

## **PAC Questions & Answers – October 18, 2011**

### **Recycling Bin Fires**

*Recycling bins have been burned at Northwood Hills Elementary, Westwood Jr. High and West Jr. High over the past month. Has RISD received threats of any kind that could potentially have anything to do with these dumpster fires? Also, have schools in the district been notified about the bin fires?*

RISD has received no threats regarding burned paper recycling bins or dumpsters. All RISD schools have been notified of the burned recycling bins. District security staff has also notified police and fire departments from both Richardson and Dallas. None of the fires have been set during daytime hours or while students or staff have been present in a building. Bins and dumpsters are already placed away from buildings to mitigate the chances of potential fires presenting a danger to the buildings.

### **School Breakfast Policy**

*Why are students required to take breakfast items from the cafeteria that they do not want? Isn't it wasteful if the food goes straight into the trash can?*

For a breakfast to qualify under the federal free/reduced meal program, each participating student is required to take three out of the four components offered. The four components include a bread, a protein, a fruit and a milk. This is a federal requirement that the district has no control over. We do share information and concerns regarding requirements with program observers/auditors annually, and have shared this concern in the past.

### **Budget Cuts and Fee Increases**

*RISD is reported to be financially stable, yet parents are seeing increased fees for many activities. One example is a 250% increase in the price for the Berkner play for first and second graders. Where can we find out the specific budget cuts (by percentage) for each department? On the budget spreadsheet on the RISD website, it looks like Science was impacted more than Physical Education, but it's hard to tell without understanding what the original budget numbers were. The ramifications of budget cuts, such as increased fees and requests to augment teacher supplies, should have been communicated to all parents before school started.*

While RISD is financially stable, all school districts in the state were impacted by the Legislature's decision to reduce public education funding by \$4 billion over the current biennium. This resulted in \$14.3 million loss of funding for RISD in 2011-12 and a loss of \$21.7 million in 2012-13. RISD staff and Board worked throughout 2010-11 to proactively address this anticipated loss of funds. We took input from staff as to reductions to consider, quantified reduction options, surveyed our staff and community as to reductions they felt were most appropriate to consider, and discussed reductions for months in public meetings. All information was posted on our website and in multiple news articles before finalizing reductions for 2011-12 and 2012-13. This resulted in about \$5.8 million in reductions and limited staff reductions. The impact to RISD was far less severe than what most of our neighboring districts experienced, due to the conservative approach the district has used for several years.

The only reduction that impacted student fees was a reduction in fine arts involving transportation for voluntary elementary field trips and resulted in a fee increase of \$3 per student for those that elect to

participate in order to cover the cost of the bus. All budget reductions were communicated to all principals, and information was provided through the RISD Communications office and multiple news articles to all in our community.

As to reductions, RISD did not target an across the board percentage reduction from all departments, but used the staff input and survey results as a guide to target reductions that involved the least impact on instruction. While an across the board percent reduction is certainly easier to implement, we do not feel it is the most meaningful way to approach budget reductions. Details of budget reductions are posted on the district website, and additional information is available through the Communications Department.

### **Recess**

*Why are elementary school students given a single 15-minute recess? Why do our students not get a second recess during the long day to get their energy out, play and run every day?*

Students are able to experience various forms of activity throughout the day, which is why the state authorized the Texas School Health Advisory Committee to meet and discuss issues of student movement and obesity. Elementary students are in school from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., 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, music, physical education and art. If each of these classes lasted an hour, that is 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.

### **Lunchroom Policies**

*Who sets the lunchroom policies for a school?*

Each school sets the policies for the lunchroom, but those do not vary much from school to school. The ultimate goal is for the students to be able to eat their lunch and have some time to visit with their peers.

### **Magnet Elementary Schools**

*Does RISD plan to turn Northlake Elementary into a magnet school? Are there concerns about the number of children who live in apartments who attend the school?*

The board of trustees has approved three magnets for our district at the elementary level, and there are no plans to add additional elementary magnets at this time. The students who attend Northlake as a home campus live within the attendance boundaries of the school, which serves both houses and apartment complexes.

