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# It Can Happen Here: How Grassroots Organizing Is Writing (& Winning) a New School Board Playbook in Texas

# Today's Panel

SEPTEMBER 26-27, 2026, HOUSTON, TEXAS

2026 NPE/NPE ACTION CONFERENCE

## It Can Happen Here: How Grassroots Organizing Is Writing (and Winning) a New School Board Playbook in Texas



**Felicity Pereyra**

BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEMBER, HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



**Maria Benzon**

BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEMBER, HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



**Nicole Hill**

DIGITAL STRATEGIST, ONLINE TO OFFLINE STRATEGY GROUP



**Lesley Guilmart**

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, CYPRESS FAIRBANKS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



**Nikki Cowart**

LOCAL PRESIDENT, CY-FAIR AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

PUBLIC SCHOOLS BUILD DEMOCRACY

SCAN TO REGISTER!

# The Problem: Cy-Fair ISD

Cy-Fair AFT
May 23, 2025 ·

We've been fighting for funding for CFISD schools. What about our school board trustees and superintendent? Are they in the right room?




## Cy-Fair ISD's school board removed chapters in books on climate change, vaccines, and diversity despite state approval




## Cy-Fair ISD elementary student struck by vehicle, parent advocates for safety measures

By Jonathan Mejia | FOX 26 Houston | Cypress | **Updated** November 16, 2024 11:35 AM CST | **Published** November 15, 2024 9:02 PM CST

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# The Work




**June 14, 2025: Candidate slate + coalition launch**

- Weekly coalition block-walks
- Tuesday night phone-banks at union hall
- AFT retiree text-banks
- Slate discussions and events
- Digital strategy with organic and paid social media
- Student, educator, & candidate canvasses

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# The Results



- All three endorsed candidates won election – **each by 10+ points over their opponents**.
- Cy-Fair AFT **membership grew by 14.5%** over the school year.
- Diverse community coalition “built” the board they wanted and, in the process, fostered genuine connections & buy-in
- 321 people signed up for Building Our Board events, with 131 confirmed attendees & 100% positive reviews.

# The Problem: Houston ISD

PUBLIC SCHOOL STATE TAKEOVERS

## High costs, dwindling enrollment: Is Houston ISD's playbook under takeover sustainable?

> The high price tag, coupled with less state funding from students leaving the district, raises questions about whether the academic improvements are sustainable in the long run and whether other districts can afford to replicate it.

BY SNEHA DEY AND ROB REID
SEPT. 21, 2026, 5:00 A.M. CENTRAL

## HISD leader Mike Miles' annual salary raised to $462,000 by board

Happy Father's Day, Mike.

By Allyson Ackerman, *News Editor*
June 15, 2025




HOUSTONCHRONICLE.COM
**HISD will use OpenAI's ChatGPT for teachers for special education compliance**



HOUSTONCHRONICLE.COM
**'I feel like a spy.' In HISD, teachers say reading books is a secret plot**



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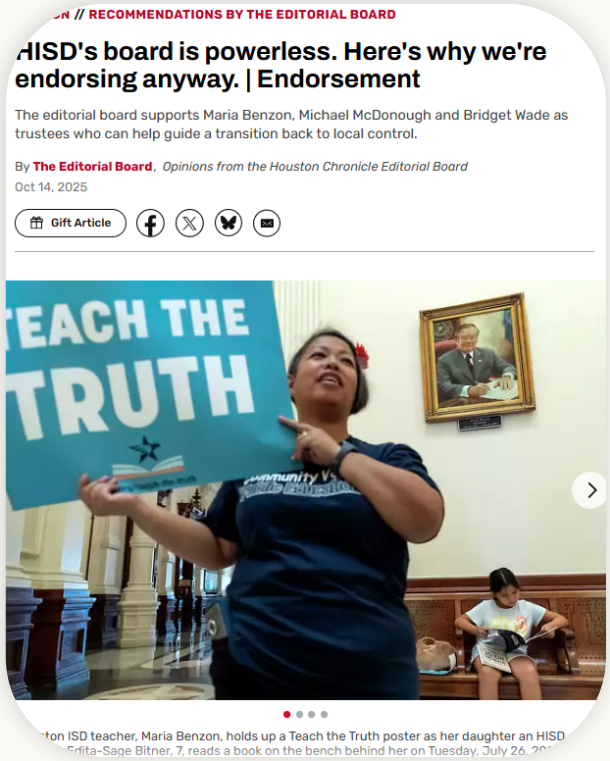
# The Work




- Weekly meetings as a slate
  - group goals for fundraising
  - discuss upcoming civic events
  - reflect on messaging
  - anticipate concerns (i.e., candidate confusion)
- Cost sharing
- Even though school board races are non-partisan, Harris County Dems endorsed/supported candidates (slate) for the first time

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# The Results




- Two out of four slate candidates won election (and **by 20+ points over their opponents**). Two additional slate candidates ran unopposed.
- Big turnout for a non-primary, general election. **Out of 49,202 voters in these races, 27,668 voted for slate candidates (56%)**.
- Lots of talk in the community about exercising their voice with their vote, **even when the elected positions won't have a vote immediately.**
- Voters chose educators (Michael and Maria).

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# Takeaway #1

## Better together, stronger together

Slides & resources

https://bit.ly/NPE2026

**Whether you are a candidate, a campaign manager, a parent, or an educator – you can't do this on your own.**

Both campaigns ran and operated as a slate, supporting each other on the campaign trail.

They mapped and charted their communities, identifying their allies and supporters and leaning on them.

As people, they also learned to lean on their own personal support networks when the going got tough.

# Takeaway #2

## Own your values

Slides & resources

https://bit.ly/NPE2026

**The easiest message to stick to is the one you believe in.**

Voters can sense authenticity – in person and online.

Lead with your values, the ones you share with your community's voters.

That also means speaking in plain language about why you're running, what the current problems are, and what solutions you want to work toward.

Give voters credit and explain "hard" things to them.

# Takeaway #3

## Do you want to be right, or do you want to win?




Slides & resources

https://bit.ly/NPE2026

**Center your desired outcome and *not* your personal ego and preferences.**

Candidates: You need to be open to new information and flexible about your approach if you're going to win. But that doesn't mean compromising your core values.

In coalition work: No permanent friends, no permanent enemies. Everyone's invited to the table.

# Takeaway #4

## Start now




Slides & resources

https://bit.ly/NPE2026

**You can't start too early if you're going to build the coalition you need to win.**

If you're a potential candidate, ID the big stakeholders in your community and having real conversations about your candidacy and their support.

Start talking to previous candidates – people who've done the same job, gone through the same steps.

If you're in an educators' union or a parent group, bring together coalition partners and decision-makers to have the “hard” conversations & get on the same page.