

December 9, 2013

Getting back in the saddle after a weeklong break may be difficult in other professions, but in ours, there really isn't time to think of how difficult it may be to engage. From the first minute of the week, students had a lot to prepare for, and the teachers were ready to meet the students' needs. Except for the cold days that caused a change in plans for some [PE teachers](#), it was obvious that teachers were ready to get started. From teaching and learning to dancing and parade participation, our teachers and students were quit active this week.

In my opinion, the most significant part of our week was the opportunity to visit with various campus faculties throughout the school district. This past week I had the opportunity to visit with the faculty at three elementary campuses: [North Heights](#) on Tuesday; Calderon on Wednesday; and [Garfield](#) on Thursday. I took the opportunity to review student achievement trends for the past two six weeks, and also thanked them for what they have accomplished. Because of teacher's hard work, student achievement is on the rise. I also stressed to teachers that comparing test scores from one class to the next or one campus to the next is absolutely not the purpose for assessments. The main purpose is first, for each teacher to use assessments to understand the depth and complexity that needs to be engendered in the preparation of their lesson; and second to use the assessment results to determine concepts that need to be retaught. I also took the opportunity to review the possible elementary bilingual campus organization for the coming school year, and the opportunity elementary teachers will have to provide input into next semester's master schedule.

While I was out and about making presentations to faculties, I also took the opportunity to visit various classrooms throughout the district. On Tuesday, I was taken on a tour of classrooms by [Dr. Mendez](#), assistant principal at North Heights Elementary. I was most impressed with [Mrs. Gonzalez'](#) kinder classroom, where students were engaged in a science lesson to the exact depth and complexity that the lesson was planned for. It was reassuring to see her students engaged deeply and enhancing their learning. On Wednesday, I was able to sit in on a [planning session](#) and visit some classrooms at Calderon Elementary. Ms. Muraira, principal, and Mrs. Mericer, Instructional Coach, were doing something absolutely awesome. They were taking new teachers on [Learning Walks](#) to observe exceptional instruction throughout the campus. To close the loop on the learning opportunity, they then discussed the finer points that were observed. Learning Walks truly are a worthwhile investment in the success of new teachers.

Later that evening I visited the [Polar Express Literacy Night](#) at Cardwell Elementary. It was nice to see so many [students](#) and their parents engaged in learning various methods of developing literacy skills at home. From cutting and pasting to building vocabulary models with [edible treats](#), everyone learned something new. Aside from the literacy experience, students had the opportunity to visit with [Santa Claus](#) and [perform](#) for their parents. I ended the evening by joining my family at a [Band Booster](#) fundraiser at Mr. Gatti's. It is always nice to see [teachers](#) coming out to support their students.

Friday morning I headed to Lamar Elementary for a couple of activities. However, on my way to Lamar, I saw the Band Booster President, Mr. Eddie Solis, demonstrating, on a cold day at the carwash, that there really isn't any limits to [volunteer work](#). I am certain that we have a tremendous band program because of the tremendous commitment from our parents. Upon arrival at Lamar Elementary, I was able to observe their awards ceremony. Parents, grandparents, and other [family members](#) took pride in seeing the [principal](#) handout different types of awards. After the awards assembly, I was encouraged to visit [Mrs. Peña's classroom](#) where [Toby Globy](#) and Mr. Onofre, from the City of Del Rio, were talking to students about necessary precautions when using natural gas. The next stop was Cardwell Elementary for a surprise assembly. At the surprise assembly, representatives from [HEB](#) presented a check for \$1,000.00 to Mrs. Guanajuato-Webb, campus principal. Cardwell Elementary was HEB's book drive regional winner. Congratulations to Cardwell students and faculty!

While no local athletic events were scheduled for the week, there were still plenty of opportunities to enjoy our students' extra-curricular engagement. I ended the day on Friday by observing our students participate in the [City's Christmas Parade](#). Congratulations to the CTE department for winning first place - [awesome float](#)! Saturday morning I joined various [principals](#), and lots of parents as their elementary students competed in the championship round of E-cadet, a Robotics competition. Congratulations to all the [teams](#), [sponsors](#), and parent volunteers for creating such an amazing opportunity for their [students](#).

Saturday evening presented an opportunity for my entire family and I to enjoy our secondary students participate in a fine arts dance recital at the Paul Poag Theater. Sitting in the balcony level gave us the opportunity to enjoy the performances, and also appreciate how [well behaved](#) our [middle school students](#) are. They sat up there and supported everyone else as they patiently waited for their turn. Excellent job!

I want to take this opportunity, as we begin the two weeks of school before the holidays, to remind everyone to be safe and celebrate with lots of joy. The time you will spend with your colleagues in celebrating the season will speak volumes of not only how much you understand the value of your work, but how valuable your team members are. Let the Happy Holidays begin!

*"Peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures." - John F. Kennedy*