

A Journey to the Superintendency and Beyond

RETIRED SUPERINTENDENT FARON HOLLINGER

WORDS NEIL ADAMS

“A leader’s success will, in large measure, depend upon the quality and character of the people they surround themselves with.”

This is one of the greatest lessons that Faron Hollinger learned during his career as a teacher, school psychologist, and administrator.

“People may not necessarily remember your specific accomplishments as a leader, but they will almost always remember the way you interacted with them and the relationships you developed with other people throughout your time of service.” It is the wisdom acquired through his career in public education that has motivated Hollinger to continue his work through the private sector.

Hollinger chose the University of South Alabama for his undergraduate work in order to romance his high school sweetheart, Marsha, whom he later married. Marsha served as a physical education and biology teacher, coach, and media specialist in the Baldwin County Schools and then as a media specialist in the Walker and Mobile County Schools. They have two sons and four grandchildren.

Hollinger comes from a family with close ties to public education. His mother, Louise, served as the comptroller of the Baldwin County School System for 42 years. Hollinger entered college with the expectation that he would take a different direction. He earned his bachelor’s degree in criminal justice with a minor in sociology while working as an intern in the Alabama Department of Pardons and Paroles. Upon graduation, the state had a hiring freeze on probation supervisor positions so he went to work as a psychiatric aide at the Albert P. Brewer Developmental Center in Mobile.

After working at the Brewer Center for two years, Hollinger received a call from Dr. A.R. McVay, then superintendent of

Baldwin County Schools. McVay asked Hollinger if he had ever considered working as a teacher and proceeded to tell him about an expanding field in education – special education. Hollinger responded to this opportunity by enrolling at Mobile College for coursework leading to teaching certification. Hollinger then accepted a position as a special education teacher in Baldwin County High School, his alma mater. During this time, he completed his master’s in special education and certification in school psychometry at the University of South Alabama.

While Hollinger enjoyed his work as a teacher and psychometrist, he dreamt of becoming a school psychologist and applied to UA for an EdS degree in school psychology. Hollinger says the most impressive aspect of his time at the Capstone was the overall character of the institution, the outstanding faculty, fellow students, and the rigorous standards of department leaders such as current Dean Jim McLean.

In 1986, upon completion, Hollinger was promoted to school psychologist and supervisor for school psychological services. His responsibilities were expanded district-wide and he was promoted to the level of division superintendent for all special services. It was during this time that he completed his doctoral studies at the Capstone.

The city of Jasper provided Hollinger his first opportunity to lead a school system. Hollinger said he was attracted to that system by the very positive reputation that the system had. He learned the importance of investment in early childhood learning and a commitment to innovative technology. These factors would become cornerstones for Hollinger’s time in the city and he credits any success to the standard of excellence established by the previous superintendent, outstanding employees, and to

the efficient use of resources by a small school system.

In 2002, Hollinger returned to Baldwin County Schools as superintendent. During his tenure, student achievement increased and International Baccalaureate programs began at two separate high schools. The district received District Accreditation as a Quality School System through SACS. Technology was a major focus and the school system greatly increased its Wide Area Network and the ratio of networked computers per student. He worked to bring national attention to the Baldwin County School System and to increase public/private partnerships, which totaled more than 900 upon his retirement.

Upon his arrival in 2002 the Baldwin County school system, one of the fastest growing in Alabama and the Southeast, had not built additional school space since 1998, and required numerous portable classrooms. During Hollinger's tenure almost 1.3 million square feet of educational space was constructed, reducing the number of portable classrooms from 200 to less than 50.

In keeping with his leadership philosophy, Hollinger brought in a number of highly successful team members, including a former Fairhope High School class valedictorian. This CIO, Derek Roh, brought a corporate mentality to the way the school system organized and deployed its technology. Within three years, he received the National Public School CIO of the Year Award from the Consortium of School Networking. In 2010, Hollinger retired from his position as superintendent.

After his retirement, Dr. Hollinger began working as an educational consultant and in August 2011, he was invited to join the Board of School Superintendents (BOSS) in a Cohort Chair position. BOSS is a national organization devoted to providing professional enhancement and consulting services



Dr. Hollinger with Gene Stallings

to current school superintendents through coaching support, cohort roundtables, professional networking, and superintendent leadership development. BOSS was recently recognized as a finalist in The Regional Finals for the Harvard Business School Business Plan Competition.

"It is important first and foremost to be a servant of the people; not only with the people working for the organization, but also the people served by the organization."

As a result of the positive experiences he has enjoyed and the relationships he has established, Hollinger has now launched his own consulting firm, known as Akribos Consulting Group. Through Akribos and BOSS, Hollinger is currently involved in a number of projects with more in the discussion stages. Hollinger also works with The University of Mobile Center for Leadership, where he writes a weekly inspirational column for educators. He partners with the Center for Leadership's director, Dr. Joe Savage, and his brother

Phil Savage of NFL and Crimson Tide Radio, to provide staff development and leadership training for educators across the region and state.

In 2009, Hollinger was asked to serve on the Capstone Education Society Board of Directors. He says that this invitation was the icing on the cake and a major highlight of his professional experience. The best part, he says, is being able to give back to the institution, renew old acquaintances and develop new relationships.