

April 14, 2014

To Whom This May Concern, to Include But Not Limited To: FAMU DRS Administration, Florida A & M University School of Education Administration, Florida A & M University the President's Office, Florida A & M University Board of Trustees (FAMU BOT), Florida Department of Education (FLDOE), Florida Board of Governors, and Governor Rick Scott:

We represent concerned parents of the Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, Developmental Research School (FAMU DRS). We have vested interests in the success of DRS because we render to this school the absolute best part of us as people, our children. Many of our children have attended DRS from kindergarten forward, while others have come to the school at different intervals. It is our belief that DRS administration has lost control of the school.

Over the course of many school terms a number of negative issues at DRS have contributed to a litany of complaints the concerned parents have identified against the DRS. Because the list is so extensive and we believe remedies to correct will take years, we have outlined the top three most pressing concerns:

- Academic mediocrity
- Subpar leadership
- Negative Student Behavior

Academic Mediocrity

The level of rigor in academic coursework lacks value and substance at DRS from grades 6th -12th. Many students across the school are performing below grade-level in their classes. Students are ill-prepared to perform at grade level or above on both standardized assessments and end-of-course examinations. Major concerns plaguing parents involve whether or not students will have the competencies needed to compete with their peers outside of the culture and environment fostered by DRS.

The culture which exists at DRS currently allows for disorganization, negative disruptions, irresponsibility, and lack of accountability. It also fails to promote time-management, personal responsibility, and academic excellence. Several examples can drive this argument home; however to simplify we will present one example:

"Student A has seven classes, one of Student A's classes is through Florida Virtual School. Student A's other six classes are on DRS campus. Student A rarely turns in assignments by deadline. Student A can float around school in and out of class with no consequence. Student A has numerous opportunities to get extra-credit points although Student A does not turn in assignments when due. Student A's teachers give Student A as well as other classmates numerous opportunities to turn-in past due assignments. Student A makes the honor roll every 9-week period with little to no effort."

Concerned parent perspective:

As a parent, fostering an environment where children are allowed to do what they wish cripples them. This is major disservice because they lack structure, organization, personal responsibility, and

accountability. In the example provided, Student A has bad habits that hold no negative consequences within the school. Where student A should have received zeros for failing to submit assignments by their deadlines, Student A instead was given numerous opportunities to complete and submit assignments as well as numerous opportunities to gain extra-credit points. The lesson student A learned was not a lesson of value but instead how to master procrastination, ignore and disrespect timelines, find loop-holes, and still get rewarded even when failing to do their part.

In addition to those lessons, student A is confused and frustrated because Student A has the FLVS class and those bad habits learned in the other six classes cause a struggle for student A in the FLVS class. The easy path Student A has grown accustomed to on DRS campus does not mirror the higher expectations the student is encountering on FLVS.

As concerned parents we are asking that all students be held to a higher standard. We are asking that consistency exists throughout all classrooms. Characters traits of success include but are not limited to being able to:

- Manage time
- Organize
- Prioritize
- Accept personal responsibility
- Become self-sufficient
- Actively listen and engage
- Think critically
- Work from a smarter platform

The school-system is one of the strongest institutions responsible for the enculturalization of young minds aside from parents, peers, religious and political affiliations. The struggle we as parents of DRS have is the parental institution and the school do not appear to be working collaboratively for the success of the DRS students.

Subpar Leadership

For several years there has been a major disconnect involving effective and transparent communication between DRS administration and DRS parents; information is untimely or non-existent in many cases. Issues of minor importance are communicated; however, issues of extreme importance are not discussed or addressed in a timely manner.

A number of assurances were provided to parents for the 2013-2014 school term to include:

- Amazon Kindles to students for textbooks, assignments, important information
- Parental workshops to assist parents with supplementing the Common Core Standards
- Across-the-board enforcement of school standards, dress-code compliance, rules

And although transparency of the curriculum and highly qualified educators was not something parents were promised, it is important to parents to know exactly what curriculum the school is using when teaching students in all grade-levels and that the teachers interacting day-to-day with students are highly qualified to do so.

