

HISD Interim Superintendent Grenita Lathan is holding a series of Virtual Parent Connection meetings with PTO and PTA leaders throughout the district. Questions that have been raised during the sessions are included below and will be updated after each meeting.

Can you share more information on HISD becoming a District Of Innovation (DOI)?

Our board is scheduled to vote on May 14, 2020, on a resolution that will allow us to become a DOI. When you are a District of Innovation, you are able to ask for several exemptions from TEA. We would seek exemption from starting the school year on the fourth Monday of August so that we can start earlier, we would seek Career and Technical Certification relief to hire qualified individuals to teach those classes, and exemption of the requirement of 90% attendance. [For more information on DOI, click here.](#)

When will students start the 2020-2021 school year?

We are projected to start August 24, 2020.

Which school districts around us are operating as DOI?

Spring Branch, Alief, and Fort Bend are currently DOI districts surrounding HISD.

How will the DOI change magnet school statuses?

A DOI designation would have no direct impact on magnet school status or process

Where will HISD receive funding from Texas if we extend school year?

There are some stipulations for additional funding. However, because of the unique position HISD is in as a recapture district, additional funding will not come, so we will have to absorb any additional cost to operate on extended day.

Would an extension to the school day alleviate the necessity for make-up days if more closures occur?

It does not. We will still build in inclement weather days.

If the school day is extended, how would that impact bus schedules?

We are planning and looking at different models that could implement if the school day is extended.

How would an extended school day affect after-school programs?

We want our students to enjoy athletic or clubs but have them be home at decent hour to do homework and enjoy family time, so this is a factor that we are closely assessing.

Do laptops students received at the beginning of the year need to be returned?

Students will return their laptops during the last week of summer school. Students in elementary will receive a backpack with books and activities when turning in their laptops. Middle school students will receive packets with activities they can self-engage with during the month of July.

How can I request a computer for my student for summer school?

You can call the HISD @ H.O.M.E. phone bank to request a computer for summer school. The number is 713-556-4636.

Could the district consider parents who do not speak, read, or write English and have multiple students at home engaging in distance learning?

We will take this into consideration as we work to develop a guidebook.

Could the district ensure that working technology and hotspots are available for all students for next school?

The shift to distance learning was an unforeseen situation, but we are working on this and we have estimated this will cost us \$25 million to \$35 million to provide all of our students with the necessary technology and hotspots.

In the normal school calendar, our teachers turn in all grades by May 29. Why was the change implemented to submit grades by May 22?

Elementary and middle schools traditionally have all grades submitted the week before school ends. High schools usually require additional time because of finals. Because there are no finals this year, the date was moved to earlier for everyone. This ensures we have more time to assess the students who need additional support and need to attend summer school.

If we applied to attend a different school through school choice, when will we find out the application results?

June 1 is the notification deadline.

Magnet process Phase 1 and 2 drops June 1. Can we extend this date due to our situation?

We've extended the deadline by 2 months already in light of COVID. Extending it further would make it very difficult for schools to properly plan and prepare for the 2020-2021 school year. If there are extenuating circumstances related to COVID, please contact the school choice office and let them know (713-556-6734).

Will there be a tightening in school budgets for next school year?

There are no specifics yet, but we are planning for a tighter budget, and we have already been monitoring expenditures more closely and establishing tighter guidelines.

If budgets are tightened, will PTAs/PTOs be asked to sponsor more events on campuses?

That could be a possibility, but we are trying not to put an extra burden on our parent organizations, and for us to provide what we can. Everything will be contingent on the cost associated with keeping our schools closed due to COVID-19.

Do any district employees need to be concerned about job security or future cuts?

We are trying to maintain and keep as many if not all of our positions we currently have. The challenge will be beyond the 2021-2022 school year, and we are looking at expenses and our budget to be able to work on a plan for the future.

Since the mayor is asking seniors to come to their campuses on June 5 for a virtual celebration, why can't we hold in-person graduation ceremonies?

The mayor's celebration is for the graduates only with social distancing protocols required. For us, the issue is not holding a celebration for our students, but the additional attendees that would require enforcement of social-distancing protocols.

