

Mesquite Education Association FR Questions - October 2016

1. Why are paraprofessionals made to clock in and clock out although they are NOT hourly employees? It is not a State Law, so please tell us the reason? Can a principal or supervisor tell a paraprofessional to not clock in until 8:00am if arriving to work at 7:00am? It is said that the district does not have money to pay overtime, but the employee doesn't receive overtime because they are not hourly.
The Administration should realize how much extra work this is for a campus. Shouldn't only hourly employees be mandated to clock in and clock out?

Since Paraprofessionals are not hourly, then change the GHG system to only hourly employees clocking in and out. It is not fair that all employees are not required to clock in and shows a distrust of Paraprofessionals by MISD. Many district Paraprofessionals are very upset about this, some having worked for MISD for 20-plus years. Change the nonexempt employees that are not hourly in the system to make this fair to all employees. It would only require that the Job Class being changed and can be done all in one program. In case of an emergency, you cannot get an accurate record of who is in the building, because not everyone is clocking in and out. Enclosed, please see the U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division Fact Sheet #21 stating that any timekeeping plan is acceptable as long as it is complete and accurate.

The GHG Clockwise System is unreasonable. People are cheating the system daily. Friends and family work in the district. Anyone can clock in for anyone and we do. It's a joke throughout the district. "I'll clock in for you on Tuesday if you'll clock in for me on Wednesday!" No question asked, this is the worst thing MISD has ever wasted money on!

Why do some campus and department professionals have to sign in upon arrival and other campus and department professionals sign in at any time during the day? Shouldn't everyone sign in upon arrival?

In my building, professionals can sign in any time during the day. People are taking full advantage of this by coming in late (5 days a week) and signing in later in the day with the excuse of forgetting to sign in earlier. Can it be made mandatory for everyone to sign in when upon arrival?

In last month's FR Questions/Answers, the question was, "Why do we have to clock in?" The answer was broken into 5 reasons. The 3rd reason stated: ... 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. If Professionals can sign in at any time during the day and not have to sign out, how does this provide an accurate list of who is at work and who is not?

Since Paraprofessionals are nonexempt, why can't they be changed to exempt? They are having to clock in and out, yet are not hourly. I know the GHG system was in last month's questions, but shouldn't everyone be treated the same? Paraprofessionals certainly work as hard as the professionals.

GHG is a replacement for the paper time cards and sign-in sheets that were previously filled out by employees. We are not requiring anything that was not required before. We are only asking that it be completed electronically so that we can reduce the paper and time it takes to process paper.

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.

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.

Everyone should clock in at their scheduled time whether they are required to clock in and out or just clock in. This would enable us to have a more accurate picture of who is on a campus at any given time. If someone is consistently arriving late, that will be addressed by their supervisor.

Individuals who may clock in for one another are not following ethical behavior at the workplace and it is not an acceptable standard of procedure.

2. I am a campus secretary. My principal expects me to come in early and stay late for obvious reasons, I do. Why am I not paid overtime?

I am a paraprofessional. I come in early and stay late. However, I am not paid overtime, although the time clock clearly shows my hours. As stated in the Fair Labor Standards Act website, non-exempt employees that work over 40 hours a week are to be compensated. Why do my paychecks stay the same each pay period?

We have some very hard-working paraprofessionals on our campus – no one more so than the principal’s assistant. These paraprofessionals are typically responsible for business management, financial accounting, overseeing other paras, along with many more duties. Why, then, can they not be paid overtime when they continue working after 4pm? Many times, they are given new assignments by supervisors after the 4 o’clock hour. It seems we really take advantage of some of our best employees and should pay them overtime.

The paraprofessionals are a hard working group of individuals and we are very lucky to have them working in our district. We must respect the Fair Labor Standards Act and the employee’s personal time. If an administrator requires the employee to work late, they are to clock in and out when they are working and be paid the overtime. Also, a supervisor can say that they must go home now and complete the work the next day. If you feel there is an error in your paycheck, you need to contact payroll.

3. Regarding the annual supply reimbursement of \$60 for classroom teachers, is the cutoff date for turning that in set by the principal or is it standard across the district?

We know that teachers get reimbursed for supplies they purchase for their classes. Can aides receive the same reimbursement since often times they purchase items that are used for rewards such as stickers, stamps, and treasure box items?

The principal can set a cutoff date if they would like to have one, but the only district-wide cutoff would have to do with which fiscal year the reimbursement would fall in. We do not reimburse aides out of the teacher reimbursement code.

