

In my 20 years as Superintendent, the closing of North Iberville High has been one of the most difficult professional decisions that I have had to make. By bringing that recommendation to the School Board at its April 21<sup>st</sup> meeting, I was aware of the unrest and resentments that would soon follow. I had 2 choices before me:

***The simple choice*** was to allow things to basically continue as usual, making a few changes here and there, plugging in a new program and then hoping against hope that our children would be better served.

***The second choice, the tough one***, was to close North Iberville and have students attend Plaquemine High School, thereby allowing them more academic and social choices and experiences for preparation into the next phases of their lives.

The question is WHY? On what grounds was this second choice made?

The first is ***students' performance levels***. While some students do graduate from North ready to enter post secondary education, a 2 year career and technical training, or a 4 year university, the majority of the students *do not*. In fact, the average performance level of students at North in middle and high school is far below that of the state average and below that of any other school in the district. The state has deemed an SPS score of 60 as the cut off score for schools falling into School Improvement. Using the School Performance Score Calculator provided by the state, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade SPS at North is 49.6 and high school is 57.7. The SPS of grades 7-12 is 53.7. If grades 7-12 were a *stand alone school* and did not combine its scores with the elementary school

scores, then it would be labeled an *Academically Unacceptable School*. The children from North deserve better.

The second reason for the decision is **course offerings**. Currently there are 96 students in grades 7-12, approximately 24 per grade level. The student population just does not warrant creating elective courses that would serve too few students. Some classes would have no more than 2 or 3 students, making student/peer engagement and interaction, so vital to learning... *near impossible*. Therefore, students are not given the opportunity to explore their interests and talents in a school setting with the guidance and assurance that is so necessary to our high school students having to make such big decisions about their futures. Our children from North deserve better.

Finally, **student preparation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century** must be the guidepost of the entire district high school initiative. Experience and exposure are key to student learning. Programs concentrating on student engagement with high standards, remediation, career and technical focus and college bound curriculum must be developed and implemented. Students must acquire adaptable, transferable skills and learn to solve real-world problems to become 21<sup>st</sup> century employees. All of this requires class sizes and diversities (interests, talents and ability) that are able to sustain such a teaching and learning environment. Students from North deserve this.

Moving students from their home-town school to Plaquemine is being questioned by parents, grandparents and other community members. The feeling is that something is being taken from their children. But the SOMETHING

that they are holding on to, is not working for their children. Moving North students to Plaquemine High is traumatic at best, but the devastation of not moving is even greater.

While we all have questions, concerns and deep feelings regarding this action, we cannot let the kids bear the brunt of *business as usual*. It is time for us to do the responsible thing, as hard as it may be, and open a world of greater opportunity of the children of North. They do deserve it.