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Forney Family  
Gold Medallion Entry for Special Communication Project/Campaign  
5 Communication Staff  
School District with 14,900+ students
Forney ISD - Forney Family  Gold Medallion Entry: Special Communication Project/Campaign

Synopsis of the Forney Family Campaign

Our objective was to create a marketing campaign to unite our community all while also establishing trust in a new superintendent and the district and laying the groundwork for a future bond. As a fast-growth district, we were creating a new culture from the ground up that both long-time residents of Forney and our new residents could embrace together. We needed to bridge misinformation from previous financial struggles and the division of becoming a two high school community in order to unite our families.

The Forney Family unity campaign was created with the idea of “one district, one community and one family.” It focused on humanizing our social media, providing grassroots community conversations, personal presentations by our superintendent, and other personal touches.

In order to implement, we took an internal approach first. As the largest employer in the county, we knew our employees should be the first to start the culture change. Then we started pitching directly to parents, community partners and our social media audience that focused on relationships first.

You can’t drive through Forney or go to the grocery store without seeing a Forney Family yard sign, window cling, car sticker or T-shirt. It has invaded our community, and continues in everything we do. This was hugely impactful for the passage of our 2019 bond for $623 million with a 73% voter approval, and our current May 2022 bond on the ballot for $1.29 billion.
Summary of the Forney Family Campaign

Our objective was to create a marketing campaign to pull a divided community together while also establishing trust in a new superintendent. As a fast-growth district, we were creating a new culture from the ground up that both long-time residents of Forney and our new residents could embrace together.

We researched not only history of the district and its leaders, but current demographics. In addition to a fast-growth district, the demographics were beginning to change. We looked at enrollment data and future projections in addition to studying past culture and climate surveys. A lot of qualitative data was reviewed through emails, social media posts and in meetings with staff and community partners. Our team interviewed administration for their take on the current culture of the district, as well as the new superintendent's image.

We had a very divided community in summer 2018, due to becoming a two high school town 10 years earlier. We had the additional challenge of "humanizing" the district after a 2009 financial crisis and spring 2018 hazing incident. We were tasked with uniting the community, so we created Forney Family with the idea of one district, one community and one family.

In order to implement, we took an internal approach first. As the largest employer in the county, we knew our employees should be the first to start the culture change. And we had a superintendent that supported a belief in relationships first with a grass-roots effort. He personally trained all staff in our district values the first week of school before we rolled out our values and Forney Family brand to the community.

Then we started pitching directly to parents, community partners and our social media audience. The social media audience was extremely negative to start, but with the same grassroots approach, our superintendent and cabinet called those making negative comments letting them know we believe in voice and wanted to listen. Through phone calls and personal meetings, within 3 months the social media audience started turning. We gained fans and advocates we could call on through our partnership program. They were fighting our social media battles for us. We also called those that were supporting us on social media and thanked them.

A lot of our measurements were qualitative to measure the pulse of the community and the new culture. However, we do have some quantitative measurements through social media and culture and climate surveys. We are able to quantify social media. Engagement is up by over 70%. Posts inside our community groups used to be almost 100% negative, but are now trending about 60% positive with our new key communicators and social media advocates coming from our partnership groups. (We conduct social media audits monthly to monitor not just “likes” but engagement and qualitative reviews of comments.)

We now have tremendous support at our campuses. Our monthly leadership meetings with our principals is a great opportunity for us to gauge campus culture. We also meet monthly with the leader of each campus Advocate team for Q&A and feedback.

Each spring we conduct a culture and climate survey, while these are primarily campus and teacher focused, our parents and students both answered in the 80% range that teachers were
attentive, listening, concerned about their child, and the district was preparing them for a successful future. This was compared to 60% the previous year.

In addition, our high school athletics and fine arts teams are joining together for community service projects and other combined efforts.

You can’t drive through Forney or go to the grocery store without seeing a Forney Family yard sign, window cling, car sticker or T-shirt. It has invaded our community.

We feel this was also hugely impactful for the passage of our November 2019 bond for $623 million by almost 73% voter approval. In addition, Forney Family continues today as a positive unity campaign, laying the groundwork a 2nd time for our $1.29 billion May 2022 bond referendum.

