

Superintendent's Communications Council

Campus Questions

April 14, 2014

ELEMENTARY

Academy at C.F. Thomas

1. **Is a pay raise being considered in next year's budget?**

A. We are in the early stages of the budgeting process and have not had an opportunity to meet with the Board to find out what their expectations are. Consequently, I cannot respond with any details. However, I can say that the Board is committed to paying a salary that is competitive with the salaries paid by the six highest paying districts in our area.

2. **Has our district ever considered going to four nine-week grading periods instead of six six-week ones?** After the required ISIP testing the first week of every month, the Aims Web assessment, CBAs, DRA, Running Records, STAAR practice, etc., and then report card assessment, it seems we assess more than we teach.

A. Here is the feedback received from our principals:

***Nine weeks vs. six weeks reporting periods:** Overall – the consensus was that the nine-week reporting period was very positive for a few reasons as follows:

- ✓ A student's ability to recover from a failing average is better due to the longer reporting time
- ✓ District CBAs could be aligned to occur at the end of each of the nine-week periods since there would only be four.
- ✓ Progress reports would still go home each three weeks.
- ✓ Time needed for those standards/units that might take longer could all be covered within a reporting period.
- ✓ Teachers would not have to deal with all of the extra work that comes with report card time as often (i.e., assessing Kinder/1st grade students for the SB report card)–thus, increasing available instruction time.

* The only negative was that the four grading periods might affect the yearly average – since they currently have six grades that determine this average and this would be reduced to two. However, some principals in our cluster had experience with the nine-week system (either as a parent or administrator) and it didn't really seem to affect students negatively. In fact, since students had more of an opportunity to recover a low average – the grade averages actually were slightly better.

Birdville

3. **It is very common for team leaders to receive a stipend. How can we accomplish this in the near future for grade level team leaders in Birdville?**

A. BISD recognizes the important of team leaders. Therefore, this is being considered for the near future. This will be evaluated during the budget process.

ELEMENTARY (Continued)

Birdville (continued)

4. Getting corporate entities involved in local schools is usually a successful venture. **Can the district form a committee to connect our schools with corporations?** Examples: Texas Motor Speedway is very involved in several schools close by (sponsoring reading programs, bringing in cars and drivers, etc.); near Houston, NASA has partnered with a local school to bring in scientists/speakers, programs, etc.
 - A. The district realizes the importance of partnerships with local corporations. This is currently handled through the Career and Technology Department. However, we will continue to look at ways to expand these partnerships across the district.

Major Cheney

5. We have talked with at least six applicants that had difficulty with the application or training process. **What can the district do to improve the substitute coverage for campuses?**
 - A. We just began a new initiative to increase the number of applicants. However, this is the first we have heard of applicants having difficulties with the application process. Please contact HR with the difficulties so the application process can be evaluated.
6. Elementary reading teachers were told they would not be able to utilize the STAAR release items for classroom instruction or assessment, whereas math and science teachers were permitted to use the items. Originally, the idea was that the selections would be used on reading CBAs. However, so far, we have not seen any use of the STAAR questions on the CBAs. It will not skew any data to use the STAAR reading release at this point, because these students will not see their grade-level released tests again. Basically, we are being told to never use it in our classrooms for the entire year. **Shouldn't we be permitted to utilize such an invaluable resource with our students?** Our students need to be exposed to it before the STAAR.
 - A. The question stems on the released test have been approved for use in classroom instruction or assessment. The passages must be secured for use at the district level because there are an insufficient number of released passages at this time. Teachers are encouraged to use the question stems to formulate assessment items based on the fiction and informational text that is used in day-to-day instruction. As more passages are released by TEA, the curriculum staff will be able to be more flexible in giving access to campuses.

Foster Village

7. There is concern on our campus about administration being pulled away for meetings, trainings, etc. and not on campus to support teachers with students with discipline issues. This often leaves the school counselor or secretary in charge of discipline problems, especially since Foster Village only had a part-time AP. **Are there plans in place to alleviate these issues for campuses with part-time assistant principals?**
 - A. BISD has added staff in key areas each year for the past three years. We will continue to evaluate staffing requirements and make adjustments as needed.

