

Houston Independent School District's 2024 Bond Proposal

Key Takeaways

Houston Independent School District (HISD)'s 2024 bond proposal includes a combination of districtwide investments to address challenges across all schools, and targeted major investments for schools with the greatest needs.

- Districtwide investments, which would benefit most or all schools, include HVAC upgrades, lead abatement, and technology improvements.
- The bond proposal also invests in renovating an existing Career and Technical Education (CTE) center and building three more, which prepare students for specific careers such as health science and information technology.
- In addition to the districtwide investments, 43 campuses would also receive significant investments for major renovations or rebuilds.

HISD has not passed a bond proposal since 2012 and has not funded large-scale improvements to its elementary and middle schools since 2007, increasing its maintenance spending and negatively impacting students due to the lack of funding for facilities improvements.

The district has planned how to navigate major challenges for its bond proposal such as declining enrollment and ensuring accountability.

- Co-locations, which move multiple schools to a single physical location while maintaining separate facilities for each alongside their identities and student bodies, allow the district to more affordably address the major facilities needs of multiple schools.
- HISD has made clear commitments by putting forward specific bond language and developed additional guardrails including an oversight committee to support accountability and performance.

Essential Points

Why is HISD putting a bond proposal forward, and how did they decide what projects to include?

- HISD has not passed a bond since 2012, leaving many of the district’s facilities in poor condition and negatively impacting both students and the district’s finances.
- To address that issue, HISD is putting forward a 2024 bond proposal that prioritizes needed districtwide investments in campus infrastructure, programs, and technology, and then allocates the remaining funding to major improvements for the schools in greatest need.

School districts in Texas typically issue a bond about every 5 years, but HISD has not issued a bond since 2012.

The lack of a bond has left HISD with many schools that are in poor condition, creating two key challenges:

- Aging infrastructure that creates a challenging environment for students to learn in^{2 3}
- Pressure on HISD’s operating budget because it must pay to repair and maintain aging infrastructure³

Additionally, the 2012 bond focused on high schools, which means that HISD’s elementary and middle schools have not received significant investments since the 2007 bond.^{4 5}

How do peer districts’ bond funding compare with HISD’s?

Peer districts have recently raised significantly more money per student from bonds. The median of seven peer districts identified by HISD (including Dallas ISD) raised \$57,268 per student through bonds from 1992 to 2024 while HISD raised \$22,813 per student over the same period.²

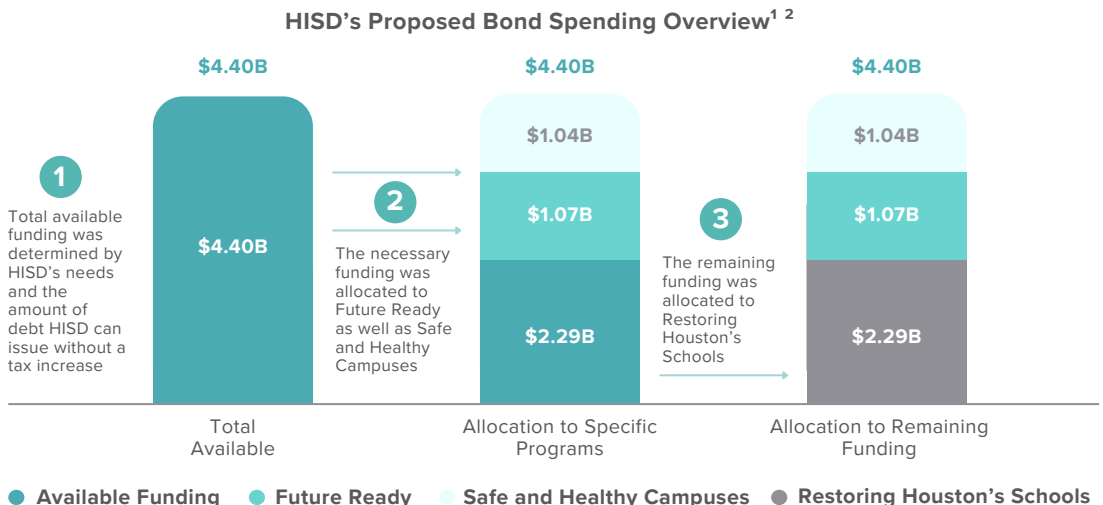
How did HISD decide what to include in their bond proposal?

