

# Lee College adopts Drew Elementary as ‘College Bound’

## Partnership expands commitment to create college-going culture throughout service area

BAYTOWN, TX — With the support and resources of Lee College and the mentorship and involvement of dedicated residents of historic Barrett Station, the students at Charles R. Drew Elementary School in the Crosby Independent School District have set their sights on achieving new goals: attending college and earning a degree.

Lee College has adopted Drew Elementary as a “College Bound School” as part of the Cradle to Career Network, an ongoing effort to create a college-going culture for local youth by engaging all members of the community in providing wrap-around support as students transition into college – from schools and educators to non-profit organizations, health and human services agencies, business and industry, local government and residents at large.

“Congratulations on being future college graduates! We stand together as a community committed to you, and you have to be committed to excellence in everything you do,” DeDe Griffith, Interim Vice President of Instruction, told hundreds of cheering Drew students at a recent pep rally held in their gym to kick off the new partnership between the college and elementary school.

Crosby ISD Superintendent Keith Moore, Lee College President Dr. Dennis Brown and other administrators and faculty offered words of welcome and encouragement, and enthusiastic students – all clad in red T-shirts emblazoned with “Lee College” and “Future College Graduate” – raised their hands and voices to pledge to go to college.

“We are so very excited to have you as part of Lee College,” Brown said. “If you put forth the effort, you will be a success story. All of you can walk across that stage and receive that college degree.”

For the College Bound partnership, Lee College will provide Drew Elementary with regular programming and opportunities to help students and their families learn more about the value and importance of higher education. Students at every grade level will learn about science concepts from college faculty, and the Lee College Mobile Go Center – a 42-foot, air-conditioned trailer outfitted with high-speed Internet, satellite dishes, remote printers, laptops and LCD televisions – will visit the elementary campus each month. On board the center, students will learn about the wide variety of rewarding and interesting careers available to college graduates and have access to a library of more than 500 e-books on science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics.

Parents at Drew Elementary will also be involved in the effort, participating in a common reading program and receiving guidance and information about how best to prepare their children for college success.

“You’re part of a team and you’re part of a family,” said Drew Elementary School Principal Walter Berringer. “We have an obligation to each other to make sure we’re successful. We have to make great decisions and work as hard as we can every single day. There is no doubt in my mind that we are going to start college, and there is no doubt in my mind that we are going to finish college.”

As he looked at the sea of red tees and smiling faces at the pep rally kick-off, Jerry Bluitt realized he had come full circle. An alumnus of Drew Elementary who was instrumental in helping get the College Bound partnership in place, Bluitt retired from a 30-year career as an IBM engineer and returned to his native Barrett Station to help usher the historically African-American enclave into a brighter and better future. The program will help recreate the loving and unified family atmosphere he remembered and benefited from as a child, he said.

“After they saw the model, the community said it was long overdue,” said Bluitt, who has helped raise support for and awareness of the College Bound School and Cradle to Career Network programs with faith-based organizations and local businesses in the area. “For our kids to be successful, we’ve got to shape them in good and positive ways. We have to walk with them.”