Senior Citizen VIP Pass

ENTRANT:
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TYPE OF DISTRICT/ORGANIZATION SUBMITTING ENTRY:
Public school district - Over 25,000 students
No. of Communications staff - 5

ENTRY CATEGORY:
Public engagement/parent involvement

Please consider this entry for a Golden Achievement Award!
SYNOPSIS

Often described as a big district with a small-town, family feel, Garland ISD enjoys a rich history of more than 100 years. Many staff members spend their entire career in the district—the longest serving 68 years—and some even graduate from GISD as well. While a seasoned community is undoubtedly a point of pride, an aging demographic can also present its own challenge. Historic GISD data shows that voters 65 and older participate in most elections but do not initially favor school bond referendums. Looking ahead to the future, Garland ISD wanted to reconnect its senior citizens with the district to give them an accurate perspective. More importantly, GISD also wanted to honor those who helped build its tri-city community.

In August 2019, the district launched a senior citizen VIP pass program, offering free admission to all GISD-hosted athletics and fine arts events. The district’s Communications Department was also challenged with a goal of 1,000 cardholders by the end of the first year. To help spread the word, tactics included an announcement in the Superintendent’s State of the District address, digital billboards, electronic and printed newsletters, the district’s website, social media and more.

GISD celebrated its 1,000th VIP in just three-and-a-half short months and continues to gain new members almost every day. The perks have also grown to include specially designed district tours which showcase innovations in education, such as 1:1 Chromebooks in secondary classrooms; Career and Technical Education, including a student-prepared lunch; and new facilities made possible by GISD’s 2014 Bond Program.

“I was amazed at the changes—the way GISD has evolved since my three children went through the system,” was just one of the numerous positive comments the district has received since launching this program. But perhaps the most prized response stated, “Next year when I go to pay our GISD tax bill, I will have a smile on my face!”

The district looks forward to continued engagement with its senior citizens and also plans to add veterans to the VIP pass program next school year.

RESEARCH

A tradition-rich district, Garland ISD’s history spans more than 100 years. In that time, GISD has passed five bond elections. Voters approved $79 million in 1986, $110 million in 1992, $156 million in 1996, $385 million in 2002 and $455.5 million in 2014. The district’s most recent election passed with 62 percent of voters in favor, but this was after months of hard work. GISD conducted a phone survey of the district’s tri-cities before the Board of Trustees put a bond on the November 2014 ballot, and the baseline question asked respondents whether they vote in all, most, only some, very few, or none of the local elections dealing with bond issues, taxes and local development projects. The highest percentage of respondents answering “all” belonged to voters 65 and older. Another question mentioned that Garland ISD was considering calling a bond election and asked whether respondents would vote yes, in favor, or no, against, the issuance of $450 million in bonds to construct, renovate, and equip school buildings and make other improvements with the levying of property tax. This time, voters 65 and older had the highest percentage answering that they would not support the bond.

Armed with the knowledge that GISD’s senior citizen community needs extra consideration in regard to bond elections, the district received a demographer’s report in 2017 showing this to be the largest-growing population group. In 2010, citizens 65 and older equaled 7.5
percent of the district’s population. By 2015, that number had grown to 11.4 percent. And, all other age groups presented a decline as well.

This means that GISD’s tri-cities are blessed with stalwarts who have grown up and raised children in the district. For example, GISD’s Student Services Center was recently rededicated in honor of the Valle family. Manuel and Maria Valle moved to Garland in 1929 as the city’s first Hispanic residents. Their eight children graduated from Garland High School—the most in school history from a single family—and now at least one of them still resides in the city. Pascual was the first all-state football player from Garland, and he and his son, Tony, were also the first father-son duo inducted as members of the Garland Sports Hall of Fame. Pascual still remains a local celebrity throughout GISD. Another icon is the district’s former Executive Director of Athletics. Homer Johnson graduated from Garland High School in 1945 and returned in 1948 as a coach. In 1962, he became GISD’s first athletic director and eventually retired from the district in 2016 after serving 68 years.