Holiday Heights

- 8. There have been several occasions this year that we have been asked to split up a class in our grade level due to a substitute either not taking the job, someone not showing up or a last-minute emergency. As much as we want to be helpful and flexible, this disrupts our day, changes scheduling of centers, materials, etc. **Has there been any discussion about splitting the money a sub would have been paid between the teachers who took the students for the day?** Although it isn't much once divided, it does "soothe" the spirit.
 - A. That is not something that has been discussed at Cabinet level but is an interesting idea and one that warrants consideration. We will analyze the practicality and cost of that plan and give it serious consideration.

North Ridge

- 9. According to our data, it seems that our campus falls in line with the district average for percentage of students meeting CBA expectations. Unfortunately, these averages are terribly low. We feel that an entire week has been lost in instruction time due to the CBAs. **What is being done to make improvements so that we don't feel like we've wasted valuable instructional time?**
 - A. I think the concept of a "week" from the teacher is due to the fact students take one subject per day which spreads testing over the course of a week. The tests are designed to be completed in one class period or less. It is not a week per content area. It is a week where testing is occurring at the campus, but it is one day of testing per content area. They have a two-week window (typically) in which the campus testing coordinator schedules the tests.

Smithfield

- 10. **When is the targeted date for a bond election? Will it be broken up into separate proposals this time (new construction, safety and security, technology, etc.?)**
 - A. The district has formed a Bond Planning Committee that will prepare a recommendation to the Board for a possible November 2014 election. It will be up to the Board as to the number of propositions that may be on the ballot.

Smithfield/Green Valley

- 11. **Are there any plans to add a full-time math specialist to our campus next year?**
 - A. Math specialists are central office personnel and not at the campus level. However, if this is regarding a math interventionist, your campus principal needs to submit a personnel request through the proper channels.

ELEMENTARY (Continued)

Walker Creek

12. **Would the district consider a full-time teacher position or tutoring position to oversee Istation and Think Through Math as a separate computer class, thus freeing the teachers to actually teach?**
- A. Every campus was given a full-time reading interventionist. Istation and Think Through Math are resources not classes. They should be used for interventions.
13. **Would the district consider building an Early Learning Center?** It would free up classrooms at all of the elementary schools that currently have Pre-K and PPCD; furthermore, play equipment and classrooms would be safe and appropriate for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds.
- A. This would have to be a recommendation from the Bond Committee and be approved by the Board and voters.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

North Ridge

14. When scheduling various meetings, is it possible to take into account middle school release times? With the middle school release time being 3:50 p.m., it makes it very difficult to get out of the door, the parking lot, and across town in 10 minutes. **Is it possible to have a standard meeting start time of 4:30 p.m. so as to give middle school teachers travel time without having classes covered and missing valuable instruction time?**
- A. When scheduling meetings that involve middle school teachers only, a 4:15 p.m. or 4:30 p.m. start time can be accommodated. When scheduling meetings involving both secondary and elementary teachers, the later start time causes difficulties for those groups, especially high school teachers who are dismissed at 2:30 p.m. The Curriculum Department will consider this request when meetings are scheduled for cross-grade level groups in the future.

Watauga

15. **Will the district look into creating a daycare for teachers as an option?** Average cost of day care per week is around \$175 and having one in the district would ensure we hire qualified teachers to run it as well as money staying in the community. It would also help the teacher and day care workers in regards to having the same work schedule and calendar. Most day care centers require you to pay them even if your child is not there ... for example, school holidays.
- A. This question has been raised in every district I have served in and generally proves to be impractical due to cost, space limitations, and liability. Very few districts offer day care. However, some districts have partnered with a local college or day care provider to assure that services are available at a reasonable cost and on a schedule that is more in sync with the school calendar.

