

## Remembering 9/11 in West ISD

By David Truitt, Superintendent

Last Friday, I was standing in the West Middle and High School gymnasium watching the Homecoming pep rally. As usual, our outstanding band, Dazzlers, football team, and cheerleaders were leading the cheers and skits. At the beginning of the pep rally, our band played our national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner," and the students, staff, and parents all sang along. In the past, we have all heard and sang our national anthem during various West ISD events. Whether at a West Trojan athletic event or school program, West ISD has always honored our flag and nation. As I looked over the crowd, this pep rally and honoring of America felt different. Our cheerleaders were all lined up and each read a fact from the timeline of events from September 11, 2001. After each event was read, our band chimed a bell in remembrance of those who lost their lives and loved ones in the attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Veterans were even on hand to serve as the honor guard, present the colors, and lead the pledge.

Frankly, my heart still aches even thinking about the events from 9/11. Some days you never see coming. I was in Katy, Texas, serving as an assistant principal at a middle school when a secretary called out that a plane had just crashed into the World Trade Center. At first, the news did not even register. A plane? Surely it was an accident because a plane had strayed off course. But the plumes of billowing, black smoke on television told a much different story. Those of us who lived through September 11, 2001, remember where we were, when we heard the news, what we did, and how we felt. It was a feeling I hope our students never have to experience in their lives again.

Watching our students hear the timeline of events from 9/11 and the veteran color guard lead the pledge, I asked myself, "Does West ISD do enough to promote how fortunate we are to live in this great country where we enjoy blessings no other country on Earth gets to enjoy?" In my opinion, the answer is no. We are not doing enough. In this day and age where high-stakes testing dictates curriculum, teaching practices, and lesson planning, we have allowed our appreciation for some of the fundamental principles that make our nation great slip away and be simply forgotten. The 9/11 attacks changed history, and for most of our students, 9/11 is just that: history. Many students were not even born and the rest were quite young when the attacks occurred. West ISD cannot allow events like 9/11 to go by each year without acknowledging our history, the events of that day, their impact, and our resolve to overcome these great tragedies. We must remember, learn, and celebrate. I have come to the conclusion the place to begin restoring pride and awareness in our government, history, and patriotism does not reside in Austin or Washington D.C.; it resides in every classroom across West ISD. The Texas Education Code states, "Educators will prepare students to be thoughtful, active citizens who have an appreciation for the basic values of our state and national heritage and who can understand and productively function in a free enterprise society." I love this! We need more of this in West ISD!

This year, West ISD will renew its commitment to this great nation by ensuring the values that make the United States of America the greatest country on Earth are taught in all classrooms. We will work with our students on projects, activities, and events that allow them to give back to the community, so that they understand how good it feels to do something for someone else. We will work with the veterans and first-responders of our community to ensure our students know the sacrifice they made to help make our country truly great.

This year, the community and West ISD must work together to show the next generation why we are proud to be Americans. Together, we will honor the members of our armed forces, past and present, and first-responder units by passing on what it means to be a true American: Service above Self. I believe these acts are what truly makes our community great. Go Trojans Who Love to Serve Others!