

# Temple Terrace Prepared To Help Improve Schools

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TEMPLE TERRACE - After a handful of meetings with the school district, Temple Terrace city leaders say they are happy to work with the district to improve Temple Terrace schools.

The comments that came at Tuesday's city council meeting were in stark contrast to the words that came from city leaders two weeks ago.

During a Jan. 24 town hall meeting, city council members and the mayor expressed concerns over the schools' poor academic performance, high incidents of crime and lack of dynamic programs that would attract Temple Terrace residents. Some city leaders suggested that Temple Terrace should break away and become its own district.

But Mayor Joe Affronti seemed more optimistic Tuesday night, citing several meetings he had with district leaders including Superintendent MaryEllen Elia.

"We don't want to be adversaries," Affronti said. "We want to work together to do what's best for our schools."

The city sent the district a list of recommendations and other public comments from the town hall meeting. Some of the suggested items were the need to re-examine school boundaries, implement a magnet program and convert Greco Middle into a high school. Affronti said the talks went well and he hopes changes will be made soon.

During an interview a day before the council meeting, Affronti said he doesn't believe these talks would have happened if he hadn't spoken out in favor of creating a smaller school district. Last month, he went to Tallahassee to support a bill that would split large countywide districts into as many as nine smaller districts.

"I'm not completely blaming the district for all our problems," Affronti said. "There are things the city certainly should have done to reach out to the district for help."

Most of the council members praised Affronti for "stirring the pot" to bring change to the schools, but Councilman Ron Govin criticized Affronti for creating his recommendations without discussion from council. Affronti said time constraints forced him to draft the list and that he kept council members informed on all the discussions.