

The following questions were answered at the November 30, 2004, PAC meeting.
Scholarships for student trips

1. What are the guidelines for scholarships for student trips?

If the student trip occurs as a component of the academic program, district funds are generally utilized. The funding of student trips occurring outside of the academic day fall within the realm of the club or entity that supports the reason for the trip.

For example, the majority of such trips are associated with fine arts, and usually have booster clubs to provide financial support. Each booster club is a separate entity and sets their own guidelines, mainly dependant on the level of monetary support available. Committees usually make the decisions in each club, and the directors should only serve in an advisory role.

Overcrowding in junior highs

2. Is the district actively attempting to equalize the student populations at the junior high schools, especially in light of Freshmen Programming, and ease the overcrowding in the Lake Highlands area junior highs?

Every junior high facility will be under maximum capacity when ninth-graders move to the high school campuses next year. The current enrollment numbers for Forest Meadow and Lake Highlands Junior High are 700 to 800 students, while those facilities both have a capacity of significantly higher.

For example, several years ago, Forest Meadow housed more than 1,400 students.

Efforts continue to be made to approximately balance the enrollments at junior highs within the various areas of the district, however, many factors affect those enrollment numbers and some factors affecting Lake Highlands-area schools are often different than factors affecting junior highs in other parts of the district.

Piano in band

3. Why can pianos not be added to our bands, and why is music credit not extended for students who play piano?

The district's music program has traditionally and philosophically been designed for those instruments that are a regular part of a school's ensemble, and which have a "single voice" such that when combined, contribute to a group ensemble experience.

Traditionally, piano has not been one of those instruments, with the exception being as part of a jazz ensemble. Students who play piano in jazz ensembles do receive credit for their musical participation.

Racial/ethnic options on enrollment form

4. The annual enrollment form allows only one choice to be selected from five racial/ethnic options. This prevents biracial individuals as well as nationalities not listed on the form from recognizing/reporting their true ethnic make-up. How can children whose parents are of different racial backgrounds identify themselves within their school environment?

These choices are dictated by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) through the PEIMS data reporting system to which all school districts are required to adhere.

RISD has no authority to change the options on the form, and currently, if more than one box is checked, the district must choose only one.

Access to class lists

5. Our PTA begins fundraisers, membership drives and compilation of our school directory very early in the school year. Due to privacy issues, the school is not allowed to give us class lists. This makes the process very difficult and excludes some students. Why is the PTA not allowed access to these lists? Was this ruling made at the district level? Who would be the appropriate entity to contact about getting class lists for these limited purposes?

On the back of each student enrollment form is the Release of Student Directory Information Election option, which parents or guardians complete annually on behalf of their students. This is required by the Federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA).

FERPA was established to ensure that information about individuals is not disclosed to unauthorized sources without consent.

Accordingly, RISD requires anyone seeking student information, whether outside of the district or a district affiliate such as PTA or booster clubs, to submit your request for such information to the Records Management Office. In this way, the district can ensure that the privacy election for each student is enacted.

Student information requests can be made to Janet Williamson in the Records Office at 469-593-0361. There is a fee of less than \$10.00 for processing student directory information requests.

Campus Space & Overcrowding

6. What is the district doing to avoid overcrowding and/or trying to put too many classes/programs on a campus? With the proposed Town Center development in Lake Highlands, and apartment complexes targeted for closure, what will be the estimated impact to White Rock's enrollment, and how would that affect overflow? How will the opening of Ferris Branch Elementary impact White Rock Elementary's enrollment? What are the attendance boundaries for Ferris Branch?

The district examines space available at each facility before decisions are made to introduce new programs that require accommodations. In some instances, existing programs or classes may incur a change of schedule or change of rooms. In this specific area of Lake Highlands, space and program needs will be alleviated by the opening of Thurgood Marshall Elementary for the 2005-06 school year.

While the details of the development plan are tentative, the approximate estimated impact on WRE's enrollment is a reduction of 160 students. This, and the opening of Marshall Elementary, will additionally affect WRE, as students that are currently overflowed away from their home schools would be given an opportunity to return as space becomes available.

The attendance boundaries of Marshall Elementary will be voted on by the Board of Trustees in early 2005.

