

Mesquite Education Association

FR Questions - November 2016

- 1) What formula is used to determine the amount of travel allowance for employees that travel in the district?

The travel allotment is on a tier system rather than a formula according to the amount of travel within the district estimated/associated with a particular position. There is a basic annual set amount for each level with the minimum being essentially for picking up the mail, etc., and the maximum being for traveling extensively from school to school, making home visits, etc., on a regular basis. Some may vary due to special circumstances or number of days. The general range for the positions that receive travel is from around \$200 to \$1,176 annually according to the above.

- 2) Would it be possible to have a search function added to Eduphoria or to the Forethought section? This would make searching for curriculum and instructional resources much easier.

Currently there is a search function in Forethought that can search the titles. We can certainly request a feature update to search the contents in Forethought from our Eduphoria vendor. We will do that immediately if it would be helpful to teachers. It is then up to the vendor if that feature can be added.

- 3) Each year as we start setting up our classrooms, it seems as if we are given more and more new and exciting programs to implement. However, as the years progress, teachers spend more time in meetings and less time in their classrooms. What can the district do to allow teachers more time to prepare their classrooms in years to come?

The district sets aside one district staff development day plus our convocation ceremony. There are also some required trainings from TEA that employees have to complete each year and those are typically scheduled during that week at the campus level. This school year we added two staff development days at the beginning of the year in order to provide more time for campuses to complete all the necessary trainings and hopefully provide more time for teachers in their classrooms. We were able to do that because of the new legislation that requires # of minutes of instruction for students, instead of # of days allowing some flexibility. With the legislation session in 2017 approaching, we are anticipating some changes to this new rule due to the complexities of reporting requirements in PIEMS. Campuses have discretion to schedule work time for teachers during that week at a time that is most appropriate for them.

- 4) Why was a mandatory TELPAS training scheduled at 12:30 at the PDC when High School teachers do not finish their 2nd period class until 12:10. By the time we get our things together and exit the building there are only 10 minutes to drive across town. And what about lunch – how is it acceptable to not give teachers lunch?

The training was scheduled on two different dates with a morning and afternoon session. Morning sessions ended at 11:00. All high schools have slightly different bell schedules so thank you for bringing that to our attention. Start and end times will be addressed with future sessions to allow for travel and lunch.

- 5) Please explain the thought process in scheduling PSAT testing, staff development, and a mandatory TELPAS training in a six-weeks period that only has five weeks. There are other places in the calendar where staff development could go. The spring semester has more time for staff development days, at the high school level, and would not take away valuable instruction time. In regards to TELPAS training, TELPAS rating doesn't happen until the spring, so again, no reason to mandate that teachers take a half day the week before the end of the 6 weeks in an already shortened time period.

PSAT testing is determined by the College Board and must be administered on a designated day. District staff development days are strategically placed in the calendar to provide teachers enough time to start the year, but then continue their professional learning in order to implement new strategies into their classroom to positively impact student performance. TELPAS training has required windows of time that have to be met for TEA. The referenced session was the foundational training required for new trainers to explain the connection between the ELPS and TELPAS. It provides an overview of how to use ELPS effectively in ongoing instruction. It is offered in the fall to help evaluate who will become TELPAS raters in the spring. Rater training is in the early spring. With the large number of students that take TELPAS, which impacts many teachers that will be raters, enough time is needed to get all the pieces completed prior to the TELPAS testing window.

- 6) Why can't paraprofessionals that are not hourly employees be changed in the GHG system or MUNIS system so they do not have to clock out each day?

The Federal Labor Law does require that all non-exempt employees clock in and out. All paraprofessional and auxiliary personnel are classified as non-exempt. All of the non-exempt employees are subject to be paid overtime. The non-exempt status is determined by the duties the employee performs and their rate of pay. It does not matter whether they are hourly or non-hourly.

- 7) What is the purpose of signing in and out, if overtime is not paid, but work is expected to be finished? We have a few hourly who were told to sign out, but to not leave until their work was finished. There are also hourly employees who take work home.

