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| **As HISD Focuses on Health, Employees Embrace Incentives to Lose Weight**    When HISD is recognized by the Houston Business Journal this week as one of the area’s healthiest workplaces, you won’t find many district employees celebrating with cookies or doughnuts. Instead, you might be asked to step aside as a walking group makes its way through the halls of central office.  A new incentive program, the HealthyWage Challenge, is paying off – and paying out. More than 5,500 employees at central office and campuses across the district signed up for the program, which adds $40 a month to an employee’s paycheck if he or she loses 4 pounds or more. The challenge spans four months, and in the first month’s weigh-in, 2,023 had qualified for the bonus.    That collective 14-ton-loss will add up to $80,000 in employees’ paychecks next week.    “We are educators, and we have the power to influence the next generation,” said Brad Bailey, HISD’s general manager of benefits. “We can pass on our passion for health to our students and children, and serve as a role model for them.”    Many employees have formed teams and added exercise to the diet equation. It’s common these days to see professionally-dressed workers lace up athletic shoes during their lunchtime or breaks to take a few laps around the workplace.    Tenia Osayande’s Fantastic Team met the first month’s challenge, losing between four and eight pounds each, for a total of 31 pounds. Osayande and teammate Nathalie Cascante, who work in the district’s central office, have changed their eating habits dramatically.  Waffles, bacon, and eggs at breakfast have given way to high-protein, high-fiber choices such as oatmeal or egg whites. They have healthy and low-calorie snacks close by such as fruit, protein bars, and sugar-free candy. Lunch ranges from a salad to a sandwich to healthy microwaveable meals and includes a workout: Cascante and her walking partner walk for 30 minutes around the neighborhood nearly every day.  Bailey isn’t daunted at the prospect – if the challenge continues at this pace – of paying out more than $300,000 in rewards. The money is built into HISD’s health insurance internal service fund, and he said it’s a wise investment which minimizes employee claims for obesity-related health issues.    For the third year in a row, HISD has been named by Houston Business Journal as one of Houston’s Healthiest Employers. The winners will be announced Friday at a special luncheon at Weston Oaks Hotel and in a special edition of HBJ.    HISD encourages healthy living in a number of ways:  ·         Free Brown Bag Workshops that present strategies and resources to help employees address personal health, emotional health, and workplace issues  ·         Two free Health and Wellness Centers for employees who sign up for the district’s health insurance  ·         Supplemental Sick Leave Bank of personal  leave days given by employees who want to voluntarily participate in a plan to extend leave for employees who have serious illnesses  ·         Red Brick Health rewards employees with cash deposited into their paychecks. For example, using a pedometer to track activity can earn employees $1 a day if they log a certain number of steps. For completing a health assessment, one can earn $125. There are other ways to earn money as well.  ·         The Employee Assistance Plan provides free and confidential 24-hour support for all kinds of personal life challenges.  ***Photo cutline:*** *Administrative Services Manager Reba Jelks joins other employees in a weigh-in as part of the HealthyWage Challenge*. |

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