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Dr. Arturo Almendarez, Superintendent Calallen Independent School District Corpus Christi, Texas

By Robert H. Leos



Asking voters to approve the authorization of millions of dollars in bonds for improvements requires careful input, planning and collaboration among the various sectors of the community. On November 6, 2007, residents living in

Continued on the next page

the Calallen Independent School District (CISD) section of Nueces County will decide whether to approve almost \$44 million in bonds for some much-needed improvements to the school district. The process leading up to this vote has taken more than two years of work on the part of CISD's Long Range Strategic Planning Committee. This group includes representatives from the business community, parents, and others interested in moving the district forward with the planned improvements.

Dr. Arturo Almendarez, superintendent of the Calallen Independent School District, explained how these new resources will be used, if approved by voters, and described the process that went into putting together the bond package. He also offered his views on some of the skills and knowledge aspiring school administrators should develop in order to be successful.

Dr. Almendarez received his doctorate from Texas A&M University and is in his fifth year as superintendent of the Calallen Independent School District. His professional experience includes serving as teacher, high school principal, assistant superintendent in the Corpus Christi Independent School District, superintendent of Odem-Edroy Independent School District, and deputy commissioner at the Texas Education Agency. He returned to Calallen in 2003 where he had been superintendent for eight years prior to going to the Texas Education Agency. rhl.

ROBERT LEOS: *The bond election for the Calallen Independent School District is less than a week away. When did you actually start planning for November 6, 2007?*

DR. ALMENDAREZ: We started in August 2005 by developing a long-range strategic plan. That process took several months. We took the strategic plan to the school board in February 2006. The board adopted it last year. We had five different committees working on this project and they made the decision to call for a bond election. It has been at least a two-year process.

ROBERT LEOS: *As time-consuming as the process seems to be, was it very difficult to get community involvement in the planning?*

DR. ALMENDAREZ: It is a difficult and time-consuming process but we had very good participation from the community. We started with about 100 participants and ended up with about 65 or 70 people that came to the majority of the meetings. As school administrators, we are not allowed to lobby for passage of the election so a small group of steering committee members has done the majority of the work to see that the bond election passes.

ROBERT LEOS: *What is the history of bond elections in the Calallen school district? Have they been successful in the past?*

DR. ALMENDAREZ: We had two bond elections when I was here in the 1990s. They were small in comparison and they both passed. One advantage I think we have is that

we have not had a *major* election in over 25 years. The cost of building everything has increased dramatically since then.

ROBERT LEOS: *What are some of your plans for using the additional resources, if voters approve?*

DR. ALMENDAREZ: We plan to demolish part of Magee Elementary School and keep part of it. Our plan is to centralize many of the services that are located in different parts of the school district. For example, we will relocate our maintenance services and our technology center. In addition, we will relocate our curriculum specialists there. We will try to house the disciplinary alternative education program there that is currently on the middle school campus in Annville. We hope to see some savings by centralizing these services.

The building that was the old high school in the 1940s and 1950s, which we affectionately call “the Alamo,” will be demolished. The school district will sell the property to developers to build single-family homes. The plans also call for renovations and additions to Wood River Elementary, East Elementary, Calallen Middle School, and to the high school. We plan to have a new Science and Technology Center, a new Agriculture Science facility, as well as improvements to the band hall.

ROBERT LEOS: *I note on the school district website that you plan to make some much-needed improvements for your athletic program.*

DR. ALMENDAREZ: We plan to expand the visitors’ side of our stadium. Calallen is centrally located between the Rio Grande Valley and San Antonio. We get calls from school districts several times a year asking if we could host events. Because of the limited size of the visitors’ section of our stadium, however, we are not able to do it. If we succeed in getting the additional resources, our expansion will enable us to host playoffs, soccer matches, and band marching contests. This will help our booster clubs as well as the merchants in the area.



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Related to the improvements for our athletic program, we also plan to add synthetic grass at the stadium, improve the baseball and softball fields, resurface the middle school track, and do some renovations to the middle school gymnasium.

Other non-athletic improvements will include constructing a new Magee Intermediate campus, making some district-wide technology improvements, upgrading parking lots and roads, as well as upgrading the district’s bus barn.

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ROBERT LEOS: *You have served as a school administrator in large districts as well as smaller ones such as Odem and Calallen. What are some of the major differences in working in a small school district as opposed to a large one?*

DR. ALMENDAREZ: You get to know the kids in a small school district. I know many of the students by name. That is very difficult to do in a large school district. You get to know the staff. I probably know two-thirds of the staff. Here in Calallen, I go into classrooms and help students with their work and advise them. I loved the position that I had in Corpus Christi ISD and the work that I did, but in a large district, you rarely have the opportunity to work with the students.

ROBERT LEOS: *Reflecting on your experiences throughout your career in educational administration, what skills do you believe aspiring administrators should absolutely develop in order to be successful?*

DR. ALMENDAREZ: To be a successful school administrator, you have to know instruction. You should also know school finance and develop a good work ethic. Surround yourself with smart individuals. Hire people who can help you.

Good people skills are very important. You have to learn to become an active listener and enjoy working with people from diverse backgrounds. Most importantly, students interested in a career in education need to know that it is a wonderful career.

ROBERT LEOS: *Good luck on the bond election on November 6.*

DR. ALMENDAREZ: Right now, my wish is that the bond passes on November 6 so that we can do more district-wide. I want Calallen Independent School District to be exemplary and my main concern is that all of our students do well academically.



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For More Information on the Calallen Independent School District and the Bond Election, Visit:

<http://www.calallen.k12.tx.us>

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