

Superintendent Watson Welcomes 2018-19 ACE Committee and Provides Key Updates

The Advisory Committee on Education held its first meeting of the 2018-19 school year on Wednesday, kicking off a series of eight gatherings designed to gather feedback from campus staff on key issues affecting educators and students within the district.

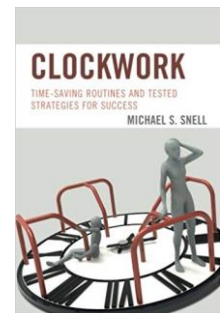
Spring ISD Superintendent Dr. Rodney Watson opened the meeting by welcoming educators and urging them to take an active role in the ACE meetings, which he described as critical to helping the district progress.

“This is a group where you all get to give me feedback,” Dr. Watson said. “This is how we get change in the district.”

In a change this year, ACE members are going to be given greater ownership of the meetings, including two new stipend positions for both elementary and secondary representatives. But he said all members have the important responsibility of taking information from the meetings and disseminating it to their campus colleagues.

2018-19 Principals Books Study

This year, Dr. Watson said principals would be reading *Clockwork*, a book by Michael S. Snell, which covers strategies for time management. He encouraged ACE Committee members to also read the book as they face the challenges of being busy educators trying to prioritize many important tasks in an ongoing quest to meet the needs of students. ACE members will receive a copy at their next meeting.



LIFT YEAR Priorities

EVERYchild2020

a student-centered plan to transform Spring ISD

The 2018-19 school year marks the fourth year of the district's strategic plan EVERYchild 2020, and provides an opportunity to capitalize on the achievements of Years 2 and 3 to ensure best practices and successes are shared and replicated across the district.

“As a school district, we're never arriving, we're always a work in progress,” Dr. Watson said. “We're looking at how we can take what we did last year, build upon it and make it better.”

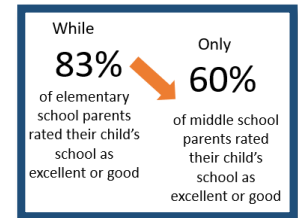
Specifically, the superintendent reviewed this year's five priorities - Special Education, Professional Development, Gifted and Talented Education, Dual-Language Programs and Performing and Visual Arts Integration. He noted that all of the areas are in response to both data and feedback. In particular, the district's push to offer more professional development comes as a result of last year's ACE Committee meetings and a survey indicating teachers wanted more offerings to help them strengthen their instructional practice. In addition, he noted that it's important to help teachers grow as a way to improve student achievement.

“If we have staff that are rated as distinguished and campuses that are rated Improvement Required, that's a disconnect,” said Dr. Watson. The goal, he said, is to ensure high-quality teachers are improving student outcomes.

Special Education also poses challenges: “One of the biggest issues is compliance,” Dr. Watson said. “The other part is student achievement. We must make sure those students in Special Education are actually growing.”

2018 Accountability Ratings and Enrollment Trends

In August, the Texas Education Agency released its new A-F letter grade accountability system. The formula used to calculate letter grades for districts is based on how districts perform across three areas: student achievement, school progress and closing the gaps. Though technically Spring ISD was among 92 districts designated as Not Rated in 2017-18 because of Hurricane Harvey, its numerical score would have resulted in a C grade.



Dr. Watson told ACE members that the Board of Trustees is looking for the district to improve its grade to an A over the next year. Though that goal is lofty, he said it is achievable, considering the work individual campuses have done in recent years to improve their own ratings. In particular, he applauded Bammel and Ponderosa elementary schools for achieving TEA distinctions.

Overall, he noted that, for the first time since the 2010-11 school year, all of the district's 26 elementary schools Met Standard.

Finding ways to continue improvement is especially important as the district continues to face competition from charter schools moving into the area and luring away students, Dr. Watson said. He said it's important to keep the district's enrollment steady and to encourage all students to come to school every day, since state funding is linked to attendance and attendance is linked to academic achievement.

Currently, he noted that the district is within one percent of its projected enrollment for the year.

2016 Bond Update

As the school year begins, there is much work underway on 2016 Bond projects, including an upcoming October 9 ribbon-cutting ceremony for the district's new Police Command Center and Tax Office, located at 420 Lockhaven.

In addition, the district held a groundbreaking ceremony on September, 8 for the district's replacement stadium off Cypresswood Drive, and steel beams are going up for the Roberson Middle School replacement campus on Veterans Memorial Parkway.

