

Beyond the Classroom...Why?

Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.

Theodore Roosevelt

Being selected as the Escambia County Teacher of the Year in 1985 was a great honor, a moment that caused me to reflect about the joys of the teaching profession. But, as I accepted the award, in my heart I recognized that I was simply a representative of many outstanding teachers who were also working to make a difference for students inside Escambia County classrooms.

As a special education teacher, I had a close look at what makes a classroom work and how to get students excited about learning. Yet, there is another element in education that is equally responsible for academic success: the administration. Without strong, positive, accountable leadership, no school is able to perform well.

Having excelled in the classroom, my reputation as a professional teacher, a hard worker and a person who could get things done caused the administration at the district level to seek me out to

become a district administrator. They convinced me that I could improve students' lives exponentially by helping to train other teachers to do the things that I had been doing. This logic is why I moved into administration.

At the district level I moved up through the ranks, serving as a staffing specialist, data specialist, program coordinator, and director. In each position, increased responsibility was given to me, and I improved both my own skills as well as the department to which I was assigned.

Currently, I serve as the Director of Evaluation Services which provides services to every school in the district. When I first accepted this position in 2003, the primary responsibility of the Director was to supervise the logistics of the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT), which had been implemented in 1999.

At that time, the students' scores on the FCAT were kept on a mainframe at the district level and were not available to individual teachers in the school. Each year, the teacher had the responsibility to teach the student but had very limited information about the student's strengths and weaknesses.

That situation seemed to me to be like trying to fly an airplane without the ability to see the instrument panel. Yes, you may be able to see out the window, weather permitting, but you have no way to definitely determine your altitude, fuel level, speed, direction and other important considerations.

With a secure password, it is now possible for every teacher in every school to access the students' scores from any computer at school or at home. When preparing lessons, teachers are able to see the skills that students have mastered and the skills they need to improve. They can now see the "teaching" instrument panel.

Since I have assumed the Director of Evaluation Services position, my supervisory roles have expanded to include Guidance Services, Health Services, Psychological Services, Audiological Services, School Social Workers, Media Services, District Textbook Inventory and State/District Testing and Evaluation. These experiences have allowed me to implement and fine tune many of the practices and principles outlined in this book. By creating a winning team attitude, I have learned we can overcome any obstacle. By practicing accountability

on all levels, we rise to the challenge and deliver better service, create innovative solutions and change the direction of our school district. By setting standards, tracking results and providing transparent accountability, we can significantly improve the education for students in Escambia County.

Observing the system through such wide-range perspectives has given me a more comprehensive understanding of the total system. I have been able to understand both the strengths and weaknesses of the school system. In addition, this viewpoint has allowed me to recognize problems in four major areas:

- student achievement,
- discipline and safety,
- low pay for employees, and
- transparency and accountability.

The recognition of the problem areas led me to develop a vision for our school system which would make each of these areas better.