

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.**
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- Winford Adams Jr.**
Vice President
- Kelly P. Hodges**
Secretary
- Justine Durant**
Assistant Secretary
- Donald Davis**
- Jana Gonzales**
- Deborah Jensen, Ph.D.**

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, April 13 at the Gordon M. Anderson Leadership Center, 16717 Ella Blvd.

The Spring ISD Board of Trustees met at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, March 9 at the Gordon M. Anderson Leadership Center to address items on the agenda. President **Rhonda Newhouse** called the meeting to order and led the United States and Texas pledges of allegiance.

Recognitions

Since January 1984, the Board has recognized students and staff for major accomplishments beyond the District with Points of Pride awards. ABCD awards are presented to individuals or groups that go Above and Beyond the Call of Duty.

Points of Pride and Other Recognitions

Board Recognizes Students Named 2020-21 All-State Musicians by Texas Music Educators Association

Trustees recognized three Spring ISD students from Dekaney High School and Spring High School for being selected as 2020-21 All-State Musicians by the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA). The group, who went through a virtual audition process this year due to COVID-19, included Dekaney's first-ever choir student to be selected for All-State, junior **Teon Golden**.



Teon Golden



Christopher Aviles



Leonidas Velasquez

In addition to Golden from Dekaney, who was selected for the Bass 2 section of the All-State Mixed Choir, Spring High School saw one choir student and one band student chosen this year to represent the campus. Senior **Christopher Aviles**, a longtime member of both the school's choir and its Lion Players Theatre Company, was selected for the Tenor 2 section of the All-State Mixed Choir. Spring High School senior **Leonidas Velasquez**, meanwhile, was the only baritone saxophone player chosen for this year's 6A All-State Band from the four TMEA regions covering the entire Houston metropolitan area.

"While these students normally would get to go to San Antonio and participate in all of those normal things that an All-Stater gets to do, this was not a normal year," said Spring ISD Assistant Director of Performing and Visual Arts David Landgrebe during his remarks at the board meeting. "The journey of earning a seat was the reward this year, and these students showed so much tenacity navigating the virtual platform of these auditions."

Although the annual TMEA clinic and convention in San Antonio was canceled this year due to COVID-19, student musicians from across the state still competed for the chance to be named All-State musicians – the highest individual honor a Texas music student can receive. More than 70,000 students auditioned this year, with only the top 2.5% of those who initially auditioned ultimately receiving the honor.

"To Teon, Chris and Leo, you're outstanding gentlemen who are truly making Spring ISD proud," said Spring ISD Board President **Rhonda Newhouse**.

Trustee **Winford Adams Jr.** also congratulated the three, adding his praises also for their teachers and all of the district's performing and visual arts faculty for supporting students both before and during the pandemic.

"I want to just give a really big shout-out to their music teachers," Adams said. "You all are doing phenomenal work. Thank you so much for what you do, and congratulations." Read more.

Board Recognizes Communications Team for Recent Awards from Texas School Public Relations Association



Trustees recognized the Spring ISD Communications Department with a Point of Pride award for recently winning 40 Star Awards from the Texas School Public Relations Association for excellence in school communications during the 2019-20 school year.

The awards included four Crystal Certificates of Merit, top TSPRA awards that Spring ISD received for a pair of photography portfolios, a video portfolio, and content created for the 2020 State of the District event.

"I'm happy tonight to have the chance to shine a light on one of our district departments that usually stays busy shining a light on others," said Superintendent **Dr. Rodney E. Watson**. "One of the most important things that our district's Communications Department does is ensure that Spring ISD remains a trusted source of information for our community – that we provide clear, timely and transparent communications about what matters to our families, students and staff."

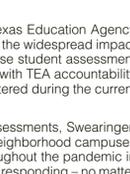
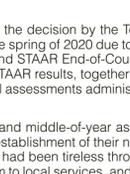
Watson noted that the team was also awarded two Best of Category Awards – one for a photo entry from one of Spring ISD's drive-through graduation events last spring, and another for a poster campaign highlighting personal reasons why Spring ISD students choose to remain drug-free.

Trustee **Deborah Jensen** noted that when she first saw the drug-free posters, she thought it was a national campaign. "And then I realized that it said Spring ISD in the corner and I thought, 'Oh, the quality of the work you all do is just amazing,'" she said. "Thank you for making us look good."

