

From January 2009 PAC Meeting

Child Nutrition

Has RISD done anything to try to improve the quality of food served in the cafeteria, such as moving towards more fresh, whole foods such as fresh fruits, wheat breads, and organic meats?

RISD consistently offers high quality nutritious food in all our cafeterias in accordance with dietary requirements issued by the US Department of Agriculture for all school meals. RISD Child Nutrition staff have taken a number of steps to provide healthier menu selections, including but not limited to the following:

- *Daily menus include 2-3 selections of fresh fruits and vegetables*
- *Using turkey and chicken instead of beef and pork for items like spaghetti, hot dogs, corn dogs, sausage, etc.*
- *Converted cooking method from deep fryers to baking for items such as French fries, steak fingers, chicken strips, etc.*
- *Converted to low fat selections for cheese, milk, sauces, etc.*
- *Moved to whole grain for items like pizza and other bread items*
- *Reduced portion sizes for dessert items*

Texas was one of the first states to implement more rigorous nutrition standards for food provided to students through the Texas Department of Agriculture's Foods of Minimum Nutritional Value regulations. RISD is compliant with these regulations and implemented several requirements early to try to best serve our students.

The RISD Child Nutrition department surveys students at various campuses annually to determine preferences and get input on menu items students would like to see offered. We also welcome suggestions from parents through the district Student Health Advisory Council or by contacting Child Nutrition directly via email, in person, or by phone.

Math Homework

These days it seems very hard to help your kids with their math homework. The concepts being taught today (starting in third grade) are not the same ones most parents were taught and can be quite confusing. Is there some sort of tutorial or maybe even a class that could teach parents the math concepts that their kids are being taught?

There are no classes for parents to teach math concepts; however, most of the elementary schools have a Math and Science night to help parents see and understand how their child experiences math and science daily. The purpose of "homework" is for the student to practice independently the concepts that were introduced that day or week at home. If a student cannot apply the concepts to the level that the work can be done independently, then the parent should write a note or send an email to let the teacher know so the teacher can reteach the concept. Math today is not taught the way it was a generation ago, even the vocabulary is different. Today's adults learned math in a more "rote" way with little understanding of the "why" a

particular operation is performed. There is now a much stronger emphasis on problem solving by using the concepts taught in real world problems.

Why do the Magnet School Office and the Transfer Office have different dates for approving admissions and transfers?

The magnet process and transfer process are separate processes that function differently with substantially different timeframes and considerations. Accordingly, the dates associated with each process are based on what works best for each process.

RISD understands that some parents will engage both processes simultaneously with the intention of choosing the preferred outcome. While sympathetic, the district cannot base the deadlines and dates to accommodate such cases at the expense of the other factors that must be considered.

From a practical standpoint, some parents who engage both processes simultaneously do so with opposite priorities in terms of preferred outcomes, so changing dates to accommodate the group that places a higher priority on magnet school admission would come at the expense of the group that places a higher priority on obtaining a transfer.

RISD Budget Situation

Does RISD have a budget shortfall for 2009-2010? If so, how will that be addressed?

RISD's 2008-09 budget is balanced. The current school finance system basically caps school funding using revenue levels from 2005. This means that in order to pay for increases in teacher salaries, fuel, utilities, supplies, insurance, etc. districts must either reduce other expenses, find ways to increase revenue, or adopt deficit budgets and consume reserves.

