



A Transformative Educational Experience: HISD Students Travel to Japan

The Houston Independent School District Foundation (Houston ISD Foundation) is dedicated to enhancing the educational landscape of the Houston Independent School District (HISD). By fostering innovative programs, securing vital resources, and building strong community partnerships, we strive to empower students, educators, and schools across HISD.

This year, a groundbreaking HISD initiative was introduced as part of the New Education System (NES) program, known as the DYAD Travel Initiative. The primary goal of the DYAD Travel Initiative is to provide students with enriching educational experiences beyond the traditional classroom setting. Specifically, it aims to broaden students' perspectives by offering them opportunities to travel and learn about different cultures, histories, and global perspectives. These trips are designed to complement their academic learning and foster a deeper understanding of the world around them, ultimately preparing them to be informed, engaged, and culturally competent individuals.

As part of this initiative, seventh-grade students from six NES middle schools—Patrick Henry, Forest Brook, McReynolds, Sugar Grove, Fleming, and Key MS—embarked on an enlightening trip to Washington DC in June. Their itinerary encompassed visits to over 10 monuments and memorials, 5 museums, and numerous historical landmarks, providing them with a comprehensive understanding of American history and governance.

Meanwhile, eighth-grade students from the same middle schools undertook a transformative journey to Japan in May. Before their departure, students engaged in cultural immersion activities, including a market scavenger hunt and an authentic Japanese dinner. In Japan, they explored over 10 monuments, 5 museums, 3 notable shrines, and more than 10 historical landmarks. These experiences were designed to immerse students in Japanese culture, history, and traditions, fostering a deep appreciation for global diversity. Japan was selected for its rich cultural heritage and educational opportunities, coupled with safety and logistical considerations that made it an ideal destination for HISD students.

The execution of these trips was flawless, with HISD successfully transporting over 170 students and 36 chaperones to Japan, completing all six trips without any safety incidents. This achievement underscores the meticulous planning and coordination, ensuring every aspect of the journey was thoughtfully managed.

The impact of the DYAD travel program on participating students has been profound. These journeys provided a unique opportunity for students to broaden their perspectives and gain a

deeper understanding of the world around them. Feedback from students highlighted the transformative nature of the experience, with many expressing newfound appreciation for cultural diversity and global awareness.

"The most important thing I learned on this trip was that every country has its own unique culture, and it's important to respect and adapt to different ways of life," remarked one student. Another noted, "This trip opened my eyes to a world beyond what I knew in Kashmere Gardens." Students were particularly struck by the hospitality and cleanliness of Japan, noting the stark contrasts to their experiences in the United States.

Feedback from parents and educators alike has been overwhelmingly positive, with many lauding the program for its educational value and life-changing impact on students. Katherine Smith, CEO of the Houston ISD Foundation, emphasized the program's significance: "The DYAD Japan Travel Initiative represents a milestone in our commitment to providing equitable educational opportunities in HISD. These trips have not only enriched students' academic experiences but also broadened their global perspectives."

Beyond its immediate educational benefits, the DYAD Japan Travel Initiative plays a crucial role in cultivating well-rounded, culturally competent students. By exposing them to diverse cultures and histories, the program helps bridge educational gaps and promotes a more inclusive learning environment.

Looking ahead, the Houston ISD Foundation remains dedicated to expanding such opportunities, ensuring that every HISD student has access to transformative educational experiences. To learn more about the Houston ISD Foundation and its initiatives, please visit www.HoustonISDFoundation.org.



