



West University Elementary School



Texas Education Agency Exemplary School
Texas Business and Education Coalition Honor Roll School
Texas Monthly Best Public Schools in Texas

GENERAL PARENT INFORMATION **2008 - 2009**

School Mascot: Mustang
School Colors: red, navy blue, white

web page: <http://ES.houstonisd.org/WestUniversity/>

OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Thursday: 7:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Friday: 7:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Main office: 713-295-5215
Fax: 713-667-8514

STATEMENT OF NON-DISCRIMINATION

It is the policy of the Houston Independent School District not to discriminate on the basis of age, color, handicap or disability, ancestry, national origin, marital status, race, religion, sex, veteran status, or political affiliation in its educational or employment programs and activities.

COMMUNICATION

- A. Monday folders – Each Monday the weekly folder will be sent home with important information for you. Please send the Mustang folder back to school each Tuesday. We will use these folders throughout the year.
- B. *The Pony Express* – This weekly newsletter will be sent home each Monday in the weekly folder. The PE contains important information regarding school activities for the coming weeks. The publication deadline for news items for the Pony Express is Thursday at noon. Items submitted for publication are subject to editing and must be approved by the principal.

- C. Monthly Food Service Calendar – Each month you will receive a calendar listing menus for the month in our school cafeteria.
- D. Special Bulletins – Every effort is made to include all information in the Monday folder, however occasionally it will be necessary to send home a special announcement on other days. Please check your child’s backpack each day for these items.
- E. Connect-Ed - HISD utilizes a telephone call-out program that enables us to contact all parents with a recorded telephone message. West U Elementary will use this sparingly to reduce interruptions to your family time. Most phone calls will go out to your home phone number. In the event we have urgent information to share with you, each of your contact numbers will be called. Please make sure the information you list on your child’s enrollment card is accurate. Please notify the office immediately if any of your contact information changes (telephone numbers, address, etc.) including your work number and cell number.

VISITORS

Texas state law and HISD policy require **all visitors**, including parent volunteers to produce a valid Texas Driver’s License or Texas DPS identification Card and sign in at the main office upon arrival at school. Furthermore, all visitors must obtain a visitor’s badge before proceeding to any part of the building. Visitors who do not abide by this requirement are subject to removal from campus and criminal prosecution for trespassing. We utilize the Raptor system. Your driver’s license or state DPS ID will be scanned into the computer and a photo visitor’s badge will be printed for your visit.

DRESS CODE

Please read the Dress Code policy included on a separate sheet of paper in the first day packet. The SDMC made some important changes to the Dress Code this year. The revised code was given to all of our returning students at the end of last year and provided to all new students at the time you enrolled your child.

SCHOOL SPIRIT DAY

Friday is school spirit day. Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to wear a West University Elementary shirt or the school colors on this day.

STUDENT USE OF TELEPHONES

Generally, students are not allowed to use the school telephones to call parents for forgotten homework, lunch money, after-school plans, etc. With approximately 1,000 students, it ties up our phones if we allow students to call whenever they forget something. This also discourages student responsibility. In the event of an emergency (to be determined by school office), a child may use the telephone.

CELL PHONES IN SCHOOL

Under HISD policy, students may have a cell phone in their possession. Students may not use the phone nor have it turned on during the school day. Furthermore, students may not use the cell phone in the school building before or after school if it causes a disruption or causes the student to be tardy, or miss their bus or carpool ride. Students who violate this policy will have their cell phone confiscated. Parents may retrieve the confiscated phone from the office. Repeat violations will result in a loss of the privilege of possessing a cell phone on campus. See the *HISD Code of Student Conduct, 2008-2009* for more information.

FIELD TRIP POLICY

Students must have a signed parent field trip permission form on file before they will be allowed to leave campus on a field trip. These forms will be sent home by the teacher prior to the field trip.

RELEASE OF STUDENTS DURING SCHOOL DAY

Parents must report to the office and personally sign out their child. We will then call over the intercom for the student to come to the office to leave school or give you a release slip if you wish to pick up your child from their class room. Please give the release slip to the teacher who has your child at that time. If your child is at Ancillary class, that teacher will, in turn, give the slip to your child's homeroom teacher.

Children returning to school that day must be signed in at the office prior to their return to class.

Students will not be released to anyone who has not been cleared through the office. Office personnel will ask for a driver's license or state DPS identification card. The driver's license or ID number will be recorded on the Student Sign-Out Sheet. Office personnel will check the enrollment card of the student to verify the parent's name, or to verify that the parent has given permission to release the student to that person.

