

The **Springboard** e-newsletter is provided as a community service to inform the public of actions during the monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees. The official minutes from the meeting will be posted online at www.springisd.org once approved by the Board.

Trustees

Rhonda Newhouse, M.Ed.
President

Deborah Jensen, Ph.D.
Vice President

Donald Davis
Secretary

Winford Adams Jr.
Assistant Secretary

Justine Durant

Jana Gonzales

Kelly P. Hodges

Public Participation is Welcomed

Citizens who want to speak at a Board meeting are asked to register at least 15 minutes prior to the time when the meeting is scheduled to begin.

For more information, go online at www.springisd.org and click on the Public Participation at Board Meetings link under General Info.

The next regular Board Meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 8.

The Spring ISD Board of Trustees met at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 11 via video conferencing, due to health and safety concerns related to the COVID-19 coronavirus, to address items on the agenda. President **Rhonda Newhouse** called the meeting to order.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent **Dr. Rodney E. Watson** began his remarks by explaining that he had been delayed in logging on for the board meeting due to his participation in a virtual town hall sponsored by State Senator **Carol Alvarado** (Texas Senate District 6), where he had been sharing with members of the community about Spring ISD's back-to-school plans.

"It was great once again to be able to share the plan that we have in place and how we're responding to COVID," Watson said, "but more importantly, what we're doing about making sure that we're continuing to educate our kids."



He noted that, with school set to begin virtually on Monday, Aug. 17, one of his highest priorities has been communicating with parents and helping them understand how the online offerings this fall will differ from those developed as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded during the spring semester.

"Last Thursday night we did get a sneak peek at our curriculum and all of the great work that our curriculum team and teachers have been working to develop for our families," Watson said. "So we're excited to be able



Rodney E. Watson

to offer that to all of our students starting Monday."

He went on to say the district already had plans in place to continue soliciting feedback from parents and families as the new school year gets underway, and that he and other district leaders would continue to apprise the board and the community of the results of upcoming surveys.

Watson spoke briefly about ongoing professional development (PD) for teachers to ensure a strong start to online learning in the upcoming weeks.

"Our teachers have been involved in training," Watson said. "Last Thursday night you heard as well about the training that was developed by teachers for teachers. This week we've had PD training that has been developed by our curriculum and instruction department, delivered through workforce development, and it has gone off extremely well – and extremely well organized – to make sure that our teachers have the supports that they need."

He concluded his remarks by entreating the goodwill of the entire community as teachers and district staff work to educate students even as the pandemic continues.

"We know that this is an uncharted time that no one in the country has ever experienced before," Watson said. "So there will be times that we'll make some mistakes, but as you know – and you know us well – that when we make a mistake, we will admit it, but we will work to rectify it to make sure that it does not hurt our students and our parents."

Acknowledging the uncertainty and the ongoing need to balance health and safety with the educational needs of students, Watson ended his remarks by asking "for grace and mercy as we implement and lead during this uncommon time."

Trustees Remarks

At each regular board meeting, during Opening Remarks, each board member is given the opportunity to share information with those present.



President **Rhonda Newhouse** invited the trustees to make remarks.

After beginning the official meeting with a presentation honoring Spring ISD's Elementary and Secondary Teachers of the Year, **Rhonda Newhouse** proceeded to open the remarks section by acknowledging the two winners – Reynolds Elementary School Special Education teacher **John Martinez** and Roberson Middle School Math teacher **Jo'NeQui'a Powers**.

With both Martinez and Powers present for the online board meeting, Newhouse acknowledged how difficult social distancing and safety requirements had been for the trustees, who normally enjoy celebrating the accomplishments of district teachers and staff in person.

"We miss being with our Teachers of the Year, we miss our Employee Recognition Banquet," Newhouse said. "I tell you, the board says we have just been lonesome in not being able to see our employees from Spring ISD."

She went on to thank the two teachers for participating in the board meeting and work session, and wished them continued success.

