

# HEATED DEBATE RESULTS IN 4-3 VOTE TO RETAIN SUCCESSION POLICY

By Rick Janacek

December 18, 2013

The Humble ISD Board of Trustees made major changes to its board operating procedures, but kept intact its current succession plan for choosing a board president. The new procedures mark the first time in three years the procedures have been updated. The proposed revisions and a plan to change the way board presidents are selected brought about heated debate from several trustees who wanted to see changes in the current format.

Trustee Keith Lapeze led the committee that reworked the board operating procedures. The proposal was first introduced during a board workshop in October. Last month, Lapeze had stated the proposal, which was tweaked after input during the workshop, would be ready for review in January and a vote in February. However, after a heated debate with fellow trustee, Robert Scarfo, Lapeze brought forward two different proposals for a vote this month.

“As promised, we have board operating procedures,” Lapeze said. “We have two versions because at the workshop we had several board members that wanted one particular version and we had others that wanted another particular version. So we have two versions that are here for consideration.”

The two proposals included rules on how the trustees would select the board president annually. One proposal would have kept the current system, where the board president is selected via a succession. In this system, trustees are guaranteed of serving once every seven years. A second proposal would have changed the system to an elected system where trustees would vote for the board president, vice-president, secretary and parliamentarian. Several trustees were vocal in their support of this proposal.

“I am in support of option two, which is election of officers,” said Trustee Heath Rushing. “From my perspective, there are times when electing officers by succession might not position the district to be in the best place or this board in the best place to have the leadership it may need under any variety of circumstances at any given point in time. I think as a board it would be beneficial to have the opportunity to elect people with certain skill sets or experiences that allows us to be effective as a board in addressing any issues the district may have on any given year. I don’t think succession planning allows us to do that.”

“I have had a lot of time to think about this and I have changed my mind on this,” added Trustee Robert Sitton. “I was for succession and now I’m for election. Because a lot of research I have done, not with just schools and the public sector, but the private sector also, and how organizations are run and how the election process works. Because of that, I think it’s more appropriate and prudent to go in that direction.”

Even Lapeze, who had previously favored the succession system, admitted that he favored elections.

“As the leader of the committee that brought the recommendation to the board, in my mind, it was a recommendation for harmony,” Lapeze said. “I didn’t want to hurt anybody’s feelings. Personally, I think election of officers is the right way to go. But my thought process was attempted to be harmonious. Despite my attempts at every single turn to be harmonious, I have been met with combativeness. That has effectively changed my mind. I am for the election of the officers of the board. That doesn’t mean someone here is going to serve as president. If this is done correctly, it could be done like Houston ISD where you have a succession-like election. We are in the distinct minority in the state. And I think this will be the most harmonious at this point.”

But other trustees, like Charles Cunningham, argued for keeping the succession plan.

“Election of an officer is going to guarantee that of the seven up here, not all seven will be president,” Cunningham said. “And I disagree that there will be a board member that is not capable of being president. If we are capable of getting out there and campaigning and running for office, I think we can be president.”

The succession plan narrowly passed 4-3, with current President Brent Engelage, Vice President Scarfo, and trustees Cunningham and Angela Conrad voting in favor of the plan. Sitton, Lapeze and Rushing all voted against the succession proposal.

The debate over the proposed procedures did not end there, however. Cunningham admittedly demanded that a section of the operating procedures be deleted. The section regarded communication between board members and the superintendent and staff.

“These documents are in violation of the education code,” Cunningham said. “The power of the president, the power of the superintendent, the restrictions on communication, all of that is in violation. There are checks and balances involved here, and you are going to strip me of that. I am a duly elected official and you are going to strip our ability to communicate with the superintendent, to communicate with campus administration, district and campus level.”

Lapeze agreed to delete the section in question, along with other smaller tweaks, and the board passed the procedures which will go into effect immediately.

## **TRUSTEES SQUABBLE OVER NEW BOARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**

By Rick Janacek

November 20, 2013

Tensions heated up between Humble ISD Trustees Keith Lapeze and Robert Scarfo at November’s board meeting. At issue was a proposed revamp of board operating procedures and policies, and the timing of when those proposals will be before the board of trustees for a vote.

A committee, led by Lapeze, has been working on a proposed draft of the revised policies for several months. The policies had not been revised since 2010. Lapeze first presented the proposed policies at a board workshop last month. Lapeze told the board at its regular November meeting that he would have a final draft of the new operating procedures ready to view in February, and that a vote would take place in March.

“These board operating procedures really don’t effect anything until there is a transition,” Lapeze said. “So basically we need to have it done the month before that. That transition will be in May or April, so we are going to have it done well before that.”

That timeline did not sit well with Scarfo, who believes the new policies and procedures should be in place sooner.

“What you are referring to, the committee selection, is just a part of a lot bigger updating of board protocol, ethics and code of conduct and all those types of things,” Scarfo said. “As a group, we admit that it sat for so long. By our own current board operating procedures it’s supposed to be looked at every year, and we all sat at a workshop. I think we’ve done the work, so I don’t think it’s that much to be put it together.”

Lapeze admitted that the committee is waiting on him to finish the revisions, but Scarfo reiterated that since the whole board has looked at the proposal, it should be presented at a board meeting sooner rather than later. Lapeze angrily responded to Scarfo’s comments, telling him and the rest of the board that they would have two proposals before them by the next meeting.

“Mr. Scarfo, I promise that after now hearing you, this makes me want to have the discussion we need to have,” said Lapeze. “So what I am going to do is we are going to make sure in December we are going to have the board operating procedures ready for discussion. We will have that discussion in December, I guarantee it. And what I want to do is I want to have two versions of it, based upon the discussion we had earlier.”

The potential changes the board is considering include a new code of ethics that all board members would sign, changing the powers of the board president changes to how board members are selected to different committees.

Another interesting topic of discussion involved an agenda item that usually receives no discussion – budget amendments. Different budget amendments are brought to the board for approval almost every month. They can range from small items, such as a transfer between functional categories for proper coding that was up for approval in November, to larger items. But most amendments are usually approved without discussion. Lapeze brought up the item for discussion because he said he believes there should be changes overall in how the board is presented with these amendments.

“One of the targets this year is we are going to be looking at how we budget different groups and campuses,” Lapeze said. “Every regular board meeting we’ve had budgetary amendments come up for the seven years I’ve been on the board, and it’s been a consent vote. I think with a new focus on the budget, down to the smallest matters, that we want to change how we do things in our district. I think it would be a good idea if we started pulling this every month and we start discussing what is happening in the budget that requires an amendment to the budget. I doesn’t necessarily have to be something that has to be pulled, but more explanation than we currently have. I’d like to get some more explanation wrapped around those changes for future agenda items. This is information that I would like to see given to the board. Basically more about what it was, whose department it is in, why this wasn’t in the budget before, why this is a critical item and can it wait.”

Humble ISD Superintendent Dr. Guy Sconzo told Lapeze that it would not be a problem to include these items in future budget amendment proposals.

“My tendency would be, for each of the amendments, to include a description of what and why, and make that a part of the monthly highlights [that the district gives to the board before every meeting],” Sconzo told Lapeze.

The budgetary amendments were passed unanimously after the discussion. The board also approved without discussion an independent auditor’s report that is included in the district’s Comprehensive Annual Financial Report. According to district officials, the report is part of a federally mandated audit designed to meet the need of federal grantor agencies.

The district also honored its Super Staffers for the month of November. The Super Staffers award is part of a new alternative compensation program for all teachers and staff throughout the district. The new program, created by a committee made up of teachers, administrators and staff members, is designed to help reward district employees for their work. This month’s winners included Foster Elementary Nurse Julieanne Kowalis, Kingwood Park High School Math Teacher Mark Ruffin, and Administration Executive Assistant Carolyn Harden.

