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Sharpening the Pencil

Best Financial Management Practices Review
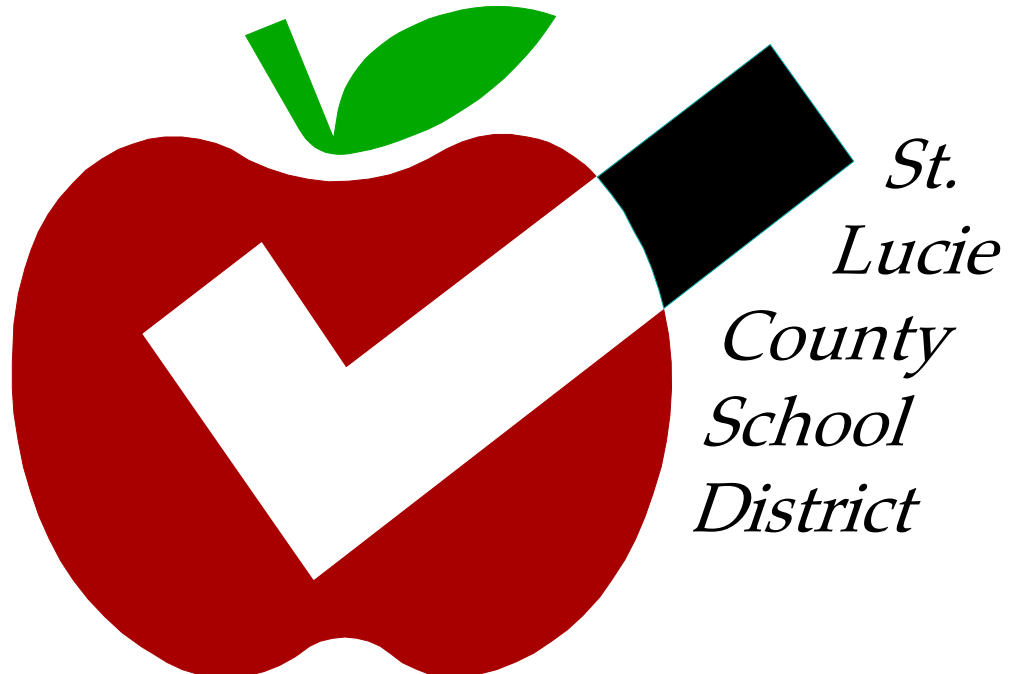
St.
Lucie
County
School
District

Sharpening the Pencil

Office of Program Policy Analysis
and Government Accountability

an office of the Florida Legislature

Report 03-26

The Florida Legislature

OFFICE OF PROGRAM POLICY ANALYSIS AND GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

John W. Turcotte, Director

April 2003

The President of the Senate
The Speaker of the House of Representatives
The Joint Legislative Auditing Committee
The Superintendent of the St. Lucie County School District
The School Board Members of the St. Lucie County School District

I have directed that a Best Financial Management Practices Review be conducted of the St. Lucie County School District. The 2001 Legislature directed that the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) contract for a best practices review of the district, and the results of this review are presented in this report. This review was made pursuant to the Sharpening the Pencil Act (HB 269) passed by the 2001 Legislature to improve school district management and use of resources and to identify cost savings.

OPPAGA is issuing the *Digest of Best Financial Management Practices Review, St. Lucie County School District* to comply with the law that directs OPPAGA to issue a report to the district regarding its use of the best practices and cost savings recommendations.

OPPAGA and the Auditor General were responsible for fieldwork and report findings and recommendations. OPPAGA made the final determination on the district's use of Best Financial Management Practices, based on information in the final report.

Martha Wellman was the contract manager for this review. Other OPPAGA staff included Brown, Rose Cook, Art Cunkle, Kathleen Del Monte, Michael Garner, Ron Patrick, Susan Speck, and Rich Woerner, under the coordination of Jane Fletcher. Auditor General staff included Jim Kiedinger, Brenda Racis, and Marie Westbrook under the supervision of David Martin.

We wish to express our appreciation to the staff of the St. Lucie County School District for their assistance.

Sincerely,

John W. Turcotte
Director

JWT/mc

cc: The Honorable Jeb Bush, Governor
        Commissioner Jim Horne, Commissioner of Education

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

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Digest of the Best Financial Management Practices Review

St. Lucie County School District

Sharpening the Pencil

Report No. 03-26A

April 2003

Results in Brief

Created in 2001, the Sharpening the Pencil Program (s. 1008.35, *Florida Statutes*) is intended to improve school district management and use of resources and to identify cost savings opportunities. The act directs the Commissioner of Education to adopt the best practices as standards for the Best Financial Management Practices Review and establishes meeting the best practices as the goal for all Florida school districts. The best practices are designed to encourage districts to

- use performance and cost-efficiency measures to evaluate programs;

- assess their operations and performance using benchmarks based on comparable school district, government agency, and industry standards;

- identify potential cost savings through privatization and alternative service delivery; and

- link financial planning and budgeting to district priorities, including student performance.

In accordance with Florida law, the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) conducted a best financial management practice review of the St. Lucie County School District during Fiscal Year 2002. The St. Lucie County School District currently is using 88.3% (189 of 214) of the best practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education. The district should be commended for being well managed and a good steward of public resources. The district is using a majority of the best practices in each of 13 areas reviewed and all of the best practices in 5 areas. The report contains action plans to address the remaining best practices and to make the district eligible for the Seal of Best Financial Management. (See Exhibit 1.) A detailed listing of all the best practices that identifies the district's status in relation to each is on page 6 of this digest report.

Exhibit 1
The District Is Using 88.3% of the Best Practices

Best Practice Area (Total Practices)	Is the District Using Individual Best Practices?	
	Yes	**No**
Management Structures (12)	11	1
Performance Accountability System (5)	3	2
Educational Service Delivery (16)	12	4
Administrative and Instructional Technology (20)	20	0
Personnel Systems and Benefits (15)	15	0
Use of Lottery Proceeds (5)	5	0
Use of State and District Construction Funds (4)	4	0
Facilites Construction (32)	29	3
Facilites Maintenance (26)	17	9
Student Transportation (20)	17	3
Food Service Operations (17)	15	2
Cost Control Systems (31)	30	1
Community Involvement (11)	11	0
All Areas (214)	**189**	**25**

Exhibit 2
The Review Identified Ways the District Could Further Reduce Costs and Increase Revenues

Ways to Save	Projected Five-Year Net Fiscal Impact
Management Structures	
• Evaluate the number of school-based administrators in middle schools, after evaluating the employee to student ratios. (p.3-18)	$2,500,000
Facilities Maintenance	
• Establish an incentive-based comprehensive energy management program. (p. 11-41)	$1,586,000
• Close or downsize the maintenance warehouse and negotiate volume discounts for parts and custodial supplies. (p. 11-23)	$370,000
Student Transportation	
• Seek reimbursement for Medicaid transportation it currently provides to some district students will reduce uncompensated transportation expenses. (p. 12-21)	$341,630
• Reduce school bus-related vandalism and its unreimbursed costs. (p. 12-24)	$345,000
Cost Control Systems	
• Implement a purchasing card system. (p. 14-34)	$26,000
TOTALS	**$5,168,630**

As seen in Exhibit 2, the review identified additional opportunities to reduce costs and increase revenues. Implementing these opportunities would have a positive fiscal impact of $5,168,630 over a five-year period. Determining whether to take advantage of these opportunities is a district decision and should be based on many factors including district needs, public input, and school board priorities. If the district uses these opportunities to reduce costs and increase revenue, it would be able to redirect the funds to other priorities, such as directing more money into the classroom or addressing deficiencies identified in this report.

Purpose

The purpose of Best Financial Management Practices Reviews is to improve Florida school district management and use of resources and to identify cost savings. Florida law directs the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability and the Office of the Auditor General to review the financial management practices of school districts. Florida law also provides that the best financial management practices, at a minimum, must instill public confidence by

1. addressing the school district's use of resources;

2. identifying ways that the district could save funds; and

3. improving the school district performance accountability systems, including public accountability.

Background

The 2001 Legislature passed the Sharpening the Pencil Act to improve school district management and use of resources and to identify cost savings. Two of the most important provisions of the act are that it specifies those districts scheduled to undergo a Best Financial Management Practices Review each year of a five-year-cycle and requires public input during the review process and after the distribution of the final report.

The act also directs that the Commissioner of Education adopt the best practices to be used as standards for these reviews and establishes meeting the best practices as the goal for all Florida school districts. The best practices are designed to encourage districts to

• use performance and cost-efficiency measures to evaluate programs;

• assess their operations and performance using benchmarks based on comparable school district, government agency, and industry standards;

• identify potential cost savings through privatization and alternative service delivery; and

• link financial planning and budgeting to district priorities, including student performance.

In accordance with the schedule of best financial management practice reviews in the act, the Legislature directed that OPPAGA to review the St. Lucie County School District. With about 30,000 students, the St. Lucie County School District is the twenty-third largest school district out of 67 districts in the state. Located in southeast Florida, north of Palm Beach, the district operates 41 schools and programs, including 21 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, 4 senior high schools, 1 magnet school, 1 exceptional student education school, 1 combined schools, and 7 other types of schools and programs. OPPAGA and the Auditor General staff conducted fieldwork and developed report findings and recommendations.

The report contains findings related to each best practice and detailed action plans to implement each report recommendation. These action plans were developed with input from the school district and describe the specific steps the district should take if it decides to implement the recommendation within two years. Pursuant to s. 230.23025, *Florida Statutes,* OPPAGA made the final determination on whether the school district is using best practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education based on information in the final report and the independent assessment of the district's use of each best practice.

OPPAGA expresses its appreciation to members of the St. Lucie County School Board and district employees who provided information and assistance during the review.

General Overview and District Obligations

Currently, the St. Lucie County School District is using 88.3% of the best practices adopted by the Commissioner, and at this time, is not eligible for a Seal of Best Financial Management. Appendix A of this report contains an action plan detailing how the district could meet the best practices within two years.

Within 90 days after receipt of the final report, the school board must

- decide by a majority plus one vote, whether or not to implement the action plan and pursue a Seal of Best Financial Management, and
- notify OPPAGA and the Commissioner of Education in writing of the date and outcome of the school board vote on whether to adopt the action plan. If the school board fails to vote on whether to adopt the action plan, the superintendent must notify OPPAGA and the Commissioner of Education.

After receipt of the final report and before the school board votes whether to adopt the action plan, the school district must hold an advertised public forum to accept public input and review the findings and recommendations of the report. The district must advertise and promote this forum to inform school and district advisory councils, parents, school district employees, the business community, and other district residents of the opportunity to attend this meeting. OPPAGA and the consultant will attend this forum.

If the school board votes to implement the action plan, the district must submit two annual status reports, the first report no later than one year after receipt of the final report and the second report one year later.

After receipt of each status report, OPPAGA will assess the district's implementation of the action plan and progress toward implementing the best financial management practices in areas covered by the plan and issue a report indicating whether the district has successfully implemented the best financial management practices.

If the school district successfully implements the best financial management practices within two years, it will be eligible to receive a Seal of Best Financial Management from the State Board of Education, a designation that is effective for five years. During the designation period, the school board must annually notify OPPAGA, the Auditor General, the Commissioner of Education, and the State Board of Education of any changes that would not conform to the state's best financial management practices. If no such changes have occurred and the school board determines that the school district continues to conform to the best financial management practices, the school board must annually report that information to the State Board of Education, with copies to OPPAGA, the Auditor General, and the Commissioner of Education.

Conclusions by Best Practice Area

A summary of report conclusions and recommendations by best practice area is presented below.

Management Structures

The district meets 11 of 12 best practices established for management structures. The St. Lucie County School District has a cohesive management team and comprehensive strategic plan that is directing the district's actions. But, the district is facing many challenges and needs to look more closely at its

administrative structure, particularly at the school level, to ensure that it is making the best use of available resources.

Performance Accountability System

Currently, the district meets three of the five performance accountability best practices. The St. Lucie County School District has a strategic plan that sets accountability standards for both instructional and non-instructional programs. However, the district is not conducting formal evaluations of its programs and strategies and needs to improve its reporting.

Educational Service Delivery

The district is using 12 of the 16 best practices for educational service delivery. While the St. Lucie County School District generally provides effective educational services and programs to its students, there are several areas for improvement. The district should improve the processes through which ESE students are identified and evaluated, establish mechanisms to improve ESE students' academic and nonacademic performance, and provide all teachers with access to curriculum guides linked to the sunshine state standards.

Administrative and Instructional Technology

The district is using all of the 20 best practices related to administrative and instructional technology functions. The St. Lucie County School District has developed and maintained a cost-effective administrative and instructional technology program and infrastructure. The district's technology initiatives will continue to improve and flourish with additional training and support.

Personnel Systems and Benefits

Overall, the district is using all of the 15 best practices in this area. The St. Lucie County School District's Human Resources Service Department generally practices sound personnel management. The district has implemented several new initiatives in recent years that are already resulting in gains in district goals. Some minor modifications and adjustments will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the program.

Use of Lottery Proceeds

The district uses all of the five best practices pertaining to the use of lottery proceeds. The district has defined enhancement, allocates lottery proceeds to School Advisory Councils as required by law, and reports the costs of specific activities supported with lottery proceeds.

Use of State and District Construction Funds

Overall, the district uses all of the four best practices pertaining to the use of state and district construction funds. The St. Lucie County School District has made effective use of state and district construction funds.

Facilities Construction

The district is using 29 of the 32 best practices related to facilities construction functions. The St. Lucie County School District has successfully privatized much of its construction program. It has developed an award winning, cost-effective construction program that has allowed the district to upgrade and construct modern facilities district wide. However, paying for new facilities puts a strain on the capital budget.

Facilities Maintenance

The St. Lucie County School District is using 17 of the 26 best practices for facilities maintenance. The St. Lucie County School District is cost-effectively operating and maintaining its schools; however, further opportunities exist to improve efficiency, performance and program costs for the Maintenance Department.

Student Transportation

The district is using 17 of the 20 best practices established for student transportation. The St. Lucie County School District operates an effective student transportation system. However, it can increase transportation revenues by seeking Medicaid reimbursement and decrease costs by taking steps to reduce bus vandalism

Food Service Operations

The district is using 15 of the 17 best practices for food services. The St. Lucie County School District has a fiscally sound food service program that is well managed and provides nutritious meals, but needs to clarify management roles and resolve maintenance issues.

Cost Control Systems

The district is using 30 of the 31 best practices established for cost control systems. The district's cost control systems include internal auditing, financial auditing, asset management, inventory management, risk management, financial management, purchasing, and payment processing. Overall, the district has established effective cost control systems in these areas. However, certain enhancements could be made

in the areas of internal auditing, inventory management, financial management, and purchasing.

Community Involvement

The district is using all of the 11 best practices related to community involvement. The St. Lucie County School District is actively involved with the larger community.

St. Lucie County School District
Best Financial Management Practices

Currently, the St. Lucie County School District is using 88.3% (189 of 214) of the best practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education, and at this time, is not eligible for a Seal of Best Financial Management. This appendix provides a detailed listing of all the best practices and identifies the district's current status in relation to each.

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		
MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. The roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent have been clearly delineated, and board members and the superintendent have procedures to ensure that they have effective working relationships.	✓		3-9
2. The board and superintendent have procedures to ensure that board meetings are efficient and effective.	✓		3-10
3. The board and superintendent have established written policies and procedures that are routinely updated to ensure that they are relevant and complete.	✓		3-11
4. The district routinely obtains legal services to advise it about policy and reduce the risk of lawsuits. It also takes steps to ensure that its legal costs are reasonable.	✓		3-11
5. The district's organizational structure has clearly defined units and lines of authority.	✓		3-14
6. The district periodically reviews its administrative staffing and makes changes to eliminate unnecessary positions and improve operating efficiency.		✓	3-15
7. The superintendent and school board exercise effective oversight of the district's financial resources.	✓		3-20
8. The district has clearly assigned school principals the authority they need to effectively manage their schools while adhering to district-wide policies and procedures.	✓		3-20
9. The district has a multi-year strategic plan with annual goals and measurable objectives based on identified needs, projected enrollment, and revenues.	✓		3-21
10. The district has a system to accurately project enrollment.	✓		3-22
11. The district links its financial plans and budgets to its priority goals and objectives, and district resources are focused towards achieving those goals and objectives.	✓		3-23
12. When necessary, the district considers options to increase revenue.	✓		3-23

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		

PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. The district has clearly stated goals and measurable objectives that can be achieved within budget for each major educational and operational program. These major programs are: • Educational Programs: Basic Education (K-3, 4-8, 9-12), Exceptional Student Education, Vocational/Technical Education, and English for Speakers of Other Languages. • Operational: Facilities Construction, Facilities Maintenance, Personnel, Asset and Risk Management, Financial Management, Purchasing, Transportation, Food Services, and Safety and Security. Goals and objectives must be present in both the educational and operational areas to meet this best practice. The district lacks these accountability mechanisms in the operational areas.	✓		4-3
2. The district uses appropriate performance and cost-efficiency measures and interpretive benchmarks to evaluate its major educational and operational programs and uses these in management decision making.	✓		4-7
3. The district regularly assesses the performance and cost of its major educational and operational programs using performance measures and benchmark data and analyzes potential cost savings and/or cost avoidance of alternatives, such as outside contracting and privatization.	✓		4-8
4. The district formally evaluates the performance and cost of its major educational and operational programs and uses evaluation results to improve program performance and cost-efficiency.		✓	4-9
5. The district clearly reports on the performance and cost-efficiency of its major educational and operational programs to ensure accountability to parents and other taxpayers.		✓	4-10

EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. District administrators use both academic and nonacademic data to improve K-12 education programs.	✓		5-5
2. District administrators facilitate sharing effective instructional practices to improve student performance.	✓		5-14
3. The district provides effective and cost-efficient Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs.		✓	5-16
4. The district provides effective and cost-efficient instruction as part of its English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program.	✓		5-26
5. The district provides effective and cost-efficient secondary vocational and adult/technical education programs.	✓		5-31
6. The district's curricular framework is linked to Florida's accountability standards and to the Sunshine State Standards.		✓	5-36
7. The district has adopted a plan for the progression of students from kindergarten through grade 12 that maximizes student mastery of the Sunshine State Standards.	✓		5-37
8. The district ensures that school improvement plans effectively translate identified needs into activities with measurable objectives and that school advisory councils meet statutory membership requirements.	✓		5-40

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		

EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
9. The district's process for selecting instructional materials ensures that instructional materials meet the needs of teachers and students.	✓		5-42
10. Each student has current and appropriate instructional materials in core courses that are aligned with the Sunshine State Standards and the district's pupil progression plan.	✓		5-44
11. The district's procedures for acquiring, maintaining, and disposing of instructional materials are cost-effective.	✓		5-45
12. The district has implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the overall performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its major educational programs. [1]		✓	5-48
13. The district regularly reviews its organizational structure and the staffing of the central office and schools to minimize administrative layers and processes.	✓		5-49
14. The district clearly reports on the performance and cost-efficiency of its major educational programs to ensure accountability to parents and other taxpayers.	✓		5-50
15. The district has sufficient school library or media centers to support instruction.		✓	5-51
16. The district provides necessary support services (guidance counseling, psychological, social work, and health) to meet the needs of its students in a cost-efficient manner.	✓		5-52

ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. The district has solicited and used broad stakeholder input in developing an integrated learning system and in setting priorities for administrative and instructional technology decisions.	✓		6-6
2. The district has a comprehensive technology plan that provides direction for administrative and instructional technology decision making.	✓		6-10
3. The district provides formal and informal support to assist educators in incorporating technology into the curriculum.	✓		6-12
4. The district provides technical support for educational and administrative systems in the district.	✓		6-13
5. The district provides technical support for hardware, software, and infrastructure in a timely and cost-effective manner.	✓		6-13
6. The district has a professional development plan that reflects the district's vision of integrating technology to enhance and enrich the learning environment, as well as improve administrative support.	✓		6-16
7. The district provides professional development for the instructional technologies.	✓		6-19
8. The district bases technology acquisitions on instructional needs and makes technology acquisitions based on those needs. [2]	✓		6-19

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[1] See performance accountability best practices and indicators for more information on each indicator for this best practice.

[2] Instructional needs include incorporating technology into the curriculum and needs of students learning how to use technology.

| Best Practices | Is the District Using Best Practices? | | |

ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY	YES	NO	PAGE
9. The district bases technology acquisitions on the results of research, planning, and evaluations of previous technology decisions to ensure technology decisions are cost-effective.	✓		6-20
10. The district has established standards for acquiring new programs and digital content that promote the integration of technology into everyday curricular needs.	✓		6-20
11. The district has a stable and efficient infrastructure. [3]	✓		6-21
12. The district has established and communicated a policy stating appropriate uses of all types of technology resources, including computers, video equipment, software, and the Internet.	✓		6-21
13. The district supports compliance with the established policy on safe and legal use of technology resources.	✓		6-22
14. Segregation of Duties: The district segregates duties to reduce the risk that unauthorized transactions will be entered and not discovered quickly.	✓		6-22
15. User Controls: The district's user controls ensure authorization prior to processing transactions and ensure all output represents authorized and valid transactions.	✓		6-23
16. Application Controls: The district's applications are designed to provide users with reliable data.	✓		6-23
17. General Controls: The district has established general controls in the areas of access, systems development and maintenance, documentation, operations, and physical security to promote the proper functioning of the information systems department.	✓		6-24
18. The district's management information systems provide data needed by administrative and instructional personnel in a reliable and timely manner.	✓		6-25
19. The district has taken steps to minimize the number of databases that are independent of its centralized computer systems.	✓		6-25
20. Other Controls: The district has established appropriate controls related to electronic data exchange transactions, other transactions processed through electronic media, and image processing systems.	✓		6-26

PERSONNEL SYSTEMS AND BENEFITS	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The district has efficient and effective processes for recruiting and hiring qualified personnel.	✓		7-4
2. The district maintains a reasonably stable work force through competitive salary and benefit packages and through district-wide efforts to address and remedy factors that contribute to increased turnover.	✓		7-7
3. The district provides a comprehensive staff development program to achieve and maintain high levels of productivity and employee performance among non-instructional employees.	✓		7-10

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[3] Examples of this include a Wide Area Network (WAN) and a Local Area Network (LAN).

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		

PERSONNEL SYSTEMS AND BENEFITS	YES	NO	PAGE
4. The district provides a comprehensive staff development program for instructional employees to attain and maintain high quality instruction and to achieve high levels of student performance.	✓		7-11
5. The district provides a comprehensive staff development program for school-based administrators.	✓		7-15
6. The district's system for formally evaluating employees is designed to improve and reward excellent performance and productivity, and to identify and address performance that does not meet the district's expectations for the employee.	✓		7-17
7. The district ensures that employees who repeatedly fail to meet the district's performance expectations, or whose behavior or job performance is potentially harmful to students, are promptly removed from contact with students, and that the appropriate steps are taken to terminate those persons' employment.	✓		7-20
8. The district maintains clear and effective channels of communication with employees.	✓		7-22
9. The district has efficient and cost-effective policies and practices for providing substitute teachers and other substitute personnel.	✓		7-24
10. The district maintains personnel records in a highly efficient and accessible manner.	✓		7-26
11. The district uses cost-containment practices for its Workers' Compensation Program.	✓		7-27
12. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the human resource program.	✓		7-28
13. The district periodically reviews the organizational structure and staffing levels of the office of human resources to minimize administrative layers and processes.	✓		7-29
14. The district periodically evaluates its personnel practices and adjusts these practices as needed to reduce costs and/or improve efficiency and effectiveness.	✓		7-31
15. For classes of employees that are unionized, the district maintains an effective collective bargaining process.	✓		7-31

USE OF LOTTERY PROCEEDS	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The district has defined "enhancement" in a way that the public clearly understands.	✓		8-5
2. The district uses lottery money consistent with its definition of enhancement.	✓		8-5
3. The district allocates lottery funds to school advisory councils as required by law.	✓		8-6
4. The district accounts for the use of lottery money in an acceptable manner.	✓		8-6
5. The district annually evaluates and reports the extent to which lottery fund expenditures have enhanced student education.	✓		8-7

| Best Practices | Is the District Using Best Practices? | | |

USE OF STATE AND DISTRICT CONSTRUCTION FUNDS	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The district approves use of construction funds only after determining that the project(s) are cost-efficient and in compliance with the lawfully designated purpose of the funds and the district's five-year facilities work plan.	✓		9-2
2. The district uses capital outlay and operational funds appropriately, lawfully, and in accordance with its adopted five-year facilities work plan.	✓		9-7
3. The district minimizes construction costs by using appropriate measures from the SMART (Soundly Made, Accountable, Reasonable and Thrifty) Schools Clearinghouse Frugal Construction Standards. [4]	✓		9-8
4. When designing and constructing new educational facilities, the district incorporates factors to minimize the maintenance and operations requirements of the new facility.	✓		9-9

FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The district has established a facilities planning committee that includes a broad base of school district personnel, parents, construction professionals, and other community stakeholders.	✓		10-4
2. The district has established authority and assigned responsibilities for facilities planning.	✓		10-5
3. The five-year facilities work plan provides budgetary plans and priorities based on the master plan and input from the facilities planning committee.		✓	10-5
4. The five-year facilities work plan is based on a thorough demographic study and enrollment projections.	✓		10-7
5. The five-year facilities work plan is based on an evaluation of the physical condition and the ability of facilities to meet educational needs.	✓		10-9
6. When developing the annual five-year facilities work plan the district evaluates alternatives to minimize the need for new construction.	✓		10-11
7. District planning prioritizes construction needs.	✓		10-12
8. The district can demonstrate that the construction program complies with the current *Laws of Florida*.	✓		10-13
9. For all projects with dates of construction contracted after July 1, 2001, the district can demonstrate that the construction program complies with the Florida Building Code.	✓		10-13
10. The school board ensures responsiveness to the community through open communication about the construction program and the five-year facilities work plan.	✓		10-14
11. The district develops descriptions and educational specifications for each project.	✓		10-14

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[4] The web page is: http:smartschools.state.fl.us.

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		
FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
12. Educational specifications for new construction, remodeling, and renovations include a description of activity areas.	✓		10-16
13. The architectural design fulfills the building specification needs as determined by the district.	✓		10-16
14. New construction, remodeling, and renovations incorporate effective safety features.	✓		10-17
15. The district begins school site selection well in advance of future need based on expected growth patterns.	✓		10-18
16. The board considers the most economical and practical locations for current and anticipated needs, including such factors as need to exercise eminent domain, obstacles to development, and consideration of agreements with adjoining counties.	✓		10-20
17. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the construction program.	✓		10-20
18. The district has considered, and where possible implemented, the general requirements recommended in the SMART Schools Clearinghouse Frugal Construction Standards.	✓		10-21
19. The district minimizes construction costs through the use of prototype school designs and frugal construction practices.	✓		10-21
20. The district secures appropriate professional services to assist in facility planning, design, and construction.	✓		10-22
21. The district can demonstrate that funds collected for school projects were raised appropriately.	✓		10-23
22. District planning provides realistic time frames for implementation that are coordinated with the opening of schools.	✓		10-23
23. For each project or group of projects, the architect and district facilities planner develop a conceptual site plan and building specifications.	✓		10-24
24. The district follows generally accepted and legal contracting practices to control costs.	✓		10-25
25. The district has assigned one person with the authority and responsibility to keep facilities construction projects within budget and on schedule.	✓		10-26
26. The board minimizes changes to facilities plans after final working drawings are initiated in order to minimize project costs.	✓		10-26
27. The architect recommends payment based on the percentage of work completed. A percentage of the contract is withheld pending completion of the project.	✓		10-27
28. The district requires appropriate inspection of all school construction projects.	✓		10-27
29. The district conducts a comprehensive orientation to the new facility prior to its use so that users better understand the building design and function.	✓		10-28
30. The district conducts comprehensive building evaluations at the end of the first year of operation and regularly during the next three to five years to collect information about building operation and performance.		✓	10-29

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		

FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
31. The district analyzes building evaluations to determine whether facilities are fully used, operating costs are minimized, and changes in the district's construction planning process are needed.		✓	10-30
32. The district analyzes maintenance and operations costs to identify improvements to the district's construction planning process.	✓		10-30

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. The district's maintenance and operations department mission, organizational structure, and operating procedures are established in writing.	✓		11-6
2. The district has established maintenance standards in its short- and long-term plans for providing appropriately and equitably maintained facilities within budget and in accordance with the district's five-year facilities work plan and annual budget.		✓	11-7
3. The district clearly identifies and communicates performance standards and expected outcomes to maintenance and operations staff.		✓	11-9
4. The district ensures that maintenance and custodial standards are regularly updated to implement new technology and procedures.	✓		11-12
5. The district obtains and uses customer feedback to identify and implement program improvements.	✓		11-13
6. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance and efficiency of the maintenance and operations program.		✓	11-13
7. The district accurately projects cost estimates of major maintenance projects.	✓		11-16
8. The administration has developed an annual budget with spending limits that comply with the lawful funding for each category of facilities maintenance and operations.	✓		11-19
9. The board maintains a maintenance reserve fund to handle one-time expenditures necessary to support maintenance and operations.	✓		11-21
10. The maintenance and operations department regularly evaluates maintenance and operations activities to determine the most cost-effective method of providing needed services.		✓	11-22
11. The district minimizes equipment costs through purchasing practices and maintenance.		✓	11-26
12. The district uses proactive maintenance practices to reduce maintenance costs.	✓		11-28
13. The maintenance and operations department regularly reviews the organizational structure of the maintenance and operations program to minimize administrative layers and processes.		✓	11-29
14. The maintenance and operations department regularly reviews the staffing levels of the maintenance and operations program to maximize the efficient use of personnel.		✓	11-30
15. The maintenance and operations department ensures qualified staff by using appropriate hiring practices.	✓		11-33
16. The maintenance and operations department has a written job description for each position within the department.	✓		11-34

| Best Practices | Is the District Using Best Practices? | | |

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE	YES	NO	PAGE
17. The district provides appropriate supervision of maintenance and operations staff.		✓	11-35
18. The district provides a staff development program that includes appropriate training for maintenance and operations staff to enhance worker job satisfaction, efficiency, and safety.	✓		11-36
19. The district provides maintenance and operations department staff the tools and equipment required to accomplish its assigned tasks.	✓		11-37
20. A computerized control and tracking system is used to accurately track work orders and inventory.	✓		11-37
21. The maintenance and operations department has a system for prioritizing maintenance needs uniformly throughout the district.	✓		11-39
22. District policies and procedures clearly address the health and safety conditions of facilities.	✓		11-39
23. The maintenance and operations department identifies and implements strategies to contain energy costs.		✓	11-40
24. The district has an energy management system in place, and the system is maintained at original specifications for maximum effectiveness.	✓		11-44
25. The school district complies with federal and state regulatory mandates regarding facility health, safety, and energy efficiency conditions.	✓		11-45
26. The district is aware of and prepared for the permitting and inspection requirements of the Florida Building Code.	✓		11-45

STUDENT TRANSPORTATION	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The student transportation office plans, reviews, and establishes bus routes and stops to provide efficient student transportation services for all students who qualify for transportation.	✓		12-6
2. The district ensures that all regular school bus routes and activity trips operate in accord with established routines, and any unexpected contingencies affecting those operations are handled safely and promptly.	✓		12-13
3. The district effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants it needs.	✓		12-16
4. The district trains, supervises, and assists bus drivers to enable them to meet bus driving standards and maintain acceptable student discipline on the bus.	✓		12-19
5. The district provides student transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students and accurately reports exceptional students transported to receive state funding.		✓	12-20
6. The district ensures that staff acts promptly and appropriately in response to any accidents that occur.	✓		12-23
7. The district ensures that appropriate student behavior is maintained on the bus at all times.		✓	12-23
8. The school district has a process to ensure that a sufficient number of school buses are acquired economically and will be available to meet the district's future student transportation needs.	✓		12-25

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		

STUDENT TRANSPORTATION	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
9. The district provides timely routine servicing for buses and other district vehicles, as well as prompt response for breakdowns and other unforeseen contingencies.	✓		12-27
10. The district ensures that fuel purchases are cost-effective and that school buses and other vehicles are efficiently supplied with fuel.	✓		12-29
11. The district maintains facilities that are conveniently situated to provide sufficient and secure support for vehicle maintenance and other student transportation functions.	✓		12-30
12. The district maintains an effective staffing level in the vehicle maintenance area and provides support for vehicle maintenance staff to develop their skills.	✓		12-31
13. The district maintains an inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment needed to support student transportation functions that balances the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs.	✓		12-32
14. The district provides appropriate technological and computer support for student transportation functions and operations.	✓		12-33
15. The district has established an accountability system for student transportation, and it regularly tracks and makes public reports on its performance in comparison with established benchmarks.	✓		12-34
16. The district coordinates long-term planning and budgeting for student transportation within the context of district and community planning.		✓	12-35
17. The district monitors the fiscal condition of student transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget.	✓		12-37
18. The district provides regular, accurate, and timely counts to the Florida Department of Education of the number of students transported as part of the Florida Education Finance Program.	✓		12-37
19. The district has reviewed the prospect for privatizing student transportation functions, as a whole or in part.	✓		12-38
20. The district periodically reviews the organizational structure and staffing levels of the student transportation program to minimize administrative layers and processes.	✓		12-39

FOOD SERVICE OPERATIONS	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. The food service program is clearly defined with a mission statement, operating policies and procedures, and performance expectations.	✓		13-7
2. The district regularly reviews the organizational structure and staffing levels of the food service program to enhance the efficiency of program operation.		✓	13-9
3. The district uses a comprehensive food service training program to increase productivity, improve employee performance, and enhance the food service program.	✓		13-17
4. The district identifies barriers to student participation in the school meals program and implements strategies to eliminate the barriers.	✓		13-19
5. The district has established cost-efficiency benchmarks based on comparable private and public sector food service programs and other applicable industry standards.	✓		13-23

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		

FOOD SERVICE OPERATIONS	YES	NO	PAGE
6. The district regularly evaluates the school food service program based on established benchmarks and implements improvements to increase revenue and reduce costs.	✓		13-25
7. The district regularly assesses the benefits of service and service delivery alternatives, such as contracting and privatization, and implements changes to improve efficiency and effectiveness.	✓		13-26
8. The program budget is based on department goals, revenues, and expenditure projections.	✓		13-27
9. The district's financial control process includes an ongoing review of the program's financial and management practices.	✓		13-28
10. The district accounts for and reports meals served by category.	✓		13-30
11. The district regularly evaluates purchasing practices to decrease costs and increase efficiency.	✓		13-31
12. The district has developed an effective inventory control system that is appropriate to the size of the school food service program.	✓		13-32
13. The district has a system for receiving, storing, and disposing of food, supplies, and equipment.	✓		13-33
14. The district has a plan for the repair and replacement of equipment that includes preventive maintenance practices.		✓	13-34
15. The district provides school meals designed to meet the nutritional needs of students.	✓		13-36
16. The district's food production and transportation system ensures the service of high quality food with minimal waste.	✓		13-37
17. The district follows safety and environmental health practices and regulations.	✓		13-38

COST CONTROL SYSTEMS	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The district has established an internal audit function with its primary mission to (1) provide assurance that the internal control processes in the organization are adequately designed and functioning effectively, and (2) where appropriate, offer recommendations and counsel to management that will improve performance.		✓	14-6
2. The district obtains an external audit in accordance with government auditing standards.	✓		14-8
3. The district provides for timely follow-up of findings identified in the external audit.	✓		14-8
4. The district obtains and reviews required financial information relating to school internal accounts, direct service organizations (DSOs), and charter schools.	✓		14-8
5. Segregation of Duties: The district segregates responsibilities for custody of assets from record keeping responsibilities for those assets.	✓		14-11
6. Authorization Controls: The district has established controls that provide for proper authorization of asset acquisitions and disposals.	✓		14-11

Best Practices	**Is the District Using Best Practices?**		

COST CONTROL SYSTEMS	**YES**	**NO**	**PAGE**
7. Project Accounting: The district has established records that accumulate project costs and other relevant data to facilitate reporting construction and maintenance activities to the board, public, and grantors.	✓		14-11
8. Asset Accountability: The district provides recorded accountability for capitalized assets.	✓		14-12
9. Asset Safeguards: Assets are safeguarded from unauthorized use, theft, and physical damage.	✓		14-12
10. Segregation of Duties over Inventory: The district segregates responsibilities for custody of inventories from record keeping responsibilities for those assets.	✓		14-13
11. Inventory Requisitioning Controls: The district has established and implemented controls that provide for proper inventory requisitioning.	✓		14-13
12. Inventory Accountability and Custody: The district has established controls that provide for inventory accountability and appropriate safeguards exist for inventory custody.	✓		14-14
13. Inventory Management: The district periodically evaluates the inventory function to determine its cost-effectiveness.	✓		14-14
14. General: The district has a process to set objectives for risk management activities, identify and evaluate risks, and design a comprehensive program to protect itself at a reasonable cost.	✓		14-16
15. Providing for Coverage Against Risk Exposure: The district has comprehensive policies and procedures relating to acquiring and reviewing coverage for risks of loss.	✓		14-17
16. Management Control Methods: District management communicates its commitment and support of strong internal controls.	✓		14-21
17. Financial Accounting System: The district records and reports financial transactions in accordance with prescribed standards.	✓		14-22
18. Financial Reporting Procedures: The district prepares and distributes its financial reports timely.	✓		14-22
19. Budget Practices: The district has a financial plan serving as an estimate of and control over operations and expenditures.	✓		14-23
20. Cash Management: The district has effective controls to provide recorded accountability for cash resources.	✓		14-25
21. Investment Practices: The district has an investment plan that includes investment objectives and performance criteria designed to maximize return consistent with the risks associated with each investment, and specifies the types of financial products approved for investment.	✓		14-26
22. Receivables: The district has established effective controls for recording, collecting, adjusting, and reporting receivables.	✓		14-27
23. Salary and Benefits Costs: The district has effective controls that provide accountability for the payment of salaries and benefits.	✓		14-27
24. Debt Financing: The district analyzes, evaluates, monitors, and reports debt-financing alternatives.	✓		14-30
25. Grant and Entitlement Monitoring: The district effectively monitors and reports grants activities.	✓		14-30

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		
COST CONTROL SYSTEMS	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
26. Segregation of Duties: The district segregates purchasing responsibilities from the requisitioning, authorizing, and receiving functions.	✓		14-32
27. Requisitioning: The district has established controls for authorizing purchase requisitions.	✓		14-33
28. Purchasing: The district has established authorization controls over purchasing.	✓		14-35
29. Receiving: The district has established controls to ensure that goods are received and meet quality standards.	✓		14-37
30. Disbursements: The district has established controls to ensure disbursements are properly authorized, documented, and recorded.	✓		14-38
31. Invoice Processing: The district has established controls for processing invoices to ensure that quantities, prices, and terms coincide with purchase orders and receiving reports.	✓		14-39

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. The district has developed a meaningful community involvement mission statement and maintains ongoing community involvement activities in its strategic plan directed toward performing that mission.	✓		15-4
2. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the Community Involvement Program.	✓		15-5
3. The district solicits and incorporates parent and community involvement and support.	✓		15-7
4. The district uses a variety of methods of communicating with parents.	✓		15-9
5. The district periodically reviews the organizational structure and staffing levels of the Community Involvement Program to minimize administrative layers and processes.	✓		15-9
6. The district has active Parent Teacher Associations /Parent Faculty Organizations (PTA/PFO) and other effective methods to involve and encourage parent leadership and participation.	✓		15-10
7. The district provides activities that encourage families to be involved in the schools.	✓		15-10
8. The district uses community resources to strengthen schools, families, and student learning and consistently offers school resources to strengthen communities.	✓		15-11
9. The district has developed school-business partnerships.	✓		15-12
10. District schools maintain active and effective programs to involve volunteers in the education process.	✓		15-12
11. District schools solicit economic support through school foundations.	✓		15-12

The Florida Legislature

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability

Visit the *Florida Monitor*, OPPAGA's online service. See http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us. This site monitors the performance and accountability of Florida government by making OPPAGA's four primary products available online.

- OPPAGA publications and contracted reviews, such as policy analyses and performance reviews, assess the efficiency and effectiveness of state policies and programs and recommend improvements for Florida government.

- Performance-based program budgeting (PB²) reports and information offer a variety of tools. Program evaluation and justification reviews assess state programs operating under performance-based program budgeting. Also offered are performance measures information and our assessments of measures.

- Florida Government Accountability Report (FGAR) is an Internet encyclopedia of Florida state government. FGAR offers concise information about state programs, policy issues, and performance.

- Best Financial Management Practices Reviews of Florida school districts. In accordance with the *Sharpening the Pencil Act*, OPPAGA and the Auditor General jointly conduct reviews to determine if a school district is using best financial management practices to help school districts meet the challenge of educating their students in a cost-efficient manner.

Subscribe to OPPAGA's electronic newsletter, Florida Monitor Weekly, a free source for brief
e-mail announcements of research reports, conferences, and other resources of interest for Florida's policy research and program evaluation community.

1 Introduction

Best Financial Management Practices Reviews are designed to help districts meet the challenge of educating students in a cost-effective manner. The Florida Legislature scheduled the St. Lucie County School District's assessment as part of the 2001 Sharpening the Pencil Act.

Overview

The 2001 Florida Legislature passed the Sharpening the Pencil Act to improve school district management and use of resources and identify cost savings. One of the most important provisions of the act is that it requires each school district to undergo a Best Financial Management Review once every five years. The act identifies those districts scheduled to undergo review each year of the five-year cycle. The St. Lucie County School District was 1 of 10 districts selected for review in the first year. [1]

Under these reviews, The Florida Legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) and the Florida Auditor General (AG) examine school district operations to determine whether districts are using the Best Practices to evaluate programs, assess operations and performance, identify cost savings, and link financial planning and budgeting to district policies. The Best Practices were developed by OPPAGA and the Florida AG and adopted by the Commissioner of Education's office.

The Best Practices are designed to encourage school districts to

- use performance and cost-efficiency measures to evaluate programs;
- use appropriate benchmarks based on comparable school districts, government agencies, and industry standards;
- identify potential cost-savings through privatization and alternative service delivery; and
- link financial planning and budgeting to district priorities, including student performance.

Districts found to be using the Best Financial Management Practices will be awarded a Seal of Best Financial Management by the State Board of Education. Districts that are found not to be using Best Financial Management Practices will be provided a detailed two-year action plan for achieving compliance. The district school board must vote whether or not to implement this action plan.

Florida law gives OPPAGA authority to contract with outside consultants for all or parts of the review. In the case of St. Lucie County School District, OPPAGA and the Florida Auditor General conducted the entire review.

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[1] Due to the state's budget difficulties, the Legislature reduced the number of reviews during the first cycle to six during a special session in November 2001.

Background and Scope

The St. Lucie County School District has seven primary goals that address a range of issues from educational attainment to improvement of facilities to community involvement. The district has 21 elementary schools; 6 middle schools; 4 high schools, 1 magnet school, 1 6-12 grade school, 1 exceptional student educational school, 3 schools operated in conjunction with the Department of Juvenile Justice, and 4 other alternative education schools and programs. In 2001, the district employed 4,060 full-time personnel, and served over 30,000 students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. Total expenditures for the St. Lucie County School District for the 1999-2000 fiscal year were $218.2 million.

Beginning in November 2001, OPPAGA and the Florida AG assessed the operations of the district under the fourteen (14) best practice review areas illustrated in Exhibit 1-1.

Exhibit 1-1

Best Financial Management Practices Review Areas

1. Management Structures	8. Facilities Construction
2. Performance Accountability Systems	9. Facilities Maintenance
3. Educational Service Delivery	10. Student Transportation
4. Administrative and Instructional Technology	11. Food Service Operations
5. Personnel Systems and Benefits	12. Cost Control Systems
6. Use of Lottery Proceeds	13. Safety and Security
7. Use of State and District Construction Funds	14. Community Involvement

Members of the OPPAGA and Florida AG teams express their sincere appreciation to the St. Lucie County School Board, the superintendent, and district and school-based employees who provided information and assistance during the review.

Methodology

In conducting this review, OPPAGA and the Florida AG used a variety of methods to collect information about the district's use of the Best Financial Management Practices. Review staff conducted several site visits to the St. Lucie County School District. Refer to Exhibit 1-2 for a timeline of major project activities. The review staff conducted numerous interviews with district administrators and staff, held a public forum in conjunction with the District Advisory Council, conducted focus groups with principals and teachers, attended school board and School Advisory Committee (SAC) meetings, and conducted site visits to schools. Staff also gathered and reviewed many program documents, district financial data, data on program activities, and data on student performance.

In an effort to put St. Lucie's programs and activities in context with other Florida school districts, OPPAGA and the Florida AG gathered information from five peer districts around the state: Escambia, Highlands, Lake, Marion and Osceola. The peer districts were selected based on their similarities with St. Lucie across a number of categories, including the size of the student population and demographic information.

Exhibit 1-2

St. Lucie County School District Best Financial Management Practices Review Timeline

Activity	Date
OPPAGA and Florida AG Team Conducted First Site Visit	April 2002
Team members reviewed the district's self-assessment with district staff, conducted numerous interviews, collected additional data, and identified preliminary high level issues.	
OPPAGA and Florida AG Team Conducted One Public Forum	April 8, 2002
Team members conducted a public forum to obtain input from the community on current issues and concerns as well as outstanding district services or programs. A press release was issued and members of School Advisory Councils, PTA, Parents and the Community were invited. The forum was held simultaneously with a District Advisory Council Meeting at the school board office.	
OPPAGA and Florida AG Team Conducted Second Site Visit	May 2002
Team members conducted focus groups of principals and teachers, attended school board and SAC meetings, and interviewed district and school-based staff. Team members collected additional documentation and data to supplement the district's self-assessment and information collected during the initial site-visit.	
OPPAGA and Florida AG Team Conducted Third Site Visit	July 2002
Team members conducted numerous interviews with the superintendent, assistant superintendents, program supervisors and directors to discuss preliminary findings and potential solutions.	
Draft report submitted for district review	October 2002
Presentation of final report to the St. Lucie County School Board	April 8, 2003

Source: OPPAGA.

Interviews

To understand the St. Lucie County School District's practices and programs, the review team conducted over 200 on-site interviews with numerous individuals. The review team interviewed a wide range of district personnel representing all levels of staff. Interview participants included school board members, the superintendent, assistant superintendents, various program directors and supervisors, principals, teachers, district-based and school-based support staff, and bus drivers. In addition, the team held many telephone conversations and exchanged electronic correspondence with district staff to gather additional information and feedback on relevant issues.

On-Site Observations

Team members conducted on-site observations of district operations. These observations included district offices, school campuses, transportation facilities, maintenance hubs, and the district's school cafeterias. In total, the review teams visited all of the schools in the district.

Public Forum

The review team conducted a public forum in conjunction with the St. Lucie County School District's District Advisory Council (DAC). The forum was conducted at the district's main school board meeting room in Ft. Pierce, to allow citizens to express their concerns regarding current issues and obtain feedback on outstanding district programs and services. The team also distributed pamphlets with information on how the public could provide information through a 1-800 Community Input Hotline and office e-mail.

Peer School Districts

OPPAGA and the Florida AG, in consultation with the district, identified five peer districts with the purpose of putting St. Lucie's programs and activities in context with comparable Florida school districts. To gather information from the group of peers, the review team sent a request for information to the superintendent in each of the five districts. Peer district staff provided information, documents and data for comparison purposes. The review team also used data from the neighboring districts of Martin and Indian River, to compare selected aspects in the review areas of Personnel Systems and Benefits, Administrative and Instructional Technology, Construction and Maintenance, and Educational Service Delivery.

2 Statistical Profile of the St. Lucie County School District

The St. Lucie County School District has seven primary goals including improving student performance, ensuring fiscal management, and improving community involvement.

County Profile

As of July 1, 2001, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that the total population of St. Lucie County was 200,018. The county's population increased by 28.3% between 1990 and 2000, compared to the state's growth rate of 23.5% during that same time period. This means that St. Lucie County has experienced relatively fast growth compared with the rest of the state. Of this population, approximately 60% reside in one of the county's 2 municipalities. Port St. Lucie is the largest municipality, followed by Ft. Pierce. The remaining population lives in unincorporated areas of the county.

Of the county's population, 98.2% consider themselves to be one race, while the remaining 1.8% consider themselves multi-racial. The largest proportion of the population is white, but persons of Hispanic or Latino origin comprise 8.2% of the population, which is approximately half of the statewide figure of 16.8%. By contrast, 15.4% of the county's residents are Black or African American, which is similar to the statewide figure of 14.6%. However, these percentages do not resemble the racial/ethnic composition of the student population.

