement efforts and strategic priorities at multiple levels.

(Aligned to Research Question 3)

Strong data culture and greater use of student data to inform program decisions and teaching strategies are emphasized at all levels by leaders and staff. The HISD REAL Program's mission is to give students the tools, strategies, and opportunities to be successful. Leaders have begun some efforts to understand marginalized populations' experiences. However, there is currently no strategic data collection and analysis process to ensure a common understanding of all needs and gaps.

From survey data provided by the program, based on the student, staff, and parent responses to the survey question about The HISD REAL Program helping students be successful in life, 85% of students Strongly Agree/Agree, 100% of parents Strongly Agree/Agree, and 66% of staff Strongly Agree/Agree. The overall mean for this question fell into the level of "Agree" (M = 4.29). The staff mean (M = 3.44), falling

into the “Neutral” level, brought the overall mean down. The percentages are broken down and shown in Figure 9.

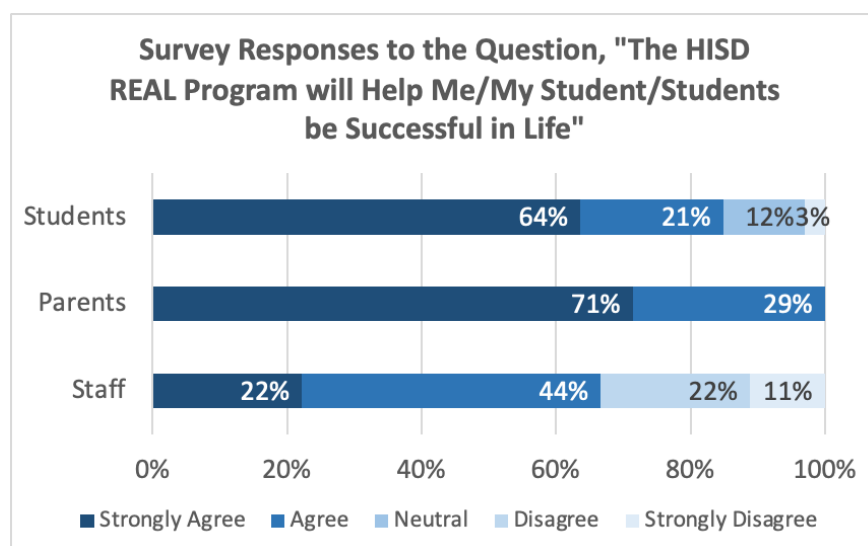


Figure 9: Student, Parent, Staff, and Overall Survey Responses

There are some signs that school progress is being monitored. As part of Mr. Pierre’s presentation to the Board of Directors in April 2023, he provided an Impact Report (See Appendix N) containing data collected from October 2022 through April 2023. The HISD REAL Program has created a Concept Paper (See Appendix O) that provides updates on the program’s impact on student learning and experiences. The Concept Paper contains baseline data that can be used for future data tracking and comparisons. Based on the Concept Paper, as of June 2023:

- **Students Served:** The Program reached 71 students from Chavez, Milby, Sterling, Wheatley, Worthing, and Yates High Schools.
- **Credits Earned:** Together, these students earned 419 credits and sustained an attendance rate of 86%. Accelerated Academic Progress: 35% of students participating in the REAL Program advanced two or more grade levels within a single academic year.

- **High School Graduates:** Despite having no students enter the REAL program as Seniors, eight students (all of whom joined the program mid-year) graduated from high school, and six have applied to Houston Community College (HCC) for Fall 2023.
- **Employment Attainment:** 28% of students secured employment within three months of completing the REAL Program.
- **Personal Development:** 85% of students reported feeling hopeful for their futures, while the same percentage of students took pride in their academic accomplishments in the REAL Program.

Based on the Program Overview, the selection of program cohorts will be established by assessing various indicators. Current and former students attending target campuses and falling within the top quartile of the early warning indicators listed below will be considered candidates for The HISD REAL Program. These indicators will be determined using the Analytics for Education (A4E) Dashboard and the Early Warning Indicators Analyzer. The indicators to be assessed include:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| ● Current Course Failures | ● Special Education |
| ● Excessive Absences | ● Title I |
| ● Failed STAAR Reading | ● Expelled |
| ● Failed STAAR Math | ● Homeless |
| ● Math/Reading Skills more than two years below current grade | ● Parole Probation |
| ● Overaged for grade (2+ years) | ● Pregnant/Parent |
| ● Section 504 | ● Previous Dropout |
| ● Retained within the last 3 years | ● Residential Placement |
| ● Economically Disadvantaged | ● CPS Custody |
| ● English Learner | ● DAEP Placement |
| ● Migrant | ● Behavior Incident |

These indicators will serve as criteria to identify students eligible for participation in The HISD REAL Program, ensuring that those who meet specific criteria receive the necessary support and resources to enhance their educational experience. Currently, there is not a system that shows where

students fall into these indicators. Without access to this student data, it is difficult for staff members to understand the whole child and meet their individualized needs, which could impact their success.

To meet students' individualized educational needs for credit retrieval, The HISD REAL Program's accelerated instruction framework facilitates student learning using APEX Learning (See Appendix P). This software application allows students to progress in courses based on their knowledge of the material rather than their seating time. Students participating in the program are re-engaged through accelerated instruction and paid summer internship opportunities. Aside from hands-on learning experiences, Academic Success Coaches and mentors guide students.

However, there is limited information about how data is consistently utilized to identify program challenges and gaps among students. The strategic plan monitoring data structure is not yet clear. Even though the program shares progress updates with the board, there is an opportunity to improve understanding of progress by incorporating more data, including disaggregated data. Monitoring strategic planning is crucial for determining the efficacy of program policies and teaching strategies. Parents expressed a need for more communication about their student's progress. One parent shared, *"I should provide[d] information about my student."* Another parent shared, *"The HISD REAL Program needs to be more informative with her progress in the program and her goals."* School staff shared, *"Better communication with their home campus counselors so we can let students know where they are (credits)."*

There is a lack of evidence showing any consistency of The HISD REAL Program monitoring and completing deep data analysis on student attendance, academic performance, counseling, parent outreach, listening, support, connection, mentoring, and engagement, which these various components have shown drastic improvements in student outcomes (Gomperts, 2015). Still, with the lack of data and evidence to support what is occurring within the program, it is difficult to best understand where changes need to be made (Williams, 2019; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Data monitoring allows students to

build better relationships, obtain problem-solving skills, and perform better in all areas of life

(Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Finding 4

The HISD REAL Program community and partner engagement is strong. However, communication with parents and the community must be more proactive and informative.

(Aligned to Research Question 3)

The HISD REAL Program has established and supported several effective partnerships that address outstanding student and parent needs. The program has active and productive partnerships with the following organizations:

- **Association partnerships:** EDLOC, AT&T, Microsoft, BET, Chick-Fil-A, Toyota, Travis Manion Foundation, R Prosper Road Foundation, McDonald's, Amazon, Comcast, Nike, Walton Family Foundation, Coca-Cola, Kroger, Camelback Ventures, Workforce Solutions, Taco Bell Foundation for Teens, and Luby's
- **Local and regional partnerships:** Houston Texans, Houston Endowment, Houston Food Bank, Main Street Ministries Houston, and Houston Complete Communities

When asked, "What components or activities have been most influential for the REAL program?", one staff member shared, "*Field trips to various industry partners and job opportunities.*" Based on the student survey, 79% of students mentioned partnership activities, such as field trips, speakers, and shadowing experiences, were the most influential part of The HISD REAL Program. These partnerships generate benefits for parents and students, including equity-enhancing opportunities for students.

To provide support for students and parents, it was noted that on the HISD website, there is a link for parents that includes multiple resources that directly impact students' mental health, well-being, safety, and belonging at school, such as YouTube videos, flyers, and informational pamphlets and

websites. One staff member shared, *“We [The HISD REAL Program] have wrap-around services not only for our students but their families. Rental assistance, food, clothes.”*

In the parent survey, when asked, “What improvements do you think the REAL program could implement?”, parents reported that the most common forms of communication from the district were email and phone calls. Some families gave positive reports about communication:

- *“Relationship between the school and us is high. There's a two-way relationship with adults. They will communicate on a regular basis, offer suggestions, and super supportive. I'm able to speak freely with an adult to ask questions on a child's progress.”*
- *“Pleasant; the teacher last communicates well with me”*

One staff member also shared, *“We've provided greater opportunities that allow the students to express themselves creatively through education and innovatively through visitations to affiliated companies and field trips to universities the student may have an interest in attending.”*

On the contrary, some parents and staff felt that consistency should be considered with the communication systems. For example, one parent stated, *“I haven't spoken with any adults since she has been in the program.”* Another parent reported *“Communication with the parents”* is an improvement that The HISD REAL Program could implement. Staff shared:

- *“I need to create and communicate systems around all aspects of our work.”*
- *“Communication among staff has not been the best, but it is significantly improving, and that really has been the difference for me. When expectations are clear, it allows things to flow easily. Nonetheless, I do feel like I am valued, and I feel supported.”*
- *“I also need to work with the rest of leadership to fine-tune our profile of a student to ensure we communicate clearly to campuses and families of expectations and outcomes of the program.”*

The vision, mission, and goal of The HISD REAL Program is to provide wrap-around services to students. Wrap-around services have been shown to develop positive, meaningful, healthy, and caring

relationships that offer support and opportunities emotionally and instructionally (Williams, 2019, p. 78). It was mentioned that food and clothing services were offered to students and parents, but it was also stated by a parent that there had been zero communication since their child entered the program, deterring The HISD REAL Program from further development in this area. Students and parents must feel that they are part of the team and belong to fully trust and give in to the program process (Hofer et al., 2021). Having these fundamental relationships helps students with problems and allows them to learn how to handle real-life hurdles (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Finding 5

Student motivation has increased due to The HISD REAL Program components and support from staff.

(Aligned to Research Question 2)

There is a strong emphasis on long-term success in the program model. As indicated in the Program Overview (See Appendix J), one of the key components of this program is the development of a comprehensive understanding of the postsecondary education opportunities, job readiness, and mentoring opportunities for students after graduation. As part of the transition process, students are given the following tools to help them succeed:

- **Career Exploration:** Through industry visits, career presentations, and mentorship, students will gain an in-depth understanding of their position in the workforce.
- **Industry Certifications:** All students will engage in CTE coursework for vocational training.
- **Career Transition Support:** Students will receive college and career exposure, job placements and internships, and full support in developing a postsecondary plan.

Students of The HISD REAL Program were offered the following training courses as part of the REAL Program (See Appendix Q) during the school year 2022-2033: 10 hours of financial literacy training, 6 hours of entrepreneurship education, as well as 26 hours of soft skills/job readiness training as part of

the program components. Many partners assist with hands-on career explorations, including Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, BP, Amazon, Texas Work Solutions, All five military branches, TSA, KKR career exploration, Habitat Community Home Build Event, TC Energy, and Bank of America. As part of its preparation programs, the organization has partnered with Career Gear (male students), Dress for Success (female students), Fotofest (literacy through photography), Toastmaster (YMCA), Student podcast-8 Million Voices (Baker Ripley), The Plug (Electric Vehicle Club), STAAR tutorials (the University of Houston and teachHouston), and college tours at the University of Texas at Austin among other organizations. Furthermore, as a collective effort, The HISD REAL Program has assisted nine students in finding employment with Sam's Club, Burlington Coat Factory, Houston YMCA, Taco Bell, Starbucks, Amazon, and a paid summer internship placement (various locations).

SDT was evident while analyzing our findings related to student motivation. Students spent time detailing how their experiences, and specifically their motivation, have been influenced by The HISD REAL Program. From the data below, we have determined that students have increased their intrinsic motivation in order to achieve their goals, directly correlating to SDT. They explained how The HISD REAL Program has helped them take control of their present to impact their futures. 36% of students said that The HISD REAL Program has adequate resources to help them be successful academically, socially, and emotionally and said no changes need to be made to The HISD REAL Program. Responses from the other 64% of students had suggestions like providing headphones, transportation, a gym, a revised dress code, and a more flexible schedule to enhance their success.

When asked if “student[s] [are] hopeful about the future” on the student survey, 88% of students strongly agreed/agreed, while 100% of parents and 77% of staff agreed/agreed. Only one staff member strongly disagreed with this statement. The overall mean ($M = 4.18$) fell into the agree category, and again the staff mean ($M = 3.22$) was the reason for the overall mean going down. These percentages are broken down, as shown in Figure 10.

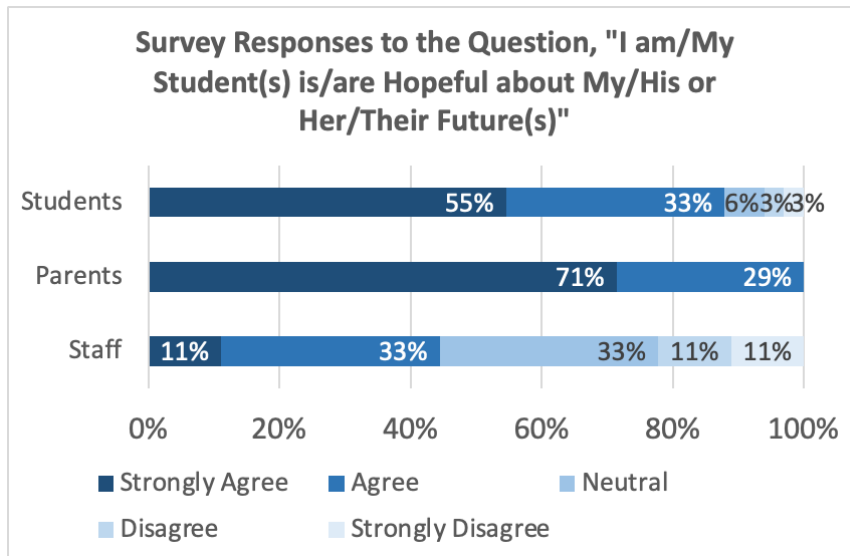


Figure 10: Student, Parent, Staff, and Overall Survey Responses

When asked if “student[s] work hard in The HISD REAL Program” on the student survey, 90% of students strongly agreed/agreed, while 100% of parents agreed/agreed. Staff members did not have this question in their survey. The mean of student and parent responses (M = 4.43) fell into the “Agree” level. These percentages are broken down, as shown in Figure 11.

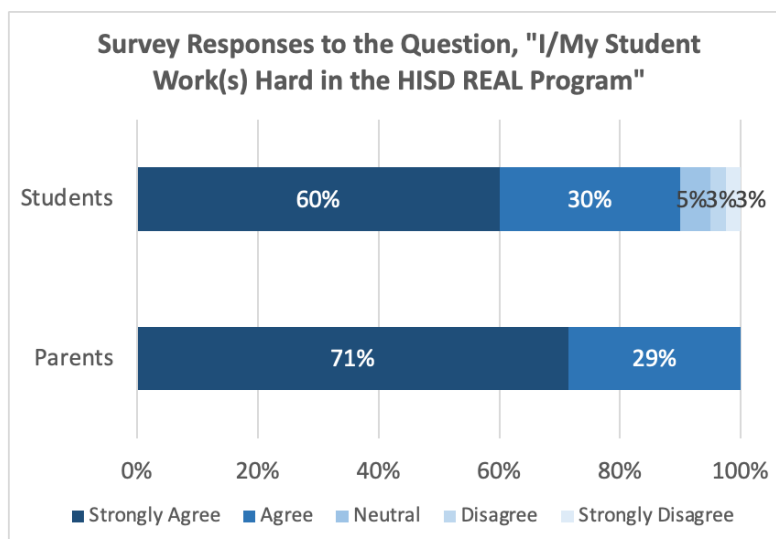


Figure 11: Student, Parent, and Overall Survey Responses

According to the survey feedback provided by The HISD REAL Program on the survey prompt “By attending the REAL program, how has your educational experience been affected,” multiple students shared:

- *“It changed myself, and it actually got me going to school.”*
- *“Attending the REAL program real-life changed me as a person. It’s not even about the educational process no more. It’s more about who I wanna be they help me catch up to all my work, grades, and NGS [No Grades Submitted].”*
- *“Made me more motivated to do my work.”*
- *“I actually have hope in myself and motivation to keep going.”*

On the parent survey prompt, “How have you seen a difference in your student since he or she started attending the HISD REAL program?”, one parent shared, *“My student is very motivated now to attend school.”* SDT has found that motivated students have long-term school achievement and obtain higher academic success (Taylor et al., 2014). Another parent shared, *“He actually likes school now and loves his teachers, and is more determined.”* SDT says that “the satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness mediates the relationship between intrinsic motivation and academic achievement (Taylor et al., 2014). On the staff survey prompt, “Tell us about any resources The HISD REAL program contributed to the community? What impact do you feel the contributions were? Why?” one staff member shared, *“The REAL program has provided an alternative education to the community. The impact has been beneficial because some of the students would have found themselves behind in school and help students with their self-confidence.”* A staff member suggested *“more educational outings.”* and elaborated by explaining that *“The students absolutely loved the trip to Austin. This also allows for students to feel more connected to their peers and staff.”* These responses show that students are connected to The HISD REAL Program, and there has been an increase in student’s overall

sense of responsibility (autonomy), desire to succeed (competence), interpersonal relationships (relatedness), and engagement, all relating to SDT (Liu et al., 2020).

It has also been reported that some students felt that some improvements should be made to increase their motivation. Based on student's responses, three students mentioned not liking the dress code/uniforms, four students mentioned making the schedules more flexible, two students mentioned transportation access needs to be improved, two students explained that they need more teacher assistance with work, and two specified they wanted staff to stop treating them like kids. A student requested a *“bigger position to be able to advocate for my peers and self.”* Students that feel autonomy and desire to have a voice and choice in their learning can deepen their intrinsic and autonomous motivation (Taylor et al., 2014). Deci and Ryan (2000) found that having the opportunity to meet personal needs by having a say in producing meaningful and personal goals led to students achieving better outcomes and having higher intrinsic motivation.

Giving students opportunities to choose has been shown to reduce stress and increase motivation (Hofer et al., 2021). The HISD REAL Program gives students choices and flexibility in advancing their education. 88% of students responded positively about their experience and excitement with the program. By focusing on relationships, academic performance, and various opportunities, students are better able to succeed, which is shown through the average response that students agree that they are hopeful about their futures (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). SDT has found that with an increase in taking responsibility in becoming successful and by The HISD REAL Program's students taking responsibility, being hopeful about their futures, and having a supportive environment, the program will see improved academic and nonacademic performance in the students (Ryan & Niemiec, 2009; Taylor et al., 2012).

Recommendations/Interventions

A series of six recommendations were developed based on the five findings of The HISD REAL Program. These recommendations illustrate how the program can expand access to opportunities for students, parents, and staff. Using the study's findings, the recommendations contain immediate, short-term, and long-term suggestions for next steps. As a part of the strategic improvement planning and implementation process, this section contains details of possible key activities and factors for The HISD REAL Program to consider as part of their process for planning and implementing strategic improvements.

Recommendation 1

Establish a shared understanding to ensure progress toward the desired future state based on a shared understanding of and investment in The HISD REAL Program's mission, vision, and theory of change.

(Aligned to Research Question 1 and Finding 1)

Engaging and investing in others is a part of the program's commitment. It will take shifting mindsets, building shared understanding and investment, and holding everyone accountable for achieving the program's goals to gain and maintain momentum around this commitment. When alternative schools have structured expectations, organized data collection and analysis, and clear communication, it allows students to "have a fighting chance to succeed in school" (De la Ossa, 2005). By ensuring these systems are in place and monitored regularly, it is easier to gather evidence of where the program may need to focus on improvement. Redefining the mission, vision, and theory of change, how it intends to achieve those goals, and how it plans to measure progress can help HISD REAL Program improve alignment. As a result, The HISD REAL Program can strengthen its organizational cohesion, accountability, and transparency.

Theory of Change

Establish a stakeholder-facing Theory of Change that leaders can continuously reference, communicating the rationale for focusing on equity and how current strategic priorities will advance equity. Ensure that leadership teams collaborate to develop or revise The HISD REAL Program's "mission and vision" that promotes equity and engages others in the process. There is no explicit reference to the mission and vision on The HISD REAL Program's website. Also, a well-developed Theory of Change allows a program to connect strategy with expected outcomes explicitly and provides a tool for prioritizing and guiding decisions. The items will help staff and the community interpret and understand program actions' what and why when inevitable questions and challenges arise. This will also help The HISD REAL Program understand what and why strategies are aligned.

