

8/28/2023
Policy Updates

1. **Student use of mobile phones during the school day**

As is current policy, student cell-phone use will not be allowed in HISD schools during the academic day. Student use of phones during the academic day disrupts learning and instruction, fuels disputes between students, and undermines the culture we are working to create in all HISD campuses.

Students must leave their cell phones at home or in their backpacks. Should a teacher or administrator see a cell phone on a student's person (even if it is in a pocket, but visible) or being used by a student, the teacher or administrator will:

1. Ask the student to hand over the mobile phone.
2. Put the student's name on the phone (as with a sticky note), and
3. Take it to the office or give it to a learning coach or teacher apprentice to take to the office.

The first time a student has a mobile phone taken to the office, that student may pick up the cell phone from the front office after school. If a student violates this rule a second time, the cell phone will be returned to a parent or guardian who must come to the school to retrieve it.

These rules apply to all HISD schools. However, for the 2023 school year, non-NES and non-NES-A schools may make procedural changes or exceptions as the principal deems necessary to ensure good order and good instruction. For NES/A schools, rare exceptions for an individual student's unique health or personal situation may be made by the Division Superintendent or their designee.

2. Transportation Update

HISD is starting off the 2023-2024 school year with 517 bus routes. All routes are staffed. Transportation and operations worked hard to ensure the district has enough bus drivers and to allow busses to arrive at the stops as scheduled and to drop off students at school on time.

Since routes and ridership are determined by the students who sign up for transportation and show up at the bus stops the first few weeks of school, student ridership will increase in the early weeks of school.

Over the next three weeks, there will be adjustments to routes and bus stops as we accommodate the students who sign up for transportation after the first day of school. In some cases, two routes may need to be consolidated into one to accommodate all students while we work to hire additional drivers.

HISD will inform impacted families directly about any change to their route, but families should look out for calls and emails about their child's bus route throughout the month of September.

3. Open Classroom Door Policy

HISD will ensure schools, students, and staff are safe. Our schools will be nurturing, collaborative environments for teachers and students. We can and will safeguard every student and teacher at the same time we facilitate exceptional instruction, collaboration, and real time observation and coaching for students and staff.

To the greatest extent possible, classroom doors will be open when teachers teach. Doors will be locked but open so that they can be shut and automatically locked in case of an emergency. In addition to the instructional benefits of the open-door policy, safety and discipline within the classroom will be better when the classroom doors are open, and behavior can be monitored by administrators or other adults.

Of course, principals may make an exception in specific cases such as classroom doors that open to the outside, doors to classrooms with students with special needs who may be difficult to keep in the classroom if the door is open, and to classrooms that are significantly impacted by noise from the cafeteria, gymnasium, or choir, etc.

The open-door policy will be supported by our work to enhance safety measures in place at every campus. We will take additional steps and maintain an internal environment that is joyful and that supports our main educational mission – providing high-quality instruction.

For those of you who are unaware here is just a few of the steps we have taken to enhance security district-wide. We have already begun to increase the size and effectiveness of the HISD police force and plan to do much more this year. We are conducting a facility security audit and will prioritize campuses with the highest need to maximize limited resources this year.

4. Academic Calendar Changes

Development of a District's school year calendar should start with the number of student-teacher contact days needed to support student academic growth and close the skills gap. Districts and schools that have numerous students behind grade level, need more time and more days.

The 2023-2024 HISD calendar has 172 student-teacher contact days. This calendar is not optimized for strong academic performance. It does not reflect an urgency to close the achievement gap and prepare students for a fundamentally different world and workplace.

However, the administration recognizes that many people make their own individual or family plans based on the published schedule. So, even though the calendar does not adequately

support student learning, start, and end dates have not been changed for this academic year. The number of student-teacher contact days and holidays stay the same except for a one-day change at the end of winter break (with a corresponding addition of one-day at the beginning of winter break).

The four changes are better for instruction and places a minimal burden on parents and students:

1. The first change is not until Friday, October 13. School will be closed on that day in order to conduct professional development for teachers.
2. The next change moves the professional development on Tuesday, November 7 to Friday, November 10. Having a professional development day on a Tuesday is very disruptive to the flow of an instructional week. Absences will be greater for students and staff on that Monday if students do not have to go to school on a Tuesday. We can still support the election day activities that are conducted in many of our schools on November 7, keep our students safe, and support efficient effective instruction.
3. HISD will start winter break day on Friday, December 22 and end on Monday, 8 January instead of Tuesday, 9 January. When we are in school, we will take our jobs seriously and conduct high quality instruction, and we will also enforce staff attendance rules. This change is intended to make it easier for employees and families to make it home for the holidays.

Students will return on Monday, January 8 instead of Tuesday, January 9. Teachers will return on Friday, January 5. We recognize that this change may impact some travel plans. Please take advantage of the four-month lead time to make appropriate changes.

4. Teachers will no longer have a professional development day on Tuesday, February 20. Classes will be held that day.