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Dr. Cary Israel

photo provided by Collin College



## Best in the West

By Tricia Musslewhite

**STUDENTS ACROSS NORTH TEXAS** have gone back to school. For most there are commonalities: teachers, books and homework. But for one local college president the desire to provide an educational program that meets the student's individual needs is resulting in success.

Cary A. Israel is president of Collin County Community College District (Collin), a multi-campus operation serving more than 41,000 students annually. Under his leadership, Collin is nationally recognized for outstanding and innovative programs.

Dr. Israel recognizes the barriers to a college education and together with the college's board of trustees have made it a priority to tear down those barriers. Collin was the first college in Texas to offer students dual admission to a four-year university, making college more affordable and accessible. Agreements with Baylor University, Southern Methodist University,

Texas A&M College Station, Texas A&M Commerce, Texas Tech University, Texas Woman's University, The University of Texas at Dallas and the University of North Texas provide students concurrent enrollment, with access to libraries, sporting events and guaranteed admissions to the partner university after

successful completion of requirements.

Time is another barrier. Access to a community college gives high school students a head start on their future. More than 1,300 seniors attend college courses at Collin. Frisco Independent School District leads the state in the percentage of students who enroll in this program. Weekend and online classes are another growing convenience factor that accommodate students' various schedules and learning styles.

Dr. Israel learned about these barriers when he was an undergraduate at Michigan State University working three jobs. He knows those wages wouldn't pay for school today and believes funding, through scholarships and legislation, is a high priority. He fears an undereducated workforce saying, "If we don't get students (without resources) in the pipeline, they're not going to transfer to the universities."

Collin has grown by almost 11,000 students since Dr. Israel joined in 1999.

With an annual growth of 10 to 12 percent, Dr. Israel says Collin is predicted to be the fastest growing college in Texas until 2015.

Dr. Israel believes, "The success of the institution is because of the vision of the board, faculty and student success." His colleagues believe Dr. Israel's leadership drives Collin's success and recently nominated him for an Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) Regional Chief Executive Officer award. Dr. Israel will attend the 2007 ACCT Leadership Congress and receive the CEO award for the western region, which, according to his staff, means he's the best in the west. From the ACCT's five recognized regional CEOs, one will receive the top honor – the Marie Y. Martin CEO Award. "I am extremely honored and deeply appreciative of the board," says Dr. Israel. "I was humbled by their (nomination) comments."

The list of regional CEO awards included Dr. Israel's name once before. In 1996, when he was president of Raritan Valley Community College in New Jersey, he won the CEO award for the association's northeast region. His past presidencies also include the Illinois Community College System and Front Range Community College in Colorado.

Dr. Israel and his family are happy to call North Texas home. He and his wife, Trudy, live in Allen. When he's not anticipating the needs of students, you can find him on the tennis court anticipating Kendre's, his 21-year-old daughter, next volley. He also can be seen serving community organizations and strives to establish civic values in students. In 2000 he created Texas Campus Compact, part of a national coalition of college and university presidents committed to the civic purposes of higher education.

Dr. Israel has numerous initiatives, but he is clear on what the outcome of the goals will be. He says, "We want to be an affordable, quality institution of higher education, and we want to be the best."

*Tricia Musslewhite is a freelance writer living in Frisco.*