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HISD's Decentralization Reform (Part II: Principal Survey)

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Research Brief

for the Houston Independent School District

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Research Brief Abstract

HISD's Decentralization Reform (Part II: Principal Survey)

This research brief is Part II of a four-part study of decentralization in HISD.

- Part I describes how decentralization was enacted in HISD.
- Part II reports HISD principal attitudes and satisfaction within the current decentralized model.
- Part III examines the impact of decentralization on student outcomes.
- Part IV examines the impact of decentralization on funding equity.

Findings from Part II

HISD principals who elected to participate in the survey on average expressed positive statements about their degree program training and current level of efficacy related to their ability to: use data to identify student needs; communicate with teachers to identify student needs; and make staffing decisions to support student needs. They reported having autonomy over making the scheduling, instructional, and staffing decisions that are best for their students. They further reported being supported by HISD central administration in the fundamental roles that principals are expected to fulfill in the current decentralized model: analyzing the data to best determine their students' needs; making staffing, instructional and scheduling decisions based on that analysis, and; preparing a budget that reflects those needs.

Findings do suggest possible opportunities including professional development for first year principals about how to make staffing decisions to support student needs and a review of the budget analyst protocols and/or an efficiency study of the support provided by budget analysts to each campus.

Introduction

In the late 1980s, the Houston Independent School District (HISD) was a centralized bureaucracy like many other urban school districts. Student performance was a concern: The drop-out rate for HISD was double the state average (10% in HISD versus 5% state average in 1990), and student outcomes on average were low (e.g., 32% of 9th graders met or exceeded the minimum expectations on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills TAAS in 1990 compared to the state average of 49%). Over the course of several years (1990–1999), the HISD School Board adopted a decentralization plan to improve student achievement and increase equity in funding; both the board and the administration believed that this could be accomplished by shifting more decision-making to the lo-

cal level (campus). This reform culminated in a shift from a full-time equivalency funding model (FTE) to a weighted student funding model (WSF) in 1999; the district refers to this model as a per unit allocation (PUA).

This brief reports input from HISD principals that pertain to the current decentralized model; it is one part of a four-part study of decentralization in HISD. The first two questions relate to how the policy of decentralization was initially implemented, and how it is currently practiced in the district; the second two questions examine the impact of decentralization on student outcomes and funding equity. Here, we examine principal attitudes and satisfaction within this decentralized model.

What does the literature say about the role of the principal in a decentralized model and more broadly?

A guiding motivation of the decentralization model is that the school principal is in the best position to make many site-specific decisions to best support their students' learning needs. These decisions include, but are not limited to, scheduling, curricular, and staffing decisions. Importantly, in order for decentralization to work, principals must understand how to analyze their student data; have the ability to plan strategically based on student needs (e.g., hire additional staff in critical areas); and receive sufficient funding that allows academic needs to drive the budgeting process. This notion of budgetary discretion is linked directly with WSF as a funding mechanism in the literature (see e.g., Odden & Busch, 1998; Ouchi, 2004; 2006).

The fundamental roles of a principal as discussed above are not always specifically tied to a formal model of decentralization. For instance, researchers describe a system-

atic increase in the decentralization of *teacher hiring* over time in all types of districts from 1987 to 2012, especially in urban settings. Results from the 2015–16 National Teacher and Principal Survey (Taie & Goldring, 2017) indicate that 87% of principal respondents have major influence in the hiring process and Zigarelli (1996) found principal autonomy in teacher hiring/firing is a factor in identifying an effective school. Grissom and Loeb (2011) have also identified organizational management skills (including managing budgets and resources) as a key complement to instructional leadership for school success. These traits of personnel autonomy, managing resources, and managing budgets are therefore not necessarily unique to principals in a decentralized model, but they are the essential roles of principals in a decentralized model. Through our survey, we examine HISD principal attitudes and satisfaction in the current HISD decentralized model.

Research Questions

As indicated, this report is the second of a four-part series of briefs on decentralization in HISD. This study examines HISD's principals' self-reported perceptions of their ability to make campus decisions to benefit students based on their degree training, support and autonomy. These specific roles are articulated both in the academic literature and in HISD school board policy. Because funding goes hand in hand with governance, and WSF is seen as a key part of a decentralization reform, we specifically ask about WSF in our survey questions as well.

The research questions for this brief are:

- Do HISD principals believe they have the skills/training needed to make the best decisions for student learning?
- Do HISD principals believe they have the necessary support from HISD central administration to make the best decisions for student learning?
- How do HISD principals rate their autonomy?
- How do HISD principals rate their understanding and beliefs about the WSF process?

Methods/Data

Using a questionnaire, we analyze HISD principals' beliefs on their autonomy and capacity. The survey was announced via the HISD Academic Services newsletter on 11/27/2017 and 12/4/2017 and the survey was conducted using Qualtrix. The survey was accessed by 167 persons; there are 277 potential principal respondents. Three cases were dropped because the respondent was not a principal, and 11 cases opted out from participating and were dropped. The final sample consisted of 153 HISD principals, with an 88% completion rate (135/153).

For most of the opinion questions, a four-point Likert response scale was used with 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree. All survey questions included an option for additional comments. Open-ended responses are included in Appendix; responses were analyzed for common themes where the responses exceeded ten percent of the sample.

Table 1 displays the distribution of characteristics in the sample and in the overall HISD principal population. Due to differences in the categories offered on the survey and the categories used to store information about school principals in the district, categories cannot be statistically compared. However, an inspection of the percentages suggests some similarity. For additional data on tenure and degree level, see Appendix.

Table 1. Respondent characteristics

	HISD	Survey
School Level		
Elementary School	58%	65%
Middle School	17%	13%
High School	17%	15%
Other school level	n/a ⁺	6%
Gender		
Male	32%	32%
Female	68%	54%
Prefer not to answer	n/a [*]	14%
Race/Ethnicity		
Asian	3%	2%
Black or African American	36%	21%
Hispanic or Latino	34%	30%
White	26%	26%
Two or more races	—	4%
Prefer not to answer	n/a [*]	17%

* n/a in this case indicates that this category used in the survey does not explicitly match a category used within HISD.
 + Other includes: PreK-12, PreK-8, K-8, and ECC.

Findings: How do HISD principals report their experience in the current decentralized model?

Do HISD principals believe they have the skills/training needed to make the best decisions for student learning?

As seen in Table 2, the majority of respondents *agree* or *strongly agree* that the degree program they pursued to become a principal provided the necessary training to support their ability to do the following when they first became an HISD principal: use data to identify student needs (117, 81%); communicate with teachers to identify student needs (118, 82%); and make staffing decisions to support student needs (108, 75%).

Table 2. Degree program effectiveness (n=144)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the degree program(s) you pursued to become a principal provided the necessary training to support your ability to do the following when you first became an HISD principal?	Agree/ Strongly Agree
Use data to identify student needs	81%
Communicate with teachers to identify student needs	82%
Make staffing decisions to support student needs	75%

Almost all respondents currently feel well prepared to do the following: use data to identify student needs; communicate with teachers to identify student needs; and make staffing decisions to support student needs (first year principals were excluded from this question). See Table 3.

