

Tuesday, May 28, 2013

The last month of classes is a serious time for most students. For some it becomes crunch time where completing make-up work, missed exams or projects becomes an immediate wakeup call. For others, it's a time of wondering what the future holds. These worries and wonderings are often tempered with end of the year festivities that allow all of us in the field of education to celebrate why we entered this noble profession.

The week of May 20, 2013 started with many Monday meetings that left us wondering if we would ever get to step on to campuses. After a Cabinet meeting, an Education Foundation meeting, an Insurance Committee meeting, and a very productive Regular School Board Meeting we were able to check some items off of the To-Do-List and visit with students.

Tuesday morning we visited Lonnie Greene and saw P.E. Coach Rudy Elizondo ensuring that his students understood the different events for their upcoming Field Day. Field Day is always a clear indication that the school year is about to come to an end. I am always awestruck how coaches are able to structure activities in such an unstructured setting – the open field. In the afternoon we were treated to an Athletic Spring Awards assembly that left everyone in the stands with a complete understanding of why we promote UIL athletics in our schools. Many students were recognized for their team and individual accomplishments. However, I walked out entirely impressed with a student who Coach Castellanos (Tennis Coach) hi-lighted. Andrea Urueta, class of 2013, accomplished a 90 percent winning record in singles, and 89 percent in doubles. She reached the finals of the highly competitive Spring District 29 5A Tennis Tournament, and become our first girl's singles player to advance to the Region 4 Regional Qualifiers Tournament since 1993. As if breaking a 10 year drought was not enough, Andrea is also currently ranked #4 among her graduating class of 622 seniors with a GPA average of 4.911, and will be pursuing her career at Texas A&M University at College Station. It is no wonder she walked out with the Most Valuable Player Award, the All Academic Award, and the Female Athlete of the Year Award. Texas A&M is lucky to have you – Gig 'em.

Later that evening the All-District Elementary Choir entertained a capacity crowd at the Paul Poag Theater. Unfortunately I was only able to catch the last couple of songs, but perhaps they saved the best for last. The students sang One Small Voice to perfection and captivated the audience by signing the words to the song.

Thursday was filled with GT fairs, Retirement Ceremonies, and a National Honor Society Banquet provided by the Bank & Trust. Somehow members of the school board and I managed to make all three. Visiting the GT Fair at Lonnie Green Elementary gave us the opportunity to listen to Fifth Grade Student, Alyla Rojas, share with her mother something about each of the projects she worked on including projects about inventors, future inventions and Greek Mythology. What was most notable was that Alyla was also able to share the high points of her friend's projects as well. Clearly their teachers maximized the learning, each step of the way.

Next, the district came together to celebrate the retirement of 32 individuals who, for the greater part of their lives, served our students in various capacities. It was a special treat to see individuals who had

personally educated and inspired so many of us, close a chapter and begin another. The evening ended at the Ramada Inn Ballroom as we heard the accomplishments and future plans of our NHS students. Our students have clearly been prepared to compete at so many levels. Because of the hard work and dedication of our parents, students and staff, Ivy League schools as well as many Texas universities will feel the positive impact of our students.

Friday morning I was able to visit with CTE Aircraft Mechanic students who described their experiences and thanked their instructor, Mr. Ruben Resendez, for everything they had learned. It was nice to see that a partnership between the school district and Laughlin is providing experiences for our students that most kids throughout the state do not otherwise have. Our school district week was concluded by enjoying a Sunday evening with the Ram Varsity Cheerleaders and their families. Listening to their experiences, I could only imagine the countless hours they dedicated to making our school proud while at the same time taking care of their own school work.

I want to close this blog by talking about the future of technology in our school district. As we visited DRMS earlier last week, we saw 8th grade students under the supervision of Mrs. Bonita Cardenas-Gonzalez taking an 8th Grade Computer Literacy Test. Results from this test allow us to make data driven decisions about the type of technology skills that students must learn in today's world. What has become clear is that our state and national education programs will be increasingly driven by digital learning opportunities. We must be ready to meet the challenges of the digital learning age. We have seen the growth of virtual high schools and online college courses. Experts tell us that digital learning is clearly the wave of future learning. What must be considered is the type of funding that is provided by the state and federal government. For example, the state has merged the technology allotment fund with the textbook allotment fund into what is now called the Instructional Materials Allotment (IMA). These limited funds are not sufficient to purchase all the textbooks which will be up for adoption in the upcoming proclamation.

The message is clear. We must find digital means that are more efficient, engaging, and increasingly rigorous for our students. To this end, we have redirected one of our curriculum specialists, Mrs. Cheryl Pond, to the serve as the district's Instructional Technology specialist. I believe her to be highly qualified and expect great contributions from her. In this new role, Mrs. Pond, alongside Mr. Casillas, the district's Chief Technology Officer, will explore and implement ways of increasing the digital learning opportunities for our students. I believe it is highly probable that we will pilot iPad rooms alongside other 1:1 digital learning opportunities throughout the district. Of course all in preparation for what will, one day soon, be taken to scale.

"Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning." - Benjamin Franklin