

Greetings,

Before I get into updates, I want to acknowledge something. Weeks like this can feel heavy. There's a lot of information, a lot of repetition, and a lot to process. And while the financial reality we are facing is serious, I also think it is important to remember that challenge and opportunity often show up together.

This moment gives us a real chance to strengthen how we operate as a district. It gives us the chance to bring strong financial practices into our business office, raise our expectations around professionalism and communication across the organization, and take a thoughtful look at our enrollment, our programs, and what our community needs moving forward. Most importantly, it gives us the chance to reconnect with our vision for who we want to be as a school system.

I believe we will grow stronger because of this work.

On Wednesday night, the Board of Education received the independent audit report at our public meeting. None of it was a surprise, but hearing it formally and publicly matters. Being transparent and accountable is part of moving forward in the right way, and this report is an important step in that process.

Please know that the Board is taking this seriously, and our administrative team is already preparing to create a multi-year corrective action plan. This will take all of us working together. Staff, families, and community members each playing a role in helping us move forward. I'm confident we are capable of doing that together.

We'll approach this with transparency, optimism, and a clear focus on our mission. Humor may still appear here and there. It's part of who I am and sometimes part of how we breathe in difficult moments. It also reminds us that even in moments like these, we're human, and sometimes a moment of levity is what allows us to again take a breath and press forward with clarity and strength. Still, compassion, communication, and forward progress will always come first.

There's also so much happening across our schools that reminds us that joy, pride, and purpose are still very much alive in South Country.

This week, I shared an update on our strategic plan with the Board, and it was encouraging to see how much progress has been made. We're improving instruction, strengthening communication, increasing student engagement, and aligning systems across the district in meaningful ways. There's important work happening.

I also attended the High School Center of Excellence Induction Ceremony, and it was a beautiful celebration of student achievement, dedication, and character. It was the kind of event that makes you smile long after you leave.

I spent time at the high school curriculum fair as well. Students challenged me to match famous quotes with the correct historical figure and to decode emojis. I am proud to say I was absolutely terrible at both. But it turned into great conversations, a lot of laughs, and moments of genuine curiosity. Later, I had separate conversations about classic literature and why certain books still matter decades later. Those moments remind me just how powerful student voice can be.

And one of the highlights of the week was watching students at Frank P. Long get hands on time with the Fire Department, Police Department, and the South Country Ambulance Company. They explored emergency vehicles, asked questions, and met a very adorable K9 who may now be the most famous figure in the district. Beyond the excitement, these experiences help students see and appreciate the people who keep our community safe every day.

So yes, there is real work ahead.

But there is also pride, progress, and possibility.

We have dedicated staff, incredible students, supportive families, and a community that cares deeply about its schools. That is a strong foundation to build upon.

Wishing you all a restful weekend, and at least one moment that makes you smile.

And as always, it really is a privilege serving this community as your superintendent of schools!

Tony Santana  
**#clipperPRIDE**