



West ISD Announces Plan for 2013-14 Educational Operations

Following a successful completion of the 2012-13 academic year, and after adjusting to the unforeseen challenge that relegated the District to only one of four operational campuses, the West Independent School District has planned for all of its approximately 1500 students and 200 plus staff members to restart their educational experience within District boundaries beginning this August 2013.

"The District is forever appreciative of our friends at Connally ISD, surrounding McLennan and Hill County ISDs, as well as Grand Prairie ISD, Temple ISD, Spring ISD, Technology for Education and CISCO Systems, who rallied in support of our students and teachers," District Superintendent Dr. Marty Crawford explained. "However, our kids are West kids, and they are ready to return to their school home in their town".

The *Rise Up West ISD* campaign Phase I goal is to reboot the school system at full strength for all West ISD students - back here in West - beginning this August/ September utilizing temporary classroom buildings for grades 6-12 at one location (the current West Middle School location) and grades PK-5 at West Elementary School. Included in that plan is to restart all phases of our educational programs, including co- and extra-curricular activities, so that students and the West community can see that progress is being made, and that the School District is determined and resilient to achieve excellence. The District will implement Phase I execution of facility repair and temporary building construction, along with other educational preparations throughout the summer. Portable classroom buildings, the demolition of damaged buildings, and the reboot and installation of curricular and extra-curricular facilities will be a priority during Phase I.

"From April 18th and on, our purpose during our *Rise Up West ISD* campaign has been to get the student experience as close to normal as possible, while doing our part to rally in support of the City of West to become greater than it was prior to the 18th of April. Phase I will be no different," Crawford explained.

Aside from the State required educational program, support programs that were exceptional before the explosion are being continued: Agriculture Education, Career & Technology Education, Dual Credit courses, Pre-Advanced and Advanced Placement Courses, our fine arts programs of band, theatre and art, Junior Historians and athletics.

"All band and athletic programs will continue at full strength," Crawford adamantly stated. "The Middle School will have 6th thru 8th grade band and its athletic teams will compete with both A & B team schedules. The same goes for West High band and athletics where we are slated to be prepared to march on Friday nights and compete in UIL events. Our freshmen, JV and varsity teams will compete in all of our sports. Regardless of the information circulating, we will still put a WT on our uniforms to represent our school and community.

The District is also planning to roll out new programs in the next few years such as innovative competitive academics, possibly a multi-media and construction design program (in partnership with our architects, Huckabee & Associates), middle school-aged Teen Leadership, and the possible insertion of a medical technology academic pathway at WHS. These programs will comply with new legislation and to continue the preparation of students for 21st century post-secondary learning or successful workforce employment.

Superintendent Crawford affirmed, "The District feels that academic, co- and extra-curricular programs are not the only part, but part of the holistic student experience in education, ultimately keeping kids, families and community members interested in our educational vision so that they will stick with us. I also believe we can be opportunistic and implement 21st Century initiatives to show we are not settling because our facilities were damaged, but instead are super-seeding expectations."

West ISD recognizes to execute the vision the District has for students and as part of the response to West's challenge, the quality of education in West now and in the future, the facility projects will require money listed in the millions of dollars. Revenue resources will come from a variety of places: insurance settlement dollars, support from the Federal government through FEMA, the State of Texas, and some local funds, where the District has practiced a conservative fiscal program for the past five years.

"Our physical plant repair and recovery will be upwards of \$100 Million and will take two to three years to complete. Our insurers have a covenant to fulfill, FEMA continues to positively work with us, and the State of Texas understands that Texas students deserve brick and mortar facilities as quickly as we can put them up. Being down to one gym of five, and one athletic field of three, is temporary, but having those facilities in shape to serve secondary school kids in band and athletics this fall, while handling wear and tear is important. The community will also see the West ISD baseball/softball/track athletic complex (approved by voters in May 2012 and was about to break ground at the time of the explosion) take shape over the next year as a statement of fidelity to kids," the superintendent stated.

Crawford went on to add that while the District is working with architects in the early parts of Phase II (construction/repair of facilities), ultimately, the District is focusing on Phase I of the *Rise Up West ISD* campaign. The West ISD Board of Trustees and administration's hearts ache that at least two classes of seniors will spend their senior years in temporary facilities. We therefore realize the urgency to provide those two cohorts of students the best chance at success in the academic, social, and extra-curricular parts education. Getting West ISD facilities in shape is a residual of our covenant for kids and the senior classes that follow for the next 100 years.

"We are a 'kid first' leadership team and make decisions based on kids. As much as the citizens of West love their children, they can appreciate that approach by the school district, and will be pleased with the school district's efforts as part of restoring our great community. We will remain a legitimate player in Central Texas public education as our part in the restoration of West on behalf of students and for the long term sustainability of the City post-tragedy."

The District has created a list of *Frequently Asked Questions*. While it may not answer every question, the District encourages stakeholders to contact District and campus administrations to address student, parent, and taxpayer concerns if you have a question not listed.

Additionally, the West ISD Board of Trustees and superintendent meet monthly at regularly scheduled and special called meetings. Meeting dates, locations, and times are posted in The West News, on the District's website at www.westisd.net, and at the District administration complex located at 801 N. Reagan.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q #1: Why will the District conduct school in temporary facilities for grades 6-12 when they were able to use Connally ISD the last 6 weeks of the school year?

A: For 3 reasons.

