

# Superintendent's Communications Council

## Campus Questions

### February 2, 2015

#### ELEMENTARY

#### Academy at C. F. Thomas

**1. When will it be possible to get access from our classroom phones to area codes OTHER than 817?**

We have many, many parents that have 214, 689, or a vast array of other area codes on their phone numbers, and we can't call them from our classrooms. We either have to go to the office and use the ONE phone that can make outside calls, or use our cell phones, which we do not want to do. We just want access to outside area codes other than 817.

- A.** If a phone call is a local or local plus phone call, it can be called from any phone within the district. Some 214 numbers and 682 numbers may be classified as long-distance (689 is a Florida area code), but most 214 and 682 numbers should be local and local plus. We realize that it is more and more common for parents to forgo a landline and only use a cell phone, and when they move they tend to keep their original number.

The Technology Department has a current project underway to switch the district from an analog system to a digital system. As part of that project, we are reviewing the district's practices regarding long-distance calls. We will discuss the issue with our long-distance provider and seek unlimited long-distance service. We are working to determine how the circuit change will affect our service costs, and are determining the new ways the system can be configured to control costs while allowing more access. This summer we will make a recommendation to the Cabinet of changes we have determined are needed and the associated costs or savings. We hope to allow all phones to dial long-distance. Until that time, our current procedure is as follows:

- Principal, assistant principal(s), counselors, nurses and teacher lounges have USA long-distance calling abilities by default
- Requests for long-distance calling abilities for additional telephones are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. This is done by submitting a Help Desk ticket request with justification which is then forwarded to each principal for review.
- Personal long-distance calls are not allowed

**2. Why do our elementary schools have a 7 hr. & 15 min. day when all of the surrounding school districts have a 7 hr. day for their young students?** Keller, HEB, & Fort Worth ISDs' elementary hours are 8:00–3:00. Northwest, Irving, & Grapevine Colleyville ISDs' elementary hours are 7:45–2:45. Arlington ISD's elementary hours are 8:20–3:20, and Southlake Carroll ISD's elementary hours are 7:55–2:55. Our district's website states elementary hours from 8:10–3:25. Fifteen extra minutes may not seem astronomical, but when you multiply it by 180 school days, it translates to 2700 extra minutes or 45 extra hours per year. If you consider a normal elementary school day is seven hours, then those 45 extra hours translate to about 6 extra days. Since lack of time for planning and preparation is every elementary teacher's biggest problem, it would seem one solution to this problem would be the use of the extra time each day for those purposes. We also need to consider the needs of our younger elementary students for whom a longer school day is detrimental in terms of attention span and physical and mental endurance.

- A.** The start and end times for schools depends on many factors. We have established instructional time and with the increased difficulty in the math standards, we need the additional time. We will be revisiting the allotment of instructional time.

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#### ELEMENTARY (Continued)

##### Birdville

3. Insurance Question: A staff member wrote ... "Tamiflu was over \$130 that I was to pay out of pocket. I was told our insurance only paid something like \$20. Because of the price, I had to call my doctor back and request another prescription which was less expensive and less effective, making me heal at a slower rate. **How can we improve our current insurance coverage?** What are we doing to make our "voice" heard regarding insurance? The cost keeps rising, but coverage declines. Is it true we can't leave TRS, that once a district signs up, you can never leave? That does not seem to make sense to have no choice in the matter. What are school districts doing to lobby TRS and get insurance costs under control?
- A. We are prohibited from leaving the TRS insurance plan once we join. This requirement was established many years ago by the state.

There are many organizations representing Texas school districts that speak on our behalf regarding these health insurance issues. Insurance costs and claims have been greatly affected by the new Affordable Health Care Act. There are a number of medical services required to be offered at no charge based on the rules of the Affordable Health Care Act. TRS ActiveCare along with the TRS Retiree Insurance Plan have struggled financially due to the new requirements as well as the general increase in health care costs.

4. There seems to be a need for keyboarding skills to be taught to elementary students. **How can we help our students with these basic keyboarding skills which will help them throughout their education?**
- A. Each elementary school should have a plan to provide formal keyboarding instruction for students. This can be done in the computer lab with the Technology Educational Assistant or in the classroom where student laptops are available.

Currently, the district uses free resources to teach keyboarding, but is exploring the possibility of purchasing a standard software program.