To decide the size of its bond proposal, HISD performed an internal analysis and worked with external experts to determine the bond amount that meets as many of the district’s needs as possible without raising taxes, which is \$4.4 billion.⁶ While the district identified more than \$10 billion in needs, HISD prioritized improvements and established a plan that remains within the \$4.4 billion total.⁷ **The district divided its needs into three major categories:**

<p>Safe and Healthy Campuses:</p> <p>Improving HVAC systems, lead remediation, and meeting state requirements for campus security</p>	<p>Future Ready:</p> <p>Investing in Pre-K, Career and Technical Education (CTE), and technology</p>	<p>Restoring Houston’s Schools:</p> <p>Modernization, renovation, and rebuilds of individual schools with the greatest needs</p>
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HISD started by determining the amount of funding needed for Safe and Healthy Campuses and Future Ready (\$1.04B and \$1.07B respectively), and then allocated the remaining amount (\$2.29B) to Restoring Houston’s Schools.⁸

Safe and Healthy Campuses and Future Ready would provide improvements districtwide, while Restoring Houston’s schools would provide targeted support to high-need schools.⁸



Data Sources

1: [Houston Landing](#), “HISD might ask taxpayers to back a multibillion-dollar bond”, 2: [HISD](#), “Prospective Bond Board Workshop”, 3: See [Houston Landing](#), “Most HISD campuses had heating issues during January freeze”, 4: [HISD](#), “2007 Bond Projects”, 5: [HISD](#), “Building Programs Overview”, 6: [HISD](#), “Special Meeting Presentation Materials for 6.27.24”, 7: [Houston Public Media](#), “Houston ISD board of managers set to vote on historic bond proposal”, 8: [HISD](#), “Board Workshop on Prospective Bond”

Essential Points

What are the projects that HISD is proposing in the bond?

- The proposed districtwide investments, which are around half the bond total, would address districtwide needs such as bringing the district in compliance with the state’s security standards and improving the district’s HVAC systems.
- The remaining funding is planned to enable rebuilding, renovation, and expansion of 43 campuses that HISD has identified as having the greatest needs.

Within HISD’s three overarching categories of investment (Safe and Healthy Campuses, Future Ready, and Restoring Houston’s Schools), the district is proposing specific projects.⁹

Safe and Healthy Campuses consists of district-wide investments in security upgrades (supporting 98% of schools), HVAC improvements (70% of schools), and lead abatement (50% of schools).⁹

These investments would allow HISD to secure campuses by using a single point of entry, test school environments to identify any hazards to students, remove lead from the district’s schools, and update HVAC systems to help students learn in comfortable temperatures districtwide.¹¹

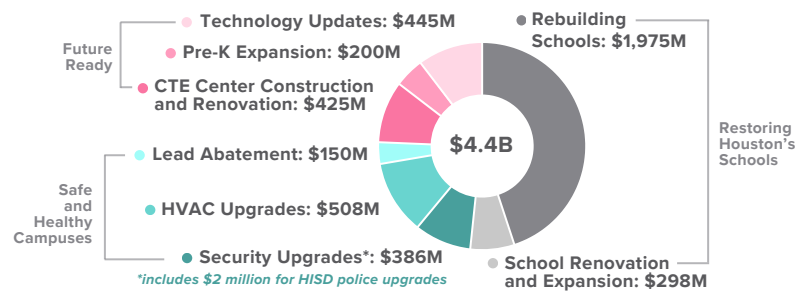
The other category of district-wide investments is Future Ready. Around 40% of the Future Ready funding is planned to support career and technical education (CTE) by opening new CTE centers and renovating an existing career center to prepare students for professions such as health science and information technology.^{9 12 13}

According to the U.S. Department of Education, students who earned multiple credits within a single CTE course of study were more likely to graduate high school and were more likely both to be employed and have higher earnings eight years after their expected graduation date.¹²

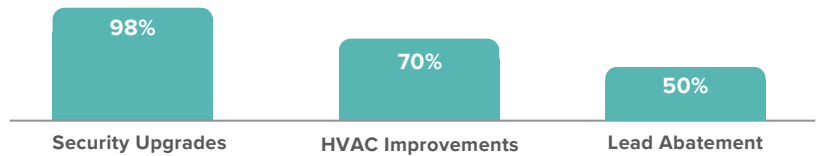
Other planned Future Ready investments include expanding pre-K programs and upgrades to technology across HISD.⁹ Specific planned technology improvements include adding interactive displays to every classroom, cybersecurity improvements, upgrades to district infrastructure to enable reliable internet access, enhanced physical security, and more efficient administrative and academic operations.¹⁰

The final major category of spending that HISD is planning is Restoring Houston’s Schools, which consists of targeted investments to perform renovation, expansion, or rebuilding of 43 campuses.^{2 8} As HISD’s 2012 bond primarily focused on improvements to high schools, Restoring Houston’s Schools focuses on necessary improvements to the district’s elementary and middle schools.^{2 5}

