

Questions from 1925 Committee - Meeting #1

1. Does the recent lowering of the federal rate impact our bond rating?

While we keep a close eye on the Federal Government's Interest Rate from an investment perspective, the movement of that rate would not directly impact our District's bond rating. Our bond rating is based on a comprehensive evaluation of our District's perceived ability to pay back any bonds we might sell, based on our current and historical financial position, our internal budgeting and finance processes and strategies, and our capacity to sell bonds related to our local property valuations and current market conditions. As such, our recent declines in Maintenance and Operations (M&O) fund balance could ultimately impact that rating.

2. Is there a financial penalty for class size waivers?

There is no specific financial penalty assigned for filing class-size exception waivers, as outlined in TEC §25.112.

3. Would the new staffing models result in layoffs, or would it be achieved through attrition?

Based on our average yearly attrition, we should be able to accomplish potential staffing reductions by not filling positions after employees resign or retire.

4. Why are we funded on attendance instead of enrollment?

Below is an excerpt from a *Texas Tribune* Article from February, 2023:

"This is a key policymaking question," (Texas Commissioner of Education) Morath said. "An enrollment-based financial system is much more discernible; it's predictable. You have a little bit more budget stability from an enrollment perspective than you do on an average daily attendance basis."

But Morath said the upside to an attendance-based system is that it creates an incentive for school districts to locate kids that are missing or chronically absent.

"On an average daily attendance basis, literally every day that a kid shows up to school counts," he said.

Morath also estimated that if Texas were to overhaul its entire public education funding system and base it on enrollment, it would cost the state an extra \$6 billion per budget cycle. (<https://www.texastribune.org/2023/02/06/texas-senators-school-finances/>)

5. Since the fund balance was used to provide raises in 2023, and since the fund balance is declining, what would happen to those raises if no additional funding is provided?

The District adopts a compensation plan each fiscal year following a review of market comparisons and local fund availability. Typically, once a salary/compensation increase is adopted, those new salary and pay scales remain intact going forward. Ultimately, future budgets will have to be adjusted to include the cost of previously-approved raises.

6. What is block scheduling?

***Block scheduling** is an alternative to the traditional daily school schedule where, instead of attending all scheduled classes every day, students attend fewer classes each day, but for longer periods of time.*

*In **modified block scheduling**, used at the four Denton ISD comprehensive high schools and LaGrone Academy, the schedule combines both traditional and block periods. Students attend two traditional length periods daily (1st and 5th), while the remaining six periods (called 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B) are double the time in length and are split into A and B days, alternating every other day.*

A Day	B Day
1 st period (~45 minutes)	1 st period (~45 minutes)
2A period (~90 minutes)	2B period (~90 minutes)
3A period (~90 minutes)	3B period (~90 minutes)
5 th period (~45 minutes)	5 th period (~45 minutes)

7. How does Denton ISD compare in enrollment?

Based on enrollment, Denton ISD is the 43rd-largest school district in the state and the 12th-largest in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. Just for reference, there are more than 1,200 school districts in Texas.

8. Will we get School Health and Related Services (SHARS) funds back?

We can still bill for Medicaid, but it is reimbursed at a much lower rate (hence the drastic cut) than in the past. There is no plan for the federal government to reimburse at a higher rate in the future.

9. How many different options do we offer for World Languages? If we only offer Spanish, could we be more efficient with staffing?

Denton ISD offers ASL (American Sign Language), French, German, and Spanish. Additionally, we are continuing to offer Latin this year at some high school campuses,

but it's possible that this course will close soon due to low enrollment and difficulties with finding certified teachers.

Generally speaking, offering multiple language options in high school does not inherently cost more than other electives, assuming that student enrollment is evenly distributed across all available programs. However, the reality is that student interest varies, leading to uneven enrollment by language. Without monitoring, this can result in teachers of less popular courses having smaller course loads than other teachers. Solutions we have employed when this happens include combining or "stacking" language classes (e.g., German III students and German IV students co-seat in the same class period together), sharing teachers across campuses, and using world language teachers with varied certifications to teach other courses during their day. We have explored distance learning options where the teacher is at one campus and students at another campus learn via live stream.

For any elective, it is standard practice not to run a class if it has low enrollment, as this is not cost-effective. Language courses do present unique challenges, however, since once a student begins studying a particular language, they need the opportunity to continue to more advanced levels in order to meet state graduation requirements and to access the terminal course in the sequence. This continuity is critical, as it supports not only language acquisition but also student motivation and commitment.