All employees are expected to follow district purchasing procedures when purchasing items for the classroom. Whether an employee can be reimbursed out of campus funds would be determined by the principal based on whether they had the principal's permission to purchase the items, were purchased from an approved vendor, and eligible for reimbursement.

4. We have been told that when the new building at West Mesquite High School is completed, the portables are going away. Unfortunately, the new building will not alleviate the issue of not having enough classrooms since the new building will have fewer classrooms than the current number of portables. Even with the portables, most teachers do not have our rooms for conference periods either day. I know that some of the "floating" teachers are coaches and don't need a room the whole day but they and the teachers whose room they "float" into shouldn't have to be displaced. Why could we not keep the portables on campus for those teachers who are currently "floating" from classroom to classroom?

The addition to WMHS is going to add 21 classrooms, 6 Science Labs, 5 CTE Rooms, 1 Drama Classroom, 1 Dance Classroom and 1 CTE Lab for Welding. The Library and another Science Lab will also be renovated. There will be painting and other cosmetic items completed in the school. There are presently 23 portables on the campus. We would like to have a teacher in their own room but it isn't always possible.

5. Does the district get compensated for advertising on behalf of Balfour and Jostens, and for allowing access to our students for direct sales?
Do we have someone with upper level business negotiation experience looking for extra income from sources like these?

No, the District does not receive compensation from these vendors. These activities are provided as a convenience for the students. They are under no obligation to visit with the vendors or make any purchases. Any attempt to negotiate a percentage of sales from these types of activities would ultimately increase the cost to the students and as a District we believe that generating income in that fashion is inappropriate.

6. Currently we as a district are spending class time, allowing for-profit companies to make money off of our students, endorsing those companies by association, and setting our students on a path of making payment plans. Class time, student trust, and student financial decisions are valuable assets.

It is a campus decision about scheduling time for these activities. Any company that sells a product expects to make a profit. We are not endorsing these companies or obligating our students to purchase anything from Balfour or Jostens. It is ultimately the student's choice to purchase their memorabilia from Balfour, Jostens, Walmart, a jeweler or online. It is also the student's responsibility to decide how to pay for a purchase from any business, whether it is on a payment plan or in its entirety.

7. How much are the renovations costing for the Towne Crossing Building? Are these renovations really necessary?
Since the Administration Building and Curriculum Building were both just renovated, will they require even more renovations when other departments move there? Shouldn't the District keep a healthy fund balance?

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%.

8. What is MISD's policy on the wearing of jeans/the giving of Jeans Days? Is there some degree of consistency/continuity throughout the district or is it solely at the discretion of the principal? When our principal does allow us a jeans day, it is often related to some type of reward or incentive.

There are specific guidelines pertaining to the wearing of jeans, and these can be found in the *Dressing the Part* brochure and on page 57 in the *Employee Handbook*. Although these are generally adhered to, the implementation remains at the discretion of the campus principal. It should be noted that a Professional Dress Committee consisting of representatives from all areas has been formed to review and update the current guidelines which were last revised in 2012. One of the issues to be addressed will be the uniformity in granting jean days.

9. What is the policy for taking breaks for exercising during the workday? There are two employees who walk in our building once each hour. Their walk is all over inside the building and then outside around the building and sometimes even the parking lot. This takes at least 10-15 minutes out of their workday each hour. Each day it would total about an hour. Are these people making their time up? The time spent walking might add up to an hour per day.

There is no specific policy regarding this particular issue other than the one pertaining to standard morning and afternoon breaks. We certainly support the wellness initiatives of all employees designed to improve health and increase the corresponding work productivity. However, this should probably not be done at the frequency and duration as described, nor at the expense/distraction of others. Therefore, the individuals involved should adjust their routine accordingly.

10. Has any thought been given to hire more office help for each campus? Adding the new GHG is a whole lot of extra work for office staff. With having to learn the new Skyward at the same time, dealing with GHG and its problems, puts even more pressure on our secretaries. They already have very difficult job, but they keep smiling and working hard each day. The office staff is essential to MISD. Many of them have to work so many extra hours just to keep up and not get behind.

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.

