

**Mesquite Education Association
FR Questions - February 2018**

- 1. With the notification of the need to buy sodas from the Dr. Pepper Company, our costs are going way up. While I understand the need to purchase from Dr. Pepper (contract, machines, etc), why must the cost be so different? For example, \$2.50 at Kroger vs. \$7.50 from DP Company with a smaller bottle? For one event that I will be hosting, my cost for water/sodas will go up almost \$400.**

This was the bid that was accepted in April of 2010. It is a 10-year contract that ends in 2020. Those businesses have their own contracts and agreements.

- 2. Why do MISD employees have to reapply for a transfer for their child every year no matter what grade, but a non-district parent does not once their child gets to high school?**

All transfers must be renewed annually, per law. Local Board policy FDA governs out-of-district transfers, and FDB governs in-district transfers. School district employees are afforded the benefit of early transfer submittal (Jan. 15 through Feb. 15), while the parent transfer application timeline is between March 15 and May 15.

- 3. Can the district develop a bell schedule for the high schools when we have 2-hour delays? Missing all of one class really messes both students and teachers up regarding schedules. That places us an entire class behind and can be very difficult to take something out of a lesson so we are not constantly behind.**

Since the District instituted its first delayed start in January 18, secondary campuses have developed a delayed-start bell schedule.

- 4. Can we put something in the code of conduct about discipline for students who video fights? Often they are inciting and exploiting the fight. On my campus as far as I've seen, those students do not face any consequences for fostering an environment where fighting is seen as a joke and as entertainment. To me, these students are often just as in the wrong as the students who are actually involved in the fighting.**

The Student Code of Conduct comes directly from Texas Education Code Ch. 37. This Code governs law and order in Texas public schools and outlines specifically what schools can and cannot do in response to various infractions. Fighting/mutual combat is considered a general conduct code violation and is punishable by a continuum of consequences, ranging from a conference to a discretionary discipline alternative education placement, depending on the mitigating factors. Principals also have the discretion to give consequences to onlookers, inciters, and videographers.

- 5. Can the district please provide some insight as to its views on student violence and fighting? At the high schools the violence and fighting gets worse and worse each year. I can say that I often do not feel safe here at work. I do not feel like my administration or this district do enough to "punish" students who fight. I also think we should hold the students who instigate the fight (who are behind the student who initiates it egging them on) accountable to some form of repercussion as well. Additionally, we do nothing to the students who stand around and video tape. Violence is not some spectator sport that should be happening on our campuses as a source of entertainment. Yet we do nothing. We must remember our inaction sends just as strong of a message as any action we could take.**

The District is vehemently opposed to fighting and violence of any kind. The utmost importance is placed on student and staff safety. In light of the fact that fights were up .03% from the fall of 2016

to the fall of 2017, the District has implemented a Behavior Framework that addresses root causes of misbehavior and includes prevention, intervention, restoration, and repercussions.

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Does the district have any plans to make fighting a more serious offense or is it even on your radar of things that are a serious issue among your teachers? I would like to suggest that we create and enact some district policies to protect our teachers and students. Perhaps a rule that if a student starts a second fight on campus they be expelled or sent to challenge for the rest of the year? I understand that sometimes students defend themselves and we have to take all the details into account, but we also know who many of the aggressors and frequent offenders are, yet we leave them here to potentially harm others, and I find this unacceptable and dangerous. I would like to know my district views the violence and fighting as a concern and values the safety of everyone on its campuses, but I honestly do not believe that is true.

Texas Education Code Ch. 37, the law that governs discipline in Texas public schools, gives very specific guidelines for what consequences schools are allowed to issue for various conduct code infractions, including fighting/mutual combat. Expulsion is reserved for firearms violations, sexual assaults, and other felony crimes. In addition, state law requires that administrators take into account mitigating factors, regardless of whether the infraction is a discretionary or mandatory DAEP or JJAEP placement: 1) self-defense; 2) intent or lack of intent; 3) disciplinary history; and 4) disability.

6. Why are Academic UIL events not supported in our middle schools?

To our knowledge, there has never been a request from a MS campus to participate in Academic UIL. It would require sponsors and students willing to give the time and energy to prepare for the competition. Like any other program, this would have to be budgeted. If you are interested in starting this at your campus, please talk with your building principal. Then the coordinator of Advanced Academics would help coordinate next steps.

