

# Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about MIS/HPMS... But Were Afraid to Ask...

## Academics

### How do teachers decide what students are to learn?

Teachers begin curriculum planning with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), which can be viewed at: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/teks/index.html> The TEKS include the state-required curriculum for each content area.

During the summer and in team meetings throughout the year, teachers work together to organize the standards into teachable units based on what students should know and be able to do. The curriculum timelines outlining these units can be viewed at: <http://curriculum.hpsid.org/index2.html> The district curriculum timelines are a work in progress as curriculum is constantly updated based on the needs of students.

### How do teachers decide what instructional strategies, resources, and assessments to use?

After the curriculum timelines are established, the teachers meet together in departmental teams to discuss how they will teach the required content. Teachers collaborate and share ideas regarding ways to make instruction challenging and engaging for all students. Specific teachers' daily work and homework assignments can be viewed at [www.schoolnotes.com](http://www.schoolnotes.com).

Teachers participate in professional development activities that deal with differentiation, technology integration, effective teaching practices, student engagement, and effective assessment practices. Departmental chairs then facilitate departmental planning times in which teachers discuss and select the resources they will use to teach their lessons. Teachers also discuss common assessments to help ensure consistency of learning standards and achievement across the grade level.

### Why is there so much emphasis on the TAKS?

First, we need to distinguish between the TEKS and the TAKS. We do align our instruction to the **Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)** because those are the necessary concepts and skills that all students must master. These TEKS are based on national and state standards. We teach to the verbs of the TEKS, which include critical thinking skills (identify, compare and contrast, make inferences, distinguish, summarize, etc.). We also look at the nouns of the TEKS to ensure our students are exposed to all types of formats and equipment they need to master (graphs, calculators, probes, literary devices, etc.) We use the TEKS as a framework for writing the district curriculum and planning daily lessons that are challenging and engaging. The **Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)** is an end-of-year summative assessment that measures how well individual students and the school as a whole have mastered the TEKS. The TAKS is a very public measure of our school's performance. The TAKS results and accountability rating (currently EXEMPLARY for all HPISD schools and the district) affect the schools' reputations, real estate values, and perceptions of the quality of the school district. The TAKS rating can even influence the support and enrollment of our schools. However, the TAKS must be kept in perspective. It does not drive instruction;

it is simply a summative measure of how well students have learned the TEKS. We strive for day to day activities and assessments that are meaningful and challenging, but those are not publicized like the TAKS results are. Some examples of other types of formative and summative assessments we use are class discussions, oral responses, student projects, student presentations and products, written products, student demonstrations and other performances, science labs, student displays, and teacher-written quizzes and tests.

### **How do HPMS and MIS compare to other schools across the state and nation?**

Both schools are exemplary schools and are consistently awarded the Texas Business and Education Coalition Honor Roll status, putting them at the top of schools across the state. Both schools earned Gold Performance Awards from the Texas Education Agency for the highest levels of commended performance and attendance. HPMS was also recognized as a 2005 National Blue Ribbon School, putting it in the top ten percent of middle schools in America.

### **How can I monitor my child's academic progress?**

Begin with accessing your child's teachers' notes on [www.schoolnotes.com](http://www.schoolnotes.com). You can also see your child's grades, schedule, and attendance report on Parent Internet Viewer (PIV) at: <http://piv.hpisd.org/>

Four times a year, teachers hold "Open Team Meetings". I highly encourage you to attend this informal meetings to hear about the important learning your child is doing in the classroom. Each teacher will give an update on their subject area and a Q & A time will be held for interested parents.

Additionally, if you need specific feedback, or if you have a concern about your child's progress, I encourage you to schedule a team conference with your child's team of teachers. Contact one of your child's core area teachers to set up a conference. Typically, the child's advisory teacher will take care of the details in scheduling the conference.

As students enter middle school, parents need to help them begin to learn to monitor their own progress and responsibility levels. Have students get on PIV and schoolnotes with you and talk about their continued progress. Help your child learn to be his/her best advocate. By middle school, students should take the lead in this process while the parent provides support and appropriate expectations. A former Director of Admissions at UT was recently asked, "What makes a successful freshman at UT?" She replied, "They know when they need help, and they know how to get it." Middle school is a great time to let students tryout the process of approaching their teachers and trying to solve their own problems, while the parent is close by to provide support and communication.

