

Q&A from the RISD Parent Advisory Committee – February 22, 2011

Bus Policies and Practices

Is there a policy on the idling of buses? Is it necessary for buses to idle while classes are on field trips or waiting outside a school or in a neighborhood before pickup? Are bus drivers permitted to leave the bus while students are at their destination so idling can be avoided?

RISD's contracted bus provider is Dallas County Schools, which does have an anti-idling policy in place for drivers:

Dallas County Schools Anti-Idling Policy

Anti-idling procedures have been adopted by DCS in cooperation with Federal Clean Air Act. It is environmentally important that restrictions on the length of time a DCS vehicle is allowed to idle be implemented and monitored.

1. No vehicle shall idle for more than five minutes during their normal operating hours.
2. Buses are not to be started and left unattended prior to departure, nor are they to run beyond the time necessary to complete the pre-trip or post-trip inspections.
3. A bus may not idle while waiting for fueling or cleaning.
4. Upon arrival at the campus or other destination, bus engines shall be turned off until after students are loaded and the bus is departing the area, or as soon as students are unloaded. This shall include routes, field trips, shuttles or any activity provided by Dallas County Schools.

The preceding procedure will apply to all DCS vehicles and may be subject to the following:

- Traffic Conditions
- Vehicle is being serviced (repaired)
- To defrost a windshield (maximum 30 minute idle time)
- Heating bus during sub-freezing weather (maximum 30 minute idle time) upon approval of Service Center Supervisor/Dispatcher.

Is there a policy for drivers talking on a phone or texting while driving the bus?

It is against the law to use a cell phone when driving a school bus with students. If this is observed, please contact Dallas County Schools at 214-944-4511 or the RISD Transportation Department at 469-593-0090. Please try to obtain the bus number and time of day so the issue can be directly addressed to the driver in question.

How are bus drivers supervised? Is there ever random supervision?

There are bus driver supervisors from Dallas County Schools that do random checks of routes, pick-up/drop-off locations, etc. However, there are over 110 routes in RISD and a limited number of supervisors. We encourage parents and residents to report issues of lengthy idling or driver cell phone usage while driving to Dallas County Schools at 214-944-4511 or RISD Transportation at 469-593-0090. Please try to obtain the bus number and note the time of day.

No idling zones

Would the district consider designating the "handheld device zones/school zones" as a "no idling" zone as well?

The no handheld device zone is a state law, which RISD would be unable to add to amend. Parent vehicle idling during pickup times is an issue that can largely be addressed through awareness and education at the school level.

Internet Safety/Social Media

Has the district considered an educational program for students regarding Internet Safety and Social Networking (Facebook) Safeguards?

RISD's curriculum includes Technology Application TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge & Skills) covered in K-8 as technology is introduced to, and used by students. Those TEKS include global Internet safety information. The TEKS are being revised by the state for 2011-12, and are expected to specifically include social networking and expanded Internet safety information.

RISD is also creating an online staff development course covering Internet usage and safety for teachers and staff. The course will be mandatory for all teachers and administrators and should be available in the Spring 2011 Semester.

Bullying Programs

What programs do we have in RISD to address bullying before it happens? Is RISD taking any measures to address it both at the student level as well as the teacher level to help them identify and prevent potential instances of bullying? How are these programs being implemented at the elementary and middle school levels?

RISD has numerous programs and efforts aimed to prevent bullying behavior, including:

- All campuses submit an anti-bullying action plan annually. This has been in place since 2005. We are one of only a handful of school districts in the state that requires an annual action plan.

