

Unfinished Business

An Analysis of the Turnaround Of
Okaloosa Schools 2001 – 2005
And a Roadmap for Doing Even Better

A Report Commissioned by the Okaloosa County
School Board

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Introduction:

“It is not what we have done but what we still must do...”

Recently the Okaloosa County School District has been recognized as ranking first in the state of Florida in reading, mathematics, and science proficiency and tying for second in writing as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). This recognition by the Governor and Commissioner of Education comes on the heels of Okaloosa schools performing as Best in Florida in student academic achievement the preceding two years, 2004 and 2003, by having the highest percentage of schools graded an A.

June, 2002, was the first time Florida schools were provided FCAT Sunshine State Standards and Norm Reference Test data by achievement level for each student in grades three through ten. Also beginning in 2002, FCAT total scores for reading and mathematics were reported in terms of a new developmental scale that provides for reporting growth continuously from grades 3 – 10. For these reasons, 2002 student achievement data is our baseline from which we measure academic improvement.

If the same baselines were available for prior years, the gains made by Okaloosa Schools between 2001 and 2005 would be displayed as even more evident and dramatic. Beginning in 2001, Okaloosa Schools began a significant academic transformation. Okaloosa became the first district in the state to end social promotions, the first to provide publicly-funded, privately-provided one-on-one tutoring to failing students through the Second Chance Fund, and the first to begin conforming previously inflated grades to actual performance against Sunshine State Standards.

Okaloosa Schools began to experience the positive impact of these and other academic reforms as county schools moved from a reported 27th in the state in 1999-2000 to 2nd in the state in 2002 in school grades.

Continuing since 2002, we have succeeded in steadily increasing the percentages of students who score at or above grade level in the core areas tested by Florida and decreasing the percentages of students who score below grade level. We have also been successful in raising the academic performance of many students in the subgroups named by the No Child Left Behind legislation, particularly our African American students and our Students with Disabilities.

Today our students scoring at the proficient level in reading has improved by 17.38% since 2002; too, the percent of students passing reading with a Level 2 or above now stands at 86.29% compared to 77.68% in 2002. Our students have improved in mathematics proficiency by 22.05%, and our students performing at Level 2 and above in math outscore reading slightly at 88.34%.

In the NCLB subgroups, our African American students have improved substantially, moving from 33.16% proficient in reading in 2002 to 46.18% in 2005, an improvement of 39.28%. In proficiency in math, they have moved from 33.29% to 48.72%, an improvement of 46.34%. Also a NCLB

subgroup, Students with Disabilities have increased their academic performance, often dramatically. Students with Disabilities scoring in the proficient range in reading have improved by 82.83% and by 82.84% in mathematics.

These are historic accomplishments. The Commissioner of Education has said that Okaloosa Schools have come further in less time than any other public school system. At the beginning of the 2005-2006 academic year, Okaloosa Schools are recognized as not only first in the state in reading, mathematics, and science but as having set new state-wide achievement records in those academic disciplines.

However, the hallmark of the Administration and School Board which took office five years ago has been to avoid rest stops and excuses and to continuously develop even better student performance. This has led to every school setting higher expectations for itself every year and increased customizing of educational services to meet the needs of individual students.

This report will discuss the specific areas where there are still ample opportunities and, indeed, significant obligations for Okaloosa Schools to keep doing better.

The state has correctly recognized that, in the 2004-2005 school year, of our students scoring in the Lowest 25th Percentile, 60% made learning gains in reading; 15 counties increased the learning gains of these students more than we did. It is also true that, this past year, 64% of our grade 3-10 students made learning gains, the second highest in the state, but our very lowest students are not making gains as rapidly compared to fifteen other districts.

One explanation may be that, because our gains have been so dramatic over five years – raising literally thousands of students from below grade level to grade level or better performance – it is natural that in the fifth year our rate of ascent should naturally slow. Another explanation may be that other school districts that didn't raise standards and provide extensive help to struggling students as early as did Okaloosa are now having the statistical advantage of “picking the low-hanging fruit.” This argument would also hold that the lowest 25 percent of Okaloosa students are achieving a far higher level of proficiency than the lowest 25 percent of, say, Duval County students (Duval led the state in learning *gains* but was far from the top tier in learning *proficiency*.)

However valid those arguments may be, there is an over-riding value: an organization whose mission is education can never be satisfied until every practical action is taken to help a child learn. While our lowest 25 percent have risen to the level of many districts' middle 50 percent, we still have opportunities which, if not low-hanging, are well within our reach if we stretch.

It is not what we have done but what we still must do that should be the mission of Okaloosa Schools in this school year and beyond.

10th Grade, LEP and Gifted:
The most evident problem areas

The most evident "soft spot" in our performance is tenth grade reading. While there is a slight gain in proficiency from 2004 to 2005, across the four years from 2002-2005 our tenth grade students' reading performance has actually declined by 1.96%. Reading proficiency begins its decline in the middle grades and ends with OCSD's lowest level of proficiency occurring in the 10th grade. Looking inside this 10th grade regression shows that Students with Disabilities, Economically Disadvantaged students, and African American students regressed in proficiency performance by 29.74%, 22.73%, and 11.31% respectively. Looking still deeper, tenth grade is the only grade level in which Specific Learning Disabled students regressed in 2005 by 15.77% (see Sec. B, p. 101).

No high school in Okaloosa County is immune to this serious issue. For the specific data on each subgroup, see Section B; data is listed by each No Child Left Behind subgroup, by grade level, and by school.

Too, with several grade level exceptions, our Hispanic students and our Limited English Proficiency students have not made the progress we have set out as objectives in our School Performance Plans. In fact, as a district, Okaloosa failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress under No Child Left Behind precisely because our Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students did not meet the performance objectives set by the state.

Of the thirty categories of student performance measured in NCLB, our students met twenty-eight but fell below the objectives set for reading and

math for LEP students. The NCLB AYP objective for reading is 37% at or above Level 3; our LEP results were 25%, well below the objective. The math objective is 44% at or above Level 3; our LEP students scored at 39% proficient (see Sec. B, p. 46).

Many of these non-proficient readers in the NCLB subgroups and tenth grade also fall into the Lowest 25 Percentile group identified by the state, but these are not our sole areas of concern. Perhaps surprisingly, in 2005, 19.53% of our gifted students regressed one or more achievement levels in reading and 14.09% regressed one or more achievement levels in mathematics. The heaviest reading regressions in our gifted students are in middle school; all three grade levels (6, 7, and 8) showed the highest percent of regression in our district. In sixth grade reading, 20.33% of the gifted students regressed one or more achievement levels; in seventh grade, 16.36%, and in eighth grade 39.75%. The greatest regression of gifted students in mathematics is in the fourth grade with 28% falling back one or more achievement levels (see Sec. B, p. 173).

Just as it is critical that we recognize where and how we are making remarkable learning gains, it is equally important that we address the areas where gains are below expectations or where, in some cases as noted, students at both ends of the proficiency continuum are regressing in our schools. To do this, we must examine and reinforce those practices that have worked for our students, discard ineffective methods even if they are time-honored and turn renewed attention to those areas that need improvement.

The 2000 Baseline: A School System in Decline

The purposes of this document are to recognize the condition of our district in late 2000 and early 2001, to give an overview of actions taken by Okaloosa School District, both organizational and instructional, which have resulted in our remarkable increase in student achievement, to recognize the patterns emerging from four years of student data, and to make recommendations to continue and increase the achievement of all students.

Although the 2002 data set serves as our baseline, the year preceding that assessment was anything but idle in Okaloosa's schools. By the year 2000

there was a growing unease in our county regarding the effectiveness and the viability of our school system.

Citizens were increasingly concerned with the declining academic rank of our schools, the sketchy information they were receiving regarding the new state assessments, the advent of a state graduation test slated to be given to students who were unprepared, the widespread use of administrative or social promotion rather than academic proficiency to move students through grade levels, the organization of two charter schools to attract the “serious students” away from district-operated schools, the increase in number of administrators whose ranks were growing five times faster than the number of students, and the fact that the district had had four chief financial officers in three years leading to schools starting without budgets in August of 2000.

Continuing a pattern which had existed for at least a decade, in 2000 OCS D socially promoted 392 kindergarten through eighth students, sending on to the next grade students who were seriously below grade level in mathematics and reading, leaving them unprepared to meet even the most basic academic challenges in the ensuing grade. Another result of these unearned promotions was teachers having grade level classes made up of an extremely wide range of abilities. They often, therefore, did not have the materials, the time, or the training to differentiate instruction on so many levels.

Virtually every classroom in every school in the county contained socially promoted students, many of whom were several years behind the other students in the class.

When the new Administration and School Board took office in November, 2000, literally thousands of high school students were performing five years or more below the grade levels to which they had been promoted. The preceding year 4 out of 10 high school sophomores failed the 10th grade FCAT, thereby imperiling their graduation from high school.

The First Steps to Performance:
Real Data and Tough Decisions

A vital need in the district in 2001 was access to student performance data in a system that was usable at the school level. Principals, teachers and parents needed to be able to see exactly how a student was progressing over time. This called for longitudinal data for each student. Principals, teachers and district personnel needed to see how specific groups of students were progressing both with longitudinal data tracing the same students' performance through time and with year-to-year comparisons to analyze grade level and subject area performance.

Though our district had been giving standardized tests for many years in elementary schools and the first FCAT's had been administered, the district had not systematically archived student achievement data nor had it developed a process or system for gathering and reporting either longitudinal or year-to-year comparison student achievement data.

Schools individually struggled to create databases and reports that were meaningful to them, but those independent databases often did not collect common data sets; therefore, there was no consistent longitudinal or year-to-year data for the district as a whole that could be used to make instructional decisions about what was working and what was not.

With these serious concerns, the Superintendent and School Board had to take bold and culture-changing actions. The effectiveness of these actions would not be judged by courage or swiftness, however, but by their effect on student academic performance. Those actions were founded in several core beliefs which drove the many decisions made throughout 2001 and the years following.

First Principle:
"The Answers are in the Schools"

One foundational management principle from which the Administration and Board worked was that those closest to the students are the most knowledgeable and the most responsible. Assistant Superintendent Frank Fuller summarized this principle best when he said, "The answers are in the schools." In that light, authority was decentralized to the schools both financially and instructionally.

Working from this belief the Superintendent and School Board consolidated district departments which had previously addressed elementary curriculum and instruction, secondary curriculum and instruction, assessment, Exceptional Student Education and English as Second Language administration, Title I administration, student services including guidance, psychological services, student discipline, and extracurricular activities into one streamlined and sparingly peopled department: Quality Assurance.

Too, district personnel were reassigned to schools for direct support: school psychologists, ESE staffing specialists, social workers and attendance officers now reported to principals. The district was divided into three geographical zones for management and supervision; three assistant superintendents, all previously principals, were charged specifically with overseeing student achievement as well as the traditional management functions.

Ninety and then ninety-one percent of each school's earned FTE funding was allocated directly to the schools. District overhead was reduced to 9 percent. This was in stark contrast to the typical practice among Florida school districts. (Florida State University College of Education reported in 2003 that district overhead averages 18 percent.) IDEA funding for ESE students was sent to schools to supplement FTE and to fully fund the ESE programs. Schools were trained in the understanding and use of the new budgeting system and then charged with making resource decisions -- fiscal, human, and time -- with students' academic needs driving those decisions.

This massive administrative downsizing and decentralizing of overhead netted savings of \$6.4 million. The savings were returned to schools, thereby buffering schools from any reduction in staffing or services when 9/11 forced the Legislature to reduce school funding mid-year.

The success of this decentralization of authority and responsibility was dependent on school principals functioning as the instructional leaders of their schools, not merely as the managers. They were expected to make changes that would positively and clearly impact student achievement. During the 2001 school year, thirteen schools were assigned different principals. During 2002, seven more principalships were changed. These appointments were critical to Okaloosa schools.

Since the late 1980's the Effective School Research started by Ron Edmonds and now continued by Larry Lezotte, has maintained the principal-as-instructional-leader as one of the ten most important impacts on student achievement. Obviously, to make the kinds of changes needed regarding curriculum and instruction in our school district, our administrators had to be knowledgeable about the day-to-day work in the classroom and the meaning of data and its relationship to what was being taught and how it was being taught. They were expected to be able to communicate and implement procedures, policies, and practices which may have conflicted with prevailing norms and practices; they were to expect work that was outside existing systems; they had to have the knowledge and skills to do so.

Two years after these changes in our principalships an impressive meta-analysis of thirty years of research on educational leaders has shown that "there is, in fact, a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement...one standard deviation improvement in leadership practices is associated with an increase in average student achievement from the 50th percentile to the 60th percentile" (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty 3)

"A major focus in the findings of this meta-analysis is that the school leader today must understand it is likely that the changes necessary in schools today will require leaders to work far more deeply with staff and the community. It is possible [that these] changes will disrupt cooperation, a sense of well being, and cohesion. [These changes] may confront group identities, change working relationships, [and] challenge expertise and competencies..." (3).

