

Monday, September 9, 2013

This past week, while our nation's leaders in Congress debated over possible interventions in Syria, the students of San Felipe Del Rio - CISD were surrounded by incredible blessings. From the simplicity of enjoying breakfast in the classroom at the elementary level, to participating in intense extra-curricular activities at the secondary level, one thing is certain as I walk the halls of our schools; our kids are in a great place. It's a wonderful feeling to note our students' lives are safe and consistently enriched. It almost seems selfish to think that our students did not have to worry or even think about the current Middle Eastern problems. We truly are blessed to live in the delightful community of Del Rio, the wonderful state of Texas, and this great Nation.

I started the week by visiting Lamar Elementary where I encountered a [student](#) returning the breakfast in the classroom carts to the cafeteria. He proudly recalled enjoying his Coco Puffs for breakfast. Before leaving Lamar, the interim principal and I visited Mrs. Padilla's fourth grade classroom, where we saw students using a chart she had created for each student. It was clear that the students were engaged and quickly grasping the math concept. Excellent job! Later that evening, my son and I watched our Queens Volleyball team enjoy a solid victory over the ladies from Kennedy High School. It was enjoyable to see our Queens athletic ability highlighted as a result of hard work and commitment to their team.

On Wednesday, I was able to visit Buena Vista Elementary. Although great instruction was occurring in the classrooms, what I recall most was seeing the [students](#) enjoy their Physical Education class in the open field. It was bright and sunny, which also meant it was hot! Buena Vista Elementary is our only elementary school without a gymnasium. There is no need to worry Buena Vista students! This past July our Board of Trustees approved the construction of a gymnasium for your school. Within a couple of months we should start seeing the beginnings of construction and should see a completed gym before the start of next school year.

Thursday was a wonderful day to celebrate high school students and their participation in extra-curricular activities. Mrs. Mancha and company did a wonderful job organizing our community pep rally. Not only did the community get to meet all the students that participate in [tennis](#), [cross country](#), [golf](#), [volleyball](#), and [football](#), we also enjoyed the performances of the students who build school spirit by leading the fans throughout these contests. The [cheerleaders](#), [Belles](#), [band](#), and [dance company](#) continue to grow in strength and numbers. It was truly awesome to see so many of our students on the football field during this pep rally. As an added bonus, [elementary](#) students who had previously participated in a mini dance/cheerleading camp also had the opportunity to perform during this community event.

On Friday afternoon, Mr. Cabello, principal of the Student Guidance and Learning Center (SGLC), invited me to share my story with his students and encourage them to be aware of the opportunities we all have regardless of our background. I enjoyed my visit with our students at the SGLC and then prepared myself for the evening activities. Friday night was great for Coach Frenchey McCrea and the Rams football team. The adjustments and hard work were evident on Friday night as Coach McCrea and his staff led our mighty Rams to the first victory of the season. Besides delighting in the success on the football field, I appreciated the hundreds of community members coming together to support our students participating in the Friday night excitement.

On Saturday, I had the opportunity to support our [booster](#) organizations by stopping by the Ford dealership to test drive a vehicle. For every vehicle taken for a test drive, the Ford dealership, in turn, made donations to our soccer, volleyball, cross country, softball and basketball booster organizations. I ended the day by celebrating the award of a letter jacket to one of our students, [Anissa](#). The awarding of letter jackets is just another sign that a lot of our students will be graduating from our high school very soon and venturing out of our community!

In closing this blog I want to thank the principals and teachers who have worked diligently in making our district led instructional reform, the planning protocol, a successful venture. Change is not easy, especially when the change we are trying to implement, encompasses the instructional activities of so many of our teachers. However, observing [principals](#) and their [assistants](#) play an active role in the instructional planning discussions, is a true indication that our reform continues to head in the right direction. I was also pleased with the [collaboration](#) I observed between the cluster leader and the instructional coach at Buena Vista Elementary. It's this type of collaboration that will enhance every learning experience we create for our students.

I asked our Curriculum and Instruction Department to highlight some planning protocol sessions that embody the reform we are working to achieve. Here is what one report indicated:

This week, I was amazed to see the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade math teachers at Garfield Elementary make a connection to the assessment for the 1<sup>st</sup> six weeks (Planning Protocol, Step 1). In the process of planning, they discussed the word "formula" is used often in their direct instruction, but the assessment reminded them of other ways this word could be used, such as "expression". The teachers indicated their kids may not be familiar with this word. They then added it to their Academic Vocabulary list and created a journal entry that would utilize "expression" in place of "formula" (Planning Protocol, Steps 3 & 4). The teachers then proceeded to create their engaging lesson on Volume. These conversations that take place while planning, are what creates powerful lessons and rigorous learning opportunities.

In so many professions, such as technology, engineering and medicine, there are mathematically proven methods to solve problems and enhance outcomes. In our profession, the only assured guideline for success is "collaboration". I am encouraged by what I have seen thus far and am hopeful for the continued implementation of our reform movement. I encourage every teacher and administrator to be a model for this type of collaboration.

"Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another." – Gilbert K. Chesterton