

Navigating Change: Building a Stronger Future for Randolph County Schools

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There has been a great deal of engagement with Randolph County Schools (RCS) in recent weeks, and it stands out as a bright spot amidst the challenging decisions facing our school system. These decisions are undeniably difficult and impact our students and families across the district. Yet, this engagement has revealed some significant areas we need to improve to advance our schools.

Continuous Engagement in Outcomes

I have seen an increase in attendance at board meetings, which is encouraging. However, I have also observed people leaving before explanations and evidence are presented and the spread of misrepresented facts, name-calling, and false accusations. Such behaviors only serve to undermine the productive dialogue that is critical for moving our system forward.

Constructive engagement requires a willingness to listen, learn, and consider perspectives that differ from our own. We must take the time to examine the evidence, reflect on the implications for students, families, and staff, and ask ourselves, “Does this achieve our purpose?” Only by taking this responsibility seriously can we work together to advance our schools and give our children the education they deserve.

Taking the Time to Understand

The RCS leadership team, including myself, has a combined 192 years of educational experience, with 120 of those years in school leadership. These men and women have dedicated their careers to supporting the students and staff of RCS. Unfortunately, some have made swift judgments about proposals with little understanding of the reasons behind them. Our team has faced derogatory comments, threats, and defamatory statements aimed at discrediting the difficult decisions we are tasked with making.

It baffles me that while we trust professionals in fields such as medicine, law, and engineering, education often faces unwarranted criticism. We don't tell doctors how to diagnose patients, lawyers how to litigate cases, or engineers how to construct buildings. Similarly, educators bring expertise that should be respected as they navigate these challenging and complex decisions.



Community members have asked me to consider developing a committee to aid in our work. I am not opposed to this idea, but I recognize that it, too, comes with its difficulties. In the past, I led a superintendent's council that worked well to keep people informed but generated little actionable progress. Many ideas shared by the community could not be fulfilled due to regulations, funding limitations, or systemic barriers. While the council eventually disbanded, it fostered a greater understanding and respect for the complexities of educational leadership.

Comprehending the Difficulty of Balancing Costs in Education

Since the closure of Homestead School in 2017, RCS has lost 544 students, resulting in approximately \$4.5 million in lost funding. This significant reduction, combined with inflation, decreased federal funding, and numerous unfunded mandates, has necessitated complex cost-cutting measures. Despite this, accusations of financial mismanagement persist, fueled by misinformation. It's important to note that our finances are independently audited annually, subject to oversight from state and federal authorities, and publicly reported after board meetings.

The simple truth is that we cannot operate the same-sized organization with fewer resources. Downsizing is not only necessary for survival but critical for ensuring that RCS can thrive in the future. We cannot advance without the resources to invest in critical areas that prepare students for the demands of the future.

Another consideration is that what may make good financial sense may not always suit a student's education. This balance is often overlooked but is one of the most critical aspects of decision-making in our schools. Each penny we expend affects students and staff; that immense responsibility requires great consideration. There are thousands of policies and laws governing education and ensuring compliance while balancing the financial realities adds to the complexity of these decisions.

The dozens of changes we see annually, generated from new leadership, legislative and congressional actions, court rulings, and other systemic outcomes, make this balance even more challenging. Each iteration traditionally brings additional burdens on the district to implement, often without the accompanying funding or resources. This constant state of change requires us to be agile, knowledgeable, and deeply committed to doing what's best for our students

The Risks of State Takeover

Some have suggested that a state takeover would benefit our schools. I encourage those with this view to speak with anyone who has worked in or currently works in a state-controlled district. The responses are rarely positive. A state takeover clearly signals that we have failed in our responsibilities to govern and lead. In other words, we have failed our kids. The state would make the necessary decisions to meet regulatory requirements, including closing schools and cutting staff, without any input from local communities. This is not a path we should want for RCS.

Moving Forward

We can dwell on past decisions or focus on shaping a better future. The past cannot be changed, but the future of RCS depends on us defining what we want for our children. I am not satisfied with where we are or what we provide for our students, and I hope others share this sentiment so that

we can come together to build a better path forward while respecting one another's ideas and hopes for the future.

We don't have to agree on everything, but I urge everyone to take the time to understand the evidence and justifications behind proposals before dismissing them outright. We can move forward with determination, understanding, and a shared commitment to our students' success. Our students need us more now than ever.