

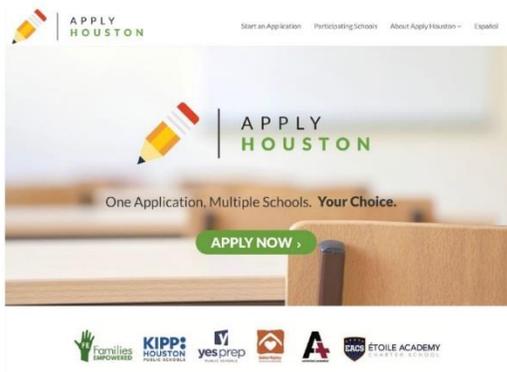
ApplyHouston: The First Application Season

Note: This is the second of a three-part series on our work on ApplyHouston, please [click here](#) for Part I

In Houston, there are over 100 charter school districts, each with their own application process and deadlines – some even have separate application processes for each campus. In addition, inter- and intra- district transfers, magnet schools, and private schools all have their own deadlines and processes. In other words: a chaotic system, favoring parents with the most time and resources.

*To address this inequity and level the playing field, Families Empowered acted as consensus builder, fundraiser, and project manager for ApplyHouston, a citywide application that allows families to apply simultaneously to more than 50 campuses within 5 public charter school networks. ApplyHouston saves parents time and frustration, making it easier for them to make deliberate and informed choices. The project took three years from idea to launch on November 1, 2017. **As of May 4, 2018, 26,679 families have submitted an application through ApplyHouston, an increase in applications submitted compared to last year.**¹*

Promoting ApplyHouston



A ground-breaking shared school application for the nation's fourth-largest city required a robust marketing and communications effort. Families Empowered collaborated with its school partners in this work, leading the effort with high-quality digital and printed collateral, an engaging mobile-friendly website to host the application, and a public relations campaign which earned several media appearances. To help parents with the new application process, especially for those with limited access to technology, Families Empowered's

bilingual staff worked hosted "Application Nights" events and two large school fairs.

Because Families Empowered was the project manager for ApplyHouston, and already has strong brand recognition and relationships with almost 50,000 families in Houston, there were some unique efficiencies: the total marketing budget for ApplyHouston² was under \$20,000, **compared to budgets nearing 5 to 8 times that amount in smaller cities** with similar projects such as Boston, Philadelphia, and Indianapolis.³

In fact, one of the things school partners seemed to particularly appreciate was the integration between Families Empowered's school enrollment support and ApplyHouston. For example:

¹ For networks which provided data to Families Empowered on the number of applications they received during the 2016-17 enrollment season (the vast majority of applications were from networks where Families Empowered has access to baseline data). The change from the baseline year was a **6% overall increase** in applications.

² Not counting what individual school networks spent on marketing

³ Based on interviews with leaders from those cities; Indianapolis launched the same year as ApplyHouston, Boston launched in 2016, Philadelphia's project has been around for six years and started as a school finder tool, added a shared application, and this year is integrating an enrollment function

“As a new school, ApplyHouston really helped us stretch our limited marketing dollars – we could track about half our initial applications to some connection with ApplyHouston or Families Empowered. The ApplyHouston was quick and user-friendly and love how integrated ApplyHouston was with Families Empowered support.”

-- Kayleigh Colombero, BES Fellow and Founder, Etoile Charter School

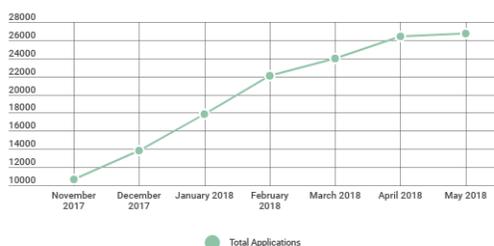
TROUBLESHOOTING

The initial launch of AppyHouston was generally smooth, but, as might be expected, there were a few technical snags in the first months, such as some parents having difficulty logging in. ApplyHouston’s developer, School Mint, was quite responsive in addressing and resolving these difficulties.

Upon reflection, some school partners wished they had spent more time coordinating their own individual marketing efforts with ApplyHouston, and taking better advantage of the opportunity for collaboration with other networks. In addition, some of the smaller and new school partners found that some families applied to their school without knowing much about it, but they did appreciate the opportunity to start a conversation with those parents. All school partners are signing on to use the system next year, so there will be another opportunity for collective planning and coordination.

RESULTS

ApplyHouston’s Cumulative Applications Submitted Over Time



Was it all worth it? The initial results speak for themselves—as of May 4, 2018 ApplyHouston received **26,679 applications in its first year**, an overall increase from the previous application season. To put this number in context, the Denver shared application and enrollment system, which has been around for seven years and currently includes over 200 schools, received 23,111 applications this past year.⁴ In other words – this

is phenomenal success for the project’s first year, and there is definitely room for growth in future years as more school partners join the project.

What Families Empowered is most proud to announce is that **4,460 parents (23%) applied to multiple schools, compared to around 6% in previous years**. The organization sees this as a sign that Houston parents are better able to navigate the system, and take advantage of choices that are available to them. In other words: **empowerment!**

⁴ Denver Public Schools, Denver Public Schools “Choice Analysis” Presentation; February 2018