Design work is underway for all three ninth-grade centers, and the plan is currently to bring those renderings to the Board of Trustees in November. On the north side of the district, site work is progressing on Middle School No. 8, which will hold a beam-signing ceremony on Oct. 25.



With the district planning to open two new middle school campuses next August, as well as a specialty school known informally as Middle School No. 9, Dr. Watson told the group it was a good time to focus on the middle school years.

Toward that goal, he is holding a listening tour to gather important feedback from fourth- and fifth-grade elementary parents about how they would like district middle schools to be improved and strengthened.

On Tuesday, Dr. Watson heard from parents at Bailey Middle School and at least another five sessions are scheduled over the next three weeks. He announced the listening tour on Sept. 11 at the Board of Trustees meeting, where he outlined the importance of a districtwide focus on middle schools. “This is a big priority for us, because our data shows that some of our families are opting out of our middle schools,” he told the trustees.

Specifically, the annual opt-out rate since 2012-13 has been about five percent each year based on enrollment data. Survey data also shows a drop in the number of parents rating their child’s school as excellent or good from elementary to middle schools.

“We have got to do some work because our parents are checking out at the middle school level,” Dr. Watson said.

He said administrators are already trying to leverage research on middle school programming as they come up with recommendations to bring to the Board of Trustees in November. Some feedback he has already heard is that middle school class sizes need to be smaller. He welcomed ACE input as the administration puts together a plan.

2018 District PBMAS Results

Dr. Miguel Perez, executive director of strategic planning, gave the ACE group a high-level overview of the Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System, which is used by TEA as one part of its annual evaluation of school districts’ performance and program effectiveness.

PBMAS looks at four areas: Bilingual Education and English as Second Language; Career and Technical Education, Special Education and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) – specifically Title I and Migrant programs.

Dr. Perez reviewed last year’s results, showing the group areas in which the district improved, stayed the same or declined.

“Even though we had pockets of excellence, we need more pockets of excellence,” Dr Perez said. He said improvement is possible through the work of dedicated teachers in the classroom. “At the end of the day, what you do with the kids matters.”

Professional Development Calendar for 2018-19

Pam Farinas, assistant superintendent of Workforce Development, reviewed the upcoming professional development being offered to educators during the 2018-19 school year, including the professional development day on Friday, Sept. 21, which marks the first of five scheduled throughout the year.

Morning sessions will be held at the campuses, while teachers will have the option to travel throughout the district for specific offerings in the afternoons. Farinas explained that some principals may encourage specific teachers to sign up for trainings based on their observations of what might benefit that teacher.

All of the trainings are listed in Eduphoria, the district’s Learning Management System, and teachers need to register in order to receive credit.

She noted that teachers will see an alignment between the professional development they indicated they wanted last year and what is being offered, including popular topics such as Get Better Faster.

Strategic Compensation and Rewarding High Performance

The district is planning to launch another component of its **Spring Rewards strategic compensation plan** during the 2019-2020 school year that could reward high-performing teachers with bonuses of up to \$4,000.

Currently, the design team has narrowed the model down to one option and it will continue to be shared with district stakeholders in preparation for roll out next year, according to Dr. LaQuita Carter, assistant superintendent of performance management. She said the goals of the **Spring Rewards program** align to the district’s strategic plan: to



encourage high performance from every employee and promote excellence in every classroom. The “why” behind this work is to be intentional with recruitment, retention, and growth of staff while rewarding those who go above and beyond with achievement and growth as strong indicators.



One aspect of **Spring Rewards** already in place is the teacher attendance incentives. Since starting that initiative last year, the district has awarded more than \$170,000 in attendance incentives to more than 100 teachers with perfect or near perfect attendance during the 2017-18 school year.

That program is continuing this year because of the importance of teacher attendance to ensuring student achievement. Dr. Carter noted that attendance will continue to be an integral part of the Spring Rewards program when it launches next year. Teachers would only qualify for potential bonuses if they have four or fewer absences in the academic school year, in addition to meeting other benchmarks in the areas of student achievement, school progress and closing the gaps, as measured by state accountability.

More information about the specifics of the program will be released in January, Dr. Carter said. She encouraged any ACE members interested in working on the strategic compensation initiative to let her know.

Closing Remarks by Dr. Watson and Next Meeting Date

Dr. Watson closed the first ACE meeting by again thanking the participants and noting that he and his leadership team are aware of all the demands being placed on teachers. He said he is looking strategically at how much is being asked to figure out how to lessen the load while still accomplishing everything that needs to get done between the start and end of the school year.

The next ACE meeting will be held on Wednesday, Oct. 10 from 4:30 to 6 p.m.