

Tuesday, September 3, 2013

After a long and productive summer, we were eager for our teachers to return to work, but somewhat hesitant about our readiness to receive our students. The principals and counselors were worried about their master schedules, the teachers were concerned with the organization of their classrooms, and everyone worried about the overall climate that would be fostered with students as they walked through the doors. As I walked the hallways of most of our schools during these past two weeks I noticed the genuine concern of our employees. At the high school, I saw many teachers and their families working diligently to prepare for the school year. On the Saturday before the first day of school, I saw Mr. Santillan's (Spanish teacher) daughter helping to decorate his room by painting some curtains on his classroom wall. That same Saturday I also saw Mrs. Packouz juggling her daughter while making preparations for the year to come. At Del Rio Middle School I took time out from the alumni volleyball game (which our Queens won) to walk the halls and noticed teachers working late to decorate and prepare their rooms. I don't think a night went by that I drove by Buena Vista Elementary, on my way home, and didn't find their parking lot full of teacher vehicles.

At the end of the summer, everyone's efforts paid off. The secondary campuses had their master schedules in place, with students fully scheduled. The elementary campuses had arranged their schedules to facilitate growing numbers of students and teacher planning periods. On the first day of school I was thoroughly impressed with the smoothness with which students transitioned from summer vacation back to school; and even more impressed with the welcoming appearance of each campus. This transition could not have occurred without everyone's hard work. The bulletin boards at so many of the campuses were well planned, motivating, and welcoming. It would not be fair if I didn't note that the bulletin boards at Buena Vista Elementary were the most consistently thematic - a super hero theme. I understand that Ms. Olivia Pimbert, Kinder teacher, lead a lot of the work for the preparation of the bulletin boards. Excellent job Ms. Pimbert!

Well before the end of the summer, our band, football, cross-country, tennis, and volleyball students had begun their practices. On one of my early drives to work I stopped by the Buena Vista park to chat with Coach Nolan Pritchard, assistant Tennis Coach, who was encouraging our tennis students to continue their conditioning work out. On another occasion I visited with the band students and thanked them for their efforts. Although our students enjoy participating in their activities, I want them to understand how important their contribution is to building school spirit. Who amongst us, who graduated from Del Rio High School, remembers the band playing our school song, or the various student groups welcoming us as we walked into pep rallies? We have incredible students who deserve an incredible education.

At the central administration building our summer was not only dedicated to the many routine tasks of hiring teachers, completing policy adjustments, and reviewing handbooks. We took on two tremendous challenges. First, we set out to present a balanced budget to our board of trustees. Second, and most importantly, we set out to ensure the implementation of district led instructional reform – the Planning Protocol.

For the first time in many years, our Finance department presented a balanced budget to our board of trustees, inclusive of a step increase for all staff and salary adjustments recommended by TASB for our hourly employees. By presenting a balanced budget, we were able to ask our board of trustees to dedicate twenty-five million dollars from our fund balance for future construction. In the near future, we will form a citizen's committee, who will consider, and recommend to our trustees, future construction projects. Among many construction options to be considered will be renovating our 8<sup>th</sup> grade campus into a fine arts performing center, a middle school magnet, a CTE magnet, and perhaps in due course an Early College High School.

Without a doubt, the biggest challenge of the summer and throughout the year to come has been, and will be, implementing our district led instructional reform. While many are welcoming the support and direction of our curriculum department and our newly created instructional coaches, some are left wondering if there truly is a need for change. The answer is simple. Although each of our campuses was able to meet the standards set by the Texas Education Agency's accountability system, each was also left wondering what else could have been done to close the performance gap to other communities similar to ours. The research has clearly indicated that in order to implement and sustain instructional improvement for all students, the instructional practices of the whole district must take priority over the individual successes of some. Please know that I will not require anyone to work longer or harder than they have worked before; I will only expect that we all work differently.

I am excited and energized by the training our curriculum coordinators provided to our instructional coaches over the summer. Not only did they begin their preparation early on this summer, they also created a tremendous amount of positive energy and a sense of personal responsibility for our district's success. On this Labor Day weekend so many of our elementary instructional coaches came to the C&I building to plan for the week to come. The planning that is now occurring at each of our campuses is promising and absolutely headed in the right direction.

I look forward to leading the district to higher levels of student achievement and personal satisfaction for each of us. Confidently, I will declare that our students and staff should not be and will not be second to anyone.

*"Things do not happen. Things are made to happen." - John F. Kennedy*