This kind of culture change clearly calls for leaders who know the work of teachers and schools must change from an adult-centered institution to a student-centered series of services. Therefore, selecting effective administrators who can evaluate the teaching in their school, analyze the student data to make instructional decisions to increase achievement, and then allocate resources to affect those decisions has been a major focus in this district over the past five years.

A Change in Emphasis:
Results, not Process is Important

Another driving principle was that our schools' work was to be predicated and evaluated on results not processes. The movement to a statewide curriculum, the Sunshine State Standards, had occurred in 1996 with the intent that all students in Florida, with the exception of the severely cognitively disabled, master the content benchmarks.

With the curriculum defined and the test developed to measure a student's knowledge of the curriculum, the job of the teacher changed. No longer could our discussions center on what the teacher taught. What mattered was whether the students learned it or not and how they were able to show what they had learned.

We had to start with the student outcome in mind, not which activities or materials we would use in our classrooms. Our work was to be measured by the results of it, not the process of it. The results-orientation was an expectation in every part of the school system: transportation, food services, maintenance and facilities, and all district departments.

With the school reforms directed by No Child Left Behind, the state of Florida, and our own values, we recognized that we must implement policies and practices which met the needs of an increasingly heterogeneous student body.

"Today's classrooms are typified by academic diversity. Seated side by side in classrooms that still harbor a myth of 'homogeneity by virtue of chronological age' are students with identified learning problems; highly advanced learners; students whose first language is not English; students who underachieve for a complex array of reasons; students from broadly diverse cultures, economic backgrounds, or both; students of both genders; motivated and unmotivated students; students who fit two or three categories...By 2035, students of color will be a majority in our schools, with increasing populations of children of immigrant and migrant families expanding the presence of cultural diversity in schools. Half of all children will live in single-parent home as some time during their school years" (Tomlinson, 119).

Facing these issues in our schools, we believed we had to use a variety of strategies to more directly individualize and differentiate instruction.

Giving substance to these core beliefs, early in 2001, the Superintendent and School Board began implementing a series of practices which were based on high expectations for performance and founded on the value that all students would learn; all practices stemmed from the three goals stated by the Superintendent:

- Increase student achievement
- Make resource decisions based on student needs
- Improve communication with parents and the community.

From the Bell Curve
to
Customized Instruction

While it may sound simple that we committed ourselves and our resources to the academic needs of every single student, it is an extraordinary movement away from the bell curve mentality and the whole-group-instruction model used by many educators.

Certainly, we had recognized that some students needed more help and extra time, and our schools, like others nationwide, were fraught with pull-out programs which removed those students from their grade-level instruction, meaning that too often they were never taught the concepts and skills expected for their grade level and, therefore, remained deficient. They did not master the curriculum expected of them and were left unprepared to learn at the succeeding grade level. Often struggling students were taught in alternative education or exceptional education classes that watered-down the curriculum, actually changing or omitting the skills they were expected to learn. In effect, they never had the opportunity to learn the required curriculum – the Sunshine State Standards -- the curriculum the FCAT tests.

By teaching to the middle not only were low-performing students left behind, but advanced and gifted students were too often not challenged, being re-taught material they had already mastered. Changing our focus to customized and individualized instruction began a significant culture change which would affect every ability group and would necessitate changes in curriculum, instructional practices, and assessment.

Within the first several months the Administration and the School Board defined six fundamental changes that were necessary to move Okaloosa School District away from teaching to the middle to becoming “the best in Florida and a model for America.” Each of these changes supported one or more of the three goals now published widely throughout the county:

1. Eliminate the longstanding practice of social promotion. Every student must earn his promotion to the next grade based solely on his academic achievement.
2. Eliminate grade inflation. Students’ grades must be based entirely on academic achievement insuring that the student is able to perform at the grade to which he is being advanced.
3. Teach to high, clearly defined standards. The Florida Sunshine State Standards must define the skills, concepts, and scope of all classroom instruction.
4. Use research-proven, most effective teaching methods. Eliminate pull-out and tracking programs which supplanted regular classroom instruction; increase inclusionary classes for ESE and ESOL students; supplement instruction for students with deficit skills.
5. Promote parent responsibility and involvement. Have accurate information about students’ abilities and deficiencies and honestly communicate it to parents and students; broadly communicate to the public the expectations for student academic performance; include parents in school decision-making through the School Advisory Council.
6. Make financial decisions based on students’ academic needs. Each school will develop an annual School Performance Plan which sets specific, measurable objectives for all groups of students and shows how the school’s human and monetary resources will be used to help students meet those objectives.

These goals and fundamental changes are broad and encompass many day-to-day practices which have worked to improve student achievement.

Changing Organizational Variables

One of the ways Okaloosa County School District will continue to improve is to further refine and institutionalize the series of organizational changes

begun in 2001. Several examples of taking some of the practices to their next level are included here in italics.

- Decentralizing authority and responsibilities to schools
- Insuring that Quality Assurance, consolidated from curriculum and instruction, assessment, Exceptional Student Education, and student services departments, addressed student results; *QA's work must continue to analyze student achievement, oversee the tight alignment of curriculum, assessment, and instruction, and monitor practices for effectiveness and legality.*
- Schools taking the responsibility for the performance of personnel assigned to schools for support: psychologists, staffing specialists, social workers, and attendance officers; *psychologists should be submitting evaluation reports that include specific motivational, behavioral and academic strategies for students they test; they should work as knowledgeable members of the guidance committee at their assigned schools giving specific recommendations for students of concern.*
- Continuing the appropriation of earned FTE funding to schools *with the requirement of auditing specific to all expenditures*
- Continuing IDEA funding being allocated to schools per program need; ESE 100% funded; *specific auditing for IDEA funds*
- *Monitoring and reporting to the Superintendent and the Board the use of Supplemental Academic Instruction funds*
- Keeping the principal-as-instructional-leader model as advocated in 20 years of Effective School Research by Edmonds and Lezotte; *increase in-district training for principals for instructional management and change process management; continue training in balanced literacy for secondary administrators.*
- Monitoring a focused School Performance Plan requiring measurable objectives for the four major academic areas; the SPP and all its components focusing on student achievement tied to instruction, assessment, teacher training, and expenditure of resources; the SPP requiring schools to designate very specific target groups of students as determined by testing data; requiring schools to measure the effectiveness of their goals and present results to Superintendent and School Board
- Continuing the practices which eliminate social and administrative promotion for all grade levels using reading and math data as

- determiners; defining the specific criteria for pupil progression from grade to grade
- Monitoring and reporting to the Superintendent and Board student retentions by grade and by school; *further refining the longitudinal data on the performance of retained students with the focus on the effectiveness of specific strategies, time, programs, and materials*
 - Monitoring and reporting to the Superintendent and Board the students exempted from retention through Good Cause; *collect, display, and analyze the longitudinal data for effectiveness of the promotion (see above under retentions).*
 - Continuing the Second Chance Fund with specific Plans of Care implemented to meet the needs of each retained student; *specific data collection is critical to knowing what is working or what is not.*
 - Defining grade level expectations in relation to the Sunshine State Standards (*see Opportunity to Learn recommendations*)
 - Defining grade level performance and refining policies to curb grade inflation; monitoring grading for each school by publishing grade norms for each school each nine weeks; *moving away from subjective grading to measuring against exemplars of proficient student work (see Opportunity to Learn and Monitoring recommendations)*
 - Continuing a web-based grading report system so parents and students could check grades daily; using the new electronic AIP/IEP/EP will give parents the specific instructional objectives for their student.
 - Developing data and reporting systems for schools and district (*fully discussed in later recommendations*)
 - Continuing the communication with parents and community: the district website and its links; the School Leaders Council; school websites; Moving Up

Changing Instructional Variables

Additionally, the instructional practices begun in 2001 will need continued attention. Some recommendations for extending these practices are included in italics.

- Intensifying the alignment of instruction to the Sunshine State Standards (*see Opportunity to Learn recommendations*)

- Principals and staffs continuing to refine systems for monitoring the instruction of the SSS in their schools (*see Opportunity to Learn recommendations*)
- Principals and school teams refine training in more specific data analysis: *NCLB subgroups; lowest 35th percentile of students; gifted students; all groups to be targeted in SPP if data shows any deficit*
- Strengthening AIP's , IEP's, LEP's and EP's to set and evaluate measurable objectives for students; frequently monitoring progress and resetting objectives as needed
- Continuing grading policy which directs below grade level performance to receive only a D, F, N, or U including all ESE students working for a regular diploma: *grading practices must be further refined in each grade level and each subject; progress toward proficiency must be measured by teachers using exemplars of students' work which show below grade level performance, mastery at grade level and above grade level performance; this level of specificity and sophistication takes the subjectivity out of grading and shows students exactly what is expected of them.*
- Increasing inclusionary practices for Title I students, ESE students, and ESOL students; pull-out programs considered supplemental rather than primary instruction
- Insuring the classroom teacher is responsible for instruction and grading rather than the supplementary teacher: Title I, ESE, ESOL
- Continuing intense individualized and customized instruction for retained students (Plan of Care), students exempted from retention due to Good Cause; below grade level students (specific AIP's designating instruction specific to the student's deficit, summer intensive studies, after school instruction), and students unsuccessful in passing the FCAT graduation test; providing funding for all programs through SAI funds
- Continuing and refining embedded reading and literacy staff development in schools with the use of Literacy Coaches; *in the 2005-06 school year an evaluation of the Literacy Coach program should be conducted with the expectation that the qualitative responses will verify that teachers have improved their skills in literacy instruction and the quantitative data will begin to show that students in schools with literacy coaches have increased their reading proficiency; 2005 reading scores can serve as the baseline.*

- Continuing the development of Individual Professional Development Plans and Professional Development School Plans which train teachers on-site in the use of best instructional practices to meet the academic needs of all students; *continue literacy instruction and add best practices for processes and strategies of differentiated instruction.*

Each school and department must reexamine its systems and procedures for implementing these organizational and instructional practices. For example, if AIP's are not being collaboratively written, or if they are not being revisited frequently with intent to alter instruction as needed, or if teachers are not meeting regularly to define proficient and exemplary student work in relation to the SSS benchmarks, these will become fruitless practices.

Each of these actions taken over the last four years has impacted student achievement; these policies and practices have moved us closer to addressing the academic needs of every student while meeting the requirement to teach very specific content and skills to a mastery level. But we must take individualization of instruction to a new level, both in terms of teaching to a specific student and in terms of understanding what mastering a standard or benchmark looks like in the classroom. For example, the regression of our gifted students is, in part, the result of our not individualizing their instruction according to their needs and abilities. Our greatest reading regressions in our gifted students occur in middle school where the gifted classes become very subject specific, rather than student specific as required by their Educational Plan (EP).

It's All About Reading

The Administration intended for the above practices to affect all content areas in grades kindergarten through twelfth, but we also realized that we needed very specific expectations and practices to impact our reading instruction. Consequently, we established various policies, directed instruction and delivery, and implemented many strategies to address our students' reading.

Like the state, OCSD took the position that reading is fundamental to all learning and used grade level reading as one criterion for promotion. District personnel also understood that the state's school grading system which became finalized in 2001 calculated a school's annual grade using reading

gains and proficiency as fifty percent of a school's grade. Beside the moral imperative to teach every student to read, the state's school grading system offered the practical incentive to making reading a priority. The incentive came in the form of the principal's evaluation as he was expected to increase reading achievement and in the form of a financial bonus for staff in schools graded an A.

