

CONNECTING



David Young
Superintendent, AISD



Darrin Cox
Homeless Liason, AISD

Dr. David Young became Superintendent of Schools for Abilene ISD on August 20, 2015. A product of Abilene ISD schools and 1990 graduate of Cooper High School, Dr. Young served as the superintendent of the Pampa Independent School District from 2012-2015 prior to joining AISD. "I am absolutely thrilled to have the opportunity for our family to return home to Abilene," Dr. Young said. "This community already means a great deal to me, and I look forward to serving the staff, students and community as a part of its dynamic and successful school district."

Before becoming Pampa ISD's superintendent, Dr. Young served the Midway ISD as Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction for three years. He held several central office roles in the Bryan ISD and was a building principal at both the middle and high school levels while serving in the Bryan, Navasota and Grapevine-Colleyville ISDs. He taught mathematics in both the Grapevine-Colleyville and Waxahachie ISDs. Dr. Young received both his undergraduate and doctoral degrees from Texas A&M University in College Station and his masters from Texas A&M Commerce.

Dr. Young's wife, Amanda, a 1992 graduate of Cooper High School, is an elementary school counselor at Bowie Elementary School. The Youngs have three children: Austin is a student at Hardin-Simmons University, Madison is a student at Cooper High School, and Jackson attends Madison Middle School. On the state level, Dr. Young is active in the Texas Association of School Administrators, the Texas Association of Mid-Sized Schools, and the Texas Association of School Boards. Dr. Young holds leadership positions in the Texas Association of Community Schools and is currently serving as president of the Texas Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

WHO CAN I CONTACT FOR VOLUNTEER INFO?

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Darrin Cox was in a rut. He needed a new way to impact the lives of Abilene Independent School District children he just wasn't reaching. Luckily for him — and those children — an opportunity came along and he jumped headfirst into a new role. Now, Cox is beginning his second year as homeless student liaison within the district, a job that allows him to make a difference in the lives of students he feels need it the most. He maintains three storage closets of donated clothing and school supplies, where he can hand out basic essentials most people take for granted. Seeing the smiles on the faces of the children he meets with, just when they get a new pair of underwear or a T-shirt, gives him a reason to come to work, he said. "I want to take the barriers out of their way so they can go to school like everyone else," Cox said. "So that they can learn like everyone else." Part of Cox's job is to help parents and students understand what qualifies as homeless — it's not students living under a bridge or in homeless shelters. Abilene ISD must follow guidelines in the federal McKinney-Vento Act to determine if a student is considered homeless, and these regulations are far broader than simply not having a permanent roof overhead at night.

For instance, the largest segment of homeless students officially in Abilene ISD are those who are "doubled up," where their family lives in a residence with another family, Cox said. As of the second week of school, 302 of the district's 353 classified homeless students were in this situation. "It doesn't mean they're not living in a nice home," Cox said. "These are different guidelines. This group of students is what some of us refer to as a 'forgotten population.'" Cox said the district's homeless population, comparing September 2016 to September 2017 figures, is up 89 students.

Last year, the district identified about 1,200 students throughout the course of the year, either temporary or permanently homeless, who were eligible for the services. The number could be reached again this year, he said, adding educating parents and guardians, community groups and churches has helped with tracking down eligible children. Before taking his current position, Cox spent 24 years as a truancy officer. Barriers like poverty and transient life kept parents from being able to help students. If students did find themselves at school, they might not have underwear, or socks to go with their shoes. Some simply didn't have shoes. So, when Cox took over as homeless liaison, his goal became to make sure he wasn't helpless ever again. "No one's saying no to them now," Cox said. "We're able to give them the things they need. I've got a pretty awesome job. It's pleasant when I go to work now. I enjoy their smiles, and when I leave the office, I'm happy. Not many people get to do this."

Cox's storerooms were inspired by the work of Jim Clark and the Christian Service Center. When fire destroyed the center in April 2016, Cox and his team were forced to find a different way to get the neediest students the materials they needed. So his own warehouse began accumulating donations he solicited throughout the community. Slowly, it grew, with supporters stepping up and helping spread the word. This year, Facebook pleas for donations, like one posted by Abilene Education Foundation secretary Paige Sproles, were met by supporters and needed items came flooding in as both school started and Hurricane Harvey laid waste to Texas's gulf coast. "I used to work for a special education program, the Student Achievement Center, where every teacher would give a student a stocking for Christmas," Sproles said. "Those stockings had a toothbrush, toothpaste, socks, and other essentials. Those kids would get ecstatic, running around, because they got a toothbrush. They'd never had one of their own before." Talking to Cox, Sproles put the word out on Facebook and received strong support. Friends, like Lin Thompson, saw and knew they needed to step up and take action. She said she met a friend at Target and went on a little shopping spree. "I'm a mom of two young children," said Thompson, marketing director for Chick-fil-A in north Abilene. "I can't even fathom what people are going through. We take for granted sometimes what we have. If the least I can do is buy underwear and school supplies, then that's the least we can do."



To make a contribution or volunteer, call Cox at 677-1444, ext. 8641.

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