

## **West ISD Chooses Joy**

By David Truitt, Superintendent

This week, our students head home for the Christmas break for much needed rest and time with family and other loved ones. This time of giving and sharing will not go unnoticed by our students, staff, and families as our wonderful community will once again search for ways to serve and celebrate together. December is truly a wonderful time of year. It is a time to remember the true reason for the season and all the great things happening in West. It is a time to be thankful for all our many blessings, but just as important, it is a time to be joyful.

As you know, choosing joy is tough. I have learned this school year that not every district rating, score, decision, news, or event is going to come out the way we hope. For me, it's a day-to-day fight to trust that God will work everything for the good of those who love him. I strive to choose joy in my work, because I know it is my responsibility to decide how I am going to react to those circumstances and challenges. Henry Drummond said, "Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day." My favorite part of choosing joy is that it will never leave me in times of hurt, struggles, or unhappiness. Difficult circumstances will arise, harsh words will be spoken or written, and sometimes things just won't go the way we want them to, but we must remember that West is a great place to live and raise families. It is a place full of joy. As I have heard so many of you say, "God is good, and West is blessed." There is no reason we should ever doubt that truth.

As I reflect on the fall semester, West has much to celebrate and reasons to be joyful. The West Middle and High School athletic program continues to dominate the district competition and advance in the playoffs. Our cross country teams even had two runners advance to state. Our theater department performed seven plays, and the sound of each band at the most recent Christmas Concerts would match or surpass any school in Texas. Our new choir made its debut, and our FFA program won many shows and leadership skills competitions. Our VEX Robotics team kicked off its competition season last Saturday, and our Technology Student Association recently attended a leadership conference. Our UIL Academic teams at West Elementary School and West Middle School had many individual champions, and we have eleven Destination Imagination teams ready for competition. Our Builder's Club and Key Club are back in action, and our Junior Historians are touring Texas and showcasing our wonderful Czech heritage. You name the academic, agriculture, career and technical, athletic, or fine art event, and West ISD is competing at an exemplary level in it. I think you will all agree that these accolades are reasons to choose joy when sharing news about West ISD.

Now, you might be saying, "David, yes, those district accolades are wonderful, but we have heard that West Elementary School and West Middle School did not receive the best ratings from the state for the 2017-2018 school year. How can you be joyful about that news?" Great points, but I still choose joy and will continue to choose joy. With the recent changes to the state accountability system, we learned our school district received a "B" letter grade, and, again, we have implemented several school improvement measures in hopes of joining the "A" public school districts in central Texas. West High School received four distinction designations from the state and was once again named a NAMM Foundation "Best Communities" for music education. Yes, our elementary campus did not meet the state's standard for the 2017-2018 school year, but the current staff is up for the challenge. Our elementary students, staff, and parents have been working hard all semester on two, submitted and

approved, school improvement goals with the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and I know we will reap positive results and rewards come the final testing data release from the state in June.

Recently, our Board of Trustees and community heard two updates on our school improvement plan, and progress has been made on both TEA goals. Guided reading and math plans have been implemented, and a new literacy library is being utilized by all staff members. Two instructional support coaches with the Region 12 Service Center are working with our grades 3-5 teachers, and Diane Gough, a former, award-winning principal from Midway ISD, is assisting with the plan as well. Teacher-requested resources have been purchased, and the state's Interim-STAAR was administered at grades 3-5 before Thanksgiving and grades 6-8 this week. In January, the state will release a "what if" letter grade for all campuses, so our community must remember that the West Elementary and Middle School teams are working hard with our parents, district officials, the Region 12 Service Center and Texas Education Agency to ensure our plan is a success. To date, West Elementary has met all school improvement goals and timelines. District officials have released the grades 3-5 interim-STAAR testing data, and our students have shown promising growth after only eighteen weeks of instruction.

Every day, West ISD is trying new ways to engage our students and parents, and our students are achieving at unprecedented levels in the classroom, gym, locker room, lab, and barn. As I shared in an article back in November, I will not let the state rating at the elementary campus deter us from our goal to ensure West ISD is THE "Education Destination" for current and future families in West. Our discussions are all about how we can make West ISD better and keep our vision statement of "children as our first priority" at the forefront of our work. A letter grade based on a few state tests given over a few days of the school year will not define our work or worth.

Again, I am proud to call West my home, and I am so grateful that West ISD has such a large group of parents, staff, community members, and business leaders who are so willing to help make West and West ISD truly great. I believe it is the job of everyone in our community to ensure we have successful schools, and now is the time to come together and choose joy during this Christmas season. West ISD has wonderful students, staff, and parents. We have a supportive Board and community. Let's strive to model this spirit of joy and service for one another. Let's be joyful and shout from the rooftops that West is best and blessed. This Christmas season, I choose to be a joyful Trojan. How about you?