To increase reading achievement the following actions were taken; again, recommended extensions of the practices are in italics:

- Principals were charged with insuring that their staffs were teaching the reading skills and concepts of the Sunshine State Standards because the state's reading assessment is predicated on proficiency of the SSS (*further discussed in Opportunity to Learn*).
- Level 1 performance on FCAT reading (grades 3-8), 25% or below on the SSS reading NRT, or below grade level reading performance in K-2 were partial criteria for retention; *the new policy addressing every student who scores the 35th percentile or below on the NRT portion of the FCAT in reading(or math) will reach a number of students who have minimal skills but who have not had the mandated necessary interventions; many schools already realized the wisdom of addressing these students in the School Performance Plan and in implementing AIP's for them.*
- Teachers were to assess for grade level reading performance and share that information with parents; report cards evidenced below-grade-level reading.
- Teachers were to give honest and meaningful feedback on progress reports and report cards; grades measure only one thing: academic proficiency in relation to the Sunshine State Standards, Advanced Placement standards, or International Baccalaureate standards. Parents and students deserve accurate and honest information about the student's progress toward meeting these standards. If a student performed below grade level, he could not receive higher than a D, F, N, or U; *grading practices must be further refined in each grade level and each subject; progress toward proficiency must be measured by teachers using exemplars of students' work which show below grade level performance, mastery at grade level, and above grade level performance; this level of sophistication takes the subjectivity out of grading and shows students exactly what is expected of them.*

- The AIP's and IEP's for below-grade-level readers were rewritten to address the five researched areas of reading adopted by the National Reading Panel and the state of Florida's reading initiative: phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. Teachers had to address the individual reader's deficits in these areas, notify parents of the deficits, and instruct to remediate those; *the use of the electronic AIP/IEP/Plan of Care must be used to help schools coordinate Plans among all teachers who work with a particular student; several teachers working with the same student but independent of each other must consolidate their knowledge and skills to help that student.*
- Teachers were to frequently use formative reading assessment and alter instruction to meet student needs; assistant superintendents used this information every 4.5 weeks to monitor a school's progress (*further discussed in Monitoring Student Work*).
- District adopted the use of an elementary reading textbook that used a spectrum of instructional level materials as its core text; this aided teachers in ascertaining and reporting grade level performance and it gave teachers below-, at- and above- grade level materials; previously, the core text used grade level selections and teachers who wanted to instruct at the student's level had to find the below or above grade level materials on their own; *the district must prepare for the next reading adoption for both elementary and secondary by analyzing the effectiveness of this one; a multi-level basal text which supports balanced literacy is a necessity.*
- Teachers were trained in the effective use of the basal reading series; *training was voluntary and a disappointingly small percent of our elementary teachers attended the training; with the adoption of our next reading basal the district and schools must work together to offer a training schedule and incentive to attend; since staff development should be embedded into a school, the principal must include this training in the school's Professional Development Plan.*
- The primary reading instruction was to take place in the grade level classroom rather than in a pull-out program to insure the student had the opportunity to learn the skills and concepts expected at that grade level; additional help was to be supplemental in addition to the classroom reading time

- The classroom teacher became responsible for assigning the reading grade as the primary teaching responsibility was hers/his; *the classroom teacher is responsible for individualizing and differentiating the instruction each student needs; in that light, if a student requires additional time and assistance, the teacher must coordinate and monitor the intervention and remediation services the student receives; without careful planning and oversight, the extra instruction can contradict the primary instruction, resulting in skills being omitted or repeated unnecessarily, confusing and frustrating the student.*
- Round robin reading instruction was eliminated and replaced with guided reading and other balanced literacy strategies; *there should not be an elementary classroom (K-5) in any school that delivers instruction or practices reading in round robin fashion; principals must insure this is not occurring—see below.*
- Elementary principals were trained in the requirements of a balanced literacy instructional model and given checklists of classroom “look for’s.”
- Schools were allocated Title V funds dedicated to building their libraries by adding books with content motivational to each grade level but at varying readability levels; science and social studies leveled libraries were built at the elementary schools, some middle, and some high schools; *schools must inventory their media materials to insure that books for every reading level are available to every student; schools must insure that their libraries have materials that support the explicit standards of the Sunshine State Standards.*
- Several middle and high schools added immersion programs, offering reading instruction to secondary students
- Title II grants were written to fund literacy coaches in first elementary school then in middle schools; literacy coaches worked with elementary and middle school faculties to build their knowledge and use of balanced literacy strategies; we used an embedded staff development model to facilitate the opportunity for teachers to practice and learn from each other; *see recommendation regarding literacy coach program and its evaluation.*
- Florida law required middle schools to meet the Rigorous Reading Requirement that 75% of the students at each grade level, (6-8)

read at a proficient level on FCAT; the district conducted awareness activities for this component of the state's Middle School Reform (*see Secondary Reading Recommendations*).

- High schools developed a literacy initiative in 2004-05 that focused on teaching content area teachers effective literacy strategies to use and continuing remedial reading for deficient readers.
- School Board passed an Intensive Reading Initiative for secondary students; it mandates required reading at a student's instructional level for Level 1 and Level 2 students.
- Over 200 teachers were trained to receive their reading endorsement or their certification; *implement a support plan that continues through and after these newly-trained teachers complete their practicum; conduct a qualitative and quantitative evaluation at the end of the 2005-06 school year; expect positive reaction to the IRI by reading, grade level, and subject area teachers and an increase in student achievement as evidenced by the IRI assessments and a decrease in the percentages of students performing in Levels 1 and 2 on the FCAT.*
- Middle and high school Intensive Reading Instruction has begun with limited class sizes, required formative and summative assessments and leveled materials in all district secondary schools; *it is vital that a meaningful collection and analysis of data be done during this and following years or this extraordinary initiative can become an ineffective remedial program rather than a successful intervention for students who have missed reading skills (see recommendations under Secondary Reading Recommendations and Data System recommendations).*

2005 and Beyond

The gross and disaggregated data show our area of greatest concern is secondary reading; too, with flat writing scores for all grades 4, 8, and 10, we must change practices specific to literacy – reading and writing. First, however, there are several important core instructional areas which we must understand and address; making the recommended changes in these areas will positively impact instruction and learning for all students, but particularly low-performing students. These are school-level factors which

can take us to the next level of performance if we use the research and our own data effectively.

The first three sets of recommendations speak to the three school level factors which have the highest correlate to student achievement. In other words, if we continue to use our core beliefs, our experiences from the last four years, our student data, and educational research to make decisions about Opportunity to Learn, Impact of Time on Learning and Monitoring of Student Work we can significantly increase student achievement.

Opportunity to Learn

The opportunity to learn the curriculum has the highest correlate with student achievement among all school level factors. Opportunity to learn has been widely studied by researchers for over thirty years, but Robert Marzano has completed a meta-analysis of the research and quantified its effect on student achievement in What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action. He and E. D. Hirsch offer the statistical proof that Opportunity to learn is the most meaningful variable affecting academic achievement over which schools have direct influence (23).

While it may seem obvious that students cannot learn what they are not taught, that is actually the case when the intended curriculum, in our case the Sunshine State Standards, is not the implemented curriculum. Most parents and educators believe our schools teach a coherent curriculum; in fact, our district's 2005 school survey results report just that. But as Stevenson and Stigler report in The Learning Gap:

Daunted by the length of most textbooks and knowing that the children's future teachers will be likely to return to the material, American teachers often omit some topics. Different topics are omitted by different teachers thereby making it impossible for the children's later teachers to know what has been covered at earlier grades – they cannot be sure what their students know and do not know (Marzano 140).

The implementation of the SSS seemingly should have eliminated redundancy and omissions in our teaching, but our schools still struggle with

refining the curriculum in each grade level and subject area. Too often, teachers still move through a textbook without rearranging, eliminating or modifying lessons to teach the necessary standards. While they feel compelled to “cover the book,” many still teach their favorite topic regardless of any connection to the Sunshine State Standards.

The lament we often hear is that teachers are being asked to do more, when, in fact, this is a time we should be doing less; we should be eliminating much of the disconnected information we teach and reducing the needless redundancies in and among our grade levels.

Schools may think that they have addressed the lack of coherence between what the Sunshine State Standards mandate and what is taught by having teacher teams agree upon what should be taught, or they think they have resolved the mandate to teach the Standards by using textbooks which to some extent correlate the Standards to the text and lessons. Neither of these approaches is enough to insure a curriculum which thoroughly teaches the skills, concepts, and the level of intellectual engagement needed at a grade level or in a subject.

While all students need to know exactly what they are expected to learn, “The greatest favor we can do for low-achieving students is to make the implicit standards explicit, so they will know, often for the first time, what they have to do to succeed” (Tucker 32). The students who are most dependent on our schools as their sole source of learning, poor and minority students, suffer the most when what we teach is not tightly aligned to the skills and standards they are expected to master. Our classrooms are often the only place where they have access to the knowledge expected of them to progress through the grade levels and to graduate. If our curriculum is not tightly aligned, they pay the price.

The following are recommendations to insure that every student has the Opportunity to Learn:

- Teachers must use the resources provided to them by the state to limit and define our curriculum: the actual Sunshine State Standards, the Benchmarks, the Grade Level Expectations, the Item Specifications for the FCAT, the Florida Writing rubric, the scored writing assessments, the scoring guides produced in Okaloosa County, and the released test items (soon to be increased) and their scoring. Essential

concepts and skills are to be extracted from these documents; they are our blueprint for curriculum alignment.

- Teachers must work with the end in mind; ideally Okaloosa would start with the 12th grade essential skills and work backwards to kindergarten, identifying those concepts and skills *needed* in the cores subjects in each grade level; name the essential skills and concepts to be learned at each grade level.
- Teachers in grade levels and departments must begin to decide how to limit their instruction to the essential standards and frameworks. Some Grade Level Expectations and standards must be consciously eliminated; the McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) researchers have identified a core of 200 standards and 3,093 benchmarks embedded in the typical K-12 curriculum and all are not necessary. All skills and concepts are not hierarchical and teachers must work together to identify only the essential ones and eliminate those unnecessary ones (Marzano 25).
- Teachers must decide which concepts and skills are *introduced*, which are *mastered* and which would become *remedial* skills at each grade level (i.e., multiplication is a remedial skill in the 6th grade; major parts of speech are remedial in the 7th grade); making these decisions will enable teachers to eliminate unnecessary whole-group instruction that repeats what the majority of students already know and allow more time for the designated skills to be introduced and/or mastered.
- Teachers must identify the academic vocabulary needed in each grade and subject area and align it through all grade levels; the state and local documents cited above will help in the identification of critical academic vocabulary (*see recommendations for direct vocabulary instruction*).
- Teachers must examine textbooks to confirm the SSS being cited are the essential standards; too, teachers must work together to rearrange the order of the textbook if needed. We often read of our country's lackluster performance in mathematics compared to Japan and European countries; however, the "U. S. textbooks address 175 percent as many topics as do German textbooks and 350 percent as many topics as do Japanese textbooks" (Marzano 26). We are trying to teach too much too quickly. We have all heard our curriculum is "a mile wide and an inch deep," but we have done little to correct that.

- Teachers must work together to construct pacing charts of the essential skills to identify when students should master them throughout the year.
- Vertical alignment and refining must occur between grade levels in each school and department; elementary, middle school, and high schools must work together to identify essential skills and to construct pacing guides.
- Middle school and high school teachers must know the essential reading/literacy standards and how to teach them in their content area; this alignment would consist of core content correlated to the literacy standards necessary for the student to access subject area content through reading and to show understanding through writing.
- Teachers must work together to examine and identify student work which best exemplifies the standard(s) being taught; teachers should use these exemplars with students the next time they teach the standard.
- All assessments, both formative and summative, must test the objectives required by the standard; teachers will construct assessments which measure both proficiency and excellence in the understanding and application of the standard. The required comprehensive exams for high school students must be constructed to measure the performance standards rather than memorized information.
- Principals must monitor adherence to the standards by requiring and checking standards-based lesson plans which clearly state the objectives of the lesson that will enable the student to demonstrate the knowledge and skills stated in the standard.
- Principals must know whether the objectives and activities in the lesson plans are likely to lead to the students' mastering the standard.
- District staff must be the leader and monitor of this enormous undertaking; the task can be too difficult and cumbersome for every school to take on individually. There is great value in teachers in a school working together, but identifying the common essential standards, the academic vocabulary, and the pace of their instruction is crucial to the district so that support can be offered and results can be measured.

It is important to note that the Sunshine State Standards are currently under review at the state level. The International Center for Leadership in

Education, under the leadership of Willard Daggett, is analyzing our Standards to “ensure rigor and relevance and alignment to postsecondary education...and the College Board is analyzing [the standards] and Grade Level Expectations for alignment from grade to grade ...for rigor” (FLDOE, “Raising Student Achievement” 14).

Okaloosa County district administrators must pay careful attention to the progress of these revisions and be ready to articulate to our schools the end results and the reasons for them. In fact, these very revisions and the necessity for teachers to know them could be the springboard for our own further revisions and alignment.

Too, in an effort to specify only the most essential skills and concepts for high school students to learn to be able to succeed in post-secondary work, the College Board has done extensive work with colleges and universities. Using the backward design model, they have delineated the appropriate high school curriculum based on rigorous college expectations. Our schools using the Springboard curriculum and assessments are teaching to the explicit college-preparatory standards identified in this work. Qualitative and quantitative data should be gathered from our schools’ use of Springboard, so it can be shared across the district.

Opportunity to learn what he will be tested on is fundamental to a student’s academic achievement. Pull-out programs and modified curriculum were a norm in many Okaloosa schools five years ago, and by returning instructional delivery to the classroom, we made the first move toward all students being taught their grade level and subject specific curriculum.

Identifying the critical or essential skills and eliminating those not needed is an enormous and difficult undertaking, but we cannot progress without it. For too long our model has been curriculum – instruction – assessment. We used our textbooks and personal experience to determine what we taught; then we decided on the assessment after we taught it. With the implementation of standards we must use this model: critical curriculum – assessment – instruction, with our instruction being driven by the essential standards and the assessments that will measure them.

As acknowledged by John Balfanz of Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on Education of Students Placed at Risk, “a critical source of poor performance unrecognized...is actively manufactured. This occurs when ...

inattention to the technical core of schooling (curriculum, instructional materials, and academic learning time) severely limits students' opportunity to learn." (Balfanz 5) If we are intelligent and artful in our identifying and teaching the necessary skills, our model will not be one that "teaches to the test" but one that teaches and tests what students must know to succeed in each grade level and in each content area.

Impact of Time on Learning

A meaningful curriculum, no matter how tightly refined to its essential skills and concepts and how tightly aligned between grade and subject levels, cannot lead to student learning without the student having the necessary time to master the standards. Each student must spend the amount of time he needs to master the skills and concepts designated for his grade level.

