

ISA 101: An Introduction to the School

Important Information for Parents and Guardians

A Brief History of ISA: A group of educational innovators, including employees at Trinity University and the North East Independent School District, created ISA from a “blueprint” visualized in a paper written by Thomas Sergiovanni, a professor of education at Trinity. The paper describes a small, intimate school with a caring, trusting environment, high standards of student and faculty achievement, and the support needed to help students reach the goals expected of them. In this school, all students would be treated as gifted and talented students, and instructed at a level appropriate to that status. ISA opened in 1995 with a pioneer class of freshmen, under the leadership of Principal Chula Boyle. As these students advanced through their four years, other classes followed them, until the school had students in all four grade levels, a total of approximately 450 students, for the 1997-1998 academic year. In that year, Shari Albright assumed the role of principal and served the school for eight years. Kris Wickerham joined the ISA community as the campus’ third principal in 2005. ISA’s achievement and reputation have continued to increase each year, with the Texas Education Agency again honoring ISA as a State of Texas Recognized High School in 2006. ISA also recently became the first campus in North East Independent School District to be named to the Texas Business Education Coalition’s Honor Roll and is a past winner of the Goldman Sachs Prize for Excellence in International Education. In 2007 Kathy Bieser, a former ISA teacher and assistant principal, was named ISA principal. ISA has continued to garner state and national accolades, and has been chosen as a mentor school for the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), an Exemplar school by the Texas High School Project and Communities Foundation of Texas, one of Texas Monthly’s Best Public Schools, and a Silver Medalist School for 2008 in the U.S. News & World Report’s “America’s Best High Schools” report.

ISA’s Population: We draw most of our students from over 25 middle schools all over San Antonio, and a few from surrounding areas such as New Braunfels. Acceptance to ISA is determined by a lottery system; central office personnel draw names from all applications. There are no achievement-based criteria for acceptance; students need only a desire to attend. Students bring different backgrounds and talents that make ISA a vibrant, dynamic place.

The Block Schedule: High schools in North East ISD follow a class schedule that utilizes alternating “A Days” and “B Days.” The school day begins at 9:00 a.m. and ends at 4:00 p.m. Each school day consists of four 90-minute class periods, with periods 1-4 taking place on A Days and periods 5-8 taking place on B Days. The longer class periods allow for more intensive study and discussion than the shorter class periods used in middle schools.

Academic Teaming: Part of the vision of ISA includes the incorporation of grade-level teams of teachers. Each grade level has one teacher per core academic subject (English, mathematics, science, and social studies). ISA teachers use one of their two planning periods to meet with their teams. Thus, every other day, teachers collaborate to plan activities, confer with parents, and discuss students and the issues affecting them. ISA teachers take “team time” very seriously and consider team meetings to be a key factor in the success of the school.

The 80 Standard: We believe in challenging our students to excel beyond the minimum level of achievement defined by the Texas Education Agency. All ISA students must earn a grade of 80 in **each ISA course by the end of the school year**. We require students who do not fulfill this contract to complete various summer obligations (ISA and/or district summer schools) in order to return to the school for the following academic year. The 80 Standard is not a punishment. It is a manifestation of our belief that our students are capable of performing at a high level.

“Big Teach”: This is ISA’s term for “assembly.” We use “Big Teach” because our assemblies usually include an academic focus. We hold Big Teaches to allow guest speakers to reach an entire class, to introduce whole-class projects, and to discuss issues that affect a class as a whole.

Bus Information: ISA students who live in the Lee High School attendance zone use regular school routes. Students who live in other North East Independent School District high school zones may take advantage of shuttles that pick them up at their high school campuses in the morning and return them to their campuses in the afternoon. One bus services each route; there is a “Roosevelt / ISA shuttle”, a “Reagan / ISA shuttle”, etc. After school, busses leave ISA by 4:30 p.m.

Campus Rules: While ISA does promote a comfortable, student-centered environment, as a high school in the North East ISD, we are bound to certain regulations of student behavior. Claims by students that certain behaviors and/or appearances are “okay because it’s ISA” are false. Our students’ adherence to district values is a fair requirement, and it helps to nurture a healthy relationship with our sister campus, Robert E. Lee. We thank you for helping us to maintain these standards.

Parent Nights: We believe that it is important to maintain contact with our students’ parents throughout the year. During the school year, ISA hosts three Report Card Parent Nights, which provide an opportunity to pick up report cards and to communicate about what is taking place at the school. We find that regular communication about a student’s progress boosts a student’s performance, as students know that they are supported and cared for on all fronts. We would love to see you at these gatherings, which generally occur at 6:00 in the evening on the first Thursday after the end of a grading period

Trinity Interns: ISA is fortunate to have been chosen as a Professional Development School by Trinity University, which brings us many unique opportunities. These include teacher training on research-based teaching methods and school reform, student participation in seminars on a wide variety of topics, use of Trinity’s facilities for ISA activities, and the participation of Trinity Interns who are studying to earn a Masters in the Arts of Teaching. These Interns begin working with a Mentor Teacher (or Teachers) before the year begins and are a regular part of the faculty. They focus on different aspects of teaching in the fall while assuming some limited instructional responsibilities. This process leads to a full takeover, during which they assume the role of lead teacher for a significant segment of the spring semester (usually 6-9 weeks). They are supported by the Mentor Teacher and team teachers throughout, and come to form important relationships with the students. A significant portion of the ISA staff has been hired after the completion of this program, and we continue to believe that it is a superb way to prepare teachers.

Internship Program: All ISA students complete an internship experience of 120 hours or more. During the senior year, working with the internship coordinator, teachers, and community partners, students create placements that allow them to explore their expectations and interests in the work world and investigate the possibilities of various college majors. In the internship placement, students are able to establish a personal work ethic; receive mentoring from adults who will acquaint them with organizational procedures, corporate etiquette, and professional expectations; and create connections that will assist them in realizing their educational and professional potentials. The internship allows students to apply classroom learning to real-world situations. ISA students have fulfilled their internships in medical offices, law firms, scientific institutions, schools, and technology companies, among many other options.

Travel Opportunities: ISA’s curriculum emphasizes an international perspective, and we believe that the best way to learn about other countries and cultures is to interact with them. Throughout the school year, our students may travel to Mexico, Europe, [Japan](#), and other countries with ISA teachers.

We believe that international travel is an important part of an ISA experience, and the ISA community works to raise funds to make travel affordable for as many students as possible. Since spring of 2001, nearly the entire sophomore class took a five-day academically oriented trip to Zacatecas, Mexico. Additionally, students and teachers from other countries visit ISA several times each year, attending classes and interacting with the ISA student body.