Projections for the 2009-10 budget include a modest increase in teacher and other staff salaries, etc. and will result in a net deficit of \$1,664,700. Administration recommended the following to the Board on January 12, 2009, to address this projected deficit:

- *Increase net revenue by implementing after school programs at remaining campuses - impact - \$524,157*
- *Reduce Central Administration expenses and/or functional areas that are high compared to peer districts - impact - \$300,000*
- *Eliminate the Junior High pilot reading program in place at three campuses - impact - \$650,000*
- *Close the Planetarium - impact - \$199,532*

Total operating impact - \$1,673,689

The RISD Board has no additional operating taxing authority without a voter referendum. The finance system would allow up to an additional 13 cents of operating tax with a voter referendum. While RISD supports voter approval of tax decisions, this referendum is required to

occur five months after the budget is adopted. This means RISD would establish pay scales/raises, sign contracts and pay salaries for five months before finding out whether the tax referendum passed and the district actually had revenues to cover adopted expenses. This is not an effective or reasonable way to run the district or any business. School districts are the only local governmental entity required to handle tax increases in this manner.

The above recommendation will also go to the district Budget Review Team for consideration before being deliberated further by the Board of Trustees and any action is taken. The Budget Review team is comprised of community members, campus staff, and central staff.

The Board must adopt the 2009-2010 budget before June 30, 2009.

Uniform GPA

How will RISD go about instituting the new uniform GPA policy? Why did RISD choose not to report student GPAs on a 4.0 scale in the past?

When the district receives the instructions for the Uniform GPA from the state:

- District programmers will create (and test) the program for the new calculation within our Student Information System.*
- It is anticipated that the Uniform GPA calculation will begin with the incoming 2009-2010 9th grade class; therefore, the students who entered 9th grade in RISD prior to 2009-2010 will continue to have the current calculation method. 9th graders in 2009-2010 and thereafter will have GPA calculated using the Uniform GPA.*

In the past, RISD used a 100 scale for GPA reporting, for the following reasons:

- The 100 scale GPA is very accurate, reflecting the exact grade earned by the student (including quality points to reflect the increased rigor of PreAP or AP). It is currently able to be calculated to six numbers to the right of the decimal.*
- There has been no standard for a 4.0 scale. Colleges have historically used letter grades and compute GPA by assigning "4.0" to an A, etc. Because of the wide range an "A" or a "B" can entail, the 4.0 GPA scale is much less specific.*
- Although some districts have established a GPA calculation with smaller ranges of grades assigned to a 4.0 or 3.5 or 3.0, etc., RISD has continued to use the more accurate numeric scale.*
- When RISD is asked for an "unweighted 4.0 GPA" by NCAA, colleges, or scholarship application, RISD has a 4.0 computation using the 90-100 = 4.0; 80-90 = 3.0; etc.*
- RISD does not currently have a weighted 4.0 calculation.*
- The Uniform GPA initiative is attempting to standardize the 4.0 scale. There has been a great deal of discussion between the THECB (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board), parents and school districts. In the beginning, the 4.0 calculations had "a range of numeric grades" to equal 4.0. The latest release has changed that so that only a grade of 100 = 4.0. A final scale has not yet been adopted by THECB as of 2.4.09.*

Is there a districtwide policy on the qualifications required of parents to volunteer in our child's classrooms?

Anyone wishing to volunteer in any capacity in an RISD school must first agree to undergo a criminal background check, which is reviewed by the district's Human Resources department before clearance can be granted.

Parent volunteers are used in a wide variety of capacities in RISD schools, depending on their preferences, abilities and needs of the campus.

From October 21, 2008 PAC Meeting

Physical Education Credit for Marching Band

What year did RISD change the requirement that Marching Band can be an equivalent to Physical Education? Can the requirement be changed to include students who are enrolled in Orchestra and participating in all fall marching Band practices, concerts, and performances so they receive the same credit for PE as Band students? If so, can these Orchestra students receive PE credit for previous years of participation in fall Marching Band?

RISD has been offering waivers for at least 30 years, but according to the state, it cannot be used for Orchestra students.

Per the Texas Education Agency, even though a student might participate in Marching Band activities, they must be enrolled in Marching Band to receive the credit.

The TEA waiver is very course-specific and includes Marching Band, Drill Team, Cheerleading, JROTC, Dance, Athletics, Off-Campus PE, and several Career and Technology work based courses. A maximum of two credits may be received.

