

## **Orange County Public Schools have goals to realize their vision**

Board member Rick Roach wrote a *My Word* sharing the vision statement for Orange County Public Schools: to be the top producer of successful students in the nation. He boldly challenged the notion that a countywide elected chair could do any better.

To underscore Mr. Roach's point, the vision statement is part of a comprehensive strategic plan developed by the school board and superintendent. Our plan includes the vision statement, a mission statement, and goals, along with measures and initiatives to drive district action.

The OCPS mission statement is: to lead our students to success with the support and involvement of families and community. Our goals are: intense focus on student achievement, a high performing and dedicated team, a safe learning and working environment, efficient operations, and sustained community engagement. Measures and 376 strategies are in place. A dashboard to review them is being assembled at [www.ocps.net](http://www.ocps.net).

A "mystery writer's" assertion that our vision statement is really a goal and could be better does not justify OCPS being used as a guinea pig for an experimental governance model, one that creates an eighth board member elected countywide with two votes in the event of a tie and the title of chairman for four years. This is not a CEO position like a "strong mayor."

OCPS is not perfect, but it is nowhere near the failing school district some would have you believe. This is the third year in a row OCPS earned a B under Florida's demanding school accountability measures. In fact, 70 percent of its 165 graded K-12 schools earned A or B despite higher standards. *Newsweek* magazine recognized 11 of Orange County's 17 high schools as among the top five percent in the nation for academically rigorous course offerings.

Furthermore, OCPS set or equaled historic district highs in 17 of 22 FCAT assessments. We set a new district record this year for the percentage of students scoring at grade level 3 and above in FCAT Reading and FCAT Math, as well as for students scoring level 4 and above in FCAT Writing. Despite the challenges we face as a large urban school district with high mobility and poverty, our dropout rate last year was half the state average (1.7 vs. 3.3 percent). When you compare similar counties to one another, OCPS is the second highest performing district in the state!

Our school district and community can be very proud of these accomplishments, yet our work is not done. There is no silver bullet. Becoming number one in the nation requires hard work and commitment.

I challenge residents, businesses, government, faith communities and media to work with OCPS to build on the progress we've made. Our students deserve it. Our success depends on it.

*Karen Ardaman is chairman of the Orange County School Board.*