##### Foster Village

5. **Why are there positions that do not require substitutes when the person of record is absent?** For example, EXCEL Teachers who miss time with EXCEL students because of testing or whatever causes them to not be on campus to pull them. And, why is that time just cancelled and not required to be made up with those students?
- A. That has been a standard practice for many years. The rationale initially was that it was difficult for the specialized teacher to leave lessons that could be used by a substitute. Also, it is difficult for someone unfamiliar with a campus to be expected to drop off/pick up students which is a typical practice, especially for primary students. Of course, if one of these teachers has a long-term absence, a substituted is arranged. When possible, the specialists make up the time. If not, they certainly make sure students get the content.

All that being said, in almost every case, the specialists should have lessons available just like teachers do. They could even be directed to have substitute plans for last-minute absences.

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#### ELEMENTARY (Continued)

##### Foster Village (continued)

It might not be of the same quality, but at least the classroom teachers would not have to make impromptu plans to include those students in their lessons without notice.

For reading and math interventionists, it is a little trickier because some of the resources they use require training in order to implement. We could ask them to create a set of back-up plans that would be beneficial to almost any of their students just like we do for the EXCEL teachers.

##### Green Valley

6. **We would like to know if our district has plans, or has thought about having, School Marshalls for added security.** If it was considered what was the decision? What reasoning was behind the decision as to why, or why not, to have extra security measures put in place?
  - A. Representatives from BISD and the local municipalities (FD/PD/EMT) are in constant contact with one another, usually on a daily basis with one city or another. In addition, the BISD Emergency Management Team meets regularly to discuss matters like the one you mentioned above. In this case, we went a bit further after the state changed the law and allowed School Marshalls. BISD met on several occasions with the police/fire chiefs from each of the five cities (where schools are located). As a result of these meetings we, along with the police/fire chiefs, decided *not* to have School Marshalls, nor to allow teachers to carry weapons in Birdville ISD for the following basic reasons:
    - A. We have a joint response from Watauga, Richland Hills, N. Richland Hills and Haltom City since it goes to a single 911 operations center when an emergency occurs. The response to BISD calls has been unbelievable. In a couple of incidents, where reports have been made since the Joint Operations Center has gone live, our response to "serious incidences" has been no more than a minute to get first responders on the scene with 10–20 officers arriving within minutes.
    - B. If we lived in an area that it took 20–30 minutes because we only had a Sheriff's Department, then School Marshalls might be appropriate, but that is not the case here.
    - C. The last reason we decided not to have School Marshalls is because of the immediate response time. If you have School Marshalls (whose pretense is that teachers would carry weapons but no one would know which teachers), when PD enters the building, they cannot tell the "good guys" from the "bad guys." We do not believe we need to put our teachers (or other employees) in this position.

The meetings with the police/fire chiefs gave us an opportunity to review all of our protocols with the local PDs/FDs/EMTs. We will continue to add security measures from the general fund, as well as properly utilizing the bonds approved by our citizens in the last Bond election.

##### Holiday Heights

7. **Could we have several GT classes for 6 hour credit be held over summer?** As busy as we are during the year, having GT opportunities in the summer would be appreciated.

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#### *ELEMENTARY (Continued)*

#### Holiday Heights (#7 continued)

The online pilot for GT courses that is currently in process will not be replicated in a four-week window in the future. Based on feedback regarding the quality of the courses, decisions will be made whether to continue using TAGT On Demand as a resource for required GT training. If the decision is made to purchase the online product, it will be available for all professional staff 24/7 throughout the entire school year.

8. I would like to know if any consideration has been given to allowing individual teachers to keep the heat on after hours. **With this cold weather, it is impossible to stay and do catch-up when the heat goes off?**
  - A. With proper notice from the campus and at facilities having individual classroom control of the HVAC system, requests of this nature can be accommodated. Facilities with multi-zone (multi-room) HVAC control systems are cost-prohibitive to operate in this manner because the entire facility or large portions of the facility must operate in order to satisfy a single user's request.

#### Richland

9. We love having the technology the district has been able to provide us and we have a concern about projectors. There have been several times that work orders have been placed for projectors and technical services tells us that they are waiting on new projectors. **Can you tell us the plan for installing the new projectors and if there is anything that can be done in the meantime until the new projectors arrive?**
  - A. Due to an overwhelming increase in projector failures, the Board has funded over \$250,000 in replacements over the past 18 months, for which we are very grateful. However, it has not been enough to keep up with the demand, which has delayed replacement of projectors. The purchase process we must follow takes about two months to complete, which makes it difficult to assure sufficient inventory. Added to that, we have been buying projectors in such large quantities that we at times deplete the suppliers' stock.