In the event a parent calls to authorize us to release their child to another adult, office personnel will verify the identity of the parent with a return call to the parent's number listed on the enrollment card.

The principal must be informed, with proper legal documentation, of any legal matters regarding parent visitation rights, custody, or guardianship. Please contact our school Student Information Management Specialist, Mrs. Sandra Cloud, in the school office if you have any questions concerning student custody issues.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

All students must be in class by the 7:45 a.m. bell. Students who arrive after this time are considered tardy and must be accompanied by an adult to the front office and issued a tardy note to class.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT EACH CHILD ARRIVE TO SCHOOL ON TIME EACH DAY. We begin our instructional day immediately following the morning exercises and

announcements. Your child cannot fully participate in the day's activities if they miss this important starting activity and are not in their class ready to begin the day at 7:45.

Students are required by state law to be in attendance for at least 90% (no more than 10 excused absences) of the days class is in session. Absences in excess of this rule constitute failure unless overridden by the school attendance committee. ***Acceptable excuses for absences and tardiness are personal illness, sickness or death in the family, quarantine, weather or road conditions making travel dangerous, participation in school activities with permission, religious holy days, and or emergencies or unusual circumstances recognized by the principal.*** Additionally, in accordance with the Texas Education Code S21.035(f), a student shall be excused from attending school for the purpose of observing religious holy days when it is a tenet of their faith that they must be absent from school during such time. In addition, students may also be excused for one travel day to and one travel day from a religious holy day observance. Any additional travel days are unexcused absences.

Absences or tardies for any reasons other than those listed in the last paragraph are considered unexcused.

We no longer ask parents to call school to report student absences unless your child has a contagious disease such as chicken pox. In such case, please contact our school nurse, Paula Bottecelli, to report the illness.

Students will be provided a reasonable amount of time to complete make-up work after absences.

Upon a student's return to school after an absence, the student **must** provide a signed note from the parent stating the reason for the excused absence or tardy (see list of acceptable excuses in the first paragraph on this page). Notes not received within **three school days** shall be considered **unexcused**.

We are required under Texas law to report any unexcused absences in excess of three days to HISD and Harris County District Attorney's Office. The Harris County District Attorney's Office will continue the "Stay In School" program, which is designed to increase school attendance. Once your child has reached the legal limit of three (3) unexcused absences, a warning letter will be sent to your home. If, however, your child continues to incur additional unexcused absences, the school will file a case in the Justice of the Peace court, where you and your child must appear in response to the charges.

Students are not counted absent if the child has a documented appointment with a health care professional as long as the student commences classes or returns to school on the same day as the appointment. The appointment must be supported by documentation such as a note from the health care professional. Most doctors, dentists, etc. have pre-printed forms for this purpose. Remember to ask for a school excuse note when you check out at their offices, student must arrive on campus with required documentation.

HISD policy states that an elementary student's absence during official ADA attendance reporting time that results from an individual visit to a Magnet school during Magnet Week, or a private school, is not considered an extracurricular, co-curricular, or district-sponsored activity for the purpose of attendance accounting. The student must be counted absent.

Please contact Mrs. Sandra Cloud, Student Information Management Specialist, if you have any questions relating to attendance.

ENROLLMENT INFORMATION CARD

In the first day packet, each child receives a 8 ½” x 11” “Enrollment Information” card. Please complete this form filling in **all** information. These important cards are kept on file in the main office and are used to notify parents in the event of a student emergency. Additionally, we will consult this card before releasing a student to anyone. It is extremely important to have correct and updated information on the cards including telephone numbers. **Please notify the office immediately if your home, work, pager, or emergency contact numbers change during the school year.**

LOST AND FOUND

Parents are encouraged to label their child’s belongings including clothing articles to enable easy identification if misplaced. The Lost and Found is located in a basket in the clinic. Eyeglasses, money, jewelry, keys and other valuables are kept in the main office. We periodically donate unclaimed items to Goodwill. Please check the basket in the clinic if your child doesn’t come home with his/her belongings.

PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCES

Parents are encouraged to confer with their child’s teacher. All conferences must be scheduled in advance. Parents may call the main office and leave a message for their child’s teacher indicating that they wish to schedule a conference. The teacher will contact you to schedule a time for the conference. Parents and visitors may **not** interrupt classes to talk to a teacher, nor will teachers be called to the telephone during class time.

STUDENT USE OF TELEPHONES

Our telephone lines are extremely busy. At times, it is difficult for callers to reach us. Consequently, student use of the telephone is discouraged, except in the case of an extreme emergency. **Plans for after school pick-up should be established by the parent and child before the child comes to school each day.** There are pay telephones at the Harris County Library (Auden) and the Scout House (Edloe).

