



Elementary

Curriculum & Instruction

Guidelines

Houston County Schools



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Vision Statement

“Every student is achieving his or her maximum potential in an inspiring, engaging, and challenging environment.”

Mission Statement

Houston County Schools will provide a learning community that empowers students to explore, create, challenge, innovate and lead.

Core Values and Beliefs:

- We believe education is the key that unlocks doors to different opportunities in life.
- We believe learning empowers the individual. We believe we are the agents of change for the world we want to create.
- We believe that a culture of excellence is our greatest legacy.
- We believe that communities thrive only to the degree that education of all is a shared commitment.
- We believe improved instruction for our students is driven by continuous learning and training by our educators, staff, and leaders.
- We believe the Houston County School System is an emotionally and physically safe place for students and staff that promotes respect, self-worth, creativity and academic growth.
- We believe all stakeholders should work collaboratively.
- We believe education should be responsive to the diverse needs of our students and community.
- We believe education should be celebrated as a lifelong process that fosters personal growth.
- We believe our system is a premier school district that promotes College and Career Readiness and Success.
- We believe the staff of the Houston County Schools is a key to students' success as productive citizens and lifelong learners.
- We believe the support of our local communities enhances the quality of the local education system.
- We believe involving the student's family and community is critical to learning and academic achievement.

GENERAL INFORMATION & GUIDELINES

The Houston County Schools' Curriculum & Instruction Guidelines Handbook is designed to give guidance to teachers and staff regarding the policies and procedures for all teaching and learning that occurs in the district. This guide is not exhaustive of all possible policies and procedures regarding curriculum and instruction, but it strives to provide practical direction for staff to follow when faced with questions and concerns. Where appropriate, staff should refer to relevant laws, codes, and guidelines from governing agencies supervising teaching and learning for circumstances not outlined in this manual (e.g., the Alabama Administrative Code, the State Board of Education, HCBOE Student Code of Conduct, etc.).

Age Requirements

Students must be 4 years old on or before September 1st in order to register for Pre-K. Students who enter kindergarten must be 5 years old on or before September 1st. First Grade students must turn 6 on or before December 31st in order to enroll in first grade.

Attendance/Registration

All students enrolled in the Houston County School System are to be in continuous attendance. The principals shall enforce the compulsory attendance laws of the State of Alabama. Please refer to the Student Code of Conduct for specifics.

- Each teacher is responsible for checking the class roll daily in their assigned class(es) and properly posting attendance in the online system.
- All documentation for absences must be received within three days or the absence will be unexcused. Please follow your school's guidelines for recording the reason for the absence.
- Students may do makeup work within five days if the absence is excused.
- Attendance policies for elementary/middle school are based on the entire school year. Students may be retained whenever absences exceed ten days per school year.
- A kindergarten student who accumulates more than ten absences in one school year may be withdrawn from the roll for the remainder of the school year.

Homeschool

An elementary student transferring into the Houston County Schools from an alternative program will be given a grade level benchmark test in reading and mathematics for correct grade placement. This will ensure that the student receives instruction according to his/her education level.

Note: i-Ready may be given for a benchmark test in reading and mathematics during the school year, along with the End of Year Assessments of the previous grade level. Mastery will be determined with a minimal score of 60/D.

Communication with Parents and Guardians

- Tests, classwork, notes, reports, etc. may be sent home, signed by parents/guardians, and returned to the teacher to verify parents/guardians have viewed the classwork. The school will designate the day of the week that student folders are sent home.
- Teachers should have a conference with all parents/guardians within the first three weeks of school. This can be accomplished with a parent night for each grade level. This will give teachers a chance to meet all parents and establish lines of communication between the school and home. It may be necessary to contact parents by phone if circumstances prohibit their attendance at the set meeting.
- A teacher does not need to wait until a student has failed a complete nine weeks before communication with parents. Teachers should keep a record of contacts and attempted contact with parents.
- Progress reports and report cards must be sent home on the designated date (see county schedule) during each of the four reporting periods. There should be a minimum of four grades per graded subject on the progress report and 8 grades per graded subject on the report card.
- All teachers are to attend quarterly P.T.O. meetings. At least thirty minutes should be established for parents to visit the classrooms or conference stations at the P.T.O. meetings. P.T.O. meetings are scheduled in advance to prevent conflicts. Teachers not in attendance are to notify the school principal in writing as to the reason for failure to attend the meeting. The principal will forward a copy to the superintendent.

