

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

- 1. Do all MISD schools have the same Fire Marshall that conducts inspections? It seems that whomever does inspections, is stricter on high school campuses than on elementary campuses.**

The same Fire Marshall from the City of Mesquite Fire Department completes all fire inspections.

- 2. Please provide some clarification on the new restrictions for clubs and groups now being forced to purchase all drinks through Dr. Pepper. At this point my cost for student events will go up because I can no longer take advantage of purchasing drinks at other approved locations when items are on sale. How does this benefit my students? Also there has been some indication that Athletics is exempt from this policy. Is this true?**

The school district has been under contract with Dr. Pepper since June of 2010. The contract is in effect and thought to be followed.

- 3. In checking out the new district website I noticed that the district has a construction department. What is the function of this department and its' employees and is it part of or an extension of the maintenance department?**

The school district has had a construction department for many years. Dr. Horn started the department when he was the superintendent. They are responsible for the building of all bond projects. This includes new schools, additions to schools and various projects around the district.

- 4. If we are in somewhat of a money crunch, why is our maintenance department working unlimited overtime and have been for the last couple of years?**

Each department has a certain amount of overtime budgeted. The departments have been using more of the budget due to all of the projects that are going on in the district. This includes the replacement of ceilings, updating older schools, painting schools and many other various projects. Our goal is to keep our older facilities in shape so that we do not have to build or do major renovations in the future.

- 5. With all of the money and budget talks that are taking place, why does the school district allow employees to drive the school vehicles home, especially those who live way out of MISD boundaries? Could we not save money on not only gas but the maintenance required on these vehicles from the extra wear and tear that isn't school related?**

There are only a few supervisors who are allowed to take their vehicles home. These are people who are on call 24 hours a day. These employees keep a log and are charged for the miles to drive their vehicles to and from home. The charge is the federal tax rate times the miles and is applied as a fringe benefit on their W2 form.

- 6. If an employee is allowed to drive their district-owned vehicle home and has an accident while not on district time, why does the district pay for the repairs and not make that employee or their insurance pay for it?**

The insurance always follows the vehicle. There are consequences in the district regulations for at fault accidents. These include suspension with-out pay, retraining and up to termination.

**7. Are employees who are allowed to drive school vehicles home allowed to use those vehicles for personal use (dr.'s appt., shopping, running errands)?**

The vehicles are not to be used for personal use but are used to run work related errands during the work day. They often have to pick up supplies at various locations and are allowed to stop and have lunch during their scheduled lunch time.

**8. Who in our district has access to a school district credit card and can make purchases? Is this user list public information and can it be viewed by any employee?**

The school district credit cards are allowed for check out following the district procedures of use as long as the employee has their supervisor's approval and a check requisition. The card must be returned after a specific amount of time.

**9. When and where is the new CTE high school being built?**

The School Board has not made a firm decision at this time.

**10. What type of yearly leadership training do campus administrators attend? If they are not currently attending yearly trainings on being good campus leaders, are there plans to implement these types of trainings?**

We have a robust leadership training program that has been implemented. First and foremost, our Executive Directors of Leadership Development sole purpose is to grow their principals. They visit campuses 75% of their time to walk classrooms, review campus plans, attend campus leadership meetings and generally develop the capacity of their principals. In addition, they provide multiple cluster meetings where they provide professional learning on relevant topics based on the needs of the principals. Campus visits are organized around topics so that principals can view best practices not only around the district, but in other districts as well. Every summer we have a leadership retreat to set out the vision for the year and develop our leaders. During the year, at our Instructional Leadership Team meetings, a portion of the meeting is designated to developing them as leaders. The Assistant Principals also meet together around the same content. The last two years we have met as a leadership team in the evenings 4-5 times per year to further enhance leadership skills. We were blessed to attend a Leadership Training at Deloitte University last year for a weekend. This year we have organized two "Camp Ignites" on Saturdays where we focus on six strands of leadership, based on needs of principals. Our goal is to continually improve the leadership of our principals and assistant principals.