A significant percentage of St. Lucie County's population (19.2%) is school-aged (5 to 19 years old) while an additional 5.6% are less than five years old. By contrast, 22.7% of the county's population is 65 years old or older. Approximately 77.7% of the county's residents aged 25 years or older are high school graduates, and 15.1% have graduated from college. The percentage of high school graduates is similar to the statewide figures of 79.9%, but the state had a relatively higher percentage of college graduates (22.3%).

St. Lucie County's median household income (based on a 1999 model) is $36,363, and the per capita income in 2000 was $21,993. As shown in Exhibit 2-1, the per capita income of St. Lucie County residents has been consistently lower than the per capita income of the state as a whole. In 2000, the per capita income of St. Lucie County residents was $5,771 below the state average.

Exhibit 2-1

Per Capita Income of St. Lucie County Residents Was $5,771 Below the State Average in 2000
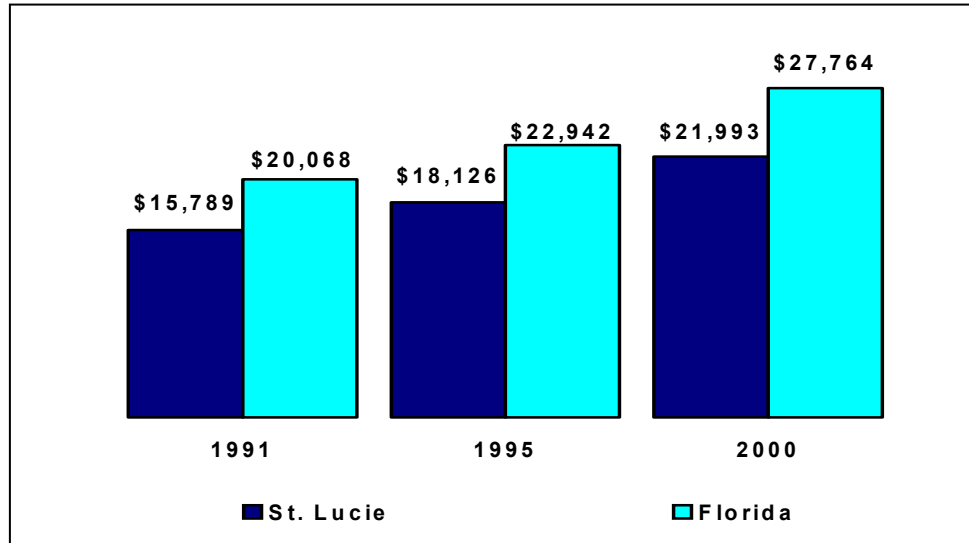
Source: Florida Research and Economic Database, 2002.

Poverty rates are slightly higher than the state average with 13.4% of the county's residents living below the poverty level in 1999, compared to 12.5% for the state as a whole. This may have a negative effect on the tax base for the school district and may correspond with the percentage of school children who are eligible for a free or reduced price lunch, which is discussed in Educational Service Delivery.

Over the past five years (1997-2001), the county's unemployment rate has been on average significantly higher than the state's unemployment rate (10.1% and 4.4% respectively). This suggests that students who graduate from high school in St. Lucie County may find gaining employment more difficult than graduates in other parts of the state. St. Lucie County has a civilian workforce of 82,182 people. The county's primary sources of employment include the service industries related to tourism, retail trade, and local government.

School District Profile ─────────────

The district operates 41 schools and other educational programs as shown in Exhibit 2-2.

Exhibit 2-2

The St. Lucie County School District Has a Total of 41 Schools And Programs

Type of School	Number of Schools and Programs
Elementary (K-5)	21
Middle (6-8)	6
High (9-12)	4
Magnet Art School (3-8)	1
6-12	1
Vocational	0
Adult	0
Charter	0
Exceptional Student Education	1
Juvenile Justice	3
Other Type	4
Total	41

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

With over 30,000 students in 2001-02, the School District of St. Lucie County is the 23rd largest school district in the state. The student population has increased steadily between 1997-98 and 2001-02, for a total change of 8.02% as shown in Exhibit 2-3. This rate was similar to the 8.94% increase in enrollment across the state.

Exhibit 2-3

Enrollment Growth in St. Lucie Has Been Increasing Rapidly Over the Past Five Years

	Fall 1997	Fall 1998	Fall 1999	Fall 2000	Fall 2001
Enrollment	28,284	28,875	29,357	29,538	30,552
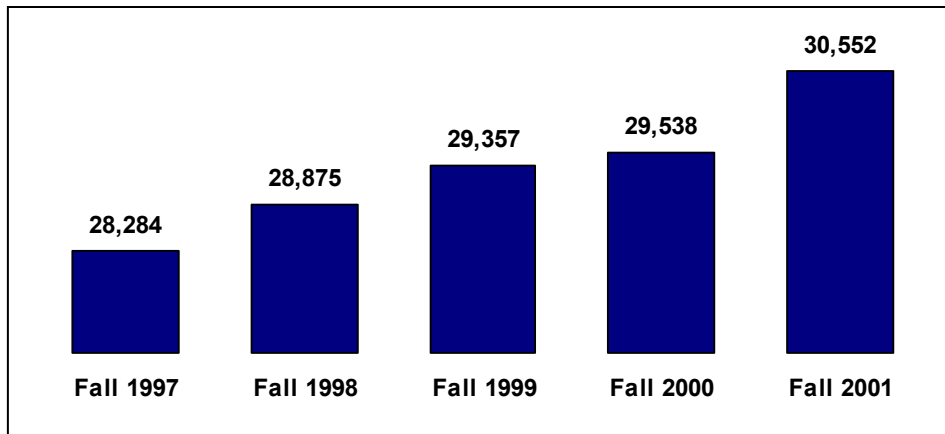
Source: Florida Department of Education (2000-01).

School District Financial Information

The total expenditures for the St. Lucie County School District for the 1999-2000 fiscal year were $218.2 million. The district receives revenues from federal, state and local sources. Most of the revenue that the district receives from the state is generated through the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) which was established by the Legislature in 1973. In distributing funding to Florida's 67 school districts, the FEFP takes into consideration a number of factors, such as varying local property tax bases, education program costs, costs of living, and costs for equivalent programs due to the sparsity and dispersion of the student population. This funding source annually prescribes state revenues for education as well as the level of *ad valorem* taxes (property taxes) that can be levied by each school district in the state. It also includes some restricted funding provided through categorical programs, through which the Legislature funds specific programs such as instructional materials or student transportation. Exhibit 2-4 describes the district's revenue, expenditures, and fund balances for the 1999-2000 fiscal year.

Exhibit 2-4

District Funds Include Federal, State, and Local Sources and Expenditures are Primarily Related to Instruction

Revenues and Expenditures	Total (Millions)
Revenues	
Federal Direct	$ 2.17
Federal Through State	19.26
Federal Through Local	.00
State	119.29
Local	86.80
Other	.37
TOTAL REVENUES	**227.89**
Expenditures	
Instruction	93.28
Pupil Personnel Services	9.84
Instructional Media Services	3.45
Instruction and Curriculum Development Services	5.77
Instructional Staff Training	1.47
Board of Education	.57
General Administration	1.83
School Administration	9.03
Facilities Acquisition and Construction	8.70
Fiscal Services	1.07
Food Services	9.79
Central Services	3.62
Pupil Transportation Services	11.05
Operation of Plant	14.78
Maintenance of Plant	4.14
Community Services	.17
Other	.50
Fixed Capital Outlay:	
Facilities Acquisition and Construction	9.80
Other Capital Outlay	8.56

Revenues and Expenditures	Total (Millions)
Debt Service:	
Principal	12.07
Interest and Fiscal Charges	8.71
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	**218.20**
Excess (deficiency) of Revenue Over Expenditure	**9.69**
Other financing sources:	
Operating Transfers In	13.98
Proceeds of Loans	.73
Sales of Certificates of Participation	19.79
Sales of Fixed Assets	.02
Operating Transfers Out	(13.98)
TOTAL OTHER FINANCING SOURCES	**20.54**
TOTAL EXCESS OR DEFICIENCY	**30.23**
Fund Balances, June 30, 2001	**$ 51.09**

Source: Florida Auditor General Annual Audit, Ending FY 2000.

As Exhibit 2-5 illustrates, the percentage of administrators and instructional staff are lower in the St. Lucie County School District to those districts used for comparison, and Exhibit 2-6 illustrates the actual number of administrators, instructional personnel, and support positions in the district.

Exhibit 2-5

St. Lucie's Staffing Ratios Are Lowest Among Its Peers

School District	Staff Ratios					
	Administrators to Classroom Teachers	Administrators to Total Instructional	Administrators to Total Staff	Classroom Teachers to Students [1]	Teacher Aids to Classroom Teachers	Guidance to Students
Escambia	1: 15.72	1: 17.78	1: 33.52	1: 17.35	1: 5.15	1: 462.20
Highlands	1: 11.46	1: 13.03	1: 25.57	1: 17.78	1: 4.42	1: 355.06
Lake	1: 14.17	1: 15.96	1: 30.33	1: 18.30	1: 4.49	1: 361.32
Marion	1: 13.30	1: 14.69	1: 30.56	1: 17.11	1: 2.82	1: 499.59
Osceola	1: 15.23	1: 18.07	1: 35.60	1: 19.19	1: 2.78	1: 461.98
St. Lucie	**1: 19.73**	**1: 22.42**	**1: 40.19**	**1: 14.73**	**1: 4.83**	**1: 345.42**
State	1: 14.20	1: 15.89	1: 29.04	1: 17.68	1: 4.29	1: 438.18

[1] This is not the same as average classroom size. This ratio is calculated by DOE by numbers reported through the EE0-5 survey of salaries in districts. The classroom teacher ratio includes all staff paid under the instructional salary schedule, and some of these positions may actually be administrative positions. The OPPAGA team is trying to produce more appropriate ratios at the time of this draft.

Source: Profiles of Florida School Districts, Staff and Student Data, Department of Education, 2000-2001.

Exhibit 2-6

St. Lucie County School District Employed 4,060 Staff in Year 2001-02

Full-Time Employees	Number	Percent
Administrators	101	2.5
Instructional	2,265	55.8
Support	1,694	41.7
Total	**4,060**	**100%**

Source: Profiles of Florida School Districts (2000-01).

The St. Lucie County School District faces a number of distinct challenges. For example, the district has a high percentage of low income residents, a lower level of high school graduates, and a trend towards rapid student growth. In addition, because of its controlled choice program described in the Management Structures and Transportation chapters, the district has higher transportation cost than comparable districts (these costs are often offset by savings in construction costs and increased labor costs).

3 Management Structures

The St. Lucie County School District has a cohesive management team and comprehensive strategic plan that is directing the district's actions. But, the district is facing many challenges and needs to look more closely at its administrative structure, particularly at the school level, to ensure that it is making the best use of available resources.

Conclusion

The St. Lucie County School District is using 11 of 12 of the best practices for management structures. The district board has many formal and informal mechanisms to ensure positive working relationships among board members and between the board and the superintendent. The board and superintendent work together cooperatively and the superintendent has strong support of the board. Board meetings are well run which ensures that major policy decisions are made in a timely and efficient manner. The board and superintendent obtain legal services that are appropriate and cost effective, and they exercise appropriate oversight of the district's financial resources. The district provides school administrators with the authority and discretion they need to operate their schools, while the district's zone directors help to ensure that principals comply with district policies and procedures. In addition, the district links it primary goals and objectives to its financial plans and pursues additional revenue sources when necessary.

However, the district could benefit from several modifications to its current policies, organizational structure and the goals, objectives, and strategies in its strategic plan. The district has identified these needs and has embarked on several new initiatives to address these areas of concern. Specifically, the district convened its policy revision committee to update the district's board policies to comply with the re-write of the state's educational code. Secondly, the district senior district administrators may have lines of authority and responsibility that are too broad, although the district is aware of this and is looking at ways to supplement these positions. Third, school-based administrative staffing levels are high relative to the district's peers and accreditation standards, especially in the middle schools. Finally, the district has a good strategic plan that covers both instructional and noninstructional programs, but many of the objectives, strategies, and measures of success are intermingled.

During the course of this review, OPPAGA identified a number of district accomplishments in its management structures, some of which are included in Exhibit 3-1 below.

Exhibit 3-1

The District Has Had a Number of Notable Accomplishments in Management Structures in the Last Three Years

- The district changed the size of its administration through reorganization in 2001 and 2002. This reduced administrative, instruction and support employees by 72 positions and changes in another 20 positions, resulting in annual cost savings of approximately $2.6 million.
- The school board has enrolled in and completed Master Board training after a new member joined the board.
- The district has developed a comprehensive strategic plan that includes goals and objectives for both instructional and non-instructional departments.

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Overview of Chapter Findings ——————————

OPPAGA reviewed the district's management structures using the Best Financial Management Practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education and associated indicators. OPPAGA employed several methodologies to develop chapter conclusions and action plans. For instance, we conducted on-site interviews with School Board members, the superintendent, district-level administrators, and other stakeholders in the county. Team members also conducted focus groups with school principals, teachers, bus drivers, maintenance workers and custodians from across the district. Questions varied depending on the persons surveyed and the results have been validated and incorporated into this chapter where applicable. The OPPAGA team also reviewed significant documentation including: 1) the district's policies and procedures; 2) budgets for the current and past years; 3) billing records; and 4) board meeting minutes. An overview of chapter findings is presented below.

Responsible Management of the District

1. The roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent have been clearly delineated, and board members and the superintendent have certain procedures to ensure that they have effective working relationships. (Page 3-9)
2. The board and superintendent have procedures to ensure that board meetings are efficient and effective. (Page 3-10)
3. The board and superintendent have established written policies and procedures that are currently being updated to reflect the recent re-write of the state's educational code. (Page 3-11)
4. The district routinely obtains legal services to advise it about policy and reduce the risk of lawsuits. It also takes steps to ensure that its legal costs are reasonable. (Page 3-11)

Effective and Responsible Operation

5. The district's organizational structure has clearly defined units that are reviewed on an annual basis. Furthermore, the district has recently made changes to ensure that the lines of authority are not too broad for district administrators in these units. (Page 3-14)
6. The district periodically reviews its administrative staffing and makes changes to eliminate unnecessary positions and improve operating efficiency. However, school-based administration has not been included in these assessments. (Page 3-15)
7. The superintendent and school board exercise effective oversight of the district's financial resources. (Page 3-20)
8. The district has clearly assigned school principals the authority they need to effectively manage their schools while adhering to district-wide policies and procedures. (Page 3-20)

Allocation of Resources

9. The district has a multi-year strategic plan with annual goals and measurable objectives based on identified needs, projected enrollment, and revenues; but many of the measures are contained within the goals and strategies, which make measuring performance difficult. (Page 3-21)
10. The district has a system to accurately project enrollment. (Page 3-22)
11. The district links its financial plans and budgets to its priority goals and objectives, focusing its resources towards achieving those goals and objectives. (Page 3-23)
12. When necessary, the district considers options to increase revenue. (Page 3-23)

As seen in Exhibit 3-2, the district has an opportunity to save money in school-based administration.

Exhibit 3-2

The District Can Reduce School-based Administrative Costs

Way to Save	Five Year Fiscal Impact
• Evaluate the number of school-based administrators in middle schools, after evaluating the employee to student ratios. (Page 3-19)	• The district could save between $2,500,000 and $3,000,000 over five years by eliminating deans and some assistant principal positions in its middle schools.

Source: OPPAGA.

Determining whether to take advantage of these opportunities is a district decision and should be based on many factors including district needs, public input, and school board priorities. If it uses this opportunity to reduce costs, the district would be able to redirect the funds to other priorities, such as putting money into the classroom and addressing deficiencies identified in this report.

Background ———————————————————————

The St. Lucie County School District has five board members and an appointed superintendent. The district's board members are elected at-large; although they do represent specific districts within the county. Each member is elected for a four-year term. Two members are elected at the time of the presidential general election, and three are elected at the time of the gubernatorial general election. The district has an experienced board with most members having served more than one term. The newest member was elected for her first term in 2000. Exhibit 3-3 shows the length of time board members have served and their previous experience.

Exhibit 3-3

St. Lucie's School Board Members Are Relatively Experienced

Board Member	Tenure	Experience
Dr. Samuel Gaines	Originally took office in 1972, reelected to several succeeding terms, reelected in 2002	Long-time resident, funeral director, 2nd longest continually serving board member in Florida
Dr. John Carvelli, Chair	Elected in 1994, reelected in 2002	Food service business, concerned community member
Dr. Judi Miller	Elected in 1986, re-elected four times as of 2002	Educator, activist parent
Kathryn Hensley	Elected in 1996, re-elected in 2000, second term ends in 2004	Local community activist, active SAC member
Carol Hilson, Vice Chair	Elected in 2000, first term ends in 2004	Elementary educator, long-time community member

Source: St. Lucie School District.

The current superintendent was appointed in 1996, after previously serving as an administrator in the Osceola County School District. The superintendent holds a Doctorate of Education and an Education Specialist degree. He has over twenty years experience in collective bargaining and has served as a chief negotiator for twelve years. The school board recently extended his contract through the 2004-2005 school year.

The superintendent is the chief executive and administrative officer of the board, and as such, is responsible for organizing the district's administration. Exhibit 3-4 illustrates the current district administrative structure.

Exhibit 3-4

The St. Lucie County School District Has Recently Reorganized Into A More Consolidated Management Structure
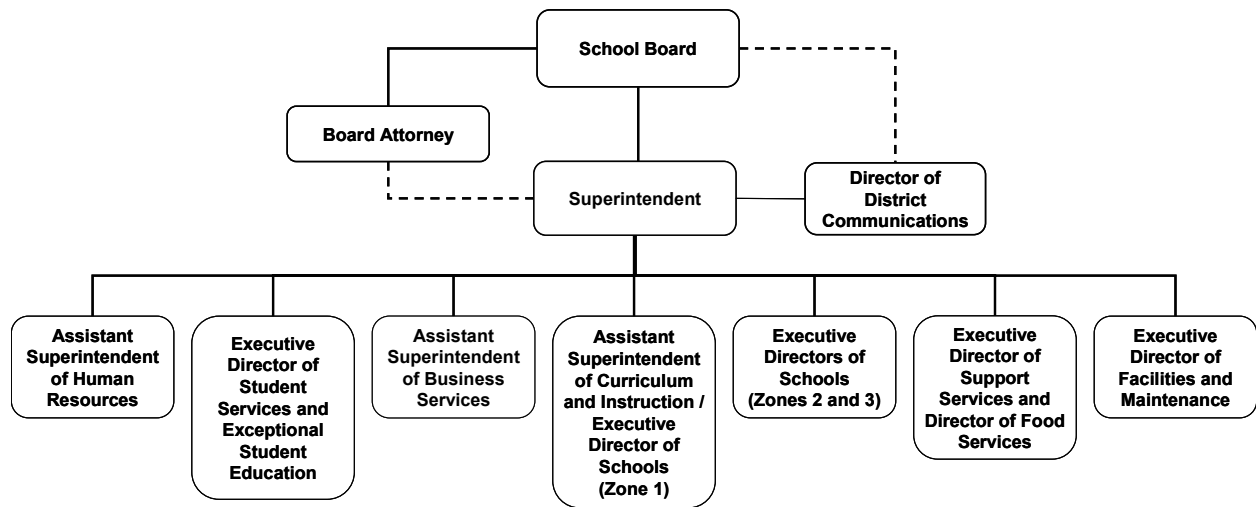
Source: St. Lucie School District.

As described in Exhibit 3-4, the Director of District Communications reports directly to the superintendent and indirectly to the board. In this position, the director plans, directs, and coordinates the district's communications and information services designed to inform employees and the general public about what is happening in the schools and the district. The communications director also directly supervises the district's foundation assistant and the RSVP/volunteer coordinator. As of the 2002-03 school year, the director of communications has direct supervision over the student assignment function as well. The district communications department's management is detailed in Exhibit 3-5.

Exhibit 3-5

The Director of District Communications Also Oversees Student Assignment
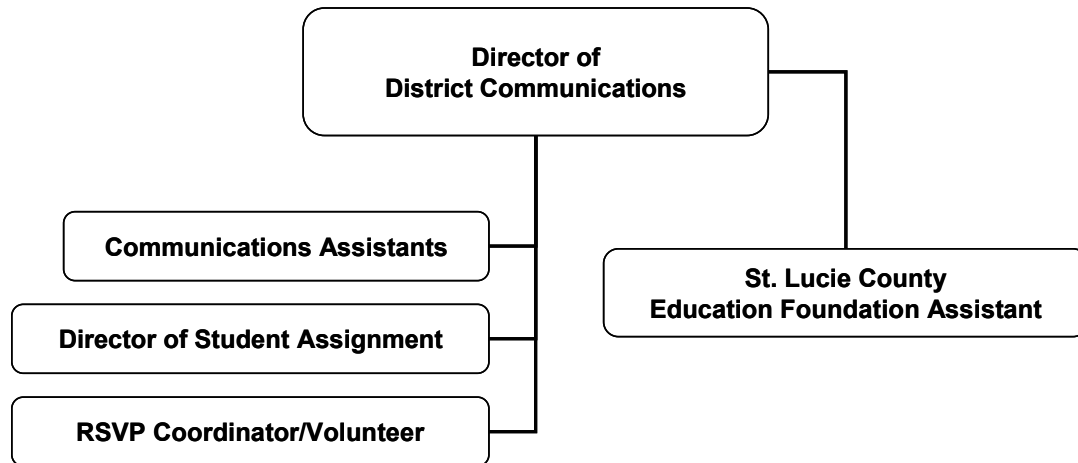
```
                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │      Director of        │
                    │ District Communications │
                    └─────────────────────────┘

   ┌──────────────────────────┐
   │ Communications Assistants │        ┌──────────────────────────────┐
   └──────────────────────────┘        │     St. Lucie County          │
                                        │ Education Foundation Assistant │
   ┌──────────────────────────────┐    └──────────────────────────────┘
   │ Director of Student Assignment │
   └──────────────────────────────┘

   ┌──────────────────────────┐
   │  RSVP Coordinator/Volunteer │
   └──────────────────────────┘
```

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

The Director of Student Assignment position identified in Exhibit 3-5 needs additional discussion because of its importance in this district. The St. Lucie County School District was under a court- ordered desegregation decree for many years. In order to comply with the order, the district moved to a "controlled-choice" student assignment system. Under controlled choice, the district has no school zones, at least not in the traditional form seen in most districts in Florida. Instead, the St. Lucie County School District is divided into three large zones based on geographic regions (north, west, and south). Each zone includes a portion of the two incorporated cities in the county, Fort Pierce and Port St. Lucie. All zones contain several elementary schools, one to three middle schools, and one or two high schools. The three zones serve as the only zoning requirement. Students and their parents submit a first, second, third and fourth choice on their school assignment application and the district uses a computer application to determine the final assignment. Once a student is assigned, he/she may re-apply to move to a different school within their zone or to a school in another zone if it offers a unique program that is not available in the student's primary zone. Students may stay in the same school without reapplying after the initial assignment. The siblings of these students automatically go to these same schools or may apply to go to another.

The controlled choice student assignment program has both benefits and challenges. Because of this program, the desegregation lawsuit was dismissed. In 2001-02, the student assignment program also allowed the district to manage an unexpected surge in student enrollment of 700 students over the district's projections. The controlled choice program allowed the district to distribute these students so efficiently that only seven new instructors were required to cover the increased number of classes. The most significant challenge created by controlled choice is a significant transportation cost. These benefits and challenges will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter and in other chapters in this review.

Each zone has an executive director of schools as its primary administrator (see Exhibit 3-6). Each executive director of schools

- supervises and evaluates principals assigned to him/her;
- assists principals in developing in developing, implementing, and evaluating school plans;
- coordinates district-level planning with schools;

- assists the superintendent in developing policy recommendations; and

- performs a multitude of other duties and responsibilities.

Exhibit 3-6

Executive Directors of Schools Are Primary Administrators in Each Zone

Superintendent

Executive Director (Zone 1)	Executive Director (Zone 2)	Executive Director (Zone 3)
CA Moore Elementary	Bayshore Elementary	Floresta Elementary
Fairlawn Elementary Magnet	P.K. Sweet Elementary Magnet	Garden City Elementary
Lakewood Park Elementary	Manatee Elementary	Mariposa Elementary
Lawnwood Elementary	Port St. Lucie Elementary	Morningside Elementary
Parkway Elementary	Rivers Edge Elementary	Savanna Ridge Elementary
Village Green Elementary Magnet	St. Lucie Elementary	Weatherbee Elementary
Forest Grove Middle School	White City Elementary	Dan McCarty Middle School
Ft. Pierce Westwood High School	Windmill Point Elementary	Southport Middle School
Lincoln Park Academy	Northport Middle School	Port St. Lucie High School
Ft. Pierce Magnet School of Arts	St. Lucie West Middle School	St. Lucie West Centennial High
	Southern Oaks Middle School	
	Ft. Pierce Central High School	

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

The Executive Director of Schools for Zone 1 also serves as the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. In this role, the associate director coordinates all activities related to the district instructional delivery system. She has several units reporting to her and is responsible for directly supervising and evaluating the Executive Director of School Improvement and Title I, the Director of Assessment and Program Evaluation, the Director of Grants and Instructional Materials, the Director of Human Resources Development and Learning Resources, the Director of Career and Technical Education and the Director of Alternative Education. Exhibit 3-7 illustrates these reporting relationships.

Exhibit 3-7

The Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Manages Several Educational Support Areas

```
                    Assistant Superintendent
                    Curriculum and Instruction and
                    Executive Director of Schools
                           (Zone 1)

         Executive Director
         School Improvement
            and Title I

              Director
           Assessment and
         Program Evaluation

              Director
            Career and
         Technical Education

              Director
         Grants and Instructional
              Material

        Director of Human Resources
        Development and Learning
               Resources

              Director
         Alternative Education
```
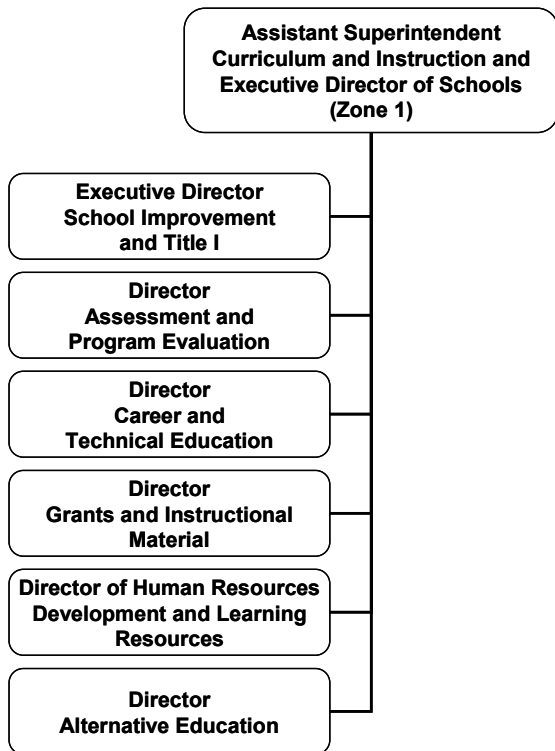
Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Exhibit 3-8 illustrates the staffing of the Human Resources Department. The Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources is responsible for supervising personnel, FTE and Position Control functions in the district. This position also coordinates the employee performance evaluation program and grievance system.

Exhibit 3-8

The Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Directs Personnel and Other Functions

```
              Assistant Superintendent
                 Human Resources

            Director
           Personnel

              Director
        FTE/Position Control, Grants
```
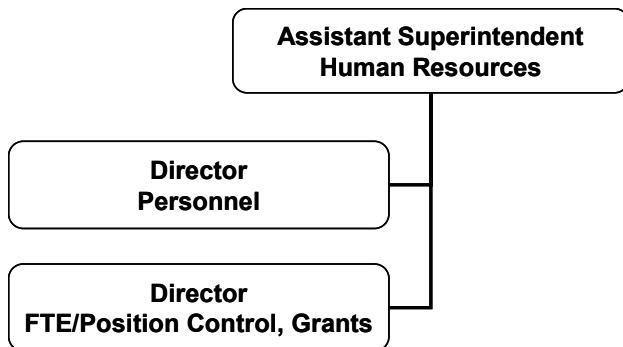
Source: St. Lucie County School District.

The district also has a Department of Student Services and Exceptional Student Education that operates separately from the Instruction and Curriculum Department. As shown in Exhibit 3-9, the executive director of this department is responsible for developing and evaluating services for students with special needs (e.g., ESE, ESOL). The executive director directly supervises three areas, as well as the Dale Cassens School (a school for students with discipline problems).

Exhibit 3-9

The Executive Director of Student Services
Manages Services for Students With Special Needs

```
                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │   Executive Director    │
                    │   Student Services and  │
                    │ Exception Student Education │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
          ┌──────────────────────┐
          │       Director       │
          │   Student Services   │
          └──────────────────────┘
          ┌──────────────────────┐
          │       Director       │
          │ Exceptional Student  │
          │      Education       │
          └──────────────────────┘
          ┌──────────────────────┐
          │     Coordinator      │
          │      FDLRS[1]        │
          └──────────────────────┘
          ┌──────────────────────┐
          │  Dale Cassens School │
          └──────────────────────┘
```

Note: * FDLRS (Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources Systems).

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

During the course of this review, the district was in the process of implementing a reorganization of its remaining operations, which is reflected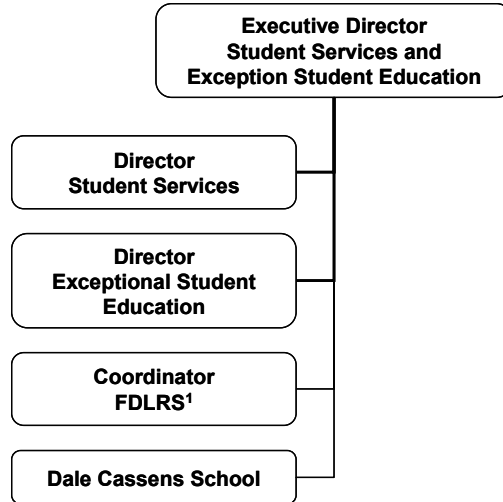 in the organizational chart in Exhibit 3-4. The primary goal of this reorganization was to group support services, business services, and facilities construction and management under more closely-related administrative arrangements. Under this reorganization, food service operations, transportation, and safety and security report to the Executive Director of Support Services/Director of Food Services. The Assistant Superintendent of Business Services will now supervise finance and budgeting, management information systems (MIS), risk management, and purchasing and warehousing. Finally, the Executive Director of Facilities and Maintenance supervises a department primarily involved in facilities maintenance as the district is not in a substantial construction phase at this time. The district may separate these two functions again if it enters a rapid construction phase. Exhibit 3-10 illustrates the new organization for these departments.

Exhibit 3-10

Recent Reorganization Has Better Grouped Support Services, Business Services and Facilities Maintenance and Construction

```
                          ┌──────────────────┐
                          │  Superintendent  │
                          └──────────────────┘
        ┌─────────────────────────┼─────────────────────────┐
┌────────────────────┐  ┌────────────────────┐  ┌────────────────────┐
│ Executive Director │  │     Assistant      │  │ Executive Director │
│  Support Services/ │  │   Superintendent   │  │   of Facilities    │
│Director Food Services│ │  Business Services │  │  and Maintenance   │
└────────────────────┘  └────────────────────┘  └────────────────────┘
    │                        │                        │
┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
│ Director of  │      │ Director of  │        │ Director of  │
│Transportation│      │   Finance    │        │ Maintenance  │
└──────────────┘      └──────────────┘        └──────────────┘
┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
│ Director of  │      │ Director of  │
│Safety and    │      │     MIS      │
│Security      │      └──────────────┘
└──────────────┘      ┌──────────────┐
                      │ Director of  │
                      │  Purchasing  │
                      │ /Warehousing │
                      └──────────────┘
                      ┌──────────────┐
                      │Coordinator of│
                      │Risk Management│
                      └──────────────┘
```
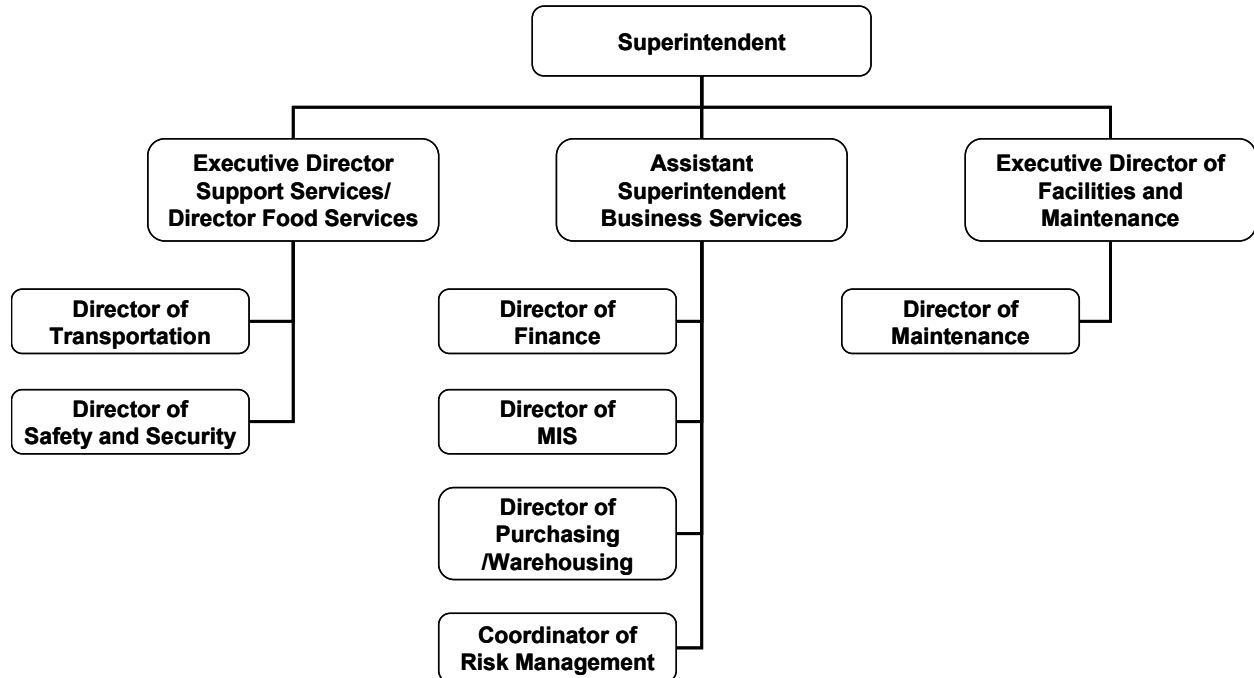
Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Responsible Management of District

1 **The roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent have been clearly delineated, and board members and the superintendent have formal procedures to ensure that they have effective working relationships.**

The St. Lucie County School Board and Superintendent use many formal and informal mechanisms to ensure effective working relationships

The district uses several mechanisms to ensure effective working relationships among board members and between the board and the administration. Based on interviews with board members, the superintendent, and district and school-based employees, these mechanisms have created a working relationship that sets a positive tone throughout the district. The mechanisms used in the district include policies that clearly delineate the roles and the responsibilities of the board, annual meetings to assess district performance, policies concerning board member access to district employees, and the completion of advanced local and state training.

One of the most important mechanisms used is that the school board takes full advantage of professional training opportunities. Specifically, new board members participate in the statewide orientation training sponsored by the Florida School Boards Association. This training familiarizes new members with their roles and responsibilities, as well as legal requirements such as compliance with Florida Sunshine Laws. The St. Lucie School Board has also pursued more advanced training. The district has completed Master Board certification on three different occasions (all members of the current board have completed Master Board training). Board members, the superintendent, and district employees report that Master Board training was critical for improving relationships, including times when partisan disputes started causing divisions among members. Interviews also indicated that Master Board training helped the district in its development of a strategic plan. The value added by Master Board training was deemed so beneficial that other district employees and even the teachers' union representatives were encouraged to participate in the most recent Master Board certification.

The district also has policies that clearly delineate the roles and the responsibilities of the board and the superintendent. The goal of these policies is to ensure that the board sets policies, and the superintendent implements them. During the course of this review the state implemented a full re-write of the school code. This rewrite necessitated a complete review and rewrite of each school district's board policies. The St. Lucie County School District completed its revisions in September 2002.

In addition to these written policies, interviews indicate that the district has an "open-door" policy between board members and employees. Under this unwritten policy, employees are encouraged to share information openly with board members. District and school-based employees report that this policy has helped relationships without generating negative consequences such as board members trying to influence day-to-day operations.

2   The board and superintendent have procedures to ensure that board meetings are efficient and effective.

The district has incorporated many procedures to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the board meetings and to manage controversial issues

The St. Lucie County School District runs very efficient board meetings. Board meetings are scheduled twice a month and are held in locations (Ft. Pierce) and at times (after 5:00 p.m. on weekdays) that are easily accessible to most of the district's citizens. Each board member reported that district employees provide materials explaining agenda items that are easily understandable and timely. Board meetings use employee and the public's time effectively. Issues are pulled from the consent agenda for discussion upon request, as was observed when OPPAGA reviewers attended a board meeting. Finally, the district has one of the better examples of a master calendar used by the board as a planning and management tool.

The school board and the administration work closely together to resolve controversial issues with minimal conflict, usually through workshops prior to the regularly scheduled board meeting or with action plans developed with broad stakeholder input.[1] For example, during the 2001-2002 school year, the district was forced to eliminate 68 positions due to budget cuts. The board and superintendent developed a plan of action that included a survey of district and school-based employees to determine where to direct the reductions. Based on survey results, the administration determined that most reductions should occur in district-level, non-instructional areas. The administration identified the positions to be eliminated, discussed the recommended reductions with board members, and then met

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[1] Workshops are advertised and open to the public consistent with Florida's government in the sunshine laws.

independently with each person in the position to be cut. To the extent possible, these employees were moved into other open positions in the district and the district was unable to place only a few employees into other positions.

As a result of this plan, district employees reported that they understood why these positions were selected and said there was little opposition to the reductions, even among those who were mostly directly affected. Interviews indicate that there was little discussion during the regular board meeting when the reductions were approved.

3 The board and superintendent have established written policies and procedures that are routinely updated to ensure that they are relevant and complete.

The district has policies and procedures to cover most day-to-day operations

The St. Lucie County School District maintains updated and relevant polices and district-wide, accessible procedures. The board attorney reviews all policies for appropriateness and ensures that policies are consistent with Florida law, in conjunction with the district's policy review committee. The review committee, at a minimum, annually reviews and updates the pupil progression plan and the student code of conduct. The committee updates other policies as necessary to comply with state law and board action. In fact, the district recently completed a full review of it board policies, and made changes were necessary, to ensure the policies are consistent with the school-code rewrite that occurred in 2002. The board approved the policy revisions in summer of 2002. District policies are accessible from the main administrative office in Ft. Pierce or through its main website at http://www.stlucie.k12.fl.us/.

The district also has district-wide, procedures that are easily accessible and updated on a regular basis. Currently, these procedures are primarily included in the "Handbook for School Administrators" which is provided to all principals and assistant principals in the district. The handbook includes, among other things, the district's mission statement, goals and objectives, calendars, operational task reminders and procedures, discipline procedures, and school choice procedures. This handbook is updated on an annual basis. Other procedural manuals include the "Selection of Administrators in St. Lucie County" handbook that addresses personnel issues deemed appropriate in the district, purchasing manuals, budget manuals, and other operational manuals (transportation, food services, etc.).

4 The district routinely obtains legal services to advise it about policy and reduce the risk of lawsuits. It also takes steps to ensure that its legal costs are reasonable.

Current legal services are satisfactory, but the district should periodically conduct in-depth evaluations to determine if internal counsel may be more cost effective

The district's legal counsel reviews policy revisions and board agenda items as needed and provides legal advice to district employees and school administrators upon request. The board attorney also reviews business contracts in conjunction with district employees. The board attorney is responsible for contracting for additional legal services in the event of legal actions against the district that require very specific legal expertise (e.g., federal Title IX lawsuits, desegregation lawsuits). Besides these activities,

the board attorney plays a limited role in the district's management and meets with district employees on an ad hoc basis. Board members and the superintendent express confidence in counsel's abilities and report no concerns over current representation.

The St. Lucie County School district currently contracts with external law firms for all legal services. Primary legal counsel is obtained through Gonano & Harrell (Dan Harrell officially serves as the board attorney), and personnel and labor relations issues are handled by J. David Richeson and Associates. The board's contract with Gonano & Harrell has been in effect since 1987. Mr. Harrell's contract includes a $4,400 monthly retainer and an hourly rate of $141 per hour for additional time. Richeson and Associates' contract has been in effect since the 1999-2000 school year. Richeson's contract includes a $6,250 monthly retainer for 750 hours annually, or 62.5 hours monthly, and an hourly rate of $90 per hour if the firm's time exceeds 750 hours annually. During fiscal year 2001-02, expenditures for the board attorney totaled $171,749 and Richeson and Associates' fees totaled$197,662.

Exhibit 3-11

Monthly Legal Expenditures for Board and Labor Attorneys for the Last Two Years
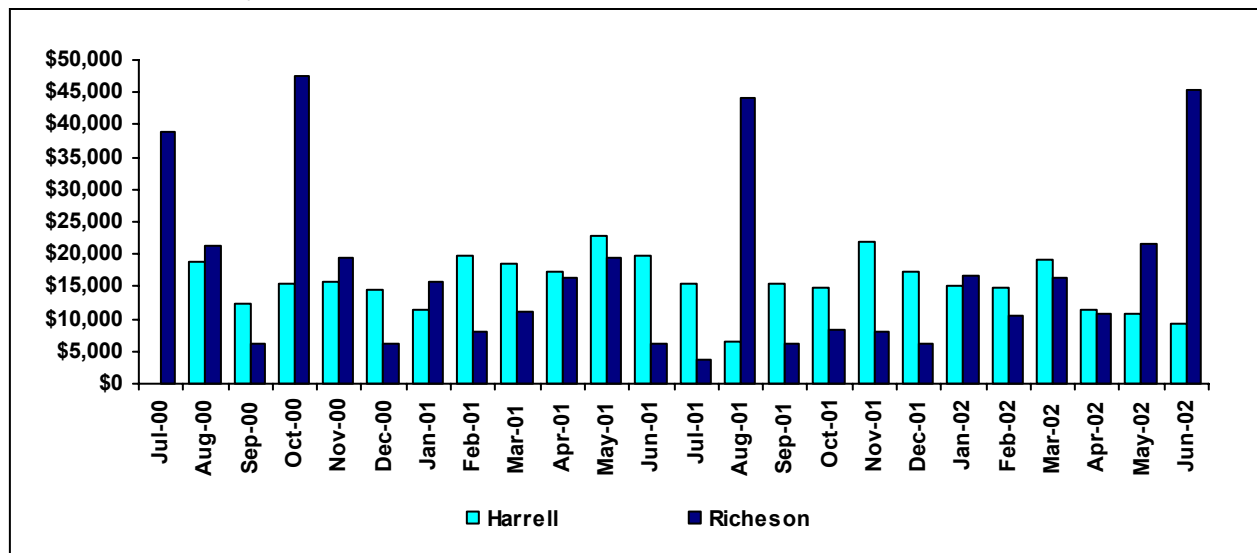
Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Exhibit 3-11 shows monthly expenditures for contracted legal services for July 2000 through June 2002. This graph shows that legal expenditures for both firms have fluctuated from month to month over the past two years, anywhere from under $5,000 to occasionally over $40,000. Of the two firms, Richeson and Associates has produced the greatest amount of fluctuation. Monthly expenditures for Richard and Associates exceeded $38,000 on four different occasions during this time period including $38,786 in July 2000, $47,486 in October 2000, $44,033 in August 2001, and $45,389 in June 2002. These large monthly expenditures were related to employment cases that required additional work including reviews by the Department of Administrative Hearings (DOAH). More generally, the district's hourly billing rate and annual expenditures for Fiscal Year 2001-02 fell around the mid-range for its peers as described in Exhibit 3-12.

Exhibit 3-12

Board Attorney Billing Total Expenditures are Comparable to Its Peers

School District	Hourly Billing Rate	Total Expenditures, 2001-02
Escambia	N/A	$476,355
Highlands	$150.00	347,768
Lake	120.00	108,663
Marion	118.00	148,318
Osceola	110.00	716,724
St. Lucie	**141.00**	**369,410**

Source: OPPAGA. Peer district survey responses.

In order to be proactive for the OPPAGA review, the district recently conducted it own analysis of legal expenses to determine whether it would be more cost effective to hire an internal board attorney. The analysis compared total retainer fees for St. Lucie and four peer districts (Okeechobee, Martin, Indian River, and Brevard). The analysis also compared total legal expenditures between St. Lucie and Martin school districts. Based on this analysis the district concluded

> *Currently, the St. Lucie Co. School Board would not realize cost savings by hiring, rather than retaining, attorneys. As indicated above [in the analysis], a neighboring county [Martin] that employs attorneys also must contract with additional attorneys for environmental and real estate issues; the fees we pay to Gonano & Harrell and Richeson & Associates cover all of these areas and no additional attorneys are needed. Our fees also purchase the services of not only 2 individual attorneys, but the resources of their entire offices and staffs of assistants. Retaining attorneys allows us to pay only for the services we need. Finally, we believe that Harrell's and Richeson's long histories of service to the School Board provide value for the price paid.*

We do not disagree with this assessment. Based on how the current attorney's time is being used and past expenditure patterns, it is unlikely that a full-time staff attorney would be more cost effective for this district. Total expenditures for a staff attorney, office assistant (either a legal secretary or a paralegal), office space, law library, and other incidentals, would likely cost as much or more than is currently being paid to the external firm. However, because this district is growing rapidly, we believe that a periodic assessment of whether a full-time staff attorney may be more cost effective than external council is appropriate for this district, and should be conducted again in the next three to five years.

Recommendations ——————————————————

- *We recommend that the district periodically evaluate whether hiring a full-time staff attorney may be more cost effective than the current contract for legal services.*

Action Plan 3-1 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 3-1

Attorney Costs Should Be Periodically Reviewed		
Strategy	The district should periodically determine whether a full-time staff attorney would be more cost effective than the use of an external law firm.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The board and superintendent should calculate total expenditures for legal services, including subcontracts for legal services. Expenditures should be separated by task performed.
	Step 2:	The board and superintendent should calculate settlement costs (this is used as a benchmark to assess counsel's effectiveness).
	Step 3:	The board and superintendent should research comparable legal costs of similar-sized districts. The research objective should be to see if the district could reduce its routine legal costs either by hiring an in-house attorney to do some of the more routine work now performed by the contract attorney. This research could be conducted in house or through a contract with an entity such as the Florida School Board Association.
	Step 4:	The board should take steps necessary to implement the recommendations that result from this research.
Who is Responsible	Board, superintendent	
Time Frame	December 2005, every three to five years thereafter.	

Source: OPPAGA.

Effective and Responsible Operation

5 The district's organizational structure has clearly defined units that are reviewed on an annual basis. Furthermore, the district has recently made changes to ensure that the lines of authority are not too broad for district administrators in these units.

The district has a traditional organizational structure that is evaluated on an annual basis.

The St. Lucie County School District has a traditional hierarchical structure for a school district. Basic functions in the district are grouped by instructional and non-instructional services. The superintendent directly supervises nine people under this management structure. These people include

- three Executive Directors of Schools who provide direct oversight of district schools by geographic zone;

- an Associate Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction who is responsible for administering educational programs in the district;

- an Assistant Superintendent of Business Services who coordinates budgeting and finance, risk management, purchasing, and MIS;

- an Executive Director of Facilities and Maintenance who manages facility maintenance and construction;

- an Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources;

- an Executive Director of Support Services who is responsible for food services, student transportation, and safety and security; and
- an Executive Director of Student Services.

The district has developed position descriptions for each of these positions and updates them on an annual basis. The position descriptions include general responsibilities of each administrator and the number of persons who are directly supervised by him or her. The strategic plan also contains detailed mission statements and department descriptions. Furthermore, our interviews with district and school-based employees show that they are generally aware of who is ultimately responsible for these functions and most school-based employees are satisfied with district services.

Although we received few specific reports of school-based personnel having difficulty accessing district services as a result of this large supervisory responsibility, there was a general concern among the OPPAGA review team that some district administrators had lines of authority that were too broad. The reorganization and significant reduction in district and support staff that occurred in fiscal year 2001-02, created at least one district administrator with 18 direct reports, and another administrator that is responsible for two major operational areas, in which she is personally responsible for day to day school-based operations in one of the two areas. This concern was discussed with the district during the course of the review. The district's administration and board members also identified this as a need and have taken steps to adjust the span of control in these areas. Specifically, the district plans to separate the Zone 1 Executive Director responsibilities from the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. The district has identified resources that will be generated through normal personnel attrition that will be used to fund the position. The district is also hiring a new food service coordinator that will be financed primarily through food services special revenue.

