

Advisory Committee on Education Gathers for Fifth Meeting of the Year

Chief of Staff Dr. Julie Hill opened the fifth ACE meeting of the 2018-19 school year (and the first meeting of 2019) on Wednesday, Jan. 23 at the Gordon M. Anderson Leadership Center, welcoming committee members, thanking all for their attendance, and wishing everyone a happy new year and a good second semester on their respective campuses.

Topics covered during the meeting included an update on the district's Targeted Improvement Plan, general discussion of the 2019-20 Instructional Calendar Survey results, and feedback received following the Jan. 7 professional development campus-based morning sessions.

District Targeted Improvement Plan Update

The Performance Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS) is used by the state to monitor performance of student populations in four programs:

- Bilingual Education/English as a Second Language (ESL)
- Career and Technology (CTE)
- Special Education (SPED)
- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

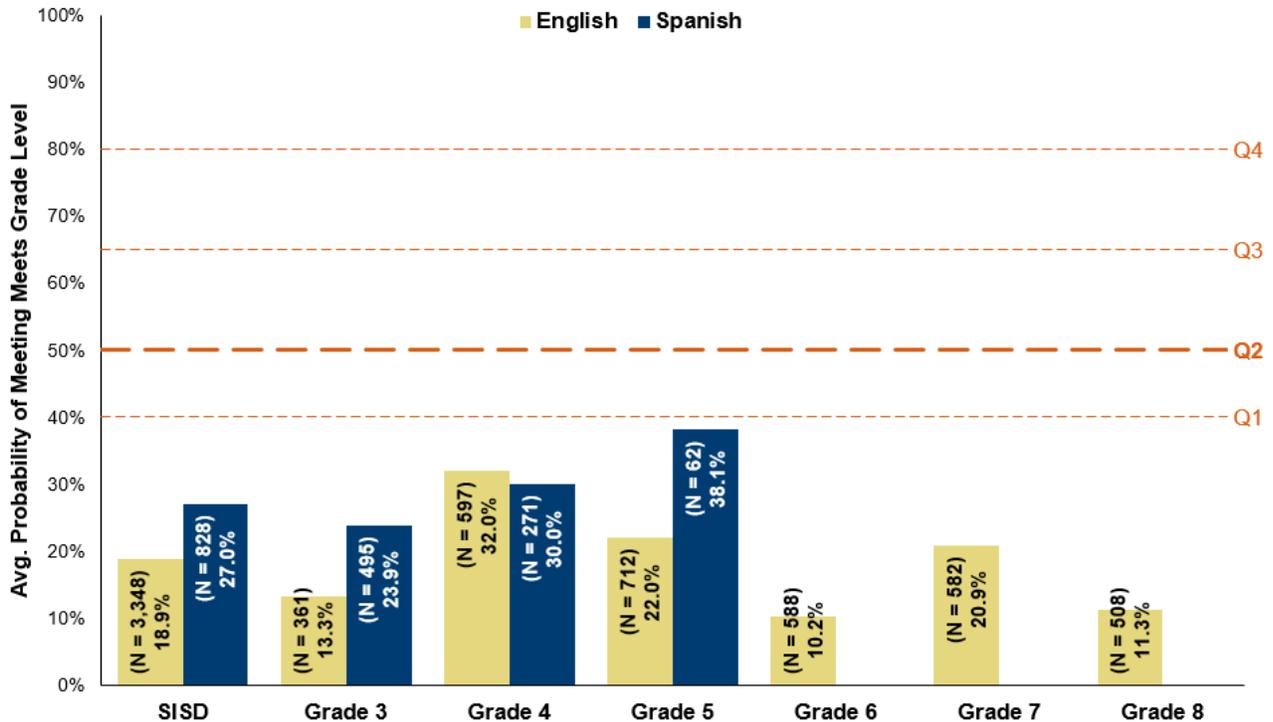
Each program is measured by a set of Performance Levels (PL), which are individually scored 0-4. The higher the PL, the lower the district's performance. As part of its Targeted Improvement Plan (TIP), Spring ISD has been focusing on two primary goals:

1. By June 2019, at least 80% of dual-coded CTE/LEP and dual-coded CTE/SPED students will reach the "Meets" level on EOC English I/English II resulting in an improvement from Performance Level 3 to Performance Level 0.
2. By June 2019, at least 80% of grade 3-8 SPED-identified and 3-8 LEP-identified students will reach the "Meets" level on STAAR Reading resulting in an improvement from Performance Level 2 to Performance Level 0.

