

Superintendent's Communications Council
Campus Questions
February 11, 2020

ELEMENTARY

Francisco

1. Are the 457b's charging a monthly service fee now that we've changed companies?

- A.** The prior 457 Plan included service fees for participants. The fees charged by the new company are comparable to what was being charged by the previous plan administrator.

Mullendore

2. What is the purpose of finding the Independent level for BAS, when according to Donalyn Miller students should have the freedom to pick their own independent reading books? Also, all guided reading instruction is done at students' instructional reading level. Finding an Independent Reading level on top of the highest instructional level is time-consuming and takes away from our instruction time.

- A.** While adhering to the BAS administration guidelines, three reading levels are found: Independent, Instructional, and Hard. The independent level is the highest level a student reads accurately and comprehends without assistance. Many teachers utilize the independent reading level for tracking and charting reading growth in student data folders as part of their Continuous Improvement plan. The independent level is also reported when instructional staff collaborate on shared students, (i.e., classroom teachers, interventionists, SPED teachers, and Title 1 tutors).

As Donalyn Miller asserts, self-selecting text is motivational for students. However, students often need assistance in selecting books that match their interest with their ability level. Primary teachers use the independent level to provide a variety of books for individual book boxes, bags, or tubs. This offers student choice while ensuring they are independently reading books at a high enough accuracy rate that it will improve their reading. Knowing a student's independent reading level helps teachers guide student choice to ensure high success practice during independent reading.

For more information on the benefits of reading at the independent level, please read: Allington, R., & Gabriel, R. (2012, March). Every Child, Every Day. Retrieved January 2020, from [ASCD.org \(Every Child, Every Day\)](https://www.ascd.org/Every-Child-Every-Day)

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ELEMENTARY (continued)

Snow Heights

3. Are there currently any plans to implement/research a more developmentally appropriate computer-based benchmark assessment for Kindergarten Math?

STAR Math is not designed for Kindergarteners (1st grade–12th grade). We know the we have the LENA to guide instruction should we want to use that to progress monitor, however the time spent to give that sometimes negates the information gleaned from assessment.

A. TEA has mandated assessment for early grades. Districts had a list of approved assessments from which to select. The STAR Math is an adaptive test and does provide data, which is comparable from MOY to EOY. The adaptive nature of the exam does provide information on student performance from pre-K to 12th. Based on information from TEA, changes to the early grades assessment may result from HB3. We will consider all direction from the state as we plan for the future.

Spicer

4. Is there a person designated to ensure that all important events are included on the Important Events Calendar on the BISD website?

It is hard to plan without these things being included. Two examples this year are the Haltom High School Homecoming Parade and the Battle of the Books Competition. Our campus did not know about the Haltom Homecoming Parade until after we had scheduled and advertised our curriculum night for the same evening. This impacted many of our families since we are a Haltom Feeder School. The second example is the Battle of the Books competition. This was scheduled for the same day as the district-wide 5th grade trip to the symphony at Bass Hall, and as of January 9th, the Battle of the Books Competition was not listed on the Important Dates Calendar. We have students that will miss the trip to Bass Hall due to Battle of the Books being scheduled for the same day.

A. The Communications Department works hard to make sure District-level events are posted on the District's calendar and shared down to the campus calendars. Campuses are responsible for posting their events on the calendar provided for the campus. This is the only way for the feeder schools to try and avoid scheduling conflicts. However, with a District our size, it is difficult to find nights that are open.

The District can't place every event on the calendar. With sporting events alone, it would make the calendar so congested that it would not be of value to anyone. An "Important Dates" document is created each year and placed online for campuses to reference. It can be found on the "For Staff" page on our website.

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ELEMENTARY (continued)

Spicer (continued)

5. What is the timeline for completing the secured vestibules for the elementary schools?

A. The District will be engaging a new contractor to complete the work within the next few weeks. The work should be completed by the beginning of the 2020–21 school year.

Walker Creek

6. Can you please consider labor reorganization on elementary campuses to maximize student learning and staff productivity?

