

Happy New Year! 2026, can you believe it? We are a quarter of the year into the “new” century.

I hope everyone had an enjoyable and relaxing winter break. As lovely as it was to spend a week with my family, I was about over highs in the 30s to 40s. So happy to step off the plane last night into 70 degree weather – though I am not excited for January’s cedar allergies to kick in.

With the extra days off before we return to campus, I hope students took the chance to rest up and get ready for classes to begin on Tuesday. The spring semester often has a tendency to “fly by” so enjoy these last couple of days together. Also, if your kiddo has taken too great advantage of the opportunity to sleep in – you might want to take tonight and tomorrow morning to get back in the habit of going to bed at a reasonable hour and waking up at the normal school time. This first week back can be a tough one on many students whose sleep schedules were significantly different over break than during school.

As an FYI, I really did take a break these last couple of weeks, so have not been on email.....at all. I will start to catch up after PD tomorrow, so if you emailed me, just be a little patient. I’ll respond to you as quickly as I can once I have the time to dive into emails.

If you are one of the families that scans this message, make sure you make it all the way to the end to the “calendar time” section. Lots of important dates listed there.

Oh, and if you are one of the families that reads every word – be prepared, I’m feeling philosophical this morning, so be ready for the start of some “big questions” right before the announcement section.

Weekly Schedule

- **Monday** – PD Day, no classes for students,
 - If your student needs to take a make-up Fall Semester Exam, please make sure they are in the main office by 9:15am. Testing will begin promptly at 9:30am and late comers are not admitted to the testing room.
 - Make sure your student knows where their school ID is and has it ready to bring in the morning!
- **Tuesday** – Regular B Day
- **Wednesday** – Regular A Day
 - Shadow Host Training in theater at beginning of lunch
- **Thursday** – Regular B Day
 - Shadow Host Training in theater at beginning of lunch
- **Friday** – Advisory A Day
 - Class of 2029 (9th graders) will have their class meeting in the gym
 - Elective Fair during lunch

Please note that we are not starting the semester with a special bell schedule. If your student had a semester long class in the fall, they will want to check their schedule to see where their new class is before Tuesday. This includes signature courses and seniors in AP Gov/AP Econ. Teachers of semester long classes will understand if it takes a day or two for students to find where their new class is, but it would be great if students could be aware and figure out where they need to go ahead of time.

Rules of the Road

As you begin to think about your student returning to school on Tuesday, please also think about a New Year's resolution around driving habits. Towards the end of the semester we began to get more phone call complaints about people (mostly parents, but I'm sure a few students as well) making U-Turns in the middle of the street and cars not stopping at stop signs. For those of you who drive on Jain –yes, that's a real stop sign and you need to adhere to it. Similarly, as you turn right on Bolm from Gardner, that is a stop sign – it means you stop completely. Not yield, not a rolling stop, not put on the gas so you can go before the next car – please truly stop. As for the U-turns – REALLY?? Neighborhood streets where people are parked on both sides and traffic tends to be heavy at particular times of the day is not the place for a U-turn. Just do the block. The extra ninety seconds isn't worth the increase in your insurance when you cause an accident

Overton Stars

I want to thank everyone who adopted an Overton Star or donated a gift card for your generosity. You don't get to see the impact of your kindness on these families, but I want you to know that it was profound.

CIS at Overton shared with us that as families were picking up their presents and gift cards they thanked her profusely. Some cried. Some shared with her how grateful they were because they just hadn't known how they were going to give their kids a proper Christmas this year. You made a real difference in their lives. So THANK YOU. It means so much to us that we are able to do this at LASA.

Attendance Meetings

When report cards come out in a couple of weeks, you might notice that your student has an asterisk instead of credit awarded for one or more of their classes. This means that their attendance fell below the 90% required by the State and they did not bring notes to explain these absences. Towards the end of this week myself, or one of the assistant principals, will begin calling in students who are in this situation. Most will be put on a "principal plan" and assigned either tutoring or office hours to regain the credit. We will begin by talking with seniors, so they have a chance to complete their hours and regain credit before mid-year transcripts go out to colleges. Students on a principal's plan have a designated amount of time to complete their hours. If they go beyond this time, it will become more difficult for them to regain the credit.

Reset for Spring – Centering Values – Yes, I'm Feeling Philosophical

Being with my extended family tends to make me a little philosophical. What can you expect hanging out with 10 children/young adults between the ages of 10 and 28? Since many of them are in college or have recently graduated, we tend to talk a lot about the purpose of school both at the high school and college levels. No surprise, I have a lot of beliefs in this area. In fact, I have so many thoughts around this topic that I've decided to put a little in each principal's message over the next few weeks to, hopefully, get these important conversations started at your house as well.

