



San Benito Schools **A Consolidated Independent School District**

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A district of which to be quite proud

A Statement by Michael A. Vargas, President, San Benito CISD Board of Trustees

As a proud product of San Benito schools, my upbringing and learning experience was filled with pride in our school district and in our community. The unconditional love and support given to us by our teachers, administrators, school leaders, and community encouraged our success as students. This same sense of pride, home, and belonging became, for me, a source of strength that I frequently tapped into as I navigated my college years and early professional career across the country, far removed from the sheltered boundaries of my hometown. This pride has remained with me and has resonated deeply and profoundly within me, as I eventually made my way back to my hometown.

Our hometown district of San Benito is something of which we should all be proud. We are frequently and repeatedly recognized at the state and national level for our various accomplishments, and we consistently push the envelope with innovative methods to enhance learning experiences and opportunities for our students.

In February, we were pleased to learn that San Benito CISD was named a 2019 Innovative District by the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE), whose mission is to challenge, inspire and equip today's educators. San Benito CISD was selected for making rapid and significant improvements in student outcomes. Becoming an Innovative District was no easy feat as it took approximately two years of demonstrating substantive, data-validated growth and transforming instruction to meet the needs and demands of the future. All San Benito residents and families should be proud of this distinctive designation.

For successfully increasing its rigor and relevance and added emphasis on student technology usage, San Benito CISD was one of only eight (8) schools from across the United States selected to present a session at ICLE's national conference in Washington, D.C. District representatives were asked to present multiple sessions that will focus on the steps taken by SBCISD and its schools in successfully increasing its rigor and relevance and adding an emphasis on student technology usage. This is the first time that San Benito CISD was asked to present at the conference, which demonstrates ICLE's interest in having SBCISD share best practices with other school districts interested in striving for this prestigious designation.

At a recent school board committee meeting, some of our San Benito teachers gave personal testimonials praising the ICLE training and how effective the model has been to impact student learning. In fact, at the same meeting, school board member M.L. Garcia emphasized the program's success, stating, "I wish more teachers would go."

Again, there is so much about which we can all be proud in our San Benito schools. That is why, as school board president, I have been disheartened at the recent, persistent, and negative attacks that our district has been experiencing. Just last week, an article was written in a local newspaper that was filled with inaccurate information. The media outlet confused an expense for in-district professional development with ICLE with the trip to the ICLE national conference in Washington, D.C. (which they also inaccurately referred to as an "at-risk" workshop). A photo of a sign that showed an inaccurate amount for the conference expense was published along with the story. The sign was paid for by a politically-motivated individual whose son is no longer employed at the district for not abiding by board policy.

After a few back-and-forth communications with the media outlet, a subsequent clarification story was eventually published. Though this is commendable, the damage was already done. As elected leaders, we know that there will always be attacks that appear to stem from a political nature from individuals or groups who may not agree with decisions that are made. We also know that salacious headlines sell newspapers. However, we have a responsibility to our community and our constituents to address misinformation and misguided perceptions, especially when it comes from a media outlet that people are generally accustomed to trusting as a reliable source of information.

A 2018 Gallup poll demonstrated that reasons respondents had for not trusting news organizations is due to inaccuracy or bias. When media outlets so carelessly (or even sometimes, purposely) run false information or "fake news," is it any wonder why there exists such distrust? We ask that our San Benito residents consume media with a cautious awareness of news stories that may potentially be inaccurate, one-sided, or biased. Most importantly, we ask that you please not let politics tarnish your perception of our great San Benito school district.

For our part as elected leaders, we will do our best to ensure open, timely, and accurate sharing of information with our local media outlets, as well as through our own outreach efforts such as The San Benito District Observer, so that our San Benito residents and families remain informed and addressed of district news, events, and accomplishments.

As school board president, I remain committed to leading our district with transparency and accountability, and I will continue to serve our community in the best interest of our San Benito district, schools, students, and families.

Let us all demand the same level of accuracy, professionalism and accountability from our news media outlets.