6 The district periodically reviews its district administrative staffing and makes changes to eliminate unnecessary positions and improve operating efficiency. However, school-based administration has not been a traditional part of this analysis.

The district recently eliminated or changed 92 administrative, instruction, and support positions in response to state-mandated budget reductions

As previously discussed, the district recently reviewed and adjusted its administrative staffing both as part of a general reorganization and in response to significant budget reductions requirements from the state. The district had a reduction in district employees by 72 administrative, instruction and support positions, resulting in annual cost savings of $2,388,923. The district also changed the classification of another 18 positions resulting in a cost savings of $204,078. Cost savings from these staffing changes will equate to approximately $13 million over the next five years. This initial cost savings were so significant that the district was able to budget for 55 additional instructional personnel in the fiscal year 2002-03 budget at a cost of $2,539,138 and still have a net budgetary reduction of $53,863. Exhibit 3-13 details the position changes that occurred during the 2001-02 and 2002-03 school years.

Exhibit 3-13

Cost Savings from District Employees Changes in 2001-02 and 2002-03 Will Save Almost $2.6 Million

Action	Type of Position	Number of Positions	Fiscal Impact
Eliminate – Purchasing Agent	Admin	1	$ (80,464)
Eliminate – Director of Learning Resources	Admin	1	(80,927)
Eliminate – Coordinator of Transportation	Admin	1	(68,181)
Change – Principal to Director of Federal Programs	Admin	1	(236)
Change – Principal to Director, Alternative Placement and 21st Century Schools	Admin	1	(40,753)
Change – AP to 10-month teacher	Admin	1	(13,391)
Change – Coordinator of Personnel to School Relations Specialist	Admin	1	(15,333)
Change – Clerical Adjustments	Admin	1	(51,006)
Change – Coordinator Communications to Director of Communications and IS	Admin	1	3,267
Change- Coordinator FTE to Director FTE/Position Control	Admin	1	3,823
Eliminate – TSA, Housing Authority	Inst. Support	1	(41,079)
Eliminate – Fed Program Specialist	Inst. Support	1	(51,347)
Eliminate – TSA, Drug Education	Inst. Support	1	(18,863)
Eliminate – Manager, Farm	Inst. Support	1	(72,515)
Eliminate – Program Specialist	Inst. Support	1	(59,754)
Eliminate – ESE Program Specialist	Inst. Support	1	(57,674)
Eliminate - ESE Program Specialist	Inst. Support	1	(54,202)
Eliminate – Speech Pathologist	Inst. Support	1	(64,133)
Change – Tech Resources Spec from 11 months to 10	Inst. Support	1	(4,538)
Change – Language Arts (12 to 11) ; Reading and math TSAs from 11 months to 10	Inst. Support	1	(13,615)
Change – ESOL and Federal Program TSAs from 11 months to 10	Inst. Support	1	(13,940)
Change – Distance Lmg Specialist from 12 months to 11	Inst. Support	1	(5,192)
Change – Alternative Ed Spec from 12 months to 11	Inst. Support	1	(7,570)
Change – Social Worker from 11 months to 10	Inst. Support	1	(5,159)
Change – Psychologists (14) from 11 months to 10.5	Inst. Support	1	(35,162)
Change – Behavior Analyst from 11 months to 10	Inst. Support	1	(408)
Change – Job Development Counselor from 11 months to 10	Inst. Support	1	(483)
Change – ESE Program Spec from 11 months to 10	Inst. Support	1	(506)

Action	Type of Position	Number of Positions	Fiscal Impact
Eliminate – Personnel clerk typist	Support	1	(26,994)
Eliminate – HRD secretary 1	Support	1	(30,302)
Eliminate – Federal secretary 1	Support	1	(31,792)
Eliminate – Learning Resources secretary	Support	1	(30,685)
Eliminate – Student Services clerk	Support	1	(31,807)
Eliminate – AP clerk	Support	1	(38,560)
Eliminate – Purchasing clerk	Support	1	(30,438)
Eliminate – Payroll clerk	Support	1	(32,470)
Eliminate – Superintendent's clerk/typist	Support	1	(26,626)
Change - Behavior techs (21) from 11 months to 10	Support	1	(3,906)
Eliminate – LPA middle teachers	Instruction	5	(244,148)
Equalize high school staffing	Instruction	9	(439,466)
Eliminate – middle school achievement specialists	Instruction	3	(146,489)
Eliminate – paraprofessionals	Instruction	35	(630,007)
Total Eliminated		72	$ (2,388,923)
Total Changed		18	$ (204,078)
TOTAL		**90**	**$ (2,593,001)**

Source: St. Lucie School District.

When compared to peer districts, St. Lucie has few administrators as a ratio to its instructional personnel. More specifically, the district has the lowest administrative to instructional employees, classroom teacher to student, and guidance to student ratios compared to all of its peers and the state as a whole. These figures indicate that employees in this district is primarily school-based, which has significant implications for any cost reduction initiatives in this district. However, these staffing ratios do not reflect the 68 administrative and support positions that were cut mid-year 2001-02, nor the increase in student enrollment at the beginning of this year; therefore, any future budget cuts may have to impact the classroom, an option that will likely be strongly resisted by the board and the administration.

Exhibit 3-14

St. Lucie's Overall Administrative Staffing Ratios Are Lowest Among Its Peers

School District	Employees Ratios					
	Administrators to Classroom Teachers	Administrators to Total Instructional	Administrators to Total Employees	Classroom Teachers to Students	Teacher Aids to Classroom Teachers	Guidance to Students
Escambia	1: 15.72	1: 17.78	1: 33.52	1: 17.35	1: 5.15	1: 462.20
Highlands	1: 11.46	1: 13.03	1: 25.57	1: 17.78	1: 4.42	1: 355.06
Lake	1: 14.17	1: 15.96	1: 30.33	1: 18.30	1: 4.49	1: 361.32
Marion	1: 13.30	1: 14.69	1: 30.56	1: 17.11	1: 2.82	1: 499.59
Osceola	1: 15.23	1: 18.07	1: 35.60	1: 19.19	1: 2.78	1: 461.98
St. Lucie	**1: 19.73**	**1: 22.42**	**1: 40.19**	**1: 14.73**	**1: 4.83**	**1: 345.42**
State	1: 14.20	1: 15.89	1: 29.04	1: 17.68	1: 4.29	1: 438.18

Note: The classroom teacher to student ratio is not the same as average classroom size. The classroom teacher ratio includes all employees paid under the instructional salary schedule, and some of these positions may actually be administrative positions.

Source: Profiles of Florida School Districts, Staff and Student Data, Department of Education, 2000-01.

While administrative staffing is relatively low at the district level, St. Lucie's school-based administrative staffing is high compared to both its peers and regional accreditation standards (see Exhibit 3-15). For middle and high schools, only two of St. Lucie's peer districts had higher administrative staffing levels (elementary schools were not included in this analysis due to the large number of schools in each district). One peer district, Escambia, has half the school-based administrators of St. Lucie. Using another comparison, the number of administrators in middle and high schools in the district is higher than the baseline accreditation standards recommended by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' (SACS). As demonstrated in Exhibit 3-15, the St. Lucie County School District exceeds these standards by an average of 1.58 school-based administrators per middle school and .80 administrators per high school. If the school district takes steps to examine these positions and, as a result, reduces its administrative assistants (assistant principals and deans) to bring its ratios closer to the lowest of its peers, the district could redirect over $560,000 in operating funds for any purposes it deems necessary (see Action Plan 3-2 for more detail).

Exhibit 3-15

St. Lucie's School-Based Administrative Staffing In Middle Schools Is Higher Than Its Peers and Regional Accreditation Standards

School District	School-based Administrative Employee Ratios and Average Numbers of Employees Over or Under SACS Accreditation Standards					
	Middle School Administrator to Student Ratio	Average Number of Assistant Administrators Over (or Under) per Middle School	Total Number of Assistant Administrators Over (or Under) for Middle Schools	High School Administrator to Student Ratio	Average Number of Assistant Administrators Over (or Under) per High School	Total Number of Assistant Administrators Over (or Under) for High Schools
Escambia	1: 724	0	.5	1: 385	1	6
Highlands	1: 349	1	4	1: 279	1.83	5.5
Lake	1: 373	1.11	10	1: 321	3.86	11.5
Marion	1: 515	.61	5.5	1: 530	-.14	-1
Osceola	1: 346	1.67	10	1: 484	-.63	-2.5
St. Lucie	**1: 367**	**1.58**	**9.5**	**1: 369**	**1.5**	**7.5**

Source: OPPAGA.

Based on this analysis, we recommend that the district reevaluate it school-based administrative staffing levels. Whether the district uses a peer comparison or bases its staffing levels on the SACS accreditation standards, we believe the district can reduce these positions and use the salary expenditures in other areas. If the district aligned middle school administrative staffing levels with SACS standards and the lowest of its peers, we estimate that it could reduce the number of assistant principals and or deans in its middle schools by 9.5 positions which would result in cost reductions of $568,575 per year (or $2,842,875 over five years). [2]

Recommendations ────────────────────────

- *We recommend that the district assess its school-based administrative staffing by comparing its school based administrative staffing to that of o peer districts and SACS accreditation standards and by analyzing the functions school-based administrators perform and the need for those functions.*

- *Action Plan 3-2 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.*

Action Plan 3-2

School-Based Administrative Staffing Should Be Regularly Evaluated		
Strategy	The district should review its assistant administrative staffing ratios at all grade levels to those of its peers and SACS accreditation standards, and adjust the staffing formulas as necessary to minimize school-based administration.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The board and superintendent should direct district employees to conduct an assessment of the number of assistant principals and deans in its peer districts' elementary, middle, and high schools.
	Step 2:	The assessment should include determining the function of these assistant principals and deans (e.g., discipline, guidance, curriculum support), and should determine how districts with lower numbers of these administrators manage these functions.
	Step 3:	The board and superintendent should review the SACS accreditation standards for assistant principals and deans to determine if they are an appropriate benchmark for the St. Lucie County School District.
	Step 4:	District employees should compare these benchmarks to the actual staffing levels in each elementary, middle, and high school in the St. Lucie County School District.
	Step 5:	The superintendent should recommend to the board changes to the staffing formula based on these assessments.
Who is Responsible	The board, superintendent, and district employees	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Source: OPPAGA.

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[2] Our analysis compared St. Lucie's assistant administrative staffing ratios (assistant principals and deans) in middle and high schools against those of its peers and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation standards. Based on an initial assessment, we determined that middle schools in the St. Lucie County School District had assistant administrative staffing levels significantly higher than its peers and SACS accreditation standards. As a result, we focused our assessment of school-based staffing reductions only in middle schools. We then calculated the average number of assistant administrators per middle school compared to the district's peers and the SACS standards. This assessment found that the district has 9.5 additional middle-school administrators beyond the accreditation standards and the lowest of its peers. In order to calculate potential fiscal impacts, we assumed an average salary and benefit amount of $59,850 per administrator (in discussions with the district we determined that the average salary for these administrators is $45,000 plus 33% for benefits). Based on our analysis, if the district chose to align its middle school administrative staffing levels to the SACS standards and the lowest of its peers, the total amount available from 9.5 administrative positions would be $568,575 annually.

7 The superintendent and school board exercise effective oversight of the district's financial resources.

The district has budget materials that are relatively easy to understand and closely monitors its fiscal resources

The district is currently changing the format and function of its budget as part of the management plan created by the new. The budget calendar will remain the same, but the allocation system for individual schools will change. Employees believes that there were inequities in past school budgets, particularly related to custodial services and, by tying a greater proportion of district dollars to the individual FTE, the new allocation methodology should ensure greater equality among the district's schools.

The district has effective oversight of fiscal resources. The district monitors expenditures closely and no spending may occur without formal approval of the Assistant Superintendent of Business Services and the superintendent. School expenditures are monitored for deviations from the budget by the business services department and plans are developed if it appears that an individual school will exceed its budget. The district maintains a reserve fund that is at the low end of the best practice standards, although the district is trying to increase its reserve to make it more attractive when the district pursues another bond issue for capital projects.

8 The district has clearly assigned school principals the authority they need to effectively manage their schools while adhering to district-wide policies and procedures.

The district has given considerable authority to individual principals

St. Lucie county school principals have the fiscal and leadership authority they need to effectively manage their schools. School-based administrators have flexibility in their budgets, especially in the use of Title I funds. Principals also have discretion over their staffing levels and have the ability to shift allocations based on need. For example, a principal who is budgeted an extra physical education teacher may use the allocation to hire two teacher's aides instead. Principals report that they clearly understand what is expected from their leadership and know how to accomplish their goals and objectives. Generally, principals report that they are comfortable with the level of support provided by the zone directors and other district administrators. When asked if they would like additional support from district administration, they reported that there was no unmet need in their schools.

Although the principals have considerable authority and independence to manage their schools, the district has developed several methods to ensure consistent adherence to district wide policies and procedures. The two primary mechanisms used by the district include a procedures manual (discussed earlier) and site-visits by the Executive Directors of Schools for the three zones. The zone directors not only disseminate policies and procedures, but also evaluate the principal's performance, including their adherence to district policies.

Another way the district ensures consistent adherence to district policy is through the use of "cluster leader principals." Within each of the three zones, the superintendent has selected one principal who has demonstrated superior leadership skills. These cluster leader principals serve as liaisons between the

other principals in their zone and district administration. These three principals help to disseminate district policies into each school, as well as provide training across grade levels. In turn, cluster leader principals help other principals obtain support services from the district and serve as professional and social mentors, especially to new principals. Cluster leader principals coordinate closely with the zone directors and participate in many facets of district decision-making.

Allocation of Resources

9

The district has a multi-year strategic plan with annual goals and measurable objectives based on identified needs, projected enrollment, and revenues.

The district has established goals and measurable objectives for both instructional and non-instructional areas

The St. Lucie County School District has a strategic plan with clear statements of the district's vision and desired direction. The plan is directly linked to the state and district's educational goals, especially as they relate to student performance. The plan contains seven priority goals and as many as a dozen strategies for accomplishing each goal. The district's 2002-03 priority goals, objectives and strategies to achieve these objectives are detailed in Appendix A.

The district's strategic plan also establishes goals, objectives and strategies for each of the departments in the district, both instructional and non-instructional. For each strategy, the plan details a timeline for accomplishing the strategy, specifies data analysis requirements, defines an evaluation methodology, assigns responsibility for accomplishing the strategy and assesses the fiscal impact. Furthermore, each major instructional and non-instructional program has more specific goals and objectives at the department level that are tied to those in the strategic plan, as well as strategies to accomplish these goals and interim measures to assess performance.

The most significant drawback to the district's current strategic plan is that some goals, objectives, and strategies are sometime inverted, with objectives written in the form of strategies and performance measures sometimes written as goals. Another issue is that the strategic plan is limited in its timeframe. Most strategic plans should project forward several years (usually five years, at a minimum). The district's plan only covers two to three years depending on the area, although it was updated for the current school year (2002-03).

Both of these issues are being addressed by a review process that was initiated in November 2002. In this process, the district will use internal groups to evaluate the strategic plan, the district's progress toward meeting its goals and objectives, and will recommend amendments to the strategic plan. This evaluation process is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 Performance Accountability.

10The district has a system to accurately project enrollment.

The district has student enrollment projections that are generally accurate

The district routinely determines future student enrollment with only small amounts of error. As seen in Exhibit 3-17, student enrollment projections had less than a 1% error rate in all but one of the last five years.

Exhibit 3-17

Student Enrollment Projections Are Generally Accurate

Fiscal Year	Appropriated	Actual	Actual Over/ Under Estimate	Forecast Error Rate
1998-99	28,561.63	28,459.70	102	.4%
1999-00	28,705.48	28,662.77	145	.5
2000-01	28,981.98	29,114.19	(132)	-.5
2001-02	29,340.51	30,032.63	(692)	-2.4
2002-03	31,057.22	31,094.74*	(38)	-.1

*Based on annualized October FTE projections.

Source: Legislative Services Education Estimating Conference.

The only exception to this trend was in 2001-02, when the district's student enrollment projections underestimated FTEs by almost 700 students. It was only because of the district's ability to assign students within the controlled-choice assignment system that the district was able to absorb the students without significant fiscal effects.

The district's struggle with student FTE projection error in 2001-02 seems to be a temporary issue that resulted from a series of unusual circumstances. First, the district's long-term employee who was responsible for the FTE projections retired. As a result, the district contracted with a demographer from Florida State University to produce the forecast. This demographer died while preparing the district's 2001-02 projection. The district quickly contracted with another demographer based at the University of Florida to complete the projection. However, this person ultimately quit without providing any projections. Finally, the district coordinated with a specialist in the St. Lucie County planning department to complete the estimate. Not surprisingly, the district's 2001-02 projections were inaccurate.

The district has taken several steps to address this problem. The district's Assistant Superintendent of Business Services has primary responsibility for projecting student enrollment. In this position, the assistant superintendent has contracted with a private consultant (Fishkind and Associates) to assist the district in its FTE projections. The consultant is also helping the district develop it s five-year facility plan. Based on an assessment of the district's 2002-03 projection and the annualized October 2002 FTE counts, it appears that the district's response to its forecasting challenge appears to have corrected any problems.

11 The district links its financial plans and budgets to its priority goals and objectives, and district resources are focused towards achieving those goals and objectives.

The district links its overall budget to specific goals and objectives

The district has formally developed strategies and objectives to improve its performance at the district-level and at the program-level, and these goals and objectives are directly linked to the budget. Each strategy in the strategic plan indicates if there are expected fiscal impacts associated with its implementation, and the current budget contains funds for implementing these strategies.

For example, the introduction of the Comprehensive Balanced Approach to Reading Program (PreK-12) is one of the strategies being used by the district to accomplish its districtwide Goal A. The primary measurement (or criteria for success) of whether this strategy was successfully implemented is a minimum of one year growth in FCAT scores for 90% of students testing. To implement this strategy, the strategic plan indicates the district will add over 30 reading and literature coaches over the next five years. The predicted resources required to hire and retain these additional employees are $225,000 in 2001-02, $200,000 in 2002-03, $700,000 in 2003-04, and $1.3 million in 2004-05.

The district provided for these added positions in the 2002-03 budget, however fiscal materials provided during a budget workshop demonstrated that this level of hiring may have been unsustainable if not for a grant that the district recently received. The implications of these budget constraints are discussed in more depth in the Chapter 4 of this report (Performance Accountability).

12 When necessary, the district considers options to increase revenue.

The district seeks additional revenue as needed

The district has considered various options to increase revenue in times of need. The district was able to obtain a voter-approved, half-cent sales tax for construction and school improvement and has been able to leverage the maximum tax millage allowed. Exhibit 3-18 illustrates the revenue generated from the half-cent sales tax for the last four years.

Exhibit 3-18

The District's Half-Cent Sales Tax Generates Approximately $8 Million on an Annual Basis

Fiscal Year	Actual Collections
1998-99	$ 7,284,079.23
1999-00	7,614,229.23
2000-01	8,930,903.48
2001-02 (as of June 2,2002)	8,362,791.18
Average	$ 7,943,070.85

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

The district has also been able to issue bonds when necessary to cover capital improvement and actively pursues federal and state grants to supplement these funds. For example, the district obtained over $23.6 million in federal and state grants in 2001-02.

The district is currently considering rather innovative approaches for building new facilities in the district. During the course of this review, the district was in discussion with local housing developers to develop new schools sites whose construction funding would be derived from non-traditional sources.

4 Performance Accountability System

The St. Lucie County School District has a strategic plan that sets accountability standards for both instructional and non-instructional programs. However, the district is not conducting formal evaluations of its programs and strategies and needs to improve its reporting.

Conclusion

The district is using three of the five performance accountability best practices. To meet these best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its performance accountability system, the district needs to improve on its strategic plan, conduct more formal evaluations based on need; use these evaluations to modify programs; and report more performance information to the general public. Implementing the recommendations to improve in the area of performance accountability should have no fiscal impact other than that of district staff's time.

During the course of this review, OPPAGA noted a number of district accomplishments in the performance accountability system, some of which are included in Exhibit 4-1 below.

Exhibit 4-1

The District Has Had a Number of Notable Accomplishments in Performance Accountability Systems in the Last Three Years

- The district developed and started to implement a comprehensive strategic plan in 2002.
- Student performance information was used to modify existing strategies and to create new strategies to promote reading within each school.
- The district created peer committees to evaluate progress toward meeting the objectives in the strategic plan.

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Overview of Chapter Findings

OPPAGA staff reviewed the district's performance accountability system using the Best Financial Management Practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education and associated indicators. The best practices team employed several methodologies to develop chapter conclusions and action plans. These included review of district self-assessments and supporting documentation, interviews with district staff, and focus groups with teachers and principals.

An overview of chapter findings is presented below.

Accountability of Programs

1. The district has clearly stated goals and measurable objectives, but may have difficulty achieving these priorities within budget for each major educational and operational program. (Page 4-3)

2. The district uses performance measures, cost-efficiency measures and interpretive benchmarks to evaluate its major educational and operational program and uses these in management decision-making. (Page 4-7)

3. The district regularly assesses the performance and costs of its major educational and operational programs using performance measures and benchmark data and analyzes potential cost savings and/or cost avoidance of alternative program delivery systems. (Page 4-8)

4. The district does not formally evaluate the performance and cost of its major educational and operational programs on a routine basis. (Page 4-9)

5. The district clearly reports on the performance of its major educational programs to ensure accountability to parents and other taxpayers, but reports little regarding its operational programs. (Page 4-10)

Background ———————————————————————

A strategic plan that was developed and adopted by the board in January 2002, is the primary performance accountability system for the St. Lucie County School District. The plan has five key components including

1. vision, mission, and beliefs, which act to guide the district's decision making process;
2. goals, which embody principles that lead organizational activity;
3. strategies. which identify tasks and actions that focus on the application of resources;
4. financial impacts, which outline the costs of various programs and strategies; and
5. evaluation systems, which guarantee accountability by identifying effective goals, strategies and tasks.

Specifically, the strategic plan includes measurable goals and objectives, as well as evaluation methodologies for both instructional and noninstructional programs. The district has seven primary goals, and both instructional and non-instructional areas have program-level goals and objectives that link the specific function of their program to those of the overall district strategic plan.

Within the strategic plan, each goal has one or more measurable objectives. And for each objective, there is one or more strategies specified to accomplish the objective. Each strategy includes a timeline for implementation, specifies data requirements and benchmarks, describes an evaluation methodology, identifies the person(s) responsible for implementing the strategy, and identifies its fiscal impact.

As a whole, the district's successful implementation and evaluation of its strategic plan could constitute one of the better accountability systems in the state. However, the implementation of the plan has been coupled with the economic downturn in the state economy and within the district as a whole. As a consequence, many of the initiatives proposed in the strategic plan have not been implemented at the time of this review, and most of the evaluations have been postponed for lack of resources.

Accountability of Programs

1 **The district has clearly stated goals and measurable objectives, but may have difficulty achieving these priorities within budget for each major educational and operational program.**

The St. Lucie County School District has several districtwide priority goals in its strategic plan (See Exhibit 4-2). These goals pertain to both instructional and noninstructional programs. Four of the seven districtwide goals are linked to the state of Florida's Goals for Education, and the others are closely linked to significant needs in the district. The district's hope is that these goals provide a clearly-defined purpose and allow its schools to communicate this purpose to the district's residents.

Exhibit 4-2

The St. Lucie County School District Has Priority Goal That Are Linked to Florida's Goals for Education

Priority Districtwide Goals
Goal 1. St. Lucie County students will successfully compete at the highest levels nationally and internationally and will be prepared to make well-reasoned, thoughtful, and healthy lifelong decision. (Linked to State Goal 3)
Goal 2. The St. Lucie County School District will provide high skill, high demand technical programs that are aligned with industry standards and post secondary pathways which prepare students for lifelong learning. (Linked to State Goal 2)
Goal 3. The St. Lucie County School Board and the Superintendent will work collaboratively to improve teacher salaries and will focus on recruitment and retention of teachers and staff who possess the competencies and demonstrate the performance needed to maximize learning among all students. (Linked to State Goal 6)
Goal 4. St. Lucie County Schools will provide an environment that is drug free, protects student health, safety and civil rights and is conducive to teaching and learning. (Linked to State Goal 5)
Goal 5. Build a positive image and increase confidence in our schools through involving more citizens in the education process. (Linked to State Goal 8)
Goal 6. St. Lucie County Schools will plan, design, construct and maintain schools which are high quality, economically built and provide our students and teachers with an environment which is conducive to, and fosters, the educational process.
Goal 7. The St. Lucie County School Board closely measures, distributes and monitors its resources to ensure the financial stability of our schools.

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

In addition to the districtwide goals, each department/division has program-level goals and objectives. And like the district as a whole, each department has a stated mission statement, primary objectives, and specific strategies to accomplish the objectives that include fiscal impacts and persons with primary responsibility for implementing the strategy. Each strategy, in turn, has an evaluation component that will allow the department to understand whether the objective was met. This is true for the operational areas as well. It is important to acknowledge that the St. Lucie County School District is one of the few in Florida that has developed goals and objectives for its operational and support services.

The district has established measurable goals and objectives for both its instructional and noninstructional programs, but objectives and strategies are often inverted

The district's strategic plan has program-level goals and objectives for all of its major functions including Assessment and Evaluation; Business Services; Career and Technical Education; Curriculum (School Improvement, Educational Technology, Federal Programs, Title I and Migrant); Exceptional Student Education; Facilities; Finance; Food and Nutrition Services; Human Resource Development; Learning Resources; Maintenance; Management Information Systems; Risk Management; Safety and Security; Student Assignment; Student Services; and Transportation.

The lower-level program goals directly reflect the purpose and intent of the programs, and are tied to specific short-term outcomes being pursued by the district. These goals are current, easy to understand, and should lead these programs in a positive direction. However, most of the program-level objectives are written at too low of a level and constitute output measures more than true objectives. Specifically, many of the strategies related to student performance in the educational programs are really objectives, while many of the objectives are better described as output measures or strategies.

For example, under the School Improvement and Educational Technology program section of the strategic plan, there is a Language Arts Objective 3a that states "By March 2002, 80% of elementary teachers in the district will attend four out of five balanced reading components as evidenced by inservice records." The strategy specified in the plan to achieve this objective states "Share current balanced reading research with elementary reading teachers through districtwide systematic and explicit balanced reading professional development." While these are clearly written and measurable, the objective in this case would be a better performance measure for the strategy, and a different objective should be developed. One way to reorganize this particular example would be the following

> **Goal 3. Student Performance**
>
> **Objective 3a**. *Assist teachers' in providing the balanced reading curriculum to decrease the percentage of students scoring a Level 1 in FCAT reading.*
>
> **Strategy 3a**. *Share current balanced reading research with elementary reading teachers through districtwide systematic and explicit balanced reading professional development.*
>
> **Measure 3a**. *By March 2002, 80% of elementary teachers in the district will attend four out of five balanced reading components as evidenced by inservice records.*

This inversion of objectives, strategies, and measures occurs in the operational and support areas as well. For example, Objective 3 under the Human Resources Division states "By the end of February 2002, an additional enhanced principal, assistant principal and aspiring administrator training plan will have been implemented." The three strategies outlined for achieving this objective specify developing monthly training plans for principals, assistant principals and aspiring administrators. Finally, the measure in this case is actually the reiteration of the objective. This objective and its strategies could easily be rewritten as follows

> **Goal.** *Secure the most qualified administrators, teachers and staff available.*

> ***Objective 3***. *Increase the number of current staff that can move into administrative positions by 10 % over the next year.*
>
> ***Strategy.*** *Provide professional development training opportunities during work hours for principals, assistant principals and aspiring administrators.*
>
> ***Measure***. *By the end of February 2002, 80% of principals, assistant principals and aspiring administrators will have access to an additional enhanced professional development program during work hours*

These two examples are only meant to illustrate the appropriate relationship between objectives, strategies and measures. Only the district can determine whether these or similar objectives and strategies are appropriate for these programs.

In general, the district should ensure that its objectives, strategies and measures are properly associated. This will require that the district reconsider all of the objectives and strategies in the 2001-02 Strategic Plan. The district should also emphasize measures that are outcome oriented. Most of the measures outlined in the strategic plan are input or output focused. The district will be unable to determine overall program success without changing this focus.

While these are areas that need general improvement, there is a more serious concern. The strategic plan has tens of millions of dollars of fiscal impacts related to its implementation strategies, and it does not appear that the strategies can be accomplished within the current budget or those of the next several years. For example, the introduction of the Comprehensive Balanced Approach to Reading Program (PreK-12) is one of the strategies being used by the district to accomplish its districtwide Goal A. The primary measurement (or criteria for success) of whether this strategy was successfully implemented is a minimum of one year growth in FCAT scores for 90% of students testing. To implement this strategy, the strategic plan indicates the district will add over 30 reading and literature coaches over the next five years. The predicted resources required to hire and retain these additional staff are $225,000 in 2001-02, $200,000 in 2002-03, $700,000 in 2003-04, and $1.3 million in 2004-05. The district provided for these added positions in the 2002-03 budget, and has recently received a state grant to fund the positions in the future.

The strategy outlined to accomplish the district's Goal C is another example of the fiscal challenges of implementing the strategic plan. Goal C relates to improving teacher salaries. The district's strategy is to invert the budget process placing teacher's salaries as the first priority. More specifically, the district plans to increase teacher salaries by 3% (plus step) each year, pending availability of funds. This strategy was initiated in the 2002-03 budget, but it is unlikely that it can be maintained without new revenue. Fully implementing this strategy would mean that total teacher salaries would increase to over $107 million in 2004-05, from $88 million in 2000-01.

Recommendations ———————————

- *We recommend that the district reexamine its objectives and strategies within the 2001-02 Strategic Plan to see if they are properly associated with each other and to determine if they can be accomplished in light of the current, and projected, fiscal environment in the district.*

Action Plan 4-1 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 4-1

Reevaluate and Modify the Strategies in the District's Strategic Plan	
Strategy	Reexamine and modify the strategies in the strategic plan to ensure that they are reasonable and able to be accomplished within the limitations of district's current and projected fiscal status.
Action Needed	Step 1: The committee and/or staff that developed the strategic plan should be reconvened.
	Step 2: The committee should reevaluate each strategy to determine if it is still a priority or should be excluded from the plan.
	Step 3: The committee should work with the Assistant Superintendent of Business Services to examine all remaining strategies to determine their individual and total fiscal impacts.
	Step 4: These impacts should be considered in light of recent budget reductions.
	Step 5: Revise the strategies as needed based on whether it is reasonable to expect that the district can afford to implement the strategies.
	Step 6: Submit the modifications to the board for approval.
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent of Business Services, and the strategic plan committee
Time Frame	August 2003

Action Plan 4-2

Reevaluate and Modify the Strategies in the District's Strategic Plan	
Strategy	Develop measurable long-term objectives for all district educational and support programs.
Action Needed	Step 1: The strategic planning committee should include longer-term outcomes for presentation to the board and public.
	Step 2: The committee should work with key staff in each program to develop useful long-term measures. Proposed measures should be made available to stakeholders for comment.
	Step 3: Make proposed long-term measures available to stakeholders for comment.
	Step 4: Revise the proposed measures as needed.
	Step 5: Submit the long-term measures to the board for approval.
	Step 6: Develop systems for collecting reliable data on the approved measures.
	Step 7: Periodically review the measures to ensure that they're still useful or whether new measures should be developed.
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent and the strategic planning committee
Time Frame	August 2003.

Source: OPPAGA.

2 The district uses performance measures, cost-efficiency measures and interpretive benchmarks to evaluate its major educational and operational program and uses these in management decision-making.

The district uses performance measures to evaluate and manage both its educational and support services programs

The St. Lucie County School District has developed a wide variety of performance measures to determine whether its instructional and noninstructional programs are progressing appropriately. Most of these measures are included with the strategic plan, although many were being used prior to its development. The performance measures may include the successful development of a single product (such as a procedural manual in the maintenance department), specific benchmarks (such as comparisons of interest rates on school board investments to those of districts with comparable liquidity), or more long-term changes in program outputs (such as the percentage increase in the number of industry aligned/certified vocational programs offered by the district over the next three years). In general, these measures are directly linked to the programs' goals and objectives.

At the district level, most of the performance measures related to student achievement are based on progress in FCAT scores and the increased participation of students in programs designed to improve performance. For example, the performance measures related to implementing the Comprehensive Balanced Reading Approach to Reading and the expansion of K-8 math curriculum using Math Solutions are focused on progress in their respective FCAT scores. Other strategies are measured by examining increases in student participation (e.g., an increase in the number of students enrolled in AP classes, enrollment in SAT summer school will increase by 5%, etc.). The performance measures for the operational and support services tend to be more focused on specific outputs, although there are some that look at outcomes (e.g., the strategy of equipping school buses with video cameras to reduce disruptions will be measured by demonstrating a decrease of bus discipline referrals from the previous year).

At the educational program level, most of the performance measures pertain to the percentage of teachers obtaining additional training in a new curriculum and the percentage of teachers using this training in their classrooms. While there are a few measures that link these strategies to overall outcomes (such as 60% of students will score at least 80% on test for a certain subject matter), in general, these measures are short-term in nature and are primarily linked to specific inputs and outputs.

This is true for the operational areas as well, but the performance measures for these areas are predominately output oriented. Many of the measures include the development of a specific product (e.g., timely financial reports, the development of a procedural manual, the addition of a new program in a particular department). When there is a long-term, outcome-focused performance measure it tends to be very general in nature (i.e., per meal food prices will decrease in the food services program as a result of a certain strategy being implemented).

The district's performance measures do not regularly focus on outcomes

The St. Lucie County School District has developed a wide variety of performance measures but they do not regularly evaluate outcomes in these measures. It is important that school districts focus on outcomes because they can help staff understand the overall impact that results from implementing a strategy, and prevents them from generating outputs simply for the reason of generating outputs ("bean counting"). The focus on outcomes is also necessary if the district wants to accurately evaluate the cost-efficiency of

its major programs. The lack of focus on outcomes in the district is true for both the instructional and noninstructional programs in the district, with some exceptions.

Recommendations ───────────────────────────

- *The district has developed good performance measurement systems for its instructional and noninstructional programs.   However, it can improve these systems by expanding them to include some long-term measures focusing on outcomes.*

  The steps needed to implement this recommendation are included in Action Plan 4-1.

3   The district regularly assesses the performance and costs of its major educational and operational programs using performance measures and benchmark data and analyzes potential cost savings and/or cost avoidance of alternative program delivery systems.

The district conducts a number of interim assessments to determine whether its major educational and operational programs are progressing and are cost efficient. These assessments include informal discussions among administrators, formal and informal comparisons with other districts, monitoring of timelines for program implementation, reviews of non-FCAT test scores in its educational programs, and monitoring of changes in standard operational performance measures. Of these measures, the most commonly used assessments are progress toward meeting implementation deadline.

In the educational programs, performance assessments are usually in the form of feedback from climate surveys, needs assessments, test scores, and informal monitoring by principals and district staff. Most of the educational programs look at non-FCAT test scores that are associated with their balanced reading initiative. Some of these assessment tools include the accelerated reader program, the "FCAT mini-test" and ABACUSS. The district curriculum staff also considers certain performance measures such as attendance rates and report card grades that can either be aggregated or reviewed separately as part of a student profile that was developed recently for each child. The district has also implemented a new assessment tool developed by the Northeast Florida Education Consortium. The tool is being called the FCAT analysis software and is used to disaggregate and reorganize FCAT scores to improve classroom instruction. The database contains three years of FCAT scores (2000, 2001, 2002), and allows staff to look at student FCAT scores by scoring clusters, NRT percentiles, demographics and other characteristics. All instructional personnel have access to the software in their classrooms, and district administrators have access through the MIS. The software is being used as tool to assess the quality of instruction.

In the operational and support programs, assessment is usually more informal. Most of the operational administrators interviewed and documentation supports that assessments tend to be on an ad hoc basis, unless the measure is part of continual monitoring system. For example, the maintenance supervisor examines work order completion rates on a monthly basis to determine where certain employees may be having problems, and the transportation director is consistently measuring discipline referral rates and bus arrival and departure times.

For both the instructional and non-instuctional areas, most of the costs savings analyses have been conducted by the Assistant Superintendent of Business Services in conjunction with the program administrators and the superintendent's leadership team. This information is provided to the superintendent as part of the budget recommendations, or in times when fiscal changes require (e.g., the mid-year budget reductions in 2001-02).

4   The district does not formally evaluate the performance and cost of its major educational and operational programs on a routine basis.

The district does not regularly evaluate its major educational and noninstructional programs. Most evaluations are conducted on an ad hoc basis and are not comprehensive in nature. To date, the district has not formally evaluated its success in achieving the goals and objectives described in the strategic plan. However, the district is moving in this direction with two new initiatives.

First, the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction is in the process of hiring a consultant to serve as the evaluator for some of the new educational curriculum programs. The person being considered is the previous evaluation expert from Polk County who recently retired from that district. The consultant will work on a part-time basis and will conduct all the needed evaluations for the balanced reading initiative. However, the use of this evaluator will be limited to this program. The evaluator will only be considering the district's overall performance toward implementing the balanced reading initiative.

The second initiative is broader in its application. The district has created peer committees that will be responsible for evaluating the district's performance toward accomplishing its strategic plan objectives. Each committee will consist of district staff from a particular area (say food services) and principals who will be responsible for examining another program's (possibly ESE) progress toward accomplishing its goal and objectives. In November 2002, peer committees met to conduct the first evaluation of the strategic plan. These committees will develop an informal progress report that will be reviewed by program staff and then submitted to the superintendent in April 2003. The superintendent will then aggregate the progress reports into a single document for presentation to the board in May 2003. Board members and the superintendent's senior leadership team will use these reports to assess the overall success in meeting district and program goals and objectives, and will revise any goals and objectives where deemed appropriate. One of the most significant factors that will be considered in this review will be the fiscal impacts of implementing all of the current strategies in the plan.

Recommendations ———————————————————

- *The district should move forward with its evaluation plan as described above.*

Action Plan 4-1 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

5   **The district clearly reports on the performance of its major educational programs to ensure accountability to parents and other taxpayers, but reports little regarding its operational programs.**

The district provides considerable information about student performance on its website. This information includes FCAT scores by schools and overall school grades. Parents can easily access this information to determine how well their school's performance compares with other schools in the district, the district average, and the state average. They can also use this information to determine whether their school has improved its performance and how much improvement has been made.

However, neither the board nor parents and other stakeholders routinely receive information on how special groups of students, such as ESE and ESOL students, are performing, and how the performance of these students compares with that of basic students. Although district appropriately expects special groups of students seeking regular diplomas to perform at the same level as basic students, these students face special challenges and the district receives more resources with which to serve them. To be accountable for the services it provides for these students, the district needs disaggregate their performance data from that of regular students.

Although the district has developed an accountability system for its operational and support programs, it does not report on the performance of these programs to the board or public. However, this is primarily because the evaluation of the strategic plan will not occur until mid 2003. The district does plan to report this information in a comprehensive report that will be published on its website sometime in mid-2003.

Recommendations ———————————————

- *Once the district conducts its formal evaluation of its instructional and non-instuctional programs, it should provide the results to the board, relevant stakeholders and the public at large.*

    Action Plan 4-2 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 4-2

Strategic Plan Evaluation Results Should be Distributed to Various Stakeholders		
Strategy	Report accountability information for educational and support programs to the board and public.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The district should implement its current strategic plan evaluation system for instructional and noninstructional programs.
	Step 2:	Within the educational programs, the district should report on the performance of special groups of students, such as ESE, ESOL, and at-risk students to both the board and the general public. Because these groups may comprise relatively small numbers of children at the school level, the district may want to report this information district-wide.
	Step 3:	The district should include performance information in the budget document that is approved by the boards.
	Step 4:	The district should consider reporting performance data for special groups of students and support programs on its website. This information would be most helpful if the district included comparative information on basic students or from similar programs in other districts.
Who is Responsible	The board, the superintendent, and the senior leadership team	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Source: OPPAGA.

5 Educational Service Delivery

While the St. Lucie County School District generally provides effective educational services and programs to its students, there are several areas for improvement. The district should improve the processes through which ESE students are identified and evaluated, establish mechanisms to improve ESE students' academic and nonacademic performance, and provide all teachers with access to curriculum guides linked to the sunshine state standards.

Conclusion

OPPAGA examined the district's educational programs based on best practice standards established in the following four broad areas:

- operations of K-12 instructional programs;
- acquisition, replacement, and disposal of instructional materials;
- analysis of performance data and evaluation of educational programs; and
- library media and support services.

Overall, our review found that the St. Lucie County School District is using 12 of the 16 best practices for educational service delivery.

Exhibit 5-1

The District Has Had a Number of Notable Accomplishments in Educational Service Delivery in the Last Three Years

- We commend the district for its innovative Truancy Night Court and encourage its continuation.
- We commend the district for producing the Library Media Services Report which includes a school library media report for each school in the district. These reports provide information on circulation, budget, and inventory, as well as overviews of library media center activities and practices for the preceding school year.
- We commend the district for its strong participation in St. Lucie County's Shared Services Network Executive Roundtable which is a collaboration of funding agency CEOs and key community leaders working to improve outcomes for the community's children.

Source: OPPAGA Analysis.

Overview of Chapter Findings

OPPAGA reviewed the district's educational service delivery using the Best Financial Management Practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education and associated indicators. The team employed several methodologies to develop chapter conclusions and action plans. For instance, OPPAGA staff conducted on-site interviews with district and school based administrators and visited 10 of 36 schools. OPPAGA staff conducted individual interviews and focus groups with teachers and administrators. In addition, we gathered and evaluated information on policies and procedures relating to educational

service delivery activities. To receive additional input, OPPAGA held a public forum at which staff spoke with many District Advisory Council members.

An overview of chapter findings is presented below.

Effective and Efficient Programs

1. District administrators use both academic and nonacademic data to improve K-12 education programs. (Page 5-5)
2. District administrators facilitate sharing effective instructional practices to improve student performance, given budget constraints. (Page 5-14)
3. The district's Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program has many strengths, but needs to improve timeliness of student placement, student performance, and student suspension rates. (Page 5-16)
4. The district's provides effective instruction as part of its English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). (Page 5-26)
5. The district provides effective secondary vocational programs. (Page 5-31)
6. While the district's curricular framework is linked to Florida's accountability standards, the district does not have curriculum guides which include teaching strategies linked to the Sunshine State Standards. (Page 5-36)
7. The district has adopted a plan for the progression of students from kindergarten through grade 12 that maximizes student mastery of the Sunshine State Standards. (Page 5-37)
8. Most school improvement plans effectively translate identified needs into activities with measurable objectives. However, the district should work with schools to ensure that school advisory council membership represents the community the school serves. (Page 5-40)

Cost Effective Instructional Materials

9. The district's process for selecting instructional materials ensures that those materials meet the needs of teachers and students. (Page 5-42)
10. Most students have current and appropriate instructional materials in core courses. (Page 5-44)
11. The district has adequate procedures for acquiring, maintaining, and disposing of instructional materials, but could make some improvements. (Page 5-45)
12. The district has implemented some accountability mechanisms; however, it needs to improve its evaluation component. (Page 5-48)

Performance Accountability

13. The district regularly reviews its organizational structure and the staffing of the central office and schools to minimize administrative layers and processes. (Page 5-49)
14. The district is doing a fair job of reporting on the performance of its major educational programs to ensure accountability to parents and other taxpayers. (Page 5-50)

Library Media Services

15. The district has sufficient school library or media centers to support instruction; however, collections need to be updated. (Page 5-51)
16. The district provides necessary support to meet the needs of its students in a cost-efficient manner. (Page 5-52)

Background

In 2001-02, the St. Lucie County School District enrolled 30,587 students. The district has 36 schools, including alternative education and charter schools, distributed throughout the county. For Fiscal Year 2001-02, the per pupil expenditures were in line with their peer districts and the state average (see Exhibit 5-2).

Exhibit 5-2

St. Lucie County's Per-Pupil Expenditures Are Less Than Peer Districts

| District	Regular	Exceptional	At-Risk	Vocational	School Operating Costs
Escambia	$4,025	$7,674	$7,916	$4,840	$4,848
Highlands	$4,005	$8,370	$6,676	$4,535	$5,064
Lake	$4,081	$6,177	$4,809	$4,308	$4,509
Marion	$4,134	$7,824	$6,649	$4,768	$4,948
Osceola	$4,155	$8,235	$4,520	$4,342	$4,857
St. Lucie	**$4,371**	**$7,490**	**$4,077**	**$4,842**	**$4,993**
State	$4,378	$7,991	$5,644	$4,979	$5,180

Source: *Florida Schools Indicator Report 2001-02,* Florida Department of Education.

Curriculum and Instruction

In St. Lucie County, an assistant superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction supervises the district departments that provide services to support schools in their role of educating students. These support services include school improvement, assessment and program evaluation, grants and instructional materials, learning resources, career and technical education and alternative education. As shown in Exhibit 5-3, the assistant superintendent is responsible for six departments that provide these services.

Exhibit 5-3

A Team of Staff Members Performs the District-Level Educational Service Delivery Functions
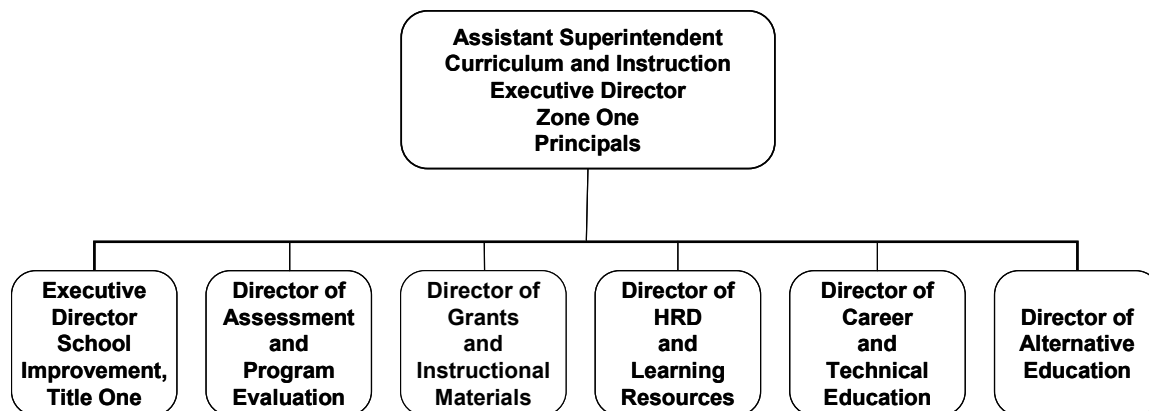
Source: St. Lucie County School District.

St. Lucie County Has a Diverse Student Population That Is Growing

Compared to their peer districts St. Lucie County has a diverse population. The district has more students qualifying for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) than any of their peer districts, with the exception of Osceola County, which has the second highest ESOL population in the state. St. Lucie County's percentage of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch, a commonly used poverty indicator, is higher than the state average and is higher than two of its peer districts. In addition, St. Lucie County experienced 11% growth in student population over the past five years.

Exhibit 5-4

St. Lucie School District's Student Demographics

District	Total Students	Percentage Increase, Fall 1996-2001	Percentage Limited English Proficient	Percentage Eligible for Free or Reduce Price Lunch
Escambia	44,802	(2%)	1%	55%
Highlands	11,304	2%	4%	56%
Lake	30,678	17%	3%	39%
Marion	39,330	9%	3%	51%
Osceola	37,766	38%	17%	47%
St. Lucie	**30,587**	**11%**	**6%**	**51%**
State	2,499,781	12%	8%	44%

Source: *Profiles of Florida School Districts 2001-02*, Florida Department of Education.

The District's Diversity Presents Challenges in Educating Students

In 1997, OPPAGA found that schools serving a large percentage of children from low-income families had significantly lower student test scores than schools serving a small percentage of these students. [1] Although high-poverty schools received more resources per student, they faced greater challenges to improving student performance. These challenges included high student mobility, absenteeism, and disciplinary problems. Excessive student absences and students enrolling in and withdrawing from a school during the year make learning more difficult for students and teaching more difficult for teachers. High percentages of ESOL and new students present similar challenges. Students new to the country as well as to St. Lucie County have not always been following the Sunshine State Standards and therefore may not be performing at the same level as the students in St. Lucie County are required to do. We noted that a critical step to improving student academic performance in high-poverty schools was implementing high expectations for all students. In addition, school principals who exhibited strong leadership behaviors and consistently focused on improving student performance could make a difference in the performance of their schools.

