

Recruitment and Retention

As the video indicates, we cannot proceed with this discussion without acknowledging the elephant in the room. The faculty and staff of the District School Board of Pasco County deserves to be paid more. Across the board pay raises, for instructional and non-instructional staffs, must be raised. The referendum that increases the millage rates in Pasco County will help meet this goal. For the purpose of this post, I will not go into all the pros and cons of this proposal. However, I will link the site for you to do your own research. I will say that I am in support of the issue, while I have reservations on the timing and the plan if the proposition fails. I would also note that this proposition does not bring the district nearly competitive enough, although it would be progress. One last note, the salary and/or hourly rate increases is obvious. I have posted about it earlier and I am sure that it will be an ongoing discussion which must be addressed in future discussions. The salary issue is just one component of a much larger issue though. I believe the retention and recruitment issues come down to a lack of respect. It is this larger, umbrella which I would like to focus on today; again, salary increases are a part of this respect. As our state and county recover from the pandemic, teachers have witnessed a shift from being lauded for all the work they do as families isolated in their homes for online learning two years ago to this most precious profession being tarnished and ridiculed at every level; and I truly mean from all directions. We are attacked from the state and federal levels, from both the media and social media platforms and within our own community at school board meetings. It is a profession that has truly experienced the best and the worst, and unfortunately, we are experiencing a pendulum swing in the wrong direction. We cannot correct this mass exit and historic decline in candidates until we first correct this lack of respect. Example #1- Many of you may have heard that the Instructional and Non-Instructional contracts were not voted on until two weeks before the end of the school year. However, few know that the district office staff negotiated, signed and received payment two months earlier. The fact that our district puts itself before its employees speaks volumes (it will be another issue in this series). Example 2- when the governor and the state's legislative body comes out and attacks public educators specifically and our district does not speak up, their inaction speaks even louder. We must elect officials who put their needs behind the needs of their most vital resources. Example 3- when public testimony at school board meetings accuse teachers and staff on a consistent basis and these comments are not discounted, proven wrong and put to rest by our elected officials, staff becomes disenfranchised. We must correct this issue. Respect also looks like supporting discipline concerns and valuing staff experiences. Recently at my school a student attacked an AP, the principal and the SRO. According to Mr. Browning's new "zero tolerance plan" the student should have been expelled. Paperwork was filed in a timely manner, yet the case did not progress to the expulsion hearing. 3 criminal charges have been filed against this student, yet he could return in semester 2. This is but one example of thousands where faculty and staff do not feel supported. The district will showcase its Gallup Survey. I encourage you to look into the numbers, and you will see that the faculty and staff are not happy. Many have asked for a different mode to air or true feelings, but like many things in the district it has fallen on deaf ears. Prior to this summer, a good friend of mine who was a phenomenal educator, who resigned as of June 2022, petitioned the county to allow her and another coworker to hold a training at our annual preschool year institute that would allow the faculty and staff to share reasons for mass resignations and early retirement. This county denied this request; is it because they don't want

to make the necessary changes. It is obvious that they do not listen when we write to them or comment on surveys. The teacher submitted her resignation, stating among other things the lack of collaboration between the district office and the school sites as her motivation. This was a mentor, a school leader and educator that made a difference that has now been lost. And she is just one of hundreds leaving. Until the county fixes this inequity, the mentors, the teachers with experience, and those who sign up for all of the extra responsibilities and duties will leave in large numbers. Respect is also not being shown to those of us with the largest years of service. Once again, this returns to pay. The governors mandate to raise the minimum starting salaries of teachers was done with ill intent. Yes, salaries must increase. But an intended consequence came to fruition almost immediately. Teachers with no experience became equal in pay to teachers with more than 8 years of continued experience. I spoke to a teacher with nearly 15 years of continued experience who explained to me just today, that she could resign this year, take a year off and reapply for her current job and make more money as a rehire. Again, this was done intentionally at the state level. The state in 2008 passed legislation that anyone hired after that date would no longer be given the opportunity to earn Professional contracts. All new hires would default to annual contracts; these contracts can be ended, with limited documentation required to be presented, and the teacher would no longer be rehireable within the county. A few sidenotes here- 1. Imagine being a brand-new graduate, with the debt that is included with this degree, and you know that you could be fired without cause at any time and be unhireable. Would you venture into that field or would you choose something with more guaranteed security and better advancement opportunities? Gone are the days of department leaders and step increases. It isn't uncommon for a teacher with less than 3 years of classroom experience to transition within this district to administrative, training and leadership positions. In many cases people with little to no experience are coaching, leading and evaluating teachers with 7-9 times more experience. 2. Quick analogy, image a profession, say pro-athlete or even someone in the military... Now image a new recruit, someone right out of bootcamp making an annual salary that is larger than the master-sergeant who ran the bootcamp. How would that recruit be respected? How would others look at the master sergeant? And no, the salary should not dictate the respect, but we know that it does. We know that a larger salary tends to be improperly connected to respect and being heard. And that is the situation that has been handed to teachers. It is one of the main reasons we have a massive brain-drain and experience evacuation in our district. This leads to another issue within the topic of retention. Those with the most experience, who feel unheard, disrespected and attacked, who are leaving in mass are leaving no mentors and experienced guides for those who are coming into the profession. I cannot tell you how valuable my mentors my first 3-4 years of teaching were to me personally. I do know that if they were not in my life, I would not be in education nearly 3 decades later. Their advice, their modeling their support was invaluable. And the current climate in schools is making that relationship impossible. We can't retain when there aren't guides and mentors to support those retentions. Last point on retention. And for this, I want to focus on the non-instructional employees. And once again, we must focus on pay first. The support of the \$15 an hour minimum wage is noble. But please do the math, it comes out to less than \$30,000 a year in take home pay. That isn't livable. Yes, many of these people are retirees, non-college graduates, but they can all make more at fast food chains. For schools that use substitutes as a possible recruiting tool... sub here and maybe it will lead to a full-time job. How can we possibly recruit a person when we pay them a flat rate, take away any break and move them 3-4 times a day between different classrooms, subjects, etc. How can we retain bus drivers when students who misbehave, assault

