

REPORT OF THE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES STEERING COMMITTEE

Prepared For

The Greater Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce

May 24, 2011

“We’ve spent a generation trying to reorganize schools to make them better, but the truth is that people learn from the people they love.”¹

¹Brooks, David. *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character and Achievement*, Random House, NY (2011)

PREFACE

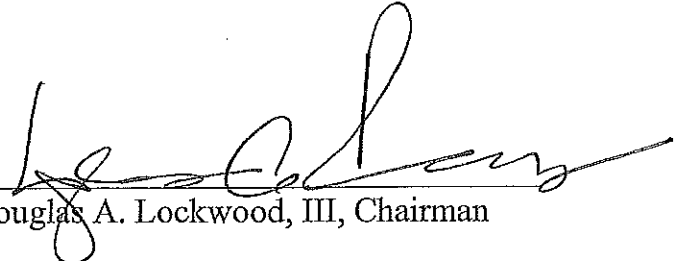
The Greater Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce (the "Chamber") is dedicated to the support of public education in Winter Haven. Our community's prosperity undeniably depends on the educational outcomes of its schools. Out of concern for the quality of our schools, the Chamber formed the Educational Outcomes Steering Committee (the "Committee"), to survey Winter Haven's public schools and to recommend strategies to improve the schools through the involvement of every sector of the community. The members of the Committee sincerely hope that this report accomplishes its purpose, even if it serves only as an outline of the vision ahead of us - a committed community devoted to the belief that every child deserves the best education we can provide.

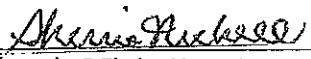
The preparation of this report involved months of interviews, research, presentations, meetings, and discussions with enumerable educators, business men and women, students, and concerned citizens. Yet the Committee only scratched the surface in the time allotted. As discussed in this report, significant improvement will require the concerted effort of the entire community, citizens and educators alike, to achieve the results our children deserve. The sweep of the issues that affect our public schools is daunting and not unique to Winter Haven. The same challenges impact school districts throughout the United States. Few problems with public education today are solvable without a sustained public commitment to address them. For that reason, the Committee hopes that this report is only the start of a sustained community effort to substantively improve the educational outcomes of our local schools.


Although we have reason for concern over the quality of our schools, the many successes of our schools are impressive and should motivate all of us to engage in the work of helping our children achieve their best. The passion of many of the teachers and administrators interviewed by members of the Committee was evident, sincere, and compelling. Good teachers teach because they love teaching; this despite the difficult challenges facing their profession. These educators deserve respect, recognition, and support.


Finally, the Committee thanks the Chamber for its commitment to the schools and the privilege of serving on this Committee. It also thanks all those who participated in this effort, including all the many officials and staff with the City of Winter Haven and the Polk County School Board, and those citizens of Winter Haven vitally concerned about the education of our children. Indeed, the community interest in this project has been both astonishing and heartening. Equally impressive are the many talents of those

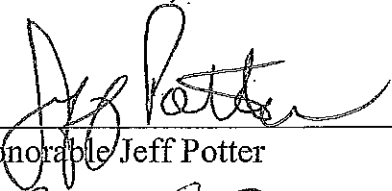
who have already agreed to join this effort. Without doubt, Winter Haven has the talent and resources to make this educational mission to elevate the quality of our schools a reality, the impact of which will enhance the quality of life for all its citizens.


Douglas A. Lockwood, III, Chairman


Sherrie Nickell, Ed.D.


Eileen Holden, Ed.D.


Samuel Bennett, Ed.D.


Honorable Jeff Potter

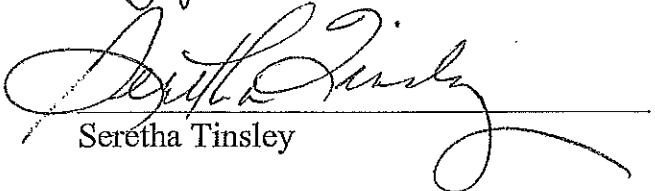

Seretha Tinsley

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Chamber selected the following individuals to serve on the Committee: Dr. Eileen Holden, the President of Polk State College ("PSC"); Dr. Samuel Bennett, the Dean of the College of Education at Southeastern University; the Honorable Jeff Potter, the Mayor of Winter Haven; Dr. Sherrie Nickell, the Superintendent of the Polk County School District (the "District"); Seretha Tinsley, an owner of PenGeo, Inc. and related business entities; and Douglas A. Lockwood, III, an attorney with Peterson & Myers, P.A. Others involved in the efforts of the Committee included Dr. Sharon Miller, Nat West, Suzanne Threadgill, Dr. John Stewart, Thomas Costello, Honorable Edward Threadgill, Charles McPherson, Tom Oldt, Bob Gernert, the Executive Director of the Chamber, and Cindy Price, President of the Chamber, not to mention many others who have contributed to this initiative over the past few months.

The Chamber requested that the Committee examine Winter Haven's public school system. It was the Chamber's intent that the Committee's study would "involve the consultation and collaboration with all sectors of the Winter Haven community with the goal of identifying ways to significantly improve the quality of these schools." The purpose of the initiative was to build a "consensus of the business, educational, professional, civic, governmental and minority communities" to partner with educators to improve public education. The Committee recognizes that substantive changes will take the resolve of the entire community and time to implement. As such, the Committee

determined that the implementation and continued success of any significant changes will require a protracted commitment by all of us into the future. In fact, the Committee's central recommendation in this report is the creation of a community organization to partner with educators, students, businesses, government, and others to advance the goal of a quality public education for all the children in Winter Haven.

In working toward these objectives, the Committee interviewed teachers and administrators at Winter Haven High School ("WHHS"), Lake Region High School ("LRHS"), Denison Middle School ("Denison"), Westwood Middle School ("Westwood"), Jewett Academy ("Jewett"), Brigham Academy ("Brigham"), Elbert Elementary ("Elbert"), Garner Elementary ("Garner"), Inwood Elementary ("Inwood"), Lake Shipp Elementary ("Lake Shipp"), Wahneta Elementary ("Wahneta"), Jewett Middle Academy ("Jewett Middle"), Jewett School of the Arts ("Jewett Arts"), Snively Elementary ("Snively"), and Pinewood Elementary ("Pinewood"). With the assistance of the Chamber, the Committee prepared a survey sent via email to over 700 of its members to assess the business community's perceptions of public education and its level of commitment to improve the schools.

Committee members spoke to various civic leaders, parents, students, elected officials, teachers, administrators, minority organizations, school board representatives, and community leaders to assess the community's views and opinions of the public schools. The Committee examined the current conditions within the schools, solicited

ideas for improvement, formulated plans for meaningful change and developed community based strategies to implement recommended changes. During this process, moreover, the Committee has sought to identify leaders within the community who are committed to quality public education, and to determine the level of the community's commitment for expanded community involvement in the schools. Lastly, the Committee sought to determine whether there is a consensus within the community to implement certain strategies toward the goal of materially improving the schools.

Initially, the Committee's focus was principally directed at WHHS, Denison and Westwood. The reception of the community, however, was so enthusiastic that the scope of this initiative expanded to the elementary schools, LRHS, and the other public schools within the greater Winter Haven area. This expansion in the sweep of the Committee's efforts was also a response to the recognition that the learning students receive in elementary school impacts their performance in middle and high school, and that the schools affect each other in myriad ways that require that all the schools be viewed as an integral whole.

The Committee believes that a review of the history of Winter Haven's schools and of the changes that have occurred socially and legislatively over the decades is necessary to understand the reasons for the current conditions within the schools. More importantly, any proposed change must be assessed in the context of the historical, societal, political and legal environments in which our schools operate. Accordingly, this report will briefly

address some of those factors that impact our local schools. This report, however, is not intended as a comprehensive treatment of these issues, but as a summary which the Committee hopes will increase the community's understanding that a deeper involvement with the schools is imperative - particularly during these difficult times for public education.

II. A HISTORY OF WINTER HAVEN SCHOOLS

Miss Bessie Walker taught seven pupils when Winter Haven's first school building opened in 1886.² It was located on the second floor of Boyd's Hall, a two story white building constructed by Colonel Laird Boyd who migrated to Winter Haven from Lewisburg, Tennessee, with his wife and eight children in 1883.³ A grocery store operated on the first floor of the Boyd's Hall. This was a treat for the children because during recess they would rush down the stairs to buy penny candy. As enjoyable as school must have been for those first students, Miss Walker didn't fare so well - she became ill in the middle of the term that year and left. She was replaced by Miss Annie Gibbons, who taught in the Winter Haven schools until 1893.⁴

By 1890, a wooden frame school building was constructed on Central Avenue where the present day U.S. Post Office is located in downtown Winter Haven. Then in 1909, an annex was added by S.W. Byrson, a contractor who moved to Winter Haven in 1889 and built many of the early homes. During this time most students who attended

² Hetherington, M.F. History of Polk County Florida. St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1928. Print. 135.

³ Burr, Josephine G. History of Winter Haven Florida. The Larry Burr Printing Company, 1974. Print. 16, 23.

⁴ Annie Gibbons was educated at Summerlin Institute in Bartow and graduated in 1892. While attending school, she boarded with Ms. Zipperer in Bartow and worked her way through school. On the weekends she would ride her pony from Bartow to Waverly area where she cooked and cleaned house for her widowed father. Burr, p. 27.

high school traveled to Rollins College or Stetson University⁵ which operated high school academies.⁶ In 1915, Winter Haven had its first high school graduation. By that time the school had outgrown its facilities because of the significant population growth during the early 1900's.⁷

W.W. Mann, a contractor, citrus grower, city councilman, county school board member, merchant, hotelier - and most interestingly, a Wyatt Earp look alike, decided Winter Haven needed a new school building.⁸ Plans were drawn to build a red brick structure with room for an auditorium, a cafeteria, and enough classrooms for 12 grades. Some in the community criticized the scope of the project believing that the town would never need such a large structure. After all, the construction cost of the school was \$30,000! The school was completed in 1915, but the student population during the Florida boom soared and a separate high school building was constructed in 1922 at the current location of Denison Middle School.

During the Florida boom, Winter Haven grew so rapidly that in 1925, a large, new two-story Mediterranean-style stucco high school building was erected next to the

⁵ Stetson University is Florida's oldest private University and was founded in 1883. Rollins College in Winter Park was founded 1885.