We are constantly monitoring the pulse of our community, not just through social media, but through one-on-one conversations. As we continue to grow, we know this will become harder, but we’ve built an army with our Forney Family (staff, parents, students, businesses, community leaders) that are helping us tackle it one person at a time.

The best lesson from this was how our audiences responded to our superintendent’s image. He is a natural on camera and with people, but always wore a suit and tie. He played a hard role as deputy superintendent “cleaning house” after the financial crisis in 2009, so we wanted staff and the community to relate to him. We started asking him to show his sense of humor, take off the tie, be seen in a Forney Family T-shirt and jeans occasionally, and show himself as the human person that is also a caring father of 3 kids in the district. We needed the staff and community to see him as a caring leader, not as the cold, bureaucratic “district.” We softened his image, and the community loves him. We knew when building this campaign it would be a year long push to a bond referendum, and a vote for the bond was a vote of trust in the superintendent. We treated him like a political candidate. But the trust he has built will continue to live beyond the bond, just like Forney Family.
Additional Support Material

I. RESEARCH

Situation Analysis: Forney ISD experienced steady growth until 2016-2017, and then proceeded to explode in 2017-2018. It is a fast-growth district with approximately 10,300 students as of July 2018 when the Forney Family campaign launched. As of March 2022, Forney ISD is just under 15,000 students, and is projected to grow by more than 2,400 students next year. The district is expected to grow to more than double in size in the next 10 years to over 35,000 students. Located 20 minutes from downtown Dallas, it’s a bedroom community with a high population of commuters.

The largest population is between ages 22-64 (55.8%) and 0-17 (33.4%). Average median income is $15,000-$25,000 above the state average, with more than 94% reading above 12th grade level, and less than 10% speaking a home language other than English. 81.3% of households are married with children. However, ESL and SPED enrollment has began to increase in 2017-2018, along with economically disadvantaged percentage. The top occupations are administrative and education, which correlates with commuters into DFW and to Forney ISD being the largest employer in Kaufman County. Kaufman County is the 3rd fastest growing county in the nation. In addition, Forney ISD went from 1 high school to 2 high schools in 2009, which divided the community between “old Forney” (south) and “new Forney” (north), creating extremely negative social media. Due to the new growth, there was also no clear key communicator group we could engage.

Until Forney ISD surpassed 10,000 students, DFW media did not pay much attention to our district unless there was a negative story. Now, we are big enough and close enough to the metroplex to pitch positive stories and get them to respond and cover. Also, the communications department expanded from 1-5 people in July 2018, allowing the district to pitch more stories than ever before.

In addition, a new superintendent took over July 1, 2018 (previously the deputy superintendent) and was facing a community that witness the district go through a financial crisis in 2009 and a soccer hazing incident in February 2018. Faith in the district had diminished, and a negative culture on social media had been created. He was known as a deputy superintendent that helped them “clean house” during the financial crisis, and was always in a suit and tie. We needed to soften his image so the community would see him as approachable.

There was a huge need to unite the community and generate positivity through internal communications first (largest number of employees in the county) and then through our students and parents, followed by our community partners.

Target audiences:
Staff (1st contact)
A. 10.3% in education (occupations), they can be used to get the word out about event. Plus, there’s crossover with staff that are also parents.
B. Parents
   1. English & non-English speaking parents (translated materials)
2. Working, commuting parents (after work on Monday)

C. Students
   1. Elementary
   2. 2 Intermediates - new model starting fall 2019 (Transition year)
   3. 2 Middle Schools
   4. 2 High School (may attend with friends versus parents)

D. Community Members
   1. Potential event partners
   2. Potential media partners
   3. Potential volunteers
   4. Potential business partners for other FISD events
   5. Potential social media “fans”/advocates

II. PLANNING
During the planning process, our team brainstormed reasons we came to Forney (career opportunity, closer to family, great district/community to raise a family, etc.), and family kept popping up. #ForneyFamily was born under the idea of one district, one community, one #ForneyFamily. In spring 2019, we launched a new logo that incorporated both high school colors. Forney High is black and yellow and North Forney is royal blue and white.