7. I like the idea of an innovative classroom. I think most teachers are trying new things and that's wonderful! I'm also very appreciative of the fact that teachers aren't expected to completely drop everything they're currently doing and can slowly incorporate new innovative things into their teaching and classroom. Classroom teachers are slowly changing to be more innovative. My only problem is I don't feel like the schools and the district are incorporating innovation. MISD schools are being run the exact same way they were run when I was a student here. How can we be more innovative as a district? Could we rethink the way a school looks and/or operates? Can we rethink our unnecessary emphasis on tests and test scores? Could we have a teacher run school? There has to be ways that we can change as a district. I currently feel like I'm trying to change to be more innovative along with my colleagues but I'm working in an outdated school system that hasn't changed in 35+ years.

Thank you for your question and we share your frustration. We applaud educators who strive - those who challenge themselves and their campus leaders to transform teaching and learning processes. True change takes time. More importantly, true change comes from culture shift. Dr. Vroonland has worked with district-wide leaders to build their capacity and empower them to make decisions that are best for their campus needs. He has encouraged us all to move from a Compliance-Based culture to an Ownership

Culture. Dr. Vroonland's article entitled, [*Moving from Compliance-Based Systems to an Ownership Culture*](#) is a good read for all educators. Our district has moved forward on several fronts to revolutionize the teaching/learning process. Initiatives such as our Early Literacy/Read, Play Talk efforts to have all students reading on grade level, ETIP – Excellence in Teaching Incentive Program, our efforts to transform student and campus learning spaces, and our new district Accreditation Process that is about to be introduced are all designed to mirror a future-focus for our district. Unnecessary emphasis on testing of students for state accountability instead of using quick, formative assessments to differentiate instruction “on the fly” is one last vestige of an outdated education system. We understand your frustration with its continuation; but we are working on that front at the state level alongside many other like-minded districts. We encourage you to take your innovative ideas to your campus leaders. They are a positive force in enabling innovation on your campuses. Please remember that innovation looks different on every campus because each campus has different challenges, circumstances, and ideas. Innovation is iterative. It keeps getting better with every try at tackling issues. And, innovation is contagious through sharing between colleagues, campuses, and districts.

8. Why are fourth grade teachers required to go on a fourteen-hour field trip to Austin without regard for personal schedules or health conditions and without compensation? Shouldn't this have been an issue that campuses decided on with the input of teachers?

The Austin field trip for fourth graders was initiated by Dr. Vroonland and board members who wanted our students to have a better understanding of state government and the 4th grade TEKS. The trips have been a huge success. Coordinating and planning enough trips to accomplish all 33 campuses going to the capital has been no small task. So many departments have contributed to the success of the trip, food service, transportation, our Social Studies instructional team, administrators, and especially teachers. Any conflicts or health conditions need to be handled at the campus level. The employee handbook (p. 21) addresses your questions. “Professional employees and academic administrators are exempt from overtime pay” and “the teacher may be required to stay longer if needed to complete the day’s work, confer with parents, to attend faculty meetings, or to perform other school duties.” This experience for our students falls into this category.

9. Where can I find how many sick and/or personal days I have left? I looked on the Employee Self Service site and can't find any information regarding number of sick/personal days.

Leave balances are included on every pay stub or direct deposit email advice/paper copy. This information no longer appears on the Munis Self-Service in that it may not reflect real time/recent absences and therefore, not up-to-date.

10. Is it within contractual requirements for non-paraprofessional staff to work outside of contract hours in terms of morning duty?

Although principals make every effort to be cognizant of everyone's time, a rotating duty such as this one that requires only one week each semester may be assigned to a contract/exempt employee to ensure efficient operation of the school. This falls under the provision of additional time to perform other school duties.

11. I have been at another campus that would split the substitute pay when a job is unfilled and the students are split with the rest of the grade level. My current campus does not do that. Is it a campus or district decision to split the sub pay?

Since every situation is different with a number of factors that need to be considered, it currently is a campus decision as to whether or not to split the sub pay.

12. Is there a process for removing non-active substitute teachers from AESOP? I try to make contact with subs before choosing them or just letting them sign up on their own. When I do call, I get a lot of "I don't sub anymore."

This is a very fluid situation in that many substitutes come and go and some want to remain on the list even though their work is very limited due to other commitments. There is a process in place, but quite often the substitute has not notified the Personnel Office of the request to be removed. They are taken off once a request or resignation is received. In addition, at a designated time every year we remove anyone who has not received a check for the year.

13. I know the district is short on substitute teachers, but I have had a few instances of subs not taking roll or handing out the assignments even though instructions were clearly written out and rosters and seating charts were on the teacher's desk? Does the district do anything about removing subs that are ineffective?

