

Spring Independent School District Board of Trustees Regular Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 9, 2021 at 7:00 PM

1. Call to Order (7:01 PM)

President Rhonda Newhouse called the Regular Meeting of the Spring Independent School District Board of Trustees to order at 7:01 PM on November 9, 2021, in the Board Room of the Gordon M. Anderson Leadership Center, 16717 Ella Boulevard, Houston, Texas, in accordance with Chapter 551 of the Texas Government Code.

Members Present:

Rhonda Newhouse, President
Winford Adams, Jr., Vice President
Kelly P. Hodges, Secretary
Justine Durant, Assistant Secretary
Dr. Deborah Jensen
Natasha McDaniel

Members Absent:

Carmen Correa

Others Present:

Rodney Watson, Superintendent of Schools
Mark Miranda, Executive Chief of District Operations
Ken Culbreath, Chief of Police
Julie Hill, Chief of Human Resources and Human Capital Accountability
Lupita Hinojosa, Chief of Innovation and Equity
Ann Westbrooks, Chief Financial Officer
Jeremy Binkley, General Counsel
Jason Sheffer, Director of Board Services

2. Flag Pledges (7:02 PM)

The Presentation of the Colors was led by the Spring Navy JROTC.

3. Moment of Silence (7:03 PM)

President Newhouse asked the audience to join in a moment of silence.

4. Performance by the Bammel Middle School Percussion Ensemble

(7:04 PM)

The Bammel Middle School Percussion Ensemble performed for the audience.

5. Opening Remarks (7:16 PM)

5.1. Superintendent of Schools (7:16 PM)

To begin his remarks, Superintendent Dr. Rodney Watson announced that online applications for School Choice Programs were open for the 2022-2023 school year. He mentioned the longstanding programs at Roberson Middle School, Spring Leadership Academy, Wunsche High School, and Spring Early College Academy.

He went on to highlight the innovative programs that launched over the past year, like the P-TECH program at Dekaney High School and the opening of the School for International Studies at Bammel.

“This past year has been an exciting time for the expansion of school choice and specialty programs throughout the district, and we’re especially proud of the way that work has progressed despite the challenges of the pandemic,” Dr. Watson said. “We’ve long known from talking to our families that they value educational options and choice for their students.”

He went on to mention the daily campus tours that will take place the week of November 15-19, as well as help sessions for parents wishing to apply. Families who want to learn more about these schools and the application process can visit SpringISD.org/choice.

Dr. Watson followed up by recounting that morning’s ribbon-cutting ceremony at Westfield High School for the school’s brand-new barbering lab. The Barbering Program is a first-of-its-kind offering in Spring ISD, with 25 spots per year available for Westfield students.

The CTE program is fully comprehensive, combining high school academics with career-focused coursework and professional training, preparing students to become fully-licensed barbers by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation. The district’s professional partner is Eros Shaw, a Spring ISD graduate and entrepreneur behind Mystros Barber Academy.

“The Barbering Academy at Westfield is another example of Spring ISD’s drive to provide innovative options for our students that connect learning to life and prepare students for success,” Dr. Watson said.

He ended his remarks by offering an update on COVID-19 vaccinations, in the wake of the CDC and the FDA authorizing vaccinations for the virus for all children ages 5 and older last week.

“We will be sending out information to all of our parents with some resources on when and where they can access vaccines for their children, should they choose,” Dr. Watson said. “As always, we urge parents to consult their pediatrician with any questions regarding the vaccine.”

More information on vaccination sites throughout the district can be found on the district website at springisd.org.

5.2. Board of Trustees (7:18 PM)

President Newhouse invited the Trustees to make remarks.

Trustee Adams commented on the district’s high school marching bands and their recent performances during the UIL Area F, 6A Marching Contest, which saw both Spring High School and Westfield High School ranking in the top 10 in the area finals. “I think they did a fantastic job. I’m really proud of the students,” said Adams. He went on to praise the efforts of music teachers and the many parents whose efforts support music groups and music education in Spring ISD. “I want to congratulate the band directors, all the music teachers, and all the parents,” Adams said. “The booster parents and the parents that are supporting those kids as chaperones deserve a round of applause, I think.”

