

<http://www.aspirepublicschools.org/about/about.html> (Aspire Public Schools- Calif.)

<http://www.schoolimprove.com/index.htm> (School Improvement Group)

<http://www.fgse.nova.edu/nieo/> (National Institute of Educational Options at NOVA Southeastern)

<http://www.psk12.com/rating/index.php> (Rankings of Public Schools)

<http://www.educationchange.com/> (Council for Educational Change- incl. PASS program)

<http://www.psparents.net/> (Info. clearinghouse for parents)

<http://www.tutorsforkids.org/default.asp> (Supplemental Educational Services Quality Center)

<http://www.parents4publicschools.com/index.html> (Parent Group Network- outreach)

<http://www.kcforums.org/default.asp> (Model for Community Forums- Kansas City)

<http://glef.org/index.php> (George Lucas Education Foundation - Educational Innovations)

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TO: Blue Ribbon Panel

FROM: Jim Martin, School Board Member-Elect

1. LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT

The influence of the State and Federal Government on how schools are funded and the mandates imposed upon the local school systems require more interaction with the elected officials at these higher levels. Legislators must be aware of the issues in the classroom and the commands placed on the administration of the schools that do not add value. It is the duty of the School Board to maintain on-going dialog with the representatives of Orange County and the State of Florida, through regular channels of communication and through special meetings concerning adopted, proposed or needed school-related matters.

These issues include, but are not limited to:

- Changes in the treatment of corporate and private contributions to public education that is equal to the favorable tax treatments afforded private and charter schools.
- Changes to the School grading system (A-Plus Plan) to make it compatible/comparable to the Federal (Adequate Yearly Progress) program.
- Changes to the current testing program (FCAT) and use a nationally recognized program for reading and math.
- Changes to the current law that prohibits local government from denying development approvals based on school overcrowding if there is capacity in any school within miles of the school impacted by the development, or in some cases, if there is capacity anywhere else in the county.*

(*Per Teresa Jacobs letter to Charter Review Committee April 9, 2004.)

2. CHARTER AMENDMENT

The School Board should take a pro-active role in the future development of Orange County and growth management issues. Each local government entity should have a broad understanding of the capacity and plans for the schools that have zoned attendance boundaries within their city and within the area of any future annexation. It is the School Board's responsibility to maintain a hands-on approach to leading development toward any existing or school contained in a twenty-year plan.

Since the School Board does not have the authority to direct growth, the next best position is to empower another agency. This second agency would have the ability to consistently protect the interest of the School Board and influence the county growth patterns to be compatible with the educational goals of the community.

The proposed Amendment (June 16, 2004) to Article VII, Section 1, Section 704.B.2 (a)

and (b) of the General Provisions of the Orange County Charter that effects school rezoning issues should be supported. This amendment to the Charter basically states that the County will prevail over municipal ordinances when re-zonings and comprehensive plan amendments increase the residential density if the change in population affects portions of the municipality; and, the school district cannot certify to the local agencies (Cities and/or County) that the resulting zoning change can be accommodated.

This position is not too different than the intent of the Martinez Plan. However, there needs to be a methodology for resolving conflicts that impact the potential overcrowding of classrooms and campuses.

Note: On Monday, July 26, the Charter Review Committee made changes to the wording of the amendment that will allow municipalities to have the same powers as the County. This is a welcomed revision and still maintains my support.

3. LOCAL SCHOOL FUNDING

The opportunities to capture a realistic impact from new construction over the past two years cannot be reclaimed. The result of any delays in recalculating and updating the impact fees in Orange County may have created the need to have a much larger increase. However, delaying the re-assessment of the impact fees must start immediately. The debates over the current formula and fairness of impacts must be through an open forum and re-evaluations. The amounts assessed for new homes in Orange County may not reflect the true proportion of diminished capacity of classroom space, or the cost of building more schools.

In a July 16, 2004 Orlando Sentinel, the Orange County Auditors reported that delays in re-assessing impact fees may have cost the School District \$90m.

The 2002 voter-approved half penny sales tax has helped provide some relief in the construction of new schools, but it is not likely that the voters of Orange County will be willing to increase this amount. Until the School Board can earn the trust of the citizens as being responsible stewards of their tax dollars, any additional funding must come for other resources. In addition to lobbying for a greater return on state funding (pre-Lotto percentage levels of the general revenue) and federal funding, Orange County will need to review new sources, such as a real estate deed transfer tax.

The success of the districts COVE Committee for the past six years should be expanded to review school maintenance reports on older schools. The cost savings associated with such items as improved air conditioning, water usage, and electrical systems may also save the significant funds. Retrofitting schools with new technologies can have a lasting effect on the facilities and would ultimately reduce the need major repair or replacement

4. ENRICHMENT

Educators have the means to target distinctive patterns in children's learning. Some students, for example, have the ability to read without much more than the talent to "say" the words printed in a textbook. Comprehension and application are vital components to the total reading package. Each student's capacity to develop sentences, paragraphs and express "thoughts through words" is part of the overall lesson that should be included in the curriculum.

