

Houston School District Plans Takeover of Student Advocacy Group

What is going on?

The school board of Houston ISD, the largest school district in Texas, is planning to “dissolve” the student-run, student-led advocacy group (the HISD Student Congress) to replace it with a “district-sanctioned vehicle” for student voices that is “under the direction” of administrators. See the board resolution [here](#). (Original source is [here](#)). The board vote occurs on Thursday, Feb. 11, but the agenda will be voted upon and set this upcoming Thursday, Feb. 4.

What is the HISD Student Congress?

StuCon is a student-run, student-led organization [founded by two dozen high school students in 2014](#). It has been continuously running as the oldest student voice group in Texas. Over the years, StuCon members have submitted an [amicus brief to the Texas Supreme Court](#) on a school finance case, [proposed legislation in the Texas legislature](#) to require student input in curriculum changes, [participated in a superintendent search](#), [founded a local civics education collective](#), and [organized a school reopening survey](#) that gathered nearly 3,000 student responses, among other things.

What has been the relationship between StuCon and HISD?

StuCon is incorporated within HISD, which operates its budget and is supposed to provide staffing support. But over the years, HISD has consistently undermined and stonewalled the student group. Neither the school board nor the administration has been responsive to requests to get help with recruitment. StuCon bounced between over a half dozen advisors within the district for the last several years. StuCon has been stonewalled from offering input in district decision-making. Most egregiously, StuCon hasn’t been able to access its own bank account for two years now.

Why are they taking over?

HISD is not interested in genuine student voice. This past July, StuCon organized a school reopening survey that went viral and had nearly 3,000 student responses ([CBS News](#)). HISD proactively reached out to StuCon– for the first time in months – to try to get them to “communicate” with them before talking to the press. After years of being stonewalled, it took national press attention to get HISD to pay attention to students.

Now, HISD apparently wants student voice - but only in a way that is highly restricted, “district-sanctioned”, and “under the direction” of the administration. In other words, they want quiet students who won’t solicit press attention or air the district’s problems.

Did HISD give StuCon a heads up?

No. Not one board member or district staff member has reached out to StuCon yet. This, despite StuCon's repeated communications to the board over the past few months. This, despite StuCon's seven year working relationship with HISD – longer than any current board member has served.

What has StuCon been doing in the meantime?

A lot! This fall, StuCon alumni came together to revamp the organization in partnership with current students for the years ahead. [All five former speakers of the congress \(high school grads from the classes of 2015 to 2019\) wrote to the school board and senior-level district staff in September](#) announcing plans to steward the organization, redraft the constitution, raise capital, build new student membership, establish alumni support, and more. StuCon alumni have been fulfilling the role that HISD never did. Much of this was done in partnership with the [Institute of Engagement](#), a local Houston education collective founded by StuCon alumni that has received hundreds of thousands in grant money to pursue youth civic action projects in the city.

School board and staff largely ignored the email. If the board votes to "dissolve" the organization, then StuCon will proudly go independent and continue the fight to ensure equity, justice, and representation for all of Houston's forgotten young people.

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For more information, or to speak with students directly, please contact Amy Fan, who is the alumni advisor to StuCon, at 832 373 0778 or amy@iehouston.org.