Revision of Mission and Vision

Revisit and revise the mission, vision, strategic plan, and policies to make equity commitments more explicit. Create a new "mission and vision" for the organization and publicize it on The REAL HISD Program and 8MS website, which will show alignment and consistency. Provide materials that are accessible and understood by all stakeholders in multiple languages and different formats. Build collective responsibility for improving student, parent, and staff experiences, access, and outcomes by communicating The HISD REAL Program's journey and beliefs.

Recommendation 2

Improve recruitment, hiring, and retention of staff across all positions by developing new strategies

(Aligned to Research Question 1 and Finding 2)

“Effective schools are better able to recruit, assign, develop, and retain effective teachers” (Loeb et al., 2012, p. 270). Staff diversification is a key indicator of The HISD REAL Program's commitment to

equity, as it better represents its student enrollment. To diversify staff at all levels and in all positions, the following recommendations suggest actions and provide resources. To do this, teachers must have intrinsic motivation, support, proper education, clear communication, and a full understanding of job expectations. With all these factors, teachers will be more long-term, ultimately influencing student achievement. (Loeb et al., 2012)

Review and Update Policies, Practices, and Protocols

Review and update the HR policies, practices, and protocols for The HISD REAL Program. Revise The HISD REAL Program's written policies and procedures related to recruitment, hiring, and retention and provide training to hiring teams around the revisions. Revise the program's screening and interviewing questions to ensure alignment with the program updated policies, core values, and equity commitment. Establish a robust Staff Diversification Plan, including goals, action steps, timelines, and key performance indicators to measure progress and implementation. The following are some examples of goals that might include monitoring and increasing:

- The percentage of applicants who identify as people of color or with other dimensions of diversity.
- The percentage of applicants invited to phone screening interviews who identify as people of color or with other dimensions of diversity.
- The percentage of applicants invited to sample lesson who identify as people of color or with other dimensions of diversity.
- The percentage of applicants who were finalists for their position who identify as people of color or with other dimensions of diversity.
- The percentage of hires who identify as people of color or with other dimensions of diversity.

Tracking Systems and Data Collection

Develop tracking systems and data collection techniques for monitoring the plan's goals. Analyze district data for staff longevity and estimate vacancies due to retirements over the next 3 to 5 years.

Establish Partnerships and Outreach Programs

Establish partnerships and outreach programs to expand recruitment networks. Colleges and schools of education: The HISD REAL Program is located near several colleges of education whose undergraduate and graduate programs are sources for pipeline development, outreach, recruitment, and continuing education and certification programs, such as the University of Houston, Rice University, Houston Baptist University, and the University of St. Thomas. For Community organizations, partnerships with culturally-based organizations can facilitate the sharing of job opportunities.

Recommendation 3

Ensure staff feedback and evaluation structures are aligned with organizational priorities by providing opportunities for professional learning, development, and ongoing support.

(Aligned to Research Question 1 and Findings 2 and 3)

The evaluation process has outstanding opportunities for capturing expectations and behaviors across the program in alignment with the recommendations regarding professional development and learning. Once staff members have received feedback, the supervisors could provide professional learning, development, and support in the areas of struggle. This will allow staff members to learn new skills and strategies to implement with students. Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) confirmed that having “well-defined and well-agreed-upon” data structures and consistency improves student performance. It is anticipated that efforts to revamp the evaluation system in spring 2023 will improve uniformity among evaluators and provide educators across the program with much-needed guidance and support. Ensuring

that The HISD REAL Program's staff thoroughly understand all expectations, feel the organization is structured, and receive immediate and detailed feedback will increase the staff's sense of satisfaction and belonging (Hofer et al., 2021). Successful alternative schools' essential components include strong leadership, staff professional development, community partnerships, and effective communication and collaboration among all stakeholders (Duke & Tenuto, 2020). To support staff as they engage in this process, The HISD REAL Program needs to provide guidance on how the evaluation and feedback process can benefit their professional development. To this end, consider the following suggestions:

Embed New Vision and Theory of Change with Professional Development

Implement newly identified vision and Theory of Change within existing professional development systems. Assess the learning and development opportunities aligned with existing strategic priorities to identify a vision and theory of change. Develop a team of representatives, experts, and educators to oversee the revisions and oversee the piloting of professional development sessions and guide the process of the revision. Establish a system to track training access and accountability, such as conferences, professional development, and setting alignment and measurable professional development goals, so that they are in alignment with The HISD REAL Program's goals. All staff members must be aware and have access to continuous training and development to make The HISD REAL Program a more equitable program for everyone.

Evaluation and Feedback

Create the evaluation and feedback process that can help improve the professional development opportunities with The HISD REAL Program. Develop a vision for evaluation based on evaluation data, including the process, frequency, and communication of evaluation results. Ensure that the evaluators are trained on how to use the evaluation process to make an effective evaluation. Ensure that you ask for

feedback frequently and proactively from the staff to determine how to improve the evaluation process, priorities, and structure.

Feedback Conversation

Increase comfort levels and be better prepared to engage in conversations about feedback, evaluations, and lines of difference through leveraging resources and support systems. Supporting stakeholders in developing their skills in having courageous conversations is vital to supporting shifts in beliefs and practices. It can be beneficial to sustain the implementation of program goals if stakeholders are given a safe space that allows them to grow at their own pace.

Recommendation 4

Develop an equity-centered, data-informed culture throughout the organization by developing data management plans, key performance indicators, and practices.

(Aligned to Research Question 1 and Findings 1 and 3)

The HISD REAL Program has taken a few steps aimed at improving its data management practices, including using APEX Learning. Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) found that monitoring students by giving each a unique identification number allowed the schools to collect adequate data regarding enrollments, attendance, academic progress and status, and graduation. This data allowed districts to understand how to meet student needs, which is how implementing data management plans, key performance indicators (KPIs), and practices could positively impact student achievement and outcomes. This data will guide The HISD REAL Program toward the best understanding of where improvements can be made and where students need more support. A stronger data management system will enable the use of key performance indicators and practices to create an equity-centered data-informed culture throughout the district. Hofer et al. (2021) found that gathering data about the whole child, and focusing

on the components of SDT research, have helped guide alternative route programs to making improvements within the organization.

Data Tracking and Monitoring

To be able to track individualized data over time to see trends, The HISD REAL Program must identify what key action steps are necessary to ensure that program information systems are current, accurate, and integrated with other systems. To reach program-wide agreements on what data will be collected and monitored, develop a master list of quantitative and qualitative data and an analysis schedule. The HISD REAL Program can start by revising its current goals:

- In Year 1 (2022-2023), 80 students either (a) at risk of dropping out or (b) who have dropped out in the last two years will re-enroll with HISD.
- In Year 1 (2022-2023), at least 60% of all program participants will graduate. This will be scaled up by five percentage points each school year— 65% in Year 2 (2023-2024) and 70% in Year 3 (2024-2025).
- Students will have equitable access to wraparound services. The satisfaction rate with non-academic support provided will be at least 90%. 100% of all students leaving The HISD REAL Program will have at least one job credential/certification.
- The average daily attendance for all participants will be at least 85%.

Develop Key Performance Indicators

To strengthen The HISD REAL Program's existing strategic plan, KPI working groups can be formed for each department to establish appropriate KPIs. The attendance rate, behavior, pass rate, percentage of students reading at grade level by subgroup, and graduation completion rate by subgroup

could all be KPIs. Leaders should also keep an eye on data trends as part of KPIs. When developing KPIs, some considerations include:

- KPIs should reflect areas for improvement identified in strategic plans, departmental plans, and board goals.
- A small number of KPIs (3-5) should be selected for each HISD REAL Program priority area rather than overloading planning documents with them.
- Include qualitative and quantitative data from multiple stakeholders. KPIs should primarily reflect student outcomes and include staff and parent measures.

Data Analysis

Create conditions for staff to employ data analysis and data analysis skills. Develop data system and analysis skills using existing structures such as Airtable, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), leadership team meetings, and board work sessions. Establish and use leveled protocols to examine disaggregated student and program data regularly so disparities in student, staff, and program performance can be identified, and address and access reports to improve metrics for marginalized students' performance and achievement. By implementing common protocols, professionals in school-based PLCs and board meetings can discuss data in a common language, which could lead to more consistent analyses and data-driven decisions. To ensure staff has the time to make data-informed decisions to design or adapt their instruction, The HISD REAL Program staff needs to consider the frequency and duration of PLCs and planning periods. Record videos and artifacts that illustrate how staff teams are already using data to make informed decisions are using it.

Professional Development on Data Analysis Skills

Continue to invest in the development of staff data and analysis skills. There is a need for further development of data analysis and data-driven decision-making skills. The contents of this Recommendation add more professional learning opportunities as systems, protocols, and practices are initiated and aligned across The HISD REAL Program at different levels. When designing new professional learning opportunities, some considerations include: Providing ongoing coaching or support as the staff learns and acquires new skills for analyzing and using disaggregated qualitative and quantitative data to inform decisions. Collecting and analyzing data collaboratively related to a shared practice problem by small groups of staff. Provide professional learning topics that address specific data analysis and decision-making issues, such as:

- Making sense of data dashboards and navigating them
- How data analysis protocols work, what they do, why they do it, and how they do it
- It is important to understand what KPIs are, and what we are doing with them
- Making informed decisions based on the analysis and collection of qualitative data
- A guide to engaging parents in discussions about children's data as part of data collection
- A method for engaging students in the discussion of data in the classroom

Recommendation 5

Develop a communication system that fosters relationships with all parents, particularly marginalized populations.

(Aligned to Research Question 3 and Finding 4)

“Communication is at the heart of the family-school relationship” (Bouffard, 2008, p. 1). Family and The HISD REAL Program staff should form a strong partnership to improve academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students. Tam et al. (2001) discovered that one of the six points to developing

and implementing an effective program was communicating information and purpose with all participating parties. It is also important to ensure there is an opportunity for all parties to partake in the communication and dialogue (Goodall, 2016). In The HISD REAL Program's case, this would include students, staff, families, partnership organizations, and the community. Henrich and Darling-Aduana (2021) found that regular communication throughout the school year has been shown to support a student's overall progress. Using multiple non-traditional methods, The HISD REAL Program can communicate with all families to support student learning by allowing all families to be engaged. Communicating The HISD REAL Program's vision and empowering families to build relationships with leaders and staff are possible with authentic and tailored communication. Community partnerships and collaboration can support alternative education settings by providing resources, support, opportunities, and wraparound services to disadvantaged youth, resulting in higher student success (Mills et al., 2016; Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; McGregor et al., 2015). To strengthen community ties, exploring and using different methods of reaching and engaging all parents is essential. Coordinating and collaborating with relevant stakeholders, such as families, communities, and support services, can positively impact students and is of great importance to the success of alternative education programs (Nada et al., 2020).

Shared Vision

Develop a shared vision for The HISD REAL Program's strong and inclusive partnerships. Engage parents in identifying a vision based on their needs. Establish measurable targets for parent engagement and partnership. Establish clear staff expectations about what success looks like at all levels, such as program, department, leadership, teaching, and school committee.

Students and Parents in Decision-Making

Engage students and parents in decision-making in a more meaningful way. Rely upon student and parent surveys and other data to regularly assess and improve policies' inclusion and equity. Utilize survey data to inform district decisions for students and parents. Provide ongoing opportunities for two-way communication between students and parents. Communicate how student and parent voices influence decision-making.

Parent and Community Engagement

Find alternative methods for contacting and engaging all parents, such as Zoom meetings, community organization liaison meetings, and community spaces to continue exploring. Reach out to parents of marginalized and English language learners proactively through multiple media. The HISD REAL Program accessibility can be increased by, for example, enhancing parent communication opportunities, making communication between parents and students in other languages accessible, and anticipating the experiences of English Language Learners in all communications. All staff should be trained in which communications and engagement approach to use in which scenarios, and follow-up steps should be planned if the first outreach effort fails.

The HISD REAL Program aims to expand and leverage community relationships and resources to meet students, parents, and program needs. It is important to build on these foundations to form more community partnerships and maintain culturally and linguistically appropriate relationships among parents, schools, and communities. Identify parent needs, foster a sense of belonging, and communicate with partners to meet their needs best.

Recommendation 6

Develop a Student Motivation Plan to increase student academic and social-emotional success.

(Aligned to Research Question 2 and Findings 1, 2, 3, and 5)

Communities can advance by developing supportive relationships, mentoring programs, counseling, mental health services, student-centered approaches, and safe and inclusive environments (Duke & Tenuto, 2020). The HISD REAL Program has taken steps to develop relationships that foster access, support, and opportunity. There needs to be some improvements and focus on how to assist in developing positive, healthy, and trusting environments (Williams, 2019). Williams (2019) describes that holding students accountable and giving them responsibility can help them thrive academically, socially, emotionally, and developmentally. Ensuring that there are multiple opportunities for students to have access to assistance to develop individualized plans on how to take the next steps and monitoring the development of those steps will assist in holding students accountable (Williams, 2019; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). The HISD REAL Program should ensure that students' out-of-school problems are a focus because it can positively impact student motivation and performance (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Relationships are continuous, and as they grow, students' sense of belonging will increase (Hofer et al., 2021). By truly listening to the recommendations and perceptions of students, The HISD REAL Program could make major enhancements to the program. As explained in Finding 5, students mentioned wanting more flexible schedules, disliking the dress code, and making improvements with transportation. Involving students in making changes can give students opportunities to work on problem-solving skills, increasing their motivation and involvement within the program (Bowers & Sprott, 2012; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Speckhard, 1993). Empowering students can encourage them to hold an active role in their education, community, and society, allowing them to recognize their capabilities and increasing student intrinsic motivation and meeting their psychological needs directly correlates with Self-Determination Theory (Mills et al., 2016; Williams, 2019, p. 77; Hofer et al., 2021).

Student Voice

To better understand how students are motivated, conduct focus groups and surveys with students regarding what they would specifically like to experience to ensure they are motivated.

Vision for Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Define the vision of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in The HISD REAL Program to be able to create a specific goal on how to measure through program components.

Professional Development

By including time for staff at various levels to learn how to identify and adapt connecting activities and strategies to the needs of their students, The HISD REAL Program can create space for staff SEL development opportunities to explain the rationale behind dedicated relationship-building time. Create an opportunity for staff to practice these skills in groups. Use professional development sessions to highlight connecting strategies, such as modeling strategies, asking teachers to share successful strategies they have used recently, or highlighting strategies to try. Continue to leverage partnerships with companies and organizations for financial literacy training, entrepreneurship education, soft skills/job readiness training, and hands-on career explorations.

Student Mentor Program

Based on Recommendations 1 (clear vision and mission), 2 (improving recruitment hiring and retention, and 3 (staff feedback and evaluation structures), develop a staff and student mentor program for students. This would include staff to:

- Set clear goals and timelines with students
- Monitor progress and hold students accountable

- Develop personalized relationships with students
- Create student individualized learning plans based on goals
- Set weekly or bi-weekly meetings with students to discuss progress and potential adjustments based on data and observations

Conclusion

Through analysis and examination of The HISD REAL Program's documents and stakeholder survey responses regarding the first year of the program's implementation, and in connection with SDT, we have determined five findings and six recommendations. By implementing the recommendations, The HISD REAL Program will be able to improve various areas of the program.

Due to this being the program's first year, there was no data to gather from previous years or past students, parents, and staff. This limitation did not allow for the overall impact of a full year of the program's implementation since most data was gathered and analyzed in April 2023.

By utilizing the study's findings and recommendations, which included immediate, short-term, and long-term suggestions for the program's next steps, The HISD REAL Program can strategically plan its second year. By enabling all stakeholders in The HISD REAL Program to take leadership in the program, each stakeholder will have a lasting impact on its students, parents, and staff.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Student Survey Questions

The student survey instrument included 40 questions designed to assess the two study variables, program evaluation, and student motivation. We evaluated all variables were open responses, interval measures, and using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree.

Greetings Participant,

We are sending surveys to students, families, and The HISD REAL Program staff to gather feedback on how The HISD REAL Program is doing and how it aligns with the program's goals, mission, and vision. We want truthful responses, so all responses will remain anonymous. We hope your feedback will help our improvement efforts ensure our program meets all participant expectations. Some questions may be difficult to answer, but we ask you to do your best to respond to all questions.

We estimate this survey will take 45-60 minutes, and will close on Friday, April 14, at 11:59 PM CST. If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, please reach out to Marvin Pierre, mpierre@eightmillionstories.org.

Demographic Questions

- What is your gender? (Multiple Choice)
- What is your age? (Multiple Choice)
- Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin? (Multiple Choice)
- How would you best describe yourself? (Multiple Choice)
- Which best describes your employment status? (Multiple Choice)
- What was your last grade completed in your previous school? (Multiple Choice)
- How many more credits do you need to complete to receive your high school diploma? (Short Answer)

Likert Scale Questions (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree)

- I try things even if I might fail
- When my solution to a problem is not working, I try to figure out what went wrong
- How smart I am is something I can change
- I take responsibility for working on my goals
- I can calm myself down when I am excited or upset
- I know I will graduate from high school or achieve a graduation equivalency
- I am a hard worker
- I finish whatever I begin
- Setbacks don't discourage me
- I am hopeful about my future
- What we do in The HISD REAL Program will help me be successful in life
- One of my goals in class is to learn as much as I can
- It is easy to communicate my thoughts and ideas
- I work hard at The HISD REAL Program
- I am proud of The HISD REAL Program

- I have a plan for what I would like to do after completing The HISD REAL Program
- I am treated with as much respect as other students
- I feel like I belong in The HISD REAL Program
- There is at least one adult in The HISD REAL Program I can talk to if I have a problem
- I am comfortable asking my teachers for help
- I can do almost all the work in my class if I don't give up

The HISD REAL Program Questions

- What are you most likely to do after completing The HISD REAL Program? (Multiple Choice)
- Why are you in The HISD REAL Program ? (Short Answer)
- How do you feel about The HISD REAL Program? What are you excited about? What are you not excited about? (Short Answer)
- With your experience in The HISD REAL Program, what would you suggest to improve your high school or high schools in general regarding your educational experience? (Short Answer)
- What components or activities (ex. field trips, visits, work learning, etc.) from The HISD REAL Program have been most influential? (Short Answer)
- What do you think is needed to make your hopes about the future come true? What role do you have in making it come true? (Short Answer)
- What do you need in order to be successful? What does success look like? How will you be successful? (Short Answer)
- Who are your favorite people in The HISD REAL Program? Why? Who has been your favorite teacher? Why? (Short Answer)
- By attending The HISD REAL Program, how has your educational experience been affected? (Short Answer)
- What do you think prevented you from learning/enjoying school at its maximum at your previous school? (Short Answer)
- What resources or support **does** The HISD REAL Program provide you that helps you to be successful academically, socially, and emotionally? Please be specific. (Short Answer)
- What are some resources The HISD REAL Program **could** provide to help you be more successful academically, socially, and emotionally? Please be specific. (Short Answer)

Appendix B: Parent Survey Questions

The parent survey instrument included 40 questions designed to assess the two study variables, program evaluation, and student motivation. We evaluated all variables were open responses, interval measures, and using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree.

Greetings Participant,

We are sending surveys to students, families, and The HISD REAL Program staff to gather feedback on how The HISD REAL Program is doing and how it aligns with the program's goals, mission, and vision. We want truthful responses, so all responses will remain anonymous. We hope your feedback will help our improvement efforts ensure our program meets all participant expectations. Some questions may be difficult to answer, but we ask you to do your best to respond to all questions.

We estimate this survey will take 45-60 minutes, and will close on Friday, April 14, at 11:59 PM CST. If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, please reach out to Marvin Pierre, mpierre@eightmillionstories.org.