Our practice is to identify a campus based upon pre-determined criteria and completely replace their old projectors with new projectors, which keeps all of the units in the building consistent to the new model (excluding portables). We then assess the projectors that were removed and identify units that still have some life. These are then cascaded throughout the district following a first-reported, first-served basis via Help Desk tickets to replace non-working projectors.

There are two evaluation criteria when selecting a campus to retrofit with new projectors:

- A. The number of current Help Desk tickets in the system related to projectors. If there are a lot of tickets related to a single campus, we will give them a higher priority, thus allowing us to resolve a number of issues without having to cascade a unit.
- B. The estimated number of units with remaining life. If a campus has a large number of units that can be used as replacements, or replenish our reserves, we will also assign it a higher priority.

The old Viewsonic and Hitachi projectors that the district routinely purchased in the past are continuing to fail at an exponentially increasing rate.

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#### *ELEMENTARY (Continued)*

##### **Richland (#9 continued)**

When voters approved the Bond in November, the Technology Department began working to get access in advance to bond funds in order to purchase enough additional projectors to stay ahead of the demand. The Business Department was instrumental in assisting us with accelerating that process but we still had to follow proper procedures, which takes time. The funds had to go to the BISD School Board for approval, which happened in early December. Once the funds were approved, a large projector order was placed which arrived in early January. During that period between the Bond approval and the new projectors arriving, all of the projectors that were in reserve were depleted, halting our ability to service the projectors that were reported to the Help Desk.

In early January, we began retrofitting Birdville High with new projectors, as they had a large number of Help Desk tickets and additional units with a high amount of estimated useful life. These units are now being deployed following the first-reported, first-served process mentioned earlier.

From now on, we will be retrofitting campuses following the bond schedule. We will continue to change out projectors that fail and should not have any downtime greater than a few school days from this point forward.

##### **Snow Heights**

#### **10. Snow Heights would like to know about the new TRS thing in Austin that is supposed to start coming out of the district's pockets instead of the state's, and will this cause us to get a pay cut as the news indicated?**

- A. For the 2014–15 fiscal year, Texas school districts are required to begin paying an additional 1.5 percent of an employee's pay into the Teacher Retirement System. The Texas Legislature provided additional funding for the 2014–15 fiscal year only. Unless the Legislature provides additional funding during the current Legislative session, Texas districts will be required to pay the additional cost from other sources. Based on current budget projections for the 2015–16 fiscal year, the district will be able to cover the cost without considering a pay cut.

##### **Watauga**

#### **11. Texas Education Code –Section 21.404. Planning And Preparation Time states that “Each classroom teacher is entitled to at least 450 minutes within each two-week period for instructional preparation, including parent-teacher conferences, evaluating students' work, and planning. A planning and preparation period under this section may not be less than 45 minutes within the instructional day. During a planning and preparation period, a classroom teacher may not be required to participate in any other activity.” Throughout the school year there have been several weeks where more than one conference time a week is taken by a mandated meeting. We are often asked to meet with curriculum coaches or other people during our planning time. Losing so many conference times makes it extremely difficult to complete all the tasks we are required to do. **Is there a solution for this?****

- A. The meetings that are scheduled on your campus are specific to your campus needs. The meetings with the curriculum coaches are not mandatory from the C&I Department; however, these could be required by your principal. If there is a discrepancy with the amount of planning time that is available to you on your specific campus, please speak with your principal.

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## Campus Questions

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#### *ELEMENTARY (Continued)*

##### Watauga (continued)

12. With such a huge student population at Watauga Elementary, **why do we only have one math interventionist on campus?** With the approved bond, will we be allowed another math interventionist?
- A. Providing an appropriate and adequate RtI framework and process was a major commitment on the part of the district. In order to accomplish that, it required a close examination and alignment of State Compensatory Funds. With 33 campuses, our initial commitment was to use the funds we had to allocate staff to deliver interventionists for reading and math. As part of the district's commitment to providing an effective RtI structure and adequate intervention resources for our students, a .5 Math Interventionist position was provided to every elementary campus to support Tier 3 math students. Most Title I campuses use a portion of their Title I funds to make that a full-time position so that the Math Interventionist is on campus all day. The administrative team reviews the Tier Summary Reports submitted to David Holland, as well as the campus and district STAAR Math and Think Through Math reports, to identify trends and make staffing recommendations.

Bond dollars can only be used for capital improvements and related costs. They may not be used for personnel, utilities, and other such operating expenses.