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[1] *Improving Student Performance in High-poverty Schools,* OPPAGA Report No. 96-86, June 1997.

Effective and Efficient Programs

1 District administrators use both academic and nonacademic data to improve K-12 education programs.

The St. Lucie School District has many mechanisms for using academic and nonacademic data to improve K-12 education programs. The Assessment and Program Evaluation Department provides district and school administrators with a variety of data as well as training in the interpretation of data. District administrators compare student academic assessments both to state accountability standards and to assessment results for peer districts. The district produces summary sheets of FCAT and SAT scores which include results from neighboring districts. The district also uses the DOE School Matching Service to match St. Lucie County schools with other districts' schools that have similar demographics and have increased their school grade from the previous year. Administrators make site visits to these high performing schools to learn effective strategies for improving student performance.

While students in the St. Lucie County School District perform on par with their peers in some student performance measures, they lag behind in others

St. Lucie County's average FCAT scores are generally on par with peer districts. However, school grades and receipt of school recognition dollars are, in most cases, below that of its peers. When comparing the academic performance of the St. Lucie County School District with the performance of other districts it is important—to the extent possible—to consider the characteristics of the student population served by each district. OPPAGA considered student characteristics, demographic trends, and economic factors in selecting the peer districts to compare with St. Lucie.

The district does not compare well to most of its peers on certain aspects of its School Accountability Reports. In July 1999, the Florida Department of Education (DOE) established criteria for identifying schools with similar performance characteristics using letter grades. These grades are based primarily on Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) reading and math scores and FCAT writing scores. School grades are awarded based on a point system. Schools are awarded one point for each percent of students who score in achievement levels 3, 4, or 5 on the reading and math portions of the FCAT. Schools also earn one point for each percent of students who demonstrate learning gains from one year to the next. In addition, a school must show learning gains in reading for those in the lowest quartile (25%). Thus, even though the average score of students in one school may be comparable to that in another school, if students scoring in the lower levels do not show gains, the school is more likely to receive a lower grade.

Exhibit 5-5 illustrates St. Lucie's most recent school grades compared to its peers. St. Lucie has the second lowest percentage of high performing "A" and "B" schools among its peers and the second highest percentage of "C" and "D" schools when compared with its peers. Only 41% of St. Lucie County's schools received a grade of "A" or "B" on the state's school performance grades, which is lower than all but one of their peer districts.

Exhibit 5-5

The St. Lucie County School District Has a Lower Percentage of High Performing Schools Than Most of Its Peer Districts

District	Number of Schools Receiving Grades	Percentage of "A" Schools	Percentage of "B" Schools	Percentage of "C" Schools	Percentage of "D" Schools	Percentage of "F" Schools
St. Lucie	**32**	**19%**	**22%**	**44%**	**16%**	**0**
Highlands	15	20%	33%	40%	7%	0
Osceola	29	21%	17%	48%	14%	0
Marion	40	23%	30%	43%	5%	0
Lake	34	24%	38%	38%	0	0
Escambia	54	28%	17%	39%	15%	2%

Source: Florida Department of Education, 2002.

St. Lucie County received fewer school recognition awards than peer districts

The School Recognition Program was designed to recognize the high quality of many of Florida's public schools. The program provides greater autonomy and financial awards to schools that demonstrate sustained or significantly improved student performance. Schools that receive an "A" or schools that improve at least one performance grade category are eligible for school recognition funds.

Based on their school performance grades, nine schools in St. Lucie County received recognition and financial awards for the 2002 School Recognition Program. Each eligible school received $100 per student. Schools containing more than one level, for example grades K-12, received an award only for the level or levels meeting the eligibility criteria. The staff and school advisory council at each recognized school are responsible for jointly deciding how to use the financial award. The awards must be used for nonrecurring faculty and staff bonuses, for nonrecurring expenditures for educational equipment and materials, for temporary personnel to assist in maintaining or improving student performance, or for any combination of these.

Exhibit 5-6

St. Lucie County Received Fewer School Recognition Awards Than Most Peer Districts

District	Percentage of Schools Receiving Awards	Total Amount of Awards
St. Lucie	**28%**	**$837,132**
Marion	40%	$1,308,482
Lake	41%	$1,005,508
Osceola	41%	$1,106,040
Escambia	44%	$1,695,049
Highlands	47%	$475,989

Source: Department of Education, 2002 Florida School Recognition Program.

The district's scores on the FCAT generally do not compare favorably with its peer districts and the state in reading; in math, the district scores higher than its peers in some grades; in writing, the district generally scores higher than its peers

The most commonly used measure of effective educational programs is student test scores. In Florida, the state competency test is the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). School districts administer FCAT assessments in reading and mathematics to students in grades 3 through 10. In addition, schools administer the FCAT writing assessment to students in grades 4, 8, and 10. To receive a standard Florida high school diploma, students must pass the Grade 10 FCAT Sunshine State Standards Reading and Mathematics Tests. The FCAT consists of multiple choice questions and performance tasks in reading, mathematics, and writing. Performance tasks are scored using holistic rubrics.

The FCAT Sunshine State Standards Test reports two types of scores. The first is a scaled score based on the number of items the student answers correctly. The second is a student achievement level score that is based on the students' scaled score. Florida has established scale score ranges for each of the five performance levels. Level 1 is the lowest. Students performing at this level have little success with the challenging content of the Sunshine State Standards. Level five is the highest. Students performing at Level 5 have success with the most challenging content and answer most of the test questions correctly. In the St. Lucie County School district, student performance on the FCAT across the various subject and grade levels is mixed. As can be seen in Exhibit 5-7, the district's students generally do not score as well as their peers on the FCAT Sunshine State Standards Test in reading. The district has identified reading as an area on which to focus and has recently adopted the Balanced Literacy Program districtwide.

Exhibit 5-7

St. Lucie County's Students Generally Do Not Score as Well as Their Peers in FCAT Reading, Spring 2002

District	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10
Escambia	292/Level 3	296/Level 2	286/Level 3	296/Level 3	299/Level 2	296/Level 2	290/Level 2	301/Level 2
Highlands	291/Level 3	294/Level 2	284/Level 2	290/Level 2	295/Level 2	295/Level 2	288/Level 2	302/Level 2
Lake	298/Level 3	301/Level 3	294/Level 3	300/Level 3	300/Level 3	297/Level 2	289/Level 2	302/Level 2
Marion	295/Level 3	300/Level 3	285/Level 2	288/Level 2	292/Level 2	292/Level 2	292/Level 2	302/Level 2
Osceola	281/Level 2	284/Level 2	271/Level 2	276/Level 2	284/Level 2	280/Level 2	278/Level 1	293/Level 2
St. Lucie	**288/Level 3**	**294/Level 2**	**281/Level 2**	**292/Level 2**	**291/Level 2**	**291/Level 2**	**283/Level 1**	**302/Level 2**
State	293/Level 3	299/Level 3	285/Level 2	291/Level 2	294/Level 2	295/Level 2	287/Level 2	303/Level 2

Source: Florida Department of Education, Student Assessment Services Section, 2002.

The district's test scores in mathematics are higher than most of its peers in some grade levels, though they remain lower than the state average. As Exhibit 5-8 shows, the average scale score for St. Lucie students in grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 exceed at least three of their peer districts. The district's average scaled score in grades 7 through 9 exceed one peer district. For grade 10, the district scored higher than two of its peers. District students scored lower than the state average for all grade levels.

Exhibit 5-8

St. Lucie County's Mathematics FCAT Test Scores Are Generally Higher Than in Peer Districts For Grades 3 Through 6; Scores in Grades 7 Through 10 Are Among the Lowest, Spring 2002

District	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10
Escambia	296/Level 3	285/Level 2	310/Level 2	294/Level 2	290/Level 2	302/Level 2	285/Level 2	313/Level 2
Highlands	297/Level 3	287/Level 2	315/Level 2	297/Level 2	288/Level 2	303/Level 2	291/Level 2	321/Level 3
Lake	307/Level 3	294/Level 2	326/Level 3	302/Level 2	297/Level 2	307/Level 2	289/Level 2	318/Level 3

District	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10
Marion	296/Level 3	289/Level 2	313/Level 2	292/Level 2	288/Level 2	300/Level 2	289/Level 2	317/Level 3
Osceola	284/Level 2	283/Level 2	296/Level 2	277/Level 1	276/Level 2	295/Level 2	276/Level 2	311/Level 2
St. Lucie	**299/Level 3**	**289/Level 2**	**317/Level 2**	**295/Level 2**	**286/Level 2**	**299/Level 2**	**281/Level 2**	**316/Level 3**
State	302/Level 3	294/Level 2	318/Level 2	298/Level 2	292/Level 2	305/Level 2	286/Level 2	319/Level 3

Source: Florida Department of Education, Student Assessment Services Section, 2002.

While students in St. Lucie County generally do not perform well on reading, performance on the FCAT writing is considerably stronger. The FCAT writing portions of the test (formerly known as Florida Writes!) scores are reported on a scale of 1.0 through 6.0. Alternatively, if the student's writing is unrelated to the assigned topic or cannot be read, the student may receive a grade of U (unscorable). Exhibit 5-9 illustrates that St. Lucie County students score as well as—or higher than—the state average and some of its peers on the FCAT Writing test in most cases.

Exhibit 5-9

St. Lucie County's Average FCAT Writing Scores, Spring 2002

School District	Grade 4			Grade 8			Grade 10		
	Expository	Narrative	Combined	Expository	Persuasive	Combined	Expository	Persuasive	Combined
Escambia	3.2	3.4	3.3	4.0	3.8	3.9	4.1	3.8	4.0
Highlands	3.0	3.4	3.2	3.9	3.8	3.9	4.0	3.7	3.8
Lake	3.2	3.4	3.3	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.5	3.7
Marion	3.2	3.4	3.3	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.5	3.7
Osceola	2.9	3.2	3.1	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.6	3.5	3.6
St. Lucie	**3.2**	**3.7**	**3.4**	**3.8**	**3.7**	**3.8**	**4.0**	**3.7**	**3.9**
State	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.8	3.8	3.8	4.0	3.7	3.8

Source: Florida Department of Education, Student Assessment Services Section, 2002.

St. Lucie County's student performance shows mixed improvement over time

When compared over time, St. Lucie County shows mixed improvement in FCAT scores. As seen in Exhibit 5-10, overall, reading and math scores of St. Lucie County's students have mostly remained stable over the past three years. While the percentage of students scoring in Levels 1 and 2, the lowest range, has been mostly stable over time, it should be noted that nearly 50% of students in grade 4 and over 50% of students in grade 8 are not proficient in the Sunshine State Standards for reading in their grade levels. In the case of 2002, grade 10 reading, 66%, or two-thirds of the students in St. Lucie County Schools, are not proficient in the Sunshine State Standards for this grade. While this is slightly better than the state average of 65% for this group, this is clearly an area for improvement.

Similarly, for FCAT math, while the district's scores have generally remained stable, the percentage of students scoring in Levels 1 and 2 for grades 4 and 8 on the 2002 administration remains above the 50% mark. A significant improvement, however, is in grade 10 math, in which the district reduced the percentage of students scoring in Levels 1 and 2 from a high of 52% in 2000 to 43% in the 2002 administration of the exam. Nonetheless, more than 50% of grade 4 and 8 students in math are not proficient in the Sunshine State Standards.

Exhibit 5-10

St. Lucie County Student Performance Over Time Is Generally Stable; However, in Most Cases, More Than Half of Students Perform in Level 1 or Level 2 (the Lowest Levels)

Subject and Year	Grade 4			Grade 8			Grade 10		
	Level 1	Level 2	Levels 1 & 2	Level 1	Level 2	Levels 1 & 2	Level 1	Level 2	Levels 1 & 2
2000 Reading	33%	17%	50%	31%	29%	60%	34%	38%	72%
2001 Reading	32%	17%	49%	32%	26%	58%	30%	33%	63%
2002 Reading	33%	16%	49%	32%	26%	58%	32%	34%	66%
2000 Math	28%	31%	59%	32%	20%	52%	26%	26%	52%
2001 Math	26%	26%	52%	26%	22%	48%	21%	24%	45%
2002 Math	26%	27%	53%	29%	24%	53%	21%	22%	43%

In 2000 the Math Portion of the FCAT was not given to fourth graders, it was given to fifth graders only. In order to be consistent we have used grade 5 scores in math for 2001 and 2002 as well.

Source: Florida Department of Education, Student Assessment Services Section, 2000, 2001, 2002.

District administrators track student academic assessments for cohorts of students across multiple years to evaluate and improve the performance of students

The district generates a FCAT history report that allows schools to track individual student assessments through their academic history. School administrators use this report to group students in need of remediation or enrichment in a particular area. Administrators also use the report to help identify curriculum strengths and weaknesses.

In addition to the FCAT history report, the district uses a software system to track students' test results throughout their academic history. This instructional management system software provides educators with a link between standards and the multiple resources for teaching them as well as the knowledge of exactly how well students are learning. Administrators at the high school level also use the College Board's Summary of Answers report to evaluate student performance and to realign curriculum and instructional strategies.

District administrators disaggregate student academic assessment data to evaluate and improve the performance of subgroups of students

The St. Lucie County School District encourages schools to use the DART model to help guide instruction by identifying weaknesses. The DART model is an approach for analyzing FCAT data to improve instruction. The model comprises four steps to improvement:

- D-Data: analyze data; tease them apart; display results;
- A-Assess, identify and prioritize your needs;
- R-Review standards and testing resources to pinpoint deficiencies; and
- T-Target and align curriculum, classroom instruction, and assessment by addressing needs and deficiencies with new or adapted learning activities and available resources.

School administrators complete the DART charts with FCAT reports from the district office. Reports are generated for both all curriculum students and standard curriculum students. The DART Model uses several data sources, including

- overall school results on subtests vs. district and state results;

- subtest results disaggregated by subgroups for each school; and
- overall school results and subgroup results for writing and the percentage of students scoring in Level 1 and above, Level 2 and above, and Level 3 for reading and mathematics.

The Assessment and Evaluation Department plays a critical role in this process by providing the schools and district with the disaggregated data and reports required to complete the DART Model, through aiding in data analysis, and by providing technical assistance to any staff that requests it.

The district has recently purchased a specialized test score reporting system. This secure, password-protected web application allows teachers and administrators desktop access to student FCAT data and other performance indicator information. It is equipped to provide norm-referenced, criterion-referenced, and developmental scaled scores linked to individual students. Users can look at total scores as well as access data at the cluster and strand level. Teachers and administrators also may copy these data into other applications for further analysis. Using this software will enable teachers to determine specific areas of weakness in student performance and target instruction appropriately to help students succeed in those areas.

District administrators use student assessment data to improve the performance of all schools

In addition to DOE demographic reports, St. Lucie administrators use the "Gerald Anderson philosophy" to help ensure that all schools' and students' needs are being addressed. The Gerald Anderson philosophy is an approach to school improvement that is based on disaggregating achievement data by economic status, race, and ability. Administrators establish their calendar by planning backwards to teach weak areas as evidenced by data analysis. It is a data-driven approach which looks at gaps in achievement regardless of the letter grade a school may have received. District administrators feel that such a philosophy engenders a culture of continuous improvement. Curriculum department staff provide assistance to all schools for staff development and best practices training.

The district also provides additional support and assistance to schools that have received a 'D' or 'F' in the state school grading program. The curriculum department, along with individual schools develop and implement strategies to increase the achievement levels of all students. District staff from the Office of Assessment and Evaluation identify all students performing at level 1 on FCAT and/or below a 3 on FCAT Writing within the first six weeks of school and school personnel provide intensive remediation through an Academic Improvement Plan (AIP). The District Advisory Council and individual school improvement teams provide leadership to involve parents in the shared responsibility of increasing student achievement by focusing on the importance of regular attendance.

Each Level I and Level II school ('F' and 'D,' respectively), has a support team comprising a team leader, two members of the Technical Assistance Team, the school principal, a member of the School Advisory Council, and a teacher leader. The support team assists the school in analyzing data, targeting student populations and areas of need, identifying effective instructional strategies, locating resources, and monitoring and evaluating the results.

In addition to the support team at the school level, each D and F rated school is assigned a district support team whose responsibility is to assist the school in its efforts to improve student performance, assist in the acquisition of resources, advocate for the school's needs, and link the school with other district personnel as needed. Of the seven schools that received a D in 1999, four schools improved one letter grade the following year, indicating that the district's interventions were successful in those schools. In 2001, the district did not have any D or F schools. Five schools received a grade of D during 2002. However, it is too soon to rate the success of interventions for these schools.

The district analyzes data other than standardized test scores to assist schools

The district uses performance measures and benchmarks other than student academic assessments to assess and improve academic programs. The district examines promotion rates, graduation rates, dropout rates, and the number of students taking college entry exams. Exhibit 5-11 illustrates that St. Lucie's graduation rate is higher than both its peers and the state average. Conversely, the district's dropout rate is the lowest among its peers and the state average.

Exhibit 5-11

St. Lucie County Graduation Rate Is Higher Than Its Peer Districts and the State Average; Its Dropout Rate Is the Lowest

District	Four-Year Graduation Rate	Annual Dropout Rate
Osceola	66.1%	4.6%
State	67.9%	3.2%
Escambia	69.9%	2.3%
Marion	69.1%	2.8%
Lake	68.7%	4.9%
Highlands	58.6%	4.3%
St. Lucie	**77.0%**	**1.3%**

Source: DOE Education Information and Accountability Services, 2002.

The district also measures school effectiveness by looking at discipline data such as the numbers of in- and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to court or other juvenile authorities. A district with a high rate of student suspensions may indicate a lack of school personnel's ability to control student behavior in the classroom. This can have a negative impact on that individual student's ability to learn and perform well on student assessments. In addition, poor classroom management also may have a negative impact on other students' ability to learn. Suspension should not become a routine procedure, but rather be reserved for those students whose extreme behavior threatens the health and safety of students. Teachers should not rely on suspension or the threat of suspension to control students in the classroom. Rather, the district should support teachers in motivating students to succeed and in creating exciting, interesting lessons that engage students in active learning. In such an environment, discipline issues tend to evaporate.

As Exhibit 5-12 illustrates, St. Lucie County recorded more out-of-school suspensions than all of its peer districts and the state. The district's in-school suspension rate is also the highest among its peers and the state average. A high suspension rate may indicate that teachers and school administrators are not effectively managing student behavior in the classroom.

Exhibit 5-12

St. Lucie County Is the Highest Among Its Peers and the State for Both Out of School Suspensions and In-School Suspensions

District	Total Number of Students	Out-of-School Suspensions	In-School Suspensions	Expulsions	Referrals to Court/Juvenile Authorities
State	2,499,781	9%	10%	<1%	0
Highlands	11,304	10%	25%	0	0
Lake	30,678	11%	4%	<1%	0
Escambia	44,802	13%	5%	0	0
Osceola	37,766	13%	4%	<1%	0
Marion	39,330	14%	12%	<1%	0
St. Lucie	**30,587**	**15%**	**15%**	**<1%**	**0**

Source: DOE Profiles of Florida School Districts 2001-02.

The district is considering reducing the traditional 10-day out of school suspension for students who have alcohol and/or drug infractions and who can produce documentation of an appointment with a psychiatrist, therapist, or other mental health provider covered under Ch. 491, *Florida Statutes*. This is expected to reduce by half the days lost to out-of-school suspension for these students and reduce the likelihood that they will drop out of school. In addition, the district will be starting two alternative sites to serve this same group of students. This is in keeping with research that suggests that rather than expel first time drug/alcohol offenders districts should make intervention resources available while the students attend school. The St. Lucie County School District is working to get closer to that model. Now, mental health community agencies and a case management agency make therapy and case management available in every school.

Regular school attendance is an important component for school success. As can be seen in Exhibit 5-13, St. Lucie has a greater percentage of students who are absent more than 21 days than the state and all but one of its peers at the elementary level. In middle and high school, St. Lucie has the highest percentage of students absent more than 21 days. This may also help explain the gap in student performance as demonstrated by FCAT scores between St. Lucie students and students in peer districts. The district has recognized this as an area for improvement. The 2001-02 Student Services Plan includes as one of its objectives: "The percentage of elementary students who are absent from school 21 days or more will be reduced from the year 2000 percentage of 7.9% to 5% by the end of the 2004-05 school year." While it is commendable that district administrators recognize this area as a problem and are working to improve this area, the district also needs to focus its attention at the middle and high school levels.

Exhibit 5-13

The District's Absentee Rate Is Higher
Than the State Average and Its Peers in All But One Case

	Students Absent More Than 21 Days		
	Elementary	Middle	High
Lake	5.3%	9.8%	18.3%
Highlands	5.5%	11.5%	11.9%
State	6.0%	11.4%	15.1%
Escambia	5.9%	13.3%	15.6%
Osceola	7.9%	10.8%	12.8%
Marion	5.5%	13.4%	16.9%
St. Lucie	7.8%	17.2%	21.6%

Source: Florida DOE, *Florida School Indicators Report*, 2001-02.

One of the ways St. Lucie County is working to reduce school truancy is through its Elementary Truancy Night Court. The court grew out of the community's Shared Services Network Executive Roundtable. This group of funding agency CEOs and key community leaders has been working to solve the truancy problem. The goal of the court is to correct truant behavior at the onset. The court, a partnership between the school district, Circuit Court, Clerk of the Court's Office, and law enforcement, has shown a 92% rate of improvement in attendance for participants.

Recommendations ⸻⸻⸻⸻⸻⸻⸻⸻⸻⸻⸻

- *We commend the district for its innovative Truancy Night Court and encourage its continuation.*

- *We recommend that the district establish mechanisms to reduce both in-school and out-of-school suspension rates.*

- *We recommend that the district develop strategies to improve attendance rates of middle and high school students.*

- *We recommend that the district continue to carefully monitor its efforts to improve student performance and make adjustments as needed to help all students succeed academically.*

Action Plan 5-1

Establish Mechanisms to Reduce Both In-School and Out-of-School Suspension Rates		
Strategy	Systematically evaluate suspension data for all students.	
Action Needed	Step 1.	Disaggregate suspension data by school, teacher, offense, and other pertinent criteria.
	Step 2.	Look for trends in the data to determine where (for example, certain schools or certain teachers) the highest percentages of suspensions occur.
	Step 3.	Focus resources on those sources. For example, if some schools have higher rates of suspensions than others, target those schools. This should include additional training in appropriate interventions and mechanisms to deal with difficult student behavior.
	Step 4.	Evaluate at least semi-annually and revise as needed.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of Student Services; zone directors; director of School Safety; director of Student Services; director of MIS; principals; assistant principals; deans; guidance counselors; and data specialists.	
Time Frame	April 2003-June 2003; ongoing thereafter.	

Action Plan 5-2

Develop Strategies to Improve Attendance Rates of Middle and High School Students		
Strategy	Develop mechanisms to improve attendance rates of middle and high school students.	
Action Needed	Step 1.	The Director of Student Services meets with the Manager of Social Services, principals, deans, and guidance counselors to evaluate attendance data.
	Step 2.	The team establishes strategies to improve attendance among middle and high school students.
	Step 3.	The team implements the strategies.
	Step 4.	District personnel evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies regularly and make changes as needed.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of Student Services; zone directors; director of MIS; director of Alternative Education; director of Student Services; director of School Safety; manager of Social Services; principals; assistant principals; deans; guidance counselors.	
Time Frame	April 2003-June 2003; ongoing thereafter.	

Action Plan 5-3

Continue to Carefully Monitor Efforts to Improve Student Performance	
Strategy	Continue to monitor efforts to improve student performance and make adjustments as needed to help all students succeed academically.
Action Needed	Step 1. The director of Assessment and Evaluation continues to provide disaggregated data to schools. Step 2. The director of Assessment and Evaluation continues to work with principals in using the DART model to analyze student test scores. Step 3. Principals and teachers continue to use software to determine students' areas of weakness. Step 4. Principals and department chairs work with teachers to implement effective strategies to help students improve academic performance. Step 5. District and school personnel evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies regularly and make adjustments as needed.
Who is Responsible	Director of Assessment and Evaluation; principals; assistant principals; department chairs; teachers.
Time Frame	March 2003-June 2003; ongoing thereafter.

2 District administrators facilitate sharing effective instructional practices to improve student performance, given budget constraints.

The district has a quality professional development program and uses a variety of strategies to identify and communicate exemplary educational practices and strategies to teachers

The district uses a variety of mechanisms to identify and facilitate the communication of exemplary education practices. These include

- curriculum specialists who serve as a resource to teachers;
- recognition of teachers who pursue professional development;
- release time for teachers; and
- in-service training, orientation, and mentoring.

Curriculum Specialists Serve as Resource to Teachers. Personnel at the district level serve as a resource to teachers. District curriculum resource specialists in language arts, math, reading, and science identify effective teaching methods and provide training and expertise to teachers. These specialists are responsible for serving all K-12 needs. In addition to the curriculum specialists, three technical resource specialists (one for each zone) provide assistance and support to schools on an as-needed basis. Two additional resource specialists provide support to the kindergarten program and the Title 1/Migrant Program.

While the resource specialists in the district are dedicated and knowledgeable, there may not be enough individuals to meet the needs of the district's teachers. Other districts similar in size to St. Lucie, have different resource teachers for the elementary and secondary levels in each of the core subject areas. The district has trained 24 teachers in Balanced Literacy who in turn train other teachers throughout the district in this approach. In addition, the district is currently developing teacher cadres to provide staff development workshops in language arts and math. District administrators should monitor this process and regularly evaluate whether it meets the needs of classroom teachers.

Recognition. The district encourages teachers to participate in professional development by recognizing teachers who use best practices.

- St. Lucie participates in the teacher of the year program.
- The district conducts an annual "Night of the Stars" in which outstanding educators, volunteers, and support staff are publicly recognized at a formal gala event.
- For some training activities, the district presents thank you letters and formal certificates to teachers acknowledging their participation and the value it brings to the district.
- The school board formally recognizes teachers in the district who have attained national board certification. In addition, the district calls upon these teachers to serve as teacher leaders in their schools and throughout the district.

The district does not normally provide monetary compensation to teachers for taking courses offered through the district training program. However, the district does provide modest stipends for training activities such as Math Solutions (discussed in the next section). In the case of technology training that is offered after school hours, individual principals have the discretion whether to pay a stipend to teachers who participate.

Release time for teachers. While the district does not have early release days that allow teachers to pursue training opportunities, it does provide release time during the school day so teachers may attend courses during their workday. In addition, the district has recently worked to establish four teacher in-service days for the next school year. This will free up more time for teachers to attend district trainings without negatively affecting student learning.

In-service training, orientation, and mentoring. The St. Lucie County School District has a professional development program for both instructional and support staff. Every year, the director of human resources development carefully reviews each school's school improvement plan and develops a comprehensive matrix of each school's training needs. While this is a time-consuming task, administrators believe that it allows them to see the big picture and where each school is in terms of training needs. In addition, it may help the district save money by consolidating the same training requests from several schools into one training session. Finally, it provides the human resources development department with data which may be useful when writing future grants.

The district has recently focused its attention on three specific training areas: Balanced Literacy, Math Solutions, and technology. Balanced Literacy provides a mix of both phonics and whole language learning and is seen as a more effective way to help students gain reading skills and language understanding. Math Solutions is a course for K-8 teachers which presents practical ways to understand and implement standards-based instruction. The program uses activities to help teachers build students' numbers sense and computational skills using manipulative materials as well as cooperative and individual learning strategies. The central focus is on problem solving in all strands of the math curriculum. The technology offerings of the district include instruction on the use of software packages such as ABACUS, Lotus Notes, and InteGrade Pro Gradebook in addition to training in basic computer and internet skills.

Because a large portion of the professional development budget is devoted exclusively to Balanced Literacy and Math Solutions, little funding remains for other types of training. The district staff is aware of this and will be evaluating the effects of concentrating funds in this way in the coming year.

Classes and workshops are voluntary and usually held during the workday. In addition, some teachers participate in training workshops during the summer. Teachers who attend summer institutes generally receive a stipend.

The department announces training opportunities, both district-sponsored and other local training such as workshops or courses at a nearby college or university, regularly in the district newsletter *Lucy News* and on the district's intranet. The department also sends daily emails of training opportunities as they become available. The district's intranet has increased the efficiency of communicating professional development offerings. Teachers are able to access the training catalog via the intranet. A sample listing of recently held trainings in various areas can be found in Exhibit 5-14.

Exhibit 5-14

A Sample of In-Service Offerings

Area Covered	Workshop Title
ESOL	Testing and Evaluation
ESOL	Applied Linguistics
ESOL	Methods and Strategies
Inservice Activities	Balanced Reading Elementary
Inservice Activities	Balanced Reading Middle
Inservice Activities	Balanced Reading High
Teacher Induction Program (TIP) Training	TIP-Classroom Management
Teacher Induction Program (TIP) Training	TIP-Substance Abuse
Teacher Induction Program (TIP) Training	TIP-Exceptional Student Education Awareness

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

The district has an orientation program for new teachers referred to as the Teacher Induction Program (TIP). The TIP offers new educators training sessions and other support services to help them meet state requirements in the 12 teacher competencies.

In addition to the beginning teachers orientation program, the district has a mentoring program for all teachers new to the district. Mentors in this program provide non-evaluative support to all teachers who are new to the district.

3 The district's Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program has many strengths, but needs to improve timeliness of student placement, student performance, and student suspension rates.

Many aspects of the district's ESE program are positive

The St. Lucie County School District ESE program has several notable strengths, including those below.
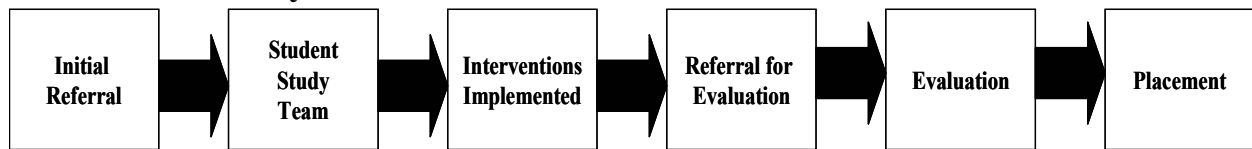
- Procedures consistent with federal and state laws
- ESE student identification
- Student to teacher ratio
- Medicaid reimbursement
- Participation in statewide assessments

- Graduation rate

Procedures consistent with federal and state laws. The district's procedures for identifying and assessing students, developing individual education plans, and providing and coordinating services for ESE students are consistent with federal and state laws. Teachers, parents, or guidance counselors begin the ESE process by referring students for assessment. Each school has a student study team comprising the guidance counselor, the school psychologist, the initiating person, and the student's teachers. Other members may include a school administrator, an alternative education teacher, a behavioral specialist/analyst, a dean, the ESE program specialist, a speech pathologist, and other individuals as appropriate to the student's needs. The team meets on a regular basis to discuss students in need of resource services, alternative teaching strategies, curriculum changes, behavioral interventions, and/or psychological evaluations. When a child is initially referred, the student study team reviews the case, assesses the student, and determines appropriate interventions to assist the student in succeeding. School personnel then implement these interventions over the course of six to nine weeks. If the student study team finds that these attempts prove unsuccessful, the student is then referred for a psycho-educational evaluation with the school psychologist. The results of this evaluation determine a child's ESE status.

Exhibit 5-15

The Student Study Team Referral Process

| Initial Referral | → | Student Study Team | → | Interventions Implemented | → | Referral for Evaluation | → | Evaluation | → | Placement |

Source: Developed by OPPAGA.

Identifying ESE students. Students with special needs are identified through the Department of Student Services. After a parent or school staff member identifies that a student seems to have unmet needs, the teacher discusses their concerns with the parents and requests a meeting with, at a minimum, the student study team. The team meets and plans specific interventions to help the student succeed. If after two different interventions the student is still having difficulty, the student is then referred for an individual evaluation. If the student is found to be in need of ESE services, the school places the student in the appropriate setting to receive the services necessary to succeed. The district employs 12 full-time school psychologists who have responsibility for multiple schools.

The percentage of ESE students identified and served in St. Lucie County is on par with its peer districts. The federal Office of Special Education Programs closely monitors overidentification of students with special needs. Twenty percent of the students in St. Lucie County Schools have been identified as ESE. This includes 15% identified as disabled and 5% identified as gifted. As Exhibit 5-16 demonstrates, the percentage of students identified as disabled in St. Lucie County is among the lowest of all its peers and the state. However, the percentage of students in the district that have been identified as gifted is higher than all its peers and the state average.

Exhibit 5-16

The Total Percentage of ESE Students (Disabled and Gifted) Identified and Served in St. Lucie County Is About Average Compared With its Peers and Slightly Higher Than the State Average, 2002

District	PK-12 Population	Percentage Disabled	Percentage Gifted	Total ESE
Osceola	37,744	15%	<1%	16%
State	2,500,161	15%	4%	19%
Escambia	44,648	16%	4%	20%
Lake	30,626	17%	3%	20%
Marion	39,319	17%	3%	20%
St. Lucie	**30,552**	**15%**	**5%**	**20%**
Highlands	11,303	19%	4%	23%

Source: *LEA Profiles*, 2002, Florida Department of Education.

While the percentage of students with disabilities served in the district is on par with the state average, St. Lucie County may be underidentifying gifted students in certain ethnic categories. As Exhibit 5-17 shows, while 29% of the overall student population in the district is black, only 12% of gifted students are in this category. In addition, only 6% of Hispanic students in St. Lucie have been identified as gifted, while this group represents 12% of the overall student population. The lack of minority representation among students classified as gifted is a problem statewide. The representation of black students identified as gifted in the St. Lucie County School District has been increasing steadily over the past 10 years from a low of 4% to the current 12%. Nonetheless, the district should establish mechanisms to ensure it appropriately identifies gifted minority students.

Exhibit 5-17

St. Lucie County Schools ESE Student Membership by Racial/Ethnic Category

	All Students	Students with Disabilities	Gifted Students
White	56%	51%	77%
Black	29%	38%	12%
Hispanic	12%	8%	6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1%	<1%	3%
Amer. Indian/Alaskan Native	<1%	<1%	<1%
Multiracial	2%	<1%	2%

Source: *LEA Profiles*, 2002, Florida Department of Education.

Student to Teacher Ratio. When compared with its peer districts, St. Lucie County's Exceptional Student to ESE teacher ratio is well within the range of its peers. As Exhibit 5-18 shows, on average, there are 22 exceptional students per exceptional education teacher.

Exhibit 5-18

St. Lucie County's ESE Teacher to
ESE Student Ratio Is on Par With Its Peers

District	Exceptional Education Teachers	Exceptional Student Population	Ratio
Escambia	449	9,170	1:20
Marion	354	7,779	1:22
St Lucie	**279**	**6,026**	**1:22**
Osceola	255	5,859	1:23
Highlands	112	2,551	1:23
Lake	228	5,924	1:26

Source: Profiles of Florida School Districts, 2001-02, DOE Education Information and Accountability Services.

Student Placement. St. Lucie County places ESE students in the least restrictive environment. The district uses three approaches to educating students with special needs: inclusion, pullout, and self-contained, depending on the needs of the child and the provisions of the Individual Education Plan. St. Lucie has one special school exclusively for ESE students, the Dale Cassens School. This school serves approximately 129 students from kindergarten through age 21 who have special needs by using a positive behavioral support program to provide individually designed educational programming. In addition to this school, some schools have self-contained classes for the most severely challenged students, such as those with autism. Much of the ESE population is included in the regular classroom and pulled out for one or two periods, such as for reading and language arts. As Exhibit 5-19 shows, just under half (48%) of students with disabilities are placed in a regular classroom. This is on par with the state average. However, this number has been decreasing over time. The district should continue to track this data and work to ensure that students with disabilities continue to be placed in the least restrictive environment.

Exhibit 5-19

The District's Regular Class Placement of Students
With Disabilities is on Par With Its Peer Districts and the State, 2001-02

District	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
Marion	38%	30%	36%
Escambia	48%	42%	42%
Highlands	44%	43%	46%
Osceola	52%	52%	48%
St. Lucie	**55%**	**49%**	**48%**
State	49%	48%	48%
Lake	53%	54%	55%

Source: *LEA Profiles*, 2002, Florida Department of Education.

Medicaid Reimbursement. St. Lucie County Schools reduces its overall cost in serving ESE students by actively seeking Medicaid reimbursement. The district participates in the Medicaid School Matching Program, a program which provides for reimbursement of direct medical services provided by the school district to individual students, as well as for administrative services devoted to planning, preparing, and supporting the ESE student's medical and emotional needs. The School District of St. Lucie County began involvement in this program in 1999.

In August 1999, the district hired a staff person to focus exclusively on Medicaid reimbursement. With the help of this position, the district has greatly increased the amount of reimbursement it receives for both administrative and direct services it provides to ESE students. Exhibit 5-21 shows the increase in

Medicaid funding for both administrative and direct services during the period 1999-2001. During 1999, the district received $556,847 dollars for administrative claims. This number increased to $759,154 for 2000. In 2001, St. Lucie received $880,737 in Medicaid reimbursement for administrative services to ESE students. The district also received reimbursement for direct services. During 1999, the district received $64,471 for direct services provided to ESE students. In 2000, this number rose to $122,443 and in 2001, the district received $270,080 for direct services. For the period 1999-2001, then, the district has generated a total of over $2.6 million in Medicaid reimbursement funds.

Exhibit 5-20

The District's Medicaid Reimbursement Has Increased Over the Period 1999-01
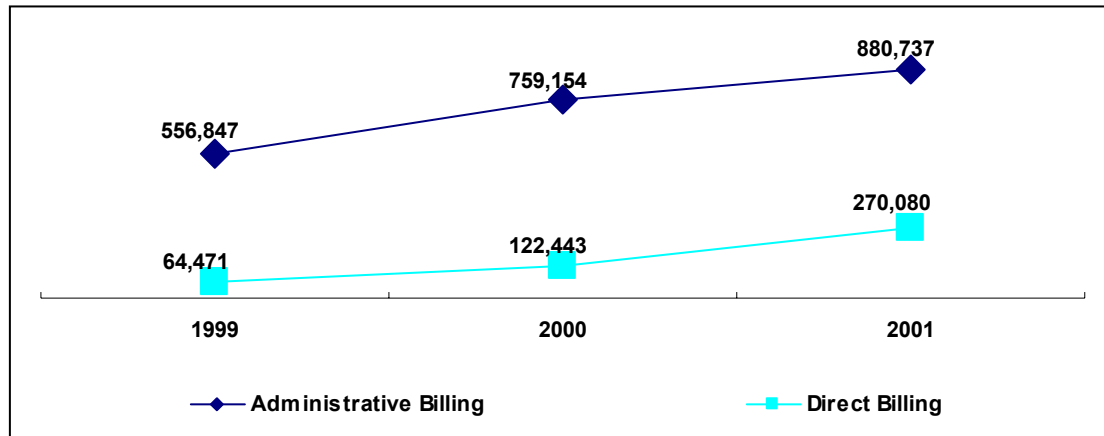
Source: Developed by OPPAGA based on data provided by AHCA/Medicaid (School Enrollment and Reimbursement Data 2001, 2000, 1999 Summaries) and Administrative Claiming, Medicaid Program Analysis, 1999, 2000, 2001.

The Student Services Department is currently billing for nursing, occupational therapy, psychological services, physical therapy, and speech therapy services. Last year the district began billing for social work services. The district is currently building the infrastructure to seek Medicaid reimbursement for transportation services and expects to hire a part time clerk for this purpose.

Participation in FCAT Testing Program. The district's participation rate of students with disabilities in statewide assessments in 2000-01 was higher than most of its peers and the state average. As can be seen in Exhibit 5-21, St. Lucie County School's participation rate of ESE students in both FCAT Reading and Math is higher than most of its peers for both reading and math in grade 8. In addition, the district's participation rate has increased considerably from 2000 to the 2001 exam administration in both subject area tests. The participation rate of ESE students in statewide assessments is particularly important given the possibility that some districts may overidentify students with special needs, thereby having their scores dismissed from the school grade which is based largely on students' performance on the statewide assessments. Since the participation rate of St. Lucie students is the second highest among its peers and the state average, there is no evidence that this is occurring in St. Lucie County.

Exhibit 5-21

The District's Participation Rate of Students With Disabilities in Statewide Assessments in 2000-01 Compares Favorably With Peer and State Averages

District	Grade 8-FCAT Reading			Grade 8-FCAT Math		
	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01
Escambia	58%	57%	55%	57%	57%	53%
Highlands	89%	84%	84%	88%	83%	86%
Lake	73%	74%	77%	75%	73%	76%
Marion	80%	79%	71%	79%	80%	70%
Osceola	67%	76%	81%	68%	78%	81%
St. Lucie	**71%**	**67%**	**82%**	**68%**	**64%**	**81%**
State	70%	76%	76%	70%	76%	76%

Source: *LEA Profiles*, 2002, Florida Department of Education.

Graduation Rate. One indicator of a program's success in serving students with special needs is the graduation rate of students with disabilities, particularly those who graduate with a standard diploma. As Exhibit 5-22 shows, the district's standard diploma graduation rate for special needs students in 2000-01 was higher than all its peer districts, but lower than the state average. While this is commendable, it should be noted that the percentage has been decreasing over the past three years. The district identifies ESE students who fail the grade 10 FCAT in mathematics and provides these students with additional academic support such as after-school tutoring. The district should continue to establish mechanisms to help improve the percentage of students with disabilities who graduate with a standard diploma and to ensure that this rate does not continue to decrease.

Exhibit 5-22

The District's Standard Diploma Graduation Rate for Students with Disabilities in 2000-01 Is Higher Than All Its Peer Districts, But Lower Than the State Average

District	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01
Marion	39%	33%	24%
Escambia	77%	49%	38%
Highlands	57%	47%	40%
Osceola	56%	36%	40%
Lake	66%	58%	44%
St. Lucie	**79%**	**62%**	**46%**
State	66%	56%	51%

Source: *LEA Profiles*, 2002, Florida Department of Education.

Timeliness of placement, student achievement, and suspension rates need to be improved

While aspects of the district's ESE program are positive, such as student-to-teacher ratio, Medicaid reimbursement, and participation rate in statewide assessments, the district needs to improve three vital areas of ESE service delivery: timeliness of student placement, student achievement, and student suspension rates.

Timeliness of ESE Student Placement. The Department of Education is currently considering establishing a 60 school-day rule for completing psychological evaluations. According to district personnel, 60 school days is equal to approximately 90 calendar days. Based on district records, the

district's median referral time from assignment date to date of evaluation to report date is just over three months, or approximately 92 calendar days. This number is down significantly from the previous year (180 calendar days), but slightly higher than the 60 school-day rule being considered by the Florida Department of Education. To its credit, the district's Department of Student Services recognizes this as an important area for improvement and has included it as one of the objectives in the 2001-02 Student Services Plan: "The time for a school psychologist to complete an Exceptional Student Education evaluation and report will be reduced from the 2000-01 average of six months to three months by 2002-03." The district has largely succeeded in reducing the time lag in evaluating students. If the state does adopt the 60 school-day rule, the district will be close to compliance. District personnel indicated that, due to recent clarification from the Florida Department of Education regarding timelines for evaluations, the district is far closer to compliance than originally believed.

In addition to timeliness of student placement, it is important that school districts strive to keep referrals that are pending from one school year to the next to a minimum. Not only are students who may need such services not receiving them, but school districts can potentially receive additional funds to help offset the cost of providing ESE services for students who do qualify. By hiring psychologists on an OPS basis during the summer, the district was able to reduce its pending referrals rate by 44%.

Results from our teacher survey also confirm this lack of timeliness in evaluating students for ESE services. Nearly half, or 46% of the respondents to our survey indicated that they disagreed with the statement: The district's assessment and placement of ESE students is timely. Twenty-six percent agreed with that statement while 25% selected 'neutral.' The remaining 3% either left that question blank or marked 'not applicable.'

One reason for the lack of timeliness in evaluating students for ESE services may be the high number of students who are referred but not found to be eligible for ESE services. The percentage of students initially referred for ESE services who are eventually evaluated and found to be eligible for ESE services is known as the 'hit rate.' A hit rate over 75% indicates that teachers and other school-based personnel are correctly referring students for ESE services. A hit rate below this number indicates a high rate of inappropriate referrals and may indicate a need for improved education and training of school-based personnel.

On average, 56% of the students in St. Lucie County who are initially referred for ESE are later determined to be eligible for ESE services. This low 'hit rate' presents an undue strain on district staff who must carry out the evaluations. The district needs to improve its training and education of teachers and others at the school level on appropriate mechanisms to use in the classroom before initiating a referral of a student for ESE services and how to recognize when a student may truly be in need of ESE services. The district has recognized this as an area for improvement and has included it in Student Services department goals, which in turn is tied to the district's strategic plan.

Another reason for lack of timely ESE evaluations may be lack of sufficient number of psychologists. The ESE Department recommended that the district hire two more psychologists in 2001-02, but the district did not give this priority in the budgeting process. The estimated cost of hiring a school psychologist with a master's degree is $48,000 comprising $37,000 in salary and $11,100 in benefits. Thus the total estimated annual cost of hiring two psychologists is $96,000, which would amount to $480,000 during the next five years

This cost would be reduced slightly by the increased revenue the district would receive if it completed ESE evaluations in a timely manner. For example, in the prior FTE survey count, the district had 54 pending referrals. If these referrals had been assessed prior to the next FTE count and 56% of the referred students qualified for ESE services, the district's guaranteed ESE allocation for 2001-02 would have been

$12,799,435, an increase of $749. The district also would have received an additional $23,310 in federal funds. [2] The *total* estimated funding to the district for ESE students from state and federal sources would have been approximately $24,059 if all pending referrals had been assessed. Actual revenue increases depend on annual legislative appropriations and federal funding.

Student Performance. ESE student performance in reading is another area in which the district needs to improve. This parallels the need for improvement in reading for all students in the district. While the scores of ESE students taking the FCAT are on par with the district's peers in grade 8 and 10 math and better than most peer districts in grade 5 math, the district's average scaled scores in reading in grades 4 and 10 are the lowest among all the peer districts.

Exhibit 5-23

Average Scaled Scores of District Students with Disabilities Taking the FCAT Are Mixed When Compared With Peer District Scores, 2000-01

District	FCAT Reading			FCAT Math		
	Grade 4	**Grade 8**	**Grade 10**	**Grade 5**	**Grade 8**	**Grade 10**
Escambia						
Students with disabilities	247	249	255	250	258	268
Gifted students	362	358	364	372	358	377
Highlands						
Students with disabilities	232	232	260	235	243	281
Gifted students	375	374	365	387	380	386
Lake						
Students with disabilities	259	238	256	272	252	274
Gifted students	385	383	375	388	377	380
Marion						
Students with disabilities	239	226	249	247	236	268
Gifted students	389	375	361	393	373	387
Osceola						
Students with disabilities	231	232	261	239	244	282
Gifted students	371	381	373	381	375	395
St. Lucie						
Students with disabilities	**229**	**236**	**247**	**263**	**244**	**274**
Gifted students	**374**	**356**	**363**	**384**	**366**	**374**

Source: *LEA Profiles*, 2002, Florida Department of Education.

Suspension Rates of Students with Disabilities. Another indicator of program success is the rate of in-school and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of students with exceptional needs. A district with lower suspension rates for its students often indicates a strong commitment of a district to work with all students despite the sometimes difficult behavior that can lead to student suspension. As Exhibit 5-24 shows, the district's in-school suspension rates for students with disabilities is higher than most of its peer districts and the state. In addition, the district's rate of out-of-school suspensions for students with disabilities is the highest among its peers and the state average. The percentage of students with disabilities that received out-of-school suspensions (21%) is more than twice that of their non-disabled peers (10%). This is a problem in many of the peer districts. Nonetheless, the district needs to work to decrease the out-of-school suspension rates for ESE students and ensure that students with disabilities are not being suspended for behaviors related to their disability.

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[2] The *federal* entitlement per special education student for the St. Lucie County School District was $777 per student. The district would have received an additional $23,310 in federal funds (54 pending referrals times 56% qualifying students times $777 per student).

Exhibit 5-24

The District's Suspension Rates for Students With Disabilities Are Generally Higher Than Its Peers and the State; Expulsion Rates Are Very Low, 2001

District	In-School Suspensions		Out-of-School Suspensions		Expulsions		Alternative Placement	
	Students with Disabilities	**Nondisabled Students**	**Students with Disabilities**	**Nondisabled Students**	**Students with Disabilities**	**Nondisabled Students**	**Students with Disabilities**	**Nondisabled Students**
Escambia	9%	6%	18%	9%	0%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Highlands	33%	18%	18%	6%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Lake	4%	2%	17%	9%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Marion	14%	9%	19%	11%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Osceola	9%	2%	19%	10%	0%	<1%	<1%	<1%
St. Lucie	**17%**	**12%**	**21%**	**10%**	**<1%**	**<1%**	**0%**	**0%**
State	13%	8%	15%	7%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%

Source: *LEA Profiles*, 2002, Florida Department of Education.