Table 3. Perceptions of self-efficacy (n=122)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that you are well prepared to do the following today?	Agree/ Strongly Agree
Use data to identify student needs	97%
Communicate with teachers to identify student needs	96%
Make staffing decisions to support student needs	97%

Do HISD principals believe they have the necessary support from HISD central administration to make the best decisions for student learning?

Respondents feel supported by administration vis-a-vis data analysis needs (124, 87%) and leadership training (109, 77%) while fewer (84, 59%) *agree* or *strongly agree* they have the budget analyst support needed (see Table 4).

Table 4. Central administration support (n=142)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that HISD central administration provides the necessary support to you in the following areas?	Agree/ Strongly Agree
Data analysis to identify student needs	87%
Leadership training	77%
Budget analyst support	59%

How do HISD principals rate their autonomy?

Almost all respondents *agree* or *strongly agree* that they have autonomy over staffing (127, 92%), instructional (127, 92%) and scheduling (132, 96%) decisions that are best for their students, as seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Principal autonomy (n=138)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that you have the autonomy to do the following?	Agree/ Strongly Agree
Make staffing decisions that are best for my students	92%
Make instructional decisions that are best for my students	92%
Make scheduling decisions that are best for my students	96%

How do HISD principals rate their understanding and beliefs about the WSF process?

Most respondents *agree* or *agree strongly* that they understand how WSF funding is calculated (107, 76%) and the percentage of their budget allocated in this way (102, 72%) as seen in Table 6. Familiarity with the WSF model is related to the amount of experience respondents have: those with 0–1 year of experience were less likely to describe being familiar with WSF.¹

Table 6. Understanding WSF (n=141)

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Weighted Student Funding (WSF) (per unit allocation) process?	Agree/ Strongly Agree
I understand how WSF allocations are calculated.	76%
I understand what percentage of my budget is WSF.	72%

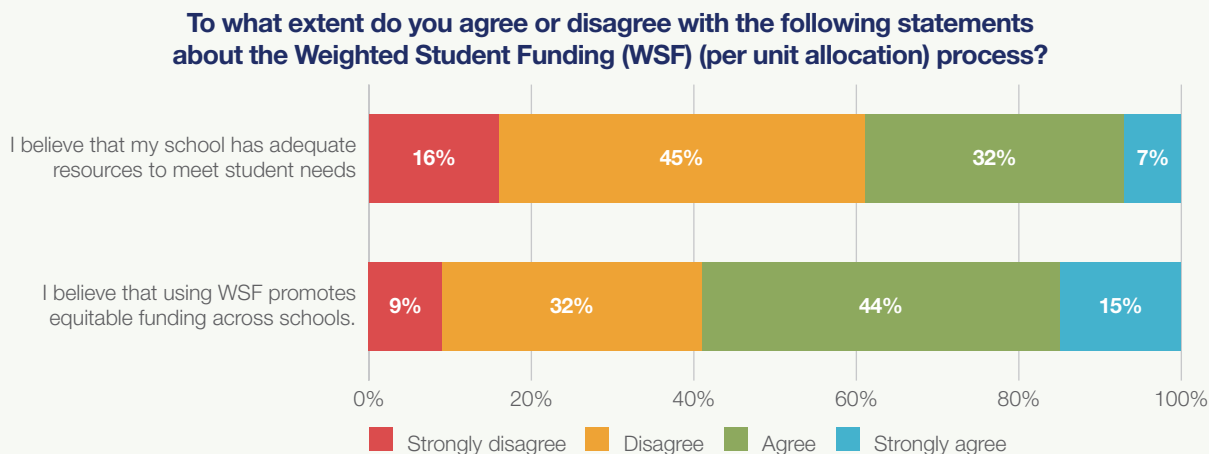
Participants were also asked about their beliefs about funding equity and adequacy in the district. Of the 138 HISD principals who responded, 84 (61%) *disagree* or *disagree strongly* with the statement that their school has adequate resources to meet student needs while 54 (39%) *agree* or *agree strongly* with this statement. Fifty-seven (41%) *disagree strongly* or *disagree* that using WSF promotes equitable funding across schools while 81 (59%) *agree* or *agree strongly* that using WSF promotes equitable funding across schools.

Other insights

Respondents were divided on their perceptions about the existence of district policies or practices that constrain their abilities to make the best decisions for their students (yes=70, 51%; no=66, 49%). There were statistically significant differences by school level for this question, with high school principals more likely to answer “yes” that there were policies or practices they felt constrained their autonomy than principals of middle or elementary schools.

Most participating HISD principals report being comfortable with the current distinction between campus and central funding functions. When asked if there are budget items currently handled by the district that would be better handled at the campus level, 70% responded “no”. Similarly, when asked if there were budget items that the campuses currently handle that would be better handled at the district level, about 76% of principals responded “no”. (Open-ended responses are provided in Appendix, see Figures 13 and 14.)

Figure 1. Beliefs about WSF (n=138)



¹ The analysis tested for any statistically significant relationships between survey responses and years of experience and school level. All statistically significant relationships are reported.

Discussion

Those HISD principals who elected to participate in the survey on average expressed positive statements about their own capacity, their training, and their sense of autonomy. They described being supported by central administration in the fundamental roles that principals are expected to fulfill in the current decentralized model. HISD has policies and procedures in place aimed at supporting principals in their fundamental roles. For instance, HISD's current school board policy emphasizes the role of the principal. Administrative Regulations (LDU 2010.02) state that the principals are in charge of the budgeting process for their student population, school staffing and hiring specifically. The Educational Philosophy (LDU 2013.01) places decision-making at the principal level, and also holds the principals accountable for innovative instructional results. Attitudes of principals expressed in this survey reflect the supportive environment these policies aim to create.

Although responses were generally positive, some of the results suggest possible opportunities to improve or increase principal support. For instance, 59% of respondents *agree* or *strongly agree* that they are provided with the necessary budget analyst support. HISD practices are in place to support principals in the budget process. HISD currently has seven budget analysts and seven senior budget analysts who are assigned to support principals. Principals also have access to guidance through the "Understanding the Budget Process" manual, and through SAP 4.6 training programs (LDU 2009.10). However, there are no set procedures defining the use of budget analyst assistance; the analysts are available to support principals as needed. Possible next steps include a review of the budget analyst protocols and/or an efficiency study of the team support.

Additionally, while 75% of responding principals *agree* or *strongly agree* that their degree training prepared them to make staffing decisions to support student needs, this means that about one-quarter of principals *disagree* or *strongly disagree* that their degree training adequately prepared them to perform fundamental roles when they first became principals. In contrast, of principals with at least one year of experience, about 97% *agree* or *strongly agree* that they are currently prepared to make staffing decisions to support student needs. This pattern in the data suggests that a segment of principals are starting at HISD concerned about their ability to perform their fundamental roles, but very quickly grow their abilities to more confidently serve their students, staff, and the district. In part, this rapid uptake by principals may speak to the district's nine leadership development programs. These programs emphasize mentor relationships and a cohort experience to facilitate networking and collaboration, in addition to planned opportunities for skill development. These programs appear to be serving principals well in shaping and developing skills that enable principals to feel more confident in performing their fundamental roles. To address the lower confidence of beginning principals, the district could consider identifying strategies for improving the connection between principals' degree programs and the transition into HISD schools. This could include a future study utilizing HISD's current principals to identify which degree programs are particularly successful at preparing principals for taking on the fundamental roles in HISD. The district could also consider setting up partnerships with degree programs locally and across the State of Texas to discuss the district's specific training needs and working to ensure those needs are met by the training and education offered in the degree programs.