School consolidations

7. Are there currently any plans to consolidate some of the underutilized elementary schools and if so, when?

There are no current plans to consolidate any additional facilities for the 2005-06 school year. With the repurposing plan already passed by the board and the long-planned move of ninth-graders to high school campuses under the Freshmen Programming initiative, the superintendent feels that is enough change for students, parents and staff to grow accustomed to at a given time.

Next year, the district and the board will assess the ongoing budget situation at that time and examine appropriate alternatives as needed, which may include additional facility repurposing or consolidation.

Buses

8. Why aren't there any buses that pick up from Richland Village/Richland Trace and Regal Springs?

That location falls within the two mile radius from school, and bus routes to school from that location are therefore not eligible for state reimbursement. An afternoon route was added several years ago to return students residing at that location home after school, but the district is paying directly for that route, and cannot afford a morning route as well.

International Baccalaureate Program

9. Are there any plans to introduce the International Baccalaureate Program in RISD schools?

This program used to be offered at Richardson High School and was discontinued in favor of pre-Advanced Placement and AP opportunities.

There are several reasons it was discontinued:

- Because the teachers involved in the program require specialized training, the cost of maintaining the program was extremely expensive.
- The program requires an extensive level of rigor over an extended period of time. The rigor generally precludes students from participating in any other extracurricular opportunities, and that affected the program's popularity.
- Because of the rigor and time commitment involved, in its 10 years of existence, no RHS student ever graduated with an IB diploma. Students would begin the program but discontinue it before all requirements were satisfied.

RISD is examining the possibility of reintroducing the IB program in some capacity if a cost-effective method of doing so can be found. As part of this, the district is studying the implementation and effectiveness of this program in other districts.

Permission slips for field trips

10. Are permission slips required for every trip that the students take away from their campus?

Yes, in every instance, a permission slip is required. When instances where this procedure has not been followed are discovered, steps are taken to educate all staff members involved to ensure the policy is followed in the future.

Evacuation policies

11. In light of the recent terrorism acts in Russia and other events of the last few years in the USA, please define what the district's evacuation policies are and what precautions and procedures we have in place for our children?

Each school has a specific safety and security plan that is reviewed annually. It contains the details of how to react when a crisis situation occurs or appears imminent, including lockdown and evacuation procedures.

That plan contains information specific to that campus regarding evacuation procedures, parent pickup points and other information germane to that campus.

Each classroom in every school contains a step-by-step crisis "flip chart" that staff can refer to as needed.

The district also works annually with the Richardson and Dallas police and fire departments to review crisis procedures and the overall student safety plan.

In addition, for safety and security reasons, RISD provides each teacher with a cellular telephone.

Library class time

12. What is the district's policy regarding Library classes? Why do some schools have a scheduled library class for each grade level, but others don't?

RISD's policy is that all library time be flexibly scheduled, and able to shift as needed to accommodate student research. Typically, grades K-1, and sometimes grade 2, are scheduled for story time and book checkout on a regular basis, with grades 2-6 scheduled regularly, but not always consistently, as needed.

At any given school, you should be able to examine the library schedule and see all classes in all grade levels coming to the library for a variety of needs at various times, with information-literacy instruction, project-based learning, reading promotion, story time, and book checkout being the primary functions.

In addition, teachers should feel comfortable sending small groups of students to the library during the day for either book checkout or research activities.

Transfer from low performing school

13. Under Section 29.202 of the Texas Education Code, students assigned to a campus which has been rated as "low-performing" during any of the preceding three years are eligible to attend

a different school in the district. What is the specific procedure for applying to attend a different school under this provision of state law?

Both state and federal law provide provisions similar to what the question is describing.

Under federal No Child Left Behind legislation, a Title 1 school that does not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years will trigger a provision that allows parents to transfer from that school if desired. RISD has not had any schools fall under this provision.

Under the state assessment and performance legislation, if a school has been designated “low performing” for one year, then parents with students attending that school may elect to request a transfer from that school for the following three years. Parents may not choose the destination school when requesting a transfer under this provision.

Like all other transfer requests, the transfer requests described above can be initiated at the student’s home school.

