Superintendent Spotlight
By Dr. John Frossard

The Wichita Falls ISD is preparing to launch several new projects this year.

It seems like we are often working on partnerships with Midwestern State University, and this year is no exception. They’re great to work with, and we share common goals to educate students in new ways.

Our most recent partnership with MSU has been a great success. Two years ago, we set up a scholarship partnership that would guarantee top WFISD students some scholarship help if they enrolled at MSU.

Since then, 177 WFISD scholars have accepted scholarships valued at $270,375. We’re proud of that.

Now we may again partner with MSU to bring pre-engineering and/or robotics courses to our high school campuses. MSU is an ideal partner in this venture because of its wealth of expertise in the McCoy School of Engineering.

In another venture, representatives from the Wichita Falls Chamber of Commerce board recently approached WFISD Board President Trey Sralla and me about pursuing another school bond. They want to see the city get a “win” in this area to create positive momentum for our community.

Because of the seriousness of our drought, we’re leery about proposing a bond as big as the $125 million bond we attempted earlier this year. But we may be interested in pursuing a smaller bond that would finance a Career and
Technology Center. That was the one facility everyone in town agreed we needed when we attempted to pass a bond last spring.

A small bond could also finance the expansion of the junior high schools so that we can bring the sixth grades to those campuses. We also need to fund renovations for a couple elementary schools that are in poor condition.

The WFISD trustees will discuss these possibilities and perhaps propose a small bond that would go to the community for a vote as soon as May 2015.

We’re also considering the prospect of working with United Regional Health Care System and MSU to develop a medical science academy at one of our high schools.

The project is an outgrowth of House Bill 5, which redesigned the framework of graduation requirements for high school students. Now high school students must specialize in one of several “endorsements,” which is like choosing a college major.

One of the endorsements dovetails nicely with medical science. If our city picks one area in which to specialize, Wichita Falls is well suited to medical science because of both MSU’s popular and expanding health science programs and the achievements and prestige of United Regional. It just makes sense.

I’ve been consulting with United Regional CEO Phyllis Cowling and MSU President Jesse Rogers. Both support the project. I, too, am familiar with medical academies. When I worked in Fort Bend ISD in Sugar Land, Texas, I designed its successful academy program.
That district was the seventh largest in Texas with an enrollment at that time around 69,000. If our school board agrees, I believe a medical academy suited to our enrollment could be up and running fairly quickly, with a pilot program as soon as next year.

Looking long term, WFISD needs a Career and Technology Center. It would have to be financed through a school bond. If we build that, I’d also propose adding new academies focused on science, technology, engineering and math. Even an Early College program would be advantageous to our district.

Early College helps goal-oriented high school students earn large amounts of college credit while in high school, which vastly reduces the cost of college for them.

How soon could it all happen? I envision piloting the medical science academy at one high school in the 2015-2016 school year. The academy would draw students to that particular high school for a few years. But, once a Career Center is built, we could move the medical science academy to the new facility and make it available to students at all three high schools.

As you can see, we’re building on our district’s many successes. Did you know that our 2014 graduates were offered more than $9.7 million in scholarship opportunities?

We also recently received a grant award letter from the West Foundation. The Foundation is generously providing us with $333,000 to support a variety of projects during the 2014-2015 school year.

The West Foundation also recently spent $100,000 to honor 20 of our top teachers with their annual West Teaching Excellence
Awards. They awarded each teacher $5,000. That’s a nice pat on the back for them and a great way to start the school year.

Many more great things are in our future. Stay tuned.

Sincerely,
Dr. John Frossard
WFISD Superintendent