

**DATE:** August 24, 2018

### **SUPERINTENDENT'S BACK-TO-SCHOOL MESSAGE**

Welcome back! Everyone in the Dripping Springs ISD family is looking forward to the 2018-19 school year and making it the best ever for the Tiger Nation.

As we prepared for the year, our leadership team and staff spent time considering who we are and what we believe in. We asked ourselves questions like: What is the culture of Dripping Springs ISD? What do we want for our students?

One thing we know is that this is a transformational time for education. Our children learn differently today than they did even 10 years ago. And as they enter into a rapidly changing global society, they need to be prepared to adapt and grow with the changes. Our responsibility is to cultivate the skills they need to manage rapid change and to develop each of them as life-long learners and positive contributors. We do this by encouraging students to explore subjects they have an interest in, and connecting those interests directly to their learning. If students are excited about the focus of a lesson, they will naturally be more engaged.

Over the past several months we have talked about our district's culture. We have narrowed a description down to four words: organic, empowerment, performance, and learning.

Organic doesn't mean everyone gets to do whatever they want, whenever they want. Rather it is the creation of the right environment to nurture growth and learning through relationships in every individual in the district. We have to set the right boundaries and then allow learning the freedom to develop based on strengths and interests.

Empowerment means pushing the responsibility for learning to where it belongs – with the learner. It's all about autonomy and accountability at every level of the organization, and true agency for teachers and students.

Performance is the proof of learning. It has to be rigorous and relevant and allow for learner choice. Performance expresses student voice. Learning has to be anytime, anywhere, anyhow. It has to be creative in the sense of being constructive (not artsy necessarily), and it has to be personal, connecting to each learners'

interests and passions.

Creating an environment that allows for meaningful and authentic learning falls in the hands of our talented teachers and staff. Our teachers and campuses are empowered to take risks as they search for the most effective ways to foster learning in their students. We understand that over time, many factors influence the journey we are on with our students. We invite you to join us on that journey.

As we prepare for the first day of school, our enrollment continues to rise at a steady and strong pace. We expect approximately 400 new students this year, bringing our district enrollment to more than 6,900 students. Last year we opened a new elementary school and a new middle school. In May voters approved a \$132 million bond that includes expansion of Dripping Springs High School and one new elementary school. It also includes a plan to relocate Walnut Springs Elementary next to Dripping Springs Middle School and to convert WSE into a new administration building. Other projects at DSISD campuses also were included, as well as technology improvements and land acquisition.

This year will be the third year of implementation for our 2016-21 strategic plan. The plan focuses on the idea of personalized learning for every student. We strive to create an environment where every student can reach his or her unique potential based on individual passions, strengths, and interests. We have made great progress in the first two years and will stay on track to accomplish our goals. The full strategic plan, which consists of four areas of emphasis, can be viewed on the DSISD website and a summary is located on Page 4 of this newsletter.

To new parents, students and staff, we are glad you have chosen to join the Dripping Springs ISD family. When my family and I came here seven years ago, it was an intentional choice. DSISD has an outstanding reputation that has been built not only on the success of our students, but the fact that we do things our way. The DSISD team consists of true “life-changers” who go above and beyond every day to serve kids and help them achieve their potential. Our students come to school ready to learn and continually surprise us with their astounding creativity and abilities. Our parents are involved and active partners. Our community is consistently supportive of education and of our district. Together we are equipping and inspiring our students to be life-long learners and positive contributors to the world!

Dripping Springs is truly a special place. The Tiger Nation is strong and proud. Thanks for being a part of Dripping Springs ISD. #iamDSISD

Best wishes for a great school year.

Sincerely,  
Bruce Gearing  
Superintendent