⁶ Burr, p. 104.

⁷ Just years earlier around 1887 the population of Winter Haven was estimated at 100. Burr, p. 30.

⁸ In 1905, W.W. Mann opened a country store where Arabella's is today and owned multiple businesses in Winter Haven during his lifetime. Burr, p. 58.

building built in 1922 on the site where Denison's campus is located today, and the high school built ten years earlier on Central Avenue became Central Grammar School. When Winter Haven High School ("WHHS") moved to its current location in the mid 1950's, the building became Denison Junior High School. Unfortunately, this architecturally interesting building was demolished when the current building for Denison Middle School was constructed in 1971.

For those who enjoy nostalgia, and for those students at WHHS who work on the yearbook, the first WHHS yearbook was published in 1917. It was named *Wha Hwa Hta See*, which is a Chippewa Indian word meaning "Little Firefly" and taken from "The Song of Hiawatha," a popular poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The following is the text from the preface of the 1917 yearbook:

The Wha Hwa Hta See is no longer a dream in the minds of our boys and girls, but a reality. It is our wish to give its readers some of the activities of our school life. It records the reminiscences, yes, the fun and frivolities of our student body. It will give some conception of the school's phenomenal growth during the past four years. It will show how the school has grown from six teachers to seventeen, that department after department has been added, making the school second to none in the state, and the most up-to-date and progressive in Polk County. Then you may watch for the announcement of other departments from time to time.

In 1917, there were only 12 students in the graduating senior class, all of whom held impressive positions of leadership in the school which included Mary Moulton, the poet, and Ruth Marshall, the prophet. Speaking of prophets, Dick Pope, the founder of

Cypress Gardens, was a junior that year. When he first pitched the idea of Cypress Gardens, few called him a prophet; but he turned out to be a visionary who knew that Florida's tourism industry would profoundly accelerate Florida's growth.⁹

As time marched on and through the 20's, 30's, 40's and 50's elementary schools were constructed in Winter Haven as Denison Junior High and WHHS grew over the decades. Inwood Elementary was built in 1927, Brigham in 1951, Garner in 1955, and Westwood in 1961. In 1947, the Winter Haven community decided to build a football stadium at Denison Field. Not surprisingly, the Quarterback Club of Winter Haven solidly backed the initiative. The construction was a community effort, and such community leaders at the time as Harry E. King, W.H. Hamilton, and C.N. McElvey were involved in different aspects of the project. At a cost of \$40,000, Memorial Stadium was dedicated at a Friday night football game on October 17, 1947. Memorial Stadium still serves as the venue for WHHS's home football games and other events thanks to the vision of these community leaders.

As Winter Haven's schools grew over the decades, so did the Polk County School District (the "District"). In 1881, Polk County only had eleven organized schools with a total of 242 students. The cost to operate all these schools was only \$2,200, but just \$1,400 was generated that school year from the three millage tax levied as real property

⁹ Burr, p. 311.

taxes in the county.¹⁰ For additional income, the schools collected \$1.50 from each student that year to operate. When the dust settled, however, "[t]he school fund was in debt - as usual - the indebtedness being about \$500."

By the end of 1882, the number of organized schools grew to 36 and the tax revenues for the schools increased to \$2,054.11.¹¹ As a consequence, "the school fund was nearly out of debt." Teachers in 1887 were customarily paid \$40 a month, plus a housing allowance of \$10 to enable . . . [them] to pay their own board."¹² During this time Polk County had its first official school superintendent, John Snoddy, who served in that capacity until 1888.

From the \$2,200 in 1881, the District's budget has grown to \$774,400,000 for the 2010-2011 budget year. Today more than 95,000 students are enrolled in the 160 schools and other learning centers in the county. The District is the largest employer in Polk County, making it among the largest 40 school districts in the nation. Polk County is one of Florida's largest counties covering more than 1,850 square miles. The logistics of moving students to and from the schools is complex. With its fleet of 550 school buses, 50,000 students travel each school day a total of 52,500 miles. The circumference of the earth at the equator is only 24,901.55 miles!

¹⁰ By 1902, the millage rate for the schools had risen to 5 mills, or \$5.00 for every taxable value of \$1,000. Burr at 55. Currently, the millage rate is 7.792 for the District.

¹¹ Hetherington, p. 168.

¹² Ibid.

To appreciate how dramatically education in Polk County has changed from the 1870's to the present, a reading of D.H. Sloan's description of his education at the time is revealing:¹³

In early times there were only log school houses in the county, except in the two villages of Bartow and Fort Meade. There were no desks, even the teacher had none, and the pupils held their books in their laps. There were no stoves, and only an occasional open fireplace. When it was too cold to sit in the log building, with cracks in the wall and open floors, school would adjourn to the outdoors, the pupils sitting around log heap fires, often in a drizzling rain. There were few roads to school - only cattle or pig trails. The average school term was three months, seldom more than four. The pupils were taught by faithful, God-fearing, rod-using teachers, and teaching then did not consist of merely hearing lessons, nor did it require years before the pupils were able to spell and to read intelligently. The boys tried to please the girls, and sometimes the girls tried to look sweet - and did look sweet - at the boys. These were never-to-be-forgotten days. The boys ran off to fishing holes, to the woods to gather grapes or other fruits, but seldom played hooky. Wrong-doing meant a severe licking at school, and the same remedy at home. I and many others alternated in going to school with cotton picking (nearly every little farm then had its cotton patch), potato digging, hog killing, etc. Children learned how to talk, and spell and figure, as we termed it. Being raised thus, I could appreciate the need of better conditions for the children of the later day. I got through the Florida Legislature a district school bonding bill, and we now have buildings finer than we really need, and terms so long that children get completely tired out, so they can neither study or learn. So it goes - none of our systems, conditions or methods are perfect. Back to the

¹³ D.H. Sloan was born ten miles north of Lakeland in 1864. His parents were among the first settlers. D.H. Sloan became one of the county's leading citizens serving on the Lakeland City Council, the District School Board, and as a state representative and a one term Florida state senator. Hetherington, p. 167.

old log school house, its open cracks, and the pig trails leading to it - never! But God give us again the godly, patient, helpful teaching spirit of the good old days.

Perhaps Mr. Sloan's prayer to a return "of the godly, patient, helpful teaching spirit of the good old days" is worth our consideration today in the midst of the second decade of the 21st century.

This brief description of Winter Haven's schools would not be complete without a history of its segregated schools for its African-Americans. That story begins with Dr. Mary B. Jewett, one of Winter Haven's earliest benefactors and community activists. Dr. Jewett had visited relatives here for years before she permanently moved from New York City to Winter Haven in 1911 while in her early 50's. Her sister was married to Dr. Fred Inman, a pioneer who had moved to Winter Haven in 1887. Although Dr. Inman was a surgeon, he had become interested in agriculture, purchased significant acreage around Lake Spring, and planted vegetables and citrus groves. The work needed for Dr. Inman's agricultural interests attracted African-American workers into the area around the present day Florence Villa community of Winter Haven. The black community grew, but the educational opportunities for their children were sparse, if anything at all.

So the early 1920's, Dr. Jewett donated land, money and assisted in raising monies from others for a training school for African-American children. This school served students from Pughsville in southwest Winter Haven to Auburndale and other surrounding areas. From this start, Jewett Primary Grade School was born, and later

Jewett High School and Jewett Elementary were named in her memory. Because of segregation, the schools in Florence Villa became the center of community life for its African-American residents. Moreover, these schools formed the hub of African-American education and culture, drawing students from Polk City, Lake Alfred, Lucerne Park, Pughsville, Carters' Corner, and Inwood. According to local historian Ulysses Johnson, a school play was a major community event, and "you would have thought you were on Broadway" when the students performed.¹⁴

The Florence Villa Training School was built in 1924 at a cost of \$20,000. The original ledger sheet listing the financial contributors to build the school is shown below:

Florence Villa Trg. School,		Fla.
Polk County,		1682
Five acres of land,		
Six-teacher type		
Built under the 1924-25 budget,		
Application		No. 2-D
Total cost		\$20,000
Negroes	\$2,000	<i>This school paid all furnishing and completely destroyed by fire about 4:00 A.M. 14 January 45</i>
Whites	11,500	
Public	5,000	
Rosenwald	1,500	

Mr. P's Record

¹⁴ Personal interview with U.J. Johnson. April 7, 2011.

Only \$5,000 came from the public coffers. Julius Rosenwald, one of the founders of Sears & Roebuck Co. and a friend of Dr. Jewett, contributed \$1,500.¹⁵ Tragically, this first school for African-Americans was destroyed by fire around 4:00 a.m. on the morning of January 17, 1925.

Undeterred by this setback, Dr. Jewett simply proceeded to build another, larger school elsewhere. During the 1920's and most of the 1930's, the Florence Villa Training School only offered up to an 8th grade education. It wasn't until 1939 that the school graduated its first high school class, which was the first time an African-American could receive a high school diploma in Winter Haven. Dr. Jewett, community activist, accomplished physician and visionary, died in February 1928, but not before she had greatly impacted our community.¹⁶

Although the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954 ruled in Brown v. Board of Education that segregation in the nation's public schools was unconstitutional, Winter Haven's schools remained segregated until 1969, and even then integration wasn't accomplished to the satisfaction of the federal courts until years later. One of the casualties of desegregation was the elimination of Jewett Elementary and Jewett High School as neighborhood

¹⁵ The Rosenwald Fund initiated a rural school building program for African-American students primarily in the South and contributed to the construction of more than 5,000 schools. <http://www.searsarchives.com/people/juliusrosenwald.htm>

¹⁶ Among Dr. Jewett's many accomplishments was her founding of the Women's Civic League. Winter Haven's History Museum is located on Lake Howard in the building that was built to house the Women's Civic League for years. She founded the public library, spearheaded the beautification of Central Park, and led the fight against the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad to remove an unsightly train depot on Central Avenue. She was obviously a force to be reckoned with. Burr, p. 372.

schools. Both schools are now successful magnet schools of choice - Jewett Middle School Academy and Jewett School of the Arts. The transition of these schools to magnet schools was designed to accomplish certain criteria for desegregation resulting from years of litigation. Culturally and socially, these schools meant much to the Florence Villa community. Even today, some within the Winter Haven African-American community see the elimination of its community schools as a profound loss for its community that reverberates today.