11. Is there a plan for aides to get a raise? Most of us are not able to provide for our families.

Although salary increases are never at the level we would like for them to be due to budget constraints, we have made significant adjustments in the paraprofessional and auxiliary scales over the last three-year period. In conjunction with the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) study conducted in 2013, the lower steps were raised significantly in 13-14, and the additional increases were completed just this year with many receiving adjustments from 10% to 25%. Going forward, we will continue to monitor the market and provide increases as the budget will allow in order to remain competitive.

12. Is there a way for aides to get extra pay for morning or afternoon duties?

Compensation is provided for certain morning and afternoon duties that extend beyond the regular daily responsibilities. We would suggest that you visit with your principal to see if your particular assignment qualifies or rather a part of your normal array of duties.

13. Why are secondary teachers on block schedule, required to give six week exams on the last day we see our students? Teachers should be given the discretion to give them any day that last week of the six-week period. This would allow us to give absent students a chance to complete their exam, and thusly close out our grades more completely. This would also decrease the number of “incompletes.” Is this a policy that can be reviewed or changed?

When the exam is scheduled is based on the pacing of the curriculum and whether or not all the content is covered prior to the six-weeks test. If a department is ready to give it earlier in the week, that is something that can be discussed with your campus principal to adjust the day.

14. What are the campus qualifications, data, and determining factors when deciding which Mesquite ISD campuses receive instructional specialist teachers and which campuses do not? For Elementary? Middle? High School? For example, some middle schools and high schools have instructional specialist and some do not? Why? Please explain. How is it determined how many per campus? Some have 1-2 while other campuses have 3-4.

Instructional Specialists are funded with Title 1 federal monies. Campuses that are school wide title campuses have funds that can be used for these positions. All elementary campuses are school wide title, secondary campuses that are school wide are McDonald, New, Vanston, Wilkinson, Agnew and West Mesquite. How campuses spend their title monies and which positions they fund are up to the campus principal. Campuses receive their share of the title monies based on their percentage of free and reduced lunch population. Campuses that have additional instructional specialists most likely have higher percentages of free and reduced students or decided to prioritize their budget in that particular area based on their campus needs assessment.

15. Why were the district level checkpoints (DCPs) scheduled, literally for the day after a six-week grading period in high school ended? On the ground, it appears that the decision-makers weren't aware of the grading periods which have been available as part of the district calendar since last spring. If they were aware, why couldn't they have been scheduled so that they could BE the 6-weeks exams themselves? It is hard to explain to students (as well as teachers), and rightly so, why they have a six-week exam followed immediately by a checkpoint with no time in between for correcting misunderstandings, etc.

Six week exams are graded and a summative assessment for that timeframe. DCP's are used to determine students' strengths and weaknesses so that teachers may plan accordingly to meet their needs by providing scaffolded instruction, targeted tutoring or other interventions. While it is a campus decision on how to use a grade from a DCP, it would be encouraged to not have it adversely impact a students' overall grade. The assessment calendar was utilized in planning the dates for DCP's, however we welcome feedback during the year so that adjustments can be made in the future to better meet with needs of our students and staff.

16. Can we make the MISD website and the school websites more mobile friendly? There are school related links that do not work when trying to access them on anything other than a computer.

There are technical limitations with our current vendor that prevent our district and campus sites from being truly mobile friendly and responsive. We know this is a huge issue because mobile access is truly the norm. Going forward, we have signed a contract with a new vendor, and mobile access will not be a problem. The new district and campus websites are scheduled to launch in June.

17. Can we add student email logins for Outlook to the Student Portal?

Student email logins for Outlook have been added to the Student Portal.

18. What can be done about overloading computer-based classes well beyond the number of computers in the classroom? (27-30 students in a class with 20 computers)

Computer labs in each high school range from 24 to 30 computers depending on the room. Those rooms should be one-to-one (student to computer) and the maximum seating capacity should be set based on the number of computers in each room. Other CTE classrooms that have been issued laptops are not necessarily one-to-one technology and students may have to share devices.

19. With inclusion, why do we separate AP/GT classes from regular education?

Per the Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students from TEA, we identify and cluster G/T students together with other identified students and a trained teacher in the school setting as much as possible. G/T students in middle school are clustered in content-specific G/T classrooms to not only meet this requirement but, more importantly, to allow them to move at an accelerated pace of depth and complexity to maximize their potential. At the high school level, we offer open enrollment for almost all of our AP Courses while we continue to cluster our

G/T students together as much as possible. In Mesquite ISD, we continuously strive to meet the educational needs of all of our students, allowing them to ultimately take ownership of their learning and to thrive in the classroom and beyond.