As concerned parents, we are asking that DRS administration communicate openly, honestly, and timely with all parents and not a select few. In order to bridge the gap from mediocrity to excellence the efforts must be inclusive of all stakeholders associated with overall success of DRS and each DRS student respectfully.

Negative Student Behavior

Negative student behavior is an ongoing issue at DRS. A number of factors contribute to problems being exhibited inside and outside of the classroom including but not limited to:

- Student/teacher argumentative disruptions (this sends a negative and unprofessional message to students when teachers are arguing back and forth with students and takes away from instruction time)
- Student/student altercations
- Students performing below grade-level mixed with students on or above grade-level (such as a Geometry class where half the students have not yet passed Algebra I). This creates feelings of frustration, anger, and boredom for students.
- Disruptive and unchallenged behavior of students in the classroom, distracting and preventing their peers from learning the course material
- Lack of communication and responsiveness from some teachers with parents

DRS appears to take nearly any student that applies to the school for the purposes of increasing enrollment numbers. Like many schools who demand success, as concerned parents we believe more scrutiny should be taken when considering applications for admittance into DRS. Criteria should be considered which includes:

- Academic aptitude for learning
- Age appropriate standards for positive and negative conduct
- Commitment to parental involvement

As concerned parents and stakeholders of DRS, we are striving for open, honest communication and actions towards the resolutions of these and other issues. We ask that we be invited to bring solutions, not just concerns, and that the paths to implementation be made clear to us so that good intentions are not lost in a sea of bureaucracy where it is never clear who has the power to make improvements.

Respectfully Submitted,

DRS Concerned Parents (Signatories Below)

Addendum to Letter - Concerned Parents of FAMU DRS

Respectfully signed,

Signature Mia Faye Burton
Name Mia Faye Burton
Address 2706 Walnut Way
Tallahassee FL 32310
email MiaBurton@excite.com

Signature Hazel Jamison
Name Hazel Jamison
Address 1324 Central St
Tallahassee, FL 32303
email _____

Signature Ursula E. Staten
Name Ursula E. Staten
Address 1308 Maude St.
Tallahassee, FL 32310
email staten.timmer@gmail.com

Signature Lavada J. Tookes
Name LAVADA J. TOOKES
Address 1328 Caleman ST
Tallahassee, FL 32310
email lavada.tookes@yahoo.com

Signature Daniela F Cross-Wilkin
Name Daniela F Cross-Wilkin
Address 272 Briky Ct.
Tallahassee FL 32305
email nia.fifi73@gmail.com

Signature Quinnette S. Griggs
Name Quinnette S. Griggs
Address 930 Crawshaw Ln
Tallahassee, FL
email QuinnetteGriggs@gmail.com

Signature Stacy Timmer
Name STACY TIMMER JR
Address 1308 MAUDE ST
Tallahassee, FL 32310
email stacy.timmer@gmail.com

Signature Esther Warendorf
Name Esther Warendorf
Address 137 Robin Rd
Monticello, FL 32344
email E.W.HomeFinder@gmail.com

Addendum to Letter - Concerned Parents of FAMU DRS

Respectfully signed,

Signature Norman Gallon
Name Norman Gallon
Address 2706 Wahnishukay
Tallahassee, FL 32310
email _____

Signature _____
Name _____
Address _____
_____ email _____

Signature Eula Fogle
Name Eula Fogle
Address 2706 Wahnishukay
Tallahassee FL 32310
email _____

Signature _____
Name _____
Address _____
_____ email _____

Signature Jennifer Williams
Name Jennifer Williams
Address 725 KENDALL DR
TALL. FLA. 32301
email tiyhtgrip323@aol.com

Signature _____
Name _____
Address _____
_____ email _____

Signature Ashanti K. Fisher
Name Ashanti K. Fisher
Address 1331 Coleman St.
Tallahassee, FL 32301
email idmark@aol.com

Signature _____
Name _____
Address _____
_____ email _____

Addendum to Letter - Concerned Parents of FAMU DRS

Respectfully signed,

Signature Rochelle Jackson

Name Rochelle Jackson

Address 718 E Brickyard

Rd Midway FL 32343

email Rochelle.Jackson@yahoo.com

Signature _____

Name _____

Address _____

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