

**Mesquite Education Association**  
**FR Questions - February 2017**

- 1. Is it possible for Energy Management to determine the approximate cost to the district of the annual expense a mini refrigerator in a classroom costs? If so, can consideration be given to allowing employees the option to pay the annual amount & receive a “permit” (official sticker) to have a refrigerator in their classroom?**

We will be happy to look into this request.

- 2. We are noticing quite a bit of trash collecting on our campus, especially after the weekend. Our students do a great job of pitching in to help, but sometimes it is too much and is often not appropriate garbage for little hands. Is there a way that we could get help during times that crews are not mowing? It is embarrassing to escort a child and their parents to a portable on their first day and have to explain the mess!**

We share each facility with the city. Please let the office know at your school if there is a problem with the city area and we will notify the city. If the problem is on your campus side, please let the office know so that they can ask the custodian to pick up the area.

- 3. Why are all HS campuses not required to have the early 9AM graduation slot which requires students to report to the campus at 4AM? The fact that only certain schools are assigned this time slot seems very unfair. I have heard that it is scheduled this way due to the number of graduates. The district should be able to work out a plan in which all high schools are assigned the 9AM/4PM slot.**

MISD opted to have a large school, small school, large school slot on the first day and then large school and small school on Sunday. It was designed to float between the three largest schools to keep it balanced and share the load. The decision was designed to manage traffic patterns as the number of graduates is indicative of crowd size.

- 4. I would like to know why as a district we do not do more, and place more emphasis on, plagiarism and cheating. If we continue to preach and push college readiness and preparedness, then plagiarism and cheating must be part of the conversation and process. Plagiarism is a major problem in our English and History courses (all courses really), with little if any consequences. Cheating is a rampant problem that teachers have all but given up on trying to prevent/control/manage. Our students are simply not taught from an early age that these things are wrong. They think there is absolutely nothing wrong with taking photos on their phones of other students work to use to copy. When they get to college they are in major danger of being expelled for cheating and plagiarism. These are things that colleges absolutely do not tolerate, and often once expelled students have a very hard time gaining admittance elsewhere. I would like to see our district put some standard form of discipline in place in regards to academic dishonesty, particularly a strong punishment for plagiarism. I do not think it should simply be a teacher punishment as this leads to no uniformity on a major issue, nor does it send a strong message about how wrong and very serious the issue is. The discipline office views these offenses and teacher issues, and often when we call parents they also don't find the issue to be a major one. What we as teachers need is for the district to set the tone, and for uniformity. We simply must start holding our students to higher standards.**

The MISD Student Handbook [p. 36] specifies “copying another person’s work, such as homework, classwork or a test, if a form of cheating. Plagiarism, which is the use of another’s original ideas or writing without giving credit to the true author, will also be considered cheating, and student will be subject to academic disciplinary action.... Teachers ... will assess the academic penalty to be imposed.” Also in the Student Code of Conduct [p. 8], it states that “Students shall not: Cheat or copy the work of another.” In our current digital environment students must be taught about plagiarism. It is so easy to cut and paste and for students to not fully understand that is plagiarism. As more is done in the arena of digital citizenship and teachers purposefully teach about plagiarism at earlier grade levels, hopefully, our students will understand and learn the importance of academic honesty.

- 5. Could you please explain rationale behind having the 7<sup>th</sup> grade writing students take a district checkpoint that has 22 questions on it with only 1 class period to complete the checkpoint? The actual STAAR test has 30 multiple choice questions and students are given 4 hours to complete questions and 1 essay. How can we use this as reliable data when they are basically answering the same amount of questions in a fraction of time?**

The number of multiple-choice questions for the district checkpoint suggests 20 – 30. The checkpoint is an opportunity to assess the students’ skills and abilities to move through the revising and editing questions in a timely manner. The bulk of allotted time for the STAAR assessment is for students to apply the writing process to a prompt. We strive for the district checkpoints to give enough information for teachers to change instruction to meet the needs of students. Please use the Checkpoint Feedback Form to provide information regarding content and length of the DCPs. Those feedback items are critical to the feedback loop for improving our assessment process.

