

## **Fact: Orange schools are successful**

My Word by Anne Geiger; published October 21, 2008 in the Orlando Sentinel

As an outgoing member of the Orange County School Board who relinquished her seat voluntarily, I hold a unique "politics-free" perspective on our public schools. Some think I departed out of frustration. Not true. With critics taking periodic potshots at Superintendent Ron Blocker, the school board and school district, no wonder many are blind to indisputable success. Before deciding on a district wide elected school board chair this November, Orange County voters must know the facts that reveal high performance and strong leadership.

- \* OCPS has a new vision and strategic plan to be "the top producer of successful students in the nation."
- \* OCPS has earned an "A" school district grade from the Florida Department of Education (FDOE).
- \* Three-quarters of schools are high-performing "A" and "B," surpassing similar large districts in Tampa and Jacksonville, and approaching Palm Beach.
- \* Since 2004, 96% more students earned passing grades on Advanced Placement tests, and 500% more Hispanic and 600% more Black students have taken AP tests since 2001.
- \* Lee, Robinswood, Carver, Jackson and Memorial middle schools and Jones and Evans high schools are now accredited as International Baccalaureate World Schools (6th-10th), and Jones and Evans are IB Diploma Programme (11th-12th) candidates, adding to those at Glenridge Middle and Winter Park, University and Cypress Creek high schools.
- \* Initiated in 2005, OCPS's League of Educational Excellence is a cutting-edge model of middle and high school reform built on rigorous college-preparatory and career/technical instruction.
- \* Florida's 2008 Teacher of the Year was Rick Ellenburg, Camelot Elementary science teacher, and Jennifer Bohn, Evans High IB coordinator and Orange County's 2009 Teacher of the Year, was a Florida top five finalist.
- \* Since 2001, sixty-one existing schools have been or are being renovated; another eighty-two are in the pipeline. Most are funded by voter approved half-penny sales tax receipts. Thirty-seven new schools have opened since 2001.
- \* Per FDOE, OCPS ranks seventh lowest in administrative costs per student among Florida's sixty-seven districts and lowest among Florida's seven largest districts. OCPS has maintained A1, AA-, and A+ financial ratings for school construction bonds (COPs) and Standard & Poor's Financial Management Assessment is "Strong."

Various critics harbor special interests and seek control over district operations. They are promoting the district wide elected school board chair. This politician would have TWO votes in a tie, violating the democratic principle of one person, one vote. Voices of single member districts would be diluted. Accountability and organizational strength would be weakened due to the blurring of lines of authority between this powerful elected chair and appointed superintendent.

School leaders welcome dialogue about further improvements that move our public schools from good to great. We are all responsible for protecting the integrity and stability of our public schools, particularly in turbulent times. They are the vehicle for achieving the American Dream, not a playground for political mischief or opportunistic profit. If performance is high and leadership is strong, why is this powerful elected chair so important to special interest critics? Know the facts before you vote.

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