- All counselors and campus administrators have been through bullying, cyberbullying and sexting training – 2006, 2010, 2011.
- Bullying presentations have been made to staff members during staff meetings and parents during PTA meetings.
- All campuses have anti-bullying curriculum.
- All students have received information on bullying and how to report bullying on the campus. This has been done via the counselors, student driven lesson, announcements, video announcements, student code of conduct, videos, or classroom guidance lessons.
- Several of the high schools have student driven anti-bullying initiatives led by the Peer Helpers, Peer Mediators/and or Student Council
- Campus administrators now have a way to electronically report bullying in the discipline management tracking system – Jan. 2011.
- The “Rtime” – Relationships to Improve Education (anti-bullying) program is being expanded to three elementary schools per year until all elementary campuses have been trained. There are currently 12 elementary campuses with the program. However all elementary campuses have anti-bullying curriculum that is used in classroom guidance lessons.
- Rtime has had such success that approx. 200 elementary schools in the Dallas area have been trained.
- The “Negotiate” program (the junior high version of Rtime) has been piloted in two junior highs with plans to add two schools per year until all junior highs are using the program.
- The RISD has an anti-bullying policy in the Board Policy manual and in the Student Code of Conduct.

Electronic (Cyber) Bullying

What is RISD’s policy regarding electronic bullying (e.g., harassing texts or improper posts on social media websites)?

The two documents that primarily govern this area are the RISD Student Code of Conduct, which can be found at:

http://www.risd.org/Group/Parents/Student_Services/StudentServices_Docs/2010-11%20ENG%20Guidebook.pdf, and the Acceptable Use Guidelines for Technology, which can be found at:

http://www.risd.org/group/departments/instructional_technology/InstructionalTechnology_Docs/AUP.pdf.

The relevant pages of the Code of Conduct are 33, 46 and 93.

The standard for electronic bullying to be punishable under the Code of Conduct involves the use of any district resources or networks for bullying activity, engaging in the electronic bullying activity while at school or a school-sponsored activity, or engaging in the bullying activity outside of school if the conduct causes substantial disruption to the educational environment.

All RISD principals and counselors have been through cyber bullying training in 2006, 2010 and 2011.

Transfer Policy

How can it be so easy to transfer from one school to another when there is no obvious performance issue with the home attendance area school? Does RISD put transfer requests on public record? What is the rationale for granting transfers? What is being done institutionally at these schools to address the reasons for the transfers?

RISD follows a neighborhood school concept in which attendance is determined by the geographic area in which a student resides. An intradistrict transfer process and policy exist for parents who desire their children attend a school outside of their home attendance area. The policy was implemented in response to parent requests for attendance options. Not all transfer requests are approved.

The process and rationale for consideration of transfers is outlined in the policy, which is available in the Student/Parent Guidebook & Student Code of Conduct, found at:

http://www.risd.org/Group/Parents/Student_Services/StudentServices_Docs/2010-11%20ENG%20Guidebook.pdf. The relevant section is Appendix H, on page 91.

Often the reasons parents give for wanting to transfer to another school do not pertain to the performance of the attendance area school in which the student resides.

Specific parent intradistrict transfer request forms typically contain private information which is not considered public.

Building administrators are engaged and concerned when a parent asks for a transfer, particularly when the student is a kindergartner and hasn't tried their home school. All transfer requests have to be signed by the principals of both schools involved, so the administrator is aware of who the family is and why they want to transfer. In most cases, the administrator will call and talk to the family about the request.

Crowded Apartments

How and when will the Board and administration respond to the situation of less homeowner representation among students at Northwood Hills Elementary? Who is responsible for ensuring the apartments are not over-crowded, leading to this outcome?

RISD recently had an updated demographic study performed by Templeton Demographics, and the information related to multi-family dwellings in the district was that most were at or above the 94% occupancy mark, which is considered at capacity in that industry.

RISD uses the information, along with current enrollment numbers, to predict the number of students within each attendance area that may show up to enroll each year. This allows the district to initially plan for staff and classroom space to accommodate students.

School districts do not have any legal ability or jurisdiction to impact where families choose to reside or the occupancy rate of apartments. Individual schools attempt to create a welcoming environment for all parents to facilitate and encourage the parent involvement that is critical to a child's academic success.

Recess

Why do our students not get a second recess during the long day to get their energy out, play and run every day?

Elementary students are in school from 8:00am to 3:00pm, which is seven hours. If you take out the lunch period, there are six hours in which a student must be taught math, language arts, science, social studies, and music, physical education & art. If each of these classes lasted an hour, that's six hours of instruction.

The State Board of Education recognizes the time factor for teachers trying to fit in the entire curriculum required to be taught, and instituted a minimum requirement of 135 minutes of physical activity a week so students could have time to get up and move in some manner.