the principal, are allowed back on a bus after less than a 5-month ban? How do we expect to keep them when they again can make more money with Lyft and Uber and not have the weight of 30+ lives on their minds at the same time? We need to hire more drivers. We need to incentivize longevity, in all positions. Nearly every profession in the world sees an increase in compensation and advancement with longevity, except education. This must be fixed. As I transition to the recruitment piece let me say that much of this needs to be changed outside of the district purview. Recruitment needs to be a state, if not a national, concern. We are witnessing a mass exit in education in nearly every state. So, our recruitment efforts are being match and overtaken by many other states. We have no state tax which is an incentive for some, but we rank in the bottom 10% in many education indicators: pay, student spending, educational quality, etc. Even if we were to raise our wages, attracting candidates is harder when you have those strikes against you. You then add the media and social media attacks mentioned earlier, the fact that we are a right to work state and a governor and legislative body that is constantly attacking our schools, verbally and financially, it is an uphill climb. So how do we fix it.... I will say that Pasco might be a model county for some things. The Educational Training Centers, like the one at River Ridge, need to be replicated. One of the things that got me interested and has allowed me to remain is I felt like I experienced teaching often growing up. Part of this was that I benefitted from being the child of one Pasco County teacher and the nephew of another. It was also beneficial that I interned at a school every year of my college experience. I knew very early that this was my chosen profession. Like an athlete who takes to a game at an early age, I developed a toolkit that allows me to recall past experiences, observations of mentors and interactions that allow me to succeed. Education does not do this enough. People think they know what teaching is like, but they really don't. I think I know how to play baseball, but not at a professional level. I do my taxes every year, but I couldn't be an accountant for a large corporation. The same is true for teaching. Because you are a parent, or because you were a student, doesn't mean you know the job. That is why we must elect people with experience to help improve the system. Secondly, we need to do away with the General Knowledge portion of the certification exam. Let me make it clear, I am not trying to say we should make becoming a teacher easier. My reasoning is simple. Students who graduate from a Florida high school have already demonstrated mastery of these skills. They had to pass EOCs, FSA, assessments, etc. Too many of our graduates take years off. Many of our teachers started in other professions. This time off makes skills in certain areas weak. I have little doubt that after nearly 30 years since my last math course, if you gave me the Math portion of the exam, I would struggle. I have a master's degree. I am Nationally Board certified. Yet, Geometry could stop me from being a teacher. Does that make sense? We need to void this requirement, which eliminate thousands of potential teaching candidates from entering the work force. And again, they proved with the gaining of a high school diploma from a Florida high school, that they had those skills. In several of my endorsement meetings for this campaign, I have been asked about affordable housing. It is an issue that hurts many educators. I know first-hand. Our debt-to-income levels are not attractive to lenders. In my first 8 years of teaching, I moved to 4 different schools. Again, a lack of stability in one location was a strike against me. There are programs and special lenders to help teachers find homes, but they are not well publicized. Once again, the lack of moving up the corporate chain and having preidentified salary increases would help with making future plans. But, as indicated earlier, we signed our contract for 2021-22 school year in May 2022. Many who have 10+ years of service have actually seen a reduction in our salaries when one accounts for inflation and compensation packages. So, in-order to attract teachers we need to retain those

here. This retention also includes promoting teaching to our students. One of the programs that aided me as a student was having a FEA chapter- Future Educators Association. For some, it was an excuse to be in a club, either to be with friends or to get out of class. However, like FFEA and FBLA, the skills learned and conversations had promoted the career. We don't do that enough. In this age of higher-level teaching, the push for Bloom's Taxonomy and being able to teach someone else what you have learned is the highest form of demonstrating mastery of learning, why wouldn't we be attracting more educators. If we truly had students teaching one another, they would be able to see that the profession is an option. But we are not having those conversations. The disenfranchisement that has ensued from the lack of respect, poor pay, constant attacks, has made many in the profession to push future students away. Once again, I'm over 2500 words in and I feel like I have just scratched the surface. We haven't discussed the lack of having a voice in much detail. We have failed to mention the increase work loads and expectations that are placed on our desks each and every day. The fact that we are told to not teach to the test yet being constantly reminded of the testing schedules and school grades have gone unmentioned. The inordinate amount of time and money we spend on our own classrooms and students just to get them in their desks. There are so many reasons teachers either leave the profession or never consider it as a profession. Yet, they all come down to respect. Without change, the problem will grow, the number of vacancies will increase, the number of bus routes will diminish. We must make decisive changes. We must increase pay. We must utilize the experience of the work force to foster real change. And we must value all employees. This process can change by electing leaders with true educational experience to positions of true leadership and decision-making. It means in 2 years that we elect or appoint or superintendent that has a focus on improving public education. It means filling a school board with former teachers who have firsthand experience with the real problems and offer real solutions to which effect the classroom. And finally, it begins with electing people who have been committed to improving education for decades, not weeks. Please remember to vote on August 23rd. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out. There is so much more to say about this and many other issues.