Demographic Questions

- What is your gender? (Multiple Choice)
- What is your age? (Multiple Choice)
- Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin? (Multiple Choice)
- How would you best describe yourself? (Multiple Choice)
- Which best describes your employment status? (Multiple Choice)
- How many children do you have? (Multiple Choice)
- What is the highest level of school or degree you have completed? (Multiple Choice)
- If you dropped out of school, why? (Short Answer)

Likert Scale Questions (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree)

- My student will try things even if he or she might fail
- When my student's solution to a problem is not working, he or she will try something else
- My student believes they can change how smart he or she is
- My student takes responsibility for working on his or her goals
- My student can calm down when she or he is excited or upset
- My student will graduate from high school or a graduation equivalency
- My student is a hard worker
- My student finishes whatever he or she begins
- Setbacks don't discourage my student
- My student is hopeful about his or her future
- I am hopeful about my student's future
- What The HISD REAL Program does will help my student be successful in life
- My student communicated his or her thoughts and ideas
- My student works hard in The HISD REAL Program
- I am proud of the The HISD REAL Program
- I am proud of my student
- My student has a plan after completing The HISD REAL Program
- My student is treated with respect in The HISD REAL Program

- My student is supported in The HISD REAL Program

The HISD REAL Program Questions

- Tell us about your relationship with the adults at your child's school. (Short Answer)
- What are your hopes and dreams for your child in the future? (Short Answer)
- What resources do you think the school provided you to better support you as a parent and your family? Please be specific. (Short Answer)
- What resources do you think the school should have provided you to better support you as a parent and your family? Please be specific. (Short Answer)
- How have you seen a difference in your student since he or she started attending The HISD REAL Program? (Short Answer)
- What do you like about the The HISD REAL Program? (Short Answer)
- What improvements do you think The HISD REAL Program could implement? (Short Answer)
- How has The HISD REAL Program improved or not improved your student's motivation academically, socially, emotionally, etc.? (Short Answer)
- What does your child love about school? What do they like least? (Short Answer)
- What did you like about your student's previous school? (Short Answer)
- What did you dislike about your student's previous school? (Short Answer)

Appendix C: Staff Survey Questions

The staff survey instrument included 40 questions designed to assess the two study variables, program evaluation, and student motivation. We evaluated all variables were open responses, interval measures, and using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree.

Greetings Participant,

We are sending surveys to students, families, and The HISD REAL Program staff to gather feedback on how The HISD REAL Program is doing and how it aligns with the program's goals, mission, and vision. We want truthful responses, so all responses will remain anonymous. We hope your feedback will help our improvement efforts ensure our program meets all participant expectations. Some questions may be difficult to answer, but we ask you to do your best to respond to all questions.

We estimate this survey will take 45-60 minutes, and will close on Friday, April 14, at 11:59 PM CST. If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, please reach out to Marvin Pierre, mpierre@eightmillionstories.org.

Demographic Questions

- What is your gender? (Multiple Choice)
- What is your age? (Multiple Choice)
- Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin? (Multiple Choice)
- How would you best describe yourself? (Multiple Choice)
- What is the highest level of school or degree you have completed? (Multiple Choice)
- How long have you been in the education field? (Multiple Choice)
- What grade levels have you taught? (Multiple Choice)

Likert Scale Questions (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree)

- My students try things even if they might fail
- My students figure out what went wrong if their solution to a problem doesn't work
- My students take responsibility for working on their goals
- My students can calm themselves down when they are excited or upset
- My students are hard workers
- My students finish what they begin
- Setbacks don't discourage my students
- My students are hopeful about their futures
- What we do in the REAL program will help students be successful in life
- It is easy for my student's to communicate their thoughts and ideas
- I am proud of the REAL program
- All students are treated with equal respect
- My students ask for help when they need it

The HISD REAL Program Questions

- How do you think you currently meet the needs of the students in the REAL program? (Short Answer)

- Tell us about your experience in working at/with The HISD REAL program. Please be specific. (Short Answer)
- How do you think The HISD REAL program could improve? (Short Answer)
- What makes the REAL program different from the mainstream learning environment? (Short Answer)
- What are your hopes for The HISD REAL program? (Short Answer)
- What components or activities have been most influential for the REAL program? (Short Answer)
- Why did you decide to be a staff member of The HISD REAL program? How did you hear about it? (Short Answer)
- How do you motivate your students? (Short Answer)
- Tell us about any resources The HISD REAL program contributed to the community? What impact do you feel the contributions were? Why? (Short Answer)
- Are there any resources you believe could have been contributed that weren't? If so, what would they be? Why do you feel these resources could be impactful? (Short Answer)

Appendix D: Analysis Table - Survey and Document Analysis Evidence

Survey Key

- How effectively does The HISD REAL Program, as designed and delivered, align with its stated mission, vision, and goals?
- How, if at all, does a student's perception of school change due to participating in The HISD REAL Program?
- What factors impact a student's choice of being involved in The HISD REAL Program?

Document Analysis Evidence Key

1. Mission, Vision, & Goals (65)
 1. REAL Impact Overview
 2. 8MS PD Agenda_3_31_23
 3. 2022-2023 calendar
 4. Eight Million Stories Operating Policies and Procedures
 5. 8MS Academic Success Coach
 6. 8MS Managing Director of Strategy and Operations
 7. 8MS Operations Associate Job Description
 8. 8MS Managing Director of Programming
 9. 8MS Student Support Specialist Job Description
 10. 8MS Family and Student Engagement Specialist
 11. 2022_Revised_HISD_REAL_flyer_English Spanish_Final
 12. Press Release
 13. Graduation Pictures (16)
 14. Art of Automobile Pictures (37)
2. Student Motivation (54)
 1. Email
 2. Graduation Pictures (16)
 3. Art of Automobile Pictures (37)
3. Factors of Impact (57)
 1. Art of Automobile Pictures (37)
 2. Graduation Pictures (16)
 3. 8MS and HISD_HISD REAL Program Overview
 4. Video Documentary
 5. REAL Impact Overview
 6. Social Media

Project Questions	Survey Evidence	Document Analysis Evidence
<p>How effectively does The HISD REAL Program, as designed and delivered, align with its stated mission, vision, and goals?</p> <p>Our mission is to provide a network of support and access, that closes the opportunity gap for traditionally underserved youth (10-21 years old).</p> <p>Through our holistic services and core programming, we give our youth the opportunity to build relationships, develop new skills, and establish goals that will put them on a trajectory to success and</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tell us about your relationship with the adults at your child’s school. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Good ○ If the need or request anything, I just do it cordial ○ The relationship between the school and us is high ○ There is a two way relationship with adults. They will communicate on a regular basis, offer suggestions, and super supportive. I’m able to speak freely with an adult to ask questions on child’s progress. ○ I haven’t spoken with any adults since she has been in the program ○ Pleasant; the teacher last communicates well with me ● What resources do you think the school provided you to better support you as a parent and your family? Please be specific. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I do everything ○ Care - a caring team that knows how to communicate and excuse plans ○ PATIENTS and a small school setting ○ The school provided better meals for my kid ○ The teachers and counselors are hands on which supports child's needs. ○ So far she is focused and enjoys the program and it eases my mind knowing she’s at school and not skipping school. ○ Small class setting ● What resources do you think the school should have provided you to better support you as a parent and your family? Please be specific. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nothing they gave me everything ○ Nothing, it was perfect the way it was. Way better than a regular school ○ n/a ○ It should provide information about my student ○ N/A ○ Be more informative with her progress in the program and her goals ○ Transportation 	<p>Impact Overview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This artifact shows the program overview, which includes the problem and program potential solution and desired outcomes. It also had the interventions ● that the program provides. It breaks down the current statistical evidence pertaining to credits, attendance and partnerships, and feedback. It also shows withdrawals. <p>Operating Policies and Procedures Manual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This artifact shows the majority of the manual is not completed. However, there are headers that list Intro and background, referral and enrollment, programs, academics, data management, operations, branding, safety and security, job duties and essential functions. <p>2022-2023 School Calendar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This artifact shows the dates students and staff will attend programming.

self-sufficiency in adulthood.

- What do you like about the REAL program?
 - Smaller group setting: That they help the student more One on one, Small class setting; teacher/student relationship
 - That it is unique and different. I was surprised how much they help in your child's future and care and the readiness for the real world
 - They've given my child a reason to want to attend school and I'm GRATEFUL.
 - I like the program because is a alternative way my son can graduate high school
 - I like that the Real program genuinely cares about their students education and provides them with life goals to succeed.
 - It's not crowded and the students can actually learn and experience other things like educational field trips
- What improvements do you think the REAL program could implement?
 - 3 - Nothing they do a good job, None, The school has done everything good
 - extend the program thru high school completion
 - The Real program should implement more locations to serve other students within HISD.
 - For me it's communication with the parents
 - Provide transportation
- My student has a plan after completing the REAL program
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)
- My student is supported in the REAL program
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)
- My student will graduate from high school or a graduation equivalency
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)
- I am proud of the REAL program
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)
- My student has a plan after completing the REAL program
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)
- My student is supported in the REAL program
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)

[Example of PD Agenda](#)

- This artifact shows sessions that staff will attend regarding data, practice same lessons, org-wide culture planning and documents time.

[HISD Real Flyer](#)

- This artifact shows the requirements students need to have to be eligible to be admitted to The HISD REAL Program. The goal of the program is communicated. It lists the overview of the school day. It also lists the benefits of the program and the curriculum it uses (APEX). Explains how they approach the whole child (food, clothing, and child care). The flyer is also communicated in Spanish.

[Student Support Specialist Job Description](#)

- This artifact clearly states the mission and vision of the program, the description of roles and responsibilities, salary, and benefits.

[Operations Associate Job Description](#)

Students

- How do you feel about the REAL program? What are you excited about? What are you not excited about?
 1. I am excited about the REAL program that we get to do things easier here and faster so I thank y'all so much for this opportunity.
 2. I am excited to catch up and go above a grade level n graduate early
 3. nothing
 4. I feel great about the real program
 5. How I feel about the real program is happy what im excited about is the new activities they bring to the program what im not excited about is leaving
 6. I think the REAL program is doing a good job right now. I'm excited that we will get a student body president. I'm not excited about the fact that we cant use headphones.
 7. i feel like the real program is here for me to do better. i am excited about all of the new opportunities.
 8. I'm excited to go to college and I'm not excited to leave the program
 9. I'm excited to get my credits, not excited for the unnecessary changes
 10. good
 11. I feel helped and catered to. I am excited about the credits i have earned so far. I dislike the lack of being organized
 12. I like it
 13. I love the REAL program it has helped me so much mentally, i am excited to graduate, I am nit excited about leaving the people i became friends with while here
 14. I'm excited about everything, because REAL just beginning. if you want to be for real.
 15. N/A
 16. its great
 17. I'm good with the way things are.
 18. I like it. I'm excited about job opportunities. I'm not excited about the transportation

- This artifact clearly states the mission and vision of the program, the description of roles and responsibilities, salary, and benefits.
- This artifact also links the application to apply.

[Managing Director of Strategy and Operations Job Description](#)

- This artifact clearly states the mission and vision of the program, the description of roles and responsibilities, salary, and benefits.
- Ages changed

[Managing Director of Programming Job Description](#)

- This artifact clearly states the mission and vision of the program, the description of roles and responsibilities, salary, and benefits.

[Family and Student Engagement Specialist Job Description](#)

- This artifact clearly states the mission and vision of the program, the description of roles and responsibilities, salary, and benefits.

19. how i feel about the real program is that i can do my best at reaching my goal .Im excited about passing all my courses and reaching my goal .im not excited about how slow i been moving in apex i feel like i need to do better and get on my grind
20. achiveing my goals
21. im exited that i git an oppportunity to graduate on time
22. its mid
23. I feel that the real program is a very good movement created by 8 million stories & I am mostly excited about the programs that they have in store here.
24. I really like the program because they really care about you, give you the push you need it and they keep it real with us.
25. Its cool
26. i feel that its great im excited about the program
27. the real is a great program from young adults and im excited because they give people a second chance.
28. im not really sure
29. I feel very happy because I can recover my credits and catch up
30. i feel like the real a great program, im excited about the second chance they give you in life.
31. One thing that excites me about the REAL program is the job and internship opportunities we have.
32. I feel like this is a great program. Overall, I have seen a lot of students improve in their apex and most students have improved in the way they speak and act. The program has thought a lot of us how to be and speak professionally. It has thought us how to fill out job applications and have prepared us for future job interviews. They offer to help find jobs, help you fill out FASFA application, and help you with any personal problems you might have. I am excited to see in how many other ways the program will improve I think it is great the way it is now.
33. i dont like the dress code but i like the opportunity they have.

[Academic Success Coach Job Description](#)

- This artifact clearly states the mission and vision of the program, the description of roles and responsibilities, salary, and benefits.
- No salary listed

[HISD Program Overview](#)

- This artifact shows an executive summary of the program
- Target grade levels
- Named working with disconnected youth
- Aligned - In line with the district's mission to provide all students with the tools necessary to reach their full potential
- Using its OnTime Grad model and leveraging building space at Jones High School, cohorts for HISD REAL will be identified in two ways:
 - 1. Pre-emptively: Students who are currently enrolled in HISD who meet more than 3 of the 23 early warning indicators. Students will follow

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● With your experience in the REAL program, what would you suggest to improve your high school or high schools in general regarding your educational experience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Communication ○ I can improve my attending, saying like to go to school because school isn't that bad after all. ○ school time, lunch and better environment ○ learning ○ I would suggest to improve the type of teachers. Schools need teachers that will dedicate their work time to all students, even if one day is not enough. ○ with my experience in the real program what ill suggest in highschool is theres always a chance to be better ○ I think we should have more programs that prepare students for adulthood. ○ they should have more emotional support for the kids and not only focus on work they should do the an life part. ○ make it a more comfortable Enviromint and more available help for students ○ Almost everything ○ good ○ Be more active within the kids in and outside of school lives and be more concerned. ○ I am going to general ○ Tutoring ○ Give all the class on apex ○ N/A ○ my self ○ The library ○ i suggest to improve how fast i move in my learning experience in high school ○ hhh ○ ill want to imkprove communicating my thoughts better | <p>the referral process; they will be attached to their home campus while receiving services through this partnership at Jones HS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2. Reactively: Students with whereabouts unknown who have not been with HISD within the last two years. Students struggling to enroll at their home campus will be enrolled at the HISD Virtual School. From there, they will follow a process to receive services through this partnership with Eight Million Stories, Inc.. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● List the program statement and solution, program goals and objectives, targeted campuses, target grades, and target population ● Academic intervention and computer-based instruction. ● Reduced hours during the instructional day, allowing students to work and/or |
|--|--|--|

- idk
- I feel that other high schools should improve there school by giving there students more oppurtunities.
- they should get better teachers or re train them at regular high schools
- As of now i feel like the real is good as it is.
- nothing
- schools need to have people like the REAL PROGRAM because of the respect and time they give to students
- my experience in the real program is great community and environment.
- I would suggest that high school put in better efforts to communicate with students as well as give more respect to students.
- In my opinion, I think my high school should improve in many ways starting with keeping up with students who are behind and checking up on students. At the high school I was attending they lacked on doing so because they are so focused on what students are doing bad that they don't think about what problems the student could personally/internally be going through. Yates High School should improve in many other ways to one day be considered like the Real program they lack respect for students, they lack on teaching, and they always put themselves first before putting a student first I have had many horrible experiences with teachers including racism, name calling, and arguments because I've stood up for other students, they were being unfair too. Not just that but they also lack on keeping students informed about important things. They have no care in the world towards students and constantly brings students down by saying things like "Then you all wonder why you
- all don't have anything" things a teacher shouldn't say to students. It honestly just lacks so much.
- that the students should care more and also the teachers.
- What components or activities (ex. field trips, visits, work learning, etc.) from the REAL program have been most influential?

participate in other programming.

- Post-secondary support

Art of Automotive Photos

- This artifact shows a project that students have completed with a community partner on automobiles.
- Hands-on learning
- Real-life experience

Apex Learning (online platform)

- Platform that students use to complete assignments and see growth.

Press Release

- This artifact shows a press release from HISD about the partnership between 8MS and HISD.

Graduation Photos

- This artifact shows photos of students who gradyated with the HS diploma.

Instagram

- Thisa artifact shows evidence of the activities students completed while in the program.

- The field trips have been more influential because they teach us and tell us like what we can do for ourselves in the future or what we can study for.
- most of them
- 2
- The fieldtrips to places that interest me that might be adaptive for me in the future to look for a job. I was really intrigued in the Microsoft field trip because I am interested in the tech field for my career.
- a few activities that have been a BIG influence on me is when the music people came to help us record a song or when we went to UT to see how college is
- The field trips have been very influential.
- when we went to Austin.
- The HP and Austin field trips
- Apex and Trio
- apex
- HP have influenced me the most to thrive for success
- meet new people
- The speakers they bring in to talk to us and the life lessons they give along the way
- HP, UT and Workforce
- N/A
- the teachers
- Apex
- The Austin field trip
- hp has been the most influential and UT austin
- hhh
- work learning because I have to learn a different way
- the shadow with bank of America
- The trip to hp (Hewlett-Packard Company) was the most influential to me because it showed the power of team work.
- All of them are really influential to me I get to learn a little from everything

- Hp
- the hp field trip because i learned alot
- Mircosoft, because it thought us more about technology.
- all of them
- when the military used here they influenced me to enter the military
- Mircosoft, it helped me learn more about technology and building things with it.
- Yesterdays field trip to hp was a very influential field trip as well as to Austin
- A component from the REAL program that has been the most influential is the financial literacy classes there were a lot of things I learned that have helped me manage my money and a lot of advice that I will need in the future.
- going to hp it help a lot to see life.
- I know I will graduate from high school or achieve a graduation equivalency
 - SD→SA (2, 0, 3, 6, 22)
- I am proud of the REAL program
 - SD→SA (2, 0, 3, 6, 22)
- I have a plan for what I would like to do after completing the REAL program
 - SD→SA (2, 0, 2, 12, 17)

Staff

- How do you think you currently meet the needs of the students in the REAL program?
 - In my role, I think I meet student needs by being someone they know will listen but also hold them accountable. I encourage and correct at the same time. That is needed as our students thrive in structure. I definitely also have opportunity to grow as well.
 - By doing my research on current teaching trends, intentional conversations and building rapport with students.
 - Supporting and giving them tools to utilize as they advocate for themselves. Strongly encouraging students and finding the good in each one

- I have been helping our students needs by being available to help them with needs outside of the school. I have helped students with Ubers to job interviews, to school, and home on occasions. I have also been able to speak with students when they are going through things at home.
- My position can improve the need for students away from campus.
- I offer a meditation space to help relieve stress and anxiety before classes begin. Helping educators in the class allows me to interact with students and give them positive feedback. I also report concerns related to any barriers I see that may be holding a student back from reaching their goals.
- By showing up for them everyday, and being my most authentic self.
- Many if not ALL the students that are admitted into the REAL program fall below right at or fall below the poverty line. As a result, they are experiencing many inequities especially when it comes to the quality of education, they receive. They are academically behind and the last two years of abrupt remote learning made matters worse. Nothing was in place that regularly assessed the mental health of our students during the pandemic or even after. My role addresses the need for regular emotional and mental health support especially for our students.
- I hope that my continuous words of encouragement and emotional support to every student would be words of wisdom that they can apply to life leading them into successful careers and entrepreneurships.
- Tell us about your experience in working at/with the REAL program. Please be specific.
 - I enjoy my time working at REAL. I love seeing the growth of our students; they came in not seeing the possibility of college or even having experienced success. They now feel like, "why not me?". I have also experienced moments of frustration because there have been missed opportunities for student learning that could have been

prevented. I know that so much more needs to be done to grow the program to its full potential, but I am willing to put in the work.

- There needs to be a conversation about work-life balance and creating healthy boundaries in the workplace. There is an apparent lack of understanding of people having lives outside work. Also, there is a lack of classroom support. We cannot teach students about wellness and structure if we do not have that ourselves. Staff members should feel supported, UPPER MANAGEMENT is doing a great job telling us what we need to improve on, but there is no highlight on what we have done right, health and wellness checks, or anything. There is a continuous sense of urgency without consideration or empathy.
- This is a learning experience for myself. The REAL students have lots of issues which has them lacking support
- I believe that my experience with the REAL program has been eye opening. The program has shown me that there should be a lot more alternative programs so that students can have exposure. It has been challenging at times due to the staff shortage but the goal of serving youth still was met.
- Life changing experience working with many different personalities. I learned how to adapt and respond to many needs.
- The guest speakers seem to inspire the students to succeed in the career of their choice. Offering a 2 year scholarship to students motivates them to push through and finish the work. Addressing mental health helps remove the barriers to learning and gives each person an opportunity to focus on their school work.
- My experience working at REAL has been a struggle, stressful, and draining mentally.
- when I was first hired on. I felt I was being pulled in many directions (college app, resume, classroom support, enrichment, social emotional support). My role wasn't clear at the time and that made things feel shaky for me. Communication among staff has not been the best but it is significantly improving and that really has been the

difference for me. When expectations are clear it allows things flow easily. Nonetheless I do feel like I am valued and I feel supported.