• **#1 – Safety Concerns.** Using I-35 in its current condition for shuttling kids back and forth to West for two years is a legitimate and major safety concern, not to mention costly, due to

added miles. Our first victory came at the conclusion of the '12-'13 year when the last bus was in the yard and no accidents occurred during those last 6 weeks.

• **#2 – Academic Concerns.** With the limited amount of space and resources, we would not be able to execute State required graduation plans long term. We received waivers in '12-'13 but know that long term student success requires us to offer our full academic program. We can do that locally with the amount of temporary facilities we will have.

• **#3 – School Experience & Community Presence Concerns.** Our kids are West kids and were awesome, adapting to the challenge thrown at them at no fault of their own. However, they deserve to get back in their routine here at home. We also feel our students should be educated here and our teachers should teach here locally, where our tax dollars support them. It will also mean the largest employment operation in the community will be back at full strength in West, just in different types of facilities.

Q #2: I've heard programs are being cut. Is that true?

A: Absolutely not. We are running at the challenge instead of from the challenge and are being opportunistic, breaking bad habits and developing new and improved habits. Our kids deserve the same and even better experience and opportunities than what they had before the tragedy took their school buildings. We are committed to doing just that and even more. It starts first by honoring the next senior classes, the classes of 2014 and 2015.

Q #3: What about teachers and staff losing their jobs?

A: We are committed to employ those that stuck with us through our challenges for 2013-14. Of course we are funded by enrollment and we allocate staff based on enrollment. As long as enrollment remains steady, funding is robust enough to maintain staff, and work performance is exceptional, we do not foresee the need to reduce staff.

Q #4: The temporary facilities, who's funding those?

A: Great question. We know that has been a concern for a select few that do not have to place their children on I-35 daily. To answer, the folks at FEMA have been helping us get back on our feet and the temporary facility project - Phase I - has been in the works with them since May. The District qualified early for these Category B Emergency Protective Measures where temporary facilities are eligible, and we will continue to work with FEMA as we set up that campus. We also have insurance dollars, separate from construction/repair funds, that will assist the ISD, especially in demolition.

Q #5: What about displaced students?

A: If your residence was in Zone 1, 2, or 3 at the time of the blast and you were forced to reside outside the West ISD boundaries, we want you back, just as we wanted you in school right after the blast! Please contact your campus and provide updated residency and contact information so we can contact you. The District will communicate the transportation plan for displaced students later this summer once we have gathered the displaced students' names and locations.

Q #6: What about non-resident transfers?

A: Contact your campus principals to see what attention your application needs as a non-resident student. As always, non-resident transfer students must be in good standing to attend, just as they are during the year and after the school year, when they apply to attend West ISD schools.

Q #7: What are the conditions of facilities for extra-curricular programs?

A: Once the temporary campus location was slotted, we began working on what extra-curricular facilities were needed. As most of you know, the District went from five gymnasiums to one when the blast happened, the North section of West HS where the band hall is located and attached to the WHS gyms is dangerous, the WHS Ag shop is mangled, West Trojan Stadium was used for medical triage, and the track field was littered with shrapnel and debris and had water access issues.

The District will be able to address all of these issues. The 1967 gym will have minor repair and will now be the competition gym for all court sports; the WMS practice gym floor will be saved, the unusable shell of the building removed, and a temporary tent-like facility erected for physical education classes and additional practice space for athletics, band, cheer, and dance; Trojan Stadium has been combed of medical and hypodermic wastes, the sod and some soil will be removed and sod laid as a temporary measure for practice and competition; the track field is having debris removed and water systems repaired; and Agriculture Education will continue coursework and most programs as normal.

Q #8: Will we have enough dollars to rebuild/repair?

A: The District continues to work with insurance to completely fulfill its part of the covenant it has in covering school facilities that house and support school children. The District's policy is approximately \$60 Million.

While a firm number is not available at press time, the District continues to compete with the insurers to secure every dollar owed to West ISD on behalf of school children. The District is still on solid footing with FEMA and sees a long term construction partnership with them as a strong possibility. We also have been engaged by the Texas Department of Emergency Management, the Texas Department of Insurance, and have a few folks in Austin and Washington D.C. working behind the scenes on behalf of our West school children.

Finally, there are some philanthropic groups who are keeping a close eye on the situation as well and may seize small and large opportunities to help the current and future school children of West.

Regardless of the final funding number, the District will stretch every dollar and will not rest until we have facilities "learning ready" in support of students where the community can be proud to send their kids and where we can serve school children for years to come.

Q #9: We live in Zone 3. I'm really concerned about our taxes. What is our tax obligation on a damaged or destroyed home? What about the District's revenue? Will it decrease?

A: Wednesday, June 26th, the West ISD Board voted to allow the McLennan County Appraisal District (MCAD) to begin its process for reappraising Zone's 1, 2, & 3. MCAD will contact the owners of those affected properties with instructions.

It is projected that the District could see the valuation of north of Oak Street decrease by upwards of \$40 Million once MCAD has completed the process, significantly decreasing revenue. However, the District has appeal opportunities with the State for assistance with no implications to the local tax payer, for gradual to no reduction, until the north side of town valuation begins to creep back toward stability.

Q #10: It was reported we aren't starting school until September?

A: The District is observing the Board adopted District calendar as is. Extra-curricular activities begin early August as allowed by the UIL. Teachers return August 19th and the first day of school for students remains August 26th. What an wonderful day that will be! It will be another victory in our quest to make this an outstanding school system for the children of West.