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Say Hello to Foundation's New Executive Director Craig Evans

At the start of the New Year, the Foundation welcomed a new leader. Dr. Craig Evans joined the team as the new executive director, succeeding Nancy Peed, who, after 10 years driving the mission and success of the organization, retired at the end of 2007.

Craig has a long history in public education, a deep passion for young people and their achievement, and a great commitment to bridge-building between our community and schools. While new to the Foundation, he's not new to this community. Craig spent the majority of his career in the public education arena, working for more than a decade in Orange County Public Schools - as a teacher, dean of students, assistant principal and principal. He returned home to upstate New York and worked in the Ithaca City School District as a principal and district-level administrator for a few years before heading to Ithaca College, where, most recently, he served as the associate vice president for Institutional Advancement. Welcome, Craig!



• School district staff welcome Dr. Craig Evans



I'm thrilled to be back in Orlando and to continue building on the important work of the Foundation, which has clearly become one of the region's most vital organizations - concentrating on an area that this community has consistently deemed a priority.

For 20 years now, the Foundation has been making a difference through innovative programs and projects such as Read2Succeed, Middle School Kids and Teach-In; a teacher grant program that annually awards hundreds of thousands of dollars to teachers for creative classroom learning; and a major community engagement initiative that's reconnecting the community to the classroom. And I look forward to continuing this organization's great work and exploring new ways to help our students reach new heights.

It's clear this community thrives on partnerships, and we need this sense of togetherness to make a difference for our children. I encourage you to get more involved in driving student achievement in Orange County. Everyone has a role. There are definite needs to be met and so many opportunities to unlock and pursue.

Contact me or any one of our staff members to learn how you can help. Together, let's make sure that every day, every child in Orange County benefits from a quality public education.

*Best Wishes,
Craig S. Evans Ed.D.*

UPDATES

on our Work to Engage the Community and Drive Student Achievement

Survey Uncovers Important (and some surprising) Facts, Issues & Ideas About Parent Involvement



COUNT ME IN! Understanding the state of parental involvement in

Orange County has been the focus of *Count Me In!* for the past few months. More than 500 parents completed a survey to help *Count Me In!* do three things: learn how citizens define parental and family involvement; identify the barriers that impede involvement and ways to overcome them; and collect and share best practices. The results reinforced some assumptions and brought to light some important issues and even ideas. Here's a glimpse at some of the most significant findings:

- The vast majority of **respondents feel their school offers a welcoming environment** and that there is a level of comfort communicating to teachers and school staff.
- While a majority of respondents say they're encouraged by a school to volunteer, **33% never volunteer to help in the classroom.**
- 46% of respondents say **they sometimes or never participate in school-parent decision making activities.**
- Not surprisingly, **time constraints, work-related issues, childcare and transportation issues were the biggest barriers to involvement.** A smaller, but significant, percentage of respondents (13%) indicated that there are language/cultural/educational barriers that interfere with participation at school.
- **76% of respondents indicated they are aware of how the No Child Left Behind Act impacts their child's education.**

While most respondents felt that volunteering in the classroom and attending school events, in large part, defines involvement, dozens of respondents said they're not certain what the real needs are. In addition, some citizens said they'd like more help understanding how to help their child and recommended more school-to-parent outreach, such as parental/motivational seminars, more on-line tools, and 'dad days' at schools.

Count Me In! is now sharing the results of the survey with the district and others in the community. In addition, *Count Me In!* plans to develop a parent-principal-teacher toolkit that will feature helpful and useful information, including a list of community and social service resources, data and informational web-sites dealing with ways parents can help their children, and best practices of local parent-school involvement programs.

Citizens Affirm Their Voice, Role in Helping our Students & Schools



- Members of the *Count Me In!* Steering Committee (a volunteer group of citizens) and the Foundation's Board of Directors met jointly for a planning retreat on February 7 to talk about current work, focus and successes, and to map out specific plans for the future. Look for *Count Me In!* to catapult its role as a community convener, both to gather citizen input and ideas on public education and engagement, as well as to facilitate conversations about important education issues. *Count Me In!* also wants to help create broad understanding of the district's strategic plan, ensure that goals and progress align with the vision and voices of citizens, and motivate community involvement in areas where we can make a difference.



- "Amazing!" "What a sense of camaraderie!" "It's unbelievable to know my opinions matter!" "It's incredible to see that people really care!" That's just a sampling of what 35 diverse citizens from across Orange County said at a community forum to gather input on the revitalization of Robert Hungerford Prep in Eatonville. It culminates months of outreach the Foundation has been conducting, at the request of Superintendent Ron Blocker and the School Board, to generate perspectives from citizens that will help guide the Board in its decision-making on the school's future. Forum participants are reviewing and topping off the hopes, ideas and wants that 350 people expressed in conversations with the Foundation – all to determine what types of educational programs at Hungerford would attract students and thrive. In April, the Foundation will issue a report to the School Board that summarizes the community's vision for Hungerford.

New Video Series Helps Students Deal with Real-Life Issues



A young girl begins losing confidence and pines over her looks and weight. Succumbing to pressure, a teen boy makes the wrong choice and suffers the ultimate consequences. This is real life for our young middle school students who face enormous social, emotional and physical changes on top of dealing with the challenges and rigor of their education.

The Foundation made a commitment to help middle schoolers in Orange County. Last year, the Foundation provided *LifeSkills Training* curriculum (a program of study on social and emotional learning that



connects to academic success) to the district's 36 middle schools in collaboration with the district's SAFE department. The program provided instruction for teachers and students and addressed issues such as positive social interaction, understanding different emotions, the effects of substance abuse and improving self-esteem.