Could we use Delmar Stadium to hold graduation ceremonies outside for schools that don't have their own stadium?

Currently, some of our stadiums, including Delmar, and campuses are being utilized as COVID-19 testing sites.

What would the district do if a child is found positive of COVID-19 in a school?

Campus will inform Health and Medical Department in HISD, which will then contact the Health Department. Depending on the situation, there may be a need to close the school as well as other schools and/or transportation routes. Closed campuses will be cleaned and sanitized before students return.

When students get back to campus, will each school have a nurse on site?

Yes, each campus will have a nurse. The exceptions with two campuses on the same lot, which would share a nurse.

Do you anticipate students would need to wear masks to school?

That is a possibility based on the guidelines from Health Department and/or CDC. We are trying to plan to the best of our ability as to how many we should purchase and stock and budget for it.

What will happen with students who have health risks who choose not to return to school once the opens again?

We are waiting on guidance from TEA on how we will track attendance for students whose parents choose to keep their student at home.

Does HISD have enough cleaning supplies in stock?

Yes, we do. We continue cleaning and monitoring and ordering what we need.

Has the potential bond referendum been placed on hold?

Our plans were to conduct a facilities assessment. A portion of that is on hold because of the COVID-19 situation because buildings are closed. Other parts such as the demographic studies are progressing, as we look at growth across our district and city.

Are there any plans to help provide relief to overcrowded elementary schools? Social distancing policies make this even more critical.

COVID-19 aside, to receive relief around overcrowded campuses we would need to have additional schools and space. That is one of the reasons we approached the facilities assessment and the demographic study. As it relates to social distancing, we are definitely looking at that and how to reopen schools in August, and if we would limit the number of students who attend school at a given time. If it is all day or half day, all those factors are being considered as well as data and guidelines from our city, state, and the CDC, to do our best to keep our students safe. This also includes transportation. Transportation will be the driver of how we look at modified school days. We are running different models. We are also the beginning stages of discussing rezoning.

Is it possible to have better simplified instructions of the different technologies' parents are having to learn to navigate?

Yes, and this is part of the feedback I'm seeking from you. We need to know what resources will help you best so we can work around your suggestions.

Will volunteering have more strict guidelines?

We recently updated our guidelines for volunteers but will certainly revisit them in light of COVID-19 to ensure that students and staff are safe.

How can PTA and PTO support students in schools where principals are not open to the work we can do?

Please contact FACE@houstonisd.org for next steps.

Session 2 Questions

What is the plan for summer school?

Summer School will be virtual, from June 8 thru July 2, Monday through Thursday. Enrichment students will be available to all students through the different learning platforms, but 40,000 students have been identified to hold summer sessions with actual teachers facilitating the virtual sessions. We are discussing the possibility of maybe considering an option for our special education students.

For summer school at the high school level, can any student who wants to take a class sign up to take it, or is it only for those who are invited to attend?

At the high school level, we are offering two type of classes: credit recovery for students who need to make up for lost credit, and original credit classes for students that have not previously taken a course or received credit for it. Principals will have to submit a request that those courses are needed. Live lessons with teachers for students required to attend summer school will be available. All courses for high school will be through HISD APEX platform.

Will students have to do the Academic Boot Camps this year, or are we starting year-round school this year?

At the moment, students that have been identified to participate in the Academic Boot Camps are based on their academic performance prior to March 12, 2020 and also their performance these past two months. Right now, we have identified about 40,000 students that will participate in Summer School, so that will be in addition to these students, especially students that are academically behind, or were not as engaged, or are at risk of falling behind.

If my first-grader is not invited to Boot Camp, would virtual summer school still be an option for her?

If she is not identified to attend Summer School, she will have access to enrichment opportunities in the HISD @ H.O.M.E. platform. You can also contact the school principal for additional resources.

Why won't there be class on Fridays during the summer if summer school is online?

During the Summer, HISD operates in a modified schedule, working 10 hours per day, Monday-Thursday.

Can students take virtual summer school classes through any high school or can they only take ones from their school?

The APEX platform is still tied to a specific campus, so even if the class is virtual, the course has to be built into the campus offering.

Can principals hire retired experienced teachers to provide academic support to students in small group settings?