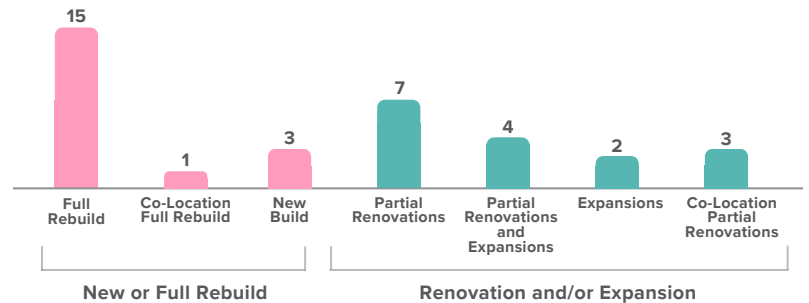
HISD’s Proposed Bond Spending Overview^{9 10}



Safe and Healthy Campuses: Portion of Schools Receiving Improvements⁹



Renovating Houston’s Schools: Major Renovation Categories⁸



How did HISD decide which schools to focus on for Restoring Houston’s Schools? HISD prioritized schools to invest in using a combination of their condition (measured using a facilities condition index), their enrollment compared to their capacity, and their location.⁸

Specific investments were then targeted based on those factors. For example, high enrollment schools with major facilities needs might be proposed for rebuilding, while under-enrolled schools with major facilities needs might become part of a co-location, relocating schools to a common location to allow them all to benefit from improvements.⁸

Data Sources

2: HISD, “Prospective Bond Board Workshop”, 5: HISD, “Building Programs Overview”, 9: HISD, “HISD 2024 Bond Proposal”, 10: HISD, “CAC Report Questions”, 11: HISD, “HISD Bond 2024”, 12: U.S. Department of Education, “Bridging the Skills Gap: Career and Technical Education in High School”, 13: HISD, “CTE Programs of Study”

Essential Points

What are some specific challenges HISD must navigate throughout the bond process?

- HISD’s bond proposal navigates its declining enrollment by co-locating some schools, moving them to a common location to save money while maintaining independent facilities, student bodies, and identities for each.
- The district plans to ensure accountability through a combination of clear plans and an established oversight committee.

Two specific challenges that HISD must contend with throughout the process of authorizing, issuing, and utilizing bonds are navigating the district’s declining enrollment, and ensuring accountability as bond funds are used.

How does HISD’s bond proposal navigate the district’s declining enrollment?

Many of HISD’s facilities needs are for schools with declining enrollment.⁹ This creates a challenge for the district, as it must navigate how to help students who happen to be in schools with declining enrollment while being a good steward of limited resources. **That leaves the district with a few options:**

Do not perform major repairs for schools with declining enrollment

Repair and replace schools regardless of enrollment

Co-locate schools with declining enrollment

What is an example of a proposed co-location?

An example of a proposed co-location is Franklin Elementary School and Edison Middle School.²

HISD is proposing co-locating them because each has facilities beyond normal repair and declining enrollment, and they are located 0.2 miles apart.² Co-locating the schools would allow HISD to provide both with new facilities in a more affordable and efficient manner.²

To avoid closing any schools, alleviate major facilities issues for as many students as possible, and responsibly use its limited resources, HISD is focusing on co-locations.¹⁴

Co-location allows HISD to simultaneously spend bond funds efficiently while keeping school communities intact by locating schools on a common site or within a shared building.² That saves HISD money on school construction and renovation by reducing the campuses’ combined footprint, and reduces ongoing costs due to shared staffing and facilities without disrupting services to students.¹⁴

Nevertheless, school communities are kept intact through separate spaces for each school (for example, a separate wing for each if there is a shared building) with individual entrances and exists for each school.¹³ Co-location would not be a new tool for HISD – there are already ten instances of co-located schools in the district, and HISD included seven more in this bond proposal.¹⁴

How will HISD ensure accountability throughout the bond process?

There are **two key mechanisms** through which HISD will ensure proper and transparent spending of money raised through the bond process:

The Election Order

The election order passed by HISD’s board, which is what sends the bond to voters, includes specific language about how the bond money will be spent. It includes a list of schools in which investments will be made and outlines the specific investments (e.g., HVAC improvements or lead abatement) that are planned for them.¹⁵

HISD is not required to provide that level of detail but is choosing to do so.¹⁰ As a result, the district is only able to spend bond money on those projects.¹⁰

The Bond Oversight Committee

HISD is creating a bond oversight committee, which would periodically meet with the district administration’s bond team to review the district’s progress towards meeting the bond’s goals.¹⁰ The district’s plan is to launch the bond oversight committee in September, prior to the bond election.²

The charter for the bond oversight committee has already been published and contains measures to keep members independent of district administration such as making appointments last for the entire implementation of the bond, disqualifying district staff and contractors, and preventing members from receiving compensation from the district.¹⁶