

SUPERINTENDENT'S COMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL

December 12, 2011 Meeting

?# CAMPUS QUESTION

ELEMENTARY

1. Academy at West Birdville **Q.** *How do you feel about teachers evaluating principals?*
 - A.** In BISD, we do not think it is appropriate for teachers to evaluate their principals. However, there is an avenue for staff to provide positive and constructive feedback on principals to the associate superintendent for staff and student services. Teachers should first give the principal the opportunity to address any questions or concerns. If it is more appropriate to take the concern beyond the campus, they can be brought to the attention of the associate superintendent for staff and student services. All employees should feel like they have an avenue to express their concerns.

2. Academy at West Birdville **Q.** *What is your philosophy concerning bilingual education and how does the district plan to address the continued growth in this area?*
 - A.** Our philosophy toward bilingual education is to enable Spanish-speaking English language learners to become competent in the comprehension, speaking, reading and composition of the English language through the development of literacy and academic skills in the primary language and English. The program emphasizes the mastery of English language skills, as well as mathematics, science and social studies, as integral parts of the academic goals for all students and to enable limited English proficient students to participate equitably in school.

The district's plan is to continue to provide the most appropriate program for these students, which is bilingual education. Therefore, a task force has been created to design a plan that will outline how to continue our program model.

We need to collect data and see if this is working and what needs to change.

3. Binion **Q.** *Will there be any incentives offered for retirement, such as changing the policy on paying employees for local sick days which they have saved (currently a \$10K cap)?*
 - A.** Because of the uncertainty regarding school finance during the 2011 legislative session, the board of trustees offered a one-time additional \$1,000 incentive for those who retired in May 2011. At this time, the board has not indicated whether they will extend a similar offer for May 2012. If they decide to do so, it will be communicated to staff through the "e-nlightened." See Board Policy DEC (Local) to view the current incentive program. The current policy has a \$10,000 cap.

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ELEMENTARY (Continued)		
4..	Binion	<p>Q. <i>When teachers choose to work at their building on Saturday or Sunday on their own time, could it be possible to apply for two-hour heating/cooling setbacks in their classrooms so they can work in a comfortable atmosphere?</i></p> <p>A. In most cases, it is very expensive to provide heat or air for one or two teachers because the temperature is not zoned by individual rooms. Depending on the campus, if several teachers who are working in a specific area make a request, it may be more economically feasible.</p>
5.	Birdville	<p>Q. <i>Is there a way to make sure our curriculum is written by master teachers with experience in the specified grade level/subject?</i></p> <p>A. Teachers have been identified by their principals, department chairs/team leaders or content consultants to work on writing teams to create curriculum in all content areas. To the extent possible, several other teachers are asked to give input about the documents before they are finalized. Content consultants review all writing team work, make needed revisions, and format the documents before they are posted in CCO. Many master teachers are involved in the development of curriculum in BISD. If a situation arises that makes it necessary for the content consultant to do the initial writing, he/she always seeks input from writing team members and others regarding the new curriculum before it is shared with all teachers.</p>
6.	Birdville	<p>Q. <i>Would the district consider using professional curriculum writers instead of volunteer or selected BISD teachers?</i></p> <p>A. Our belief is that the most effective curriculum is that written by educators within the local district. Although the curriculum is based on common standards, BISD teachers understand the nature and needs of our students and that makes them able to arrange the standards in a logical order to address those needs. We have looked at products such as CSCOPE in the past, but the consensus has been that we could create a superior product. We continue to research other products so that we can be aware of what is available. If any of those products reveal themselves to be a better fit for us, they would certainly be considered.</p>
7.	Cheney	<p>Q. <i>Can the district support each campus with resources based on the information and goals included in their campus plan? Resources are often passed out to every campus regardless of need or support of the school's goals.</i></p> <p>A. Often there is a need to have district resources campuses are required to use. We are looking at a mechanism to help provide additional options. However, there should be a quality control measure to make sure the campus is using their resources to align with district and campus goals.</p>