This year, in connection with the *LifeSkills Training*, the Foundation is rolling out a video series aimed at helping teens better cope with real life issues. The videos, which are scheduled to be shown to all middle school children in the district by the end of the school year, feature teens acting out scenes about the choices they make and talking candidly about who they are.

In addition to the classroom focus, the Foundation is helping parents address and talk through these real life issues at home. The Foundation offers middle school *LifeSkills* parent training and helpful resources. For more information, contact Molly Pivaler at [407.317.3261](tel:407.317.3261) or molly.pivaler@ocps.net.

314 Teachers Receive Innovative Teaching Grants

Teachers throughout the district got an extra-special gift before Christmas when the Foundation hosted a reception to award 314 teachers nearly \$220,000 for innovative classroom initiatives. The grants are underwritten by **Darden Restaurants Foundation, Citi, Progress Energy, Universal Orlando Foundation** and **The Bond Foundation**. A sampling of projects and initiatives that were awarded funds include:

- Seismographs for an Earth Science Class at Bridgewater Middle School
- Books for third graders mentoring Pre-K students at Zellwood Elementary School
- Supplies for Olympia High School students studying Japanese art
- Tape players for Freedom Middle School to enhance literacy
- A speech language pathologist collaborating with a classroom teacher on a grammar project



Learn, Act, Vote

This year is obviously a transformational year for our country, state and community as we elect new leaders to guide and serve us. Because public education is a major issue locally, as well as throughout our nation, the Foundation and *Count Me In!* encourage you to learn, act and vote ... to start discussions with candidates in your representative areas to learn where they stand on important educational issues and to hear their ideas and solutions.



On a local level, we have even more reason and motivation to learn about and act on public education as the Orange County School Board recently unveiled its strategic plan for the district - something citizens expressed a need for in the *Count Me In!* Community Agreement. The plan provides specifics on the district's

mission, vision, goals and action plans, and objectives to meet those goals. And with collaboration from *Count Me In!*, one of those goals centers on sustained community engagement in public education. As investors in our public schools, we encourage you to become familiar with the plan, ask questions and get engaged. Visit www.ocps.net for more on the strategic plan.

Remember: ensuring a quality public education for our children is everyone's responsibility. The Foundation has a host of important links on its web site to better help citizens learn, act and vote when it comes to public education.

Visit www.foundationforocps.org for:

- A voter's guide to political candidates and public education issues
- Links to an assortment of local and national resources, reports and data on public education
- Top stories on public education and public engagement initiatives throughout the U.S.

Foundation, Public Connect on Future Goals

Now in its 20th year of existence, the Foundation for Orange County Public Schools has made a mark on enhancing student achievement with thousands of supporters, core student-enrichment programs, a major community engagement initiative and \$2 million provided for district programs and schools each year. But, there's more to be done. Looking toward the next 20 years, the Foundation -- with the vision and voices of the public -- has set our sights on nine primary goals to direct our work for students. If you believe in these goals, won't you join us on our journey to ensure that every day, every child in Orange County benefits from a quality public education? Call the Foundation at [407.317.3261](tel:407.317.3261) to find out how you can help.

- Help all of students excel and make their dreams a reality.
- Motivate greater involvement of the community in the achievement of our children and ensure everyone understands they have a role to play.
- Ensure that parents have the tools they need to support their children.
- Work cooperatively with our leaders to ensure that plans for our schools and communities reflect our vision and voices.
- Help secure excellent teachers in every classroom.
- Build trust and pride in our schools.
- Ensure that all students have equal access to opportunities, resources and programs.
- Help our communities and schools become safer places.
- Bring about greater respect and understanding of our community's rich and growing diversity.



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With Special Thanks

- The Foundation recently received a \$10,000 gift from the *Orlando Sentinel* Family Fund for the RAFT - Reading is a Family Thing - program at Cypress Creek High School. Aimed at addressing family literacy, RAFT currently has 80 children from 45 families actively enrolled in the program. Awarded at a recent breakfast hosted for local not-for-profit organizations, this recognition comes from a committee of Sentinel staff members who read and judge grant applications and make recommendations for funding.
- The Foundation would also like to thank the *Orlando Sentinel* and Orange County Clerk of Courts for their undying commitment to the children in our schools. Both are long-time participants in the Read2Succeed program and engage dozens of volunteers to be reading mentors to second-graders who need a little extra help. In addition, the *Orlando Sentinel* is a long-time co-sponsor of the annual Teach-In (along with Bank of America). Thank you *Orlando Sentinel* and Orange County Clerk of Courts for all you do!

GET INVOLVED

Make a contribution to the Foundation.

Yes! I want to invest in students and teachers in Orange County Public Schools with a tax-deductible gift.

Name _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email Address _____

- \$100 Provides 15 books for mentors to read with second-graders who need support and a little extra help through our Read2Succeed program.
- \$250 Provides 30 workbooks for Middle School Kids - a middle school youth development program that is helping children learn positive social interaction skills, understand different emotions and the effects of substance abuse and prevention strategies, and improve self-esteem.
- \$500 Provides curriculum for 50 students in a family literacy program.
- \$1,000 Provides tuition for 10 teachers to attend professional development opportunities to better meet student needs.
- Other amount: _____

Check enclosed (make payable to Foundation for Orange County Public Schools)

Please bill my gift to: VISA MasterCard Discover AMEX Account # _____

Exp. Date _____ Verification Number _____ Signature _____

Cut out completed form and mail with contribution to:

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