Continued population growth of the greater Winter Haven area in the late 20th century resulted in the construction of a new high school. In 1995, Lake Region High School ("LRHS") was built in Eagle Lake. LRHS serves children residing in north Bartow, Eagle Lake, and south Winter Haven. LRHS draws most of its students from Winter Haven's public middle schools - Westwood, Denison and Jewett Academy. WHHS and LRHS are considered neighborhood schools, which means that students matriculate to these schools based on the location of their primary residence.

An increasingly integral part of the Winter Haven public schools is Polk State College ("PSC"), which began in 1964 as Polk Junior College built on the former public golf course between Lake Martha and Lake Elbert. PSC is a multi-campus public institution serving the higher education needs of Polk County. Over the years, PSC has undergone tremendous growth and change and now serves 14,000 degree-seeking credit students and 8,000 non-credit students. Currently, PSC operates two full-service

campuses in Winter Haven and Lakeland and two centers in Lake Wales and Airside Center southwest of Lakeland. PSC recently purchased land in Haines City for a future site and construction is underway for an Advanced Technology Center in Bartow. PSC offers certificate, associate and bachelor's degrees to meet the educational and workforce needs of our changing society. Most of Polk State College's students reside in Polk County.

The Winter Haven campus, which sits on 99 acres, annually serves over 8,000 degree-seeking credit students and 500 non-credit students in a wide variety of certificate, associate and bachelor's degree programs. The campus consists of 11 buildings with a current replacement value in excess of \$65 million.

Construction is underway on the Winter Haven campus for a new 15,000 square foot building to house the Chain of Lakes Collegiate ("COL") High School, a charter high school that allows students to earn college credit and complete their 11th and 12th year of high school simultaneously. The COL Class of 2010 had the highest graduation rate of any Polk County high school and the graduates earned an average of 42 college credits.

The graduates from WHHS and LRHS have many options for a college education in Polk County. Florida Southern College, founded in 1921, is located in Lakeland, as is a branch of the University of South Florida ("USF"). A growing Southeastern University is also located in Lakeland. Warner Southern College and Webber International University are located in Lake Wales and Babson Park, respectively. Most recently, USF

Polytechnic has announced plans to start construction of a new campus near Lakeland.

All of these colleges and universities have some ties to the high schools in Winter Haven to a greater or lesser extent.

Winter Haven's public schools consist of WHHS, LRHS, Denison Middle School, Westwood Middle School, Jewett Middle School Academy, Elbert Elementary, Jewett School of the Arts, Wahneta Elementary, Snively Elementary, Chain of Lakes Elementary, Garden Grove Elementary, Brigham Academy, Inwood Elementary, Garner Elementary, and Lake Shipp Elementary.¹⁷ Chain of Lakes Collegiate High School is a public charter school that is a college preparatory school located at PSC. New Beginnings High School is a charter school that serves students who previously left high school before graduating, but who want to return to complete the requirements for graduation. Hartridge Academy is a charter elementary school that serves about 150 students in grades K-5.

Winter Haven is Polk County's second largest city. As a percentage of growth, Winter Haven grew faster than Lakeland over the last decade. Demographers predict that Winter Haven will continue its robust growth into the foreseeable future. For that reason, we can expect the construction of new schools and the expansion of existing schools well into the future.

¹⁷ Attached as Appendix A is the demographics and other attributes of the students who attend these schools.

III. THE LAWS IMPACTING PUBLIC EDUCATION

Federal and Florida legislative mandates set the course for Winter Haven's public schools. Those laws, including the regulations implementing them promulgated by the United States Department of Education ("DOE") and the Florida Department of Education ("FDOE"), have created the learning environments in our schools today. Principals lead and teachers teach, but these laws and regulations drive or impact almost every decision made in the schools: from the curriculum that is taught, to the food that is served in the cafeteria, to how money is spent and resources allocated within the local schools. A brief description of the most significant of these laws is necessary to understand the extent of the national and state government's involvement in local public education.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 ("NCLB"), was signed into law by President George Bush on January 8, 2001.¹⁸ NCLB expanded the role of the federal government in the public school systems throughout the United States. The legislation was intended to reverse the perceived decline in the quality of public education as described in A Nation at

¹⁸ The NCLB is a nearly 1,100 page document that represented a substantial modification of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. With significant bipartisanship support, the NCLB passed with huge majorities in the House and Senate. One of the sponsors of NCLB, Senator Edward Kennedy, tied the enactment of NCLB as fundamental to the future of democracy, liberty, and of the United States in leading the free world. "Democrats liked the expansion of the federal role in education, and the Republicans liked the law's support for accountability and choice. . . ." Ravitch, Diane: The Death and Life of the Great American School System. New York: Basic Books, 2011. 94-95

Risk, a report prepared by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983.¹⁹

The report described a steady erosion of academics and attributed the decline to the curriculum and policies within the nation's schools. A Nation at Risk described the superior achievements of other countries, which caused considerable alarm throughout the country.

In her recent book The Life of the Great American School System, Diane Ravitch described the public's reaction to the report:

The report was an immediate sensation. Its conclusions were alarming, and its language was blunt to the point of being incendiary. It opened the claim that "the educational foundation of our society is presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur - others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments." The nation it warned, has "been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament." Beset by conflicting demands, our educational institutions "seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined efforts needed to obtain them."²⁰

The national legislative response to A Nation at Risk took years to formulate. The elixir Congress developed was the NCLB.

NCLB created many programs and is complex, but its primary thrust is assessment and accountability. NCLB's accountability plan is summarized as follows:

1. Each state is required to choose its own tests to measure student proficiency.

¹⁹ Many commentators suggest that the United States is continuing to lose ground academically, especially when compared to other countries. See Darling-Hammond, Linda. The Flat World and Education. New York: Teachers College Press, 2010. 13-17.

²⁰ Ravitch, p. 24.

2. Any school receiving federal funding must administer these proficiency tests to their students in grades three through eight annually, and once in high school in reading and mathematics.

3. All the states are required to develop a plan with timelines describing how all their students would become proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014.

4. All the schools are expected to make educational gains in the performance of all students, regardless of background, toward 100% proficiency by 2014. This standard of measurement is known as "adequate yearly progress," or AYP.

5. If schools fail to make adequate progress toward the goal of 100 percent proficiency, the federal government may impose serious consequences, including "corrective action," a restructuring of the school, or even closure.

Florida's proficiency test for students is the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (the "FCAT"). FCAT tests are given students in Winter Haven's public schools as described under Florida law.²¹ As a test, the FCAT's content must align with the curriculum content established in the Sunshine State Standards - a description of certain knowledge and skills that Florida public school students are expected to acquire in the language arts, science, mathematics and social studies.²² There are many assessment tests administered to students in Winter Haven's public schools, but the FCAT is critically important because it is used to

²¹ §1008.22, Fla. Stat. (2010)

²² §1003.4, Fla. Stat. (2010)

determine whether a school meets the criteria for achieving its adequate yearly progress; but more importantly, whether a student graduates from high school. For these reasons, the FCAT has become the topic of much discussion, criticism and debate as was evident from the Committee's interviews of educators, concerned citizens, and students. The FCAT is not a test to establish a minimum educational standard. It is a difficult test.²³

The State of Florida's involvement in public school education is as complex and involved as the federal government's. Most Florida laws that involve the public schools are found in the Florida K-20 Education Code, which is embodied in the 583 pages of Sections 1001.01-1013.83, Florida Statutes (2010). Interestingly, the K-20 Education Code states that "[p]arents, students, families, educational institutions, and communities are collaborative partners in education, and each plays an important role in the success of individual students."²⁴ These state laws, however, seemingly address every imaginable aspect of running Florida's public schools, arguably leaving the chaff for the local schools and community.

Similar to NCLB, the Florida K-20 Education Code emphasizes assessment and accountability. Florida's Sunshine State Standards predated NCLB. "The primary purposes of Florida's student assessment program are to provide information needed to improve the public schools by enhancing the learning gains of all students and to inform parents of the

²³ A sample from the 10th grade FCAT 2.0 for reading is attached to this report as Appendix B.

²⁴ §1000.03(5)(f), Fla. Stat. (2010)

educational progress of their public school children."²⁵ The FCAT is Florida's primary student performance tool and the school grade is the most public manifestation of FDOE's assessment tool for the individual schools.

The calculation of a high school's grade is a complicated mixture of FCAT scores, student learning gains, academic "improvement of the lowest 25th percentile of students . . .", graduation rates, performance and participation in College Board Advanced Placement ("AP"), International Baccalaureate ("IB"), dual enrollment courses, and student achievement of national certification programs earned while at school. The formula is tweaked up or down in a variety of ways and intentionally statistically biased to encourage the academic improvement of "at risk" students.

Because a school's grade is determined as the result of a statistical blend of a multitude of diverse data, it is difficult to understand the reasons for a particular school's grade without dissecting the data. Moreover, the school grade is a moving target. The method by which the grade is calculated has changed 5 times over the last 10 years. For example, the definition of "graduation rate" changed for school year 2010-2011, and the FCAT 2.0 in reading, administered for the first time this school year, was intended as a more difficult test from prior years. Just these two factors may make it more difficult for high schools in Florida to raise their school grades.

²⁵ §1088.22(1), Fla. Stat. (2010)

Wilma Ferrer is the senior director of the Polk County School Board's Department of Assessment, Accountability and Evaluation. On March 24, 2011, she presented a power point presentation to the Committee which described the methods used to calculate the school grade. Moreover, she compiled and presented the underlying data used to determine the 2010 school grades for Winter Haven's schools.²⁶ This mass of statistical data is assembled by teachers, principals, and administrators who devote substantial time to implement the prevailing philosophy that assessment and accountability are the linchpins to a better education.