This would enable campus leadership to streamline their focus/time on instruction. Would we be able to hire a Dean of Students to coordinate the following?:

- All local, state, and federal testing
- Rtl
- Academic and Behavioral Referral processes
- Section 504

The Dean could be from the LEAP or teacher pool.

A. Your concerns will be brought forward during staffing and budget preparation that we are now in the process of taking care of. We are reviewing all campus level staffing in order to maximize efficiency.

7. We are excited about the SEL initiative! Can you make the SEL initiative involve a model similar to the academic model, which utilizes coaches and interventionists?

A. That is a great thought. We will be rolling out the SEL curriculum in the fall, and there will be training associated with it. Currently, we could share this model with the two general education behavior facilitators for implementation.

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MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Haltom

8. Special education population and paperwork has seemed to increase over the years. There hasn't been an increase in support, such as E.A.s, but student needs are much more demanding. I understand student-to-teacher ratio, but if we want our students to be able to reach their full potential, student needs need to be what is considered and not the numbers. This is occurring in all the programs; Inclusion setting, resource, and specialized programs. **In the future, how will this be addressed?**
- A. As our demographics change, so do our needs. The District is currently evaluating all of the special education programs. This effort is being spearheaded by our interim director of special education. We have already begun addressing the staffing needs and program requirements. We are looking at factors other than staff-teacher ratio as we know this does not tell the complete story in our special needs classrooms. Dr. Brown has made this a priority for Cabinet, Human Resources and the Special Education departments.
9. Also, for the paperwork; we get paid the same amount as general education teachers. We are expected to do everything they are required to do and the ARD paperwork for each student (20+ IEPs), goal progress each six weeks, XLOGs, along with many other things to make sure we stay in compliance and are following the laws. **Has any type of compensation (stipend) ever been considered for special education teachers? Can it please be considered for the future?**
- A. All stipends are included and reviewed in the annual compensation analysis prepared by the Texas School Board Association. The District considers any stipend additions as recommended by TASB within budget constraints. We also monitor the state and area trends when evaluating stipends. Thank you for bringing your concern to our attention, and we will consider the requested stipend as we proceed through our budget process this spring.

HIGH SCHOOLS

Birdville

10. The policy on semester exam exemptions does not include anything about ISS or suspensions at the moment. So a student who has been in ISS multiple days or suspended multiple days can still be exempt for the semester final. Exemptions seem like a privilege that should be lost for getting suspended or ISS. **Is that something that the district would consider adding to the policy for next year?**

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HIGH SCHOOLS (continued)

Birdville (#10 continued)

- A. The current guidelines for semester exam exemptions are “based on grades, attendance, and conduct as specified for each class.” A student’s overall discipline record that would include OSS and ISS would be a departure from considering exemptions on a class-by-class basis. Clarence Simmons, executive director for secondary education, will discuss this with the high school principals and bring a recommendation to the Birdville ISD Cabinet if a consensus is reached that this change is necessary.

Haltom

11. My question is concerning equity in stipends. **When was the last time stipend allotment and equity were addressed?** My main concern regards the amount of time spent by coaches/directors in relation to the dollar amount that is awarded per stipend. How are stipends decided? I ask specifically because it seems that athletic stipends are awarded more money than fine arts and also that stipends typically held by men are compensated more than those held by women.
- A. All stipends are determined by the District. As mentioned above, all stipends are included and reviewed in the annual compensation analysis prepared by the Texas School Board Association. The District considers any stipend adjustments or additions as recommended by TASB within budget constraints. We also monitor the state and area trends when evaluating stipends. I’m not aware of males being given a higher stipend than females for the same position.
12. Since so many classes are becoming sheltered and BISD’s multilingual student population is on the rise everywhere, what steps are being taken to ensure quick and accurate communications from teachers to parents? Many times, if the language is spoken by one of the teachers in the building, we can ask another educator to translate, but it puts an unnecessary and unfair burden on that teacher to offer assistance. The other choice is to ask for Catholic Charities or other outside places to translate, but by then, several days to possible weeks have elapsed. The district needs to take a close and careful look at future communications if we are to truly serve our parents and our students in an effective and **TIMELY** manner. So again, what is the district doing to make sure teachers who do not speak a non-English language can communicate with parents issues, concerns, and positives in a timely manner?