There is a substitute form that can be submitted whenever a person does not meet the expectations. These are forwarded to the Personnel Office and a conference is held with the individual and they are generally given the opportunity to make the necessary corrections. If the shortcomings continue and other reports received, the substitute can be restricted from the campus or removed from the list completely.

14. If an employee's normal work hours are 6am-2:30pm and their lunch break is 12-12:30, why is an employee docked a 30-minute lunch if they punch out at 12:00 to leave for a Dr.'s appt. and such? Shouldn't the employee receive 6 hours of time instead of the 5.5 hours the time clock puts in?

It is not the intent to charge hourly employees for their lunch time in such instances. In the GHG system, the person in charge of the time at the particular facility can go back in and add .5 for the day.

15. When laptops are re-imaged, why aren't they returned to us with important programs such as Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, etc. loaded on them? This software is included prior to the technicians taking them away and important student work or documents from the district's curriculum cannot be opened after they have been updated.

The technicians utilize the district approved images in the re-imaging process. The application list included on the *elementary* and *middle school student* devices does not include Microsoft products. This was taken off of the image approximately four years ago. With the positive response to the features Google provides with anytime, anywhere learning and the large cost for Microsoft Office licenses, it was determined that the need for Microsoft Office at those levels was no longer needed. Curriculum documents are accessed by teachers and can still be accessed on the desktop in their classrooms. If you have a machine that you believe should have Microsoft Office, please contact the Helpdesk.

16. Please note this is not a school problem but a district problem which is why it's being addressed. Historically the problem I'll be referencing has occurred at most MISD campuses since the procedure of checkpoints has been in place. Having worked at more than one MISD school and friends that work all across the district, I can vouch for this.

I would like to start by saying I see the educational benefit to district checkpoints and use the information from district checkpoints to guide my instruction. I've been a huge advocate for DCP's. I feel some questions/rules are not developmentally appropriate but overall I still feel like I get a lot of information from both administering and evaluating the DCP's. The problem with the DCP's is how they are used by campus administration and executive directors.

Administrators require teachers to fill out unnecessary paperwork that has never helped me as a teacher. Most teachers can tell you so much more than a DCP analysis tells you. Then teachers sit in data meetings and listen to administrators talk down to us and tell us everything we're doing is just not enough. We're often overly criticized, judged, told that we don't have enough commended students or too many commended students, hurtful accusations, and rarely given positive feedback. These practices lead to low morale and classroom teachers wanting to leave the classroom.

In addition, if the grade above us does better than our grade we're told to go and learn what they're doing right, but if the grade above us doesn't perform well we are accused of not preparing them properly. Please keep in mind if a grade such as fourth grade scores high in math then not only did the fourth grade teachers do a great job but so did the kinder, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade teachers.

Like many of my co-workers I love MISD but this practice of teacher shaming has to stop. I've watched too many teachers cry, stress, panic, quit, and/or retire early because of these poor practices over the years and I know a few teachers in the district we're going to lose.

How can we change the DCP's to be student growth focused and not a way to compare or figure out what teachers are doing wrong? Classroom teachers don't hate DCP's, they hate the way we're treated and compared because of DCP's.

If MISD is going to be such a huge advocate of the state not doing this to schools/districts, then maybe we should think about abandoning these poor practices ourselves.

In 16/17 we reduced the number of district/campus checkpoints by more than 50%. We also changed the DAT process to include only those people a principal invited and felt they needed in the meeting as a resource. The meeting should be a collaborative review of data. The purpose of the checkpoints is to identify areas of strength, areas that need growth, to inform instruction, and provide guidance for interventions. It is a diagnostic tool, used formatively – not a summative assessment. Ideally, formative assessment in the classroom is driving instruction daily. With strong formative assessment practices (one of our courses in ETIP) we should continue to be able to reduce checkpoints in the future. One of the areas we are focusing on is student growth over time. The ERG tool has been helpful in measuring growth in students to inform teachers. In addition, when a grade level is doing something well, the idea we promote is for sharing and collaboration to occur among the staff. We often get our best ideas from each other. If an administrator suggests a teacher visit another grade level to glean ideas, it is meant to provide another resource for the teacher. The goal of these meetings is not to shame or criticize anyone, but to grow and learn together and inform our instruction.

17. For high schools, why are the football players allowed to wear their uniform on game days but no other sports teams are allowed to do the same?

Our MISD Athletics Department has no policy concerning the wearing of team jerseys on game day. This is a campus decision.