

Grateful Trojans on a Mission

By David Truitt, Superintendent

Boy, Election Day seemed like it would never get here. For months, we have listened to so many ads and debates on TV, read ads in newspapers, and clicked on social media tweets and threads. I hope you were able to vote, because I truly love that our great country allows us the freedom to choose the people we want to represent us at the local, state, and national levels. This year, Election Day also made me think about how close this special day is each year to Thanksgiving. A time of election debates and ads about which candidate is best and shared political opinions followed by a time of thanksgiving and gratitude and remembrance of our many blessings.

As I have shared in the past, I love this time of year. The weather is changing, leaves are turning and falling, football and volleyball playoff games are being scheduled, families are making plans for the holiday week, and turkeys and pies are being purchased. Trojans everywhere are gearing up for a week of food, family, fellowship, and fun. For me, Thanksgiving is always a time for everyone to pause and give thanks for the great things that are happening in our lives. A time for our community to honor the past, be grateful for the present, and pray about the future. Thanksgiving is a time to remember and shout from the top row of the bleachers at Trojan Field how God has blessed both our school district and community.

This time last year in an article, I shared that gratitude is derived from the Latin word, *gratia*, which means grace, graciousness, or gratefulness. I still love this for where we are in 2018... heading for 2019. I still think of Thanksgiving as gratitude in action. Again, this very thought is what I want for our students, but also for our staff, parents, and community. We have so much to be grateful for in West ISD. All campus construction projects are finished. Two West High School students just advanced to the state Cross Country Meet. Our West High School volleyball team is making another deep run in the playoffs. Our West High School football team has the chance to win district this week against Teague. Our West Middle and High School theater programs have already performed three shows, and the Pride of West Marching Band received a 1, Superior Rating, at the recent UIL Marching Contest. Our new choral program is off and running, and our FFA program is once again winning Grand Champion recognitions at every show. Our Vex Robotics teams are gearing up for another run at the upcoming tournaments, and the college acceptance letters for our senior class are rolling in. Our recent school district financial audit went well, and our staging on the state's Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS) showed great promise.

In regards to the new state accountability system, our school district received a "B" letter grade, and we have put in several measures this year in hopes of joining the "A" public school districts of Midway, Lorena, and China Spring. West High School did receive four distinction designations from the state, but we are not where we want to be at West Elementary School and West Middle School in regards to the new state rating labels. Our elementary campus did not meet the state's standard, and we all want the campus to receive a future letter grade that represents the great work happening on the campus throughout the 2018-2019 school year. Yes, we have work to do, but we are up for the challenge. I am truly grateful for how hard our elementary students, staff, and parents are working this year on our two school improvement goals with the Texas Education Agency, and I know we will reap positive results come the final testing data release from the state in June. Recently, we met with our both our Region 12 Service Center and Texas Education Agency campus assistance coordinators, and West Elementary has

met all school improvement goals and timelines to date. An interim-STAAR testing window is even scheduled for next week as a tool to gather testing data on the progress our grades 3-5 students have made after the first twelve-weeks of school.

With everything going on in our lives, I believe we must stop and remember that great things are still happening in the lives of the West Trojans. My own children love attending school in West. I know every staff member is working hard and loves working with their students. Every day, we are 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. To date, we have completed 26 of the 35 West ISD Strategic Planning Team goals from the district action plan crafted with parent, staff, and community member input last year. I will not let the recent rating at the elementary campus deter us from our goal to help make West ISD 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.

I am so grateful to call West my home. I am so grateful that West ISD has such a large group of parents, staff, and community 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 for the 1,371 students across West ISD. I hope our community will consider volunteering in our schools, reading to a child, tutoring, attending a school activity or event, cheering on our children in the stands, or serving on a campus or district committee over posting on social media, holding meetings, or typing letters seeking division at a time that we must come together for the sake of our students. I am always actively seeking help and any positive and productive efforts to ensure we are making progress on our journey to greatness for all students on all campuses.

This Thanksgiving, let's take a moment to remember and give thanks for the great things happening in West. We have wonderful students, staff, and parents. We have a supportive Board and community. Let's strive to model for our children a spirit of thankfulness and service for one another. Let's be grateful for what we have and all that is to come this school year and in the near future. Let's have a mindset of confidence and courage in our work every day of the school year; specifically at West Elementary. Please enjoy your turkey and thanks for supporting your mighty Trojans!