



District 3 News

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Another school year has flown by...

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The month of April was noted for a number of events that proved somewhat stressful yet most proved successful. The first was the visit to our district by the AdvancED External Review Team. Their purpose was to review and evaluate our overall educational system from one end to the other. The review was highly successful and the team was most complimentary. Please refer to the copy of an article that appeared in the St. Augustine Record on April 14th regarding this visit and review.

FCAT exams were administered during the month. I served as a proctor at Pacetti Bay Middle School, Liberty Pines Academy and Osceola Elementary School. I was very impressed with the professionalism of our teachers and staff members. I was especially impressed with our students. They seemed intent upon doing their best on the test and followed appropriate instructions through-out the testing sessions.

Another matter arose that seems to have been fueled by misinformation centered around inspirational messages being delivered at graduation ceremonies and other student related assemblies. Much controversy was generated and your school board was the recipient of considerable criticism (unearned).

I sincerely hope that this last month of school for the 2012-2013 school year will be a productive and successful one for all of you. You have my admiration and respect.



Bill Mignon
School Board Member
District 3

Please be advised that the Board has not changed policy in regard to graduation ceremonies, and they will be conducted in the same manner as they have in the past.

U.S.DOE outlines the principles governing student speech and religious expression of graduation ceremonies as follows:

School officials may not mandate or organize prayer at graduation or select speakers for such events in a manner that favors religious speech such as prayer. Where students or other private graduation speakers are selected on the basis of genuinely neutral, evenhanded criteria and retain primary control over the content of the expression, however, that expression is not attributable to the school and therefore may not be restricted because of its religious (or anti-religious) content. To avoid any mistaken perception that a school endorses student or other private speech that is not in fact attributable to the school, school officials may make appropriate, neutral disclaimers to clarify that such speech (whether religious or nonreligious) is the speaker's and not the school's.

Our View: Why our schools are so great

To get an idea just how good St. Johns County Schools are, read the report from the internationally recognized accreditation agency that presented its findings to the district last week.

But, then again, maybe reading the report isn't such a good idea. It's in educationese. Educators understand it, but we were left scratching our heads.

So we turned to one of the evaluators, retired Martin County school administrator Delores Calloway of Palm Beach County, to put it in English for us. She's the one we quoted in the newspaper Friday saying, "You have a jewel here, and you should be very, very proud."

And here, in a few words, is why her evaluation team found St. Johns County schools to be so special: "They want increased student achievement."

The common thread that runs through the district is that everyone shares that goal. From top administrators to students and everyone in between there is agreement and acceptance that it's all about students succeeding. She was impressed when she spoke with students that they knew their teachers were working to help them do well.

The school board earned her praise because, while they don't always agree, they work well together, something that she said doesn't happen in every school district.

The board sets clear standards that permeate throughout the district. From administrators to teachers to parents and students, the message of improved student learning is well understood and embraced.

"The school board knows their role, but they also allow people to run the district," she said. "They trust them,"

"Certainly the level of trust sets the district apart," Calloway said.

The administration earned her praise for their strong leadership, their engagement of the community in the setting of goals, and their emphasis on solving problems. But most of all she praised them for working to "make sure teachers have what they need in the classroom" so they can be effective teachers.

The district also understands the role of testing, she said. While some testing is required, the district uses testing to identify areas to help students learn.

"They aren't just testing for the sake of testing," she said. "They want to help students become the best they can be."

So what makes St. Johns County schools go special?

"The trust, the vision, the culture set it apart," she said.

All those come together to accomplish the shared goal of helping every student learn, grow and prosper.

That's it, in plain English, why your local public schools are as good as they are.

Exciting News



"Congratulations to Nigel Pillay, Assistant Principal at Pedro Menendez High School, Lauren Abell, Assistant Principal at Gamble Rogers Middle School and Patrick McGee, Assistant Principal at W. D. Hartley Elementary School. All three recently completed Year 1 of Phase II of the St. Johns County School District Leadership Academy. After completion of Year 2, they will be evaluated for recommendation to be certified as School Principals."

The 64 Who Never Came Home

Salute to our Veterans

At the heart of a hardened Philadelphia neighborhood, the former Thomas Alva Edison High School stands quietly in the Northeast precinct like an abandoned mansion. On the inside, it's as broken as the gang-infested community that surrounds it.