## **HUMBLE SCHOOL BOARD DISCUSSES POTENTIAL CHANGES AT WORKSHOP, DISTRICT POLICY**

By Rick Janacek  
November 6, 2013

As the Humble ISD Board of Trustees prepares to consider several major changes to policy and procedures over the next few months, the board sat down to discuss those potential changes at a special workshop. The board is considering changes to its own policy and codes of conduct, along with changes to the district’s advertising policy and the addition of video streaming its monthly meetings. Different board committees, all led by Trustee Keith Lapeze, researched these potential changes and gave initial drafts of the changes to the rest of the board at the meeting.

The changes the board is considering to its own policy include a new code of ethics that all board members would sign, changing the powers of the board president, and changes to how board members are selected to different committees. It has

been several years since board operating procedures and policies have been updated, and the Evaluation Committee was tasked with making those changes. While the board seemed to support the initial draft of the code of ethics, based upon a similar code of ethics at Cy-Fair ISD, along with changes in how informational requests from board members are processed, a debate arose over the selection of the board president and committee appointments. Lapeze and the committee proposed the formation of a new committee that would be in charge of appointments.

“Every year somebody is not happy about what committee they are on, and right now that is the sole decision of the president,” Lapeze said. “Our idea to try and get rid of the hurt feeling syndrome that happens every now and then with committee appointments is to have a three-member committee that consists of the president, past president and vice president to make the committee appointments.”

That discussion evolved into a discussion about how the board currently selects a board president, which is done on a rotating basis. Some trustees suggested that the rotation be changed to an election of the president.

“We compare ourselves to other school districts, and I think we should compare ourselves to other types of industries,” said Trustee Heath Rushing. “I happen to work in one of those industries that is highly governed by committee. It’s not one where you have succession by rotation. It is truly elected for all of the different committees and all of the positions on the committees.”

Trustee Robert Scarfo said he supported the current system because it helps reduce cliques among board members, but fellow Trustee Robert Sitton accused Scarfo of campaigning for an election system.

“Have you changed your stance on this?” Sitton asked Scarfo. “A couple of years ago you were hell bent on wanting us to do elections, right after I was elected, and so now you like the succession model.”

Scarfo denied the accusations, saying he didn’t recall making such statements. In regards to the committee appointments, current Board President Brent Engelage said he supports the proposed changes.

“I like the idea of having a committee,” Engelage said. “Even though we didn’t vote, you (Lapeze) and I met with Charles [fellow Trustee Charles Cunningham]. That was very helpful to me even though I tweaked it. I liked that ability to tweak it but I certainly see where it might be better to have a firm vote.”

Lapeze told board members he would include their input and have a revised draft of the proposed policy ready for a vote in the spring.

The board also discussed a subject that has received quite a bit of attention recently; video streaming of board meetings. The proposal has been discussed several times, most recently at a board meeting in September. A board committee that includes Lapeze and fellow trustee Angela Conrad looked into the costs of such an operation. While most of the board seemed to be on board with at least a trial, some board members seemed to be against the idea.

“It seems like the only reason we are talking about this is because of one individual,” said Engelage. “We haven’t had a million emails, we haven’t had letters. I am glad we are talking about it and it doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t do it. But it seems the only reason we are discussing it is because of one person.”

“I very seldom ever have anyone ask me why we don’t archive,” Sitton added. “There are a few people that come to board meetings that ask about it. If we want to do it as a board to show that we are transparent, I don’t have a problem with it, but let’s do it for the right reasons. And there have been recordings that have been taken in this board room that have been posted that were chopped up and things taken out of context, and that’s the biggest concern I have with this.”

Conrad and Scarfo assured Sitton that the official stream could not be altered and said that having this tool would be beneficial to the district.

“You could actually use this as a tool to get more community involvement,” Conrad said. “Because if you get their attention to watch the Super Staffers or some other accommodation they can look and see what else is on the agenda and they might click

on it and actually watch part of the board meeting.

Most of the board seemed against the idea of live streaming. The board did not set a timetable as to when this proposal may come before them for a vote.

Finally, the board discussed major changes to its advertising policy. Among the biggest of the proposed changes would be how contracts are handled. Currently a third-party vendor hired by the district has a direct contract with the advertiser. However, the new policy would dictate that the contracts be only between Humble ISD and the advertiser.

“Right now the district is not a party to our advertising contracts. We are a third-party beneficiary, technically,” Lapeze said. “The policy is going to be changed so that the contract is with the district.

Lapeze said he hoped to have the changes ready for board approval in December, when the district would place a Request for Proposal to third-party vendors. The district’s current contract expires at the end of the year which means there will likely be a gap and a potential loss in revenue. However, Lapeze said the Advertising Committee decided a gap would be acceptable.

## **HUMBLE ISD TRUSTEES APPROVE DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY, DISCUSS CURRICULUM AUDIT FOLLOW-UP**

By Rick Janacek

October 23, 2013

Just two months after rejecting a similar proposal, the Humble Independent School District Board of Trustees unanimously approved a wide-scale demographic survey for the entire district. The \$75,000 cost for the survey will come out of the district’s general fund. It is the first district-wide survey conducted since 2009, although smaller, specialized surveys have been conducted in the last two years.

The company Population and Survey Analysts (PASA) were once again selected to conduct the survey. PASA had conducted similar surveys for the district since 2004.

Several Humble ISD trustees said they did not see the need for such a survey in August, citing cost and the fact that it had just been a few years since similar surveys had been conducted. However, the same trustees said they have had a change of heart since the beginning of the school year and discussion with Humble ISD Chief Financial Officer Lynn Lynn.

“A lots happened in two months,” said Humble ISD Trustee Robert Scarfo. “We have exceeded our most likely scenario by more than 1,100. Ms. Lynn went into detail how things have changed and the impact those numbers have and why it’s so important to work off of up-to-date information. It’s so crucial for our financial projections and to get them right. We now find ourselves at a point where we need to look at this recommendation and I think it really makes sense at this time.”

“The discussion last time centered around issues regarding the demographic study which we did not believe we needed it as a board, and I still do not believe we need it for those reasons,” added Trustee Keith Lapeze.

“However, Ms. Lynn and I spoke and she told me how her group uses the numbers and projections for budgets. And after talking with her, this is basically a no-brainer.”

District officials said enrollment information provided by the PASA demographic survey is critical to the budget development process. The survey is the basis for calculating state funding, project growth in the district, assess staffing needs, and determine if additional facilities will be needed to meet student demand.

The district is already beginning to experience enrollment growth this school year with additional housing within the district. In fact, enrollment this exceeded PASA projections and several campuses are at or near capacity.

While the board agreed to the survey, Scarfo asked if the district should look at other vendors to conduct demographic surveys. Humble ISD Superintendent Dr. Guy Sconzo told the board that while now is not the time to change vendors, it is something that can be looked at in the near future.

“There are other firms that are in demo study biz for school districts across the state,” Sconzo said. “The conversation we had, and my reaction to that, is that on a going forward basis and with advanced notice, we really need to issue a request for qualifications and see who responds. We can then have the ability through the RFQ process to analyze and make sure we are comparing apples to apples.”

The Board of Trustees also discussed another hot topic – the 2011 Curriculum Audit. The audit was conducted by the Phi Delta Kappa International Curriculum Management Audit Center and identified gaps and inefficiencies within Humble ISD. The group also made recommendations on how to improve those gaps and ways to improve transparency to parents and the public. Several of the recommendations have already been implemented, and some trustees said they would like to see the group come back in and do a follow up assessment.

“We have spent a lot of time, a lot of staff resources and a lot of district money with implementing the audit recommendations and we have completed or have come close on six of those audit recommendations,” said Trustee Scarfo. “Because we have invested so much, should we ask them to come back and look at what we have done in terms of implementing these recommendations?”

Lapeze said he wanted to see a follow up assessment, but he said the time for such a look is not now.

“We’ve got to do this, but the question is timing,” he said. “We discussed the after audit process after the audit was completed. What they told us was for the board to stay on top of this, we needed to bring them back in. But they said we don’t want to do it before four years because the district hasn’t had enough time to begin to digest the entire report.”

Sconzo agreed that the four-year timeline works, and said more time is needed before a reassessment is conducted. Scarfo disagreed, and said waiting four years into the five-year program before getting a progress report is too long to wait. No decision on when the group should be brought back into conduct a reassessment was made at the meeting.

