Dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I want to begin this letter by writing that I strongly believe in the HISD stated vision that “every child shall have equitable opportunities and equal access to an effective and personalized education in a nurturing and safe environment.” I believe this should be the shared goal among all those involved in HISD. I do not believe that the proposed district changes and FTE budget / centralization model provides a successful approach to facilitating the HISD vision.

***[Enter 3-4 sentences detailing your family’s background and your personal experience with HISD schools. What struggles have you or your children encountered? What goals do your children have for their future? How has the current system of schools facilitated your child(ren)’s success?]***

It is evident that students thrive in an individualized educational environment. Our current PUA model was developed to support this approach. With a district as large and diverse as HISD, there are a multitude of needs at each campus. Enabling principals to utilize funds under the PUA model as they see fit allows our school leaders to serve the unique needs of their individual campuses and students. A majority of our Houston schools continues to improve and excel thanks to a combined effort from parents, administrators, teachers and students. It requires a lot of time and effort from the community, as well as dynamic leaders and teachers. It takes an engaged, dedicated student body. Our successes are why the HISD PUA approach is now the model for other large metro area school districts, including New York City, Hartford, Denver, Chicago, Cleveland and Boston.

Our district is not failing. Our current model is not broken. The 2016-2017 HISD “Adopted District Budget” document on pages 38-41 highlights some of the statistics that show our schools are improving and excelling, winning awards and gaining national recognition.

* 235 out of 275 schools (85%) earned a “met standard” rating for the 2015-2016 school year, a six-point increase from the previous year.
* At the same time, 18 fewer schools received an “improvement required” rating. Overall, HISD earned a “met standard” district rating.
* More than half (31 out of 58) of the HISD schools that were considered “improvement required” last year have now met the state standard.
* 22 Houston schools (8%) are award-winning
* One school in the district is ranked in the top 10 nationally by both the Washington Post and US News & World Report lists, (23rd in 2014 and 2015, 10th in 2016, 8th in 2017). Carnegie Vanguard High School has one the lowest per student budgets and would be expected to bear some of the most fundamentally destructive proposed changes.

An FTE-centralized model will not save our 14 (5%) failing schools. It will not solve the problem of underperforming students. Documentation of “per student per school” budget numbers available on the HISD and TEA websites shows we are already spending substantially more per student at some of our lowest performing schools. The proposals to strip magnet status, end transportation, and dictate allowed courses, staff, and programs will gravely injure our thriving programs. A quadrant system will re-segregate our city; this is the very thing our current model was implemented to dissolve. Our current magnet system provides an enormous population of students and parents with the choices they need to participate in programs that suit their needs and interests.

“Recapture” and “FTE-centralization” do not go hand in hand. We deserve more than one radical and limiting proposal when referring to our budget limitations. The $200 Million budgetary shortfall can be addressed in the current PUA funding model. HISD is combining three different agendas into one proposal: Budget cuts, saving our struggling schools and drastically changing our school funding model. A cut of $200 Million is approximately 10% of the HISD Annual Budget. It is proposed that 44% of the cuts will come from schools. That $88 million should be equally divided by schools, and the decision about how to implement the budget reduction should be decided by each school as is best for their students. Based on the HISD Board’s own Policy Manual, “the District shall decentralize” and “decisions should be made in schools; accordingly, principals shall be the leaders of that decision making process.” FTE actively works against that policy.

As the parent of Carnegie Vanguard High School student, I want HISD to continue the current PUA funding model. I believe the current magnet status of Carnegie is valid. I recognize that there will budgetary changes based on the upcoming shortfall. I want our principal to maintain the decision-making capabilities that have allowed our school to achieve a top 10 national ranking. I believe the admissions matrix, lottery system and district-provided transportation creates an opportunity for every GT student in HISD to have equal access to the Carnegie program.

I recognize our district needs to make changes. We have clear opportunities for improvement. I truly believe every student in our city deserves an effective education in a safe environment. I do not want more for my child than for others. Addressing the issue of equity and how to fix our struggling schools does not have to come at the cost of our successful campuses and thriving students. The responsible thing to do is to look to our successful programs as models, and to our strong leaders to mentor and assist in the improvement process. Our number one goal should be to discern a thoughtful, long term plan that provides successful neighborhood schools for all communities. We do not need a reactionary quick-fix that unravels the fabric of the growth and success created over the last decade.

As stated in the HISD Trustee Mission, “We believe that meaningful engagement with the community is important in all major decision-making.” Therefore, I ask you to please give thoughtful consideration to the input received from all community members when making this important decision. Please allow the principals at successful campuses to decide how they want to make their budget cuts. Please do not vote for this proposal as it stands.

Sincerely,

Name