

**August 28, 2017**

**Welcome** to a **wonderful** school year. Can you imagine the **energy** and excitement that each student will bring with them today? Last night so many students made a last minute trip to the store to purchase a journal or a notebook, selected what they would wear today and made plans to arrive at school early. The exuberant energy seen in our students was equally matched by the enthusiastic **teachers** who worked over the weekend to prepare their rooms. I am confident this will be a **great** school year.

The energy each of you showed at our annual **convocation** was absolutely **contagious** and a great display of our community's **pride**. After our third year of hosting convocation in the Carl Guys Gymnasium, I am certain it will now become a tradition. Our **student groups** did a great job bring the crowd to their feet. Whether they were **dancing, cheering, or playing** an instrument, they were entirely **impressive** and a great reflection of our **school system** and your classrooms.

Speaking of your classrooms, I want to commend each of you for the work you did this past week in preparing not only your classes but yourselves. The participation in **staff development** was **phenomenal!** Whether you were engaged in **QTEL** strategies, working with the **Curriculum Dashboard** or preparing for the **90-minute block**, your participation was excellent. It should be no mystery why our students' academic growth kept pace with the growth of students in our surrounding Districts; and absolutely widened the gap when it came to college readiness.

As I visited campuses this past week, and particularly on Friday, I saw so many teachers not only organizing their **classroom**, but working on **lesson plans** for this week. I commented to a friend that by choosing to use Friday to **collaborate** with their fellow teachers only meant that they would have to spend time over the weekend working on their room organization. It is awesome to have this type of dedication and commitment to our students.

I want to dedicate some time now to update you regarding our health insurance plan for our employees. This evening we will discuss with our Board of Trustees a recommendation to maintain the current insurance plan for our employees and to provide a "back to work" stipend that will cover the increased cost of the health insurance. In simple terms, this means that beginning in January 2018; the District will offset any increase in our health insurance cost by providing a cash amount equal to the increased costs. For example, if you see a cost of \$50 per paycheck for insurance, then you will also see an increase in your paycheck by the same amount.

The "back to work" stipend will be funded from excess fund balance which we believe approximates \$7 Million dollars. We are confident that we can continue to cover the cost of the "back to work" stipend because of savings arrived at through studying our health care plan; and projected increases in our budget and fund balance from the following sources:

- \$.6 Million from increased enrollment during the 2017/2018 school year and beyond.
- \$2.25 Million (previously allocated for purchase of property) being returned to fund balance.
- \$2 Million projected increase for the 2018/2019 school year from taxing the Windmill farms

We regret that it took us so long to arrive at a feasible solution and that there was so much anguish

caused by this delay. However, we have come to find out that when it comes to making sound health insurance decisions, there is no other critical ally other than our own community. Making these sound decisions, unfortunately, takes a whole lot of time. We are confident that given the time, we will always come up with the most favorable solutions for our employees and our students.

I hope each of you have a wonderful first day of classes and great school year and that each of you will spend some time reminding our students how blessed we were this past week. While we do not know what the weather will do in the next two weeks, we do know that our community has been spared the hardship that so many families are experiencing in the Houston area. We are truly blessed in so many ways.