

Ysleta Independent School District, Texas

District Profile*:

Rank among U.S. school districts (by size):	113
Number of schools:	61
Number of students:	44,729
Number of teachers:	3,075
Per pupil expenditures**:	\$7,508

Superintendent: Hector Montenegro was superintendent of Ysleta Independent School District (YISD) from 2003-2008. He began his career in education in 1975 and held positions including teacher, assistant principal, principal and assistant superintendent. Prior to Montenegro's role as superintendent in YISD, he was superintendent in San Marcos, near Austin. Roger Parks was interim superintendent from January 2008 to February 2009. He began his career in education in 1965 and served as superintendent of Gadsden School District before retiring in 2001. Michael Zolkoski was appointed superintendent of YISD in March 2009. Zolkoski has 39 years of experience in education as a teacher, assistant principal, principal and education consultant. Before his appointment in YISD, he was superintendent in Tulsa, and the Texas districts of Brownsville and Judson.

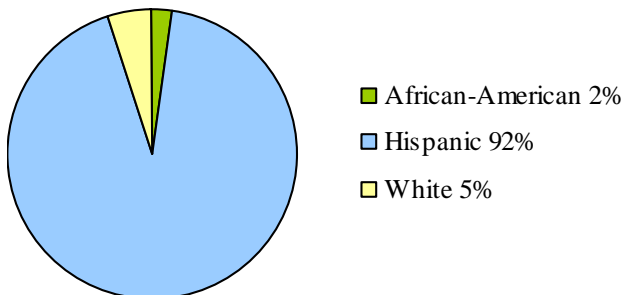
Governance: A seven-member board of trustees is elected from single-member districts for staggered three-year terms.

Teachers Unions: Texas is a non-union state.

Student Characteristics:

Percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school lunch:	81%
Percent of students designated as English language learners:	24%

Student Demographics:



*2009/10 data, unless noted otherwise

**Total expenditures per pupil in 2006-07. Source: Common Core of Data

Student Achievement

- In 2009, Ysleta *outperformed* other Texas districts that serve students with similar family incomes in reading and math at all school levels (elementary, middle and high school), according to The Broad Prize methodology.
- In 2009, Ysleta's Hispanic and low-income students *achieved higher average proficiency rates* than their counterparts statewide in reading and math at all school levels.
- In 2007 (the most recent year for which graduation data were available), Ysleta's average graduation rate for its Hispanic students was 70 percent, the *fifth-highest graduation rate for Hispanic students* among the 100 school districts eligible for The Broad Prize.
- In 2009, 88 percent of Ysleta's seniors participated in the SAT exam, the *highest participation rate* of the 100 districts eligible for The Broad Prize. In addition, 79 percent of Ysleta's Hispanic seniors participated in the SAT exam, the *highest participation rate for Hispanic students* of Broad Prize eligible districts.

High-Impact Factors Behind Improved Student Achievement

- **YISD has a cohesive and comprehensive system for assessing and reporting student performance.**

About five years ago, officials in the Ysleta Independent School District realized they needed a better system for reporting and analyzing student data. They sampled “packaged” data warehouse programs, but ultimately developed their own system. That work resulted in “DataMart”—a user-friendly and highly accessible database that allows educators in Ysleta to view information at the district, school, classroom, individual and subgroup levels.

Teachers are responsible for entering data on their students, and the site is refreshed twice a day. Teachers also provide suggestions on how to keep improving the system.

“This continues to grow as employees tell us what they need,” says Sharon Ninkovich, former director of technology information systems.

To keep parents apprised of how their children are performing, the system also has a component called “PowerParent” which allows parents to track their child’s attendance, class assignments, grades and course credits. Officials report that students themselves also routinely use the system to keep up with their grades.

- **YISD’s organizational culture is characterized by positive, collegial working relationships.**

Improvement throughout the Ysleta district has been driven in part by two philosophies, both of which have helped to create a more positive climate. In 2005, the district began embracing “fish!,” an organizational culture theory that was intended to improve attitudes in the workplace, but can also be applied to a school setting. The simple message—inspired by the fish market salesmen at the Seattle Pike Place Farmer’s Market—is “play, make their day, be there and choose your attitude.”

The district has also been inspired by author Alan M. Blankstein’s theory of “failure is not an option,” which led to a strong sense of urgency about raising student achievement and greater buy-in to the concept of professional learning communities.

In customer service surveys of school employees, the district’s leadership receives satisfaction levels in the 80 percent or higher range. Local school staff call the relationship between the district and the schools “supportive,” and several top administrators described the feeling toward working in the district as being “like a family.”

- **YISD has an effective support system for new staff.**

Teachers and principals who are new to the district are provided considerable training and support to ensure that they understand the district’s policies as well as its philosophies toward learning. For example, they participate in an extensive five-day orientation program and are assigned a mentor as part of the “supported teachers achieve results” program. Teacher mentors remain available to work with the new teachers for up to three years. And new principals receive mentoring for about one year.

In addition, principals attend leadership academies that cover topics like supervision, personnel evaluation and conducting effective walkthroughs. Staff members say they are encouraged to support each other.

- **YISD supports effective instruction.**

Since 2006, Ysleta leaders have increased the district’s emphasis on accountability, using data to make decisions, and making sure resources are supporting effective instruction. All budget requests have to include an explanation of how the expense is related to improving achievement. And resource allocations are regularly reviewed by the school board to ensure they are an effective use of funds. One school board member said the approach toward programs that aren’t working is to “fix it or use the funds elsewhere.”

Leaders also review instructional programs and recommend that those programs with a positive impact on student learning be replicated across the district. For example, when test scores increased after teachers from several schools attended a particular mathematics workshop, other schools were asked to send their teachers to the same training.

- **Professional development in YISD is driven by student achievement-related data and designed to improve teaching and learning.**

Student achievement scores in Ysleta are analyzed each year by campus improvement teams and district staff to determine each school’s strengths and areas of need. When schools have certain challenges in common—whether it’s a need for training on delivering interventions, monitoring progress from interventions, or helping students struggling with reading comprehension—district leaders and specialists design targeted professional development opportunities based specifically on needs shown by data.

Professional learning community meetings involving principals, instructional leaders, teachers and curriculum experts from a feeder pattern are held to share effective strategies for engaging students, improving teachers’ skills in using those strategies, and encouraging teachers to address content outside their specialty. Fine arts teachers, for example, received training on reinforcing vocabulary and math concepts in their work, especially in areas where students struggle. Professional learning community meetings are held at least once a week in schools and monthly across feeder patterns.

Improving teacher effectiveness in the district, however, does not come at the expense of classroom instruction. “We don’t do teacher pull-out during the school day,” says Pauline Dow, the district’s associate superintendent of academics.

Instead, the district has a “Holiday Exchange” policy, which serves as an incentive to encourage teachers to attend staff development programs during the summer. In exchange, they receive extra days off during semester breaks—days when students are not in attendance.