

April 27, 2005

For more information contact:

Kevin McGeever, Online City editor (727) 893-8854

Anthea Penrose, Public Relations Manager (727) 893-8461

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## *St. Petersburg Times* launches “The Classroom” – an online ‘blog’

The Classroom, a sptimes.com web log on education, is off to a fast start.

Clayton Wilcox, the Pinellas County superintendent of schools, is the host for this online discussion on the *St. Petersburg Times* Web site ([www.sptimes.com/classroom](http://www.sptimes.com/classroom)). Wilcox has commented on controlled choice, the county’s alternative to court-ordered desegregation; on the quality of the high schools; on transportation services and student safety.

Since March 13, the Classroom’s first day, more than 1,700 responses have been posted.

Here’s a sampling:

On April 22, after sptimes.com posted a video of a 5-year-old student being handcuffed by police, Wilcox wrote:

“Today (4/22/05) the St. Pete Times and most of the local media are running a videotape of police handcuffing a kindergarten student at one of our schools. While it is very difficult to watch on the surface- given the age of the child and a number of other factors, there were circumstance "informing" the incident that I can not go into here due to both student and employee privacy concerns.

“I am interested in both your reactions to the video (available on the Times website) and suggestions that you might have for dealing with student discipline at the school house - absent the use of physical force or intervention by the police.”

Within 24 hours, his message prompted almost 400 comments.

The Classroom is sptimes.com’s first web log hosted by an outside source. Kevin McGeever, the *Times*’ online city editor, said: “We were looking for an issue that would attract participation. In Pinellas County, one of the nation’s largest school districts, public education is in a critical moment as it emerges from court-ordered desegregation.”

Wilcox, the first-year superintendent, has been a willing host, McGeever said. “The superintendent is web-savvy and interested in keeping in touch with his constituents. He posts at least twice a week and plans on using the blog to deliver news to parents.”

###