Physical Education

14. Why is physical education offered only two days a week for 45 minutes each? This, combined with only one twenty-minute break for recess per day seems inadequate for an elementary age child during a seven-hour school day.

State of Texas Senate Bill 19, which became effective in 2003, stipulates that elementary students must receive 135 minutes per week of physical education. This is achieved by two sessions of 45-minute instruction by a certified physical education teacher.

The remaining 45 minutes per week of structured activity is provided by campus staff in a variety of ways. There is no specific requirement regarding how that additional 45 minutes per week be utilized, but the RISD practice has been to provide students physical activity before or after lunch, a structured recess, and/or activity time in the classroom.

Overflow students

15. Why do Big Springs Elementary’s overflow numbers keep getting higher and other schools such as Canyon Creek and Prairie Creek remain under capacity? Why aren’t some of the overflow students routed to the smaller schools, and why wasn’t Prairie Creek involved in the recent re-purposing plan since their numbers are so small?

One of the primary goals of RISD’s overflow policy is to keep students as close to home as possible, so the district assigns overflow students to the closest school to their home school that is not at full capacity. So the explanation of why some schools receive more or less overflow

students in a given time period is a reflection of where within RISD the population is growing, and therefore, where the overflow students are coming from.

While the overall student population of RISD is down less than one percent this year, there are areas within the district that continue to experience significant growth, and one of those areas is the east side.

The opening of Thurgood Marshall Elementary in 2005-06 is expected to alleviate the amount of overflow occurring on the east side of the district.

To provide historical perspective, the number of overflow students assigned to Big Springs over the last five years is as follows:

1999-2001: 6 2001-02: 3 2002-03: 4 2003-04: 3 10/29/04: 25

District recycling programs

16. Does RISD have a districtwide recycling program or are recycling programs administered at each school? If districtwide, how does each school manage their participation?

The recycling program has existed within RISD for several years and is managed at the campus level. Room-sized and commercial-sized recycling containers exist on every campus, and education/awareness of the proper use of those containers takes place at the campus. Schools are able to receive some additional funds based on the amount of materials recycled.

Volunteer background check

17. What can the district do to streamline the background check process for school volunteers? How do our school office staff check and are they responsible to check? Could the district provide each cleared parent with the documentation that could be shown at the office before going into the building?

The district must balance student and staff safety with volunteer convenience. Currently, volunteers are required to fill out a single, one-page form, from which a confidential background check is conducted by a firm in that field.

Once a volunteer is approved, his/her name is added to the volunteer list, which is available to all principals. Volunteers are then sent a confirmation postcard via U.S. mail, which may serve as documentation of approval. Like every building visitor, that volunteer must sign in and out when arriving/departing a campus, which allows their name to be verified as on the list of eligible volunteers.

After school programs

18. Why don't we have after school programs that are free to the students?

The district cannot afford to offer widespread after-school programs at no cost.

TAKS and TEKS

19. What is, or who has, accountability for the quality of the TAKS and TEKS? Are they measured and what data is used to support the grade level appropriateness of TEKS?

Both the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum, and its corresponding Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), were designed and maintained by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) with input from state and national education experts. Questions continue to be reviewed and field tested before being widely circulated. RISD has no authority to alter TEKS or TAKS in any capacity.

Questions for October 26, 2004

1) There was talk of redrawing attendance lines for Forest Meadow due to overcrowding. Is there a plan? If so, when?

Attendance boundaries were actually changed last year when Audelia Creek Elementary opened. Their sixth graders fed into Richardson Junior High this year and will attend Liberty Junior High in fall 2005. There are possibilities of additional changes as the new Lake Highlands area elementary school on Ferris Branch is opened and the area junior high enrollments have declined slightly.

2) Students who are currently 8th graders have not been informed of programming changes for next year when they move into the ninth grade in the high schools. When will this take place?

Freshman Programming plans have been in the works since 2001, and information concerning specific opportunities for classes are being put together now. Student should receive information before January so they can make choices for their high school careers. More information will be forthcoming.

3) Why are school nurses pulled out so much? Even part-time nurses are not at their schools every day that they are assigned.

