



PRESS RELEASE

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What's New at HISD for the 2010–11 school year

Highlights Include a Longer School Year, the Apollo 20 Project, Improved Security, New Schools, and a New Leadership Structure for district schools

August 12, 2010 – More than 8,000 of HISD's more than 200,000 students will begin school a week early as the Houston Independent School District launches its Apollo 20 project at nine under-performing schools. The Apollo schools open on August 16, with the rest of HISD's schools opening on August 23. In addition, under the bond program, three schools have been renovated, students at Piney Point Elementary will return to a brand new school and safety has been enhanced with the addition of thousands of security cameras. The expansion of the breakfast in the classroom program continues and the nutrition of school meals has been improved. Here are more details on those items and other noteworthy highlights.

Longer School Year – Last year students attended school for 175 days. This year that has been expanded to 180 days. For the nine Apollo 20 schools, students will attend for 185 days. Apollo 20 schools start on August 16. The rest of HISD schools start on August 23. Research shows that more time on task results in significant academic gains.

Apollo 20 Schools - In a bold effort to improve the academic achievement of students, HISD is launching the Apollo 20 school transformation project for the 2010–2011 school year, beginning with nine under-performing schools. Eleven more schools will be added in the 2011–12 school year, for a total of 20. The Apollo 20 project will incorporate best practices from successful public and charter

schools across the nation and will serve as a model for the entire district. The program involves transformation strategies that include a longer school year, a longer school day, an effective principal and teachers in every school, high-dosage-tutoring in math (one tutor for every two students) for all 6th and 9th grade students, data-driven instruction and a culture of high expectations and no excuses. Dr. Roland Fryer, a Harvard economist, is acting as an advisor on the Apollo 20 project. His research on successful schools helped identify the strategies that will be used to transform the nine Apollo schools. [Click here for more information.](#)

Strategic Direction –HISD has developed a plan for transforming the district to align with the board’s vision and meet the needs of HISD’s students, parents, and the broader community. The purpose of this Strategic Direction is to describe as clearly as possible the major areas of focus for HISD over the next several years. Thousands of people within the community participated in the process, recognizing the stake that we all have in the success of the district. With their help, five core initiatives have been identified: 1) Effective Teacher in Every Classroom; 2) Effective Principal in Every School; 3) Rigorous Instructional Standards and Supports; 4) Data-Driven Accountability; and 5) Culture of Trust Through Action. [Click here for more information.](#)

Brand New Piney Point Elementary – For years much of Piney Point Elementary has been housed in temporary buildings because the school wasn’t large enough to handle the student population. That all changes in the 2010–11 school year, with the opening of the brand new Piney Point. It’s the first new school to be completed under the bond that voters passed in 2007. The school is designed to meet “green” standards under the LEED certification program. The new \$15 million school facility is 114,000 square feet and will accommodate 1,014 students, pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The new school was built on the same site (8921 Pagewood Drive, 77063) adjacent to the old school. That allowed school to continue, uninterrupted, in the old facility while the new one was being built. In addition, three bond renovation projects are nearly complete at the Rice School and Ashford and Bush elementary schools.

Thousands of Security Cameras Installed - Under the 2007 bond program, \$90 million was set aside for the installation of security cameras, fencing and security lighting. Closed Circuit TV (CCTV) systems were to be installed or upgraded at 189 campuses. By the end of August 2010, those new systems will be up and running at 175 campuses. Upgraded camera systems will be installed at 14 more campuses as part of bond renovation projects. HISD currently has 8,171 cameras. The cameras can be remotely monitored at the HISD Police Department.

Security Fencing - The next major safety and security bond project will be to install vinyl-coated chain link fencing and ornamental iron fencing at 144 campuses throughout the district. To date, 20 fencing projects have been completed. Some campuses received new fencing along the entire perimeter, while other campuses received fencing to replace damaged areas. The new fencing is provides security while being much more pleasing to the eye. HISD Superintendent Terry Grier ordered all razor wire to be removed district-wide. That task was completed earlier this year.

