

West ISD's Journey to Greatness

By David Truitt, Superintendent

Since my arrival in January of 2015, I have shared numerous times my belief that the West Independent School District could and should be the education destination for all current and future families in central Texas. With this belief, our district must be committed to ensuring our academic, athletic, and fine arts programs operate on an exemplary level. Frankly, our students deserve the very best. Education and business leaders would say our district must constantly review how we are responding to the needs of our students. They would also say we must continue to move forward and never settle for mediocrity, or good over great. Every day, we must remember we are on a journey to greatness.

I have been asked several times what I believe makes our schools great. I believe our community would say that great schools have leaders who lead with passion, teachers who come alive in the classroom and thrive in a team setting, a healthy component of parent and community involvement, innovative programming, engaging and quality lessons presented in every classroom, and a caring, respectful, and secure learning environment. Great schools also expect great things of their students, not only academically, but across a broad range of extracurricular interests. I also believe great schools possess a trademark spirit of service and commitment.

Over the past few months, several national organizations have noticed and recognized our district or a specific campus with a special honor. While on our journey to greatness, I believe it is very important to celebrate each success, no matter how small. Our School Board, staff, parents, and students need to know we are on the right track, and that different educational leaders and organizations across the country are taking note of our work in West.

First, *Teacher.org* informed us that we have been ranked as the 36th best school district for Teacher Support in all of Texas. We were ranked ahead of neighboring districts such as Whitney, Teague, Glen Rose, Lorena, La Vega, Groesbeck, Robinson, Connally, and Waco. After reviewing the list, we were even ranked ahead of Eanes, Carroll, Garland, Allen, and Frisco to name a few. The criteria used to assess how well a school district supports their teachers centered on student class size, administrator and support staff availability, and student proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. Only 419 school districts in Texas made the rankings, so we appreciate this special recognition from this organization.

Next, *Educational Results Partnership*, or *Edresults.org*, notified us that both West Middle School and West High School were named Texas Honor Roll campuses. This Honor Roll recognizes public elementary, middle, and high schools for demonstrating consistently higher levels of student academic achievement, improvement over time, and reduction in achievement gaps among ethnic minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. For high schools, Honor Roll recognition also includes college readiness in students. Only 713 campuses were recognized in Texas for this honor, and two West ISD campuses made the list.

Third, the *U.S. News and World Report* recently issued their annual ratings and rankings of the top high schools in the United States. The U.S. News rankings include data on more than 21,000 public high schools in 50 states and the District of Columbia. Schools were awarded gold, silver or bronze medals based on their performance on state assessments, their graduation rates, and how well they prepare students for college. U.S. News informed us that West High School achieved the Bronze Medal for high-

performance in student achievement. This rating moved West High School into the top 30% of all high schools across the country. To produce the 2016 Best High Schools rankings, North Carolina-based RTI International, a global nonprofit social science research firm, implemented the U.S. News comprehensive rankings methodology, which is based on these key principles: that a great high school must serve all of its students well, not just those who are college bound, and that it must be able to produce measurable academic outcomes to show it is successfully educating its student body across a range of performance indicators.

Finally, we are still awaiting word from the Texas Education Agency on whether West Middle School and West High School will be named a Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (T-STEM) Academy. With only 70 identified T-STEM Academies in Texas, this news will be another great accolade for our staff, students, and community. T-STEM Academies work to increase the number of students entering postsecondary studies and careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, facilitate the promotion of quality school leadership that supports school redesign efforts, offer quality teacher recruitment and improved teacher preparation programs, and assist in the long-term educational and economic development and alignment of these fields.

As you can see, it is a great time to be a West Trojan. With the hard work and dedication of our outstanding School Board, staff, parents, and students, West ISD will continue on our Journey of Greatness, a journey so great that everyone across the state and country will know about the work and success of the mighty Trojans. It is an exciting time to be in West.