

NORTH SAN ANTONIO TIMES

New AHISD super to carry on tradition of excellence

Thursday, 14 August 2008



Dr. Kevin Brown, newly appointed superintendent at Alamo Heights Independent School District, addressed the new employees to the district Monday morning in preparations for the new 2008 - 2009 school year. Photo by Mary Candee

By Tony Cantú
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Newly installed Alamo Heights Independent School District superintendent Dr. Kevin Brown says he's basically happy with what he has been seeing in his district – but resting on those laurels, he adds, would be a mistake.

“Nothing is broken in the Alamo Heights school district, and we have such a tradition of excellence,” Brown said in a recent interview. “But we can never be just OK.”

Taking the district reins in May, Brown will kick off his tenure as superintendent in earnest in the post-summer return to class for students this year. Brown replaced Dr. Jerry Christian, who left for a job as CEO of the Sunshine Cottage for Deaf Children after a 13-year stint as AHISD superintendent.

Speaking in his new offices in the administrative building across from Alamo Heights High School, Brown said the centerpiece of efforts in his new role would be to spend a year studying the district's long-range strategic planning process – particularly as it relates to the small number of students not pursuing higher education once they graduate.

“Ninety percent to 94 percent of our students are college-bound,” he noted, “but we want all our students to do well, and we have to

always take care of our students who are struggling. That will be our big focus.”

Generally speaking, those lagging behind are economically disadvantaged students qualifying for free or reduced school lunches, he said. According to the summer 2008 Alamo Heights School Foundation newsletter, a full 25 percent of AHISD students are considered economically disadvantaged.

Even against a backdrop of overall achievement – a 95.9 percent student attendance rate with more than 100 of Advanced Placement high school pupils among them – Brown said there is always room for improvement.

“We can never tread water in Alamo Heights,” Brown said. “That achievement gap is something we want to eliminate.”

Toward that end, Brown said the district offers tutoring before and after school with special services offered to academically challenged students. One new development since Brown’s being named superintendent is the hiring of a college admissions counselor specifically charged with helping students attend the university of their choice, he said.



Photo by Mary Candee

He added that technology – secured thanks to proceeds from a recent \$49.5 million bond program – also would play a major role in piquing students’ interest in learning. Already, mounted projectors and screens have been installed in classrooms and laptops issued to every teacher.

“It’s a huge advantage for us,” he said of the portable computers. “We will be using technology in any way we can to engage students in learning.”

Brown explained that he was very happy with the makeup of the district staff he finds himself surrounded by, noting he is directly responsible for hiring roughly 70 percent of them.

Before becoming superintendent, Brown was director of personnel as well as the district’s spokesman.

In many ways, AHISD – its 9.4-square-mile boundaries making it one of the state’s smallest districts – is unique. In 40 years, the district has not had to build a new school, given a 4,500-student enrollment that hardly fluctuates from one year to the next, Brown noted. But it is that very consistency that is one of the district’s greatest strengths, Brown said.

Even a pair of substantial population shifts expected in the coming months – a revamped Fort Sam Houston/Camp Bullis expected to bring thousands of new residents to San Antonio, and the AT&T headquarters pullout in favor of Dallas – are not expected to have an impact on student enrollment, Brown said.

“Because we’re so land-locked, I don’t know impact that would have,” he said. Alamo Heights itself mirrors its namesake district – its

consistent boundaries enveloped by San Antonio offering no room for further substantive growth.

“Because we’re so land-locked, I don’t know impact that would have,” he said.

Brown noted personnel throughout the district are eagerly anticipating the centennial of AHISD, with planned festivities year-round in 2009.

But while the district itself may be a geriatric greatly benefiting from bonds-generated makeover – a re-done athletic facility and a beautified high school auditorium among its enhancements – the 41-year-old Brown cuts a youthful figure as he bounds down the hall to welcome his guests and lead them to his office.

In that space are signs that, indeed, he may walk the walk: On one of his walls hangs a poster depicting a cross-section of children under the banner “Success For All.” And at various spots are framed pictures of his wife, Paige, and two young daughters, Molly and Hannah – not framed in the traditional sense, but encased in a digital photo version allowing for various intermittent images – attesting to his penchant for technology for the students he now oversees.

“Alamo Heights has a ‘Mayberry’ feel to it yet we’re in the middle of this large city and with all the advantages that come with that,” Brown said. “I think this is a paradise for kids and teachers.”