As a former classroom educator, Dr. Stone understands that regardless of what changes are made at the executive-level, it’s the teachers who have to implement and live with the changes. That’s why she still lives by advice she received from her own mentor nearly 25 years ago when she moved from the classroom and into an administrative role: ‘take the teacher’s eyes with you.’

“I’m really driven by building relationships and connecting with people.”
Dr. Jeannie Stone, Superintendent

Whatever position I’ve been in, I take the teacher’s eyes with me,” Dr. Stone says. “And I talk about that a lot with teachers so that they know that’s how I lead, and they have a lot of buy-in to things we’re doing because of that.”

Connecting with others is one of the most effective ways one can lead, according to Susan Cook, COO and Leadership Coach at School Innovations & Achievement (SI&A)—which is working with Richardson ISD to help the district improve student attendance.

“Connecting with others to achieve district goals is subtle but powerful,” says Cook. “People are at the center of all leadership efforts. Leaders cannot lead unless they understand the people they are leading.”

James Kouzes and Barry Posner, authors of The Leadership Challenge, describe Dr. Stone’s successful leadership practice perfectly, “When leadership is a relationship founded on trust and confidence, people take risks, make changes, keep organizations and movements alive.”

“We’ve seen before that new programs can only succeed in helping children achieve when everyone is on board,” says Cook. “Superintendents like Dr. Stone, who emphasize strong relationships with their classroom teachers, often make the biggest impact in student growth.”

Dr. Stone notes that leading in a way that lifts teachers’ voices up and makes educators feel supported isn’t always easy, and requires much more than talk.

“I promote this and talk about this overtly because I want them to hear me from my heart who I am and what I’m about,” she says. “And then the biggest thing is to walk the walk, and that’s what I try to do every day—because actions speak louder than words.”