Language Therapists

The dyslexic training program that utilizes tapes moves too fast for some students in the district.

When will RISD consider hiring language therapists to work with such high risk children? Some of these students need more attention at a slower pace.

The pace of the Dyslexia training program (or Alphaphonics) has proven to be effective for the majority of students with dyslexia. The tapes can be slowed down or replayed for review, but it is not recommended, as other students in the group would have their pace interrupted, and the lessons could not be finished in the two year timeline.

The facilitators do review past lessons at the beginning of each session, and students are making progress. Along with the Alphaphonics program, the student receives an intervention program, (such as SOAR at Bowie), which also reinforces reading skills.

Language therapists are hired to accommodate students who have speech and language difficulties as identified in their IEP's. If a student has not been identified as having a language difficulty to the extent that special education services are needed, the remediation is handled through the use of the intervention and Alphaphonics. The pacing can be addressed at the school level with the facilitator and principal to determine what adjustments can be made without jeopardizing the progress of the other students.

REACH Schedules Interfere with Physical Education

Both primary and intermediate REACH students frequently have REACH scheduled on their P.E. days, leaving them with one 45-minute session of P.E. per week. Since the Take 9 program is not used consistently on all campuses (including intermediate REACH), these students are missing 90 minutes of P.E.

Please remember that REACH is scheduled when considering the individual schedules of 40 elementary schools. Because of this, conflicts are going to occur, despite all parties working toward accommodation when possible.

The two Intermediate REACH sites (Bowie and Skyview) where students are pulled from their home campus for a full day have the following arrangements to accommodate physical education for REACH students:

Skyview: *Requires all students to walk/skip/run the perimeter of the playground area before going to separate physical learning stations & equipment, with both fields and courts supplying opportunities for semi-organized sports such as soccer, football, kickball, and basketball.*

Bowie: *Weather permitting, accommodates 10-15 minutes of recess daily. Also have ten minutes of end of the day activity, which includes a variety of curriculum-related, active games.*

Since Primary REACH has only a two hour block of time, Bowie does not regularly include P.E. activities for those students.

REACH works with schools and encourages them to be creative in their scheduling so that all students get the necessary physical education. Some campuses allow REACH students to go to P.E. with another homeroom on a non-REACH day.

Refund Procedure for Cafeteria Account Balance for Graduates

If RISD requires students to use accounts instead of cash for lunch, what is the procedure to refund graduated students their balances at year-end? Is it possible for parents to check on the student's balance? If a refund is not issued, what happens to the unused balance? Is it possible to donate this money to the school?

Parents should contact the Child Nutrition office to request a refund of any balance. Parents that use PAYPAMS to add funds to their student account(s) can access the balance at any time through the PAYPAMS website. Parents that deposit funds into their students account by check

through the school cafeteria Manager can contact the Child Nutrition office for current account balance. Any remaining balances are first used to offset accounts with a negative balance if the campus has provided a child lunch during a period of insufficient/no account balance. Child Nutrition is not permitted to donate unused funds to a campus, but parents are welcome to request refunds and then donate the funds to the campus of their choice.

Increased Graduation Requirements

Since graduation requirements have increased, is the district considering allowing for more credits to be earned by correspondence, offering more summer school choices, or going to an 8-period day?

The current schedule does not allow some students who are involved in extracurricular activities to take all their required courses during the regular school day or allow any time to take courses to determine college/career interest.

The state's new "4X4" graduation requirements do require additional math and science classes beginning with this year's sophomore class (the Class of 2011)

RISD has been preparing for this for two years, and has altered course offerings and schedules to be more accommodating to students in this situation. In addition, the district is examining the possibility of offering more summer courses starting in 2009 (next summer) outside TAKS-tested courses.

