

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

- 1. When was the decision to do a "land swap" made and who was involved? Did anyone who actually work at North Mesquite High School have a voice in the decision?**

This decision was made in the Fall. The decision was made with input from different staff members on the NMHS campus. Due to this input, a plan is being developed that will help the school by correcting many of the flooding issues, athletic fields and band marching space.

- 2. How many accidents can an employee have in a district vehicle before they lose driving privileges?**

All drivers of District vehicles are expected to drive safely and defensively and to take all reasonable precautions while in the performance of their job duties, in order to prevent motor-driven vehicle accidents. Drivers will face disciplinary consequences as outlined below for any preventable District vehicle accident during any school year (September – August).

Consequences for Minor Preventable Accidents (less than \$5,000 damage):

- a. 1st offense: letter of reprimand, required defensive driving re-training, and one week out of field trip rotation (if applicable)
- b. 2nd offense: letter of reprimand, required defensive driving re-training, one-day suspension without pay, and one week out of field trip rotation (if applicable)
- c. 3rd offense: termination of employment

Consequences for Major Preventable Accidents (more than \$5,000 damage):

- a. 1st offense: letter of reprimand, required defensive driving re-training, two-day suspension without pay, two weeks out of field trip rotation (if applicable)
- b. 2nd offense: termination of employment

- 3. Are plans being made to build another elementary school (#34) and middle school (#10) in the upcoming bond package?**

The School Board will finalize their decision in February.

- 4. Can we relax the dress code, allow appropriate pants/tshirts, and just require students to wear ID badges? It is a nightmare trying to keep up with polos/belts/dockers/facial hair/shoes/piercings/etc. I signed up to be a teacher because I love teaching, not because I wanted to micromanage attire.**

Recommendations to the Student Code of Conduct and Student Handbook, including Dress & Grooming Standards, are made by staff, administrators, and parents each year. The process for providing input to the Board of Trustees is articulated in the Student Handbook.

- 5. After all is said and done regarding the land swap, will North Mesquite be given additional security to prevent students from going of campus to the new stores/restaurants?**

There is no plan at this time to add additional security personnel to North Mesquite High School. Students who leave campus in violation of closed-campus rules will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the Student Code of Conduct.

- 6. Why does the district give checkpoints to World Geography, which is a senior elective class? Seniors miss class for many senior and college activities. It is not a true reflection of the instruction.**

World Geography is a social studies elective class for students in grades 9-12. Checkpoints are used to determine if students are mastering the TEKS for that course. The district checkpoints should be a summative reflection of the TEKS taught in the class.

- 7. Why are full department district trainings taking place during the school day? I thought the purpose of the new calendar was to allow more time for staff development for teachers without taking them out of the classroom. We are already at a shortage of subs so the teachers not at the training are having to cover for those teachers. This creates disarray in classrooms, breaks routines with students, negatively impacts student behavior, and negatively impacts student learning. Why aren't these being conducted after school hours or during staff development days if they are that important?**

The curriculum department only has 2 professional learning days during the entire school year. There may be other training opportunities provided at the district level but we try to keep those to a minimum. The Lead4Ward trainings have specified number of training slots. These slots are divided between campuses based on campus size. It is a campus decision how those slots are used, and whether they use all of them or give up slots for reallocation to another campus.

- 8. My concern lies around the increased number of staff developments during the school week. I feel that it is affecting my productivity in the classroom. I've had 6 staff developments during the school day. We've also had to take extra students in classes because there are not enough subs in the district to accommodate the trainings. I don't mind taking extra students, but it's hard to play catch up with extra students at the last minute. I was wondering if district staff development days could be considered or if trainings can be offered during the summer, so that we're not out of class or splitting classes. We had a district staff development on Monday and then we were out on Wednesday for Lead4ward with no subs. That Monday would have been a great day for LLI training. My wonderful Principal was my sub and the Asst. Principal was a sub also. Another issue is that these Lead4ward trainings are trainings we received last year. I'm not really hearing much different information and being out on checkpoint days and days like Halloween (even half day) is stressful. I always want what is best for my students and I'm very appreciative of anything that will help me grow, but when I'm feeling that my students are suffering, I feel helpless and stressed. All I'm asking is to stay in the classroom to teach. I come to work sick because I feel my students need me, so I struggle with being out for trainings I've taken before or that may be more affective if scheduled on a district day when we are without our students. Thanks for your time and consideration.**

There are only 2 elementary district level professional learning days per school year. The other professional learning days are campus days and are at the discretion of the campus principal. The shortage of substitutes is certainly an issue and we understand the frustration when there is not adequate coverage. Often when a new instructional resource or we have information that must be disseminated to teachers we have no choice but to pull teachers on an instructional day. We strive to keep those to a minimum.

- 9. If teachers are not allowed to take off during blackout days for personal reasons (illness, family event, family matter, etc.) without being docked, why is the district scheduling professional development for training for entire departments on these days? These days are**

**blacked out because we want teachers IN the classrooms on these days, and subs are also harder to come by on these days, so why would the district want 8 English teachers out on one campus on the Friday before Thanksgiving for a training? Subs are not picking these days up, so teachers who have been required to come to work that day due to the blackout day now have to lose their planning time to cover other classes. Doesn't that completely defeat the purpose of the reasoning behind the blackout days to begin with?**

The only district level professional learning days scheduled are one day in August, one day in September for elementary, and one day in October for secondary. The other professional learning days are at the discretion of the building principal. Although the primary purpose of blackout days is to help alleviate the substitute shortage and imposition on other teachers, occasionally it is necessary to utilize a blackout day for vital training provided to support campus/ district programs and initiatives.