- The experience in working with students in the HISD school system allowed me to know how the students have no voice, but the REAL program has given them a voice and the hope of achieving any and all goals in life to become successful.
- How do you think the REAL program could improve?
 - I need to create and communicate systems around all aspects of our work. I need to provide more coaching to staff to build their capacity so that they are proactive instead of reactive. I also need to work with the rest of leadership to fine tune our profile of a student to ensure we communicate clearly to campuses and families of expectations and outcomes of the program.
 - I have genuinely enjoyed a lot of students, and some of the projects we have worked on have helped me properly understand their long-term goals and have helped me shape the classroom expectations and also hold them accountable. The only issue I am having is helping those students who are not interested in getting help. So, to do this, I would need more in-class support, and a disciplinary program should be established.
 - Exercising their - Voices will help them feel comfortable with speaking for themselves and opening up - With sharing their needs and concerns.
 - I believe the program could improve by continuing to add programs to add exposure to the students. I also believe that parents should be more involved with the program.
 - More programs for the students and staff that are successful from start to finish.
 - Offering tutors to students to help them succeed in areas where they are struggling.
 - Better organization, policy and procedures guidelines for the program.
 - -The students are in the same classroom for 5 hours a day. It may not seem like a long time for adults but many of our students need

transition periods. Building a schedule where students can get up and walk into a different class for their activities will allow them to take a break then reset for their next activity. - Better communication with their home campus counselors so we can let students know where they are (credits). -In class Support for academic coaches (tutors), More educational outings. The students absolutely loved the trip to Austin. This also allows for students to feel more connected to their peers and staff. -Summer programming

- First have a set mind to listen to the voice of vision, before moving forward until you've actually caught the vision.
- What makes the REAL program different from the mainstream learning environment?
 - The biggest difference is our work is grounded in building authentic relationships with students and their support circle (or create a support circle for them). We do not simply focus on the traditional components of education, we also focus on life skills such as financial literacy, SEL support, and job skills. Student voice is also a priority to us; we provide them an opportunity to try new things and leverage their strengths.
 - Very dependent on everyone working together to achieve a goal but lacks proper structure and understanding of professionalism.
 - We give kids chances and opportunities other students don't receive in traditional school
 - What makes the REAL program different is the programs that are not in a traditional setting. Programs such as financial literacy, podcast, and the Plug. REAL also has exposed students to experiences that they have not had before.
 - The students are able to be personable to each staff member on campus.
 - It gives the student autonomy and recognizes each person's strength. The program removes barriers to learning by addressing them (mental health support, filling out job applications, free clothing and shoes, to name a few). The environment teaches respect for self and

for others. Students are made aware of how they speak and to form new habits to help them speak professionally so they can be taken seriously when they go out lookin for jobs. The program invites speakers to assist students in career selections and hone in on their interests so they can make better choices for a successful future.

- Self pace, enrichment, life skills, job placement
- The REAL program reengages students. It's a shift many students desperately needed. Smaller classrooms, tailored learning and specialized support is what makes REAL different. Also, the staff reflects the students. Black students need Black educators.
- I feel it gives the students an opportunity to learn and develop leadership skills, both academically and socially.
- What components or activities have been most influential for the REAL program?
 - Field trips to various industry partners and job opportunities. The credit recovery piece is secondary.
 - The enrichment
 - Enrichment
 - Financial Literacy and shorten class schedule
 - Girls group has been an amazing influence on the young woman who attend. The field lessons have also been a positive influence on the students who participate.
 - I believe speakers like Mr. Harper and the field trip to UT Austin had a significant impact on the students.
 - The field trips, and guest speaker
 - Relationship building with our students -Enrichment opportunities during school hours (financial Literacy, Podcast) -Field trips
 - We've provided greater opportunities that allow the students to express themselves creatively through education and innovatively through visitations to affiliated companies and field trips to universities the student may have an interest in attending.
- Why did you decide to be a staff member of the REAL program? How did you hear about it?

- I had previously worked with Marvin; I wanted to work as a staff member of REAL because I know we fill the gaps of the traditional school system; I believe what we do changes the trajectory of our students' lives
- I wanted to positively impact students who are looking to grow..
- I have seen the program grow and support students. I heard about the program from a previous employer
- I decided to be a REAL staff member because I believe in the vision that was started with Eight Million Stories. I believe that all students need exposure and a chance to showcase their talents. I heard about the program while working with Harris County Juvenile Probation.
- I have been watching the amazing work 8MS has been doing the previous years.
- The REAL program has dedicated professionals that need support from volunteers. I saw a need for basic administrative work. The educators are better able to focus on the students by finding the tools they need at their fingertips. I have seen relief on their faces when they were able to find a file easily, locate the correct supplies in an organized closet and communicate with a Spanish speaking parent. I heard about the program through AmeriCorps.
- I want to make a difference in the way a youth thinks about themselves
- I decided to join the REAL team because I believe education is the foundation for success and the loved what 8MS was already doing. When I saw the job posting on Indeed and looked up the organization, I saw many great things that I look for in an organization. I am currently still here because I see myself growing in my role and that is the most important component for me.
- Life lessons allows you open up your heart and become relatable in wanting to help others.
- I am proud of the REAL program
 - SD→SA (2, 0, 1, 4, 2)

<p>How, if at all, does a student's perception of school change due to participating in The HISD REAL Program?</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How have you seen a difference in your student since he or she started attending the REAL program? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ He likes going to school and he wants to go to college ○ He actually likes school now and loves his teachers and is more determined ○ My student is very motivated now to attend school. ○ Yes he has started to like school more ○ I noticed a difference in students mindset about education. He once contemplated dropping out of school until the Real program provided him with better curriculum to suit his learning style. ○ She's more open when we talk she's more focused and enjoys going to school ○ Yes! Absolutely! Very thankful! ● My student will try things even if he or she might fail <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SD→SA (0, 0, 2, 3, 2) ● When my student's solution to a problem is not working, he or she will try something else <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SD→SA (0, 0, 1, 4, 2) ● My student believes they can change how smart he or she is ● SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 6, 1) My student takes responsibility for working on his or her goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SD→SA (0, 0, 2, 3, 2) ● My student can calm down when she or he is excited or upset <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SD→SA (0, 0, 5, 1, 1) ● My student is a hard worker <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 4, 3) ● My student finishes whatever he or she begins <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SD→SA (0, 0, 2, 5, 0) ● Setbacks don't discourage my student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SD→SA (0, 0, 3, 4, 0) ● My student is hopeful about his or her future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5) 	<p>Art of Automotive Photos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This artifact shows a project that students have completed with a community partner on automobiles. ● Hands-on learning ● Real-life experience <p>Graduation Photos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This artifact shows photos of students who graduated with the HS diploma. <p>Instagram</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This artifact shows evidence of the activities students completed while in the program.
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- My student communicated his or her thoughts and ideas
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 4, 3)
- My student works hard in the REAL program
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)

Students

- I try things even if I might fail
 - SD→SA (1, 0, 7, 10, 15)
- When my solution to a problem is not working, I try to figure out what went wrong
 - SD→SA (1, 1, 4, 14, 13)
- How smart I am is something I can change
 - SD→SA (1, 0, 4, 11, 17)
- I take responsibility for working on my goals
 - SD→SA (2, 0, 1, 13, 17)
- I can calm myself down when I am excited or upset
 - SD→SA (1, 1, 5, 13, 13)
- I am a hard worker
 - SD→SA (1, 1, 1, 9, 21)
- I finish whatever I begin
 - SD→SA (1, 2, 2, 10, 18)
- Setbacks don't discourage me
 - SD→SA (1, 3, 5, 10, 14)
- I am hopeful about my future
 - SD→SA (1, 1, 2, 11, 18)
- One of my goals in class is to learn as much as I can
 - SD→SA (1, 0, 2, 14, 16)
- It is easy to communicate my thoughts and ideas
 - SD→SA (4, 2, 4, 11, 12)
- I work hard at the REAL program
 - SD→SA (1, 1, 2, 10, 19)
- I can do almost all the work in my class if I don't give up
 - SD→SA (1, 0, 2, 7, 23)

- By attending the REAL program, how has your educational experience been affected?
 - Is been affected positively because It changed myself and it actually got me going to school.
 - Good
 - just do apex
 - Attending the real program my educational experience has been affected in ways like learning how important it is in the real world to be professional, because the real program is teaching about the real world and how it can affect us in many ways if we dont do whats right.
 - attending the real program real life changed me as a person its not even about the educational process no more its more about who i wanna be they help me catch up to all my work grade and NGS
 - I was able to recover all my credits and made me more motivated to do my work.
 - in a good way
 - It helped me reached my right grade
 - I actually have hope in myself and motivation to keep going
 - good
 - It have increased in a positive way.
 - I can move at my speed
 - Yes, im much more attentive and i enjoy coming to the program its such a loving, non judgeful environment
 - It when up, i been more in engaged in school
 - N/A
 - a lot gained a lot of experience
 - It's definitely been a little shift in my work ethic.
 - I have a second chance
 - at first i wasn't use to the environment because i was so use to regular school and moving around alot not just staying and one spot all day
 - hhh

- it has gotten much better
- made me more woke
- It changed my level of thinking.
- is been great I really didnt have hope on myself but the program chance it around
- alot
- im getting credits fast
- by attending the real program it helped me learn more about things in life.
- i been focused
- It opened my eyes to what the real world is like and is preparing me for the real world.
- it helped me alot made me understand more about different things.
- I have regained motivation for school
- By attending the REAL program my educational experience improved I have learned so many important life and social skills. Not just that but I have learned how to prepare for job interviews and how to fill out job applications. I have learned how to speak, act, and dress professionally. I have learned new words and have been practicing them for future references.
- its been very great i can say.

Staff

- My students try things even if they might fail
 - SD→SA (0, 4, 1, 3, 1)
- My students figure out what went wrong if their solution to a problem doesn't work
 - SD→SA (1, 4, 0, 4, 0)
- My students take responsibility for working on their goals
 - SD→SA (1, 4, 2, 1, 1)
- My students can calm themselves down when they are excited or upset
 - SD→SA (1, 3, 3, 2, 0)
- My students are hard workers

- SD→SA (1, 2, 1, 4, 1)
- My students finish what they begin
 - SD→SA (1, 2, 3, 2, 1)
- Setbacks don't discourage my students
 - SD→SA (2, 5, 1, 1, 0)
- My students are hopeful about their futures
 - SD→SA (1, 1, 3, 3, 1)
- It is easy for my student's to communicate their thoughts and ideas
 - SD→SA (1, 5, 0, 2, 1)
- **How do you motivate your students?**
 - Provide them with opportunities to have small wins; build their confidence and make things relevant to them.
 - Using videos that speak to subjects they are interested in, giving students a chance to also teach others.
 - Talking with them encouraging them and supporting them
 - I motivate students by constantly staying positive even when they can only see negative. I constantly remind them that they can accomplish anything through hard-work and dedication.
 - Positive and influential affirmations.
 - I give them positive feedback when they don't feel like their doing a good job (Example: During a "feel good Friday" painting session I heard a student say he wasn't very good at painting, I encouraged him to try something new. The result was a wonderful Jackson Pollock rendition. I mentioned this to him and he asked who the artist was, an excellent educational opportunity. I mentioned that there are different types of paintings and Mr. Pollock was a famous artist).
 - Positive attitude and interactions
 - I veer away from their circumstances and really lean into the here and now. I encourage students to think of the bigger picture and what that looks and feels like to them. I use their motivation to motivate them. I also try to be as consistent with how I show up and how I speak to them.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The key word is genuine love and compassion, not only in words, but also showing consistently 	
<p>What factors impact a student's choice of being involved in The HISD REAL Program?</p>	<p>Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are your hopes and dreams for your child in the future? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To go college and become some one in life ○ I don't have hopes and dreams for my child as he has his own and I believe in him ○ My hopes and dreams is for my child to continue to receive a great education and become a productive member to society. ○ I hope my son can be successful in life ○ I hope and dream child can apply learnings and life skills taught in the real world after graduation. ○ To graduate and become an independent young lady with high standards for herself ○ Receive college degree ● How has the REAL program improved or not improved your student's motivation academically, socially, emotionally, etc.? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It has improved hom in his Attitude ○ It improved his motivation a lot. He is more involved in decisions and care about his future. ○ My student is motivated to do homework now. ○ The real program has improved my son he is motivated to go to school now ○ The Real program improved students motivation academically and emotionally. ○ It has improved her motivation greatly and for that I'm grateful ○ My child is now motivated to attend school and is doing very well academically! Thankful. ● What does your child love about school? What do they like least? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They like the time that he goes in and time he gets out he feels like it doesn't take all day to be in school ○ The learning, his teachers in how they are so involved and hands on 	<p>Art of Automotive Photos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This artifact shows a project that students have completed with a community partner on automobiles. ● Hands-on learning ● Real-life experience <p>Graduation Photos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This artifact shows photos of students who gradyated with the HS diploma. <p>Instagram</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Thisa artifact shows evidence of the activities students completed while in the program.

- Small setting and the opportunity given to work toward receiving diploma
- My child likes history and dislikes math
- My child loves that he's not judged because of learning disability.
- Not crowded and she's able to focus. Nothing
- My child loves her teachers and the opportunity that's been given to succeed academically
- What did you like about your student's previous school?
 - 5 - Nothing N/A
 - I liked the building
 - I liked the prestige of students previous school
- What did you dislike about your student's previous school?
 - I didn't like that the teacher Really didn't care
 - Evrything, staff never knew anything, not professional, they show how confused and frustrated they are. No one returns your call, and the misinformation.
 - "constant" chaos
 - I dislike the education programs in my son's previous school
 - I disliked students previous school due to not meeting students disability needs.
 - No communication on her progress and always worried about something happening in the school
 - Lack of concern from staff; students out of control
- I am hopeful about my student's future
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)
- What the REAL program does will help my student be successful in life
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)
- My student is treated with respect in the REAL program
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)
- What the REAL program does will help my student be successful in life
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)
- My student works hard in the REAL program
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)

- I am proud of my student
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)
- My student is treated with respect in the REAL program
 - SD→SA (0, 0, 0, 2, 5)

Students

- Why are you in the REAL program?
 - New chance
 - “For a second chance at life”
 - “to look for new things”
 - “Secoond chance at life”
 - To get back on track
 - Gain life ready-ness skills and to graduate highschool
 - To change my life around and do the best i can to past
 - Credits/Graduate
 - “I needed my credits and I did not qualify to enter my degree that i needed to be”
 - “I was not holding myself accountable at my home campus resulting in my grades slipping and me being behind on credits”
 - “Credits”
 - I didnt have credits or good attendance
 - To recover my credits and gain some helpful skills for my future
 - Lack of credits
 - Graduate
 - To graduate on time and to be prepared for the real world after
 - Graduation
 - Be done with school
 - My credits
 - Gain credits and prepare us for real life things

- To get my credits and a job and cus i like how they realse early
 - Because needed help with my credits
 - To graduate
 - To grad early
- Mixed
 - "I am in the REAL program because I know this program will help me succeed in life. The REAL program is a great program that will help you graduate and not just that but help you find yourself and your passions. The REAL program provides a lot of things that not a lot of programs offer. I am here because being here has made me the person I am today and I have achieved many of my goals as well. I saw progress in myself and that is why I am here."
 - "I am in the program, because I wasn't attending real school and i almost got kicked out but they gave me another chance to redeem myself so I took it when they told me it would be over here in MLK so I took it, but they told me i would come here to get my credits back so I can go back to the grade I am supposed to be in."
 - To get help with my work
 - Just moved over here
 - I was not being successful in school
 - I dropped out
 - Its a good place to be
 - N/A
 - I was skipping school
 - A student
 - Lack of attendance due to location from school and credit recovery
- What do you think is needed to make your hopes about the future come true? What role do you have in making it come true?

- I have myself and my decisions to make my hopes on my future come true.
- I feel like i need better transportation
- stay positive
- I need more time to figure out how I'm gonna achieve complete the goals I have set for me in this program, about which career I wanna take.
- What I need to make my hopes about the future is support and the role i have is being a leader so its coming true
- I think students should be able to get some hands on experience with whatever field they want to get into in the future.
- consistency
- My high school diploma and finishing all my apex's
- I already know how to make my products, I need materials and promotions
- apex
- Stay consistent and remain focused. Being dedicated and focused.
- successful
- Positive support, and a good environment with people that are just as motivated
- Just some reminds every now and then. just letting me I'm on the right path keep going
- N/A
- money
- I think A good education is needed.
- Dedication. A big one.
- staying fouce dont let anything get in my way
- hhh
- to be consistent with the ,littel things in your life and set goals and grow even more from it
- a better job
- I think that all i need to make my dream come true is a lot of dedication and passion.

- My role is to get my diploma
- idk keep dreaming ig
- confidence, and i have confidence
- Stay focus.
- hard work and dedication
- it takes being responsible to achieve our future
- effort and a good mindset.
- To make my career path come true I need self discipline and patience
- The thing that is needed to make my hopes about the future come true is commitment. As long as I am committed to doing something I will get it done. The role that I have in making it come true is being here in the REAL program now and not just that but I am a Hispanic female that would like to make a difference in the world. I have interest in helping people who are mentally ill and I feel like my presence would be really helpful not just because of my culture but also because based on what I have experienced. I know that I will have the power to help a lot of people who are mentally ill once I get my degree. I truly am excited!
- my role is by doing it and dont complain about it.
- **What do you need in order to be successful? What does success look like? How will you be successful?**
 - What I need would be my family to believe in me that I can do stuff myself no matter how old I am cuz all you really need is sum faith and confidence. Success looks like to me if I have my dream car and a house that's how know I made it. I will be successful by making my own decisions and not what others think because they aren't the ones working for you.
 - Im pretty much on the right track to be successful i just think i need to keep working hard
 - stay in your own lane
 - What I need in order to be successful is nothing more, I am having all the help I need in the REAL program.

- what I need to be successful is motivation and support what success look like is me always on time being on task I will be successful by doing what i do right now and that be a leader
- We need more resources to help get students jobs or resources that allow students to some experience with whatever field they might want to enter
- i need to stay focused
- I need a college degree and success look likes being financially wealthy
- a 3D printer and funding for the materials
- apexx
- Just determination and drive.
- being you
- i will be successful, by keeping my head on straight and making wise and beneficial decisions
- By staying on task an not letting up for no one
- N/A
- money
- I have to be engaged in my work.
- Dedication. Success looks like money. Being dedicated to my future.
- i will be successful by givng 100% every day
- hhh
- being consistent and motivated
- to graduate
- in order to be successful i think you need an high school education and you need to experience networking.
- I dont know yet
- A job
- self-motivation ill be successful by doing me
- keep trying and never give up.
- working hard and confidence
- The first thing is to trust me and be responsible
- As of now i don't think i need nothing but a little gladness.

