

Strategic Planning in West ISD

By David Truitt, Superintendent

“Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.” – John F. Kennedy

During last week’s Regular Board Meeting, I presented detailed information on why the West Independent School District (ISD) needed to spend some upcoming time and energy on discussing and crafting a district-wide strategic plan. A plan that would define our work for years to come as we strive to be the education destination in central Texas.

As you know, we have made great strides since the fertilizer plant explosion. Our students and programs are no longer in temporary facilities, and we are even completing construction projects and plans for our last remaining lost facilities. Our fine arts, athletics, and academic programs are achieving at all-time highs, and we know we have been blessed throughout the entire process. Remember, West ISD has a Texas Education Agency designated STEM Academy. We are a NAMM Foundation “Best Community” for Music Education, and the *US News and World Report* named West High School a Silver Medal “Best High School in the Nation.” The determination and strength of our students, parents, staff, and community has been truly remarkable.

With that said, I think everyone in our community would be greatly disappointed in me, as the leader of West ISD, if our work ended here. It would be easy to say that our new campus is complete, our students are happy, and now, we can rest. Well, I believe West isn’t about “easy” or not seeing our journey through to the end. I truly believe our work is just beginning. I believe the best is yet to come. We have a chance to ensure all Trojans, Prekindergarten through Grade 12, have the best opportunities for success in life after graduation from West High School, and, like you, I want to see this vision fulfilled.

The first question I challenged our Board with was: “Is West ISD truly an education destination?” We can look at state accountability data on the STAAR test all day long, but the answers or actions I was really looking for centered on whether families move to West because of our school district. I, also, flipped that thought around and asked if families then stay in West because of our school district. I am constantly asking myself if our families are proud of our work and whether they share the great things happening across our campuses with others. The key for me is that we can never be satisfied with where we are. We must always move forward and strive to get better.

Mr. and Mrs. Snook at West High School often say that West ISD is a “3A District with 6A Dreams.” I love this thought, because I believe this signifies that we are vigorously going to fight for new and needed educational opportunities for our students. I want our Board and leadership team to “move mountains” for our students. We must constantly ask our students about their future plans and desires for life after high school and do our best to meet these goals and dreams. I want every student to dream big. Then, it is my job to help make sure each dream is a reality.

The next question I challenged our Board with centered on: “Why strategic planning?” I believe a strategic plan helps to fully uncover all available options, sets priorities for them, and defines the methods to achieve them. Strategic planning helps bring our future into the present, so that we can actually do something about it. My favorite part of strategic planning centers on the opportunities it brings for our staff to interact with and educate our many stakeholders. This leads to enhancing our relationships with them as well. Strategic planning isn’t something done in the solitude of my office. It is

a time to bring together staff, parents, community leaders, and business leaders to brainstorm, develop, analyze, and prioritize an action plan for the future of our district and students. It is a time to discuss how and where we want to educate our youngest learners, technology integration across our campuses, dual credit offerings at West High School, STEM integration, the best use of the '67 gym, how we respond to our struggling learners, the addition of a new track, the completion of the athletic complex, and much, much more.

Strategic planning helps us define our purpose, our why. We can evaluate our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. We can review growth patterns, property and facility needs, funding challenges, staffing needs, and marketing and branding needs of the district. With the brainpower and passion for our students across the community, I believe this work will be a defining moment in the history of West ISD. You see, I believe futures begin in West ISD. It is time we moved our focus from the West ISD that was and even the West ISD that is. Let's come together and focus on the West ISD that is yet to come... the West ISD we dream about and hope for future generations. Are we ready to make bold decisions for our students? The Board and I are ready! How about you? Go Trojans!