

Mesquite Education Association
FR Questions - October 2017

- 1. I'm asking this question on behalf of my students and parents. What was the reasoning for getting rid of freshman cheer? This takes an activity away from an entire group of students that could be involved in school. Eighth graders are not trying out because they have to compete with everyone for a JV spot. If we have freshman sports, why do we not have freshman cheer? Also, with our high school numbers on the rise, wouldn't it make sense to provide this for our freshman students? It's proven that students who are involved in school get into less trouble. Yes, I know they can be involved in other activities, but for some, this is their passion. A few may make JV, but it takes the opportunity away for many. As far as cost, cheerleaders pay for most of their cheer items.**

Each year, the district convenes a meeting with all secondary principals, cheer sponsors, and a central office representative. This meeting serves as a time to hear recommendations, proposals, and input from campuses and other stakeholders. Upon consensus, changes are made to the cheer regulations and guidelines. The decision to have a varsity squad consisting of up to 16 members and a junior varsity squad consisting of up to 14 members was made in December 2015. The Junior Varsity/Varsity model for cheer is seen across the state and in many other high school programs, such as soccer and tennis, to optimize participation and have a full slate of team members. The cost for participating was not a factor in merging 9th grade cheerleaders with the JV squad, since the district pays half of all cheer expenses.

- 2. Since there are only a few 5th Fridays of the month, can that Friday also be a district jeans day?**

According to the recently revised guidelines, fifth Fridays are reserved for incentive/ fundraisers at the discretion of the principal or supervisor. Since these have just been implemented, there are no plans to change at this time but will be reviewed once again in the spring.

- 3. Why aren't all employees who are not salary, such as ones who can get OT and/or extra pay for any hours over a normal work day, required to punch in/out on the time clock instead of using handwritten time sheets?**

To our knowledge, all employees should now be using the GHG system with the exception of non-teacher substitutes. If this is not the case, we would suggest that you share your concern with your supervisor or the Personnel Office.

- 4. Since our time clocks record in 15 minute increments, why can't our personal and sick days be used in increments of 15? If an employee needs to leave 45 minutes early for a Dr. appointment, we have to take a half-day off.**

Substitutes cannot be secured for less than a ½ day at the campus level; otherwise, teachers would have to be imposed upon to cover and this is what we are trying to avoid. In addition, trying to keep up with 15 minute increments for 5,400 employees would be virtually impossible for the Payroll Department. If the occasional doctor appointment requires that you only be off for that short of a time period, we would suggest that you work with your supervisor.

5. What is the district's policy or procedures for dealing with an employee who is no longer able (physically, mentally, etc.) to perform their duties?

All employees must be able to perform the essential functions of the job. If this is in question, the District reserves the right to require an examination and a report from a physician selected by the District.

6. Does MISD have any programs or offer any form of assistance to auxiliary employees who wish to take college courses through DCCCD or the A&M campus at the PDC?

Unfortunately, we do not have any programs of this nature at this time. We did have such a program at one time for classroom aides, but it was dissolved after a few years due to limited participation and most of the necessary classes being scheduled during the work day.

7. If the clinic is open until 5:00 PM, why isn't a provider available for employees to be seen at that time so that we do not have to miss school?

A provider is available but the last appointment is scheduled for 5:00. This particular time is in demand and is quite often booked days ahead. We know that it is frustrating when you can't get in at the time you would like, but would suggest that you try to schedule when you have a conference period or break.

8. This is a follow up to a question asked in September about requiring teachers to eat lunch with students for the entire first week of school. Teacher's eating lunch (Duty-Free) should never be a "principal's decision". I know teachers have been required to miss lunch or eat with the students at several schools in Mesquite. There's a regulation that is supposed to prevent this from happening.

Texas Education Code, Section 21.405 says:

(a) Except as provided by Subsection (c), each classroom teacher or full-time librarian is entitled to at least a 30-minute lunch period free from all duties and responsibilities connected with the instruction and supervision of students. Each school district may set flexible or rotating schedules for each classroom teacher or full-time librarian in the district for the implementation of the duty-free lunch period.

(b) The implementation of this section may not result in a lengthened school day.

(c) If necessary because of personnel shortage, extreme economic conditions, or an unavoidable or unforeseen circumstance, a school district may require a classroom teacher or librarian entitled to a duty-free lunch to supervise students during lunch. A classroom teacher or librarian may not be required to supervise students under this subsection more than one day in any school week. The commissioner by rule shall prescribe guidelines for determining what constitutes a personnel shortage, extreme economic conditions, or an unavoidable or unforeseen circumstance for purposes of this subsection.