These pillars of the community undoubtedly helped lay the foundation for GISD’s past, present and future successes. In fact, they are often called upon for advice during strategic planning or other public forums. In June 2019, the district began its current strategic plan process with surveys, summits and focus groups. A Design Team then developed a rubric to evaluate all GISD facilities. With a district goal of ensuring all students graduate prepared for college, careers and life, architects also conducted site walks to determine needs. This assessment will now be used in future bond election discussions.

Knowing that a referendum could be called in the near future, GISD wanted to start its informational campaign as soon as possible. And why not start with the population that had been removed the longest? In an effort to give back to those who built the district while also engaging them to reconnect, GISD decided to implement a discount program for senior citizens. The name “VIP” was strategically chosen to denote their significance, and research of other districts around the area revealed that many already had similar programs in place. In fact, GISD’s Athletics Department allowed residents 65 and older to attend all non-varsity football games for free during the 2018-19 school year. The district decided to bolster that pilot for 2019-20.

PLANNING

Convening a committee of district leadership and representatives from the communications, athletics and fine arts departments, GISD’s new senior citizen VIP pass program was formed. Planning meetings began in May 2019 with a target launch date of Aug. 1. The committee first discussed benefits and agreed to offer free admission to all non-playoff athletic events hosted at district facilities, in addition to all fine arts events. Discussing logistics, the committee determined a photo ID badge, similar to an employee’s, made the most sense. The process would then include a qualifying senior stopping by the GISD Print Shop, presenting a driver’s license, taking a photo and ultimately receiving a VIP pass. During sign-up, the district would collect contact information as well, including a mailing address, email address and phone number. This would allow Communications to deliver important program information in addition to future bond election collateral. To help VIP members become actively engaged, the process would also allow signees to express interest in volunteering at a campus.

When envisioning a design for the pass, Willy Wonka’s golden ticket came to mind since the pass would allow seniors free access to events. Gold cards are also often associated with discount programs, and the color itself symbolizes royalty. Communications wanted program
participants to feel special, so the pass contains a gold background. In addition, the photo on the front alleviates the need for additional identification, which was an improvement upon athletics’ pilot program.

GISD leadership wanted to improve upon the original number of cardholders as well. In 2018-19, less than 50 senior citizens took advantage of the free athletics events. The 2019-20 VIP pass goal was set at 1,000. Communications even designed a special pass for the lucky recipient. Compared to participation in other districts’ senior citizen programs, this was going to be a lofty goal. One that was chosen not only to motivate staff to work extra hard to achieve it, but also to make sure that a large number of community stalwarts received recognition.

Preparing to launch the program, GISD set a budget that would not have a financial impact on the district. The Print Shop would purchase an ID badge machine for approximately $5,000 with revenue generated from jobs for out-of-district entities. Communications would then pay for all printed marketing materials with existing funds, not to exceed $500. And, digital marketing via GISD-operated platforms would be free, in addition to a digital billboard that could be run as part of a pre-existing contract.

As Aug. 1 neared, Communications created garlandisd.net/vippass, which included instructions on how to obtain the card, as well as contact information and a link to athletics and fine arts schedules. Staff wanted the experience to be as easy as possible for its senior citizen audience, so everything was housed on one page and all other collateral linked to it. Administration also wanted to ensure fidelity of the program’s implementation across the district. That’s why all coaches and fine arts staff were emailed VIP treatment expectations. To prepare marketing materials, Communications conducted a photoshoot with a few community influencers. One graduated and retired from the district and has several ongoing connections. Another couple has chaired the Garland Association for Hispanic Affairs for several years.

IMPLEMENTATION
GISD’s superintendent officially kicked off the new senior citizen VIP pass program marketing in July during his State of the District tour to chambers of commerce and other organizations. He not only announced the upcoming program but also an exclusive deal he made with neighboring Wylie ISD. Since GISD and WISD share their own athletic district, each superintendent agreed to honor the other’s senior citizen cards. This information was shared at approximately one dozen tour stops.