Some principals are doing that now. It is a principal and a school-based decision.

What can I do as a volunteer in the summer to support my school now?

Please send an email to your school principal, and they can share what support is needed.

How is the District of Innovation Committee formed?

This is a 15-member committee. Each Board trustee will appoint one member to represent them on the committee and the Superintendent will appoint six staff members to be part of the committee.

How does the curriculum change with DOI?

The curriculum doesn't change with the designation of District of Innovation.

How would adjusting the 90% attendance rule affect funding for schools based on student attendance?

It would not affect funding or attendance, because if the DOI plan gets approved, we would request an exemption for this rule.

Would the district consider forming neighborhood/HOA groups that can help kids and parents who need assistance with adjusting to home learning?

Yes. We currently work with other groups that support our students through tutoring, and we can look in engaging HOA and neighborhood groups.

Phase 1 and 2 magnet waitlists for program choice are being eliminated on June 1. Why was June 1 set as a date? Can this be moved to the end of July?

Moving the dates impact budget and transportation. Additionally, the deadlines for magnets have been extended during this time. Any parents experiencing extenuating circumstances can contact the School Choice Office at SchoolChoice@HoustonISD.org

Our school has books that come from the district that we cannot use in the classroom due to our language immersion school. How can we address these items that our school doesn't need but still has to pay for?

We will follow up and review the situation with the school principal and with the textbook department.

When will we have a plan for next school year?

We are looking at all the different recommendations we have received: having everyone return, continuing virtually, or a hybrid model. We are taking into consideration all the different guidelines being provided, including classroom social distancing and transportation, to keep our students and staff safe.

Will families be given the option to work from home with guidance of a teacher?

We are waiting for guidance from TEA on what attendance for student will look if parents choose to keep their students at home. Once we receive these recommendations, we will be able to plan on options for our parents.

You mentioned that we may be in a deficit, if so, where would we be affected in the classroom?

We do our best to not cut anything from classrooms. The driving factor will be the reimbursement we are able to get for all the related expenses around this pandemic. When planning for the next 2-3 years, we can foresee the impact.

Would our PUA be reduced?

PUA will not be reduced for the 2020-2021 school year.

Is there any type of anticipation that social gatherings at the school will be restricted? We typically use those events as fundraising for our PTO, but we are wondering if these will be restricted and we will need to pursue another avenue. Has the district contemplated any changes?

There is a possibility that there will be restrictions early on when we go to face-to-face interactions. At the beginning of the pandemic, we started implementing restrictions, and those can be a possibility when we go back.

How will the FACE department be able to best support us a PTO?

FACE will continue supporting PTO/A and parent organizations as it has, supporting formation, legalization and planning. These supports will be available virtually, until the current situation changes. For any questions or support requests, please send them to FACE@houstonisd.org

If there are community closures, is there a way to keep schools open?

We will follow the recommendations from our city, county, and state officials, and it might vary from campus to campus.

How will you keep a log of good substitutes for schools when a teacher could be out due to COVID-19?

We do keep a log of good substitutes. Substitutes do have an option to decline working at a specific campus. Substitutes who have done an outstanding job and are part of our log have been offered long-term assignments to work virtually during this pandemic.

Will vaccinations be required if students get to study from home?

Yes. Vaccinations are a state requirement and they still need to get them even if studying from home.

Can PTA and VIPS meet at schools to plan ways to provide additional support about social distancing and everything they need to know about COVID-19?

Not at the moment. We encourage you to work virtually to plan for the year how you will support your schools during the 2020-2021 school year.

Can PTAs/PTOs and volunteers who do not have home computers or smartphones use campus computers and labs to continue PTA end-of-the-year requirements and election of new 2020-2021 board members?

At the moment, all campuses are closed. We encourage PTA and other parent organizations that might not have technology available to host conference call for their meetings. Please contact FACE@houstonisd.org if you need assistance with planning.

How is the your administrative team providing coaching, guidance, and support for PTOs and PTAs?

We continue to share both with campuses and families what a parent organization-school relationship looks like, and help them work together to achieve their goals. The key is for all parts to understand everyone's role, and set goals and parameters for the year, so the relationship can move smoothly.