Board Community Conversation

10.22.2022

Please note, questions and answers were recorded in the order in which they were received.

1. **Question:** I thought there was going to be follow up questions from these meetings. Where are they? I did not receive follow up, which I thought was going to happen. Could the FAQs be linked to the community conversation schedule so that it’s easier to find?

   **Response:** The way the process works is that we get the questions back from the meetings, administration answers them, and they get posted on our website. We will make sure that they are more visible. The questions and answers can be found here: https://www.mansfieldisd.org/about-misd/school-board/board-communication

2. **Question:** Parent has a 6th grader at the Brenda Norwood Fine Arts Academy -- Praise for the integrated fine arts program. However, parent is concerned over the discontinuation of the program after 6th grade. The insinuation was that the program was going to continue through middle and high school. We received word that it is not. My daughter learns differently. I do not want to put her back into a mainstream school. Is there a middle school that has advanced fine arts courses? What is the plan for these kids transitioning back into a comprehensive middle school program? They won’t be with the friends that they have gone to school with at the Fine Arts Academy. Parent has emailed the Wester fine arts director and not gotten a response.

   **Response:**
   Dr. Cantu Response-The thought was that we do have comprehensive fine arts programs at MS and HS levels. We don’t want a fine arts academy to pull students from those programs. The reality is that there are financial constraints that make it challenging to open a fine arts academy for middle school/high school – teachers, building space, curriculum. We are discussing support for students transitioning from the fine arts academies to middle school fine arts programs.

   Board Response—We need to put that information in a place where parents can find that support on our website.

3. **Question:** What is the status of the Director of DEI search and of the committee?

   **Response:**
   Dr. Cantu Response – There are not enough applicants to make a pool of highly qualified applicants.
Board Response – The DEI Director is a vital role, but the work of DEI is ongoing even though that position is vacant. The committee is not meeting, but the work continues throughout our curriculum, daily operations, etc.

4. **Question:** If your child has to transfer due to a campus administration grievance, why is the burden of transportation on the family? What is the burden/response on administration? Are administrator evaluations available through the Freedom of Information Act?

**Response:**
Dr. Cantu Response: The only transportation that we are able to provide is School of Choice routes. We are short bus drivers. We have had to approve waivers to increase class size instead of moving kids to campuses with space.

There is an accountability process for every administrator, evaluations, letters of reprimands – these are not available through public information.

5. **Question:** What does mental health support look like, especially supporting the family system? If a kid is in trouble who might hurt themselves, what type of training does HOPE Squad receive to help them?

**Response:**
Board & Dr. Cantu Response -- There are crisis counselors at every campus. HOPE Squad is a program that trains kids to recognize other kids who might be struggling. The HOPE students know who to contact on the campus. The students and teachers are trained on what to look for and who to contact. On the counseling page, there are links to questions that direct you to resources in the community based on your situation – adults and students. There are after-hour reporting resources that pick-up notifications or reports to provide help 24/7. There are also SEL lessons for students and families. We focus on SEL through the curriculum in our classrooms and extracurricular activities, teaching students how to treat each other.

6. **Question:** Why does it take so long for someone to get hired and interviewed?

**Response:** That is an HR question. I would encourage the person who applied to reach out to them.

7. **Question:** Is it possible or planned to pilot a fine arts program or STEM program as our students matriculate from the 6th grade? If so, how soon? Maybe at least one team of those teachers could move up? Maybe we could get area businesses to sponsor a team of teachers?

**Response:**
Dr. Cantu Response – We have financial restraints that prevent it. We are looking for ways to integrate these students into middle school. Nothing is off the table. We are looking at capacity, finances, etc..

Board Response – Building utilization – we cannot put a program in a MS that is projected to be at capacity. It could not support an additional program. We have to have a long-term approach. Transportation is an issue. Buses need to be retired and replaced. The district needs to prioritize on urgent needs.

8. **Question:** How are the campuses selected for Choice programs? Can those programs move or change?
Response: The new schools were designed for those programs. Jerry Knight STEM Academy was renovated based on need. Some schools were chosen because of capacity and geographical area (spread them out). If a program is put in a campus, it usually stays if it’s successful. We are constantly reviewing those programs (C&I). We have branded schools – those are brought forward by the schools and there is an application process.

9. Question Would 6th grade fine arts students be able to transfer wherever they want?

Response: Yes.

10. Question: Is there a possibility of expanding the Jerry Knight STEM Academy into a STEAM academy to incorporate a fine arts branch?

Response:
We would need to reduce the number of STEM students to make that happen. Funding would prevent us from expanding the Jerry Knight STEM Academy. But, everything is on the table.

11. Question: On the news this week, we’ve heard of a group seeking a back door to provide a voucher program in Texas public school districts, there was a group seeking a voucher program. Has MISD been approached about voucher programs? If so, how would you respond?

Response:
Dr. Cantu Response – I 100% support public education. We have not been approached.

12. Question: What is being done to get more economically disadvantaged students to participate in the STEM Academy? Currently less than 10% participate.

Response:
Dr. Cantu Response – We are adamant that we provide transportation to make it accessible to all students. We also continue to be intentional about how we promote it. We had a well-attended Power of Choice event last weekend.

13. Question: Could you elaborate on the Thompson Institute?

Response:
Dr. Cantu Response — I was nominated. This has been happening for 30 years. It’s an opportunity for superintendents representing districts of all sizes from around the country to come together to share best practices and discuss current issues impacting public education. Bob Thompson has been training for 30 years. It’s a great learning opportunity.

Board Response — We as a board hire the Superintendent, and we continue to push and measure her on her growth and leadership. To get this one of a kind opportunity is significant.

Questions that were written on cards but not asked:

14. Question: What is the plan to find more subs? Have you considered an increase in teacher compensation due to teacher resignations?

Human Resources Response: Our sub pool is actually growing back to pre-pandemic levels, and our daily substitute fill rates have returned to near pre-pandemic levels, as well.
Some of the measures we have taken to increase our substitute pool are conducting job fairs geared toward hiring substitute teachers and hourly employees, attending job fairs through other entities with this purpose, posting fliers about becoming a substitute at local businesses, posting on social media regarding becoming a substitute, allowing substitutes to attend orientation virtually versus holding monthly in-person orientation sessions, increasing the daily compensation rates for substitute teachers, and recognizing outstanding substitutes through the Substitute of the Month award.

Salary increases are something considered during the budget preparation process each year. For the ‘22-23 school year, our teachers received a 4% of midpoint raise. We will consider salary increases for ‘23-24 during the budget season later this school year.

15. **Question:** How does the disciplinary structure support students towards being a better, well-rounded human being vs. Leading to the prison pipeline system?

**Student Services Response:** Mansfield ISD takes a holistic approach to addressing student behavior. We included input from SEL and Counseling in creating an effective discipline plan for students. The largest factor that helps us avoid the pitfalls of the school to prison pipeline is that we do not have a zero-tolerance discipline policy. Campus administrators are trained to consider all mitigating factors and apply discipline techniques designed to teach students about the behavior and reflect on how to improve future behavior. We specifically train on the effects that removing students from the educational setting has on students when assigning consequences and implement alternative techniques when appropriate.