**11. I am wondering if there are any plans to upgrade our transportation buses. I have noticed many buses that are old and are not very attractive. I have also noticed many that do not have working air conditioning and the interiors are not in the best shape. I realize budget is tight but with all the upgrades happening in the district, one would think our "billboards" would be a priority.**

Upgrading of transportation equipment is a top priority in MISD. Transportation Services adheres to a bus replacement cycle established by the Board in compliance with state safety regulations and national standard guidelines. Every bus receives a pre-trip and post-trip inspection, in addition to monthly and annual state assessments. Buses nearing retirement age are exclusively used for local field trips. Fleet requirements have grown every year due to growing enrollment, homeless students, and career & technology class needs. As a result, MISD currently purchases seven school buses annually.

**12. Why are paraprofessionals not able to apply to have their child attend an MISD school if they live out of district? Who is in charge of the district transfers?**

Texas Education Code 25.037 requires districts who accept out-of-district transfers to file the transfer with the state. Upon the filing and certification of any transfer, the state per capita apportionment shall transfer with the student. For purposes of computing state allotments to districts eligible under the Foundation School Program, the student's attendance prior to the date of transfer shall be counted by the sending district and the student's attendance after transfer shall be counted by the receiving district.

The vast majority of Texas school districts have a "no interdistrict transfer" FDA(LOCAL) policy. The exceptions are generally (1) allowing a resident student who becomes a nonresident during the course of the school year to remain through the end of the school year, and (2) allowing full-time professional employees to transfer their children. Many school districts require the aforementioned out-of-district transfers to pay tuition.

Although the historical reasons for MISD allowing out-of-district transfers only to Ch. 21 professional employees is unknown, it is likely that the practice began as an aggressive recruitment activity to procure and retain teachers.

**13. As a teacher in Mesquite ISD for the past four years, I have been impressed with the way the ELA curriculum team has kept up the scope and sequence. This year I have been concerned with why the curriculum team does not update the Eduphoria weekly files based on the number of school days in the week. Teachers are scrambling to fit in five days of lessons in a four-day week and then provided with insufficient lessons during some five-day weeks. This is often because the curriculum is not updated from year-to-year based on holiday weeks. I believe that people in these positions should be required to update weekly lessons and resources based on the timeline and scope and sequence they are providing. Teachers work so hard each day in the classroom to teach students and it is frustrating to think that these things are not being monitored and addressed. Also, is there a way that writing and reading curriculum teams could come together to plan units that integrate both subjects? Lucy Calkins provides great lessons that could easily be integrated into most reading lessons provided. We all know that we are pressed for time, and this integration could help ensure that TEKS are addressed in a meaningful and effective manner.**

Curricular resources are designed to support each teacher as they teach the non-negotiable scope and sequence. It is our hope that teachers would use these lessons as a springboard and follow the needs of their students. We want teachers to feel the freedom to innovate, while remembering that the scope and sequence and TEKS are a roadmap for the year.

Students are responsible for reading more genres of texts than they are responsible for writing. This naturally creates time when students will be studying one genre in reading while writing in another genre.

All of our K-3 teachers were trained in the workshop model and were given the Lucy Calkins writing units as a resource. We have cited the existing TEKS, but also used the new TEKS as a guide when creating the scope and sequences for this year. Our new TEKS call for a strong connection between reading and writing including some that emphasize this intersection.

Hopefully, this will give our K-3 teachers this year and next to really master the workshop model in writing. Then, in 2019-2020, when we have new TEKS, new materials, and new assessments, writing workshop will be solidly in place.

**14. Is there data to show that Instructional Specialists working strictly with teachers improves student achievement? Wouldn't Instructional Specialists be better utilized working with struggling students?**

There is data that shows instructional support and change as a result of coaching. When comparing instructional coaching to tutoring or acceleration, there is a disconnect. Coaching is proactive and focuses on improving Tier One instruction, so all students are successful. Tutoring/acceleration is reactive, and focuses on remediating students' learning deficits. Both can be beneficial. We believe as we continue to improve our craft as teachers, less tutoring and acceleration will be needed. Coaching should be seen as a support for teachers and Tier One instruction.

