To: GISD School board

RE: GISD expenses questioned against the news of budget dipping into Rainy Day fund

February 12, 2019

As stated at the February 11 GiSD board meeting, I have a number of questions and comments regarding expenses of GISD. This letter will state additional concerns and details so is not the usual one topic, one page recommended business letter; please read to the end and consider all points.

My first thought addressed budgeting. Everyone has a budget. Was this not foreseen and expenses modified? What was the two cent issue voted on months ago? Where does that come into play?

I do not believe this situation to be brought upon solely by the oil boom or the Robin Hood program for school equity. It also did not happen overnight. Many of the expenses mentioned here are current, but have been money spent over the last few years.

Acknowledging that I am not “privy” to all factors, I question the following GISD expenses:

* Experts brought in for annual tasks, such as class scheduling for students. Can each campus not determine workable class schedules for students? There are numerous student requirements, but do we need to bring in and pay someone from the outside to do this? This sends the signal that we – as counselors, as teachers – cannot do this?

Worse, that the schedules were not workable and it was a nightmare to get them straightened out. At the most basic, sit grade-level teachers around a table with a blank roster sheet for each class period. Like dealing cards, place students with requirements such as special ed, 504, ESL, band, athletics, etc. first. Then fill in the balance of the placements. Even out class sizes. Recognize that there will be students enrolling and unenrolling, so leave some empty seats. It would take a few hours, This could be done during the end of year work days or on a summer work day, just not the last days before students return in August.

* Hiring an outside company to create six week tests for every grade level and every subject. Expenses involve even making the computer to program that will then create the tests and grade the tests. The purpose is to guarantee that all teachers, at all grade levels, are following the YAG, the year at a glance, which lays out which state TEKS should be taught at what time of the school year. Presumably, this is a type of quality control, but more often used as a “gotcha!” If a student does not do well on a TEK, on a test, the teacher must plan upcoming lessons to the precise point of, “I will teach this TEK on this day checking specifically on these students.” This takes hours to plan and document, per child, rather than planning lessons that regularly review skills for all students. A student may not score poorly only because they don’t know the answer.

Often mistakes, made by the testing company, are found in the tests. Misspellings, injected off topic words, two correct answers listed, questions printed on the page before the passage, etc.

There is no “real-time” allowance made for missed reteach or for classes missed due to a flu outbreak, assemblies, bad weather, emergency conditions, etc.

This expense has brought no return. Scores are not increasing. Teachers are trained, experienced professionals They are certainly capable of working as a team to create a test. This is actually disrespect to the worth of teachers and their respective departments. At district gatherings and in emails, teachers are told that they are appreciated. Teachers are told that they are valued. This cannot be true when you don’t trust your teachers to make even a six week test. It is insulting to hear those words come out of superintendent and school board mouths when this, and other insults, are what is actually happening in schools.

No business would hire and pay an employee, task him or her with gathering information only to say that while the employee is informed, a consultant is going to be paid to write the report, without the benefit of hands on knowledge.

* Academic coaches: This is a nebulous expense. People hired without a clear job description. Within that lack of clarity, expectations have changed, not evolved, changed. I would think that even coaches would be frustrated. Cushy job? Difficult job? Guaranteed job? Who can say? There is no transparency and no accountability. Do we need this many coaches? Why? How is their day spent? Are they handling tasks that should be handled by other employees? Exactly how many times should a grade level department or teacher meet with or see a coach? Who evaluates and who has feedback? How can coaches be evaluated individually when the desired result is higher STAAR scores? Again, scores are not increasing, so why do we continue to have the expense?

My personal experience is not positive. Workshops given by the coaches at GJHS were a waste of time, not only my opinion, at a time when we needed the planning time that was being taken. Workshop information could have been given in an hour per day, or in an email or handout. I have not received anything that I couldn’t or hadn’t found for myself. You may not realize the efforts your teachers make to find engaging, relevant lessons. Many purchase materials or Teachers Pay Teachers resources on their own dime. There was little teaching experience for the coach who was asked about student discipline affecting learning and student motivation. She had no answer. When asked to demonstrate classroom management and teach a class with numerous discipline and motivation issues, the coach refused.