

Monday, June 10, 2013

In closing our school year the week of June 3, 2013, could clearly be described as the most exciting week for our community as a whole. For our teachers, who embark in this noble profession, this week was a bright light demonstrating the accomplishments of another year's commitment. For our students, the week signified the culmination of one stage and enthusiasm to take a break before the beginning of another. A. J., a second grade Garfield student, wore a shirt crafted by his artistic mother that best expressed this sentiment: "See you later second grade, I am going to Rocket into third."

Without a doubt, for the senior class of 2013, it was a busy, celebratory week. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday were all about our seniors. A special thanks to Mrs. Linda Corbell, CTE teacher, for a beautiful job as Master of Ceremonies during each of these events. On Wednesday, various community organizations joined our students at the Carl Guys Gymnasium to present numerous scholarships. These scholarships assist our graduates in achieving their goals. I am told that over \$200,000.00 were awarded from local community efforts. On Thursday, the Top 20 graduates, along with their parents, were honored with a banquet at the Ramada Inn. Our administration and Board of Trustees had the opportunity to hear each of the students' accomplishments and plans to further their education. In working diligently to promote community awareness, pictures and names of the Top 20 graduates will be displayed on the flashing marquee located on the corner of Veterans and Gibbs Street. It is a privilege to have had these students walk our hallways and sit in our classrooms. Friday night's commencement exercises were beautiful. The skies cleared, the night was cool, and our spirits were lifted with the salutatorian and valedictorian addresses from Paola Gonzalez and Ariel Cordova.

Earlier in the week I had the opportunity to visit some classrooms. I must admit that as a campus principal, and now superintendent, I worried about the lack of structure during the last week of school. Although we want to celebrate the school year's end and all the accomplishments, we always worry about potential risks when we move away from teaching and learning. Nothing set my mind at ease more than my visit to Mrs. Debbie Escamilla's fourth grade classroom at Ruben Chavira Elementary and my visit to Mrs. Linda Vallejo's sixth grade English Language Arts classroom at SFMMS. In Mrs. Escamilla's classroom, I observed students writing SOS stories and even had the opportunity to read some of them. My personal favorite was a soccer story written by Adrian Ortiz. In Mrs. Vallejo's classroom, I saw students working on a rigorous final exam and then working to finalize research papers. Having read Number the Stars, Sloan Taylor and Mario Esquivel were finalizing research on World War II. Sloan was also able explain to me other topics being researched by his classmates. I was most impressed by these two classrooms because not only were they engaged in rigorous work during the last week of school, but they were working on what students so often hate to do – write. Awesome job on the part of Mrs. Escamilla, Mrs. Vallejo and their students!

It was an honor to be the guest speaker at the Garfield Elementary Kinder Graduation and the Fifth Grade Promotion Ceremony. I took the opportunity to encourage parents to continue to stay engaged in their children's education and to continue to believe in the educational system. Their principal, Mrs. Eliza Diaz, shared with them that three high school students had been honored for having perfect attendance throughout their entire public school years, and that each of them (Angel Alderete, Carla

Chavez and Emmanuel De Leon) had attended Garfield Elementary. It takes a full commitment and absolutely dedication from both students and parents to have perfect attendance for one school year, now imagine 12 years. Wow, hats off to these students and their parents!

I had the opportunity to end the regular work week with two exciting events. First, I was honored to present a diploma to one of our life skills students at Calderon Elementary. The family's pride in seeing Cynthia graduate was enough to sustain us through any difficult day we may be having. Finally, I participated in the clap-out ceremony at North Height's elementary. For those that have never seen this type of event, it involves having the fifth grade students walk the halls a final time while the underclassman continuously clap. There were tears and laughter and all in all a great way to end the school year.

With this instructional year in the books, we must spend all of our energy and focus our entire attention to planning for the coming year. I want to take this opportunity to mention some initiatives that will begin over the summer and discuss our plans for their implementation. First, we must create daily structured time for our teachers to plan rigorous, engaging lessons. The Planning Protocol will guide this initiative and provide high impact, job embedded professional development. To this end, we will move to eight daily classes, similar to many districts throughout our state. Our core teachers will teach six classes, have a conference period and a planning period. This type of schedule will be implemented in grades six through twelve. Our elementary teachers will also have daily structured time for planning. However, the structure will revolve around specials (electives).

The additional class is an added bonus because it helps to address the need to increase the number of students graduating under the Recommended High School plan. So many students finish high school completing only a Minimum Graduation plan, which provides our students with a diploma, but limits their future educational endeavors. Working together, I am positive we will increase the number of students graduating higher than the minimum plan. This will guarantee more students have options to pursue a career or further their education.

With the year wrapped up for students and the continued professional development set out for the staff of San Felipe Del Rio CISD, I hope the message is clear: It is our obligation to ensure the finest education for every child. In order to provide the best, we must strive to be the best in everything that we do. For students, may this time be used for rest and relaxation, as it is well deserved. May the staff find some time to relax and to reflect not only on achievements made this year, but more importantly what we can improve upon for the betterment of our district. I look forward to what will be a successful school year come August, with focus, direction and collaboration. It is an honor to be your superintendent.

"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." - Buckminster Fuller