Communications Officer **Sylvia Wood** credited the district's talented staff and students for giving the team amazing stories to share. "We are also very grateful for the ongoing leadership of Dr. Watson and all of our trustees who support our Communications work day in and day out," she said. "We would not be able to do what we do without your commitment to keeping our families and staff informed and engaged." Read more.

Board Honors Elementary and Secondary Principals of the Year for 2020-21

Following the Points of Pride presentations, trustees recognized Spring ISD's 2021 Elementary and Secondary Principals of the Year – **Shanna Swearingen**, principal of Ponderosa Elementary School, and **Kenisha Williams**, principal of Twin Creeks Middle School. The district's Principal of the Year award goes to one primary and one secondary level principal each year, with finalists selected based on campus data and observations, student assessment, and feedback from other district leaders and members of the community.



Shanna Swearingen

Kenisha Williams

"As you know, we've got 40 amazing principals, so this is a very difficult decision to make," said **Dr. Lupte Hinojosa**, the district's chief of innovation and equity, during her remarks. "But at the end we did look at not only quantitative evaluation of the principals but also a qualitative evaluation of the principals, and this year we want to recognize two amazing principals that not only have succeeded with their schools but also in the community."

This year's contest was unique in part, Hinojosa said, because of the decision by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to suspend annual academic assessment requirements in the spring of 2020 due to the widespread impact of COVID-19 on Texas schools and classrooms. Without STAAR and STAAR End-of-Course student assessment data for last spring, the district incorporated additional historical STAAR results, together with TEA accountability ratings related to school progress and academic growth, plus local assessments administered during the current school year measuring progress at each campus.

In addition to their schools' strong showing on beginning-of-year and middle-of-year assessments, Swearingen and Williams were both praised for their visionary leadership and establishment of their neighborhood campuses as hubs serving the community. Hinojosa said that both principals had been tireless throughout the pandemic in working to find needed resources for their families, connecting them to local services, and responding – no matter the hour – to acute needs affecting their students.

"These are two principals that go above and beyond, taking care of their community, taking care of their teachers and their students," Hinojosa said.

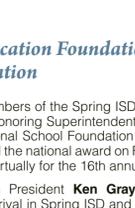
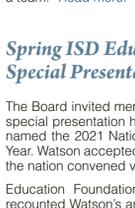
Swearingen, whose campus was hit especially hard during Hurricane Harvey, said that the resiliency of the Ponderosa community, together with her own faith, had given her the hope and strength to continue fighting for strong outcomes for every student at the school. She also praised her staff for their commitment to service excellence.

"I can tell you I have a phenomenal instructional leadership team. I have phenomenal staff that have the mindset that our students can learn and will succeed," Swearingen said. "It has definitely taken a village, and I am so appreciative of all that I've learned and the opportunity to serve in Spring ISD."

Twin Creeks' Williams also spoke of the importance of the surrounding community in making her school's success possible.

"Thank you for allowing me to serve the students, the staff and the parents – the community of Twin Creeks," said Williams, who along with Swearingen also thanked the district's assistant superintendents and School Leadership support team. "It is definitely an honor to receive this recognition on behalf of our campus, and I'm just reminded of how special Twin Creeks is and the many opportunities that we provide to students and staff to have success." Read more.

Board Honors Two Digital Learning Coaches with Employee Excellence Awards



Darlynn Daniels

Belinda Howell

The Board also announced the Employee Excellence Award winners for December 2020 and January 2021. Trustees continued this year's tradition of recognizing the winners during a special virtual presentation at the regular board meeting, rather than holding surprise in-person ceremonies at employees' campuses or job sites.

"The Spring Independent School District Employee Excellence Award is given each month during the school year," said Board President **Rhonda Newhouse**. "The award recognizes district employees who exemplify the district's guiding principles and core values. One employee is selected for this prestigious award each month."

The December award was given to Cooper Elementary School Digital Learning Coach **Darlynn Daniels**, who was praised for helping faculty and staff on her campus, as well as throughout the district, maximize the potential of virtual learning tools and platforms ever since her arrival in Spring ISD last year.