- 10. Teachers are allowed 8 days to take off, but due to the new restrictions (blackout days, only a certain amount of staff allowed to take off on each campus, checking with the administration for approval, not being able to use staff development days, and etc.) teachers are very limited to take care of their own personal well-being and family. Does the district plan on lifting some of the restrictions next year?**

As indicated in #9, the primary purpose of the newly implemented program is to help alleviate the substitute shortage and imposition on other teachers and it appears to be working in that the number of absences for the first semester was down by 1,200 compared to the previous year. We always remain open to reviewing and adjusting, but no major changes are planned for the upcoming year.

- 11. Would it be possible for maintenance, tech services, and custodial employees who are supplied uniforms, to wear cargo/carpenter style work pants (not denim) in the future? For some of our jobs it would be nice to have the extra pockets these styles of pants have.**

This is something that should be discussed with the various supervisors and if deemed beneficial, could certainly be considered. The major concern would be for safety reasons if such pants were too baggy and/or if the additional pockets could be caught in machinery, etc.

- 12. Since the school district pays the salary of the employees at the MEHC, what exactly does the city of Mesquite contribute?**

The costs/expenses to operate the MEHC are shared (including salaries) according to the utilization and number of employees of each entity. Currently, this is approximately 65% for the MISD and 35% for the City and the costs are shared accordingly.

- 13. Why are retired City of Mesquite employees allowed to utilize the MEHC but retired MISD employees are not?**

Unlike the employees from the school district who leave the MISD plan and join the TRS plan upon retirement, City employees do not have such a state program and, therefore, remain on and contribute to the City plan until becoming eligible for Medicare. Since they continue to pay into the local plan which subsidizes the MEHC, they remain eligible to participate.

**14. What is the process for 6th grade teachers transitioning to middle school next year?**

It has been our experience in the past that these situations are generally solved through regular attrition (resignations, retirements, etc.). However, in order to provide as many options as possible for those who may be affected, we are extending the dates for the transfer list from now until the beginning of spring break. In addition, we will be conducting an in-district transfer fair in March and will establish dates/deadlines to return to the home campus should an opening occur at a later time. We will also be working with principals to determine openings at the earliest time in order to assist in accommodating the 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers who may be impacted.

**15. Would it be possible to look into employees getting paid twice a month verses the monthly time frame? In education, we so often come from two educator households, that both having to wait for the monthly pay date can be difficult. Even if there was an administrative fee, would it be possible?**

This is something that we have examined, but have no plans to change at the present time due to cash flow (state funding received on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month) and the workforce to administer. Any fees assessed would not be significant enough to offset these issues.

**16. I have worked for the District full-time for 25 years. I noticed that I have surpassed the Maximum Hourly Rate for two years now. I am currently a Pay Grade 3. I am only \$2.00 away from the Maximum of a Pay Grade 4. What is the protocol when this happens to an employee?**

Although there is a maximum on the chart for each pay grade, we have no “top out” that you often see in the business world. The floor and ceiling of each range generally move up slightly each year, and those who are at the top or beyond (due to tenure, etc.) will continue to receive the percentage increase granted all other employees.

**17. Why are there only two new Apple Corp teachers a month? With a district our size, why not have three – one for Elementary, one for Middle School, and one for High School?**

Apple Corps is a very exclusive and prestigious honor reserved for teachers who exemplify the highest standards of the profession. We want to be sure that those standards remain true rather than having to fulfill a quota each month. We maintain a rotation to ensure that each campus has an opportunity to have an Apple Corps inductee as often as every other year.

**18. With the abundance of Chromebooks/technology accessible in every classroom, can we please see some legislative changes regarding the cell phone policy?**

Our district is fortunate to be able to provide quality technology to MISD students, especially at the secondary level. In addition, we have no plans to exclude student-owned technology devices from being brought to school and used for instructional purposes in the classrooms. We believe that these devices can and do augment their learning. Campus leadership teams are exploring and developing innovative instructional strategies that best utilize technology to benefit our students through the implementation of campus Technology Integration Plans. The issue with technology is not *how many* devices a campus has – the real issue is always about *how* technology is used so that it becomes a “game-changer” for student learning. Many campuses are choosing to emphasize the importance of digital citizenship so that students make the right

choices anytime that they utilize technology, whether it be a district-owned or personally-owned device.

**19. Is membership in a school's PTSA mandatory? For the record I always have, even though it should be mostly a parent-led enterprise, in my opinion. Is it correct that each campus must achieve 100% staff membership or give back money to the district and/or pay for those teachers who did not opt in (in which case my dues are subsidizing others')? Isn't pressuring me (and we are pressured) to join an organization a violation of some district or board policy?**

Member in a school's PTSA is not mandatory, but certainly recommended as we know that a strong partnership between school and home is in the best interest of both parties. We agree that it should be a parent-led enterprise and principals have taken, and will continue to take steps to increase parental involvement on the PTA board. If a campus does not achieve 100% membership they do not have to give money back, nor do they have to pay for the teachers that did not join. Encouraging teachers to join is not a violation of any policy.

**20. Because some schools give only one day or a half day for teachers to work and prepare before the beginning of the school year, while other schools give much more, some teachers are essentially required to work for free before school starts in order to actually be ready for school to begin. If work time in the classroom is left up to principals, then some people are being forced to come early, stay late, and come on the weekends and work for free while others are not because they were given more time. This should not depend upon where you are assigned. Can the district please step in and make this fair for ALL teachers across ALL campuses?**

Principals have the autonomy to create their professional learning plan around the needs of their campus. It is difficult to compare the needs of one campus vs. another as it will always be different each and every year. We added additional professional learning days to the beginning of the school year in order to provide extra time to help alleviate this concern.