Limitations

The primary questions the survey data allow us to answer relate to principal perceptions of: their degree training; their current level of efficacy; central administrative support; understanding and beliefs about WSF; and sense of autonomy. In addition to responses to survey items, a selection of responding principals provided open-ended responses to particular items throughout the survey. These responses, de-identified to protect confidentiality, are available in Appendix and can be consulted for additional feedback provided by principals. Note, the open-ended response data were not collected systematically therefore the comments do not necessarily reflect general patterns of attitudes, beliefs, or practices of principals in the broader HISD population.

Although we collected data from a sample of principals that generally reflected the composition of principals in all of HISD, our results only reflect attitudes and opinions of principals working in a decentralized system; there is also the potential of self-reporting bias. Results of this brief provide no evidence of potential differences principals would experience in a more centralized model of central administration. Additionally, it is important to remember that although survey participants were fairly reflective of all HISD principals, there might be unmeasured but systematic differences between those who chose to respond and those who did not respond. Caution should be used when attempting to make any inferences from these data.

Conclusion

Decentralization in HISD had two main stated objectives: redistributing funding and improving student achievement. Principals play a major role in achieving these goals in a decentralized model. In this second part of the larger four-part study, we surveyed

HISD principals and found that the majority of respondents describe feeling prepared and supported in the context of the duties they are asked to manage in the existing decentralized structure.

Addendum

This survey was conducted in December 2017. In January 2018, HISD formed the Principal Budget Advisory Committee, which consists of 36 principals: they represent schools from a variety of sizes (small, medium, large), board member districts (geographical), academic levels (elementary, middle, high, multilevel), and type (magnet, specialty, comprehensive, etc.). The purpose of the committee is to: gather input/feedback on the budget process and the current

working recommendation to move the HISD budgeting process to an FTE funding model; to include the principal voice in the decision process; to allow principals to raise issues that might not have been addressed without their input; and to guide the district through this budgeting process to make sure that all schools have the resources to be successful. The group has already met three times.

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Appendix

Demographic Information

Figure 2: School level of survey respondents (n=136)

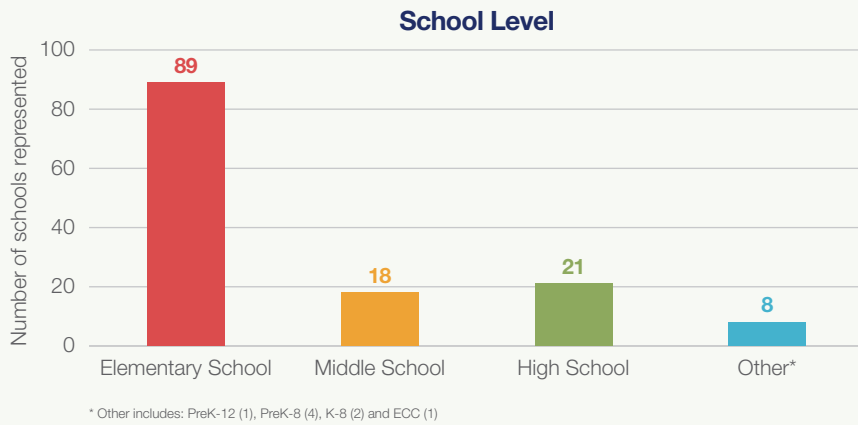


Table 7: Years of experience as HISD principal* (n=152)

	N	Percent
0–1 years	31	20.4
2–5 years	57	37.5
6–10 years	29	19.1
More than 10 years	35	23.0

* Twenty respondents indicated having served as a principal outside HISD; 15 provided additional information on their years of experience outside HISD.

Figure 3: Gender identification of survey respondents (n=133)

Gender Identification

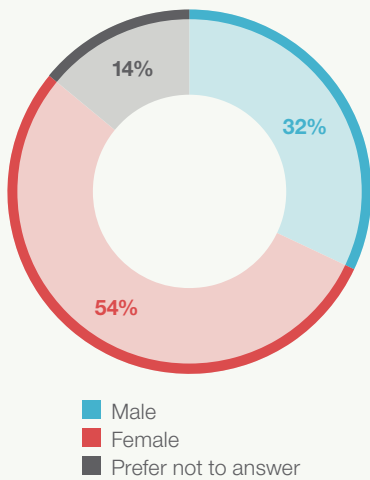


Figure 4: Race/Ethnicity of survey respondents (n=135)

Race/Ethnicity

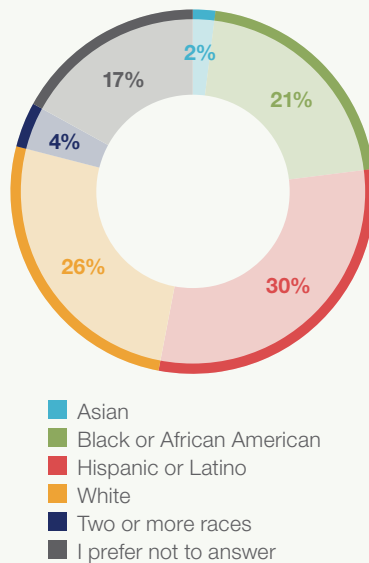
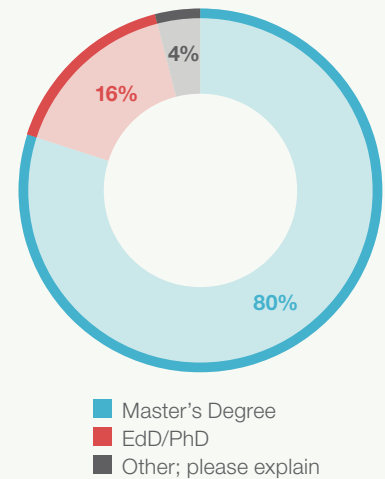


Figure 5: Highest level of education attained by survey respondents (n=136)

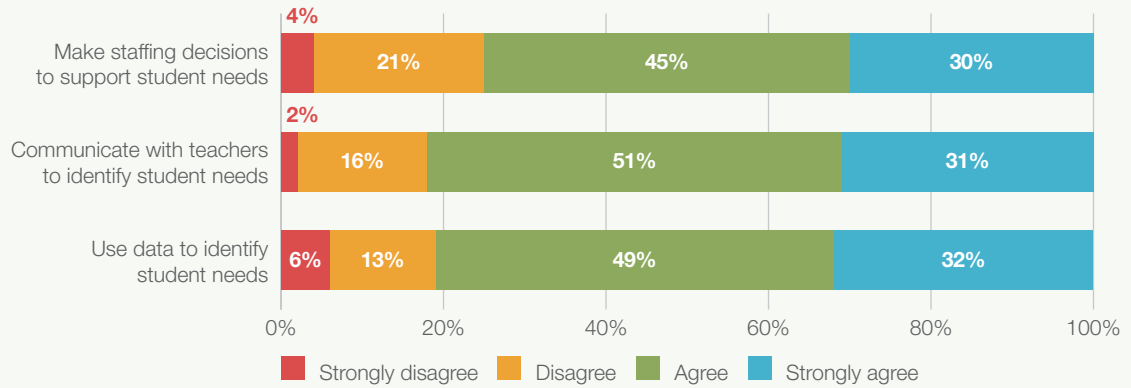
Highest Level of Education Attained



Do HISD principals believe they have the skills/training needed to make the best decisions for student learning?