**15. We were told we had to have our ESL certification if we were in an English classroom or taught English Language Arts. Since then, we have not had any reminders or clarification of any kind. Please give us details of this requirement. Do we have to pay for the test? That will get expensive if I fail at \$130 each time. Do we have to pay to have it added to our certification – \$75 to add to certificate. Why, if it is required by MISD, are we expected to pay for the test on our own? Is there a prep class? Does it cost? Who will pay for that? Is there a certain number of times I can take the test if I fail? What if I never pass the test? Will adding the ESL certificate, affect my lifetime status? If it does affect my lifetime status, who is going to pay for the renewal every 5-6 years? Why, if all ESL students are grouped into one room, do we all have to be certified? If the students are already pulled by an ESL teacher to receive ESL services, why do the General Ed. teachers need to be certified at all? Is MISD eliminating ESL teachers? Will we get a stipend for being ESL certified? Bilingual gets a stipend.**

Reminders for ESL certification are sent to campus administrators to disseminate to their affected teachers. A teacher will sign up for the test, but will be reimbursed after successful completion. There is a fee for the teacher to add their new certification area to their teaching certificate through SBEC. There have been and will continue to be free prep classes offered. All dates are sent to campus administrators to disseminate. There is also a study manual online that is available. TEA now has a limit of taking a test 5 times, however waivers are available and must be approved by TEA to take the test again if that occurs. The addition of any new certification does not affect any previous lifetime certifications. There are no plans to eliminate ESL teachers. We are moving to a model where elementary teachers and secondary ELA teachers get ESL certified in order to effectively serve our growing LEP population. ESL teachers will continue to work with students that score lower on TELPAS. ESL teachers do not receive a stipend.

**16. Will there be 6th grade bilingual next school year?**

By law, a bilingual program must continue throughout an elementary school campus configuration. Since 6<sup>th</sup> grade is currently in elementary at most of our campuses, our program continues through the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Most of our students exit after 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Next year, all of our 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes will be moving to middle school, therefore eliminating the requirement to offer 6<sup>th</sup> grade bilingual. We have multiple openings every year so any current 6<sup>th</sup> grade bilingual teacher will have a job in the district.

**17. Can you explain why December 19 and June 4 are black out days for Elementary and Middle School staff? These dates are only early release for high school campuses. Elementary and Middle Schools are on regular schedule those days. It doesn't seem appropriate for those dates to be black out days for all employees.**

According to Policy DEC, discretionary use of leave shall not be allowed on the first or last instructional day, the day before a school holiday, the day after a school holiday, days scheduled for end-of-semester or end-of-year exams (including December 19 and June 4), days scheduled for state-mandated assessments, or professional or staff development days. The policy is administered uniformly and across the board and not specific to the different levels.

- 18. This question is in regards to blackout dates and docking of pay. If the day off can be planned well enough in advance, the day has been approved by campus administration, and a sub has been secured, why is it necessary to still dock someone's pay? Can this be at the discretion of the campus? Thank you!**

As indicated in the response to #18, discretionary use of leave shall not be allowed on the first or last instructional day, the day before a school holiday, the day after a school holiday, days scheduled for end-of-semester or end-of-year exams, days scheduled for state-mandated assessments, or professional or staff development days. In order to be consistent and fair, the blackout provision of the policy needs to be administered uniformly and across the board.

- 19. With the new absence policy, we seem to be covering even more classes during our planning period because people are no longer putting in for a sub ahead of time, they are just putting in sick the morning of or the night before so they cannot be told that they cannot take off. Some of us have covered multiple days in a row, 3-4 times a week. How are we supposed to prepare and plan to run our classes effectively when we are not getting time off to prepare for these things?**

As indicated many times, we realize the importance of a daily conference period and regret those occasions when this time is taken due to a lack of substitutes. It is our hope that this will subside in that with the implementation of the new policy, the overall absences are down by 15% from the previous year through the end of October. It should be noted that we rely on the professionalism of our staff members, and it is very difficult to regulate those who may be attempting to “game the system” by waiting so long to put in their absences.

