

Where We Are...

*There are many ways of going forward,
but only one way of standing still.*
Franklin Roosevelt

Some troubling facts identify significant challenges to our educational system.

- Almost one fourth of adults in Escambia County are functionally illiterate.
- Eighteen percent (18%) of our beginning kindergarten students are not able to recognize more than a single letter of the alphabet.
- The number of Escambia County's middle and high school students suspended from school is much higher than the state average as reflected in the following chart:

**Students from the total enrollment
who served out-of-school suspensions:**

School	Escambia	State
Elementary	5.0%	3.0%
Middle	22.6%	14.2%
High	20.6%	12.0%

Data from 2006-2007 school year. Data obtained from the Florida Department of Education web site: <http://roi.fldoe.org>

- Approximately one fourth of our high school students do not graduate.
- Forty percent (40%) of Escambia County's high school graduates do not attend college, nor do they seek post-secondary training.

These statistics alone are daunting. However, there are additional reasons for our community to be concerned.

- Escambia County public schools have experienced a declining enrollment over the past ten years.

- Poverty is also widespread. In Escambia County, 59% of students receive free or reduced price lunches. [*http://www.fldoe.org/eias/flmove/escambia.asp](http://www.fldoe.org/eias/flmove/escambia.asp)
- Average teacher pay in Escambia County ranks **below** that of Santa Rosa and Okaloosa Counties as well as the state average.

Challenges that arise from these disturbing facts require innovative and revolutionary solutions. These challenges are systemic community problems which require a multifaceted approach.

Imagine not being able to read the instructions for operating a microwave. Imagine not understanding the instructions for a medication you have been prescribed. Imagine not being able to read the ingredients for a recipe.

In the 21st century, Escambia County's literacy deficit is unacceptable and must be overcome. We, as the school district, can lead the way with programs for adults that are run in collaboration with school and community agencies, like the United Way, ECARE, Wee Read and various service clubs.

We need to work with these and other community and faith-based organizations to bring literacy resources into the local neighborhoods where they are needed. One simple action that we can take is to make our facilities available to community organizations.

Together we can develop a system that could have a significant, lasting impression on our community. Our educational efforts should not stop at the 12th grade. We need to look at the whole community and use our talents and skills to foster change for the better.

We must remember that the school system is a reflection of the community, and we must lead the way toward improvement in our future. When Escambia becomes a high-performing school district, everyone will benefit: our students, the community, the area's economy and each of our lives. We can do this together, if we put away politics and focus on improvement!

It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.

Harry Truman

In addition, increasing pay for better employees will require both local and legislative efforts. Being more transparent and accountable to the public about decisions and policies is an area on which the school district will have to work. I believe that the **combined efforts** of school and community will overcome our challenges. Please note that the emphasis is on the words **combined efforts**. Alone, neither the school system nor the community can overcome these challenges.

In all these areas, I promise to set the standard and to work cooperatively and diligently with those who have the best interest of our students at the forefront of their efforts.