

May 15, 2000

AISD Retiree Appreciation Dinner

I'm pleased and honored to be with you today on this auspicious occasion. Looking out across this room, I see collectively 2,477 years of experience in teaching, nurturing, and supporting the children of Austin as they grew and learned and became productive adults. They couldn't have done it without you.

You got them to school safely. You fed them. You kept their school grounds safe, clean and attractive. You provided the background support that made learning possible. You kept track of them when they were out sick. You fixed their schedules. And when they changed their minds, you fixed them again. You counseled them. You encouraged them. You taught them. You served them as role models. You gently guided them--and sometimes not so gently. You taught them. You taught them to love learning. You showed them how to become successful young men and women.

In the thousands of student lives you've touched, you leave a living legacy in this district. What more can anyone ask? The success story that Austin has become--that's your doing. That's your work. You've invested your working lives in these students, and the dividends are boundless.

Tonight we honor 177 professional and classified employees of the Austin Independent School District. Twenty-five of you have given 30 or more years of service to the people of this school district.

I thought I'd mention the names of a few of you, so we'd all have a better picture of who you are. Every single one of you has a story of dedication to the children of this district. Here are a few representative stories:

- Bernice Ledbetter--who could not be with us tonight--retired last year after teaching 51 years in AISD. That followed two years of teaching in another school district. For a half century, she taught 2nd grade and ESL classes, ending her career at Casis Elementary.
- Husband and wife Lee and Bonnie Lancaster are retiring together, after 17 and 22 years with the district, respectively. Bonnie has been a secretary in the Special Education Department, and Lee has been our supervisor for vehicle services.
- Maria Miller is retiring after 24 years with the school district. For 18 of those years, as school secretary, she was the glue that held Murchison together. It was Maria Miller who greeted parents and children every morning in English or Spanish. When Murchison was the site of the district's transitional bilingual program, Maria Miller was the point of contact and mediator for the refugee children coming into our schools from the countries of Central America. She looked out for the children from Montopolis who were bused to Murchison, as she did for all the children in the school. She was the soul of the school. She kept the office running efficiently and was held in the highest esteem by the faculty.
- I can't end my remarks without also recognizing Dr. Charles Akins, who is retiring after 41 years serving this school district. We will have other opportunities to honor Dr. Akins--especially when we open Charles Akins High School in the next school year. But I couldn't let this occasion pass without recognizing Charles Akins's strong, quiet and compassionate leadership and his total dedication to what is best for kids. Others may pay that lip service, but Charles Akins makes that his practice in everything he does. He has led this district through difficult times. I'm told by many that the successful transition from the old Anderson High School to the new Anderson High School would not have been possible without Charles Akins's leadership. He is this district's moral compass. I depend on Charles for advice on the most serious matters affecting this school district. I hope I can continue to ask for his advice and counsel even when he's not right next door.

Before I end, I do want to ask one more favor of you. If you have the time and still have the desire, we want your expertise to continue to help us out. Consider substitute teaching. Many of our retired employees do substitute as a way to continue working with our kids. And if you don't substitute, please continue to give us your advice and counsel. It is invaluable.

Tonight we are here to show our appreciation for your work, for your passion for the education of children, for your years of dedication to a difficult job, day in and day out. What we say here tonight cannot in any way measure up to your contributions to these students and this community.

But our thanks are probably not what you got into this business for. Instead, you're here because you are rewarded when a child's eyes light up with sudden understanding. You're here because you want to make sure our children are safe and secure and supported so they can begin every school day ready to learn. You're here because you see in some uncertain seven-year-old the beginning of a real thinker. You're here because you want to help middle school kids maneuver their way through the minefields of adolescence. You're here because you didn't give up on kids who began life with two strikes against them. You're here because the faces of those kids are your reward.

Again, thank you. And don't go too far away.

Pascal D. Forgione, Superintendent
Austin Independent School District
1111 West 6th Street
Austin, Texas 78703-5300
Office: 512-414-2482
Fax: 512-414-1486
superintendent@austin.isd.tenet.edu