CAFETERIA PROCEDURES

Students may bring lunch from home with utensils needed to eat lunch with the exception of sharp knives.

Additional food items may be purchased from the cafeteria serving line.

Students may purchase a plate lunch, ala carte items or snack items from the serving line.

Parents or students may purchase a lunch card in the office for a period of one to four weeks (Cash only; no checks. See Financial Clerk Lucille Francis in the front office).

Students who forget to bring lunch money or a lunch will be provided a nutritious lunch per federal school lunch guidelines and HISD policy.

Parents are encouraged to join their child for lunch. Please remember to sign in at the main office and obtain a visitor's badge.

All HISD students are eligible for breakfast at no charge each school day. Students must finish breakfast and leave the cafeteria in time for class. Students may not use breakfast as an excuse for being tardy.

Please encourage your child to demonstrate good behavior in the cafeteria each day.

TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL NUTRITION POLICY

Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV) Policy

FMNV refers to the four categories of foods and beverages (soda water, water ices, chewing gum, and certain candies) that are restricted by the U. S. Department of Agriculture under the child nutrition programs. Elementary school campuses may not serve or provide access for students to FMNV and all other forms of candy at any time anywhere on school premises until the end of the last scheduled class. Such foods and beverages may not be sold or given away to students on school premises by school administrators or staff (principals, coaches, teachers, etc.), students or student groups, parents or parent groups, or any other person, company or organization.

Competitive Foods

An elementary school campus may not serve competitive foods (or provide access to them through direct or indirect sales) to students anywhere on school premises throughout the school day until the end of the last scheduled class. This does not pertain to food items made available by the school food service department. Elementary classrooms may allow one nutritious snack per day under the teacher's supervision. The snack may be in the morning or afternoon but may not be at the same time as the regular meal periods for that class. The snack may be provided by the school food service, the teacher, parents or other groups and should be at no cost to students. The snack must comply with the fat and sugar limits of the Public School Nutrition Policy and may not contain any FMNVs or consist of candy or dessert type items (cookies, cakes, cupcakes, pudding, ice cream or frozen desserts, etc.). Please refer to the attached revised suggestions for nutritious snacks.

FMNV AND TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL NUTRITION POLICY EXEMPTIONS

School Events: Students may be given FMNV, candy items or other restricted foods during the school day for up to three different events each school year to be determined by campus. The SDMC at West U has designated Thursday, December 14, Wednesday, February 14, and Wednesday, May 23 as the three school event days for our school. During these events, FMNV may not be given during meal times in the areas where school meals are being served or consumed.

TAKS Test Days: Schools and parents may provide one additional nutritious snack per day for students taking the TAKS tests. The snack must comply with the fat and sugar limits of the Public School Nutrition Policy and may not contain any foods of minimal nutritional value or consist of candy, chips or dessert type items (cookies, cakes, cupcakes, pudding, ice cream or frozen desserts, etc.).

Instructional Use of Food in Classroom: For instructional purposes, teachers may use foods as long as the food items are not considered FMNV or candy. Students may consume food prepared in class for instructional purposes, however, this should be on an occasional basis, and food may not be provided or sold to other students or classes. Food provided for students as part of a class or school cultural heritage event for instructional or enrichment purposes would be exempt from the policy, however, FMNV may not be served during meal periods in the areas where school meals are being served or consumed.

Field Trips: School-approved field trips are exempt from the nutrition policy. A school official must approve the dates and purposes of the field trips in advance.

This policy does not restrict what parents may provide for their own child's lunch or snacks. Parents may provide FMNV or candy items for their own child's consumption, **but they may not provide restricted items to other children at school.**

COMPLIANCE AND PENALTIES

The Texas Department of Agriculture will aggressively enforce and diligently monitor the Texas School Nutrition Policy to ensure compliance. When violations of this policy are noted, TDA will disallow all meal reimbursement for the day and require the school to reimburse the food service account for the lost reimbursement. A documented corrective action plan will be required and will be monitored diligently to ensure continued compliance. **There are schools in HISD who were forced to reimburse the state out of their general instructional fund last year due to parents violating the Texas Public School Nutrition Policy. Please help us avoid this situation by following the policy.**

BUILDING ACCESS

All exterior doors to the building except for the main entrance in front of the office will be locked each day at 8:00 a.m. **ALL PARENTS VISITING CAMPUS BETWEEN 8:00 A.M. AND THE END OF THE SCHOOL DAY MUST ENTER THE BUILDING THROUGH THE MAIN ENTRANCE (REMEMBER TO SIGN IN AND GET A VISITOR'S BADGE!).**

Prominent notices are posted at each entrance indicating that all visitors must first report to the campus administrative office. This shall apply to parents, Board members, volunteers, social service workers, invited speakers, maintenance and repair persons not employed by the District, salespersons, representatives of the news media, former students, and any other visitors.