Also at the October meeting, the district recognized its first Super Staffers of the Month and Elementary Teachers of the Year. The Super Staffer of the Month program is a new employee incentive program introduced at last month’s meeting. It allows for teachers as well as employees holding other types of positions to be honored at their campuses. The first recipients of the award were Linzi Sims, a math and science lab teacher at Park Lakes Elementary School; Michael Porter, a special education teacher at Kingwood Park High School; and Barbara Rendon, an assistant supervisor in the Transportation Department.

## **HUMBLE SCHOOL BOARD TALKS MORE ABOUT VIDEO STREAMING**

By Rick Janacek  
September 25, 2013

The issue of transparency within the Humble Independent School District and its board of trustees became a topic once again at the September school board meeting as both board members and speakers brought up the issue of video streaming.

The idea of streaming and recording all board meetings was brought up during last spring’s board elections and again at the

board's June meeting, where the issue was discussed at length.

"Our legislature puts their meetings online; the city council in Houston does. There's a lot of precedent for it," Humble ISD Trustee Robert Scarfo said in June.

The board decided at that time to table the idea and let one of the board's several committees look at the issue further. The two biggest concerns that the board wanted addressed at that time were cost and the potential for individuals to manipulate the recordings after they went online.

While the board did not directly delve into the video streaming issue at its September meeting, the issue of video streaming was once again raised by Bobby Petty, a local parent and a supporter of streaming and transparency within the district.

"I think we are at that stage right now where we would like to see this happen as a community," Petty told the board. "We would like to see the decisions you are making so that we do not only have to read about it in the newspaper if we can't actually make it. As you know Humble ISD is a rather big community, and is actually made up of three communities: Kingwood, the City of Humble and Atascocita. It's one of the bigger districts in the area, and sometimes it's hard to get here and make meetings. So being able to have that online resource is really, really helpful," said Petty.

He then gave the board suggestions on services they could use and examples of other districts that are streaming their meetings.

"Katy ISD had this issue come up two years ago," he said. "They had a number of allegations on issues and the way they decided to do it was to just go ahead and go fully transparent and they used a company called Swaggit. Swaggit is used by a lot of different school districts in the area. What's cool about this is if people can't be here, they can watch it any time. It goes in the archive and stored off site so it's a lot cheaper."

The board told Petty that they are continuing to look into the issue. In fact, board member Keith Lapeze, who leads the committee that is looking into video streaming, proposed a special meeting to look into the issue further.

"Under the timetable that we talked about, we had a deadline of acting by the end of the year," Lapeze said. "I think meeting in the second half of October would be a good time to discuss this further before we reach a decision."

Lapeze also added that he wanted to use that special workshop in October to discuss board operating procedures.

"It is my understanding that some board members had some issues with some of the work that was assigned to my committee on board operating procedures," he said. "Work that hasn't really began. So thinking about this, I think we should have another workshop so we can discuss this again and discuss this issue in public."

The board also approved the contract of Superintendent Dr. Guy Sconzo. The new contract will help ensure that Sconzo remains as Humble ISD superintendent until the end of the 2016-17 school year.

Board members also heard about a new alternative compensation program for all teachers and staff throughout the district. The new program, proposed by a committee made up of teachers, administrators and staff members, is designed to help reward district employees for their work. The plan would recognize one person, either a teacher or staff member, at every district campus each month. Those people would then be placed into a random drawing and recognized at the district level with a prize. The committee told the board they hoped this would be a way to reward employees and incentivize them during the school year.

"It sounds really easy, go out and create an alternative compensation to pat people on the back, but it wasn't easy. What we found out was what might motivate me, might not motivate someone else," said Dr. Thomas Price, Humble ISD chief academic officer. "We do a great job of honoring the teacher of the year, but we have a lot of other really great support people in our district and we wanted to make sure that this committee didn't forget those support people and was inclusive of everyone."

The new program is expected to be implemented within the next few months, and will not replace the current Teacher of the

Year program.

## **PARENT OUTRAGED BY BUSING POLICY ADDRESSES SCHOOL BOARD**

By Rick Janacek  
August 28, 2013

Parental concerns regarding children walking to the new Ridge Creek Elementary School has Humble ISD officials defending its policy regarding bus routes.

Kimberly Davis, who has a 9-year-old child attending the new school, said she is upset that the district will not be sending a bus to the apartment complex where she lives, Alta Pine Forest. The apartment complex is within a two-mile radius of the school. The district provides transportation to students who live more than two miles from their home campus or must cross a hazardous intersection or road to get to school.

District officials said the apartment complex is within two miles and that the school is accessible through the neighborhood on residential streets.

“This area has been studied and does not meet the criteria for bus service,” said District Public Information Director Jamie Mount. “From the apartments, students would walk out the back gate and through the neighborhood toward the school. District staff verified the route several times, both in person and using routing software, as being under two miles.”

The state’s education code, which the district’s transportation policy follows, states, “A regular eligible student means a student who resides two or more miles from the student’s campus of regular attendance, measured along the shortest route that may be traveled on public roads, and who is not classified as a student eligible for special education services.”

However, Davis claims the district is wrong. She said the back gate is an exit-only gate, and that the district is not taking the entire complex into account.

“Actually, we are not 1.8 miles from the school, we are 2.2 miles from the school,” Davis said. “What the district is doing is using the pick-up and drop-off point as a reference. That pick-up and drop-off happens to be the exit-only gate for our apartment complex, which is a back gate that goes out to John Ralston. They are using that as their point of reference, but that is not our address. Our address is not the back gate. Our front office is 2.2 miles from the school. We have students that live in those buildings, which means that those kids actually have to walk between two-tenths and four-tenths of a mile before they even get to the route.”

Davis said the route is not only dangerous because of traffic at the back gate of the apartment complex, but there are also several registered sex offenders along the route.

“That is irresponsible of the school district,” she said. “The district always gets a list of sexual predators in the area, and they probably know the level of the sexual offenders. So now these children have to walk through what is basically a maze or a gauntlet to get to school. That is appalling. You want to say you care about my child, but when you do that you are obviously showing me you don’t give a damn about my child,” said Davis.

While the district did not comment directly about Davis’ claims about sexual offenders along her child’s route to school, district officials said they do care about the safety of all students and try to work with parents as best they can. However, they said they have treated this area like all others.

“Parents’ concerns are understandable and we always care about student safety,” Mount said. “We would love to be able to offer school bus service to every home, but the reality is state funding is provided when students live more than two miles away from their campus. Many times, families want an exception made for their area but school districts must consistently adhere to criteria to be fair to all families.”

Mount adds the district has tips for safe walking to the school at its website, [humble.k12.tx.us](http://humble.k12.tx.us).

“Parents use many options to get their children to school safely. Some parents form carpools. Some parents walk with their child or identify a neighbor to walk with the children. Some parents get a friend or grandparent to take their child. Some parents hire a babysitter or day care service. We always advise students to walk in groups and not alone.”

Parents who live at the Alta Pine Forest apartments have been meeting to consider options for getting their children to school. They are even talking with a private transportation company that would bus the students to school for a weekly fee.

Davis said she is also trying to work out her transportation options, since she has to be at work before dawn and her fiancée must be at work before her son goes to school. But, she said if anything were to happen to her son while walking to school she would never forgive the district.

“I am not going to allow something to happen to him. If something happens to him, all I have to say is the district better get ready because I will get a lawyer. That’s not a threat. If something happens, I will go after the district because they should have done something,” she said.

## **HUMBLE ISD'S SCONZO NAMED REGION 4 SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YEAR**

By Sofia Schmidt

July 17, 2013

Humble ISD Superintendent Dr. Guy Sconzo was named Education Service Center Region 4’s Superintendent of the Year recently, placing him for consideration with a further statewide honor delivered at The Texas Association of School Boards annual convention later this year.

“This nomination is coming from our school board and that means a lot to me personally. There are a lot of high-quality superintendents in our region. It is an honor to be able to represent all of them with this nomination,” Sconzo said.

