Years ago when I was a student at Houston’s Northbrook High School, these two teachers saw something in me that caused them to reach out, devoting extra time and effort to assure that I made the most of my educational opportunity. Given my extraordinarily casual approach to learning at the time, it took incredible vision on the part of these two educators to see me as anything more than another kid who would pass through the system and into a life of minimum-wage jobs and constant struggles.

The fact that I was a poor student throughout most of my high school years is part of my story that I have shared openly throughout my career in public education. Since becoming superintendent of Boerne ISD in July, I am certain several of my new colleagues already have heard the story a handful of times in different meetings where I have been introduced. But it is an important story to share because it carries a powerful message about the impact teachers have each day on the lives of students entrusted to their care. Mrs. James and Mrs. Gillpin did not have to spend the extra time with me that they did. After all, I probably missed more of their classes than I attended. My attitude toward classwork and assignments was poor. My self-confidence was virtually nonexistent.

I was one in a family of four children raised by a single mother. We moved frequently, often staying one step ahead of landlords seeking payment for rent past due. From school to school to school, there was no consistency in my learning patterns, in my friendships or in the adults who were in position to help shape my life. But Mrs. James and Mrs. Gillpin changed that simply by caring. Most importantly, they went the extra mile to assure that I came to school regularly, that I took seriously my classwork, and that I identified a way to belong to something bigger than myself. Without their course-correcting influence, I most assuredly would have been adrift in a vast and tumultuous sea of indifference.

Today as my family and I take our place in your community and begin to make it our home, I want you to know that, just like those two teachers from years ago, I am committed to the students of this school district, steadfast in my desire that they receive the best educational opportunities available. Our school district stands on firm footing thanks to the commitment of so many. Boerne ISD’s reputation for excellence was a leading factor in my family’s interest in coming to this community. My wife and I are educators and we are parents of one of Boerne ISD’s newest high school students. Public education is important to us.

As the new school year begins, I cannot help but be reminded of Mrs. James and Mrs. Gillpin and the transformative influence of their passion and compassion for students. Similar acts of caring and kindness will take place throughout the year all across our district. I look forward to learning your vision for the continuous improvement of our school district as together we educate, motivate, counsel and care for our precious students.