We needed to unite both high schools, as well as the long-standing residents of Forney with the new families, while allowing them to keep their “sibling” rivalry for sports, fine arts and academics. The campaign was set to launch first with our staff, then with students and parents and then the community as a whole during a year long process. Our plan was to turn the negativity tide within one school year. During summer 2018, our principals and admin team also unveiled Forney Values with Relationships First at the center that aligned perfectly with our Forney Family marketing campaign. While most goals are measurable, the basis of great public relations is to inform (educate) which can change attitudes which then changes behavior. Our superintendent has a similar philosophy that values drive our behavior which creates our culture. Our goal was to inform the public about all of the positives of Forney ISD and about our Forney Values change their attitude and behavior to create a new positive culture, which is tough to measure. (We do have an annual culture and climate survey each spring, but it differs slightly from campus to campus as they have their own unique spins on our district culture.)

A. Goals
   1. Consistent connections.
      a) From the district-level to campuses & community.
      b) Between the board and community.
      c) Between district and staff (internal PR)
      d) Partnerships (businesses, organizations, nonprofits)
         (1) Create community advocates through staff and community leaders, creating a list of key communicators.
(2) Build support for each campus through partners.

2. Two-way engagement between schools and the community. 
   (Align Forney Family marketing with our Forney Values (Relationships first, excellence, individualization, voices, collaboration, perseverance and learning. Our superintendent believes that our values drive our behavior and behavior drives our culture. We wanted the community to embrace our values.)
   a) Schools engaging the community.
   b) The community engaging schools.

3. Marketing great things (education and community).
   a) Create a positive culture and attitude throughout our community.
   b) Change social media negativity (almost 100%) to a more positive (at last 50%) culture.

B. Overall Theme
   1. #ForneyFamily
   2. Forney Family
   3. Forney Family values

III. IMPLEMENTATION
   A. We began implementation by launching Forney Family to our school board in July 2018. Then with our staff in August 2018. 
      1. Internal Launch
         a) We launched Forney Family with our staff by providing half-day professional development sessions over our Forney Values and what they mean led by our superintendent and cabinet. Each staff member received a Forney Family T-shirt to wear. With 14 campuses (some small enough to combine), we provided 8 half-day sessions (4 days) plus 1 day for convocation. It was a week-long launch. We then started sharing out the pictures of our staff with the community on social media and began using #ForneyFamily with all of our social media posts.
         b) We trained all campus leadership running social media accounts to use the hashtag, too, and start sharing out.
         c) We launched an Ambassadors program in 2018-2019 through Friends of Texas Public Schools. They created good news bulletin
boards on every campus and participated in brotherhood/sisterhood activities (such as hot chocolate bar served to fellow co-workers). At the end of the first year, we asked them to rebrand FOTPS Ambassadors to a name that was unique to the Forney Family, so we now have Forney Family Advocates. 2018-2019 there were nine K-6 elementaries, and Fall 2019 we opened as seven K-4 elementaries and two 5-6 intermediates, we had a lot of staff transitions and relocations. We rebranded as Advocates and asked the 2018-2019 teams to reassemble and invite 2-3 new staff from their campus to join them. They blend together returning and new staff each year to expand teams as we expand campuses each year with our rapid growth. (Forget “Elf on the Shelf,” we had “Superintendent in a Tin” circling our admin building last year.)

d) In addition, we launched “Thankful Thursdays” every Thursday in September, October and November to have the community appreciate our staff, but we also flipped it and had a parent Thankful Thursday and a community and business member one to show that everyone is a part of the Forney Family.

2. Direct Email
   a) Staff weekly e-newsletter included videos and Forney Family announcements, including sending onesies to our newest family members to be featured. It was rebranded after one of our values (voice).

   b) Parent emails (sent direct) started to include video series about #ForneyFamily and our values.
   What is Family? - https://youtu.be/QP6mSBdSmkU
   Welcome to the #ForneyFamily - https://youtu.be/v8sBYaq3xGE
   Forney ISD Values Series (Video #1 of series) - https://youtu.be/EHUk6y5tvw
In every video our superintendent was in, we used it as a moment to soften his image. Over the course of our videos, by the end of the school year, he never wears a tie in them. You also see him with a Dr. Terry puppet, having fun with students, interacting with the community, dressing up at Halloween, and more. We wanted to show him as human - as a dad, community member and caring person - not as a bureaucratic school district that doesn’t have a voice behind it’s social media.

