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**Hillsborough County**  
**PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
*Excellence in Education*

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 MaryEllen Elia

July 21, 2008

Mr. Dale McClellan  
 President  
 Hillsborough County Farm Bureau, LAA  
 100 South Mulrennan Road  
 Valrico, Florida 33594

Dear Mr. McClellan:

It was a pleasure to meet with you, Judi Whitson and Michelle Williamson, to discuss the Agribusiness programs that our district offers to students in numerous high and middle schools. Thank you for your letter dated May 29, 2008, requesting more information concerning the Agribusiness programs. Our district has long supported the Agribusiness programs and the Career and Technical Student Organization, FFA. We have been partners with the Hillsborough County Farm Bureau Federation and the community and look forward to continuing the partnership.

We continually update our program offerings to stay current with industry trends. This summer, we are writing curricula for our middle school programs to ensure that they meet the rigor needed to prepare our students to stay connected to Agribusiness programs as they articulate to high school. We encourage our students to be program completers and to be active participants in FFA. Focusing on a program of study enables students to expand their knowledge base and remain competitive for leadership positions and scholarships.

Students in our district are encouraged by their parents, peers, teachers, guidance counselors and administrators to pursue the highest level and most rigorous academic courses. Our state has a partnership with the College Board. This partnership is vital to preparing our students for postsecondary courses and the world of work. The College Board is a non-profit organization built on research based best practices.

Taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses does not prevent a student from taking a Career and Technical Education (CTE) course. Our research shows that 82 percent of students who are enrolled in AP courses are also enrolled in CTE courses. This proves that our CTE courses help to prepare our students to be competitive both in college and in the workforce. The district offers students the choice between AP courses and dual enrollment courses which both provide students with rigorous course work and preparation for college. Counselors are trained to help students and parents decide upon the best course schedule based solely on the students' needs.

While our students are allowed to choose a program of study to meet their needs, our teachers are also allowed to participate in trainings to help train them in best practices for their specific area of expertise. One example of this is the Content Area Reading Professional Development (CAR-PD) course. The CAR-PD course teaches elective teachers effective reading strategies which they can incorporate into their curriculum. The CAR-PD training allows CTE teachers to keep those FCAT Level 2 students in their courses rather than losing them to a reading remediation course. Each elective teacher in Hillsborough County has been offered multiple opportunities to take this training. Teachers who participate in the CAR-PD training are also eligible for a one-time \$500 incentive payment. Ms. Pam Peralta, General Director of Career and Technical Education, sent information regarding CAR-PD to Ms. Whitson. We appreciate the Farm Bureau's willingness to help us communicate to our teachers the importance of obtaining CAR-PD credential.

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I know that one of the concerns that the public had last year was that of reducing the contracts of the Agribusiness teachers. It was viewed as a means of closing down some of the programs in the county. That was not our intent. The reduction of contract time was not done lightly. The Agribusiness teacher contracts along with roles and responsibilities were studied and it was determined that we could maintain effective Agribusiness programs while reducing the number of hours for which each teacher was contracted. Based on the needs of the students and each program's specific requirements it was decided that each high school would maintain one twelve-month teacher, and a provision was also made for extended contracts for the other teachers in each department.

As you are aware, FFA should be an integral component of each Agribusiness course. The FFA provides agriculture students with numerous opportunities for leadership. We would like for every student taking agriculture classes to be allowed the privilege of being involved in a quality program such as FFA. Agribusiness teachers are strongly encouraged to establish FFA chapters that would allow their students to partake in various leadership and educational opportunities including but not limited to Public Speaking, Parliamentary Procedure and other judging contests. Hillsborough County Public Schools is fortunate to have teachers who excel in encouraging FFA students to achieve the highest levels of both academics and leadership.

I have asked the new agribusiness supervisor, Pam Walden, to be available to attend Farm Bureau meetings in order to facilitate and encourage an open dialogue between the District and the Farm Bureau. Mrs. Walden may be contacted at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED].

If you have additional questions in this regard, please advise.

Sincerely,



MaryEllen Elia  
Superintendent