- In order to be better you have to want to be better
- In order to be successful you need to have your priorities straight and you need to have a lot of commitment. Success to me is whenever I am constantly meeting my goals and I am constantly doing what I have to do. I will be successful by going to college and I will be even more successful once I've met all the requirements to become a psychiatrist.
- getting help from the real and by doing my work.
- Who are your favorite people in the REAL program? Why? Who has been your favorite teacher? Why?
 - Mr.G is my favorite teacher I won't even lie I don't know how to spell his name, but he's been my favorite teacher because He knows us more and he's like one of us and he understands us and he's super cool.
 - my favorite teacher has been ms.tisdell nobodys my favorite people
 - dont have none
 - My favorite people in the REAL program are my mentors and coaches.
 - my favorite people in the program is everyone i love all the teacher and the reason why is because when i 1st came here they didnt treat me new they treated me like i been here always supporting and making sure im ok
 - Ms. Tisdell has been very good at making sure we are on task and in line. Ms. Davis has helped many students, including myself, stay motivated and keep working.
 - everyone
 - all my peers and Ms.Beda
 - Beda,Goins,Pierre,Tisdell,Garrett, Davis. They all been there for me emotionally and helped me in some sort of way
 - n/a
 - Ms,G; warm welcomes Ms.Betta; always kend an ear, Ms.T; always keeping it real and genuine.
 - everyone

- Ms.Tisdell, she is such a positive teacher to bbe around, and you can tell shes a loving person and geniune i love her ALSO, NONE THE LESS Ms.G, Mr.Goings, and Ms.Beda i can come to all them about anything and they also make sure i am good and they check on me
- Everybody to be honest, cs everybody support everybodys at REAL.
- N/A
- no one
- I think I'm good with everybody
- Everyone
- Ms. Clark because she help me by accetping me to the real program and giving me another chance
- hhh
- every body
- mr.goings
- Ms Clark,Mr Gowens,Mr peire,Ms Watson
- Everyone is my favorite people
- Ms. Clark
- ms clark, ms o becuse they help me alot and encourage me
- i dont have a favorite person i feel like it wouldn't be fair if i said i had a favorite person.
- nobody i dont have one
- Ms.davis is the person who encouraged me to do everything I have to do and because of her I am where I am
- i feel like it wouldn't be fair if i had to pick a favorite person.
- Ms.T and Ms.B are my favorite people at this program because im comfortable communicating to them
- Everyone in the program is considered my favorite teacher each and every teacher have tried their best to help me keep moving forward. Not just the teachers but the other staff as well. Ms. Garret and Ms. Watson are the sweetest, Ms. Davis constantly always checks up on me and is always so understanding, Ms. Beda is always there to give advice or to listen to me, and Ms. Clark is always serious, but I love how she always expects the best of us and she is actually really

	<p>understanding and loving. Each and every staff at the REAL program is great I am thankful to have had every single one of them in my life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ every one because they care about us. ● What do you think prevented you from learning/enjoying school at its maximum at your previous school? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I didn't like going to my previous school because it was boring and they don't really teach nothing. ○ The teachers, environment, respect, and the lunch ○ nothing ○ The environment prevented me from learning enjoying school at its maximum at my previous school. ○ what prevented me from learning at school is it was a distraction i wasnt really learning anything and the teachers dont care at school ○ The long school days and lack of engagement. ○ lack of focus and being a follower ○ my anxiety and home problems ○ Everything including myself ○ the food ○ Not feeling comfortable, feeling unseen and unheard. ○ I can come at 9:30 ○ There were so many kids, and the teacher lacked helping every single one of us it was so much going on and not a good environment to focus on ○ Me not coming to school enough ○ N/A ○ my self ○ My study habits my sleep schedule. ○ Lousy work ethic, problems with personal life ○ myself i was skiiping class and coming late everyday ○ hhh ○ no motivation or support ○ the school time ○ The overcrowding of students made me uncomfortable 	
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- The people around me
- Me
- the teachers wasnt teaching
- the community and environment prevented me from learning in school.
- nothing
- bad influences that should not be in school
- the community prevented me from learning in school and i had things going on in my life.
- I felt like school was not all that necessary to have a successful career
- What prevented me from learning at my previous school was honestly the lack of uninterest towards students. Not just that but emotional abuse from teachers and students. I also went through depression, anxiety, and ptsd so that affected my attendance a lot. I used to not have a plan at all because my depression was too much but eventually I learned to overcome it and want to help other people overcome it as well.
- the teachers.
- **What are some resources the REAL program could provide to help you be more successful academically, socially, and emotionally? Please be specific. (32 responses)**
 - 9 - Idk, nothing really, nothing they already do it, They mastered everything, N/A, nothing, nothing the REAL program is great, I feel like the real program great as it is now, as of now i feel like it should stay the same
 - 2 - Make the school time more shorter or let us get out earlier or start school more late so we can get enough sleep and have our minds straight, They could provide the time for more
 - 2 - All i really need is for the teachers not to talk to other people like they a lil kid, not treat us like kids
 - 2 - Better uniforms, the dress code
 - 2 - Better transportation, Good transportation
 - 2 - Boxing, open gym

- I think the REAL program could use more resources to help the kids get jobs.
- Headphones
- An bigger position to be able to advocate for my peers and self.
- Perhaps a little more on hand activities
- Being more engaged
- Money
- Staff and Teacher assistance
- helping me complete my courses and pushing me to do better
- Hhh
- Poetry
- Life
- more time to find the path that will lead me to my goal that I set myself when I entered the program
- The REAL program has may job and internship opportunities
- What resources or support does the REAL program provide you that helps you to be successful academically, socially, and emotionally? Please be specific.
 - It supports us with respect and other type of things like teachers that can talk to us and help us out on how we can become more successful.
 - I can communicate when i feel like i need to
 - be positive
 - The resources the REAL program has provided to me is the person we can talk to, the social worker, I was able to speak to her about what was going on with disclosure and trust that it would be kept between us. Sometimes having someone to speak to is great with such trust.
 - the resources the real bring is really everything for example i told them i wanted to make music and they brought someone to help me make a song if im not alright they notice it they will support me the whole time till im feeling better whatever goal need or want they going to support it and push me till i make it
 - The extra curriculars are very helpful and fun.

- it helps me by being more on task
- The real program as help with reaching my right grade level not only that but help realized how fun college will be and they hear my voice
- Apex and connections
- apex
- A chance to voice my opinions
- they have more resources
- The speakers we talk to, them bringing in people with different careers paths to talk to us
- Getting us out, an showing us a whole another world an have we can actually make money different ways.
- N/A
- work thats easy
- Since I've been here my people skills have definitely got better.
- A way to recover my credits
- support me academically motivate me to do my work and stay focuss
- hhh
- the 'and life' part of this program
- the early relise and letting us go on our own pace
- apex and the mental health staff
- The REAL program pays for 2 years of college as well as they help you gain knowledge for the real world
- Life skills
- the REAL program has everything anyone needs
- As of now i dont think i need an support.
- im not sure
- One of the most important resources is the apex because I was able to grab my credits and be in the grade that I need to be.
- As of now nothing.
- The REAL program provides students with years of college debt free
- The REAL program offers transportation, counseling, and will help with any personal problems you might have..
- time and respect.

- There is at least one adult in the REAL program I can talk to if I have a problem
 - SD→SA (2, 1, 1, 8, 21)
- I am treated with as much respect as other students
 - SD→SA (0, 1, 4, 9, 19)
- I feel like I belong in the REAL program
 - SD→SA (1, 2, 5, 7, 18)
- There is at least one adult in the REAL program I can talk to if I have a problem
 - SD→SA (2, 1, 1, 8, 21)
- I am comfortable asking my teachers for help
 - SD→SA (1, 1, 5, 14, 12)

Staff

- Tell us about any resources the REAL program contributed to the community? What impact do you feel the contributions were? Why?
 - n/a
 - I think we fell short in that area.
 - It's giving kids that don't have support the support they need. The contributions were academics, enrichment, meals and caring
 - The REAL program has provided an alternative education to the community. The impact has been beneficial because some of the students would have found themselves behind in school and help students with their self confidence.
 - I am unaware of any contributions REAL has made to the community.
 - The REAL program offers 2 year scholarships to students who complete their coursework in 2023. This gives them them an incentive to pursue a career that otherwise wouldn't be accessible to them.
 - We have wrap-around services not only for our students but their families. (Rental assistance, food, clothes). Also the works program.
 - This program contributes to students in an area of self-sufficiency, thus giving the students in this program the confidence and tools to

give back to the community. The REAL program allows the students to obtain resources for job skills for gainful employment, also the team members offer both physical and mental support.

- Are there any resources you believe could have been contributed that weren't? If so, what would they be? Why do you feel these resources could be impactful?
 - Mental health resources, parent workshops (job assistance, GED, rental assistance, college information, financial literacy, etc). I also think our students could participate in meaningful community service. Sometimes by empowering the parents or the community our students come from, the more they are willing to support REAL and their student. It allows the student to have a circle of support -a village- of informed people who share the same vision of success for the student.
 - n/a
 - Transportation, this will support students with attendance issues
 - I believe that an after school mentor program could be beneficial. I believe that a lot of the students need some form of mentorship or continuing coaching after school when they return back to their problems that could reinforce things that have been taught throughout the school day. I also believe a parent support group program could be beneficial.
 - REAL should reach out to the community in the form of community service events led by students. This will help students get a visual of what the real world requires to operate and become a better place for all.
 - I believe students would benefit from having a professional Health Care specialist to educate them about self care and options related to reproductive concerns.
 - n/a
 - Having a partnership with a clinic that we can directly refer our students to will be impactful in terms of treatment and interventions.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ I hope we can accommodate some of our students who are interested in becoming attorneys or pursue forensic investigative careers. I feel these resources would be helpful for some students who are interested in pursuing these types of careers. I feel like this would have a great impact on the community. The sky is the limit!● What we do in the REAL program will help students be successful in life<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ SD→SA (1, 2, 0, 4, 2)● All students are treated with equal respect<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ SD→SA (1, 3, 2, 2, 1)● My students ask for help when they need it<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ SD→SA (2, 4, 0, 2, 1)	
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Appendix E: Mean of Likert Scaled Questions

Key 1 - Project Questions

- PQ1: How effectively does The HISD REAL Program, as designed and delivered, align with its stated mission, vision, and goals?
- PQ2: How, if at all, does a student's perception of school change due to participating in The HISD REAL Program?
- PQ3: What factors impact a student's choice of being involved in The HISD REAL Program?

Key 2 - Survey Question by Audience

- STUDENT QUESTIONS - 33
- PARENT QUESTIONS - 7
- STAFF QUESTIONS - 9

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Mean
I try things even if I might fail	1	0	7	10	15	4.15
My student will try things even if he or she might fail	0	0	2	3	2	4.00
My students try things even if they might fail	0	4	1	3	1	3.11
Overall	1	4	10	16	18	3.94
When my solution to a problem is not working, I try to figure out what went wrong	1	1	4	14	13	4.12
When my student's solution to a problem is not working, he or she will try something else	0	0	1	4	2	4.14
My students figure out what went wrong if their solution to a problem doesn't work	1	4	0	4	0	2.78
Overall	2	5	5	22	15	3.88
How smart I am is something I can change	1	0	4	11	17	4.30
My student believes they can change how smart he or she is	0	0	0	6	1	4.14
Overall	1	0	4	17	18	4.28

I take responsibility for working on my goals	2	0	1	13	17	4.30
My student takes responsibility for working on his or her goals	0	0	2	3	2	4.00
My students take responsibility for working on their goals	1	4	2	1	1	2.67
Overall	3	4	5	17	20	3.96
I can calm myself down when I am excited or upset	1	1	5	13	13	4.09
My student can calm down when she or he is excited or upset	0	0	5	1	1	3.43
My students can calm themselves down when they are excited or upset	1	3	3	2	0	2.67
Overall	2	4	13	16	14	3.73
I know I will graduate from high school or achieve a graduation equivalency	2	0	3	6	22	4.39
My student will graduate from high school or a graduation equivalency	0	0	0	2	5	4.71
Overall	2	0	3	8	27	4.45
I am a hard worker	1	1	1	9	21	4.45
My student is a hard worker	0	0	0	4	3	4.43
My students are hard workers	1	2	1	4	1	3.22
Overall	2	3	2	17	25	4.22
I finish whatever I begin	1	2	2	10	18	4.27
My student finishes whatever he or she begins	0	0	2	5	0	3.71
My students finish what they begin	1	2	3	2	1	3.00
Overall	2	4	7	17	19	3.96

Setbacks don't discourage me	1	3	5	10	14	4.00
Setbacks don't discourage my student	0	0	3	4	0	3.57
Setbacks don't discourage my students	2	5	1	1	0	2.11
Overall	3	8	9	15	14	3.59
I am hopeful about my future	1	1	2	11	18	4.33
My student is hopeful about his or her future	0	0	0	2	5	4.71
My students are hopeful about their futures	1	1	3	3	1	3.22
Overall	2	2	5	16	24	4.18
What we do in The HISD REAL Program will help me be successful in life	1	0	4	7	21	4.42
What The HISD REAL Program does will help my student be successful in life	0	0	0	2	5	4.71
What we do in the REAL program will help students be successful in life	1	2	0	4	2	3.44
Overall	2	2	4	13	28	4.29
One of my goals in class is to learn as much as I can	1	0	2	14	16	4.33
It is easy to communicate my thoughts and ideas	4	2	4	11	12	3.76
My student communicates his or her thoughts and ideas	0	0	0	4	3	4.43
It is easy for my student's to communicate their thoughts and ideas	1	5	0	2	1	2.67
Overall	5	7	4	17	16	3.65

I work hard at The HISD REAL Program	1	1	2	10	19	4.36
My student works hard in The HISD REAL Program	0	0	0	2	5	4.71
Overall	1	1	2	12	24	4.43
I am proud of The HISD REAL Program	2	0	3	6	22	4.39
I am proud of The HISD REAL Program	0	0	0	2	5	4.71
I am proud of The HISD REAL Program	2	0	1	4	2	3.44
Overall	4	0	4	12	29	4.27
I have a plan for what I would like to do after completing The HISD REAL Program	2	0	2	12	17	4.27
My student has a plan after completing The HISD REAL Program	0	0	0	2	5	4.71
Overall	2	0	2	14	22	4.35
I am treated with as much respect as other students	0	1	4	9	19	4.39
My student is treated with respect in The HISD REAL Program	0	0	0	2	5	4.71
All students are treated with equal respect	1	3	2	2	1	2.89
Overall	1	4	6	13	25	4.16
I feel like I belong in The HISD REAL Program	1	2	5	7	18	4.18
There is at least one adult in The HISD REAL Program I can talk to if I have a problem	2	1	1	8	21	4.36

I am comfortable asking my teachers for help	1	1	5	14	12	4.06
My students ask for help when they need it	2	4	0	2	1	2.56
Overall	3	5	5	16	13	3.74
I can do almost all the work in my class if I don't give up	1	0	2	7	23	4.55
I am hopeful about my student's future	0	0	0	2	5	3.67
I am proud of my student	0	0	0	2	5	3.67
My student is supported in The HISD REAL Program	0	0	0	2	5	3.67

Appendix F: Academic Success Job Description



Our Mission and Vision

Our mission is to provide a network of support and access that closes the opportunity gap for traditionally underserved youth (16-21 years old).

Through our holistic services and core programming, we give our youth the opportunity to build relationships, develop new skills, and establish goals that will put them on a trajectory to success and self-sufficiency in adulthood.

Academic Success Coach – Position Summary

Under the direction of the Managing Director of Programs, the role of the Case Manager is to oversee the service planning and transitional process for youth entering and exiting the program. Perform the duties of the role while providing a safe and successful learning environment for youth and encouraging social and emotional development through the achievement of academic and personal goals.

Duties and Areas of Responsibility

- Work with student to establish realistic goals and instructional plans to recover credit
- Assign coursework in APEX learning platform (including quizzes and tests)
- Monitor student progress and provide instructional intervention when appropriate
- Work closely with the On-Time Grad teacher to provide instructional support on assigned coursework or STAAR test prep
- Establish, maintain, and support standards of personal conduct and discipline
- Maintain inventory of equipment and materials assigned to the credit recovery lab
- Maintain professional competence through in-service education activities and self-selected professional growth activities
- Provide on-going emotional support and personal professional contact with student
- Act as a liaison between the student and Engagement Specialist or Student Support to ensure support services are provided
- Support the Program Manager in the planning and delivery of enrichment activities
- Serve on the recruitment team to assist with outreach and enrollment

Special Events

- Plan and manage logistics for special events.
- Support planning and execution of additional special events in collaboration with the Employer Team and the rest of the 8MS team (e.g., Meet & Greet, Industry Panels, Closing Ceremony, etc.).

Additional Tasks and Team Engagement

- Other duties as assigned on an ad hoc or seasonal basis in service of the 8MS team/program and the broader mission and work of Eight Million Stories.
- As part of our culture of collaboration and valuing every team member's perspective, every 8MS team member is expected to actively participate in structures for individual and organization-wide feedback and continuous improvement, including, but not limited to: staff meetings, surveys, professional development sessions, and retreats, etc.

Minimum Education, Training and Experience

- Bachelor's degree in psychology, social work or related field.
- Minimum two (2) year experience working with at-risk and/or opportunity youth (16-21 years old)

What you will bring to the role:

- A passion for community service with an emphasis in workforce development, youth development and education.
- Experience working in youth development, education or non-profit start-up.
- High level of proficiency with Microsoft Office applications including Excel and Power Point.
- Confidence presenting to adults and youth/young adults in virtual or in-person settings.
- Strong understanding of current trends in serving youth/young adults (16-21 years old)
- Experience as part of a hardworking and diverse team supporting organizational vision.
- Proven organizational skills and the drive to manage client caseloads.
- Excellent problem-solving skills, resourcefulness, and resilience in the face of change.
- Strong interpersonal talents including speaking, writing, and listening skills and experience using various modes of communication including text and social media.
- Houston area resident and/or possess significant knowledge of and connection with youth serving community organizations.

Supervision:

- Receives supervision from the Managing Director of Programming.

Appendix G: Managing Director of Programming Job Description



Managing Director of Programming

Under the direction of the Executive Director and as a member of the leadership team, the Managing Director of Programming is responsible for overseeing program management, training, and development of educational programming for Eight Million Stories and R.E.A.L Academy.

Our Mission and Vision

Our mission is to provide a network of support and access, that closes the opportunity gap for traditionally underserved youth (9-21 years old).

Through our holistic services and core programming, we give our youth the opportunity to build relationships, develop new skills, and establish goals that will put them on a trajectory to success and self-sufficiency in adulthood.

In this role you will:

- Directs and coordinates the operation of integrated, multi-instructional programs (REAL Academy and Eight Million Stories).
- Coordinate with external agencies, districts and/or organizations on pertaining to the educational programming including special programs, projects and workshops; resolves complex issues and makes decisions which have wider scope and/or greater impact.
- Cultivate an environment of respect that is welcoming to all and promotes a sense of belonging among staff and students.
- Evaluate student learning outcomes (REAL Academy and Eight Million Stories), develop and implement strategies to increase success for both programs.
- Develop, implement and maintain program budgets for REAL Academy and Eight Million Stories.
- Monitor and maintain locally funded projects ensuring compliance with federal, state and local guidelines
- Ensure educational program activities align with grant/contract requirements
- Facilitate collection of and analyzes data; prepare special and recurring reports
- Supervise and regularly evaluate staff, faculty, class, and program effectiveness
- Direct and administer a program that meets the educational needs of young adult participants.
- Maintain an auditable record of pupil attendance and behavior.
- Review and evaluate delivery of services on an on-going basis. Direct all changes to improve service delivery and ensure education program goals are being met.
- Ensure student records and files are maintained.
- Ensure all funding agency reports are submitted on time.
- Collaborate with Finance Department to create program budgets and fiscal controls. Adhere to all funding agency guidelines when expending funds.
- Define, measure, and evaluate program performance data.

- Knowledge of current workforce needs related to education/training options.
- Seek out and ensure opportunities for professional development for staff is made available, as directed by state and federal guidelines.
- Stay abreast of theory and practice in adult education
- Demonstrate an ability to work with diverse groups
- Attend conferences, training, and professional development opportunities.
- Assist in the planning, coordinating, and schedule of orientations and graduation ceremonies.
- Receive, distribute, and reply to communication sent to REAL Academy from district and/or site administration.
- Execute other duties as assigned by Executive Director.

What you will bring to the role:

- A passion for community service with an emphasis in workforce development, youth development and education.
- 10 + years working in youth development, education, or education non-profit.
- Proven ability to manage and implement program operations.
- Strong communication skills.
- Highly organized multi-tasker able to delegate and manage multiple projects MS Office and database skills.
- Commitment to and knowledge of working with data to evaluate and improve program results.
- Team leader, flexible, and creative
- Sensitive to socio-economic and ethnic minority issues.
- Support and value adult learners from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, socio-economic
- Strong understanding of current trends in serving youth/young adults (10-21 years old)
- Experience as part of a hardworking and diverse team supporting organizational vision.
- Proven organizational skills and the drive to manage client caseloads.
- Excellent problem-solving skills, resourcefulness, and resilience in the face of change.
- Strong interpersonal talents including speaking, writing, and listening skills and experience using various modes of communication including text and social media.
- Advanced people management skills

Salary Range: \$115,000-\$120,000

We offer a robust benefits package including excellent medical/dental/vision coverage.

Appendix H: Operations Associate Job Description



Please complete this [form](#) to apply for an open role at Eight Million Stories, Inc. Please note that you must also submit an updated resume to hiring@eightmillionstories.org in order to complete your application. Once your application is complete (this form and resume), you will receive an acknowledgement email within 2 business days.

Operations Associate

Under general supervision of the Director of Operations, the Operations Associate oversees office support for Eight Million Stories, Inc. This ideal individual organizes, directs, and performs varied and complex clerical and secretarial work with confidentiality and sensitivity. In performing duties, responsibilities and tasks, the individual utilizes independent judgment, initiative, tact, patience, and courtesy.

