



## Widening Love's Circle

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### **Position of the Board of Directors of the First Unitarian Universalist Church on the 2024 Houston Independent School District Bond Initiative September 18, 2024**

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston stands in solidarity with those opposing the issuance of \$4.4 billion in bonds under the current HISD administration (1). While we acknowledge the need for infrastructure and facilities repair and upgrades in HISD schools, and ordinarily strongly support school bonds, we cannot do so as long as Mike Miles is superintendent.

Mr. Miles has implemented drastic changes in curriculum and instruction throughout the district and has created a work environment that is so hostile that over 40% of teachers and 50% of principals left or were forced out of the district in a single year (2). Students, parents, and school counselors report that the hostility has spilled over onto students, with rates of student referrals for mental health support and physical symptoms of emotional stress skyrocketing. Furthermore, Mr. Miles has removed libraries and librarians from almost all of the schools in the district, leaving them only in the most wealthy neighborhoods' schools, while depriving access to the children and families most in need of libraries (3).

Our faith calls on us to side with love, to work to uphold the worth and dignity of every individual, work to dismantle racism, support the democratic process, and respect the interdependence of all. Mr. Miles has implemented a system that directly contradicts these values. In his first year as superintendent of HISD, Miles has wasted district funds on unnecessary and redundant equipment purchases (4), refused to provide an alternative budget when it was requested by the Board of Managers, increased a \$200M deficit to \$450M (5), and come under investigation for sending tax dollars from Texas to bail out his failing charter school company in Colorado (6).

We therefore have no faith that the bond funds would be managed responsibly under Miles.

In addition to our lack of trust in the current administration, we also disagree with many of the proposed use of bond funds, including money for lead remediation at seven campuses that will be closed, closing schools that are in historically underfunded Black and Brown communities through forced "co-location," (7) and inflated costs per building compared to expert projections. It is clear that the accounting methods used to create the proposal were either substandard or deliberately misleading, and that the planned use of bond funds will not benefit the schools

and communities most in need, but will perpetuate the historical underfunding and disregard for them.

The hostile state takeover of HISD was undemocratic, politically motivated and harmful. Appointing an unelected Board of Managers who do not answer to the people violates the principle of no taxation without representation. Providing the Miles administration with \$4.4 billion in taxpayer funded bond money is not consistent with our Unitarian Universalist values, particularly Equity, Justice, and Generosity.

#### References:

1. Zuvanich A. [Texas Gulf Coast Area Labor Federation opposes Houston ISD's \\$4.4 billion bond proposal](#). Houston Public Media. 6 September 2024.
2. Mizan N and Goodwin A. [HISD sees 'unprecedented' departures, with more than 4,000 employees leaving the district in June](#). *Houston Chronicle*. 5 August 2024.
3. Zuvanich A. [City leaders criticize Houston ISD superintendent Mike Miles over plans for school libraries](#). Houston Public Media. 26 July 2024.
4. Houston Education Association: [https://x.com/houston\\_tsta/status/1797615628163162606](https://x.com/houston_tsta/status/1797615628163162606)
5. Ozebek K and Rafique S. [HISD superintendent talks budget cuts, layoffs in one-on-one with 13 Investigates](#). ABC 13 News. 20 May 2024.
6. Banks N. [Houston ISD superintendent accused of funneling tax dollars out of state](#). The Texas Tribune. 14 May 2024.
7. Lehrer-Small, A. [What's in Houston ISD's \\$4.4 billion bond plan? Here are 5 key takeaways](#). Houston Landing. 7 June 2024.