



3/20/18

Spurgeon Intermediate School

Home of the Cougars since 1974

Spurgeon Cougar Cable – Celebrating those that do the less visible work in our school

As we near the finish line for the 2017 – 2018 school year Spurgeon has much to celebrate. This past Saturday was the Intermediate School District Track Meet. I love these events because so many students get to participate and experience success on the competitive field.

Our students did great!

Beyond the successes at the track meet, I'd like to take some time to celebrate the unsung heroes in our school. By far and away the bulk of the work in a school happens in the classroom, as it should be. However, there are some crucial support roles and systems in schools that make that classroom work much more tenable. I have written before about the reality that much of what happens in schools is invisible to most people. Today I'd like to shine a light on some of that work to honor the people who do it and do it so well.

Almost every day the first person on our campus is Mr. Quintana, our Plant Manager. He arrives in the dark and does the work of making sure that we are ready to open our doors at 7:00 am. There has been many a day when I receive an early morning text from Mr. Quintana informing me of a situation that he had to handle before any other employee arrived on campus. Beyond his early morning work, Mr. Quintana hustles constantly to ensure that our campus is presentable and that some of the icky stuff that is bound to happen when you have over 1000 people using our facilities is tended to. No matter the job, Mr. Quintana approaches it with the same steadfast professional attitude that makes it evident that he is proud of our school and proud of the work that he is able to do here daily. I am more than thankful that he is on our team.

The next person on campus – often arriving with me – is Mrs. Dominguez, our Office Manager. Without her organizational skills, quick mind, and capable insight into the inner workings of our school we would not be able to effectively open our doors. She starts first thing in the morning ensuring that we have substitutes for absent teachers and class coverage for classes where we don't have substitutes. Beyond that she works to ensure that all of these classes, which are covered by people other than their regular teacher, have lesson plans that can be followed. Without her diligent efforts first thing in the morning our days would be much more challenging. Beyond this work Mrs. Dominguez manages our school budget, our facilities work orders, our yearly and weekly calendars, parent calls, ordering and managing inventory and so much more. And, she is my able and willing assistant in countless parent and student meetings and a valuable member of our leadership Cabinet. Few see the volume and complexity of work that Mrs. Dominguez does daily. I am truly thankful for her knowledge, skill and dedication.

Our Data Tech, Mrs. Cordon, puts in countless hours to organize our testing (and we do a lot of testing). Teachers and students experience the tests but they have little idea of the organizational and planning work that goes into making these tests as smooth as they are. In addition to all of this work Mrs. Cordon helps us with our Cougar Roar videos and



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countless other tasks about our campus. When she sees a problem, even one that is outside of her job description, she is not shy about politely pointing it out and offering up solutions. This is exactly the sort of person that leaders hope for. That is, those whose eyes are open and who go beyond complaint to suggesting workable solutions. For this reason we have brought her into our leadership Cabinet meetings and this has been helpful in many ways.

Mrs. Sanchez and Mrs. Ontiveros, our Attendance Clerk and Registrar respectively, work diligently and quietly behind the scenes keeping the fabric of our school together. Mrs. Sanchez ensures that all of our students' attendance records are current and accurate. She follows up with students who have challenges getting to school. Though this is a relatively small number of students the work that goes into this takes time and persistent effort (remember, we can't help them to learn if we don't have them in school). Frankly, the work that Mrs. Sanchez does helps to ensure that our students are here to learn and that we are maximizing our ADA. Mrs. Ontiveros ensures that our students are enrolled and that our families are served. Aside from managing the enrollment and grading system, Mrs. Ontiveros serves as our McKinney Vento Liaison. In this latter capacity she spends hours helping to align resources for our families who are most in need. Both Mrs. Sanchez and Mrs. Ontiveros cover our main office phones daily ensuring that our families and teachers are served. I am thankful for the work and dedication of both of these capable, behind the scenes team members.

Ms. Rio, our Office Clerk, is usually the first face that visitors see. She always greets visitors with a smile and welcoming demeanor. This might seem like a small thing but I know that it matters. I have been to schools or businesses where the front line person was not pleasant and it sets the tone for a visitor's entire experience in that organization. Ms. Rios sets our visitors up to feel welcome and cared for. I am thankful that she is in that role at the front desk.

Mr. Diaz is our Computer Technician. I hardly need to tell you about how crucial he is to the daily functioning of our school as we were without any Computer Tech for months this year. Mr. Diaz has quickly made himself an invaluable member of our team. He works quietly, efficiently and diligently to make sure that our computer labs and classroom technologies are all functioning. Crucially, he also manages Chromebook repairs. This latter job is no small feat as every student in our building must have access to a functioning Chromebook in order to engage in the math curriculum (remember, the math text is electronic). Next year this is even more crucial as both math and English Language Arts texts will be entirely electronic. I am very thankful for all that Mr. Diaz does behind the scenes to keep our school running.

