



HOUSTON NEWS

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Houston Education Association urges HISD to keep paid COVID leave for employees

The Houston Education Association (HEA) is urging Houston ISD to reconsider its decision to end its special leave time for teachers and other employees who contract or become exposed to COVID-19. HISD has announced that beginning with the new school year, employees will have to use their regular leave time for COVID recovery and quarantines.

HEA President Michelle Williams pointed out that under HISD's regular leave policy, employees accrue only one paid day of leave per month.

"This will force employees who have not accrued enough leave time, including teachers and other workers new to the district, to decide whether to put their co-workers and students at risk of contracting COVID by coming to school so they can continue to pay their bills," she said.

Williams also noted that many HISD teachers contribute a leave day every year to the district's Supplemental Sick Leave Bank. HEA is asking the district to consider revising the Supplemental Sick Leave Bank policy to include COVID-19 paid sick leave. It also is urging the district to revise the accrued paid leave policy to give employees infected with COVID an advance on sick leave days if they currently don't have enough paid leave. Employees who don't complete the school year after receiving the benefit would have the time deducted from their escrow accounts.

"We understand that the previous COVID-19 paid leave was not a long-term solution for the district. But HISD cannot ignore the fact that COVID will remain a health issue for the foreseeable future. The district needs to find a long-term solution to help protect the health and safety of its students, work force and community," Williams said.

"An employee who contracts COVID is advised to stay home for at least five days. Asking employees to stay home when they don't have enough leave and will have to forfeit pay punishes hard-working employees who already are under-paid. It also will encourage many of these teachers and other workers to return to work prematurely at risk to students and co-workers," she added.