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Welcome back, Students!



Rice district facing challenge with changes

A massive job appears ahead for all involved with the Rice Consolidated Independent School District...from the superintendent to the student, including the parent and taxpayer.

Because of the Texas Legislature, as you no doubt have been reading or hearing, the most massive changes in Texas public education are being implemented — in some cases only when the legislative meaning is clear — than at any time in the past two decades.

Rice district superintendent Harold King said this week that it sometimes is hard enough to implement changes the legislature mandates when it meets in a regular January session, let alone from a session that just concluded this summer. This time, it is a job that will go on all year long.

There are two House Bills causing all the changes. One is House Bill 246 that deals mostly with academics. The other is House Bill 72 that can best be described as a financing plan, although it did call for changes in the school regulations.

With the school district here preparing to adopt its budget this month, it learned that next summer, it has to hold and pay for an eight-week session for any student (who will be in kindergarten or first grade in the fall of 1985) that is from an "economically deficient" family, or that is deficient in the use of the English language. That summer schedule falls in the fiscal year the school board is planning its budget for right now.

At the same time, the district is just now learning the impact of "financial equalization." The legislature voted in a form of "Robin Hood" financing, by decreasing state funds for more economically well-off districts, and giving more funds to those districts that do not have such "riches."

Several weeks ago, a Headlight article, actually a news release from State Senator Kent Caperton, said the Rice District would lose about \$5,000 in state

funds. King said Monday afternoon that figure was likely to be a decrease of more than \$130,000, but it isn't even known for sure yet. The formula for figuring state aid is complicated, but part of it deals with a comparison of how much school districts in one county spend on each pupil. Rice district taxpayers have been spending more per pupil than either Weimar or Columbus. Therefore, that part of the state aid formula means Rice will receive less funds, Columbus won't be cut so drastically, and Weimar will receive more than it had been receiving.

The impact of the decrease in state funds isn't fully known yet, but the school board is working on budgeting, with an earnest attempt to control spending, before deciding how much of a change is necessary in the tax rate.

Other changes

Supt. King outlined some of the other changes required:

•For the first time, teachers have been given a list of "essential elements" they must teach in their subject

areas. As a simple example, they must teach the multiplication tables. The school district however must decide an evaluation plan, and how to implement that plan. Some of the questions are: how much must a student learn before consideration is given to allowing that student to go on to the next higher grade level...and what do you do with the students who do not master that level?

Say the district decides that a student must learn 75 percent of the essential elements. The student must then have both a 70 grade average and the mastery level before promotion to the next grade is allowed.

•In addition to the summer pre-school for next year, the district must create and fund a pre-kindergarten program for youngsters who will be four-years-old before September 1 each year. This only for the students in the same category as the summer school program.

•The district must file a "report card" with the state, apparently with a large amount of hard data, about the effects of the new legislation.

This is an attempt to measure the two new pieces of legislation.

•Not at all the least of the changes is the new salary plan and "career ladder" program for teachers. The attempt here by the state was to raise the salary level of beginning teachers, and give other teachers an increase. The career ladder program is an exercise in evaluation that judges a teacher on a degree of performance, coupled with the educational experience and level of educational training. The Rice district school board will appoint the evaluation committee.

The Rice district is working on the impact of the salary plan now, and spent part of Monday morning in a special board session discussing that as well as the 1984-85 budget.

With a decrease in state aid, the state mandate that teachers get a pay increase, and a drastic change in homestead property

evaluations for tax purposes, the board and administration have a lot of work ahead of them — work that should be done in a relatively short period. August and

September will be busy and important months for the Rice district students and residents, with decisions made now having an impact far into the future.

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