

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

- 1. Can a reminder be sent out that burning candles or Scentsy is not appropriate in the work place? The smell can be overpowering causing some people to get sick. If you mention anything to the individual, it creates an unpleasant working place.**

According to the employee handbook on p. 59, “mild scents may be worn/used in moderation, but strong or offensive scents that become detrimental to the work environment are not welcome and may be prohibited. If this scent falls into the strong and offensive, please speak with the supervisor of that area.

- 2. Why do we have a dress code that is not followed? If principals are selective in which offenses to address, why can't teachers or students be selective in which ones to follow? How can we be consistent in dress code and do away with dress code violations that are not addressed on campus? Students notice the inconsistencies and it makes them reluctant to follow it. Also, teachers who do adhere to the dress code are fighting a losing game when other teachers don't enforce it.**

All rules, guidelines, and laws outlined in the Student Code of Conduct, Student Handbook, Employee Handbook, and Board policy are meant to be followed. Staff members who are concerned about Code of Conduct infractions being ignored should direct those concerns to the building principal.

- 3. In this day of mental health issues and stress, are there district plans to let counselors be focused on stress, counseling and peer mediation rather than paperwork and meetings? It would be nice for the counselor to see classes weekly or bi-weekly for coping skills and stress management.**

Counseling Services is very aware of the growing number of mental health concerns and stressors with which our students and their families are struggling. MISD Counseling Services has developed a renewed focus on the counselor role in addressing these issues and are diligently working on ways to effectively address the concerns. Developmental guidance (social emotional learning) is an area of emphasis for our program, and counselors are required to lead these activities and be visible in classrooms at regular intervals throughout the year. Additionally, counselors see students with pressing issues individually and in small groups.

**4. Other districts in the area have high school programs where students can earn college credits in high school, sometimes even graduating with an Associate's Degree. Is this something Mesquite ISD might consider in the future?**

Our high schools offer several ways of earning college credit. The MISD website under the Academics tab, has a section on Earning College Credit. In addition to our Advanced Placement course offerings, we partner with Dallas County Community Colleges to offer at least 15 college hours at each campus. Several campuses offer other courses based on the ability to credential college instructors. We plan to add 4 additional dual credit courses at various high schools for the 2017-2018 school year. Please contact the dual credit counselor at the high school level for additional information.

**5. Would it be possible to give substitute teachers their own login so they can access teacher computers? As it stands, subs can't use the document camera on our new TVs, or access websites, video clips, etc. that may be part of a lesson.**

This is something that has been examined, but we have been hesitant to allow substitutes access to the various accounts for the following reasons:

- Adding over 700 substitute teachers could be taxing to the network
- Privacy and security associated with the teachers' computers
- Reduces the temptation of "surfing" the internet or conducting personal business instead of monitoring students

With that being said, we do understand that the restrictions do create some limitations as listed, and will not rule out the possibility at some point in the future.

It should be noted that access is often granted to those serving in long-term assignments.

**6. Will the district provide more transparency in regards to how salary schedules are determined? According to the current Administration MISD salary schedule, there are Coordinators that are in the same salary schedule as several Directors, Assistant Directors in a salary schedule lower than most Coordinators, and Assistant Directors in a salary schedule above several Directors. The other salary schedules are equally confusing, especially after viewing other districts' salary schedules. Both Garland ISD and Rockwall ISD have excellent handbooks regarding salary schedules or compensation plans.**

Three years ago, the district enlisted the services of the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) to examine our salary schedules for comparison purposes. They assist districts all over the state with compensation plans and have all of the market, salary, and job classification data in order to make recommendations. A number of things were considered when classifying positions including duties and responsibilities, demands, time requirements, number supervised, etc., rather than titles alone. After reviewing and comparing district data, job descriptions, and visiting with general supervisors, they advised us where to categorize the various positions in order to bring us more in line to what other districts are doing locally and statewide. Although there may be some disagreement as to where some positions are placed, categories and pay grades are clearly outlined in our compensation plan.

- 7. Could we look into hiring district translators, and paying them a decent salary with wages? Often times Spanish speaking teachers and paras are asked to translate on short notice for extremely important meetings like ARDs. The assumption that we can translate just because we speak Spanish is unfair. The language used in these meetings is highly specialized and often times needs study on the part of the translator to be able to accurately and correctly translate. Translating spoken word from one language to another is much harder than people think. Translators are trained and certified to do this. Teachers and paras are not, and are often asked to give up our conference for no extra pay to translate – a job which is both hard and in the case of a recorded ARD, stressful. As a district, we cannot keep trained translators because we do not pay them enough; in DISD they have a translators' office. These professionals are used for ARDs, 504s, parent meetings/assemblies, teacher/parent phone calls, and any other translating service needed in the district. They are paid a decent salary and offered benefits. Hiring 2-3 professional translators would benefit the entire district.**

We do understand the concerns, and a number of valid points are made. However, with 48 campuses, it would take a lot more than 2-3 professional translators to cover the entire district; therefore, becoming a major budgetary issue. In addition, the demand is great and highly trained/certified translators are in short supply. Although we do rely on and have confidence in our current personnel, this issue is something that we will continue to look into.