In reviewing testing data from Quarter 2 benchmark exams – when the goal had been to see 50 percent or more of the targeted students reaching the "Meets" level on both the EOC English I/English II benchmark and the STAAR Reading benchmark – Dr. Hill emphasized that, although the graphs do not yet show the full projected improvement, she and other district administrators are feeling positive about the gains made so far. She also discussed lessons learned last year, and how those lessons help put the data in a broader context.

Benchmark Results – Q2 Target: 50% Meets

LEP Grades 3-8



“Last year, we took results back to the campuses and worked from them there,” Dr. Hill told committee members. “I feel much more comfortable this year, because if we did it once, we can do it again.”

Although the progress so far isn’t enough for Spring ISD not to have a TIP in place, she indicated that is still the long-term goal.

“We still think we can get to those ones and zeroes,” Dr. Hill said. “I know we can do it. We can get there.”

The group then went on to discuss the Q3 goal of 65 percent or more of the coded 3-8 SPED and 3-8 LEP students scoring at or above “Meets Level” on district benchmark #2. A question was raised as to how individual teachers could best make use of the results, especially since the computerized tests are adaptive in structure. Since the computerized test adapted depending on performance on previous sections, it could be hard to use the benchmark data to drive interventions.

Both Dr. Hill and Superintendent Dr. Rodney Watson discussed the issue, explaining, in part, that the decision to utilize the adaptive computerized benchmark tests was driven by the district’s need to make students more comfortable taking such tests.

“The state is moving to online assessments,” Dr. Watson told the committee members. “A lot of our students aren’t used to that. In a lot of other states, all the assessments are already online. If we don’t get our students ready for that, we’re going to be way behind the eight ball. We have to make sure our kids are ready.”

In the continued discussion, some committee members expressed their surprise at finding the data more useful than they had expected it would be. The superintendent said that the district would continue to use the information in whatever ways needed to help students succeed.

“The purpose of this data was to tell the district, based on where we are now, what we need to do next,” he said, going on to add that, “The benchmark data are district-level assessments and aren’t meant to be as

useful for small-group planning and individualized interventions. But we needed to know, as a district, if this was the state-level exam, how would our students do?”

He seconded Dr. Hill’s earlier comments that the administration was happy to see the gains, and remained hopeful about the upcoming Q3 and Q4 results.

“It shows the amount of work you and your peers have been doing,” Dr. Watson said. “If we can keep moving forward, we’ll be able to meet our goal. We’re not as far away as you may think. And even though you may have some students in your classes who are struggling, I definitely want to make sure, when we leave this conversation, that you’re encouraged.”