Figure 6: Degree of program effectiveness (n=144)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the degree program(s) you pursued to become a principal provided the necessary training to support your ability to do the following when you first became an HISD principal?



Additional Comments (N=12)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the degree program(s) you pursued to become a principal provided the necessary training to support your ability to do the following when you first became an HISD principal?

I feel my experiences through my internships (Masters and Ph.D.) along with my assistant and associate principal positions were crucial for these skills.

I received my Masters and Principal Certification through my admission to an innovative HISD Principal Cohort program. It's a shame the district discontinued this opportunity as the education and experience it provided were invaluable.

I spent three years as an assistant principal working for an excellent principal; I was well-trained.

I learned it as an assistant principal.

My degree program did go into these area, however constant changes in education and particularly changes in accountability system, I do not believe that my degree program prepared me. I would say 70% of my learning of how to do the above was learning from my principal as an assistant principal, attending work sessions on the topic, collaborating with principals or learning from opportunities provided by districts that I have worked for.

My school program focused on theory opposed to real life. HISD PD's gave me the additional training that I needed to target focus areas. The on the job training was essential to growth as a leader.

Dillard University and Texas Southern University had great programs that prepared my journey in becoming a principal.

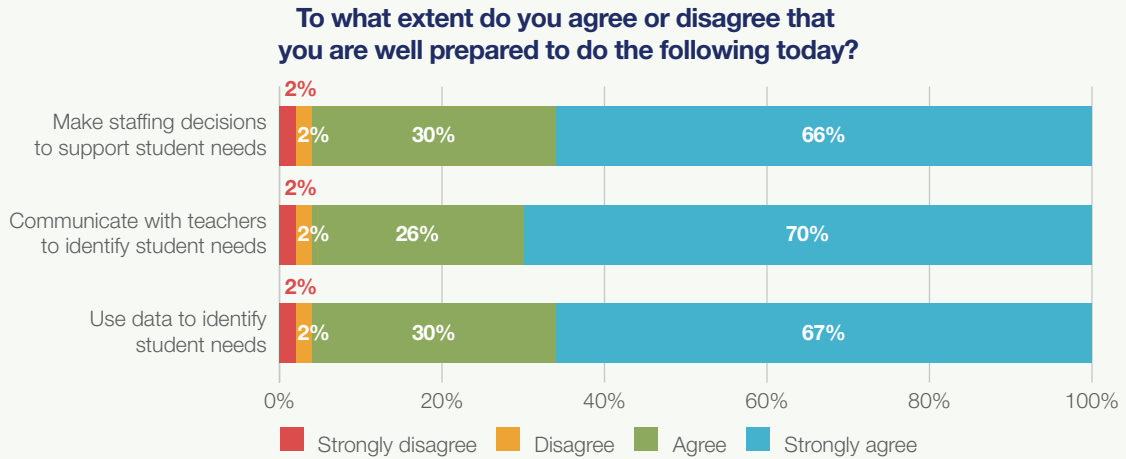
My college work prepared me very well to perform these tasks effectively.

I would like more training in how to talk to staff members about reassignment to better meet needs. These are difficult conversations, and I have not role played them.

Researched-Based programs that fit the community needs.

We touched on student data, but it was a very small portion of the overall focus on leadership.

Figure 7: Perceptions of efficacy (n=122) (excludes first year principals)



Additional comments (N=5)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that you are well prepared to do the following today?

I feel my experiences through my internships (Masters and Ph.D.) along with my assistant and associate principal positions were crucial for these skills.

I feel that my ability to do this came not only from district training, but the experience I had as an assistant principal.

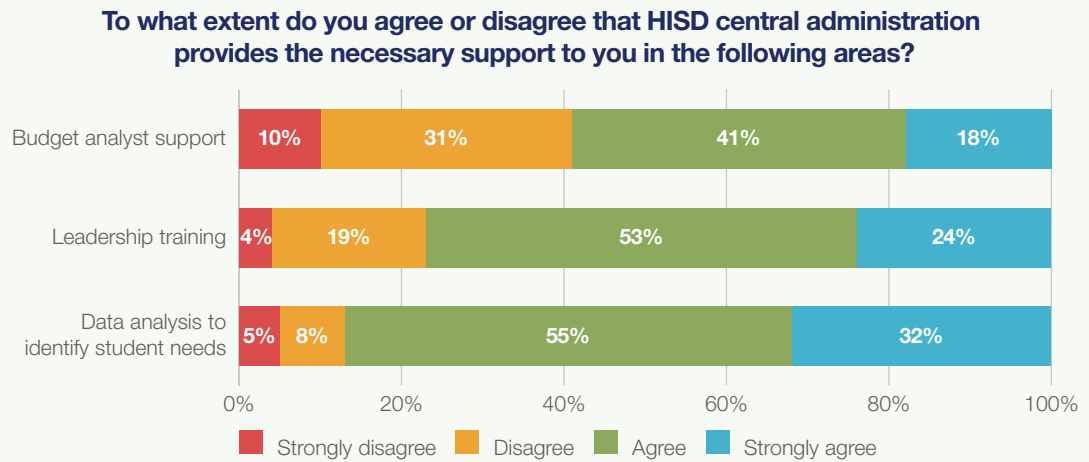
HISD has a wealth of PD available to grow in the areas. Principals are the ones who need to look and seek to grow.

College work plus hands-on experience gave the skills necessary to perform these tasks effectively.

I believe my understanding of data is greater than most principals, but not nearly what I would like it to be. Principals have access to massive databases of data, and the time it takes to review these databases into usable fashion is extraordinary. Years ago, HISD principals had greater advisement and support from the district, now we just get massive reports and we are on our own to sift through it.

Do HISD principals believe they have the support needed from administration to make the best decisions for student learning?

Figure 8: Perceptions of support from central administration (n=142)



Additional Comments (N=14)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that HISD central administration provides the necessary support to you in the following areas?

My first few years as principal I had a good budget analyst that really helped. Because of their training I think I manage my budget well, but I do not have a good analyst now. I believe there needs to be more consistency in this department.

Was better when we had just a few budget analysts working with school budgets as they knew all of the variables without having to ask others. Now the work is spread out and it seems that nobody is an expert at anything.

My budget analyst is incompetent.

I have gotten the most support and mentorship from more informal relationships with other principals. I have been very lucky to have had a few strong SSOs, which helped with more challenge situations.

As stated before it is available principals need to look for the training it does not fall on their laps or they are not forced to attend.

Do not feel as supported by budget analyst this year. Leadership training is too generic. Needs to be more specific.

For years the experienced principals in the district were called upon to support new principals with budget issues. It became clear that experienced principals were far more informed than most HMW personnel—especially those in the various school office iterations.

Our assigned budget analyst is very supportive but personally need more practice in all things relating to the budget.