The school grades for Winter Haven's schools from 2000 to 2010 are shown below:

	<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>
Brigham	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Elbert	A	C	B	A	B	B	A	B	B	B	C
Garner	D	C	C	A	B	B	B	C	C	C	C
Garden Grove	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	B
Inwood	A	A	A	B	A	A	C	A	B	B	C
Jewett (Arts)	A	A	A	A	B	B	A	A	A	A	B
Lake Shipp	C	C	C	B	C	D	A	A	B	B	C
Pinewood	-	-	C	B	B	A	C	A	B	B	A
Snively	B	B	B	C	A	C	A	C	C	B	C
Wahneta	C	C	A	A	B	D	A	C	C	C	C
Denison	A	A	B	B	I	C	B	C	C	B	C
Jewett Academy	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Westwood	C	C	C	B	C	C	B	B	B	B	B
LRHS	C	C	C	C	C	C	D	D	D	C	C
WHHS	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	D	C	D	D

The collective average of all these grades gives Winter Haven's public schools a grade point average of 2.92 over a period of ten (10) years. The year to year averages have

²⁶ The power point presentation and the statistical information used to calculate the school grades for Winter Haven's public schools are included in Appendix C to this report.

not improved. In 2000, the school grade average for Winter Haven's public schools was 2.93, in 2010 it was 2.53. The average grade from 2000-2010 for WHHS and LRHS is 1.7 - a disappointing average. But exclusively focusing on a school's grade does not tell the whole story, and unfortunately, does little to inform the public of the specific strengths and weaknesses of any given school.²⁷

As an example, WHHS received a D grade in 2009 and 2010, but in 2010 WHHS increased its graduation rate to 85.6%, exceeding the state and national averages. This increase gave WHHS additional points toward its grade because of the improved graduation rates of students that FDOE defines as "at risk" students. Moreover, WHHS increased the reading proficiency of its students by 3 percent from the prior year, increased by 2 percent its Adequate Yearly Progress ("AYP") requirements, and significantly increased reading and math proficiency among its Hispanic students who represent 12.6% of WHHS's student body. Because, however, the percentage of lackluster FCAT reading results decreased from 41% to 39% among the "lowest 25th percentile of students in reading . . .", WHHS was penalized statistically in the calculation of the school grade.²⁸ Instead of a C, WHHS received a D for its 2009-2010 school year grade because of this factor alone.

²⁷ Because of the complexity involved in the calculations of the school grade, even the accuracy of the grade is debatable. As reported in the April 30, 2011 issue of the St. Petersburg Times, three Pinellas high schools, Gibbs, Dixie Hollins and Pinellas Park, earned higher grades than they were given based on the corrected data that the Pinellas County School Board submitted to the FDOE. After the school grades were released in December, 2010, "district officials said they caught more errors . . .". Because the District missed the deadline to submit the corrected data, FDOE refused to change the school grades. "Grades for 3 schools are wrong" St. Petersburg Times, 30 April 2011, p.1B.

²⁸ §1008.34(3)(b)(1)(c), Fla. Stat. (2010)

Public education today is directed by federal and state mandates that school systems must follow to receive public funding. Because NCLB and the Florida K-20 Education Code established assessment and accountability as their mantra, testing and measurement are emphasized, and FCAT and school grades are the result. An increasing number of educators believe that this approach has failed.²⁹ Others believe that accountability and assessment are important, but that the approach to measure gains in education should change.³⁰

Based on the Committee's interviews of local educators and community groups, many in the community believe that the impact of this narrow approach to assessing Winter

²⁹ In Richard Rothstein's introduction to his book Grading Education: Getting Accountability Right, he states:

No Child Left Behind was an utter failure, and in 2007 and 2008 Congress refused to re-authorize it in anything like its original form. Parents, teachers, school administrators, school board members, and state legislators were vocal about their contempt for NCLB's consequences. Although many policy activists admired the law's requirement that schools be held accountable for the performance of minority as well as middle-class white students, few believed that the law succeeded in improving American education - and many concluded that the law did great harm. Yet, despite widespread dissatisfaction with NCLB, Congress has been unable to devise a reasonable alternative and so, as of September 2008, NCLB remains on the books.

³⁰ Diane Ravitch describes what might constitute a useful accountability strategy. On page 163 of The Death and Life of the Great American School System, she states:

NCLB assumes that accountability based solely on test scores will reform American education. This is a mistake. A good accountability system must include professional judgment, not simply a test score, and other measures of students' achievement, such as grades, teachers' evaluations, student work, attendance, and graduation rates. It should also report what the school and the district are providing in terms of resources, class sizes, space, well-educated teachers, and a well-rounded curriculum. Furthermore, a good accountability system might include an external inspection of schools by trained observers to evaluate their quality on a regular schedule, though not necessarily every single year.

Haven's schools has hurt education more than helped. Perhaps it is another example of the unintended consequences arising from a naive belief that complex social problems can be solved with the simple public policy fix of more legislation.

Inevitably, the laws will change. But for foreseeable future, any community effort to improve Winter Haven's schools will have to work within the federal and state legislative framework for public education currently in place. Consequently, the recommendations contained in this report all assume that the existing legal framework of the public schools will continue into the foreseeable future.

IV. THE CHALLENGES

About 13,000 children attended Winter Haven's public schools during the 2009-2010 school year. The number of students enrolled has remained steady over the past five years, but the demographic composition of its student body has noticeably shifted with an increase of Hispanic students from 17.0% to 21.6%, a decrease of Caucasian students from 54.7% to 45.2%, and an increase in the percentage of African-American students from 25.5% to 29.49%. The data showing the increasing number of students receiving free and reduced lunch evidences attendance of significant numbers of students from low income families.³¹

Based upon many of the Committee's interviews of teachers and administrators within the schools, the Great Recession has adversely impacted many families contributing to increased student absenteeism and some of the social pressures experienced by many of the students and their families. Several schools, Chain of Lakes Elementary, Denison, Garner, Westwood, WHHS and LRHS have chronic student absenteeism of over 10%. According to the most recent data, absenteeism has further escalated during the current school year, which was a problem many of the teachers and administrators discussed during interviews with the Committee.

³¹ Poverty affects educational outcomes. In the New York Times opinion page on April 25, 2011, columnist Joe Nocera discusses the interplay of the school reform movement and those who suggest that socioeconomic factors predominantly affect educational outcomes. This debate is waged within our community based on the many interviews completed during this initiative. If anything, this debate emphasizes the interconnection between economic development and educational success. They both depend upon the other. The better the schools, the better the local economy, and *vice versa*. As citizens of this community, it is our duty to improve both.

Statistics tell only a part of the story. To more fully understand the conditions within Winter Haven's public schools, the Committee decided to interview teachers, principals, administrators, and students. Most of these interviews included a tour of the facilities, discussions with students,³² and information about special programs like the career academies, ROTC, band programs and athletics. The denouement of these face-to-face discussions was as informative as any statistical analysis of the current conditions within the schools.

The following is a collection of the summaries and specific comments from teachers and administrators at Denison, Westwood, WHHS, LRHS, and the elementary schools. The interviews were voluntary and conducted over the course of the past several months. Although the interviewers were armed with an outline of questions, most of the opinions expressed by the educators were in response to the conversations that ensued during the interviews. All of those who volunteered were assured that any comments or opinions expressed during the interviews would not be attributed specifically to them - thus the obvious candor of some of the comments in this report.

The comments were derived from notes taken during the interviews, and summarized for the purposes of identifying the means by which the community can collaborate with these educators to improve the education in our schools. The information is in no particular

³² The Committee initiated a student essay contest sponsored by State Farm and Peterson & Myers, P.A. Students were asked for their ideas to improve their schools. The Committee received 222 student essays. Dr. Eileen Holden and Dr. Sherrie Nickell selected the winners. The winning essays from WHHS, Denison, and Westwood are included in this report at Appendix D.

order. The interviews were intended to solicit the opinions and views of those on the front lines of public education. Because the focus of the Committee's inquiry was to identify specific problems or challenges in the schools, most, but not all, of the conversations centered on the perceived problems in the schools, and ideas to improve them with the involvement of the community.

DENISON

- The culture of Denison has changed in the last few years as the community socioeconomic levels have also changed to lower levels. The neighborhood community around Denison has deteriorated in the past several years causing home values to also decrease.
- The shifting dynamics of the culture of Denison has moved from the 60% free and reduced meals to 80% today, which has impacted the school.
- **Great Things at Denison:**
 - Amazing media program
 - Band program - 30 years of "superiors"
 - Career fair
 - Support from administration
 - A community school
 - A core of parents involved with band and sports
 - "Cool School Award" from Fox 13
 - Great school spirit
 - Robotics
 - STEAM Grant
 - Pirate Writing program
 - Teachers care and have the personal touch
 - Recycling Club

- PAWS academic program - prepare to learn/act responsible/work cooperate/show respect
- Parent nights are great
- Denison has a wonderful "family atmosphere"
- Arts Club
- Hard working teachers
- "We are Family at Denison"
- Chess Club
- Fellowship of Christian Athletics
- Denison has a wonderful "family atmosphere"
- **Needs Improvement:**
 - We need a gym or a covered area for PE
 - The facilities need lots of help-paint/repairs/sewer
 - Students need a reason to be in school; not just the FCAT
 - FCAT Saturdays
 - Parents are great and want to be more involved - but because of the poor economy, more and more parents are taking on more jobs to simply survive. Lack of parent involvement is not lack of caring
 - Bring back the pride of Denison - students, parents and faculty
 - Open Computer Night-0 parents attended - parents are involved as much as they can be - limited because of economy and long work schedules. Lack of involvement is not a lack of caring.