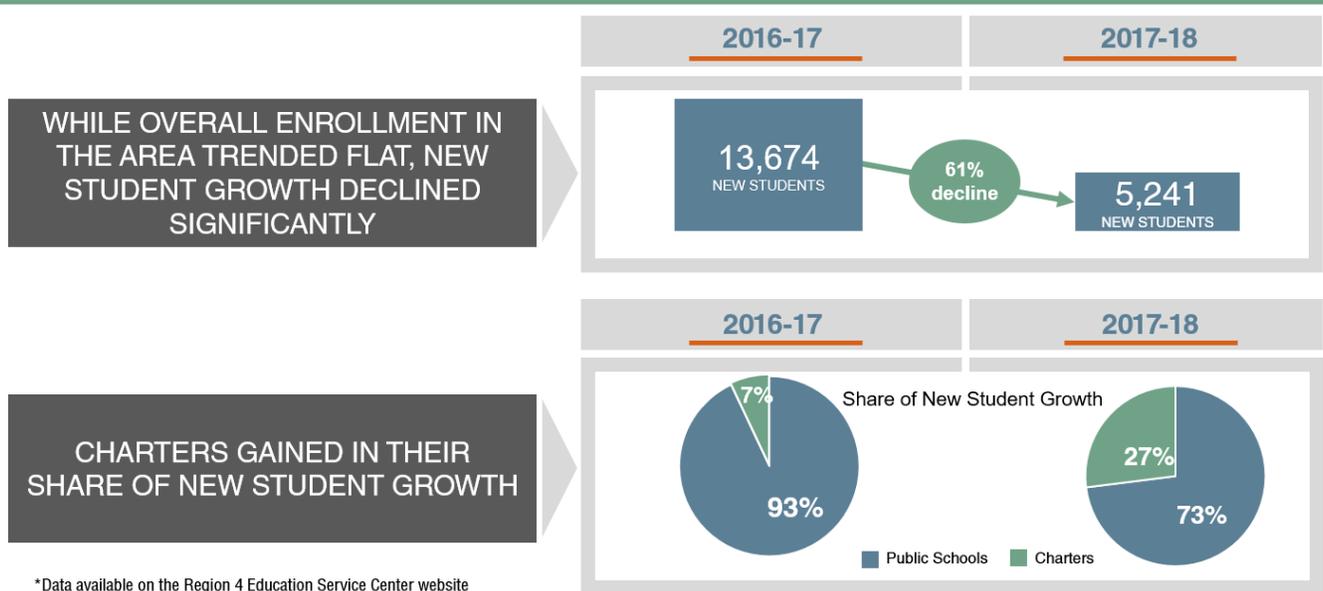
Charter Schools and Enrollment Trends

In wrapping up the Targeted Improvement Plan update, Dr. Watson transitioned briefly to speak with the group about how enrollment trends in the greater Houston area were starting to impact Spring ISD. In particular, he spent a few minutes discussing how the expanding charter school movement was forcing Spring ISD to take innovative approaches to curriculum and other areas.

“Every time a charter school organization wants to move into the area, the state sends me a letter,” Dr. Watson explained. “In the past several years, I would receive maybe five of those a year. In December and January alone, I’ve received 30 of these letters.”

While not all of these charters will ultimately end up opening campuses within the district’s boundaries, Dr. Watson emphasized that the trend is real, and that, while charters are capable of offering good programs for certain students, their growing share of new student enrollments – both in Spring ISD and across the region – poses challenges for public school districts, which remain charged with offering a quality education to every student who enrolls.

NEW STUDENT GROWTH TRENDS IN THE HOUSTON AREA



“We have some competition now,” Dr. Watson said. “When our enrollment declines, our funding decreases.”

He stressed the fact that, often, it’s parents who feel disconnected from their district, or parents who feel their children’s needs aren’t being met, who will be the first to leave. The superintendent told ACE members that it was important for the district to reach out and connect with community stakeholders, especially those parents who are not already actively engaged in some way on their child’s campus.

Dr. Watson cited examples such as the recent Middle School Listening Tour as ways the district is trying to engage with families.

“We’re meeting with parents, and we want to be responsive,” he said. “Our new district programming is all in response to feedback and input from our parents.”

2019-20 Instructional Calendar Options Review and Discussion

The group shifted tracks to discuss the 2019-20 Instructional Calendar options and the results of a recent districtwide survey collecting feedback on the proposed calendars. During its December meeting, the committee had considered three different calendar options – a more traditional academic calendar in line with recent years, plus two more innovative calendar options that would add in more breaks throughout the year, particularly during the fall semester.

