**Promises made, Opportunities squandered**

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Make no mistake. HISD has been underperforming and managed in a problematic way for years. Multiple superintendents, multiple district initiatives, multiple calls for action. In its purest and most idealistic form, an overhaul through state control might have done the job - but it didn't. For years, campus administration has had unfettered power in staffing, budgeting and curriculum. In some instances (inside the Houston Arrow) things were going along well. In other areas, not so much.

The HISD Library Services department had the responsibility for seeing that library programs across the district were in alignment. However, past history highlights that upper district level administration had little or no knowledge or perhaps interest in keeping libraries vital. In 2008 libraries were infused with 10M dollars by HISD to enhance and improve library collections. In Library Services, certified, experienced library professionals spent countless hours and worked diligently to ensure that those dollars were distributed to schools fairly - to schools with librarians who would make good purchasing decisions, to campuses that had a very low collection size and/or a very old average collection age. All of that was for naught as ineffective district leadership changed course and allowed funding to be manipulated. Although the funds were board approved for library use, principals were now given the flexibility to "opt out" and use the funds in some other areas of the school as they felt were more appropriate. Campuses with no staff in the library or staff unable to create lists of books for purchase were allocated funds that were removed from fully functioning libraries. So the decline in services and resources was resolved for some, but not all.

During Supt. House's tenure in 2021, staffing libraries became a priority. No longer could principals make unilateral decisions about whether or not they fill a library staff position. Things improved greatly. Nothing was perfect. But there was light peeking through the tunnel. And more good news to come… ESSER funds were allocated and dispersed to campuses. 10.5 million dollars were infused into library collections.

Fast forward to the state takeover in 2023. With millions of dollars in ESSER funds sitting on library shelves, fully certified librarians or a certified teacher assigned to libraries across the district, the state takeover team – headed by Supt. Miles - systematically disemboweled all of these improvements. Staffing was removed from libraries. Library Services Department positions were closed. Campuses designated as NES saw libraries and staffing removed as well as shelving. Campuses not designated NES are not being encouraged (allowed?) to maintain or build their library program either through staffing or funding. Materials, staffing and overall access to library and reading materials is slowly but surely dwindling throughout the district. Of great concern

is the large number of materials removed and discarded from libraries. The loss of taxpayer monies literally thrown away is staggering.

So here we are.  What could have been a watershed moment for HISD turned into squandered opportunity.  Desperately needed improvements across the district, not just in libraries, were disregarded in favor of a rote curriculum that removed all local control from campuses.  Did principals overplay their hand in the past?  Yep.  Are they stuck now adhering to an educational program not anchored in any kind of best practice?  Also, yep.

And this while current HISD administration touts "The Houston Promise" that "zipcode no longer dictates destiny" and while schools in the most economically challenged neighborhoods - i.e. not in The Houston Arrow noted above -  are the least likely to have retained any of the library resources purchased in the last 5 years. Promises like these don't bring much hope.