Communications continued that community outreach Aug. 1 by sending an informational flyer to all libraries, senior centers, recreation centers, churches and supermarkets within GISD’s tri-cities—over 300 locations. Featuring a brief call to action, it included text in English, Spanish and Vietnamese—the district’s three most widely spoken languages. An accompanying letter asked each recipient to post the flyer and to inform patrons when possible. This flyer strategically pictured the couple who has strong ties throughout the community in order to encourage a sense of endorsement.

Additional print marketing included a story and a brief in two editions of the district’s ConnectEd newsletter. This quarterly publication is printed in-house and mailed to every home in the area—approximately 112,000. Posters were also hung in the front entry at all 85 GISD facilities. This poster strategically pictured the alumnus and former employee in order to foster a sense of loyalty. Lastly, vinyl banners were displayed on fences near the Print Shop to direct senior citizens where to go.
As mentioned previously, all digital marketing built on the district website by leading audiences to it. GISD’s social media accounts twitter.com/gisdnews, twitter.com/gisdnoticias and facebook.com/choosegarlandisd each introduced the program and chronicled the journey to VIP No. 1,000. With more than 72,000 followers on Twitter and 2,000 likes on Facebook, Communications made sure to reach these audiences repeatedly. Staff also enlisted others, like the City of Garland, to share information via their own social channels. On Aug. 1, the district’s e-newsletter was sent with VIP pass information to the families of GISD’s more than 55,000 students. A digital billboard also ran for four weeks along an interstate and state highway, totaling approximately 1-2 million impressions. Lastly, digital signage on the video boards at the district’s two athletic stadiums thanked VIPs in attendance at a few dozen events.

In just three-and-a-half short months, GISD issued its 1,000th VIP pass to Billy Burleson. Commemorating this milestone, Communications organized a small photo shoot and gifted Burleson with a bag of district swag. He commented that he learned about the senior citizen program through GISD’s ConnectEd newsletter.

EVALUATION

Boasting more than 1,100 VIPs to date, the word keeps spreading and new senior citizens keep signing up. The most recent recipients received their passes March 5—just one day before the district left for Spring Break. And, GISD uses their contact information to send weekly emails with upcoming events.

Communications also contacts the group with other opportunities or important information. After achieving the once lofty goal of 1,000 VIPs, staff began to evaluate how they could further benefit these senior citizens. Every year, Communications hosts district tours with Leadership Garland, Rowlett and Sachse groups, and without fail, they all leave saying, “Wow! I didn’t realize all of the great things happening in Garland ISD.” Shouldn’t the senior citizen community see more than just athletics and fine arts? Shouldn’t they see the greatness that their tax dollars fund? These questions led to the formation of the district’s first-ever senior citizen VIP tour. At 5 p.m. Friday, Dec. 6, Communications sent an email announcing 30 available spots. Each one was filled by midnight, and in fact, a second date had to be added to accommodate respondents from the rest of the weekend.

Seventy VIPs in total toured GISD Jan. 23 and Feb. 20. Kicking off the morning at breakfast with the Superintendent, attendees were served by special education students in a transitional job skills program. The group then visited the district’s highest-achieving middle school to see 1:1 Chromebooks and a secured entryway—both products of the 2014 Bond Program. Stopping at an elementary to see GISD’s newest magnet program, Montessori, VIPs witnessed this unique, individualized learning in action. The group then drove by the construction site of the district’s Natatorium and ended the day at the Gilbreath-Reed Career and Technical Center, two additional Bond 2014 products. After eating a lunch prepared by culinary students, the VIPs explored more state-of-the-art learning spaces, including a student-run animal grooming business open to the public, a working cross-section of an ambulance, and an innovation lab complete with 3-D printers. GISD’s video department filmed the second tour and compiled a highlight reel with testimonials, which can be viewed at youtube.com/garlandisdnews.

Some of the most heartwarming feedback received from cardholders was sent after the Jan. 23 tour. One participant stated, “Thank you so much for the visits today. They were absolutely uplifting. What a great job GISD is doing for the students and community. I am spreading the
Another wrote, “Thank you for treating us like VIP citizens. All the information and school visits were interesting, and we learned a lot about GISD today. I retired from GISD eleven years ago as a counselor, and it sure has changed. Happy to see the new natatorium that I fought for almost 45 years ago when our daughter was a competitive swimmer at North Garland High School. We were happy to finally visit the Career and Technical Center as well...an amazing building. We felt so lucky and proud to be supporters of GISD.” The most prized piece of feedback read, “My wife and I thoroughly enjoyed the day. Next year when I go to pay our GISD tax bill, I will have a smile on my face!”