Disciplinary Action

Corporal punishment must be administered by the administrator or by the teacher in the presence of a certified professional employee (not before a classroom of students). Please refer to the Student Code of Conduct for details.

Field Trips

Only trips which are directly related to a unit of instruction being studied by a particular group of students shall be considered an educational field trip sponsored by the Houston County Board of Education. A field trip will be approved by the superintendent or his/her designee only when related to the instructional program of the school and for which a lesson plan has been developed. The teacher shall direct the online request for a field trip to the principal. The online form should include an outline of the trip and shall show how the field trip will be of benefit to the

students. Seating arrangements (student roster) should be attached/listed prior to submitting the online form.

- A field trip for one calendar day shall be limited to a radius of two hundred fifty (250) miles from school unless otherwise approved by the superintendent or his/her designee.
- Overnight trips must be approved by the Superintendent or his/her designee. Out-of-state field trips and overnight field trips must be submitted to the superintendent/Board for their general knowledge and /or approval.
- Transportation costs of field trips shall be paid from the school's base budget or from internal accounts. Educational field trips shall not be of prohibitive cost to students.
- The parent/guardian shall be notified prior to any field trip. Such notice shall state the place to be visited, the date of the trip, the time of departure, and the time of return to school. Any student making a trip shall present a note from his/her parent/guardian giving permission for the student to make the trip. All documents needed in case of emergency should be provided before the trip and should be in possession of the employee in charge of the field trip. Procedures for administering medication shall be followed in accordance with the established medication disbursement guidelines.
- Only parents/guardians may take their child home from a field trip.
- The local lunchroom manager and school nurse should be notified of field trips at least two (2) weeks in advance.

PROMOTION AND RETENTION PROCEDURES

- Promotion is based on grades which support the promotion in all instances.
- Standards must be met for a student to be promoted. (Alabama Act 93-367 pg. 266)
- The decision to retain a child is not to be made until the last nine weeks of the school year. In the year of retention, the teacher and the administrative staff must develop and implement instructional strategies and approaches enhancing the probability of the student's success.
- A second retention during the elementary years results in a higher rate of school drop-outs. Therefore, it is incumbent upon administrators, teachers, and parents to facilitate success through appropriate placement and instruction. Students must be taught the required standards. Mastery of skills is the goal of elementary education programs.
- No student shall be retained more than twice between K-3rd grade per Alabama Literacy Act.

First Grade Promotion/Retention:

Students must pass both ELA and Math to be promoted. Promotion and retention for ELA will be determined by the second semester average. Promotion and retention for Math will be determined by the yearly average. (Please reference HCS Student & Parent Handbook pg. 20)

RTI: Before a student can be retained, the school should have used a three tier plan of intervention for the student. There should be supporting documentation that an intervention plan was implemented. Parents must be notified throughout the school year of their child's academic progress through weekly papers, progress reports, nine-week report cards, and parent conferences. The decision to retain a child is not to be made until the last nine weeks of the school year. RTI teams cannot make the decision to promote or retain a student.

Special Education Promotion/Retention: Teachers must follow the guidelines written in the student's IEP. As soon as a classroom teacher notices that a student is struggling, the special education teacher should be notified. **A review of the IEP should be considered in order to ensure appropriate modifications or accommodations are made.**

- **Modifications** are *changes* in the content and in standards set for a specified curriculum level. (Example: *The standard is that students will multiply two-digit numbers. The modification could be the student will add two-digit numbers*).
- **Accommodations** are strategies used to address the needs of students and curriculum content/standards are **not** changed. (Example: *The student will be allowed to use a multiplication chart while multiplying two-digit numbers*).

English Learners (ELs) Promotion and Retention: Any student receiving EL services is eligible for appropriate accommodation to instruction. For English Learners (ELs), the teacher will modify and/or accommodate assessments within each grading category as needed and determined by the student's EL plan. The student's EL status should be considered when determining promotion and retention. When a student begins to be unsuccessful, the EL Committee should meet to discuss appropriate next steps. Report cards for EL students should not reflect a grade lower than a 60/D without prior approval by the EL Specialist. If recommended by the EL committee, an EL students may receive grades of:

- **S** (Satisfactory)
- **N** (Needs Improvement)
- **U** (Unsatisfactory)

INSTRUCTION AND ENVIRONMENT

All subjects will be taught using the Alabama Courses of Study as guides. All students are to be taught grade level work in all subjects..

- Benchmark assessments are administered periodically to assess academic levels and student growth.
- Using the assessment data, standards will be prioritized and the priority listing becomes the sequence for teaching.
- Weekly assessments should be administered online when technology is appropriate.

TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES

Teacher Preparedness

Teachers should be prepared for the next day's lesson before he/she leaves in the afternoon. Bell Ringers, Morning Work, Activity Sheets, etc. should be placed on each students' desk or board before leaving for the day. Students should not have to wait for the teacher to prepare for instruction. Teachers should not be tardy to school/class so that students are unsupervised or having down time. Establish the same routines for yourself that you expect of your students.

Classroom Environment

The classroom should be clean, orderly, and attractive. The following should be visible in every classroom:

- Teacher's name, grade, and daily schedule outside the door
- Emergency procedures posted inside the doorway of your classroom
- List of classroom rules of conduct visible at all times
- Weekly lesson plans
- Substitute folder
- Bulletin boards that are current and reflect instructional/educational themes
- Learning objectives should be presented verbally or posted on the board.
- Learning objectives posted for each subject
- Sound Walls K - 2
- Display standards based student work

Lesson Plans

Lesson plans should include Alabama Course of Study, and indicate how instruction will be differentiated to address the needs of all learners.

- Each teacher is required to have a **daily lesson plan** written for the week. Teachers are required to upload lesson plans in Schoology by 8:00 am each Monday morning. Administration may also require that a printed copy be submitted weekly. As a general rule, the following items should be included in your weekly lesson plans:
 - Learning Objective per subject
 - Resources Needed
 - Activity/Procedures to accomplish the objective
 - Standards taught in each subject
 - Homework Assignment (include vocabulary work lists, special project directions/due date, testing dates, etc. should be visible in the Home-Portal)
 - Ensure the plans are student/parent friendly.

Substitute Folder/Notebook

- Each teacher is required to have a **current substitute folder or notebook** on their desk at all times. This folder should include, but is not limited to, the following:
 - Detailed schedule and routines
 - Class Roll
 - Safety Procedure information
 - General information and daily procedures (lunch money, bathroom, lunchroom, PE, teacher who can be of assistance, other relevant information).
 - Names of students with special schedules (include their schedule)
 - Names of students with allergies or specific health needs
 - Names of students with special pick-up/parent restrictions
 - Extra work that students are able to do with minimal assistance
- Leave school each day as if you are going to be absent the following day. Preparedness will ensure that valuable instructional time will not be lost.
- **Teacher's Responsibilities to a Substitute Teacher.** The regular teacher has an important role to fulfill in relation to the substitute teacher. Such duties are:
 - To instruct students as to attitudes, behavior, and class procedures in the event of a substitute.
 - To have a substitute notebook/folder ready and accessible.

Teacher's Responsibilities regarding Homework

- Follow the guideline for the amount of time.
- Communicate expectations to students.
- Post homework assignments and provide time for students to record the assignment. K - 3 may provide written homework assignments.
- Model homework strategies and provide models throughout the year.
- Review homework and provide feedback in a timely manner.
- Establish a system for recording and reporting homework.
- Ensure that resources and materials required for homework are easily accessible.
- Post homework assignments online for parent viewing.
- Notify parents regarding homework problems and missing assignments.
- Assign long-term projects so that completion time includes more than one weekend and is not limited to a school vacation period.
- Discuss and coordinate homework practices with colleagues and provide guidelines for the type of homework at each grade level.

GRADING PROCEDURES

The Houston County Board of Education recognizes the need for an adequate evaluation reporting system which equitably reflects the achievement of students. Grades must serve the best interest of students, be based upon the taught curriculum, be used constructively and positively, and based on standards that apply to all students.

Online Grade Book

Teachers are required to use the online grade book when recording and averaging numeric student grades. Teachers must record grades **within five (5) days of giving an assessment**. **Progress reports and report cards should be printed from the online system for first through sixth grades.** Kindergarten report cards are completed by hand and ESGI is used for progress reports.

At the end of the academic school year, teachers must print and turn in a manual copy of their yearly grade book to the administrator. Printing the grade book periodically may be helpful.

Grades recorded by teachers are not to be changed unless:

- Errors have been made in computation.
- Factors have been included that are not consistent with guidelines.
- Procedures have not been followed.
- Make-up or retesting for good reasons.

After grades are posted, changes may be made upon consultation between the teacher, counselor, and the principal for the reasons stated.