Our Mission and Vision

Our mission is to provide a network of support and access, that closes the opportunity gap for traditionally underserved youth (10-21 years old).

Through our holistic services and core programming, we give our youth the opportunity to build relationships, develop new skills, and establish goals that will put them on a trajectory to success and self-sufficiency in adulthood.

Desired Characteristics:

The Operations Associate provides a professional environment that supports the program culture expectations. Positions are characterized by wide-ranging responsibilities often conducted in an atmosphere of frequent interruptions, time constraints and/or in the necessary absences of the Program Site Administrator(s). This position is pivotal in facilitating Eight Million Stories' programming purposes and the efficient daily operations of the organization. The position buffers the Program Administrator(s) and staff from unnecessary interruptions.

Essential Duties:

- Manage main office and provide secretarial support to Program Site Administrator(s) and staff as required.
- Maintain administration calendars, screen calls, receive visitors and respond to requests for information and assistance as appropriate.
- Explain program procedures/expectations to parents, community organizations and the general public.
- Provide training, assign, and monitor the work of staff, student helpers, and volunteers.
- Maintain and troubleshoot office equipment, as necessary.
- Establish and maintain confidential files.
- Independently respond to routine letters, emails, and general correspondence.
- Responsible for performing and/or delegating correct record keeping of student enrollment preparation and/or maintenance of the confidential student folder.
- Maintain and update student and staff emergency information, i.e. emergency cards, computer data and disaster preparedness. Maintain student attendance records, including preparation and verification of daily student attendance, entering enrollment information into the attendance system, preparing required attendance reports on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.

- Maintain control of school facility keys, assign, and distribute keys to certificated and classified staff as necessary.

Other Related Duties:

- Assist with implementation and coordination of emergency procedures for Program Site Disaster Plan.
- Assist with student medical needs and administer first aid, CPR and/or prescribed medication as necessary.

Supervision:

- Receives supervision from the Director of Operations. Provides leadership and direction to other support staff, volunteers and student helpers as assigned.

Minimum Qualifications:

Knowledge of:

- Modern office methods, procedures, terms, equipment used in a school office including knowledge of Microsoft Office word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, database, E-mail and internet computer applications.
- School/Non-profit office practices and procedures.
- Standard record keeping, filing systems and procedures.
- English usage, spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Business letter and report writing techniques.
- Business office telephone techniques and etiquette.
- Basic math used in an office environment.
- Principles of leadership, office organization and management, public relations, and training.

Ability to:

- Effectively plan, organize, and prioritize work of self and others in a demanding environment.
- Provide leadership and direction to other support staff assigned to Eight Million Stories.
- Utilize sound independent judgment in performing tasks and fulfilling responsibilities.
- Establish and maintain effective interpersonal relationships and effectively communicate using tact, patience and courtesy in a manner that reflects positively on Eight Million Stories, Inc.
- Communicate accurately, effectively, and courteously both orally and in writing to a diverse audience under busy and/or difficult/confidential situations.
- Operate various standard and specialized office equipment including a personal computer.
- Rapidly learn procedures and software as required.
- Compose correspondence and written material independently.
- Understand and carry out oral and written instructions.
- Maintain databases and manage information systems.
- Understand, be sensitive to and respect the diverse academic, socio-economic, ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, disabilities and sexual orientation of students, parents, teachers, administration, and staff.

Employment Standards:**Education:**

- High School Diploma or Equivalent.

Experience:

- Two (2) years of responsible varied clerical and secretarial experience involving public contact is required.
- School/Non-profit site experience is highly desirable.

Salary/Pay: \$15/HR – 40 hours per week

Physical Demands, Working Environment and Hazards:

The physical demands described here are representative of those that must be met by employees to successfully perform the essential functions of this class. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

Work Environment:

This job operates in an office environment, predominately seated. This role routinely uses standard office equipment such as computers, phones, copy machines, filing cabinets, and fax machines. The noise level can vary depending upon daily activity but will remain within moderate noise level range. The incumbent has direct and indirect contact with public and other district staff. The position requires working with high volume, tight deadlines, being subject to frequent interruptions, and without direct guidance from supervisor.

Physical Demands:

While performing the duties of this job, the position is continuously required to sit, talk, hear, and use repetitive motions of the wrists, hands, and fingers. The incumbent will frequently stand, walk, carry, reach, grip, and grasp; occasionally stoop, kneel, and crouch. The work involves little to light physical efforts; frequently exerts up to 10 pounds of force and occasionally exerts up to 20 pounds of force. This position requires near visual acuity sufficient to use a computer screen.

Appendix I: HISD Academy Website


HISD

[Home](#) | [About Us](#) | [Board](#) | [Parents & Students](#) | [Directory](#) | [Careers](#) | [myHISD](#) | [News](#) | [Resources](#) | [HISDtv](#)

Home > Directory > Virtual Learning Options > HISD Real Academy

VIRTUAL LEARNING OPTIONS

- Home
- Yearly Stats
- Contact Us
- Course Listing
- S U M M E R | 2023
- Programs Description
- HISD Real Academy**
- Resources
- Tuition, Discounts and Fees
- Employee Discount
- PAY TUITION ONLINE



Reimagining **MY** education and life.

The future that you are imagining is possible with HISD REAL. Students from partnering high schools can recover credits, make real-world connections, and take a new path to graduation.

Eligibility Information

- At least 12 credits or classified 11th grade
- Priority enrollment is given to students zoned and enrolled to one following high schools:
 - Chavez
 - Milby
 - Wheatley
 - Sterling
 - Worthing
 - Yates

Serving and supporting students from all HISD high schools if space is available.

- Ages 16-21

Benefits:

- Accelerated credit recovery through APEX Learning
- Shortened school day
- Paid summer internship opportunities
- Support from Academic Success Coaches and mentors
- College/career advisory counseling
- Hands-on learning experiences
- Assistance with food, clothing, childcare, and more

School Day: 9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. Location: Jones Futures Academy 7414 Saint Lo Road Houston, TX 77033.

Appendix J: 8MS and HISD REAL Program Overview



Executive Summary

As a district grounded in equity, Houston ISD understands that traditional K-12 learning options are not well-suited for all students. However, alternate learning options outside of OnTime Grad and Liberty High School for newcomers are not available.

Research shows that alternate learning options—tailored to address a student’s extenuating circumstances— are well-positioned to ensure that students not only meet the requirements for graduation, but also succeed after high school.

In line with the district’s mission to provide all students with the tools necessary to reach their full potential, Innovation & Strategic Initiatives and the Office of Special Populations are recommending a new, high-impact effort: **The HISD R.E.A.L. Program**. This program, administered in partnership with Eight Million Stories, Inc., will target *disconnected youth* in need of re-engagement.

Disconnected youth are students who are at the greatest risk of dropping out or who have dropped out. In addition to supporting students with the completion of their high school equivalency (diploma or GED), students participating in this program will receive job training, mental health counseling, college and career advising, full-scale wraparound services, up to two years of support post-graduation, and more.

In the state of Texas, a dropout is defined as a student who is enrolled in school at some time during the school year but leaves school during the school year without an approved excuse. A dropout is also defined as a student who completes the school year and does not return the following year.

Using its OnTime Grad model and leveraging building space at Jones High School, cohorts for HISD REAL will be identified in two ways:

1. **Pre-emptively:** Students who are currently enrolled in HISD who meet more than 3 of the 23 early warning indicators. Students will follow the referral process; they will be attached to their home campus while receiving services through this partnership at the Jones HS.
2. **Reactively:** Students with whereabouts unknown who have not been with HISD within the last two years. Students struggling to enroll at their home campus will be enrolled at the HISD Virtual School. From there, they will follow a process to receive services through this partnership with Eight Million Stories, Inc..

Target grade levels for this program include Grade 11, Grade 12, the Class of 2020 (longitudinal cohort) and the Class of 2021 (longitudinal cohort).

OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Of the 5,440 high school students who did not come to school on August 23, 2021, only 1,181 have returned to HISD as of April 5, 2022. For 2,067, whereabouts are unknown, triggering a potential dropout.

The district faces unique challenges around re-engaging disconnected students, compounded by the implications of COVID-19. Leveraging innovative partnerships with community-based organizations is critical to not only reenroll students, but also ensure the completion of high school coursework.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

HISD Innovation & Strategic Initiatives and the Office of Special Populations are recommending a partnership with Eight Million Stories to create the HISD REAL Program.

This targeted, comprehensive program would be located at Jones High School, serving high school students who have disengaged from their education. Eight Million Stories, Inc. supplements the district's current approach to serving students who have dropped out or who are at risk of dropping out by implementing:

1. Accelerated credit recovery during the school year.
2. Postsecondary support for college and career preparation.
3. Non-academic supports to address social, emotional, and other wraparound service needs.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM (CONT'D)

Proposed Solution

To achieve these core objectives, Eight Million Stories will provide each student with a personalized graduation plan— within the parameters of the optional flexible school day. This program will work with a target group of HISD schools to enhance their support for students who have previously disengaged, as well as those who are in danger of disengaging from their learning.

Defining success: Program goals & objectives

- In Year 1 (2022-2023), 80 students either (a) at risk of dropping out or (b) who have dropped out in the last two years will reenroll with HISD.
- In Year 1 (2022-2023), at least 60% of all program participants will graduate. This will be scaled up by five percentage points each school year— 65% in Year 2 (2023-2024) and 70% in Year 3 (2024-2025).
- Students will have equitable access to wraparound services. The satisfaction rate with non-academic supports provided will be at least 90%.
- 100% of all students leaving the HISD REAL Program will have at least one job credential/certification.
- Average daily attendance for all participants will be at least 85%.

Target Campuses

- Chávez High School
- Milby High School
- Sterling High School
- Wheatley High School
- Worthing High School
- Yates High School

Target Grade Levels

- Grade 11
- Grade 12
- Class of 2020 (Longitudinal Cohort)
- Class of 2021 (Longitudinal Cohort)

Target Populations

The purpose of this program is to provide an added, comprehensive level of support to students most at risk of dropping out in HISD. These are current students' data indicate are on the cusp of not completing their high school coursework as well as students no longer engaged in their learning.

To develop program cohorts, the following indicators will be assessed. Students—both current and former— at target campuses and in target grade levels falling into the top quartile of these early warning indicators will be considered candidates for the HISD REAL Program, as determined in the Analytics for Education (A4E) Dashboard, Early Warning Indicators Analyzer:

- Current Course Failures
- Excessive Absences
- Failed STAAR Reading
- Failed STAAR Math
- Math/Reading Skills more than two years below current grade
- Overaged for grade (2+ years).
- Section 504
- Retained within last 3 years
- Economically Disadvantaged
- English Learner
- Migrant
- Special Education
- Title I
- Expelled
- Homeless
- Parole Probation
- Pregnant/Parent
- Previous Dropout
- Residential Placement
- CPS Custody
- DAEP Placement
- Behavior Incidents

The program model outlined by Eight Million Stories reflects a research-based yet practice-driven process for how learning best occurs for students who have not been successful in a traditional learning environment. Program design elements are grounded in education experiences that are holistic, ensuring that students gain the skills, confidence, and social capital needed to be successful.

- **Blended Learning Environment:** Academic intervention and computer-based instruction.
- **Accelerated Credit Recovery:** Classes through which students receive credits expeditiously, tutoring, etc.
- **Optional Flexible School Day:** Reduced hours during the instructional day, allowing students to work and/or participate in other programming.

This model underscores that every student, regardless of personal circumstances, should have the opportunity to learn through authentic, hands-on experiences that hold relevance and meaning in their lives. Emphasis is placed on personalization and high expectations, addressing the root causes of low performance.

Postsecondary Support

The program model is predicated on long-term success. As such, a core component of this program design is ensuring that students graduate with a full understanding of their opportunities for postsecondary education, job readiness, and mentorship. Students are prepared for a successful transition using:

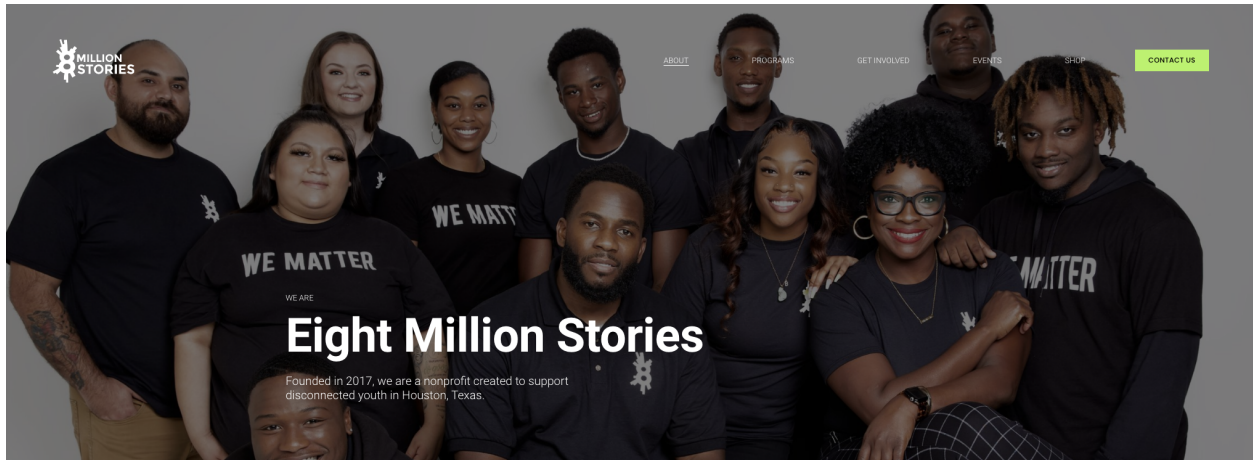
- **Career Exploration:** Through industry visits, career presentations, and mentorship, students will gain an in-depth understanding of their position in the workforce.
- **Industry Certifications:** All students will engage in CTE coursework for vocational training.
- **Career Transition Support:** Students will receive college and career exposure, job placements and internships, and full support developing a postsecondary plan.

Supports beyond the classroom

The HISD REAL Program students will receive extensive case management—this is intentional and ensures that students do not get ‘lost in the process.’ Case managers, assigned by Eight Million Stories, will work with students and their families to create personal development plans. These plans will become the framework for all programs.

In addition, the services provided to students help with the implementation and growth of culturally responsive and emotionally safe learning environments. Program support services and resources help students develop skills to manage their emotions, form positive relationships with peers and adults, feel empathy for others, and make responsible decisions during and beyond their time in the program. As an organization, Eight Million Stories underscores that the best learning comes when students have supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful.

Appendix K: Eight Million Stories Website



Our Mission

We are working to transform the lives of vulnerable youth (9-21 years old) through education, skills training, employment & authentic relationships.



Eight Million Stories, Inc.

Operating Policies & Procedures Manual



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- Academic Specialist

- Program Manager

- Director of Operations

- Executive Director

Introduction and Background

Our Mission

Our Vision

Our Motto

Organizational Profile

Our Staff

Academic Success Coach- **Theresa Hall**

Executive Director & Co Founder- **Marvin Pierre**

Family and Student Engagement Specialist- **Koty Davis**

Guidance Counselor- **Agnes Beda**

Managing Director, Programming- **Bianca Clark**

Managing Director, Strategy & Operations- **Skyra Thomas**

Operations Associate- **Natosha Watson**

Program Manager- **Anjanette Idom**

Student Support Specialist- **Desmond Goins**

Our Board of Directors

Location and Hours of Operation

3015 N. MacGregor Way, 2nd Floor

Houston, TX 77004

Phone:

Email: info@eightmillionstories.org

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:00am-4:00pm

Introduction and Background

Background Information

Eight Million Stories

Goals and Guiding Principles

Eight Million Stories Student Profile

The Eight Million Stories Experience

Referral and Enrollment

Supplies, Equipment, and Purchases

Supplies

Storage

Eight Million Stories stores supplies in several areas:

- Instructional materials and office supplies are stored in the storage cabinet in The Hub.
- Cleaning supplies, paper goods, uniforms, and Eight Million Stories swag are stored in the closet located in the corner of The Hub.
- Water, snack items, and related food items are stored in the closet near the doors of The Hub.
- Chromebooks are stored in the technology cart located in the classroom.

Procurement Process

Approval

Order

Tracking

Delivery

Process Payments

Staff On-Boarding

New Staff Member

Once a candidate has accepted an offer to work at Eight Million Stories, the following steps take place to prepare for the new staff member:

Paperwork

The Director of Operations emails the new hire a link for BambooHR, to complete required paperwork 5 days before the start date. The list of the required paperwork includes signed job offer letter, W2 tax form, I-9 form and supporting documents, direct deposit authorization form, federal W-4 form, and company health insurance policy forms.

Email and Computer Log-in

The Director of Operations sets up the new hire with an email account and sends the log-in information to the new hire the day before their start date. The email format is: firstinitiallastname@eightmillionstories.org (Example: bsmith@eightmillionstories.org). The Operations Associate assigns desktops to new hires and provides computer log-in and WIFI access.

Fingerprinting Clearance

The Director of Operations checks and prints the new hire's fingerprinting clearance for his/her HR file on their first day.

Welcome Email to Staff

The Executive Director emails the Eight Million Stories staff to announce the new hire 2 days before the start date.

Update phone and staff list

The Operations Associate updates the phone and staff list and sends the list out on the new hire's first day.

Insurance (medical, dental, vision, long-term disability, life insurance/ADD)

The Director of Operations processes medical, dental, vision, long-term disability, life insurance/accidental death and dismemberment for the new hire on the first of the month after the new hire has completed 30 days of employment at Eight Million Stories.

Branding

Social Media

Email Signature

Swag

Facilities

Eight Million Stories is currently located at the Center for Hope, 3015 N. MacGregor Way, 2nd Floor, Houston, TX 77004. We lease space from Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church.

Maintenance

Temperature Adjustments

Internet

Phones

Hours of Operations

Appendix M: Professional Development Session



Date: Friday March 31, 2023

Start Time: 10am-4pm

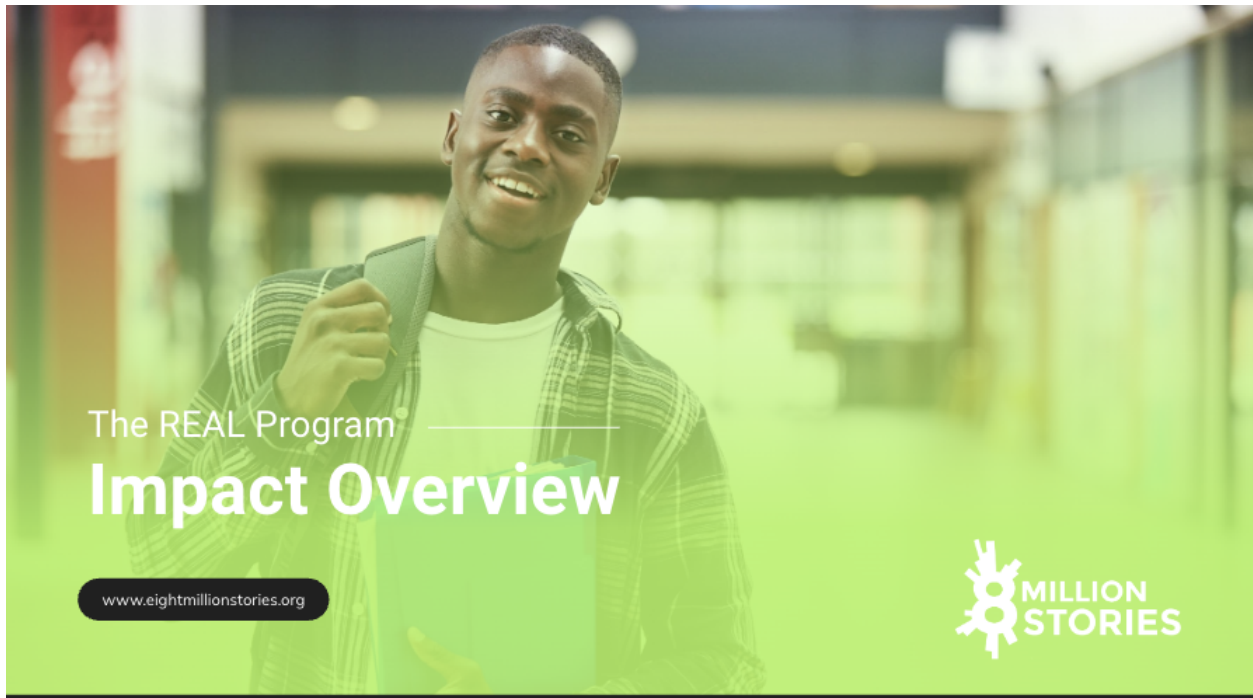
Location: TMCx Accelerator - 2450 Holcombe Blvd, Houston, TX 77021 (X38 Conference Room)

What to bring: Laptops and Energy!

