

## Academics in the Air

By John Chapman

As the new school year begins, while the leaves are changing and cooler temperatures are moving in, majority of people are geared toward athletic events. What about academics? What is Comfort ISD doing to improve academic programs?

Comfort ISD teachers worked hard last year to get the students ready for the TAKS test, and it paid off with higher 2008 scores. We will continue to work hard to obtain a RECOGNIZED rating from Texas Education Agency, but there is more to academics than the TAKS test. Many hot topics in the education world include, but are not limited to Gifted and Talented (G/T), District Alternative Education Program (DAEP), Dyslexic Program, English as a Second Language (ESL) and Slow Learners sometimes commonly called At-Risk students which need on-going intervention programs. Comfort ISD has many of these programs up and running and has for years, but how are they evaluated and do they work? The answers are yes they are evaluated on an on-going basis by district specialists and yes, they do work due to increasing mastery levels and on-going benchmarking by district personnel.

Currently, the district has reorganized the DAEP, or District Alternative Education Program. If a student has to be placed into the DAEP for inappropriate conduct for whatever reason, although it's not a pleasant thought for parents, it should ease the mind a little knowing that the DAEP will continue to provide the student with an appropriate education. The administration is making final touches to the program by using the updated DAEP packet and implementing new procedures.

The Gifted and Talented program is our next endeavor. G/T programs can be a touchy subject in some households. While every parent wants to think of their child as "G/T", in order to be placed into the program, the student has to qualify by meeting certain criteria based on a battery of standardized tests. Currently, the district has a good program at the elementary level, which, like all other programs, needs to be constantly evaluated so we can see if we are continuing to grow and change with the times. The Jr. High and High School rely on Advance Placement (AP) classes to challenge the students intellectually. The district will explore other avenues to better prepare students for post graduation programs. Expect a change for the G/T program this fall.

Another difficult and challenging topic to address is the dyslexia program. Again, the district has a program in place that is meeting the needs of the students, but we can do more. The administration is researching to see if and what changes need to be made to assist the instructors as well as the students we serve. The district expects a complete evaluation of the program in mid spring. Students with dyslexia tendencies will NOT fall through the cracks. We will continue to provide an appropriate education for these individuals.

Our ESL, or English as a Second Language, program is increasing each year. The district is meeting the requirements set by the state to meet the needs of our ESL population. As legislators meet, the program will have new challenges which the district will face. We will continue to meet the needs of our ESL students and make sure they receive a strong education.

A program that I hold dear to my heart is for slow learners or at-risk students. Past, present and future generations have been faced with students that struggle in one or more academic areas. These students do not qualify for special education, but need assistance to be successful in the classroom and on state mandated tests. I strongly believe we should try everything in our power to meet the needs of every student which translates in to forming intervention teams. If a student continues to struggle in the classroom, the classroom teacher takes the concerns to the intervention team. The intervention team, which is comprised of academic specialists from different areas, recommends research based methods or strategies to the classroom teacher. One of the biggest pushes throughout the state is the Response to Intervention. (If you are so inclined, you can link to the Texas Education Agency website [www.tea.state.tx.us](http://www.tea.state.tx.us) and search Response to Intervention to learn more.) Once the student has been through the intervention process, the team continues to monitor and try different levels of intervention until the student shows success. For some students, this could be a small modification, but for other students, it could be an on-going process. The goal of the district is to provide the appropriate tools to empower students to compensate for any difficulties that come their way. Intervention programs and strategies are constantly evaluated to see what works, but what works for some may not work for others. That is why intervention is very time-consuming, but definitely necessary and important.

All Kendall and Kerr County residents wanting to participate in the early voting will take place at the Kendall County Courthouse on October 20<sup>th</sup> through 31<sup>st</sup> for CISD Board of Trustee elections in districts 4, 5 and 6. If you decide to vote on November 4<sup>th</sup>, please report to your designated polling location. I urge you to take the time to vote...remember, a wise person once said..."if you don't vote, you don't have the right to complain."