

District School Board of Madison County

Dr. Karen Todd Pickles
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www.madison.k12.fl.us
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April 12, 2019

Chair Gibson, Board Members and Staff:

Effective leaders know when they have reached an impasse and are no longer effective. After pouring my heart and soul into making effective changes for our students, the superintendent and board have reached a position where I personally feel my position is ignored, the board makes their own recommendations, and the position of superintendent is not considered in actions. The past three and half months have been wrought with many accusations, an intentional micro-management battle by the board, and an overall intent to strip the powers and duties statutorily granted to the superintendent. There comes a time when one must decide to continue the good fight and remember why you started a journey; however, when that same journey has a negative impact on your family and health, you must reevaluate the purpose.

After significant reflection, both personally and professionally, I wish to notify you that I have decided to tender my letter of resignation as Superintendent of Schools for the Madison County effective, April 30, 2019. I have accepted another position where my work will focus more directly on providing direct support services to those truly needing assistance, which is one of my greatest passions.

I truly thank the citizens of Madison County and all the staff of the Madison County School District for giving me the opportunity to serve the students in our county. I started this journey in an effort to make changes and turn our school system around. With my background and experience, I know what students need to complete to be competitive for life after graduation. Change is never easy, but I looked for the positive features in all our employees.

I am grateful for the parents, community leaders, and staff, who came together on behalf of student achievement which resulted in significant progress and achievements within our schools. During the 2017-18 school year, we overcame many challenges and improved our district to a grade of B. Our greatest challenge was moving our persistently low-performing school out of turn around.

While under my leadership, Madison County has been filled with many accomplishments in academics and athletics. We have seen improvements in student growth and academic achievement, we continue to close our achievement gaps, we've increased graduation rates, and our latest academic accomplishment was the recent expansion in our learning opportunities. With the excellent coaching staff, our coaches have built relationships with our students and instilled in our teams the desire to achieve their very best. With such, Madison County can proudly claim they are back-to-back State Championships in Football and a first-time State Championship in Boy's Basketball.

Other recent district and school accomplishments show our continued efforts for our students and teachers. These include our collaborated Welding Program with our local community college, our additional instructional professional development support for our new teachers, streamlined

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curriculum offerings focused on standards, and a single sign-on approach with our technology. Additionally, there was a recent change in leadership at our largest school. With this leadership change came a shift in focus to increase the rigor in K-2 and tackle discipline. Providing additional resources and addressing the student issues saw a reduction in discipline referrals.

With additional funding, we now have a school resource officer at each of our public traditional schools and have an increased awareness on the trauma issues our students are faced with daily. Focusing on our students and our teachers is an example of focusing on the whole child initiative and a way to address the social and emotional needs of our students. The increased professional development available to our teachers is just one initiative we have as an investment in our human capital—our staff. The increased staffing investments have been supportive measures to address the behavioral needs in our schools.

With the help of our very supportive community members and business partners, we successfully brought our persistently low-performing school out of turn-around by implementing a continuous improvement model for learning. Madison's educational programs are focusing on a standards-based learning curriculum for our students, but the work is not nearly done.

Additionally, during the 2017-18 year, our audited fund balance realized the largest financial increase since 2012. The audited fund balance increased from 4.0% to 5.5% as of June 30, 2018. With consistent monitoring, and ensuring better grant utilization, we have streamlined our expenditures to begin an overall improvement of the fiscal health of the district—something that cannot be accomplished overnight unless significant expenditure reductions are addressed. Our current practices will continue to see savings in the future.

I can truly say I did what I was elected to do—improve our schools. I truly hope each of you remember why you were elected and focus on our students and govern through policy—something each of you has lost sight of and seem to have forgotten overall the last several months.

I wish the employees of the Madison County School District the best in the future!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Karen Todd Pickles".

Karen Todd Pickles
Superintendent
Madison County Schools