- Band needs a tuba
- Improve athletic programs as reward for academics
- Denison needs a gym or covered area - no basketball courts
- Lack of arts
- Morale has dipped - hard to get motivated
- Teachers need more planning time
- More counseling for parents
- Facilities need drastic help - ten years-same roof leak/sewer system smell/replace folding chairs
- Out of 125 band students - none are taking private lessons
- Bring back the development of the basic skills
- Need respect for diverse populations-students, parents and staff
- Need after school programs, but there is a lack of funding
- Programs for the students who are not on the college track-shop/ag/home economics/vocational skills - "not all students should be college trained"
- Need equipment for game room
- The community needs to be more involved in Denison, "I don't think our community even knows that Denison exists."
- Angry young men need male role models to help them survive
- Denison has no Spanish classes
- Teachers are overburdened and need more planning periods
- High school student turnover rate

- Need some vocational type programs, the children need to be kept busy after school
- Pressure on teachers is unbelievable and burn-out is a problem
- Need more technology and classes that teach technology
- Discipline is inconsistent
- Best students move to the magnet schools
- Sports need to be back in the middle schools
- Denison is isolated from the community and needs to be embraced by it
- Need a sports program and a number of students don't have much to look forward to in school
- Need incentive programs for good grades or other achievements
- Morale is falling fast
- Need pride in the school. The facilities are in need of repair.
- Students need more field trips
- Students are over tested and are not provided opportunities to enjoy school and school related activities
- Need more computers
- Need more role models for the students
- There is a gap where the community is, and where the school is
- It's like there is a wall around Denison; need more community involvement
- Cafeteria is too small, and front driveway needs paving

WESTWOOD

- **Great Things at Westwood**
 - Great technology tools for classrooms: Smart Boards, Airliners, additional computers for classrooms, laptops, personal microphone speakers
 - Great advanced classes: Chinese, gifted reading, Greek Mythology
 - Many tutorial opportunities for students
 - "Real Men Read" - mentor meets with 8-10 students every Tuesday to build relationships
 - Saturday camps: Science, Reading, Writing
 - Business partners provided "back to school" items for students
 - "Qimo for Kids" conducted essay contest and awarded computers to students
 - Faith-based organizations sponsored "Teacher Appreciation Breakfast" and FCAT testing snacks and water
 - Academic gains are made every year
 - Project Based: robotics, learning maps
 - Great teachers - a helping faculty, "We are a Family." Caring faculty is concerned about student success-passionate about education
 - Hard working and dedicated teachers. "We help each other." "We have experts in all areas."
 - Many teachers arrive early and stay late
 - Proud to maintain "B" school grade
 - Great parent programs: I-Moms, All Pro Dads, Hispanic Night, Science, Reading, Social Studies Nights
 - Supportive Administration: Principal takes care of the faculty, he has high

expectations and has the school at heart

- Academics have improved, especially reading. Every teacher starts each class with 15 minutes of silent reading or the teacher reads to the students
- **Needs Improvements:**
 - Parental support is lacking. It is not that parents are not concerned, they have to work several jobs to support the family
 - Student discipline needs improvement; to be consistent with stricter-bring back respect-keep them in the classroom. Students are given too many warnings
 - More involvement of tutoring and mentoring. Students need more positive role models to look up to.
 - Bring back after school programs and activities; those build relationships
 - Training and education is needed for parents
 - Too many curriculum changes - too often
 - More Career Day type speakers throughout the year and not just for one day
 - Back to school drives with school supplies are only at the beginning and should be throughout the school year
 - Improve dress code for faculty-professional dress helps improve classroom discipline
 - Community around the school needs to be cleaned up - help the neighborhood
 - Need of person to oversee business community involvement and mentoring program
 - Reading students should be leveled and taught at their own level of reading and not just because they are a certain grade
 - Administration needs to be more visible in the classroom
 - Need more science lab equipment - great need for microscopes

- Provide more field trips or bring the people and programs to Westwood
- In school suspension should not be enjoyable as there is no fear of discipline or student consequences
- Tap into VIP alumni of Westwood-Chauncey Davis-NFL player with Atlanta Falcons
- There aren't any art classes
- The economy is breaking the families apart - single mom with three jobs
- Many parents are frightened to speak with teachers (authority)

WINTER HAVEN HIGH SCHOOL

- **Great Things at WHHS:**

- Creation of the Academic Booster's Club at WHHS has emphasized academics
- The Blue Devil television program has won "Best of Show" for the past 3 years and has won national and international awards
- In athletics, WHHS won 6 district championships and 3 district runner's up
- Awarded the 2010 All County Sports Award for Polk County Schools because of 9 district championships and 5 "Coaches of the Year"
- The new buildings for the 2010-2011 school year will create a great school environment
- WHHS has great teachers
- Both the baseball and football teams made it to the regional semi-finals
- The medical academy is great at WHHS
- A WHHS student won the Polk County Poetry Award

- **Needs Improvement:**

- The schools need to publicize the high academic achievement of many of the students. For example, Bright Future scholarships and University of Florida, FSU Admissions.
- WHHS needs more dual enrollments offered, and more academies within the high school to keep the students engaged.
- The hallways are a problem. There is a lack of respect, and the school needs to focus on high academics with a strong attendance policy and some discipline practices that are consistent.

- WHHS needs the backing of the community. With respect to discipline issues, there are only 50 or so children who are 99% of the problem. The collegiate high school has taken many of the best students, yet those students can use WHHS's facilities, including the athletic programs.
- Children are engaged in the medical academy, which should be expanded, along with other academies that provide a "hands-on" education.
- Apathy is a problem with many students because some students cannot take electives because they have to take multiple reading or other required classes.
- It is critical that the school raise the expectations of the students. There has to be a larger amount of accountability for everyone, including the students.
- There are not good alternatives for credit recovery, there is no summer school, and there are problems involving some of the students with the vocational schools.
- WHHS needs a policy regarding cell phones as they are a huge classroom distraction. The teachers need to be more appreciated. They need to be supported as they are not appreciated by the community and others.
- The business community needs to get involved and there needs to be incentive for the students. Kids love rewards for what they do, and they respond well if they are recognized.
- Parents need to get involved. For many kids, if they were not in sports, they wouldn't stay in high school.
- WHHS needs new equipment for its weight room. The equipment its using is many decades old.
- There has to be a consistent discipline policy. Kids must have predictable consequences for their actions.
- WHHS's image in the community has been hurt because of the lack of a dress code.
- Students with little accountability don't accept responsibility, and frequently the punishment for discipline doesn't fit the infraction.

- Many of the AP teachers are very good, but about to retire. The best students are going to IB, Harrison School of Arts, or the Collegiate HS.
- There needs to be higher expectations for the student. There is very little teacher support regarding professional development, which is needed to help teachers develop high expectations for the students. The teachers are too busy doing things that don't directly improve the education of the kids.
- The entire school must be committed to professional development, which is needed. Because of the extreme focus on the FCAT, many of the students dislike learning.
- The students make comments about WHHS being a "D" school. WHHS needs to be a comprehensive high school, offering different vocational programs. We need an educational system that serves 100% of the population, not 20%.
- Most of the teachers have a strong work ethic. The teachers are a big resource, but they are not utilized well. The teachers are discouraged, and looking elsewhere for jobs.
- There are a lot of signals being sent out that the teachers are not important.
- There are a lot of poverty issues that affect the students. Some students have no electricity at home and do not have the basics. There are a lot of sleep deprived students who work after school until late at night. There are teachers who always teaching the FCAT. Teachers used to teach character education. With respect to the reading classes, competition and incentives work to motivate the students. With respect to the reading programs, there are many ways that the community can help.
- For many students, after school programs would be a relief, as many do not want to go home after school.
- The students should have uniforms and teachers required to dress more professionally.
- The schedule needs changing. School starts too early.
- There needs to be a lot more community involvement in the school, including mentoring.

- Teachers frequently have to purchase their own materials for their classrooms. The books are inadequate. Teachers have to do much more paperwork than is necessary. There needs to be a workroom for the teachers as it is difficult to get things done.

LAKE REGION HIGH SCHOOL

- **Great Things at LRHS:**

- The IMAG Academy is very successful at LRHS, and there needs to be more career academies like IMAG
- Lake Region has a good teaching staff and the teachers go out of their way to help their kids
- The teachers want their students to succeed
- The facilities at LRHS are exemplary
- The Sound of Thunder Marching Band has consistently received superior ratings at the local, district and other state levels, as has the Voices of Thunder Chorus
- A number of organizations at the school have received recognition at the district, state, and national level, including Thunder TV, HOSA Health Academy, Marine JRTOC program, FCCLA and DECCA
- The school is active in local civics projects like Relay for Life and Habitat for Humanity. The student council adopted families during Thanksgiving and Christmas.

- **Needs Improvement**

- There is significant apathy primarily among the lowest achievers. LRHS needs to incorporate more technology into its curriculum, increase its project learning, and there needs to be a more hands-on approach to learning.
- The kids are overtested, particularly the kids that have educational challenges. The community could help supplement the classroom libraries of the reading teachers. There needs to be more parent involvement in the school.
- With respect to discipline, there needs to be more consistency. There also needs to be better communication between the parents and the children. There needs to be more of a team approach to teaching the kids to be more actively involved in their learning.

- There needs to be more to motivate students. Incentive programs are effective.
- A lot of the kids move back and forth between the schools. Lake Region has felt like a stepchild to the community since it is outside of the city limits of Winter Haven, but that is improving as more and more Winter Haven students graduate. A lack of parental involvement is evidenced by the fact that the yearbook may not be done this year because there are not enough people willing to place ads in it.
- Attendance issue is a big problem, and it seems to get worse every year, and not by just small increments. There is so much stress on families that it is difficult for parents. Students are working and attendance is a huge problem.
- Vocational schools have attendance and academic requirements so these vocational schools are not always an option for these students.
- As an indication of how the economy has adversely affected many families, is that the parking lot at Lake Region is only about half full, whereas four years ago people were on a waiting list to get parking permits.
- Ninth grade attendance is a huge problem, as this is a big transition for kids. There needs to be some sort of truancy program.
- All requests for resources should go through the principal with their request made of the community. That way the principal can monitor what the school is or is not receiving.
- With respect to discipline it is sometimes difficult to be consistent because of all the factors involved. For example, there are medical issues, frequency of misbehavior, and all of the discipline problems need to be handled on a case-by-case basis.
- Lake Region needs to coordinate volunteers better as they need more guidance. Volunteers are underutilized. Lake Region should establish a list of volunteers, and there needs to be a mindset that these volunteers can be plugged in to the needs of the school.
- Lake Region has a multilingual population. Mental health funding is drying up, and it's a real issue with some students.

