

Editorial: Collier County public schools

Making (up) the grade?

By Daily News staff

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When a handful of parents first brought concerns to the attention of the public and the Collier County School Board about the way grades are determined at the very highest pinnacle of high school academics, we struggled to grasp the overall importance. Their point seemed as narrow as the differences among grade-point averages of graduating seniors in the rarefied atmosphere of the A-plus-plus list.

Some School Board members were reluctant to go along with parents' cries for an outside, independent audit as if they were on a witch hunt.

Now the audit is in, and the public ought to be glad the parents persevered.

The audit found students earning various levels of credit for the same course or even credit for a course they did not take at all.

The audit keeps going, describing a status quo in need of scrutiny, reform and accountability.

The audit found:

- Students lifting weights or washing towels or as part of classes with titles such as Peer Tutoring or Leadership Development.
- High school students retaking courses from middle school in order to boost their eventual grade-point averages and impress colleges.
- Students who have taken hard courses in a subject being allowed to take easier courses, some of them online, in the same subject — again for appearances rather than substance.
- The opportunity for students and others to gain access to other students' academic records via computer.

And more.

Auditors from the firm of Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP come to the point: "The academic integrity of the schools is called into question."

This is serious stuff.

The impact could be serious, too. School Board Chairman Steve Donovan said Wednesday he is calling a special meeting for next Tuesday on two topics — the audit and the employment status of Superintendent Ray Baker. Donovan says the problems cited in the audit call for "a true shake-up" in the administration, and changes will be made.

He calls the practices cited in the audit cheating and evidence that the administration's emphasis on academic rigor is, in part, an illusion.

It behooves the public to be aware and informed and stay tuned as more and varied opinions on the audit's powerful findings come forward. Whatever is to happen will happen quickly.

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