

DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

March 10, 2017



Spring Break is here! This time of year is always full of activities as we begin the slide into summer. Months of hard work are evident as students prepare for competitions, state testing, year-end projects, and various other activities.

Our District Leadership Team is already busy planning for the 2017-2018 school year. From discussing district calendar options and daily schedules, to developing course offerings, they are working hard to ensure the best options for our students as we continue to grow.

We have a lot of information to share with you during this edition of our District Newsletter. Please be sure to add important dates to your calendar. Keep in mind **Annual Commitments are due March 31st**.

As always, I encourage you to become involved in your student's experience at the Innovation Academy. Please do not hesitate to contact us with questions or concerns you may have.

Jo Ann Simmons, Ed.D.
Superintendent

UPCOMING HOLIDAYS AND NON-INSTRUCTIONAL DAYS

Spring Break – No School **March 13th-17th**. *Classes resume March 20th*.

Good Friday – No School **April 14th**.

Memorial Day – No School **May 29th**.

Bad Weather Make-Up Days – **June 5th-6th**. *If needed.*

The District Calendar is located on our Website under QUICK LINKS. You can access it at:

<http://www.uttia.org/documents/2016/04/district-calendar-2016-2017.pdf>

STAAR/EOC TESTING – MARCH ADMINISTRATION

The first round of required state testing will occur on **March 28th-30th**. We encourage your student to get a restful night of sleep and a healthy breakfast each day in preparation for testing. Students should not bring electronic devices to school on their testing days. The schedule of testing is as follows:

March 28th – Grades 4 & 7 Writing, Grades 5 & 8 Mathematics, English I EOC

March 29th – Grades 5 & 8 Reading

March 30th – English II EOC

The second set of STAAR/EOC tests will occur in May.

ACCREDITATION STATUS

The Innovation Academy is proud to announce we have received the status of '**Accredited**' for the 2016-2017 school year according to TEA's latest report. Full details can be found here:

http://tea4avcastro.tea.state.tx.us/accountability/accreditation/2016_2017_accreditation_statuses.html

SCHOOL REPORT CARDS (SRC) AND FEDERAL REPORT CARDS (FRC)

TEA recently released both the School Report Cards (SRC) and the Federal Report Cards (FRC) required by the U.S. Department of Education.

The School Report Card (SRC) combines accountability ratings, data from the Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR), and financial information to give a broad view of campus performance. Available for each campus in Texas, the SRC is intended specifically to inform parents and guardians about a school's individual characteristics and its academic performance. Our School Report Cards may be accessed any time on TEA's Website at <http://tea.texas.gov/perfreport/src/index.html>.

Federal Report Cards (FRC) for the state, the district, and each of the district's campuses are now available on TEA's website at <http://tea.texas.gov/FRC.aspx>.

If you have difficulty accessing the information from the website, hard copies of the reports are available at the campus office. If you have questions about the information, please contact your Campus Director.

K-2 CHARTER EXPANSION

The Innovation Academy has submitted an Expansion Amendment Request to the Texas Education Agency for the addition of grades K-2 to our charter. In the event the request is approved, the Tyler Campus will begin enrolling students in K-2 for the 2017-2018 year. Our Longview and Palestine Campuses will begin enrolling 2nd graders only for 2017-2018 and will add K-1 in subsequent years.

In preparation for the addition of these grades, we are currently accepting applications for admission to be placed on the waiting list. Enrollment in these grades are not guaranteed as we must receive the approval. Once approved, a lottery will be held to accept students (in the event there are more applicants than openings). Our regularly scheduled lottery will take place on April 7th. We do not know if K-2 will be included at that time, if not, we will host another lottery specifically for grades K-2.

Please tell your friends and family about this opportunity so they can submit their applications now. We look forward to serving students in grades K-12 on all campuses in the coming years.

IMPORTANT NOTICE CONCERNING HOUSE BILL 2610

Due to legislative changes defined in House Bill 2610, pertaining to the number of minutes students are required to attend school each day/year, our charter will likely be required to extend our day in 2017-2018. This statewide law went into effect for 2016-2017, but we were granted a one-year waiver until a final determination could be made on whether charter schools will be required to comply. We do not know the final outcome of their decision at this time, but we must be prepared to extend the day if required.