That started our “On the Road with Dr. Terry” series.
Episode 4 (with a puppet) - [https://youtu.be/3lzhWrEm83w](https://youtu.be/3lzhWrEm83w)
Episode 6 (driving a forklift) - [https://youtu.be/MXLUXG1ZWcM](https://youtu.be/MXLUXG1ZWcM)

c) Preparation for community newsletter began. Because of the growth, there wasn’t a list of key communicators, nor was there a community email group. We began revamping our partnerships program (that was 1 of the 5 new department positions hired in July 2018) to build relationships and start a community newsletter. (That launched in summer 2019 as “Enlightened.”)

3. Community Partnerships
We had a huge need to build community partnerships. With the increase in staff from 1 to 5 in July 2018, that created a Community Partnerships Director to oversee the creation of new joint projects. (She received the Chamber of Commerce’s Helping Hand Award in February 2019 for her work with our district partnerships.) We launched monthly meetings of the following groups where we started with good things, explored what questions they had (open Q&A), communicated information we wanted their help in sharing out, empowered them to share the information and be a part of district committees, campus teams, etc., and then “launched” them with a thank you and inspirational story about FISD.

a) Pastors & Principals - a monthly group of about 20 local pastors. Each church adopted a campus (or two) and supports that campus. Every other month, principals are invited into be a part of
planning for everything from a Back to School Bash to community drives to volunteer support. (We do not have a pastors alliance, so this was created from scratch.)

b) PTO Council - a monthly PTO presidents group that allows us to help them with their 501(c)3 nonprofit status and assist with nonprofit policies. Twice a year the PTO Council joins our pastors, principals and service organizations to plan major events, like our Back to School Bash.

c) Service Organizations - our nonprofit organizations meet monthly to share their needs with us and we collaborate to host community and district-wide drives (working smarter, not harder) to meet needs for our students and their families. Everything from sock drives to “Pack the Pantry” each November. This allows us to meet needs more efficiently and meet a bigger need. For example, I could be a parent with kids at up to 5 campuses (early childhood, elementary, intermediate, middle and high school), so they would all have a sock drive at the same time versus having to buy socks at random times throughout the year. We also assist them with student volunteers. In August 2019, they provided over 50 volunteers to help us with our first ever Back to School Resource Fair. We assisted over 800 students and 300 families with backpacks, supplies, immunizations, eye screenings, free books and more. They expanded to include weekly drive-thru resource hubs for our community throughout spring and summer 2020 during the height of COVID. The Back to School Resource Fair has now run as a drive thru for 2020 and 2021, too.
d) Retired Educators - This was an informal group that we leveraged for our first Back to School Bash in August 2018. They traditionally went to breakfast together that day. We now get them involved on our campuses, welcoming students that morning. We also host them 3-4 times a year for a meeting at our administration building.

e) Realtors - We do not have a realtors association, despite being fast-growth with houses being built everywhere. There are a lot of realtors in our area, but we created a list manually and invited them to their first meeting at our administration building. They are now coming 3-4 times a year to get information about our district to help as they sell homes. They are also providing input as we revise our Prospective Parent Package welcoming new families to our Forney Family.

f) Senior Citizens - We have a local senior citizen center that we have our superintendent speak to and students perform for them several times a year, but it was for seniors who were not as mobile or active in the community. Once again we used a grassroots effort to create a list and public invite for seniors 55+ and partnered with our education foundation to provide a senior 55+ breakfast twice a year. This allows us to develop a relationship with seniors still active in our community. We launched Forney’s first Gold Card program with this as well. While not new to school districts, Forney had never offered this to their senior community.

g) Businesses - We created yard signs and window clings to give to our business partners, and even had a Forney Family Day, where our admin team and school board took maps and canvassed the local businesses to simply say thank you for being a part of the Forney Family. (Most were in shock, as they expected us to ask for a donation, but that wasn’t what the day was about.) Signs and window clings are all over the community now.
4. **Local Media**
   a) Forney Messenger and Forney Living (printed) have always worked well with Forney ISD. They continue to print any and all press releases we send them, but they are a weekly newspaper and monthly magazine. We did run Forney Family ads to celebrate our students when reaching the state level.

   b) InForney.com (Social media and online paper) - We established a new relationship with Inforney, and they have become one of our biggest allies in sharing information through social media. Their reach is mainly Kaufman County.
c) Dallas media - We established new relationships with Dallas media, pitching positive Forney Family stories, and our community nominated one of our middle schools for the first Carter in the Classroom (NBC 5) feature of the fall. Wayne Carter shared that Warren Middle School received more votes than any other school in the history of the TV segment. He’s now returned for two additional feature stories about one of our high schools. Our superintendent was also invited to appear on WFAA’s Inside Texas Politics (ABC) and with Dale Hansen.

