

The Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce recently named an educational steering committee to perform a comprehensive analysis of Winter Haven's public schools with an emphasis on Winter Haven High School and Denison and Westwood Middle Schools. The study is a collaborative effort seeking input and support from educators, administrators, parents, students, business leaders and the community at large. The committee is currently marshaling the resources within the community with the goal identifying ways to substantively improve the quality of Winter Haven's public schools. With the consensus and involvement of the business, educational, professional, civic, governmental and minority communities, we intend to implement programs within our middle schools and high schools designed to inspire our students to achieve their vocational and educational objectives.

The committee will submit a report to the Chamber and the community during May in time to begin implementation of the proposals for the 2011-2012 school year. The report will address the current status of Winter Haven's public schools. This will involve not only statistical analyses, but surveys and personal interviews with all sectors of the Winter Haven community. The report will describe the history of Winter Haven's public schools. It will focus on the societal and educational changes over the years which have adversely impacted the educational performance of these schools. An understanding of the reasons for the current condition of the schools is necessary to develop any effective plan for improvement, particularly programs designed to effect major change for the better. It is our intent to provide everyone a voice in this discussion - as our sole mission

is to significantly improve these schools and without the community deeply involved, real change is not possible. Success depends on implementation, accountability, and the perseverance of everyone concerned over the long term. Plain and simple, any significant improvement in Winter Haven's public schools will depend upon the support and involvement of the community.

Today, local communities must partner with educators to develop robust public schools that build a strong community and with it, a stronger economy. For that reason, the members of the steering committee consist of representatives of the business, educational and civic communities. The partnership, however, is larger than the steering committee; it includes you.

If you have an interest in contributing in this effort in any way, please notify the Winter Haven Chamber by emailing your idea, comments, and suggestions at Chamber1@winterhavenfl.com. Someone from or on behalf of the steering committee will contact you. Members of the committee are currently conducting personal interviews with educators, parents, students and others within the business community to develop a plan to improve the schools. It is seeking to build a strong network of support to implement changes the community proposes to substantively enhance the quality of Winter Haven's public school system. Again, this is a community effort; not just another committee, not just another report, not just a wish list, and certainly not a pointless discussion. This is a community effort to do something that must be done for us all, especially our children.

Winter Haven is a Premier Community only if its public schools are exemplary, and devoted to providing the premier education our children need and deserve. So the time is now to seize the many opportunities at Winter Haven's doorstep, and build rock solid educational paths for our children so that they can have meaningful and rewarding lifetime employment opportunities and enjoy learning as a tool to develop satisfying careers and a path to good citizenship. The future of our children depends on all of us in the community working together. It will not be easy. Admittedly, tough issues and obstacles abound. But there is an old adage, "All of us are better at some things than others, but none of us is better than all of us together." Let's make it happen. It's time.