

January 6, 2017

After a wonderfully restful holiday break, I am rejuvenated and ready for the upcoming second semester. I am hopeful that everyone enjoyed lots of rest, eats and other wonderful experiences. As for New Year's resolutions, I encourage each and every one to be strong as you move forward with new resolve and encourage each other to do the same. As I visited with teachers and asked about resolutions I mainly heard (1) better dieting, (2) exercise and (3) being positive. Personally, I am "all in" on these three resolutions. Awesome!

Making my rounds the first few days of the year I found so many things to be positive about and as I reflect on what was observed I am beyond impressed with our immediate surroundings. Monday morning I walked our entire high school and found myself in the health careers hallway (Love Wing) around 7:25 AM. Seeing so many [students](#) sitting in the hallway reviewing material, I wondered which teacher would give a semester exam a whole week in advance (and after a holiday break). I asked a few students which final they were [studying](#) for (after all, it was the first Monday after New Year's Day). Each student provided a similar response – "no exam, we are just studying." Wow! These are a whole bunch of students who have drank the incredible [Kool-Aid](#) provided by their teachers; they are certain and confident that hard work creates results. This was absolutely an [incredible](#) motivator for the start of the SFDRICISD 2017 New Year!

Next, I toured some of our elementary campuses expecting to see teachers reorienting students with the routines of the school. Instead, I saw teacher after teacher in classrooms across the District engaging their students in serious learning. Although everyone was impressive, I was beyond impressed with the engagement of student's in [Mrs. JoAnn Perez's](#) class at [NHE](#). Each student was independently [engaged](#) in practicing their reading, waiting for the teacher to call them for an individual conference. Undoubtedly, rigorous learning routines are clearly established in Mrs. Perez's class.

Another highlight this week included seeing the Gerardo Maldonado [CTE](#) Center open its doors and [welcome](#) students for the very first time. Knowing that we have created another setting where [Rigor](#), Relevance and [Relationships](#) can be championed (in support of learning) is entirely rewarding. Over the past two decades, millions and millions of dollars have been invested in school reform research particularly with respect to improving and reforming high schools. Overwhelmingly, research mentions how the importance of school size (smaller is better) and how establishing a thematic focus in creating Rigor, Relevance and Relationships in support of student and school success can positively impact student learning and development. The [CTE center](#), along with Early College High School and the Blended Learning Academy, are precisely what the doctor ordered.

How about the construction of the [Early College High School?](#) Although we keep saying that we are renovating the old administration building into the ECHS, the reality is that every bit of the previous building is being torn down with the exception of the [metal frame](#) and the foundation. Soon enough, we will have another small school where Rigor, Relevance and Relationships in support of learning can further be championed. I encourage you to drive by and notice the daily [progress](#) being made.

Before closing this blog, I want to bring attention to two other noteworthy improvement projects at [San Felipe Memorial Middle School](#) and at [Dr. Fermin Calderon Elementary](#). Each of these schools has received a fresh new "look." The SFMMS main campus building has had the front yard [landscaped](#) and beautified, and the Calderon Elementary campus was entirely [transformed](#) with a new paint job. Both campuses look beautiful and full of energy! I hope the students and teachers can come to work and start the day with a brighter smile. Let's have a great 2017!

**Be always at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let each new year find you a better man."— Benjamin Franklin, American inventor and diplomat.**