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5. **Forney Family Social Media** - We started with #ForneyFamily in all of our district social media. In spring 2019, we launched Forney Family as its own social media accounts to expand our reach out into the community, beyond parents, students and staff that were already following our district pages. We rebranded the #ForneyFamily with a new logo that incorporated both high school colors (Forney High is black and yellow and North Forney is royal blue and white.) In addition, for all of our social media, we began a grassroots effort of personally contacting anyone we saw posting negative comments on our pages and in some of our area groups. We took the commenting off social media and called then directly or reached out via email or with a response of “We’d love to talk with you more about this. What number can we reach you at or you can all us at....” Taking away the barrier of the computer screen and putting a face or voice that will speak with them and listen started turning the tide. It took about 3 months and about 40 phone calls and 5 in-person visits to change the story on social media. Then we’d ask them to repost about their experience with our catch phrase “our doors are open and our
“phones are on.” We wanted to retrain the community to build a relationship with us and come to us first for action.

a) Forney Family Facebook www.facebook.com/ForneyISDFamily
b) Forney Family Twitter www.twitter.com/ForneyIily
c) Forney Family Instagram www.instagram.com/ForneyFamily
d) www.ourforneyfamily.comSDFam

6. Forney Family Videos (a few we haven’t already shared)
   a) What is Family? - https://youtu.be/QP6mSBdS1kU
   b) Welcome to the #ForneyFamily - https://youtu.be/y8sBYaq3xGE
   c) 1st Day of School (Back to School Bash with our community partners) - https://youtu.be/7txDhYqReOQ
   d) Forney ISD Values Series (Video #1 of series) - https://youtu.be/EHUb6y54tyw
   e) Life Skills (Community Partners with our Next Steps program) - https://youtu.be/7BEn3awz6Y4
   f) Always #ForneyFamily (Companion to Welcome to the #ForneyFamily) - https://youtu.be/OuSQyDVwU
   g) ‘Mazing Things is kicking off this year, and is a spin on Jimmy Kimmel’s Mean Tweets. We’re featuring students and staff reading positive things about them and their campus.

7. Direct Mail
   a) For the first time in over 10 years, Forney ISD did 3 direct mail pieces in the spring of 2019 about Forney Family. We wanted to reach audiences not on social media or websites. (Yes, those really are our students and their future career choices. The photographer did a great job.) We continued them in summer 2020, and again in winter 2021-2022.
Forney ISD - Forney Family  
**Gold Medallion Entry: Special Communication Project/Campaign**

**Forney Independent School District.** We are making students & teachers our top priority.

**Forney Independent School District.** Excelling in competition, the classroom & our community.

**Forney ISD leaders are rolling up their sleeves to protect taxpayers.**

**Forney ISD students are preparing for the future.** And making new friends along the way.

**Forney Independent School District; We are preparing our next generation of leaders.**

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**Forney ISD students are preparing for the future.** And making new friends along the way.

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8. Forney Family Awards
   a) The Forney Family award was created for students, staff, or community members who demonstrate Forney values through an individual act of service to the district, campus, staff or students.
   b) The Forney Legacy Award is given to individual or group of students, staff, or community members who have exhibited servant leadership over time and a long-standing history to Forney ISD and the Forney Family. Recipients who have made significant contributions to Forney ISD.

(1) We had 2 Forney Legacy Awards given in 2018-2019 to former school board present and current state representative Keith Bell and to long-standing owners of the Forney Messenger Cary and Judy Griffin, for over 50 years of positive coverage of our district in their weekly paper. They were given framed Forney ISD flags with an engraved nameplate.

Forney Legacy Award (Rep. Keith Bell) - https://youtu.be/5FSiV5A54hE

IV. EVALUATION
   Fall 2019
   We’re continuing Forney Family on, and for the first time in several years we were able to have 1 convocation and fit everyone in a new building (rented a new church facility to house everyone). It was the “Forney Family Reunion” and everyone received new Forney Family T-shirts with the new blue and gold logo.