The St. Lucie County School district faces a unique challenge due to the high number of therapeutic foster homes in the county. While St. Lucie has 20 such homes, nearby counties have considerably fewer. Martin County has two, Okeechobee has three, and Indian River has no such settings for individuals with special needs. Therefore, most students in need of such services attend school in St. Lucie County. These students require intensive services at both school and home. In addition to the therapeutic foster homes, there are a number of developmental services group homes from other districts that bring additional students with disabilities and high need to St. Lucie County. In some cases, these students have been clients of the Department of Juvenile Justice and are assigned to St. Lucie from districts other than the Treasure Coast area. For example, a student with a history of sexual battery requires close supervision and is, at times, homebound. Those who have experienced extreme neglect and abuse often need one to one behavioral assistance throughout the school day.

Given the mixed success of the district in serving students with special needs, the district needs to improve its evaluation of its ESE program, particularly looking at student outcomes. The district intends to include in its 2002-03 Strategic Plan a mechanism to evaluate student outcomes at the school level. At the elementary schools, this function will be conducted by the student support specialist, while the department chairperson will provide this function at the high school level. The district should establish mechanisms to 1) systematically evaluate and improve processes through which gifted students are identified, particularly minority students, 2) establish mechanisms to help ESE students improve reading skills, and 3) systematically evaluate suspension data and develop mechanisms to reduce the high rate of both in school and out of school suspensions for students with disabilities.

Recommendations

- *We recommend that the district establish mechanisms to systematically evaluate and improve processes through which gifted students are identified, particularly minority students.*

- *We recommend that the district continue to work to improve the timeliness of student evaluations, including reducing pending referrals, and reducing the percentage of inappropriate referrals.*

- *We recommend that the district work to help ESE students improve reading skills.*

- *We recommend that the district systematically evaluate suspension data for students with disabilities, and develop mechanisms to reduce the high rate of both in-school and out-of-school suspensions and ensure that students with disabilities are not being suspended for behaviors related to their disabilities.*

Action Plan 5-4

Establish Mechanisms to Systematically Evaluate and Improve Processes Through Which Gifted Students Are Identified, Particularly Minority Students		
Strategy	Increase the representation of minority students as gifted.	
Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish a team comprising the ESE director, the ESOL specialist, and ESOL representatives at each school.
	Step 2.	Investigate other methods of identifying gifted students, particularly those methods which have been found effective with culturally and linguistically diverse students.
	Step 3.	Develop strategies to ensure that the representation of minority students in the gifted program is appropriate.
	Step 4.	Ensure that all necessary personnel are trained in these strategies.
	Step 5.	Train teachers to recognize possible giftedness in students. This may include, for example, a checklist to assist teachers in recognizing giftedness in their students.
	Step 6.	Monitor the implementation of the strategies, evaluate their effectiveness, and adjust as necessary.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of Student Services; zone directors; director of Exceptional Student Education; ESOL specialist; principals; assistant principals.	
Time Frame	By the start of the 2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter.	

Action Plan 5-5

Establish Mechanisms to Improve the Processes Through Which ESE Students are Identified and Evaluated		
Strategy	Improve the timeliness of evaluations, reduce pending referrals, and reduce the percentage of inappropriate referrals.	
Action Needed	Step 1.	Improve timeliness of evaluations by continuing to track referral and evaluation data. Establish mechanisms to reduce the time for student evaluations. Reducing pending referrals and reducing the percentage of inappropriate referrals will further help improve the timeliness of ESE evaluations.
	Step 2.	Reduce pending referrals by continuing to use OPS psychologists during the summer to reduce the number of pending referrals over the summer months.
	Step 3.	Reduce the percentage of inappropriate referrals by providing teachers with training in how to recognize students who may be in need of ESE services. This should include equipping teachers with appropriate interventions that should be used before referring a student for ESE evaluation.
	Step 4.	After reducing the number of inappropriate evaluations, examine the workload of psychologists and, if necessary, make it a budget priority to find the funds to hire one or two school psychologists.
Who is Responsible	Timeliness: director of Student Support Services; Student Support Team trainers; principals; assistant principals; director of MIS. Pending Referrals: director of Student Services; Psychological Services manager; director of ESE; guidance counselors. Inappropriate Referrals: director of Student Services, director of Exceptional Student Education, principals, guidance counselors, ESE Department chairpersons, ESE Program specialist.	
Time Frame	April 2003–June 2003; ongoing thereafter.	

Action Plan 5-6

Work to Help ESE Students Improve Reading Skills		
Strategy	Evaluate current reading programs currently in use.	
Action Needed	Step 1.	Select a sample of students and compare reading post test scores with FCAT scores.
	Step 2.	Using trend data (at least three years of data), determine which programs are the most successful in helping students improve their reading skills.
	Step 3.	Focus resources only on those programs that significantly improve ESE students' reading skills.
	Step 4.	Maintain data for all reading programs used, evaluate regularly, and make changes as needed.
	Step 5.	If no reading program is found to be successful, contact other districts or DOE to locate effective programs.
Who is Responsible	Director of Exceptional Student Education, program specialist for Curriculum, Department chairpersons, director of Assessment and Evaluation, ESE Program specialist.	
Time Frame	April 2003-July 2003; ongoing, thereafter.	

Action Plan 5-7

Develop Mechanisms to Reduce the High Rate of Both in School and Out of School Suspensions and Ensure That Students with Disabilities are Not Being Suspended For Behaviors Related to Their Disability		
Strategy	Evaluate suspension data for students with disabilities.	
Action Needed	Step 1.	Disaggregate suspension data by school, teacher, offense, and other pertinent criteria.
	Step 2.	Look for trends in the data to determine where (for example, certain schools or certain teachers) the highest percentages of suspensions occur and the reasons for these high rates.
	Step 3.	Focus resources on those sources. For example, if some schools have higher rates of suspensions than others, target those schools. This should include additional training in appropriate interventions and mechanisms to deal with difficult student behavior.
	Step 4.	Evaluate at least semi-annually and revise as needed.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of Student Services; zone directors; director of Alternative Student Placement; director of Exceptional Student Education, director of Student Services, principals, assistant principals, deans, behavior specialists, program specialists for compliance, ESE Department chairpersons; director of MIS.	
Time Frame	April 2003-June 2003; ongoing, thereafter.	

4 The district provides effective instruction as part of its English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program.

The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program serves students whose first language is not English or who come from homes in which a language other than English has had a significant impact on their level of English Language proficiency. Students served in the ESOL program are referred to as Language Enriched Pupils (formerly known as Limited English Proficient). St. Lucie County School District has a higher percentage of total Language Enriched Pupils (LEP) students than most of its peers, but a lower percentage than the state average. As Exhibit 5-25 shows, 8% of the students in St. Lucie

County schools were receiving ESOL services during the 2000-01 school year. The state average is 11%. ESOL students in St. Lucie County come from 41 different countries and speak 36 languages.

Exhibit 5-25

St. Lucie County Has a Higher Percentage of Students That Are Identified Language Enriched Pupils Than Most of Its Peers, but a Lower Percentage Than the State Average, 2000-01

School District	Student Enrollment	Number of Students with Limited English Proficiency	Percent of Students with Limited English Proficiency
Escambia	47,729	439	1%
Lake	32,301	1,097	3%
Marion	41,539	1,257	3%
Highlands	12,860	928	7%
St. Lucie	**32,804**	**2,492**	**8%**
State	2,636,118	290,024	11%
Osceola	39,542	8,543	22%

Source: Florida Department of Education, Office of Multicultural Student Language Education, 2000-01.

The district's policies and procedures are consistent with federal and state laws

The district's procedures for identifying students eligible for ESOL programs are consistent with federal and state laws and the Multicultural Education Training and Advocacy (META) agreement. St. Lucie's Language Enriched Pupil (LEP) Plan, which has been approved by the Department of Education, addresses services, procedures, and policies regarding LEP students. Topics covered in this document include identification of LEP students, appropriate programming, procedures for exiting students, access to home language services, disciplinary action, and parental involvement.

The district offers professional development for teachers of ESOL students

The district offers teachers ESOL training that leads to ESOL endorsement (similar to certification) to teach ESOL students, as required by the state. Depending on grade level and subject area taught, teachers must complete 18, 60, or 300 hours of ESOL training. While strategies presented in ESOL training are designed specifically for ESOL students, teachers have found them to be useful for all students.

The ESOL curriculum is delivered in English using ESOL strategies such as demonstration/role play, graphic organizers, visuals, manipulatives, peer tutoring, and small group instruction. Subject area teachers instruct LEP students using the corresponding district curriculum that follows the Sunshine State Standards. Instructional personnel provide students appropriate and individualized instruction through the use of ESOL teaching strategies, appropriate instructional materials, curriculum modifications, and testing modifications.

The district assesses and places students in the ESOL program quickly

Timely assessment and placement of LEP students is important so that students who require ESOL services are not without needed support. All students and their families are given a Home Language Survey when they register for school. Those students whose parents have indicated speaking a language other than English in the home are screened and assessed. As Exhibit 5-26 demonstrates, the average number of days from the time a student is identified to the time the student is classified is lower in St. Lucie County than in all its peers and the state.

Exhibit 5-26

The Average Number of Days Used to Classify LEP Students in St. Lucie Is Lower Than All Its Peers and the State

School District	Number Classified	Average Number of Days Used To Classify Students
St. Lucie	**234**	**7**
Highlands	101	8
State	30,283	8
Lake	93	12
Osceola	1,478	21
Escambia	16	23
Marion	108	24

Source: Florida Department of Education, Office of Multicultural Student Language Education, 2000-01.

The district serves ESOL students in a variety of ways

The St. Lucie County School District uses a variety of approaches to help ESOL students succeed. In the elementary grades (K-5), a teacher with ESOL endorsement (see above) is provided for each grade level within each school. At the secondary level, ESOL students may be served in one of three ways: inclusion, sheltered, or self-contained. In the inclusion model, a teacher trained in ESOL strategies provides basic ESOL instruction. Basic subject area instruction is provided in the regular classroom setting in which students are mainstreamed with other English proficient students. The sheltered model is a means to provide regular curricular offerings that are more comprehensible to LEP students. Instruction is given in English, but students are in smaller groups which allows teachers to spend more time on difficult concepts. Basic ESOL instruction and basic subject area instruction are provided in classes containing only LEP students. The self-contained approach is used for students who are pre-literate and have little educational experience in their native language. These students are generally in self-contained classes for the core subject areas and mainstreamed with their non-LEP peers in elective courses.

Students in St. Lucie County spend more time in the ESOL program than their peers

The length of time a student spends in an ESOL program is one indicator of program effectiveness. Exhibit 5-27 compares the length of time ESOL students spend in the program in St. Lucie with its peer counties in Florida. As can be seen in the table, St. Lucie students are spending a longer period in the ESOL program than students in all the peer districts and the state average based on 2000-01 figures. Moreover, the time St. Lucie students spend in the program has been increasing over the past three years. One reason given by the district for the relatively long period of time students spend in the ESOL program is that St. Lucie County has a relatively high percentage of migrant students, many of whom are in the ESOL program. Children of migrant families move in and out of the district often, their mobility patterns mirroring the agricultural picking cycle. Thus, while students may officially be counted as part of the ESOL program, there are times during the school year when, in fact, they are not present in the classroom. This could artificially increase the average length of time an ESOL student spends in the program.

Exhibit 5-27

St. Lucie County's LEP Students Are Served in ESOL Programs for a Longer Length of Time Than All of Its Peers and the State, 2000

| School District | Overall Average by Year | | |
	1998	1999	2000
Osceola	2.33	2.17	2.12
Escambia	2.37	2.28	2.15
Highlands	2.15	2.10	2.15
Lake	2.74	3.11	3.06
State	2.78	2.97	3.09
Marion	2.83	3.75	3.65
St. Lucie	**3.64**	**3.77**	**4.33**

Source: Florida Department of Education, Office of Multicultural Student Language Education, 2000-01.

ESOL student performance is mixed when compared with peer districts

Student performance on various academic assessments and non academic measures provide an indication of how well the district is accomplishing its goal of educating ESOL students. Academic assessments include the Florida Writing Assessment and the FCAT.

Academic Assessments. In a recent administration of the Florida Writing Assessment, ESOL students in St. Lucie County scored better than their counterparts in most of its peer districts on the Narrative/Persuasive section of both grade 4 and grade 10 tests (see Exhibit 5-28). For the Expository section of the Grade 10 test, St. Lucie students scored as well or better than two of its peers but lower than the state average. On the Grade 4 and Grade 8 tests, St. Lucie students in the ESOL program generally scored higher than their peers and the state average.

Exhibit 5-28

Performance of St. Lucie County's LEP Students on State Writing Assessments Is Generally Higher than Its Peers and the State, 2000-01

| School District | Average Score | | | | | |
| | Expository | | | Narrative/Persuasive | | |
	4	8	10	4	8	10
Escambia	3.4	3.1	4.0	3.0	3.4	4.0
Highlands	2.6	2.8	1.9	2.1	2.3	2.5
Lake	3.4	2.8	2.6	2.8	2.8	2.9
Marion	3.4	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.1	2.5
Osceola	2.8	3.0	3.2	2.5	2.4	2.5
St. Lucie	**3.5**	**3.7**	**2.7**	**3.3**	**2.6**	**3.0**
State	3.0	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.6	2.6

Source: Florida Department of Education, Office of Multicultural Student Language Education, 2000-01.

The percentage of currently enrolled LEP students in St. Lucie County scoring poorly (in levels 1 and 2) generally compares favorably with the state average for current LEP students. However, when comparing the performance of students who have received LEP services and completed the program with the state average for this group, the results are mixed. As Exhibit 5-29 shows, a higher percentage of former LEP students in St. Lucie County scored well (in level 3 or above) than the state average in grade 5 math. However, in the remaining grade and subject areas – grade 4 reading, grade 8 reading and math, and

grade 10 reading and math—the percentage of former LEP students in the district who scored poorly (in levels 1 and 2) is higher than the state average.

Exhibit 5-29

St. Lucie County Former LEP Student Performance Is Mixed When Compared With the State Average on FCAT Tests, 2000-01

	Percentage of Students Scoring in Levels 1 and 2			
FCAT Test	**District Former LEP Students**	**State Former LEP Students**	**District Non-LEP Students**	**State Non-LEP Students**
Grade 4 Reading	54%	44%	40%	38%
Grade 5 Math	48%	51%	45%	44%
Grade 8 Reading	65%	64%	51%	47%
Grade 8 Math	55%	50%	40%	36%
Grade 10 Reading	80%	75%	59%	58%
Grade 10 Math	58%	43%	34%	31%

Source: Florida Department of Education, Office of Multicultural Student Language Education, 2000-01.

Nonacademic Data. Additional indicators of a program's success in serving LEP students include nonacademic data such as the rate of graduation, dropout rate, and retention rate. As Exhibit 5-30 shows, when compared with their non-LEP peers, fewer St. Lucie students who are enrolled in classes specifically designed for LEP students graduate when compared with their non-LEP peers in the district, though this number is slightly higher than the state average for LEP students. Fewer district LEP students drop out of school than their non-LEP counterparts, at both the district and state levels. However, considerably more LEP students in St. Lucie County are retained, or not promoted to the next grade (13%), than non-LEP students in the district (7%) and in the state (6%). This may, in part, be related to the fact that the St. Lucie County School District has the highest migrant student population (13%) of all its peer districts and is considerably higher than the state average (2%). A full 39% of migrant students are also considered LEP students. Migrant students move frequently, causing disruption in the continuity of instruction. Students who miss several weeks or months of school are less likely to meet the standards required to be promoted to the next grade.

Exhibit 5-30

St. Lucie County LEP Students Performance Is Mixed When Compared With Non-LEP Peers and the State Averages, 2001

Indicator	District Students Enrolled in LEP Classes	State Students Enrolled in LEP Classes	District Non-LEP Students	State Non-LEP Students
Graduation Rate	38%	36%	71%	67%
Drop Out Rate	1%	5%	2%	3%
Retention Rate	13%	9%	7%	6%

Source: Florida Department of Education, Office of Multicultural Student Language Education, 2000-01.

Overall, the district does a good job serving the needs of ESOL students. The district's policies and procedures are consistent with federal and state laws. The district also offers training for teachers leading to ESOL endorsement and identifies and places students in the ESOL program quickly. Student performance on the FCAT writing assessment is generally higher than in peer districts and the percentage of ESOL students scoring in the lower levels on FCAT reading and math is comparable to its peers and

the state average. In addition, fewer LEP students drop out of school in St. Lucie County than their non-LEP counterparts. However, a lower percentage of LEP students graduate than their non-LEP peers and the district could improve its percentage of students that are retained in grade.

Recommendations

- *We recommend that the district establish mechanisms to improve academic support for ESOL students to help them succeed, particularly working to reduce the retention rate of ESOL students.*

Action Plan 5-8

Establish Mechanisms to Improve Academic Support for ESOL Students to Help Them Succeed		
Strategy	Reduce the high retention rate and improve the graduation rate of ESOL students.	
Action Needed	Step 1.	Provide training to all ESOL teachers in effective instructional strategies to ensure comprehensive instruction.
	Step 2.	Increase Basic ESOL instruction to non-English speaking (NES) and limited English-speaking students (LES).
	Step 3.	Increase supportive instruction to ESOL students [ESOL aides will target NES/LES & FES (less than two years)].
	Step 4.	Academic Improvement Plan will be developed for students who show low performance. By the end of first quarter, develop a remediation plan (AIP). Update and adjust as needed.
	Step 5.	Increase parent participation by providing more opportunities for parents to meet and share. Increase number of Parent Leadership Council meetings from two to four times a year.
	Step 6.	When determining retention, consider the 'good clause consideration' that ESOL placement for less then two years precludes retention.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of School Improvement; director of Human Resource Development; ESOL specialist; principals; assistant principals; ESOL teachers; ESOL aides; guidance counselors	
Time Frame	By the start of the 2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter.	

5   The district provides effective secondary vocational programs.

The district's Vocational and Applied Technology Education Office provides a variety of education and career options for secondary students

St. Lucie County offers its secondary students a plethora of quality vocational programs. A major component of the program is the district's Tech Prep Academies. Twenty-eight academies provide a planned sequence of rigorous academic and technical courses within the district's high schools. Exhibit 5-31 demonstrates some of the many programs available to high school students in St. Lucie County.

Exhibit 5-31

St. Lucie County School District Technology Preparation Programs

Academy	Program Name
Agribusiness and Natural Resources	Agritechnology
	Veterinary Assisting
Business and Office Systems	Accounting Operations
	Administrative Assistant
	Business Supervision and Management
	Digital Publishing
	Network Support Services
	Personal Computer Support Services
	Web Design Services
Early Childhood Education	Early Childhood Education
Executive Studies	Finance
	Marketing
	Travel and Tourism
Industrial Technology	Architectural Drafting
	Automotive Service Technology
	Carpentry
	Commercial Foods and Culinary Arts
	Journalism
	Television Production
Medical Science	Allied Health Assisting
	EKG
	Home Health Aide
	Nursing Assistant
Public Service	Criminal Justice Operations
	Paraprofessional Teacher Aide
Technology Education	Communications Technology
	Drafting and Illustrative Design Technology
	Engineering Technology

Source: St; Lucie County School District.

In addition to school-based activities, the district offers vocational and technology students several career-based activities described below to better prepare them for the workforce.

- **Job Shadowing**. Job shadowing involves unpaid career awareness or exploratory activities in which a student is assigned to follow an employee on the work site to learn about a particular occupation or industry.

- **Employer Mentoring**. In employer mentoring, students are paired with an employee/mentor who possesses the skills, knowledge, and workplace behavior the student seeks to acquire. Students may be paid or unpaid as part of the employer mentoring experience.

- **Clinical/Practicums**. Clinical /or practicum experiences provide students with real-life job activities in a work setting under the supervision of a practicing employee or professional.

- **School-Based Enterprises**. School-based enterprises are career experiences carried out in a school or employer-sponsored enterprise in which students actually produce goods or services. Students can experience the elements of an actual job and earn wages without leaving the high school campus.

- **Cooperative Training.** In cooperative training, students are placed in a job site program related to their classroom training. The cooperative training coordinator works with the students, parents, and

employers to place each student in a job, develop a training plan, establish training agreements, monitor progress through visitations and conduct assessments and evaluations.

- **Internships.** Students are given the opportunity to apply the competencies learned within the school setting to the real world. Students may be paid for the hours worked, evaluated for the work performed by their on-the-job supervisor, and obtain high school elective credit for their work experience.

The district updates courses and equipment so that graduates have the skills and relevant experience needed by employers

The district updates both courses and equipment so that graduates have the skills and relevant experience employers need. This is accomplished through federal Carl Perkins funds, as well as other grants and opportunities for collaboration and partnerships. Information regarding changes is updated and disseminated regularly.

Courses. The state Department of Education annually updates the vocational program courses standards and provides a copy to each district. District administrators have, in turn, distributed a copy of this update to all vocational teachers and schools. In addition, the district has distributed to all teachers computer disks containing the updated frameworks for all vocational program areas. Teachers, in turn, work from these frameworks to prepare their lesson plans.

Equipment. The district periodically updates its equipment to ensure that students receive the skills and relevant experiences employers need. For example, during the past two years, the district has purchased software upgrades and curriculum materials for its automotive program; textbooks, student workbooks, and kitchen equipment for the culinary arts program; studio cameras and editing equipment for the television production program; hospital beds for allied health programs; and various software programs for its web design and business education programs.

The district adds, drops, or redirects the vocational/ technical programs it offers as job trends and industry demands change

The district aligns its vocational/technical programs with high skill, high wage jobs identified on the state's Targeted Occupations List and with those that are in demand based upon industry needs and economic development. The district also relies on local input through the workforce development boards. For example, with donations from Dell Computer Corporation and Microsoft, the district recently established a Dell A+ Certification Academy at one of its high schools and is working to establish an additional academy at a second high school. These academies provide students with the necessary training to gain A+ certification and Dell Computer Certification, both important certification requirements of major corporations. In 2000-01 the district received $1,050,000 for the creation of three Oracle Internet Computer Academies. As a result, 60 students per year will complete the program and gain Java and SQL database programming skills as well as marketable industry certification.

The district has recently begun developing a school-based enterprise involving special needs students. With a grant of $91,131 from Vocational Rehabilitation, this program allows students to become directly involved in producing and marketing silk-screened and custom-embroidered products and printed materials. Students are involved in the planning, production, marketing, and accounting aspects of the enterprise.

The district has an effective process for including business and industry, postsecondary education institutions, and labor organizations in planning vocational tech prep programs

St. Lucie County School District includes input from business and industry, postsecondary education institutions, and labor organizations in planning vocational tech prep programs. This is evidenced by its extensive list of districtwide advisory committees, leadership team meetings with other directors in the Quad County Consortium, regular schedule of articulation meetings, and continuous participation in business organizations throughout the region.

The district maintains technical advisory committees in 16 areas, including agriscience, automotive, construction, film and TV production, information technology/computer science, pre-engineering, and veterinarian assistant. Each committee is involved in curriculum review, support for alignment with industry standards and certifications, providing resources and technical updates, staff development for teachers, and work-based learning experiences for students.

The district also maintains an active relationship with such organizations as the Youth Council, the Business Alliance, the Florida Employers Advisory Council, the St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce's Education and Tourism Committees, and the Treasure Coast Chef's Association.

The district effectively coordinates courses and business partnership outreach between its secondary vocational education programs

The district effectively coordinates courses and business partnerships outreach between its secondary vocational programs. The St. Lucie County School District is an active member in the Quad County Tech Prep Consortium. Comprising Indian River Community College and Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, and St. Lucie counties, the Quad County Tech Prep Consortium was instituted to establish community partnerships for goal oriented education to produce career ready students. Members of the consortium work to assure that students have the opportunity to participate in tech prep programs of study and that each tech prep student has an individual learning plan and is enrolled in an articulated, sequential program of study. The consortium also strives to increase both the percentage of high school graduates entering postsecondary training and the percentage of high school graduates who enter the community college with advanced standing credit through articulation agreements for competencies in tech prep programs.

As part of the Quad County Tech Prep Consortium, the St. Lucie County School District has more than 24 articulation agreements with Indian River Community College. Additional articulation agreements exist with other institutions such as New England Institute of Technology. Over 1,200 formally signed business partnerships enhance the district's vocational programs and provide support and assistance to students pursuing technical careers.

The district regularly assesses the effectiveness of its secondary vocational programs using an analysis of performance measures to make improvements

The district regularly assesses the effectiveness of its secondary vocational programs using a variety of performance measures. These include

- students attaining academic, vocational, and technical skill proficiencies;
- students attaining a high school diploma or GED or a vocational certificate in conjunction with a diploma or GED; and
- student placement in, retention in, and completion of postsecondary education or advanced training, placement in military service, or placement or retention in employment.

District administrators track students who complete vocational programs by high school and by academy. The district also maintains statistics on the Gold Seal Vocational Scholarship Award program. The Florida Legislature created the Gold Seal Vocational Scholarship Award program in 1989 to provide postsecondary education opportunities and scholarships for outstanding vocational students. In 1997, the Legislature incorporated the Gold Seal Vocational Scholarship Award program into the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program. A Florida Gold Seal Vocational Scholar is eligible for an award equal to the amount required to pay 75% of matriculation and fees if the student is enrolled in a public postsecondary vocational institution.

The district uses the data maintained by the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) system as one way to assess the effectiveness of its programs. The FETPIP system is a state data collection system that obtains follow-up data on former students. This information includes employment, continuing post-secondary education, and military service.

As Exhibit 5-32 shows, the placement rate for secondary vocational students in the St. Lucie County School District is on par with its peers and the state average. Even so, the district's director of Career and Technical Education has developed a plan to further improve the placement rate of its graduates. This plan includes improving data recording, implementing the Work Readiness Certification curriculum through the Workforce Board, and increasing the use of community-based instruction. The district should continue to carefully monitor each of these components and make changes as necessary.

Exhibit 5-32

St. Lucie's Placement Rate Is on Par With Its Peers
and the State For Secondary Vocational Students, 2000-01

School District	Student Placement Rate
Osceola	79%
Escambia	81%
Marion	81%
St. Lucie	**81%**
State	81%
Lake	83%
Highlands	84%

Source: Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program, 2000-01.

The St. Lucie County School district is one of 30 school districts in the state that do not directly provide postsecondary programs. Postsecondary vocational and technical programs are offered through Indian River Community College. Districts that do provide postsecondary opportunities receive additional funding through the workforce development education program. Because the St. Lucie County School District does not participate in this program, it is ineligible to receive such funding. This places the district at a disadvantage since it does not receive funding that could also be used to enhance vocational and technical programs for secondary students.

6 While the district's curricular framework is linked to Florida's accountability standards, the district does not have curriculum guides which include teaching strategies linked to the Sunshine State Standards.

St. Lucie County School District should include specific teaching strategies in its curriculum guides

The district's curriculum aligns with the Sunshine State Standards and district grade level expectations. Grade level expectations are listed by subject area within each grade. For example, one Florida Sunshine State Standard for grade 5 science is "The student uses scientific tools to measure speed, distance, and direction of an object." This objective is then correlated to the instructional management software program. For example, the objective above is linked to objective number 97 in the software program system. The district updates its curriculum guides annually. The district has a full-time person responsible for maintaining the system and for entering revisions and updates as needed.

While the curriculum guides contain a description of the core curriculum Sunshine State Standards listed by subject area with benchmarks, it does not include specific teaching strategies, nor does it provide examples of cognitive questions. Learning strategies for ESOL and ESE students also are missing from the guide, as are examples of vocabulary the students need to be familiar with to meet the benchmark. The district should ensure that all teachers have access to specific teaching strategies for each objective. This can be done in a variety of ways. For example, the district could provide links on their website to other sites that have specific teaching strategies that are aligned to the Sunshine State Standards. Alternatively, the district could collect effective teaching strategies from experienced teachers and create a database linked to the Sunshine State Standards, accessible via the district website. Both of these options can be accomplished with existing resources. Yet another option for the district is to select lead teachers in each grade level and curriculum area. These experienced teachers would meet and systematically go through each objective and brainstorm specific strategies they know to have been successful. Vocabulary lists, if appropriate, would also be drawn up at this time. These lead teachers would then develop guides containing effective teaching strategies in their discipline to be placed on the district's website or in a hardcopy format. The district may choose to begin by focusing on those areas of student performance which administrators have identified as needing improvement. This option would require the district to pay teachers a modest stipend for additional work. If four teachers met for 20 hours per week for two weeks during the summer, the cost would be four teachers times $15.00 per hour times 40 hours per teacher or $2,400. This is equivalent to $600 per teacher for each course. These guides are not intended to be prescriptive but are intended to provide assistance to teachers who choose to use them. By providing this resource, the curriculum department will enhance its support of classroom teaching while effectively using the department's limited resources.

Recommendations ———————————————————

- *We recommend that the district provide teachers with access to learning strategies tied to the Sunshine State Standards and benchmarks.*

Action Plan 5-9

Establish an Accessible Method for Teachers to Obtain Teaching Strategies Linked to the Sunshine State Standards and Benchmarks; These Strategies Are Intended as Guides and are Not Intended To Be Prescriptive	
Strategy	Provide access to specific teaching strategies for each grade level in the core subject areas.
Action Needed	Step 1. Establish a committee to determine which option the district will use to provide teachers access to teaching strategies linked to the Sunshine State Standards and benchmarks.
	Step 2. Determine which subject areas and grade levels the district will focus on first. For example, the district may choose to focus its efforts initially on grade 10 English and Algebra I.
	Step 3. Develop a time frame for having teaching strategies available for all identified subject areas.
	Step 4. Ensure that all teachers have easy access to these teaching strategies. This resource is not intended to be prescriptive, but to be available to help teachers teach specific standards using strategies that teachers have already found to be useful.
	Step 5. Revise or add teaching strategies when curriculum changes or when teachers identify new strategies. The district may want to revise these guides based on the textbook adoption cycle.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of School Improvement and Title I; resource specialists; department chairpersons; Selected lead teachers in each grade level and core subject area.
Time Frame	Summer 2003; ongoing thereafter.

7 The district has adopted a plan for the progression of students from kindergarten through grade 12 that maximizes student mastery of the Sunshine State Standards.

The district's student progression plan meets state requirements and includes policies related to evaluating student performance, but could be enhanced by clearly defining retention criteria

The district has recently revised its current plan which is expected to be approved by the board later this school year. The revised plan has the required parts, but could be strengthened by more clearly defining specific retention criteria. The revised plan should also make more explicit in the secondary section the provision regarding the passing of tenth grade FCAT as a requirement for high school graduation.

Florida requires school boards to establish a student progression plan that is based on an evaluation of how well a student masters the performance standards approved by the state board. In addition, the district's plan must be based on local goals and objectives that are compatible with the state's plan for education. Before recommending that a pupil progress from one grade to another, the teacher must consider pertinent factors as prescribed by the district school board (s. 1008.25, *Florida Statutes*).

The district's student progression plan is organized into three sections, elementary (Grades K-5), secondary (Grades 6-12), and appendices. The elementary and secondary sections describe the provisions required for a student to progress through the school system. The district's plan complies with state regulations including those pertaining to the list below.

- Procedures and requirements for admission and placement
- Age requirements
- Documentation required for admission
- Placement of students
- Progress through the elementary grades
- Progress through the middle school
- Progress through high school
- Special graduation programs
- Special provisions for credit

While the current student progression plan has the required components, it could be strengthened. The new plan should articulate specific factors that teachers are to consider when making decisions about retention or promotion. The plan should also include the interventions required if a student is behind and the assessments available to assist in determining if a student should be retained. While principals indicated in focus groups that teachers in their school are implementing this process, it should nonetheless be made explicit in the plan.

The district has a separate document, the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Plan (CIA) which outlines the various assessments used for each grade as well as the date each assessment is given, the reason for the assessment, and the responsibilities of both the district and the school with regard to each assessment. However, this plan does not include actual steps and interventions for each of the core subject areas. To avoid unnecessary duplication, the district should consider combining the strengths of the CIA Plan into the revised student progression plan. The process for making retention and promotion decisions should be explained in an easy-to-use format, such as a matrix detailing every step and option. A matrix should be included for every grade level in the subject areas of reading, math, language arts, and science. Exhibit 5-33 is one example of such a matrix for end-of-year decision making in reading for the 4th grade student.

Exhibit 5-33

An Example of Part of a Student Progression Plan That Is Clear and Concise: Fourth Grade Remediation and Progression Plan in Reading, 2001-02

Academic Area Addressed	Step 1 4th Grade Screening Criteria for All Students	Step 2 Further Diagnostic Assessment for Identified Students	Step 3 Development of Remediation Plan (AIP)	Step 4 End-of-1st Semester Review of Remediation Results	Step 5 End-of-Year Assessment for Proficiency Level	Step 6 Criteria for Retention	Step 7 "Good Cause" Considerations Regarding Retention	Step 8 Guidance Committee Decision Regarding Retention
Reading (Basis for Retention)	☬ Continue AIPs on students who were not dismissed at the end of 3rd grade. ☬ A 3rd grade FCAT *norm-referenced test (NRT)/ Stanford 9* national percentile of 25 or less, move to step 2. ☬ A 3rd grade FCAT SSS at Level 1, move to step 2.	☬ Administer *Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test* (Level 4). Percentile rank of 25 or less, move to step 3. OR ☬ Administer *Silvaroli Reading Inventory.* Less than independent on either word recognition (wr) or comprehension (comp) for grade	☬ In consultation with parent, write and implement Academic Improvement Plan (AIP) for intensive remediation. ☬ For ESE students, coordinate with the ESE teacher regarding student	☬ Analyze student progress and adjust AIP as needed.	☬ Administer same type assessment test as used initially. Passing score is as follows: •*Gates-MacGinitie (Level 4) = Percentile rank of 36 or above.* •*Silvaroli* =independent level on word recognition and comprehension on grade 4*	☬ If at least 2 of the following 4 criteria for retention are met, move to steps 7 and 8. •Passing score for selected test is not achieved. *(Administer as needed.)* •Failing grade in reading for the year.	☬ When determining appropriateness of retention the guidance committee considers these: •ESE placement (IEP may preclude retention). •ESOL/LEP (placement for less than 2 years	☬ Guidance committee evaluates each student based on criteria for retention and "Good Cause" considerations and determines best placement from the following: •Remediate before the beginning of the next

Academic Area Addressed	Step 1 4th Grade Screening Criteria for All Students	Step 2 Further Diagnostic Assessment for Identified Students	Step 3 Development of Remediation Plan (AIP)	Step 4 End-of-1st Semester Review of Remediation Results	Step 5 End-of-Year Assessment for Proficiency Level	Step 6 Criteria for Retention	Step 7 "Good Cause" Considerations Regarding Retention	Step 8 Guidance Committee Decision Regarding Retention
	No, norm-referenced test, move to step 2. A grade of F at the end any grading period, move to step 2 to determine needs. All students, move to step 6 in mid-May.	3*, move to step 3. OR Administer *Diagnostic Assessment of Reading (DAR).* Less than mastery on level 3*, move to step 3.	progress toward Sunshine State Standards.		selection. •*Diagnostic Assessment of Reading (DAR)* = Mastery at level 4. Move to step 6.	•Level 1 on *FCAT* SSS for reading. •Bottom quartile on norm-referenced test portion of *FCAT* reading.	precludes retention). •Previous retentions - Two retentions preclude further retentions.	school year and promote. •Retain and remediate in a different program that takes into account the student's learning style.

* Please use the new Ninth Edition of *Silvaroli's* Form A Pretest and Post-test.

Note: If, at any time, adequate progress as defined in step 5 is achieved, the AIP may be discontinued and normal monitoring of progress resumed.

Note: A second year of retention requires the school and district to "consider an appropriate alternative placement" which takes into account the student's learning style.

Source: Developed by OPPAGA based on Okaloosa District's Fourth Grade Remediation and Progression Plan, 2001-02.

Recommendations ———————————

- *We recommend that the district revise its student progression plan to include actual steps and interventions in making retention and promotion decisions for each grade level in the subject areas of math, reading, language arts, and science. To avoid unnecessary duplication, the district should consider incorporating the strengths of the CIA Plan into the student progression plan.*

Action Plan 5-10

Revise Student Progression Plan to Include a Step-By-Step Process to Aid Decision Making	
Strategy	Revise the student progression plan to include a clear, easy-to-follow, step-by-step guide to decision making for math, reading, language arts, and science for each grade level. The strengths of the CIA might be incorporated into the revised plan to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort.
Action Needed	Step 1. Create a team of the appropriate personnel. Step 2. Make revisions to the student progression plan to include a clear, step-by-step process which includes steps and interventions for each grade level. Step 3. Submit the revised plan for school board approval. Step 4. These changes can be phased in over a two-year period.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of School Improvement and Title I; assistant principals; director of Assessment; director of Vocational and Technical Education; director of Student Services; director of Exceptional Student Education; zone executive directors; principals; guidance counselors.
Time Frame	June 2003-July 2003; June 2004-July 2004, if needed.

8 Most school improvement plans effectively translate identified needs into activities with measurable objectives. However, the district should work with schools to ensure that school advisory council membership represents the community the school serves.

School improvement plans are generally good, but could be improved

The purpose of the school improvement plan is to direct school activities to improve student academic and non-academic outcomes. The school improvement plan should have goals, measurable objectives, and strategies to meet these objectives.

We reviewed all of the school improvement plans and asked the questions below.

- Is there evidence that the objectives contained in the school improvement plan are based on analyses of student outcomes?
- Does the school improvement plan contain measurable objectives that describe the desired improvement?
- Are the goals and objectives in the plan supported by clear implementation strategies (action steps)?

Most of the plans followed the district's standardized format. This standardization helps assure that School Advisory Councils address each of the eight state education goals and all of the elements required by law. Most of the plans contained clear objectives based on students' needs. In general, these objectives were measurable and included clear and specific implementation strategies.

However, some plans fail to include a clear description of where the school was presently at on a given indicator. For example, for the objective "Twenty percent of students will have vocational training or employment...by May 2002" there was no indication what percentage of students currently participate in such activities. Without such information, it is impossible to determine if improvements will have been made. Another area of weakness for some plans was the failure to designate the person(s) responsible for each strategy specified in the action plan and clear timelines for completion of the activity.

In the past, the district has provided training for SACs through an annual training conference. However, for the 2001-02 school year, the conference was eliminated due to budget constraints. Instead, the Department of School Improvement and Instructional Technology provided training and support to school advisory councils who specifically ask for it. During 2001-02, the district provided this on-demand training to nine schools. The district has reinstituted districtwide SAC training for the 2002-03 school year in addition to providing additional support as requested by individual SACs.

While 65% of teachers who responded to our survey agreed that the school improvement plan drives the school improvement process at their school, only 41% agreed with the statement "The district provides effective support to develop the school improvement plan." It is likely that instituting more regular training for all SAC members will help schools overcome most of the minor deficiencies in the school improvement plans. In the coming school year, the district plans to hold a districtwide training for SAC members. In addition, district administrators plan to provide individualized training to School Advisory Councils at their request. This should help individual SACs improve their school improvement planning process.

To assess the quality of each School Improvement Plan, the district uses a checklist of 15 components which include vision and mission statements, definition of adequate progress, school goals, and measurable objectives. In addition to the mandatory training, the district should make this checklist part of the training and require that each SAC include the completed checklist when it submits the SIP to the district for review. In this way, SAC members will be able to ensure that they are including all the necessary components in their plan before submitting it for district review.

School advisory councils would benefit from recruiting more diverse members

School advisory councils assist schools in preparing and evaluating school improvement plans. State law requires all councils to include the principal, teachers, educational support employees, parents, business and community members, and in the case of high schools, students. The variety of groups specified for membership helps provide an appropriately balanced and broad-based approach to school improvement. State law also requires school advisory councils to reflect the ethnic, racial, and economic community served by the school.

The school advisory councils in St. Lucie County were lacking true representation of all ethnic groups served by the school, particularly among the black and Hispanic populations. In 50% of the SAC rosters reviewed, the SAC membership did not reflect the diversity of the community that the school served. In addition, a majority of the SAC rosters included just three categories: black, white, and other. Each roster should include the number and percentage of SAC members, broken down by ethnicity. At the very least, these should include black, white, and Hispanic.

Like many school districts in Florida, the St. Lucie County School District faces challenges to minority representation on school advisory councils. Because of controlled choice, many students attend schools fairly distant from their homes. This makes participation on councils difficult, particularly when attending a meeting may entail a 45-minute drive (one way). Nonetheless, the district needs to work to increase minority participation on school advisory councils.

The district needs to ensure that schools are more careful to 1) recruit members that are truly representative of the ethnic background of the student body served by the school, and 2) report the number and percentage of each specific group represented. If a school's SAC is not representative of the ethnicity of the community served by that school, the district should establish a mechanism to appoint individuals to ensure that SACs in the district truly represent all ethnic groups. In addition, four council rosters did not include educational support staff on their rosters. The district should work to ensure that all schools include at least one educational support employee on their school advisory council.

Recommendations

- *We recommend that the district further strengthen the evaluation and accountability component of the School Improvement Plans, placing particular emphasis on current status of the school on the particular objective in question as well as attention to persons responsible for each action.*

- *We recommend that the district increase efforts to recruit a more diverse membership for School Advisory Councils and expand the reporting categories in the SIP to include black, white, and Hispanic.*

Action Plan 5-11

Further Strengthen the Evaluation and Accountability Component of the School Improvement Plans	
Strategy	Expand training and support of school improvement teams.
Action Needed	Step 1. Require training for every School Advisory Council/School Improvement Team responsible for the SIP.
	Step 2. Continue to include checklist as part of the training. Have checklist included as part of the actual SIP, a copy of which should be completed and signed by the SAC chair and the principal.
	Step 3. District staff meet at least once during the year (about mid-way) in small groups to ensure that SACs are moving toward completion of their SIP and to assist with technical advice. This could be done, for example, by zone or by school level.
	Step 4. Evaluate the process and make changes as needed. For example, the district may need to increase the workshops to twice a year or hold additional training in specific areas of need.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of School Improvement and Title I; principals; SAC chairpersons.
Time Frame	April 2003-August 2003; ongoing thereafter.

Action Plan 5-12

Increase Efforts to Recruit a More Diverse Membership for School Advisory Councils	
Strategy	The district should develop a recruitment plan to attract diverse members for school advisory councils including educational support staff as well as minority membership.
Action Needed	Step 1. Convene a group of stakeholders, including the volunteer coordinator, the executive director of School Improvement, District Advisory Council members, SAC chairs, current minority SAC members, and the director of Human Resource Development to develop a strategy to recruit SAC members.
	Step 2. The strategy should be developed and implemented by the beginning of the next school year.
	Step 3. The recruitment strategy should be evaluated on a periodic basis to determine effectiveness.
	Step 4. The district should make use of all available resources such as FL-SAC, the district television station, local newspapers, and other local media to inform and invite the public to participate on SACs.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of School Improvement and Technology; District Advisory Council members; principals; assistant principals; SAC chairpersons; volunteer coordinator; director of Human Resource Development
Time Frame	Prior to the 2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter.

Cost-Effective Instructional Materials

9 The district's process for selecting instructional materials ensures that instructional materials meet the needs of teachers and students.

The district has a plan for purchasing instructional materials that adheres to the state adoption schedule and other requirements in Florida law. Principals and teachers provide feedback on the usefulness of

instructional materials and are involved in the selection of instructional materials. The district has clearly identified the flexibility schools have to make decisions regarding instructional materials.

Instructional Material Selection Committees Are Made Up of All Relevant Stakeholders

In St. Lucie County, instructional materials are adopted for the most part, on a countywide basis. Selection committees made up of teachers, administrators, district curriculum specialists, parents, business partners, experts in the field of study, etc., are invited to serve on textbook committees. It is the duty of the committee to choose instructional materials that best meet the needs of the teachers and students of the district. Nobody is denied being on a textbook selection committee should they wish to volunteer. The textbook adoption committee members are "selected" in the following ways:

- the district requests nominations from each school and grade level;
- it includes all those wishing to volunteer;
- it solicits parents and community members to join the committees; and
- it solicits "experts in the field" from the community (for example, for the Health adoption physicians, dieticians, nurses, health department officials, parents, and clergy members served on the adoption committee)

The District Follows Florida Law When Adopting Textbooks

The district purchases textbooks by following the state adoption schedule. Adoption committees may use one of two different selection procedures. The first is the standard adoption process in which committees have full access to all the materials (textbooks, workbooks, software, and bonus items such as posters) to be considered for adoption. The task of the committee is to preview the materials to ensure that they are in line with the Sunshine State Standards and will best meet the needs of teachers and students. Vendors may present materials to the committee. This process is used for minor adoptions in non-core subjects.

The second process, which is in its second year of use, is a blind adoption process. This process, sometimes referred to as the Connie Muther system, is a process of selecting instructional materials by removing all the "glitz and glitter" contained in textbooks and focusing on instructional content. Committee members are not allowed to know the identity of the textbooks' publishers. District employees that are not members of the textbook committee remove all traces of the publisher's name and photocopy the texts removing any traces of eye-catching marketing techniques. A series of "traces" is then done to see how well the publisher addresses a given topic, not only within the grade level, but across grade levels as well. This process is used for all core curriculum courses. The specific steps in the process are presented below.

- The district office informs schools which materials up for adoption will be using the blind adoption process. Schools should not receive materials for these adoptions, as it is imperative that committee members do not preview the materials prior to the district committee meetings.
- The district office contacts vendors as to which materials up for adoption will be using the blind method. A letter of warning is sent to all vendors stating that if materials are sent to schools, they will jeopardize the blind adoption process and therefore forfeit their opportunity of their materials being adopted in St. Lucie County.
- District personnel train those adoption committee members not familiar with the blind adoption process.
- Committees hold a series of meetings at a centralized location to review these materials and decide which to adopt.
- Once the selection is made, the district office informs all schools of the final selection.

Principals Are Given Some Leeway in Purchasing Textbooks

Principals are given instructional material allocations based on FTE counts. They are also given the current Florida statute outlining their responsibilities regarding textbooks. When the district adopts a single text for the entire county, the principal must purchase that book. Otherwise the principal is required to spend 50% of his or her instructional material allocation on materials that are adopted by the state. The other 50% can be spent on any materials. If the principal chooses to purchase something not on the county-approved adoption list, he or she must complete a waiver process showing how the alternative materials they have selected would be of more benefit to the school. Also, if a principal/school decides to purchase alternate reading materials, they may do so in addition to the county purchase.

By adopting a single reading text and requiring principals to purchase that text and by doing a countywide purchase of reading texts, the district was able to create an economy of scale and get more for its money, and at the same time support its countywide balanced reading initiative.

10 Most students have current and appropriate instructional materials in core courses.

Instructional materials are aligned with the Sunshine State Standards and the Pupil Progression Plan. Principals effectively communicate to parents how instructional materials are used to implement the curriculum objectives of the school through newsletters. Students have current state-adopted textbooks and/or other appropriate current instructional materials in core courses.

**Some Schools Reported They Have Enough Textbooks For Students
While Others Reported They Do Not**

Principals communicate to parents how instructional materials are used mainly through school newsletters and parent meetings/events. When asked whether they had enough textbooks for students in core classes principals' and teachers' responses were mixed. One school reported having a single class set of core subject textbooks for an entire grade. This means that the teachers and students in each class had to take turns using textbooks. Another school reported not having enough funds to purchase books when enrollment increased. This school had a set of 28 books per class and when enrollment increased beyond 28 students per class, some students had to share books until the additional books the school ordered arrived. Many schools reported having class sets of books that students could not take home unless their parents specifically requested they have a book to take home. Many of these comments were the result of confusion whereby parents and teachers thought students should have both a book for school and one for home use so they would not have to carry books back and forth to school. It is important to note, however, that not all schools had a problem with the number of textbooks they have. Most schools reported that they do have enough textbooks for students in core classes.

As part of our survey, teachers were asked to respond to the statement, "All students have access to current instructional materials in core courses to take home." The results were split with 43% of teachers agreeing that all students did have instructional materials to take home and 35% said the students did not have instructional materials to take home. The remaining 22% marked neutral (14%), not applicable (7%), or left that item blank (1%).

The reasons for this discrepancy from school to school are because the purchase of textbooks varies from school to school and the number of students who transfer out of the school varies from school to school.