Trustee Dr. Deborah Jensen discussed the fall holiday season as a time when the district celebrates the work of various groups and departments, and described a recent experience she had volunteering at one such celebration. “I had the privilege to serve barbecue to the Transportation Department,” Jensen said, “and it is just so much fun to see these hard-working people who transport our kids every day safely – and just do an amazing job – and I want to thank them.”

President Newhouse thanked her fellow Trustees for regularly attending and taking part in events throughout the district. She also related her

own experience attending a dinner hosted by the culinary arts students at Carl Wunsche Sr. High School. “This was the first ‘first-class’ restaurant presentation that they made to the public,” Newhouse said. “Parents were invited, we had table linens, tablecloths and linen napkins. The students were dressed appropriately, and the menu was fantastic!” President Newhouse thanked the Wunsche Culinary Arts Program, and also praised the district’s broader Career and Technical Education (CTE) offerings that connect students with skills and certifications to give them a head start in their chosen professions. “It just goes to show that our students are reaching out, and they are doing fantastic in the various programs that they are involved in, so hats off to CTE as well.”

Trustee Durant echoed comments made during the Superintendent’s Remarks about the opening of the annual School Choice application period. She encouraged families to consider the many choices available to students in the district, whether through specialty schools or their neighborhood campus. “I just wanted to comment that all of our comments tonight have spoken to the choices that we have available to our students in Spring ISD,” Durant said. “I know a lot of people feel like charter schools bring choices, but I don’t think they have anything on Spring ISD.”

6. Recognitions (7:24 PM)

6.1. Point of Pride – Texas Art Education Association District of Distinction Award (7:24 PM)

The Board celebrated the district’s 2021 District of Distinction award from the Texas Art Education Association (TAEA). This year, TAEA named Spring ISD among recipients of the award for the third year in a row. The award, given to just 20 recipients for the first time in 2019, recognizes districts committed to providing a well-rounded curriculum that supports strong visual arts education across all schools and grade levels.

“The award would not be possible without our Spring ISD Performing and Visual Arts Department and our district’s amazing campus art teachers, who bring the arts to life with students every day in the

classroom,” said Executive Chief of District Operations Mark Miranda during his introductory remarks.

A leading advocate for visual arts education, TAEA has long honored outstanding individual teachers for their work in the classroom. This is the third year the organization has honored school districts that meet the rigorous District of Distinction criteria. Each participating district submitted documentation showing how they performed across various aspects of the program’s 14-point rubric during the 2020-21 school year.

Out of more than 1,100 districts eligible in 2021, only 40 met the standard. In addition, the district’s director of performing and visual arts, Dr. Joe Clark, told trustees that Spring ISD was one of only 17 Texas school districts to earn the award all three years, putting the district in the top 1.5% for art education statewide.

“We would like to once again thank the Board of Trustees for their vision, their direction and their dedication to our students,” Dr. Clark said. “You have allowed us to aggressively support our teachers in our classrooms so they can support the opportunities and choice for our students.”

The award recognizes excellence in the classroom, but also districtwide efforts to engage students in meaningful encounters with the visual arts, both on campus and in the community. TAEA also looks at field experiences, community service and community exhibitions, along with other elements, as part of the rigorous criteria for the award.

To celebrate, Dr. Clark and the district’s visual arts coordinator, Amanda Byers, were joined at the meeting by campus art teachers, plus two high school seniors who spoke to the Board about how their art studies had impacted their lives.

“Thanks to the Westfield art program and its wonderful teachers, I’m able to do many things I never imagined myself doing,” said Westfield senior Ana Rodriguez, who specializes in ceramics, but also enjoys sculpture and painting. “They have given me so much freedom throughout the years, while at the same time teaching me and never limiting my creativity.”

Rodriguez thanked the Trustees for supporting arts programs in Spring ISD, adding that the benefits to students are wide-ranging. "Being in art has not only helped me grow my art skills," Rodriguez said, "it's also helped me grow as a person."

Fellow Westfield senior Tzu Springer agreed, adding his thanks for all that studying art in high school had done for him. "I feel that this art program changed the way I think and approach real-world situations, as well as my ability to create and express myself through art," said Springer, who has centered his own art studies in mixed media and architectural design.

Board members in turn congratulated the teachers and district administrators whose work helped make the District of Distinction award possible, while also thanking the students for their testimony.