The FCAT reading scores for each child is divided into four areas of assessment. These reading content scores include: Words/Phases, Main Idea/Purpose, Comparison, and Reference/Research. A student's reading FCAT score is an amalgamation of these elements. Math is also a combination of content areas.

The tools for assessing each student's strengths and limitations are reported in the FCAT scores supplied to the schools and parents. In order to exploit the reading potential of each student, the identified weakness must be corrected. Expecting to achieve better overall reading scores, without understanding problematic issues, and addressing the student's individual reading issues, will not result in a comprehensive reading growth. More reading is not the complete answer to every child's improvement. Using the FCAT as one of the tools for improvements, as with any test of skill or knowledge, will accelerate the entire learning process.

This need to pinpoint boundaries in the student's math or reading expands as they are promoted from one grade to the next. For example, in early elementary grades, most children can be taught with nearly the same strategy of phonics and systematic lessons. However, as new subjects get introduced into the classroom, the focus changes from the basics to other critical paths of learning. What started as a minor shortfall in one region of reading and language can grow to a major hurdle. By the time a student reaches high school, the problem could mean the difference between passing or failing, or even dropping out.

5. PROGRAM AUDITS

The ability of the OCPS administrative staff to evaluate on-going new programs may need the assistance of independent review. New teaching programs and techniques are produced and marketed without the full appraisal of their effectiveness or added value to the classroom. The cost of these tools can be in the millions of dollars, and their effects are not only related to the annual budget. A new program that has not been proven, or one not embraced by the teachers responsible for its implementation, wastes time for the students exposed to the program.

One noticeable drawback to any new program is the transient nature of the community. A benefits of a program that requires the attention of the student over a period of years, is lost if they move and the new school is not using the same program. The same is

true if a student transfers from a school without the new program.

The use of program audits will reduce the pressure on any school to become the testing ground for an unacceptable program. The audits would include professionals from the classroom, administrative staff, retired educators, and independent evaluators. Before the program is adopted into the budget, it would require the full acceptance of the audit review committee. The program audits would also be required throughout the term of the contract and before any renewal agreements are signed.

6. TEACHING PARTNERS

Relief is necessary in every classroom as teachers become ill, take time for professional development training, or some other valid reason. This absence from by the primary instructor does not require that the teaching to be interrupted. At the middle school and high school levels, “teaching partners” rather than substitutes can be used. Each discipline, such as science, English, math, can be required to have the qualified individuals as alternates and partners when the regular teacher is not available. Rather than act as an “on-call” agent of the school, a teaching partner would have the opportunity to become familiar with the teachers’ students and lesson plans. One partner could cover more than one school. A science teaching partner for Evans, for example, could also work at Meadowbrook or Robinswood Middle School (two of the feeder schools for Evans.)

When there is no call for the primary teacher to be absent, the teaching partner can provide tutoring or other support services. In this way, the partner becomes a team asset, and the student’s development is not hindered as also receives the advantage of an additional specialist in each subject.

Teaching partners need to be qualified, and preferably certified, in the subject that they are assigned to. With a shortage of teachers in Central Florida, this change may not require the recruitment of new teachers, but a reclassification of existing substitute teachers. Issues, such as benefits and salary, would need to be addressed. However, with the added value in the classroom and better accountability, any additional cost can be justified.

This same idea can be used at the elementary school level. Teaching partners would be used to support instructions, help administer and grade tests, and act as a replacement (substitute) in the teacher’s absence. The children would have the opportunity to become more familiar with the teaching partner, creating a less-disruptive environment with the primary teacher is not available.

7. SUBSTITUTE TEACHING

Without the “Teaching Partner” program, changes are necessary to the existing substitute teachers’ program. The first revisions to the system must include

qualifications, accountability, and development.

Also, high on the agenda is the recruitment of additional substitute teachers through partnerships at local colleges, other agencies, and business partners. Mentoring programs can be expanded from one-to-one training, to adoption of the class by partners that can offer internships, equipment funding, project sponsorships, and staff support. This business partners would have the ability to provide occasional, part-time replacements for the primary instructor.

The current method of using substitute teachers can be improved by raising the minimum qualification. These qualifications may vary, depending on the grade level and subject matter. Pre-qualifying substitutes can involve testing, prerequisites, certification, additional training, and peer evaluations.

Any work performed by a substitute teacher should be accountable. Quantitative and qualitative measures can be instituted, and evaluated by the primary instructors, with a database of results and oversight by the OCPS administrative staff.