According to district staff, schools make the decision when to purchase textbooks. They do not always purchase books in the year in which they are up for adoption. Some schools have spent their textbook allocation on FCAT preparation materials and then had to purchase texts for two subjects the following year. This makes the school short on textbooks. The other reason is mobility. St. Lucie County has a high population of migrant workers and other students who move very frequently and do not always turn in their books before they move. When this happens the district ends up replacing the lost book, when they have the funds to do so.

11 The district has adequate procedures for acquiring, maintaining, and disposing of instructional materials, but could make some improvements.

The district's process for selecting instructional materials includes an analysis of the relative usefulness and, in some cases, cost of available materials to ensure that the district gets the best value. The district's disposal of instructional materials does not maximize revenue for the disposed materials. The district needs to improve the amount of money collected for lost and damaged instructional materials. What money the district does collect is used to offset the costs of new instructional materials.

The District Uses a Blind Adoption Process

Instructional materials that go through the blind adoption process are examined for curricular content only. According to district employees, price is considered in the blind adoption process if, for example, one text cost substantially more than another or if the committee is torn between two texts. This process places emphasis on the instructional value of the materials.

Principals Don't Always Try to Sell Obsolete Instructional Materials Before Giving Them Away

The district's policy is clear; principals have two options when disposing of obsolete textbooks.

- Giving or lending the materials to other public education programs within the district or state, to the teachers to use in developing supplementary teaching materials, to students or others, or to any charitable organization, governmental agency private school or state.
- Selling the materials to used book dealers, recycling plants, pulp mills or other persons, firms, or corporations upon such terms as are most economically advantageous to the school board.

The handbook goes on to emphasize that all monies received by reason of sale, exchange, or other disposition of instructional materials shall be deposited in the district school fund and added to the district appropriation for instructional materials. This amount will them be returned to the school's state/county adopted instructional material account.

However, principals don't always attempt to sell obsolete materials before giving them away to charitable organizations, parents, or teachers. The district should amend their policy to require principals to make a good faith effort of attempting to sell its textbooks before they can give them away.

Schools Have a Difficult Time Collecting Fees for Lost and Damaged Textbooks

Principals reported having difficulty collecting fees for lost and damaged textbooks. During interviews, the most common reason they cited for this difficulty was "There are no teeth in the law," meaning there

is not much they can take away from students that will force them to pay their fees. The principals reported they do not allow students with outstanding fees to participate in some extra-curricular activities. However, this method does not seem to be very effective.

Exhibit 5-35 illustrates where the most work needs to be done in the area of collection of fees for lost and damaged books. Middle schools collected only 12.73% of assessed fees while high schools were able to collect only 32.06%. This goes against conventional wisdom that it is easier to collect fees in the upper grades than elementary schools because there are more opportunities to motivate the students to pay. High schools commonly do not let students participate in the prom, grad night, and graduation ceremonies if they have outstanding debts. In St. Lucie County, elementary schools collected the highest percentage of fines.

The district assessed a total of $42,543 in fees for lost and damaged books. However, it collected only $11,083 of the fees that were assessed leaving $31,460 outstanding. (See Exhibit 5-34.) The most extreme cases were one school that reported assessing $9,146 in fees and only collected $1,143 and another that assessed $4,346 in fees and reported collecting no fees. It is important to note that these are not annual totals. At the secondary level, a student may carry debt for the entire time they are enrolled in that school. It is possible for the fine for a book lost/damaged while a student was in ninth grade to stay on the school's outstanding lost/damaged book fine list until the student graduates four years later. The district should require schools to track and collect fines on an annual basis and should not allow fines to be carried over from year to year.

Exhibit 5-34

The District Needs to Increase the Amount
of Fees Collected for Lost and Damaged Textbooks

School Type	Value of Lost Books	Amount Collected	Amount Outstanding	Percentage Collected
Elementary	$2,473	$1,143	$1,330	46%
Middle	$19,199	$2,445	$16,754	13%
High School	$13,625	$4,369	$9,256	32%
Magnet Schools	$7,246	$3,126	$4,120	43%
District Total	$42,543	$11,083	$31,460	26%

Source: OPPAGA analysis.

The district does track lost and damaged books and the fees collected by individual schools. Principals are required to submit a lost or damaged materials report to the district data manager by June 15 of each year. During one of our principal focus groups, a principal of a high school indicated that the school is going to use a computerized system to track textbooks next year. Every textbook will have a bar code and will be scanned into the library system. Then, when students are assigned a textbook, it will appear on their library record. The principal stated although it is a very time consuming task to barcode and record all of the textbooks in the school, once they are all in, the system tracking lost, damaged, and recovered textbooks will be more efficient.

While it is unlikely that the district will recover all of the fees for lost and damaged books since there will always be extenuating circumstances prohibiting students and parents from paying, the district should collect more than it is currently collecting.

Recommendations ———————————————

- *We recommend that the district amend its policy regarding the disposal of obsolete textbooks to require principals to make a good faith effort to sell the materials before they give them away.*

- *We recommend that the district develop a system to collect more fees for lost and damaged books.*

Action Plan 5-13

The District Should Amend Its Policy Regarding the Disposal of Obsolete Textbooks to Require Principals to Make a Good Faith Effort to Sell Them Before Giving Them Away		
Strategy	In order to recover funds to be used toward the purchase of new or replacement textbooks, the district should amend its policy regarding the disposal of obsolete textbooks to require principals to make a good faith effort to sell them before giving them away.	
Action Needed	Step 1.	The district should amend its policy to require principals to try to sell books before giving them away.
	Step 2.	A portion of this policy must be that the principals provide documentation that they did try to sell the books.
	Step 3.	A portion of this policy must be for the district to track the amount of books sold and the amount of money recovered on a school by school basis.
Who is Responsible	School board, superintendent, director of Assessment and Evaluation (or other persons supervising the textbook adoption process)	
Time Frame	The policy should be in place before the beginning of the 2003-04 school year.	

Action Plan 5-14

The District Should Develop a System to Collect Fees for Lost and Damaged Books		
Strategy	The district should develop policies and internal systems designed to maximize the collection of fees for lost and damaged books.	
Action Needed	Step 1.	The district should develop policies and internal systems designed to maximize the collection of fees for lost and damaged books.
	Step 2.	As part of this policy and system, the district should include a parent and community education program on the subject of fees for lost and damaged textbooks. The district's cable TV station and school newsletters are examples of two methods of educating students, parents, and the public about the requirement of paying school fees.
	Step 3.	The policy and system should include a component stating that if fees are not paid, the student will not be permitted to participate in non-required school activities such as non-academic field trips, the prom, and graduation ceremonies. The policy should require school principals to adhere to these policies.
	Step 4.	The policy should also include a data collection system that will allow the district to track the amount of outstanding fines accrued on an annual basis, the amount carried over from previous school years, the amount not recovered and the reason the fee was not recovered.
Who is Responsible	Director of Assessment and Evaluation and school principals	
Time Frame	The policy should be in place before the beginning of the 2003-04 school year.	

Performance Accountability

12The district has implemented some accountability mechanisms; however, it needs to improve its evaluation component.

The district has clearly stated goals and measurable objectives that address the major aspects of each major educational program. The district has performance measures and benchmarks for evaluating the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of its educational programs and uses these to make management decisions. However, while the district has implemented a schedule to formally evaluate major educational programs using regular assessments, legal requirements, and other reasonable criteria as factors in selecting programs for evaluation, it has not completed these evaluations.

The District's Strategic Plan Serves as a Roadmap for the District

The district's strategic plan is written in a coherent, easy-to-use manner that emphasizes student learning as its main priority. Each goal has a number of strategies associated with it. These strategies are broken down to determine a timeline, measurement (criteria for success), person responsible, fiscal impact, and the funding source used to pay for the strategy.

The strategic plan goes further than a discussion of overall district goals; the plan also includes sections for each department. Each departmental section contains specific goals that are linked to the district and state goals. The plan for the School Improvement and Education Technology, K-2, Federal, and Title I/Migrant department begins with a needs assessment that includes an analysis of FCAT scores, evidence that the district is using data to make decisions. The district does not limit educational goals to subjects tested by the FCAT and includes data-based goals and objectives for curriculum content areas including drug education, health, and physical education.

Major Programs (Title I, Migrant, and ESE) Are Evaluated as Part of the Strategic Planning Process, But Are Not as Thorough as They Should Be

As part of the strategic planning process the district has implemented a schedule to formally evaluate Prekindergarten, Title I, Migrant, and ESE programs using regular assessments, legal requirements, and other reasonable criteria as factors in selecting programs for evaluation. Each section of the strategic plan begins with a review of student test data and objectives. However, the district has not completed these evaluations. The district has conducted evaluations of programs which have a federally required evaluation component or programs funded through grants that require program evaluation. These evaluations tend to not be thorough enough to be considered a full-scale evaluation and are typically merely reporting designated data items to the entity that required the evaluation. For other objectives in the strategic plan related to education service delivery programs, the district has developed an evaluation process that began in late fall of 2002 and plans to be finished summer of 2003. This review process will use committees of peer administrators in the district to conduct these evaluations. For more information on these evaluations, see Chapter 4, Best Practice 4.

Recommendations

- *The district should move forward with its evaluation plan as described above.*

Action Plan 4-1 in Chapter 4, Performance Accountability System, provides the steps to implement this recommendation.

13 The district regularly reviews its organizational structure and the staffing of the central office and schools to minimize administrative layers and processes.

The central office's organizational structure and staffing levels for its education program minimizes administrative layers. The district regularly reviews the staffing of schools to ensure the teacher/pupil ratios stated in state statute or district policy are maintained and are comparable with appropriate benchmarks. The district reports organizational structure and administrative staffing review findings to school board members.

The District Revises Its Organizational Structure as Needed

In recent years, the district has experienced funding shortfalls. As a result, it has been forced to evaluate positions and organizational structures in an effort to cut costs. Positions have been combined and/or eliminated. This combining and eliminating of positions is particularly evident within the Curriculum and Instruction Department. In districts of comparable size and demographics this department is headed by several people; in St. Lucie County one person is responsible for all of these tasks.

Although they have the lowest percentage of administrative staff of their peer districts (see Exhibit 5-35.), the district is doing a fair job in the area of program oversight and providing support to schools. St. Lucie County's staffing levels are comparable to their peer districts.

Exhibit 5-35

Peer District Comparison of Staffing Levels

District	Total Number of Staff	Percentage of Administrative Staff	Percentage of Instructional Staff	Percentage of Support Staff
Escambia	5,347	3%	54%	43%
Highlands	1,392	4%	51%	45%
Lake	3,519	3%	52%	45%
Marion	5,257	3%	48%	48%
Osceola	4,146	3%	50%	47%
St. Lucie	**4,077**	**3%**	**55%**	**43%**
State	280,658	3%	55%	42%

Source: DOE Profiles of Florida's School Districts 2001-02.

However, according to our teacher survey teachers indicated that the level of support in ESOL classrooms could be improved. Thirty-eight percent of teachers responding to our survey agreed with the statement "I receive needed support in integrating ESOL students into regular education classrooms." Twenty-three percent disagreed with the statement, while 23% remained neutral. To the district's credit, after recognizing the need for assistance in the area of ESOL, a full-time ESOL resource specialist was hired during the summer of 2002 to coordinate the ESOL program.

Another area teachers indicated a need for improvement is providing district support to School Advisory Councils. As previously addressed, the district is changing its SAC training program from an as needed basis to requiring training for each SAC within the first semester of the school year.

St. Lucie County's Class Sizes Are Larger Than Most of Their Peers and the State Average

St. Lucie County's average class size, while not the largest among its peer districts, is high when compared to their peer districts. The ratio for teacher aides to classroom teachers is about average when compared to the peer districts. The district's guidance counselor to student ratio is higher than the state average and all but one of its peer districts.

Exhibit 5-36

Peer District Comparison of Staff Ratios

District	Average Elementary Class Size	Teachers Aides To Classroom Teachers	Guidance Counselors To Students
Escambia	22.7	1:6	1:453
Highlands	21.7	1:5	1:435
Lake	22.8	1:4	1:404
Marion	18.5	1:3	1:518
Osceola	25.4	1:3	1:525
St. Lucie	**24.2**	**1:4**	**1:525**
State Average	24.1	1:4	1:455

Source: DOE Profiles of Florida School Districts 2001-02; *Florida Schools Indicator Report*, 2001-02; St. Lucie County School District.

14 The district is doing a fair job of reporting on the performance of its major educational programs to ensure accountability to parents and other taxpayers.

The district can demonstrate that it publicly reports on the performance and cost-efficiency of its major educational programs. School grades are reported in the local newspaper and on the district's website. In addition, the district operates a television station that it uses to publicize district and school events.

The district reports information to school advisory councils in a manner that is clear and understandable. As discussed in section eight of this chapter, a district curriculum and instruction staff person serves on each of the school advisory councils. This assures that the school advisory councils receive accurate information that is interpreted by district staff members who know how to correctly interpret the data. The district also breaks FCAT and other test data out by sub-groups including gender, race, performance level, at-risk, ESE, and ESOL. While these data are used by school staff to identify strengths and weaknesses of the school, they are not reported to the community. The district could improve its reporting by publishing this data as well as school grades in a place that is readily accessible to the public.

The primary method the district uses to receive and respond to feedback from parents and other taxpayers is school climate surveys and parent surveys. While developed at the district level, both surveys are based on state models and are required as part of the state's school improvement and accountability system. The results are used to help school advisory council members develop the school improvement plan and are not distributed to the public as a whole.

For general information, the district has developed a variety of booklets and pamphlets that are distributed to the public throughout the community. One example of these public relations materials is a booklet *34 Reasons to Move to St. Lucie County*. This is a guide to public schools for families relocating to St. Lucie County and contains information on how to register a child for school within the controlled choice program, basic information on each school, and contact information for district, city, and county services.

Library Media Services

15**The district has sufficient school library or media centers to support instruction; however, collections need to be updated.**

The district's school libraries or media centers need to update their collections. The district periodically reviews library and media services to ensure that resource materials are accessible to all students and represent current research. Library and media services are automated.

The District's School Libraries Do Not Have Up-To-Date Resource Materials In All Areas, Some Content Areas Are Not Tracked

The district compiles data on the overall age of collections for only some types of books and by school level (elementary, middle, or high). It does not report the age of the complete library collection at each school at the district level. The district's records on collection age indicate that the collections are older than they should be. For example, 65% of elementary school media center science books are between 9 and 15 years old, as are 67% of middle school media center science books; and 60% of high school media center science books are 20 or more years old. Although St. Lucie County's Library and Media Services Report contains a wealth of information organized in an easy to use format, the report does not contain information on the age of the library collections at each school. It is unclear if the school libraries have sufficient up-to-date materials. Because science changes as time progresses it is important for science books to be up to date. In contrast, for fiction, the condition of the book is more important than the age.

In order to have a clearer picture of the age of the library collections in the school media centers, the district should include in its annual report an analysis of the age of the library collections on a school-by-school basis. Once this data is collected and analyzed, the district should focus its funding for library materials on bringing the district's library/media centers up to generally accepted standards, giving priority to the most severe cases.

Recommendations ──────────────

- *We recommend that the district include age of library/media center collections of individual schools in their annual Library Media Services Report.*

Action Plan 5-15

The District Should Include Age of Library/Media Collections of Individual Schools in Their Annual Library Media Services Report	
Strategy	As part of the annual Library Media Service Report, age of collections for individual schools by subject matter and/or type of book should be reported by each school and included in the report.
Action Needed	Step 1. Using generally accepted weeding standards, Library and Media Specialists should annually assess the age and state (wear and tear) of their library collections.
	Step 2. Library and Media Specialists should then report the age of their collections, by book type, to the district staff for inclusion in the Library Media Services Report.
	Step 3. If Library/Media center collections are determined to be older than the standards dictate the district should develop and implement a plan to purchase books in order to update the library media collections of their schools. Plans should be implemented giving the schools with the greatest need priority for purchasing updated material.
Who is Responsible	Director of Staff Development and Learning Resources; school library and media specialists
Time Frame	The policy should be in place before the beginning of the 2003-04 school year.

16 The district provides necessary support services to meet the needs of its students in a cost-efficient manner.

The district has developed and implemented a plan for providing student support services in a cost-efficient manner. The district can demonstrate that it regularly reviews its plan for providing student support services. The district regularly compares staffing levels and expenditures to comparable districts and/or to state or national benchmarks to ensure efficient use of resources. The district regularly evaluates the effectiveness of its delivery of student support services and uses the results to make improvements.

The District Has Developed and Implemented a Comprehensive Plan for Providing Student Support Services

The district develops a Student Services Plan that is updated on an annual basis. In fact, the first objective in the plan is "The Student Services Plan for Student Support Services will be reviewed and updated for effectiveness annually with community, school, and parent input." Other elements addressed in the plan include:

- increasing the percentage of students evaluated for ESE who qualify for services;
- increasing the amount of funds billed to the Medicaid School Match Program;
- reducing the number of students who are absent for 21 days or more; and
- increasing the number of schools utilizing CBM/DIBELS to monitor student-reading progress

By updating the plan on an annual basis, the district is using the results of the planning process to improve future service delivery.

The District Response to the Schools' Needs Is Mixed

According to our survey of teachers, the Student Services Department's response to school need is mixed. As seen in Exhibit 5-37, while most teachers indicated that they do receive support from student services staff, that support could be better. The Student Services Department has recognized this, and at the end of the 2001-02 school year, the director of Student Services requested several positions to help provide services to the schools. The director requested a nurse, two psychologists, and a district guidance counselor. The positions were rejected due to funding constraints. District staff noted that three of the four peer districts have a district guidance position. While the district could benefit greatly from the addition of these requested positions, the staff of the department is doing the best that they can with the resources they have. However, it is important to note while the requests for these positions were turned down, the district did approve the hiring of an additional clerk to help increase Medicaid reimbursements. The hiring of a clerk could help increase the amount of Medicaid reimbursements the district receives and, in return, they could hire staff in positions to provide services directly to children.

Exhibit 5-37

According To Teachers, District Response To Student Service Needs Is Mixed

Survey Question	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I receive needed support from school psychologists.	43%	31%	18%
I receive needed support from guidance counselors.	66%	16%	14%
When necessary, I can obtain support from social workers.	65%	22%	7%

Source: OPPAGA.

6 Administrative and Instructional Technology

The St. Lucie County School District has developed and maintained a cost-effective administrative and instructional technology program and infrastructure. The district's technology initiatives will continue to improve and flourish with additional training and support.

Conclusion

The St. Lucie County School District is using all 20 of the best practices for administrative and instructional technology. The district provides comprehensive administrative and instructional technology to its schools and support divisions. The district's technology initiatives include a wide area intranet, individual school networks, classroom computers and network connections, and a computer for most teachers. The district supplies Internet access in all classrooms, free Internet access for teachers from their homes, instructional television, and at least one computer for every four students.

The St. Lucie County School District has cost-effectively provided an integrated set of administrative information systems to help managers oversee operations and make effective decisions. The instructional systems help the teachers and schools provide educational programs that meet student needs for achievement and technology education. The district also provides access to Internet resources for students, teachers, and district employees and a district-wide network for communication and access to centralized management systems.

The technology plan can be improved by adding administrative systems to the same process used for planning instructional technology. Although best practices have been employed throughout the district's technology programs, some key efforts have been slowed or delayed by budget cutbacks in state funding. To ensure that it continues to meet all best practices for administrative and instructional technology, the district may need to use cost savings opportunities to budget additional funds for technology support personnel and teacher training.

During the course of this review, OPPAGA identified a number of district accomplishments in administrative and instructional technology, some of which are included in Exhibit 6-1.

Exhibit 6-1

The District Has Had a Number of Notable Accomplishments in Administrative and Instructional Technology in the Last Three Years

- The district began implementing software that manages standards-aligned curriculum, provides instructional resources and assessments, and measures student performance against district and state curriculum objectives.
- The district acquired and implemented software to measure student learning gains and assist principals and teachers monitor and compare those gains by student, class, grade level, school, and a variety of demographic characteristics.
- The district set minimum standards for technology competency for teachers. Assessment results indicate that

these standards have been achieved with few exceptions.

- The district established guidelines identifying professional development strategies to help teachers integrate technology solutions into the curriculum.
- All schools have been retrofitted or constructed for technology.
- The district's on-line work order system provides schools an automated request process for maintenance needs, updates the warehouse inventory system, and uploads charges to the financial accounting system.
- The district provides parents internet access to bus route information by their address and posts any changes in routes and bus numbers daily. The transportation mapping software downloads new student information each day to determine which bus each new student will ride.
- The district installed a wide area network to connect all facilities and classrooms into a district intranet and provide everyone high-speed access to the Internet.
- The district upgraded network servers to the same operating system to standardize support and training needs in a cost-effective manner.
- The software systems are uniform in both libraries and cafeterias to provide modern, consistent information for students and management.
- The district installed an expert security and data storage system for the entire wide area network.
- The district can configure new desktop machines and reconfigure existing machines remotely from the data processing department.
- The district has provided most teachers with a telephone, laptop computer, and a variety of technology training opportunities.
- The district generates revenue by providing data processing services to another school district.
- The district has reciprocal agreements with a consortium of smaller districts for applications development and disaster recovery.

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Overview of Chapter Findings

OPPAGA reviewed the district's administrative and instructional technology using the Best Financial Management Practices and associated indicators adopted by the Commissioner of Education. OPPAGA employed several methodologies to develop chapter conclusions and action plans. Initially, OPPAGA conducted on-site interviews with district-level managers, district-level employees, and principals. OPPAGA also gathered information on the administrative and instructional technology activities including the district's policies, procedures, technology plans, budgets, and a written self-assessment by district administrative personnel. To receive additional input, OPPAGA surveyed teachers. Questions asked in interviews and surveys varied depending on the methods, individuals, and groups. The results have been validated and incorporated into this chapter where applicable.

An overview of chapter findings follows.

School Board Technology Plan

1. The district solicited and used broad stakeholder input in developing an integrated learning system and in setting priorities for administrative and instructional technology decisions. (Page 6-6)
2. The district's comprehensive technology plan provides direction for administrative and instructional technology decision making. (Page 6-10)

"Just-in-time" Support

3. The district provides formal and informal support to assist educators in incorporating technology into the curriculum. (Page 6-12)

4. The district provides technical support for its educational and administrative systems. (Page 6-13)

5. The district provides technical support for hardware, software, and infrastructure in a timely and cost-effective manner. (Page 6-13)

Professional Development

6. The district has a professional development plan that reflects its vision of integrating technology into the curriculum as well as improving administrative support. (Page 6-16)

7. The district provides professional development for instructional technologies. (Page 6-19)

Appropriate Technology for Performance

8. The district makes technology acquisitions for instructional needs. (Page 6-19)

9. To ensure cost-effective technology decisions, the district bases technology acquisitions on the results of research, planning, and evaluations of previous technology decisions. (Page 6-20)

10. The district has established standards for acquiring new programs that promote the integration of technology into everyday curricular needs. (Page 6-20)

11. The district has a stable and efficient infrastructure. (Page 6-21)

Appropriate Use of Technology

12. The district has established and communicated a policy for appropriate uses of all types of technology resources, including computers, video equipment, software, and the Internet. (Page 6-21)

13. The district supports compliance with the established policy on safe and legal use of technology resources. (Page 6-22)

Management Information Systems

14. Segregation of Duties: The district segregates duties to reduce the risk that unauthorized transactions will be entered and not discovered quickly. (Page 6-22)

15. User Controls: The district's user controls ensure authorization prior to processing transactions and ensure all output represents authorized and valid transactions. (Page 6-23)

16. Application Controls: The district's applications are designed to provide users with reliable data. (Page 6-23)

17. General Controls: The district has established general controls in the areas of access, systems development and maintenance, documentation, operations, and physical security to promote the proper functioning of the information systems department. (Page 6-24)

18. The district's management information systems provide data needed by administrative and instructional personnel in a reliable and timely manner. (Page 6-25)

19. The district has taken steps to minimize the number of databases that are independent of its centralized computer systems. (Page 6-25)

20. Other Controls: The district has established appropriate controls related to electronic data exchange transactions, other transactions processed through electronic media, and image processing systems. (Page 6-26)

Background

A school district's administrative and instructional technology function typically includes communicating with and engaging different segments of the community. The St. Lucie County School District's planning process for technology includes district employees, parents, other governmental agencies, civic groups, the local community college, and local businesses. The district coordinates administrative and instructional technology through budgetary appropriation procedures, community input, the Division of Curriculum and Instruction, the Learning Resources Department, the Management Information Systems (MIS) Department, and teams of administrative and professional employees meeting with school principals and employees. The director of MIS and the assistant superintendent of curriculum share the administrative responsibility for technology planning.

Instructional technology includes activities to provide essential technology and supplemental resources to schools to get students involved in technology as a learning resource and communication tool and to enhance parental involvement in student and school activities. Most of these activities take place at the school rather than the district level. The St. Lucie County School District's instructional technology functions include infrastructure planning, school technology support, and training.
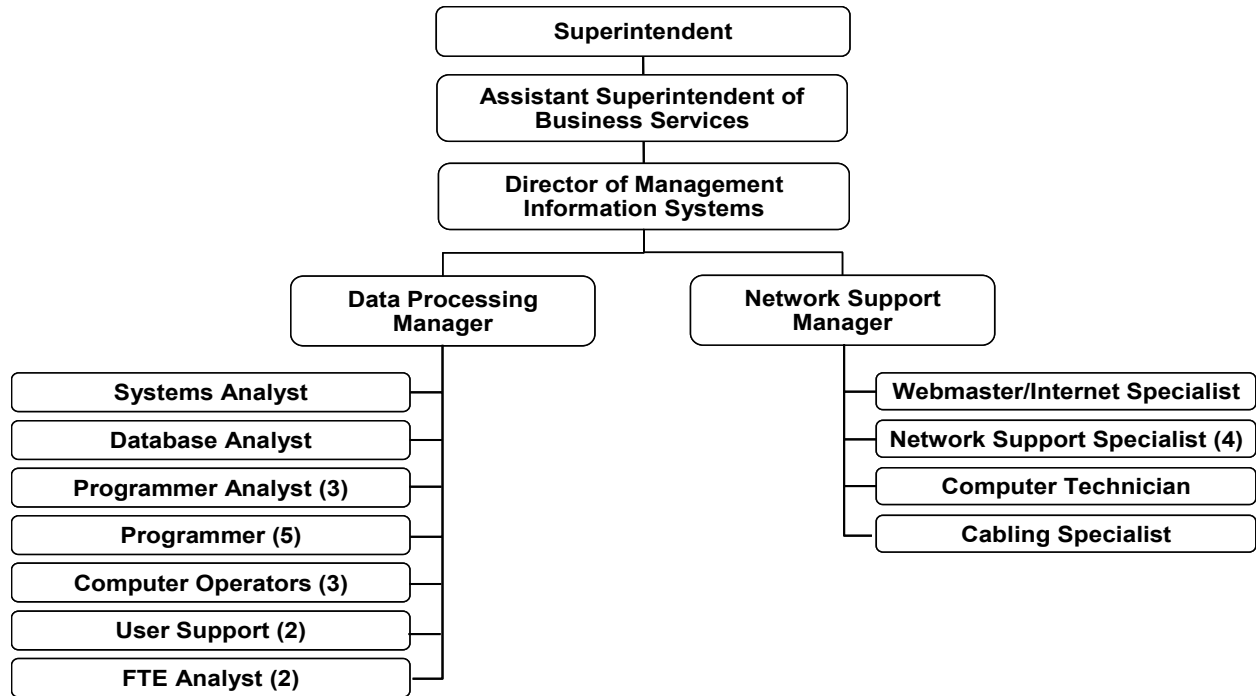
The district's administrative technology functions include providing timely and reliable information for managing instructional efforts and business operations of the district. This includes providing management information systems for the following functions:

- human resources,
- finance,
- textbooks,
- property and asset inventories,
- cost accounting,
- purchasing bid specifications, and
- student data reporting.

The Management Information Systems Department purchases and installs technology-related equipment; plans, installs and maintains the district's intranet; monitors the Internet connection; and provides systems security, systems administration, applications development, applications maintenance, and technology support operations. These essential functions and their attendant procedures are performed by 28 administrative, professional, and support service employees. Exhibit 6-2 illustrates the organizational structure of this division.

Exhibit 6-2

St. Lucie County School District: Administrative Technology Employees

```
                          Superintendent
                               |
                 Assistant Superintendent of
                      Business Services
                               |
                   Director of Management
                     Information Systems
                               |
            +------------------+------------------+
            |                                     |
     Data Processing                       Network Support
        Manager                               Manager
            |                                     |
  Systems Analyst                        Webmaster/Internet Specialist
  Database Analyst                       Network Support Specialist (4)
  Programmer Analyst (3)                 Computer Technician
  Programmer (5)                         Cabling Specialist
  Computer Operators (3)
  User Support (2)
  FTE Analyst (2)
```

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

The Division of Curriculum and Instruction helps schools identify their technology needs and plans to meet those needs. Within the division, two technology resource specialists and an instructional management specialist comprise the Learning Resources Department which provides administrative guidance and coordinates and provides training and technical support to principals and instructional employees at the schools. Exhibit 6-3 illustrates the organizational structure of this division.

Exhibit 6-3

St. Lucie County School District: Instructional Technology Employees

```
                   Superintendent of Schools
                               |
                 Assistant Superintendent of
                         Curriculum
                               |
                    Executive Director of
                   School Improvement and
                   Educational Technology
                               |
            +------------------+------------------+
            |                                     |
 Instruction Management Specialist      Technology Resource Specialist (2)
```
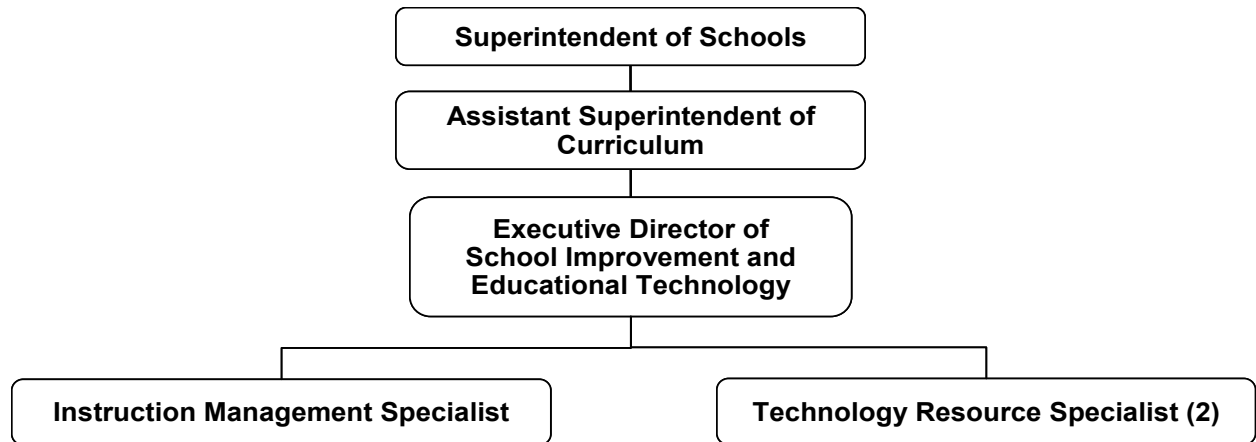
Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Despite budget constraints, the district maintains technology in the classroom as one of its top priorities in curriculum delivery. Exhibit 6-4 shows all computers in use in the classrooms in the St. Lucie County School District. This exhibit illustrates the student to computer ratio for the district and compares it with the state average and several other Florida school districts.

Exhibit 6-4

St. Lucie County Has the Second Lowest Ratio of Students per Computer Compared With Similar School Districts and the State Average
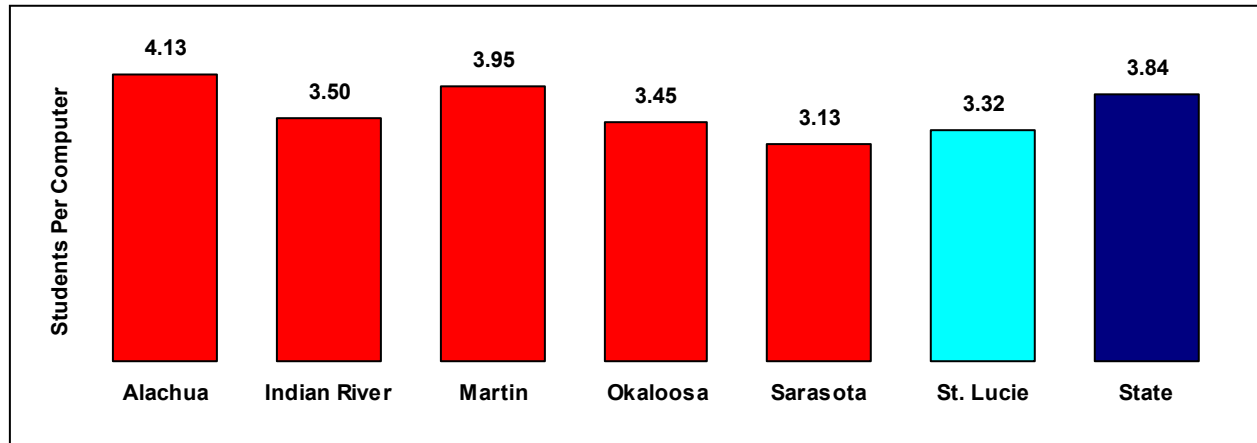
Source: Florida Department of Education 2001-2002 Technology Resources Survey.

School Board Technology Plan

1 The district solicited and used broad stakeholder input in developing an integrated learning system and in setting priorities for administrative and instructional technology decisions.

The district planned technology initiatives using input from district and school administrators, teachers, technology coordinators, and the business community

Technology plan development for the St. Lucie County School District includes input from a wide variety of principals, district administrators, and many of the professional employees from the curriculum, exceptional student education, and management information divisions. In addition to the technology committee members, the district solicits administrative input from principals, a variety of departments who bring input from their employees, and from the technology committee visit to each school. The director of facilities served on the technology committee to represent administrative systems needs for the facilities, maintenance, and transportation departments. Exhibit 6-5 shows the membership of the committee.

Exhibit 6-5

St. Lucie County Technology Committee Members

- Associate Superintendent of Curriculum
- Assistant Superintendent of Facilities and Transportation
- Executive Director of Student Services
- Director of Assessment
- Director of Exceptional Student Education
- Director of Human Resources
- Director of MIS
- Executive Director of School Improvement and Educational Technology
- Director of Vocational and Applied Technology
- Principal, Fort Pierce Westwood High School
- Principal, Village Green Elementary School
- Principal, Windmill Point Elementary School
- Principal, Lawnwood Elementary School
- Principal, C.A. Moore Elementary School
- Principal, Fort Pierce Central High School
- Principal, Dan McCarty Middle School
- Assistant Principal, Port St. Lucie High School
- Purchasing Agent, SLC
- Network Support Manager
- Webmaster/Internet Specialist
- Instructional Management Specialist, SLC
- Technology Resource Specialist, SLC
- Technology Resource Specialist, SLC
- Technology Resource Specialist, SLC
- Assistive Technology Specialist
- Two CTA/CU Union Representatives

Note: Membership varies from the previous year due to changes in the district's organizational structure.

Source: The School District of St. Lucie County, Florida - Technology Plan, 2002.

The district assigns Helping Educators Apply Technology (HEAT) teams, called wave teams, to annually review the technology portions of every school improvement plan. These wave teams consist of a group of administrative employees who go to each school every year to meet with the principal and selected school employees. These meetings assess schools' needs and help them meet district technology standards criteria identified in the standard school model, which describes the standard equipment and technological infrastructure schools should have to meet their processing, software, and connectivity needs for the upcoming year. Due to technology advances and increasing demand, the district updates the model annually.

The wave teams also review technology literacy profiles. These profiles test knowledge and skill level in information technology and are part of each teacher's and school administrator's annual performance review. By reviewing teacher profiles and comparing the school's equipment with the standard school

model, wave teams gather information the district uses to budget its technology hardware, software, and training needs.

The district obtains additional input from a community technology group that meets to coordinate student opportunities and advise the district and the schools on technology issues. This group includes the Smithsonian, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), University of Florida's Institute for Food and Agricultural Science (IFAS), Harbor Branch Oceanographic Center, the Manatee Center, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Exhibit 6-6 shows the all of the district's public and private partnerships who participate in appropriate technology-centered plans and activities so that all students develop into educated, productive, and responsible citizens.

Exhibit 6-6

St. Lucie County School Technology Public and Private Partnerships

- Workforce Board of the Treasure Coast
- St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce
- University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agriculture Science
- USDA United States Department of Agriculture Research Station
- Hurricane House
- Research and Education Coalition
- AEGIS Telecommunications "Learn and Earn Academy"
- Metropolitan Planning Organization/St. Lucie Urban Area
- Boy Scouts of America
- School Readiness Coalition of St. Lucie County
- District Advisory Council
- St. Lucie County Children's Services Council
- Children's Home Society of Florida
- Bell South
- St. Lucie County Sheriff's Department
- Leadership St. Lucie
- Indian River Community College
- Department of Children and Families
- St. Lucie County Education Foundation
- League of Women Voters
- Florida Institute for Art Education
- Boys and Girls Clubs of St. Lucie County
- Big Brothers and Big Sisters of St. Lucie County
- St. Lucie County Public Health Department
- St. Lucie County Supervisor of Elections Office
- Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute
- Smithsonian Marine Station
- St. Lucie County Cooperative Extension Service
- 19th District, Public Defenders Office
- Department of Juvenile Justice
- Fort Pierce Police Department

- Port St. Lucie Police Department
- ALPI Headstart
- East Coast Migrant Headstart
- Early Intervention Program IDEA Part C
- Quad County School to Work Consortium
- SLC Library System

Source: The School District of St. Lucie County, Florida-Technology Plan, 2002.

The district has not given administrative systems for support divisions the same annual needs assessment and evaluation of its instructional systems. These systems have been developed by the district over the last 20 years in response to federal and state requirements. The MIS department coordinated the district's planning for new administrative systems and for updating existing systems. The district's administrative team reviewed and approved system expansion and enhancements during annual budget cycles as the needs became urgent.

These administrative systems support many state and federal reporting requirements and help improve the divisions' efficiency. Annual assessments of support divisions' technology needs would provide the district with more information about technology budget and training needs. The district could extend the wave team analysis and planning to administrative systems.

Recommendations

- *The district should apply the wave team concept to administrative systems evaluations and planning. The administrative systems in the St. Lucie County School District provide critical management information that supports efficient use of scarce resources. The district may benefit from consistent planning and implementation of technology initiatives by ensuring all systems get the same level of scrutiny and consideration.*

Action Plan 6-1 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 6-1

Apply the Wave Team Concept to Administrative Systems	
Strategy	The district should implement the wave team analysis and planning process for administrative systems.
Action Needed	Step 1: The MIS director should design and schedule annual reviews of administrative systems similar to the wave team visits to schools.
	Step 2: The technology committee should incorporate the results of these reviews in the annual technology plan revision.
Who is Responsible	MIS director
Time Frame	July 2003

2 The district's comprehensive technology plan provides direction for administrative and instructional technology decision making.

The district annually revises its multi-year technology plan that is aligned with state reporting requirements and federal initiatives

The St. Lucie County School District's board-adopted technology plan supports overall district educational and operational goals. The district created its technology plan in response to the 1996 Technology Literacy Challenge, a federal initiative resulting from the Telecommunications Act of 1996. This act deregulated some business sectors that, in return, were to provide Internet access to schools nationwide. The purpose of the challenge was to give students technology skills, which have become as fundamentally important as the traditional skills in language arts and mathematics. E-rate funding is a federal grants program under the Telecommunications Act, which calls for providing all K-12 public and private non-profits schools, as well as libraries, with discounts for telecommunications services.

The district updated the technology plan for 2002 as part of its annual strategic planning effort. The Florida Department of Education requires that school districts include a wide variety of elements in their technology plans. These elements help ensure that the plans will meet eligibility requirements for E-rate funding and the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund (TLCF) which help districts pay for technology initiatives. [1] The district's plan meets these requirements.

The technology plan meets the best practice criteria, guides program development, and includes short- and long-term goals, annual objectives, and strategic directions. The long-term goals and strategic directions provide multi-year objectives to district employees for all aspects of technology implementation. The plan, which the district updates annually, includes the following elements:

- mission,
- planning process,
- needs assessment and goals,
- development of public and private partnerships,
- funding plan,
- technology acquisition plan,
- access,
- user support plan,
- staff training plan,
- program evaluation,
- standard school model,
- school board policy – copyrighted materials usage,
- Internet acceptable use policy,
- network and internet access policy, and
- technology support request form.

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[1] The district's E-rate application was approved for $562,000 to subsidize telecommunications costs and $760,000 for servers and network switches for 9 schools.

The technology plan update process includes plan objectives review, individual school review, and the superintendent's input. The plan describes the district's future objectives and specifies its technology initiatives for the current year. The technology committee meets regularly to address current technology issues and develop future plans.

The MIS, Educational Technology, and Learning Resources departments work as a team for all technology initiatives. The wave teams review the technology component of each school improvement plan. This review looks at hardware needs, software needs, and the current status of both and compares that information with district standards. The superintendent participates in technology planning and carefully scrutinizes technology-related budget requests.

The district's budget supports most of the plan although budget constraints delayed its new systems training and implementation timelines. This has slowed the implementation of software designed to assist schools and teachers align their curriculum and lesson plans with the Sunshine State Standards.

The district's plan provides for efficient and effective information processing and communication services to meet instructional and administrative needs. The technology plan directs the district to

- maintain the automated information management systems needed for the efficient and effective operation of the school district;
- develop and maintain the telecommunications and data communications infrastructure necessary to provide access to automated systems and remote resources;
- support instructional programs by providing telecommunications and data communications to classrooms and homes;
- support instructional programs by providing access to data for analysis of programs and services; and
- provide the technical means, support and training for personnel to use these information system resources.

The district's technology planning efforts focus on instructional needs. The technology plan covers administrative systems for hardware and communications infrastructure and some applications training. It could be improved with a more comprehensive treatment of administrative systems.

The technology plan includes objectives for technology initiatives. Some of these objectives, such as providing telephones to all classrooms, are easily measured. However, the measures for other objectives, such as ensuring equitable access to information technologies, are not as apparent. Specifying measures, such as providing one computer for every three students, for these objectives would better enable district to assess its implementation of the plan. The district's ability to achieve its technology plan objectives will be strengthened by including measures within the objectives and setting specific time frames and follow-up procedures for their attainment.

Recommendations ⸻

- *The plan could be improved with a more comprehensive treatment of administrative systems. See Action Plan 6-1 in the previous section of this chapter.*

- *Express technology plan objectives in measurable terms and periodically report progress toward obtaining these objectives. Adding objectives and reporting strategies to the plan would strengthen the district's ability to monitor the attainment of plan objectives.*

Action Plan 6-2 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 6-2

State Technology Plan Objectives in Measurable Terms		
Strategy	The district should ensure that the technology plan objectives are stated in measurable terms. The district should develop procedures for follow-up reporting on the progress made towards attaining its objectives.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The executive director of Educational Technology and School Improvement and the MIS director should meet with the technology committee and review the current objectives.
	Step 2:	The technology committee should recommend restated objectives and follow-up procedures.
	Step 3:	The superintendent and senior staff should review, modify, and approve the changes.
	Step 4:	The approved changes should be incorporated into the next technology plan revision.
Who is Responsible	The superintendent and technology committee	
Time Frame	January 2004	

"Just-in-time" Support

3   The district provides formal and informal support to assist educators in incorporating technology into the curriculum.

The district provides technical support to schools

The district provides a variety of support systems for educators. Each school assigns a technology contact to coordinate with district employees and provide initial on-site assistance. Other technology support systems include a telephone help desk, two technology resource specialists, and on-site assistance by MIS personnel. Resource specialists provide classroom training on districtwide instructional software to groups of teachers and individual assistance to teachers who ask for help. The director of MIS reviews and approves technology requisitions for schools and departments prior to purchase orders being issued. The MIS director also combines and times orders for technology equipment to negotiate discounted prices and help schools achieve maximum cost-effectiveness.

The wave teams coordinate purchasing of new software for the district and individual schools. At wave team meetings with school administrators, team members discuss many technology issues including how teachers and principals achieve curriculum compatibility with state standards and district guidelines. As a result of these discussions, the wave teams determined that the district needed a comprehensive software application to help teachers provide instruction aligned with the Sunshine State Standards.

During the 2001-02 school year, the district began implementing software that provides lesson plans aligned with the Sunshine State Standards, testing, and student tracking. This system allows teachers to customize applications for their individual classroom needs. The software manages standards-aligned curriculum, provides instructional resources and assessments, and measures student performance against district or state curriculum objectives.

Teachers and administrators can use this software to see what instructional strategies work and determine what changes need to occur in curriculum, instructional delivery, assessment, and professional development. This system helped adequately trained teachers implement improved curriculum delivery in schools. Principals in OPPAGA focus groups reported that teachers who have been trained in using software to keep track of student progress, compose tests, and plan lessons more effectively than teachers who have not been trained in using the software. Training issues and recommendations are discussed in more detail in section 6 of this chapter.

4 The district provides technical support for educational and administrative systems.

The district coordinates user support through a centralized call center help desk

The St. Lucie County School District help desk provides five people fielding telephone requests for technology assistance on hardware, software, and connectivity problems. The help desk is a point of contact for every employee in the district; it provides solutions or links users with other problem solvers and dispatches MIS technology experts when necessary.

The district is divided into three zones for school choice and technology support. One person from the MIS department and one from the educational technology department per zone collaborate in providing rapid response technology support to each school. Each school assigns a technology contact to coordinate with district employees and provide on-site assistance. The MIS director takes responsibility for all technology in the district and is familiar with each school and department's technology status and challenges. The MIS employees who provide support to schools and district departments meet with the MIS director each week to monitor workload, coordinate technology projects, and communicate significant developments in technology support in the district.

The professional and administrative employees from the MIS, Educational Technology, and Learning Resources departments works as a team at technology meetings that address all technology initiatives currently in progress. The district has standards for operating platforms and server platforms that ensure districtwide compatibility.

5 The district provides technical support for hardware, software, and infrastructure in a timely and cost-effective manner.

The district provides cost-effective network maintenance and user support

Technical support employees at the schools offer the district's teachers and employees the most timely and cost-effective assistance. The MIS help desk provides the next step in technology assistance throughout the system. The help desk provides immediate answers to technology questions, forwards hardware and other technical difficulties to MIS personnel, and researches problems for technology users.

The technical support contacts at the schools use a web-based system to notify the district help desk of problems needing attention. The help desk personnel dispatch technical support to solve any problems needing physical attention or additional expertise. The help desk tracks response time and solutions in the web-based tracking system.

Network problems get immediate attention and are resolved within 24 hours. Network management software generates emails to the district employees and the hardware vendor on critical system problems as soon as they occur. This allows district network technicians to identify and fix problems very quickly, sometimes before the affected employee notices that a problem exists. Complaint logs show that technicians resolve problems quickly. The district stopped surveying employees satisfaction with the network three years ago after quick response to network problems became routine and all survey responses were positive for several years. Principals in all three focus groups commented on the timeliness and effectiveness of support.

The wave teams periodically review the St. Lucie County School District technology equipment and infrastructure and recommend improvements in the standard school model. The district increases the standards for the minimum acceptable computer platform each year. The MIS department annually submits a budget request to provide for contracted hardware repair needs not covered by warranties. The wave teams annually review the technology portions of every school improvement plan. They assess each school's needs and assist it in meeting the upgraded criteria for the standard school model.

