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### **Local Voices**

#### **Dr. Sophia Jones-Redmond, Superintendent Thornton Fractional High School District 215**

“District 215 is committed to an overall culture of equity where the creation and implementation of policy, the allocation of resources, and access to opportunity are intentionally aligned to meet the needs of all student groups, regardless of: race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, home or first language, religion, national origin, immigration status, age, or physical appearance.” This is the District’s Equity Statement which supports our overall mission, “to provide diverse learning opportunities that inspire all students to become life-long learners who contribute to their community.” This is the daily focus in each Thornton Fractional District 215 (TFD 215) school.

TFD 215 strives to provide the highest quality education possible, with the best qualified staff as possible. Are we getting there? Absolutely! Utilizing factual data, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) School Report Card designates Thornton Fractional District 215 as commendable and that is due in great part to the high-quality teachers and staff that stay with the district. Research tells us that students perform better with staff that they know and build relationships with; TFD 215 has a 94.4% teacher retention rate, while the state average is 87.6%. Additionally, by focusing on quality applicants, 82% of District 215 teachers have a master’s degree or higher, while the state average is 59%. Our focus always has been and always will be, to hire the most highly qualified teachers to provide the best education possible to TFD 215 students. Our recruitment efforts for teachers of color are paying off with 22.4% of our teachers identifying as Black, Hispanic, Asian or American Indian while the state average is 16.8% (based on 2022 ISBE School Report Card data.)

Administration continually works to ensure our district staff are representative of our students and that goes beyond recruitment. A solid “*grow our own*” foundation was laid this summer with the second annual Future Teacher Summer Academy. These students are interested in becoming teachers and throughout the school year are also serving as tutors with feeder district elementary students. The Future Teacher Clubs provide activities that will help students build their resumes, get accepted to college and develop leadership skills. They also are given opportunities to network with professionals in the education field. In a show of support to “*growing our own*”, the TFD 215 Local 683 presented scholarships to three of the students. Beyond the club, two academic courses are offered during the school day for the Educator Pathway including Foundations to Teaching (dual credit—high school and college) and Educational Methodology. It is anticipated that many students through this coursework and club will return to the district as teachers.

With record numbers of teachers nation-wide leaving the education profession and enrollment in college education programs decreasing by as much as a third or higher in some states (Illinois enrollment dropped 60% between 2010-2018), Thornton Fractional District 215 has identified staffing improvements in its strategic planning development process to ensure the strides that have been made continue to improve. Our goal, our mission, is to move from Commendable to Exemplary. We have an incredible foundation of dedicated staff, board members and community who focus daily on providing the highest quality education to all students with the highest quality staff as possible. It is an on-going data-driven process, but one TFD 215 embraces to insure an excellent education for all students.