

Superintendent's Communications Council
Campus Questions
October 5, 2015

ELEMENTARY

ACFT

1. What is our district's policy on seeking waivers for the 1:22 class size limit in K-2?

According to Texas Education Code 25.112 a waiver may be granted for unanticipated enrollment growth, lack of facilities, lack of teachers, or financial hardships. Unanticipated growth can only be used if only one classroom is over the limit of 22. Surely our district has the financial resources to hire teachers and provide the facilities needed.

A. During Dr. Brown's tenure with BISD, the District has greatly reduced the number of class size waivers requested. Finances are only one of several factors considered in requesting a waiver and is never the sole factor considered. As you mentioned, space is often an issue. If we do not have a classroom available for an additional teacher we have a choice of transferring the latest enrolling students to another campus or requesting a waiver. Every year within Birdville ISD we do have situations where we must consider requesting waivers from the state for the 22:1 ratio. We do everything we can to avoid this by utilizing a process we call Overflow Transfers where we send a student from their home campus to a nearby campus that has space in a particular grade level. Last school year over 160 students were transferred using this method. We know from our last demographic study, and from actual numbers this year, that many of our elementary schools are at or above 95% capacity. Just because a campus is over/under capacity does not mean that we do not have one or two grade levels that exceed our projections. We control a lot of things, but when families move out of a house, we do not control who moves into that home and what grade levels those "new students" will impact. Many of our elementary schools have no additional classrooms, and most have no more than one space where they can add if this was needed. These capacity issues are why we are reducing our Open Enrollment from both inside and outside BISD so we can better predict our projections in the future.

2. If teachers need to be moved at the beginning of the school year can it not be done on the Friday preceding the first week of school? The number of students who come to "Meet the Teacher" during the week preceding the first week for students should be a reliable indication of enrollment in each grade level. It is traumatic for students and parents when they are pulled from one class to form a new class. It is impossible for an elementary teacher to take down one classroom and set up a new classroom, often in a different grade level, in one day and be adequately prepared to teach students.

A. While we cannot predict exactly how many students will be in attendance on the first day of school, we want to make sure we do not make hasty decisions. Our current practice typically does not allow adding a teacher prior to school starting. However, with the concerns shared, we have decided to review our practices and procedures on when we will add new teachers. The timeline of setting up a new classroom will also be reviewed.

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Foster Village

3. In regards to the six weeks curriculum previews, **would there be a way to build these into other professional development that is already scheduled instead of the after school times? Or could a couple of the previews be combined so teachers would only stay for after school curriculum previews every other 6 weeks?**

A. Additional planning opportunities are being built into District professional learning days. October 9 will be a full day of structured planning for all elementary core content teachers. The after school curriculum previews that were held last year were highly praised by the teachers who attended. As we looked at ways to equip teachers with the information needed to effectively plan each six weeks, expanding the curriculum preview offerings seemed a logical design. While it would be great if every teacher could attend every preview, we understand that is a big commitment to make. If every teacher cannot attend, our suggestion is that grade level teams work out a schedule so that someone is present at each of the previews. That person can take back the information to share with the rest of the team. This works well for self-contained teachers. For singletons in departmentalized settings, it is more problematic. Again, plan to attend all the sessions that you can. The C & I team will post as much of the preview information as possible on our website. As soon as it is available, you will be notified. We also are looking into ways to conduct the previews virtually so that teachers can access them from home or school at a time that is convenient. We will take your recommendation of doing two six weeks previews at a time under consideration. If it proves feasible, the format could be changed in the future.

4. **Is there a plan in place that will move towards each campus housing an instructional coach?**

A. Each year we consider the staff that are needed at campuses and within each department. No one would argue the value of each campus having an instructional coach. However, the cost of this would be in the vicinity of \$900,000. This would negate other positions being approved that are required, such as bilingual teachers. We also have many requests which have to be considered. Once these requests are discussed, then priorities are established. The Cabinet looks at funding campus needs over those at the District level. There are situations when staff must be added at the central level, such as the necessary support that was provided this year by adding diagnosticians and LSSPs.