While we could run the cost-savings on cutting back from four languages to three, going lower than two or three has a different impact on the district. Universities often assess high schools based on a range of internal, undisclosed criteria. Doing so helps to contextualize applicants' achievements within the environment of their specific high school. While the exact criteria can vary by institution, one of the factors considered is the academic rigor and curriculum of the high school, including a consideration of how many AP courses they offer. Additionally, reducing access to AP level world languages to a single option would remove the option for students to demonstrate proficiencies in multiple literacies, and in an increasingly interconnected world, offering a range of world language options gives students a competitive edge in fields like international business, translation, education, and government.

It's worth exploring what the cost savings would be, but we need to approach cautiously so we don't disadvantage our students with regards to college and career readiness and opportunities.

10. Can we increase virtual offerings to relieve student-teacher ratio issues?

Yes, we can work collaboratively with Teaching and Learning, and the campus to determine if a distance learning (virtual) option would be feasible for certain courses. We currently have teachers with split teaching assignments, teaching at multiple campuses due to program needs based on student course requests. A distance learning model has also been used recently in teacher shortage/hard-to-fill certification areas where the student enrollment numbers allow.

11. How many local credit courses, like HS101 could be eliminated to make more room in the schedule for other courses?

Students in Texas entering high school are required to complete the curriculum requirements for the Foundation High School Program plus one Endorsement. This is equal to 26 graduation credits. Students in Denton ISD are required to have the same number of credits for graduation.

High School 101 is not a local credit course; it is a state elective course that results in state elective credit for students. For Denton ISD students, HS 101 is equal to one of the 26 courses required for graduation. If it were not required for our students, they would have to replace that credit with another state elective credit.

“Local Credit” (or “no credit”) courses are courses that students can elect to take but that do not count toward one of their required state credits for graduation. The local credit courses in Denton ISD are Academic Support (credit recovery), Military Drill I-IV, Partner Classes (like Partner Physical Education Mentors), Student Council II-IV, Student Athletic Trainer I-IV, English English as a Second Language III-IV, Peer Assistance & Leadership III-IV, PSAT/SAT Prep, and Peer Assistance II-IV.

12. Is it worth revisiting the number of club and event stipends available to teachers?

Yes, we will evaluate current and historical stipend pay to determine where cost savings could be applied. Consistent with Dr. O’Bara’s, superintendent, statement in our recent meeting, where we reduce/eliminate expenditures in specific areas, an impact is created to someone or something. In this scenario, opportunities for students within their school would be reduced or eliminated.

13. What are administrator’s responsibilities?

Administrators are responsible for the overall functioning of the campus while ensuring compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. These responsibilities include but are not limited to: Campus Improvement Planning (oversight of Campus Leadership Team and the Campus Needs Assessment & Campus Improvement Plan); recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and retention of faculty and staff; T-TESS cycle (teacher evaluation including goal setting, walkthroughs, observations, end-of-year conferences); student discipline management; collaborating with PTA; community engagement outreach, delivering professional development; implementing and monitoring campus systems (arrival, dismissal, attendance, safety & security, cafeteria, discipline, technology management, etc.); ensuring student engagement and academic success, Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data entry and verification; Admission, Review, Dismissal (ARD) meetings; Section 504 meetings; Language Proficiency Acquisition Committee (LPAC) meetings; Gifted and Talented (EXPO) meetings; Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) meetings; master schedule development; oversight of campus budget; oversight

of campus personnel, state & local assessment oversight (Beginning of Year - BOY, Middle of Year - MOY, End of Year - EOY, State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness - STAAR).

14. How many other school districts are in this position with such a gap in funding?

While cumulative data about 2024-2025 public school system budgets from across the state is not currently available, the Texas Association of School Business Officials (TASBO) recently conducted a survey and shared this on their website:

*“The **2024 TASBO School Finance Survey** gathered responses from 313 districts, reflecting 54 percent of the state's students. Notable findings reveal that nearly 80 percent of respondents face challenges with deficit budgets or insufficient resources, a concern ranking among the top three challenges for half of them. While less than a third reported deficit budgets for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23, over half anticipate deficits for FY 24.*

Looking ahead to FY 2025 -26, more than half of surveyed districts anticipate implementing budget cuts, with many also needing to use fund balances. Additionally, 43 percent of districts are presently undergoing significant cuts. Potential measures to address financial constraints include staff reallocation, revising staffing formulas, eliminating contract services, reducing department budgets, curtailing custodial and travel services, trimming online services/software, and staff reductions through attrition. This survey underscores the pressing financial challenges confronting Texas school districts.”