Extending the day would result in a new dismissal time of at least 2:55 p.m. to meet the required 420 minutes of instruction per day. We will send out notification to parents as soon as we receive word from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) on their final decision, which will likely not come until May.

ANNUAL COMMITMENT LETTERS – DUE MARCH 31st

As a public-enrollment charter school, we are required to accept applications and hold an enrollment lottery for new students each spring. In order to calculate the number of available openings for those looking to join us next year, we must first know the intentions of our current students.

Our Annual Commitment Letters will be mailed out to parents/guardians of existing students as soon as we return from Spring Break. The purpose of these letters will be to indicate whether or not your student(s) are returning next school year. There is also available space to indicate any new siblings who wish to enroll with us in the coming year. Keep in mind an application will still be necessary for each sibling and admission is not guaranteed if their grade level is currently at capacity. By listing siblings on your commitment response, you will be contacted to begin the admission process for those students.

It is imperative these Commitment Letters are returned by the **due date of March 31st**. **If we do not receive a signed copy for your student(s), the Innovation Academy will make their spot(s) available to student(s) on our waiting list.**

As you take the time to consider your plans, we would like to highlight some of the exciting things taking place at the Innovation Academy now and in the near future.

UIL ACADEMIC MEET

Students from all three campuses came together February 10th in Tyler for our District UIL Academic Meet. Coaches and students worked hard to prepare and enjoyed a little friendly competition amongst their peers. Students were able to participate in chess, calculator applications, number sense, math, science, computer science, social studies, current events, impromptu speaking, persuasive speaking, storytelling, spelling, and ready writing. Medals were awarded to 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place, while ribbons were awarded to students placing 4th, 5th, or 6th. The campus with the highest overall points took home the coveted UIL Academic trophy. Points awarded were as follows: Longview – 1,249 points, Palestine – 1,148 points, and Tyler – 476 points. A detailed list of results is provided as a separate attachment with the Newsletter. Congratulations to Longview on the District win!

PROJECT LEAD THE WAY (PLTW) STUDENT SHOWCASE

We were excited to have our campuses to once again participate in the Student Showcase at the Project Lead the Way (PLTW) Conference in Austin. Two Tyler campus students, John Daniel and Trevor Dublin, led a presentation with the assistance of their PLTW Teachers, Mr. Vogt, Ms. Mabry, and Mr. Wilson, on the virtual reality classroom they have created with knowledge gained from their Gateway to Technology (GTT), Intro to Engineering and Design (IED), and Computer Science A (CSA) classes. Longview Campus had one student, Jade Pugh, who presented on work completed as part of her Computer Science course. <http://www.kvue.com/mb/tech/stirring-up-interest-for-stem-projects/408072024>

Our Longview campus also hosted a Family STEM night in celebration of Engineer's Week to show the public how they use PLTW to emphasize STEM across all disciplines. Families worked together to create circuits, build spaghetti bridges, design foil boats and test the weight loads they could carry, design and create cardboard tube rollercoasters, and figure out how they could "fit" through an index card.

Students, parents, grandparents, and siblings all had a great time working together on these challenges! Homemade chili, Frito pie, and desserts were available so families could enjoy the evening. Parents also donated door prizes for the event. View an article by Longview News-Journal here:

<http://longviewnewsjournal.tx.newsmemory.com/publink.php?shareid=434b0689a>

ODYSSEY OF THE MIND

Tyler students participated in the regional Odyssey of the Mind competition in Southlake, TX on February 25th. Three teams of students competed by presenting their long-term problem solutions. One of the three teams will advance to the state finals in Houston in mid-April where they will compete for a chance to represent the UTTIA at the world finals in May. The advancing team consists of Bridgette Hippe, Sammi Cooley, Rachel Daniel, Grace Wilson, Travis Salter, and Meredith Hilbig.

Odyssey of the Mind provides students an opportunity to participate in a large scale PBL, where they creatively problem solve and collaborate on a unique solution, demonstrate learning across all content areas, present to a panel of judges before an audience, while competing and interacting with students from all over the region, state, and world.