Visits to individual classrooms during instructional time shall be permitted only with the principal's and teacher's approval, and such visits shall not be permitted if their duration or frequency interferes with the delivery of instruction or disrupts the normal school environment.

Any person entering or leaving school premises shall first obtain permission from authorized personnel.

BUILDING SAFETY/SECURITY

We take student safety and security very seriously at West U. For that reason, we ask parents to abide by all safety and security guidelines including traffic rules, building access, etc. Each year, our school Safety Council updates our Safety and Security Plan. We appreciate your cooperation with these plans and policies

EMERGENCY DISMISSAL PROCEDURES/FLOODING

Please complete and return the green form included in the first day packet. When heavy rain and street flooding occur in the morning, your child **will not** be counted tardy. Please **do not** attempt to drive or walk through flood waters. Wait until waters recede and you can safely escort your child to school. In high flood water, manhole covers will float off of the manholes. If you or your child were to step into a manhole, you or your child could drown. Please do not take this chance. We have had situations in year's past when major flooding occurred preventing some parents from getting to school. **We will stay with your child until you or someone you designate can arrive.**

BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL PLANS

Students should not be dropped off at school prior to 7:15 a.m. The cafeteria is open at this time for students who wish to purchase breakfast. All students except those eating breakfast in the cafeteria will wait outside until the 7:35 a.m. bell rings. **No students are allowed in the building prior to this time.** On days of inclement weather, students may go to the cafeteria to wait for the 7:35 a.m. bell.

Please plan carefully with your child regarding after school plans each day. Students should **not** use the office phone except in emergency situations to call parents after school to arrange pick-up plans. All students should be picked up from school **no later than 3:15 p.m.** Except in the case of street flooding, there is no supervision available after this time. Students should not be left at the West University Library unattended after school. A list of nearby day care providers is available in the school office.

CLOSING OF SCHOOL DUE TO INCLEMENT WEATHER

The HISD Superintendent of Schools may close schools because of inclement weather or emergencies (flooding, icy roads, power failures, etc.). HISD instantaneously announces such closings through its new telephone and e-mail notification system, Connect-ED. This information is also announced on radio and television stations (KTRK AM 740 and KTRH ABC Channel 13 are both good sources for this information.). Under both emergency closing plans, **A** and **B**, students are excused from class for the day. Under plan A, all employees are also excused. Under plan B, schools are closed, but administrative offices remain open.

Individuals who miss the announcements can phone HISD's Weather Hotline (713-267-1704) for details.

PARENT CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Frequently we receive requests from parents to observe in classrooms. This can be for a variety of reasons from "I want to see how my child acts in class," to "I want to see which class would be best for my child next year."

It is our policy that we do not allow parents to observe any classroom. There are sound reasons for this policy. If a parent is concerned about their child's behavior, their presence in the class will not result in a true picture of how the child behaves on a normal school day. The child will act differently if mom or dad is present.

Secondly, very few parents are trained in classroom observation protocol. If their purpose is to observe instruction, the question must be asked, "What training do you have to assess instructional methodology and practice?".

Finally, given the nature of our community, once we allow parents to observe in classes we will be approached with numerous requests to do the same from other parents and prospective parents. This will create a disruption to the instructional and educational process at our school. Please contact the school principal if you have any questions relative to this policy.

DOGS ON CAMPUS

Parents, please remember to keep all dogs outside our school fence. With all the students arriving at the same time in the morning and leaving at the same time at dismissal, there is the possibility that a dog may become nervous and bite a child. Additionally, some of our students are frightened of dogs and the presence of dogs on campus scares some children. All dogs must be on a leash and may not be brought inside the fence surrounding the school property.

VOLUNTEERS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Volunteers are crucial to the continued success of WUES. Whether volunteering with a class party, chaperoning a field trip, participating in field day, or helping with fundraising events, you are important and needed.

HISD policy and state law mandate that we must conduct a criminal background check for all volunteers who may be in direct contact with students or who may supervise students. To err on the side of the safety of our children, we require VIPS approval for any school activity that is not a spectator event. For example, parents may attend the 5th Grade Promotion Program as a spectator, but they must complete the VIPS approval process in order to chaperone the 5th Grade Picnic. Examples of activities that require VIPS approval include, but are not limited to, Field Day, Kindergarten Thanksgiving Feast, 4th Grade Texas State Fair, any field trip, etc. This list is obviously not inclusive. Please contact your child's teacher or Magnet Coordinator Tracey Wyatt if you are unsure about a particular event. We encourage all parents to complete the VIPS registration process in order to make it possible for all parents to participate in a variety of volunteer roles at our school. We typically have over 1500 volunteers register for VIPS each year.