Region 4 contains seven counties with 50 public school districts and 51 charter schools serving more than 1 million students.

Sconzo has been Humble’s superintendent since June 2001. Between then and now, district enrollment has increased by 40 percent.

“Leading through changing times is challenging, but Humble ISD was able to gain community support for three bond referendums and a tax rate election, and implement new programs to meet changing needs due to the relationships Sconzo established with board members, staff, students and the community,” the nomination form stated.

The district nomination form included details of Sconzo’s management in fiscal, personal, student and facility matters. Sconzo has also worked with a budget development committee implemented under his direction in order to address the proposed needs of students and projected costs.

“This comprehensive budget planning process, focused on student achievement and financial sustainability, has proved both

effective and impressive over the years,” the form stated.

“To say that Dr. Sconzo is deserving of this award is probably the understatement of the year, said Brent Engelage, Humble ISD board president, “Dr. Sconzo’s name throughout the state of Texas is well known and always associate with excellence.”

In addition to several administrative awards, Sconzo was also awarded the Haden McKay Citizenship Award in 2009 for his outstanding dedication to the community.

The TASB state committee will select five finalists from the regional recipients in August and select the winner Sept. 28 in Dallas.

Sconzo was nominated for a Superintendent of the Year honor from the Texas Association of School Administrators in 2007 by Dr. Bonnie Longnion, who sat on the board that hired the superintendent. Sconzo won the Texas nomination and went on to represent the entire state of Texas at a national level.

“He played a great role at the state level,” Longnion said. “Superintendents across the state respect him and so does the school board.”

Sconzo received a doctorate in education administration, curriculum and finance from Ohio State University in 1978. He served as an associate and interim superintendent for Oklahoma City Public Schools in the ‘90s.

“Dr. Sconzo has immersed himself in all aspects of the community, not just as a bystander, but truly as an active participant and community leader,” said Charlie Dromgoole, president of the Lake Houston Area Chamber of Commerce. “Because of his willingness to be an integral part of the community, he has been able to generate significant community involvement and participation in the activities and challenges of the Humble ISD that has resulted in an engaged community and a first-rate school district.”

## **NEW DISTRICT POSITION SPARKS DEBATE**

By Rick Janacek

July 3, 2013

A debate that likely started behind closed doors spilled out into the open session of the Humble ISD Board of Trustees meeting last week. At issue was the creation of a new position, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

Superintendent Dr. Guy Sconzo recently recommended changing the position that was formerly lead director for curriculum and instruction to an assistant superintendent position after a vacancy occurred. Marie Flynn, who previously held the position, left the district recently. However, some board members had concerns about the new position, a position that was not part of the recommendations from the 2011 curriculum audit.

“We made it quite public that this curriculum audit was a master plan or blueprint for the future, and I get concerned when we veer from that,” said Trustee Robert Scarfo. “In the organizational chart job description, there was a recommendation to change the name of the academic director to instruction and curriculum director, but I didn’t see anywhere in the audit that said we needed another assistant superintendent to do that job.”

Scarfo said that his concerns were more than just the title change, but that the district may be veering away from the audit recommendation in other areas as well.

“I’m just concerned because I have heard we are having trouble with another of the recommendations with getting in sync our budgeting process to our planning process, and I am starting to get some concern that we are kind of putting it aside,” he said.

Scarfo's comments drew a heated response from Sconzo, who maintained the title change was made to attract better qualified and experienced candidates.

"I respectfully completely disagree with any veering from the curriculum audit recommendations," Sconzo said. "I recall a conversation among the eight of us at the time at a board retreat that there was agreement that we were not going to completely accept every detailed recommendation in that organizational chart. And we've not. The assistant superintendents over campuses, according to the audit, should have been associate superintendents. The curriculum audit doesn't have the director of special education reporting to the chief academic officer, but we did that and we've done it for over a year. We've done it from the moment we started implementing the curriculum audit," said Sconzo.

Sconzo also blasted Scarfo for his comments regarding budgeting and planning.

"I think it is completely inaccurate to infer that we are veering away from the audit recommendations when it has to do with planning and budgeting because we have no control over when the State of Texas provides us with test scores. And that drives planning, which is on a cycle completely different than when the State requires us to develop and adopt a budget. The board can't do anything to alter those cycles. We have worked hard to try and make sense of those convoluted cycles, and I think we have gotten to a place where it is much better than it was two years ago."

Board member Robert Sitton said that while he agreed with some of what Scarfo said, he believed this position was important enough to make an assistant superintendent.

"I remember the meetings that we had in the board room and came out here and had discussions that this position arguably was more important than the grade level assistant superintendents," he said. "Yes, there has been a name change to the position, but we are looking for a critical need individual on the same level as those grade-level assistant superintendents."

After the discussion, the board voted in favor of hiring Dr. Robin Perez for the new position, with Scarfo and fellow board member Charles Cunningham voting against the resolution. Perez previously served as Superintendent of Buna ISD and she has 30 years of experience in education according to officials. The board also approved the hiring of an assistant principal for Woodcreek Middle School, a coordinator of secondary English language arts, and a special program coordinator. For video of the board meeting go to [youtube.com/user/OurTRIBtube](https://www.youtube.com/user/OurTRIBtube).

## **NEW HUMBLE ISD TRUSTEES TAKE OATHS**

By Geoffrey Geiger

June 19, 2013

The Humble ISD Board of Trustees convened June 11 with two new members, Angela Conrad and Heath Rushing, following last month's election.

The trustees voted unanimously to continue an existing five-year contract with Chick-fil-A for pre-packaged chicken sandwiches at 15 middle and high school campuses. Public opposition to the proposal came from Humble Area Democrats President Patty Pinkley.

"I feel by allowing this organization into our schools, it is discriminatory," Pinkley said, alluding to the comments and actions of Truett Cathy and other executives with Chick-fil-A regarding their stance in favor of traditional, Biblical marriage. "Why is Humble ISD spending upwards of \$700,000 for a company that is obviously an anti-gay organization?"

Pinkley also questioned the district's bidding, funding, and nutritional guideline requirements. Both Superintendent Dr. Guy Sconzo and assistant superintendent Martha Buckner indicated that the sandwiches (and all food vendors) have to comply with

state and federal guidelines on nutrition in order to be considered for bids.

Fifteen bids were distributed, according to the district, and two returned the request.

Additionally, the funding comes from grants the district's nutritional services department has available, and not from the district's general fund.

The board unanimously approved a \$138,850 agreement with the Harris County Department of Education for therapeutic services, \$40,000 for swimming pool chemicals and related services from two companies, tree grinding and electrical services and lease transfers for two cell towers.

The one contentious vote came regarding a six-month period contract extension for Steep Creek Media, the district's locally contracted advertising service provider for school buses and facility since 2008. The contract was set to expire at the end of this month.

Robert Sitton questioned the timeline, suggesting entertaining a month-to-month contract idea. He also issued his concern with allowing the sale of naming rights.

According to Sconzo, allowing the contract extension allows for flexibility in more fully developing a district advertising policy, board adoption of such a policy and drafting 'requests for proposals' for potential vendors.

"I think the safeguards are in place," Sconzo said.

According to him, the advertising committee established two conditions for SCM that full board approval would be needed for sales of naming rights and for any sales of anything exceeding \$5,000. Sconzo also hinted that summertime is the "height of selling season" for establishing advertising on school buses for the fall semester and stadium scoreboards for football season.

"I don't want to mess with a month-to-month arrangement that could potentially jeopardize...or put off a potential advertiser," Sconzo said.

"We learned a lot during that time [the SCM contract period], Lapeze said. "Instead of dealing with brush fires here and there on these issues, we've got to decide as a board what do we want to sell ... we've got to resolve this," advertising committee chair Lapeze said of policy development and mentioning an example of parent groups selling banner space on fencing.

"We're approaching this in our [committee] as a global reevaluation of our policy," Lapeze said.

After further discussion over potential other vendors, internal marketing possibilities and concerns over accounting of funds, the board voted 6-1 in favor of the extension. Sitton voted against extension.