So let's begin with the most basic. The start of this New Year and new semester is the perfect time to remind your student what is (big picture) important. For so many of our kiddos (and to be fair, many of their parents) they only see high school as a stepping stone to college. What is important to them is the final grade on whatever test/paper/class is next on their calendar. But, that isn't what we, as

an academic community, find most important. For the LASA staff the learning and the path each individual student takes to get to that learning is what drives us. This isn't to suggest that grades are irrelevant, that wouldn't be true either. However, students (and again, some parents) seem to think that a GPA and/or a grade in a particular class is the determining factor for everything else that will follow, particularly college decisions. This misunderstanding is not only an incredible over simplification of the college admissions process, but allows students to justify unethical decisions like cheating as being worth it.

So, if the grade isn't primarily what we want a student's focus to be on... then where should it be? Great question! The answer, for me, is actually pretty easy. Learning – broadly defined. Yes, this means how much the student is learning material wise within any particular class (and this amount will vary based on class and a student's personal interest and prior knowledge) but this also means learning a general academic skill set as well as learning more about their own personal strengths and needs as a student. In my opinion, these last two, the general academic skill set and a deeper understanding of one's self – are actually the most important in high school.

So, what does that mean and what do we do to keep the focus on learning? Let's just look at one piece today and then go through the others over the next couple of weeks.

Before you keep reading, take a quick minute and grab a scratch piece of paper or the notes apps on your phone/computer. What are the skills YOU had to learn or wish you had learned when you were in high school? Not the content, the actual academic life skills....

When you really get started, you find the list just keeps growing and growing. Here are a few I came up with for myself...

- How to take notes during a lecture;
- How to stay awake and focused in class when lost, bored or distracted by something else in life;
- How to ignore those around me and ask a question during class;
- How to figure out what my question actually is and not just "I don't get it";
- How to study differently depending upon the class or the teacher or the style of assessment;
- How to talk with a teacher when I was excited about a topic and wanted to dig deeper;
- How to talk with a teacher when I was bored witless by the topic and completely lost;
- How to form a study group that will actually help keep me focused and not just be based on the people I wanted to hang out with;
- How to make friends with others in class so I had someone to text or call when I was confused over the weekend;
- How to find a way to learn difficult (or boring to me) material when I was not connecting with my instructor's methods of teaching;
- How to say "no" to doing something I wanted to do in order to find time to complete schoolwork to the best of my ability;
- How to move past the need for external motivation and instead rely on determination to get done what I needed to;
- When to recognize that my brain is tired and I wasn't actually remembering anything and should therefore just go to bed;

Do you see what I mean about the list being never-ending? I could go on and on. Trust me, as you move through the next couple of days you will continue to think of skills that you learned or wish you learned in high school that would have made your college experience (and maybe some other life experiences) so much easier.

To end this first part of our semester beginning reflection, here is my challenge to you – How can you find a way, at home, to ask more questions about this academic skill set than you do about an individual assignment or grade in a class? How can you change your messaging about your goals for your student this semester to get them to start to increase their competence in these areas and start to find the answers that will help them become more successful students in general.

Part 2 – next week

Announcements

Shadow Hosts

There will be a mandatory training Wednesday and Thursday at 11:45 in the LASA theater. All potential Shadow Hosts must attend one of these trainings. Trainings will start promptly and last about 20 minutes so students will have time to get their lunch afterwards.

House District 29 Candidate Forum

You are invited to join *Raise Your Hand Texas*

for a public education-focused conversation with all 7 candidates for **House District-49**.

- **Date: Thursday, February 19, 2026**
- **Time: 6:30 pm**
- **Candidate Forum**
- **Location: Liberal Arts and Science Academy (LASA High School)**

This Candidate Forum is part of a series of over 15 public education candidate events that *Raise Your Hand Texas* is hosting across the state before the 2026 Primary election on March 3. This Forum will be for **House District-49**. The seat that Representative Hinojosa previously held.

Like all Raise Your Hand Texas Candidate Forums, this will be an issue-focused conversation, including questions on statewide and local topics. All seven candidates for HD-49 will participate, and LASA and *Raise Your Hand Texas* will not endorse candidates.

