

Superintendent's Communications Council

Campus Questions

April 15, 2013

ELEMENTARY

ACFT

1. In considering future calendars, **why can we not give up the Memorial Day holiday in favor of having a holiday on Good Friday?** It seems silly to have a holiday at the very end of the school year. Easter is a very traditional family time and would give everyone a nice breather to gear up for STARR and the final push to the successful end of the school year.
 - A. The calendar committee is made up of teachers, community members and other staff. They are the ones who help develop the calendar each year. Also, the BISD community has not been supportive of students attending school on Memorial Day.
2. **Are Special Education teachers still going to be working with students with needs?** Often, kids with special needs are delayed in some areas more than a year. Consequently, students are falling behind in the classroom because an all-inclusion model does not work for everybody. I have heard that all teachers will be asked to gain certification in special education and the kids will be absorbed into the classroom. Can you explain what the plan is for kids with special needs and for the staff that serves them?
 - A. There are no plans to significantly change special education services. There will always be a need for special education teachers to work with students with disabilities. Additionally, not all children in special education can be served in a general education classroom all the time. We cannot anticipate a situation where all general education teachers would need to be certified in special education and that all students with a disability would be served in general education all day. While we are looking to have more "push-in" and/or co-teaching services, we continue to expect that needed special education services will continue to be provided by a special education teacher.
3. Since we are required to get 6 GT hours every year, **why can't that be taken care of during one of the many professional development days during regular school hours instead of us having to get them on our own time without many opportunities available?**
 - A. District professional learning days provide opportunity for grade level/content teams to collaborate around common learning so that there is consistency across the district on curriculum and instruction practices. Typically, the content on those days is based on district-wide initiatives or state mandates such as the assessment system. When professional learning that meets any of the GT requirements is conducted on district days, teachers are given specific credit hours for attending.

Binion

4. **In reference to RTI, are there going to be tools provided to assess student progress throughout the school year that are consistent throughout the district?**
 - A. Absolutely. We will use ISIP for reading K-8, and we are requesting a universal math screener for grades K-12. The math program is AIMSWeb, and it is for K-8. We do not have universal screeners in reading and math for 9-12 yet, but we will continue to search for them. We are moving Read180 to the high schools as a reading intervention program. It does not have a universal screener, but it does assess students along the pathway to determine where they are. The same is true for Think Through Math which we are currently using in grades 3-8.

Foster Village

5. **Did all schools change to lower quality projectors, or just a select few? If all schools did not have their projectors changed out, how can we go back to the better quality projectors with higher quality image?** Students have even noticed a change in the quality of the image.
 - A. Several campuses had a mix of brands of projectors within the same campus. Our support staff recommended reorganizing the distribution of the projectors to maintain a single brand of projector in each campus to make support, inventory, and replacement of projectors more efficient and to maintain equity among classrooms within each campus. The choice of distribution was made based on the brand most prevalent at each campus.

We realize that some campuses were reduced in quality in some classrooms. To compensate for this and increase our quality of visual-based education, those campuses that now have the lowest quality projectors will be first on our schedule to have them replaced with new higher quality projectors. This will be funded either through bond funds, should the upcoming bond pass, or requested replacement funds, should the bond fail.

6. **Since the push is for students with special education issues to have more inclusion, will teachers be trained to co-teach?**
 - A. This summer, five BISD staff members will be trained as trainers for co-teaching. With our own set of trainers in-district, we will be able to schedule co-teaching training anytime during the year. We will be offering our first training in August and will be offering additional training throughout next year.

North Ridge

7. **Can the district compensate ESL classroom teachers with a stipend for all the extra duties they are required to do every year?** There are teachers who let their ESL certification go to “inactive” because of the added requirements.
 - A. We re-evaluate our stipends each year during the budget process and this can be considered.

ELEMENTARY (Continued)

North Ridge (continued)

8. **Is there going to be a full-time literacy support specialist at every campus next year, including ours?**
 - A. Staffing is a part of the budget process each year, and final decisions will not be made until that process is completed. A budget request has been made for a full-time literacy interventionist at each elementary and middle school campus next year. If approved, the interventionists will serve Tier 2 and Tier 3 RtI students as well as students identified as having characteristics of dyslexia.

