

Letter to the Editor : Common Sense vs. Non Sense

Written by Travis McGee, Sr.
Friday, 02 November 2012 09:10



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HISD Bond 2012: What More Can HISD Do With \$1.9 Billion That They Couldn't Do With \$2.3 Billion From The Last Three Bonds?

AS a parent, taxpayer, and community leader I'm very concerned with the past, present, and even future actions of HISD. One year ago HISD stated and reiterated several times that student population and enrollment was declining specifically in older, African American communities. However, research has shown quite the opposite. The population has not decreased. Research has also shown the demand for quality education has increased. This is evidenced in the amount of students pursuing and attending schools that are not in close proximity to their homes. These parents and students are desperately seeking out schools that have adequate programs that do not exist in their communities.

One year later HISD is asking *WE The People* for \$1.9 billion in bonds to put "New Buildings" in the same areas they initially stated did not have sufficient enrollment. Board members suggested current campuses did not have enough children to operate or function on their current campus budgets. They even closed four schools (Grimes, Rhoads, Stevenson, and McDade). Ironically, several of the schools were included in the 2007 Bond. If the schools were included on the bond proposal, why are they closed now?

We The People vote for our best interest and not a politician's hidden agendas.

Beautification should not be priority over education. If schools are performing poorly before and

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after passing the bond, will a big pretty building improve the performance? Or will it just increase our taxes? The problem in the minority communities is the lack of programs and superior instructors. Families are following the programs even if that means being bused out of the area. Why should any child have to be bused from their community in order to receive a quality education and the opportunity to participate in programs that enhance the educational experience?

In 1954, we had Brown vs. Board of Education. Today, it's Brown vs. the Houston Independent School District.

The difference being the lack of white schools in a seven block radius. Since our schools are being closed, children are being bused miles away from their homes in search of a quality education.

Who really benefits from these "Blank" checks also known as HISD BONDS?

It sure isn't the children!

Billion dollar bonds equal multimillion dollar contracts. In 1998, history was made when voters approved a bond for \$678 million. In 2002, history was rewritten when voters approved a bond for over \$808 million. In 2007, another bond was approved for \$805 million. Each time the bond was presented HISD and local officials stated that this OPPORTUNITY won't come around again. This will be the 4th OPPORTUNITY in 14 year.

The key word is OPPORTUNITY.

Exactly who's OPPORTUNITY is it? Our schools didn't get in these so-called deplorable conditions over night. If \$2.3 billion have been allocated over 14 years, where did it go? From 1998 to present, District 9 has received a total of \$255.3 million (only 8 schools built) and District 4 has received \$327.6 million in bond money (only 7 schools built). That is a total of \$582.9 million combined in which only 15 schools were built. District 2 received \$390.6 million and almost built more schools than both districts combined.

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Note: A state of the art elementary school can be built for \$16 million. Frost Elementary School located at 5002Almeda-Genoa Road is a perfect example.

In 2010 HISD had a total of 298 schools. Today, HISD has 279 schools with an average budget of \$1.6 billion. You would think with 19 fewer schools there would be a surplus in HISD's budget and a decrease in our taxes. However, just last year they closed 4 schools (Grimes, Rhoades, Stevenson, and Mc Dade). Even though Grimes (380) and Rhoades (320) were on the 2007 bond they were both closed. Ironically the buildings are currently being leased out to HISD Charter Schools with less than half the enrollment of either school. Both Charters have 5 year leases at a rate of roughly \$15,000.00 a month. This was done less than a month after closures.

I guess it pays to have friends sitting on the board.

There were 10 other schools with lower enrollment than Grimes. Also, the 2002 bond financed the construction of 2 new schools with 1 residing in Grimes' attendance zone. By HISD's numbers high schools should have an enrollment of 1,000 or more students. Middle school should have at least 750 students and elementary at least 500. If our schools don't meet the criteria, they are considered small and are subject to consolidation or closure regardless of academic standing.

HISD would rather close or move a school than help improve it.

As of December 2010, HISD had 66 schools that they were considering closing or consolidating. As of March 2011, the list went down to 37 with 80% of those schools being predominantly minority schools. All of our Black communities from North, South, East, or West will be without schools and have a crippled feeder pattern.

Trades in Schools

Trades in school are a must. We must admit that everyone will not attend college. Even though

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HISD has a gifted and talented population of only 15% and 60%-80% of its students classified as economically disadvantaged/at risk population, they see no need for trades. For some reason HISD believes trades are inferior. However, they are willing to ask *We the People* for \$1.9 billion worth of trades.

How can anyone in their right mind believe anything HISD says? If we can't see the previous \$2.3 billion, why would we give them another blank check with absolutely no accountability? If our children and schools really came first, why was the new Administration Building built before any of the out dated schools? The old admin property sold for \$38 million and the new was built for \$28 million. With \$10 million unaccounted for and a new 300,000 square building, do the children really come first?

HISD is funded per student and not per administrator.

We must use Common Sense to VOTE NO against this Non Sense.