The board organized their officers and committees following their oaths.

Brent Engelage will serve as president for 2013-14, Robert Scarfo to serve as vice president. Engelage was vice president under former president Charles Cunningham for 2012-13.

Both Conrad and Rushing, like all the board incumbents with the exception of 25-year trustee Dr. Bonnie Longnion, were endorsed by the Kingwood TEA Party. Lapeze and Engelage were supported additionally by the Humble Area Democrats. Conrad, an Insperity employee like trustee Robert Scarfo, defeated Longnion with 54 percent. Rushing, an executive with Memorial Hermann Northeast, bested five other candidates in the open race for former trustee, current Houston City Council member and Rushing friend, Dave Martin.

## **TRUSTEES ARGUE OVER BOARD PROCEDURES**

By Rick Janacek  
June 5, 2013

With the 2013-14 school budget balanced and on track for approval next month, the Humble ISD Board of Trustees decided to switch gears during its monthly budget workshop and debate a topic that has attracted a great deal of attention over the last few months – policies and procedures.

Specifically, the board discussed its operating procedures that were adopted in 2000 and last revised in 2010. Board President Charles Cunningham, in his last month as president, brought up the subject at the end of the meeting; a meeting that had been relatively quiet until that point.

“I thought it would be good to look at our operating procedures, as well as our protocols, because some of this stuff is outdated,” Cunningham told the board. So I just wanted the board members to look at it and see what things might need to stay and what might not.

Outgoing Trustee Dr. Bonnie Longnion, who helped create the procedures, was asked to look over the document and research other boards’ operating procedures.

“What it is designed to do is create a code and behavior as a board you all agree too,” Longnion said. “This is how you are going to operate, this how you are going to behave, this is what you expect of each other. Essentially, it is an ethical agreement. I am disturbed that we haven’t gone through and made revisions. Typically, everyone revisits theirs every year.”

While board members looked through the document, Cunningham mentioned a point that started a debate between himself and fellow Trustee Keith Lapeze. Cunningham wanted the board to look specifically at the section dealing with generating agenda items for board meetings.

“At times, because we have a board that is really involved in what is going on with the district, we tend to ask for, in my opinion, too many reports of the administration,” Cunningham said. “As you read this, I want you to know if this is something we should adhere to or do we want to change.”

Cunningham also suggested that the protocol states that the board president should poll each individual board member to see if there is consensus to put an item on the agenda. That suggestion drew the ire of Lapeze, who said that getting the consensus outside of a meeting was against the law.

“For a president to go and get consensus from the rest of the board on an issue that may come before the board is a violation of the Open Meeting Act,” Lapeze said.

Longnion said the intent of the rule was to ensure the staff was not overburdened with making reports for board members, and was not to get consensus of the board ahead of a meeting.

“In some districts, board members cost the district \$100,000 to \$150,000 and even more in employees’ time on a task that was only designed to answer that board member,” Longnion said. there shouldn’t be seven heads going out and asking staff for reports that are time consuming. We can talk about it at the end of the meeting. We can’t talk about the value of the item, but we can discuss it as a potential item for the future.

The actual procedure states, “At the end of a meeting, any board member can request that the board place an item on the agenda for an upcoming meeting. The president will poll the board members. If a majority of the board members believe there is value for the item, then the president will include it on an upcoming agenda.”

At the end of the discussion, the board agreed that the operating procedures should be sent to a committee headed by Lapeze to look at potential revisions.

Before the debate over operating procedures, the board received an update on the 2013-14 budget. As has been the case since the beginning of the budget process, the budget remained balanced at \$272.8 million.

“I think we are in pretty good shape and it is really nice that we have gotten to this point to put forth a budget that is balanced,” Finance Committee Chair Robert Scarfo told the board. of course, there is going to be some moving pieces later on in July once we have good numbers from the Legislature.

During a special board meeting before the budget workshop, the board officially canvassed the results of the May Board elections and hired an acting Chief Technology Officer. Robert Calvert, who previously worked for Fort Bend ISD in a similar position, was hired by the district to help plan out and restructure the technology services department pending several retirements and other changes within the department.

## **HUFFMAN ISD APPROVES 3 PERCENT SALARY INCREASE**

By Bruce Olson

June 5, 2013

The Huffman ISD Board of Trustees approved a 3 percent salary increase May 20 for all fulltime employees effective with the coming 2013-14 school year.

“These are the salary increases that we talked about in the budget workshops: 3 percent of midpoint for administrative/professional, clerical/professional and maintenance and \$1,500, which is 3 percent of the average salary for teachers, librarians, nurses and counselors. At the workshop we had estimated teachers at 3 percent would amount to about \$1,400. The actual number came out in the \$1,450-1,460 range so we rounded up to \$1,500 which is just over 3 percent,” said district CFO Tim Brittain.

In addition to the salary increase, the board approved a number of additional staff positions to restore the district back to where it was before some of the cuts made in 2011-12 and to cover enrollment growth. Specific positions to be added include a pre-kindergarten bilingual teacher, a first grade teacher, a Huffman intermediate teacher, a middle school language arts teacher, a life skills K-5 teacher, a career and technical education high school teacher, an instructional aid for life skills at Huffman High School, an instructional aide supporting both Copeland Elementary and Huffman Intermediate schools and a special education specialist supporting district wide needs.

Joel Nolte, assistant superintendent for curriculum, explained the cost and how it would be covered.

“The impact of these positions will be \$405,500. This additional cost will be covered by additional revenue due to increased enrollment and improvement in the state funding formulas,” he said.

The board also approved funding for a new technology project that will help manage and control the large, often duplicated registration and form completion requirements that parents and the administration must process every school year for every student. David Carpenter, HISD’s director of technology, presented a proposal to move forward with a new online registration and document management system.

“Every year the district prints large packets of registration forms including first day of school forms, athletic forms, child nutrition forms, human resources forms; up to 40 sheets of paper per student. Parents or employees then complete these forms by hand, the forms are returned to the school where many are found to be lost, illegible or improperly filled out. The school then processes the forms by hand and then they are stored or destroyed. We are seeking a solution that would increase parent convenience, increase district efficiency and decrease district costs. This solution would allow parents to fill out their students forms online without having to enter duplicate information, verify the information has been entered correctly, and transmit the forms to the appropriate staff member and whenever possible process the forms automatically,” Carpenter said.

He pointed out that this system could eventually serve as a much more comprehensive data management platform to make

more efficient the handling of the district's, human resource management records, its accounts payable records and a lot of other cost effective improvements. Trustee Dean Tinnin asked if this system would require parents to provide more information than what the district already was collecting.

"I am asking this because I want to be able to answer the question from parents that are hesitant about providing more personal information on line where they fear it can be accessed and misused more easily than if it were kept in paper files," he said.

Carpenter assured him that there was no new information being collected and that all of the information currently collected on paper forms was already in the school's online operating systems. This proposal was a way of collecting and handling it much more efficiently. The board approved the requested \$30,000 to proceed with the system implementation.

## **'BUSINESS AS USUAL' IN HUMBLE ISD AFTER ELECTION**

By B.R. Kimbro

May 22, 2013

Two new nameplates will appear at the Humble ISD Board of Trustees meeting next month after the May 11 election saw a vacant seat get filled and a challenger upset a 25-year incumbent.

Six of the seven board positions were up for grabs and all five incumbents with expiring terms ran for re-election. Position 4 incumbent Charles Cunningham was the only candidate to run unopposed.

Joining the school board are Angela Conrad and Heath Rushing.

Conrad, an instructional designer for Insperity, pulled a surprise upset over former Position 3 incumbent Dr. Bonnie Longnion in the regular election while Rushing beat out five other Position 6 candidates in the special election to fill the vacancy that Dave Martin left after being elected to the Houston City Council.

Conrad won 54 percent of the 3,993 votes cast to unseat Longnion, who had been on the board since 1988 and was the longest-sitting district board member.