Time is the second most powerful correlate of student academic achievement in the meta-analyses conducted by Marzano (18) and one of the top four correlates affecting student learning in the Effective Schools Research. We must recognize that our job is not to "cover the material" but to give the necessary time and the kind of work it takes for every student to learn the standard (s).

As Marzano reports The National Education Commission on Time and Learning found that instructional time varies greatly among classrooms; in an hour segment the time used for actual instruction ranged from a low of 21% to a high of 69% (25). We must use time to help our students in two different ways: by what we do in the classroom (this includes homework) and by the extra time we provide with tutoring, outside-the -day instruction, and summer services.

Every Minute Counts

First, with a finite curriculum which must be taught at specific grade levels within a certain amount of time, it is more important than ever that teachers are able to teach without being interrupted and that they use their time effectively – both the classroom time and the time they allocate for homework.

The following are recommendations in relation to insuring the sanctity of time in the classroom:

- Teach only the refined, aligned essential standards; there is not time to teach all the Sunshine State Standards, Grade Level Expectations, or our “favorites.”
- Develop and use pacing guides to be sure all standards are given sufficient time to be taught and practiced in the presence of the teacher.
- Realize that each student needs a different amount of time to master a standard; use the student’s longitudinal academic data and personal interaction with him to determine if he needs more time or less time than the average learner; teachers must take the responsibility to see that the student who needs more time gets more time.
- Do “time audits” within the school so teachers can see whether they have maximized their time; teachers can “time” each other, or a teacher can audiotape a lesson and calculate actual instruction when he listens to it.
- Teachers must identify and eliminate time off task, loss of time through starting late, finishing early, through transitions in the lesson, and through housekeeping activities that can be done other ways or other times.
- Principals should insure interruptions to classes are exceptions: they must eliminate frequent schedule changes and special events, unnecessarily calling students from class, and bells, if not needed.
- Teachers should eliminate class work that is unchallenging (word searches, puzzles, looking up vocabulary words), repetitive, or already mastered by the students.
- Class work must be active and engaging; if a teacher interacts with students and hears/sees incorrect responses, the skill can be retaught immediately and the misconception corrected; a major focus of the teacher during class time must be correcting errors in thought and product; if the correction occurs the next day or week, time has been lost and misinformation or misunderstanding has been embedded.
- Instruction of a standard must be customized so that every student has the time he needs, whether it is less time or more time – including more scaffolding, more practice, or extended time outside the school day; for students who have mastered the standard; time is wasted by

reteaching them; their time must be used to deepen or advance their understanding of the standard.

- Homework must be constructed and assigned to effectively use a student's time, and class time should not be used for homework; new skills should first be practiced in the teacher's presence to insure the student understands the concept or skill. The student must be told the explicit objective of the homework and how it will help him meet the objectives of the lesson, and he must receive corrective feedback.

Count on Extra Time

The second way we control time is through the extension of instruction. During the last three years our district has retained students who could not show a basic mastery in reading and/or mathematics and secondary students who failed too many courses to be made up in the succeeding year.

Retention of low-performing students has been an extremely controversial issue among educators for decades. Okaloosa County School District mandated a stringent retention policy based on this core belief: all students cannot learn the exact same thing in the exact same time, so because the state's curriculum expects them all to learn the SSS to a certain level, some students needed more time. Some students needed an additional year to master that grade level's skills and concepts.

Retention before 2001, though rare in our district, often meant the student was consigned to the same teacher, the same materials, and the same kind of instruction. Our commitment was to offer a different approach to the retained students – one that gave him classroom instruction and extra tutorial support within the day and outside the day, one that offered specialized learning materials, one that transported students before and after school. The Second Chance funds were appropriated to create an individualized and customized plan which addressed the specific academic deficits of each retained student. Parents were able to choose between school-sponsored tutoring or private tutorial services for their student's afterschool instruction.

Another way we have extended learning time for the struggling student has been to provide extra instruction during the school day with Title I teachers, ESE teachers, tutors, technology, and sometimes by eliminating all but the most critical courses or instruction. We have added Summer Intensive

Services for retained and struggling students to further teach them and to maintain their learning momentum.

Fortunately or unfortunately, our educational system was built within a very structured amount of time – less than one third of each day for 180 days per year – and over the years students have been asked to learn and produce more without our adjusting the time it took to learn it. We must take control of this paradox by refining and reducing what we teach and extending the learning time for students who need it.

Monitoring Student Work

The third school factor which has a high correlate to student achievement is the meaningful monitoring of student work. Before a standards-based curriculum was adopted, student work was assessed primarily by students' grades which were predicated on the individual teacher's expectations. It has long been lamented by the public that grades were excessively subjective and inflated. Certainly, many teachers, grade levels, departments and schools spent considerable time developing a scope and sequence for the skills required in each subject area and teaching those skills; in some cases teachers worked together to formulate assessments, but in most classrooms student grades were the result of each teacher's choices about curriculum and instruction and his teacher-made tests. In this way, grades served as a trailing indicator, information for students and parents after the fact, after it was too late to affect the learning of that grading period.

With the implementation of the Sunshine State Standards and the criterion-reference assessment of those skills, we found that class grades were often not predictive of FCAT proficiency. In fact, in 2002 we had many students who met the criteria for retention who had made A's and B's in their reading and math classes.

Today we know that grades must measure a student's progress toward proficiency in the grade level expectations. We must learn new monitoring skills to be able to be accurate about the student's level of mastery and predictive of the student's ability to be successful with succeeding work. Mastery is defined as "the level of achievement that students must reach to be predictably successful at the next level of schooling" (Lezotte 147).

Grading for Standards Mastery

Essentially, teachers must approach monitoring of student work on two fronts: formative assessments which should serve as assessments *for* learning and summative assessments which serve as assessments *of* learning. Summative assessments, such as AP and IB exams, the FCAT, and standardized tests report what has been learned after the fact; these tests report trailing data. Formative assessments, on the other hand, give the teacher leading data, or just-in-time information, which can be used to alter and re-design instruction to meet the learning needs pinpointed by the assessment.

With the national, state, and local testing mandated by No Child Left Behind, far more attention has been paid to summative assessment than formative, and both kinds are important. To continue the performance improvements our students have made in the last four years, we must turn our attention to understanding and using good formative assessment – assessment *for* learning. Effective use of formative assessment entails the teacher using the continuous flow of performance information to advance, not only check on, student progress. These are the recommendations for effective use of formative assessment:

- With the tight alignment of curriculum, the elimination of unnecessary teaching, and the development of pacing charts, teachers will know and be able to tell their students in advance the exact benchmarks students are to reach and the timeframes they are expected to learn them in.
- Students should be told from the outset of every lesson, unit, chapter, and topic what the learning goals are and what the mastery will look like; specific student work should be shared as exemplars.
- Classroom assessments are used to provide the students specific information on how their work is progressing toward the mastery the exemplars show; in this way, the assessments can be used both to encourage and to correct the students.
- Teachers can use these assessments to help students who need more time with a skill or concept measure where their learning is in relation to the level expected. Students have more control over their own learning if formative assessment is used this way because they can see what they need to do to improve.

- Teachers must continuously adjust their instruction based on the results from the formative assessments; they can advance it or reteach unlearned information.

In a review of over 250 research articles published on the connection between the use of formative assessment and increased student achievement, Paul Black and Dylan William of Kings College, London, reported “unprecedented positive effects on student achievement...between a half and a full standard deviation. That would lead to percentile-score gains of from 15 to 30 points, or three or more years in grade equivalents” (Stiggins n.p.).

Summative assessments are also necessary, but their function is to report what has been learned. These trailing indicators hold both the teacher and the student accountable for their work. One current summative assessment issue in Okaloosa County is the mandated comprehensive exams in high school classes. They offer a new level of student and instructional accountability, and they could be extremely useful in several ways.

First, we must insist that they be designed to measure the level of mastery expected at semester and year’s end of the Sunshine State Standards for that subject area, not extraneous, non-essential information. If we do this, the comprehensive exams could be constructed by core subject teachers working together early in the semester, certainly long before the exams are given. Second, this alignment of curriculum and assessment could serve to tighten instruction (see recommendations under Opportunity to Learn) in our classrooms. Secondly, students could be told the exact performance and learning expectations before their instruction. Some might think that this would be teaching to the test. The truth is if the test measures the curriculum that is required and the test is constructed to measure application and understanding of those skills and concepts, then our comprehensive exams are an instrument to take us far beyond the days when tests measured memorized information which was often quickly forgotten. Assessment driving instruction is not a negative thing if what is being tested is meaningful and has relevance to further learning.

The preceding school level factors, Opportunity to Learn, the Impact of Time on Learning, and Monitoring Student Progress affect student achievement above all others. Acknowledging the research and recognizing its promise is critical to each school. It is the responsibility of district staff and schools to assess where their practices fall in relation to each of these

factors. Our schools are still, in many cases, in the process of understanding the depth of the implications to our beliefs and practices that a standards-based curriculum has made. Careful scrutiny of these three school level factors at each school site will help us better understand what teaching and learning means today.

Teacher Effectiveness

Another highly important factor which directly impacts student achievement is the effectiveness of a teacher. In Okaloosa County the hiring of teachers and their ongoing training is a principal's responsibility. Selecting effective teachers has become a particular challenge with the implementation of Class Size Reduction. This constitutional mandate has greatly increased the number of teachers in our district, straining the pool of qualified personnel and necessitating increased professional development to bring newly hired teachers into our system understanding our core beliefs, our policies, and the many demands of the standardized curriculum and assessment.

Principals understand that the three hallmarks of effective instruction fall directly to the teacher: teachers must insure the rigor of expectations and instruction, the relevance of what they are teaching to the student and his future, and the relationships that motivate students to work to their potential. Principals do not want to sacrifice any of these elements, but it is more and more difficult to hire teachers able to insure all three. But because the teacher and his ability are central to a student's achievement, some reminders of the effect a quality teacher has on student achievement are worthy of mention.

Qualified Teachers

Volumes have been written about, and NCLB has been partially formulated on, the increase in student achievement when instruction is delivered by a teacher trained and qualified to teach the specific grade or content area. Marzano's meta-analysis reports that Ferguson and Ladd conclude teacher qualifications alone account for 40% of the variance in student learning (62); Linda Darling-Hammond reports that teacher quality accounts for as much as 60% of the variance in student achievement (62).

The most well-known research on teacher quality has been conducted by William Sanders working with the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System. He found that, on the average, gains of 53 percentage points in achievement in a year were produced by the most effective teachers and 14 percentage points by the least effective; the typical gain per year is 34 percentile points. Perhaps Sanders's most important finding is the following:

Effective teachers appear to be effective with students of all achievement levels regardless of the levels of heterogeneity in their classes (Marzano 72)).

These are particularly meaningful findings in relation to our need to individualize instruction and our commitment to address the academic needs of all students.

It may seem that with a very specific curriculum there would be less need for teacher training. In fact, the very acts of refining standards, selecting appropriate strategies and activities to teach them, deciding on the pace of instruction, adjusting them for students' individual needs, and developing assessments that measure students' extent of mastery of the standards all call for a very knowledgeable, well-trained teacher. While we employ a high percentage of qualified teachers, there are areas we need to address:

- Seniority is not necessarily the best criterion for teaching a grade or a subject; teachers are often assigned to teach advanced classes because they have seniority; teaching assignments should be based on the knowledge and effectiveness of the teacher and the needs of the students.
- We must use our resources to hire the personnel for the needs of the students whether it is advanced courses or remedial courses.
- The needs of our students, reflected very clearly in our NCLB data, require that we employ certified Exceptional Student Education (ESE) teachers and endorsed Limited English Proficiency (LEP) teachers to work closely with other classroom teachers to supplement classroom instruction.
- We must implement a solid plan to insure our teachers become LEP endorsed as they have committed to do at hiring; this is a serious need in Okaloosa County, one which calls for shared responsibility between our LEP and staff development personnel.

- We must insure that we do not use inclusionary practices to reduce our core of ESE teachers; successful inclusion requires the skills of an ESE teacher and a classroom teacher working closely together.
- Our deficient areas are primarily reading and writing; we must support the newly-endorsed secondary reading teachers and offer the endorsement to an even greater number of teachers; this endorsement trains teachers in both reading and writing best practices.
- We must continue to employ reading teachers with specific secondary training and experience.
- We must further implement embedded staff development so teachers can learn together, from each other, and have the opportunity to practice new skills while receiving coaching from teachers with those skills. This does not mean hiring coaches in every subject area, necessarily, but it does mean creating an environment where teachers do not remain isolated and are expected to share their skills and knowledge. One of our strongest opportunities to improve lies in stopping the isolation of our teachers. Richard F. Elmore, a vocal critic of the staff development practices of the last fifty years says, “Professional development should be designed to develop the capacity of teachers to work collectively on problems of practice, within their own schools as practitioners” (6). We have the opportunity to improve our teachers’ practices to meet the demands of a standardized curriculum and a results-oriented focus if our schools use their Professional Development Site Plan to set meaningful learning goals for teachers. Too, we must work with teachers to help them set individual training objectives which will increase their literacy and subject area knowledge and insure the practices in our classrooms meet the needs of every student. We can not afford to participate in the isolated, patchwork training of the past.
- We must continue our training and testing of our paraprofessionals.
- We must conscientiously train our administrators to understand and manage dramatic educational shifts; they, too, must establish a community of learners among themselves.

