

2016-2017: A School Year to Remember

By David Truitt, Superintendent

Back in August at the start of the 2016-2017 school year, I shared my belief that the West Independent School District (ISD) should be the education destination for all current and future families in central Texas. With this belief in mind, I shared how our district has committed to ensuring our academic, athletic, and fine arts programs consistently operate on an exemplary level. Like you, I have always felt our students deserve the very best. With the help of our Board of Trustees, West ISD continually reviews how we respond to the needs of our students. This work is needed as we continue to move forward and never settle for mediocrity, or good over great. Every day this school year, we have tried to remember why we are here, and that, every day, we are on a journey to greatness.

Over the past few months, several national organizations have once again 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 Board of Trustees, 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. From the opening of our new campus back in August to our recent Class of 2017 Scholarship Night, we have much to celebrate in West.

First and foremost, we kicked off the school year with Taina Maya from KWTX News 10 in West honoring West High School as the "School of the Week." News 10 highlighted our band, Katelyn Mayes, football team, volleyball team, cheerleaders, Dazzlers, cross country team, Student Council, Junior Historians, baseball team, softball team, and Technology Student Association club. All of Waco was able to see the great things happening in West.

A few days later, news crews were back for the opening of the new West Middle and High School campus. Wednesday, August 24, 2016, was truly a day to remember. We started the morning with a Spirit Walk from the Trojan Gym on North Davis Street and arrived at the new campus for a ribbon cutting ceremony right before the first bell rang. I can still remember senior, Payton Landrum, cutting the ribbon, and Mr. Snook and Ms. Scott receiving the American Flag from our lost gymnasium from the previous campus. The faces of the students as they arrived at the campus for the first time was a memory and thought I will never forget.

Our first year as a Texas Education Agency Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (T-STEM) Academy was a huge success. The students enjoyed our new engineering and biomedical science courses and cannot wait for the Year 2 courses. We had several STEM projects highlighted during our new STEM Showcase, and I lost track of how many guests came by West to tour the campus and study our work. The Project Lead the Way courses were a huge success at West Elementary and West Middle School as well.

Once again, the *U.S. News and World Report* issued their annual ratings and rankings of the top high schools in the United States. The U.S. News reviewed data on more than 21,000 public high schools in 50 states and the District of Columbia, and 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 Silver Medal for high-performance in

student achievement. West High School moved up from the Bronze to the Silver level this year. In central Texas, West High School only trailed the Harmony School of Science (Waco campus) and Midway High School in the rankings. Midway High School was only 13 spots ahead of us. West High School finished at 2,570 in the entire United States out of 26,407 high schools. This ranking made us a Top 10% High School in the nation and Top 6% High School in Texas.

Just this week, West ISD was honored with the Best Communities for Music Education designation from The NAMM Foundation for its outstanding commitment to music education. West ISD is one of 4% of districts across the nation receiving this prestigious award in 2017. The Best Communities Music Education designation is awarded to districts that demonstrate outstanding achievement in efforts to provide music access and education to all students. This award recognizes that West ISD is leading the way with music learning opportunities as outlined in the new federal education legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). I cannot thank our music, Dazzler, art, theater, Junior Historian, and band teachers and sponsors enough for all their hard work. The 4% mark means West ISD is one of only 527 school districts in the entire nation to earn this honor.

Finally, last Sunday's Baccalaureate Service and Senior Scholarship Night topped off the school year. On this special night, Coach David Woodard gave the Senior Class Charge, the West Ministerial Alliance led the service, a West High School-based Student Praise Band led the singing, and senior parent, John Hlavenka, oversaw the creation of a fabulous dinner. During the program, Mr. Snook announced that the Class of 2017 had already earned over 1.6 million in scholarship money. We also had several seniors earn athletic and academic scholarships to several major universities in Texas, as well as an appointment to West Point by Cade Fleaher.

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. I cannot wait to see what 2017-2018 has in store for us!