

Let's Rise Up for West Elementary

By David Truitt, Superintendent

While recently driving around Waco, I saw a sign that read, "An Investment in our Schools is an Investment in our Community." Never in the history of West has this statement meant more than it does right now. With the recent reopening of the 1923 and 1957 buildings, West ISD has made another huge stride in rebuilding our facilities from the devastation of the fertilizer plant explosion. Just take a moment and think about the opening of the West Middle and High School complex, the building of the baseball and softball complex, and now the new Administration Building. With work underway on the 1967 gymnasium and track and football complex, West ISD is truly an "Education Destination". Every new facility is now ready for the many future generations of Trojans, but, as you know, we still have one facility to go. A facility we cannot forget, but must ensure is treated with the same respect, care, and urgency as our other construction projects. You pass this campus everyday as you drive on Oak Street or Interstate 35. It is the campus where our youngest and most-in-need learners attend school for seven years. It is the campus that must be at the forefront of our minds as we move through several Bond Awareness events and activities. It is the campus that must receive the attention it deserves throughout the spring semester as we strive to redefine how we educate and ensure the safety of our hundreds of elementary students. This work is worth the investment in our schools and community, but most importantly... our children.

Back on Wednesday, November 15, 2017, the West ISD Board of Trustees approved thirty-five action statements presented by the West ISD Strategic Planning Team. This team consisted of approximately one-hundred West ISD staff members and parents, community members, business leaders, and civic leaders. One of the action items centered on the future of the current West Elementary School site; specifically the desire to see a new campus built on a new site in West. On Wednesday, December 13, 2017, the West ISD Board of Trustees approved the request to seek interested architects and engineers for this project. Since December, the Board has discussed all financial implications of this plan with Dan Wegmiller with Specialized Public Finance, Inc. Mr. Mikeska has also held several conversations with West ISD's Bond Attorney. A Bond Feedback Survey will even be released this week on the West ISD website and other social media platforms.

Currently, West ISD is awaiting the return of the potential architect qualification packets. The deadline to return the packets is this Friday, February 9, 2018. A committee of Board members and district leadership team members will review the packets and request the finalists to present to the Board during a Special Called Meeting set for Monday, February 12, 2018, at 6:30 PM at the West ISD Administration Building. On this night, the goal is to possibly approve an architect to assist the district through this special project. On Wednesday, February 14, 2018, the Board will then consider during the Regular Board Meeting an action item to possibly move forward on calling a bond for May, 2018. During this meeting, the Board will host a Public Hearing for the community. The meeting is set for 6:30 PM at the West ISD Administration Building.

This past Monday, February 5, 2018, I met with members of the West Elementary staff. The purpose of the meeting was to share several updates and discuss their greatest safety and learning obstacles in relation to the physical plant of the campus. The safety of our children, staff, and parents kept coming up over and over again. From the front entry to the playground to our student drop-off and pick-up plans to parking to the size of the classrooms, restrooms, and cafeteria, and to the location by Interstate

35, the staff worked vigorously to offer possible solutions for each challenge. An engineer will review solutions for these concerns as well, but the list is great. For decades, the campus has served the community well. Portions of the current campus still remain from 1952, and several additions and upgrades have been completed over the years. With this work comes challenges with sewer, water, electrical, wireless connectivity, roof leaks, wiring, ADA compliance, AC and heating, and kitchen space. Currently, our students even begin eating lunch at 10:15 AM.

I believe now is the time to rise up, and let the community decide on the future of the current West Elementary campus. To date, the Strategic Planning Team, the West Elementary staff, district officials, and our Board of Trustees have deemed this project worthy of our time and energy. Often, I talk about how we must strive to meet the needs of “all of our children.” For me, “all” means “all”; including our youngest Trojans. I am prepared to host many events to gather feedback and answer questions about this project. I am willing to meet anyone for coffee or lunch to discuss why this project is important to the life of West. My office door is always open to anyone who wants to help me make our district truly great. Let’s rise up for the current and future students, parents, and staff of West Elementary! The investment is worth it!