New Schools – The **Empowerment South Early College High School** was approved by the Board of Education in June to become HISD’s fifth Early College High School. The school will be housed in Jones High School and students will be bused to Houston Community College for the college portion of the program until a new facility can be constructed at or near an HCC campus. The school was previously called Empowerment College Preparatory Academy.

High School Ahead Academy is a new HISD charter school. Its mission is to prepare over-age middle school students for the transition into high school. The school opened in February and begins its first full school year in August.

New Leadership Structure - HISD’s five regional offices have been replaced by three school offices, one each for elementary, middle and high schools. The offices are each headed by a Chief Schools Officer. A total of 24 School Improvement Officers will work directly with schools to support and enhance the efforts to improve academics. This structure allows for more collaboration and sharing of best practices among HISD schools. The school offices also have nine parent liaisons.

New Principals - HISD will begin the school year with 47 new principals. Four of the vacancies are a result of principals being promoted to School Improvement Officers under the new school leadership structure and 28 of the new principals were promoted from within. The rest were recruited from outside the district.

New Teachers - About 800 new teachers are joining HISD this year. That’s fewer than in the past, indicating that more teachers are staying with HISD. Teachers that facilitate the highest levels of student academic growth are eligible for HISD’s ASPIRE Award program. In January, 2010, the ASPIRE program paid out nearly \$41 million in performance bonuses. The administration and the board of education are committed to continuing to offer performance pay to reward success in increasing student academic outcomes and to serve as a strategy to retain and

recruit top talent. ASPIRE stands for Accelerating Student Progress Increasing Results and Expectations.

Effective Teachers Initiative – When it comes to student achievement, teachers matter most. That is why one of the core initiatives in the district’s Strategic Direction is An Effective Teacher in Every Classroom. HISD is partnering with The New Teacher Project to improve the district’s teacher recruitment and selection policies and practices, to develop a more robust teacher appraisal system, create a comprehensive system for teacher professional development and design career pathways, opportunities and a compensation system for teachers during the five-year initiative.

Breakfast in the Classroom Program - HISD’s free breakfast in the classroom program, known as First Class Breakfast, will continue to expand. The program was phased in at 162 schools serving 100,000 students last year, making it one of the largest such programs in the country.

52 more schools will be added this year, bringing the number of students being served to approximately 117,000. Principals who already have the program report better attendance, better conduct and fewer visits to the nurse’s office.

More Nutritious Meals - HISD’s huge food production facility produces most of the menu items served at HISD schools. The facility allows more cooking from scratch, with little-to- no added preservatives and control over ingredients and nutrients such as salt, sugar, and fat. Many recent nutritional improvements have been made and the new 2010-2011 school year menus are even healthier. Processed foods are being replaced with made-from-scratch items whenever possible. Food services has been meeting with its parent and student advisory committee this past summer to ensure the student needs for both nutrition and taste are met. Their suggestions have been incorporated into the new menu and food services will continue to hold student and parent taste testing and focus groups throughout the school year.

K12RadioHouston – This summer, HISD along with RFC Media launched the nation’s first internet radio station built around the common interest of education. The station features rhythmic pop music and news items and announcements about the district and its schools. Plans are for the station to feature student reporters and other student generated content. The station can be launched from the HISD web site at www.houstonisd.org and a smart phone app is coming soon.

More Information - More information is available on the HISD website at www.houstonisd.org, where you can also sign up for regular updates from the district. Plus, the district is once again operating the “Back to School Hotline” to answer questions from parents about enrollment, new immunization requirements, transportation, etc. The hotline is opening earlier this year to accommodate the early start of the Apollo 20 schools. Parents can dial **713-556-8900** from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. for back-to-school information on August 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 23.

The **Houston Independent School District** is the largest school district in Texas and the seventh-largest in the United States with 297 schools and more than 200,000 students. The 301-square-mile district is one of the largest employers in the Houston metropolitan area with nearly 30,000 employees.

For more information, visit the HISD Web site at www.houstonisd.org.