- 6. I understand the reason for making all ELA teachers become ESL certified, but I’m wondering will this be a requirement for all core content areas? The language barrier doesn’t end after students leave their reading and writing classes. How do you explain requiring one content area to acquire certification for the benefit of students, but not requiring all core teachers do the same?**

Starting in 17/18, we are implementing the plan of getting all elementary teachers PK – 5 and 6 – 12 ELAR teachers certified in ESL in order to provide services for students in the classroom that are on the higher levels of TELPAS. This will enable the ESL teacher(s) on each campus to serve those that need additional supports. Research indicates that language acquisition occurs more quickly when a student is immersed in the language by remaining in the classroom with their peers. With our growing ELL population this will also help with staffing models. This initiative will take a minimum of 3 years to accomplish due to the number of teachers we have in our district. This plan will keep us in compliance with state regulations on serving our ELL population. If a teacher in another content area would like to get ESL certified, we would certainly reimburse them for successful completion of the test. All teachers should be utilizing the ELPS in all content areas in planning their instruction to meet the needs of their students.

- 7. I am shocked at how tricky the DCPs are. It seems these are a “gotcha” instead of a way to see what they know. The word problems in the student workbook are not worded anything like the ones on the DCP. Some of the words used in the problems (on the DCP) are far above 2<sup>nd</sup> graders level of comprehension. I understand that some of the words have no bearing in the answer, but if a 7-year-old has no idea what the word means, how are they to know? When teachers have to have a discussion to decide on which answer is correct, how will a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader figure it out? This is unfair to the students and teachers. We are being set up for failure. Are there any plans to re-vamp the DCPs to make them more beneficial instead of a “gotcha”?**

District checkpoints are primarily created from 4 types of questions: questions from the Lead4ward field guide, released sample items from TEA, released STAAR questions, and questions from the adopted resources. The second grade assessments on the whole come from the textbook resources because of the lack of other resources to be used. Of the 60 questions asked on the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade DCPs thus far (DCPs 1-4), only 6 of those have not come from the resources mentioned. District checkpoints are certainly not meant to be a “gotcha” for students or teachers. It is imperative that we assess students for transfer to determine whether or not they have mastered the standard. The ability to apply what has been learned is crucial in order for students to pass the state assessments, but it will also be important for future learning.

**8. I was looking at the new calendar and I see that teachers have no fair day. I was wondering why? As a parent, I actually take my children on that day.**

The first calendar draft sent out before the winter break did not include a fair day for staff. With that scenario, we were unable to include one and still meet the minute and contract day requirements. But a second draft was created that does include a fair day for students and staff. We changed the dates for the winter break to be able to provide the fair day. Staff members will have one less day for winter break than usual. The updated draft calendar will go to the School Board for approval in March.

**9. Does having a WiFi network for students to use their devices slow down WiFi that is for district devices? If it does, is there data that shows how much students use it for school assignments and how much is used for just goofing off?**

Allowing students access to the MISD WiFi does not slow down or in any way degrade network performance for district-owned devices. Technical Services has network monitoring software/hardware in place which allows us to track the internet bandwidth needs of our district. Network monitoring reports indicate we have ample bandwidth to meet these needs. We do not currently capture internet data for analytical purposes to determine whether or not the BYOD devices are being used for educational purposes.

**10. As a platform to question campus practices, FR questions seem traceable with the FR code and the online question form. Are the days of anonymous questions gone? If an employee has an uncomfortable situation and wants to question it, this method can be intimidating.**

After serious discussion, district leaders have determined that submitting FR Questions from handwritten forms to electronic forms is the safest platform for employee concerns to be submitted with complete anonymity. MEA has gone to great lengths to assure that all questions and concerns remain completely anonymous. If you are referring to the campus/location as the FR code, this has always been a part of FR questioning, allowing administrators to resolve issues and answer questions.

**11. Why aren't food service or custodian questions ever answered?**

All questions submitted should receive an answer. Certain campus or facility questions dealing with a specific concern will be addressed by the principal or administrator at the campus or facility.