Green Valley

5. We understand that we are to implement new spelling practices; however, most grade levels started the year without documents to reference for planning purposes. Recently, much information (72 pages) has been made available to some, but not all grade levels. **When the district changes practices, could more thought and planning be put into how the information will be presented to teachers?** This is a lot of information to sift through once we have already begun planning, and while we agree with the changes, the expectations and stress put on teachers when new information is delivered in this way makes for a rough start to a new school year.

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Green Valley (#5 continued)

- A. The new curriculum documents are the final pieces of the total ELAR Framework that we developed three years ago. They provide the tools for teachers to fully implement the framework as it was originally designed. As is always the case, those final elements of any program are the ones that take the most time because we want them to be error-free before publication. Norma Jackson is assisting Teresa Lawson in the creation of the Word Study documents. They are working to complete them as soon as possible, and they are committed to providing each grade level with what is needed for each six weeks in a timely manner. As of this writing, K–2 documents are completed for the year, but not all have been loaded into Forethought. Every grade level has documents for the first two six weeks and will have the third six weeks at least two weeks before they are needed. This rollout will be similar to the manner in which we provided clarifying documents the first year of the new curriculum design. Those were not available at the beginning of the year, but they were available in time for teachers to plan for the next six weeks. The C & I Team is reinforcing with teachers that implementation of the new curriculum is a process that will take time. They should be taking on only a few pieces at a time until they become familiar with them. Content coordinators and coaches are willing to meet with PLCs at any time to train or respond to their questions.
6. The STAAR math test on the computer is written for grades 1–12. Kindergarten cannot use the graphs, as there is an error message that comes up saying they are only available for grades 1–12. **What is the data we are hoping to get from kindergarteners taking this test? Is there no other alternative that would give us a better picture for our young kindergarteners, and allow us to use/see/manipulate the data from the test?**
- A. The component of Star Math that first drew our attention is that it is one of a very few universal screeners that provides data for students in grades K–12. That was a key factor for us because of the RtI guidelines that have been established in the District. While there are five reports in the Star Math screener that are not available for kindergarten, there are eight reports that are accessible. The Diagnostic Report, the Instructional Planning Report for Students, and the Instructional Planning Report for the Class are probably the ones that are most beneficial in guiding teachers to support their students' learning. The Growth Report and Annual Progress Report will be available after two tests are given to form the trend lines. The Summary Class Report, the Test Activity Report and the Test Record Report are available for kindergarten, but that data may not be as beneficial to teachers in planning instruction. Mary Valamides will continue to work with academic coaches to familiarize them with these reports and the best way to use them when working with kindergarten PLCs following the screenings. As soon as possible, she will do an informational session with principals so that they will be able to access and use the reports in the most effective ways with their individual campuses.

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Holiday Heights

7. State law requires students who do not pass the STAAR tests at an SSI grade level to be retained in their current grade – “unless a parent appeals the retention and a local, campus-based grade placement committee unanimously agrees to promote them.” Research shows that retention is a very serious intervention and can be highly effective, or not, depending on the use of best practices during the decision-making process. The state recognizes that this must be done with careful consideration and that the decision must ultimately be made by a group of highly educated school professionals. **Does the district have plans to eliminate random variations in using this critical intervention by creating a uniform process based on best practices, articulating clear standards that must be met at each grade level, and follow an appeal process that is in line with the state law for SSI grades?**
 - A. The District follows the state SSI flowchart for making decisions regarding students who are not successful on STAAR in SSI grade levels. The flowchart articulates clear guidelines including an appeal process. The decision-making authority lies with the campus grade placement committee, but the steps should be consistent. The random variation that is referenced is inevitable because the GPC makes its decisions based on individual student information—test data, grades, anecdotal information, outside (home) factors, etc. It would be challenging to establish static standards for retention or promotion of these students since each has unique factors to be considered. If needed, additional training on the SSI/GPC procedures can be provided before placement decisions must be made next spring or summer.

