

Good Evening Pershing Community –

Never in my career did I think I'd be sitting at my computer at home to compose an email to my community to discuss our move from a traditional face-to-face teaching and learning model to a virtual teaching and learning model. In a matter of two weeks, we've gone from pushing our way through the Pershing hallways to clamoring to figure out how to make sense of not only what is going on in the world, but how we maintain, dare I say it, normalcy, for our school community.

COVID-19 has brought our nation to a standstill, and I know personally I am struggling with this new normal, although I would not say this is exactly normal. What I will tell you is that my focus has shifted, and I am charging full steam ahead in working with the Pershing faculty and staff in doing what is best for our Pershing Pandas!

First and foremost, we are partners in your child's education. We are a team; faculty, staff, students, and parents! We must not lose sight of that fact and we must continue doing our best to educate our nation's future.

At the district level, HISD is working nonstop in gathering resources and posting them at www.houstonisd.org/home. Our district's curriculum department is working to put together educational resources for parents, students, and teachers to use as we navigate through the world of distance learning. While not perfect by any means, they are a quick resource to help keep our students engaged as we work tirelessly to develop online lessons taught by Pershing teachers.

I am attaching a presentation that provides information on what Pershing is doing to educate our students. I have also attached the schedule we will be following while we are at home; however, please note that this could change. Regardless, I will communicate with you any changes as they occur.

Basically, we have created a schedule where students will engage with teachers virtually and through other means (i.e., Google Classrooms, Microsoft Teams, Zoom). We do not expect students to sit in front of a computer from 8:30 – 3:50 each day. Instead, we have come up with times that students will be “in class.” I've had several parents reach out to me regarding a schedule and as I stated in my email last Friday, it is important that we provide some sort of structure for our students.

On Mondays, classes will not be held; however, students will engage in lesson content that is posted by their teacher. If you are looking at a lesson cycle, consider this the “warm-up” day. Students will be provided resources, web quests, videos, articles, etc. that introduce them to the lesson content they will be learning throughout the week. The reason we are doing this is so that teachers have time to meet virtually to collaborate on lessons for the next week. This is so important in making sure we continue to provide the best lessons possible.

On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, students will participate in 30-minute classes – or direct instruction. This will happen in a variety of ways, including live classes via Microsoft Teams and Zoom. The expectation is that students will learn new content on these days so that they have the information they need to complete whatever activities the teacher assigns for Thursday and Friday. While we'd love to be able to teach all the objectives we have left to cover, I've asked the teachers to focus on the most important objectives that will be needed for future classes.

Thursdays and Fridays are considered student learning opportunity days. What does this mean? These days are for students to take the content they learned on Tuesday or Wednesday and apply it – the independent practice. Now, this may not be the case every week. Teachers may tell the students that they will have another online session in order to cover more material. Teachers will communicate this to the students each week.

Each day students will be given an opportunity to reach out to their teachers for additional assistance during the teachers' 1:30 – 3:00 pm office hours. Teachers may hold virtual office hours, or simply respond via email. This is flexible to meet the needs of our students.

The most important factors in all of this are patience and flexibility. Like you and your child, the teachers are learning how to navigate these uncharted waters, so things may change as we reflect each day on how we are doing.

We've been asked about assignments and grading. Our expectation is that students are completing the assignments they are given and turning in to teachers on their due dates. Teachers will be providing feedback to students on how they did on the assignment so that they know what it is they need to work on.

I want to stop here and mention the paper-based instruction. We recognize that not all our students have access to a device, although most of what we do can be accessed on a smartphone if they have one. The district is working on putting together paper-based instruction and as soon as we know what that looks like, we will communicate that and how it will be distributed.

Academics is not our only focus. Our counseling team is standing by ready to meet our students' social and emotional needs. Students and parents can request an appointment by completing an appointment request at <https://ijpcounselors.weebly.com/>. Ms. Williams, our Communities in Schools Social Worker, is also available.

Several 6th and 7th grade parents have asked about the Algebra Readiness Test. Luckily almost all our Pre-AP 6th and 7th grade students took the first part of the readiness test, but not all classes were able to take the second part as it was scheduled for March 13th. At this time, we do not know how the matrix will be adjusted to reflect the fact that the entire test was not administered. Since we were the only middle school administering it in March, I'm sure the district will address so that all middle schools are on the same page. As I find out more information about qualifying for Algebra, I will share that with you.

STAAR, including STAAR -Alt, has been canceled this year. For 8th graders, that means it will not be a part of their promotion standard. For those students in Algebra or Biology, the STAAR End-of-Course Exams have also been canceled and will not be required for graduation. Credit will be based on grades and adequate attendance (I'm assuming adequate attendance will mean their attendance up to March 13th).

I wish I had the answers to all the questions you may have. We are in a state of constant change, so in some cases, I send out information and then it changes the next minute. My commitment to you is to keep you informed as much as possible. My entire team is here for you and I've included the email addresses for the entire leadership team and counseling team on the presentation. Please do not hesitate to reach out to them.

In the coming days, you should hear from your child's 1st period teacher. As we get closer to going live on Tuesday (don't forget that Monday is a district holiday), teachers will begin sending out information on what to expect for their class. We are in the process of compiling the platforms that each teacher will be using so that we can post on our website. We are working hard to update our school website as quickly as we can and will provide as many links as possible. Again, this is new, so we will make mistakes, but will learn from those and adjust along the way.

I could not end this letter without praising the incredible staff at Pershing. They have been working nonstop since I held our first virtual faculty meeting on Monday. Each department has been meeting in their respective PLCs virtually to begin the process of creating lessons. While nothing compares to face to face teaching and learning, we are doing all of this because we want our students to have as quality an experience as possible. We will work together as partners and we will be successful, because we are the best!

Again, please do not hesitate to reach out to your child's teacher, counselor, or assistant principal. We are here to serve you!

Have a great evening!

Steven Shetzer, Principal