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ELEMENTARY (Continued)		
8.	Cheney	<p>Q. <i>A snapshot test was given to elementary students on October 25. After seeing the data, are the consultants working to create a tool that better assesses our students?</i></p> <p>A. The consultants meet after each snapshot assessment to review the data and make inferences about how that data reflects on the work that they do. If better assessment items are needed, they work to provide them for the next snapshot. They also review the data for content accuracy: Were the questions over concepts that should have been taught during the six weeks? Were any of the items out of alignment? Were the questions written in the appropriate context? Is the question appropriate? If so, does there need to be instructional adjustments? Their work, like that of the teachers, is focused on how to use the data to improve instruction so students can be successful in learning what is expected of them.</p> <p>The original intent of the elementary snapshots was to provide sample questions that were at the depth and complexity levels we anticipate on STAAR. With limited information to guide their work, the consultants had to rely on information received from content specialists at TEA. We do expect STAAR and EOC to be at a more rigorous level, and we know curriculum and instructional delivery will have to be at a higher level as well. As more information becomes available, the upcoming snapshots will be revised to better reflect the STAAR tests. For this year, we will work to provide the best assessment of student knowledge about the TEKS as possible. It will be critical that teachers work in tandem with us to review snapshot data to make instructional decisions that benefit students. Constructive feedback that will assist in that process is appreciated by any of the content consultants.</p>
9.	Francisco	<p>Q. <i>Do you intend to restore one certified librarian per each elementary campus?</i></p> <p>A. That decision has not been made at this time. All staffing issues will be evaluated for next year and beyond. Decreased state funding will impact some of these decisions.</p>
10.	Francisco	<p>Q. <i>Does the district have any plans to increase security and prevent the numerous break-ins and thefts our portables have had?</i></p> <p>A. Over the Thanksgiving holiday, BISD piloted a new alarm system at one of our frequently burglarized campuses. That system included portables. In addition, the district is piloting a front door security system at three campuses over the next two months. Once data on the four pilot programs is gathered, a district-wide plan will be proposed to the Board.</p>

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?	CAMPUS	QUESTION
ELEMENTARY (Continued)		
11.	Green Valley	<p>Q. <i>Could the district provide the necessary training (i.e., TPRI, DRA, Daily 5, Math, etc.) to teachers who change grade levels before school begins - during the professional development days?</i></p> <p>A. Because of many grade level changes, our consultants tried to offer a variety of training sessions this past summer and during the professional learning days in August. The content design of the days did not provide opportunity for teachers who had changed grade levels to attend each one. Training has been offered multiple times to address this issue, and we will look at offering more throughout the year. The expectation is that teachers take what they learn at each of the content meetings back to their campuses to share in team or PLC meetings so that random variation is reduced.</p>
12.	Green Valley	<p>Q. <i>Could district-wide DRA training be provided for all K-2 teachers so we are all administering it the same way?</i></p> <p>A. Regarding Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) training, plans are underway to get one version of DRA available at all campuses. Using one version with a common scoring rubric should ensure consistent results across the district. Sylvia Davies has been communicating with principals and BRAVO teachers to determine what needs to be purchased to accommodate the administration of a common DRA.</p>
13.	Holiday Heights	<p>Q. <i>Why are we having so much trouble getting substitutes to cover positions? Is it due to decreased sub lists, daily rate, illness? Is there anything that our district can do to fix this problem?</i></p> <p>A. The concern about unfilled substitute requests is troubling; however, to “fix” this problem takes work on everyone’s part. There is not an easy one-size-fits-all solution.</p> <p><u>District-wide:</u> Overall fill rate for certified and classified positions for the last four months = 93% • August = 99% • September = 95% • October = 93% • November (through Nov. 11) = 90%</p> <p>Overall fill rate for <u>certified</u> positions = 95% (teachers) Overall fill rate for <u>classified</u> positions = 87% (paraprofessional staff which is primarily special education EAs) Overall # of absences (any reason) for certified & classified positions 8/15/11 – 11/22/11 = 10,418 Overall # of school business days for certified & classified positions 8/15/11 – 11/22/11 = 2,176</p>