Agenda Overview

Time	Session	Facilitator	Items needed for session
10am-11am	Data 101	Jessica Whittington	In case of audio issues: Laptops (via Zoom) Headphones
11am-11:10am	Org Update/Week Ahead (Launch)	Pierre	Laptops
11:10am-11:15am	Break		
11:15am-12:00pm	Practice Sample Lesson (Academic Coaches)	Pierre Ms. Omoregie Ms. Tisdell	Laptops Post-It Blank Sheet of Paper Positive Energy!
12:00pm-12:30pm	Lunch	Jason's Deli	
12:30pm- 1:30pm	Practice Sample Workshops- 8MS Works and Student Support	Pierre Goins Beda	Laptops Post-It Blank Sheet of Paper Positive Energy!
1:30pm-1:45pm	Break		
1:45pm-2:45pm	Org-Wide Culture Planning	Org-Wide	
2:45pm-3:20pm	Department Meetings (REAL, Works, Student Support, Ops)	Department Members	Laptops School Calendar (black out dates)
3:20pm-3:25pm	Break		
3:25pm-3:50pm	Department Reports (Whole Group)	Dept Lead/Rep	
3:50pm-4:00pm	Reflections and Closing	Pierre	

Appendix N: The REAL Program Impact Overview



The REAL Program Overview

Organization Overview

Problem Worth Solving

Solution

Eight Million Stories (8MS) is a nonprofit founded in 2017 to support disconnected youth in Houston, Texas.

5,440 high school students did not attend school in August 2021, and only 1,181 returned to HISD as of April 2022. For 2,067, their whereabouts are unknown, and thus at risk of dropping out. Family instability, limited resources, and COVID-19 are all factors. As a result, the district faces unique challenges around re-engaging disconnected students. These students, disproportionately minority, face a high risk of dropping out and failing to complete high school. As a result, they are unprepared for additional development via college or vocational education, which limits their employment opportunities. Consequently, they are ill-prepared for adulthood, are more likely to engage in criminal activity, earn low wages, perpetuate generational poverty, and have limited economic and social mobility.

A targeted and comprehensive program serving high school students who have disengaged from their education. REAL is a program that supplements the district's current approach to serving students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out. We seek to help the most vulnerable students complete high school while providing critical resources and development to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, increase their chances of postsecondary success, and foster thriving young adults.

Our Interventions

To achieve this goal, we focused our program interventions on the following:

- **Credit Recovery Instruction** – implement a rigorously evaluated accelerated credit recovery curriculum
- **Supportive Services** – provide critical access to transportation assistance and basic needs
- **Social and Emotional Support** – offer support through case management and access to a social worker
- **Enrichment Program** – provide quality and various enrichment activities to develop leadership and financial skills
- **Career and Job Readiness Instruction** – implement a robust career exploration program and job readiness development

www.eightmillionstories.org

Our Key Outcomes

To demonstrate our achievement of and progress toward this goal, we identified the key outcomes:

- Increase credit recovery
- Increase on-time graduation
- Increase graduation rates
- Increase hope
- Increase motivation
- Increase confidence
- Increase job readiness
- Increase application rates to college or vocational training

The REAL Program

- Dashboard
- Opportunity
- Motivation
- Exposure
- Success

Logging out of disconnected youth

Our Impact So Far

Current data demonstrate that REAL gives students a chance to succeed, has a winning strategy, and influential career exposure to help students reach their full potential. Data represents the timeline of October - April 2023.

71
Students Serviced

43
Current Students

279
Credits Earned

86%
Overall Attendance Rate

28
Community Partnerships

\$60,415
in resources provided

An Opportunity

REAL students have ambitions for the future. And our program gives them an opportunity to realize their dreams.

- 85%** believe they will graduate high school
- 88%** are hopeful about their future
- 88%** have a plan after the program
- 85%** believe the program will help them be successful
- 85%** are proud of the program
- 100%** of surveyed parents indicated that their students are *more* motivated to attend school because of REAL

A Winning Approach

REAL students are on the path to success. Our program offers a robust intervention and welcoming environment to help students thrive.

- 19%** moved up two or more grades
- 32%** identified as 11th grade before our program will graduate in May (two years growth)
- 85%** feel respected in the program
- 76%** feel they belong in the program
- 88%** have a trusted adult in the program
- 85%** indicated that they feel positive about the REAL program
- 91%** indicated that they feel optimistic about their educational experience because of REAL

Influential Exposure

REAL combines an academic curriculum with career and job readiness development to foster thriving young adults prepared for their post-secondary future.

- 57%** indicated that career exploration opportunities are the most influential program component
- 42 hours** of career and job readiness training
- 28%** of unemployed students secured employment through BMS within three months

In their own words...

- I feel like the real a great program, I'm excited about the second chance they give you in life.
- The field trips have been more influential because they teach us and tell us what we can do for ourselves in the future or what we can study for.
- I really like the program because they really care about you, give you the push you need it and they keep it real with us.
- I actually have hope in myself and motivation to keep going.

The REAL Program

- Dashboard
- Opportunity
- Motivation
- Exposure
- Success

Logging out of disconnected youth

Our Impact So Far

Current data demonstrate that REAL gives students a chance to succeed, has a winning strategy, and influential career exposure to help students reach their full potential. Data represents the timeline of October - April 2023.

71
Students Serviced

43
Current Students

28
Community Partnerships

Withdrawal Reasons

We lost 28 students for various reasons. The top reasons are discipline, low engagement, no shows and disability.

Reason	Count
Discipline	6
Overall lack of progress with credits and program engagement	5
Progress concern due to disability (ID, autistic)	4
No shows	3
Moved to BMSEd GED program	2
School requested return due to lack of progress	2
Relocated out of district	2
Homebound due to pregnancy	1
Justice involved/Violated probation	1
Eamed 13 credits and returned to graduate with class	1

Community Partners

Our partners include Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, BP, Amazon, Career Gear, Dress for Success, YMCA, Baker Ripley, University of Houston, Sam's Club, Burlington Coat Factory, Houston YMCA, Taco Bell, Starbucks, and more.

Partner Type	Count
Corporate Partners	15
Nonprofit Partners	7
Employment Partners	6

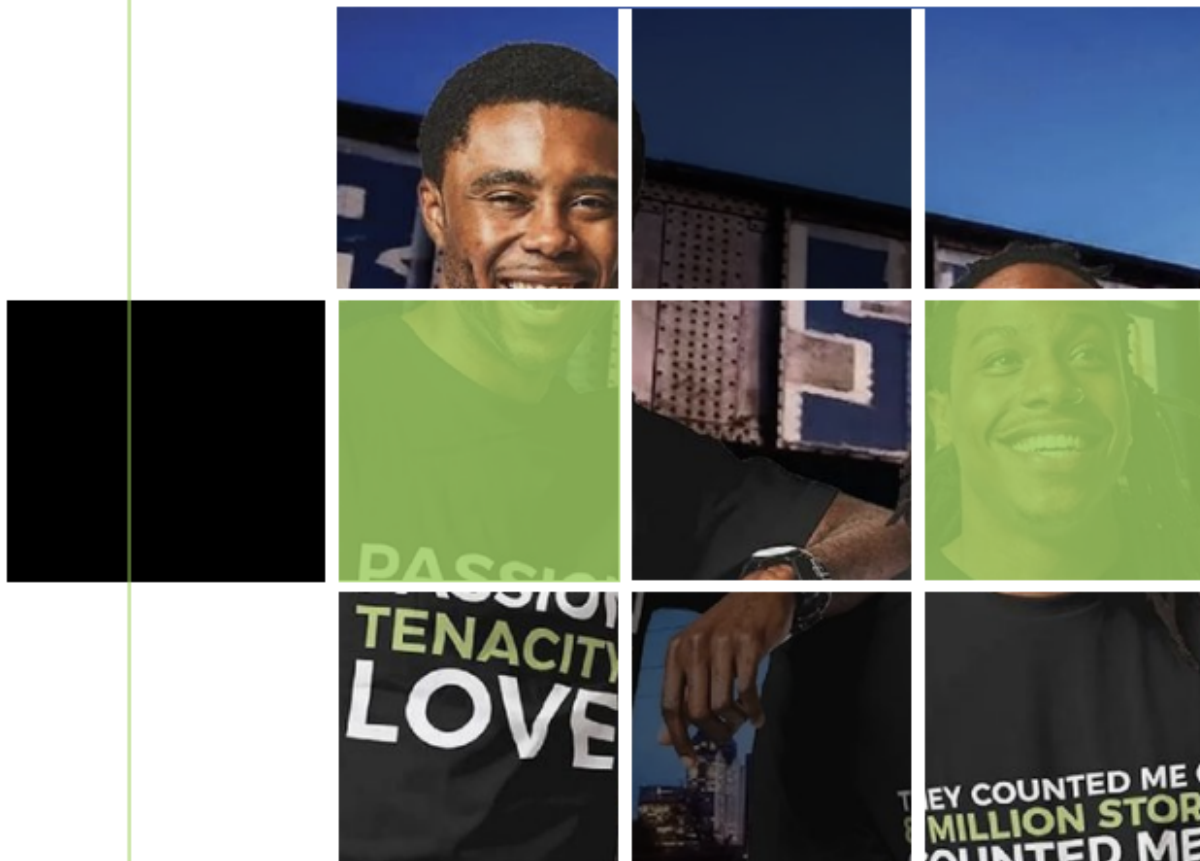


Concept Paper for Consideration by Superintendent Miles

June 2023

Reimagining Education and Life:

The HISD REAL Program





Executive Summary

Eight Million Stories seeks to build from our promising partnership with HISD to continue our collective impact into the 2023-2024 school year. We envision a strategic expansion of our role and capacity by 2025. We aim to transition from a program administrator to a fully accountable campus operating partner to the district, operating several satellite campuses across the city through an outcomes-based performance contract.

Context

Eight Million Stories (Eight Million Stories) is a Houston-based nonprofit organization that serves marginalized and disconnected youth in Houston, with a specific focus on young men of color. Founded in 2017, Eight Million Stories ' mission is to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline that disproportionately sweeps young people of color into a devastating cycle of poverty and incarceration through a holistic, student-centered approach that emphasizes education, skills training, and career readiness. The organization's programs seek to meet at-promise students where they are in life by providing a comprehensive suite of educational services, social-emotional support, and mentorship opportunities.

The 2022-2023 school year represented a milestone for Eight Million Stories: the organization partnered with the Houston Independent School District to establish the HISD REAL Program, an initiative designed to support disconnected students within the district. The Program's promising early results have demonstrated the ability of the Eight Million Stories team to effectively develop and deliver programming and support services that lead to transformative academic outcomes for HISD REAL participants, a demographic that has been historically underserved within traditional school settings in the district. The HISD REAL Program's impact extends beyond immediate academic success, setting students up for empowered, choice-rich lives.

HISD students who complete the Program are guaranteed two years of scholarships at in-state public institutions. The scholarship, facilitated through the Greater Houston Community Foundation's Always Do Good program, covers everything except housing. This opportunity, combined with our job readiness program and various partnerships, allows HISD students to access a broad range of resources through Eight Million Stories while enrolled in the REAL Program.

Looking ahead, Eight Million Stories seeks to deepen our positive impact on the Houston community through strategic growth. To that end, we are open to various partnership arrangements with HISD that allow us to achieve our mutual goals of preparing students not just for high school graduation, but also college, career, and life.



If HISD leadership is open to such a partnership, Eight Million Stories is prepared to take steps to transition from a program administrator to a fully accountable campus operating partner to the district, operating several satellite campuses across the city through an outcomes-based performance contract. This approach, we believe, would not only prove sustainable, scalable, and economically effective but would also serve hundreds of students annually who HISD has found challenging to support.

Since our founding in 2017, we've worked with more than 150 students. That's 150 youth who have changed their lives for the better. 150 people who can go out and drive improvement in their community.

And we're just getting started.





The HISD REAL Program: A Transformative Approach

The HISD REAL Program supplements the district's current approach to serving students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out. More than a credit recovery initiative, the REAL Program seeks to increase disconnected students' graduation rates and academic self-assurance, while simultaneously preparing them for post-graduate success and the exigencies of the ever-evolving future economy. The core of the REAL Program is its focus on real-world learning, ensuring that displaced students are not merely academically proficient, but are equipped with practical skills that will enable them to thrive in the future workforce. The Program centers the interests of students and deploys a suite of strategies including credit recovery instruction, wraparound services, social-emotional supports, enrichment programming, and college and career readiness instruction to ensure student success.

Eligibility for the REAL Program is open to students aged 16-21 who have attempted to earn at least 12 credits or are classified as 11th graders, and Eight Million Stories has expanded eligibility over time as home campuses have expressed interest in having Eight Million Stories support specific students. Priority enrollment is offered to students zoned and enrolled in one of the following high schools: Chavez, Milby, Wheatley, Sterling, Worthing, or Yates. However, eligible students from all HISD high schools may be served if space is available.

These students are referred to the REAL Program by their home campuses due to their exceptional needs. These are the district's most at-risk students – those with experiences such as teen parenthood, juvenile justice system involvement, and other extenuating circumstances– whose needs may exceed the capacities of their home campuses. Approximately one-third of the students in the program are identified as Special Education students. The Eight Million Stories staff collaborate closely with the home campuses of HISD REAL students to create personalized graduation plans that holistically address their academic, social-emotional, and postsecondary preparation needs while taking into account their unique needs and life experiences. For students with IEPs, Eight Million Stories collaborates closely with home campus staff on ARD meetings and IEP implementation throughout the process. Once enrolled in the HISD REAL program, these students transition from their home campus to the vibrant learning environment of the Eight Million Stories site at Jones Futures Academy (7414 Saint Lo Road Houston, TX 77033).

One of the cornerstones of the REAL Program is its accelerated instruction framework facilitated through [APEX learning](#), a software that allows students to progress through courses based on content mastery rather than seat time. Accelerated instruction, combined with paid summer internship opportunities, are elements of a comprehensive strategy to reengage students participating in the program. Students also benefit from the guidance of Academic Success Coaches and mentors, alongside hands-on learning experiences.



The structure of the REAL Program is built to respect and accommodate the realities of students' lives. The program offers a shortened school day, running from 9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m., delivering accelerated learning to achieve significant student progress.

The REAL Program goes beyond traditional classroom-based interventions and credit recovery programs. Eight Million Stories' broader network of partners and providers ensures that students have access to an expansive array of supports and real-world learning, including paid summer internships, college and career counseling, college scholarships, hands-on learning experiences, and aid with necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and childcare.

By deploying innovative strategies that meet students where they are, the Program has created an ecosystem that not only helps in augmenting academic success and postsecondary preparedness but also provides critical resources and development to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, increasing their chances of postsecondary success for some of the district's most at-promise students.

The HISD REAL Program: By the Numbers

<i>Campus</i>	<i># Students Served</i>	<i>Credits Earned*</i>	<i># Moved 2 or more grades</i>	<i>Average days in program****</i>	<i>Average Attendance</i>
Yates	37	201.5	11	82	88%
Wheatley	5	44	3	110	89%
Sterling	15	91.5	7	115	87%
Bellaire**	1	7	0	89	67%
Madison	12	71.5	4	65	90%
Worthing***	1	4	0	89	80%
Totals:	71	419.5	25	110	84%

Notes:

- Credit earned includes credit recovery, original credit, and credit gained due to attendance appeal activities*
- Student was a 5th-year senior receiving special education services. He had been enrolled in two HISD dropout prevention programs prior. We were able to get him to graduate this year**
- Student was pregnant and had another child under the age of two while in our program; she had the baby and returned to us***
- Students can join the program at any point during the school year due to extenuating circumstances****
- The REAL Program produced 8 graduates, including one three-year graduate; none entered REAL as seniors



A Promising Start: Empowering Students, Transforming Lives

Since its launch, the HISD REAL Program has made meaningful strides in providing a supportive learning environment for HISD students at risk of dropping out of school. By offering them a renewed chance to earn a high school diploma, the REAL program sets them on the path to a promising future.

2022-2023 School Year Program Outcomes:

- **Students Served:** The Program reached 71 students from Chavez, Milby, Sterling, Wheatley, Worthing, and Yates High Schools.
- **Credits Earned:** Together, these students earned 419 credits and sustained an attendance rate of 86%.
- **Accelerated Academic Progress:** 35% of students participating in the REAL Program advanced two or more grade levels within a single academic year.
- **High School Graduates:** Despite having no students enter the REAL program as Seniors, 8 students (all of whom joined the program mid-year) graduated from high school, and six have applied to HCC for Fall 2023.
- **Employment Attainment:** 28% of students secured employment within three months of completing the REAL Program.
- **Personal Development:** 85% of students reported feeling hopeful for their futures, while the same percentage of students took pride in their academic accomplishments in the REAL Program.

We look forward to continuing to track our student outcomes to be able to report on postsecondary success measures once our inaugural cohort of graduates begins college in the Fall.

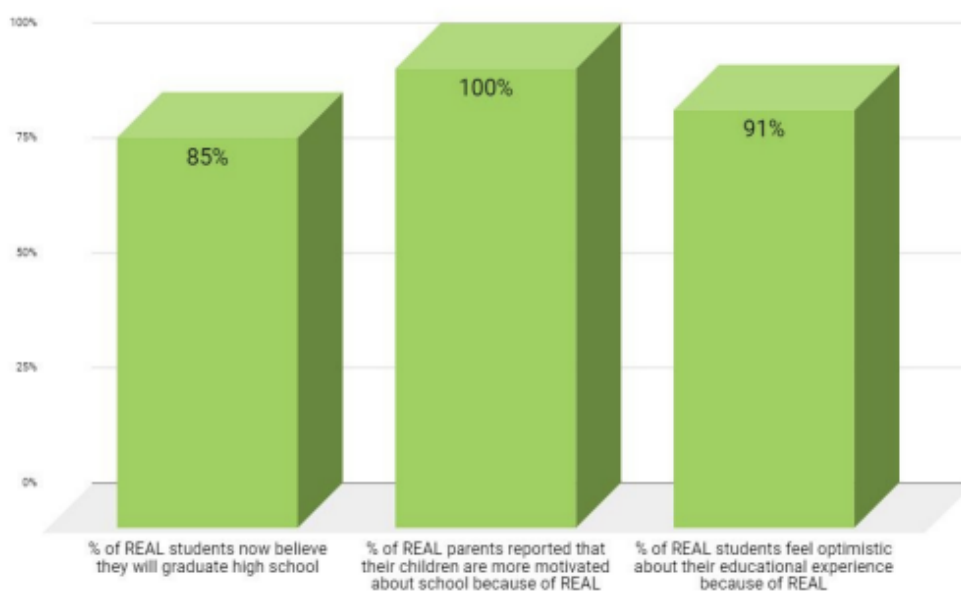
The REAL Program's results show great promise even at this nascent stage. The impact of the Program goes beyond numbers on a page. By empowering students to achieve advanced academic progression, secure stable and meaningful employment, and feel proud of their accomplishments, the Program fundamentally transforms the trajectories of its participants, providing them with the tools and confidence to lead rich, productive, and choice-filled lives.



However, we acknowledge that this is just the beginning. The strong early results of the REAL Program are a call to action for us. Continuous data-driven evaluation and program refinement are crucial to sustaining and amplifying the impact of the REAL Program. Building from our baseline data in 2022-23, we aim to work collaboratively with the district to refine our partnership approach and identify areas for continuous improvement. As part of our strategic planning year, we intend to work with the district to develop goals, progress monitoring systems, and measurement of our financial return on investment. Under the leadership of Marvin Pierre, with invaluable support from Bianca Clark and Skyra Thomas, all of whom bring a wealth of experience as educators and school administrators, Eight Million Stories has successfully secured startup funding from some of Houston's most prominent philanthropic organizations including direct funding for HISD REAL from Good Reason Houston and the Powell Foundation and prior funding for the organization as a whole from the Houston Endowment. Please refer to the appendix for Eight Million Stories' senior leadership bios.

