

RISD Parent Advisory Council – 4.8.08

Is RISD adequately prepared to address the educational needs of Autistic children? What is the district lacking by way of tools and resources that could otherwise improve such educational needs? Have these tools and resources been budgeted?

Yes, RISD is equipped to address the needs of our entire range of students, from gifted & talented to severely disabled. The district does not feel it lacks tools, resources, or expertise to productively work with disabled students.

The Special Education Department is specifically budgeted to address the educational needs of students that present significant challenges, and allocates their resources accordingly.

What plans does the district have to increase the number of course options for the class of 2011 and beyond in math and science?

The “4x4” initiative passed by the 80th legislative session starts with this year’s freshmen and mandates they earn four credits of math and four credits of science prior to graduation. Currently, a student in math must take Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II and one course beyond. For the course beyond, we offer two options, Algebra III or Pre-Calculus. We also offer Math Models for those students who might need extra preparation for Algebra II, which means a student may take Algebra I, Geometry, Math Models and Algebra II to satisfy the four years of math.

The science requirements for the four years are Biology, Chemistry, Physics and one course beyond. Currently, options for that course beyond are Aquatic Science, Anatomy, Principles of Technology, Research and Design or any of the AP classes in Biology, Chemistry or Physics.

The Texas Commissioner of Education has stated that TEA is working on other options for students to satisfy the 4x4 graduation requirements. Options they are considering include a liberal/ fine arts plan and a career and technology plan. Any other graduation plans would contain rigorous coursework with an emphasis in the specific field of study. These additional possibilities would require legislative approval.

What is the district doing for children with dyslexia after they have completed a program such as Alpha-Phonics? Is there any possibility that American Sign Language (ASL) will be offered at the high school level during the regular school year or summer school?

Students who complete the Alpha-Phonics program may still require an intervention, as indicated by assessment(s) and evaluation. Such students will enter the intervention that is offered by the district for students that score in the Strategic or Intensive range on DIBELS. These intervention programs meet the criteria for an intervention for Dyslexia.

The only ASL course RISD has at present is a one semester elective.

There are no plans at this time to allow ASL to meet the LOTE requirement; however, as more of students with dyslexia move into secondary, the district may examine this possibility through a program study to determine feasibility.

How many benchmarks and simulations are there for each TAKS test? Are these set by the district or individual schools? How many hours of classroom teaching are being spent on these practice tests?

In RISD, the benchmarking process is an integral component of our curriculum, and an element that the district feels is a core component of our success.

With the exception of the DIBELS benchmark which is used to determine a student's reading level, all benchmarking starts in the middle of October. During October, RISD benchmarks Reading, Math, and Science because students have received six weeks of instruction and it provides a valuable gauge of how students are learning the curriculum.

The next set of benchmarks occur in December, again falling near the end of the six weeks. After the holidays, a mid-year DIBELS assessment is taken to determine reading progress and begin benchmarking again at the end of January with Science.

The benchmarks get progressively harder and longer at the beginning of the second semester, with simulations in TAKS-tested areas which help the teachers identify students who need interventions such as tutoring or Saturday School, and also those who are excelling and may need additional challenge.

The benchmark calendar is set by our Elementary Curriculum Department and our spring TAKS data drives when and how we assess. The benchmarks are actually an assessment of what is being taught in the curriculum daily and are an excellent measure of how well a student is grasping concepts and applying them as needed.

The curriculum that is taught each day is aligned with the benchmarks so on the days that a benchmark occurs, the allowance is made in the pacing calendar. The classroom time allotted to the taking, discussion, and remediation of information tested on the benchmarks is an integral part of the learning cycle which must occur for teachers to be able to make good educational decisions regarding each specific student.

Given the fact that elementary students are required to have 135 minutes a week of physical activity and 90 minutes comes from PE and the rest is supposed to be made up in recess, how can recess be taken away for behavior or primary reach or TAKS testing? Does RISD have some alternative solutions for consequences?

Texas law provides for a limited number of minutes each day in which to teach all the TEKS required under our state curriculum. Due to the volume of curriculum that is required by law, if a student participates in extra offerings, the time has to be taken from somewhere.

The district absolutely recognizes the need for students to have physical activity, and has had a committee examine the requirements and offer suggestions as to how to fulfill them within the limited number of minutes available in a school day.

RISD does have alternative solutions and consequences for students who don't complete work or misbehave and building personnel are encouraged to explore all possible alternatives before taking away a recess.

