

## CISD applies for merit-pay funding

The Conroe Independent School District is applying for grant funds to award merit pay to teachers while hoping to avoid the controversy the Houston ISD experienced when it implemented a similar program.

By **Kassia Micek, Courier staff**

The CISD Board of Trustees unanimously approved the application for the District Awards for Teachers Excellence grant, which would bring a minimum of \$2 million annually for three years to CISD teachers in incentive pay.

"Essentially, this grant is intended to help districts start their own award program," CISD Associate Superintendent Chris Hines said about targeting the most in-need campuses to improve teacher quality.

Awards can be given to the entire district or target specific campuses.

"We are recommending that we target specific campuses based on performance data, similar to what the state does, and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students," Hines said.

The formulation of the grant will be decided at a later date, CISD Superintendent Don Stockton said. Administration will bring the item back before the board at the March board meeting.

"It's all about performance and rewarding that performance," board secretary John Husbands said.

However, several board members raised questions on what incentive pay would do for morale across the district, which is currently very high, board members agreed.

"I think it's a valid question whether an award program will create competition or have a negative impact," Hines said. "We have to select certain schools based on criteria."

When the Houston ISD approved an incentive program in January 2006 it was met with controversy. However, the [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#), a non-profit, non-partisan research institute, reported in April that retention in HISD is up and absenteeism is down following the initiation of the program.

Nineteen fewer teachers left HISD in 2006 than in 2005, before the program took effect, and 25 percent fewer new teachers left the district in 2006, according to the TPPF.

HISD formed a teacher advisory committee to meet annually to review the program "to make sure it is doing what we wanted it to do," said Carla Stevens, CISD associate superintendent of research and accountability.

"Based on some advice from that...we made some changes," Stevens said, adding the changes did not "water down" the 100 percent data-driven performance pay program.

The HISD gave out \$15 million in merit pay in 2006-07, Stevens said.

Through the DATE grant program, CISD must also provide matching funds of \$300,891.75 in year one, \$501,486.25 in year two and \$702,080.75 in year three. However, the district can count its existing teacher induction program expenses and stipends it pays for master's and doctorate degrees and bilingual certifications toward the required in-kind contribution, Hines said.

At least 60 percent of the total grant must go toward classroom teachers who positively impact student achievement, with the remaining 40 percent going toward a variety of activities.

"I think we need to do anything we can to get teachers to go to low-performing schools," board first vice president Mel Brown said, "and give those students a chance to exceed in life after school."