

# MONDAY MESSAGE

## FROM DR. MCFARLAND

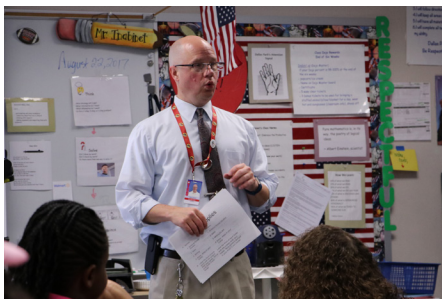


### Connecting to the grove... creating a culture of collaboration

November 27, 2017

Every year around this time, I realize how very fortunate we are to have periodic time away from work. The holiday breaks spread throughout the school year always seem to come at the right time. Holidays are special to me because my mom was an educator, and we always had the opportunity to spend these holidays together as a family. I have always enjoyed the fellowship with my aunts, uncles, cousins, friends and others, but as I have gotten older, I find myself valuing the quiet time just as much.

During the down time away from work, I often find myself reflecting on the work that has been done and the work to be done. I spent most of last week's break considering the current challenges and opportunities while thinking through high leverage strategies for success. I am convinced that we can become the top performing district in Tarrant County. However, I recognize that this will be no easy feat, will not be an overnight proposition and will be impossible without creating a true culture of collaboration.



**Collaboration is more critical for us today than it has ever been in the past.** The context in which we operate and what is expected of us as educators is different today. What students and families need from us has changed and places a different level of demands at our doorsteps. We accept the challenge and recognize that success is possible if we make a commitment to work together, learn together, plan together, share best practices and, most importantly, recognize that true success can only be achieved in a systematic way when we work across campuses, across grade levels and take ownership for every student, every school and every family we serve in Crowley ISD.

This point was made clearer to me during my reflection and reading time last week when I came across a story about the magnificent redwood tree. Redwood trees in many places grow more than 300 feet tall. They tower above all other trees and can be as tall as the length of a football field. It was interesting to find out that redwood trees grow in groves or in a close proximity to others, and the roots grow outward to intertwine with roots of other redwood trees. Redwood trees live for generations, and it is difficult to kill one. **But the secret to the redwood's survival is not in the tree itself, but in the root system.** The redwood sends its roots not down into the earth but out toward the roots of other redwoods. These trees survive all kind of threats and challenges because they remain connected with the grove and other redwoods to the point where it is impossible to determine which roots belong to which tree. They are all connected as one in a grove.

**Scientists have proven that redwoods survive because they are intertwined with others in the grove, and if they were standing alone they would easily fall under the elements and normal trauma.**

I am convinced that a culture of collaboration and collective effort is as critical to our success in Crowley ISD as it is to the vitality of the redwoods in California. Collaboration is an easy concept to buy in to, but it becomes more difficult when we must admit that true collaboration will often mean that we will have to change some of the individual practices that may have produced positive results in pockets in order to ensure system-wide success at scale.



We will be shifting into overdrive in the upcoming weeks to ensure that effective collaboration is occurring on every campus at every grade level across the district. Collaboration in lesson planning, common assessment administration, data disaggregation, progress monitoring and professional development will be priorities for all as we move forward toward the implementation of systems designed to ensure our success.

I challenge each one of you to return to work motivated and focused on delivering high-quality instruction. Study your content area and know your subject, collaborate with your colleagues, prepare to respond to the data and be ready to modify your instructional approach when the results demand it. It will take all of these actions and many others for us to meet the lofty goals we have set. A redwood tree's survival is not based on the individual strength of one tree. It is dependent on the collective power of the grove, and I believe that the success of Crowley ISD will be based on the quality of our collaborative efforts and the culture that we create. It starts with me and with you.

With something to think about, I'm Mike McFarland, challenging us to get connected to the grove.

**Dr. Michael D. McFarland**  
Superintendent, Crowley ISD