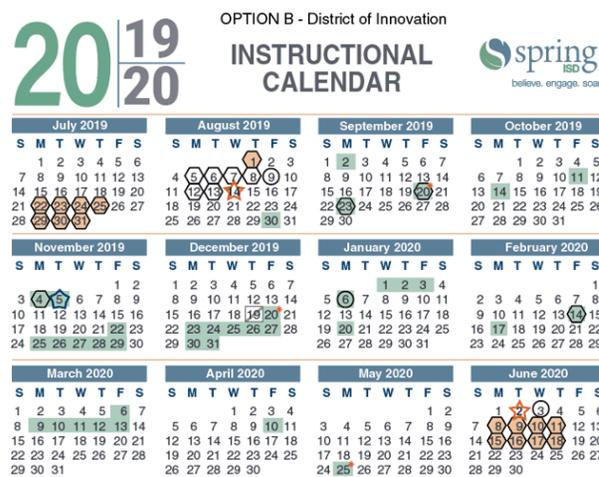
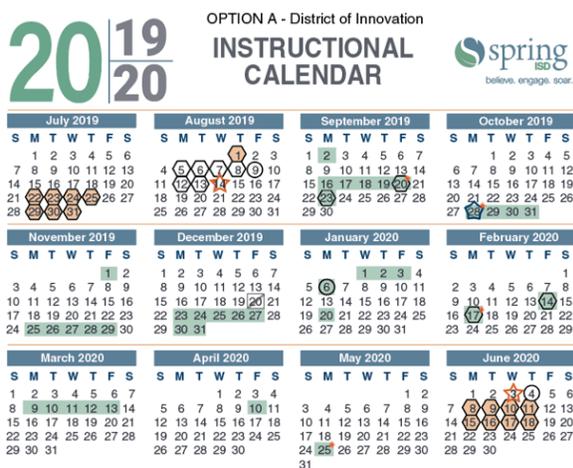
The group at that time selected to elicit feedback on the two innovative options, which eventually became Option A and Option B for the purposes of the recent stakeholder survey. Option A would build in more days off in September and October – including two week-long instructional breaks – while Option B would create more long weekends throughout the year.

In talking about the overall survey response rate, Dr. Hill praised campuses for helping to get the word out and encourage staff and students to voice their opinion.

“Teachers cast the most votes, followed by students,” she told the group. “This is double the number of votes we usually get on the calendar, and probably five times the number of student votes we’ve ever gotten on the calendar.”

While a question was raised about the amount of communication that had gone out prior to the survey about the rationale behind the less traditional calendar choices, Dr. Hill said the administration had been careful not to over-explain, wanting respondents to consider each option according to their own personal criteria.

“We didn’t want to bias them too much,” she said.



A recurring response on the survey came from many teachers and students indicating that breaks would help alleviate teacher and student burnout and contribute to an improvement in absenteeism.

The committee broke into small groups to look over the survey responses and discuss the pros and cons of each calendar option in light of the results. The committee’s input will be a valuable part of the district’s decision-making process, Dr. Hill emphasized.

January 7th PD Day AM Campus Session - Survey Results

The committee was also briefed on responses to surveys about the Jan. 7 campus-based professional development day for teachers. Dr. Hill related that responses had overall been positive, with a high percentage of respondents saying that the training would help them be effective in their job. In addition, she

said, several respondents mentioned in their survey that they would be able to go back and immediately implement something they had learned in their own classroom.

Dr. Hill also asked the committee to consider what their responses might be to some of the comments on the surveys.

“What kinds of comments might you – as ACE members – make back to some of the commenters on the survey?” she asked. “These are your peers. We want you to know what they’re saying, but also what we might say back to them to help them understand the value of these trainings, including the sessions on each campus. Many of them also included feedback about how we can improve professional development, and we would love to get your feedback on that, too.”



Before the meeting's close, Dr. Watson took a moment to mention that the board had voted during its January meeting on new teacher performance incentives, which will offer additional incentives and support to teachers in both core and hard-to-staff areas. He asked the group to help get the word out about these incentives.

“When you hear people complaining about what Spring ISD is not doing,” the superintendent said, “you need some ammunition, something to help emphasize positive successes currently underway. We want to make sure that those who these incentives are for actually appreciate these measures. I want to make sure you’re appreciating it, and that your peers are appreciating it. Because there are some great things that you all are doing that really are working.”

Next Meeting

The next ACE meeting will be held on Wednesday, Feb. 20 at 4:30 p.m.