"She's exceptional in her daily activities because she has so many transferable skills that she has shared to teach teacher capacity technologically," said Newhouse in announcing the award. "Like many in her shoes, she learned how to navigate the computer. Unlike many, she not only navigated it, but she excelled in learning new programs that she could share with others."

Newhouse noted a few of the ways Daniels had utilized her role to empower, encourage and support teachers through the pandemic, when many have wrestled to learn and grow comfortable with new technologies and new online classroom interaction with students.

"Well, I am surprised and shocked! Thank you so much, Spring ISD and Cooper Elementary. I was not expecting this at all," said Daniels, adding that educational equity was especially close to her heart as a parent of a student learning from home this year.

The evening's second Employee Excellence Award went to another of the district's digital learning coaches, **Belinda Howell** of Twin Creeks Middle School.

Currently in her fourth year with the district, Howell began in Spring ISD as a social studies teacher at Twin Creeks. As an early adopter of the Schoology online learning management system, she was able to support and help train fellow staff when the coronavirus necessitated the sudden widespread shift to online teaching and learning.

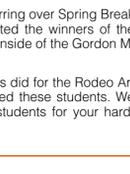
"Ms. Howell has displayed great talents in technical applications, such as becoming an expert in Schoology to support all stakeholders districtwide, including districtwide professional development and district town hall meetings," Newhouse said.

Howell said she was glad that her own excitement for new technology had given her an opportunity to help others.

"I really enjoy helping not only the students, but the parents and the other faculty and, really, everyone," Howell said. "It's just really being a privilege serving at Twin Creeks, where we really are a family and we really do win as a team." Read more.

Spring ISD Education Foundation Recognizes Superintendent in Special Presentation

The Board invited members of the Spring ISD Education Foundation to the podium for a special presentation honoring Superintendent **Dr. Rodney E. Watson**, who was recently named the 2021 National School Foundation (NSFA) Superintendent of the Year. Watson accepted the national award on Friday, Feb. 26 when attendees from across the nation convened virtually for the 16th annual NSFA national conference.



Ken Grays

Education Foundation President **Ken Grays** began the presentation, in which he recounted Watson's arrival in Spring ISD and highlighted the work done over the course of the EVERY CHILD 2020 strategic plan, developed under Watson's guidance following his arrival in the district.

"As we have now completed his initial five-year plan and started to work on his next plan, the Education Foundation took note of the magnificent work he has done for the district and his support of our foundation," Grays said. "In December, we started work and submitted a nomination to the National School Foundation for recognition of him as Superintendent of the Year."

The Superintendent of the Year award is designed to recognize a superintendent "whose visionary leadership and collaboration develops a partnership with their education foundation which provides every student the opportunity for success," according to NSFA. Watson was selected from 21 nominations submitted this year by education foundations from school districts across the country.

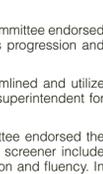
"It is with great pride and honor that we award and recognize him tonight for his honor and service to Spring ISD," Grays said.

In selecting Watson for the award, NSFA noted his strong advocacy for community partnership and his ongoing collaboration with the Spring ISD Education Foundation, a fact also noted during the board meeting by Spring ISD Namesake and Education Foundation Board Member **Gloria Marshall**.

"We see all the work that Dr. Watson does for our district, but you don't always see the work that he does in other areas," Marshall said. "Without his support, our foundation would not be as successful as it's been. He looks for ways to help us, to help provide direction to us, and it's made such a difference as we continue to work to support the students and staff of Spring ISD." Read more.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent **Dr. Rodney E. Watson** began his remarks by reminding elementary parents that the window to change their student's learning option is open through March 26. "We would love to see more of our remote learners come back to campus for this final marking period of the year," he said. "As everyone knows, we are keeping our health and safety protocols in place, including masks, so I hope parents will consider the in-person learning option."



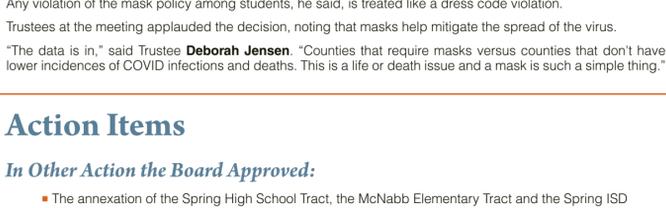
Rodney E. Watson

He then went on to note the robust discussion that the trustees had during their work session on March 4 about the district's Middle-of-Year academic data and the district's comprehensive response plan to ensure excellence, equitable outcomes for all students.