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ELEMENTARY (Continued)

Holiday Heights (Cont'd)

- A.** Some reasons that play into unfilled jobs:
1. The time the absence is reported.
 2. Absences reported the morning of the job as "Substitute Required" have a greater rate of being unfilled.
 3. The number of reported absences for a given day.
 4. School business days: These days inflate the number of substitutes needed for a given day.
 5. Selecting "Substitute Required" instead of "Pre-Arranging"
 6. Few names on the campus substitute preference list
 7. Substitutes who fall ill the day of the job.
 8. Emergencies

We have 682 substitutes in our database. The average number of absences = approximately 150 per day. When school business days are added to a regular day the number of absences goes up to well over 200 reported absences and on some occasions it has been over 300.

Example: November – 237.5 overall Absences (Prior to Thanksgiving)

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| • 101.0 School Business | • 18.0 Sickness in Family | • 3.0 Jury Duty |
| • 67.5 Personal Illness | • 5.5 death in Family | • 2.0 Vacation |
| • 37.0 Personal Business | • 3.0 Personal w/o Pay | • .5 Other Reason |

There are many solutions or ideas for reducing unfilled substitute requests, including:

1. Monitor the number of personal leave days permitted on a daily basis. Limit personal days on days that also include a number of school business days.
2. Report absences as soon as they are known about.
3. Pre-arrange substitutes as often as possible.
4. Provide clear instructions in the instruction note area when reporting an absence. Lesson plans and other information can also be uploaded into the WebConnect job.
5. Increase number of subs on individual campus substitute preference list; advise subs they are on that list.
6. Limit number of personal days taken on Fridays and Mondays as those are the days when jobs may go unfilled.
7. When taking a personal day, a substitute is expected to be pre-arranged.

14. Mullendore/Richland

- Q.** *Is there data to support the number of student absences on the Monday and Tuesday of Thanksgiving break to support the suggested calendar change of having a full week off?*
- A.** Yes, the reduced attendance in past years has resulted in a reduction in funding of approximately \$75,000. This reduction in funding is of greater concern for 2012-2013 because BISD seniors will graduate prior to the actual last day of school. Therefore, the district will have a reduction in ADA for the last four days of the year also.

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ELEMENTARY (Continued)		
15.	Mullendore	<p>Q. <i>Why is it acceptable for teachers to be required to work on Saturdays when other district employees are not required to be at work?</i></p> <p>A. Teacher contracts are for 187 days. Those days don't always align with staff who are on a longer contract year. If the two Saturday workdays are removed from the calendar, teachers would have to add them to the end of the school year in order to fulfill their 187 day contract.</p>
16.	Mullendore	<p>Q. <i>Why do curriculum changes take place after the school year has begun when plans have been made and supplies have been purchased?</i></p> <p>A. Typically, any changes made after school begins occur at the specific request of teachers who have noticed a gap that might result in reduced student achievement. When those requests are made, they go through the same review process described above. If the change is needed, a determination is made whether it must be addressed immediately or if it can be postponed until the next school year. Our goal is to make as few changes as possible while ensuring that the curriculum will provide students the learning resources they will need to be successful.</p>
17.	North Ridge	<p>Q. <i>What are your thoughts about the new Standards-Based Kindergarten Report Card?</i></p> <p>A. The developmental skills report card used in the past does not address the standards we are required to teach by TEA. It is no longer a viable tool with which to report student progress. The process used to create the new report card was extremely thorough with much input from teachers across the district. During this implementation year, a system is in place to train teachers, monitor/revise, and communicate with parents. It is expected that this report card will be as successful as the first-grade report card has been the past four years. As teachers become more familiar with holistic evaluation, the task of determining progress on individual student expectations will become less time consuming.</p>
18.	North Ridge	<p>Q. <i>Has there been a decision made on whether or not small appliances will be allowed in the district on campuses?</i></p> <p>A. Currently, district regulations do not allow it. Some of our older campuses cannot support the extra strain on our limited electrical resources. However, we are in the process of conducting an individual study of each campus to determine if additional common use refrigerators could be added at specific campuses and other campuses could be allowed a limited number of classroom refrigerators. There is no timeline as to when this study will be complete.</p>

