

Richardson ISD Parent Advisory Committee (PAC)

April 27, 2010

Several RISD campuses in Lake Highlands have experienced a decrease in property owner representation in the school over recent years, in large part due to changes in the number and location of rental properties in the area, which can impact the number of non-homeowner students being overflowed to a campus.

How and when will the Board and administration address this shift for the affected neighborhoods?

When discussing redrawing school boundaries is important to note that Richardson operates under a 1970 desegregation court order, and any changes would have to be approved by Federal court. RISD does not believe the order remains necessary, and last year began the lengthy process of requesting the order be removed.

The closure of some multi-family housing complexes in the Lake Highlands area has impacted several elementary campuses in terms of attendance, and to some extent the number of students available to attend schools within existing boundaries. This creates a situation of excess capacity at some schools.

Also in recent years, the district has experienced enrollment growth in the southern portion of the district, which creates an overflow situation at other schools.

To accommodate all students and efficiently utilize resources, in a given year, some students may be enrolled in a neighboring school if their grade level in their home school is full. At the end of the year, they return to their home school, space permitting. This ensures priority can be given each year to neighborhood students seeking to enroll.

From a standpoint of stability, principals typically prefer a set group of students that they know are in their attendance zone so they can build relationships with their families and continue to provide academic support on a consistent basis. Redrawing school boundaries is a complex process with many ramifications, so any district effort to do so would only occur after careful study and stakeholder

input.

Regardless of whether boundaries are redrawn, two ongoing factors occurring in the southern portion of RISD that would continue to impact specific school enrollment include:

- A large number of aging apartment complexes results in inexpensive housing options that directly contribute to high mobility among some families that follow the best promotions/least expensive rent.*
- Apartments that close in other districts near RISD boundaries often result in an influx of students to RISD schools as those parents relocate due to proximity, RISD's reputation, and inexpensive rent.*

RISD is not currently considering redrawing school boundaries.

Some overflowed students must walk a long distance to school, along busy and potentially dangerous streets, in some cases significantly further than they would walk if they were not overflowed. How does the Board & administration respond to the idea of rezoning in order to achieve a higher safety standard and allow students to attend schools that are closest to them?

The factors related to redrawing school boundaries are addressed above.

Regarding safety, each year RISD performs a safety assessment at each campus to address issues of need such as crossing guards, lights at intersections, and streets students may use to walk to school.

The state of Texas pays for bus transportation for students residing two or more miles away from the school they attend. Overflow students typically have the option of taking a bus to their school that departs from their neighborhood campus.

If a specific transportation situation exists that a parent believes is dangerous, they should approach the principal, who can request RISD Transportation examine the specific circumstances.

Why does RISD require telephone number, driver's license number and date of birth to be listed on checks paid for the PACE program? Identity theft is a concern – is all the personal information necessary?

RISD requires telephone number, driver's license number and date of birth for checks written to the district as this is the information that the Dallas District Attorney's office requires in order to be able to pursue checks written on insufficient funds.

Parents concerned with the requirements may consider other payment options for PACE, which include cash, money order or electronic payment via online banking.

When city projects require long-term closure of city facilities, such as parks and athletic fields, residents are likely to use RISD facilities instead. This increased use can create excessive wear, and also result in increased staff costs to keep the areas clean and maintained. Does RISD seek compensation from the cities of Dallas, Garland or Richardson under these circumstances?

Cities are not liable for any damage or use of district playgrounds or fields caused by general public use, therefore RISD does not seek any form of restitution. Except for the primary stadiums, all district playgrounds and fields are open for public use to the extent the use does not conflict with school use of the grounds.

Various organizations do rent and reserve district athletic fields for organized use and pay fees/assume financial responsibilities in accordance with the district facility use schedule.

Some city projects require long-term closure of sidewalks that some students would otherwise use to walk to school, creating a situation where students must walk in the street or through construction crews, to get to school.

What department within RISD is responsible for working with the cities of Dallas, Garland or Richardson to ensure student safety when major city improvement programs are approved which may occur in close proximity to an RISD school? In addition, what does RISD have in place with the cities to prevent individuals who may have criminal records or who are registered sex offenders from working on projects in close proximity to RISD schools?

RISD works directly with the cities within our boundaries in a number of capacities and has direct contacts through the public works and police departments.

The cities typically offer alternate walking routes when pedestrians are forced to navigate construction areas. Unfortunately, students do not always follow the alternate routes; however, when campus or district staff become aware of a potentially dangerous situation, they can work with students to make sure they understand the safety implications surrounding their choices.

The initial contact for any campus-specific safety issue should be the principal. They can then request assistance from district departments as needed and appropriate.

RISD Safety & Security Coordinator Luther Robertson, working in conjunction with our Student Services Department, is responsible for facilitating student safety issues.