And, these are not the only emails that have been received. On March 4, Communications asked VIPs how much they had utilized their passes and what they would change, if anything, about the program. By March 14, nearly 50 responses had been received, all with positive feedback. The average cardholder attended 10 events, saving $2-8 each time. And as hoped, this financial benefit made a huge impact. “I received an email from one of our VIPs,” commented GISD Superintendent Ricardo López. “She told me how her daughter used to pay for her to see the grandchildren perform. She felt like such a burden because the daughter had her own financial stresses. She said this program lifted a weight off her shoulders and allowed her to attend more events.”

Achieving its intended outcome of giving back to and recognizing the invaluable senior citizen community, GISD also achieved increased engagement. Communications has received several calls about additional tours, and some senior citizens even call to inquire about the weekly email with upcoming events. Others have started partnerships with campuses to volunteer, mentor or provide needed supplies. This engagement has garnered local media coverage as well. Three of the district’s local newspapers featured the program and no doubt added to its visibility. With an increasing reach, GISD continues to evaluate its program. One change already implemented is that VIPs do not have to renew their passes every year. The district also plans to add veterans to the program in 2020-21. And this group has become a valuable resource—one that the district cares for and is staying in communication with throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

While GISD hopes these efforts will help lead to a favorable vote during future bond elections, if nothing else, the district has gained many new ambassadors.
VOTING BEHAVIOR
QC. Thinking about local elections for a moment -- would you say that you vote in all, most, only some, very few, or none of the local elections dealing with bond issues, taxes and local development projects?

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<th>All</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>Only Some</th>
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<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<td>21%</td>
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<td>20%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<td>28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-par</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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The results of the Bond 2014 Survey confirmed that community members 65+ had the highest voting average. Knowing that active voters are powerful allies, we wanted to create a program to connect with them.

INITIAL BALLOT
Q6. Garland ISD is considering calling a bond election to be held this November. If an election was held today, would you vote yes, in favor or no, against the issuance of 450 million dollars in bonds to construct, renovate, and equip school buildings and make other improvements with the levying of property tax?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>Favor</th>
<th>Against</th>
<th>Depends / Unsure / refused</th>
<th>No, against</th>
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<td>Strongly</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>Strongly</td>
</tr>
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</table>

This graph shows how important it is to engage senior citizens. More residents 65+ voted against, rather than for, the bond on the initial ballot question.
The majority of our population is over 40. Having an established senior citizen-focused program would be a game changer in the long run.

Garland ISD has a rising 65+ population, making a senior citizen-focused initiative a smart investment for our future.
In May 2019, the district launched a facilities master plan. A sign that a bond could be considered in the future, engaging and informing our community’s strongest voters became a priority.
Garland ISD is tradition rich and has a history of giving back to those who have helped build our community. Our Student Services Center was rededicated to honor the Valle family, a longtime ally of the district as well as our community’s first Hispanic family.

GISD honored the district’s longest-serving employee, Homer B. Johnson, with an incredible retirement bash. The legendary coach spent 68 years serving GISD’s students, families and tri-cities community. Hundreds attended the celebration, including local media.
We researched and compiled a list of senior citizen-focused programs neighboring school districts offered. This helped us envision what we could offer our community members.

Athletics launched their own senior citizen program pilot in 2018-19. Seniors 65+ received free admission to any nonvarsity game hosted in GISD.
Due to the small gains of the pilot program, the possibility of a future referendum and the importance of keeping our stakeholders engaged, district leaders were set on enhancing the VIP initiative. District leadership met to redesign the program and set high goals.
## Senior Citizen VIP Pass

<table>
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<th>Status</th>
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<th>Assigned To</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<td>Robin Enriquez</td>
<td>08/01/19</td>
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<td>Tiffany Veno</td>
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The program, designed to be budget-neutral, was finalized in late June and set to launch Aug. 1—a short, ambitious timeline.
Now branded a senior citizen VIP pass, GISD’s Communications team redesigned the card. The final sleek, gold design radiated the exclusivity of being a VIP.