The answer provided pertained to the first week of school only, and it is our hope that our teachers are responsive to the needs of kids and can see the necessity of establishing procedures to ensure that students are fed properly. The question actually asked why it is necessary for teachers to eat in the cafeteria during the first week with no reference to duty.

Question from September 2017:

Why is it necessary for classroom teachers to eat lunch in the cafeteria the entire first week of school?

Answer from September 2017:

This is at the discretion of the principal with the reasons being to provide adequate supervision and direction while the cafeteria procedures are being established.

9. Do Central Administration employees have the same blackout days that teachers do, or are they exempted because of the nature of their jobs and the fact that they don't require substitutes?

Although substitutes are not needed for certain positions, as team members, every effort will be made for all to follow the blackout rules. The exception is vacation days used by those who are unable to take the days during the summer due to the nature of the particular position.

10. If we have a snow day this year, will Thursday, March 29th (the day before Good Friday) still be a blackout day since we will attend school on Good Friday?

At the conclusion of winter, we will see if make-up days are necessary and will readjust the blackout days accordingly. If the 30th ends up not being a holiday, then the 29th will not be a blackout day. In regard to the new guidelines, it should be noted that absences were down by 22% during the month of September, 33% lower on the Friday prior to Fair Day, and down by 9% on the Tuesday after Fair Day.

11. Is there a way that on the 2018-2019 school calendar we can alternate the 4-day weeks with some days off on Monday and some on Friday? The issue in elementary is the same students miss the same specials classes if we are always out on a Monday. I recently had a parent ask why her daughter keeps missing music class. As a parent I can understand the concern and wish we would alternate the days off to prevent this from happening. With the new Blackout Days policy, there's really no reason to always have our 3-day weekends be with Monday off.

This is a question that comes up often. The idea behind Mondays is that it gives students a three-day weekend, and we assume that is easier on parents than a student holiday in the middle of the week. Fridays pose a problem in the fall because of Friday night football and all the students who are involved in those activities.

12. Is it appropriate for district employees to use their school associated social media pages (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc) to promote or endorse a particular political agenda or side?

Just as any other citizen, MISD employees can express their views utilizing their own personal social media accounts, their own technology devices, and only after work hours. However, employees may not use district-owned hardware or software to express political agendas, to endorse political candidates, or to take sides regarding controversial issues.

13. Can we get the actual FR questions that were asked so we know what is being answered? With just the answer we really do not know what you are talking about.

FR Questions and Answers are distributed to FRs monthly in a format that includes both the Question and the Answer. As far as we are aware, all Facility Representatives post or distribute the FR Questions and Answers in the format that was given to them in print and by email attachment.

14. What is the purpose of the 6th grade pre-athletics program? Why are coaches required to give up their conference periods to teach the class on some campuses and other campuses don't even have coaches teaching the class? If the purpose of this program is to grow the student-athlete and prepare him/her for UIL competitions, shouldn't the coaches be the "teachers" of the class and not be required to give up a conference period to be in that class?

You are correct in that the purpose of the 6th grade pre-athletics program is to grow the student athlete, establish expectations, teach related skills of the various sports, and prepare the students for UIL competitions. Therefore, coaches are the most qualified to serve as the instructors for the class. In this particular instance, it is our understanding that there is a preparation period built into the schedule that is separate and apart from the conference period and it is this period that is being used for this purpose. The conference period remains intact and meets the 450 minutes every two-week period requirement. The assignment schedule is determined at the campus level, so we would encourage you to confer with your principal should you have any questions or concerns.

15. As of now, with the new feeder pattern, current 8th graders and current high school students are going to be grandfathered into the school that they are already aligned to go to. Why are 7th graders not grandfathered into this rule? Seventh graders will spend an entire year (and some have spent two years if their middle school has 6th grade on campus) with an athletic team (football, volleyball, basketball, etc.) learning to play with one another, being coached, and working within a specific athletic program just to be plucked out and moved to an entire new school next year. We polled our 7th grade athletes currently on a sports team, and almost 85% of them will be leaving our campus next year to go to another middle school campus. We are currently growing 85% of our athletes that will not even go here next year, which means we will be completely starting over for our 8th grade teams. Our district is constantly putting out information about how important student athletes are and how aligning them in one specific program throughout their schooling is a huge benefit, but this is the exact opposite of that vision and is a huge disservice to these athletes who are being affected.

The transition to pure feeder patterns also included a move up of the 6th graders. In doing this, five of our middle schools will be adding a class of students they do not have this year. In addition, Frasier Middle School will open next year which impacts three current middle school attendance zones. These moves together required the movement of the seventh graders this year. Moving forward, with the exception of any new middle schools being added, this will ensure pure alignment of all programs, not just athletics to a single high school, thus adding significant benefit to our students academically and in extracurricular programs.