



*Deputy Superintendent TJ Knight speaking with FISD Student Advisory Council*

## **A Student Voice**

Ferris ISD's Student Advisory Council is a representative group of students from Ferris Junior High and Ferris High School that provides student suggestions, reactions, insights, and opinions concerning school-wide initiatives currently in place and to offer constructive feedback on those being considered by administration. This Council is comprised of 28 students in grades 6-12 who meet regularly with Superintendent James Hartman and the FISD administrative leadership team.

"Campus principals select students to serve on the committee that are representative of FISD's demographics in ethnicity, gender, and involvement," said Superintendent Hartman. "We want the Council to be reflective of our secondary campus make-up and to truly provide an accurate representation of the perspectives of our student body." Additionally, principals look for students that will be willing to voice their opinions and share their thoughts with district administration. "We make hundreds of decisions every day that impact the educational lives of our students, this is one way to solicit the views of those most directly affected," added Hartman.

Deputy Superintendent TJ Knight carefully crafts each Student Advisory Council meeting agenda to stimulate student thought and engagement, and to maximize the return on student participation. "We really value what our students have to say. They have a unique perspective with their first-hand, personal experiences that makes their voice so critically important to hear. Our students are helping administration guide Ferris ISD into the learning environment that they want and need," said Knight. Issues addressed this year by the Council have included traditional student priorities such as cafeteria menus and dress code; as well as more involved topics such as course offerings, career and technology programs, and 1-to-1 technology integration. Dr. Melinda Domain, Assistant Superintendent-Student Support, appreciates the student perspectives on career and technical education offerings, especially as the district plans for course offerings this spring. "Career and Technical Education is becoming a critical piece of the curriculum for all students," explained Domain. "As the district analyzes job market data, we want to ensure that we expose our students to their future career options, as well as solicit feedback from them on what types of careers they plan to pursue. The Council provides us with the opportunity to do both by allowing students to have direct input into what courses and career pathway programs are offered at FISD schools in the future. The students' opinions have proven invaluable to us in our planning and decision-making processes."

A student-developed mobile app was presented at the most recent Council meeting, and Curriculum Director Christi Nies sees an additional benefit to having students take an active role in their own educational programming. This shift from passive recipient of learning to active participant creates a growth mindset in students that allows them to see beyond what is ordinary and to seek the possibilities. Nies agrees that, "The Student Advisory Council has allowed district administration to hear both the concerns and the aspirations students have about their school career. The students' unique perspective has played an integral role in our decision-making process as we plan for future learning opportunities in FISD."

"We are committed to providing a stimulating learning environment for our students and we view this Council and their feedback as one critical element in our planning process," further explained the Superintendent. "Students in Ferris ISD need to know that they are loved, valued, and appreciated by district leadership and this Council is one way to give voice to their opinions. Being able to talk directly with the kids and hear their first-hand perspective is one of the very best parts of my job," Hartman concluded.