

Letter to the Editor

Public Education

By Levy County Superintendent of Schools Robert Hastings

Public education and the employees of our educational system have the greatest impact on the past and future of the State of Florida. However, I am profoundly concerned with the extent and swiftness of changes that are being forced on teachers and administrators. Any acceptable business model will mandate a maximum of five changes at one time. Yet the policy makers at the state and federal levels have mandated thirty-four changes for education at the present time. I certainly believe that we need an accountability system. Everyone should be held accountable for the work they do----both in the public and private sectors. In the rush to create this system, the Florida's accountability system is no longer credible in the eyes of the public or teachers. This includes graduation requirements, adoption of new state standards, new assessments, school grades, evaluations for teachers and administrators, etc.

The First District Court of Appeals for the State of Florida has ruled that we must release the individual teacher's Value-Added Model (VAM) scores. Identifying a teacher by using the value added model (VAM) scores and judging the quality of teaching on a single piece of data is inappropriate and unfair. To understand the essence of great teaching, it cannot be found in a single test. For I am convinced that successful teaching is grounded in love and desire to help others. As often noted, students will remember us not for their test scores, but for the way we made them feel, the encouragement to learn and to know that we cared for them as individuals. We owe the success of our state and nation in a large degree to great teachers. How can we allow our educators to be disrespected by a single piece of data (VAM) scores? How many good teachers will lose their love of education if we do not slow down the legislation that cost them their dignity? My respect for the work of teachers is immense and I will continue to speak out on behalf of the essential role of educators.

Respectfully,
Bob Hastings, Superintendent