(We answered similar questions in April 2016 and April 2017.)

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HIGH SCHOOLS (continued)

Haltom (#12 continued)

- A.** The District has, in fact, experienced an increase in the number of students whose first language is something other than English. With regards to students identified as English Learners, there are forty various languages spoken by students and their families. As such, the District has Parent Liaisons who are available to translate in Spanish and Vietnamese, our two most widely spoken languages by students and families in Birdville. Additionally, the Department of Multilingual Services contracts with entities such as Catholic Charities and individuals who are able to provide translation services. The department will continue its efforts to secure contracts with other outside sources and individuals who can be more readily available to provide services. Our current providers are typically able to respond within hours if we indicate there is an emergency situation. For non-emergency requests, we are able to secure a response from our providers within twenty-four hours. We are currently testing the use of an electronic device used for translating conversations. This device could be especially useful in situations where communication must happen in a timely manner. Should the device prove to be effective, we will provide campuses with details for purchase at their discretion.

2017 Question:

With an ever-growing population of students whose parents don't speak English, how can we go about getting a translation service for phone calls? True, we have teachers who speak SOME of the languages but it is unfair to burden them when they have other matters to attend to. Additionally, there are times when a parent needs to be spoken to immediately and waiting for others to relay a call can take days or even weeks depending on the language. This is a very viable need for educators AND parents to stay connected and on the same page.

This question was asked in April 2016.

Has the District ever considered using an interpreting/translation service such as CYRACOM? BISD has a limited number of interpreters and many families who speak languages other than English. A translation service like this would make it possible to access parents and families easily for ARD meetings, parent conferences, teacher phone calls, school programs, etc.

- A.** We have three District Parent Liaisons who provide these services to campuses who need support with Spanish or Vietnamese. In some instances, we contract with Catholic Charities for these interpreting services. We will continue to explore all avenues for providing efficient and effective translating and interpreting services.

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HIGH SCHOOLS (continued)

Richland

13. Is there something that could be done to better convey conversations between district offices and end-users? Example: District decided to no longer keep a subscription to Flocabulary. The icon was on the SSO. The subscription expired end of Sept. Therefore, a teacher would assume they could make lessons using that resource. Often, one department makes a decision without informing all the other parts of the larger organization or asking for input from the end-users.

A. With regard to the my.birdvilleschools.net portal, we are always looking for ways to better communicate any changes that are taking place. There are many pieces of license-driven software, as well as links to free resources available in the portal. Resources are assigned to staff and students individually based on the group(s) (elementary, secondary, administrators, etc.) they belong to. There are large numbers of resources available and each of these resources is managed or owned by different departments across our District, compounding the communication difficulties.

In the instance of Flocabulary specifically: When planning for the next budget year, the District scrutinizes data from all resources to analyze cost, usage, and benefits to students. Unfortunately, the data showed that our usage of the Flocabulary resource did not justify the yearly subscription cost of over \$40,000. Although the cancelation of the Flocabulary subscription was communicated to principals and librarians over the summer, we recognize the need to continually improve our processes and procedures to improve the flow of information to all end-users. We will also work to improve the posting of resources on my.birdvilleschools.net and have just recently put into place processes that will allow us to better manage resources posted there.

14. With the proposed academic calendars for 2020–21, we are ending the semester before winter break. This would mean three exam grades AND a semester exam grade. This will be very difficult to do with a shortened six weeks which realistically will only be 4.5–5 weeks. Can the exam requirements for the third six weeks next year be adjusted to only 2 exams grades and a semester exam grade to accommodate for the shortened six weeks?

A. Limiting the number of major grades to two in a six weeks period limits the opportunity of students to earn satisfactory scores in a category which accounts for 50% of their grade. Major grades can be chapter or unit tests, but also can be expanded to announced projects/performances, papers or other major grades. It is reasonable to assume that even with fewer days, there is room to give students at least three opportunities to demonstrate mastery of the content in this category.