Opening video - Forney Family (Brady Bunch) https://youtu.be/zUsE2zS7mWY

We had our departments and campuses recreate “Awkward Family Photos” to bond them.

We had summer renovations on 8 of our 14 campuses, so when it came time in early August for our staff to move back in, we exhibited our values of perseverance and relationships first, with our superintendent (installing blinds) and central administration helping move campuses in. Student organizations also assisted as a part of our Forney Family.
We also began giving out car window stickers and signs to the community. This was a positive campaign already established a year earlier, but aided in the promotion of a $623 million bond on the Nov. 5, 2019 ballot. Our partnerships established the year prior also provided a platform for information presentations through relationships already in place. (This was a strategic move by our team to lay foundational work starting in October 2018 when we knew a bond was needed to accommodate our growth. For example, we set our superintendent's annual address to the chamber in October to repeat each year starting in October 2018, so it fell October 2019 right before the election in November. County officials were disappointed when they tried to get the October presentation date for their bond referendum that we had planned a year in advance.)

In fall 2019 we launched Forney Family Fri-Yay’s to extend the social media positivity beyond our district. We encourage people to post great things about living, working, playing and going to school in Forney. In addition, our superintendent regularly does Facebook lives to celebrate great things at our campuses. Our most recent Facebook live from Brown Middle School shared an incredible story that epitomizes what #ForneyFamily is all about. Brown student Bella Aviles has a huge heart, and never expected recognition for helping others with what she thought was “just a little thing.” Click here to watch. We’ll honor her with a Forney Family Award at the next board meeting.

Since a lot of our goals are relationship and culture focused, we do more qualitative evaluation than quantitative. We speak with our partners monthly to ask what questions and rumors they
are hearing, what the pulse of their community groups are, what can we do better? We value voice, which means constant two-way communication and feedback from our audiences.

We are able to quantify social media. Engagement is up by over 70%. Posts inside our community groups used to be almost 100% negative, but are now trending about 60% positive with our new key communicators and social media advocates coming from our partnership groups. (We conduct social media audits monthly to monitor not just “likes” but engagement and qualitative reviews of comments.)

We now have tremendous support at our campuses. Our monthly leadership meetings with our principals is a great opportunity for us to gauge campus culture. We also meet monthly with the leader of each campus Advocate team for Q&A and feedback. This continued throughout COVID in a virtual setting, and we resumed in-person meetings this school year (2021-2022).

Each spring we conduct a culture and climate survey, while these are primarily campus and teacher focused, our parents and students both answered in the 80% range that teachers were attentive, listening, concerned about their child, and the district was preparing them for a successful future. This was compared to 60% the previous year.

In addition, our high school athletics and fine arts teams are joining together for community service projects and other combined efforts.

With the launch of Forney Family in fall 2018, we evaluate each summer before heading into a new year. We made temporary adjustments in 2020 for COVID, moving some things to virtual, but keeping Dr. Terry as a constant familiar face in our families homes through video, social media, and direct email campaigns. We’ve been able to adjust back to in-person gatherings in 2021-2022 that are resetting all of our partnership, staff, and parent/community groups.

We slightly adjust our Forney Family theme and T-shirt designs each year, launching new initiatives along side the same core concept of “one district, one community, one Forney Family.” So Forney Family continues to thrive and bring our community together. With approximately a 30% mobility rate among our students and families due to our rapid growth, it’s helping to create a sense of community that unites everyone.

You can’t drive through Forney or go to the grocery store without seeing a Forney Family yard sign, window cling, car sticker or T-shirt. It has invaded our community.

We are constantly monitoring the pulse of our community, not just through social media, but through one-on-one conversations. As we continue to grow, we know this will become harder, but we’ve built an army with our Forney Family (staff, parents, students, businesses, community leaders) that are helping us tackle it one person at a time.
A few final samples are included on the next page. Forney Family isn’t a one-year “theme,” but a long-term campaign that we will continue to grow to give the district a human touch.

Both teams decided to not play and save the fun for district. Instead we are taking home the championship as the city of Forney!

Finally, Forney ISD is celebrating 125 years in 2024, and we’re already preparing for a giant celebration. We have plans to install the F_SD letters for our Forney Family to stand in the I.