### **What if my child is struggling in the classroom?**

Start with an email to the teacher letting him/her know of your child's struggles. Many times small adjustments can be made that will make a big difference to the child. If the child still struggles, involve the counselor. We will closely monitor the child's progress with you to see if we can pinpoint the cause of his/her difficulty and find a solution. If difficulty continues, the counselor may schedule a "Student Support Team" (SST) meeting to look more deeply

into the cause of the student's difficulty and to deepen the level of intervention. Some specific interventions that we may use are classroom and/or work adjustments, tutoring, small group instruction, increased attention to the student in class, and support classes in place of an elective.

During the SST meeting, a parent or staff member may recommend additional evaluation and testing to determine the source of the child's difficulty and recommend appropriate placement in support classes. If regular educational services and differentiation activities do not help, a referral for dyslexia and/or special education testing may be needed. If you suspect that a special education evaluation needs to be made, contact your child's counselor or the school's special education coordinator (Kim Brady).

### **What type of schoolwide recognition is available for students who exhibit high levels of academic performance?**

MIS and HPMS – “A” Honor Roll recognition; Newsletter recognition for special events such as winners of contests, students exhibiting leadership, students who excel in some type of performance; Postcards for various accomplishments

HPMS – National Honor Society; 8th grade Awards Assembly

Students who exhibit a need for accelerated instruction may be tested for advanced-level coursework and/or talented and gifted services.

### **What about the average student who works really hard?**

Remember, the “average” student makes up the bulk of society as well as our schools! We believe in providing a well-rounded education so that *every* student has the opportunity to pursue whatever school and career paths they choose in the future. We encourage *every* student to work to the best of their ability while we, the educators, work to provide lots of encouragement and an appropriate level of challenge for *all* students. Our “average” kids go on to experience very high levels of success in college and careers. Most of that will depend more on effort level, perseverance, drive for success, and passion for learning, rather than an IQ score.

### **What if my child complains of being bored?**

Sometimes school is boring. Kids say this for a variety of reasons: the type of work they have to do doesn't appeal to their style; the work is too hard; the work is too easy; they are tired; they have other things they'd rather do. In today's high tech world, it's a challenge to keep kids highly engaged all the time. While we try to keep instruction as engaging as possible, sometimes students just have to buckle down and do the work because they are learning content or skills they simply must know in order to be successful in future courses. As the parent, use your knowledge of your child to determine if this is typical middle school behavior or something more serious. Contact the school counselor if you feel this is more serious.

### **How much time should be spent on homework?**

Every child is different, and they will complete their homework at different rates. A good rule of thumb is that homework should not take more than 12 minutes per grade level (60 minutes in 5th; 72 minutes in 6th; 84 minutes in 7th; 96 minutes in 8th). In 5th and 6th grades, students have 70 minute class periods and a 35 minute advisory period. Don't be concerned if the homework takes less time in these grades due to the longer advisory period. For 7th and 8th grades, students have 50-minute class periods and 26 minutes for advisory. If kids wait until the last minute to study, or to complete projects, etc., there may be nights where the homework seems particularly burdensome. Analyze the work environment at home....are there too many electronics going around at once? Do your kids need a quieter environment in order to focus? Is someone monitoring his/her progress? If your child is consistently spending more than 2 hours a night on homework, I recommend a team conference with the counselor and your child's teachers.

### **What is the difference between TAG and AP? What is Pre-AP?**

Students are identified for TAG (Talented and Gifted) through specific district criteria. Fifth graders are served through Explorations and TAG math. Sixth, seventh, and eighth graders are identified by subject area for TAG classes. Teachers assigned to TAG classes are trained to meet the specific needs of TAG students. TAG classes are also offered in high school and are also designed to tap into the specific needs of TAG students (complex learning; accelerated learning).

AP (Advanced Placement) courses are open enrollment in high school. For AP courses, a specific curriculum is offered to students through the College Board. These courses are designed as college-prep and are aligned with the requirements for AP tests to be taken at the end of the course. High scores on these tests could result in the student receiving college credit. At HPMS, 80% of high school juniors and seniors take at least one AP course.

Pre-AP includes courses leading to the AP sequence at high school (see handout-available on the HPMS website).

### **How does my child get into TAG? AP? Pre-AP?**

TAG – There are forms in the counseling office; testing is required and is only scheduled at certain times of year (unless your child is a new student).

AP – open enrollment; however student must meet course requirements; discuss high school AP options with high school counselor; teacher input is recommended

Pre-AP -- All courses at the middle school are designed to prepare students for AP success at high school, however only Algebra I is considered Pre AP (see handout).