Some schools have morning exercises during announcements, walk around the playground or track after lunch, free play after lunch is finished, and various other types of activities which allow students freedom of movement and a way to expend energy. The educational demands for our students have increased to a level that there is hardly time to do all we need to do for students to have a well-rounded education.

Breakfast Activities

What is the district policy on school-wide breakfast activities, and their time allowance? Is there a hard-and-fast rule about what time we can plan such activities? Is there a rule about interfering with cafeteria breakfast business?

According to the Texas Public School Nutrition Policy:

Elementary schools: competitive foods are not allowed to be provided to students any time anywhere on school premises until after the end of the last scheduled class. All food, beverages and snack items must comply with the nutrition standards and portion size restrictions in this policy.

The definition of competitive foods: foods and beverages sold or made available to students that compete with the school's operation of the National School Lunch Program, and the School Breakfast Program and/or After School Snack Program.

The definition of the school day: The school day begins with the start of the first breakfast period and continues until the end of the last instruction period of the day (last bell).

In RISD, breakfast is served at 7:30am in most elementary schools.

Student Searches

What is the policy of students being searched by campus police officers? Who needs to be present? Should an entire class be searched by the campus police officer? What would warrant that?

In RISD, police officers on a campus are called resource officers, and are members of either the Dallas or Richardson Police Departments. When students are searched by resource officers, the protocol set by the appropriate police department is followed. While RISD administrators may be present, once the police officer has determined that a search is necessary, the officer takes control of the situation and utilizes their professional discretion. An entire class may be searched if the officer determines that it is necessary to safeguard students or staff. A possible instance would be an officer receiving credible information that a classroom may be in some form of danger.

Test Feedback

Why don't some teachers hand back tests so that kids can correct and learn from their mistakes?

Although many teachers do hand back tests to allow students to correct and learn from their mistakes, others do not. This is left up to a teacher's professional discretion. Tests are designed to determine whether students have learned the material taught. Teachers analyze results to determine whether is necessary to re-teach any content. Even if the tests are not returned to students, teachers are responsible for making sure students are ready to move forward in the curriculum.

Pre-AP vs non Pre-AP Classes

Why is there such an extreme difference between pre-AP and regular classes? Is there any possibility of incorporating an advanced level of classes that does not require a different book or bonus points or honors credits, but is taught at a more advanced level so students who want to be challenged more have the opportunity to be taught at a more advanced level?

PreAP classes are designed to provide challenging content and a challenging work schedule. PreAP teachers use specific curriculum developed by the College Board, the company that

produces the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). It is RISD's intent that regular education classes should also be challenging for all students, and teachers are trained in strategies to differentiate instruction so students of various abilities will find the curriculum challenging. Parents who find that their student is not being challenged in class should contact the teacher and the building principal.

Junior High Athletics Results

Would it be possible to post online the results and standings of RISD junior high teams?

Yes, we plan to pilot this in late March 2011 with our spring sports of track & soccer. Results and standings are typically generated by a third party, so as they are sent to Communications, we'll be updating the district's Athletics page at www.risd.org/athletics.

Enrollment Increases

What are RISD's plans for next year in placing this year's extra 1000+ unanticipated students?

Students who are overflowed from their home attendance area school are returned to their home attendance area school for enrollment the following year. If they wish to remain at their overflow school, they have the option of applying for an intradistrict transfer. The districtwide day for elementary enrollment to begin is March 28, 2011, and enrollment cards go home with all students that day. As with every year, parents are encouraged to return enrollment information in a prompt manner for their child to have a spot in their home school.

Desegregation Order & Attendance Boundaries

Is there an update to the April, 2010, question regarding redistricting and removing the federal desegregation order?

The district began the process in 2009 to dismiss the 40 year old court order, and that process is still underway. We do not have a specific timeframe for when the process may be complete.

Distance/Online Learning

When will RISD have distance learning?

RISD began offering online courses as a pilot during the summer last year, and details are being finalized to offer online courses again this summer. When details are available, they will be posted on the Summer School page at www.risd.org/Group/Schools/SummerProgram.html.