"I am really pleased at the show of support in the community and I am excited to return to the Humble ISD family in this new role," said Conrad. "I am committed to being an effective leader in our district and I'll start by learning everything I need to know about board operations."

Rushing, an administrator at Memorial Hermann Northeast Hospital, took about 52 percent of the 4,210 votes cast in the special election over candidates Corinn Price (17 percent), Johnny O'Connor (13 percent), Martina Dixon (13 percent), Vernon Reed (3 percent) and Edgar M. Clayton (2 percent).

"I am honored to have the opportunity to serve our great community in this new capacity," said Rushing. "The community support was tremendous and remained strong throughout the entire process. I am proud of the campaign my team put together. We developed the plan early, tweaked the plan when necessary, and executed on the plan to get the result we wanted to achieve. Now the real work begins.

In the Position 1 race, incumbent Robert Sitton won re-election with 78 percent of the vote over opponent Geoffrey Geiger.

"I am very proud and humbled by the outpouring of support during this election. I want to thank all of the volunteers who worked the polling locations [May 11]," said Sitton. "To all the voters that came out, I am honored to continue to serve you and this community."

Geiger said he was not discouraged by the results and that he will most likely run for office in the future.

“That’s democracy. I’ve called Mr. Sitton. He has my support. But, I am not going to stop fighting for accountability and better representation in Humble ISD. It’s the people’s district,” said Geiger. “Messaging and turn out matters. We were able to get a higher turn out for considerably less money than some other candidates because we had a favorable message. I’m proud of my volunteers, and I thank my supporters. Now, let’s get to work.”

Position 2 incumbent Keith Lapeze was re-elected with 2,396 votes over challengers Dena Steed (842 votes) and Miguel Perez (779 votes).

Position 5 incumbent Brent Engelage was re-elected with 2,440 votes over opponent Fred Rosenberg with 1,489 votes.

“I’m excited to have the opportunity to serve on the school board again for the next four years,” said Engelage. “We have a lot of work to do and I believe the community has elected an outstanding school board. I’d like to congratulate all my fellow board members for their victories last Saturday and wish all the contestants well and thank them for their efforts during this campaign. I’d particularly like to thank my opponent, Fred Rosenberg, for running such a good and honorable race. Fred is a good man and a great member of the Kingwood community and I wish him and his family all the best.”

Rosenberg said his philosophy on being a future candidate is about public service and not about a specific office.

“It’s not the position that’s important, it’s what, if anything, I can contribute that really counts,” Rosenberg said. “In the case of Humble ISD, it’s the success of our children today and in the future.”

## **HUMBLE ISD BOARD DEBATES EMPLOYEE HEALTH BENEFITS**

By Rick Janacek

April 24, 2013

In their last official board meeting before next month’s election, the Humble ISD Board of Trustees debated the current process of selecting health benefits for employees and was asked why they haven’t opposed a bill that would eliminate the Harris County Department of Education.

During the discussion of proposed changes to the district’s employee benefits program, board member Robert Sitton questioned the process used by the district.

“While I understand that we have a third-party administrator that takes care of this package of benefits, and also understand the magnitude of what can happen when you change a provider, the question I want answered at some point is do we have the right process in place with our third-party administrator, and are we getting the best product at the best price for our staff?” Sitton said. “And the reason I am asking that is because now that we have gone to TRS-care and are looking at premium increases (between 7.44 percent and 25 percent next year) and so forth, I want to make sure that we are taking care of our staff in as many other ways as we possibly can.”

Sitton also said that having the right benefits package is part of how the district can attract and retain quality teachers.

“I want to make sure we are giving them everything we can give them in the most efficient matter, but also something that is going to be worth it to them,” he said. “There are a lot of providers out there and for me to just say, I’ll approve and keep it going, I would like to know a little more about what they are doing and how the process works.”

Other board members defended the system, saying it is the best fit for the district.

“Part of the reason we moved health plans was the administrative aspects of it,” said Robert Scarfo. “Anyone who wants to bid on different pieces of insurance can go through our third-party administrators. It’s not that people are kept out of the process. That’s why we do it the way we do. I think we have put together a good package. There are increases in the premiums, which we knew were coming. Whether it was going to be a self-insured plan or this plan, it was going to happen. I think given our limited resources, the use of this system has worked well the last couple of years. But it is something we can certainly look at.”

Board member Keith Lapeze suggested that the board develop a workshop to look into the overall process further. In the end, the board approved the measure that included the selection of CIGNA to provide dental benefits, Aetna for disability and life benefits, Block Vision for vision benefits, and Loyal American for cancer benefits. Sitton voted against the measure.

Board members also heard comments from a member of the public regarding a proposed bill at the State Legislature by State Rep. Debbie Riddle that would eliminate the Harris County Department of Education (HCDE). The HCDE provides services to the 26 school districts in Harris County, including special schools for children with severe disabilities, schools for children in the judicial system, adult education, after-school programs, and other programs. Patty Pinkley asked the board why they haven’t openly opposed the bill.

“It is hard to argue with the dollars and cents HCDE is saving Humble ISD,” she said. “It is the purpose of the board to ensure the best interests of the children within the Humble [ISD] are protected. I feel it is a dereliction of this board’s duty that you did not see fit to immediately object vocally to Rep. Riddle’s bill. No board member not making this a priority should be reelected. These are political games that hurt our children and their future.”

Board members did not comment at the meeting, but HISD officials say the district and the board are aware of the bill and working to fight it.

“Humble ISD is working directly with legislators through the superintendent to oppose the bill,” said HISD Public Information Officer Jamie Mount. “The [HCDE] provides critical services that, if the department was not in existence, would prove to be very costly for school districts to replicate or obtain.”

The board was set to vote on a resolution in February that would have opposed the bill, but delayed the vote after questions from board members. The resolution has yet to come back up for a vote.

## **HUMBLE SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION FINANCE SHOW SPENDING PATTERNS**

By B.R. Kimbro  
April 24, 2013

Candidates running in the Humble Independent School District Board of Trustees election filed their campaign finance reports April 11, showing where contributions came from and how those were spent.

The reports – filed 30 days before the May 11 election – reveal that most candidates have generally relied on modest donations from a handful of local supporters or from their own wallets to pay for advertising expenses such as yard signs, website fees and other related costs. However, the select few seeking office that have been the most successful in raising money have also been the largest contributors of donated money to local organizations, including those which directly benefit Humble ISD, according to the school district.

Position 6 special election candidate Heath Rushing, chief operating officer of Memorial Hermann Northeast Hospital and two-year resident of Kingwood, raised the most money out of the 16 candidates vying for seats in both the special and regular school board elections.

Rushing, 35, was the first to file in the now crowded special election and raised about \$17,000 campaign s from 37 donors in the three-month reporting period. Rushing backers vary from local business owners, conservative politicians including Mike Sullivan as well as in-district and out-of-state residents. His largest financial supporter, a real estate developer, donated \$2,500 toward his campaign.

The majority of Rushing's \$8,731.75 campaign expenditures were spent on donations/contributions to organizations such as the Humble ISD Education Foundation as well as to finance various fundraising events and political advertising.

Rushing ended the reporting period with nearly \$3,000 and \$5,000 in outstanding loans.

Position 6 candidate and Kingwood resident Corinn Price, Rushing's closest competitor in terms of campaign contributions for the special election, raised \$4,525 in campaign contributions. Price, director of community involvement for Insperity, spent almost her entire \$4,549.52 campaign expenditures on advertising expenses. Most of Price's campaign contributions came from local residents as well as a few East Coast addresses.

Position 6 candidates Martina Dixon and Johnny O'Connor spent around \$2,000 of campaign contributions during the reporting period while Edgar Clayton and Vernon Reed did not need to file since did not spend more than \$500, according to Peggy Young, executive assistant for the superintendent's office.

Position 1 incumbent Robert Sitton spent about \$4,000 on his re-election campaign during the past three months, facing a challenge from Tribune managing editor Geoffrey Geiger. Six donors contributed \$4,809 to Sitton's campaign from Jan. 15 to April 11, according to campaign finance records. Contributions include a \$2,000 donation from a Kingwood surgeon and a \$1,259 in-kind contribution from a local magazine owner, records show.