Assigning Grades

- A grade over 100 should never be assigned on a report card.
- Assessment in all subject areas will begin with the first reporting period.
- Grades should reflect mastery of coursework only. There should not be an addition or deduction in points/grades due to “non-content” items. (i.e.: name on paper, bringing supplies to school, selling items, etc.).
- **A minimum of eight grades in each subject are required for each nine-week period.**
- There should be a minimum of ten items on a graded test.
- No participation grades should be given.
- Grades should be recorded electronically within five days so that parents may view.

Subject Specific Content

Tier I (Core Program)

On-grade level instruction using multiple methods of instruction and awareness of your child’s learning style. Instruction includes such strategies as modeling, re-teaching, providing general remediation, providing corrective feedback, allowing multiple opportunities for student practice, flexible grouping students, ensuring student engagement, use of pacing guides to direct instruction, use of differentiated instruction, providing accommodations to “level the playing field” for all students, and participation in a screener assessment to identify student needs that will be addressed through the RtI process.

Tier II Intervention

Additional 15 - 30 minutes of individual or small group instruction every day, which is targeted to specific needs of the student using research-based strategies. The PST determines which students need Tier II interventions and will notify parents of that decision. Selected students will participate in a “progress monitoring” assessment to determine success of these interventions a minimum of once every two weeks. Parents will be notified of a child’s progress, success, or lack of progress, along with a graph of his/her child’s progress. During Tier II intervention, parents will receive research-based strategies from the school that you can use at home to help students with reviews, homework, and studying. Tier II interventions may be short-term and stop once a student has obtained adequate progress toward the targeted skill.

Tier III Intervention

Tier III services are provided in addition to Tier II interventions. An additional 30 - 45 minutes of individual or small group instruction at least 3 times per week, which is targeted to specific needs of the student using research-based strategies and programs. These programs are taught by qualified and trained personnel. The PST determines which students need additional Tier III interventions and will notify parents of that decision. Tier III students will participate in “progress monitoring” assessments weekly to determine the success of the interventions. Parents will be notified of a child’s progress, success, or lack of progress, along with a graph of his/her child’s progress. A vision and hearing screening is conducted, along with other assessments that may help to identify any additional problems the child may be having that hinders his/her success. Tier III interventions are intensive and long-term. However, Tier III interventions may stop once a student has obtained adequate progress toward the targeted skills. Lack of progress over time using Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III interventions may result in a referral for an evaluation for special education eligibility.

Mathematics

- Savvas Envision is our adopted curriculum. All resources and assessments must align with the Alabama Course of Study. Pacing is built based on scope and sequence of Savvas curriculum and ACAP skills for tested grades.
- Math should be taught daily for a minimum of 60 minutes. This time should include whole group instruction, small group instruction and independent practice.
- Teachers should be including a fluency/spiral review of skills. This can be done through “calendar skills”, math minutes, fact practice, number talks, homework review, etc...
- The use of math manipulatives is recommended.
- A minimum of 8 grades will be given each nine weeks. The grades may come from the following:
 - Mid topic assessments
 - End of topic assessments
 - Grade level fluency standard assessments
 - Fact Practice
 - Combined Savvas Lesson Quizzes
 - Cumulative review assessments.
 - Assessments can be found in Savvas and Schoology
 - Assessments must have a minimum of 10 questions
- Formative Benchmark tests will be given three times a year covering skills aligned in the pacing guide.

- ACAP test prep materials are located inside of Schoology along with other grade level resources.
- Tiered instruction in Math classroom.
 - Tier 1 - Whole group and small group grade level content
 - Tier 2 - Additional small group grade level content
 - Tier 3 - Below grade level practice via iReady or Learning Path or pull out instruction

ELA

Houston County Schools follow the 2021 Alabama Course of Study for ELA

Recommended Instructional Times

- Kindergarten - Second Grade recommendations are 120 minutes of daily instruction.
- Third Grade - Fifth Grade recommendations are 90 minutes of daily instruction.
- Sixth Grade recommendations are 60 minutes of daily instruction.

Kindergarten

- Retention will be recommended based on mastery of standards.

First Grade

Scaffolded Reading Tests:

- First Nine Weeks - Teacher reads question and answer choices while students track and choral read if able.
- Second Nine Weeks - Teacher and students chorally read questions. Students independently read passages and answer choices.
- Third and Fourth Nine Weeks - Students independently read all parts of the test.
- Spelling and dictation are counted as the same subject. Dictation can be added to the spelling test and count as one test grade.
 - Grading Dictation - Example sentence:
When will Bob catch the frog? (worth nine points)
2 pts. 1 pt. 2 pts. 1 pt. 1 pt. 1 pt. 1 pt.
 - Capital letters count as 1 point.
 - Each word spelled correctly counts as 1 point.
 - Punctuation counts as 1 point.
- Use the dictation as a handwriting grade.
- Grammar and writing are found in the pacing guide.