Many of the recommendations made above directly involve instruction and attention to them will increase student performance in all core areas, reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies, as well as many electives.

It's Still About Reading

The following recommendations are specific to the major academic deficiencies our data has identified – tenth grade reading and reading gains of our Lowest 25th Percentile of students.

Careful analysis of our data shows that regression in reading proficiency begins in the middle school and bottoms out in the tenth grade. In 2005, 78.71% of our fifth graders were proficient readers, 73.29% in sixth, 70.74% in seventh, 68.34% in eighth, 52.33% in ninth, and 44.95% in tenth grade. If we look at the same group of students moving through the grades, in 2002 as seventh graders 62.63% were proficient readers; in 2003 the percent inched up to 65.73% as eighth, but in 2004 as ninth graders they were at 45.92% and in 2005 only 44.95% were proficient as tenth graders.

% Proficient Reading (Achievement Level 3+)							
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2004-2005 Change (% Pts)	2002-2005 Change (% Pts)	2002-2005 Percent Improvement
District	57.00%	60.89%	61.91%	66.91%	5.00%	9.91%	17.38%
3rd	71.74%	75.84%	80.69%	80.52%	-0.18%	8.78%	12.24%
4th	63.72%	75.74%	77.56%	83.03%	5.46%	19.31%	30.31%
5th	66.47%	73.80%	78.14%	78.71%	0.57%	12.23%	18.40%
6th	65.33%	70.30%	73.66%	73.29%	-0.37%	7.96%	12.18%
7th	62.63%	69.91%	76.03%	70.74%	-5.29%	8.11%	12.95%
8th	57.83%	65.73%	60.56%	68.34%	7.78%	10.51%	18.18%
9th	39.86%	43.71%	45.92%	52.33%	6.41%	12.48%	31.30%
10th	45.85%	46.44%	43.76%	44.95%	1.19%	-0.90%	-1.96%

Florida's Middle School Rigorous Reading Requirements were mandated last year to insure that our middle school students are prepared for the rigor of high school academics. In 2005, only three of our ten middle schools met the requirement of having 75% or more of its students in each grade level (6, 7, and 8) reading at Level 3 or above (see Appendix A). So it is obvious that reading cannot be addressed in the tenth grade only; we have realized that literacy is the number one issue in all of our secondary schools. The superintendent clearly set the objective for middle schools and high schools last year when he told the administrators, "These students should be leaving more literate than when they arrive." But, far too often, they are not.

For this reason, the School Board mandated a comprehensive and costly Intensive Reading Initiative to be implemented in grades 6-12 in August, 2005. Rather than revisiting the research, the expectations, and the procedures set out in Okaloosa's Intensive Reading Initiative for secondary students (presented and distributed in March, 2005), these recommendations will highlight some of those areas and make additional suggestions to address the literacy deficits in our secondary students:

- The Intensive Reading (IR) program must be implemented as designed in each secondary school; the program must have the commonality of the design in all schools in order to evaluate its effectiveness and efficacy across the district.
- We must insure that our Level 1 and Level 2 secondary students are receiving instruction in our Intensive Reading classes; an enrollment audit must be conducted immediately.
- The IR class size which is tied to the reading ability of the student must be maintained; the class size is determined by the severity of the need and enables teachers to customize instruction.
- All IR diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments must be kept in a progress monitoring portfolio available to all students' teachers; the student information must be shared with subject area teachers and parents in AIP/IEP/LEP meetings.
- Reading teachers must meet with classroom teachers to collectively address the needs of the struggling students.
- The student results for the major assessments required in the IR classes must be entered into the district's database through the AS400 in order to gather data on each student for future instruction and to conduct longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of the program; student achievement data should be available at mid-year and year's end to help administrators monitor and evaluate their school's reading instruction and the success of the district wide initiative.
- Reading teachers must have ongoing support and the opportunity to meet with experienced reading teachers and Literacy Coaches to discuss their work and their students' work.
- Instruction and assessment in the IR classes must be closely monitored by school administrators and Quality Assurance; if we do not insure the quality of the program, it will become a tracking and segregation system for low-performing students.

The implementation of effective Intensive Reading classes in our middle and high schools is a gigantic step toward remediating deficiencies and bringing students up to grade level, but if we believe the reading classes themselves will solve our students' literacy deficits, we are wrong.

Teaching literacy skills is the work of all secondary teachers. If we do not do something substantively different in the core content classes in our secondary schools, we will continue to have the need for remediation. With fewer than half of our students entering high school as proficient readers, our efforts must begin at middle school and continue through high school. We must understand that we have three very distinct reading needs in our secondary schools, beginning in the sixth grade:

1. Students who continue to need intensive reading instruction;
2. Students who can read but need to learn complex literacy skills to master their content area and to prepare for post-secondary work or education;
3. Students who have acquired basic literacy skills but who must be challenged to read more in order to develop automaticity in using them.

The majority of our students fall in the second and third categories; most students think they can read only to find they can only pronounce words. They must be *taught* the reading skills and the content-specific vocabulary they need to master increasingly complex subject matter.

Secondary teachers have long believed that students are taught all the reading skills they will need in elementary school. Reading in elementary school consists of mastering the process of sound symbol association, learning sight words to enable reading fluency, increasing vocabulary, and beginning to learn the comprehension strategies appropriate to the student's age. This is often called "learning to read," but in middle and high school our students must be taught the "reading to learn" skills: *sequencing of events, comparing and contrasting, drawing conclusions, recognizing cause and effect, forming generalizations, differentiating between important and unimportant information, summarizing, and making judgments and decisions based on the material read*. These are complex thinking and problem solving skills, but they are the very skills proficient readers must use every day in their studies.

Additionally, our secondary teachers must use, model, and teach reading strategies to their students: before reading, during reading and after reading strategies (see Appendix B). Our deficiency in secondary reading is largely a result of students not being taught the more sophisticated skills and the specific reading strategies required to master the more complicated content and of our not directly teaching the increasingly difficult content-specific vocabulary, the academic vocabulary that must be understood to master the content standards. This is not asking teachers to “teach to the test,” but to teach the skills their students need to access science, history, mathematics, drama, music, and technical skills.

Even our students who are able to read must be held accountable for reading more and reading a wider variety of texts. One of the critical determiners of reading comprehension is fluency, the rate at which one reads. If a student does not read enough to be fluent, he may read every word correctly, but his pace is so slow that he does not make meaning or he forgets it as he works through a sentence, a paragraph, or a passage.

We recognize that our students live in a highly auditory and visual society, but they must read and read well to succeed in an academic setting. Over the years, in order to compensate for our students’ lack of reading ability and motivation, we have too often provided complete outlines of every chapter, given written notes delineating key points in each chapter, handed out summaries of reading passages, and we have grouped students to discuss passages in an attempt to have all students know the information. In other words, we have often enabled our students’ inability to read. We have expected secondary students to come to us reading and then we have accommodated them when they did not.

Often these classroom strategies were motivated by the sincere attempt to teach a particular subject, but we must now acknowledge that our subject content is best taught when students can read it, think about it, and write about it themselves. For students able to read, fluency is only developed by reading more and having their pace and comprehension monitored; often the student himself is able to set his fluency goal and chart it over time. This can be done in any class with the subject content of that class.

The Other Half of Literacy...

Writing

The state raised the writing score deemed as proficient from a 3 to a 3.5 in the spring of 2005. Even with the increased objective, Okaloosa students ranked second in the state, tying with four other districts which also had 87% of their students writing proficiently. One of the state's reasons for raising the threshold was the concern that the writing they were assessing had become formulaic over time. The students' writing showed they knew the pattern to use in addressing the prompt, but their essays lacked originality, insight, voice, and vocabulary appropriate to the students' age.

Okaloosa's writing scores had been relatively flat the last several years and our student samples, too, show our students had mastered the formula of writing to an FCAT prompt, but we were not seeing the increase in writing proficiency that we were seeing in reading and mathematics for most students.

Too, the state added a multiple-choice section which tests grammar, syntax, and word choice, much like the new SAT test, to address the mechanics which were not directly assessed in the holistic scoring of the Florida Writing Assessment.

Writing is a thinking activity. Effective writers employ high order thinking skills, comprehension, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis, as well as an understanding of language. When a teacher asks students to write about what they have learned he is assessing both the students' understanding of the specific content taught and the students' abilities to think critically about that subject. Writing is way for a student to explain what he has learned in any course, and it should be used by all core teachers to do that.

Therefore, the following recommendations are applicable to all students, grades K-12, even though Florida's official writing assessment occurs only in grades 4, 8, and 10. Writing is a component of a balanced literacy approach and a necessity for assessing depth and application of knowledge; it is not an isolated subject, but a series of skills that all teachers should require.

- Elementary, language arts, and reading teachers must understand and teach the various components of effective writing: content; sentence

- structure and mechanics (usage, punctuation and spelling); organization; word choice; and voice.
- Elementary, language arts, and reading teachers must understand the Florida writing rubric and use it to score several papers each nine weeks.
 - Other core content teachers should understand the process of the Florida Writing assessment, the scoring using the Florida rubric, and the terminology associated with the rubric's expectations; ideally, they will use timed writings, short answers, and extended responses in their own assessments of their content areas.
 - Teachers must teach the writing process, but not all papers must be taken to publication; the process and skills of writing a research paper should begin in upper elementary grades.
 - Teachers in grades 2-10 must use the scoring guides and samples of student papers produced by the state; schools must use the released student assessments to train teachers to recognize proficient and advanced writing in order to teach to those levels.
 - All elementary and middle schools must participate in Okaloosa Writes, and elementary teachers must use Okaloosa Writes scoring guides to collaboratively grade sets of papers in order to choose exemplars for their instruction.
 - Teachers must individually counsel with students about their writing
 - Graphic organizers are effective tools for pre-writing, but the time to teach and use them should not be disproportionately high to the actual time spent writing.
 - Students in grades 3-12 should write (and teachers evaluate the writing) at least once per week; the product can be a summary, a paragraph, an explanation of a math problem, or a variety of responses appropriate to the standard and topic being taught.
 - Students must be taught to use the Florida rubric to discuss and score their own essays.
 - Schools should collect a bank of writing prompts for each grade level, each genre of writing to be used throughout the year.
 - Grammar, usage, and mechanics should be taught in the context of writing and reading, not in isolation using disconnected sentences; if Daily Oral Language is used, the practice sentences should form a whole paragraph or short essay at the end of the week/unit.

- Parent sessions can be held to introduce parents to the requirement of writing to a prompt in a specific genre and the use of the Florida rubric for scoring.
- Gifted and advanced students should be taught and expected to produce coherent and complex writing; from using simple figurative language (simile, metaphor) to sophisticated genre (satire, allegory), writing instruction can be differentiated to meet both the accelerated and enriched curriculum needed by our most able students.

Students with the Greatest Needs

The two previous sets of recommendations addressed specific curricular areas, reading and writing, which we must target for improvement. But looking deeper into our data at the No Child Left Behind subgroups tells us which students are in the greatest need of intervention and support.

	Reading			Mathematics		
	Improvement Level 2+	Improvement Level 3+	Proficiency	Improvement Level 2+	Improvement Level 3+	Proficiency
Economically Disadvantaged	17.11%	20.88%	53.71%	20.26%	34.72%	57.58%
Students with Disabilities	52.95%	82.83%	37.20%	50.61%	82.84%	43.00%
African American	25.05%	39.28%	46.18%	30.02%	46.34%	48.72%
Hispanic	-1.65%	-0.29%	54.70%	0%	6.17%	60.88%
Limited English Proficient	81.46%	259.26%	22.22%	7.20%	17.58%	36.36%

Examining this data more closely, our districtwide mathematics proficiency has improved for our Economically Disadvantaged Students by 34.72%; our Students with Disabilities by 82.84%; our African American students by 46.34%; our Hispanic students by 6.17%; and our Limited English Proficient students by 17.58%.

Three of these subgroups of students have improved in reading proficiency: Economically Disadvantaged by 20.88%; Students with Disabilities by 82.83%; African American students by 39.28%; and Limited English Proficient students by 259.26%.

Our Hispanic students, however, regressed in reading proficiency by .29%. These gross percentages of improvement over the baseline set in 2002 are noteworthy and in some cases extraordinary, but hidden in these figures is the recurrent theme of underperformance in reading in the tenth grade. In four of these five subgroups the percent of tenth graders scoring proficiently in 2005 was less than the percent proficient in 2002. Hispanic students are the only exception.

Another way to analyze the performance of these groups of students is to consider what percent of each group is scoring as proficient readers or proficient mathematicians. Doing that, we see that fewer than half of our Students with Disabilities, African American students, and Limited English Proficient students score at a Level 3 or higher on the reading portion of the FCAT, and fewer than half of our Students with Disabilities and Limited English Proficient students are scoring proficiently in math.