- 8. If an elective teacher also serves as a Career & Tech Representative or as a general education teacher in an ARD, and it is done during their only conference period (electives at the middle school level only receive one period off for planning/conference), why is it not treated as an SOS where the teachers are compensated for giving it up? Specifically, those that are Career & Tech Representatives are required to be in transition ARDs for 8<sup>th</sup> graders moving to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, so towards the end of the school year we are giving up several days of our only off periods to be a part of these meetings. We are not compensated/stipend on our paychecks for being CTE certified, but are required to give up our only planning time without any extra compensation. SOS's are compensated for giving up a conference or planning period (when most have two during the day) to cover for a teacher that is out. Is that not the same concept?**

Although we understand the importance of conference periods and regret when they are interrupted, they are designed for instructional preparation, planning, conducting parent-teacher conferences, evaluating student's work, and other related school business which ARDs fall under. Since certain ARDs are part of the job requirements of CTE personnel and occur during regular work hours, no additional compensation is necessarily warranted. If the time involved becomes excessive, we would suggest that the issue be discussed with your principal for possible solutions.

- 9. We have our students filling out registration forms and, on day two of this process, inputting their class selections for next year into Skyward. We are spending an entire week of instruction having our students self-register for courses. This seems inefficient as we are spending an hour explaining to students what criteria (based on testing, past pass/fail, course prerequisites, endorsement requirements, etc) is necessary to choose “the course you’ll be successful in.” In the past we have had students sitting in classes that were wrong for several weeks (full year of English 1 when they only failed a semester, etc.) ...could this be part of how that happened? Also, what is the rationale for having students navigate and input data into a system that our teachers and counselors are still struggling with on a consistent basis? It feels like our time could be more efficiently used gearing up for the upcoming EOC tests.**

The process to have students complete course requests for the new school year is, to a great extent, a campus-based decision made by the registrar and other staff that might have an opinion how best to collect the data. Because of this, the process may vary from campus to campus. And, because it is essential to have students make the best decision regarding their course selections, a significant amount of time is necessary to explain what is required and what options are available. The endorsement requirement has a further impact as students MUST choose a course that will help them to complete the chosen pathway by the end of their senior year. It is possible that students do not make the correct requests in the Spring because they either do not know whether they will pass or fail the current semester or because they do not know whether semester averaging will help them to overcome a failing mark. Registrars and counselors make their best effort to get these corrected after the end of the school year to aid in the production of the master schedule and to minimize changes early in the school year.

Regarding data entry by students, this is a campus-based decision as well. Some campuses elected to have students meet with their counselor individually to enter course requests while others have chosen to have students use their own Family Access logins to enter the data in a lab setting. Eventually, as we get more comfortable with the expanded capabilities of Skyward, all students will be entering their course requests even from home.

When choosing how to schedule the counselors to meet with students in classes, an effort is made to avoid courses that have associated EOC testing requirements. Core courses (often English) are chosen because they are required all four years in the student schedule. This may lead to scheduling difficulties during 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades because most of these have EOC requirements.

The conversion to Skyward will offer many benefits in the long term, but with change comes a certain amount of hardship. Hopefully the most difficult challenges are behind us and we will be better prepared for the year ahead.

- 10. I know our District is not putting much stock in the state’s A-F campus ratings. Nonetheless, the developmental/test ratings are out there. I saw in a summary from district administration that “coding errors” were partially responsible for all of our high schools getting “F” ratings in college/career readiness. I take it to mean that these ratings may have otherwise been, at least, C’s or D’s. As front line teachers, we couldn’t have been more disheartened to find that the low ratings (though we**

**really do need improvement in C&CR) were partially due to errors for which there are some highly-compensated district staff whose jobs are to make sure we get credit for everything we do. I assume there are several layers of people who look at what we send in to the state for high-stakes ratings. I understand those coding errors have been fixed, but have people been held accountable for what seems like a big miss? I know if we mess up an administration of STAAR on campus, for instance, there are consequences.**

Prior to the 15-16 school year, our MISD students were coded in PEIMS a “2” in CTE after the coherent sequence had been completed. That was the guidance the district had followed for a number of years. At the beginning of last year, the new CTE director was asked to investigate the reasons why CTE had such a low number of students completing a coherent sequence. It was determined that MISD students had only been coded a 2 after completing the sequence rather than “planning” to complete the sequence. After reviewing the CTE Indicator Code Fall Snapshot Decision Chart, consulting with Region 10, and state level CTE personnel, we determined that our coding was so conservative we were eliminating a large number of students that should have been coded a “2” based on their graduation plan in progress. We have now revised our coding practices and our numbers have more than quadrupled our students being coded with a 2; therefore, aligning more closely with our 40 like schools in Index 4. Based on this change, we expect to see this positively impact our progress in Index 4 of accountability in the district.

- 11. If teachers are hired to do a specific job, why are others being forced to do the job? Our campus has a BAC student that is supposed to go to the BAC Classroom for “Safety Zone” when there are behavior issues. Instead of going to the BAC class, the student is being sent to the ISIP Classroom. Shouldn’t special education students be served by the special education teacher?**

This question is very layered not knowing the individual child and his/her particular needs. In addition, his/her BIP written by the ARD committee could have designated this type of intervention. With that said, a student in BAC is there for intervention supports and still educated by his/her content and elective teachers. Students are not solely the responsibility of the BAC teacher if they are served by that program.

- 12. Years ago in our district, we would get subs to meet with other teachers in our grade level or subject area to plan, collaborate and create activities. Could we reinstate this to work with other campuses in our feeder schools (i.e. elementary schools feeding to WMHS) 2-3 times a year?**

We support collaboration between campuses in feeder patterns as you can definitely learn from each other and share best practices. Unfortunately, we have difficulty filling all sub positions and when positions go unfilled it puts a burden on the remaining teachers on a campus to fill in during their conference or take additional students for the day. Perhaps your feeder campus could arrange either after school times, skype or google hang-out during the day, or use a campus staff development day to accomplish this collaboration time.