Raising Healthy Raptors: First "Getting to Calm" Parenting Book Club This Weekend

For those who are interested in the LASA parenting book club, we will be discussing the book **Getting to Calm: Cool Headed Strategies for Parenting Tweens and Teens** very soon! We will be breaking the book into three parts over the next few months. Our January meeting will take place on Saturday 1/10 from 12:45-2:15 pm at the Pleasant Hill branch of the Austin library, which is located at 211 E. William Cannon Dr. For this first meeting, we will be discussing the introduction and chapters 1-5. Because the room has a limit of 25 people, we need everyone who is planning to attend to **fill out the RSVP** form which you can find here:

<https://forms.gle/hoBYyQdHsciXhTpp6>

Contact Mandy Menzer at mmh20cornell@yahoo.com with any questions.

NEED PARENTS for the FIND YOUR FIT Panels

Do you have a child at another high school? Or one that graduated from somewhere other than LASA? Or did you transfer to LASA after freshman year?

PFLASA needs parents with these backgrounds to help with our “Find Your Fit” Parent Panels. With the advent of ranked choice applications a few years ago, PFLASA started hosting this event for parents of potential students during the COGAT testing. This helps parents decide if LASA is the right fit for their student. And it is a fun way to hear about other programs in AISD and private schools.

Incoming parents have told us how helpful these panels have been.

Please reach out to president@pflasa.org ASAP as the first event is this Saturday! Especially if you have a few hours to volunteer on either **Saturday, January 10th or 24th**! But even if you can't make those dates work, please also reach out if you would like to participate in this event in future years.

Join Boys Basketball at their District Opener

Boys' basketball will play its district opener at home this Tuesday against Bastrop High School. The team is coming off a strong preseason and looking to improve upon last year's 2nd place district finish. LASA's own John Courey will be singing the National Anthem and LASA Cheer will be performing at halftime. Come out and support the Raptors! Game times are as follows:

- 9th: 5:15pm
- JV: 6:30pm
- Varsity: 8:00pm

Coffee Truck Returns!

Tom's Coffee Truck is coming back on January 12 to help get you through the post holiday blues!

Tom's will be on campus Monday, January 12th from 6:30am – 10:30am.

Get to campus early so you don't miss out!

There was a huge response last time they visited and your LASA volleyball booster wants everyone to get served! (pun intended)

Pre-orders will be available and the window to order ahead of time will close at noon on January 11th.

See attached flyer for details.

Accolades

Ultimate Frisbee

Congratulations to Junior and A team co-captain, Bodhi Weston! He has been selected to represent the United States at the 2026 World Junior Ultimate Frisbee Championship.

Selected from over 400 of the country's best players, Bodhi will play for the Mixed U20 National Team this summer in Logrono, Spain.

Calendar Time

Get out your calendars and get ready to start planning for the spring semester. This isn't an exhaustive list, but is a great place to begin!

- January 6 – First day of spring semester for students
- January 10 & 24 – CogAt testing (prospective students)
- January 12 – Enroll Austin open for prospective students
- January 13 – LASA information night (in-person)
- January 19 - MLK Day holiday – no school
- January 20 – Last LASA information session (virtual for perspective students)
- January 21 – Understanding College Board Accommodations (virtual, sponsored by PFLASA)
- January 30 – LASA Admissions Deadline for prospective students
- February 5 – Culture Fest
- February 6 – Enroll Austin closes for application based schools
- February 10 – PFLASA Virtual Meeting with Special Topic Presenter
- February 16 – Enroll Austin opens for all returning students
- February 16 & 17 – Student holidays
- February 19 – Raise Your Hand Texas Candidate Forum House District 49 (LASA Theater)
- February 20 – Class of 2026 Panoramic Photo
- February 24 – PTSA Virtual Meeting with Special Topic Presenter
- February 27 – African American Heritage Celebration (AISD)
- March 3 – SAT School Day (for Juniors only)
- March 7 – Prom (Brazos Hall)
- March 16 – 20 – Spring Break
- March 31 - Student & Staff holiday
- April 6 – Student Holiday
- April 7 – English 1 EOC
- April 8 – English 2 EOC
- April 18 – PD day for staff, no school for students
- April 21 – Biology and US History EOCs
- April 28 – Algebra 1 EOC
- May 4-8 & 11-15 AP Tests
- May 15 – Coffeehouse
- May 19 – LASA Academic Achievement Awards (A-cubed)

- May 22 & May 26-28 – Spring semester finals (remember there are no early finals, so please do not plan to start your summer vacation before May 29)
- May 25 – Student and Staff Holiday
- May 31 – Senior Salute at Long Center (6:00pm start time is tentative)
- June 1 – LASA Graduation 2:00pm Tony Burger Center
- June 1 – Project Graduation 10:30pm – 5:30am (June 2) Times are tentative