"We are most appreciative, Ms. Powers and Mr. Martinez, for all of your work that you did in 2019-2020, and we know you're going to be just as successful in the next school year." [Read the story here.](#)

Winford Adams Jr. spoke of the recent opportunity he had to participate virtually in the first ampED Tank, a "Shark Tank"-like online event, produced by the ampED National Fellowship, where young education professionals of color from all over the country took problems currently confronting the education sector and presented policy and initiative suggestions to an audience of school board members and other education leaders.

"The idea was to be able to get some board member or some education influencer to bring one of their ideas that they had pitched back to their board," Adams said. "It was particularly interesting because these folks only had a week to consider a challenge confronting the education sector, and then come up with a solution and then present it to us."

He described a presentation by a Stanford University graduate student hailing from Adams' own hometown of Richmond, California, whose presentation touched on creating formal district policies and structures that support leadership development.

"The policy that they took away – that I will be bringing to the governance board later on – is the codification of leadership development, which is something that we already are doing in Spring," Adams said. "But the idea that it should be codified in policy is something I'd want to talk about."

Donald Davis, in his remarks, spoke about the annual State of Education event hosted earlier the same day online by the **Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce**, where Spring ISD Superintendent **Dr. Rodney Watson** had made a presentation, along with the superintendents of other nearby districts. Davis described his pride in seeing that Spring ISD was leading the way in several important areas with proactive planning and forward-looking policies.

"Dr. Watson, thank you for laying the foundation," Davis said. "I think that we are a major force to deal with right now as far as the things we're doing in our district, and our strategies and our initiatives. Thank you."

Dr. Deborah Jensen began her remarks by also acknowledging the two Teachers of the Year recognized during the online meeting.

"First of all, I'd like to compliment Mr. Martinez and Ms. Powers. You sound like two teachers I would just absolutely love to meet, and see how you work with students," Jensen said. "Thank you so much for being part of Spring ISD."

She continued by discussing the drive-thru summer graduation ceremonies held on Aug. 8, which several of the trustees attended in person to congratulate students and their families.

"It amazes me how many things that we are having to do for the first time in history, and yet somehow they're working," said Jensen, who stressed the importance for all students of having someone to encourage them and recognize their accomplishments.

"You know, a lot of what we're doing is not the slickest thing in the world, but it's genuine," Jensen said. "I get the feeling that Spring ISD is doing pretty well to keep the human element going through a very challenging, challenging time. So thank you all in Spring ISD, for all you do." [View summer graduation photos here.](#)

Justine Durant ended the remarks section by adding her congratulations to the two district Teachers of the Year.

"I'd also like to congratulate Mr. Martinez and Ms. Powers. We were fortunate enough for you to share with us some of your engagement and work that you've done with your students in our work session, and I was very impressed."

She echoed other trustees in looking forward to a time when she could visit classrooms again and get to see Martinez and Powers in action, working with students.

"I'm excited that you are a part of the Spring team. I think it's a very well-deserved recognition," Durant said. "So once again, thank you very much, and congratulations!"

Special Recognition

In a special presentation, trustees recognized the two educators recently named Spring ISD's 2020 Teachers of the Year – Reynolds Elementary School Special Education teacher **John Martinez**, who was selected as the Elementary Teacher of the Year, and Roberson Middle School Math teacher **Jo'NeQui'a Powers**, who received the Secondary Teacher of the Year honor.

Only in his first year teaching in Spring ISD, Martinez says his passion for teaching special education came at a very early age.

"Education has been my passion for a long time, but what really pushed me towards special education was not only seeing my brother, but in high school, where I saw the students who were a little different than me and how they didn't have a voice being bullied," said Martinez. "I decided around 9th or 10th grade that I wanted to be that voice that they might not be able to have for themselves."

Martinez says he was "over the moon" discovering he was recipient for the 2020 Teacher of the Year award.

"Words can't even describe it," he says. "I wasn't expecting it – especially being a first-year teacher in the district and in special education. People in special education normally don't get this recognition, so I'd like to think that I made my impact."

Powers, who is entering her third year teaching at Roberson Middle School, says she credits the classic book, "Thank You Mr. Falker" by **Patricia Polacco**, as her inspiration into teaching. The story focuses on the author as a child with special needs and her teacher, who would not let his student fail.

