

December 16, 2013

As I begin to reflect on last week's events, I find it almost unbelievable that this is my last installment of notes for 2013. As fast paced as most teachers will affirm each year goes, writing notes on a weekly basis puts their thoughts into perspective. Although I have enjoyed every week thus far in the 2013-2014 school year, this past week has to be recorded as one of the most enjoyable. From visiting with teachers, to participating with community groups, to enjoying so many of our students' accomplishments, the week was filled with purpose and excitement.

I had the opportunity to visit with the faculty at four elementary campuses Monday – Thursday afternoons: **Lamar**, **Chavira**, **Lonnie Green**, and **Buena Vista**, respectively. Like the previous week, I took the opportunity to review student achievement, talk about our Planning Protocol, and review the possible redesign of our Bilingual program. I was encouraged by the many questions asked and particularly by the interest displayed from the teachers at Lamar and Lonnie Green. In the Bilingual redesign plan, Lamar and Lonnie Green are two of three campuses that are being considered to become leaders in our Bilingual program. I want to continue to encourage our faculty to communicate with the District's Leadership on how we can improve our programs. The input of those tasked with carrying out reform on a daily basis is vital to the success of our students.

Monday evening, I joined hundreds of parents at the Paul Poag Theater where we took pleasure in listening to students participating in the **Mariachi Concert**. From beginning **middle school** students to the most **experienced** high school students, the night was filled with **talent** and **celebration**. Over **two hundred** students composed seven different **Mariachi groups**. It was truly a **remarkable** demonstration of how **talented** our students are. As an added bonus, Mr. Rios, Head Band Director, sang Las Mañanitas for my upcoming birthday. Thank you for the pleasant surprise.

Tuesday evening left me with a difficult decision to make. I had the privilege to attend either the High School Jazz concert at the Paul Poag or stop by the Little Theater and watch Mrs. Martine's students present *Mrs. Nelson is Missing*. I decided on *Mrs. Nelson is Missing*. The students kept the audience **engaged** and **laughing** all night. Excellent performance!

Wednesday we gathered once more with the Citizen's Committee to finalize the \$25,000,000 construction recommendations that will be presented to the school board in January. At the top of the committee's list is renovating the 8th grade campus on Griner Street into a Performing Arts Center. The **well-attended** student **performances** and **activities** from this past week continue to indicate that our community is in need of a large capacity performing arts

center. The day closed on Wednesday with our middle school and high school **Color Guard** teams **performing** at the High School gym. The students presented multiple routines, many of which they choreographed themselves. The hard work and commitment was evident in each performance. It would be hard to come by without the guidance of Ms. Sandoval and the dedication of the students.

On Thursday, I, along with various community members, were invited by Miss Guanajuato, CTE High School Teacher, to judge her students' **Corporate Expo**. Under Miss Guanajuato's guidance, students developed a product, performed cost analysis, and created marketing strategies. Although it was taxing to the stomach to sample every product, we managed and enjoyed each treat. To close the day on Thursday, my family and I visited the Paul Poag Theater where so many students participated in the Elementary All City **Choir Concert**. I want to **commend** every music teacher from each elementary school. Because of their hard work and dedication, the students were well **prepared**. I reluctantly left the choir concert a bit early to get to the High School and enjoy the last few selections at the **Christmas Band Concert**. I continue to be impressed with the skills of our students. It is impressive to see so much talent and quite humbling to know that it begins within our community and through the dedication of all those involved in the education system.

I had the opportunity on Friday to stop by the **Freshman campus** to observe some social studies classes and visit with the Principal, Mr. Limon. I was pleased that even on a Friday afternoon, students were engaged in learning and teachers were continuing with planning instruction for the coming week. Great job! Friday was also my 47th birthday, and I promised my family to be home early enough to take them to dinner and then return for the Queens Basketball game. However, before going to dinner, I was pleased to review a success report on our **middle school math teachers** who had received training to pass a specialized middle school math certification exam. We are pleased to report that six teachers who received training have taken and passed their middle school math certification exam. Great job ladies!

After enjoying a delicious dinner with my family, we returned to the high school to support our **Queens**. Our girls played so **hard**, but fell short in the last seconds of the game. Regardless of the outcome, the girls showed **tremendous** improvement from a couple of weeks ago. They are on the right track and will certainly be a **force** to be reckoned with this season.

Most of the day Saturday was spent at Chavira Elementary where over three hundred of our elementary students participated in the **District's Elementary UIL meet**. The work that went in to preparing for this event was monumental. The Chavira faculty did a tremendous job decorating their campus. The halls were **lined** with Dr. Seuss **bulletin boards**, the cafeteria **recognized** each campuses' participation, and the students were provided with many **activities** to enjoy after they competed in their event. From **parents**, to **principals**, to **assistant**

principals, to **counselors**, everyone turned out to support the teachers and students who had worked so hard to prepare for their event. Congratulations to **Buena Vista**, **Lonnie Green**, and **North Heights** who placed First, Second, and Third respectively. This was truly an exciting event for our students and their parents. I ended the day on Saturday by joining the high school band for dinner at their Christmas party. Through the help of their parents, the high school cafeteria was transformed into a wonderful winter wonderland where **students** enjoyed great food, **camaraderie**, and dancing. The students had a lot of well-deserved fun.

As we prepare this week to close out our school days to enjoy the holidays, I want to thank each of you for your dedication to our students. I cannot say it enough; reform is not an easy task. Yet, as I visit schools, I continue to be encouraged by the progress being made where it counts: in our classrooms. As I've mentioned before, our teachers and principals are at the forefront of this reform and I am thankful for the time and effort. I am certain that our teachers will continue to believe in our students until they learn to fully believe in themselves.

I cannot end without recognizing that across the District, everyone is giving their best to ensure every piece of this organization is taken care of with respect to instruction. Whether it involves those that enhance our buildings, manage professional development, or engage our parents and community, the priority is that of our students. This holiday season, I am grateful beyond words for each and every member of our District's family. May the holidays bring about a restful time spent in closeness with family.

"If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich." - John F. Kennedy