Specific recommendations will be made for each of the NCLB subgroups, but the following addresses instructional practices which research shows can increase the academic achievement of all low-performing students.

Lesson Development and Presentation

1. Give an explicit orientation to the lesson and the standard(s) it teaches; many teachers today write the specific objectives for the day on the board; tell the students what they are expected to learn and how they will show they have learned it. As reported in What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action, “Not only do students *learn* more effectively when they know what they’re supposed to be learning and why that learning is important to them, but teachers *teach* more effectively when they have that same information” (Marzano 84).
2. Review previous lesson(s) attaching prior instruction to the lesson about to be taught; a good review does not merely mention the previous topic (“Yesterday we looked at the topography of Florida”); it gives specifics and involves students’ recollection and summarizing skills.
3. Provide instruction in the concepts or skills. These strategies have the most impact on student learning and should be used extensively:

- Employing similarities and differences – If we teach with the premise that any new information or idea we are developing must connect to something the student already knows for it to make sense and be remembered and used, then we will consciously show how the new information is like or unlike other things we know the student understands. This is a simplistic explanation, but helping the student to identify similarities and differences while instructing him has the largest impact on student achievement (45 percentile gain) of nine strategies proven to increase student achievement (Marzano 80) [see Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement for strategies and their specific impact on student achievement].
 - Teaching summarizing and notetaking – Having the students frequently summarize the content and skills as they are presented both focuses on their reasoning abilities and gives the teacher the opportunity to reinforce or provide corrective feedback; teachers often give internal review of a lesson, but asking students to summarize and evaluate what has been taught allows for teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction. Many of our secondary classrooms are beginning to use Cornell notetaking which teaches students to discern which information is important and requires students’ summary of the information they have taken down. Effective use of summarizing can increase a student’s achievement by a 34 percentile gain (Marzano 80).
 - Providing direct instruction of essential and academic vocabulary. As this strategy is critical to the achievement of all NCLB subgroups of students and to our other lowest performers, a separate and more complete recommendation is made regarding building background knowledge through vocabulary instruction.
4. Use effective questioning to clarify the students’ understanding of the lesson and help to assess the students’ understanding. Teachers must ask clear questions directed to a specific student about the essential elements being taught; questions should not be wasted on procedural, non-academic processes (“Did you bring your notebooks today?”), nor should questions be directed to a group of students (“Does anybody know what *velocity* means?”). Some low-order questions can be asked (who? what? when?)

where?), but the majority of questions in a lesson should be high order questions which require students to analyze, evaluate and synthesize information (Why? What would cause that? How does that process work? What would that mean to people today? How does that connect to other measurements of central tendency?). Much research has been done that shows far too often low-performing students are asked only low-order questions. Teachers must ask the challenging questions and through specific corrective feedback teach the students the skills to answer them.

5. Give meaningful feedback throughout the lesson to increase all students' understanding. Teachers must use their interactions with students to reinforce effort, give academic praise, and correct misunderstandings. Teachers too often present a lesson and move through it by listening for the correct answers from students; this assumes all the other students knew how the student respondent arrived at the correct answer. The impact of effective interaction between the teacher and students during questioning and feedback cannot be overstated. An effective teacher asks students to explain their answers; he can often get useful information about a student's thinking and his own instruction from having a student explain how he arrived at a wrong answer. He also asks students to explain their own right answers or those of other students. It is an effective way to reinforce concepts and thinking processes, and it is a way for the teacher to do a self-check of his instruction. Slowing down for extensive questioning and specific corrective feedback may seem cumbersome and time consuming, but these practices help to insure depth of understanding.
6. Use examples of proficient student work that clearly show correct use of the concepts, procedures, or skills being taught; using student exemplars is a necessary practice for standards-based instruction. Oftentimes examples of below-level and advanced-level work can be used to correct students' misunderstandings or to refine or excel their work.
7. Use frequent and varied checks for comprehension during the lesson. These informal comprehension checks are an effective way to conduct non-punitive formative assessment because they allow the teacher to correct misconceptions on the spot and to change his instruction if he needs to.

8. Give students time in class to practice and use of the concepts and procedures taught in the lesson. The need for students to practice with support cannot be overemphasized. Often teachers assign the new material to be practiced as homework, but students must have the opportunity to practice it where they can get teacher or peer support and intervention if needed. This practice can occur in a variety of ways, but its intent is always to give the students the opportunity to show they understand the concepts and skills and can use them. Grading this practice is inappropriate as it is designed for corrective feedback or encouraging recognition.
9. Assign independent practice, usually in the form of homework. This gives the student the chance to extend his practice of the newly taught concepts or procedures. Homework should be given corrective feedback for it to be meaningful to the students. Homework is not assigned to teach responsibility; its goal is to have the student practice using concepts and skills until he masters them; therefore, homework is not a summative assessment. The topic, chapter, unit, or semester exam is the summative assessment.
10. All lessons should begin with review, have internal reviews, and end with a comprehensive review. Students should be engaged in the reviews in order to check their comprehension and to further use their summarizing and synthesizing skills. In the lesson-closing review, students should be asked if the objectives of the lesson were met and, if not, to name what else they needed to have a thorough understanding of the lesson. Some teachers prefer to conduct the final review by having students respond in writing, thus checking their comprehension and practicing written summaries.

Effective teachers use this basic format for lesson delivery; all students, but especially low-performing students, students who have trouble organizing information, and non-English speaking students need the clarity and routine of a reliable lesson format. Using this structured lesson format does not take the creativity and enjoyment out of teaching and learning. A teacher's creativity and academic freedom are apparent in his choice of activities and student-centered examples he uses during the lesson. Creativity and academic freedom no longer mean a teacher can choose *what* he teaches;

instead they are exemplified in *how* the teacher presents and monitors the standards he teaches.

How Do I Get Them from There to Here?

Educators have long agreed that low-performing students and economically disadvantaged students lack the background knowledge that will help them succeed in an academic setting; too, our students for whom English is a second language and students with disabilities often have limited academic background knowledge. Teachers have known for years that a student's experiences affect his vocabulary and his ability to connect new information to something he already knows. Limited experiences do cripple children, but we can no longer recognize that and not address it head-on at all grade levels.

We know that students benefit from a variety of out-of-class experiences and that having an adult mentor is useful in building background knowledge, but these opportunities are not always under the control of the school. We must, therefore, employ proven strategies within the school day and in our tutoring to build these students' background and vocabulary.

Reading teachers often begin their instruction by connecting the reading selection to the student's prior knowledge, and if the students' knowledge is lacking, they teach the vocabulary that will be used in the reading selection. Content area teachers often believe that reading itself will increase a student's vocabulary—that the student will learn word meaning from context. But as Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown explain: “research spanning several decades has failed to uncover evidence that word meanings are routinely acquired from context” (799). These limited approaches, words taught in a selection or learned from context, cannot possibly teach the tens of thousands of words a student must know to succeed in a rigorous high school program.

In order to teach useful and necessary vocabulary, educators in the past have used word frequency lists, which typically analyze millions of words of running text to identify the most frequently used words. Today, however, there is a much more meaningful, but no less daunting, approach to vocabulary selection. With the adoption of learning outcomes, in our case the Sunshine State Standards, educators can be more specific than the word

frequency lists; they can identify the exact vocabulary a student must know to master the concepts and skills he will be taught in school.

Using the standards themselves, various professional organizations (e.g., the National Council of Mathematics, the National Council of Teachers of English, etc.) have identified the critical vocabulary necessary to understanding specific content. A list of nearly 8,000 terms has been put together by Robert Marzano using state standards and a linguistic analysis process. It lists eleven subject areas and reports the terms for subject areas at four levels: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. The entire list is given in Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement, and he invites its use by all educators.

This is a particularly meaningful document because Florida employed Marzano and McREL researchers to review its Sunshine State Standards as they were being prepared for adoption and publication. Any teacher or group of teachers could use the list as a basic tool to identify the critical terms needed to understand the standards of their grade level or subject area. As recommended earlier, the academic vocabulary should be explicitly identified when eliminating unneeded curriculum and aligning essential concepts and skills in grades kindergarten through twelfth. Stahl and Fairbanks (1986) report that “students’ comprehension can increase by 33 percentile points when vocabulary instruction focuses on specific words important to the content they are reading as opposed to words from high-frequency lists” (Marzano: Building Background 69).

Teaching vocabulary effectively will enable the student to store terms and their meaning in his long term memory and, thus, be able to retrieve them as background knowledge and use them in learning new information and procedures. Effective vocabulary instruction is not having students look up the definitions of words and/or using them in sentences. Dictionary definitions by their nature are short and compact, and they often provide only a synonym which the student doesn’t understand.

The following are recommendations for effective, direct vocabulary instruction, and though it takes time, it is class time well-spent. It levels the playing field for those students whose background knowledge is limited; it can be used to deepen and extend the vocabulary of proficient students; and it gives the teacher the foundation to build learning on.

Directly Teaching Essential and Academic Vocabulary

- Present the words/terms in everyday language rather than dictionary definitions (e. g., The happy boy ambled along, his unhurried pace showing he was glad to be outside soaking up the sunshine.).
- Use non-linguistic representations of the words/terms and have the students present the words in non-linguistic representations (drawings, photos, symbols, etc.).
- Compare and contrast the words/terms to ones already known.
- Classify the words/terms with other like words/terms according to shared characteristics.
- Have students create metaphors and analogies; this is particularly meaningful in connecting to information in the student's memory that is not literal; this strategy is useful for teaching the connotative meaning of words, especially to the more academically able student.
- Insure multiple exposures and uses of words/terms; meanings of words deepen with repeated and varied practice.
- Teach word parts, roots and affixes, to older students; teaching parts of words can be confusing to beginning readers.
- Provide time and activities that allow students to actively discuss the words/terms.
- Provide word games and puzzles for practice.

Clearly, relying on dictionary or glossary definitions or believing that students will learn the necessary vocabulary by reading are denying the research that confirms students' background knowledge and academic achievement can be substantially improved by the teacher using the above-listed best practices for vocabulary instruction. It is more important to teach students the academic vocabulary of their subject areas than it is to define general vocabulary used in word lists and specific reading passages. Part of every lesson should be devoted to developing vocabulary in ways that it is imprinted in the student's memory so that it becomes background knowledge for learning succeeding concepts and skills.

Analyzing Instruction for the Struggling Student

Continuing to focus on the needs of our academically deficient students, with a particular emphasis on reading and writing instruction, the following are recommended questions for a principal to ask and have answered about

the instruction of these students and questions for the teacher to ask and answer about his/her own instructional practices:

Principals' Questions

- Is the student provided both small group and individual instruction?
- Is the student's readiness in the deficit content or skill area used to shape instruction?
- Does the teacher use appropriately-leveled materials including materials not restricted to print?
- Is the instruction modified as needed by the use of formative assessment both formal and informal?
- Is the student's computerized practice monitored and redirected by the teacher with re-teaching by the teacher when needed?
- Is the student given extended time to learn and practice a skill?
- Does the student have to repeat skills and concepts he already knows?
- Does the teacher model his/her thinking and problem solving aloud?
- Does the student listen to connected text read fluently by an adult every day?
- Does the student write every day to both use and to summarize what he has learned?
- Does the teacher use student work as exemplars to show students what is expected of them in regard to specific standards?
- Is the student taught techniques to help him learn: self-questioning strategies, drawing or writing to organize his thoughts, proof reading skills, study methods, notetaking?
- Is the student helped to set his own learning goals and taught to self-monitor and identify growth, strengths, and needs?
- Does the teacher set high and realistic expectations for all students?

Teachers' Questions

- Do I expect every student to master the standards of this grade/subject?
- Do I value hard work as much as I do IQ?
- Do I use assessments to specifically diagnose what students know and don't know so I don't waste time instructing mastered skills?
- Do I use formative assessments to modify and revise my instruction?

- Do I use frequent and individual corrective and encouraging feedback (write notes? conference? correct homework?)?
- Do I individualize practice so students practice what they need to, not all students practicing the same things in the same way?
- Do I use and monitor technology to facilitate student practice?
- Do I use this lesson format:
 1. Do I clearly give the lesson's objective(s)?
 2. Do I interact with students to check their comprehension?
 3. Do I directly instruct in content specific vocabulary?
 4. Do I provide sufficient guided practice?
 5. Do I structure sufficient independent practice?
 6. Do I give the students multiple opportunities to practice and experiment with the skill, procedure, or concept?
 7. Do I gradually increase the responsibility for students to independently think and apply the skill, procedure, or concept?
 8. Do I conduct meaningful summative assessments that measure proficiency in understanding and applying the standards taught?
- Am I omitting already-mastered skills?
- Do I construct time-blocks for extended instruction and practice as they are needed rather than abiding by the textbook suggestions? Do I monitor my use of class time? Do I maximize learning time?
- Do I use effective questioning techniques and appropriate corrective and reinforcement language?
- Have I identified and do I use student exemplars of proficient work to help students understand what is expected of them?
- Do I write and monitor specific and individualized AIP's, IEP's, LEP's, or EP's?

