

A Message from the Superintendent

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome each of you back to what I believe will be an amazing school year and **welcome you to this email list where I will share information regarding our school district.** As your Superintendent, I feel it is important to keep you up to speed on the successes, accomplishments, stories, and issues we face in Okaloosa County Schools. Over the course of the last 8 months, I have spoken with parents from across our county in both small group and individual meetings. I truly appreciate hearing about not only your concerns, but also your praises. Because so many of you took the time to share your concerns and experiences, we have already made several improvements to our school district in the areas of Exceptional Student Education (ESE), Career and Technical Education (CTE), Safety, School Discipline, and Communication.

This year, our school district's theme is- **Everyone is Important or No One is Important!** This theme came alive based on the many meetings and interactions I had with students, parents, teachers, staff and the community. All of us, from the front office secretary to the bus driver, the teacher to the principal, the custodian to the classroom assistant, the parents to the mentor, the business partner to the community member, ALL parties make a difference in the lives of students. As such, each one of these groups is vital to the success of our students. As parents, we all have the daunting task of raising our children to become active participants in society, empowered by the knowledge and experiences they have gained throughout their young lives. President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "We may not be able to prepare the future for our children, but we can at least prepare our children for the future." I truly believe that our job as educators is to do more than simply educate students; rather, like Roosevelt states, it is our job to empower children to be prepared for an ever-changing society. This beautifully complicated task is why it is important that an open line of communication be the first step in forging our parent/school partnership. Together we are strong and together **Everyone is Important...**

To that end, I want you all to know which initiatives are important to me as Superintendent. First and foremost, **student safety is of paramount significance to me.** While it is unfortunate that the world we live in dictates that additional student safety measures be a necessary must, I recognize that it is, in fact, the world in which our students and teachers live daily. I want to be clear to our parents and guardians: I will always make decisions with your student's safety in mind. Over the course of the summer, many safety enhancements were implemented. Some of the enhancements are easily noticeable while others will not be seen by the eye.

Secondly, **I believe in educating the entire student.** Educating the entire student means placing significance and value in the arts and athletics just as we do in our core academics. Students are more than a score on a standardized test and every facet of public education brings out the best in our students, better preparing them for an unknown future. We will continue focusing on educating students to a very high level while understanding the value of programs such as Band, Chorus, Forensics, ROTC, Athletics and the impact they have on students and academics alike.

Additionally, **I am focused on getting more resources and trainings to our ESE students, families, and teachers.** I have met with ESE parents and teachers in small groups all across the school district and I have learned a lot. Based on these meetings, we have made improvements to the overall ESE programs, and I am excited about the direction in which we are headed. This year, we have two new faces in the ESE Department: Dr. Heather Willis-Doxsee who will lead ESE and Student Services as the Director of these Departments and Amy Bowles, the Program Director over ESE. I think it is also important for our families to know that we have created an ESE Parent Advisory Group who will meet quarterly to discuss ESE matters and provide input, insight, and leadership for our students. Finally, in January, I asked the Florida Department of Education to audit our ESE Program with an outside eye with the goal of strengthening our programs and supporting our students, teachers, and staff. Their recommendations, as well as our own initiatives, included adding school-based positions to directly support students, providing more focused training for our teachers and staff, and creating better oversight to ensure we are meeting the needs of students and families. I am pleased to say that we have made great strides in this area and will continue to make it a focus going forward.

Finally, we are preparing our students for jobs that have not even been created. **Our CTE Programs are a key component to the preparation for those jobs.** From our Drone and Robotics programs in elementary school to Advanced Manufacturing and Cyber Security at the high school level, our CTE Programs are among the best in the State of Florida. Governor Desantis has set the mark high for CTE as his goal is for Florida to be #1 in the nation by the year 2030. In Okaloosa County, our goal is to support this initiative, and a major emphasis will be on strengthening CTE at the elementary level and ensuring the CTE courses we offer support the local economy.

Ultimately, I recognize that raising a child- just as teaching a child- is an awesome responsibility. It is one that requires all of us... parents, teachers, administrators, and school staff to complete the task at hand: preparing our children for their futures. Thus, this email list is one that will continue to open the lines of communication between all parties. My goal will be to communicate with our parents regularly in order to keep you up to date on what's happening in your school district. **If you would like to contact me, please do so at chambersm@okaloosaschools.com or at 833-3191.** Thank you for all that you do as parents for your children.

I truly look forward to this partnership!

Marcus Chambers, Superintendent of Okaloosa County Schools