While employees, contractors and regular visitors to RISD campuses undergo criminal background checks, the district has no legal ability to perform background checks on anyone not employed by the district or with business on district property.

What are the performance expectations of the school crossing guards located at major intersections near RISD schools? Are these individuals paid employees of a city or of RISD? How are performance-related issues of crossing guards addressed?

While RISD has joint financial responsibility with the cities of Dallas and Richardson for crossing guards, the city police departments hire the crossing guards and set expectations for the positions.

The municipalities also determine which intersections require a crossing guard assignment.

Crossing guards are expected to be at their assigned intersection during active school zone hours, alert and performing their duties during that time.

Any parent or stakeholder who wishes to report performance-related issues may do so to the campus principal or to the Student Services Department, who will work with the appropriate police department to address any issues.

How does the school district determine the effectiveness of the assignments and projects of PreAP and AP classes? Also, is there a grading policy regarding giving a student a grade based not on individual performance, but on the results of a class game?

Assignments should be meaningful and grounded in content. One of the primary challenges of teaching AP is to uphold the rigor of the coursework and provide assignments that are appropriate for the learning needs of a high school student. While Pre-AP does not have the rigor of college coursework, it is a prerequisite to AP and covers content beyond what is typical for students at a particular grade level.

Some of the practices RISD utilizes to manage and support quality AP/PreAP instruction include:

- Each year, all AP teachers have their syllabi approved by the campus principal and the College Board (the organization that oversees the AP program nationally).*
- Building principals and RISD curriculum directors meet with each AP teacher every year to review AP results and to discuss student success on these tests. Instructional practices, including assignments, are part of this discussion.*
- Pre-AP teachers follow the RISD curriculum and principals use benchmark tests and student grades as well as other measures, including TAKS scores, to determine instructional effectiveness.*
- Pre-AP and AP teachers regularly work with others in the same area to share best practices. RISD supports this through teacher-released time across the district and common planning time in individual buildings.*
- All RISD teachers are regularly observed and are provided feedback from their evaluators.*

A student's grade on any assignment should be based on the extent to which a student demonstrates mastery. That is often a professional judgment of the teacher.

Parents with concerns about a specific assignment are encouraged to contact the teacher and campus principal.

Has the district considered ability grouping students for math instruction at the elementary level? Do some schools within the district ability group for math and/or other subjects?

Teachers have the flexibility to group students for any subject area. Reading instruction has been set up so students' level of reading ability is addressed by the materials they use and how instruction is delivered.

Math grouping is always an option for teachers and is encouraged so students who need more time to master material can receive clarification of concepts and higher-level students can extend their learning. RISD utilizes Destination Math, which is a resource that enables students to work independently for clarification or enrichment purposes.

A parent with questions regarding their child's learning should begin with the teacher and principal. In most instances, such situations are satisfactorily worked through at the school level.

Has the district considered an online enrollment option? Wouldn't the information be more accurate, and the process more efficient by giving parents the option of completing the information online?

Yes. RISD is in the process of previewing vendor products that will integrate with our student information system (SIS). Some online options we are evaluating focus on enrollment, emergency contacts, medical update, secondary student course choices and parent volunteer opportunities.

The timeline for implementation is dependent upon the upcoming SIS conversion, but is unlikely to occur in time for the 2010-2011 school year.

How can the district do a better job at the elementary level to prepare our children entering high school on how to study and take "classroom" unit tests and quizzes?

Between not sending home books and open book tests, students are not

prepared on how to take a book home and actually study at home for a test they have that week or the next day.

Can there be a "District Initiative" to teach our 4th - 6th graders how to prepare and take tests the way they have to when moving to Jr./Sr. High?

Not every subject utilizes a textbook as a primary content source because in some cases, the state-approved textbook is outdated and therefore not as effective as alternate materials, such as worksheets and handouts. In classes where textbooks are not the primary source of instruction, a textbook is available as a secondary resource for every student who requests one. Content covered on any test should be available for students to take home and refer to or study from to prepare for the evaluation, whether it is a book or other content medium.

Open book tests are a teacher option, but are not an element mandated by the central curriculum department. District curriculum assessments include pre-tests, mini-unit assessments, and benchmark tests. Any of these can be used for diagnostic purposes and grades, depending on the teacher's prerogative of how the assessments should be utilized.

Timed tests are not necessarily encouraged at the elementary level, because a foundation needs to be laid for all skills and concepts so students are allowed to move through a test at their pace.

If a parent feels an individual teacher or campus offers an excessive amount of 'open resource' tests to the point that students are not being adequately prepared with the study skills necessary for successful evaluations in junior high, they should first engage the teacher and principal with their concerns to receive a comprehensive explanation. If desired, parents can then move into discussions with the appropriate elementary executive director.