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Community turns out for dedication of FBISD's Aldridge Elementary (w/photos)

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Cleothia Aldridge, mother of the late Allen Aldridge, Jr., is greeted by a well-wisher at the conclusion of the dedication ceremony for the Fort Bend ISD elementary school named for her son.

Photo by Ken Fountain



The cafeteria/auditorium of Fort Bend ISD's new Allen Aldridge, Jr. Elementary School was filled Sunday with people expressing their admiration for the school's namesake, a Fort Bend ISD football standout who went on to play in the NFL (including as a Super Bowl champion) and coach for two

decades at the district's George Bush High School.

Aldridge, a 1990 graduate of Willowridge High School, played for the University of Houston and was drafted as a linebacker in 1994 by the Denver Broncos, with whom he helped win Super Bowl XXXII in 1997. He later played for the Detroit Lions.

After retiring from a professional football career, he returned to his roots in Fort Bend ISD, first as a volunteer at George Bush High School. He officially joined the staff as athletic director and head football coach in 2008, a position he held for 20 years. He died in September 2024 at age 52.

The new, 127,200-square-foot campus sits on a sprawling 9,567-acre site in the heart of the Briargate community where the former Briargate Elementary School once stood. The new \$45.5 million building, part of the \$1.2 billion bond program approved by voters in 2023, combined the former Briargate campus with another elementary school that was previously planned for the area. The new school opened its doors this fall.

Last year, after Aldridge's death, the district's board voted to name the new campus after him. The turnout and testimonials heard at Sunday's event indicated the choice was fitting.

The dedication ceremony got off to a rousing start with fifth-grade students, directed by music teacher David Watkins, sang the classic Kool & The Gang song "Celebration."

Superintendent Marc Smith, who came back to Fort Bend ISD in January 2024 after serving at other districts for several years, noted that he first met Aldridge shortly afterward at one of the annual get-togethers he hosted for the mothers of former professional football players.

"He was so gentle, he was so warm to me coming back to the district. And we had a really good conversation. He showed me his [Super Bowl] ring. Just a really gentle man. He cared, he cared a lot," Smith said. "The few moments that I had the opportunity to be in his presence, I could see the impact he had on many others."

Several members of the audience were fellow 1990 Willowridge classmates of Aldridge, and many others who had played with or under him.

"Throughout his career in Fort Bend ISD, he exemplified class and he exemplified character," Smith said. "And he expected nothing less from his coaches as well as his players. Just look around the room. The fact that all of you are today speaks volumes about the kind of man that Coach Aldridge

was. I know that his family and his friends are so very proud."

"When we think of this school, it's more than just bricks and mortar. It is where the foundation of dreams are established for students," he said. "Within these halls, students have an opportunity to discover their strengths, they have the opportunity to learn, of course, they have an opportunity to learn what it's like to persevere, and they have an opportunity to imagine who and what they are going to become.

"And as Coach Aldridge also talked about, they have an opportunity to learn what being a class individual, and what being an individual of character, what that means in their life and how that will carry them moving forward," he said.

"For generations to come, when young people walk through these halls and somebody says 'What elementary school did you attend?,' they're going say to 'I went to Allen Aldridge Elementary.'" Forever, his name lives forever. That speaks volumes for who he was, the impact he had on the community, and the impact he will have on this community forever and ever," he said.

Yolanda Sneed, Ed.D., a first cousin of Aldridge, gave remarks on behalf of the many family members at the ceremony. Also an educator, she works at the Cypress-Fairbanks school district.

"We are humbled and truly grateful for this special occasion. Having a school named in memory of Allen Aldridge, Jr. – Allen Junior as we called him – is a profound tribute to his life, his legacy and the impact he has made on so many," Sneed said.

"This honor is not only a reflection of who Allen Junior was but also a blessing that will carry his spirit forward in service, education and excellence," she said.

Principal Tara Garrett, who opened the school in her first year with the district, said the dedication was for more than just a building.

"We celebrate the beginning of a legacy. Aldridge is a place where curiosity is nurtured, where learning is inspired, and community is strengthened," she said.

"Today as we dedicate Aldridge Elementary, we will dedicate it not just as a school, but as a home for learning, a hub for our community, and as a symbol of hope and opportunity. Our mascot, Defenders, reminds us that we are here to protect and champion the promise of every child," she said.

"This is not just the beginning of a school year. It is the beginning of a legacy. A legacy that we will build together – one family, one dream at a time," she said.

Kristin Tassin, president of the Fort Bend ISD board, said that Allen "was not just a football player, a UH Coog, an NFL star, and a Super Bowl champion. He was 'Coach' Allen Aldridge at George Bush High School. Coach Allen Aldridge had deep roots in Fort Bend ISD community as we see here today. He was a Willowridge High School graduate and coach at George Bush High School for over 20 years. He was well-known in Fort Bend ISD as a servant-leader, mentor and man of character as we heard from many people today. He had a positive influence on thousands of students.

"The effects of his influence will be felt for many years to come. This beautiful facility made possible by our Fort Bend ISD community is a place where learning comes to life, young minds are empowered, and where students are inspired by teachers and leaders, much as they were by Coach Aldridge," Tassin said.

Watching the ceremony from the front row, often with tears welling in her eyes, was Aldridge's mother, Cleothia. After the ceremony concluded, she told the Fort Bend Star in a soft voice that she was overwhelmed by the number of people who came to pay tribute to her son.

"It makes me very proud," she said.

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