If teachers and administrators will ask and discuss the answers to these questions, they will increase their own knowledge and reinforce the use of these techniques and strategies. Teaching is improved with honest self-assessment and reflection, but improvement can be multiplied if educators work together. Discussing the answers to these questions is a good starting place.

This document makes many contextual and instructional recommendations which are based both in research, practical experience, and the results of our 2002-2005 achievement data. All recommendations are made with a conscious commitment to institutionalizing policies and practices which have shown to be effective, to increasing some we have begun but not perfected, and to beginning new practices at both the district and the school level. The recommendations made thus far move from the general to the specific, but there remains the need to make several commendations and recommendations specific to groups of students. Principals and teachers must use the student achievement results specific to their school and classes to select and address the recommendations particular to their needs.

We Cannot Yet Say “No Child Left Behind”

Economically Disadvantaged Students

Commendations:

- From 2002-2005, our Title I schools which serve the majority of our economically disadvantaged elementary students more than tripled the improvement made in reading proficiency (Level 3+) over our non-Title I schools: Title I schools averaged an improvement in proficiency of 41.39% and non-Title I schools averaged an improvement of 12.75%. Our Title I schools averaged an improvement of 49.6% in proficient math results and our non-Title I schools average an improvement of 34.48%.
- Our elementary schools showed more reading proficiency improvement (31.04%) than our middle schools (17.74%) or our high schools (27.20%) [see Sec. B, pp. 49, 50, & 51].

Concerns:

- Our Economically Disadvantaged students are those students who qualify for free and/or reduced lunch, but often middle and high school students do not make this claim, so the numbers of needy students in our secondary schools is certainly greater than our data shows. Secondary teachers should know which of their students are affected by low socioeconomics in order to provide the academic support they need.

- The most severe regression in percentage of proficient readers occurs in the 10th grade with a percentage point drop of 21.59 from 2002 to 2005 for a regression of 23.52%. This translates to only 22.87% of our Economically Disadvantaged students able to read at the level needed to master the more demanding content of 11th and 12th grade (see Sec. B, p. 59 for each high school).

Recommendations:

- Increase the number of volunteers in our Take Stock in Kids program which provides adult mentors for students.
- Assign a teacher or paraprofessional to meet frequently with a low-performing student to serve as an on-hand mentor.
- Schools working on establishing community outreach programs should continue and strengthen them; schools who have established these relationships should share information with other schools.
- Administrators and staffs should study Ruby Payne's works regarding the characteristics of children in poverty and the strategies that work with them.
- Some students fall into this subgroup without being classified in one of the others and they are often overlooked; schools must disaggregate their student data to identify and intervene with these students.
- Our strongest instructional intervention for this subgroup is direct vocabulary instruction (see recommendations); every secondary school must insure that direct, consistent and effective teaching of vocabulary is occurring in its classrooms; to lessen confusion, subject area teachers must collaborate and provide the same descriptions and definitions across grade levels for content area vocabulary.

Students with Disabilities

Commendations:

- Our Students with Disabilities have made remarkable improvement from 2002 through 2005. When taken as a group, these students have improved in reading proficiency by 82.83% and in mathematics proficiency by 82.84%.
- Our elementary schools have improved reading proficiency by 117.71%; our middle schools by 71.83%; and our high schools by 38.63%.

- Our elementary schools improved mathematics proficiency by 107.45%; our middle school by 94.41%; and our high schools by 40.08%.
- Our Specific Learning Disabled (SLD) students improved in reading proficiency by 82.69% and in mathematics proficiency by 73.92%. Students with Specific Learning Disabilities comprise the largest category of Students with Disabilities.
- We have reduced the pull-out programs in many schools and have increased the students' instructional time in their Least Restrictive Environment, the grade level classroom. Our elementary schools, especially, have focused on ESE services being supplemental, an addition to regular classroom instruction rather than a replacement for it.
- We have graded Students with Disabilities who are working for a regular high school diploma against the same standards and expectations set for their peers. Since these students must pass the tenth grade reading and math FCAT as their exit exam for high school graduation they must have the opportunity, time, accommodations and support needed to learn the Sunshine State Standards.
- We have begun implementing systems to insure that Students with Disabilities receive the necessary accommodations during all instruction and assessment.
- We have aligned the IEP's with the grade level expectations for promotion and written specific measurable objectives to meet these expectations.
- By our commitment to individualize instruction and to early intervention we are beginning to see a shift from waiting until a student could qualify for ESE services (the discrepancy model) to addressing his deficits as soon as they are apparent (early response to intervention model).
- We have begun to research and implement programs specific to the needs of Students with Disabilities (e. g., Linda-Mood; Read 180).
- We have in place this year Intensive Reading classes which can give us very specific information regarding how secondary reading students who have learning disabilities should be instructed (see Data System Recommendations).

Concerns:

- The tenth grade Students with Disabilities subgroup results for improvement in reading proficiency declines by 30.88%.
- The only grade level which shows a decline in Students with Learning Disabilities (a category in the larger subgroup of SWD) is tenth grade with only 11.66% of those students reading proficiently in 2005; in 2002, 13.84% had read proficiently. This decline is a 15.77% regression in reading proficiency.
- The academic achievement of secondary students with learning disabilities decreases year-by-year in both reading and math; our own collection of longitudinal data is not sufficient to analyze whether the early interventions we've taken with students in elementary school will curb this gradual regression of achievement.
- The high school immersion reading programs did little to improve the reading ability of our Students with Disabilities.
- Though our Students with Disabilities (grades 3-10) have improved dramatically in both reading and mathematics, the percent reading proficiently is a low 37.20% and the percent proficient in math is 43.00%. These results are cause for serious concern; they demand that we understand and use effective differentiation strategies, ones specific to each student's disability.
- We have recognized the need for these students to be taught the standards expected for their grade level and for graduation, but we are not yet successful predicting with reliability the time, the strategies, or the materials these students would most often need for success.
- Our achievement data must be more specific so that we can correlate particular services and interventions to success or lack of it (see Data System Recommendations).

Recommendations

- Study the instructional recommendations of and the research behind the new IDEA laws; one of its basic premises is that the discrepancy model used to identify learning disabled students, which our country has used for several decades, leaves students untaught for too long, typically until sometime in the 3rd grade. Once the student has been identified, he has missed the critical years of reading and mathematics instruction. Okaloosa must use this research to look at our own identification patterns, our own use or non-use of early intervention strategies, and our own results of tracking these students once they are

- identified. Principals, school psychologists, ESE personnel, and teachers must be trained with this information.
- We must research the programs for early intervention with struggling students; with the availability of brain research now in its third decade, more and more is being learned about processing deficits and the interventions to address them. We cannot ignore this research nor can we rush out and purchase untried programs or systems.
 - Our School Performance Plans must be much more specific to interventions needed by K, 1, 2 students; our own data shows us that the older a student with disabilities becomes the more his skills erode; we must build a strong early foundation in reading, writing and mathematics.
 - We must build effective Child Study Teams or Guidance Committees whose primary functions for each low-performing student are 1.) to review his assessment data, his actual work products, the instructional strategies and materials being used with him, the extended services given him, the additional academic and motivational support given him and 2.) to make recommendations in relation to these components. These teams must have regular classroom teachers, ESE teacher(s), school psychologist, and other support personnel. If the schools cannot implement this level of support for every low-performing student right away, they must begin with the identified Lowest 25th Percentile of students in their schools; these students are often those who are categorized in the NCLB subgroups.
 - We must insure that every student with disabilities is actually taught in his least restrictive environment with the accommodations, time, and support he needs; students will not learn the Sunshine State Standards for their grade level if most of their time is spent in pull-out classes which supplant regular instruction.

Ethnic Subgroups

Two of the major ethnic subgroups which have historically underperformed in American schools and which have been the focus of No Child Left Behind analyses across the country as well as in our district are African American students and Hispanic students.

In Okaloosa County our student population is 12% African American and 4% Hispanic. Our number of African American students has remained approximately the same over the last four years, while our number of Multiracial students has grown by over 500 students. In 2005, we served 251 more Hispanic students than we did in 2002 (see Appendix C).

Our own student achievement data show substantial improvement in the proficient (Level 3+) performance of African American students in reading and math, but a serious concern with the reading performance of Hispanic students. For the three years that NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) has been calculated and reported, Okaloosa has made federal AYP in reading, writing, and mathematics with our Hispanic students, but we recognize a need for improvement in these students.

It must be noted that the No Child Left Behind calculation of Adequate Yearly Progress counts each of these ethnicities, African American and Hispanic, as a separate subgroup, but it also calculates Limited English Proficient as a subgroup. Though Okaloosa has made federal adequate yearly progress in reading, writing, and mathematics with our Hispanic students, we have not done so with our Limited English Proficient students.

In 2003, our district did not test enough of our Limited English Proficient students to meet the 95% tested requirement, nor did we make adequate yearly progress in math for the students whom we did test. The following year in 2004, our LEP students did not make adequate progress in reading, and in 2005 they did not make adequate progress in either reading or math. In fact, Okaloosa County did not make the NCLB AYP for 2005 because of the low performance of its LEP students in reading and math (see Appendix D).

It may seem contradictory that by federal standards our Hispanic students are succeeding but our LEP students are not. There are at least two explanations: our LEP subgroup is made up of many ethnicities not just Hispanic students, and many of our Hispanic students do speak English and do not qualify for LEP services or they have been served in an LEP program and have tested out. By definition LEP students do not speak enough English to succeed academically without support in our classrooms and the need for that support has increased exponentially: our LEP subgroup of students has grown from 84 students in 2002 to 245

students in 2005, and we expect these numbers will increase substantially in 2006.

Commendations:

- African American students have improved in reading proficiency by 39.28%; our percent of African American students passing the reading SSS test has increased from 57.54% in 2002 to 71.95% in 2005.
- African American students have improved in mathematics proficiency by 46.34%; our percent of African American students passing the math SSS test has increased from 59.22% in 2002 to 77.00% in 2005.
- African American students met all the specific performances set for Adequate Yearly Progress in the NCLB grading system: 95% or more tested, and the specific criteria set for reading, math, and writing (see Sec. B, p. 46).

Concerns:

- Hispanic students lost ground in the percent passing the reading SSS moving from 74.58% passing in 2002 to 73.34% passing in 2005.
- Reading proficiency for Hispanic students regressed by .29%, moving from 54.85% proficient in 2002 to 54.70% proficient in 2005.
- The percent of Hispanic students passing the mathematics SSS test stayed the same, 79.75% in both 2002 and 2005.
- Our Limited English Proficient students, students who are in our LEP programs, have improved dramatically from 2002, but their baseline data was extremely low: 6.19% proficient in reading and 30.93% proficient in mathematics. In 2005, 22.22% of LEP students scored proficient in reading and 36.36% scored proficient in mathematics (see Sec. B, p. 170).

Recommendations:

- Schools which have implemented out-reach programs for support of the African American students should continue to build them and expand their community presentations into more groups and agencies; increase the mentoring and tutoring offered from the out-reach programs.

- The district must analyze its LEP program in terms of funding, services provided, instructional knowledge, teacher training, and the legal mandate for services which must be offered to English Language Learners.
- The district should consider a model of services which combines both immersion and support as individually required and recorded on a student's LEP plan; as with Students with Disabilities, LEP students must be taught the SSS in the context of their grade level with the support necessary for them to learn.
- The district is responsible for training schools and testing administrators regarding the format and the administration of the Comprehensive English Language Learner's Assessment (CELLA) which will be administered to LEP students for the first time in 2005-06. Raising Student Achievement: Florida's Compelling Evidence reports:

Florida has worked for two years to develop and implement an assessment system that will provide a clear picture of English proficiency development and will also provide a mechanism for school and program accountability. Florida chose to develop a new assessment because the available instruments were not adequate ... Published assessment instruments that adequately meet these requirements [NCLB's required annual assessment of English proficiency] have not been available to states; therefore, the United States Department of Education funded several consortia to develop instruments to meet this need. Florida participated in one of these consortia along with Maryland, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee, Accountability Works (Education Leadership Council) and the Educational Testing Service (ETS). The grant funding supported the 2004-05 development and field test activities. Florida's new assessment system will lead to higher student achievement for English Language Learners and more accountability for schools.

The CELLA will provide the state a single, valid and reliable instrument to measure the attainment of English proficiency and growth in English proficiency...The first administration of CELLA will be in the springs of 2005-06 and the second administration in the spring of 2006-07. These first two administrations will be used by the Department to establish

targets for English language proficiency and annual measurable achievement objectives (AMOs). In the spring of 2006-07, and thereafter in the spring, one form of the test will be used for the statewide administration of CELLA to report progress on the attainment of English language proficiency and the AMOs. Using CELLA, the Department will be able to track the achievement and progress of all English Language Learners. Additionally, data from the assessment will be used to ensure that all schools and school districts are implementing effective instructional programs that help [these students] develop English Proficiency (14).

- The LEP and Title I personnel in Quality Assurance should become thoroughly familiar with the CELLA and prepare our schools for its implementation; studying the 2004-05 field test information should help our schools prepare LEP students.
- The same personnel should be talking with other districts, especially those who field tested, to compare their LEP programs and services to ours, looking for proven instructional services to better serve our LEP students.
- Our school board attorney should examine Florida's consent decree regarding LEP services and make a recommendation as to whether our center schools are segregating students.