VEX ROBOTICS

Robotics Clubs in both Tyler and Palestine recently competed in the East Texas VEX Robotics Tournament held at UT Tyler. Tyler had two teams competing, one who made the top eight and the other who made the top four. Palestine had three teams compete, with the high school team making the finals. The teams had a great time and look forward to improving on their robots for future competitions.

TEAMS COMPETITION

Middle School and High School teams from all three campuses participated in the Tests of Engineering Aptitude, Mathematics and Science (TEAMS) competition for the first time. The event was hosted by the UT Tyler Ingenuity Center on March 4th and included various schools from the surrounding area. The competition includes three components; an essay, a multiple choice test focusing on engineering scenarios related to the annual theme, and the design/build challenge where students have 75 minutes to complete a hands-on design using a designated list of materials. In this one-day event, students apply math and science skills to solve real-world engineering challenges. This program is part of the Technology Student Association (TSA).

MATHLETICS

The Mathletics team from Tyler attended the Academic Rodeo awards ceremony on February 24th. Dominic Robinson, Ian Orr, Trevor Martinez, Navi Lee, Melissa Hilbig, and Hayden Burns were awarded a trophy for earning second place in the Mathletics competition which is held in conjunction with the East Texas State Fair.

DUKE TALENT SEARCH

Congratulations to Theoren Stroud, Sydney Sharp, Jack Moore, J.P. Kinsner, Lane Gill, Piper Choy, and Mitchell Campbell for qualifying to participate in the highly selective 2016-2017 Duke University Talent Identification Program (TIP) 7th Grade Talent competition. Students qualify by scoring at or above the 95th percentile on an accepted grade-level standardized test. Duke TIPS offers educational programs for academically talented students through the end of high school, including a Summer Studies Program, eStudies, Scholar Weekends, and Field Studies.

8th GRADE BRIDGE MEETINGS

Ms. Byrd, our Academic Counselor, will be hosting Bridge Meetings for 8th graders and their parents to provide them with valuable information in preparation for entry into high school. There are several important items that must be addressed pertaining to the Innovation Academy's dual credit model and graduation requirements. The meeting will provide information on:

- The State's Automatic College Admission Policy
- Personal Graduation Plans and the STEM Endorsement
- Dual Credit Eligibility (TSI Testing)
- Available Dual Credit Courses
- GPA/Ranking Information

The event will be held from **1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.** on each campus. Scheduled dates are:

Tyler – **March 23rd**

Palestine – **March 27th**

Longview – **April 4th**

We ask that both student and parents/guardians be present so they can learn what to expect, options available, and to sign required documents. Please mark your calendars and make plans to attend this important day. Hope to see you there!

DUAL CREDIT ENROLLMENT

As a T-STEM designated school, it is our goal to ensure all high school students take dual credit coursework as part of their Personal Graduation Plan (PGP) and STEM Endorsement. We had an impressive dual credit enrollment in the Fall Semester with 74% of 9th and 10th graders taking university credits. This semester we have improved on those numbers with **81% of our high school population enrolled in university-level coursework**; 79% of 9th graders and 83% of 10th graders. Freshman are taking COMM 1315 Intro to Public Speaking and Sophomores are taking USHIST 1302 and either PHIL 2306 Philosophy or PSYC 1301 Intro to Psychology. To enroll in dual credits students must be TSI eligible. To learn about TSI testing and our requirements, please see the next section.

8th, 9th, AND 10th GRADE TSI TESTING & BOOTCAMPS (HIGH SCHOOL)

To be eligible for dual credit coursework, students must be considered TSI ready, this is accomplished by receiving a passing cut score on a qualifying TSI exam. Students will be given this exam, the Accuplacer, at various intervals throughout the school year. In order to take the exam, students are required to take a pre-assessment activity. This pre-assessment activity is designed to give students a preview of how the test is formatted.

Students who do not pass the TSI administered in the Spring, and are therefore not considered dual credit eligible, will be required to attend TSI Bootcamps over the summer to help prepare them for future testing attempts. Students who remain ineligible when school begins will be placed in an Advisory course where they will be tutored in TSI study skills and preparation.

Once they have completed their TSI requirement and approved for dual credit enrollment, students will be registered for select university courses each semester.