Northlake continues to experience success under the state's accountability system and through other indicators of student achievement. It remains an excellent option for neighborhood children to receive a great education.

### **Intradistrict Transfers**

*Do transfers from schools that serve more low-income students to those with higher income populations affect schools' Title I status? Why does the district allow so many transfers, when many of the schools the families choose to transfer out of are performing just as well or better?*

Title I designation is determined by the Census and where students and families live, not by where students are enrolled in school. Allowing students to transfer in or out of schools does not affect Title I status. RISD encourages the neighborhood school concept, with students attending the school in their own neighborhood. However, we also feel it's important that parents are provided some choice, through both magnet schools and the transfer process. Fortunately, all RISD elementary schools are high-performing. Families seeking transfers do not do so based on school performance. There are many reasons why families seek transfers.

### **Elementary School Class Size Waivers**

*It seems that more classes are being filled over state-imposed limits via waivers. What is the long term answer to this? Is RISD considering using portables?*

The state requires that no more than 22 students be assigned to Kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade classes. There is no state-mandated cap at any other grade levels, but RISD observes a 28 student cap in grades 5 and 6.

RISD has experienced a large influx of elementary students last year (2010-11). While we did not reduce teaching allocations due to budget constraints like many districts did this year, we did not add any new allocations. More new students arrived for the 2011-2012 school year, resulting in the need for RISD to seek waivers to the 22:1 cap in grades K-4. The district determined that classes for which waivers were sought would not exceed 23:1 unless it was absolutely necessary, which it was in one classroom (to 24 students).

Dr. Waggoner is leading a group to work on a solution to having more than 22 students in K – 4 classrooms in RISD. The group will evaluate district demographic data, available classroom space, and possibilities for additional classrooms and teachers. While we may not be able to completely resolve the issue for the 2012-2013 school year, it is our goal to implement strategies to bring K-4 classrooms into compliance with the 22:1 cap.

The district does not plan to use portable buildings next year.

### **Global Report Card Report**

*A recent Dallas Morning News story compared Dallas-area suburban schools to students in 25 industrialized countries. In math, RISD would outperform 50% of students in these foreign countries, and*

*in reading RISD would outperform only 46% of students. Several school districts including Allen, Carroll, Highland Park and Plano performed better than RISD. What is RISD's opinion of the report?*

The article in the *DMN* dated 9/27/11 was published one day before the Global Report Card data was released. According to the report from the Global Report Card, this is the George W. Bush Institute's first attempt at a global uniform measure. Since there is no single test given to every student across every industrialized country, rankings were made using three tests designed for very different purposes. The three tests are as follows:

- Myriad state assessments used for No Child Left Behind accountability annually at grades 3 through 8 and at grade 10. For Texas students, the TAKS test is used for the comparison data.
- At the national level, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (or NAEP) is given to a representative sample of 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in math and reading in every state in odd years. Sample RISD students do participate in the NAEP assessment, but we do not receive the student results.
- At the international level, the Programme of International Student Assessment (or PISA) is given in math and reading to a sample of 15-year-olds from approximately 25 different countries.

A district's score is equal to the sum of the test scores from district, state and national tests based on estimates for the assessment. The Bush Institute does not claim that the Global Report Card is a perfect reflection of school district student achievement relative to international norms, because the state, national and international tests are different tests, in different grades, and sometimes in different years. The report states that the data is an "estimate" of relative student performance.

It should be noted that the Global Report Card was calculated using 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 state accountability data. Since that time, RISD passing rates have improved in math from 76% to a current score of 92%, and in reading from 84% to a current score of 94%. Hopefully, the improvement will be reflected as the Global Report Card is reported in subsequent years.