- There needs to be more mentoring, as this has fallen off since State Farm changed its educational priorities. More bilingual people are needed within the school. There needs to be Haitian mentors and volunteers.
- School starts too early.
- Credit recovery programs needs to be improved.
- Some of the students have a very poor grasp of English and their parents don't speak English at all. Many of the students don't have transportation, and even rely on the local bus system to get back and forth from school.
- There needs to be a girls and boys club near Lake Region. There needs to be more hands-on activities with the school starting at 7:10, the students have too much time after school. There needs to be after school programs.
- If the school started later in the morning, say 7:30-7:45, there would be fewer absences and tardies. With many of the students, parents can't be reached by the school most of the time, and they don't return telephone calls. The students need healthy extracurricular activities.
- The Wahneta area needs a girls/boys club. The students have nothing to do after school, or look forward to doing. There are a lot of at-risk students, including those with various mental illnesses. Some students can't read English.
- There is a lack of discipline throughout the system, and low respect for authority figures. This problem seems to be getting progressively worse. There needs to be a major shift regarding respect.
- There needs to be more community teach-ins, when business leaders come to the school and teach a class. There needs to be a greater partnership with the business community.
- The students need to have more fun at school. There needs to be more field trips. I would like to see more school activities like honor roll parties and field days. There used to be a lot of activities in 9th grade academy, but not as much now because no one is organizing these activities.
- There is a real problem with motivation and apathy, particularly with the students who have learning difficulties. Some students have to take double reading classes which can make it difficult to ever be able to take electives.

- Absenteeism is a big problem.
- The mentoring program used to be very strong, but now it is not.
- Teacher morale is low. It would be nice if there was a teacher appreciation week. Teachers at the high school level are not acknowledged.
- There needs to be more mentoring, particularly with students from single parent homes.
- There needs to be inspirational speakers at the school, and much more parent involvement. Incentive programs would help.
- There needs to be more activities at school that are enjoyable to the students.
- The system as a whole is overwhelming, not only for teachers, but for students. Teachers are exhausted.
- Funding availability within the school system drives everything, including the curriculum. Teachers have too much to do, which is unrelated to teaching the students.
- There is too much bashing of the public schools. Students do rise to greater levels of expectation, and alternatively, they will also lower themselves to lower expectations. Students should have high expectations.
- Many students, including sophomores, work at outside jobs, and they are spreading themselves thin.
- Education is not as respected as it once was.
- Teachers need more academic freedom.
- Need to focus on the 9th graders
- Cell phones are a distraction
- Difficult to deal with the disruptive students
- Teachers and administrators are buried in paperwork

- School needs better lighting at the entrance to the school as it is dark in the morning when school starts
- The school needs a PTA, like it used to have
- School spirit is low among students and parents
- Many students don't value their education
- Winter Haven community needs to be supportive of LRHS, which needs acceptance as part of the community

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The following comments were made when the elementary educators were asked about the positives of their respective schools:

- Children are #1
- Great teachers/help each other/share ideas/professional attitudes
- Curriculum organizer and curriculum maps
- LFS offers consistency for all schools
- PBS - Positive Behavioral Support System
- Concentrating on standards
- Some teachers do after school tutoring for kids needing help
- Some teachers and principals making home visits
- School uniforms
- Technology
- All Pro Dad Program
- Brigham \$500,000 STEM Grant
- Community school advantages
- Discovery testing
- "We only have a behavioral problem with Hispanic children once, when the parent(s) are informed."
- Eloise Resource Center
- Good school support

- Libraries and media specialists
- Literacy Night with Hispanic parents
- Morale high but cautious regarding budget cuts
- Parent involvement at Brigham
- Reading SRA for ESE
- School has Saturday tutoring and FCAT preparation
- Schools are safe havens for many of these children
- State Farm mentors
- The Gifted Program
- Writing program good
- Young teachers doing good job
- Working on building a trusting relationship for each child (with a teacher, etc. from the school)

When asked about what needed improvement or were problems, the responses were as follows:

- Budget cuts
- Program of the year" (constant new program) District office always adds and does not adjust taking some things away
- Micromanage - down from District how to teach - "District should tell us what kids need to learn and allow teachers the leeway to accomplish it."
- Parent support/involvement. If parents aren't helping child at home, where do they get help?
- LFS paperwork - too time consuming

- Too many kids not ready for school
- Teachers feel under valued by the community
- Rarely are positives shared by the media
- Dealing with disruptive students (almost impossible to get a child to BEST)
- Too much emphasis on FCAT - teach to the test, etc.
- Need teacher involvement at top with decision-making
- Need longer school day
- Every 4 year old child should be in VPK
- Update building
- Worry about losing guidance counselors, nurses, art, PE, media, music and other special teachers
- Tenure
- Language barriers (unrealistic to expect clear understanding of FCAT by 3rd grade)
- Attendance every day
- "A More honest communication between what is expected, required, and desired from our teachers between administrators and staff."
- Stress
- No time for creativity - "HOT - Higher Order Thinking - we want kids to do this but not teachers - the teacher's day is programmed"
- Meaningful Compact
- Parents should be required to sign the Agenda
- Professional development

- "Parents can access how their child is doing via computers - only about 2% do"
- "I have ESOL training in another state so why do I have to sit through it all over again?"
- "Why is there a \$24 charge for someone to volunteer?"
- Share old books - kids can take home
- Sheet for parents - how they can help

When asked about parental involvement and ideas to improve it, the teachers made the following comments:

- Agenda (signing should be required)
- Need more communication with parents
- Enlist pastors help
- Everyone but Magnet schools, feels parent lack of involvement is a major problem
- Make home visits
- Incentives for families to attend school functions or classes on issues effecting families (budgeting, managing time, etc.)
- Family night, make it fun - for social, not because of FCAT
- Develop Student Success Plans for Kindergarten (what student needs to accomplish, what parents need to accomplish, etc.)
- Virtual programs to help with homework
- Children get positive credits when their parents are involved

The teachers were asked their opinions on how the community could help their schools:

- Accentuate the positives
- Money for supplies, recognizing positive behaviors/achievements, clothes, blinds, copy machine, printer, notebook, need role model
- Mentoring during the day
- Thanks to State Farm mentors, other businesses are needed to follow State Farm's example
- Need role models, particularly males
- Volunteers from 8:30 - 10:30
- Be like Beymer - other churches could follow their example (they are helping 10 children from Inwood who are having difficulty with reading)
- Give books as incentives
- Need community centers - for after school tutoring
- Could schools be used for after school tutoring?
- Support after school programs
- Parent involvement
- Community should understand teacher's challenges - come in and see us
- Kids need to see leaders in action
- Financial incentives for students if parents to come in
- Quarterly showcases or assemblies for students that achieve and make gains on their report cards, benchmark, assessments, attendance & behavior
- Provide resources for parents and help seminars for using resources in the community
- Staff appreciation lunches or gatherings

- High school students mentor elementary students and gain community service hours
- Community award for individuals, churches, mentoring kids
- Community members come in to share their career, music, hobbies, etc.
- Businesses give outdated computers to kids
- Need translators
- Love for police officers to be around schools at lunch, etc.
- Team up with WH library
- Clean up the communities (drugs, poverty, etc.)
- Businesses put information in paychecks, newsletters, etc. like the following:
 - Reinforcing education to their workers - the importance of their child's:
 - Attendance
 - Homework
 - Signing the Agenda
 - Meeting with the teachers, etc.
- Have a Winter Haven Education Strategy with everyone involved

The views, comments and opinions expressed by these educators bespeak the challenges faced in our schools and the daunting issues that need attention. Several important themes were consistently the focus of the discussions, especially at the middle school and high school levels - student apathy; teacher frustration; lack of community involvement, including the need for mentoring and other support; the relative success and desire for more career academics or other programs that promote student interest in education; discipline problems and lack of respect; the exodus of high performing students to other schools; the lack of parental involvement; absenteeism; the retirement or flight of good teachers from the teaching profession out of frustration; the need for more resources; and the inordinate amount of record keeping for "accountability and assessment" that took both teachers and administrators away from the classroom; and the need for after school and summer programs.

On the whole, the teachers were complementary and appreciative of their respective principals and the school administration. They were passionate advocates for the students, and, although the lack of parental involvement was a deep concern, some rationalized the situation saying that many parents had multiple jobs or other limitations on their time, making their involvement in the school and their children's education difficult. The teachers were quick to emphasize the achievements of their respective schools, and felt that many of these accomplishments went largely unrecognized by the public. The interviewers also heard enumerable examples and anecdotes involving the lives of the students and teachers within the schools; some uplifting, some tragic. Certain classrooms were alive with

enthusiastic students, others were not. Certain programs promote academic excellence with the goal of a college education, while others are geared toward career development. Each school, like any group or institution, has a unique personality, which the Committee believes is primarily a function of the quality of its leadership.

In summary, the teachers interviewed care deeply about the children they teach, both as students and individuals. But they are also deeply concerned about the quality of the schools, and the future health of public education in our community for the reasons described in this report.

The concern of these educators is mirrored in the perceptions of the community about our schools. The business survey conducted by the Chamber revealed a business community that perceives the quality of public education in Winter Haven as mediocre at best.³³ Similar concerns were voiced in meetings with different community groups. Some groups were distressed about the racially disparate ways discipline is imposed in the schools. Others believe that there is a need for significantly more discipline, and that a lack of discipline is lowering academic achievement and precipitating the loss of good students to other schools, such as private, charter or other schools of choice. Some groups expressed concern that academic standards had fallen while others opined that the FCAT lowered educational achievement because too much emphasis was placed on the FCAT. Many in the business

³³ The results of the business survey is attached as Appendix E.

community were troubled that the reputation of the schools were adversely affecting the decisions of new businesses to locate in Winter Haven.

There was, however, a consensus of opinion on one point. Everyone shared the view that Winter Haven's public schools, especially the middle and high schools, had deteriorated over the years, and were at risk for further declines. The schools needed assistance and support - the sooner the better.

Enormous stresses have befallen our public schools. Concern about the quality of American public education precipitated legislation that arguably made the situation worse. Everyone is concerned - teachers, students, parents, business leaders, school administrators, everyone. The Great Recession has diminished funding sources for the schools and austerity is certain over the next few years. Economic stress has adversely affected the lives of both the parents and their children. Likely because the problems are so complex, we witness more rhetoric than action, more legislation than funding, and more criticism than offers of support.