### **How does a student “skip” grade levels and/or courses?**

Tests for acceleration (see district testing calendar [www.hpisd.org](http://www.hpisd.org) for dates) are required. For students in grades 5-6, a 90% or above must be scored on all four core area tests in order to accelerate to the next grade level. For seventh and eighth grades, tests are given in each subject area. A score of 90% is required in order to accelerate beyond the course. A conference with the counselor is highly recommended before a student takes a test for acceleration.

### **How are students placed in 7th grade math?**

Most students will continue the course sequence and be placed in 7th grade math. However, due to Pre AP opportunities for Algebra I in middle school, at the end of 6th grade a math placement test is given to all students. Students who meet criteria (90% or above on math placement test, commended on TAKS, five six-week grade averages of 90 or above) are accelerated to 8th grade math as a seventh grader. They will take Algebra I as an eighth grader. These students are typically stronger math students who will end up going through AP Calculus at the high school. If a student is not ready for Algebra I as an eighth grader, and they still want to take Calculus in high school, they can still do so if they take a math course in summer school or double up on math courses in high school.

Sixth grade TAG students who are already accelerated a year in math take a math placement test to determine whether they should continue the sequence and take 8th grade math (which most do) or accelerate another year into Algebra I as a 7th grader.

### **Why is 7th grade such a big transition year?**

Seventh grade is the entry into secondary education. Teachers are trained in a slightly different way which sometimes contributes to a different approach with students. Teachers in secondary schools are trained to teach with a more content-specific approach, while elementary teachers are trained as generalists who teach all subjects in a more holistic way. Recent changes in the certification processes require teachers who obtain a certification in grades 4-8 to have a subject specialization.

More classes, shorter class periods, shorter advisory time, more extra curricular activities, increased level of student responsibility and independence, beginning preparation for high school, and developmental changes (physical changes, emotional changes, more peer interaction and increased attention to peers) all contribute to the transitions students are experiencing as 7<sup>th</sup> graders.

Mid-term and final exams are new to 7<sup>th</sup> graders. They must learn to retain the information and prepare thoroughly for these exams. Because this is a new process for students, mid-terms and final exams count 10% of the final grade. In high school, mid-terms and final exams count 25% of the final grade.

**Important to Know (now and in high school):** Keep quizzes, notes, and tests organized throughout the semester; they will come in handy when completing reviews and studying for exams. Some teachers give notebook quizzes and/or notebook grades to emphasize the importance of this organizational skill.

### **What courses are available for high school credit in middle school?**

Health/Speech; Foreign Language (grades 7-8); Algebra I; Geometry

### **Why would I want/not want my child to take those courses?**

This is *very* dependent on the characteristics of your child. These courses are tough courses in which students earn high school credit. Many aren't ready. Many are. If you are unsure about these options, seek out your child's input, along with that of his/her teachers and counselor. Your counselors have years of experience with kids this age and with these courses. Listen to their advice. Use previous data and your child's study habits and schedule

as guidelines. Some students need the challenge and increased work load, some do not. Some are developmentally ready and some are not.

Advantages of taking these courses in middle school:

- 1.) frees up future choices in high school
- 2.) students receive early credits toward graduation
- 3.) the first year of foreign language moves slower, taking two years rather than one

Disadvantages:

- 1.) some students who are not ready experience frustration and even failure
- 2.) some students are not ready for the increased pressure
- 3.) students may miss some exploratory electives
- 4.) for some students, a second year of language, instead of the first year, as a ninth grader adds increased pressure for the ninth grade year

### **Do these courses show up on the transcript? Count toward GPA?**

Yes, the credit and grade appear on the transcript. No, the grade does not count toward high school GPA.

### **How many eighth grade students are currently enrolled in the following courses for high school credit?**

Based on 2006-07 enrollment of 8<sup>th</sup> graders only (510 students total):

Foreign Language? 275 students (54%) Health and Speech? 412 (81%)

Algebra I? 136 students (27%) Geometry? 21 students (4%)

### **How will I know what courses my child should take in ninth grade?**

In the spring, high school counselors will meet with students to discuss academic planning for high school. Written information, including a high school course guide, will be given to each student, and parent meetings will be held with middle and high school counselors. Students register for classes online in the spring.