Large audiences and webinars are ineffective. The budget analyst support is helpful when they come to the school to provide budget support. There is a lack of feeder pattern meetings to discuss patterns and demographic specific challenges. We do not meet to share best practices. This is greatly needed. Principals do not have support for learning. Expected to be experts and pressure is immense.

There are capable data experts at the district office, but they are spread very thin. The message is “call me if you have questions” instead of having a standard practice for looking at data and filtering some of the data for the campus. Leadership: There has been a mind-boggling rotating door of district leaders. I received incredible leadership and mentoring in 2009–10, but since then (budget cuts), a structured onboarding for new principals has been lost. The leadership development department was filled with people who have never served as a principal, so the activities were often “off point”. I’ve been a principal for 10 years and I often google HISD to find out who is at the helm of the department I am trying to reach. Often, the school offices have to “find out who is in charge” and get back to me.

Leadership training in HISD has been hit or miss. I think the district changes direction so often and reorganizes so often it is difficult to gain traction and to sustain the development of leaders. I arrived in HISD from other districts and I hang on more to the leadership training I received in other districts than to what I have received in HISD ...

It’s between disagree and agree. I think many principals need hands on training.

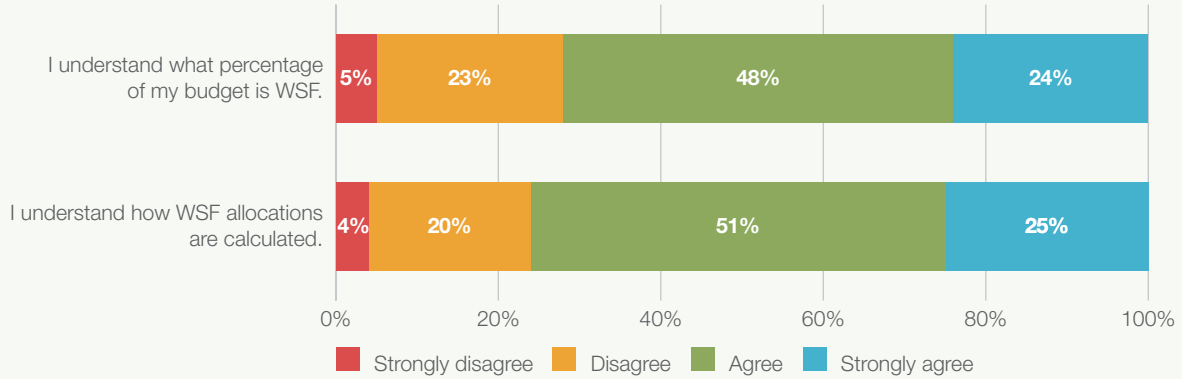
Supervisors are all about compliance and not about nuts and bolts training.

We do not meet to share best practices. This is greatly needed.

How do HISD principals describe their understanding and beliefs about the WSF process?

Figure 9: WSF understanding (n=141)

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Weighted Student Funding (WSF) (per unit allocation) process?



Additional Comments (N=8)

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Weighted Student Funding (WSF) (per unit allocation) process? Understanding process.

I learned this on my own in the role as principal.

I know this information because I asked, not because it was volunteered or required via training.

I served on a legislative committee in a previous district, and this is where my knowledge of WADA came from... I keep up with TEA and commissioner and stay informed.

Print out the Budget Allocation Handbook—on my shelf and understand how all factors (including attendance)

What I do not agree in this process is the adding of Magnet Monies because many of those take from at risk schools funding needed. those campuses already take the per unit allocation.

Since there is no final “other comments section” (not cool by the way), I will have to use this blank section to offer an overall critique. Moving away from decentralization for a district this size is understandable and easily digestible by those that haven’t led an HISD campus. Trustees can use it as the villain for anything they find disappointing, and the highest levels of administration, with no experience in it, may be easily convinced. And for those in the private sector or business world, being decentralized seems ridiculous. However, a system dependent on 210K individuals cannot be compared to Hewlett Packard. HISD outperforms suburban districts across the city and country—other districts set up with a centralized model. To what are we now suddenly aspiring to be? There isn’t success there that is transferrable to an urban district like Houston. Finally, many of the strong and high-flying principals that this district relies upon remain in Houston because of the decentralization model. The ability to lead your campus while remaining aligned with your school community is paramount to ensure that the families of Houston remain confident in our K–12 system.

I don’t agree with the WSF allocations.

I learned this on my own in the role as principal.

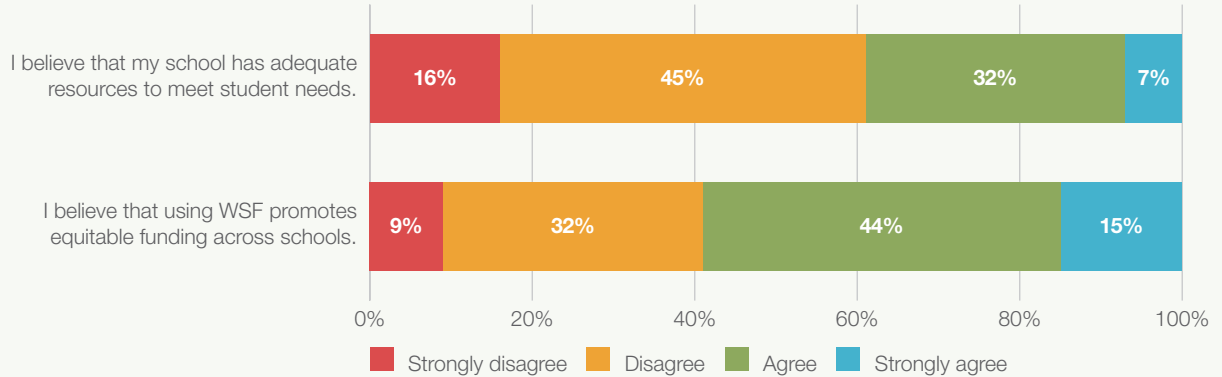
Statistical test:

Years of experience correlated positively with *understanding how WSF funding is allocated* at $p < .01$; $r = .368$.

Years of experience correlated positively with *understanding what percentage of campus funding is WSF* at $p < .01$; $r = .409$.

Figure 10: WSF beliefs (n=138)

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Weighted Student Funding (WSF) (per unit allocation) process?



Additional Comments (N=10)

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Weighted Student Funding (WSF) (per unit allocation) process? Beliefs.

We have adequate b/c we receive magnet funds. If this is taken away b/c we are GT, then this will be a game changer and I would click disagree. Those funds make a huge difference as to the curriculum resources I can provide our students.

As long as magnet PUA doesn't change and is not differentiated.

As stated before the magnet programs cause it to not be equitable due to pulling resources from one campus and then to top it off they get extra funding.

The G/T weighted formula is excessive especially when you consider the additional magnet funding provided to Vanguard campuses. The regular allocation provides all the necessary staffing, as compared to an engineering magnet, aviation magnet, fine arts magnet, health science magnet in which highly specialized teachers are required and not provided for within the regular allocation.

Including cumulative At Risk factors in the WSF would make it more equitable.

Centralized funding would facilitate more equity in funding school programs in order to meet student needs.

My school receives the least amount of per student funding in the entire school district.

