

# Opinion

## Letting students pursue their passions

There's a place for everyone in Ranger Territory and a path for every student to succeed. We are a vast and diverse school district serving students from a dozen different cities and communities. Yet, we offer an amazing array of opportunities in both academics and activities that allows every student to pursue his or her passions.

I am often asked, "What are the defining attributes of the school district?" The hallmark features of our award-winning schools are high quality, credentialed educators, competitive class sizes, high student achievement, and comprehensive program options for students.

Beginning in elementary school, our students learn in 21st century environments that are safe, small, and dynamic. With a focus on literacy and mathematical reasoning, students develop the critical building blocks of success. They also enhance their artistic skills through the arts and music, build problem-solving skills through early engineering and STEM learning experiences, and develop physical wellness through movement. In addition, families can choose International Baccalaureate, STEM, and Spanish immersion focus schools for their child.

The district's Spanish Immersion Plus program stands out from other immersion programs, as English literacy skills are paired with Spanish language skills beginning in kindergarten providing a strong foundation in reading in the early grades. In middle school and high school, students take some core academic courses in Spanish, as well as advanced Spanish language and literature courses for college credit, these world

### Around the District

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credit.

As our students progress to middle school, they begin their journey toward college and career by selecting courses that meet their academic needs and tap into a wide variety of interests. Middle school students learn by doing, exploring, creating projects, and working in teams. The innovative learning environment engages students and fosters a love for learning.

Students experience a small community and a sense of belonging as they are assigned to "houses" in the middle school where many of their classes are taken with a smaller group of students. In high school, students are part of a small advisory group with the same teacher adviser for their entire four-year experience.

In both middle and high school, our students continue their development of advanced literacy skills in reading comprehension, writing, and speaking, and problem-solving skills through mathematics and science. These critical abilities form the academic foundation for students to pursue endless career interests.

Forest Lake Area High School offers unique learning opportunities that cannot be found in other schools. The foundational academic disciplines are augmented with over 40 courses that

languages including Spanish, French, and Chinese, engineering and design-build opportunities through a partnership with Polaris Industries, performing arts in music and theater, and a wide range of classes in agriculture, business finance and accounting, computer science and programming, culinary arts, education, and social services.

Co-curricular programs enrich students' lives. Almost half of our high school students participate in at least one activity after school. These include speech, debate, drama, jazz band, FFA, student government, National Honor Society, and competitive athletics. When adults reflect on their memories of high school, many times it is their participation in co-curricular experiences they remember the most. Lifelong memories and friendships are formed through athletics and shared accomplishments with classmates. Every day, our students are creating these memories.

This wide variety of learning options, both academic and co-curricular, help Forest Lake Area Schools prepare today's students to be tomorrow's workforce and leaders. We are truly offering a small-town feel with a world-class education.

*Steve Massey is the superintendent of Forest Lake Area Schools.*