- 20. Around extended holidays, i.e. Thanksgiving, Christmas, why are 226 employees not required to work a full day before the holiday but get paid for a full day but 260 employees must work full days or get docked. Why does the district differentiate between these employees so much?**

Those who are affected generally work extra hours and events throughout the year (prior to and after Thanksgiving and Christmas) beyond their normal scope of duties and the early release days referred to provides a relatively small amount of compensatory time. 260 day employees may also use accumulated comp time depending on the necessity of duties and at the discretion of the supervisor.

- 21. Can or would the school district ask or make an employee retire because of their age? Is there an age that the district or TRS would make an employee retire?**

There is no mandatory retirement age designated by the District or TRS.

- 22. Can hourly employees be forced to work overtime or told that it is mandatory that overtime is worked?**

As circumstances dictate, employers can require an employee to work overtime in that they have the freedom to set the terms and conditions of employment, including duties and hours. Nonexempt employees must be paid at a 50% higher rate—time-and-a-half, or overtime—for any

hours worked in a work week over 40. The employer can require the workers to work overtime; but non-exempt employees have to be compensated at a higher level for the overtime.

**23. Some of the FR questions have been about concerns or problems with the answer stating "report to your manager/supervisor" but what is an employee to do when it's the manager or supervisor that is the problem?**

In such cases, it may be reported to that person's supervisor, a supervisor other than the employee's own, or to the Personnel Office.

**24. Are paraprofessionals supposed to cover classes (full day)? If so, is there sub pay for doing so?**

It is regrettable when there are not enough substitutes available to cover all absences. In these instances, everyone is subject to being asked to assist in order to cover classes, including paraprofessionals. Such occasions are at the discretion of the principal, but should be rare when no other options are available. Because these duties are a part of the actual work day, no additional compensation is included.

**25. Why does it seem like MUNIS is never working? I haven't been able to login at all this year. Is there a better place to see how many state and district days I have left?**

We are unaware of persistent problems associated with the MUNIS Self-Serve and would suggest that you contact the Help Desk if you are unable to login. Although MUNIS is the best source to get up-to-date information, leave balances are included on every pay stub or direct deposit email advice/paper copy.

**26. Are all the employees at the service center who seem to be walking for exercise for a good part of the day on a special program or something with the district's Wellness Program? If so, how does one go about getting on it?**

We certainly support the wellness initiatives of all employees designed to improve health and increase the corresponding work productivity. However, this should be done at the designated break/lunch times and not for the duration as described. If this is the case, the individuals should adjust their routine accordingly.

**27. Why does the front office need to remain open, including answering phones on staff development days? Often, paras have to miss out on opportunities to attend staff development training because someone has to stay behind and cover the front office.**

Staff development days are scheduled work days and, therefore, it is necessary for the buildings to remain open. As a result, someone needs to be available to answer the telephone, greet and direct patrons, vendors, etc. We agree with the importance of attending the training and perhaps these duties can be covered with a minimum number and on some type of a rotating schedule.

**28. Why are 4th grade teachers not given comp time for attending a fourteen-hour field trip to Austin?**

Staff members who are under contract are exempt employees and not subject to comp time or overtime.

**29. Can you explain what Apple Corps is and how people are nominated and chosen?**

Apple Corps is an MISD program designed to honor teachers who exemplify the highest standards of the profession. Teachers are nominated by their peers and approved by the principal. Most campuses conduct a vote among the staff by secret ballot, but there are no specific rules for nominations/voting – just that nominees should be selected by their peers; however, if a principal is unable to support the decision of the staff, he or she may endorse a second nominee, usually the teacher who received the second highest number of votes. Principals submit the name of their campus' nominee to Communications, and two Apple Corps inductees are selected each month and recognized the Board Meeting. Most campuses are allowed an inductee every 18-24 months to ensure that all campuses are represented as equally as possible. Apple Corps members are members for life unless they resign from the district. Retirees retain their Apple Corps status.