Spicer

9. **Would it be possible to make some changes regarding the staff badges?** Some suggested changes include a new badge each year without charge and not charging for a new badge if the old one breaks. Also, is there any way new badges could be done online or on campus? If not, could there be extended times on at least one day during the week to give staff members that have to come a distance or cross construction the time to make it to the administration building?
 - A. Because of the cost of badges, this is something that would have a large price tag each year. However, if badges break, we don't charge for replacement. Because of the special equipment required to produce badges, it is not financially feasible to place badge printing machines on each campus.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Haltom Middle

10. With the drastic changes with TRS Activecare, next year my family will pay over \$1200 per month for us to be covered with basic health insurance. The deductible has drastically gone up for the third year in a row as well. Other school districts use BCBS, United Healthcare and other similar insurance groups and pay drastically small premiums each month. **Why can't BISD do this as well?**
 - A. Birdville ISD opted into TRS Activecare several years ago. At this time, it is our understanding that once the district opted in we could not be allowed to opt out at a future date. However, the district is aware of and concerned about the rising premiums and will consider that issue in developing the 2013-14 budget.

North Oaks Middle

11. The question has been raised about the current administrations' philosophy about middle school access to cell phones and other technology during school hours. It becomes at times a game to middle-schoolers as to how they might creatively use that cell phone in class without coming to the attention of the teacher. A great deal of office time is taken up labeling phones, tracking the number of times they have been removed, contacting parents about use during class, etc. **Could some distinction be made in district guidelines regarding access to these devices by high school students as opposed to the younger students that would support a more stringent policy at the campus level?**

A. Currently, there are separate guidelines in place. The secondary 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; 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 within two school 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.

Students who violate this policy shall be subject to the disciplinary measures outlined in the Code of Conduct.

North Richland Middle

12. **Will Birdville employees be receiving pay raises next school year?**
- A. To a large extent, that question is dependent on the actions of the state legislature which is currently in session. While the state dramatically reduced school funding two years ago, early indications are that the state will return a significant portion of that funding to school districts for the 2013-14 school year. However, final funding legislation may not be approved until late May. The district will likely not give a definitive answer regarding raises until after that legislative session is finished.
13. **We think the students will try harder on CBAs and results will be better if the students have a grade at stake. If the district is worried about the grades being low because tests are sometimes not closely aligned with curriculum, could we possibly have a policy that allows us to curve the grade before putting it in the grade book and/or allow it to be added as a 4th test grade with the lowest test grade being dropped?**
- A. CBAs are formative assessments whose main purpose is to assist teachers and district staff in making curricular and instructional decisions. The results should be analyzed by district staff to determine appropriate alignment and rigor, but the results should also be analyzed by campus staff to make decisions regarding appropriate instruction and/or interventions for individual students. Putting CBA data in the hands of students is an additional way to maximize performance. When students understand the data sufficiently to make decisions about their own learning needs and respond accordingly, the CBA is most effective. Ideally, assigning a grade to a CBA should not be the catalyst for increased student engagement on the assessment. Curving grades on district assessments has not proven effective in the past, nor has the ability to drop the lowest test grade. This issue will be included in the discussion of the grading committee that is beginning its work this week.

Richland High

14. **Since the restructured pay scale caused many veteran teachers to experience pay cuts and greatly affect retirement, and with the projected increases in taxes and insurance costs resulting from Obamacare, how does the district plan to address the financial and morale impacts of the district's compensation plan?**
- A. No teacher, experienced or otherwise, should have received a reduction in pay as a result of the restructured pay scale. If anyone believes their compensation has been reduced, please bring the specifics to the attention of Mike Seale so he can review the situation and make a correction if necessary. The district is aware of and concerned about the rising premiums and will consider that issue in developing the 2013-14 budget. To a large extent, the district's ability to give a raise for the 2013-14 school year is dependent on the actions of the state legislature which is currently in session. While the state dramatically reduced school funding two years ago, early indications are that the state will return a significant portion of that funding to school districts for the 2013-14 school year. However, final funding legislation may not be approved until as late as the end of May. Until that legislation is finalized the district will not be able to give a definitive answer regarding raises.

Richland High (continued)

15. Special education students who are not in inclusion classes but need additional support, such as going to a quiet place to work and oral testing, will not be given the academic support when Content Master is dissolved. **How are these students going to be serviced to allow them to continue in a “least restrictive learning environment”?**
 - A. The discussion regarding “dissolving content mastery” revolves around campuses determining how to use special education staff to provide maximum support for students with disabilities. There has been no district mandate to dissolve content mastery, but many campuses have chosen to use content mastery staff in co-teaching or inclusion situations. Even if a campus does not choose to have a content mastery lab open during the day, students should be able to access needed accommodations such as oral testing in designated learning labs or special education classrooms.