"We always say the work we do is all about the students, all about our kids, and it is so pleasing to see how it is paying off," Board President Rhonda Newhouse said after the students' remarks. "We truly appreciate that presentation."

Trustee Adams recalled Spring ISD music students who had addressed the Board earlier in 2021, and remarked on the positive benefits of arts integration and arts education for students.

"This is the second time students from the arts programs have come before the Board and read beautifully written testimonies about their experience, and I just think this speaks to the value of art in support of all the other academic areas," Adams said. "There's been some knowledge poured into these young people, and I really appreciate it."

Trustee Durant, meanwhile, said that while Trustees are not paid for the work they do on behalf of the district, moments like Tuesday's student presentations provide a deeper kind of compensation than money could offer.

"We're here because we love and we care about our students and we want to see you succeed," Durant said. "It was a reward, and refreshing, for me to hear both of you speak. I got a little misty," she added, "because to me that's what it's all about, and I just want to say thank you."

7. Agenda Participation (7:38 PM)

Members of the public did not register to speak to the Board.

8. Presentations (7:39 PM)

8.1. Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Year Ended June 30, 2021 and the Independent Auditor's Report (7:39 PM)

Chief Ann Westbrook presented the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Year Ended June 30, 2021. She reported that the district once again received an "A" rating with a score of 94, or "superior achievement" – the highest possible from the Financial Accountability Rating System of Texas, for the district's 2019-20 fiscal year.

Commonly referred to as School FIRST, the objective of the rating system, as explained by Chief Westbrook during her presentation, is to hold school districts accountable for the quality of financial management in Texas public schools.

The School FIRST rating system used to assess the 2019-20 year consists of 20 base indicators that analyze trends related to financial management efficiencies. The first four indicators are answered with either a "yes" or "no" answer while the remaining indicators are assigned a point value. Each indicator is weighted equally with the exception of the first four. Failure to comply with any of these four indicators results in an automatic failure.

Chief Westbrook said the report will be posted on the district's finance webpage. She drew attention to page 14 of the document where the indicators are explained, and also noted that there are new indicators and ceiling requirements this year.

The report also includes specific disclosures including the superintendent's contract, reimbursements received by the superintendent and trustees, outside compensation, gifts, and business transactions between the board members and the district, if any.

Celina Cereceres, a CPA with Whitley Penn, presented the Independent Auditor's Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2021.

The district received clear audit findings including:

- Unmodified opinion over the financial statements.

- No internal control findings related to financial reporting.
- No findings related to compliance.
- No issues to report in letter to those charged with governance.
- Unmodified opinion over each major federal program.
- No internal control or compliance findings for any of the major federal programs.

Trustee Durant moved that the Board of Trustees approve the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the Year Ended June 30, 2021 and the Independent Auditor's Report. Trustee Jensen seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

9. Public Hearing for One-Time Supplemental Employee Payment

(8:22 PM)

A Public Hearing was held for One-Time Supplemental Employee Payment.

The one-time supplemental payment for employees is scheduled to be disbursed in December 17, 2021 paychecks. All eligible full-time Spring ISD employees will receive \$500 and all half-time employees will receive \$250.

The payment is in recognition of work completed during the 2021-22 school year as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to challenge all aspects of the district's operations. The supplemental payment will also lay the foundation for the continued high expectations of all employees returning to work in Spring ISD in the 2021-22 school year.

Members of the public did not register to speak on this item.

Trustee Adams moved that the Board of Trustees approve and adopt the Resolution regarding employee retention as presented by the administration. Trustee Hodges seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

10. Board of Trustees (8:26 PM)

10.1. Board Governance Committee Update (8:26 PM)

The Board Governance Committee provided an update that included a discussion on:

- Legislative Priorities
- Board Governance Manual: Trustee Conference Attendance
- Leave for Elected Officials (DEC(LOCAL))

- Board Employee Excellence Award

10.2. Board Equity Committee Update (8:37 PM)

The Board Equity Committee provided an update that included a discussion on:

- Literacy Initiatives
- At-Risk Counselors and Social Work Positions

11. Executive Chief of District Operations (8:47 PM)

11.1. Interlocal Agreement with the Harris County Office of Broadband (8:47 PM)

Chief Mark Miranda presented the Board with information regarding an interlocal agreement between the Harris County Office of Broadband and Spring Independent School District to provide broadband internet towers to select campuses for community broadband services.