## **Discipline**

### **What is the biggest discipline issue at MIS? HPMS?**

MIS--

- Attention/focus
- Bullying/gossip
- Homework completion/organizational skills

HPMS-

- Bullying/gossip
- Homework completion/organizational skills
- Dress code

### **What is being done to prevent bullying?**

- Fifth grade students are taught about bullying behavior and what bullying really means. Students are taught how to get help whether they are a victim, a bystander, or a participant in bullying behavior. This course is taught by a representative from "Family Place".

- Sixth graders are taught about making good decisions and dealing with peer interactions through the DARE decision-making model. The DARE course is taught by police officer, Rock Hardin.
- Seventh and eighth graders participate in advisory discussions with the assistant principals throughout the year. These sessions focus on respect, while educating students about harassment and bullying behaviors.
- Both schools participate in a “NO put-down” policy in which all students who put down others are immediately corrected by any adult who hears it. Students are also encouraged to speak up for the victim if they hear a put-down. Students who are aware of bullying are expected to report these incidents to a counselor, assistant principal, or principal. Parents who hear of bullying incidents are also highly encouraged to report these incidents to the assistant principal.

Students who are found to be participating in bullying behaviors will receive appropriate consequences that are based on the severity of their behavior. Consequences will also escalate for students who are found to participate in bullying behavior on a repeated basis. Parents will be contacted. We have found that parents who jump on this behavior and take it seriously tend to eliminate the behavior in the student. Parents who deny their students are participating in this behavior or feel their child is somehow justified in the behavior do not see the same success in eliminating this behavior in their child. We ask for your support in eliminating this behavior among our students. Bullying, including “cyber-bullying” can be as small as the unwelcome teasing of a friend or as big as malicious gossip toward others and physical threats.

### **What are the attendance requirements?**

Students must be in attendance 90% of school days for any course. For most courses, this means no more than 18 absences per year. For health and speech, semester credit courses, a student may have no more than 9 absences per semester.

### **How do I keep up with my student’s attendance?**

Your child’s attendance report is available online through Parent Internet Viewer.

### **What happens if my child misses more than 18 class periods (9 periods for semester courses)?**

You child loses credit for the course. If there are extenuating circumstances, an attendance committee hearing will be called to discuss the student’s specific circumstances.

### **What types of consequences do we use for misbehavior?**

Teacher conference  
 Team conference  
 Teacher detention  
 Parent contact  
 Parent conference  
 Administrator conference  
 Administrator detention  
 Lunch ISS  
 In-school Suspension (ISS)

Out of School Suspension  
Alternative Educational Placement (AEP)  
Expulsion  
(See Code of Conduct)

**How do we acknowledge positive behavior?**

MIS-  
Praise/recognition to parents  
Good citizenship grades  
Feathers (10 feathers=big feather and small prize in the office)  
“Caught you being good” = small prize in the office  
Citizen of the Month Pizza Parties  
Postcards home

HPMS-  
Praise/recognition to parents  
Good citizenship grades  
Citizen of the Month Luncheon  
Postcards home

**Student Activities**

**What type of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities are available for my child?**

Sports  
Band, Orchestra, Choir, Art, Drama  
  
MIS--Student Ambassadors/Safety Patrol  
HPMS—  
Cheerleading  
Clubs  
Community Service  
Student Council  
National Junior Honor Society

**What type of sports are available for HPMS students?**

Football, volleyball, basketball, track, cross-country, tennis  
(MIS students participate in PE only.)

**How are athletic teams selected?**

For football, all who are interested can play. For volleyball and basketball, team sizes must be manageable. Therefore, students participate in a try-out process. They are provided feedback from coaches. Results of the try-outs are posted by the coaches. Students who do not make the team are highly encouraged to continue in the athletics class, participating in an off-season program.

**What is off-season?**

For students who are not competing on the athletic teams, the off-season program is provided with the goal of developing and improving athletic skills.

### **How does off-campus PE work?**

A 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade student who participates in a competitive sport for a minimum of 15 hours per week outside the school day qualifies to apply for an off-campus PE class. This class takes the place of a 1<sup>st</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> period elective, depending on the work-out schedule of the student. Requirements and application forms are posted on the HPMS website. (<http://ms.hpisd.org/ahpms/forms.html>) Off-campus coaches are required to give a grade, or the student will not gain credit for the course.

McCulloch 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders are not allowed to participate in off-campus PE.

