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**HISD kicks off 2015-2016 school year with emphasis on producing global graduates**

*August 20, 2015* – The Houston Independent School District will begin the 2015-2016 academic year on Monday with the opening of the nation’s first public Arabic language immersion school, significantly expanded dual language opportunities and a continued shift to digital learning.

The Arabic Immersion Magnet School (AIMS) is among 283 HISD campuses that will throw open their doors on Monday and welcome back nearly 215,000 students from across the district. Bus drivers will begin transporting nearly 34,000 students to and from school, and cafeteria workers will begin cooking the 288,000 meals that they serve each day.

“The start of a new school year is always an exciting time as we welcome back thousands of students and continue our work preparing them for success,” HISD Superintendent Terry Grier said. “This year is especially exciting as we continue to set our sights on making sure our students have access to a truly global education.”

**HISD Deputy Superintendent and Chief Financial Officer Ken Huewitt and Chief Academic Officer Andrew Houlihan will welcome AIMS elementary students and staff back to school on Monday, Aug. 24 with a visit to the campus at 9:45 a.m. The campus is located at 812 W. 28th St. Reporters are invited to tour the school with HISD administrators.**

Learning a second language is a key component of a global education. At AIMS, 132 pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students will spend half their day learning in Arabic and the other half in English. In HISD, Arabic is the second most common foreign language spoken at home.

The district offers a similar program at the Mandarin Chinese Language Immersion Magnet School and has nearly doubled the size of the Spanish dual language program, expanding it from 31 to 52 campuses this year. Much like the Arabic and Mandarin Chinese schools, students in Spanish dual language programs alternate between learning in English and Spanish.

Additionally, the district this year will continue to strengthen its college readiness efforts by deploying 28 new college success advisors and 10 college success managers to campuses across the district and doubling the size of the successful EMERGE program, which aims to identify low-income, high potential students and help them gain admission to and graduate from Tier 1 and Ivy League colleges and universities.

Funded by $8.5 million in grants from the Houston Endowment, both programs are expected to boost college attendance and completion rates by 20 percent over the next three years. The district also hopes to increase the number of HISD graduates attending a four-year college, the number of students who complete their freshman year and return for their sophomore year, and the number of scholarship and financial aid applications and awards — all by the same percentage.

This year also marks the final implementation of HISD’s PowerUp one-to-one laptop initiative. More than 40,000 students at 32 Phase 1 and 2 high schools will have their devices reissued to them as they return to school this fall. About 8,000 students at the 15 Phase 3 high schools will receive their laptops later in the school year.

The laptop initiative is part of the district’s continued effort to transform classroom instruction by phasing out textbooks and transitioning to digital content and curriculum.

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