The educators within their respective schools seemed willing to do anything to improve their schools. All of the schools already have some successful programs that intellectually engage the students who participate.³⁴ Certain athletic and academic programs are exemplary. Outside of the schools, programs such as Chain of Lakes Achievers

³⁴ WHHS's television program has created nationally recognized award winning productions. A DVD produced by Pam Mizelle's class at WHHS is attached to this report as Appendix F. The videos feature student life at WHHS, including athletics, academics, clubs, and extracurricular activities. Some of the performers include students Randy Johnson, Charles Sigler, Cody Mizelle, Widson Charlemont and Megan Oliva.

("COLA"), Boys & Girls Club, Men Sharpening Men, Boy and Girl Scouts, the Florence Villa Community Development Corporation, Girls, Inc., AWANA, and the many local athletic programs help teach children ethics, good character, and sportsmanship. Several of these programs even provide academic tutors. Most of these organizations offer after school and summer programs. Beymer Methodist Church sponsors a reading initiative at Inwood that takes 10 students every Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. to participate in a one-on-one reading program at the church. Reading scores for all the participating children increased, with some of the children experiencing double digit increases in their reading scores.³⁵

With strong leadership in each school, community support, and the development and expansion of creative programs focused on kids, Winter Haven's schools can flourish and provide children academic and career tracks that will prepare them for a satisfying future as productive citizens of our community.

³⁵ Educational budget cuts will adversely affect not only the schools, but community based programs that provide support for the schools. In the case of Beymer Methodist's reading program at Inwood, the organizers of the program rely heavily on the media specialist at the school to provide information about the students' reading levels at all times during the course of the school year. This information affects which books are used and how each student is taught. In its effort to deal with the state budget cuts, the District may eliminate the full time media specialist position at Inwood and other schools. See "Polk County Schools to Cut 384 Positions," The Ledger, 11 May 2011, p. A1, A6.

V. THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Over the past decade, Winter Haven has undergone a period of significant development, even outpacing Lakeland's rate of growth. Legoland Florida plans to open in October bringing over 1,000 jobs to the tourism and hospitality sectors of the local economy. The development planned as the CSX Integrated Logistics Center, which temporarily stalled because of the current economy, will move forward within the next several years. This distribution center will generate an estimated 200 jobs to operate the terminal facility, but ultimately 8,500 jobs when the project is completed. The lakeside commercial development at the Chain of Lakes Park called the Landings is proceeding, as are other developments that will hopefully spark renewed economic activity in the community.

On April 11, 2011, the economic consulting firm, Angelou Economics, presented some of its preliminary findings to the Winter Haven City Commission, which will culminate in the preparation of a comprehensive development plan. 6-10 Corporation's extensive development in downtown Winter Haven, the creation of a Technology Park, and alliances with PSC, USF Polytechnic, and the Florida Lambda Rail Research and Education Network, has expanded the community's potential to attract and foster high technology enterprises. Winter Haven is blessed as a hub for the most advanced fiber optic network in Central Florida. The potential of these assets for economic development and educational advancement within our community is stunning. City officials will tell you that the "stars

are aligning" for an economic and cultural awakening for a city "on the verge of an economic explosion."³⁶

Yet, city officials will also tell you that businesses considering a move to Winter Haven have expressed concerns about the quality of our public schools. This should come as no surprise as business location experts say that education is one of the most important factors considered by businesses. A "well-educated workforce is the second most important factor in business relocation decisions, only behind lease rates."³⁷

Evident from the business survey and the community interviews, many within the community itself share the perception that the public schools, particularly middle and high schools, need improvement. Interestingly, Angelou Economics states in its Winter Haven Economic Development Action Plan that under performance in secondary education "and/or perceptions of its current quality" may hinder the ability to develop or attract a professional workforce or high skill industries.³⁸

Aside from considerations of economic development, a superior education enhances the student's "quality of life." Statistics abound demonstrating that one's standard of living is significantly governed by the level of one's education. High school graduates make more than dropouts, and college graduates make even more. In fact, a high school dropout earns

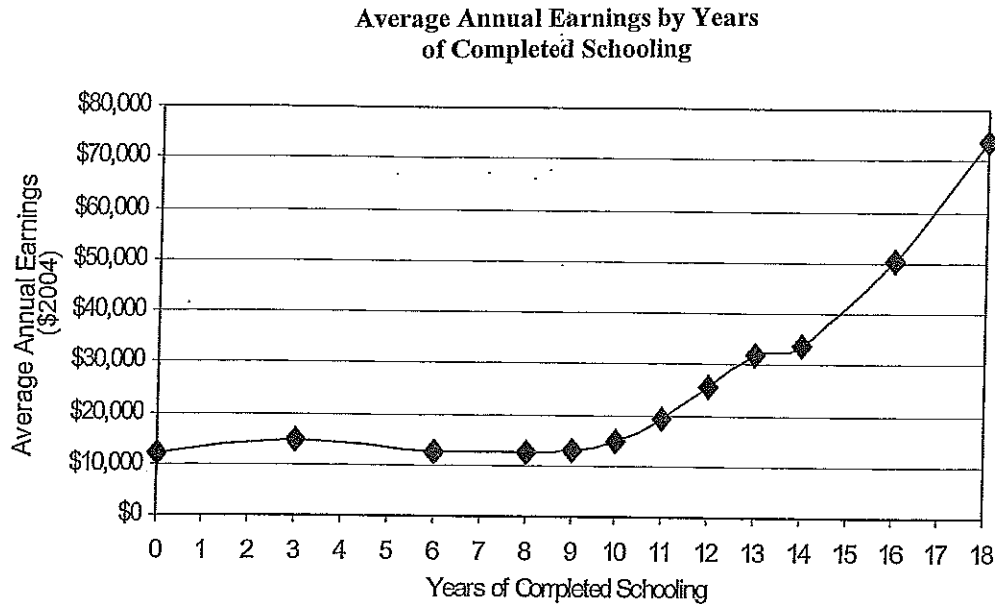
³⁶ "Winter Haven is planning retreat links - Legoland, Landings" News Chief, 27 April 2011, p.3

³⁷ Leverid, Jeff: "Public Education: Building the Economy and Strong Communities." Wisconsin Education Council. Oct. 2008

³⁸ Winter Haven Economic Development Action Plan. (Draft) p. 33.

about \$260,000 less over a lifetime than a high school graduate.³⁹ In 2004, the high school dropout earned only 37 cents for each dollar earned by an individual with more education.⁴⁰

The chart below prepared by Cecilia Rouse from Princeton University shows the increases in annual earnings by years of completed schooling.



Of course, as a society we want more of our educational system than a means for increased earnings. We want more of our high school graduates than the ability to read and write. Diane Ravitch eloquently summarizes the vision of the education we hope for our children.

Currently we want [students] . . . to be able to read and write and be numerate. Those are the basic skills on which all other

³⁹ Rouse, Cecilia, "The Labor Market Consequences of an Inadequate Education," prepared for the Equality symposium on "The Social Costs of Inadequate Education at Teachers College," Columbia University. 24 (2005)

⁴⁰ Rouse, p. 1.

learning builds. But that is not enough. We want to prepare them for a useful life. We want them to be able to think for themselves when they are out in the world on their own. We want them to have good character and to make sound decisions about their life, their work, and their health. We want them to face life's joys and travails with courage and humor. We hope that they will be kind and compassionate in their dealings with others. We want them to have a sense of justice and fairness. We want them to understand our nation and our world and the challenges we face. We want them to be active, responsible citizens, prepared to think issues through carefully, to listen to differing views, and to reach decisions rationally. We want them to learn science and mathematics so they understand the problems of modern life and participate in finding solutions. We want them to enjoy the rich artistic and cultural heritage of our society and other societies.⁴¹

These are lofty goals, but without a vision for our public schools, any effort to improve them will fail. The community will have to commit to a significant level of involvement to make a difference as there are no shortcuts and quick answers. Fortunately, the Winter Haven community has the talent and the resources to meet the challenge.⁴²

⁴¹ Ravitch, p.230.

⁴² A handbook describing how students, parents, educators, and business leaders can "make a difference" in the public schools is found in the recent book "Waiting for Superman: How we Can Save America's Failing Public Schools," edited by Karl Weber: Public Affairs. NY.2010. In this book, Eric Schwarz, a founder of Citizen Schools, a nonprofit that partners with middle schools to expand learning for low income students, states:

I appreciate that there are no "silver bullet" solutions in education. But I remain convinced that if we are truly committed to dramatic learning gains for all children, then education reform must stop being a spectator sport. To turn around our schools and to restore the promise of an education as an engine of opportunity for all children, we need to move millions of citizens off the sidelines and into the game as tutors, mentors, citizens teachers, PTO/PTA members, education activists, and even micro-philanthropists.

Weber, p. 106-07. The importance of community involvement is showcased in Jamie Vollmer's recently published book Schools Cannot Do It Alone, Enlightenment Press, IA (2010). Vollmer describes many ways a local community can support the public schools to increase student success.

VI. A COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Apparent from the school interviews is that each school operates independently of the other schools within the city. Although the schools informally network to a certain extent, each school relies on the District and its own resources to meet its needs. As described earlier in this report, the District operates 160 learning centers in Polk County, which diffuses its ability to adequately meet all of the needs of these schools, especially during a time of dramatic reduction in educational spending. The District's mandate requires that it spread its resources throughout Polk County, and its allocation of those resources necessarily must focus on Polk County as an integrated school system.

The extent of parental involvement may be adequate in the magnet schools, but in the other public schools it is lacking. In most of these schools, teachers were able to identify by name a few parents who were actively involved in the school, but not many. Parents move on after their children leave or graduate from the school. Teachers needing specific supplies or support often purchased school supplies themselves, or called local businessmen who they happened to know for help. Each school has its own fund raisers and a loose network of supporters in the community. Some schools, like Wahneta, have significant support from the surrounding community whose students attend the school. Others are much more isolated from the surrounding neighborhoods.

Within the midst of this segmentation are teachers who rely on their own wits to assemble the resources they need to teach. Band directors hit the pavement looking for

musical instruments. Teachers organize intermural sports in the middle schools calling sports stores for soccer supplies and volleyballs. Media specialists and reading teachers assemble books from private donors like the Willard Roe family's contribution of Willard Roe's library for LRHS. As previously discussed, Beymer Methodist Church has a reading program with some of the children at Inwood who have trouble reading. The Berto family sponsors wrestling tournaments at WHHS and State Farm supports a student essay contest at Denison, Westwood and WHHS.