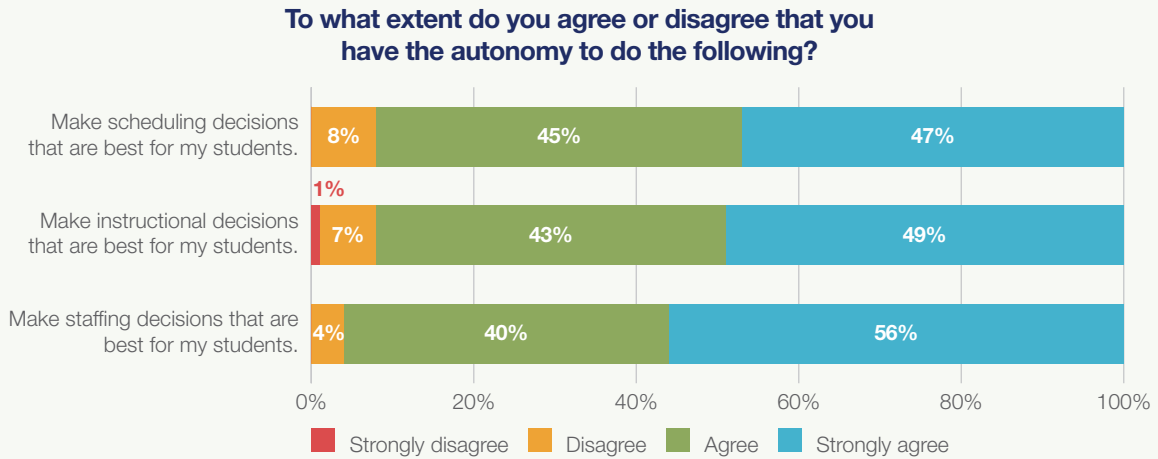
I don't fully understand this item so hard to share the equity therein

WSF alone does not achieve equity; my school does not receive enough funds to meet the needs of all students.

Due to the events of this year I was WAY below projection which has never occurred before. As a result, I am literally left without a budget to run the campus for the remainder of the year.

How do HISD principals describe their autonomy?

Figure 11: Perceptions of autonomy (n=138)



Additional Comments (N=12)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that you have the autonomy to do the following?

This is one of the best perks of working for HISD.

The decentralized funding system allows me the autonomy to make decisions that are best for my students.

These are core tenets in a decentralization model and would appear the most vulnerable as the district seemingly strives to centralize decision making.

As a leader I feel trusted and respected to make these decisions in the next interest of my campus and I hope this continues.

Although there are some limitations, in general, I have enough autonomy to make these decisions.

HISD strives to hire Haberman principals and teachers. If HISD becomes centralized decision-making, Haberman has no place in HISD.

This is what sets us apart from surrounding districts. We can truly utilize our talents and expertise about our school community to make decisions and realize our collective vision, not just carry out a mandate.

The instructional decisions autonomy is decreasing as frequently it seems that we have large district initiatives that collide with what campuses may already have in place as a best practice that is working. We've gone from I-stations that was a big monitoring and instructional tool when implemented and now to Ren 360 which is just monitoring. Both of these components have large implementation requirements and therefore impact some of the instructional decisions that I am able to make for my campus.

There is a disconnect from what actually needs to happen in a school and what central office perceives as what needs to happen. Unfortunately many times SSOs, TDSs, Chiefs, Program managers, and others who dream up initiatives for schools do not themselves know how to implement those programs. Too often those same people have never lead a school or have not led a school to success. We need to find or grow good principals and give them the autonomy and tools to do their job and hold them accountable when they don't.

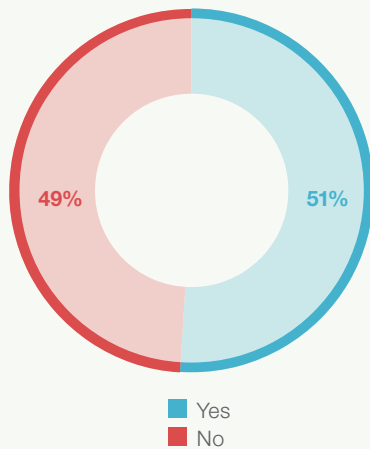
District mandates determine my schedule more than I would like. I have an unusually strong school and I would like to be able to move to a student-driven model which requires a different type of schedule to do with fidelity.

Although I believe my scheduling decision are best it would be helpful to have master principal review and provide feedback.

I don't have enough funding to do so.

Figure 12: Policies or practices that constrain autonomy (n=136)

Are there any district level policies or practices that constrain your ability to make the best decisions for your students?



Additional Comments (N=56)

* Multiple themes were identified in comments thus percentage totals can exceed 100%.

Open-ended comments were analyzed using open coding to identify categories or themes that repeated in these data. Categories were defined to be responsive to the research questions. They were designed to be conceptually congruent but are not mutually exclusive because some comments included multiple themes.

There were several identifiable themes that emerged, including testing policies, administrative details, funding decisions, bureaucracy, time constraints, multiple initiatives, teacher related policies, ELL policies, curricular policies, and bell/schedule requirements. Testing policies (21%) and administrative policies (20%) were the most commonly identified themes. Administrative policies included paperwork that “bogged” principals down and timelines that made flexibility difficult.

Are there any district level policies or practices that constrain your ability to make the best decisions for your students?

Testing policies (21%)

The incessant insistence on testing including benchmarks, DLAs, and snapshots. The desire to move to a standardized bell schedule.

District mandated programs used for screeners, too many initiatives being rolled out at once, not having enough resources due to budget cuts (Recapture), district restrictions on released tests, etc.

Universal Screener—monthly progress monitoring with number of students provides little time for actual instruction. We are spending more time scheduling computers and the screening of students than teaching.

Currently we are engrossed with the district’s IAT focus and focus on Ren 360. It is not that these two components are not highly important, however there seems to be an ongoing issue in our district of rush to implement and there is no differentiation for campuses that might already have great and working practices in place. At the campus level we feel constrained to abandon things or add and add to the plate when the plate just to be in compliance with what the district is asking. In addition, the support for most things implemented at the district is lacking.
Required testing usurps instructional time; the amount of time that was unilaterally mandated for IAT takes away from instructional time and does not differentiate by school needs.
IAT paperwork and the amount the time entering data.
district level testing timelines that are not developmentally appropriate for students, especially young students (K),
The testing/student assessment calendar can inhibit decisions made for students.
Mandatory district assessments.
Mandatory district level assessments.
Variety of testing with limited technology on campus to support the testing and interventions.
Principals are focused to adopt policies that do not meet the needs of students. We also are forced to participate in various unnecessary testing.
Administrative details (20%)
Within the last few years more of the principals’ autonomy has been constrained with practices that are more common in a centralized budget system. A recent example is the requirement that an SSO/Chief approve any position changes for a campus. This slows the process and makes it more difficult to fill positions that are necessary to meet the needs of students. Another recent example is the decision to send a team to training to support one of our SIP goals. The travel requisitions required SSO approval. This is redundant and slows our ability to serve children.
The amount of paperwork required. Often the data requested exists in a district database (like Chancery) but we are asked to compile in a format determined by SSOs and/or Chiefs.
Lack of support/accountability for district level support personnel, lack of communication from campus staff who report to district managers.
I can’t say this is a policy as it changes with each configuration. However, the back-n-forth nature of what types of positions require approval and which do not is confusing. And is not responsive to campus needs. Remaining agile is important for any system and if/when steps are created to slow that responsiveness then kids will lose out.