Gifted Students

At first glance our achievement data for gifted students seem right on target. With a standards-based curriculum and a Level 3 performance on the FCAT assessment showing proficiency with the grade level standards, we would expect a very high percentage of our academically gifted students to score at a Level 3, and they do. Our data charts show that in both subjects, reading and math, very nearly 100% of our gifted students score at least a Level 3 at every grade level. Looking within that data, however, in 2005 we see that 19.53% of our gifted students regressed one or more achievement levels in reading and 14.09% regressed one or more achievement levels in mathematics (see Sec. B, pp. 173-4).

The expectation for an annual criterion reference test is that all students will make a year's academic growth for the year of instruction. We certainly do

not expect academically gifted students to regress an achievement level – or more than one. We must examine the reasons these students are not at the very least not maintaining their original level of achievement.

It may be that the FCAT assessment is not taken as seriously by gifted students both because it may not seem difficult and because some educators use it as a “threat of retention,” something most gifted students do not worry about. Another reason for the regressions may be related to the curriculum we offer gifted students. Joseph Torgeson, a member of the National Board for Education Sciences, says, “The least well-served of kids in our public schools are our gifted kids, and in terms of our national interest, we should be doing a lot better to serve them” (Data Driven Decision-Making 3).

By law and by moral imperative we are obligated to teach to the needs and talents of each gifted student. Our answers have been varied to meeting these individualized needs, but often we have created a class or unit separate from the Sunshine State Standards rather than accelerating or enhancing the instruction in the standards. In our middle schools we have created one class at each grade level and designated it as “the gifted class” regardless of whether the subject matter met the needs or strengths of a gifted student.

Rarely have we used the National Association for Gifted Children’s program standards to complement and supplement the SSS for our gifted students. “One program option (e.g., a pull-out program) will not serve all gifted learners equally well...rather than a single, discrete entity, giftedness is a multidimensional aspect of a child’s overall growth and development. Therefore, in order to ensure an appropriate education, a continuum of services should be designed to address specific needs of many different types and levels of giftedness from kindergarten through grade 12” (Landrum 2).

Recommendations:

- Student identification processes must be examined; schools must insure that students have access to evaluation and placement; all classroom teachers should be instructed in identifying the characteristics of a gifted child.
- Specific evaluations *beyond* the initial IQ qualifying test should be conducted to offer a comprehensive view of each student; this profile

- should depict strengths and weaknesses and unique characteristics to better differentiate the curriculum for him.
- Gifted services are not a privilege; they are a right under federal legislation and Florida legislation. Students cannot be denied services because of behavior or lack of performance and this must be an understanding in our schools.
 - An appropriate curriculum for gifted students must be articulated across all grade levels; the scope and sequence would include differentiated curriculum in each of the core academic areas, leadership, creativity, and the arts.
 - The Sunshine State Standards can serve as the core academic expectations, but they must also be expanded, modified, or replaced to meet the unique needs of the gifted learner.
 - To a much greater extent than it currently is, the Educational Plan for a gifted student must be customized to establish and measure clearly articulated academic goals and objectives; no two EP's should be exactly the same.
 - Consider grading gifted students in relation to their very specific, measurable objectives established on the Educational Plans.

Currently, the district is meeting with representatives of Stanford University to consider use of its web-based programs for gifted learners. Stanford, like several other well-respected universities, has conducted research on appropriate instruction for the gifted learner and has constructed programs to be offered on-line. Stanford's programs use videostreaming, interaction between Stanford instructors and the student, and immediate assessment of taught skills in three content areas, mathematics, language arts, and writing. Stanford offers its gifted programs at reduced rates to Title I schools, so schools may be interested in examining these programs for their students. It may be especially helpful to schools which have small numbers of gifted students.

Differences are not Deficiencies

It is apparent that both the low-performing students and the academically talented students are in need of our focused attention. In truth, differentiating instruction and providing academically responsive teaching will benefit all Okaloosa students. Although we have repeatedly extolled

individualization and customization as the means by which all students will learn the necessary curriculum, many teachers must now learn how to differentiate instruction for the various needs of their students.

Most teachers plan for whole class instruction, so any modifications they make to their instruction, materials, or pacing is done on the spot – after some students have struggled or failed. In a review of the literature addressing differentiation of instruction, Carol Ann Tomlinson proposed that “differentiation that effectively responds to learner readiness, interest, and learning profile” should have six common characteristics:

1. Effective differentiation is proactive rather than reactive. Teachers should plan a lesson from the outset to address learner variance; the presentations of the lesson, the ways students practice the content, and the ways students show their understanding must all be designed in advance.
2. Effective differentiation uses flexible, small teaching-learning groups. Three to four students in a group affords the teacher the opportunities to interact and to provide student-specific feedback.
3. Effective differentiation varies the materials used by individuals and small groups; materials should match to the needs of the student; When the readiness of students is an issue, appropriate leveled materials are vital.
4. Effective differentiation uses variable pacing. Several researchers have found that “often the level of instruction is set to address mid- or high-achieving students, while the pace is set for low-achieving students, with results that many students of varying readiness levels are frustrated” (133).
5. Effective differentiation is knowledge centered. The teacher’s in-depth knowledge of his subject area enables him to identify key concepts, organizing ideas, and fundamental skills of his subject area; without this content expertise, a teacher cannot successfully differentiate for a variety of learners.
6. Effective differentiation is learner-centered. The teacher connects to the background knowledge the student brings and builds on it; he uses formative assessment to adjust instruction; he makes the skills and concepts he is teaching relevant to the student’s life; and he teaches the student to manage his own learning (131-133).

Just as teaching a standards-based curriculum demands a change in pedagogy and practice, effective differentiation, or academically responsive teaching, can only occur when teachers learn the skills and strategies to “proactively modify curricula, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, and student products to address the diverse needs of individual students and small groups of students to maximize the learning opportunity for each student in the classroom” (121). Our schools reflect our society and we do not have a choice about whether we teach academically diverse students; our choice is about how we teach academically diverse students.

Another Giant Step

The majority of the previous commendations and recommendations in this document are directly related to instruction, curriculum, and assessment. Neither the commendations nor the recommendations could have been made without the student achievement data provided by our Management of Information Systems department and our Quality Assurance department. They have, over the last four years, established a foundation of achievement data from which they are prepared to build a more sophisticated, informative, and user friendly system of data collection, display, and analysis. The following is offered as the rationale for our district constructing a centralized, comprehensive data system that can be used by schools and teachers to affect student instruction.

- Our core belief in a results-oriented school system requires the most specific student data we can gather, display, and analyze.
- The most specific student and program information is still being kept at the school level without a process or mechanism to gather and analyze instructional or programmatic effectiveness across the district (e.g., Gates-McGinitie reading results; specific interventions; reading Lexile scores); we must be able to share effective practices and interventions.
- Data supplied from sources other than the FCAT data are not a part of our database (e.g., AP, IB, PSAT, ACT, SAT, College Readiness, Nationally Certified Teachers); this information must be available to set and measure objectives, to measure quality of programs, and to correlate services to special certification.
- Florida’s database is becoming more sophisticated and specific and we must be prepared to compare its data with our own; for example, if

the state broadly reports the results of its Reading First schools, we must be prepared with our own kindergarten through second grade achievement results since we have no Reading First schools. Because we have more stringent promotion requirements for all students, K-8, we must have the data to show the effectiveness of our retained students' interventions because the state reports limited data on third grade retainees. We must stay one step ahead.

- Our data system must have a process and mechanism for collecting specific student data from schools and entering it into the AS400 (our information management system) for centralized use; it must have a process for adding assessment information from outside sources into the AS400; it must produce and frequently distribute data reports which are user-friendly, offering narratives, charts, graphs, and statistical analyses.

The following are offered as suggestions for data to be collected, archived, and reported out at regular intervals:

- All assessments required in the Pupil Progression Plan and the Intensive Reading Initiative. Currently we do not have a baseline of SAT 10 data for our first and second graders or the several assessments administered in kindergarten. Now that the NRT portion of the FCAT is the SAT 10, our first and second grade SAT 10 academic performances in reading and mathematics can be used to predict third grade proficiency.
- Data on tenth grade retakes for graduation to make instructional recommendations and to trace drop-out rate to retakes.
- All secondary assessments: PSAT, SAT, ACT, AP, and IB; for AP and IB we should collect data on participation in courses, participation in testing, scores on testing, and completion for IB program.
- College Readiness for reading, mathematics, and writing
- Retention information specific to subject(s), NRT and SSS scores, grades and interventions for all grade levels
- All assessment and program information for Students with Disabilities, Limited English Proficient students, Good Cause students, and ethnic subgroups; all groups reported in NCLB AYP
- Drop-out information by age, grade level, number of retentions, by NCLB subgroup, FCAT and NRT scores, and school
- Graduation rates for all NCLB subgroups and all schools

- Information on over-age students: NCLB subgroup; FCAT and NRT scores, grade, and school
- Specific program, time, and instructional strategies for Plan of Care and Good Cause students
- Program and assessment data on graduation waivers for Students with Disabilities by primary disability and school
- Alternative assessment data for the severely cognitively disabled working toward an alternative diploma
- Other data which will help make correlations: time in programs; level of the program or course; certification and professional development of the teacher; per pupil cost of services; after school services (Title I mandated Supplemental Educational Services); and Summer Intensive Services programs

In addition to collecting and reporting out more and different information, we must disaggregate and analyze to a deeper level that we are currently able to do. The following are suggestions for further specificity in disaggregation of our data:

- Longitudinal data depicting the academic performance of the same students over time; we mainly report year-to-year data showing what a grade level did in one year and then what the grade level did in the next year. Year-to-year data has uses in examining the curriculum, materials and instructional practices of a grade level or a subject area, but we must take advantage of the value-added assessment model that Florida uses.
- Trace the Developmental Scale Score in reading, mathematics, and science (beginning 2006) for each student; we now know which Achievement Level a student scores in, but we must know if he attained a year of improvement for a year of instruction (e. g., a student could remain in Level 3 each year, grades 3-10, but we must look at the increase – or decrease – in his Developmental Scale Score to measure his growth or regression.)
- Longitudinal data for specific groups of students: NCLB subgroups, retained students with Plan of Care services, and Good Cause students will give us information to assess the services we have offered them.
- Comparisons of our achievement data to Florida's and to other districts

To create a sophisticated system that will serve the district, the schools, and parents will take a tremendous commitment and enormous amount of work, but it is key to our getting the very granular information we need to evaluate instruction so that we can continue the increase in student achievement we have produced in the last four years.

Florida is moving forward in developing its Department of Education data systems. The state entered into a five-year partnership with Microsoft to create two major projects: 1.) a web-based system designed to drive student improvement by creating a new level of access to student-level data, curricula and materials information, classroom planning tools, and professional development classes and 2.) also a web-based system for the general public and professional educators to better understand Florida's performance data through access to the state's K20 Data Warehouse.

These systems will prove useful to Okaloosa administrators, teachers and parents, so it is imperative that district personnel stay abreast of these developments. Our own need for a very sophisticated data system will remain, however, as we need information down to the classroom level to tie our funds, personnel, and instructional interventions to each student's academic improvement.

In conclusion, if it were possible to select just one thing we have learned in the last four years about instruction which increases student achievement, a very obvious overstatement would be that we know we must customize and individualize instruction for each student. Because a standards-based system is founded on the premise that all students will learn and apply a fixed body of information and we know all students do not learn at the same rate in the same way, our job is to provide the teaching and the support services, whether for the low-performing student, the average student, the disabled student or the gifted student, that every student requires.

It would be remiss not to commend some of the extraordinary ventures which have served to individualize instruction at many levels. This is certainly not an exclusive list, but one that serves as examples of what we can do and what more we need to do:

- The Northwest Florida Ballet
- The Blended School

- The strings instruction beginning in elementary and continuing now through high school
- The extraordinary career and technical opportunities offered high school students through our nationally-recognized C.H.O.I.C.E. programs
- The burgeoning elementary models of C.H.O.I.C.E. which integrate the Sunshine State Standards into early education in the career and technical areas
- The opening of a school for students who need an alternative placement because of disciplinary issues

The public's expectation of a standards-based system is "learning for all." Our expectation as educators must be that standards serve as the antidote against the classifying of students into tracked ability groups, groups which have in the past only served to reinforce low or mediocre academic expectations. These recommendations have been made with that difficult job in mind. Our job is to teach every student the essential skills and knowledge he will need to succeed as a student and as a citizen.

These many recommendations have been made with the recognition that the challenges, regardless of the progress over the last four years, remain monumental. In many cases these recommendations call for a completely new way of thinking about the responsibilities and actions of teaching. They all call for a heightened level of teachers working together. They require a sophisticated command of his discipline from every teacher. They demand intricate organizational and instructional knowledge from all administrators. But, as difficult as some may seem, these recommendations can insure the values and practices that will continue to improve student achievement in Okaloosa Schools.

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