At West University Elementary, we divide our activities into two groups:

1. **Parent/ Student or Parent Activities (these do not require VIPS approval)** – Examples of these are: Red Apple, Meet and Greet, Round-up, Tours, Coffees, Open House, Carnival, Auction, Student Grade Level Programs, PTO meetings, lunch, Art Night, Math Night, Science Night, Bookfair, International Festival, PTO workshops and special visitors, promotion ceremonies, and any activity where the parents are spectators and not in direct contact with children.
2. **Student Activities with Parent Volunteers (these require VIPS approval)** – Field day (parents who are not VIPS approved can watch from the bleachers or outside of the gate), parent readers, folder stuffers, field trip helpers, library volunteers, special luncheons (which are grade level driven such as Kindergarten Thanksgiving Feast, 4th Grade Texas State Fair, etc), special presentations for classrooms, class parties, judges for Science Fair and other competitions, parents that work with after school enrichment groups (chess, CML, Number Sense etc....)

These lists are not exclusive. Please contact your child's teacher or Magnet Coordinator Tracey Wyatt if you are unsure whether or not an activity requires VIPS approval.

Each year we have parents who are not allowed to participate in school activities due to their failure to complete this process. We don't like to see this happen and we encourage you to contact Ms. Wyatt if you have any questions or need assistance with the registration process.

All parents approved last year via the procedures listed below have "rolled over" as approved this year, therefore, no action is needed for approved parents from last year.

How can I become a VIPS? All volunteers must register online and pass a criminal background check before they can participate as a volunteer. Please follow these steps to become a VIPS at West U or any HISD school:

⇒ **PARENTS WHO WERE VIPS APPROVED LAST YEAR WILL ROLL OVER INTO THIS YEAR'S VIPS APPROVED LIST. These parents, grandparents, and other volunteers do not need to do anything further to be approved for this year.**

Step 1: Register online at www.houstonisd.org. Stay on the homepage and scroll down to the bottom of the page, click on the word Parents or Public and then click on VIPS login or click on the VIPS Volunteers in Public Schools Logo Parent Engagement Web Portal.

Step 2: Once you have registered, you **must** go in person to the school of interest and show proof of identification.

Step 3: Identification information will go into our database for processing by the Campus Volunteer Coordinator (at West U, this is Magnet Coordinator Tracey Wyatt)

Step 4: The criminal history background check can take **2-3 weeks** to complete.

Step 5: Once you are CLEARED to volunteer, you are eligible to volunteer throughout HISD.

What type of identification is accepted?

- Texas Driver's License Official Passport
- Texas Identification Card Official U.S. Military ID
- Driver's License (issued by any state in the U.S.) Matricula Consular
- Identification Card (issued by any state in the U.S.) Resident Alien Card

Please be assured that the school never views the HISD database, and we will not see your private information. We are only informed whether a parent or other volunteer is approved or denied VIPs status.

Again, we encourage all parents to complete this process early in the school year to avoid the situation where you will not be able to participate in a school activity.

Our students benefit when our parents volunteer!

WEST U ELEMENTARY PARENT-TEACHER ORGANIZATION (PTO)

One of the hallmarks of our school is our wonderful and supportive PTO. Each year our PTO raises significant funds to supplement our programs at West U. All parents are encouraged to join the PTO and to participate in PTO activities to the degree that you are able. We recognize and respect that the level of participation will vary from parent to parent depending upon your other commitments. Please participate as much as you can; your involvement, regardless of the degree, is important to your child and to us. Your efforts will be appreciated.

IN CONCLUSION.....

Each year this document gets larger and larger as we try to get as much information to our parents as possible to insure a successful start of the year for your child. While we try to include everything in this document, we can never think of each and every situation where we have a policy or practice that impacts you and your child. In other words, this publication is not inclusive nor is it limiting. Throughout the year there situations may arise that require an adjustment of our practice. Thus, this document is not referred to as a "handbook", but rather as "parent general information". Your assistance in cooperating with our established policies, procedures, and practices is greatly appreciated.

QUOTE OF THE YEAR

"The potential of a child is the most intriguing and stimulating thing in all creation."

—Dr. Ray L. Wilbur
3rd President of Stanford University and
U. S. Secretary of the Interior

APPROVED:



John T. Threet, Principal