"This story lit a path for me and upon hearing it, God's purpose for me was confirmed: I am called to teach, to inspire, and to lead," said Powers. "Along with the book, I was fortunate to directly experience numerous teachers who cared and truly imprinted my idea of the ultimate educator in my heart."

Following the initial announcement of this year's winners on Aug. 3, Spring ISD Superintendent **Dr. Rodney Watson** congratulated Martinez and Powers on their outstanding leadership and excellence in teaching.

"Due to unprecedented times, they did not get the opportunity to be honored at our Employee Recognition Banquet this year, but I know that they will not slow them down," he said after the meeting. "They are the personification of one of our major core values, and that is to do what's best for our students." [See full story.](#)

Action Items

Two Trustees Appointed to 2020 TASB Delegate Assembly

The Spring ISD Board of Trustees unanimously appointed **Dr. Deborah Jensen** as its delegate and **Kelly Hodges** as its alternate to the 2020 TASB Delegate Assembly.

The virtual event will be held on Oct. 3.

In addition, the trustees also heard an update on legislative board priorities for the upcoming school year. The board's Governance Committee is chaired by Trustee **Justine Durant**.

"The governance committee is really excited about bringing forth our legislative priorities for the upcoming school year," Durant said. "I also want to thank and just talk about how proud and how well represented we've been by Dr. Jensen on the TASB legislative committee, not just at a local but at a state level."

She then asked for Dr. Jensen to outline the current work being done.

"We are in a time of blended priorities," said Jensen, noting that TASB has added more priorities to the list it hands down to local school boards. She urged her fellow trustees to read through them and start picking out three to five to focus on as a district.

Board Approves Resolution to Extend Start-of-School Transition

The Spring ISD Board of Trustees unanimously approved a resolution to request a waiver from the Texas Education Agency that will give the district the option to extend the start-of-school transition period for another four weeks – or until Oct. 16 – if public health conditions warrant.

Under the approved resolution, some targeted student groups who would most benefit from in-person instruction and support will be able to access on-campus instruction during this time.

"We are including criteria that would allow us to end the transition period," said Executive Chief of District Operations **Mark Miranda**.

Specifically, in deciding whether to reopen campuses for in-person instruction, the district will look at several public health indicators including:

- 14-day flat or decreasing trend in new COVID-19 cases in Harris County;
- 14-day flat or decreasing trend in daily COVID-19 hospital population in Harris County;
- 14-day flat or decreasing trend in daily COVID-19 ICU population in Harris County;
- 14-day flat or decreasing trend of COVID-19 cases in area zip codes within the district's boundaries; and,
- 14-day flat or decreasing trend of COVID-19 cases in the top 10 zip codes where district staff reside.

Trustee **Winford Adams Jr.** said he appreciated the district for preparing for potential scenarios and having plans in place to stay flexible.

"If we come to a point four weeks from now where we need to pursue this option to remain virtual only for four weeks, our plan allows for the flexibility and we have the plans in place to act on that," Adams said.

Trustee **Dr. Deborah Jensen** noted the number of COVID-19 cases and positivity rate in the area is troubling. "I'm just very grateful about the safety of all of our personnel and students," she said.

Trustee **Justine Durant** echoed those concerns and asked for an update on the prevalence of COVID-19 in Spring ISD zip codes.

Police Chief **Ken Culbreath** has been tracking the number of positive cases within district boundaries and provides daily updates. At the board meeting, he reviewed the data from the district's top 10 zip codes where employees live as they relate to Harris County total cases.

"As of today, these top 10 zip codes where our employees live, those zip codes are 6.5 percent of Harris County's total confirmed numbers," he said.

Board President **Rhonda Newhouse** asked the district to survey parents on their preferences for extending the waiver and postponing a return to campus. She also requested additional Town Halls to gather feedback and bring it back to the board, hopefully at the September work session.

Miranda noted that a survey plan is already being planned to make sure that the district captures parent feelings and preferences. "Our goal will be to give our staff and our community sufficient notice before we make a change in our instructional model," Miranda said.

Superintendent **Dr. Rodney Watson** also provided some context for the latest TEA waiver, noting that there has been some ongoing discussions about which entity has the authority to make decisions to close schools or extend remote learning.

He noted that Texas Gov. **Greg Abbott** tried to resolve that conflict by giving local elected school boards that power.