20. What practices should the teacher enact to prevent from remaining the hardest worker in the room?

What a great question! Our teachers do work very hard, but in the classroom setting we want our students to be doing the hard work. The teacher's heavy lifting should occur in the planning and preparing of high quality engaging lessons that allow students to be responsible for their learning. Allowing students to have choice and input in demonstrating their knowledge would be key to them exhibiting content knowledge and understanding. No single strategy, approach, or technique works with all students. Teachers should use a large repertoire of instructional practices. There are several great staff development offerings to help teachers in this endeavor.

21. How can students be educated with low levels of parental involvement or support outside of the classroom?

There are a variety of studies regarding this topic. Here are a few research findings:

"Schools, by and large, do not need to embark on a campaign to persuade parents that their children's education matters or that they as parents need to understand the importance of their role," the researchers write. The study authors call on schools "to find new, practical and systematic ways to encourage parental involvement and create new types of opportunities so that that parents will be able to act more effectively on the knowledge and concern they already have." Schools should avoid waiting until there is a disciplinary problem to contact parents and should give parents opportunities for involvement early in the high school process so that the first call they receive is not one telling them their child is in trouble. "One Dream, Two Realities," John Bridgeland et al, Civic Enterprises, October 2008

"The study suggests that if children don't feel connected to school, parent involvement alone will not make a significant contribution to student achievement. Students must also feel that they belong at school and that their teachers support them," Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL,2002) noted.

Even an expert such as Johns Hopkins' Joyce Epstein recognizes that parent involvement strategies, while important, are not a cure-all for a struggling school. As the SEDL meta-analysis reported, a 1997 study by the parent involvement expert and colleagues noted that parent involvement alone is not the only essential ingredient for high achievement. "School, family, and community partnerships can boost attendance and increase achievement slightly, but excellent classroom teaching will be needed to dramatically improve students' writing, reading, and math skills to meet the state's standards."

MISD teachers do a commendable job of encouraging parental involvement and keeping parents informed about student progress. We continually strive to partner with our parents and community to support students inside and outside the classroom. The one necessary condition that must exist is teachers must hold expectations of high performance for all students, with or without parental involvement.

22. What does MISD plan to do in the future for the growing needs of parent and student psychological/spiritual well-being?

Mesquite ISD continues to add tools every year to the already abundant toolkit of resources, services and programs that address the psychological-social needs of our students and their families. In addition to full-time staff members whose only job is to counsel with students in times of need and crisis (behavior specialists, intervention counselors, at-risk facilitators, LSSPs, etc.), MISD has committed an extra level of support through TLC Cadres, Problem Solving Teams and a family support therapist. MISD continues to partner with counseling, psychiatric, diagnostic and intervention resources; family services and support groups; medical agencies and community health services; and homeless shelters, housing and meal assistance.

MISD connects families and students to community resources with regard to free mental health help, in addition to real-life needs such as vision wear, transportation, juvenile services, food, clothing, legal assistance, medical care, medication, residential treatment, housing, suicide outcries, substance abuse, pregnancy, homelessness, runaway assistance, rape crisis, family violence, and alternate graduation plans. All 48 schools implement services and programs throughout the school year to address psycho-social support and involving the community and family in the solution: father programs, positive behavior programs, CSI, service projects, mentoring, anti-bullying, etc.

23. It has come to my attention that the cafeteria staff does not have to pay for their lunch. Is there a way for other staff to get free meals, as well?

The School Nutrition Program has an allowable meal expense for the Food and Nutrition Service staff that is directly involved in operating or administering the program. An example of the responsibilities of being directly involved in administering the program would be preparing the food, being a cashier, or serving the food.

24. Why does the Horn High School soccer team have to create a GoFundMe account to pay for sideline jackets when the football and baseball teams do not??? Shouldn't there be equity in funding for all sports? These guys and girls must play outside so they deserve at least something that will keep them warm on the sideline while maintaining the look of a team!

All high school athletics have adequate budgets for the number of participants on the teams. Boys and Girls Soccer have a yearly \$3,000 budget for equipment, uniforms, jackets, etc., which was increased in 2015. Every sport can do a fundraising activity to help supplement their budget to buy extra things. GoFundMe accounts are the easiest way for the teams to raise money as opposed to contracting with an outside fundraiser company, who takes 50% of money raised. The soccer team is not required to raise funds. They already have jackets.