The district provides technology support functions more efficiently than its peers. As shown in Exhibit 6-7, the district has a lower number of personnel providing technology support functions than its peers. Technical support personnel in St. Lucie also support more computers per person than do personnel in peer districts. (See Exhibit 6-8.)
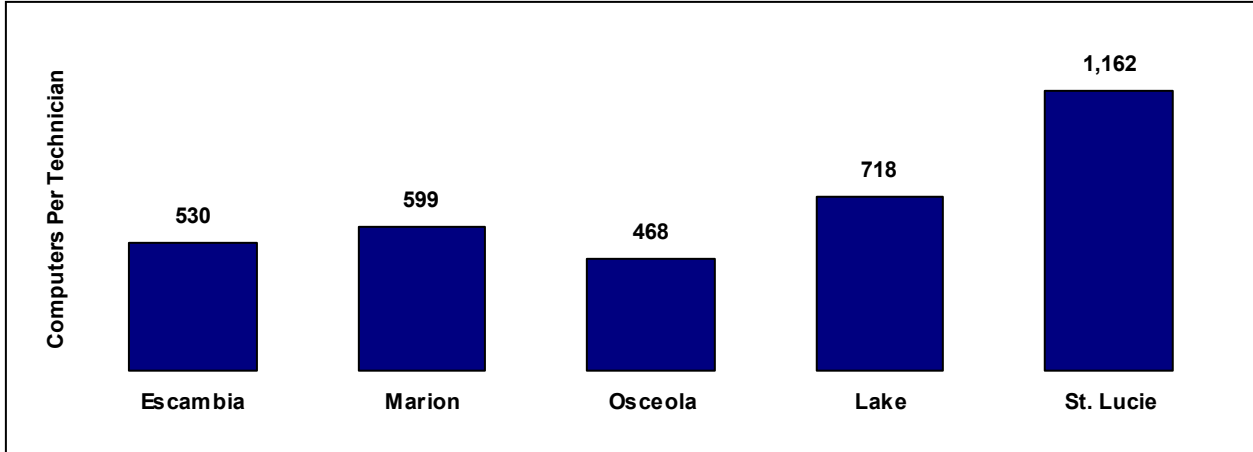
Exhibit 6-7

St. Lucie County Has the Lowest Number of Network Support Personnel Compared With Similar School Districts

Technical Support Staff

District	Staff
St. Lucie	8
Osceola	19
Marion	14
Lake	12
Escambia	11
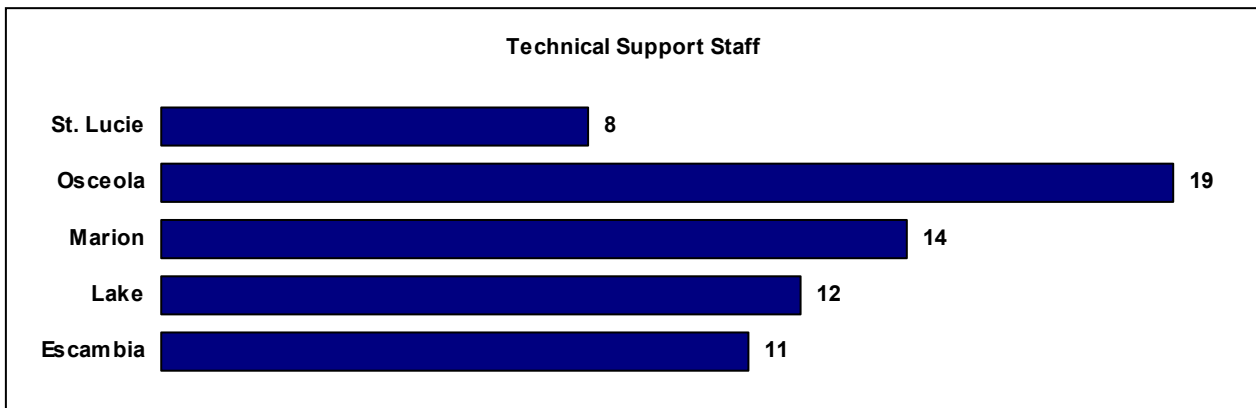
Source: OPPAGA and St. Lucie School District.

Exhibit 6-8

St. Lucie County School District
Has the Highest Ratio of Computers to Support Personnel [1]

[1] Does not include help desk personnel that do not directly perform computer or network maintenance activities.

Source: OPPAGA and St. Lucie School District.

The district has been able to perform technical support functions efficiently due to first-rate planning and dedicated support employees. District technology employees planned for increasing demand by training support personnel and users and by automating as many support functions as possible. To improve efficiency, the district has automated some technical support functions. Current support employees consistently work long hours and put in overtime beyond that normally expected of anyone other than the highest-level administrators. Since these employees fill professional-grade positions, they do not receive overtime compensation.

However, with an increasing number of users and more numerous and complex administrative and instructional applications, demand for technology support services is increasing. Given the district's current level of technical support automation, continued increases in individual productivity are unlikely. Thus, current support employees may not be able to continue to provide timely response to equipment installations, hardware support needs, and equipment maintenance.

To continue to meet best practices standards, the district may need to consider budgeting additional resources for technology support functions. If the district brought the number of its technical support personnel more in line with its peers, it would add at least three more technology support positions. This would cost the district $165,192 per year ($55, 064 in salary and benefits for each position), or $825,954 over five years. [2] However, if the district decides to create more technology support positions, it should not fill all of those positions at the same time. Instead it should fill one position to determine the impact of that employee on meeting workload needs before filling additional positions. This would ensure that the district would not hire any more employees than necessary to meet workload needs.

[2] An alternative to hiring more support staff would be to outsource technical support services. However, according to district staff and our review of local business directories, no large-scale computer support enterprises are currently located in St. Lucie County, which may limit the district's outsourcing options.

Recommendations

- *The district should review the workload of the technical support personnel and consider allocating additional resources to provide technical support for employees using the increasingly complex and growing network of hardware and software systems.*

Action Plan 6-3 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 6-3

Review the Workload of the Technical Support Personnel		
Strategy	The district should analyze the workload of technical support personnel and consider ways to cost-effectively meet the increasing demand for support services.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The MIS director should analyze support staff workload and present to the superintendent options for meeting the need.
	Step 2:	The superintendent should present the analysis and any proposed recommendations to the school board for approval.
	Step 3:	The board should approve the superintendent's recommendation and allocate the funds necessary for its implementation.
	Step 4:	The MIS director and the personnel department should implement the recommendation.
Who is Responsible	The superintendent and the MIS director	
Time Frame	July 2003	

Professional Development

6 The district has a professional development plan that reflects its vision of integrating technology into the curriculum as well as improving administrative support.

The district provides for effective professional development

The St. Lucie County School District provides thorough and ongoing training for all of its administrative systems. The school-based data specialists have an annual day of training to review changes in student information and personnel data elements required for their job duties. Newly hired personnel in these positions get individual on-site training by district MIS personnel. The MIS department schedules multiple training sessions at school sites and its training lab for new administrative software implemented across the district. District program administrators and their support employees participate in this software training along with school-based personnel.

Most of the support divisions, which include the finance, facilities, maintenance, and food service departments, provide ongoing training by either by using their experienced staff to train other employees or by outsourcing training for their systems from software vendors. For example, the transportation department employs a full-time computer specialist to maintain its mapping software and website and train the transportation support employees in using the transportation applications. Support division

employees also participate in districtwide training for email, finance, and personnel applications as appropriate to their needs.

These training activities for administrative systems were used before the district's development of a technology plan. The district can strengthen the planning and coordination of technology training by including administrative training in the technology plan. See action plan 6-1 on page 6-9.

For instructional systems, the district developed and uses an *Online Technology Literacy Profile* to ascertain technology needs and plan professional development activities for instructional personnel. Teachers complete this profile as a required part of their annual evaluation. As part of the revision of the current plan, the superintendent's senior staff discussed expanding the use of the profile to all district employees.

The district's technology planning committee uses the information from these profiles to plan both professional development activities for instructional software applications and methods of integrating technology into the curriculum. The district technology plan outlines comprehensive and appropriate professional development in the use of technologies for educators and administrators. The wave teams coordinate training at school sites. The district has one technology training lab and has plans for a second lab. Wave teams address training annually as part of the review of school needs.

St. Lucie County School District teachers have daily planning time with the option of using that time to participate in training. The Human Resources Department surveys principals at the end of each year to evaluate the effectiveness of the training as it relates to student performance. The district solicits feedback from participants at the end of each individual training session. Future training should include follow-up procedures to measure the effectiveness of technology training. See Action Plan 6-2 in section 2 of this chapter that recommends measurable objectives and follow-up procedures.

The district recently acquired software that integrates lesson planning, testing, Sunshine State Standards alignment, and student tracking. The initial purchase price for the software was $510,181, and annual maintenance fees are $42,124 for the software and $11,178 for scanners. To effectively use this software, however, teachers need training. Because of the complexity of the software, the training needs to be offered over a number of years as teachers progress to using the more complex features of the software.

The district recognizes the value of adequate technology training and planned extensive professional development activities. For example, a summer institute HEAT wave (Helping Educators Apply Technology) team trains teachers how to use software to integrate technology into the curriculum. The district provides teachers attending the institute a stipend, software, and specific training on helping students meet district technology literacy skills. However, budget cuts in Fiscal Year 2001-02 reduced training funds significantly. One technology resource specialist position and allocations for supplements for teacher training were eliminated.

According to school principals, teachers who have been trained in the new software use it to develop better strategies for helping students learn. In addition, after their initial exposure to this software, many teachers who have not been trained are eager to learn how to use it. Some software training is available on the Internet, and the district provides free Internet access to encourage teachers to obtain this training. However, most teachers need formal training to learn the software in a timely manner. Without this training, the district's investment in this system may be wasted.

The district should consider restoring the training for and development of this software, which is the cornerstone of its plan to implement technology to improve student achievement. Should the district chose to do this by adding a technology training position, the cost would be $50,475 annually. However, it could also consider contracting out for the needed training. Supplements for teachers to facilitate training in a timely fashion may cost the district at least $25,000 annually. Providing these additional technology training resources would protect the district's software investment and help it meet the

student achievement and administrative efficiency objectives which prompted it to acquire the software in the first place.

Recommendations ───────────────────────────

- *The district's technology initiative would be expedited by additional software training to accelerate implementation of the curriculum software system. Teachers and school administrators need to be trained in a timely manner. This application requires continued professional development to implement appropriately.*

- *Supplements for teacher's training time may be needed due to time constraints in currently negotiated contracts. The district can apply this training cost-effectively by continuing to use the train-the-trainer methodology it currently employs and may consider adding a training staff position to provide individualized training and coordination.*

Action Plan 6-4 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 6-4

Review the Status of Important Instructional Software Training	
Strategy	The district should review the status of its investment in software and consider the need for resources to hire another learning resource specialist for teachers training and to provide supplements for teachers who will train and be trained by instructional personnel at their school.
Action Needed	Step 1: The executive director of Educational Technology and School Improvement should report the status and timeline of the software implementation to the Superintendent. Step 2: The superintendent should present a status summary and any proposed budget additions to the school board for approval. Step 3: Any additions for teacher supplements and personnel should be appropriated in the budget. Step 4: The executive director of Educational Technology and School Improvement and the personnel department should hire a qualified applicant once the position is approved and added to the budget.
Who is Responsible	The superintendent and the executive director of Educational Technology and School Improvement
Time Frame	July 2003

7 The district provides professional development for instructional technologies.

The district provides professional development on integrating technology into the curriculum.

The district conducts some on-site training and encourages teachers to use Internet resources for technology assistance and skills development. The district's School Improvement and Education Technology Department provides three trainers to provide technology training to all employees. Budget cutbacks restricted funds for training during school year 2001-02, and one of the three trainer positions will not be funded during school year 2002-03. This reduced staffing will slow the availability of additional training and assistance.

During the 2001-02 school year, the district began implementing software that provides lesson plans, testing, and student tracking. Teachers will be able to customize this application for their student's individual requirements. The reduction in training employees adversely affects the districtwide implementation of this software.

To supplement the training it provides, the district publishes a wide variety of technology training opportunities in a monthly districtwide in-service publication *The Lucy News*. Teachers have a daily planning time and can use that time to participate in training or they can obtain training outside working hours. In addition, the local community college (Indian River Community College) provides many other technology courses and training seminars for teachers on an ongoing basis.

Appropriate Technology for Performance

8 The district makes technology acquisitions for instructional needs.

The district uses instructional needs to determine which software to acquire

The district identifies and acquires the appropriate technologies needed to improve educational performance. Wave team meetings and teacher technology literacy profiles identify some needs. For example, the wave teams identified the teachers' need to manage the instructional requirements of the Sunshine State Standards. The district purchased software based on the need to manage standards-aligned curriculum, provides instructional resources and assessments, and measures student performance against district or state curriculum objectives. The system integrates with student administrative software to eliminate repeated data entry. The model curriculum and assessment database component of the software allows customization of individual school or the district's curriculum.

The district is currently working on a security profile to give students access from their homes to the Internet and to some district systems. This first step towards student independent study via the web should be followed closely by measuring student gains in achievement. The district uses measures such as the FCAT test to assess student performance. However, it does not try to correlate the use of certain technologies with student performance on the FCAT test or improved grades.

9 To ensure cost-effective technology decisions, the district bases technology acquisitions on the results of research, planning, and evaluations of previous technology decisions.

The district bases its plans for technology acquisitions on annual assessments

St. Lucie County School District technology plan's standard school model contains specific hardware standards. The district's standard schools model was revised in school year 2001-02 to meet changing technology. Wave teams annually compare existing hardware against the model's updated standards at budget development time. The district is in the middle of implementing several administrative and curriculum software applications. The wave teams will be collecting information on the results of these applications on curriculum improvement. The district technology committee will then use this information to guide future technology plans. The committee receives and discusses information regarding the cost-effectiveness of technology-related decisions.

The district uses different purchasing strategies to lower technology costs

The district combines school purchases for a group of schools at one time to obtain quantity discounts. The district's wave teams meet annually with each school to discuss future purchases. The MIS director negotiates purchases with vendors using a variety of methods and pricing sources to get the best discount. These methods include grouping purchases for quantity discounts and timing the purchases to coincide with vendor accounting cycles that typically include end-of-period discounting. The district also compares state contract pricing with other school district and county bids, selecting the one that offers the best prices.

10 The district has established a process for acquiring new programs that integrate technology into everyday curricular needs and align the curriculum with state standards.

The district has standards for acquisition and equitable distribution of technology

The technology plan clearly delineates the approach the district follows to integrate its instructional technology with the Sunshine State Standards. Each year the district technology committee reviews the districtwide purchase plan to verify that budgetary appropriations align with the plan. The district's online newsletter and website publishes recommended software lists. Each year, the district seeks to equitably distribute technology resources to schools through careful budget planning that measures technology assets at each school against technology objectives for hardware standards.

The MIS director summarizes the needs assessments for computer purchases based on current inventories and an annually revised, standardized school configuration model. The district average distribution is one computer for every three students. Actual ratios vary by school due to this year's budget cutbacks, grants funding, special programs, and construction of new schools causing variations that change each year. The allocation process used attempts to equalize the number of computers per student and upgrade to new technology each year. The district brought each school to 80% of the ideal configuration established by the standard school model for 2002-03. The technology budget proposal reduced the computers allocated

for the current school year due to budget constraints which reduced the amount available for equalization and upgrades.

11 The district has a stable and efficient infrastructure.

The district provides a consistently available and fully operational network

The district has a wide area network that provides a reliable infrastructure for communication, data transmission, resource sharing, and Internet capabilities. All schools are connected to the district office where traffic is filtered before data is sent or received from the Internet through a fiber optic connection. The district recently awarded an e-rate funded fiber contract to increase the wide area network bandwidth for existing and future video, internet and potential voice over Internet Protocol needs.

The district has a network manager who oversees the network and ensures its availability and security. District employees report problems on a web-based system that logs, assigns, and reassigns problems until they are resolved. District employees can also phone a centralized help desk for help with emergency problems. The MIS department gives server or communications problems at school sites top priority and resolves these problems quickly.

Appropriate Use of Technology

12 The district has established and communicated a policy for appropriate uses of all types of technology resources, including computers, video equipment, software, and the Internet.

The district provides written guidelines describing the appropriate and inappropriate uses of technology

The school board approved a policy requiring students and their parent to sign an acceptable use agreement before the student is allowed to use district technology or access Internet resources from school. These policies are supported by written acceptable use agreements, copyright guidelines, and incident reporting forms.

The district promotes and practices ethical, secure and appropriate uses of technology that comply with legal and professional standards. Employees, teachers, students, and parents receive written and verbal guidelines describing the appropriate and inappropriate uses of technology, administrative reporting of misuse of Internet access, website guidelines, and style guides for classroom and school web pages.

The district's employees email addresses are published on the district's website. The district assigns email addresses to all teachers and employees with access to a computer. All email is managed by a distributed system that forwards copies of communications to a central message server at the district office to route through security filters, distribute to appropriate recipients, and retain for public archival purposes.

13 The district supports compliance with the established policy on safe and legal use of technology resources.

The district mandates written acceptable use agreements for students and parents

The district has established policies and procedures to notify students and teachers of appropriate technology use. The district requires students and parents to sign acceptable use agreements before students are allowed to use district technology or access Internet resources from school. Teachers must monitor student activities for compliance with the acceptable use agreement. Two flow charts on the back of the acceptable use agreement form define the procedures the district will use to handle incidents of technology misuse by employees and students.

The district employs two different Internet filters: a locally installed filter and the Department of Education's Florida Information Resource Network (FIRN) filter. [3] The district also encourages use of safe search engines by providing links to recommended search sites. Network virus software automatically pulls virus definitions daily to update software that protects each computer in the district from virus events that may occur on individual machines, servers or the entire network.

Management Information Systems

14 Segregation of Duties: The district segregates duties to reduce the risk that unauthorized transactions will be entered and not discovered quickly.

Appropriate segregation of duties exists within the data processing function

The district segregates duties by requiring users to authorize the MIS department to run specific programs. MIS department managers review program run logs to verify the appropriateness of program operations and updates. Within MIS, the data processing operations unit has its own chain of command separate from systems and programming. Systems programming, an operating system function separate from applications programming, is outsourced to a private vendor. Security profiles allow only certain authorized employees to update data. Management employees throughout the district and all employees in the MIS department do not have access to update data.

The district's personnel policies for MIS department employees include a variety of security procedures including reference checks, security statements, rotation of duties, and terminated employee exit procedures. These personnel procedures require that

- employees are fingerprinted before employment,
- managers conduct phone and written reference checks,

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[3] The FIRN network uses a technology for website filtering and search engine controls. The local filter adds another layer at the local intranet level to protect personal information, block chat rooms, and manage on-line time.

- keys issued to data processing employees are recorded in a log to ensure their return when employees leave employment, and
- passwords are removed for all terminated employees.

The district uses additional measures to bolster the reliability of the information it reports and uses for management decisions. For example, accounting, payroll, and other business service departments submit job run sheets to data processing, which logs and retains them for audit.

15 User Controls: The district's user controls ensure authorization prior to processing transactions and ensure all output represents authorized and valid transactions.

Appropriate internal controls exist over transaction processing

Application programs require user authorization before the data processing department run programs to process new data. This requirement protects the integrity of district data by preventing unauthorized input processing. Security profiles allow only authorized employees to update data. Managers throughout the district and data processing employees cannot update data.

The district employs multiple levels of sign-on security to protect data and application programs. Operating system security grants access only to systems authorized for each employee. The district assigns authorization for systems access in groupings referred to as panels that restricts access for each employee. Job functions dictate the type of panel used to authorize necessary employee access to information systems. Individual application level security further restricts specific panels and type of access by panel based upon the needs of each user.

Management reviews, edit reports, and posting procedures help ensure the integrity of information. MIS personnel operate, create, modify, update, and maintain applications, and then user department managers review information on reports produced by the applications for reasonableness and accuracy. Computer operators review edit reports for accuracy before postings of new transactions or data occur. The user department requests the data processing department begin posting of transactions after reviewing the input to protect the information system from bad data or mistakes during data entry.

Forms for data updating provide audit trails, structure, and control over transaction processing. The district forms committee approves input forms for data entry for all applications. Most forms that are used to collect or confirm data such as payroll registers require signatures. Supervisors approve any requests to change data outside an application.

16 Application Controls: The district's applications are designed to provide users with reliable data.

Application systems internal controls ensure control over information processing

The district maintains reports for all data that resides on the system. Each school employs a data specialist to input data, update and verify data, review reports and distribute the resulting information. These employees provide integrity checks on school system data.

Management reviews, edit reports, and posting procedures provide multiple validation steps to verify the integrity of information. Principals and district administrators determine from these reports that information processing has occurred correctly. Additional control procedures used by the MIS department personnel include:

- Adequately totaled reports generated by application systems enable information users to validate reports.
- District applications generate range tests for editing and validation of input data.
- Applications produce sufficient detail that supports summary output reports.
- Applications procedures mandate that code value tests are inherent throughout all applications.
- Updating control files require valid codes.
- User departments review edit reports before input data updates system information.
- Change logs track application activity and procedures include reviews of input.

17 General Controls: The district has established general controls in the areas of access, systems development and maintenance, documentation, operations, and physical security to promote the proper functioning of the information systems department.

The district developed written internal control procedures for data security and disaster recovery

The district established general controls for access, systems development and maintenance, documentation, operations, and physical security. Security procedures restrict online access to school district systems based upon area of responsibility. A fireproof, locked vault stores application, data, and back-up tapes and disks in the computer room. User departments must authorize modifications to existing applications and test them prior to implementation. The MIS department has written procedures for developing and updating programming source code.   Application vendors provide documentation for purchased applications.

Operator manuals document all critical startup, shutdown, and periodic update and backup processes. Operation schedules ensure successful completion of overnight jobs. Managers review the results of these jobs each morning.

Physical security includes the district's site-tested disaster recovery plan that includes interlocal agreements with two alternate sites. MIS procedures incorporate daily backups and tape copies stored offsite. Physical security includes secured and monitored computer areas. Fire proof vaults secure backup disk and tape storage. The district maintains $750,000,000 casualty loss coverage insurance that specifically lists EDP equipment. These procedures promote the proper functioning of all aspects of the information systems department.

18 The district's management information systems provide data needed by administrative and instructional personnel in a reliable and timely manner.

MIS systems provide useful and reliable management information

The district maintains management information systems that provide administrative and instructional personnel with the needed data in a reliable, timely, and cost-efficient manner. A large proportion of St. Lucie County School District data is available interactively on the Internet. Reports are made available on the web from internal data systems as well as by the DOE. District employees use the information at both levels to make administrative decisions.

Grade, attendance, and other student data is available in a variety of summary formats both online and as paper reports. The MIS department uses existing queries to fill most data requests within 24 hours. These database reports present information in a pre-determined and specific manner. If a query does not exist, district employees fill out a form describing the need for a new report. MIS allocates resources to program new queries based on available resources and priorities defined by the superintendent's senior staff.

Principals commented in all three OPPAGA focus group meetings that district administrators, school administrators, and teachers use reports of students' mastery of class materials to assess program performance and results. These reports contain performance measurement data that is routinely collected, compiled, and reported.

19 The district has taken steps to minimize the number of databases that are independent of its centralized computer systems.

## All critical system databases reside on central mainframe or network server systems

The district has centralized all critical data. This minimizes its need to separately manage its three remote databases, all of which are integrated into the central system. The maintenance work order system and the food service system upload data into the financial reporting system. Both of these systems have contracted support that work closely with the district MIS employees. The district implemented transportation routing software that uploads daily new student information from the student administrative database, determines which bus each student will ride based on their home address, and plots all district students on a mapping module within the same system. The information from this system is uploaded twice daily into the transportation department's website. Parents can access this information and determine to which bus their children are assigned, the location of the bus stop, and the scheduled times for departure and arrival at that bus stop. The transportation department provides a full-time technology employee to maintain the data, train departmental employees, and ensure the viability of the system through software enhancements and integration with the district's central system.

The district does not have any other critical databases on remote systems. All critical system databases for all types of student information, budget, purchasing, risk management, asset inventories, accounting, payroll, and personnel are stored on central mainframe and server systems. MIS incorporates user needs into the centralized databases upon request. DOE changes are always incorporated when communicated to the district.

20 Other Controls: The district has established appropriate controls related to electronic data exchange transactions, other transactions processed through electronic media, and image processing systems.

The district has established appropriate control procedures to ensure that the transactions are processed as intended

The district exchanges electronic data primarily with DOE in Tallahassee. These data exchanges are governed by state statute. The district has established appropriate control procedures for payroll direct deposit transactions processed through electronic media to ensure that the transactions are processed as intended. District employees maintain review procedures for these transactions and intensive communications by telephone with the recipients of electronic data transmissions to ensure timeliness and safety of important information transmissions.
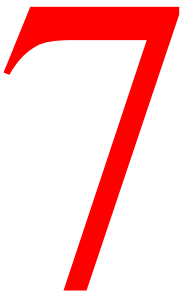
7 Personnel Systems and Benefits

The St. Lucie County School District's Human Resources Service Department generally practices sound personnel management. The district has implemented several new initiatives in recent years that are already resulting in gains in district goals. Some minor modifications and adjustments will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the program.

Conclusion

The St. Lucie County School District is using all 15 best practices related to Personnel Systems and Benefits. The district recruits and hires employees, has a comprehensive staff development program, and formally evaluates its employees to improve performance and productivity. As illustrated in Exhibit 7-1, the district has experienced several accomplishments in the area of personnel.

Exhibit 7-1

Notable Accomplishments in Personnel Systems and Benefits

- The district has designed and implemented the Instructional Performance Appraisal System (IPAS) and the Performance Appraisal System for Administrators (PASA).

- The district has implemented a comprehensive mentor program for new instructional employees.

- The district is effectively using a new imaging system to streamlining its hiring practices.

- The district has created school development plans as a way to identify and implement training needs for each school.

- The district's superintendent conducts Learning Lunches to identify problems and recognize accomplishments in the school district.

- The district maintains a unique benefits plan that gives employees numerous benefit options.

- The district has made considerable progress in reaching its unitary status goals.

Overview of Chapter Findings

OPPAGA reviewed the St. Lucie County School District's personnel systems and benefits, using the Best Financial Management Practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education and the associated indicators. OPPAGA conducted on-site interviews with district level managers and gathered information on the personnel system and benefits program such as the district's human resource policies and procedures. OPPAGA also spoke with district level employees, principals, teachers, and classified employees. An overview of chapter findings is presented below.

Personnel Processes

1. The district has efficient and effective processes for recruiting and hiring qualified personnel. (Page 7-4)

2. The district maintains a reasonably stable work force through competitive salary and benefit packages and through districtwide efforts to address and remedy factors that contribute to turnover. (Page 7-7)

3. The district provides a staff development program for non-instructional employees. (Page 7-10)

4. The district provides a comprehensive staff development program for instructional employees. (Page 7-11)

5. The district provides a comprehensive staff development program for school administrators. (Page 7-15)

6. The district has designed a system of formally evaluating employees' performance that is designed to improve and reward excellent performance. (Page 7-17)

7. The district has developed and implemented policies under which any employee who repeatedly fails to meet the district's performance standards or whose behavior or job performance is potentially harmful to students is removed from contact with students. (Page 7-20)

Managing Human Resources

8. The district maintains close and effective channels of communication with employees. (Page 7-22)

9. The district has efficient and cost-effective policies and practices for providing substitute teachers. (Page 7-24)

10. The district maintains personnel records in an efficient and accessible manner. (Page 7-26)

11. The district uses cost containment practices for its Workers' Compensation Program. (Page 7-27)

12. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency and effectiveness of the Human Resources Program. (Page 7-28)

13. The district reviews the organizational structure and staffing levels of the Human Resources Department annually during the budget preparation process to minimize administrative layers and processes. (Page 7-29)

14. The district periodically evaluates its personnel practices as needed to reduce costs and/or improve efficiency and effectiveness. (Page 7-31)

15. For classes of employees that are unionized, the district maintains an effective collective bargaining process. (Page 7-31)

Background

The St. Lucie County School District had 3,438 employees as of August 2002. District employees are grouped under three categories:

- administrative employees, which include both district level administrators and school administrators (principals and assistant principals);

- instructional employees, those responsible for teaching students at all levels, kindergarten through secondary education; and

- non-instructional or "classified," employees, which include clerical employees, food service workers, bus drivers, maintenance workers, custodians and other support personnel.

The St. Lucie County School District's Human Resources Department is responsible for most of the activities covered by the best practices within this section. The assistant superintendent of Human Resource Services oversees the activities of the Human Resource Division. The division has adopted the following mission statement:

> *The mission of the St. Lucie County School District Human Resources*
> *Department is to recruit, train and retain teachers and staff that will*
> *enable all students to graduate from safe and caring schools equipped*
> *with the knowledge, skills and desire to succeed.*

The goals within the district's strategic plan related to human resources are presented in Exhibit 7-2.

Exhibit 7-2

Goals listed in St. Lucie County School District's Strategic Plan

The primary goals the district lists in its strategic plan include

- securing for the St. Lucie County School District the most qualified administrators, teachers, and staff available;

- continuing to provide a comprehensive, ongoing staff development program to achieve and maintain high levels of productivity and performance for all employees; and

- managing St. Lucie County School District's human resources in an efficient and effective manner.
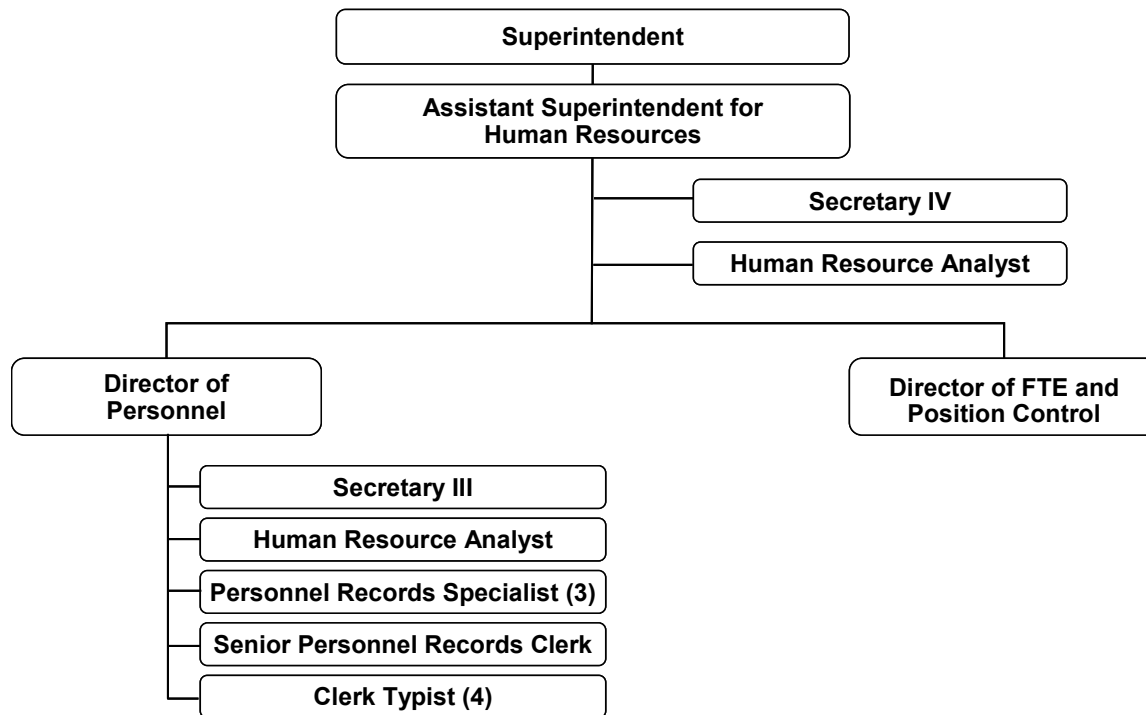
Source: St. Lucie County School District.

The assistant superintendent of Human Resource Services oversees the activities of the Human Resource Division. The primary administrative positions reporting to the assistant superintendent of the Human Resource Division include the director of Personnel and the coordinator of FTE and Position Control (title is changed to director of FTE and Position Control). During our review, the director of Human Resource Development was transferred to the Curriculum Department and the coordinator of Personnel position was deleted effective July 1, 2002. The district cut the HRD budget by about $92,596 or 48.2% as a part of budget reductions for the 2001-02 school year. [1]

The Risk Management Department oversees insurance activities, reviews health benefit payment summaries for unusual activity or reinsurance claims, and also reviews property damage and workers compensation claims for the district. This department is organizationally assigned to the Business Services Division.

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[1] Part of this reduction was due to the transfer of the Human Resource Development activities.

Exhibit 7-3

District Personnel Department Organizational Structure July 1, 2002

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                        ┌─────────────────────────┐
                        │     Superintendent      │
                        └─────────────────────────┘
                        ┌─────────────────────────┐
                        │ Assistant Superintendent for │
                        │     Human Resources     │
                        └─────────────────────────┘
                                    │
                          ┌─────────────────────────┐
                          │      Secretary IV       │
                          └─────────────────────────┘
                          ┌─────────────────────────┐
                          │ Human Resource Analyst  │
                          └─────────────────────────┘

    ┌──────────────────┐                      ┌──────────────────┐
    │   Director of    │                      │ Director of FTE and │
    │    Personnel     │                      │  Position Control │
    └──────────────────┘                      └──────────────────┘
         ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
         │           Secretary III          │
         └──────────────────────────────────┘
         ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
         │      Human Resource Analyst      │
         └──────────────────────────────────┘
         ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
         │  Personnel Records Specialist (3) │
         └──────────────────────────────────┘
         ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
         │   Senior Personnel Records Clerk  │
         └──────────────────────────────────┘
         ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
         │          Clerk Typist (4)         │
         └──────────────────────────────────┘
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Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Employee Recruitment, Hiring, Training, and Retention

1   The district has efficient and effective processes for recruiting and hiring qualified personnel.

The district's recruiting and hiring processes are generally efficient, and the district is able to fill most of its vacancies without exceptional efforts. The district implemented an automated applicant tracking system in the summer of 2001 that, when combined with the use of on-line applications, has made the process user-friendly for both applicants and administrators.

The district has a standard process for receiving and processing applications. The district's personnel office has the primary responsibility for recruiting and processing applications. However, the principal for each school is responsible for making the final decision for hiring school-based personnel, while department administrators make the hiring decisions for bus drivers and other non-school-based personnel. The district has about 250 teacher vacancies and 500 total vacancies a year.

The district maintains position descriptions that accurately identify the duties of each position and the education, experience, knowledge, skills, and competency levels required for each class of positions.

This is an ongoing process through out the year, as changes are made as needed. The district is working on making job descriptions available on its website within the next year. The district completed a major rewrite of job descriptions in 1997, and now reviews all job descriptions annually as a part of the budget process.

The district has implemented an automated applicant tracking system

In the summer of 2001, the district implemented an automated applicant tracking system for applications. Administrative and instructional applications are available for completion and submission on-line. Applications for all positions can be obtained from the district by a request through mail, e-mail, or phone. District employees scan completed applications into the applicant tracking system.

Once the application has been input and scanned into the applicant tracking system, it is available for principals and other supervisors to view via the Internet using personal passwords. This system relieves the principal/supervisor from having to travel to the Personnel Office to review applications. The applicant tracking system also provides administrators with several sort functions so that they can organize and choose from the available applications.

Although the district is experiencing a shortage of qualified applicants in the some areas, its use of on-line postings of all vacant positions and on-line applications for teachers and administrators has improved its ability to promptly fill instructional vacancies. As of the first student day of the 2001-02 school year, the district had 13 teacher vacancies, down from 32 vacancies for the 2000-01 school year. The first day of the 2002-03 school year, the district had only 3 teacher vacancies.

Recruitment Initiatives

Each year prior to recruitment, the personnel office requests from schools lists of projected vacancies to enable recruiters to focus their efforts. The district works collaboratively with Florida Atlantic University (which has a campus in St. Lucie County) in the development of alternative certification programs for critical shortage areas. The district focuses recruiting efforts on students currently majoring in education at the university level, as well as on community college and high school students who plan to major in education. The district places FAU education students in district schools for field placements and classroom internships. The district also receives federal grant money through Title II to use for scholarships to attract student teachers. Scholarship recipients are required to be enrolled in Indian River Community College and to major in education.

The district advertises "hard-to-fill" positions in newspapers, minority journals, *Education Week*, and on the sides of school buses.

The district's beginning teacher salary for the 2001-02 is within 1% of the Florida average ($26,592), but is 16% below the beginning teacher salary for Palm Beach County, which is located within 50 miles of Fort Pierce. In an effort to compete more effectively for teachers, the district implemented an adjustment of approximately 5.1% in 1998, and during the 2001-02 school year, used federal grant funds to offer a $500.00 bonus to all new teacher hires.

The district's beginning teacher salary is higher than the average wage in St. Lucie County. Its instructional, administrative, and non-instructional employee salaries are comparable to those offered in its peer districts. Its average vacancy rate for instructional employees and percentage of new instructional employees is also comparable to its peer districts.

Exhibit 7-4

The District's New Instructional Employee Vacancy Percentage Is Similar to the State's Average

School District	Percentage New Instructional Employee
Lake	6.5%
Leon	9.8%
Alachua	10.4%
Florida	10.8%
St. Lucie	**10.9%**
Manatee	12.0%
Indian River	14.1%
Martin	14.2%
Osceola	19.7%

Source: St. Lucie County School District. School Year 2000-01.

Minority Recruitment

St. Lucie County School Board Policy 2.09 requires that the Human Resources Department conduct its employment procedures in a manner that assures equal opportunity regardless of age, race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. The district was under a desegregation order for 26 years for both employees and students. Now the district is monitored by the Unitary Status Report Committee to ensure continued compliance with the desegregation order. The district identifies minority employment needs by looking at each school and determining if it is racially balanced. The district creates a report on minority employment of the district every year and will soon have the capability in its applicant tracking system to monitor variations in the number of minority applicants. The district has used several strategies to try to recruit minorities to St. Lucie County. For instance, the district generally sends diverse teams on recruitment trips and attends recruitment activities designed to attract minority applicants. In addition, the district belongs to the Florida Fund for Minority Teachers.

The districts unitary status reports for 1996 and 2001 show that the district is making progress towards achieving its goal of racial balance. The district has made the most unitary status progress in the increase of its percentage of minority adminstrators, as shown in Exhibit 7-5.

Exhibit 7-5

Unitary Status Report, October, 1996

	Black		White		Other	
	1996	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001
Percentage of students by race	31%	29.57%	60.1%	57.15%	8.9%	13.26%
Percentage of full-time teachers by race	20%	17%	78.2%	79.9%	1.8%	4.7%
Percentage of administrators by race	31.9%	34.5%	66.0%	62.7%	2.1%	2.7%

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Out-of-Field Teachers

The district has procedures to monitor both the number of out-of-field teachers and the status of those teachers' efforts to attain certification in the field in which they are teaching. The school board approves out-of-field teachers as required by the *Florida Statutes* at the second board meeting in September and January of each year. Out-of-field teachers must sign an agreement to complete requirements for certification. The district's certification analyst keeps a database of all out-of-field teachers and monitors

their progress toward appropriate certification. The director of personnel and a certification analyst visit all middle and high schools annually and meet individually with out-of-field instructors and those holding temporary certificates to provide assistance in the certification process.

Recommendations

- *None*

2

The district attempts to maintain a stable work force through competitive salary and benefit packages and through districtwide efforts to address and remedy factors that contribute to increased turnover.

Although the St. Lucie County School District faces numerous challenges, the district has maintained a reasonably stable workforce. The district's average teacher salaries and salaries for most non-instructional positions are similar to those in its peer districts. However, some large districts located nearby offer substantially higher salaries that make St. Lucie salaries appear less competitive, as shown in Exhibit 7-6.

The district maintains a reasonably stable work force given the current shortages facing the teaching profession; and despite its salaries not being fully competitive with other Florida districts. However, St. Lucie filled 27% of its fall 2001 vacancies with out-of-field teachers while, Florida districts on-average filled their vacancies with 14% out-of-field teachers. One potential explanation for the higher frequency of vacancies and out-of-field teachers is that the county is not near a major metropolitan area. The out-of-field teachers are mainly in the areas of Exceptional Student Education (ESE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Teachers for these subjects are required to have special endorsements. Florida Atlantic University, the closest four-year university, has just begun a new program for expediting ESE certification in the last year. District officials believe this program will most likely help to alleviate the problem.

Salary schedules are used to determine teachers' salaries. In determining support employees' salaries, the district looks at level of education. The district and each department review salaries every year. However, even if the district identifies inequities, it often cannot remedy them because of budget constraints.

Exhibit 7-6

Teacher Salaries

School District	Beginning Teacher's Salary [1]	Average Teacher's Salary	Maximum Teacher's Salary
Alachua [2]	25,875	31,045	44,100
Osceola	28,400	32,423	47,000
Lake [2]	28,500	32,925	44,695
Indian River	26,705	33,457	47,524
Leon [2]	26,600	33,717	45,300
Martin [2]	27,000	33,934	45,835

School District	Beginning Teacher's Salary [1]	Average Teacher's Salary	Maximum Teacher's Salary
Manatee [2]	27,593	34,248	46,217
St. Lucie	**26,756**	**34,326**	**48,152**
Florida	**26,592**	**36,365**	**44,389**
Palm Beach	31,725	41,268	57,538

[1] Teacher Salary is for a bachelor's degree holder for the school year 2001-02.

[2] Some districts had not agreed to a current year teacher salaries contract at time of printing. Salary information for these districts is from 2000-01.

Source: The Florida Department of Education.

The St. Lucie County School District salaries for most non-instructional positions are within the range of salaries offered in its peer counties. As shown in Exhibit 7-6, the district's teacher salaries are higher than its peers but lower than some neighboring counties. As shown in Exhibit 7-7, salaries for bus drivers in the district are the highest of its peer or neighboring districts. The district's controlled school choice program requires a greater level of transportation services than is needed in other counties, and thus more bus drivers are needed. The district's average bus driver annual wage is 19% higher than the state average and as much as 69% higher than the wage in neighboring counties.

Exhibit 7-7

Bus Driver 2001-02 Average Salary

District	Average Salary	Number Employed	Average Months
Indian River	$9,946	65	9
Okeechobee	$10,763	56	9
Brevard	$14,145	362	10
State Total	**$14,149**	**14,220**	**9.5**
Osceola	$15,037	224	9
Palm Beach	$15,413	637	9
Martin	$15,956	28	10
Manatee	$16,306	170	9
St. Lucie	**$16,815**	**378**	**7.4**

Source: Florida Department of Education.

The district has in place strategies to retain critical shortage area teachers and outstanding instructors.

The new instructional and support employee evaluation systems allow supervisors to identify and reinforce outstanding performers. The new appraisal system has only been in use for the 2001-02 school year and the district has only implemented the pay for performance aspect of the new system July 1, 2002. The pay for performance system will become effective once it is ratified by the teachers' bargaining agreement. The district also has procedures for selecting instructional personnel for positions that receive supplemental pay (i.e., team leaders, mentors, etc.).

During the 2000-01 school year, the St. Lucie County School District accepted state monies to provide bonuses to critical shortage area teachers, outstanding instructors at D/F or alternative sites, identified advance placement teachers, and international baccalaureate teachers. In the 2001-02 school year, the district paid an $850 bonus to selected teachers remaining in the profession (based on a copy of their evaluation) and a $500 bonus to all new St. Lucie County teachers. The district also provides a bonus to identified Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate instructors. These actions may help the

district attract and retain teachers and alleviate the problems it is having obtaining teachers in shortage areas.

The District is Developing a Process to Identify Why Employees Terminate Their Employment

The district has just completed its second year using the state-required teacher exit interviews. Additional methods the district has to obtain information include the collective bargaining process and district-wide personnel reviews. These methods do not provide enough detailed information for the district to identify specific reasons for turnover. To effectively manage its workforce, the district needs to establish procedures to collect and maintain information that will enable it to identify increases and explanations for turnover.

Recommendations

- *We recommend that the district revise its teacher exit process to capture additional information as to why the employee is leaving and work with FAU to develop a program for ESOL similar to the ESE program that helps teachers obtain certification faster.*

Action Plan 7-1

Improve Teacher Exit Process		
Strategy	Add follow-up questions to exit interview forms to obtain more information.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Develop additional questions to ask, such as whether there was anything the district could have done differently that might have influenced the teacher to stay.
	Step 2:	Develop exit forms for non-instructional employees.
	Step 3:	Compile this information.
	Step 4:	Use information to address retention issues.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Action Plan 7-2

Work With FAU to Develop ESOL Endorsement Program		
Strategy	Work with FAU to develop an ESOL endorsement program.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Discuss feasibility with FAU.
	Step 2:	Decide necessary steps
Who Is Responsible	Director of Staff Development	
Time Frame	December 2003	

3   The district provides a staff development program to achieve and maintain productivity and employee performance among non-instructional employees

A staff development program is in place for all district employees, including a plan for non-instructional employees. To track employee training history and needs, the Human Resource Department maintains in-service training histories for all employees. Although the district provides orientation for all employees, individual departments are responsible for meeting job specific training needs.

The District has a New Employee Orientation Program

All new employees must attend a three-hour new employee orientation, which covers several school district issues. The topics reviewed in the orientation are related to ethics, in-service training, forms (e.g., reason for absence), procedure information, retirement and health benefits, school choice, and the school calendar. Several topics are health related including drug-free workplace, infectious diseases, HIV and AIDS, hepatitis, blood-borne pathogens standard training, and infection control training. These orientation sessions are offered twice a month. All new non-instructional employees are on a 120-day probationary period during which they are provided support and training by their supervisors.

District officials indicated that supervisors and employees are asked to make suggestions for improvement in the new employee orientation, and that this input has been used to revise the training. For example, the Management Information Systems Department asked that the district's policy for using the Internet be included in the orientation.

The District Develops Training Plans for Non-Instructional Employees

The district establishes and implements formal staff development plans to provide on-going training of non-instructional employees. The responsibility for training different groups of non-instructional employees (e.g., bus drivers and food service workers) is assigned to the functional units within the district (i.e., transportation employees are trained by the district's transportation unit). That unit is responsible for providing the district training officer with copies of annual plans, training schedules, and attendance rosters. The district training office provides support, including financial assistance, to these efforts when needed and requested, and maintains training records for all employees.

Training Courses Are Developed as a Result of School Assessments

Each school site develops a training needs assessment as part of their school improvement plan (SIP). This assessment provides the basis for the annual HRD Training Needs Assessment Summary. The data sources for this plan include the Needs Assessment Survey, the In-service Committee, In-service Rosters, Shifting Paradigms for St. Lucie County, and the list of teachers needing ESOL endorsement. Support staff has an annual opportunity to respond to a training survey, which is also incorporated in the Human Resource Development Training Needs Assessment Survey matrix. The school improvement plans identifies each school's training needs. The district prepares a matrix of training needs based on the SIPs. The Human Resource Department also publishes a survey in the district's employee newsletter asking professional support personnel about their training needs.

Recommendations

- *None*

4 The district provides an employee development program for instructional employees to attain and maintain quality instruction and to achieve high levels of student performance.

Two particular aspects of the district's training program for instructional employees are functioning in an exemplary manner: the use of a districtwide training focus each year and the new teacher mentoring program. According to the teacher survey conducted by OPPAGA personnel, 53% of teacher respondents agree that the training opportunities provided by the district "consistently meet my professional development needs," while 22% disagreed with this statement. [2]

The District Provides a Comprehensive Mentoring Program for New Teachers

The teacher induction program includes a mentoring component for new teachers. Each new teacher is assigned a mentor to provide guidance and advice as the new employee learns the various aspects of the job. All mentors receive training in mentoring purposes, techniques, and practices. The program was piloted in the 2000-01 school year, and fully implemented it in the 2001-02 school year. The teachers chosen as mentors were required to have clinical education training, and the majority had national board certification.

The district attempts to match mentors and new teachers in location, grade, or subject area. Each mentor is required to maintain continuing contact and documentation throughout the year, and principals are asked to meet with new teachers once a month without their mentors. This monthly meeting provides some assurance that the new teacher has the opportunity to discuss concerns with the administration, and that the principal can monitor the mentoring relationship. Some principals reported that these meetings are not well attended.

Each mentor is assigned no more than three new teachers and mentors are required to meet with their assigned new teachers once a month for networking. Mentors stay until the end of the year and receive $15-per-hour stipends for 60 hours. The pilot program included 28 new teachers, and full implementation of the program involved 208 new teachers during the 2001-02 school year. The HRD Department has trained 100 mentors, most of who work with two or three new teachers each. Although it is too early to measure the long-term results of this mentoring program, the combination of peer mentoring and the involvement of the principals on a monthly basis give this program the potential of helping new teachers through the difficult first year of teaching.

District employees identified some areas for improvement in the mentoring program. Some principals expressed concerned that assigning three new teachers to a single mentor is not as effective as providing each new teacher with his/her own mentor would be. However, principals already find it difficult to match mentors with new teachers. Principals also have found that the mentoring program is very effective for new teachers just out of school, but is of limited usefulness for an experienced teacher new

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[2] The remaining 23.8% responded that they were neutral.

to the district. According to district officials, the district needs more mentors for Exceptional Student Education teachers. Despite these concerns, the program looks to be helpful.

The District's Professional Development System Is Designed to Link Professional Development with Student Achievement

St. Lucie has created a Professional Development System that addresses 2000 legislative requirements linking professional development for instructional and administrative personnel with student and school data as well as teacher and administrator data. The 2000 District Professional Development System and the county's master in-service plan received renewal for 2000-01. During the 2000-01 and 2001-02 school years, the district has emphasized the Balanced Reading program and the Math Solutions programs.

Teachers have found it useful to have this focus rather than to receive training on several varied and unrelated topics. To increase teacher attendance at training, the district has offered teachers a stipend for attending weeklong summer training classes on each of these subjects prior to the beginning of the school year.