Communications designed a special card for the 1,000th VIP pass recipient, which was the first year’s goal.
Senior citizen VIP pass information was shared on the district website. To help GISD athletics and fine arts staff prepare, VIP treatment expectations were shared via email.
To help with marketing, Communications held a photo shoot. The team strategically reached out to John Washington, an alumnus and retired employee, as well as Tony and Lupita Torres, a well-known and active couple. These photos were used on flyers, digital billboards and social media.
VIP Senior Cards

- Those 65 and over may gain access to all in-district fine arts and athletics events for free
- Includes general admission to varsity football for the first time
- Exchange with Wylie ISD
- Bring state photo ID to the GISD Print Shop at 414 Stadium Drive (behind Williams Stadium) starting August 1 to get your pass

Superintendent Dr. López helped implement the VIP pass. By sharing information at his annual State of the District tour, interest in our tri-cities soared.
FREE entry to athletics and fine arts events for seniors 65+.
Get your VIP pass at the GISD Print Shop.

Entrada GRATUITA a eventos de atletismo y bellas artes para personas de 65 años y más. Obtenga su pase VIP pass en el GISD Print Shop.

Vào cửa MIỄN PHÍ cho những buổi diễn kịch thể thao và mỹ thuật cho các vị cao niên 65+. Lấy thẻ VIP pass của bạn tại GISD Print Shop.

### Libraries
- Garland Community Library 600 South Belt Line Rd Garland 75040
- Flower Mound Public Library 3600 Main St. Flower Mound 75022
- Sunnyvale Public Library 3629 Business Park Dr Sunnyvale 75072
- Valley View Library 518 Ridgecrest Dr Valley View 76272

### Senior Centers
- Garland Senior Activity Center 650 W. Jordan Rd Garland 75040
- Plano Community Center 5202 Main St. Plano 75075

### Recreational Centers
- Bill Community Center 1120 Main St Garland 75040
- Plano Community Center 2220 FM 544 Plano 75074
- Foster Bammel Center 922 W. Ferguson Rd Garland 75042
- First Baptist Church and Retirement Center 4951 N. Central Expy Garland 75041
- Garland Parks and Recreation 850 Spring Ridge Garland 75040
- Heritage Bammel Center 2571 Heritage Pl Garland 75042
- Mark Jordan Recreation Center 652 Jordan Rd Garland 75040
- Plano Community Center 5500 Main St Plano 75075

### Churches
- First Baptist Sachse 2412 3rd St. Sachse 75048
- Pleasant Valley United Methodist Church 3015 Pleasant Valley Rd. Sachse 75048
- Kingdom Hall of Jehovah’s Witnesses 4702 O’Banion Rd. Garland 75043

Flyers with verbiage in English, Spanish and Vietnamese were distributed to over 300 locations in our tri-cities, including senior centers, libraries, supermarkets and churches.
To continue spreading the word, Communications included VIP pass briefs in our quarterly printed newsletter. Posters with verbiage in English, Spanish and Vietnamese were posted in 85 district facilities. And vinyl banners directing seniors to the Print Shop were displayed on fences near the facility.
Join the GarlandUSA team
Garland ISD is THE place to be. We’re seeking exceptional teachers and bus drivers. Join one of the best districts in the nation and apply online today.

Back-to-school forms available now
Families can review and complete back-to-school forms via Skyward Family Access. Secondary students who complete their forms by Aug. 7 will be able to view their schedules early.

You’re invited to the 2019 Health Fair and Back-to-School Rally
Get free health screenings, low-cost immunizations, resources and more from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 3, at the Curtis Culwell Center.

Locals 65+
eligible to attend athletics, fine arts events for free
Any senior citizen age 65-plus can sign up to receive a VIP pass for free general admission to all in-district athletics and fine arts events.