"What we heard was a detailed presentation on our next steps, including adjustments every three weeks to ensure that students are on track and teachers are able to adjust their instruction to meet the needs," he said. "We also are going to be providing more support and professional development for teachers to help them improve their ability to reach all students."

With the district's Spring Break scheduled for March 15-19, Watson urged everyone to stay vigilant against COVID-19. "We're seeing some light at the end of the tunnel, with more people getting vaccinated, and now it's definitely not the time to let our guard down," he said. "So I want everyone to have a great Spring Break, get some rest, have some fun, but most of all stay safe."

Trustees Remarks



Deborah Jensen Position 1

Kelly P. Hodges Position 2

Justine Durant Position 3

Winford Adams Jr. Position 4

Rhonda Newhouse Position 5

Donald Davis Position 6

Jana Gonzales Position 7

Trustee **Winford Adams Jr.** reported on his recent cohort opportunity with the School Board Partners, which includes 42 board members from across the nation. The fellowship will convene for the next two years to focus on professional development and improving student outcomes.

"The theme of the two-day workshop this past month was 'Finance 101,' which helped me to be able to ask better and more direct questions as it relates to finance," said Adams. "The overall mission of School Board Partners is to grow school board members so they can be more aggressive in promoting anti-racism governance, so I hope to bring what I learned back to this board for our team development."

Trustee **Dr. Deborah Jensen** shared that the trustees recently concluded a governance course focusing on redesigned systems of governance to increase equity in schools.

"One thing that has come out is that at-risk students and students in poverty – no matter what their race or creed – also have an uphill battle," said Jensen. "I'm looking forward to the challenge here to make sure that all of our students get the very best that they deserve."

Trustee **Justine Durant** echoed Jensen's comments on the governance course, stating that the class gave board members insight from a legislative standpoint.

"We're really excited to bring that information back to make sure that we are prepared to take head-on opportunities from a legislative perspective for the upcoming school year," said Durant.

President **Rhonda Newhouse** provided an overview of a virtual educational summit occurring over Spring Break which will include the entire Spring ISD Board of Trustees. Newhouse also congratulated the winners of the annual Spring ISD Rodeo Art Contest and spoke about the display gallery usually set up inside of the Gordon M. Anderson Leadership Center.

"It's sad that we could not have the public here to see the beautiful work that our students did for the Rodeo Art Contest," said Newhouse. "Thank you to the art teachers and the parents that supported these students. We had some beautiful artwork and some outstanding winners. Congratulations to those students for your hard, dedicated work."

Updates

Board Governance Committee Provides Update on Legislative Priorities

Trustee **Dr. Deborah Jensen** provided an update on the four major priorities for the district, which include addressing COVID-19, equity, public school finance, and charter schools.

COVID-19
Jensen called on the Texas Legislature to provide extra support to local school districts to identify and address student needs during and after the pandemic. "We know that we have had expenses, such as buying laptop computers and hotspots, and providing families to have connections to the internet, but also our students," said Jensen, mentioning recent data shows a decrease in progress compared to previous years. "This is going to require perhaps extra time and extra efforts, and it's going to take some more support from our state government."

Equity
Spring ISD continues to hold equity as a main priority in the district, with Jensen highlighting diversity and cultural awareness initiatives through staff and student education, and restorative teaching disciplinary practices that treat all students with equality. "If you want to change students, you have to change the adults," said Jensen. "We're all a part of a system here and we morally want all of our students to succeed."

Public School Finance
Jensen reported some good news from the recent legislative session in Austin, stating that state leadership will support the "hold harmless" bill under House Bill 3 to provide funding to school districts that have seen enrollment and attendance declines because of the ongoing pandemic.

Charter Schools
Another legislative priority for Spring ISD focuses on charter schools, which Jensen mentioned have full support from the state government in comparison to Texas public school districts who depend on property taxes. "They have budgets for things that public schools do not have," said Jensen.