Mrs. Cuevas, our Library Media Tech serves our school in many ways. First through ensuring that all of our teachers and students have the textbooks (including Chromebooks) to support their teaching and learning. She manages our inventory with a cool, experienced efficiency that is rivaled by few. Beyond this important work, Mrs. Cuevas is an active literacy advocate. She has served on our School Site Council and advocated for money to build our library collection. She has a firm handle on what books interest our students and she makes sure that we have them available. Having a tangible,



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real book in one's hands is a powerful and meaningful experience for our students. I am thankful for all that Mrs. Cuevas does for our staff and students' literacy.

Ms. Ocegueda, our Discipline Secretary, serves our administration and families in some of the toughest of situations. I've written about her recently so I'll simply say that I'm thankful for all that she does for Spurgeon behind the scenes.

Ms. Serrano, our School Psychologist, serves our entire population of students with special needs (over 147 students). She often gets pulled into intervention work with some who struggle to engage in learning due to a variety of factors. She does this work patiently and with a smile. Though she does not wear a fitbit to my knowledge, I'm quite sure that she logs as many steps as our DSOs daily. Ms. Serrano supports our teachers, students, families and our district in meetings with lawyers and advocates. She does this work capably and professionally, always seeking constructive solutions to challenges. I am very thankful for Ms. Serrano's diligent daily efforts behind the scenes.

Our night custodians, Adam, Bernie, David and Erik, all work in and on our building after most students and employees have left for the day. They manage setups for our events, daily maintenance and cleaning and small repairs. Spurgeon has a wonderful facility and is the work of our night crew, coupled with the work of Mr. Quintana, that keep our 44 year-old building in good shape. Visitor after visitor has commented to me on just how nice our school is. I am thankful for the work that our entire custodial crew does daily.

Our DSO's, Mr. Pena and Mr. Sandoval, serve our school with a calm capable presence. These two rival Mrs. Lloyd for total number of steps covered on a daily basis. It is their calm regular presence that helps to keep our school safe. Beyond being present before and after school and during passing periods, both help us daily as we work to redirect our 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 year-olds who sometimes make unwise decisions. I am thankful for the work that both of our DSOs do daily.

Finally, I'd like to recognize the less visible work of our two assistant principals, Mrs. Lloyd and Mrs. Ceja. These two work tirelessly and with seemingly boundless energy to ensure that our school functions. This work varies from supervision of students, before, during and after school, to managing our school systems. Both Mrs. Lloyd and Mrs. Ceja manage students through relationships and caring. I've never heard either raise their voice in anger but I've witnessed both deal with students who were engaged in challenging behaviors. Recently, I got to see a former Spurgeon parent come in to visit Mrs. Lloyd. The exchange started with a hug and went on for about 10 minutes (this was at about 6:00 pm on a regular school day by the way). When the parent left Mrs. Lloyd shared that she had been with this parent while she buried two of her sons and watched the third go to jail. The parent was thanking Mrs. Lloyd for some advice that she had given her years ago.

Mrs. Ceja shared a story with me that was both shocking and telling as to her character. It hinged on a parent who had gone to the lowest common denominator, race, in trying to push Mrs. Ceja in how to handle a particular situation with this parent's child. Mrs. Ceja handled this awkward situation with grace, dignity and professionalism. She could easily



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have walked away from the table given the attack that this parent leveled against her. Instead she stuck it out and the parent hugged her in the end, realizing that Mrs. Ceja was supporting her and her child exceptionally well. This simple example speaks to countless interactions that Mrs. Ceja has with students, parents, and colleagues. She is always professional and capable and I've never seen her shy away from a tough situation.

Our assistant principals manage student behavior, our school systems, employee evaluations and instructional leadership among so many other things. They also don't hesitate to bend down to pick up a piece of trash when they see it on the ground. As a principal, I rely upon our assistant principals to help keep our school running on a day-to-day basis. Mrs. Lloyd and Mrs. Ceja are top notch. Spurgeon is well served by both!

All of those who have been written about above engage daily in work that is invisible or less visible than what happens in our classroom. In spite of that it is crucial to the functioning of our school. I have attempted to shine a bit of light upon just a small part of what they do. Know this, our school is well served by capable people who are dedicated to helping our teachers do the work that they do in our classrooms. Because of this work our students are able to experience greater success than they otherwise would.

Thank you to our teachers, one and all. And, thank to those who work tirelessly behind the scenes. It is my great honor to work with you.

S. Caldwell