MIDDLE SCHOOL (Continued)

16. **Will the district look into switching their insurance carrier and look towards how to “own” their own health facility/clinic so the cost of going to the doctor and obtaining the prescription could be lowered?** Example: Northwest ISD uses Cigna. They own their own health care facility and their insurance pays 100% in network (if you go to their clinic by admin office). The insurance premiums would be higher per pay period but going to the doctor is free as well as prescriptions at the district health facility and going out of network it would be 70/30 split.

- A. Due to TEA regulations, Birdville ISD can only provide health insurance through TRS ActiveCare. We are, however, continually looking for opportunities to lower employee out-of-pocket expenses. This year BISD made Ameridoc available to every employee at no cost to the employee. We are planning to offer some additional opportunities to assist employees in managing their net healthcare cost in the 2014-2015 school year.

HIGH SCHOOL

Birdville

17. **Why is Twitter not blocked in the district?** Facebook is blocked, but Twitter is not, and at the high school level more students use Twitter than they do Facebook.

- A. We have requests and recommendations from schools to both keep Twitter open and to block it, and to open Facebook as well as to keep it blocked.

The CIPA law driving this is outdated. We are asking students to do school work at home on the Internet, then come to school and have a different Internet experience to learn from. It doesn't make sense.

We have created an Internet Filtering Committee who will meet shortly to address the questions and make recommendations to the Cabinet. There are no longer clear cut answers.

Haltom

18. **What decision making process is being used to determine whether BISD students will be required to take 3 or 4 years of Social Science to graduate? What is the overall goal of eliminating one year of Social Science instruction if the decision to do so is made?**

- A. The elimination of one credit of Social Studies was not decided by BISD. It is a legislative and State Board of Education decision in order for students to be able to earn required endorsements in alignment with the students' interests and aptitudes.

Haltom (continued)

19. **What is the possibility of academic coaches/master teachers at the high school level?** We have them K-8, but none 9-12. Should be a paid position or ½ position.

- A. The district provided an Academic Dean for each of the high schools. While we certainly realize the value of coaches that are content-specific, the academic dean position was meant to provide additional support for instruction. This position is strictly meant to focus on instruction and assisting the PLCs in collaborating around the four major questions. Part of the job responsibilities entail facilitating the professional learning needs of staff identified through the PLC process.

Richland

20. **What do you see as the top five issues for our BISD students in the next five years?**

- A. This is a very thought-provoking question and one that could be answered differently depending upon the various individuals that one might question. However, in our strategic planning process, the team identified some major themes as we discussed what we need to do as a district to position our students for a preferred future. Some of the major themes included things like:
 - 1. Being academically prepared to compete globally in an environment that is constantly changing;
 - 2. Being ethical, having integrity and character;
 - 3. Being service-minded;
 - 4. Possessing 21st Century skills which include:
 - a. great communication skills;
 - b. being collaborative;
 - c. working in creative and innovative ways;
 - d. being a critical thinker and problem solver; and
 - 5. Accepting responsibility and being engaged authentically in their learning.

I would rather say that these are our challenges instead of issues. As we think about our strategic vision, creating a system where our students can graduate prepared with all of these attributes will present us with a great opportunity to make a significant difference in the lives of our students. It will also position our students to be college ready, workforce ready, but more importantly, life ready. Issues will come and go. The work, however, is noble and is forever evident in the lives that we touch.

Richland HS (continued)

21. A pressing question concerns cell phones and headphones. **Since we currently allow them on campus, could there be a concrete directive or district policy about what to do when cell phones are abused?** Some official limitation that everyone can follow. Especially inform parents: **NOT TO CALL OR TEXT THEIR CHILDREN DURING SCHOOL.** We also need a united policy on listening to music during classes. With so much increased pressure on teachers to prepare students for the vital and necessary assessments, teachers need some help in the classroom regarding abuse of technology.

A. The student handbook says:

Electronic Communication Devices

Students may utilize their devices in the classroom when the teacher deems appropriate as an instructional tool for educational purposes. These devices include but are not to be limited to the following: cell phones, smart phones, iPhones, iPods and mp3 players.

