

New Vision High School Press Conference
June 18, 2008

Good afternoon. This is a historic day for the Austin Independent School District and for the East Austin community. This morning Texas Education Commissioner Robert Scott has given me a letter “granting the district’s request to repurpose the facility, subject to continuing oversight.”

There will be high school on this campus for this community this fall!

On behalf of our district, I want to thank the Commissioner for his leadership and for working with us to achieve a result that promises great results for the children of this community. We are all saddened that state law required the Texas Education Agency to close Johnston High School due to insufficient progress on the TAKS test. But the Commissioner is now giving us the opportunity to build on the rich Johnston legacy by establishing totally new models for high school education on this campus that will propel the students on this campus into the forefront of 21st Century education.

This great opportunity would not have happened without the strong support of this community and its willingness to support major changes on this campus. It would not have happened without the determination by our school board that high school education would continue on this campus. It would not have happened without the great progress achieved by Johnston’s students and teachers this past year, showing that they have what it takes for new models on this campus to be extraordinarily successful.

And I particularly want to thank two people who made this day possible. Without their leadership, their partnership and their dedication to this community, we would not be standing here today, celebrating a new vision for high school in East Austin. AISD Trustee Sam Guzman, representing this community, never wavered in his determination that there would be high school on this campus for this community. Never. And your State Senator Kirk Watson has been fighting for this school and this community for months. He has been our leader in working with the state to achieve this goal.

Commissioner Robert Scott is letting us move forward because, as he states in his letter to the district, the proposal we submitted “has significant potential.” This is a proposal that was worked out with the community. It calls for one new high school this year and a second new high school on this campus beginning in 2009-10. We have been talking with this community about partnering with Austin Community College and the New Tech High model on this campus. Final decisions on these models will be made with the community and by our school board in the next few months. I can promise you this--the new high school that will open here in August is designed to prepare all its students for college and good careers. It will provide extra support for students. It will have college preparatory classes. It will have master teachers. Our goal is for all our seniors in the Class of 2009 to be graduating on time, well-prepared for college and enrolled in college

for the fall and for all our other students to be well prepared for the college preparatory curriculum our two new high schools on this campus will offer the following year.

There are several state requirements that we should all be aware of in opening these new schools:

1. The new high schools will be schools of choice open to all students in the district with transportation provided. If your child is a 9th grader in the attendance zone or has been a student at Johnston and intends to be a student at this new high school, your child must choose to go here next year. No one will be automatically enrolled here because you live in the attendance zone. The district will be sending all families previously enrolled in Johnston choice letters in which they can choose to go to this new school or to any other school in the district. The district will also begin a recruitment campaign across the district for those students wanting to attend the two new high schools on this campus.
2. There will be new names for the two new schools on this campus. We have begun working with the community on a name for the new school opening this August. The community is providing recommendations for a board decision in the coming months.
3. The school can only keep 25 percent of its previous teaching staff. We are in the process of hiring that group and helping the other teachers find jobs in the district. Teachers on this campus next year will receive substantial stipends. We are also providing additional stipends to Master Teachers, who have demonstrated a great deal of experience and success teaching in urban schools, and who are applying from within our district and across the country to lead departments in this school.
4. The International High School for recent immigrant students will continue on this campus.
5. The state-appointed management team will continue to oversee the implementation of the repurposing plan at the two new high schools.

Some of that sounds a little difficult, but we can do it. This community has said for the past few years that it wants change on this campus. This may not have been the course we would have chosen to arrive here, but we all should recognize that now we have an exciting opportunity for important change for the students of East Austin. This campus can be and will be an education leader for our state. Sometimes opportunity is born out of crisis. With the support of this community and our partners, we will see great things on this campus in the years to come.