TADS system is extremely time consuming and does not allow for any flexibility. Teachers that are consistently highly effective should not have to have two formal observations/ two walkthroughs a year. We would be able to provide more support to those teachers needing focused support.
Transportation Guidelines; Student Transfers.
The volume of memos, information, emails, action items, etc. that require attention or action is staggering. I'm not sure what the answer is for this.
procurement processes.
TAKS students cannot complete an IGC project to replace a failed EOC exam, we have an SEL department but not enough psychologists provided by the district to support campuses.
Use of specific progress monitoring tools, timelines for snapshot testing/formative assessments.
We have initiatives that must be implemented, but the paperwork boggles us down.
Other comments (20%)
TAKS students cannot complete an IGC project to replace a failed EOC exam, we have an SEL department but not enough psychologists provided by the district to support campuses
Principals are focused to adopt policies that do not meet the needs of students. We also are forced to participate in various unnecessary testing.
We are told at the beginning of the year to register anyone who shows up. Then in October, we are told to reduce our waivers by using gimmicks like having classes of 22 and 26 instead of two classes of 24.
I like that we are making certain things centralized like the curriculum and expectations.
Having a decentralized budget is one of the reasons I continue to work for HISD. The needs of our schools are so different across the district.
We seem to direct actions toward the lowest common denominator. In high-performing schools, many of the trainings and requirements are not appropriate. We passed that threshold years ago.
Achieve 180 policy to remove IR or FIR schools from their feeder patterns.
Decentralization to campuses.
I would like more facilities funding directly. I believe that department does not respond fast enough or do a good enough job with repairs.
Special education referral policies—45 calendar days until parental consent is too long.
Discipline Policies.

Funding decisions (14%)
Funding.
Funding based on enrollment and ADA.
Yes, there are a few but the main one is how funds are not distributed equally.
Cannot get nurse position, police position or buy certain products.
Our campus needs a social worker or counselor. However, there is not enough funding to support either on our campus.
Funding for program, i.e., Magnet, Special Ed.
Magnet process.
District mandated programs used for screeners, too many initiatives being rolled out at once, not having enough resources due to budget cuts (Recapture), district restrictions on released tests, etc.
Bureaucracy (11%)
The Chiefs and SSO's continuing their practices of micromanaging. These positions are truly not necessary to begin with.
Budget and use of title I—district implements stricter code for use than other school districts—example not allowing Teacher Asst salary to be from Title I.
Timeliness of final budgets (happening late this year) and Human Resources Business Partner is inefficient.
Constant District need for data points. Too much time taken away from instruction. Lack of support closely situated to the campus level (regional offices had specialists available for campus-based support).
Within the last few years more of the principals' autonomy has been constrained with practices that are more common in a centralized budget system. A recent example is the requirement that an SSO/Chief approve any position changes for a campus. This slows the process and makes it more difficult to fill positions that are necessary to meet the needs of students. Another recent example is the decision to send a team to training to support one of our SIP goals. The travel requisitions required SSO approval. This is redundant and slows our ability to serve children.
The amount of paperwork required. Often the data requested exists in a district database (like Chancery) but we are asked to compile in a format determined by SSOs and/or Chiefs.

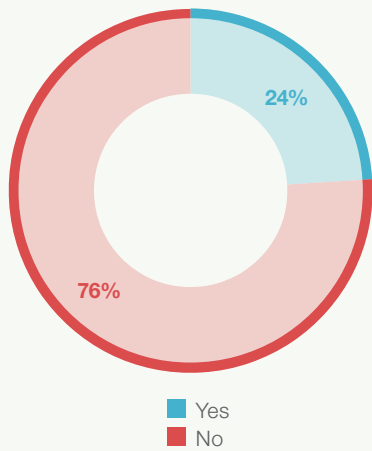
Time constraints (8%)
Use of specific progress monitoring tools, timelines for snapshot testing/formative assessments.
Timeliness of final budgets (happening late this year) and Human Resources Business Partner is inefficient.
Constant District need for data points. Too much time taken away from instruction. Lack of support closely situated to the campus level (regional offices had specialists available for campus-based support).
Meetings- being pulled off campus; several new initiatives all at once that require meetings.
I can technically spend at least two hours or more reading emails from the many departments in the district who want to promote what they do, this needs to be recentralized.
Multiple initiatives (7%)
We have initiatives that must be implemented, but the paperwork boggles us down.
Continued roll out of new programs.
Meetings- being pulled off campus; several new initiatives all at once that require meetings.
District mandated programs used for screeners, too many initiatives being rolled out at once, not having enough resources due to budget cuts (Recapture), district restrictions on released tests, etc.
Teacher related policies (7%)
There are a few teachers who sabotage the school culture. School culture greatly impacts student learning. District office does not support principals when disciplining teachers in the form of MEMOS. Politics should not interfere with student learning.
Last hired first to be let go because they were my hire, new and fresh. I had to let the better teacher go, which is not the best decision for my students.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When I hire a teacher in March, April, or May, they should receive all network credentials by August 1. It is crucial to provide teachers (especially first year) access to curriculum and planning documents so they can participate fully in August PD and PLC processes. 2. Currently, the district does not allow a CIT to appraise teachers. The CIT is directly involved with instructional practices. I had to change my CIT's role so that I could allow her to appraise teachers.
The practice of assigning teachers that have been financially rified from other campuses.

ELL Needs (5%)
Designation of campus programs such as Dual Language.
Not enough hours in the day to grow my ELL students.
Dual language program.
Curricular decisions (4%)
Ability to purchase specific curriculum and items for our students.
One-size-fits all curriculum and instruction expectations that don't fit my population. If I can demonstrate a better fit, my learning community should be able to at least pilot it and demonstrate effectiveness.
Bell/schedule requirements (4%)
Scheduling and ability to have early dismissals for parent involvement and staff development.
The incessant insistence on testing including benchmarks, DLAs, and snapshots. The desire to move to a standardized bell schedule.

Statistical test: school level correlates with response to this question at $p < .01$; $r = -.245$.

Figure 13: Budget functions that should be centralized (n=136)

Are there any budget items that you currently control that you believe would be better handled at the district level?



Additional Comments (N=33)

Open-ended comments were analyzed using open coding to identify categories or themes that repeated in these data. Categories were defined to be responsive to the research questions. They were designed to be conceptually congruent but are not mutually exclusive because some comments included multiple themes.

Major themes identified here include the belief that nursing, librarians, counselors and ancillary staff might be better managed by central administration.² Other themes related to a decentralized model or a centralized model.

Are there any budget items that you currently control that you believe would be better handled at the district level?