"Things change and things are different based on zip codes based upon ISD," Watson said. "What may happen in one part of Houston may be entirely different in our particular zip codes and there's no better people to decide what happens than the individuals residing there and the individuals that have been selected to govern."

Waiver Allows 40 percent Campus Hybrid Instruction for High School Students

The Spring ISD Board of Trustees unanimously approved a resolution to request a waiver from the Texas Education Agency that will give the district the option to allow high school students to take part in a hybrid instruction model that includes two days of on-campus learning (40 percent) with three days of virtual instruction (60 percent).

The goal of the waiver is to reduce the number of students on the campus at any one time. The district was already planning such an alternating day schedule when public health conditions allow students to return to campus.

"It would allow us to continue to offer a hybrid instruction model in our 9th- through 12th-grade campuses," said Executive Chief of District Operations **Mark Miranda**. "These hybrid models, as you're aware, will allow us to continue to socially distance our campuses through a combination of on-campus and remote instruction."

Board Approves Updated Student Code of Conduct

The Board approved several changes to the 2020-21 Student Code of Conduct that incorporates revisions and additions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specifically, the handbook now includes guidance around how students are expected to behave to promote safety when health conditions warrant in-person learning on the campuses, including maintaining social distancing procedures, handwashing, wearing masks and keeping mouth and nose covered while sneezing and/or coughing.

"We think it's important for everyone to know the expectations so that we can keep our school community safe," said Chief Academic Officer **Khechara Bradford** after the meeting. "Our goal is to really emphasize how our students all have an individual responsibility to follow these protocols and that there are consequences for not doing so."

Students could face disciplinary action for purposefully trying to cough or sneeze on another person, refusing to adhere to social distancing standards, and removing protective equipment like a mask with the goal of trying to harm or threaten another person with bodily fluids.

Students who show up to school without a mask or refuse to wear one during the school day may face a dress code violation. Bradford said all schools will have extra masks to student occasionally forget. The expectation is that all students come to school wearing a face covering, just as they would adhere to dress code.

"Our goal is to educate, coach and basically raise awareness about all of our new safety protocols," Bradford said. "These changes to our Code of Conduct give us a way to enforce these measures and keep everyone safe."

Other updates in this year's Code of Conduct include more specific language around vaping. Although e-cigarettes are already banned, students will now face disciplinary action for using a vaping device or pen, which are often disguised to look like flash drives or other harmless products.

The new language also allows for disciplinary action regardless of the substance in the vaping device.

Trustees on Tuesday discussed the importance of making sure the Code of Conduct is administered in a way that promotes equity and does not penalize any specific groups of students.

"School walls will receive guidance throughout the year on how to ensure they're equitable," Bradford said. "We'll have ongoing data review to help us provide interventions and supports for leadership teams."

In another change, the board agreed to allow for the electronic distribution only of the Code of Conduct, rather than paper copies, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. To view the entire Code of Conduct, [please click here](#). Parents without ability to download the Code of Conduct may request one in print by emailing **Thomas Graham**, the director of Student Affairs at tgraham@springisd.org.

In other action the Board approved:

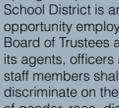
- Order for Audit and Notice of Trustee Election on Nov. 3, 2020;
- Internal Audit –Year End Progress Report FY 2019/2020 and Internal Audit Plan FY 2020/2021;
- Revised Spring ISD Staffing Guidelines for the 2020-2021 school year;
- 2020-2021 Spring ISD Compensation Manual;
- PSAT/SAT Universal Testing Contract with College Board for Grades 8-12;
- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between Texas A&M University and Spring Independent School District;
- Operation Connectivity Interlocal Acquisition Agreement with Region IV; and
- Taxpayer refunds.

Important Updates

Student Code of Conduct

In light of COVID-19, updates to the Spring ISD Student Code of Conduct have been made.

PLEASE CHECK THEM OUT AND BE IN THE KNOW!



Spring Independent School District is an equal opportunity employer. The Board of Trustees and its agents, officers and staff members shall not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, color, disabling condition, age, sex, religion, national origin, military status, or any other legally protected status in making decisions regarding staff members or students.