How did RISD come to the decision to add AP Human Geography to the high school freshman list of core classes? Also, why was pre-AP World Geography dropped from the classes offered?

The College Board made the AP Human Geography course available to high schools in 2001. At that time, the district did not have staff prepared to begin offering it to our students. We now have nine qualified teachers trained and ready, including three on the Berkner campus and two each on the other high school campuses.

The district is excited about this course, because it will be strong preparation for the demanding AP World History course offered at the sophomore level. The new AP Human Geography course is traditionally a college-level, one-semester course that will be taught in RISD as a two-semester class. This lengthening will allow our teachers to cover the seven required concepts and also add the physical geography component that students are required to have in alignment with TEKS. The extended length also allows for a course pace that is less stressful for freshmen, and additionally, it is not essential for students to pass the exam required to earn college credit in order to receive the high school credit for the course.

The decision not to continue offering the pre-AP World Geography class is in keeping with the district's policy of offering two academic levels for any course in the secondary schools.

Why can't the girls uniforms for track and volleyball be somewhat similar to the ones they use for basketball? Is any extensive thought given to the uniforms?

RISD uses the same track and volleyball uniforms as those used in other districts around the state. Uniforms are designed to be appropriate for use in the specific sport being played.

What is the district's policy regarding high school students who are registered sex offenders? Are they allowed to participate in UIL sports, after school events, etc? If there is a policy, how was it formulated?

This is specifically addressed in the RISD Student Code of Conduct, adopted annually by the RISD Board of Trustees.

It specifies that upon receiving information that a student must register as a sex offender, the student shall be removed from the regular classroom to an appropriate placement, unless the court orders a JJAEP (Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program) placement.

If the student is under any form of court supervision, including probation, community supervision, or parole, the placement will be to either the DAEP (District Alternative Educational Program at Christa McAuliffe Learning Center) or JJAEP for at least one semester.

If the student is not under any form of court supervision, the placement may be to DAEP or JJAEP for one semester or the placement may be in a regular classroom. The placement may not be in the regular classroom if it is determined that the student's presence:

- a. Threatens the safety of the other students or teachers.
- b. Will be detrimental to the educational process.
- c. Is not in the best interest of the district's students.

At the end of the first semester a student's placement in an alternative educational setting is reviewed by a committee.

Students placed in DAEP or JJAEP may not participate in co-or extra-curricular activities.

How much money is collected annually from cell phone confiscation penalties? How is the money used?

Administrative fees collected when a student violates the rules regarding use of an electronic communications device are deposited into individual campus accounts. Principals oversee the campus accounts and funds are spent on teacher and student supplies and services.

The amounts collected vary substantially from year to year and campus to campus.

All campus-level funds fall under the oversight of RISD's accounting system to ensure funds are used appropriately and in accordance with policies.

What is the policy on elementary after school quality programs? Who is responsible for setting up an after school program, administering it, hiring staff, setting pricing, funding it, etc?

In the past, and through this year, elementary after-school programs have been provided by several outside organizations at some, but not all, campuses around the district. The Board of Trustees recently approved a district proposal that will bring all elementary after-school programs in-house beginning next school year (2008-09). This is something that a number of surrounding districts have already done.

RISD is in the process of hiring a Director of After School Programs, who will administer the programs, hire staff, approve pricing, etc., based on best practices and surrounding districts.

The district took control of the programs for three primary reasons:

- RISD can benefit from the additional revenue the programs generate, rather than outside entities.

- We feel we can establish a stronger link between after-school programming and the curriculum taught during the day.
- The district ultimately wants to expand after-school opportunities to more campuses than currently served.

For 2008-09, RISD will operate at all campuses currently served by an outside provider. Beginning the following year, the district intends to expand offerings to additional campuses.

How often are actual changes made based on input received from the questions submitted by the Parent Advisory Committee? Is the intent of the PAC meetings primarily to answer questions or to take action on the issues brought forth from parents?

The primary purpose of PAC is to provide RISD parents an opportunity to meet with senior RISD leadership to discuss districtwide issues. RISD values the PAC process and feels it serves to both inform parents and as a tool to help us evaluate the need for change in policy or practice. It is important to note that PAC has never been intended as a forum for campus-specific questions or discussion.

There have been a number of important policy issues and/or initiatives over the years that have been directly affected by input from PAC. Two more recent examples are Freshman Programming and full-day kindergarten.