#### *MIDDLE SCHOOLS*

##### Haltom Middle

13. **Why do the 7<sup>th</sup>-grade reading CBAs have a weighted OER question? Shouldn't that go against writing rather than reading?**
- A. While the OER question is writing, it is tested on STAAR EOC as a reading skill. It was given the same weight as on the EOC (two OER questions = 25 percent of test). This particular skill has one of the lowest performance scores in the district, so we cannot wait until ninth grade to assess it or to begin to develop the processes needed to master the skill. The decision was made by the content coordinator and the teachers who reviewed the CBA to begin assessing the skill in EOC format beginning in sixth grade in order to increase student performance on the EOC.

##### North Ridge Middle

14. We are very appreciative of the time given in PLC's to collaborate, plan, and improve student outcomes. For the majority of teachers, unfortunately, the PLC and the conference period are not enough time to take care of work related responsibilities. **What does the Cabinet consider a reasonable amount of time, outside of contract hours, to dedicate to work related responsibilities?**
- A. Without being trite, the answer is simply, "It depends." What are some of the factors that could cause planning time to vary from teacher to teacher? Some of the factors include the following:

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**MIDDLE SCHOOLS**

**North Ridge Middle (#14 continued)**

- a. The content standards could be new, such as in the case of our new math TEKS. This is causing many of our teachers to feel overwhelmed because the standards have changed so drastically from what they were accustomed to teaching. Thus, this has created a need for math teachers to spend more time in planning.
- b. Trying to learn how to use new resources causes teachers to invest more time in planning. Again, this has happened with the math and science adoptions this year.
- c. The level of expertise in a content area or the actual experience of the teacher can cause one to spend more time planning. If a teacher has never taught a particular subject, or is a beginning teacher, planning is much more time-intensive as compared to what a very experienced teacher would need.
- d. If a teacher is developing plans for multiple content areas as in the case of our self-contained classroom teachers more time is required. This certainly complicates planning and determines the amount of time necessary to plan quality learning experiences for students.
- e. The degree to which the PLC is functioning can contribute to a teacher or a team of teachers spending more time planning. Hopefully, the PLC is a structure that should help facilitate planning and reduce the amount of time required for planning for learning.
- f. Ultimately, the answer to the question is whatever is needed to ensure that our students are successful. That is the true gauge and hallmark of planning for learning.

In summary, what does it take to ensure that our (my) students are learning and demonstrating success on all the measures that are required? That may be the initial question that should be asked by a teacher or even a PLC. In order to have successful students, what time is needed? The new normal for the teacher is really moving from the role of teacher as presenter to teacher as the “architect of learning.” This means that when we plan for learning, the emphasis moves from teacher as presenting information to students to the teacher as a designer of engaging student tasks that when completed produce the desired learning outcomes. This is much more complex and time consuming because the work of the teacher is now at the front-end.

It is about planning engaging and relevant work for students to accomplish that when completed will produce desired results. It requires time, dialogue with peers, and a thorough understanding of content, context, and cognitive rigor of the standards. I equate planning for learning to building a bridge that guarantees safe passage from one side to the next. Because planning is so critical to student success, the work is not easy nor quick. However, that is how the nature of our work has changed and with the accountability standards continuing to increase, it appears that the one component that we can control is how well we plan for learning.

- 15.** Recently there were some changes to the grading policy, with regard to the number and kinds of grades. It is my understanding that a committee exists to further research and refine BISD's grading policies and procedures, K-12. **Where can one go for an update on the purpose, agenda, and progress of this committee?** What research and best practices are being considered? Will campuses have input (other than their campus liaison)? When will decisions be finalized and put into place?

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**MIDDLE SCHOOLS**

**North Ridge Middle (#15 continued)**

- A. The elementary grading and reporting committee met this year to review the percentages applied to daily and major grades as well as discuss TA codes and the discrepancy between student grades and achievement. This committee is scheduled to meet two more times this year in collaboration with our elementary principals. Please contact your principal and teacher representative for an update and to give feedback they can bring forward at our next meeting.

**Watauga Middle**

- 16.** There is some concern and confusion about students who attend DAEP. When they return from DAEP they are frequently not working on the same curriculum as we are even though the district scope and sequence is supposed to be followed by all teachers. It is understood that students at DAEP may have issues and keeping them up to speed may present challenges but when the student returns to the home campus the expectation should be that they are very closely aligned to the district curriculum. **Can this be resolved?**

- A. Students who attend DAEP are given assignments in Compass Odyssey that are aligned to the standards that are posted in the scope and sequence for each course for which the online courses are available. If there is no corresponding lesson in Compass Odyssey, the DAEP teachers use the clarifying documents in the district curriculum to design lessons that match the scope and sequence. There is not a task-by-task alignment with what is being taught at the home campus, but the topics should be the same.