K-5 students are required to keep their devices **turned off and stored away** during the school day they may only be utilized in the classroom when the teacher deems appropriate as an instructional tool for educational purposes.

6-8 students are required to keep their devices turned off and stored away; they may only be utilized in the classroom when the teacher deems appropriate as an instructional tool for educational purposes. The students may use cell phone devices during lunchtime within the timelines deemed appropriate by campus administration.

9-12 students may use their devices during passing periods and lunchtimes unless they have violated this policy and lost the privilege as a disciplinary measure.

District employees may confiscate any electronic communication device if it clearly is not being used as an educational device in the classroom. If an electronic communication device is confiscated it shall be handed over to the campus administration no later than the end of the teacher's workday. Parents shall be notified by the campus administration within two days after the electronic communication device is confiscated with an explanation for the confiscation. The electronic device may be returned to either the parent or the student.

This is also addressed in Board policy FNCE (LOCAL).

Richland HS

22. **Can we please see about a slogan change for the district?** The current one is "everyone succeeds in the future they create" seems like the district would condone any future a student creates. For example, a student could aspire to be a drug dealer and work hard to do so as a "career." Do we want to condone that "future the student created"?

A. This summer, the Board will approve a new strategic plan for the district. As a part of the new plan, the current slogan will be evaluated to make sure it reflects the district's mission statement.

23. **What are the district's plans regarding House Bill 5 and the new graduation requirements?**

A. BISD is requiring the State Board of Education approved graduation plan and .5 Health, .5 Technology and .5 Professional Communications (Speech). Refer to the HB5 Chart and also the HB5 FAQ documents on the district's website.

24. Concerning make up time – **Could the district adopt a policy of mandatory attendance and end the make-up time policy – missed direct instruction can never be made up?** Students who go to Saturday school to make up time are generally students who are failing or at risk. The number one issue that employers have cited as the main reason employees between the ages of 18-25 are dismissed from their jobs is **attendance**. Are we really preparing our students for the real world by allowing them to make up time? If the district had a strict attendance policy, perhaps students would come to school and get the message. Let's stand up and do the right thing and communicate to the students that EDUCATION is important.

A. The state already requires mandatory attendance, and our students would be harmed academically if we did not work with them to make up work.

West Birdville

25. Understanding the need for testing is essential for educators in today's schools. However, is it possible to achieve a more balanced approach in terms of CBAs? We are changing the format of inputting grades (writing), giving the CBAs during TELPAS writing sample administration, after and before MOCK STAAR administrations and other important activities (common assessments). **Would it be possible to combine some of these different testing opportunities in order to enhance the utilization of the data that results from them?**

A. We recognize the sometimes conflicting purposes of student assessments and the impact that the state and local assessment systems may have on the core work of the district: teaching and learning. Each year the Assessment Council carefully evaluates the district assessment schedule and designs the new calendar based on input from teachers and administrators at the campus and district levels. The points made here will be taken into consideration in planning for the 2014-15 school year.

This year CBAs were moved to February due to concerns expressed last year over RtI testing and semester grading conflicts in January. The elementary CBA administrations were intentionally distributed throughout the month of February to provide campus flexibility in scheduling and to accommodate elementary teachers who teach several tested subjects so that multiple tests would not have to be administered in the same week. Writing was scheduled in the first two weeks of February; reading in the last two weeks; and math, science and social studies were scheduled for the last week in February and the first week in March. While moving to an online recording of writing scores was new this year, it should take less than 10 minutes for a teacher to enter scores in Aware once compositions have been graded.

There is no official TELPAS writing sample administration, although some campuses with large ELL populations may choose to set aside time for student writing. The writing samples used to rate students in TELPAS are to be part of regular instruction, aligned with appropriate TEKS and ELPS, and are not to be assignments created specifically for the purpose of TELPAS rating.

The district neither requires, nor advocates the administration of mock STAAR assessments; however some campuses have opted to do so this year.