Most of Sitton's campaign money was spent on political advertising and donations to organizations such as the Humble ISD Education Foundation and Kingwood Area Republican Women.

Sitton ended the reporting period with \$8,286 in outstanding loans.

Geiger, 25, has raised \$2,475 for his campaign and spent about \$2,300 in mostly advertising costs.

Position 2 incumbent Keith Lapeze self-funded his campaign with \$1,000 for advertising costs during the reporting period against challenger Miguel Perez and Dena Steed. Perez has raised \$575 and Steed has raised \$886.

Position 3 incumbent Bonnie Longion has raised \$1,380 in political contributions during her bid for re-election against Kingwood resident Angela Conrad.

Position 5 incumbent Brent Engelage spent just under \$325 of his \$3,000 in raised contributions during the reporting period.

Engelage's opponent, Kingwood businessman Fred Rosenberg, did not spend enough on his campaign to necessitate finance filing, according to Young.

## **HUMBLE ISD SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION ATTRACTS MANY NEW CANDIDATES**

By B.R. Kimbro  
March 27, 2013

All but one position remained uncontested as candidacy filing dates closed March 1 for the Humble Independent School District board of trustees regular election while some familiar faces entered the special election for Position 6 before it closed

March 11.

Positions 1-through-5 are currently up for regular re-election with all incumbents except for Charles Cunningham, Position 4, facing challengers in the May 11 election.

Geoffrey Geiger, managing editor for The Tribune, became the first candidate to contest any of the incumbents when he filed to run for Position 1 against incumbent Robert Sitton Feb. 1

Sitton, a financial adviser with Edward Jones, was voted to the board in 2011. He announced his re-election bid Jan. 17.

“I have an open door policy, any member of the community can call me at any time. My cellphone is always on and is printed on my Edward Jones business cards and my trustee business cards,” Sitton said. “I am visible and accessible. This attitude and availability helps me understand the needs and concerns of our citizens.”

Sitton’s campaign is focused on transparency, efficiency, teacher attraction and retention as well as safe and secure schools.

Geiger, of Atascocita, is seeking office because he believes district officials are out of touch with residents’ needs.

“People are receptive to my message of open and accountable government because they’ve seen the results of this school district. They understand that its time for a representative that speaks for them and with them. It’s time for a representative on this side of the river that stands up for all the people on this side of the river. You can’t call yourself an Humble guy and forget about certain segments of the population. Living in lower Atascocita, I believe I am more in touch with the needs of a working-class population. I stand for the student that wants to go to college but cannot afford it. I stand for the single mom that has to work two jobs and may not speak English well but is determined to have her children succeed. I stand for the taxpayer fed up with growing costs and shrinking results. I stand for the teacher who works tirelessly to plan every lesson and help every student while getting little help from administrators. Their needs are my demands to the district. Together, we can build a better school district.”

Both Position 1 candidates are Humble High School graduates.

Position 2 incumbent Keith Lapeze, an attorney, faces current and former Humble ISD educators; Dena Steed and Miguel Perez.

Steed, of Kingwood, has been the HHS band director for 29 years. She takes pride in that the band has a 100 percent graduation rate every one of those years.

Perez, of Atascocita, serves as an associate superintendent for the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. He says he is a proud product of Humble ISD, both as a student and as an educator. He said this gives him a fresh perspective to raise the status quo and make tough decisions that impact the students and teachers. He began his career as an educator at the former Humble Ninth Grade Campus, and later at HHS and AHS.

Position 3 incumbent Bonnie Longnion, a retired educator, faces Angela Conrad, who also is a former district educator.

“As a mother, I want my kids and all Humble area school children to have access to the highest quality education – in safe schools,” Conrad said. “As a former educator, I understand what is necessary to improve education for today’s students.”

Position 5 incumbent and Humble ISD board vice president, Brent M. Engelage, faces Fred Rosenberg, a local business owner.

“As a resident of Kingwood since 1985, I can tell you that serving on the Humble School Board for the past five years has been an amazing privilege,” said Engelage. “This district is so blessed to have incredibly supportive parents, creative and dedicated teachers and an administrative team that constantly seeks higher levels of excellence in all areas.”

Rosenberg has been a district resident for 25 years and has ran for the board in the past.

“I have , through my vast experience, the ability to critically evaluate a problem, develop a creative solution and implement a

successful conclusion,” said Rosenberg.

Six candidates entered the special election for Position 6, which Dave Martin vacated in December after he was elected to the Houston City Council.

Heath Rushing, Vernon Reed, Corinn Price, Johnny O’Connor, Martina Lemond Dixon and Edgar M. Clayton are all vying for the position.

Rushing, chief operating officer of Memorial Hermann Northeast Hospital, was the first to file for Position 6 on Jan. 31.

“Soon, I will have three children in Humble Independent School District. The discussions I participated in during these committee meetings showed me how important it is for all of us in this community to be involved in influencing decisions related to public education,” said Rushing, a two-year of Kingwood resident.

Reed, of Humble, is running in the school board trustee election for the fourth time. Reed, a retired paralegal, has lived in the school district for almost 10 years.

“I have had a genuine interest in education and the issues that come with the territory ever since my high school years,” said Reed. “I am running to represent the interest of our community, and to work hard to protect the interest of our taxpayers in these tough times.”

Sixteen-year Kingwood resident Price filed for candidacy Feb. 19. Price has been the Director of Community Involvement at Inesperity for more than 13 years. Price, a mother of two school- age children, has served on the board of directors for the Humble ISD Education Foundation since 2003, including chairman of the board for three years.

“From serving on the board of the Humble ISD Education Foundation to participating in mentoring programs and fundraising initiatives, my dedication to our community and to the children in our district has been a priority, and has given me the experience and knowledge to make a positive difference,” said Price.

O’Connor, an educator for more than 12 years, said he would bring experience in education to the board.

“Based on my experience, this will allow me to seamlessly transition into the role of board trustee,” he said. “In this time of fiscal uncertainty and ever-changing academic standards, school board trustees must be prepared to hit the ground running, in order to be responsive to the needs of our students, parents, teachers, support staff, and our community partners in education.”

Dixon, another former Humble ISD teacher, filed for the election Feb. 26. Dixon, of Kingwood, is a 14-year resident of the district and has served on various district PTSA boards. She headed the planning committee to reinstate the PTSA at HHS, which had been non-existent for at least three years.

Edgar M. Clayton, a police officer, filed for the election March 1. Clayton is a two-year resident of Humble.

## **HISD OFFICIALS PLEASED WITH DISTRICT'S ANNUAL REPORT**

By Rick Janacek

February 27, 2013

Humble ISD presented its annual performance report during the February board meeting. The report, a compilation of several different reports that is required by the Texas Education Code, didn’t reveal any groundbreaking new details. However, it did show how the district is performing, the growth of the district, changing demographics within the district and what students are doing after they leave HISD.

The annual report includes the district's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report, campus performance objectives, a report of violent criminal incidents and information from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Texas Education Code Chapter 39 requires that each Texas school district publish its annual report.

Not included in the annual report were test results from STAAR tests and end-of-course exams taken by students in grades 3 through 12. The new standardized tests were first implemented statewide during the last school year and results from the test were only released by the state within the last few weeks.

"What's interesting is that while we have standards for the end of course exams that high school students had to take last year and students completed those, grades three through eight also took exams and only in the last few weeks have we received the scores from those," said HISD Assistant Superintendent Carol Atwood. "That was about a year ago that they took those tests, and they are getting ready to take those tests again on April 1."

Because of this delay, the AEIS results released last year kept the same rankings for school districts and schools from the previous year. That meant that HISD remained a Recognized district, and all school ratings from the 2010-2011 school district remained the same for the 2011-2012 school year.

The report also addressed growth in the district. The district has grown considerably since 2009, when 33,724 students were enrolled in the district. During the 2011-12 school year, 35,824 students were enrolled at HISD. However, that was only an increase of 146 students from the previous year.

