

October 7, 2013

I cannot begin these notes without first saying congratulations to our teachers and students for completing their first six weeks of classes. To put our fast paced calendar in perspective, not only have we concluded our first six weeks of classes, but our fall season sports (football, volleyball, cross country and tennis) are at least half way completed. As quickly as our days have gone, it is encouraging to note, as a district we have completed so much: We have launched a one to one laptop initiative at the freshman campus; made some renovations throughout the district; begun construction projects; balanced our budget which has enabled us to begin a process to launch bigger construction projects; and most importantly launched an aggressive instructional reform movement. Even more promising is the dedication to keep on advancing to ensure success for our students.

When my predecessor, Dr. Ackermann, handed over the leadership of the district, she mentioned a desire to renovate our Little Theater. I had the opportunity to visit the Little Theater during two performances last May (*Wizard of Oz* and *Grease*) and quickly understood her discussion. Some planning meetings with the Fine Arts Director and Chief Operations Officer quickly resulted in a plan that culminated into a [fine project](#). We are hopeful that the staff and students will enjoy the renovations and look forward to the community enjoying our students' performances and ceremonies as well.

Tuesday was, by far, the most rewarding and exciting day of the week. I first started at the freshman campus to observe the progression and implementation of our one to one laptop initiative. In visiting Mrs. Salinas' English I classroom, I had the opportunity to appreciate [students](#) involved in a Web Quest learning [activity](#). Every student was actively searching the internet with their own individual laptop and engaged in Greek Mythology. When asked to comment on the one to one initiative, Mrs. Salinas said the following:

I must admit I was a little leery about students having access to a laptop in the classroom and all the negative issues that could take place... I've been pleased to see the ownership students have taken of the task... Our special population students have really shown interest and have required very little one-on-one attention... As a department, we will continue planning to have these successful laptop assignments for students. It's a new day at DRFS! It Does Start Here and NOW!!!

I also had the opportunity to visit with the North Heights faculty twice on Tuesday. In the early afternoon, we visited regarding our district instructional initiative. In the evening, I again, saw many of the [NHE](#) faculty at our [Queens](#) Volleyball victory over the Eagle Pass Lady Eagles. I, along with Dr. Zuniga-Barrera, high school principal, Miss Zuniga, high school counselor, and many parents and students enjoyed the [Cheerleaders](#), [Belles](#), and a thrilling come from behind win against our rivals from the south.

Tuesday, October 1st, was also the first day of the construction contract for the new gym at Buena Vista Elementary. Wednesday morning I visited the construction site and was pleased

that our contractor had wasted no time [beginning](#) the project. If plans go as they have been set, Buena Vista students will have a new gym for the 2014- 2015 school year.

Thursday morning I visited two classrooms at Calderon Elementary: Mrs. [Parsons'](#) second grade social studies class; and Mrs. [Delgado's](#) fifth grade science class. Because Mrs. [Parsons](#) was incorporating writing into her lesson, I was able to observe students taking notes. I was pleased with the class's engagement in the lesson, and especially pleased with [Erick's](#) neat penmanship. In the fifth grade science class I heard Mrs. Delgado ask "How do we know water transfers electricity" and I heard a student respond "because we saw it in our lab." I am pleased that our teachers are working to create real life experiences (labs) for our students. I know it takes extra time, but the outcomes will be significantly improved. Excellent job Mrs. Parsons and Mrs. Delgado!

Although Thursday was full of meetings and planning, time was allotted to meet with the District's Leadership Team, our principals and assistant principals. Throughout the course of our [meeting](#) we discussed how to improve the feedback we give our teachers after a classroom talk through. Congratulations to Mrs. Westlake, Garfield Assistant Principal, for having the most perfect example of appropriate feedback. I am certain that the commitment of our administrators to complete fifteen classroom visits a week and provide sound coaching to our teachers regarding the lesson implementation, will significantly change the depth and complexity of the classroom experience for our students.

Fridays seem to be the fastest days of the week, especially when we have a home football game. We had a lot of fun as we joined our high school students in their first [school wide pep rally](#) at Walter Levermann Stadium. I wish our community could have seen all 9th – 12th grade students show their spirit. It was hot, but each student stayed through the last chorus of our school song. Later that evening we enjoyed the football game and all the [festivities](#). A special treat was the recognition of two of our high school students who were named National Hispanic Merit Scholars. [Frida Rivera](#) along with [Jesus Maltos](#) and both their parents joined Dr. Zuniga-Barrera and I at center field to receive their recognition. Congratulations Frida and Jesus, remember the best is yet to come!

I want to close these notes by introducing the [Campus and District Performance Objectives](#). During the September School Board Meeting, our Trustees approved these performance objectives as a way to measure student's academic growth, guide our focus and by extension a method of evaluating the leadership's (Superintendent, Chief Officers, Directors, and Principals) performance. Throughout the course of the school year and the years to come, we will focus our attention on meeting these objectives. Not only will we measure attendance and graduation rates, we will also measure four areas of our student's performance in state assessments (STAAR). These four areas include overall passing rates, individual student growth, accelerated individual student growth, and individual commended performance (Level III). As a district we will focus all our energy and resources to show unprecedented student growth. I invite you to visit each campuses web site and review their Campus Performance Objectives.

“Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education.
The human mind is our fundamental resource.” – John F. Kennedy.