The Committee found countless examples of self-reliance on the part of the educators in each of the schools and the efforts of groups within the community who help in many ways - whether building a football stadium at LRHS or placing an advertisement in WHHS's yearbook, the *Wha Hwa Hta See*. One parent, along with her daughter who attends WHHS, decided to "make a difference" and founded the Academic Booster Club. The Committee witnessed many examples of community involvement in the schools, and involvement with the students who attend the schools. The community cares about its children. There are many who want to help, yet don't know how to lend a hand.

Many of our schools enjoy a certain level of community involvement, but it is often sporadic, fortuitous, unpredictable, and dependent on which parents happen to have children in a particular school. Currently, there is no easy way for a school to access the resources of the community to address the needs of the school that the District cannot provide.

Ironically, the Committee has identified many persons within the community who possess

the talent, time and desire to help the schools succeed. Many retired educators live here and are anxious to help. There are professionals, businessmen, and others with strong ties to the schools they attended in Winter Haven who want to participate in any effort to improve the schools. People are willing, but knowing how to help has not been easy, especially when the needs are so great.

The Committee recommends that the community establish an independent non-profit organization which consists of a partnership involving a diverse group of citizens with one agenda - the improvement of all of Winter Haven's public schools. The Committee envisions an entity that is deeply embedded within the schools to assist them with the resources they need to succeed. These resources would include mentors, tutoring, volunteers, speakers, donations, and even partnering to develop academic programs with PSC, USF Polytechnic, and other colleges in Polk County. The support might include advocacy from anything from the construction of gymnasiums for the middle schools to financial assistance for the purchase by WHHS of new band uniforms.

Based upon a consensus developed by this Public Education Partnership, its committees would, for example, assist and support the District in the development of business career academies at LRHS, like the successful IMAG Imagination Academy that prepares students for careers in public relations, advertising, graphic design, event planning and sales.⁴³ This support should expand to the creation of pre-career academies in the

⁴³ The title page of this report was designed by Vincente Lara, a LRHS student in the IMAG Academy.

middle schools, the establishment of an IB program at WHHS, the coordination of mentoring or other programs in the schools designed to develop principles and values, assist in the effort to reduce absenteeism, support incentive programs for students, support efforts to increase parental involvement, and even provide counseling from the business community for students educationally at risk.

Because a common vision is necessary to succeed, such a Public Education Partnership (the "PEP") must embrace all sectors from the community who have a heart to improve the quality of education. Teachers and certain minority groups have described challenges in the public schools that particularly affect them. City government must play a vital role by leveraging its resources and focusing on community education. The District, whose charge it is to govern the schools, must be a full partner in such an initiative - it possesses significant resources. The classroom teachers, administrators, and other educators must have a voice and engage as partners, the Chamber, the business community, and Winter Haven's churches also.

Those with special interests or expertise can immeasurably assist in the effort. For example, several musicians in our community want to partner with the band and music programs in the schools to provide additional resources and help in other ways to enhance the music education programs. Others in the field of computer technology are working with the District, the schools, and local high tech firms to enhance technology in the schools, and even assist in the development of technical career academies for WHHS and LRHS. The

PEP should include PSC, USF Polytechnic and other colleges in its leadership, to partner in the development of academic programs that extend down to the middle, and even elementary schools, in order to provide seamless academic and career tracks for students.

Winter Haven's public schools should be recognized as a whole, not a collection of separate isolated schools. PEP should consider all these schools as an integral part of the greater Winter Haven area school system with the community and the District as partners. Each school has its own strengths and weaknesses, and the schools themselves should be expected to assist other schools when the need arises. Schools must welcome the community as a partner. PEP would advocate for educational improvement in the schools, whether to seek public or private funding consistent with its mission, or for the development of academic or career-oriented programs which the community wants and needs. PEP must support the many organizations already at work in the community supporting the schools. Early childhood education, after school and summer programs, such as those offered by Girls, Inc., the Boys & Girls Club, COLA, youth athletics, and private providers, should be recognized for their work and supported by the community.

A good education seems so simple to achieve. A good teacher and a willing student, combined with a sound curriculum is the winning formula. Alexander the Great was taught by the famous philosopher, Aristotle, as a private tutor until he was sixteen years old. None of us are future kings, however, and public education is a means by which we've built our

nation for over two hundred years, and where the majority of our children receive their education. Improving our schools is worth our concerted and determined effort.

School systems pose complicated challenges. Successful public schools have good teachers, sound curricula for a diverse student population, enforce standards of civility and teach students to respect others, and assure a safe environment conducive to learning. The Committee believes that the community, as a partner, can empower the schools to become outstanding centers of learning that provide all those students who genuinely make the effort, a quality education.

VII. A VISION - A PLAN

Winter Haven incorporated as a city a hundred years ago. Imagine celebrating its centennial with a commitment to its schools. The motto of the successful Master Charter Schools in Philadelphia is "Excellence - no excuses." We should expect no less for ourselves and our schools. This motto sets a level of commitment that can "make a difference," and survive the inevitable challenges, known and unknown, that accompanies dramatic change. This devotion must be shared by our educators and students - both of whom need to know that they are supported, valued and appreciated by their colleagues, city government, the Chamber, the District and the community at large.

Ultimately, the proposals outlined in this report must have the support of the community and those who implement them. These proposals have been discussed with members of the community, and are at varying stages of development - both in concept and implementation. All of these proposals remain to be further aired and refined in the public domain. The Committee notes, however, that there is substantial support for strategies described in this report. The Committee recommends that the following be considered:

- Transform WHHS into A Center for Technology and Applied Science, where technology related career academies are developed by the District with the support of the City, which plans to connect Winter Haven's schools to its fiber optic system,⁴⁴ and through partnerships involving technology firms, PSC and USF Polytechnic. Develop an IB program at WHHS to be introduced as soon as possible for students who qualify and live in the greater Winter Haven area.

⁴⁴ A copy of the fiber optic network within the City of Winter Haven is attached as Appendix G

- Transform LRHS into a Business Enterprise Center, where more business related career academies, like the successful IMAG Academy, are developed by the District in partnership with the business community, Chamber, and Webber International University, as a potential partner whose curriculum is focused on business education.
- Introduce STEAM,⁴⁵ a curriculum that introduces an arts component into the high schools, at both LRHS and WHHS, and foster partnerships between the schools and the thriving arts community in Winter Haven.
- Diligently implement pre-career academy programs at Denison and Westwood that would naturally transition to the career academies at WHHS and LRHS.
- Recognizing that physical health is a key component to academic achievement, focus on the development of sports and physical education programs at the middle schools. This initiative includes the construction of gymnasiums or covered areas to accommodate athletic and sports programs.
- Develop a community-wide mentoring program that is organized, dependable, and consists of mentors who have varying talents or skills so that mentors can be paired to students who have differing needs and interests. Partner with the faith-based community and organizations like Big Brother and Big Sisters to reach every student who needs a mentor.
- Develop a leadership program through the Chamber, that is supported financially through the business community, for select seniors at WHHS and LRHS who demonstrate business leadership potential. This program would be an abbreviated version of the Chamber's Leadership Winter Haven program, but focused on the interests of young adults.
- Through the involvement of educators, administrators, school psychologists, counselors, parents, students and the community, develop an approach to discipline that will enhance civility within the schools and foster respect for all. Introduce character building programs led by students into the middle and high schools, but immediately initiate such programs starting the 2011-2012 school year in the 9th grade academies at LRHS and WHHS. Discipline protocols should

⁴⁵ STEAM is an acronym for science, technology, engineering, arts, and math.

be combined with character development and enhanced academic and behavioral expectations for each and every student who attends Winter Haven's public schools.

- That the City and PSC develop a program for high school students with an interest in government and public administration as practical experience and as a feeder to PSC's bachelor's degree program in public administration.
- That PSC partner with the District and Winter Haven Hospital to develop a pre-nursing career academy in one of Winter Haven's high schools.
- Create a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to support Winter Haven's public schools. - a partnership that reflects all sectors within the community and whose membership has a heart for quality education. Within the structure of this organization as described in Section VI of this report, the City, the District, PSC, the Chamber, and other entities and local organizations would be expected to participate for purposes of supporting, advocating, and expanding support for this educational mission to all sectors within the community.
- Partner with the local schools and the District to specifically address the problem of absenteeism in the schools. Truancy is a complex issue because it is caused by many factors outside the schools. Consequently, the approach must involve more than developing a school environment that attracts students, but working with parents, churches, law enforcement and others to increase awareness of the problem and counsel students and their families on the importance of school attendance.
- Development of elementary school reading programs similar to Beymer Methodist Church's program at Inwood, that would expand such a community based program to all of Winter Haven's public elementary schools, and would include volunteers from the various minority communities to assist students who have reading problems because English is their second language.
- Expand successful after school and summer programs that currently exist within the schools, and develop other such programs as appropriate for the needs of the individual schools. Support the traditional after school and summer programs in the community, so programs like those offered by the Boys and Girls Clubs, COLA, Florence Villa Community Development Corporation, Girls, Inc., scouting, and the youth athletic programs, can expand and accommodate larger numbers of children.

It is anticipated that these initiatives will evolve as they are implemented over time. In the event the community decides to adopt these recommendations and embark on the journey ahead, the Committee believes that time is of the essence. The forces at work that created the situation in our schools are still with us. The Committee believes that today is the day to make a difference in our schools and our community.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The days are gone when we should expect educators to teach our children without our involvement as a community. In 1886, Miss Betsy Walker likely taught those first seven students without much more than a blackboard, chalk, and a rod to assure her students' undivided attention. Times have changed. Today, expansive public institutions have taken the place of the local folks who pulled their resources together to build a small school and hire a teacher - a quantum leap from the "simple life" to a tangled web of bureaucracy, complexity, and contentious rhetoric about the problems faced by public education.

The history of Winter Haven's public schools evidences a deep commitment by the community to public education and the overall welfare of its children - whether it was the ambitious building program of the high school building on Central Avenue in 1915, or the first school for its African-American children championed by Dr. Mary Jewett. Today, more than ever, we need the involvement of our community. Together we can significantly improve the quality of our schools. To do otherwise is folly, to believe otherwise is surrender. We cannot afford to fail.

IX. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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