

### ***Focusing on Career Exploration...***

*It's kind of fun to do the impossible.*  
Walt Disney

Forty percent (40%) of Escambia County high school graduates will not attend college nor seek post secondary training. The school district has not adequately addressed the needs of these students. Students are graduating with no marketable skills and end up in minimum wage jobs or unemployed. To address these issues, we need to focus on career exploration beginning in the middle school grades.

Although every student in our schools will not pursue a college education, we continue to routinely promote a traditional academic track throughout our system. Instead, we must offer curriculum opportunities that lead to industry certification at the high school level.

These programs enable a student to begin working toward a career as early as their first year of high school. We need to create community-focused programs like the Gulf Power Academy at West Florida High School of Advanced Technology, and the Embry-Riddle Aeronautical Academy in Okaloosa County.

Programs such as these equip students to enjoy careers that enable them to earn wages above the minimum. Far too many of our students are not prepared for successful employment upon graduation, and this situation must change.

Students should graduate with both academic and work force skills. **Students should learn so they are prepared to earn.** Currently, our school district graduates 76% of our students, meaning that approximately one student out of four will not graduate with their classmates. Many of these students can be helped if we provide educational opportunities focused on work force development. When the system offers little that is relevant for them to learn, many students vote with their feet and exit without completing high school. When we begin focusing on career goals and interests beginning in the middle schools, we will identify these students and deliver an education that they can use to enjoy a better life. These are not radical ideas, but rather simple obtainable solutions that make sense for our district.

Imagine our schools with committed principals, teachers and staff who set instructional goals based on real

time data. Imagine our schools using best practices and sharing results throughout the system. Imagine our building-level principals assuming more ownership when they have greater control of their budgets. Imagine relevant and rigorous curricula which prepare all students for their choice of either advanced study or immediate employment.

These “imagines” can become realities. With the collaboration of passionate professionals, anything is possible!

I am proposing a common sense approach which includes personal accountability. This approach makes companies successful and allows them to stand out in their areas of expertise.

This approach can also make our school system an example of excellence. The shift in our priorities and emphasis has to start at the top. Can you see how such a shift will empower people and increase student achievement?