All paraprofessional and auxiliary personnel are classified as non-exempt. All of the non-exempt employees are subject to be paid overtime. The non-exempt status is determined by the duties the employee performs and their rate of pay. It does not matter whether they are hourly or non-hourly.

Your immediate supervisor can ask you to not work outside your scheduled hours. If you arrive at work early and are only doing personal activities, please do not clock in until your scheduled work time. Your supervisor should not require you to work and does not need to pay you for that time. Employees who do decide to work over their hours will need to have their supervisor's approval.

- 8) Are there any plans to do a cost analysis to determine how much money and productivity the district is losing on a daily basis due to the GHG time clock system? Our secretaries are spending time every day making adjustments and corrections in the time clock system?

With the implementation of new programs such as GHG and Skyward, there is a certain amount of additional work and angst initially, and we certainly empathize with all who are affected. It is our hope that the pressure and time spent will subside once the new systems are learned and they become a matter of routine. Nevertheless, we will continue to monitor to see if the workload lessens as we move forward before considering other options.

- 9) What is the purpose of having teachers sign in? We are professionals on a contract salary and do not receive overtime. I have never been concerned that I work over 40 hours a week, but now I feel less than professional.

Some school districts do not require their employees to clock in and out but many do. We are one that does require it for many reasons.

The first basic reason is that it is good accounting practices. This procedure helps us maintain records for possible federal audits, tracking hours for ACA and verifying days worked for TRS. The second reason is that we have people complete many different additional duties that are paid out of different funds (tutoring, concessions, bus driver, etc.) The different funds require record keeping to prove that the funds are being used for the allowable reasons. The third reason is that this system provides us with a list of who is on each campus every day. In the case of an emergency, we could go into the system and get a list of all employees present for that day. The fourth reason is maintaining records for substitutes. Every pay period we have people who are charged for a sub who made the decision to come to work after they called AESOP. This system provides us checks and balances to maintain the days. The final reason is the Federal Labor Law. Many of our employees fall into this category and we are required to maintain a record of their hours worked.

The GHG system is new to all of us. We are trying to move into a paperless world that will in the long run be more accurate. We have always been required to sign in daily. It has been a part of the Mesquite ISD payroll system for a long time but was done on paper. We are only asking that you do it on your computer instead so that we can move to an automated system that will be easier in time.

- 10) What is the purpose of having teachers clock in each day? Mandating salaried employees clock in each day insults our professionalism. Employee tracking is important. If the new time clock software was implemented in an effort to collect data or simplify billing, then its purpose should have been explained to the employees. The software automatically clocks us "out" each day. It is not tracking the many hours after school most of us work. What is the purpose of the time clock software and its impact on employee morale?

Please see answer to Question #9

- 11) I know this has been asked before, but I'm asking again – Can our semi-monthly paychecks be changed to bi-weekly? Many times it is three weeks or more between pay periods. Please consider this change. Thank you.

You are correct in the fact that people would be required to come in during the holiday. This school year would require people to work during Thanksgiving, Christmas and Spring Break. This would also mean each check would be smaller and causes some TRS reporting issues because they are based on a Sept. to Aug. schedule. It would also cause issues with Benefits and Extra Duty pay.

- 12) What is the cost for changes to the new building? How much will it cost to make changes in the current Administration and Curriculum buildings for new departments moving in?

The renovations at the new Administration Building are necessary so that we can get all of the staff into the space. The areas were developed to hold many small and large businesses and did not work for all of our needs. We are doing as little as possible to make this a very workable space for years to come. The expenses include getting the fiber to the building for the internet, installing walls, replacing carpet, etc. We are projecting this to run about \$450,000.

The Administration Building only had the Administrative Assistants work spaces renovated last year and is going to be used by Food Service. The Curriculum Building only had the Personnel Area painted and new furniture built into the space. This furniture will be removed and moved over to the new building.

Our fund balance is very healthy. The Board has asked us to keep the Fund Balance at 22 to 25% of the maintenance and operations budget. We presently have 32%.