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<i>ELEMENTARY (Continued)</i>		
19.	Porter	<p>Q. <i>Could we use Norma Jackson as a writing consultant for the district or implement more of her strategies district-wide?</i></p> <p>A. Norma Jackson is a leading writing coach who does work on a few campuses in the district. We could certainly consider bringing her to the district to do some writing training, but we will probably not require her strategies to be used district-wide. We have quality writing instructional resources available in our adopted materials that are working well for many teachers. There are also many teachers who are getting great results using the ABYDOS strategies. As with most instruction, there are multiple models that can address the student expectations we are required to teach. If Mrs. Jackson is available to do an overview session for those who are interested, we will be sure to communicate it in a timely manner. Before bringing her to the district, we will do some research to make sure she has revised her training to reflect the new STAAR assessment. Our ultimate goal is to enable students to write well in a variety of modes and content areas. Any training that is done would have to be based on that goal.</p>
20.	Richland	<p>Q. <i>Why are the custodial personnel not allowed to make overtime when short-staffed?</i></p> <p>A. In consideration of state funding reductions, it is important that we limit overtime whenever possible.</p>
21.	Richland	<p>Q. <i>A few years ago, vacation time for buildings and grounds was changed. We have guys with four weeks vacation, plus local and state days. Now the most vacation we get is two weeks. Will this inequality be addressed?</i></p> <p>A. District policy for all employees earning vacation time was changed in December 1999. Employees hired after that point could only earn two weeks. Those hired prior to that time were grandfathered under that plan. As they leave or retire from BISD, those hired in those positions can only earn two weeks of vacation each year.</p> <p>See Board Policy DED (Local) for more details.</p>

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ELEMENTARY (Continued)		
22.	Smithfield	<p>Q. <i>How long was the Kindergarten & First-grade report card piloted? Were parents polled as to the quality? Teachers? Principals?</i></p> <p>A. The initial request for a standards based report card in first grade came directly from teachers and principals about five years ago. The report card was phased in over a three year period at all but three campuses. Those campuses came on board this year. During the second year, a request came from principals and kindergarten teachers to move to a standards-based model. For the past two years, work on that product has been ongoing. There was no need to do a years-long phase-in in kindergarten since the system was sufficiently refined by TIMS. The team of teachers who worked with TIMS on the kindergarten design did a pilot run the sixth six weeks of last year. No formal survey has been conducted at the district level, but one is planned for the spring. Because communication with parents about their child's performance related to the standards is critical, the expectation is that this new report card will be positively received. Those campuses who have used it for several years have not reported any parent or teacher concerns to the C & I staff.</p>
23.	Smithfield	<p>Q. <i>What is the district's stance on hiring a full-time reading specialist at every campus?</i></p> <p>A. The district strongly supports having adequate staff on each campus to meet the needs of students. Obviously, all staffing decisions are affected by the available budget. The need for support staff such as reading specialists, math specialists, and instructional coaches should be determined by campus data, not by a unilateral district decision. Those campuses with an identified need for a full-time reading specialist should request that position during the budget process each year. District staff will also review current data to process those requests as budget money becomes available.</p>
24.	Snow Heights	<p>Q. <i>Now that school finance has settled somewhat, are there any plans to bring back the years of service increases? Is there any plan for how this situation will be handled going forward? Pay raises for 2012-13?</i></p> <p>A. The Board has expressed a strong desire to give raises next year. Once an amount available for raises has been determined, we will develop several options for distributing those funds. Step increases will be one of the options presented to the Board for their consideration.</p>