Second Grade

- Reading tests should be completed independently.

- Spelling and dictation are counted as the same subject. Dictation can be added to the spelling test and count as one test grade.
 - Grading Dictation - Example sentence:
When will Bob catch the frog? (worth nine points)
2 pts. 1 pt. 2 pts. 1 pt. 1 pt. 1 pt. 1 pt.
 - Capital letters count as 1 point.
 - Each word spelled correctly counts as 1 point.
 - Punctuation counts as 1 point.
- Grammar and writing are found in the pacing guide.
- Grammar grades will be given weekly.

Third Grade - Sixth Grade

- Reading tests should be completed independently.
- Unit tests will be given per the pacing guide.
- Each unit focuses on a mode of writing.
- **Students will respond to the unit writing prompt.**
- Formative assessments will be given three times throughout the year.
- **Third-Fifth Spelling will be assessed through dictation. Tests should be handwritten in the first semester. A Schoology option will be available for the second semester.**
- Grammar grades will be given on a weekly basis following the pacing guide.

Handwriting

Instruction in handwriting for elementary school students shall include proficiency in cursive writing at the end of the third grade year. Correct penmanship and neatness is required in all grade levels and should be expected in all written work. The Zaner-Bloser handwriting workbook will be utilized in grades K-3rd. Refer to Daily K-3 Handwriting Drills and Activities available from your Local Reading Specialist.

K-2 - Manuscript writing (ball and stick) will be taught in grades K-2.

2nd grade - Cursive writing will be taught beginning the second nine weeks of 2nd grade with correct formation of the letters.

Handwriting Book: Unit 1 - 1st nine weeks
 Unit 2 - 2nd nine weeks (cursive readiness)
 Unit 3 to 5 - 3rd and 4th nine weeks

3rd grade - Students will begin the school year using cursive writing and continue throughout the year. Teachers will revisit the correct letter formation of cursive letter spacing and line

placement during the first nine weeks. Teachers will turn in the class proficiency percentage at the end of the school year. Handwriting guidance is available in the ARI padlet or see your Local Reading Specialist.

4th - 6th grade - Students are expected to write legibly in cursive. In order to make legible and fluent cursive handwriting an easy and automatic skill, students should be provided many opportunities across the curriculum to practice in cursive at school and at home.

Honor Roll First through Sixth Grade

A student is eligible for the A honor roll if she/he has an A average in every subject for each grading period. A student is eligible for A/B honor roll if she/he has at least one A, no grades lower than a B.

Summer School

Houston County Schools do not offer summer school for kindergarten through fifth grade. Sixth grade students may attend summer school and should contact the school counselor for registration information.

Science - Grades

- Curriculum - Science Studies Weekly, MobyMax, AMSTI Kits, Course of Study.
- A minimum of eight grades per nine weeks is required (four grades on the progress report).
- Weekly Assessments, Studies Weekly Crossword Puzzle, Projects.
- Formative Assessments have been provided by AMSTI and found in Schoology.
- ACAP test prep for grades 4th and 6th are in Schoology.

Social Studies - Grades

- Curriculum - Studies Weekly, MobyMax, Textbooks, Course of Study.
- A minimum of eight grades per nine weeks are required.

Music

- Students will attend music class once a week or every two weeks.
- Classes will include learning music history, playing instruments and choral singing
- Grading will be based on S, N and U.

Physical Education

- Physical education (PE) class will include individual/team sports, exercises
- Character Education will be taught in PE daily as noted in the section below.
- Grading will be based on S, N, and U

Character Education

For all grade levels, **at least 10 minutes of instruction per day**, shall focus upon the student's development of the following character traits: courage, patriotism, citizenship, honesty, fairness, respect for others, kindness, cooperation, self-respect, self-control, courtesy, compassion, tolerance, diligence, generosity, punctuality, cleanliness, cheerfulness, school pride, respect for the environment, patience, creativity, sportsmanship, loyalty, and perseverance.

Guidance Counselors will also reinforce these character traits during class sessions.

Computer Science - Digital Literacy

All grades K-6th are required to complete the computer standards - digital literacy for the respective grade levels. Grade level standards will be provided with a documentation sheet and resources to complete the standards. Our curriculum for all grades levels will be the grade level standards, provided resources, and AMSTI resources/support. Schools may utilize their media specialists to provide assistance and contact AMSTI specialists for support.

