

## **Acevedo has Brought a High Level of Excellence to Monroe County Schools**

*John Andola, Key West Citizen, Published October 4, 2008*

Randy Acevedo, with 15 years' experience in Monroe County schools, has served as director of instructional technology, executive director of business services and, for the past four years, superintendent of schools. Student achievement under his leadership is at an all-time high. According to the Florida State Department of Education, Monroe County is an A-rated school district with the highest percentage of A-rated schools in the state. Furthermore, over 83 percent of students graduate in four years, compared with the state average of 72 percent.

Costly living in the Keys puts a great burden on teachers. During Acevedo's term as superintendent, however, teacher salaries have been increased across the board. The district now has the highest average teacher salary in the state, the highest beginning salary and the highest ending salary. In addition, Acevedo has placed a strong emphasis on providing teachers the classroom tools they need, including state-of-the-art computer systems and computer access for every student. Our schools have superior student achievement, our students greatly exceed the state average at graduating in four years, our teacher salaries lead the state in all categories, and there is a demonstrated emphasis on providing teachers the tools of learning for the 21st century. Randy Acevedo has clearly earned the right to continue his strong and effective leadership of the schools in Monroe County.

One claim by Acevedo detractors is that he mismanaged district budgets by diminishing reserve funds. The fact is that reserve funds fluctuate greatly at different times depending on the progress of district projects, but the district's reserve funds greatly exceed recommendations from the state of Florida auditor general and the reserves even exceed district policy. The annual district audits by the state Auditor General's Office have consistently resulted in a "clean opinion" with no material weaknesses. I'll take the word of the professional auditors.

Then there is the issue of the sale, or lack thereof, of the Harris School facility. Did anyone notice that the state offered the district far below the appraised value of that property? Normal procedure would have been to offer the average of several appraisals. Then the state demanded the district spend those funds on housing, something the district did not want to do, and the state knew that. Does anyone really think, given the state's low-ball offer and restrictions on expenditure of funds, that the state ever really intended to buy Harris School? That's not a trick question. The Harris School property is a valuable asset and the district is currently working to capitalize on it. The Marathon Manor purchase is truly a non-issue. It was purchased by the district to provide housing and to provide Marathon High School students with athletic fields, giving that school resources equitable to the other high schools. This plan is on track and still moving forward. After the district purchased Marathon Manor, Cay Clubs did consider buying the building, but later retracted the offer.

Acevedo's opponent in the superintendent's race, Fred Colvard, is praised by his supporters as having the broad experience to get the job done. Let's look at Colvard's experience. In 30 years, not counting his two years as principal at Marathon High School, Colvard has held 13 different positions in 11 different school districts in five different states. Three of those positions were as superintendent; two of the superintendent positions were for one year each and one was for two years. Following one of these positions, Colvard did a two-year stint outside of public education, and following the other two, he served in lower administrative positions. I'll let readers draw their own conclusions.

After Colvard's first year as principal at Marathon High School, students were critical of him in a poll that resulted in a student newspaper article he refused to have printed. Students expressed concern that he admitted he spent his first year on the job learning, he made promises he didn't keep, and he was absent from the halls and appeared detached from the school.

Superintendent Acevedo has a strong commitment to Monroe County schools and to our community. During his 15 years with the district, he has contributed a great deal to the success of our schools and steadily moved up to his current position of leadership. Student achievement exceeds the state average, teacher salaries are the highest in the state and teachers have the necessary tools to get the job done. Acevedo has a proven track record and voters need to support him at the polls to maintain the excellence of Monroe County schools.