

## Local principal named one of state's best

Bill McElroy, principal of the Professional Academies Magnet at Loften High School and director of career-technical education for Alachua County Public Schools, has been named one of the state's top three high school principals by Florida TaxWatch, a non-partisan, non-profit public policy research organization.



TaxWatch announced today that McElroy is one of nine statewide winners of the annual Principal Leadership Award, three of whom are high school principals. He and his fellow award winners will be recognized at the statewide TaxWatch Spring Meeting in May of next year.

According to the Florida TaxWatch website, the principal program “identifies principals around the state who have had the greatest impact on their students, in parts of the state where educational success can transform a community.” Principals are not nominated by others and do not apply for the award. It is based on data from the schools, including test results and school demographics.

McElroy says news of the award took him by surprise.

“It came out of the blue for me,” he said. “I feel very humbled and a little odd about accepting this award because what happens here at Loften is a team effort. Every adult on this campus has a singular focus on creating an ideal learning environment for students.”

McElroy began his education career in 1990 as a teacher at Gainesville High School. He worked as an assistant principal at Ft. Clark Middle School and as principal at a school in Charleston, South Carolina before returning to GHS as an assistant principal. After a short stint at the district office helping to develop new end-of-course exams, McElroy was named principal at PAM@Loften in 2012. Soon afterward he was also put in charge of all career-technical education programs in the district.

During McElroy's tenure, the number of career tech offerings in the district has expanded, with new programs designed to prepare students to work in such fields as education, robotics, manufacturing, allied health assisting and others.

The number of career certifications earned by local middle and high school students has grown to more than 2000 in 2018.

PAM@Loften is entirely a magnet academy high school, which means all the students have chosen to attend the school. Students participate in a career cluster based on their interests and in an academic schedule that provides them with a strong foundation for post-secondary education and/or the workforce. The career clusters available at PAM@Loften include automotive technology, gaming and mobile apps, graphic art and design, robotics and engineering and fire and emergency medical services. All of the programs offer students the opportunity to earn valuable industry certifications that give them a leg up on college and careers.

“I've always told kids to love what they do and get good at it,” he said. “Our students come here for that reason. They know this is a place where they can follow their passions.”

*(more)*

Students at the PAM@Loften often earn state and even national recognition. The school itself was recently awarded a Bronze Medal by *U.S. News and World Report* based on its state test scores, graduation rate and the academic performance of minority students.

“This is a much-deserved award for Bill, his staff and the students as well,” said Superintendent Karen Clarke. “There are amazing things happening at PAM@Loften, and it’s wonderful to see them getting the recognition they deserve.”

“I’ve never worked in a learning environment like this one,” said McElroy. “I feel so blessed to be here.”

As an award winner, McElroy will have the opportunity to select one of his students to receive a 2-year Florida Prepaid College Plan Scholarship. Next spring, one of the three high school award winners will also be selected for additional recognition and a cash prize.

####