

Unification will battle poverty

Some ask why the Chamber supports school system unification, instead of focusing on poverty. The answer is very simple: The Chamber's mission is to build a strong and healthy community, resulting in job opportunities for our citizens, which addresses poverty. Improving public education is the single most important thing we can do to build a strong community, grow jobs, and reduce poverty.

Valdosta's business community consistently ranks "lack of an educated, qualified workforce" at or near the top of their biggest challenges in growing their businesses. Our community has a large high school drop-out rate, affecting the quality of our workforce. Residents without a high school diploma have limited job prospects and little disposable income to spend in our businesses. Lack of education leads to poverty. It is a vicious circle.

We have two separate school systems whose educational outcomes are

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters Policy

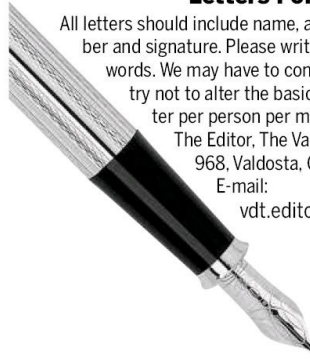
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words. We may have to condense letters, but we try not to alter the basic message. Only one letter per person per month. Write to: Letter To

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merely average in one of the lowest ranked states in the country. The Chamber believes that "being average" hurts our community. We must combine our resources and our efforts and work together — as a community — to transform two average school systems into one great public school system.

Working separately — even with extraordinary effort by our educators —

our school systems have experienced limited success. We believe that unification will provide the platform upon which our community can transform public education — and help us grow jobs, reduce poverty and increase our quality of life.

Tom Gooding
Chairman of the Board
Valdosta-Lowndes County
Chamber of Commerce