"Last year was a bit of an anomaly in that we grew at probably the smallest rate that we have grown in the last few years," Atwood said. "But rest assured that while the rate has slowed, the students are coming back and coming back in full force. In the fall of 2013, our enrollment was well over 37,000 students and that means we have added about 1,200 students already."

With the increase in enrollment over the last few years, the district has also seen a shift in demographics, with the biggest increase in the Hispanic population, which has increased to 30 percent of the population in HISD in 2012. The African-American population has remained steady over the last four years, and currently sits at 17.6 percent. The Caucasian population has dropped to just over 46 percent.

"These shifts are in line with what the country, state and entire country have seen," Atwood said.

Graduation rates in the district continued to be high, with 94.4 percent of seniors in Humble high schools completing graduation in 2011, up from 92 percent in 2010. Another 3.2 percent of the students continued for a fourth year, and 0.4 percent received their GED. The dropout rate for the 2011 school year was 1.9 percent, down from 2.5 percent last year.

Atwood also showed the board the success students that attended Humble schools are having once they go to college. According to statistics from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, out of the 2,337 Humble ISD graduates that attended college in the state of Texas, 26 percent attended a four-year university, 37 percent attended a two-year community college and three percent attended a private university. Additionally, 83.1 percent of the Humble ISD graduates that attended a four-year university had a grade point average above 2.0 their first year. Statistics indicate that 62.9 percent of Humble graduates that attended a two-year college had a grade point average above 2.0 in their first year.

The report also showed that 3 percent of the total discipline incidents in the district were considered serious and violent incidents. Atwood reported to the board that was a slight decrease from the last year.

HISD Superintendent Dr. Guy Sconzo said the report shows that the district's focus continues to be on preparing students to be college and career-ready.

"I'm very pleased with this year's Annual Performance Report," he said. "The hard and focused work in all areas of our district continues to yield the kind of continuous improvement we all want. Clearly, there is always room for improvement, but we are committed to staying on a continuous improvement track in all areas. That is what defines us."

Humble ISD uses the information in the Annual Performance Report to develop the district's improvement plan, which

establishes goals for the district and highlights areas where growth is needed.

## **HUMBLE ISD SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION NEARS**

By B.R. Kimbro

February 13, 2013

Seven candidates have entered the race seeking Humble ISD board of trustee positions for the May 11 election as of this week, according to district officials.

Candidacy filing dates for Positions 1-5 began Jan. 30 and will close March 1. The district will have at least one new board member by May to fill the Position 6 vacancy that Dave Martin left when he resigned after being elected to the Houston City Council. Filing dates for the special Position 6 election will run until March 11, and so far only one candidate has filed for the open seat.

Six of the seven board positions are up for grabs and all five incumbents with expiring terms are seeking re-election. So far, there are only two new faces and one contested race in the usually crowded election.

Incumbents seeking re-election are Charles Cunningham, Brent Engelage, Keith Lapeze, Bonnie Longnion and Robert Sitton, while local residents Geoffrey Geiger and Heath Rushing make their first appearance in the political arena.

The only incumbent who is not seeking re-election this May is Position 7 Board Member Robert Scarfo because his term does not expire until 2015.

Geiger, managing editor for The Tribune, became the only candidate to contest any of the positions when he officially filed to run for Position 1 against incumbent Sitton on Feb. 1.

Sitton, who was voted onto the board in 2011, announced his re-election bid in a press release Jan. 17.

“As I look back over the past two years, we, as a board, have accomplished so much,” Sitton said.

Sitton, a financial advisor with Edward Jones, believes he has an obligation to finish the work he started since joining the board.

“When I took the oath of office, my first order of business was to vote on a budget that cut roughly \$18 million in spending,” he said. “I was handed a 3” thick binder discussing a curriculum audit that spelled out our short comings as a district. Yes, there was a lot of work to be done, and still is. However, since that first board meeting, we have

rolled up our sleeves and gone to work.”

The incumbent cited the establishment of a new organization chart with new accountability throughout the system, as well as added transparency with the district’s new dashboard computer program among the accomplishments achieved by the board during his two-year term.

“I am also happy to report that in November 2012, we were able to give our teachers a raise that moved them up to the middle of our peer group, in salary range,” Sitton added. “This move will allow us to stay competitive in the new teacher market and also help in retaining our veteran teachers.”

Sitton prides himself on his Humble roots and being a product of the district; graduating in 1982 from Humble High School.

In fact, both Position 1 candidates got their grade-school education in Humble ISD.

Both Sitton and Geiger received their grade-school education at district schools and have family members who are former or current teachers at Humble ISD.

Geiger, a resident of Atascocita since 1993, attended elementary and middle schools within the district. He graduated from Humble High School in 2006.

“Being a recent, former student of the district, I believe I can bring a unique perspective to the issues and challenges facing students and residents,” Geiger said. “I recently attended a boundary rezoning meeting, which addresses a touchy subject, especially when parents in certain areas or neighborhoods feel their concerns are not necessarily heard or taken into consideration. There were not any board members present at the meeting, but instead parents were told that board members would be given the input second hand before voting on a boundary proposal. I find that unacceptable, especially when the boundaries never seem to touch some areas equitably. Board members should take more time out to be present at meetings on issues like this. As a public official, duty to the parents and residents of the district comes first.”

Geiger said it is time for a representative that understands public participation and that open government practices would help make the school district more responsible and responsive to residents.

Rushing, chief operating officer of Memorial Hermann Northeast Hospital, announced his intent to run in the special election back in January for the currently open and uncontested Position 6.

On Election Day, May 11, voting locations will be open throughout the district. For a list of locations and more information, visit the district’s website at [www.humble.k12.tx.us](http://www.humble.k12.tx.us).

## **HUMBLE ISD SUSPENDS CONTROVERSIAL GRADING POLICY**

By Rick Janacek  
January 30, 2013

The Humble ISD Board of Trustees have suspended a controversial grading policy at the request of the Texas Commissioner of Education for the second year in a row. The policy that requires a student’s end-of-course exam account for 15 percent of the student’s final grade for the course.

Last November, Texas Board of Education Commissioner Michael Williams announced that, for the 2012–13 school year, districts could defer implementation of this rule. This is the second year in a row that the requirement has been deferred and the rule could be change during the current State Legislature.

“I have every confidence that this piece of law will be negated this legislative session, but until such time we can only suspend the policy – we can’t change it,” Sconzo said.

The Board of Trustees unanimously voted to suspend the rule for the upcoming year. Some board members also hoped state lawmakers would ultimately change the rule.

“Some interesting facts are that of the top ten schools as graded by National Assessment of Education Progress, seven of them have zero end-of-course exams,” said board member Robert Scarfo. “We in our infinite wisdom have 15. I think this underscores how excessive that is. We are keeping our fingers crossed that they prevail.”

District officials say students’ grades will continue to be determined by the grades they receive on assignments, tests and final exams. They add that end-of-course test results have never been used as a factor in grading in Humble ISD. Sconzo says the ruling is better for students.

“Given the timing of when districts receive end-of-course scores, after the school year is over, students could leave for summer break thinking that they passed a course and then discover after summer school has begun that they did not pass as a result of their EOC score. That’s not right or good for kids.”

Also at its January meeting, Dr. Sconzo briefed the Board of Trustees about the ongoing legislative session, the recent budgets filed in the House and the Senate, and the possible impact on the district.

“Both budgets are literally within a few million dollars of each other,” Sconzo said. “Both budgets fund student growth. That is pretty significant because student growth was not funded during the last session when \$5.3 billion was cut from public education. Student growth means an additional \$2 billion in state funding should those budgets, or some compromise of those budgets, pass at the end of the session. So I think that is very encouraging news. Two billion isn’t close to restoring the \$5.3 billion that was taken away but it is a very significant step in right direction.”

Sconzo also noted to the board that on the House’s budget, the line item for state testing was left at zero, meaning that no state testing would be part of the upcoming budget. Sconzo told the board that while he didn’t expect that to last, it did send a statement regarding what he called “excessive and expensive state testing.”