The Harris County Office of Broadband and Spring ISD are partnering to install towers at two Spring ISD schools as a pilot for providing broadband services to student homes. Families that qualify as economically disadvantaged can be eligible for this service. Each tower has the capability of supporting broadband in two hundred homes within a half mile of the tower. Currently, Eickenroht Elementary School and Hoyland Elementary School have been selected for the stand-alone towers. Roughly 3,000 students live within the range of the two proposed tower locations. In addition, Spring ISD is working to find a suitable multistory facility that can be utilized for a roof top antenna as a third location.

Trustee Jensen moved that the Board of Trustees approve entering into an interlocal agreement with the Harris County Office of Broadband to provide broadband internet towers to selected campuses for community broadband services. Trustee Durant seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

12. Chief Financial Officer (9:01 PM)

12.1. Spring ISD Preferred Medical Plan (9:01 PM)

Chief Ann Westbrook led a discussion of Spring ISD's Preferred Medical Plan.

Earlier this year, the Board of Trustees approved the addition of the plan through Aetna, which was then offered to employees during the open enrollment period at the beginning of this fiscal year.

The medical plan is currently an alternative to the Teacher Retirement System of Texas plan, which Spring ISD has utilized since 2011. The Spring ISD Preferred Medical Plan includes a healthcare clinic that is available free of cost to Spring ISD employees, as well as access to clinics and physicians throughout the Aetna network.

According to Chief Westbrook, just over half of eligible district employees are on this plan, with 55% choosing the Spring ISD Preferred Plan. Out of that total, 34 percent of those on the Preferred Plan chose the Basic Plan. If this type of participation continues, Chief Westbrook said it would be likely that operating the preferred plan would break even and have no net loss for Spring ISD in the future.

Currently, the district is able to offer employees both the TRS Active Care plan as well as the Spring ISD Preferred Plan. However, with Senate Bill 1444 approved by the 87th Texas Legislature, which became effective Sept. 1, an employer that participates in the TRS Active Care plan cannot offer any alternative group health coverage.

As a result of this new law, the Spring ISD Board of Trustees must inform the state before Dec. 31, 2021 whether it chooses to leave the TRS Active Care plan or not. This would take effect for the 2022-2023 school year and the district would not be able to rejoin the plan for five years.

Chief Westbrook informed the Board of Trustees that in the coming weeks, data will be available to compare the first three months of the preferred plan with the past year of the original offered plan. Board members then asked for some clarification on each plan's offerings from Chief Westbrook, including overall costs and future planned increases to each plan.

"We just want to make sure we do our due diligence," Trustee Durant said. "I just want to caution us to make sure we do that before December's meeting."

The Board of Trustees requested that Chief Westbrook present a few more items in the upcoming December meeting. These requested items include an estimate of the long-term costs of the preferred plan, a side-by-side comparison of each plan's costs and coverage, and a recommendation from the administration.

After reviewing that information at the December meeting, the Board will vote on a decision to continue participation in TRS Active Plan or continue with the self-funded preferred plan.

13. Consent Agenda (9:25 PM)

The Board approved the Consent Agenda items that were discussed in detail at the November 4, 2021 Board Work Session.

Trustee McDaniel moved that the Board of Trustees approve and adopt all of the items listed on the Consent Agenda. Trustee Adams seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

- 13.1. Review and Approval of Minutes from the Following Meetings:
 - October 7, 2021 Board Work Session
 - October 12, 2021 Regular Meeting
 - October 18, 2021 Special Called Session
- 13.2. Remote Homebound Instruction Waiver – (GEH) and (CEHI) Program
The Board will consider approving the Remote Homebound Instruction Waiver.
- 13.3. Acceptance of Grant Funds – Houston Endowment, Inc.
The Board will consider accepting grant funds totaling \$270,000 awarded by Houston Endowment, Inc.
- 13.4. Acceptance of Grant Funds – Communities Foundation of Texas
The Board will consider accepting grant funds totaling \$100,000 awarded by Communities Foundation of Texas.
- 13.5. High-Dosage Tutoring Contract with Intervene K-12
The Board will consider approving the Intervene K-12 contract.