Specific budget items that should be centralized (51%)

- Staffing (35%)
- Nurse (35%)
- Ancillary Teachers (29%)
- Librarian (29%)
- Counseling (24%)
- Substitutes (12%)
- Fine Arts (6%)
- Athletics (6%)

- Instructional Resources (6%)
- Transportation (6%)
- Contract Fees (6%)

Statements in support of decentralized funding (18%)

Goodness no. The district currently manages one large budget area, Special Education, and it is a mess. Examine the staffing models for SpED and then try and make the case for utilizing that plan moving forward. There is no ability to quickly respond to changes in pedagogy, student needs, changes in setting. Centralizing more components of a school will only make them less powerful.

No, if anything, I would like to have more control over the budget

I believe budget control and school autonomy keep principals working in HISD. I personally have no interest in working in a centralized district. I have done that before and found it incredibly stifling to know what needs to be done with your campus, but to have your hands tied in the implementation. I think HISD would lose principals to the suburbs to where the work is easier. If those same budgetary and implementation constraints happen in HISD, what would the incentive be to stay? I have heard this comment made by several other principals since it seems that some of the powers that be are looking to centralize the district.

I certainly do not believe it would be better to centralize funding. I am far better able to efficiently use funding to meet the needs of students at my campus. Principals have to understand how to impact their funding income with correct PEIMS data. That incentive for principals will be taken away if funding is centralized and the entire district will suffer. The same applies to my ability to efficiently staff my school using part time employees where possible. I am strongly against any move to centralize funding.

I think the principal should allocate budget always. He or she knows what is needed for their budget and campus.

This would be disastrous. HISD has been innovative and has promoted excellence because we must be entrepreneurs and not dictated to by policies that do not fit unique schools.

Other comments (27%)

All salaries be taken out of budget before the school sees the budget (including hourly personnel).

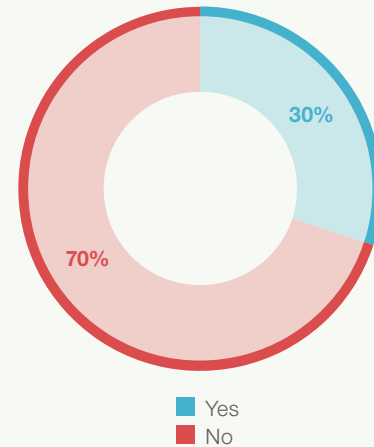
I feel that it would be helpful if the budget analysts assisted with OPM creating and delimiting positions. I feel that it would be beneficial to have conversations with them about what we need and they complete them in the system.

² The category “staffing” was included multiple times but is ambiguous.

I believe the district should restructure by cutting top heavy positions funded by title I and place those \$ in the schools to assure that every school has the minimum staff—nurse, librarian/literacy resource, counselor, administrator, Parent support.
I have not been adequately trained to understand my budget to answer this question.
In the previous district I worked for, all salary items were controlled at the district level and were equally provided to campuses based on a formula. Principals were left to handle any other funds and expenses.
There are some budget items that could be controlled by the district, but I would want control over who was hired into a particular position. If I would lose autonomy in that regard, then my answer would be no.
I haven't received adequate training specific to HISD budget processes, so my opinion is based on previous experience with budgets in other settings. It seems to me that there are some very big budget lines that allow for a great deal of discretion without guidance as a new principal. Also, the system may offer greater freedom than is wise, particularly given limited training in this area.
I think deciding the projections and number of teachers to hire is always problematic. You are always in danger of over or under projecting and then being stuck with paying back money or having to hire in September. Also, there are some positions that each campus should be given based on size for example: full time AP, instructional coordinator, dyslexia specialist, full or part time librarian, counselor, and nurse.
Technology Equipment Update carefully monitored and funded by the district including infrastructure.
Statements in support of centralized funding (9%)
All, except activity funds and general/ title 1 supply funds.
All; the budgets are challenging to read let alone be strategic with. I consider myself a smart person and still do not have a clear vision of how to be strategic with my budget. It prints on 15 pages and the system to utilize it is quite tedious.
General Funds allocations.

Figure 14: Budget functions that should be decentralized (n=135)

Are there any budget items that the district currently controls that you believe would be better handled at the campus level?



Additional Comments (N=32)

* Multiple themes were identified in comments thus percentage totals can exceed 100%.

Open-ended comments were analyzed using open coding to identify categories or themes that repeated in these data. Categories were defined to be responsive to the research questions. They were designed to be conceptually congruent but are not mutually exclusive because some comments included multiple themes.

Major themes identified here include the belief that the following programs should be managed at the campus level: Title I and II funds, custodians, facilities, activity funds, and special education.

Are there any budget items that the district currently controls that you believe would be better handled at the campus level?

Specific budget items that should be decentralized (66%)

Title I (19%)
Title II (19%)
Custodians (10%)
Facilities (10%)
Activity Funds (10%)
Special Education (10%)
Curriculum (5%)
Summer school (5%)
Grants (5%)

Payroll (5%)
Fine Arts (5%)
Other comments (44%)
Previously we used to be able to handle Title II funds for professional development. Those were completely taken away and used for Teacher Specialists at the District Level. However, not all schools get support yet all of our money was removed. Not equitable!
Literacy By (3/middle) should have been guided by individual campus needs (resources such as classroom libraries and implementation support).
I need the ability to make decisions that can be acted on quickly. When extra layers of approval are required for personnel changes, professional development, etc. we make the work cumbersome. Each of these decisions is approved through other mechanisms, such as PD plan submitted in late spring, SIP submitted in August.
I can't think of anything right now, I guess I have gotten used to the way it is.
I don't know what I control and what the district controls.
Too many levels of administration at District levels; Area Supt, SSO, TDS, Directors, managers-all with different expectations.
All budget concerns. We should contain our current PUA process.
Give us our Title II funding back. Leadership Development department is unnecessary given that we all have mentors (SSOs) assigned to us.
Bring back Title II funds. We used to receive these each year with the intent of being used for campus-specific professional development. Feeder patterns had the ability to combine funds so as to impact a greater number of students. The Title II funds were taken from us to pay for TDS with the promise that we would all have access to TDS. I've led two different large HS campuses and enjoyed the experience and expertise of TDS for 5 weeks over 7 years. Meanwhile my Title II funds were never again seen, and thus any PD I wanted to support had to be funded elsewhere (which then took "stuff" from teachers and kids).
Special Education is an area that needs to be reviewed. Staffing formulas right now only take into consideration the number of SPED students on caseload. However, as the district continues with inclusion services for students who are AU and ID, many of these students have services in excess of two hours a day. A single teacher can have a low caseload by numbers, but have many hours of support needed by those students and scheduling becomes very difficult to meet all the needs while still providing planning and lunch. Hours on caseload makes more sense that just number of students. Schools have a better handle on the actual needs than the formula implies, and two schools can have identical caseloads, but VERY different hours of service.

Custodial services. We used to have this on our staffing table. When it was removed, all that happened was that personnel for my campus were cut and cleaning quality suffered. Custodial personnel should be put back into the campus budget and principals should hire with input from central.
Campus Diagnosticians at every campus.
The schoolwires fee and the copy machine fee I know are a necessity but from a small campus with a small budget it can be pretty large expense.
Midlevel management (CSO, SSO), and the explosion of "wrap around service, IAT etc. positions that are expensive but NOT impacting campuses.
Transference Ability (9%)
Being able to move funds.
The ability to transfer funds from any budget line to another.
Transference between budgets, summer school, grants.

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