

August Georgia is becoming Parent-Driven

For Brenda Johnson and Lisa Winebrenner, the future of Butler High School is right now. And, for them, this future will get a little closer when their PTA hosts Randy Gaschler, author of “Parent-Driven Schools”

After yet another year of Butler missing the Governor’s List, the two PTA members determined that something radical has to be done.

“Our school has not been meeting the Georgia standard, but we also weren’t getting any help,” says Winebrenner, who serves as the president for the Butler PTA. “Our kids are every bit as smart and capable as kids in other schools. But, for whatever reason, the Butler environment has been a collection of problems, with children from less fortunate circumstances.”

“I was really frustrated,” says Johnson, who is also a Butler alumni. “I was searching the internet, looking for something positive that we could do here. That’s when I found Randy Gaschler and ‘Parent-Driven Schools’.”

Gaschler, who is also the president of the California-based nonprofit Innovative Education Management, is a strong advocate of parents taking back charge of their children’s education, especially through the charter school model.

“I read his book and knew that what he had to offer is what we needed.” Says Johnson. “So I contacted him. He’s scheduled to come to Augusta on February 15 to meet with parents. We believe his visit will inspire parents as to what is truly possible.”

Gaschler pioneered the charter school movement in California, and has operated several successful schools. One of his biggest arguments for parent-driven charter schools is that he believes the current trend toward teaching kids on the basis of passing

standardized tests is detrimental to the development of children becoming life-long learners. He says standardized testing is the biggest hoax ever pulled on American parents. In this book he describes the grassroots movement he led, and how that movement led to 700 parents gathering at the steps of the state capitol ultimately led to positive changes in their local school district. These changes allowed teachers to consider the overall learning styles of individual children, rather than teachers trying to fit every child into the standardized testing box.

“What we want for our kids at Butler are some of the advantages other students have.” Says Winebrenner. “The fine arts and the math and science magnet schools have made the Governor’s List for many years. We believe our kids are just as capable.”

She went on to say that her belief is that the high standards held at the magnet schools should be the same at Butler. “I think our students need to be held to a higher level of accountability. But, I also believe the teachers need to be held accountable, too. With a change in the environment of our school, I believe that there will be a high level of leadership in the classroom. That’s what is needed.

“We know that bringing Randy here is just the beginning. We know he can’t do it all in one trip, and we can’t do it all in one year. But we have to start.” And there’s no time like the present.

For more information on Innovative Education Management and Parent-Driven Schools, contact Michelle Payne at mpayne@ieminc.com, or at 916-787-9909.