Mullendore

8. It feels as if the district has very little respect for teachers' time as we strive to plan and prepare our lessons so that we can teach with fidelity. We were not given enough time to comprehend and implement the new ELAR curriculum. We were overloaded during the week prior to the first day of school so that when we began the school year, we were already behind. Now we are being asked to attend curriculum previews after school. **Could these not be done as a webinar?**
 - A. The C&I staff has heard the concerns of teachers regarding understanding and implementing the new ELAR curriculum. As this response is being written, Teresa Lawson and Norma Jackson are conducting additional half-day sessions on planning using the new curriculum documents. By the end of next week, every elementary ELAR teacher in the District will have completed this training. Additionally, campus administrators and teachers can request more support from the content coordinator and/or the academic coaches. We are committed to providing the support needed so that every teacher feels confident in using the new curriculum. Read the response to Question #3 above regarding the curriculum previews. Everything the coordinators have scheduled is intended to help teachers. We realize that you may not be able to participate in every training, but we will do everything possible to meet your needs.

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Mullendore (#8 continued)

We also know that implementation of the new ELAR curriculum will be a process. No one expects every classroom teacher to be using every component at this point. The process will be articulated at the trainings this week and next. Begin with what you know and take small steps to learn and implement the next piece. Over time, implementation will be completed. In the meantime, please communicate with Teresa Lawson or your academic coach to request whatever support is needed for your success.

9. What are the district's intentions for our use of the 1/2 teacher planning days? Is it strictly for planning, or for other things such as administrator choices or parent conferences?

- A. This is to be used for teacher planning. We will be working with administrators to provide additional directions regarding this time. It appears that there is some confusion. We will work on providing more clarity.

North Ridge

10. Why did the Excel schedule change this year? Having the Excel students out for TWO hours once a week is wreaking havoc on our schedules. Is there any way we could go back to one hour twice a week? That way most of that time would be covered by RtI time and they wouldn't miss so much class time. Twenty-five minutes twice a week is much better than an hour and twenty-five once a week.

- A. The gifted and talented program was audited by an outside consultant last year (2014–2015). Input was gathered, classroom observations were made, and data analyzed. The audit report included many recommendations including increasing the amount of service time for our gifted and talented students and rewriting the elementary gifted and talented curriculum to increase the rigor and relevance. In addition, state law (TEC §89.3) requires districts to provide learning experiences that lead to the development of advanced-level products and performances. When making this decision to have a two-hour block of time, our number one priority was our gifted and talented students. We considered the audit report, the state law, and best practices for gifted learners. In response to these three things, the curriculum was rewritten and designed for a large block of time so students are able to think critically, be creative, collaborate with other gifted and talented students, communicate effectively, and complete research. One hour twice a week will not allow the kind of rigorous work our identified gifted and talented students deserve. Therefore, it is essential they experience the longer block of time to allow their gifts and talents to develop and grow.

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North Ridge (continued)

11. If we are to teach handwriting in first grade, why don't we get our handwriting workbooks this year?

- A. Handwriting workbooks were only included in the first year of that adoption cycle. Handwriting standards are only included in the 3rd grade standard; however, we realize it is important for students to know how to correctly form letters in order for purposeful writing to take place. Having a workbook is not essential to teach children the most efficient methods of handwriting. Giving them opportunities to practice those methods is the key. That can be accomplished as part of the guided reading/writing lesson. Also, handwriting practice can be built into one of the workshop stations. We will be sure to include specific training about handwriting instruction in future curriculum previews and other District ELAR professional learning sessions. In addition, we will seek teacher input about the need for handwriting workbooks later this year so that we can make a decision about including that expense in the 2016–2017 budget.

