

Gardening Time in Crowley ISD

April 30, 2019

The beautiful weather this past weekend gave me the opportunity to engage in one of my favorite past times – gardening. There is something about being outside in the sun, digging in the dirt, planting things and watching them grow that brings me peace. While I was enjoying gardening, my mind began to wander and my thoughts drifted to the work in Crowley ISD. I immediately identified a connection between lessons I learned while gardening with my grandma and the work we are doing every day.



In the beginning stages of gardening, the first thing you have to do is prepare the soil. Plowing the ground is hard work and often causes a lot of aches and pains. The work we have been engaged in the last year and a half can be related to preparing the soil. I know that for many of you, the change and new initiatives have been overwhelming and may seem unnecessary. Change is difficult and sometimes painful because we have to do things differently to get different results.

In gardening, if you want the ground to produce something different, then the soil must be tilled, fertilized and nurtured. If plants are put into ground that has not been properly prepared, then the status quo will likely prevail, and it is unlikely that new flowers will blossom. If they do blossom, they will probably not take root. Plowing the ground and tilling the soil requires focus and intensity, and it is a necessity if you expect anything planted to take root and grow.

Once the ground is prepared and the conditions are right, seeds and seedlings must be planted. Within every seed exists a flower. If the seed is placed in good ground, fertilized and watered, then it will eventually grow and produce a flower.

The art of gardening requires the ability to see the flower in the seed and prepare the soil to produce the desired flower. When I think about the work we do in Crowley ISD and what we aspire to create, **I see the clear need for all of us to become master gardeners.**

We must look at all students as seeds and seedlings and recognize that what they are today is not all they will be. We must recognize that in order for them to blossom and achieve their full potential, we must do as the gardener does and make sure we are creating the conditions daily throughout our campuses, within classrooms and in the daily lessons to ensure that they develop into all they can be.

During the early stages of gardening, you look for a tangible sign that growth is occurring. I remember after planting with Grandma Sadie, I would check every day for any sign of growth. It was so exciting to see the first sign of a sprout from the seed. This let me know that growth was occurring.

As I look where we are as a district and at the results we have received after the first administration of STAAR, **I am excited to report that I see the first sprout. We are headed in the right direction.** We are not where we want to be yet, but we have made significant improvements across the board throughout the district. **In some cases, double-digit improvements in STAAR scores are being realized.** This is exciting, and I hope you see it as affirming to the work and the systems put into place. Regardless of what it feels like, these initial results show that your efforts are not in vain.

Continuous improvement is about getting better every day, and our current **benchmark scores** also show that we are doing just that. We are getting signs daily that the actions we have initiated are producing the results we desire.

Our investment in **early childhood education** continues to pay significant dividends. We not only have already surpassed our early childhood enrollment figures from previous years, we have been recently notified that we are the recipient of a five-year, \$8 million grant that will provide us with \$1.6 million per year to support early childhood education for students 6 weeks old up to 3 years old who qualify. The newly formed partnership with Child Care Associates positioned us to be the recipient of this outstanding investment and I believe will fertilize our efforts and accelerate our early childhood initiative.



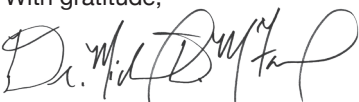
Our commitment to engage in transformation and innovation positioned us to be selected as a member of the **TEA System of Great Schools** and has resulted in Crowley ISD receiving \$300,000 to use this year in our transformation planning efforts and another \$300,000 for the actual implementation of the **ACE Demonstration and Design Lab at J.A. Hargrave Elementary School.** This campus will serve as our innovation incubator for the district, and the best practices we learn from this campus will be scaled to other campuses in the district. Because of our commitment to transformation and redesigning schools, we have positioned ourselves for additional funding through the TEA Transformation Grant Fund. We have been notified that we are in line to be awarded another \$1 million dollars over a two-year period to support innovation efforts around Senate Bill 1882. We are at the very beginning stages of investigating what transformation will look like in Crowley ISD, and it is exciting to have the potential financial support from TEA.

Purposeful partnerships are necessary for us to achieve our aspirations, and I am proud to announce that we have significantly increased our **parent, community and business partnerships** over the last year, and there are early indications that other major partnerships are on the horizon.

Engagement has significantly increased as we have hosted events designed to showcase our students and invite engagement. The Hispanic Heritage Bowl, Black History Bowl, Parent University and many other events have led to more partnerships and parent participation. The implementation of All Pro Dads, the strengthening of Five-Star Community Partnerships and the Ministerial Advisory Group have resulted in more meaningful and mission-aligned activities. Meetings with retired teachers have resulted in several educators returning to support the district as substitutes, interventionist and tutors for individual students. We also have launched social and emotional learning initiatives and will continue to refine our restorative practices throughout the district.

When I look back at our gardening efforts in Crowley ISD, I see the sprouts from the seeds we are planting, and I am convinced that we are planting in fertile ground. Thank you to all for being master gardeners and working daily to ensure that the seeds we see today become the flowers we know they can be.

With gratitude,



Mike McFarland