### **How do clubs work at HPMS?**

Clubs are formed based on survey input from students and teachers. When the list of clubs is finalized, students are given the opportunity to choose a club. The students should plan to stay in the club for the school year, however, if a student wants a change, changes are allowed at semester only. The clubs are designed to be student-led with facilitation from a teacher or parent/teacher sponsor.

The purpose of clubs is to provide opportunities for student leadership, expand a student's circle of friends (based common interests), encourage positive connections with school, and ignite students' passions and motivation to learn in an area of their own interest.

## **Social Issues**

### **What behaviors should I expect as my student grows from 10 to 14 years old? What are the "red flags" I should catch as he/she goes through these tender years? What's "normal" and what's not?**

A child moving from fifth grade to eighth grade will experience many physical and emotional changes. They are making a transition from childhood to adolescence. Within this time period, most students will go through puberty which brings not only physical changes, but many emotional ones as well. Your child will undoubtedly experience some moodiness, maybe even some withdrawal. Attention will turn from parents to peers, which is a normal developmental process children go through in order to prepare for a world in which they will interact primarily with peers. With this increased attention to peers, students may experience confusion about their identity and/or occasional hurt feelings.

As students search for their identity, expect an increased curiosity about adult situations and issues. Now, more than ever, they need their parents' guidance to navigate this uncertain terrain.

Stay in close communication with your child; know his/her friends and their parents; always know where they are; check on them; talk to them about difficult situations they may be facing. If you need help or advice, seek out your child's school counselor. During this time of

increased independence for your child, look at the DEGREE of his or her behavior before reacting. Learn the art of under-reacting, which provides a sense of calm and control at a time when kids really need the stability. Relax and enjoy this time of growth for your child.

## **Parent and Community Involvement**

### **How can I get involved in the school?**

There are many ways to get involved in the school at all different levels. Many parents choose to volunteer in the cafeteria, the supply room, in booster clubs, or for special school events. PTA meetings are held at noon to accommodate all parents to the best of our ability. Contact your child's PTA President or the school to learn more about PTA and volunteer opportunities.

### **Does the school still have room-moms? What about room-dads?**

MIS still has room-moms, and we are always open to room-dads as well! Both moms and dads get very involved in the many volunteer opportunities as well as providing support through high attendance at school events. We also have an active Dads' Club at both MIS and HPMS, and we highly encourage our dads to get involved with the Dads' Club. Contact the school for information on how to contact your Dads' Club President.

### **I'm a working parent, what can I do?**

PTA meetings are held at noon to accommodate all parents. "Meet the Teacher" and "Open House" are scheduled after school hours to accommodate working parents. Additionally, notes from Open Team Meetings are posted to schoolnotes.com so that parents who are unable to leave work for team meetings can access the information online.

### **How can I stay informed of school happenings?**

McFacts (MIS) and News and Notes (HPMS)  
View the PTA, school, and district websites  
Email Groups and Individual Emails  
Online viewing of assignments, homework, grades, and attendance  
Phone Message Systems and Individual Phone Calls  
Informational brochures available through office display  
Friday Folders (MIS only)  
Mailings  
Teacher Conferences  
Parent Meetings  
Parent Educational Presentations  
Student Programs  
Sponsor Student Organizations  
Volunteer Opportunities  
Involvement with child at home in support of schoolwork  
Site-Based Decision Making Committee  
Parent Sounding Board  
Newcomer and Orientation Events  
Open Team Meetings

PTA  
Dads' Club

**What are the best ways to communicate with school personnel?**

Most school employees can return email sooner than phone voicemail. If you do not receive an email response, be sure to resend as many of our emails get caught in our SPAM filtering program. If you need to speak to your child's teachers, contact your child's advisory teacher to set up a team conference.

**What is "Mad for Plaid"? Who decides how the money is spent? How do I find out how the money was spent?**

"Mad for Plaid" is a joint effort of the HPISD Education Foundation and the community to raise funds for the success of HPISD schools. The money is used for teacher salaries, staff development, and campus needs such as copy machines, carpet, and instructional supplies for MIS/HPMS and HPHS.

Teachers meet in Campus Leadership Committees (CLC) to give input regarding instructional and other campus needs. PTA gift committee representatives then meet to put figures to the requests and the available funds; those numbers are then presented to the PTA Gift Committee for review and approval.

The purchases made with Mad for Plaid money are made public through McFacts, News and Notes, and PTA.

**Recommended Reading:**

**Parenting with Love and Logic Jim Fay and Foster Klein**  
**Yardsticks Chip Wood**

**Any more questions?**

Don't be afraid to ask!