### **Eagle/Mustang Stadium Restrooms**

*Can the district please clean up and fix the women's rooms in Eagle/Mustang Stadium? The home side toilets leak and have water pooled around the bases. On the visitor side, none of the stall doors latch, and there was water on the floor and a coiled up hose in front of the sinks at the Pearce-Richardson game. The paper towel dispensers were empty after halftime.*

As soon as staff received these comments, we completed work orders to affect immediate repairs at the Eagle/Mustang restrooms. Staff will include all stadium restrooms as part of the stadium checks prior to each game and have provided additional instruction about equipment storage, paper goods stocking, etc., to custodial staff assigned to the stadiums during games. The same processes are also being implemented at Wildcat/Ram Stadium.

The visitor side restrooms at Eagle/Mustang Stadium are slated for renovation in the summer of 2012 as part of the approved 2011 bond program.

### **Thursday Night Football Games**

*Why are varsity football games scheduled for Thursday nights? Considering the effects on performance on tests and quizzes, as well as the ability to complete homework assignments, is there not a better alternative? This affects a large number of students, including cheerleaders, drill team, football players and band members.*

When scheduling games between RISD schools, we pair our teams by stadiums and do everything we can to have the teams that share a stadium in RISD be opposite of each other so games can be played on Fridays. When we play games on the road, however, we are at the mercy of the school or district that we are playing. For example, Garland ISD has seven teams but only two stadiums. Dallas ISD has 23 high schools participating in football (3A through 5A) and do not have enough stadiums to play all of their games on Friday nights. McKinney ISD has three high schools but only one stadium. We recognize the strain on the players and their families that playing Thursday or Saturday games can present. So RISD tries to avoid Thursday and Saturday games as often as possible.

This year, six out of 40 games played are scheduled for Thursdays. While this is just 15 percent of the games in the district, this is more than the three to five games that usually fall on a Thursday.

Of those six, Berkner's Aug. 26 game at South Garland and Lake Highlands' Sept. 8 game at Garland were because of GISD scheduling. Pearce's Sept. 29 game at McKinney North was because of MISD scheduling. Richardson's Oct. 6 game at Samuell was because of DISD scheduling. The Sept. 1 home Berkner game against North Crowley was because RISD had to host three home games that weekend. There was a problem trying to keep the schedule at five home and five away games for each school and balancing preseason schedules for other teams, North Crowley and Mesquite Horn. The Oct. 6 home Pearce game against Wylie East was moved to Thursday because of a Jewish holiday.

In summary, RISD avoids Thursday games when possible.

### **School Lunch Payment**

*Why if a child forgets to bring lunch money he or she is made to eat a cheese sandwich instead of a hot lunch with a side of fruit or vegetables? If a student makes it all the way to the cash register before being told they don't have enough for lunch, their meal is taken, which seems wasteful. Children are given a slip of paper when they are low on money, but it usually never makes it home to remind the parents.*

Last year, the district offered students who forgot to bring lunch money a hot entrée and a drink. (Prior to last year, RISD had offered cheese sandwiches and a drink.) This was abused, and what we found is that if the students got the entrée without having any money then they had little incentive to bring lunch money – RISD provided more than 48,000 free entrées to students without lunch money last year. Because of this, cheese sandwiches are again being provided, and there has already been a significant reduction in free lunches provided compared to same time last year.

Regarding payment, two points to consider are that students eligible for free/reduced cost meals are able to complete the application prior to the start of school (or throughout the school year) and start receiving meals immediately. Parents of students that are not eligible for the free/reduced price meal program are able to set up online accounts using PayPams and deposit funds into their child's account electronically and receive email notices when the account is low so their child does not miss a meal.

Parents can always choose to send their students to school with a lunch daily if these other options are not viable for them.

### **RISD's Number of School Age Homes**

*How many homes have school age children in RISD?*

RISD periodically commissions a demographic study to assist with planning. The most recent demographic study was completed in 2010, and utilized the most recent census information. That study indicated that 88,802 total households exist within RISD's boundaries. Of those, 26,821 households (30 percent) have at least one child under the age of 18.