**30. Who is responsible for counting the Apple Corps votes at campuses? How are we to know the selected winners for each campus were in fact nominated by their colleagues?**

There are no rules in place for counting votes. The rules state that winners are to be nominated by their peers; however, the principal has final approval of the campus nominee.

**31. Can you please provide some information as to when we can expect to get discipline referrals back in stock? We are currently using paper copies (and have been since school let out last year) and there is no way to confirm that you ever wrote the referral since there is no carbon copy. I also feel like students do not take them as seriously as they do an actual referral.**

Discipline referral forms are a stocked item and should be ordered through MUNIS—stock item #1330.

**32. Recently the district conducted a survey regarding a calendar for becoming a District of Innovation. Last year the district took a stance against becoming a District of Innovation. Has the district changed its mind on becoming a District of Innovation and if so why?**

During last year's legislative session, we were hopeful that the Texas Legislature would enact legislation allowing districts more flexibility on School Start Date. When the session ended without that legislation enacted, the decision was made to pursue designation as a District of Innovation to allow more local control with the school calendar and freedom from other unnecessary legislative mandates.

**33. I was surprised to see that Mesquite is pursuing a district of innovation status. I remember last year when an email was sent out to employees explaining the negative aspects of pursuing a district of innovation status and had a link to the ATPE page about concerns about innovation districts. There are a lot of concerns especially regarding teacher contracts. ATPE believes that school district employees and parents of students in the district should receive ample notice of any legal rights and protections they might be losing under a district's innovation plan. Will MISD employees receive notice of any rights and protections that we may lose when the district becomes an innovation district?**

We are not aware of a district email going out about the negative effects of becoming a district of innovation, however, Dr. Vroonland did speak to the FR Representatives related to Ch. 21 contracts. District leaders agree that teacher contract rights and protections form the core of MISD values. No employee contract rights or protections have been lost as a result of the MISD District of Innovation Plan. On the contrary, the only contract considerations included in MISD's District of Innovation Plan have a directly positive affect for many prospective and current employees. The

MISD District of Innovation Plan can be downloaded from the MISD Website under the *About Us* Tab, in the Strategic Planning section.

**34. Can I obtain liability insurance through MEA for my counseling practicum this upcoming semester?**

Liability insurance coverage is not available through MEA; it is available through ATPE. To obtain coverage, you must first join ATPE online at [atpe.org](http://atpe.org). After joining, contact ATPE at 1-800-ATPE and ask to speak with James in Membership to request a letter confirming liability insurance coverage.

**35. Our district website doesn't have Spanish versions of the instructions for parents using Skyward. Are there any plans to create instructions in Spanish?**

Our district website will auto-translate to a variety of languages including Spanish. Users can choose a language on the top horizontal navigation bar. This question may be in reference to our Skyward Family Access videos. We will work to get those produced in Spanish as well.

**36. We got an email informing us that there is a new political activist group being formed in MISD. Will you be providing an opportunity to opt out of political messages from the district? Some staffers do not agree with the political position of the leaders of the district and do not want to receive communications that, in my opinion, misrepresent politics with respect to education.**

The information being provided to Mesquite ISD staff is material advocating for public education policy. However, there is not information being provided in support of a particular candidate or party affiliation. The purpose of this information is for staff members to become informed and engaged on the issues facing public schools.

The purpose of the Legislative Advocacy Committee is to educate, inform and advocate for the students and staff of Mesquite ISD. Education policy is designed and developed by the state legislature which impacts our daily business and operations of educating students. Therefore, our desire is to be involved in this conversation so that positive outcomes occur for students.

The staff does not have to agree with the leadership on public education policy and it is your right to disagree on the issue facing public education. We would encourage you to get involved in the legislative process so that you have a voice.