Many of the substitute teachers used in Orange County are retired teachers, an excellent resource of talent. The use of retirees, business professionals, college graduates, and other pre-qualified substitutes should be provided continuing educational training. Teaching programs, changes in technology, and issues affecting the students change the settings for learning from year to year. A substitute teacher must be given the tools to maintain control of the classroom, and move the lessons seamlessly forward.

In schools experiencing difficulty in recruiting qualified and high performing substitute teachers, there may be a need to evaluate the use of pay incentives or other benefited methods.

The waste of student time with such activities as use of non-educational games and videos should not be part of the substitute's direction and is a misuse of classroom time.

8. MAGNET SCHOOLS

The original concept of Magnet Schools was to develop career interest at poor performing schools. Although this was not the premise of the Magnet Schools in Orange County, it is successfully achieved in Seminole County.

The magnet programs at Orange County's three failing schools are losing out to more attractive occupation paths at other school. An assessment of the existing programs must be completed of all magnet programs. The purpose of this review would be to evaluate major adjustments to the program. This county is large enough to have multiple magnet programs with the same core subject. There is no reason why a

student from Bithlo should have to travel to Apopka for a Science, Engineering and Technology school. A program for the performing arts, or a health-related program can be available at more than one campus without an impact to the regions, and would have a positive affect on the opportunities for a larger number of students.

Working with the local Chambers of Commerce, Valencia Community College, Rollins College, the University of Central Florida, and the wide array of other private colleges, the Orange County School Board should identify trends in college enrollment and professional development that compliments the growth of the region.

9. TEACHER ASSIGNMENTS

The Orange County School Board Administration should take over the responsibility of teacher placement until all schools are performing at acceptable levels. As vacancies are created, teachers would apply directly to the OCPS Administrative Placement HR Department. It would this department's duty to assign new teachers. This role would be developed to avoid the chance that the best schools always having the best teachers. The principal at the school would have the final say in the confirmation, but the distribution of talent would become an equitable process.

The ability of teachers to transfer from one school to the next would be allowed in the future, possibly two or three years after the original assignment. This change would create a fair system for schools to receive qualified teachers.

10. TEACHER RE-ASSIGNMENTS

In response to the recent transfer of teachers from failing schools to higher achieving schools, another plan may have incorporated the ideal that these teachers also needed additional training. Rather than re-assigning the teachers from Evans, Jones and Oak Ridge, an other idea would be to have used these teachers as the Teaching Partners*. In this plan, these teachers would be mentored by the in-coming instructor, and also have a chance to help maintain continuity to the program at these schools.

(*Teaching Partners discuss in other sections of this briefing.)

11. INTERNAL MENTORING

Have leading teachers from one school go to others to show how to succeed. Zellwood Elementary has 75.3% of its students on free or reduced lunch, and yet they received an A.

12. CORE LEARNING

Moved all non-core activities, such as sports, music and arts, to the end of the day.

13. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The school improvement programs should include and focus on parental involvement. There is a vast array of conditions that limit the parents from becoming part of the school's development. One of these conditions is the feeling that, as a parent, they have no control over how their children are treated. The solution to these feelings is in two parts. First, the school administration must become aware that their actions in dealing with parents, as well as the students, will affect future participation by the parents in academic, disciplinary, and all other areas of needed parental support. A parent must feel that their input, values and time are welcomed assets to the school. It is impossible to ignore a parent in one area and expect participation in others.

Perhaps the most important element of parental involvement is communication. Parents do not always have the knowledge of what is needed or expected of them. Newsletters, notes from the teacher, advertisements on the marquee in front of the school, do not connect with the majority of parents. Newsletters get read then tossed, notes from the teachers might never make it home, and the signs in front of the school only work in high-traffic areas.

At Charter Schools, it is not uncommon for the parent to be required to spend a certain number of hours each month working for the school. During this time, the parents learn more about the activities of the school and develop relationships with the teachers and staff of the school. Also, with the parents spending time at the school, the students develop and understanding that school is important in that family.

Computer networking is also producing new channels of communication between the school and home. Many parents have access to the internet and this can be used by the school and individual classrooms to share weekly assignments, school announcements, and begin the dialogue between the teachers and parents concerning issues of special concern.

Many schools currently use an automated dialing system to notify parents when a student is absent. Using this same system, parents could be notified of scheduled events, such as PTA meetings, open-houses, or other activities. A pre-recorded message could be delivered once a week, or as needed.

It is also important that the school take part in community activities, on and off campus. Local festivals, craft fairs, and other gatherings are an excellent chance for the parent to reach out to the school. A booth with a few teachers and/or administrators created a one-on-one interaction and sometimes a first-time introduction.

The misperceptions that groups, such as the PTA, are run by characters like the ones portrayed in the song, "Harper Valley PTA", also intimidates some parents from becoming involved. These groups and the school administration must find ways to overcome this ideal and bring parents into the program.
