

Walnut Bend Elementary School News - Summer 2018

Michele Dahlquist, Principal

The 2018-2019 school year is right around the corner and Walnut Bend Elementary continues its trajectory of continuous improvement and progress.

Before school starts Phase 1 of our SPARK Park initiative will be complete. New play equipment with an obstacle course and timer are installed, artificial turf will keep the area looking nice year round, and team games of soccer, basketball, and gaga will keep our kids fit and competitive.

Our students continued to be academically successful this past school year with strong growth in their learning even in a shortened school year and the challenges the Hurricane Harvey brought to our neighborhood and so many of our families. We continue to meet the Texas Education Agency's rigorous standards and earned academic distinctions in Student Progress and Science. Our school showed strong gains in all of the four state scoring Indexes.

As an Arts Access Initiative school, our students experienced the arts in many ways that expanded their education beyond merely academics this past school year. We were able to take in theater experiences around the city for all of our students while opening our doors to a national theater touring group, the Houston Opera, and even for ballet lessons through the Houston Ballet. In addition to these wonderful experiences, our students all participated in exploring their love of the arts through music, dance, and fine arts on campus. Every student participated in at least one musical performance, talent exposition, and art show, and our performance choir is in great demand for concerts in the community, including a well-attended concert at Herman Park. Our students' art work was even recognized as city wide winners in poster and fine arts contests.

Our teachers worked hard in the 2017-2018 school year to further develop their craft. We believe that ongoing professional development and support is more beneficial than one shot workshops, so we dedicate to yearlong learning with national experts. We worked with national consultants in math and writing schoolwide to grow our vertical teams and increase our content knowledge and instructional delivery in these areas. Our summer learning in preparation for the 2018-2019 school year has included a visit to the world renowned Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta where a large cohort of our teachers and administrators learned more about raising the bar on student engagement and school culture. We look forward to a year of careful implementation of our learning on that trip.

Our school has a district designation as a Gold Standard Family Friendly School, and we pride ourselves on having many events that families and kids enjoy that make them feel even more connected to the learning that goes on every day. Our teachers and

staff utilize social media to allow parents to see events in our classes. We believe in full circle conversations that develop the relationships with families to better support our students. We have literacy and math events so parents can explore what their children are doing in school and can develop more ways to help them at home. Our PTO has a huge calendar of events that allow families to have fun and support the school at the same time.

In 2017-2018 we completed our Maker Space and began implementation with our students to use this learning lab to explore how things work and ways to further their abilities to imagine and invent. This added to our continuing focus to develop not only strong academic students, but all the other attributes that make a well-rounded person. Extracurricular activities play an important role in student life at Walnut Bend Elementary. Our Cheer Team continues to develop their skills and performed this year at both a Rockets game and an Astros game. Our Odyssey of the Mind team continued our history of excellence by winning both the Regional and State championships and qualified to compete at the World Finals level at Iowa State University, where they placed 2nd in the world behind only a team from China. Their engineering feat of holding their top weight of 1030 lbs. on a balsa wood structure that weighed less than 15 grams was among the best in the world at any age level. To celebrate this achievement, Mayor Sylvester Turner, Councilman Greg Travis, and the entire City Council recognized June 19th as Walnut Bend Elementary School Day with a city proclamation! Sports teams, arts and academic clubs, organized 5K teams, and gardening round out more of our offerings. There is something for everyone at Walnut Bend Elementary! We look forward to sharing more of our accomplishments as the year goes on.