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## HISD AWARDS TOP BONUS TO SAAVEDRA

■ District's performance-pay amounts range from \$75,000 down to nothing

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Houston schools Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra pocketed nearly all of his performance bonus this year, earning \$75,000 of a potential \$80,000.

The bonus, based mostly on

student test scores, comes on top of Saavedra's annual \$302,000 salary. Add in other perks, such as his car allowance, and his total deal lands in the \$450,000 neighborhood.

While Saavedra earned the biggest bonus in the district, a list released Wednesday reveals how each of his teachers, principals and other employees fared in the \$25 million performance-pay program, revised and expanded since last year's controversial rollout.

HISD officials provided the Houston Chronicle with the individual bonus amounts after the Texas Attorney General's Office ordered the district to release similar data.

School board president Harvin Moore said Saavedra, who became superintendent of the state's largest district in 2004, deserved the extra money this year, as did the teachers and other employees.

"This was a year in which lots of schools went up in their ratings, and we think we did a pretty good job," Moore said.

The top-earning principal came from Wainwright Elementary. Of the 251 principals listed, 19 received no bonus, while more than 100 took

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## BONUSES: Formula based on whether students do better than expected

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About 77 percent of non-administrative employees got some money this year, with payouts to teachers ranging from \$7,865 to zilch. A third-grade teacher at Wainwright topped

the list, while hundreds of art, music and other elective teachers fell toward the bottom because they weren't eligible for as much money. Teachers of core academic subjects such as language arts and science have the potential to earn the most.

Put simply, the complex bonus formula aims to reward teachers whose students grow academically, whether or not they pass the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills or the national Stanford exam. The formula looks at whether students perform better than expected, based on their own scores in past years.

David Schellberg, a social studies teacher at Burbank Middle School, was one of the top bonus recipients this year, earning \$7,590. Under last year's formula, he got nothing.

He can't explain why — he said he hasn't changed how he teaches — but he appreciates the extra cash.

"I don't have a philosophy of education that differs in any great way from my colleagues at Burbank," said Schellberg, who was in retail management before becoming a teacher around age 40. "I come to school everyday well prepared . . . I teach hard, and I expect my students to learn the material presented. I think that is the secret."

Saavedra earned nearly 94 percent of his potential bonus this year. Last year he received \$67,250, or about 84 percent of the maximum.

"Getting the entire bonus would not mean you eliminated

the entire achievement gap, and every school was exemplary. That was not required," Moore said. "It was to be on a course that moves us toward that direction. I don't think it was easy for him. I think he and everyone worked very hard this year."

For example, under Saavedra's leadership, the percentage of students who met the TAKS college-readiness standards increased this year over last year. In language arts, 39 percent met the more rigorous standard, compared with 23 percent last year. The district's 16-point gain surpassed the state's average gain by three points.

In math, 49 percent of students met the standard this year, bringing HISD closer to the state average of 54 percent.

The college-readiness scores were just one factor in Saavedra's bonus. The largest chunk was based on how teachers fared under their bonus system, dubbed *Aspire*.

The superintendent also got extra bucks for campuses that received or maintained the state's top academic ratings and lost money for those rated "academically unacceptable."

Despite academic gains this year, Saavedra had some trouble spots, with voters only narrowly approving an \$805

### BONUS BREAKDOWN

Bonuses awarded earlier this year to Houston ISD administrators, teachers and other employees ranged from \$75,000 to nothing. Here's a look at how many employees fell into each dollar range:

Dollar range	Number of employees
\$75,000	1
\$28,140	1
\$15,000- \$21,575	7
\$10,000- \$14,999	22
\$8,000- \$9,999	37
\$7,000- \$7,999	150
\$6,000- \$6,999	605
\$5,000- \$5,999	389
\$4,000- \$4,999	869
\$3,000- \$3,999	1,155
\$2,000- \$2,999	1,339
\$1,000- \$1,999	3,242
\$41- \$999	5,305
\$0	3,765

Source: HISD CHRONICLE

million bond package in November. Several leaders in the black community blasted him for not seeking public input in developing the proposal. Bonus criteria include only academic measures, however, not other factors such as communication skills or financial efficiency.

As chief of one of the largest districts in the country, Saavedra oversees a \$1.5 billion budget, about 30,000 employees and 200,000 students.

The superintendent in the much-larger Los Angeles school district, which has more than 694,000 students, earns a smaller base salary of \$300,000 and no performance bonus, but he gets other perks such as a housing allowance.

Locally, Fort Bend Superintendent Timothy Jenney, who oversees about 68,000 students, earns a base salary of \$247,800, plus a potential \$60,000 performance bonus.

HISD's chief academic officer, Karen Garza, earned a bonus of \$28,140. Her award is directly tied to Saavedra's, so she earned the same percentage of her maximum award that he did.

"I'm very pleased with the progress the district has made over the last three years, and I haven't singlehandedly done that," said Garza, whose base salary is \$193,780. "There's a lot of good work happening in this district, and I think the gains we've seen in student achievement are just beginning."

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