Board Governance Committee Provides Update on Legislative Priorities

The Board Governance Committee is currently creating a letter to go out to public school boards on how to connect lawmakers to their state representatives and senators. The letter will provide ways by which students can approach lawmakers, including speaking points provided by the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB).

Presentations and Discussions

Board Approves New Reading Diagnostics for Students in Selected Grades

The trustees on Tuesday approved new diagnostic tools to assess and screen students to ensure they are getting the appropriate instruction and interventions in reading as required by the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

The TEA Commissioner gives school districts pre-approved options to choose from, so Spring ISD established a selection committee of three dozen educators from the elementary and middle school levels, as well as district representatives. That committee reviewed all of the options, including samples, webinars and product videos before making their decisions.

At the kindergarten, first and second grade levels, the clear winner was mCLASS, which the committee endorsed because it includes a dyslexia screener, research-based fluency measures, consistent skills progression and diagnostic data for students.

"One thing that the committee really appreciated was the fact that the data would be streamlined and utilize the same assessment for all three of those grade levels," said **Dr. Matt Pariseau**, assistant superintendent for curriculum and professional development.

For seventh grade, the other grade level in which reading diagnostics are used, the committee endorsed the RAPS360 (Reading Analysis & Prescription System) diagnostic. Some of the benefits of that screener include the ability to measure encoding/decoding, eye function word meaning, reading comprehension and fluency. In addition, the computerized test can be completed in 5-30 minutes, with individualized learning plans created for each student.

Trustees asked several questions about both programs, including the ease of administering, the data provided, their use among Spanish-speaking students, whether they can assess beyond reading, and how they actually work to diagnose potential problems, like dyslexia.

"Some students have challenges, as they read from the top left to the top right, and so you know there's tracking that occurs through the product," Pariseau said, noting that the screener uses shapes on the screen to identify if there are issues.

On a final note, Board President **Rhonda Newhouse** questioned why the seventh-grade screener doesn't involve a face-to-face screener.

"So to be one-to-one with every student, they're able to support a larger group and the software is able to do both environments."

Trustee **Winford Adams Jr.** thanked everyone on the selection committee for their diligent and thoughtful review of all of the options. "I just wanted to express my gratitude to the selection committee for the hard work they did in making this recommendation," he said.

Trustees Hear Briefing on the Ending of the State Mask Mandate

Spring ISD General Counsel **Jeremy Binkley** updated the board on Gov. Abbott's recent decision to rescind the statewide mask mandate and lift other COVID-19 restrictions as of March 10.

He noted that even though the governor ended the mask mandate, the Texas Education Agency issued additional guidance allowing school districts to continue requiring masks.

"Based on this we're going to continue requiring masks for all students, staff and visitors at campuses and district facilities at this time," Binkley said. He added that the district's mask policy was added last summer to the Student Code of Conduct, as well as the Student-Parent Handbook, which is signed by all parents at the beginning of the school year.

Any violation of the mask policy among students, he said, is treated like a dress code violation.

Trustees at the meeting applauded the decision, noting that masks help mitigate the spread of the virus.

"The data is in," said Trustee **Deborah Jensen**. "Counties that require masks versus counties that don't have lower incidences of COVID infections and deaths. This is a life or death issue and a mask is such a simple thing."

Action Items

In Other Action the Board Approved:

- The annexation of the Spring High School Tract, the McNabb Elementary Tract and the Spring ISD (Old) Transportation Tract into WCID 99, including any expenses associated with the annexation and reimbursement of related expenses;
- The first reading of proposed revisions to Board Policy EIA(Local), EIC(Local), EIE(Local) – Grading and Grading Cycle Updates to update grading and grading cycle policies for a nine-week grading cycle at the secondary grade levels;
- Minutes from the Feb. 4, 2021 Board Work Session and from the Feb. 9, 2021 Regular Meeting;
- The resolution regarding school closures due to Winter Storm Uri;
- First Reading of TASB Local Update 116, including CIB(Local) regarding technology resources and cybersecurity; DCC(Local) in reference to employment practices and at-will employment; FFAC(Local) on wellness and health services and medical treatment; GKA(Local) on community relations and conduct of school premises;
- Taxpayer refunds;
- The engagement with Whitley Penn for the district's annual audit;
- Contracts for library resources to the providers recommended by the administration;
- The vendor selected to provide property insurance for the district.



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