

My friends in Education:

On Wednesday, Jan. 18, our Superintendent, Dr. Joseph Burke, conducted a media briefing where he provided information about an upcoming Community Survey on Education. This ambitious project is an opportunity for members of our community to have their voices heard and to provide input concerning our District. And we made it a point to reach out to all segments of our community, not just those who work for or have students in our schools.

You may ask why we're trying to hear from everyone, and the answer is simple -everyone in our community matters.

The District affects all aspects of Lee County - parents, businesses, adults without children and retirees. We're all taxpayers, so we want to hear from everyone.

To accomplish this task, we hired an outside professional - Gibson Consulting, Inc. - who has nearly two decades experience working with approximately 250 school districts across America. The timeframe for the survey is Feb. 1-29, with the results coming to the School Board at a meeting in April.

The survey was born out of the discussion surrounding our current Student Assignment process and related transportation services. The idea was to ask community members a series of questions to get their opinion about what the District was doing and if things needed to change.

It was then decided that if we were going to do such an aggressive project, why not make it more comprehensive than just focusing on Student Assignment. That's why we're also gauging public sentiment on other issues, which include: what types of academic programs our community values; the level of satisfaction they have in the District's ability to prepare students for college or careers; and how they perceive opportunities for parental involvement.

To ensure we do everything we can to reach as many parts of Lee County as possible, the survey will be provided both online and in hard-copy format.

For the online version, you can get there starting Feb. 1 by visiting the District's Web site (<http://leeschools.net>) as there will be a very prominent link at the top of our main page. You can also access it directly at <http://leecountyvoice.com>.

Hard copies are being provided in several ways.

First, you can pick up a copy at the front office of any one of our schools or at our main office (2855 Colonial Blvd., Fort Myers.) We're also sending some to newspaper subscribers via their home delivery in February. And some will be sent home with the interim reports of targeted students at schools across the District. We are even sending informational flyers home to more than 90,000 customers via their utility bills.

Once the hard copy version is filled out, community members can return them to any one of our schools, to the District's main office or you can mail it directly to Gibson Consulting, Inc. (their address is printed on the hard-copy versions.)

Since I've been on the Board, I've stressed that in order to make quality decisions, we must have quality data and information. We realize not everyone can make it to a School Board meeting, so we need to use innovative ways to let people have their voices heard. This survey is a perfect example of that commitment. So we are inviting everyone to please participate -either online or by picking up, filling out and returning a hard copy version of the survey.

Your voice matters - and we want to hear from you.

Jeanne S. Dozier

Board member, District 2