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Raulerson wants more for kids

By Eric Kopp,
Okeechobee News

“If we can give them something at school — something that creates passion — then we’ve got them!”

That emotional statement was made by former Okeechobee High School (OHS) principal and superintendent of schools Phoebe Raulerson to the members of the Okeechobee County School Board Tuesday evening.

Mrs. Raulerson was addressing the board about the Florida Ready to Work program at OHS and how some students are dropping out of school and, because of this, they need to be receiving more vocational training.

“A lot of kids are dropping out because they have to. They need a skill,” she told the five-member school board. “The kids must have a passion — something they want to do. I want to put things into the high school to get kids excited.”

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Patricia Cooper told the board that the local Ready to Work program is the model for the state and that there are currently 1,365 students enrolled in the program.

The Ready to Work program is designed to help employers and job seekers make the right match and to provide more qualified candidates for employers.

In essence, Mrs. Raulerson was telling the school board of the presentation she’s going to deliver at the state level about the local



Omar Alvarado (right) was recognized at Tuesday’s Okeechobee County School Board meeting by Superintendent of Schools Dr. Patricia Cooper (left) for receiving the VSA of Florida 2007 Exemplary Participant Recognition Award for Personal Growth. Omar, who is an eighth grader at Yearling Middle School, is blind. Dr. Cooper told school board members and the audience that he plays the trumpet with this left hand while reading the music in braille with his right hand. On top of all this, he is a member of the school’s marching band. Omar said he thanked his mom, dad and neighbors for helping him.
Okeechobee News/Eric Kopp

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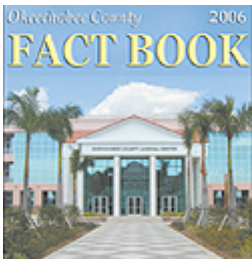
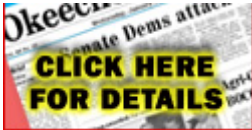
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program. She went on to say she will be pushing for more hands-on training for high school students.

“We’re losing all our craftsmen because we’re not training them,” she said. “They need to be able to read the manual and look up the parts.”

Mrs. Raulerson told the board that, currently, the best drop-out prevention program at the high school level is athletics. But, she added, athletic programs also need to be stronger at the middle school level.

“Athletics can cause a lot of kids to stay and not drop out,” she said.

She also said that many times normal school curriculum simply does not work for every student and that vocational programs can help those students by not only keeping them in school but giving them the tools to succeed in the work force.

“If a student hasn’t learned general math by high school, give it a rest and try something else,” she said. “It’s these kids that don’t see high school as doing anything for them. We’ve got to look at reality here.”

Mrs. Raulerson also stated that she would like to see more of these vocational programs accredited, as well as a hands-on test at the end of the school year.

“Then, we’re creating skilled craftsmen,” she said.

In another presentation to the board, Dr. Cooper addressed the new fifth grade building at Osceola Middle School (OMS). She said she has been meeting with parents and is explaining the school and its concept to them in depth.

She explained to the board that the fifth-grade dropoff and pickup areas will be separate from those for OMS students, and that the fifth graders will be self-contained in the building up to 99 percent of the day.

Dr. Cooper said 95 students from South Elementary and 95 students from Central Elementary will attend the 900-square-foot, 14-room building. She said the fifth graders will have their own extra-curricular activities and their own student council.

She described the school as “a school within a school.”

Dr. Cooper emphasized that these students will be kept separate from middle school students, and will even eat lunch in their own multi-purpose room.

In other business Tuesday, the school board:

- voted 5-0 to keep Joe Arnold in the position of board chairman, and Kelly Owens in the position of vice-chair.

- voted 5-0 to expel from New Endeavor High School a sixth-grade student, two seventh-grade students, two eighth-grade students, one ninth-grade student and one 10th-grade student.
- approved by a 5-0 vote to adopt a resolution asking the Florida Department of Transportation to allow the school board to acquire property near the south gate at OHS by way of quit claim deed. School board attorney Tom Conely told the board that DOT has stipulated that the school board cannot move the gate closer to U.S. 441 North and that the school board maintain drainage. Other than those stipulations, DOT is only waiting on the school board's approval, he added.
- approved a change order of \$21,905.85 for the paving and drainage project at the bus garage/multipurpose building. The change order will increase the total contract for the project to \$816,231.53.
- recognized Valerie McKee, a sophomore at Okeechobee High School, for placing second in the State Farm Bureau Speech Contest.
- recognized Will Davis, a senior at Okeechobee High School, as a National Merit semi-finalist.
- approved by 5-0 vote to change the January 2008 board meeting date to Tuesday, Jan. 22, at 6 p.m. The meeting had originally been slated for Tuesday, Jan. 8.

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