- 13.6. 2020-21 First Budget Review
The Board will consider approving the 2020-21 First Budget Review.
- 13.7. Taxpayer Refunds
The Board will ratify taxpayer refunds.
- 13.8. Request for Proposal (RFP) # 22-003 – Career and Technical Education Products, Services and Programs
The Board will consider awarding the contract for Career and Technical Education (CTE) Services to the providers recommended by the administration.
- 13.10. Request for Proposal (RFP) # 22-004 – Vending Pre-Packaged Snacks
The Board will consider awarding the contract for Vending Pre-Packaged Snacks to the providers recommended by the administration.

14. Public Participation (9:27 PM)

Jonie Ochoa addressed to Board regarding exemptions and masks.
Terkara Cormier addressed the Board regarding concerns of bullying.
LaDavius Lundy-Nellum addressed the Board regarding concerns of bullying.

15. Closed Session (9:39 PM)

President Newhouse recessed the open session at 8:26 PM for the purpose of entering into closed session pursuant to the following provisions of the Texas Open Meetings Act:

- 15.1. Under Section 551.071 - For the purpose of a private consultation with the Board's attorney on any or all subjects or matters authorized, including any item posted on this agenda.
- 15.2. Under Section 551.072 - For the purpose of discussing the purchase, exchange, lease, or value of real. property
- 15.3. Under Section 551.074 - For the purpose of considering the appointment, employment, evaluation, reassignment, duties, discipline, or dismissal of a public officer or employee or to hear complaints or charges against a public officer or employee.

1. The Board will deliberate regarding the Superintendent's evaluation and goals.
2. The Board will deliberate on employees nominated for special recognition.
3. The Board will deliberate on a recommendation for the termination and finding of no good cause for an employee's abandonment of contract.
4. The Board will deliberate on the issuance of school district teaching permits for noncore career and technology courses.
5. The Board will deliberate on employee resignations, recommendations to withdraw prior actions taken, recommendations to void employee contracts, recommendations for the proposed termination of employees on probationary and/or term contracts, and final orders for employees on term and probationary contracts previously proposed for termination and/or nonrenewal.

15.4. Under Section 551.076 - To consider the deployment, or specific occasions for implementation, of security personnel or devices.

16. Actions on Closed Session Items (10:48 PM)

President Newhouse reconvened the open meeting at 10:26 PM.

- 16.1. Trustee Jensen moved that the Board approve the Superintendent's recommendation to terminate the contracts of Jake Shanley, Jasmine Adams, Ora-Anna Brown, Elsa Ramirez, Brandi Nobles, and Cheyenne Feaster upon finding that the employee(s) failed to perform their contracts without good cause, and authorize the Superintendent or designee to notify the employees of the proposed termination pursuant to Chapter 21 of the Texas Education Code. Trustee Jensen further moved that the Board authorize the Superintendent or designee to notify the State Board for Educator Certification that the employees failed to perform their contracts without good cause, and of the action taken by the Board. Trustee Adams seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.
- 16.2. Trustee McDaniel moved that the Board render a final order to terminate the contracts of Eleanor Wilson, Anna Sanchez Andrade, Sandra Resendiz, Kelsey Bain, Kellyn Radler, Mickey Reed, and Jessica

Rosales as presented in closed session and to authorize the Superintendent or designee to provide notice of the Board's action to the impacted employees pursuant to Chapter 21 of the Texas Education Code. Trustee Durant seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

- 16.3. Trustee Durant moved that the Board issue a school district teaching permit to Natasha Hill and Edward Price for the purpose of teaching noncore career and technology courses and to authorize the Superintendent or designee to notify the Commissioner of Education of the Board's action. Trustee Adams seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.
- 16.4. Trustee Durant moved that the Board revise the continuing education in the Board Governance Manual as recommended by the Board Governance Committee. Trustee Adams seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.
- 16.4. Trustee Adams moved that the Board approve on first reading the provisions to DEC(LOCAL) regarding elected official leave as recommended by the Board Governance Committee. Trustee Jensen seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

17. Adjournment (10:53 PM)

On a motion by Trustee Durant, seconded by Trustee Adams, the Board unanimously adjourned the meeting at 10:53 PM.



Justine Durant, President



Kelly P. Hodges, Secretary