This model was started the year before last at the request of the home campuses and the Shannon staff so that teachers were not expected to provide assignments, books, and other resources when students were given DAEP assignments. Compass Odyssey courses provide consistent learning experiences that are aligned with the district curriculum for any Birdville student in DAEP. When they return to their home campuses, it is likely that some re-teaching will be necessary just as it would be for any student returning after a lengthy illness or absence for other reasons.

- 17.** Middle School Athletics: During the school year students are occasionally dropped from first period athletics due to failing grades, misbehavior, or the student no longer wants to be in athletics. Unfortunately these students are added to first period classes which often results in exceptionally large classes (30 plus students in some cases). Other teachers are not afforded the luxury of dropping students from their classes and this should not be the case for athletics. At the very least every campus should have a first period PE class so students who are a problem simply get moved to the PE class instead of rearranging their entire schedule as well as causing core classes to be overloaded. There are several middle schools that already do this. **Can all middle schools handle this in the same way?**

- A. This might be possible if there is a coach available to teach PE during that period. However, master schedule and staff utilization is a campus-level decision.



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**HIGH SCHOOLS**

**Haltom**

- 18. How are we going to address the issue of inclusion teachers meeting the district's expectation of what an inclusion classroom "should" look like – when the general ed teacher has three or more different inclusion teachers?** Especially considering they have no common planning time and/or the SPED teacher has no knowledge of the subject?
- A. Implementing the co-teach model of inclusion is a work in progress. As we move forward, the Special Education Department will work with the campus as the master schedule is constructed to try to lessen the numbers of special education teachers that a general education teacher works within inclusion settings and to match inclusion teachers with subjects for which they have some background knowledge. Additionally, we will provide ongoing training in the effective use of the co-teach model not only for the special education teacher but also for the general education teacher. This will further enable the pair to work as a team in meeting the needs of students with disabilities who receive special education services.
- 19. Is inclusion meant to be a SPED class or a behavior class?** Because currently the needs of special education kids are being challenged due to the amount of behavior kids/504s that are thrown into inclusion classrooms. Is there some way we can better diversify the classroom to better meet the needs of our students?
- A. Inclusion is a special education service designed as a "push-in" program versus the more traditional "pull-out" service models such as Content Mastery and Resource classes. The "mix" in the class is often a function of the master scheduling program as it fills the class around the students whose IEPs indicate a need for inclusion in a particular class. Again, the Special Education Department will work with the campus in the construction of the master schedule to try to eliminate as many of these issues as possible. Please note that inclusion is NOT a service offered under 504.

**Shannon**

- 20. Now that the bond has passed, when can high school teachers expect to see more technology resources in their classes? (iPad, new teacher computers, student computers, tablets, etc.)**
- A. The current plan, which has yet to be shown to the Board, will replace technology at Shannon and Haltom in the 15–16 school year and Richland in the 16–17 school year. Birdville is scheduled for the 17–18 school year, but that work will commence around the construction schedule of the school. This schedule is subject to change based on E-rate funding and input from the Board.

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**HIGH SCHOOLS (Continued)**

**Shannon (continued)**

**21.** Teachers who facilitate Compass Learning are struggling to keep students off inappropriate web sites because there are NO filters, blocked sites, or VISION software for students using the Chromebooks for Compass. **Isn't there any type of software to help restrict where students go?** Our regular Wi-Fi and lab computers have those filters and software, allowing us to teach and facilitate learning more effectively. Is there anything that can be done to help?

**A.** Inappropriate Internet sites are filtered and blocked by a content filter in the district's data center. Any device used on the district's network, including the Chromebooks used for Compass Learning, has its access to the Internet filtered. However, if a student brings in their own 3G/4G hotspot or tether-enabled cell phone and connects a Chromebook to it, they may be able to access inappropriate content. If a student is accessing inappropriate content, please notify the Technology Department ASAP by calling x5888. We will ensure the site is added to our blocked list on our network and can assist in determining if the student is using a 3G/4G hotspot or tether-enabled cell phone.

On a laptop or a Windows-based PC, software agents can be installed that can allow a teacher to supervise student work. These programs run in the background and are always on. As for the Chromebook, software and applications do not function in the same fashion and our experience so far with trying to mimic Vision on the Chromebook has been challenging.

The Technology Department has been evaluating a number of products that will give teachers the ability to supervise student work on a Chromebook. The most promising solution at this point is a software package from NetSupport (<http://www.netsupportschool.com/chrome/>). This is being analyzed and tested in our test lab by our Server Operations team. If the tests are successful, we will pursue appropriating funds and deploying it.