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ELEMENTARY (Continued)		
25.	Snow Heights	<p>Q. <i>Is there any possibility that common unit assessments could be provided through the content area instructional consultants?</i></p> <p>A. The process of creating common unit assessments is just beginning in BISD and will take a long time to refine. At this point, it will take both campus and district teams to provide sufficient items for unit assessments. As the number of available items increases, the time for creating tests will decrease. Much of the research done by the C & I staff indicates that the most effective Curriculum Based Assessments (CBAs) are those written by teachers rather than central office staff or outside contractors. We will continue to learn more about the value and best design of common assessments in the days ahead.</p>
26.	Spicer	<p>Q. <i>What are the perceptions of administration and the Board on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and its rising standards?</i></p> <p>A. AYP is a federal mandate. However, administration and the Board are aware of the standards rising to 100 percent in 2014. There have been some conversations at the federal level concerning the feasibility of adjusting these goals.</p>
27.	Spicer	<p>Q. <i>Is there a district plan to implement non-traditional (outside the box) approaches to help staff members on campuses that have diverse populations with multiple sub-groups in meeting AYP?</i></p> <p>A. The district believes all campuses are not created equal, and they are looking at ways to provide additional support.</p>
28.	Watauga	<p>Q. <i>Has any thought been given to changing the attendance boundaries for the elementary schools?</i></p> <p>A. We are still collecting data for programs, campuses, etc. Administration will use the data, along with our demographers report, to determine what, if any, changes are needed. Currently, the district is not considering any boundary changes.</p>
29.	Watauga	<p>Q. <i>Are there any plans to look into the district implementing the IB - International Baccalaureate program for high school students? H-E-B students have the advantage of the IB program.</i></p> <p>A. BISD is not considering implementation of the IB program in the immediate future, but all options for serving the students of the district are available for review at any time.</p>

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MIDDLE		
30.	North Ridge	<p>Q. <i>How does our district technology plan address the need for one-to-one computers for our students?</i></p> <p>A. BISD doesn't currently have a technology plan that addresses one-to-one computing. However, once a new executive director of technology is hired, this and other technology needs for BISD students and educators will be evaluated. Our current technology plan states that the technology needs of the district include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The need to continue to research wireless handheld devices for student use.2. The need to provide wireless laptop computers for students and teachers at every grade level.3. The need to provide access for students to digital tools and resources 24 hours a day, seven days a week. <p>Strategy 1.1.1 of the BISD Technology Plan states: "Provide technology tools to support improved student achievement of curriculum standards and promote deeper content mastery."</p>
31.	Watauga	<p>Q. <i>Are there any guarantees and/or reassurances you can give to recently hired teachers that they will have a job next year?</i></p> <p>A. It appears that Birdville's financial outlook for the 2012-13 school year is better than for the 2011-12 school year. Consequently at this time, we do not foresee that the state funding crisis will create a need to eliminate additional teaching positions next year. However, a drop in enrollment or additional state or federal funding cuts could change our outlook.</p>
High School		
32.	Richland	<p>Q. <i>Will the amount of testing be reduced once the EOC has replaced TAKS?</i></p> <p>A. We are unable to determine this at this point. Even when EOC is implemented fully, there will likely be a need for progress monitoring during the year. If there are good unit assessments in place, those might be sufficient for monitoring. For non-EOC grades, some curriculum and STAAR monitoring assessment will still be necessary.</p>
33.	Richland	<p>Q. <i>What are Dr. Brown's top three priorities for BISD?</i></p> <p>A.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Student and Staff Safety2. Student Performance3. Customer Service <p>Professional Learning Communities (PLC) are important. We should all be working together and not independently of others. In the PLCs, we should be looking at data to help us focus on the work.</p>