

## The Vision...

*If we continually practice filling our minds with thoughts of faith, hope and gratitude, it will eventually crowd out our fears.*  
Norman Vincent Peale

My vision for a better school system includes the following elements:

- **Children** want to attend,
- **Students** achieve to the best level of their abilities,
- **Employees** are proud to work for the system,
- **Local employers** can hire from a large pool of applicants better prepared to enter the work force, and
- **Taxpayers** see positive returns on their investments.

As Superintendent, I want to empower students, teachers, administrators and support personnel to set high expectations for themselves and to work toward achieving them. At the same time, I want to encourage parents and the community to become more involved in

making our schools better and for them also to set high expectations and work toward achieving them. I believe that when we are all unified and working on the same goals, we will be successful.

I have outlined my plans to realize this vision for two reasons. The first reason is to give you an opportunity to examine the plans, and the second is to start a dialogue that will bring the best ideas forward, thereby creating even better success than my plan alone. It is through our combined participation that the best is yet to come.

People often say, “We could improve the school system if we had enough money.”

If you ask those same people “How much money do you need?” the most common answer is “I don’t know – I just know we don’t have enough.”

Thirty-five years ago when Sandra and I were thinking about marriage, we asked “Should we wait until we have enough money?” Once we were married we asked, “Should we wait to have children until we have enough money?” If we had waited until we had enough money to support the marriage and children, we would be single and childless!

The truth is there will never be enough money and resources for education, but money is not always the solution. When we acknowledge that fact, we can begin to let our imagination fuel dreams that can be turned into a new reality.

Dreams are more often realized when they are directly connected to the will to pursue the dream in the face of adversity. Our district faces many obstacles in our quest to create better schools. Whenever there is an obstacle, we cannot give up on the quest; rather, we need to design a strategy to overcome the obstacle. Obstacles may be optical illusions. Frequently, a different perspective is all that is needed. When faced with adversity, the ability to make the best choice is critical as we continue to keep our eyes on the goal: better schools for our students.

Sometimes the difference between success and failure is not a lack of resources but a lack of will and perseverance. Many people spend more time and energy trying to circumvent problems rather than trying to find solutions.

A few months ago, I had the opportunity to speak to a university

graduate class. All of the students were aspiring educational leaders. During our conversation, someone in the group asked, “How do you make sound decisions?”

I answered, “Generally, I use three basic tenets:

**1) Be creative.** Always look for an angle that will allow you to view the problem and solution from a non-conventional point of view. Always consider different perspectives.

**2) Remain connected to common sense.** Frequently, in institutional decision-making, common sense gets lost. The best way to insure that decisions are grounded in common sense is to discuss the idea with the people who are on each level of implementation. Actively listen to their concerns about how the proposed action will impact them and ask for their suggestions.

**3) Be determined to stay the course.** Once the decision passes the common sense test and support of stakeholders has been obtained, then remain steadfast and determined until the goal of the decision has been reached. Sound decisions may be derailed because of a lack of resolve and determination to

stay the course in the face of obstacles. It always seems easier to back down or quit.

Education encompasses many complex problems, but I hold the firm belief that simple solutions still work. A superintendent must work on many issues simultaneously. An effective superintendent needs a team of dedicated professionals committed to a common vision and goals. Although teambuilding may sound simple, it is a complex undertaking and does not happen overnight.

The only way to improve is to understand fully what needs to be improved. Therefore, the first task is to establish a review process that identifies strengths and weaknesses in our system. The review process must include input from all areas of our county: teachers, administrators, staff and community leaders. Capitalizing on strengths and eliminating weakness are tantamount to the improvement process.

The second step is to set appropriate goals based on findings. Does this mean that every issue will be addressed immediately? No. Instead, goal-setting includes prioritizing the findings in order to begin making a plan

for improvement. Prioritizing allows the most important issues to be addressed first. A quarterly review of all identified issues will be conducted and adjustments made as needed.

The next step is to begin implementation. Each principal, department head, and leadership team will develop a plan of action with timelines and benchmarks. These plans will be monitored and the results made public. **We will become a *can-do* organization with a plan of action and accountability.** By monitoring progress, we can make adjustments along the way, insuring that we reach our goals. This is not rocket science but solid business practices that are used by highly effective companies. We need to bring this focused accountability to education in order to deliver a quality product to our customers: The Students!

To make these changes, we must have strong leadership. I will not ask anything of my staff that I will not do myself. Since every school district employee is evaluated, I too will be evaluated by the employees whom I supervise. My report card will include both areas of strengths and areas in which I need improvements. My grades and

progress will be public and transparent, keeping me focused.

Can you see the vision? It is a *revolutionary* idea for a public institution to embrace these concepts, but I know these practices work; implementing them will energize the whole organization and improve our service on all levels, taking our progress to new heights.