Our junior highs offer Health, Communications Applications, Spanish, French & Algebra I for credit as 8th graders, and RISD is also presently working with Richland College to expand our Dual Credit offerings

Our high schools do offer some optional 0 and 8th period classes, primarily for this reason, but we're examining additional course offerings during those times.

Approved correspondence courses are an option, for a maximum of two courses.

And while a mandatory eight period day does offer attractive options, it would simply be cost-prohibitive districtwide under the current environment of school funding.

RISD Instructional Philosophy

What is RISD's philosophy regarding mastery of concept vs. peeling back the layers concept?

RISD requires students to master concepts. The curriculum is designed to allow students to build upon their knowledge and skills. Curriculum concepts spiral through the grade levels and content areas, allowing students to practice skills while acquiring new ones.

It seems difficult at times to get a 504 plan for a child. What is the district doing to train teachers on this process and make the information more easily available for the parents? The process now is complicated and many parents don't know where to start.

The eligibility determination for 504 is a condition that might represent a substantial limitation to a major life activity for a student caused by a physical or mental impairment including attention problems and dyslexia.

The Campus Support and Intervention (CSI) committee works with the information provided to determine options that could be implemented in the least restrictive environment. If a parent is having difficulty getting a 504 plan, start by talking to the principal, counselor, or teacher.

Training on the Response to Intervention process and the Campus Support and Intervention team is ongoing each year. There are resources available for a parent or teacher to discuss any academic issues. A good place to start the process is at the child's home campus with the teacher or counselor.

Traffic Problem Evaluation and Crossing Guard Needs

Is there a person in RISD who evaluates traffic problems and crossing guard needs at a school?

Determinations as to whether a crossing guard can be added are made by the municipality in which the school is located (Dallas, Garland, or Richardson depending on location). Those positions are city employees through the respective police departments, so the municipality is the place to start.

Issues regarding traffic flow on school property are most appropriately directed to the building principal. Traffic flow off of school property is the responsibility of the municipality.

New Installation Requirements for LED signs (marquees)

Is there a document regarding installation procedures for new LED signs that PTAs/Booster Clubs can easily follow in order to get approval for this type of project?

In order for our PTA to install a new LED sign, we were given several requirements necessary for us to complete before the sign was approved and installed. New signs will continue to be installed and there should be a document that defines all installation requirements.

There is a document detailing the process to be used for gifts and any project involving district property. Any project of this nature should first be communicated to the building principal so they can review and determine whether the proposed project meets the needs of the school. The principal can access the gift procedures through the district intranet and will be responsible for following the project through the review/approval process. There is no specific procedure for the installation of new LED signs, as each project is unique and considered individually.

Bus Students –Tutor With Teacher

How do the students that ride the bus to and from school everyday ever have a chance to meet the teacher before or after school for tutoring?

This question could apply to all grade levels, but becomes more prominent when a junior high or high school student is involved in extra curricular activities such as athletics.

Tutoring opportunities exist at different times to accommodate as many students as possible.

All junior high campuses have a late bus which runs Monday through Thursday to facilitate tutorial needs. LHHS and LHFC share a late bus. Other high schools have the ability to request a later run if they determine a need exists.

All teachers are required to have 90 minutes of tutoring time available, some before and after school. At secondary schools, students typically have opportunities during the school day for tutoring, such pull outs, lunch, and/or advisory periods.

In addition, all secondary schools have scheduled Saturday tutorials for many subjects.

New RISD Vision Statement

The new RISD Vision Statement now reads "...inclusive learning community." What was the rationale for adding the word "inclusive" and what is the meaning of the term "inclusive"? Does inclusive include those students with more significant disabilities? What specific changes are being made in the district in order to facilitate a more inclusive learning community (at the district and individual campus level)?

The Board of Trustees recently updated the RISD Goals. Goal # 4 now reads "We will ensure a safe and inclusive environment." The Board added the word "inclusive" to indicate that the district expects that all students and families feel valued, welcomed and comfortable in our facilities.