Smithfield

12. Have we heard anything or have any idea when we will have a universal reading screener? What is the latest on Istation?

- A. No new information from TEA regarding SSI resources. The last communication from TEA was that vendors must have proposals submitted by September 17. The proposals will be reviewed by TEA staff and a recommendation made on October 15. As soon as we know which vendor(s) are approved, we will be ready to order our resources. If TEA meets all its timelines, we assume resources will be available around mid-November.

13. Why was LEAP not offered this year? What opportunities will be offered to teachers that are wishing to move into campus administration in the future?

- A. Leadership Excellence for Aspiring Principals Academy (LEAP) is designed to cultivate perspective leaders within Birdville ISD who are knowledgeable and skilled to lead campuses in a collaborative culture that is focused on results and continuous improvement. We have been providing LEAP since the fall of 2012. Over these three school years we have had 68 individuals who have successfully completed the program. Within this group of 68 we have promoted 15 to assistant principal positions and 27 others were promoted to positions outside of BISD or moved for other personal reasons. Since we still have 41 remaining LEAP prospects in our pool, it is our desire to offer LEAP II this year for the 41 remaining teacher/leaders who would still like to be considered for assistant principal positions. LEAP II will be held during the 2015–2016 school year. It is our plan to continue LEAP in the fall of 2016.

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Snow Heights

- 14. Is it possible for there to be a resource folder created for the ELAR C&I documents?** As it is currently set up, it seems somewhat arbitrary as to how to get to those resources. A teacher must click on each TEK to find it. This causes teachers to spend a lot of time "fishing" for resources we are being asked to use and less time on delving deeper into our instruction.
- A. This suggestion will be taken under consideration. In the ELAR curriculum trainings that have taken place this week, teachers were given a simple way to create a desktop folder to use as a repository for resources that are frequently used. We will seek input about the effectiveness of this strategy after it has been in use a few weeks to determine if it has solved this concern. If not, the C & I team will continue to look for solutions to ensure that the valuable resources are readily available for teacher use.
- 15. Is there a chance that BISD will develop a stipend/compensation system for teachers who have received their National Board Certifications as other districts in the state do?**
- A. This could be placed under consideration for next year's budget. We would have to know more about this prior to making any recommendations. Also, we will have to review what other area districts are doing prior to making any recommendation.

Watauga

- 16. With the bond passing last year, are there plans for any future bond packages?**
- A. During the process of working with the bond advisory committee to develop the recently adopted bond package there was a great deal of discussion about the need for another bond referendum in three to four years. I believe that is certainly in the District's best interest.

HIGH SCHOOL

Haltom

- 17. Can the district begin allowing students to wear departmental awards to graduation?** They're school-issued and reflective of the students' hard work. They are disappointed that they are told to leave them at home, especially those students who may only have the one award.
- A. Administration will discuss this with the high school principals to receive their feedback before making a recommendation to the Cabinet for consideration.

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HIGH SCHOOL

Richland

18. The dress code was changed this year to allow students to color their hair. Can the dress code also be changed to allow piercings and tattoos? If not, how are these things considered different by the administration?

A. Each spring the Office of Student Services convenes a committee of parents, secondary students, assistant principals and principals to review the Code of Conduct as well as the BISD Dress Code. This committee makes some changes that are required by the Texas State Legislature and much of the committee's time is spent going line by line over the Dress Code. The committee recommendations are reviewed by both the campus and Central Office Administration before a recommendation is made to the Board of Trustees. The issue of tattoos and piercings is one of those items that is discussed at length each year. Changes have been made through the years; not long ago boys were not allowed any piercings or gauges, and currently those (piercings/gauges) are limited to the ear for everyone. We take all changes recommended by parents or staff during the school year for review by this committee. If you would like to make a recommendation for the 2016–2017 Dress Code or any portion of the Code of Conduct Booklet, please email Dr. Rick Kempe. His email is rick.kempe@birdvilleschools.net.