These crumbling hallways are a war-era landmark, as they were once walked by 64 young men who gave their lives in Vietnam. It was, notably, the largest loss of students from any single high school in the nation, according to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Foundation.

Thomas Alva Edison High School, or simply known as Edison High, opened its doors as Northeast High School in 1903. In 1957, the school's staff, along with its trophies and awards, moved to a different location, leaving an opportunity for a new school in its shell. But instead of prestige, the student body, then known as Edison High, encountered the violence that plagued the Northeast neighborhoods during the Vietnam era.

"It wasn't unusual to have a student sitting here on Friday who then died over the weekend." Freddie Federman, an Edison High social studies teacher for several decades told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1982. That same life of crime offered teenagers a gun and a reason to skip school. The military offered these young men the chance to be something other than another member of a gang.

"You see a guy who doesn't have anything going for him," Federman said. "Then he comes back in his dress blues. For some of them it was a name on a uniform that meant you were somebody." The uniform came with a paycheck and stable employment.

"I was told that military recruiters were a constant presence in the school during that time," said Darryl Johnson, a former Edison High student, instructional design facilitator and principal intern at the facility today. "Some students were given two choices by judges: to choose prison confinement or military service."

For Clyde James, a 1972 Edison High graduate who joined the Air Force immediately after graduation, it was an escape from the streets. "There wasn't much to do coming from the worst high school in the city," James told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1982. "There was a lot of gang warfare in the neighborhoods, so you figured if you survived that, Vietnam couldn't be that much worse."

Like James, Duane Williams could predict how he might end up. Enlisting in the Army in January 1969, he wanted to escape violent streets and gang-life. The West Philadelphia native became part of Edison High School's legacy on New Year's Day 1970 when he was killed in Tien Phuoc while serving with A Co., 2nd Bn., 1st Inf., 196th Light Inf. Bde.

"If I'm going to die in the streets," Federman reflected on the young men's sentiments, "I might as well die with a uniform on, earning a paycheck."

In 1988, Edison High's opportunity for a fresh start began when the student body moved to a new building on a 23-acre facility a few miles north. Renamed Edison/Fareira High School after one of its former principals, it still embraces its sad legacy that began in the hallways of the gothic mansion, starting with the new facility's construction.

The school district had felt pressure since before the Vietnam War to build Edison students a new school. But it was a former student and Vietnam veteran, Tony Burgee, who gave the long-standing proposal another push in 1982.

Burgee organized a committee of Edison's graduates with the intention of raising money for the new facility. Between the school district and Burgee's raised funds, \$50 million was put toward construction. The building has been an active school since its completion in 1988.

"It was a promise made to them before they went to Vietnam," Burgee told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 2000. "It was like a thank you."

The memories of the 64 young men are far from forgotten in the new facility.

Mounted on a wall of the building's main entrance is a bas relief of the original school building. On it is a solid bronze plaque with the names of 54 students killed in Vietnam. (Ten more names were discovered after the plaque was dedicated.)

"I felt people should know the price that one single American neighborhood paid for Vietnam," the designer, Reginald Beauchamp, told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1989.

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For JoAnne Press, who started teaching at the original Edison High building in the 1960s, the young men who went off to war will always be "her kids." "Some days I can't even look at this," Press told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 2000 about the bronze plaque memorial. "Whatever they might have become, they never had an opportunity to fulfill."

Some 54% served in the Army; 43% in the Marine Corps. Nearly three-fourths were in the Army or Marine Infantry. Most were around 20; the youngest was 18 and the oldest 39.

Today, the school still mourns the loss of its 64 young men with an annual ceremony held the Friday before Memorial Day. Darryl Johnson, who attended the first ceremony in 1968 as a student, has been involved with it since he returned to the high school as a staff member in 1999.

"When I returned to Edison as a teacher," he said. "I was pleasantly surprised that the ceremony had continued with increased fidelity."

Gone... but never forgotten.

The ceremony includes patriotic hymns and lectures on the immense sacrifice that comes with war. As a staff member reads out the 64 men's names to an audience, a candle is lit for each individual.

"This is Edison," Press said. "Those were our kids, and they gave their lives."

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