**12. Teachers expressed their literacy needs in the 2015-2016 school year and were excited to see the upcoming changes. Instead of helping the teachers directly, more work has been given to teachers in the area of mentoring, using data, and improving implementation of the district's non-negotiable literacy framework lessons. The resources are being put into mentoring and**

**monitoring teachers instead of helping struggling students directly with small group instruction/tutoring and allowing time for planning. How are the resources being used to help students who are not reading on grade level directly?**

Professional learning is at the center of our Early Literacy Initiative. Elena Aguilar in her book *The Art of Coaching* says, “Coaching is a form of professional development that brings out the best in people, uncovers strengths and skills, builds effective teams, cultivates compassion, and builds emotionally resilient educators.” (6) It is important to strengthen the educators that teach our students each day.

The coaching model that our district is using has many benefits, not to mention the benefit of being one of the most effective forms of professional development. Coaches are able to meet the needs of each teacher, so that professional learning is differentiated. When several classroom teachers’ instructional skills improve, then the coach is able to help more students rather than a few small groups. Coaching that is guided by data helps teachers target specific skills that need attention. The coaching model promotes positive cultural change.

Using district resources to build a strong coaching model impacts Tier 1 instruction. Students who stay in their classrooms perform better. Therefore, the best place to spend district monies is improving the skills of the classroom teacher. Our hope is that our Early Literacy Specialists will get to spend their time doing just that.

**13. What is being done in the area of speeding up the dyslexia testing for students? It takes over half of a year to get students tested and placed in the MTA class.**

There are several reasons that dyslexia testing may seem to take several months to be completed. Sometimes, the student doesn’t have eyeglasses necessary for testing or cannot pass the vision or hearing test. Other times, it is several weeks between the initial PST committee meeting and the referral being completed and sent in to the dyslexia office. The PST process is a little different at every campus. RTI should not delay testing a student for dyslexia if a disability is suspected.

It is the goal of the dyslexia department to test students within 45 school days of receiving the referral. Due to the fluctuation in the number of referrals received during the year, sometimes many referrals come in at one time and the time frame has to be extended. The number of dyslexia referrals has also increased steadily over the last several years. In order to achieve our goal of staying within the 45 school day timeline, the district has added a dyslexia tester position and a bilingual dyslexia tester position to the original two facilitator positions responsible for testing and dyslexia meetings. Currently, the department is within the 45 school day timeline. In general, most students are not waiting six months to be tested and placed into MTA. Any concerns about delays for a specific student should be addressed to the dyslexia department.

**14. Why are non-service employees and people who are not MISD employees allowed to work concessions? We have to have a food handler’s certificate to work in the kitchens. Shouldn’t this be the same in concessions? The cashiers are touching the food.**

In the past, concessions at stadiums have been handled by the MISD Purchasing Department; however, Food Services will be taking over that function in the very near future. Concessions at campuses, e.g., basketball games, have been handled by campus-level organizations and parents. There are varying guidelines depending on where the concession stand fits among the types of retail food establishments. To answer your question properly, we would need more information.

**15. Can we move to our previous middle school basketball game schedules that had 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys playing on the same night and 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls playing on the next night? We have cheerleaders who participate in both basketball and cheer but are unable to cheer because they have games at the same time.**

We have had our current schedule (7G/7B-Monday and 8G-8B-Thursday) for the past 6 years with few complaints. Because the girls season begins and ends 1 week prior to the boys, there are only 3 dates when all 7/8 boy's teams play, but girls don't have scheduled games so cheerleaders could attend (plus City Tournament). This schedule gives coaches an opportunity to watch both levels. It also allows both 8<sup>th</sup> grade teams (boys/girls) to play on Thursday – the preferred game night allowing Monday through Thursday practice and more quality teaching time. This schedule also frees up our gyms since game days are different for 7/8 and allows more gym space since all teams aren't practicing at the same time. Cheerleaders have the option of cheering at the other level games (7<sup>th</sup> at 8<sup>th</sup> games/ 8<sup>th</sup> at 7<sup>th</sup> games). From a survey of MISD Middle School Coaches done in 2012, the majority of schools figured out a way to make it work for the small number of cheerleaders who also played basketball. The current schedule is the best option for the majority of Middle School basketball players and coaches.