The district has been able to add several school nurses over the last few years, but in the smaller schools, our budget dictates that we cannot yet hire fulltime nurses. All new nurses are required to have 10 days working in other schools with a colleague to be certified in vision/hearing screenings, and so must they must complete that training. In addition, they then work with other new nurses. The district employs only certified Registered Nurses, so their pay is more than a nurse's aide, therefore hiring impacts the budget where we are currently trying to cut \$8 million.

4) Can Meet the Teacher Night be changed so it does not interfere with the volleyball schedule?

The district will look at rescheduling the volleyball games that week to perhaps a Wednesday night, therefore affecting less people than would be affected by changing a districtwide Meet the Teacher Night. The possibility will be evaluated with the principals.

5) RISD seems to be one of a few districts not offering ROTC. What would it take to make it available in the district?

This question comes up every so often and the district is actually looking at ROTC, but would need a large facility for the program. Vocational program expansion is also being reviewed as the district strives to fund programs that are meaningful for all of our student body.

6) What are the criteria for transferring from one school to another? How are these decisions made?

Student Transfer Request forms are available at each school and contain information on the process and procedures for requesting intradistrict transfers consistent with state and local guidelines. Transfer requests are considered on an individual basis and transportation is not provided by the district. Receiving schools must have adequate space in that particular grade.

7) What is the policy with restricted diets and how is this handled at school-sponsored functions including class parties?

The state has guidelines on foods that are acceptable during the instructional day, however during school parties, exceptions are made. The parents of children on restricted diets should confer with their principal regarding class and school-wide celebrations.

8) How can a parent have RISD school menus re-evaluated and petition for a menu change to better reflect nutritious choices?

The Child Nutrition Department within the district works hard to provide nutritional choices every day. Care is given to look at the total fat, protein, calcium, iron and vitamins A & C content, making certain that items are the healthiest possible. Corn dogs are made from chicken, and tacos are made with turkey meat. Vegetarian items are available every day and only quality name-brand products are purchased for our cafeterias. More information can be found at www.agr.state.tx.us. Parents are invited to have lunch with their child to sample the delicious variety of foods available. Please contact the school so you can be put into the 'count.'

9) Is there any thought to implementing uniforms in RISD?

Uniform choice is left to Local School Councils at each school. Currently, 12 RISD schools have optional uniforms. Dress codes at other schools meet the district's established guidelines for not disrupting the instructional day.

10) Is the district considering physical education every day at the elementary level? It is a good way to combat childhood obesity.

The district offers 135 minutes per week for physical education at the elementary level, in accordance with the Texas Education Code. This equates to two 45-minute periods a week with a certified PE teacher and at least 45 minutes with a teacher or administrator. Physical movement is encouraged after lunch and/or at recess.

11) What is the district policy regarding standards by which booster clubs provide scholarships for students for private lessons?

Each booster club is a separate entity and sets their own guidelines, mainly dependant on the level of monetary support available. Committees usually make the decisions in each club.

12) What types of programs are available to teach students, teachers and parents about bullying?

Student Assistant Program staff are constantly supplying counselors and principals with materials to combat destructive behavior. Recent additions include “The Bully-Free Classroom,” “Please Don’t Laugh at Me,” and “Here’s Looking at You,” a kit of information on social skills and negotiation skills. In addition, a video resource library on the subject is available. STOP teams, (Students Teaching Others Peace), are being formed in several schools. Parents are encouraged to look at these books and programs and to discuss any problems they might be aware of with the school counselor and/or principal. The Student Assistance Programs staff is available to present staff development on bullying for schools and parents.

13) How will girls’ athletics, sports and cheerleading be handled compared to what is happening now in 9th grade at the junior high level?

Very carefully! The district plans include the same number of sports teams for freshmen that there are for ninth graders now, but no additional teams will be formed. Freshmen will be eligible to join ninth-grade teams, junior varsity and varsity teams. Cheerleading participation has not yet been decided, but is being discussed, as is participation on drill teams, etc.

14) Why is the amount of homework different at different schools?

The district guidelines are followed at each school, dependent upon grade-level and teacher prerogative to ensure comprehension of essential knowledge and skills. Some classes will naturally include more homework at different times of the year, and it is expected that teachers are sensitive to workloads in all subjects.