

Address to Orange County Board of County Commissioners 02/19/08  
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Our community has the critical and collective responsibility to create conditions needed for success at every public school. All students who enter our doors, regardless of gender, country of origin, ethnicity, race, or socio-economic status must be valued and are therefore worthy of receiving the best possible education in the best possible learning environment in the best possible school facility in the most stable location that can be provided.

Our goal to achieve "unitary status" is rooted in this responsibility. The perpetuation of any condition that marginalizes any of our students is unacceptable. Students who are marginalized do not have the benefit of a richly diverse and dynamically rigorous educational experience that enables success in the competitive, complex worlds of college, the workplace and citizenship.

The reality is that the students at Evans High School for many reasons and many years have become increasingly marginalized. It is both the fault of many and the fault of none. This marginalization is anathema to equity and what is in the best interest of children. That is not okay.

In 2006, after extensive study and deep debate, the school board unanimously approved the superintendent's recommendation to rebuild Evans High School on its ninth grade center campus and a portion of the land that requires your approval here today.

This rebuilding plan is one more condition that can put Evans High School on a new path toward transformation and success... top-notch administration led by Principal David Christiansen, a strong faculty, a rigorous curriculum including International Baccalaureate and Global Technologies programs...., some of the best students on the planet..., and a new school built cost-effectively in a more stable location in the shortest period of time.

I leave you with a chapter in the history of our community that actually raised the hair on the back of my neck when I heard it. I attended the annual Trailblazers Luncheon sponsored by PAST, The Association to Preserve African American Society, History and Tradition, last Friday. A number of citizens were honored for their pivotal roles in the history of civil rights in our community. One gentleman was honored posthumously, George W. Johnson, II, a prominent attorney and school board member in the late 1940's and early 1950's. He was disturbed by the social order in Orlando. To quote from the luncheon agenda, "He recommended that Jones High School be relocated from the corner of Washington and Parramore

and be significantly expanded on a site at Cypress and Rio Grande...Members of that community voiced strong opposition to the relocation of Jones. They stressed concerns regarding increased crime and decreased land values as their motivation” ...We are now today hearing chilling echoes from that long-ago era... This is 2008.

The rebuilding of Evans High School is no longer simply a land use decision. It is unique, complex and there is a great deal at stake. I respectfully and fervently ask for your approval of this planned development so that we can fully and equitably serve the students of Evans High School.