

Superintendent's Communications Council
Campus Questions
February 11, 2020

ELEMENTARY

Francisco

1. Are the 457b's charging a monthly service fee now that we've changed companies?

- A.** The prior 457 Plan included service fees for participants. The fees charged by the new company are comparable to what was being charged by the previous plan administrator.

Mullendore

2. What is the purpose of finding the Independent level for BAS, when according to Donalyn Miller students should have the freedom to pick their own independent reading books? Also, all guided reading instruction is done at students' instructional reading level. Finding an Independent Reading level on top of the highest instructional level is time-consuming and takes away from our instruction time.

- A.** While adhering to the BAS administration guidelines, three reading levels are found: Independent, Instructional, and Hard. The independent level is the highest level a student reads accurately and comprehends without assistance. Many teachers utilize the independent reading level for tracking and charting reading growth in student data folders as part of their Continuous Improvement plan. The independent level is also reported when instructional staff collaborate on shared students, (i.e., classroom teachers, interventionists, SPED teachers, and Title 1 tutors).

As Donalyn Miller asserts, self-selecting text is motivational for students. However, students often need assistance in selecting books that match their interest with their ability level. Primary teachers use the independent level to provide a variety of books for individual book boxes, bags, or tubs. This offers student choice while ensuring they are independently reading books at a high enough accuracy rate that it will improve their reading. Knowing a student's independent reading level helps teachers guide student choice to ensure high success practice during independent reading.

For more information on the benefits of reading at the independent level, please read: Allington, R., & Gabriel, R. (2012, March). Every Child, Every Day. Retrieved January 2020, from [ASCD.org \(Every Child, Every Day\)](https://www.ascd.org/~/media/ASCD/2012/03/Every-Child-Every-Day.pdf)

Superintendent

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MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Haltom

8. Special education population and paperwork has seemed to increase over the years. There hasn't been an increase in support, such as E.A.s, but student needs are much more demanding. I understand student-to-teacher ratio, but if we want our students to be able to reach their full potential, student needs need to be what is considered and not the numbers. This is occurring in all the programs; Inclusion setting, resource, and specialized programs. **In the future, how will this be addressed?**

A. As our demographics change, so do our needs. The District is currently evaluating all of the special education programs. This effort is being spearheaded by our interim director of special education. We have already begun addressing the staffi
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HIGH SCHOOLS (continued)

Birdville (#10 continued)

- A. The current guidelines for semester exam exemptions are “based on grades, attendance, and conduct as specified for each class.” A student’s overall discipline record that would include OSS and ISS would be a departure from considering exemptions on a class-by-class basis. Clarence Simmons, executive director for secondary education, will discuss this with the high school principals and bring a recommendation to the Birdville ISD Cabinet if a consensus is reached that this change is necessary.

Haltom

11. My question is concerning equity in stipends. **When was the last time stipend allotment and equity were addressed?** My main concern regards the amount of time spent by coaches/directors in relation to the dollar amount that is awarded per stipend. How are stipends decided? I ask specifically because it seems that athletic stipends are awarded more money than fine arts and also that stipends typically held by men are compensated more than those held by women.
- A. All stipends are determined by the District. As mentioned above, all stipends are included and reviewed in the annual compensation analysis prepared by the Texas School Board Association. The District considers any stipend adjustments or additions as recommended by TASB within budget constraints. We also monitor the state and area trends when evaluating stipends. I’m not aware of males being given a higher stipend than females for the same position.
12. Since so many classes are becoming sheltered and BISD’s multilingual student population is on the rise everywhere, what steps are being taken to ensure quick and accurate communications from teachers to parents? Many times, if the language is spoken by one of the teachers in the building, we can ask another educator to translate, but it puts an unnecessary and unfair burden on that teacher to offer assistance. The other choice is to ask for Catholic Charities or other outside places to translate, but by then, several days to possible weeks have elapsed. The district needs to take a close and careful look at future communications if we are to truly serve our parents and our students in an effective and **TIMELY** manner. So again, what is the district doing to make sure teachers who do not speak a non-English language can communicate with parents issues, concerns, and positives in a timely manner?

(We answered similar questions in April 2016 and April 2017.)

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HIGH SCHOOLS (continued)

Haltom (#12 continued)

- A.** The District has, in fact, experienced an increase in the number of students whose first language is something other than English. With regards to students identified as English Learners, there are forty various languages spoken by students and their families. As such, the District has Parent Liaisons who are available to translate in Spanish and Vietnamese, our two most widely spoken languages by students and families in Birdville. Additionally, the Department of Multilingual Services contracts with entities such as Catholic Charities and individuals who are able to provide translation services. The department will continue its efforts to secure contracts with other outside sources and individuals who can be more readily available to provide services. Our current providers are typically able to respond within hours if we indicate there is an emergency situation. For non-emergency requests, we are able to secure a response from our providers within twenty

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HIGH SCHOOLS (continued)

Richland

13. Is there something that could be done to better convey conversations between district offices and end-users? Example: District decided to no longer keep a subscription to Flocabulary. The icon was on the SSO. The subscription expired end of Sept. Therefore, a teacher would assume they could make lessons using that resource. Often, one department makes a decision without informing all the other parts of the larger organization or asking for input from the end-users.

A. With regard to the my.birdvilleschools.net portal, we are always looking for ways to better communicate any changes that are taking place. There are many pieces of license-driven software, as well as links to free resources available in the portal. Resources are assigned to staff and students individually based on the group(s) (elementary, secondary, administrators, etc.) they belong to. There are large numbers of resources available and each of these resources is managed or owned by different departments across our District, compounding the communication difficulties.

In the instance of Flocabulary specifically: When planning for the next budget year, the District scrutinizes data from all resources to analyze cost, usage, and benefits to students. Unfortunately, the data showed that our usage of the Flocabulary resource did not justify the yearly subscription cost of over \$40,000. Although the cancelation of the Flocabulary subscription was communicated to principals and librarians over the summer, we recognize the need to continually improve our processes and procedures to improve the flow of information to all end-users. We will also work to improve the posting of resources on my.birdvilleschools.net and have just recently put into place processes that will allow us to better manage resources posted there.

14. With the proposed academic calendars for 2020–21, we are ending the semester before winter break. This would mean three exam grades AND a semester exam grade. This will be very difficult to do with a shortened six weeks which realistically will only be 4.5–5 weeks. Can the exam requirements for the third six weeks next year be adjusted to only 2 exams grades and a semester exam grade to accommodate for the shortened six weeks?

A. Limiting the number of major grades to two in a six weeks period limits the opportunity of students to earn satisfactory scores in a category which accounts for 50% of their grade. Major grades can be chapter or unit tests, but also can be expanded to announced projects/performances, papers or other major grades. It is reasonable to assume that even with fewer days, there is room to give students at least three opportunities to demonstrate mastery of the content in this category.