GISD profiled for building the workforce of the future
The Dallas Business Journal featured Garland ISD’s Gilbreath-Reed Career and Technical Center for tackling one of Texas’ biggest issues: producing a reliable, trained workforce.

Plan your year with the 2019-20 academic calendar
Get ready for #GarlandISD1stDay, make note of scheduled breaks and more by reviewing Garland ISD’s 2019-20 academic calendar. English, Spanish and Vietnamese print versions are available online.

Communications also marketed the VIP pass digitally. Messaging was shared via a monthly e-newsletter, social media, digital billboards and video boards at GISD’s two athletic stadiums.
To celebrate our 1,000th senior citizen VIP pass holder—which was also our first-year goal—we surprised the lucky recipient with a special gift, photo op and shout-out on social media.
Communications keeps a live database of senior citizen VIP pass holders. These members receive a weekly email with upcoming events and important information.
To further benefit our VIP cardholders, we set up the first-ever senior citizen VIP tour. Inviting members via email, the first 30 to sign up received VIP Tour Golden Tickets and a schedule of the program. Due to the popularity of the first tour, a second tour was added to accommodate requests.
To document the historic senior citizen VIP pass tour, GRS-TV filmed one tour and shared this video via YouTube and social media. The video garnered more than 330 views shortly after its publication.
Thank you so much for the visits today. They were absolutely uplifting. What a great job that GISD is doing for the students and community. I am spreading the word.

Tiffany:

Pascual and I want to thank you for organizing and directing our VIP tour today.
Thank you for treating us like VIP citizens. All the information and school visits were interesting and we learned a lot about GISD today. I retired from GISD eleven years ago as a counselor and it sure has changed. Happy to see the new natatorium that I fought for almost 45 years ago when our daughter was a competitor swimmer at North Garland High School.
We were happy to finally visit the Career and Technical Center.....an amazing building.
And not to forget to mention the delicious lunch that was prepared by their students.
Thank you again for the VIP treatment. We felt so lucky and proud to be supporters of GISD.
Sincerely,
Pascual and Sylvia Valle

Tiffany, good morning. I want to again thank you and the entire team for the wonderful tour and information presented yesterday. My wife and I thoroughly enjoyed the day. Next year when I go to pay our GISD tax bill, I will have a smile on my face!
Herman & Hattie Fuette

I have enjoyed being a GISD VIP. Not only does it save money, I don’t have to stand in line to buy tickets. I have three grandchildren in GISD (3 different schools) as well as a couple more kids that I claim. They are involved in cheerleading, basketball, theatre arts, and baseball. I attended three football games a week and then three basketball games, as well as theatre arts productions, for about 25 events.

We have two grandsons one in high school and one in middle school who play for their schools and have truly enjoyed the free admission (every little bit helps when you are retired). A truly enjoyable experience! No complaints about the program whatsoever. It works great just as it is. Thank you GISD for helping us seniors!

Since the program’s inception, Communications has received positive feedback from several members.
Garland ISD senior citizen pass allows free access to school events

Anny Sivilay, asivilay@starlocalmedia.com
Aug 7, 2019

Last school year Garland ISD piloted its gold card program for senior citizens and received a lot of feedback on implementation and how this program could be improved. On Aug. 1, the district launched an improved version with its senior citizen VIP pass.

Chief Leadership Officer Susanna Russell said the district felt seniors are the heart of their communities and have laid a strong foundation for them to continue to build on in the tri-cities.

“We wanted to honor them and say ‘thank you’ to them, and so initially, when the gold card rolled out it allowed them entry into non-varsity athletic events,” she said. “Based on feedback, we wanted to expand that and market it to a much broader audience. Ideally we would like every single senior citizen who lives in the Garland ISD area to have a gold card. “We want them to feel that they’re connected to our children, strong schools build strong communities, and strong communities sustain greatness in our school,” Russell added. “We would like for our senior citizens to feel that they still have a vital role in serving our children. We want to allow them see the students perform at our fine arts and our athletic events.”

The popularity of the senior citizen VIP pass gained the interest of local media. Three media outlets highlighted the program, adding to its prestige.