Spring Testing will take place the week of May 15th at each campus. All 8th graders will be tested on the Reading and Writing portions, while the 9th and 10th graders who have not yet met the passing score in each subject area (Reading, Writing, and Math) will be tested accordingly. Summer Bootcamp dates have yet to be determined. Please watch for announcements from your campus concerning dates/times.

The following links serve as resources and study guides for the exam. We suggest using the following resources (in addition to any others you may find) to prepare for the exam.

<https://store.collegeboard.org/sto/productdetail.do?track=home&Itemkey=120095191>

<https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/accuplacer/accuplacer-texas-success-initiative-assessment-sample-questions.pdf>

BUDDY DAYS

Each campus hosts Buddy Days to allow outside students the chance to experience our model of Project Based Learning (PBL) by spending a day in an Innovation Academy classroom. We hope this opportunity allows parents who are considering educational options for their student to make an informed decision about what the UTTIA has to offer. If you have friends and family considering the UTTIA for 2017-2018, please invite them to attend Buddy Day as your students' guest. Only one guest per student and permission slips are required; please contact your Front Office for more information.

Palestine – January 27th (12 “buddies” participated)

Longview – February 3rd (21 “buddies” participated)

Tyler – **May 19th (registration due by May 12th);** (previous dates resulted in 16 “buddies” participating)

FACILITIES

As our charter continues to grow, we are working to renovate our campuses to meet the needs of our student populations from K-12. The addition of the former church building in Tyler will allow for the use of new classroom space in 2017-2018 after the completion of a planned remodel. Longview and Palestine will undergo a reorganization and repurpose of their space to accommodate the addition of new students in grades 2-3.

PARENT TEACHER ORGANIZATION (PTO)

Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) have been formed on each campus. Parents are working to provide support to students and staff through fundraising efforts. If you are interested in being involved with your campus PTO, please contact your Campus Director or visit our PTO webpage for more information.

<http://www.uttia.org/parent-teacher-organization/>

ATTENDANCE

Your student's attendance is expected. Absenteeism not only hinders student performance, but it is also against the law.

Section 25.085 of the Texas Education Code states that a child who is required to attend school under this section shall attend school each school day for the entire period the program of instruction is provided, unless exempted by law.

Students must be in attendance 90% of the school's instructional days to receive course credit. Read more about attendance requirements at <http://www.uttia.org/documents/2014/05/truancy-policy.pdf>

It is important students attend school regularly, because the 90% rule applies to all absences, both excused and unexcused. Students who have not met the 90% rule will be subject to an Attendance Committee Meeting as required by law. The Committee will review the student's attendance history, academic records, and any extenuating circumstances to make a determination on whether the student will be awarded credit and promoted to the next grade. The Committee has the right to assign make-up work/hours or retain a student based on their findings.

In order for us to properly record the reason for your child's absence, we ask that you supply a note each time your student is not in session, this includes partial day absences as well. Absences can be reported via email, but must be sent using an e-mail address on file for a parent/guardian.

Report an Absence:

Tyler – tylerabsence@uttia.org

Longview – longviewabsence@uttia.org

Palestine – palestineabsence@uttia.org

BAD WEATHER PROCEDURES

We hope the winter weather is behind us, but in the event of a winter storm, it may be necessary to delay school or close campuses for the safety of our students and staff. In the event of a weather delay/closure the district will notify parents/students by posting it on our district website (www.uttia.org), through Skyward Email, automated calling service, Remind 101 Text, and local media stations. The fastest way to receive this information is to sign up for our Emergency Alert System (Remind 101), instructions are included in the next section.

In the case of a delayed start, school will begin at 10:00 a.m. and release at 3:30 p.m. Students should bring a sacked lunch as usual.

EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM – REMIND 101

The Innovation Academy wants to ensure all parents/guardians are signed-up for our Emergency Alert System. This is a one-way text messaging service which allows us to send out important messages to all of you at once. It will primarily be utilized to communicate delays/closures due to inclement weather. We have found this option is much faster than our email or phone system. To sign-up, please follow the instructions below.

Tyler Send a text message to: 81010

Message: @uttiat

Longview Send a text message to: 81010

Message: @ialongview

Palestine Send a text message to: 81010

Message: @uttiapal