

# HISD wants more children to have health insurance

## More than 40,000 children may not have health coverage

*June 21, 2007* – Texas has the highest rate of uninsured children in the nation and HISD Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra is asking the school board to approve a plan to try to get health insurance for every HISD student.

**Dr. Saavedra will ask the board to authorize HISD to take part in the “100% Campaign,” paid for entirely by the Children’s Defense Fund Texas through the support of local hospital partners.** The goal of the campaign is to enroll every eligible HISD student in health insurance and to reduce emergency room costs for local hospitals and taxpayers.

**The school board will review the idea at a meeting Thursday, June 21, at 11 a.m. and will vote on it Monday, June 25.**

Children’s Defense Fund Texas will work with HISD to identify and enroll students and to assist parents of uninsured students in the West, South, and East Regions of HISD. A project coordinator and two parent organizers will be hired by The Children’s Defense Fund for each of the West, South, and East Regions to run the program in collaboration with HISD.

The project would use data from the **Michael and Susan Dell Foundation insure-a-kid Texas Grants for School Outreach** that identifies the health insurance status of children by adding a question to school enrollment forms. Health care partners in the project will include Memorial Hermann Healthcare System, Texas Children’s Hospital/Texas Children’s Health Plan/Texas Children’s Pediatric Associates, and St. Luke’s Episcopal Health Charities.

The HISD Benefits Department will expand the effort to HISD’s North and Central regions, so **each of HISD’s five regions will be covered.** A regional benefits coordinator and two parent organizers will be hired by HISD for each of the North and Central regions. As part of the coordinated effort, outreach will also be made to full and part-time HISD employees that are eligible for CHIP.

Two years ago, a parent questionnaire, with a 51 percent response rate, suggested that about **22 percent of HISD students, as many as 40,000 children in Houston, do not have health insurance coverage;** nearly 40 percent are covered by Medicaid; about 26 percent have private insurance; nine percent are enrolled in CHIP; and about 3 percent have a Gold Card, which is issued by the Harris County Hospital District’s Eligibility Department. (The Gold Card verifies level of payment for health and medical care received by clients through the Harris County Hospital District hospitals; payment varies from zero to full pay depending upon income and other variables.)

Children’s Defense Fund Texas reports that nearly 90 percent of uninsured Texas children have at least one working parent, but coverage is often too costly for families to afford, averaging more than \$900 a month for family coverage, according to

the Texas Department of Insurance. The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Children's Medicaid provide low-cost or free health coverage to uninsured children in working families earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level – \$41,300 for a family of four. **Of the 1.4 million uninsured children in Texas, more than half are eligible for but not enrolled in CHIP and Children's Medicaid.** CHIP was expanded and eligibility requirements simplified by the 2007 Texas Legislature, following cuts to the program in 2003. Outreach is essential to inform families of CHIP reforms.

"This is going to improve students' health and access to quality healthcare," said Evelyn Henry, HISD manager of health and medical services. "No longer will we have kids not coming to school because they're sick and don't have a source of health care. We also want parents to be aware of the benefits available for their children and how to access them. We can provide this assistance in the safe environment of our schools."

Barbara Best, Texas Executive Director of the Children's Defense Fund, said, "The 100% Campaign will benefit Houston children and local taxpayers. Uninsured children receive care in local emergency rooms, at a staggering cost to local taxpayers. Enrolling children in the CHIP program will reduce Houston's uninsured population and will ensure that children receive care in doctors' offices rather than costly emergency rooms. The 100% Campaign is a win-win for Houston children and local taxpayers."

*(For more information, contact the HISD Press Office at 713-556-6393)*