The promise of HISD's partnership with Eight Million Stories is evident and we are eager to engage with and learn from the district to build our capacity. We look forward to improving and expanding the HISD REAL Program for the benefit of our students and the communities we serve.

The HISD REAL Program: Student Impact





Program Testimonials

- *"We were so impressed with what we saw and heard during our visit!"*

-Transcend Education after conducting [an observation](#) of Eight Million Stories' site last year

- *"...your program is one of the most effective, student-centered operations that I have encountered in quite some time. Thank you for your support, mentoring, and care. "*

-Sheryl Bell-HISD Outreach Services

- *"By attending the REAL program [,] my educational experience improved... I have learned so many important life and social skills. Not just that [,] but I have learned how to prepare for job interviews and how to fill out job applications. I have learned how to speak, act, and dress professionally. I have learned new words and have been practicing them for future reference."*

-An HISD REAL student on how the program has impacted their educational experience

- *"I actually have hope in myself and motivation to keep going..."*

-An HISD REAL student on how the program has impacted their educational experience

- *"A component from the REAL program that has been the most influential is the financial literacy classes... there were a lot of things I learned that have helped me manage my money..."*

-An HISD REAL student on which component of the Program has been the most influential to them

- *"...when the military [visited,] they influenced me to enter the military..."*

-An HISD REAL student on which component of the Program has been the most influential to them

- *"...I was really intrigued [by] the Microsoft field trip because I am interested in the tech field for my career."*

-An HISD REAL student on which component of the Program has been the most influential to them



The District's Investment: A Win-Win Proposition

HISD and Eight Million Stories' partnership has enabled us to achieve significant strides through the REAL Program. Yet, we recognize the opportunity for an expanded vision. Today, our partnership with the district allows us to provide alternative pathways for students who are not succeeding in traditional school settings. However, in the 2022-23 school year, demand exceeded the capacity of the HISD REAL program; while we were funded with a target of 60 students, REAL served over 70 students out of the 100+ referred to our Program throughout the year.

To ensure that we don't turn away these students in the future, Eight Million Stories envisions a strategic expansion of our role and capacity by 2025. We aim to transition from a program administrator to a fully accountable campus operating partner to the district, operating several satellite campuses across the city through an outcomes-based performance contract.

This expansion provides a compelling value proposition for HISD aligned with the Superintendent's vision for the district's future. In partnership, HISD and Eight Million Stories can collectively offer disconnected students the highest quality academic and real-world learning opportunities. HISD REAL will offer them the specialized support required for them to graduate high school and be well-equipped for post-secondary success, leveraging the expertise of an operating partner with the specific focus, school model, and partnership infrastructure designed to cater to their needs. In essence, this approach equips HISD to offer comprehensive, inclusive support for all students, reflecting positively on the district's commitment to providing all of its students with a world-class education.

The operational transition of Eight Million Stories will be guided by a performance contract with HISD, ensuring the organization is accountable for student outcomes including high school and postsecondary academic outcomes (e.g., cohort graduation rate, dropout rate, TSI, college matriculation and persistence, employment) as well as operational and financial outcomes at the network level. The resulting network of campuses would be sustainable on public funding sources (Foundation School Program, Charter School Program, and SB-1882 funding) and this model would present a sustainable, scalable, and economically effective approach to serving hundreds of students annually whom HISD has historically found challenging to support.

To realize this vision, more support is necessary. With the Superintendent's support, Eight Million Stories would seek to undergo a strategic planning year funded by philanthropic partners and potentially also TEA planning grants. This would enable us to scale in a disciplined, thoughtful, and strategic manner, thereby meeting the growing demand for our model.

Requested Investment: Supporting the Vision



Financial Investment: Maintaining the prior administration's budget allocation of \$500,000 for the 2023-24 school year will enable the continuity of the HISD REAL Program. This allocation will allow for continued support in key areas, including instructional staff and resources, wraparound services, academic counseling, and enrichment opportunities. If district funds allow, HISD REAL is prepared to increase our capacity for the 2023-24 school year to serve a total of 80 students. See Appendix B for financial projections.



Codifying Partnership Parameters: Assigning a designated point of contact at the district's central office is vital to improving communication between Eight Million Stories and the district. This liaison would facilitate operations, allow Eight Million Stories to provide more timely, adaptive student support and progress updates, and improve the overall service that the organization is able to provide to REAL Program students. In addition, a data-sharing agreement would allow Eight Million Stories staff to better track student progress and program effectiveness (e.g., access to TSI and PSAT scores on tests taken at the home campus) and deliver tailored interventions and other support.



Strategically Scaling Impact: Eight Million Stories envisions an expansion of the REAL Program that would enable it to support even more HISD students. However, this expansion must be disciplined, strategic, and sustainable to continue delivering high-quality support to at-promise students in the district. To do this, Eight Million Stories seeks the Superintendent's support in securing philanthropic funding and/or TEA planning grants for a strategic planning year. This planning year will allow the organization to develop a thoughtful, strategic plan that will allow the organization to transition from operating a program to operating school campuses. This transition will allow Eight Million Stories to maximize both its impact on students and its overall value to the district.

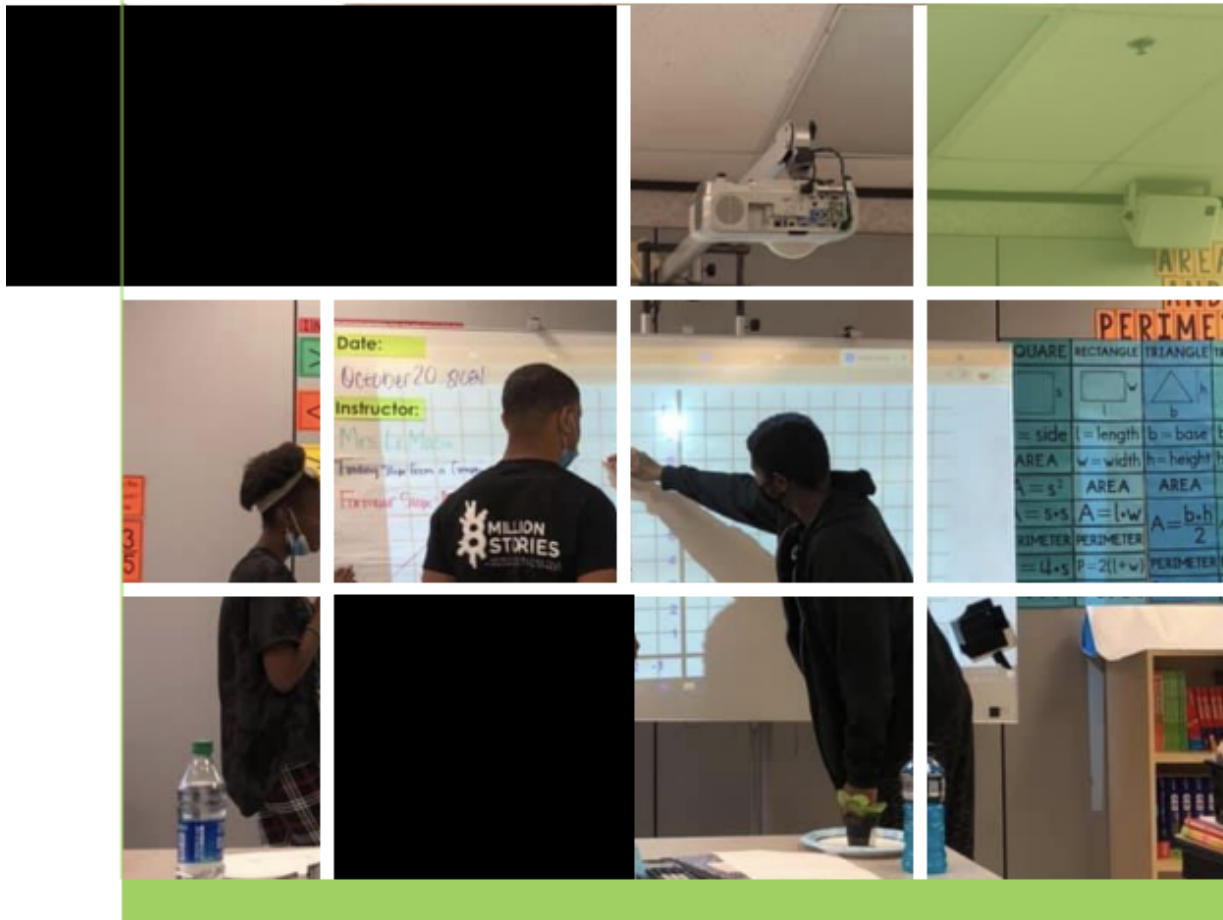


Capacity-Building Through In-Kind Support: While Eight Million Stories currently operates a robust program, we understand the need for further capacity building in key areas. We, therefore, ask that the district consider allowing Eight Million Stories access to the district's established systems and professional development programs during 2023-24 for up to ten teachers, counselors, social workers, and other staff. This includes training in areas such as school compliance, SPED compliance, instruction, finance, and principal training. This capacity-building effort will allow Eight Million Stories to absorb invaluable institutional knowledge from HISD, internalize the superintendent's expectations for quality and performance, and train our staff accordingly. As a result, the campuses managed by Eight Million Stories will be better equipped to meet the high standards of the district, solidifying our joint commitment to fostering student success.



Conclusion

The HISD REAL Program stands as a testament to what can be achieved when we design an entire school experience around the needs and potential of the students we serve. The Superintendent's support for the Program— through maintaining the budget allocation, codifying partnership parameters, and endorsing a strategic planning year, will not only ensure the program's continued success but also signify a commitment to the district's most high-need students. By investing in this cause, the Superintendent is investing in the district's future— a future where every student has a chance to succeed.





Appendix A: Eight Million Stories Leadership Bios

Marvin Pierre | Co-Founder and Executive Director

A native New Yorker, Marvin Pierre began developing 8 Million Stories during his year as a TNTP Bridge Fellow. Before that, he served as the Assistant Principal at KIPP Polaris Academy for Boys in Houston, Texas.

Prior to joining KIPP Polaris, he served as the Dean of Students at Excellence Boys Charter School in Brooklyn, NY. He was an Assistant Dean of Students at Summit Academy Charter School and has also served as Director of Student Life at Achievement First Endeavor Middle School (Brooklyn, NY).

Marvin also worked in the Investment Banking (Municipal Finance Group) at Goldman, Sachs & Co.

Marvin holds a bachelor's in Economics from Trinity College (Hartford, CT) and a Masters in Education Administration and Supervision from the University of Houston. He is a proud member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

Bianca Clark | Managing Director, Programming

Bianca Clark is the Managing Director of Programs at Eight Million Stories. In her role, she is responsible for overseeing program management, training, and development of educational programming for Eight Million Stories, Eight Million Stories Works, REACH, and Houston ISD R.E.A.L. Her primary focus is to ensure all students are emotionally and academically equipped to be successful and self-sufficient in adulthood.

She began her career as an English teacher at Houston ISD. Since then, she has served as a Dean of Instruction in Fort Bend ISD, an Assistant Principal at KIPP Houston, a school improvement consultant at Region 10 ESC, and most recently as a Principal at Southwest Schools.

As an educational leader, Bianca is known for setting high expectations and creating a safe environment where students and staff can thrive. Bianca holds a bachelor's degree in English and a Master of Education in School Administration and Leadership, both from Prairie View A&M University. She is also a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.



Skyra Thomas | Managing Director, Strategy and Operations

Skyra Thomas is the Managing Director of Strategy & Operations at Eight Million Stories. Her work at Eight Million Stories is focused on planning, coordinating, and supervising the day-to-day operations of the program. In her role, Skyra ensures that the program runs efficiently and is student-centered while driving the mission and vision of Eight Million Stories. Streamlining systems, improving processes, and analyzing the effectiveness of the program are the highlights of her work, but nothing compares to fostering strong and lasting relationships with the students.

Prior to Eight Million Stories, Skyra was the Dean of School Programming at Brownsville Ascend Middle School, where she led student social-emotional learning, and college readiness, and developed the school's first National Junior Honor Society chapter.

Skyra earned a Bachelor of Social Work from Oakwood University (Huntsville, AL) and a Master of Social Work with a certificate in nonprofit management from Boston University.



Appendix B: HISD REAL Financials

HISD REAL 2022-2023 Program Budget

<i>Item</i>	<i>Total</i>
Staff Salaries	\$368,836.00
Lunch and student activities	\$68,240.00
Facility cost	\$49,979.00
Student books and supplies	\$15,567.00
Programming	\$13,050.00
Technology cost	\$7,100.00
Marketing	\$6,197.00
Student transportation	\$4,111.00
TOTAL	\$533,080.00



Financial Projections

Scenario 1: Growth as a program (Not a full school)

In this scenario, Eight Million Stories would continue to operate as a program in partnership with home school campuses across the district. Our vision would be to operate our current site in 2023-24, and then expand to another satellite campus closer to students in another part of the city, expanding our capacity to 100+ students in 2024-25. This program budget assumes a continuation of our current program model with modest economies of scale, with responsibility for expenses shifting from philanthropic partners to the district over time.

	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
HISD Investment	\$500,000	\$500,000 (requested)	\$800,000*
Philanthropy	\$335,000 over two years		\$250,000**
TEA Grants	N/A	N/A	N/A

*Reflecting program growth and cost increases over time and shift from philanthropy

**Intent is not to rely on philanthropy long-term



Scenario 2: Transition to an Operator (Growth over time to 250+ students served annually)

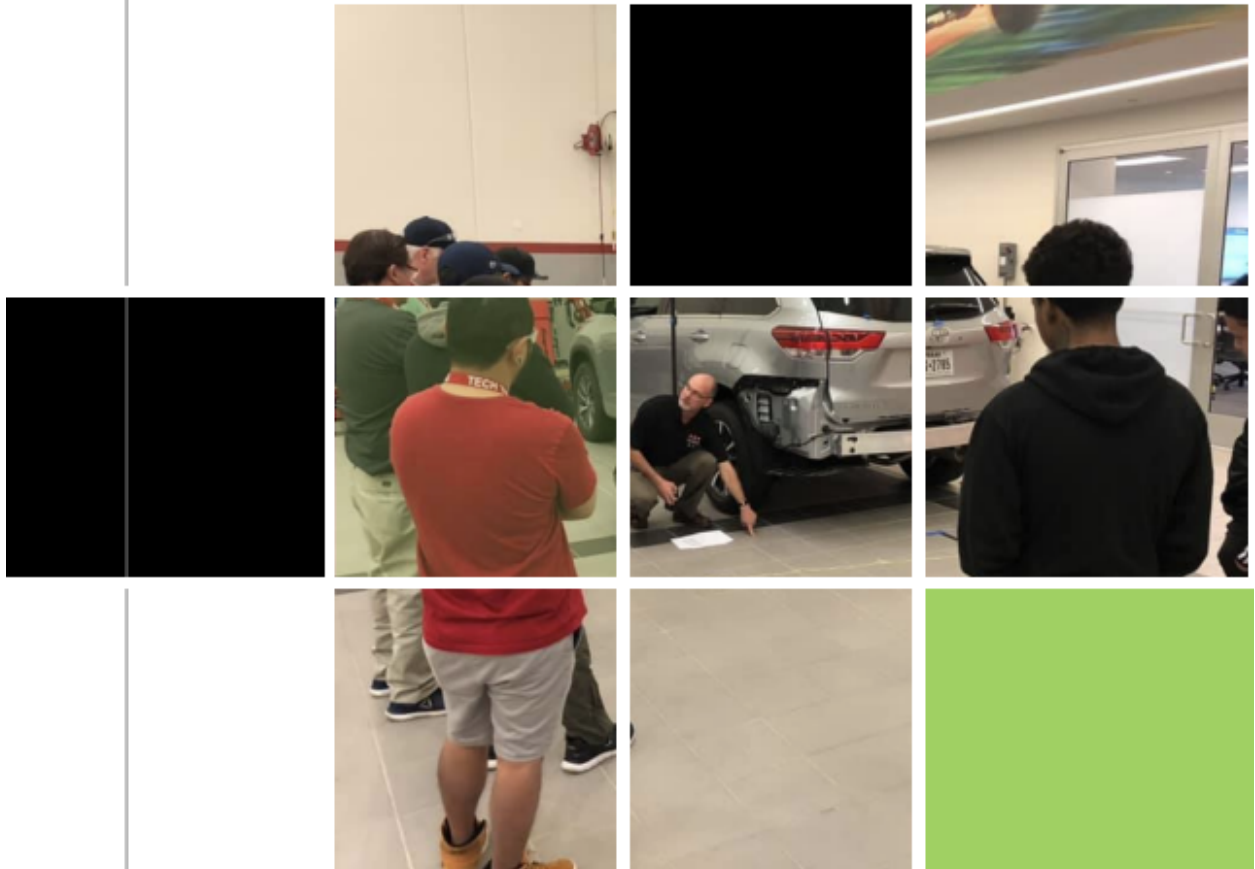
In this scenario, Eight Million Stories would become a school operator of a network of REAL sites, held accountable to clear performance goals in a partnership contract. After incorporating input and data through a rigorous strategic planning process, Eight Million Stories would fundamentally upgrade the REAL program design, clarifying key program elements, aligning staffing (e.g., certified teachers), curriculum (e.g., potential college and CTE courses), and financial resources (e.g., projecting CCMR outcomes bonuses and/or TIA funds). While the program would become considerably more robust, it would also generate significant incremental revenue from public grants and regular recurring public funding streams. Eight Million Stories could build the capacity in its network of school sites to meet HISD's entire need for accelerated instruction, credit recovery, and student support to disconnected youth.

	2022-2023	2023-2024	Goal
HISD Investment	\$500,000	\$500,000 (requested)	Revenue generated by students served (e.g., ~\$10K x 250 students = \$2.5M)
Philanthropy	\$335,000 (already committed)		Applications to New Schools Venture Fund, Charter School Growth Fund, etc.
TEA Grants	N/A	HISD applies for School Action Fund planning grant by January 2024	Charter Startup Program (~\$1M) School Action Fund (~\$1M)



Concept Paper for Consideration by Superintendent Miles

June 2023



📞 832.488.0539

📍 7414 Saint Lo Road Houston, TX 77033

🌐 info@eightmillionstories.org

Appendix P: Apex Learning

Welcome to the new and improved Apex Learning Virtual School website!

Contact Us | Student Portal | Cart | Sign In

Apex Learning

About Us | Academics | All Courses & Tutorials | Admissions | Student Life | Enroll Now

HIGH-QUALITY ONLINE LEARNING OPTIONS TO

Learn Anytime, Anywhere

All of our humans are busy right now. Can we create a ticket for you?

The image shows a young woman with blonde hair wearing large white headphones, looking down and to the left. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting. A blue banner on the left contains the text 'Learn Anytime, Anywhere'. A white chat bubble with a red '2' notification is on the right.

Appendix Q: Email from Executive Director Marvin Pierre regarding Student Offerings



Kailey Eininger <kailey.eininger@gmail.com>

A few more things!

Marvin Pierre <mpierre@eightmillionstories.org>

Sat, May 27, 2023 at 4:17 PM

To: Kailey Eininger <kailey.eininger@gmail.com>

Cc: Marvin Pierre <Marvin.pierre@gmail.com>, Destiny Shantell Woodbury <destiny.s.woodbury@gmail.com>

We have offered students the following:

- 10 hours of financial literacy
- 6 hours entrepreneurship
- 26 hours of soft skills/job readiness training

Hands-on career exploration with the following partners:

- Microsoft
- Hewlett-Packard
- BP
- Amazon
- Texas Work Solutions
- All 5 branches of the military
- TSA
- KKR career exploration - May
- Habitat Community Home Build Event - Pending May 26th - 7:30am-2pm
- TC Energy
- Bank of America

Preparation partners:

- Career Gear - Male Students
- Dress for Success - Female Students

Additional enrichment offered:

- Fotofest (literacy through photography)
- Toastmaster (YMCA)
- Student podcast-8 Million Voices (Baker Ripley)
- The Plug (electric vehicle build)
- STAAR tutorials (University of Houston, teachHouston)


College tour to University of Texas at Austin

We have supported 9 students in securing employment

Employment partners:

- Sam's Club
- Burlington Coat Factory
- Houston YMCA
- Taco Bell
- Starbucks
- Amazon
- Paid summer internship placement (various locations)

[Quoted text hidden]

 **REAL Impact Overview (1).pptx**
2455K