The District Has a New Teacher Induction Program for Instructional Employees

The Teacher Induction Program (TIP) is a result of the state mandate that Florida school districts develop and maintain a system by which eligible instructional employees demonstrates professional education competence. The TIP was developed to enable the superintendent and the designated staff to recommend qualified employees for professional certification. The goal of the TIP is the advancement of student achievement through improved teacher performance.

The New Teacher Induction Program was designed to ensure that new teachers demonstrate their professional competence prior to being recommended to receive professional certification. Over the course of the 180-day program, participants must successfully demonstrate each of the 18 competencies. These include on-the-job experiences, individual study and training, and districtwide, in-service training opportunities. Methods for demonstration of the competencies are also provided.

A committee updated and revised the Teacher Induction Program guide and training opportunities in 2001. That input plus ongoing input from administrators and teachers provided the basis for the new program.

The District Uses a Professional Development System to Plan Employee Training Needs

Each school has an improvement plan with specific objectives based on student achievement. The district's training plan is primarily based on the Professional Development System, the Master In-Service Plan and the Individual School Improvement Plans. The Professional Development System focuses in-service activities on subject area content, teaching methods, and technology, as they relate to Sunshine State Standards, along with assessment and data analysis, classroom management, and school safety. The district's training needs are correlated with these focus areas. The training that evolves is state and district focused to encompass objectives to improve student performance.

The schools base their school improvement plans on priority goals, examples of which appear below.

1. Increase academic achievement for all students in reading, writing, and math.
2. Create a safe and positive learning environment for all children and adults.
3. Update technology to enhance student achievement.
4. Provide training for staff and parents to better meet the needs of our students.

5. Enhance parent and community involvement.

The schools use these goals to determine their strategies for improving their school.

School improvement plans (SIP) identify the priority training needs of the district. A matrix of the overall training needs is then generated from the school improvement plans and other sources. The director of human resource development then creates a matrix that displays training needs by individual school, such as arts integration, underachieving students, ESOL strategies, math, reading, technology, and writing. Individual participants and schools then evaluate the training activities.

Exhibit 7-8

Methods Used to Identify Training Needs

- Local assessments
- Report card and school grades
- FCAT, FCAT Writes, and SAT and NRT scores
- Subject Skills test
- Science/History fair projects
- Portfolios
- Participant Reaction Summaries
- Site administrators' observation/assessment of the degree of transference of teacher skills and instructional strategies into classroom instruction and student performance

Source: Professional Development System for St. Lucie County Schools, September 2000 (p. 4).

The Teacher's Professional Development Portfolio is Designed to Improve Student Performance

The district is required to complete a Teacher's Professional Development Portfolio for Student Performance Improvement plan each year. The goal of this plan is to ensure that training plans for individual teachers will address improvements in instructional performance that will result in gains in student performance. Some of the areas specifically addressed in the plan include improvements in Sunshine State Standards, technology, assessment and data analysis, classroom management, and school safety. Balanced Reading and Math Solutions are training programs used in the district as a result of the information accumulated by the district through the teachers' professional development portfolios.

The administration determines the effectiveness of training programs through student performance and then decides if the training should be kept for another year, modified and kept, or discontinued. The district also looks for new training programs to consider.

The district is using FCAT test results to assess the training needs of each site's teachers relative to student performance on those tests. Each school site will revisit its school improvement plan, specifically Goal 6. [3] This analysis will determine whether previous teacher training should be continued, enhanced or discontinued in lieu of other training.

The Human Resource Division sent out a survey to principals to determine how to improve training needs in May 2002. The results of the Training Effectiveness Evaluation survey were shared with all administrators to help them to determine the value of the teacher training programs used the previous

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[3] Adequate yearly progress for goal 6 will be made when 100% of the instructional staff have received training (or equivalent courses) in 5 out of the 9 areas of in-service training as identified in the in-service Needs Assessment by June, 2002.

year. This survey asked each principal if he or she thought each training class should be kept, enhanced or discontinued. The percentage of principals responding to each of the three options was recorded. Most of the principals opted to keep things the way they were.

Ongoing Areas for Improvement

Finding time for training teachers has been an ongoing concern. The district has worked with the union to develop an improved training schedule. For the 2001-02 school year, in-service days were alternated with teacher planning days in order to provide a total of four days of training per year. Principals may also specify other training times.

The district has used several modes of evaluating in-service training activities, including individual Participant Reaction Forms to evaluate workshops and a Site Professional Development Evaluation form for each school to annually assess the effectiveness of its school's priority training areas.

According to the teacher survey conducted by OPPAGA personnel, 53% of teacher respondents agree that the training opportunities provided by the district consistently meet my professional development needs, while 22% disagreed. Some of the comments made in this survey reflect dissatisfaction among instructional personnel concerning professional development needs, and suggest that continued improvement in the district's staff development program is possible. However, the issues raised by the comments were generally scattered on different aspects of the training program, and did not identify any systemic issues that the district needs to address.

Exhibit 7-9

Survey Comments Concerning Professional Development Needs

- There were many training opportunities provided by the district that were good, but I marked disagree because there were no opportunities in the area of media specialist.
- I am in an area that has an extremely small population of both students and teachers (profoundly mentally handicapped). My district has made great efforts to see to it that needed training is available, but they don't provide it directly.
- We are offered professional development in all areas including technology.
- I feel that the extra training given is inadequate. It seems that in most instances it is done with the attitude that its "just enough to say we addressed a certain issue" but it doesn't help. It lowers morale because you feel like you are just wasting your time at these inservices.
- More support and help with meeting certification requirements.
- Professional development has been at my own expense using personal time.
- District should have never started the Balanced Reading program with limited funds. Schools should have extra money set aside for workshops and conferences. Teachers shouldn't have to pay to improve their teaching skills.
- As a school district you have to empower teachers and provide them with the skills that meet student needs. If you want to focus on accountability and performance, then develop teachers.
- More support and help with meeting certification requirements.
- TIP is a waste of time particularly for new teachers or beginning teachers to perform a TIP training of all the courses they just completed in college.
- This county does little to help out-of-field teachers gain certification. I am out-of-field this year in ESE and the county HRD, personnel department, ESE Department, and local college have offered me NO assistance in finding course work to return to ESE next school year.

Source: OPPAGA Teacher Survey.

Teachers have had difficulty obtaining needed training in the district often because of budget problems. However, the district's new training focus may help to alleviate some of these concerns. The focus will help the district channel funding into the most useful training programs.

The District Evaluates Its In-service Activities

One manner by which the district evaluates its in-service training activities is to analyze individual Participant Reaction Forms filled out by participants to evaluate workshops. Another evaluation is used annually evaluating the effectiveness of each site's priority training areas through a Site Professional Development Evaluation form.

Establishing a direct link between training and performance is difficult. The district used trial and error in deciding training needs before deciding to focus on math, reading, and computer skills training programs. The 2002-03 school year will be the second full year the focus on math, reading, and technology has been fully funded. The monies left after math, reading, and technology are used to address the training needs of specific school sites. The district's training package will carry forward every year based on state funding. They do not have new money to explore new training options.

Recommendations———————————————————

- *We recommend that the district analyze information retrieved from the new IPAS form.*

Action Plan 7-3

Annual Analysis of Employee Evaluations		
Strategy	Annually analyze employee evaluations to determine performance issues that need to be addressed.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Annually review the employee evaluations for areas of performance problems.
	Step 2:	Categorize the types of issues.
	Step 3:	Include those issues that occur frequently in the staff development plan for the following year.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel	
Time Frame	December 2003	

5   The district provides a staff development program for school-based administrators.

The district has a systematic procedure for identifying and preparing new administrators and providing them with support in their new position. The district also provides parents with several informal mechanisms to offer feedback concerning the performance of administrators at their child's school.

The assistant superintendent for Human Resources Services prepares and annually updates a plan that projects the anticipated supply and demand for administrators in the district. The plan is intended to address school and district administrative positions. This plan helps district officials select assistant principals, intern principals, principals/interim principals, district level administrators, and administrative placements. Administrative openings are posted in the school board offices, at school and department sites, and on the web through the district's website and Education America.

In addition, the district has a leadership development training program for all principals, assistant principals, and aspiring administrators. The leadership development program provides instructional personnel in the aspiring administrators program with opportunities to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to function as a dean or assistant principal in the district. The program also seeks to provide current assistant principals and intern principals with opportunities to attain the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies to become eligible for Florida School Principal Certification.

The district's Preparing New Principals Program (PNP) prepares principals by teaching management and administration skills. All site administrators have either completed the Preparing New Principals Program, or are in the process of completing the program. Supervising principals and a PNP support team provide support and mentor new assistant principals. The support team includes the supervising principal (primary mentor), a district administrator (director or above) and a program graduate of the Preparing New Principals Program. The HRD director acts as an ex-officio member of the team.

Employees and community members are given an opportunity to provide input relative to administrators' performance in a variety of ways.

- The superintendent issues a letter to the parents each year encouraging them to contact the appropriate senior administrator if they have comments relative to an administrator's performance. This letter states, "Should you wish to comment on the performance of your child's teachers, support personnel, or assistant principals, please direct your comments to the school principal. Should you wish to comment on the performance of your child's principal, please direct your comments to one of the following persons."
- Individual conferences with parents or employees often evoke feedback as well. These conferences may be conducted by the executive directors of zone operations, the immediate supervisors of the principals, by personnel administrators in response to inquiries or complaints, or by the superintendent.
- The district's grievance procedure, if not resolved at the individual school, moves to the Personnel Office where the assistant superintendent for Human Resources Services will, in the course of hearing the complaint, also hear indications of administrative performance.
- Speakers at board meetings may address what they consider to be important performance criteria. Although not required, several of the schools do a climate survey each year as part of their school improvement process. These surveys, given to parents and employees, address administrative performance.
- In addition, several school-level administrators ask their employees to assess their performance each year and use the results to plot improvement where indicated.

Recommendations————————————————————————

- *None*

6 The district's system for formally evaluating employees is designed to improve and reward excellent performance and productivity and to identify and address performance that does not meet the district's expectations for the employee.

The St. Lucie County School District completely revised its instructional personnel assessment system for the 2001-02 school year. The new Instructional Performance Assessment System (IPAS) meets all requirements of law as evidenced by the DOE Assessment System Check List and has received an approval letter from the Department of Education's Bureau of Recruitment and Professional Development. The district conducts orientation regarding the assessment process for all employees and is conducted as outlined in the collective bargaining agreements. This orientation provides employees written information regarding the assessment process including performance criteria and the process used to make mid-year and final evaluations.

The District Has a New System That Comprehensively Evaluates Employees and Plans for Their Improvement

Instructional and Administrative Personnel

Principals evaluate instructional personnel using the Department of Education approved instructional personnel appraisal system (IPAS). The IPAS process begins with the orientation of the employee, followed by the completion of a Professional Development Plan for each instructional employee. The employee's supervisor completes data collection activities. If performance is determined to be less than Improvement Expected, then the Performance Improvement Plan is prepared and implemented. If the principal determines the performance to be at least Improvement Expected, then informal and formal observations and follow-up support are provided and documented. After performance ratings are determined, a progress review conference is completed and performance ratings are reviewed. The last part of the process is a final appraisal conference where performance ratings are reviewed. The employee and the Division of Human Resources receive copies of completed appraisal forms. The union was entirely involved in employee evaluation process development. The union received a mixed reaction from the teachers. The evaluations have been used at three pilot schools and have worked out well. However, some teachers are worried that principals will use the new evaluation system against them.

The District Provides Training for the Evaluation Process

The district regularly provides training, guidance, and coaching to persons who conduct personnel evaluations to ensure they evaluate personnel properly. Each year prior to the return of instructional personnel, the district provides training to all administrators regarding the instructional personnel assessment system. Personnel administrators are also available throughout the school year to coach and provide guidance to site administrators regarding the evaluation process for all employees. The district provides new principals in particular with individual assistance during the evaluation and reappointment process.

The district has a process by which it determines/verifies that immediate supervisors have completed performance evaluations at least once a year or as required by district policy. The personnel records specialist checks annual evaluations from worksites against the reappointment list to ensure each employee received an annual evaluation. The records specialist notifies administrators of any missing evaluations and continues to request the evaluation until all of the evaluations are complete. Evaluations with less than satisfactory ratings are also reviewed by a personnel administrator.

Parents and employees have general opportunities for input regarding personnel performance. For instance, each year the superintendent sends a letter to parents inviting input regarding job performance of administrators and employees. The district also receives information regarding performance through the monthly learning lunches. More specific opportunities for job performance input are also available. At school sites, grade chairs, department chairs, etc., provide input on peers and subordinate's job performance. Supervisors also solicit information from groups of employees when conducting evaluations and have the option to ask employees to evaluate their own performance.

The District Informs Poorly Performing Employees and Creates a Performance Improvement Plan

The IPAS process is structured so that poorly performing employees are clearly informed that their performance does not meet the district's expectations. Exhibit 7-10 shows the steps involved in this process. When an employee's performance is identified as "unsatisfactory" on one or more criteria, the supervisor provides the employee with written notice as to when performance will be reevaluated in the employee's performance improvement plan.

Exhibit 7-10

Sequence of Appraisal Activities Used by the District

- Formal observation findings are reviewed.
- A Performance Improvement Plan is prepared.
- The Performance Improvement Plan is reviewed with the staff members.
- The plan is implemented.
- A follow-up formal observation is conducted.
- A post-observation conference is conducted within 10 days following the observation.
- If performance remains "Unsatisfactory" subsequent to the implementation of the Performance Improvement Plan, then the Division of Human Resources is advised accordingly. Further steps will be determined by Human Resources.
- If performance had improved to a level above "Unsatisfactory" then performance is monitored and documented formally and informally for the remainder of the school year.

Source: St. Lucie County School District Instructional Personnel Appraisal System – IPAS-2000-01.

The District Has a Pay for Performance Policy

The district has developed and implemented policies and/or procedures that link a portion of instructional employee salary to measures of student performance. Currently St. Lucie County School District has required pay for performance language in the union contract. The new IPAS allows identification of exceptional performers and upon implementation of the annual learning gains model the district will have negotiated new pay for performance language. The union and the board are involved in a continuing dialogue regarding pay for performance.

The implementation of the new IPAS and Support Staff Evaluation are a result of input from administrators regarding the need for a revision of the evaluation process. In May 2002, the classroom teachers association asked teachers to respond via email regarding "any concerns problems or positive points experienced with the instrument and/or the presentation of the evaluation." Forty-six instructional personnel responded from the over 1,800 surveys sent to all instructional personnel.

As a result of these responses and input gathered from teachers and site based administrators the adaptations described below will be made to IPAS for the 2002-03 school year.

- Training for site-based administrators will be conducted in a level suitable format; elementary, middle and high school sessions. Each accomplished practice will be discussed at length with groups generating what particular ratings would look like if demonstrated by a teacher. In addition, union building representatives will be asked to attend the training to insure a clear understanding of practices and ratings.

- Ratings will be changed from "unsatisfactory, improvement expected, satisfactory, above satisfactory and exceptional" to "unsatisfactory, improvement expected, meets expectation, above expectation and outstanding." The committee feels the change in ratings will more accurately reflect performance.

- Classroom data collection will be required prior to mid-year review and final appraisal conferences. If an individual's performance is below the meets expectation rating, they will be notified—preferably in writing.

- Training for administrators will stress the importance of their spending quality time in classrooms collecting data and making a commitment to give a higher priority to classroom observations.

- Discussions will continue to take place on a regular basis in sessions with site-based administrators regarding IPAS.

The District Has Procedures for Regarding the Maintenance of Records of Work Performance

The district has developed procedures, shown in Exhibit 7-11, for maintaining records on instructional employees placed on probationary status, disciplined due to poor performance, notified that their performance was unsatisfactory, or for any other reason.

Exhibit 7-11

Procedure for Placement of Material Pertaining to Work Performance

- Such material must be reduced to writing within 45 days and signed by a person competent to know the facts or make the judgment. Additional material may be added to clarify or simplify as needed.

- A copy of all such materials to be placed in the personnel file shall be provided to the employee by one of the means below.

  - By certified mail; return receipt requested to his-her address of record.

  - By personal delivery to the employee. Employee's signature on a copy of the material signifies receipt only.

  - Statement by a witness certifying personal delivery to the employee.

- The employee has the right to answer in writing any such material in the personnel file.

- Upon a written request by an employee, the superintendent or designee will make an informal inquiry regarding materials in the personnel file that the employee believes to be false. The official making the inquiry shall attach a written report of findings to the material in the file and send a copy to the employee.

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

The District Has Drug Testing Policies in Accordance With Florida Law

In accordance with Florida law, the district has established policies regarding the drug-testing of employees and the provision of employee assistance to employees who are impaired by alcohol or drug abuse, district policy states that the district is a zero-tolerance district. [4]

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[4] See ss. 112.0455 and 231.263, *F.S.*

The district provides employees with a written employee disciplinary procedure that includes provisions of due process. Individuals found to have drug or alcohol problems are advised to seek professional help and rehabilitation assistance and are given a referral to at least one source of these services. Dismissed employees may reapply for employment with the district in one year and are required to present documentation of successfully completed rehabilitation. Any employee with a history of drug or alcohol problems will not be allowed to drive a school bus.

If an employee is having problems with drugs or alcohol or any personal problem that is interfering with their work, district procedures specify that the employee be asked to go to an appointment with a counselor at a cost of $10. District officials indicated that they have not used this provision over the past three years. However, employees do not have to be referred; they can seek counseling on their own.

Because there are many gray areas and contentious issues involved, district personnel may have problems providing consistent information regarding employee discipline and grievance.

Recommendations

- *We recommend that the district develop a procedure to ensure communication between personnel administrators as to employee grievance and discipline procedures.*

Action Plan 7-4

Develop Communication Procedure		
Strategy	Decide upon a policy to ensure that personnel office employees are consistent in providing information to employees regarding grievance and discipline procedures.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Determine from previous experience issues that are not clear in the grievance and discipline procedures process.
	Step 2:	Develop a procedure to reduce confusion and increase communication.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel	
Time Frame	December 2003	

7 The district ensures that employees who repeatedly fail to meet the district's performance expectations or whose behavior or job performance is potentially harmful to students are removed from contact with students.

Although the results of our teacher survey suggested that there is a perception that the district is not dealing effectively with poorly performing employees, the district has the appropriate policies and procedures in place and has provided training to its administrators that should lead to the effective management of this issue.

Our teacher survey suggested that the district is not doing a good job of dealing with poorly performing employees. Only 14% of the teachers agreed with the statement that "The district deals effectively with poorly performing employees," while 41% disagreed. The reason for this perception may be that much of dealing with poorly performing contract employees is done behind the scenes. The district has found that poorly performing employees on probation or in annual status are not difficult to release.

Exhibit 7-12

Teacher Survey Comments Regarding District Actions Concerning Poor Performers

- As far as professionals are concerned, poorly functioning employees are kept employed. I have seen this in all three schools I have taught at. Our district is overwhelmed by the number of students who need special placement.

- Poorly performing employees need more support PRIOR to dismissal the first year, after which they should be let go—not kept on payroll and moved around from job to job or school to school.

- The method in which they handle poorly performing teachers and new teachers needs to be reviewed. The teachers who are not performing to ability are either left, or promoted…to get them out of the classrooms.

- Teachers who are not making the students their priority need to be re-evaluated. I do not feel that just because you have tenure should allow you to collect a paycheck while you do not teach the students.

Source: OPPAGA Teacher Survey.

Although the district has procedures to deal with poorly performing employees, other employees may not be aware that the process is occurring and therefore believe the district is doing nothing. This is because the district is concerned with maintaining the reputation of the employee. Teachers are often unaware of the extent of problems with their fellow teachers, even in the same school.

For those teachers that were in their probationary period between August 2001 and December 2002, the district terminated 7 and allowed 22 to resign in lieu of termination. For those teachers past their probation during this time period, 2 teachers have been terminated and 2 teachers have a pending termination for legal allegations. The district has more flexibility in dealing with poor performers during their probationary period. After the probationary period is over, the district has less power to deal with poorly performing teachers.

The District Has Policies Concerning Poorly Performing Employees

The coordinators and the director of personnel are responsible for following up on the performance of marginal or poorly performing employees with the employee's supervisors. Direct contact is made to check the employee's progress and reinforce required timelines as mandated by contract and or statute. There are restrictions in the law, although restructured in the last few years, that moderate the steps that may be taken with regard to poor performers. In the case of instructional employees who are in a continuing contract, it is particularly difficult because contracts negotiated by bargaining units add more steps. The district also has procedures to ensure that poorly performing employees are not repeatedly transferred among school sites in lieu of termination of their employment. According to district officials, the district has not repeatedly transferred poorly performing employees in lieu of termination under the current superintendent.

The district regularly provides training and guidance to managers on the procedures and issues associated with working with poorly performing employees. In most instances, the district has instituted a formal "improvement plan" following the tenets of the NEAT procedure (Notice, Expectations, Assistance, and Time). If the supervisor of a poorly performing employee does not collect the necessary documentation showing the notice to employees of indadequate performance and does not put the ensuing steps to monitor improvement into writing, it is almost impossible for the district to take action against an employee, especially when the employee has received years of satisfactory evaluations.

Cases involving egregious employee behavior make immediate action necessary and therefore allow the district to take immediate action to terminate the employee. The district has a contract with Richeson &

Associates, a local labor attorney who provides legal consultation as needed. Prior to terminations during the school year, an attorney always reviews cases.

The district monitors the progress and performance of students who are under the instruction of a teacher who has been identified as a poor performer through a variety of sources. Data sources listed in the IPAS include standardized test scores, grade reports, classroom test results, and portfolios. The district's new IPAS may result in improved dealings and perception of dealings with poorly performing employees by carefully documenting each employee's performance.

Recommendation

- *We recommend that the district ensure that supervisors are trained to properly document poor performers on the IPAS form.*

Action Plan 7-5

Improve Supervisor's Documentation of Poor-Performers		
Strategy	Emphasize the need for poor performance documentation in supervisors' evaluation training.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Determine problems and solutions supervisors have documenting poor performers.
	Step 2:	In supervisor IPAS training, emphasize the importance of documenting poor performance in poor performing employee's IPAS evaluations.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Management of Human Resources

8 The district maintains clear and effective channels of communication with employees.

The district uses a combination of written documents, internet-based communications, and management activities in an effort to maintain clear and effective channels of communication with its employees. The district conducted an employee survey in April 2002, that represents an additional effort to solicit input from the employees.

The district produces and distributes to its employees an employee handbook, which includes information on employee rights and responsibilities, benefits, general working requirements (workdays, leave policies, holidays, etc.), the personnel evaluation process, grievance procedures, and compensation policies. Employees are also given a copy of the contract between St. Lucie County and the Classroom Teachers Association, Inc., or Communications Workers of America as applicable. The school district's benefits plan is provided as well.

The District's Internet Site and Newsletter Provide Employees and the Community Information Concerning St. Lucie County's Schools

The district maintains an Internet website that contains information for employees, such as district personnel policies, a district calendar, district office staffing information, employment opportunities, individual school information, current district news, bus information, St. Lucie County information, and employee evaluation information. The responsibility for each office at the district level is described in the district website enabling district employees, parents, and the school board to determine the functions of those offices. The offices profiled in the district website are organized under the headings of the Superintendent's Office, the Human Resource Department, the Business Services Offices, Student Services/ESE, Elementary School Operations, Secondary School Operations, Facilities and Support Services, and Curriculum. The site also contains a copy of *The Lucie News*, the district's newsletter, which now has a calendar of in-service activities. [5]

The Lucie News keeps employees informed of district news, training opportunities, and Internet sites of interest. Since the district put *The Lucie News* online only for the December/January issue, the district saved $500 in publishing costs each month. The district now spends about $400 a month for approximately 4,000 copies and predicts that it will save approximately $4,500 per year in the future.

A problem the district has had with online publication of *The Lucie News* is that support personnel in the district do not always have access to a computer. In response to this problem, the human resource department has asked administrators to print and post the newsletter in a central location of the school or department.

The District Works to Maintain Communication with Its Employees Throughout The County

The district uses several techniques for soliciting feedback from its employees. District officials, such as the director of personnel, the assistant superintendent, and the superintendent schedule visits to individual schools and other worksites to meet with employees. The superintendent and executive directors of school operations schedule visits to each of the school sites periodically. The purpose of these visits is to observe the environment and to speak with individual employees. The monthly Learning Lunch is another method by which various groups within the system, including students, can share ideas and concerns. [6]

The director of Personnel visits schools to present training on the Code of Ethics for Florida Educators and to review with individuals and their supervisors the certification status of each teacher. The human resource analyst for certification accompanies the director on these visits and assists employees in the follow up. The assistant superintendent visits schools and other worksites on a random schedule and tries to stay cognizant of support personnel issues. In addition, the superintendent has monthly meetings with representatives of the three bargaining units to discuss problems, concerns, and upcoming events that may affect the district.

The district conducted an employee survey in April 2002. Although the response level was low, the district identified the areas below for improvement.

- In-service programs' level of meeting needs for job improvement and advancement
- Teacher Induction Program's level of helpfulness and assistance

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[5] A Publication of the Department of Human Resource Development/School Community Development Center.
[6] Once a month, the superintendent invites a group of employees and students to a lunch called Learning Lunches. During this lunch, employees and students can voice any concerns they may have about the school district.

- The Lucie News' provision of timely and helpful information
- Orientation programs level of relevance and appropriateness
- The district's policies need clarification.

In conjunction with these feedback devices, district staff has monthly meetings with representatives of the bargaining units to discuss issues and concerns that may not be directly related to contract issues. The superintendent says that he regularly invites input from employees, parents and the community regarding the performance of the district and that all administrators maintain an open door policy so that employees can ask questions, seek clarification, or pursue solutions to problems.

Heads of Divisions Can Suggest Policy Changes

Heads of divisions can seek policy changes by suggesting new language and the rational for the language change to the superintendent's senior staff and policy committee. After reviewing the proposed change, the committee provides a report to the school board attorney for further review and suggestions. In many instances, the committee consults with those who will be charged with overseeing the implementation of the change. Once the committee finalizes the proposed policy revision and before it is referred to the school board for formal adoption, a public hearing is advertised and held to receive any previously unheard input. Examples of initiatives based on outside input include the IPAS committee and the Substitute Task Force.

Recommendations————————————————

- *None*

9 The district has changed its policies and practices for providing substitute teachers and other substitute personnel to make them more efficient and cost-effective.

Although the district has had difficulties maintaining a pool of substitutes, it has implemented procedures to encourage substitutes to work more often and at more school sites; these procedures are working. However, the district continues to experience difficulties in obtaining substitutes to work with ESE students and for custodial work. Another obstacle for maintaining a sufficient number of substitutes (instructional or non-instructional) is that substitutes do not get benefits. Custodial substitutes are particularly difficult to find. They have the highest incidence of not being honest on an application and often have drug test problems.

After 90 days, the district requires a substitute to have his or her fingerprints taken again if he or she has not worked in that time. The district tries to keep up a pool of 50 substitute bus drivers. About one-third of these drivers have five or fewer years of experience.

The District Has Been Working to Increase Substitute Availability

The district continuously recruits substitute teachers in order to maintain a sufficient pool of substitutes to cover peaks of absence. In 2001, the district had over 400 substitutes actively employed; however, the district is hindered by the fact that many of these substitutes choose to limit themselves to one or two schools.

However, to encourage substitute teachers to make themselves more available, the district has instituted two incentive plans for substitute teachers. The district usually pays substitutes with less than BA/BS degrees $50 per day and those with at least a bachelor's degrees $60 per day. First, if a substitute works a long-term assignment for more than 20 days, he or she receives $90 per day for the twenty-first and remaining days of assignment. Second, if a substitute works for 100 days or more during a school year and then works 50 days during the following school year, he or she receives $90 per day for any subsequent days worked for the remainder of the year regardless of length of the assignment.

Orientation Is Provided to Substitutes

The district provides new substitutes with a three-hour orientation program and a handbook that describes the district's expectations for the performance of substitute teachers. A video, produced by Orange County California Schools, is also shown that models desirable substitute behavior. Many of the district's substitutes are enrolled in the teacher preparation program at Florida Atlantic University. Other substitutes are retired teachers or experienced teachers new to the area that substitute while pursuing full-time employment.

Many other substitutes, however, have had no formal training in teaching techniques and class management. For these substitutes, Indian River Community College (IRCC) provides a series of special classes in which the substitute receives a waiver so that he/she pays only for one semester hour of the course and the district pays for the other two. The district requires substitutes who have not had formal teaching training to take at least one of these classes during each validity period of their certification. The administration and personnel at the school in which they are serving train and oversee all substitutes especially those in long-term positions.

The district uses an automated Substitute Employee Management System (SEMS) to assign substitute teachers, paraprofessionals, and site maintenance workers. This system allows an employee to call in to report his or her absence so that the system can then identify a substitute employee to temporarily fill the position. The SEMS system in not used for bus drivers and food service workers.

Approved substitutes may indicate on a preference form those schools, grades, or subjects they most wish to serve. Schools may also identify preferred substitutes or substitutes they do not wish to return. The system further allows for principals or teachers to prearrange with preferred substitutes to take certain assignments. This system may make it difficult for new substitutes to obtain long-term assignments. Also, many substitutes will not go to ESE classes.

The District Does Not Have a Policy Regarding Absenteeism

The district does not have a uniform definition of excess absenteism; instead, site-based administrators determine when absenteeism becomes excessive. Supervisors usually deal with excessive absenteeism in the process of addressing employees' failure to perform. This issue has been contentious in the district because what one school considers excessive may not be considered excessive at another school. Therefore, the district has been working to develop a consensus on guidelines and is considering using a rating scale to determine excessive absenteeism.

Annually, the district produces statistical information regarding the attendance of teachers and school based administrators. Monthly, a report is generated regarding instructional and support employees who have maintained perfect attendance each year.

Recommendations———————————————————

- *None*

10The district maintains personnel records in an efficient and accessible manner.

The district maintains personnel records, including confidential records, in accordance with s. 1012.31, *Florida Statutes*, and applicable regulations. The district has made significant steps in automating its personnel record system and provides school administrators limited access to personnel data. The district plans an additional update to the personnel system in the future that will provide school administrators with additional access and some data entry capability. This will decrease the district's reliance on paper forms.

Employees' complete personnel files are open, as needed, to school board members, the superintendent or principal or their respective designees, the supervisor of the employee, the employee, designees of employees, and law enforcement personnel involved in a lawful criminal investigation. Some items included in personnel files are applications, appointments, certificates, deficiency forms, in service printouts, letters of commendation, resignations, resume, transcripts, and evaluation forms. Personnel files are kept in locked, fireproof cabinets that are accessible through personnel records procedures except when in process. Personnel records are archived on microfilm after two years.

The district uses a resource management system for automated record keeping. School sites have access to screens that provide general demographic information, original hire dates, continuous service dates, direct deposit bank information, sick leave membership, exemptions claimed, etc.

The district upgraded its resource management system database in October 2002. The new system allows users to enter and track more and a greater variety of information on employees eliminating the need to keep returning to paper records. The new system is expected to give the district greater flexibility over position control. The district would eventually like to move to an on-line leave request system as well.

Personnel records are generally updated as soon as new information is received. During hiring peaks, reappointment and evaluation, the entire personnel department is involved in the filing of personnel records. The In-Service Data Specialist uses a backup database. Rosters, feedback forms, and attendance data are used to maintain records for all training.

Recommendations———————————————————

- *None*

11 The district uses cost containment practices for its Workers' Compensation Program.

The district has made positive efforts to contain the cost of its workers' compensation program by reviewing claims and promoting safety within the district. The district issued a request for proposal to determine if it could obtain administrative services more economically but concluded that its present liaison with a consortium that serves several districts is the best option.

The district reviews its workers' compensation program to evaluate workers' compensation claims and expenses. Included in this evaluation is a comparison with peer and area school districts. The district has found that it has more claims than injuries and the number of complaints has leveled off. Exhibit 7-13 shows that St. Lucie has one of the lowest average cost per claim histories compared to its peer districts.

Exhibit 7-13

South Central Educational Risk Management Program Workers' Compensation Average Cost Per Claim History

County	2000	1999	1998
Charlotte	1,399	$4,098	$4,244
DeSoto	$1,888	$226	$1,846
Glades	$1,309	$2,141	$6,076
Hardee	$1,460	$1,122	$874
Hendry	$571	$2,217	$1,621
Highlands	$3,252	$7,533	$1,995
Indian River	$639	$1,812	$3,707
Martin	$1,336	$1,840	$3,001
Osceola	N/a	$1,425	$2,035
St. Lucie	**$837**	**$1,791**	**$1,450**

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

The district is a part of a consortium of school boards, South Central Educational Risk Management Program (SCERMP), since 1985. The consortium was formed to implement and participate in a coordinated risk management program for protection against risk and is administered by William T. McCreary, P.A. of McCreary Corporation. The school districts of Charlotte, DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, St. Lucie, Martin, Indian River, and Highlands counties comprise SCERMP. SCERMP provides property, casualty, liability, boiler and machinery, and workers' compensation coverage for its members.

The district has procedures in place for the timely reporting of all on-the-job injuries and uses loss information and performs accident investigations in its safety program to reduce worker's compensation losses. The District Safety Program includes reviews of all claims for frequency and high-risk areas. The district safety specialist in the Risk Management Department maintains these reports. The district has improved on-site corrections by using safety equipment, but has identified a need for more in-school safety training classes. They need more safety classes, for instance, explaining the use of extension cords and safety goggles.

Recommendations————————————————————

- *None*

12 The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms

The District's Human Resource Program Has Established a Comprehensive Strategic Plan

The district has established three main goals within its strategic plan. The plan identifies objectives for each goal and strategies for each objective.

The Human Resources Department has seven main objectives listed in its strategic plan.

- By September 2006, the percentage of vacancies filled with out-of-field teachers will be less than 15%.
- By September 2006, the percentage of support staff vacancies will be less than 15%.
- By the end of June 2004, an increase of at least 5% in Support Staff participation in training will be evidenced each year in the three top-ranked training topics identified by the annual HRD Training Needs Assessment Summary.
- By September 2004, the percentage of new teachers, retained in employment, who participated in the Teacher Induction and Mentoring programs in the preceding school year will increase by at least 5% each year.
- By the end of February 2002, an additional enhanced principal, assistant principal, and aspiring administrator training plan will have been implemented.
- Annually, the Human Resource Division will review and analyze its structure and procedures to determine needed adjustments while maintaining a high level of service to the district and community.
- The chief negotiators for the three existing bargaining units will establish with the superintendent and school board priorities to be addressed during the contract negotiations.

The strategies for these objectives are matched with a timeline, data analysis requirement benchmarks, evaluation, person responsible, and financial impact.

Additional goals identified by the human resource department that are not specifically included in the strategic plan include those below.

- Maintain a percentage of minority teachers that is at or above the state percentage.
- Target minority and critical shortage area teachers in our recruitment efforts.
- Have all elementary teachers ESOL endorsed.
- Attract sufficient applicants for areas such as bus driver, site maintenance worker and food service assistant to meet the needs of the district.
- Have sufficient substitute employees for each category of positions to cover absences or vacancies.
- Identify and nurture possible administrative candidates.

- Provide inservice training to meet the documented need of teachers in order to improve their efficiency.

- Provide the highest beginning teacher salary on the Treasure Coast.

In order to evaluate the human resources program, the division has conducted reviews of some of its primary activities. These assessments included reviews of recruiting trips in terms of cost and efficacy, reviews of the best use of personnel employees to address identified goals, and assessments of the possible use of technology to advance the goals of the division.

The District Has Analyzed Possible Outside Contracting Options

The district has analyzed the potential cost savings of outsourcing in some personnel areas. When vendors send proposals, the district reviews the cost of using private personnel services to fill temporary vacancies. It has found that it is less expensive than outside contractors to have district employees perform the activity. For instance, the district investigated the cost of using Kelly Services, Inc., to provide substitutes and chose not to use them because it would be too costly.

Validity and Reliability Are Addressed by the Human Resource Department

The district addresses the validity and reliability of personnel data in several manners. The data input by the personnel department employees is checked and verified first within the department and again through the payroll department. These checks include accurate input of the data found on the action form and the accuracy of the data that is entered on the form. Several members of the department review each agenda before it becomes public record. When the personnel department receives information from staff development regarding in-service credits toward increased salary, the information is reviewed and checked for accuracy and validity.

Recommendations

- *None*

13 The district periodically reviews the organizational structure and staffing levels of the office of human resources to minimize administrative layers and processes.

The District's Budget Cuts Have Resulted in a Significant Reorganization of the Human Resource Division

Because of reorganization and budget cuts, the Human Resource Division has been significantly restructured. The Department of Human Resource Development/School Community Development Center has been moved out of the Human Resource Department and merged with the Learning Resources Department. The Division lost the position, coordinator of personnel, a secretary position, and a clerk. The coordinator of personnel position was primarily concerned with addressing employee grievances and discipline issues.

The district's Human Resource Division consists of 16 employees that perform duties that are often interchangeable. For instance, several of the duties performed by the director of personnel are also

conducted by the coordinator of FTE and position control (now retitled director of FTE and Position Control) and vice versa. The assistant superintendent of human resource services oversees the activities of the Human Resource Division. The primary administrative positions in the Human Resource Division under the assistant superintendent include director of personnel and the director of FTE and position control and previously, the director of Human Resource Development (now in the Curriculum Department) and the Coordinator of Personnel (position is now deleted).

The Risk Management Department is under Business Services. This department oversees insurance activities, reviews health benefit payment summaries for unusual activity or reinsurance claims, and also reviews property damage and workers comp claims for the district.

The District Annually Reviews each Division

The Human Resource Department analyzes all of the departments, including itself, to complete reports for the school board. This process involves assessing the number of administrators in each department or division in order to prepare a report for the superintendent. The Human Resource Department then creates a report describing the positions that have been eliminated, which is then given to the board.

The director of the Human Resource Program also prepares a report for the superintendent and the school board on its activities and on any changes that are needed to improve the organizational structure. The superintendent and his senior staff, as part of the budgetary process, review the applications from all departments. Decisions are made regarding classification/ reclassification of employees based on these applications. Their recommendations are then presented to the school board for approval.

Exhibit 7-14

Personnel and Cost of Human Resource Department from 1999-2002

	1999	2000	2001	2002
Number of FT employees	3440	3456	3569	3565
Percentage Increase (Decrease)		0.47%	3.27%	-0.11%
Number HRD Employees	5	4	4	4
Number of Personnel Employees	16	16	17	17.5
Total cost of HR	$901,146	$844,425	$956,984	$1,050,649
Percentage Increase (Decrease)		-6.29%	13.33%	9.79%
Cost/FT Employee	$261.96	$244.34	$268.14	$294.71
Percentage Increase (Decrease)		-6.73%	9.74%	9.91%

Source: St. Lucie County School District Human Resource Department.

Recommendations

- *None*

14The district periodically evaluates its personnel practices and adjusts these practices as needed to reduce costs and improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The district made several changes to personnel procedures in recent years. These changes include revision and simplification of a complicated filing system for personnel files and applications, the addition of a fourth input clerk, an overhaul and continuing revisions to job descriptions, the creation of an abbreviated form of the orientation twice a month for new employees hired after the first of the year, the revision of personnel forms, a review of benefits, an increase in its e-mail use, the development of the supplemental handbook, a planned move to new offices with fireproof vaults, sabbatical leave for eligible CTA/CU members, and the development of the "grow your own" program.

Each school and worksite is assigned to a personnel records specialist who handles all routine paperwork and input for that site. In most cases, district administrators and employees can receive needed information or assistance from their assigned specialist by phone, fax, email, or interoffice mail. If a specialist is unable to answer a request, he/she passes it on to an administrator. If the request is of an urgent or confidential nature, the school administrator or employee can contact a personnel administrator in any of the same ways mentioned above or may make an appointment for a face-to-face meeting. Because of the efficiency of the system over regular phone contact, employees are urged to use email to contact personnel employees as much as possible.

The personnel office is in the process of formalizing a survey to solicit a broader range of feedback from employees and applicants.

The District's Direct Deposit Program Is Not Used By All Employees

Eighty to 85% of current employees are enrolled in the direct deposit program. New employees are strongly encouraged during orientation to sign up for direct deposit. However, because some employees do not trust the program, the district has not tried to make it mandatory. The district has made tentative approaches to local banks to allow for "transitional" accounts where the money would be deposited directly and is available for immediate withdrawal if desired.

Recommendations

- *None*

15For classes of employees that are unionized, the district maintains an effective collective bargaining process.

The district has clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the negotiator, the superintendent and school board members during the negotiation process. Chief negotiators annually solicit input from school and site administrators to identify issues of concern for upcoming collective bargaining. If necessary, negotiators determine the cost and feasibility of addressing concerns with the assistance of their teams

and others. The board and superintendent in executive session determine if these proposals will be included in the district's proposals to the unions.

Upon receipt of the unions' proposals, chief negotiators meet with the board and superintendent in an executive session to solicit input for the direction of negotiations. Proposals are analyzed for costs, advantages, and disadvantages. Chief negotiators are given parameters for upcoming collective bargaining sessions and district counter proposals. This process continues during the course of the district negotiations with the employee bargaining units. Once an agreement is reached, contracts are ratified by bargaining units and approved on school board agendas.

The chief negotiators for the three bargaining units attend the annual Florida Educational Negotiators Conference for negotiations training. The district uses the law offices of David Richeson & Associates, P.A., specialists in labor and employment law. According to the CTA union representative, the district's use of an attorney slows down the process; however, the union and the district still have a good relationship.

Recommendations
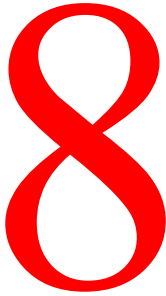
- *None*

8 Use of Lottery Proceeds

The district has defined enhancement, allocates lottery proceeds to School Advisory Councils as required by law, and reports the costs of specific activities supported with lottery proceeds.

Conclusion

The St. Lucie County School District is using all five best practices for the use of lottery proceeds. The district has defined educational enhancement and is spending its lottery proceeds consistent with its definition. Salaries and benefits of school-based personnel whose activities meet the district's definition of enhancement are funded with the lottery proceeds.

Overview of Chapter Findings

The Auditor General reviewed the district's use of lottery proceeds using the Best Financial Management Practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education and associated indicators. We employed several methodologies to develop chapter conclusions and action plans. The district maintains detailed financial records of lottery transactions. Additionally, the district's Executive Director of School Improvement manages and monitors lottery program activity, specifically school advisory councils and school improvement plans. District staff has established procedures to document compliance with lottery program requirements. We reviewed these financial and program records in an effort to determine the extent to which the district was using the best practices. Where necessary, we verified the information contained in these records. We conducted site visits and a public forum to identify potential issues related to the use of lottery proceeds. During our site visits, we interviewed district financial and administrative staff to strengthen our understanding of district processes related to the management and monitoring of lottery activity. At our public forum, we received participation from the general public.

Presented below is an overview of chapter findings.

Lottery Proceeds

1. The district has defined "enhancement" in a way that the public clearly understands. (Page 8-5)
2. The district uses lottery moneys consistent with its definition of enhancement. (Page 8-5)
3. The district allocates lottery proceeds to school advisory councils as required by law. (Page 8-6)
4. The district accounts for the use of lottery moneys in an acceptable manner. (Page 8-6)
5. The district annually evaluates and reports the extent to which lottery expenditures have enhanced student education. (Page 8-7)

Background

The district assigned the responsibility for monitoring compliance with the requirements related to lottery proceeds and expenditures to the Director of Finance, who reports to the Assistant Superintendent for Business Services. Additionally, the Executive Director of School Improvement monitors all school improvement plans and related School Advisory Council (SAC) lottery funds.

State Funding

The Legislature intends that the net proceeds of lottery games be used to support improvements in public education and that such proceeds not be used as a substitute for existing resources for public education.

Each fiscal year, the Department of Education deposits at least 38 percent of the gross revenue from the sale of lottery tickets and other earned revenue, excluding application processing fees, into the Educational Enhancement Trust Fund. The Legislature apportions money in the trust fund among public schools, community colleges, and universities. The 2001 Legislature apportioned $170,250,000 of enhancement moneys to school districts. These moneys are allocated to the districts by prorating each district's K-12 base funding to the amount of the appropriation.

School District Proceeds

In the 2000-01 fiscal year, St. Lucie County School District received lottery proceeds of $2,213,219. Projected lottery proceeds for the 2001-02 fiscal year are $2,687,176. Exhibit 8-1 presents a historical perspective of lottery proceeds received by the district over the last five years plus projected lottery proceeds for the 2001-02 fiscal year.

Exhibit 8-1

Lottery Proceeds Received by the District Have Declined
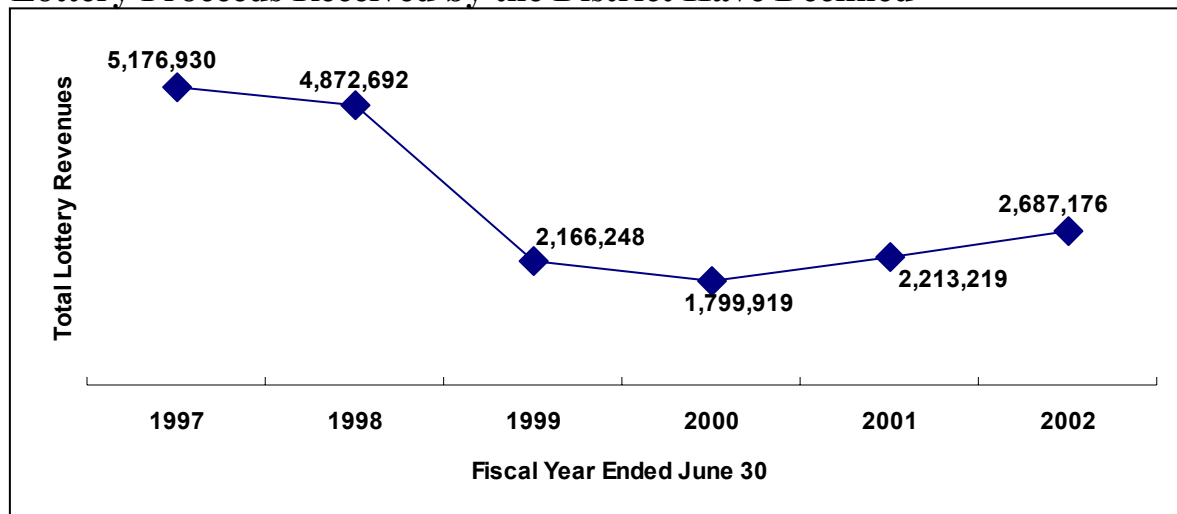
Source: St. Lucie County School District – Superintendent's Annual Financial Reports (Form ESE 145) and 2001-02 budget documents.

Beginning with the 1998-99 fiscal year, the Legislature appropriated a greater portion of the lottery moneys to support the Bright Futures Scholarship Program, Classrooms First, and 1997 School Capital Outlay Bond programs resulting in the significant decline.

School District Lottery Expenditures

Each fiscal year, the school district's lottery proceeds are allocated to each SAC and to charter schools. For example, in the 2001-02 fiscal year, the district's lottery projection is $2,687,176. From this money each school receives at least the required $10 per UFTE student for use by the school advisory board. Also, if the district has charter schools, the district is required, pursuant to s. 228.056(13)(b), *Florida Statutes*, to provide each of the charter schools its allocable share of lottery moneys based on the number of students attending the charter schools. The district allocated these proceeds as shown in Exhibit 8-2.

Exhibit 8-2

The District's Distribution of 2001-02 Lottery Proceeds

District Allocation	2001-02 Projected
Lottery Enhancement (Discretionary)	$ 2,391,176
School Advisory Councils	296,000
Total	**$2,687,176**

Source: St. Lucie County School District – Finance Office General Ledger/Budget Documents.

School District Lottery Enhancement Allocations

Each year, the annual appropriations act requires each school district to establish policies and procedures that define enhancement and specify the types of expenditures that are consistent with that definition. This law also requires school districts to use a unique fund source code for accounting for the receipt and expenditure of all lottery moneys. Amounts allocated represent partial salary and benefits payments to reduce class size and teacher workloads and to fund additional staff needed to meet the needs created by growth.

School Advisory Council Lottery Allocations

Each year, the annual appropriations act also requires that each school district allocate a portion of the lottery moneys that it receives to each school advisory council (SAC) in the district. As in recent years, each school district is required to allocate $10 per UFTE student to each school. For the 2001-02 fiscal year, the school district has allocated $296,000 to the SACs in the district or approximately $10.14 per UFTE. Exhibit 8-3 shows the amounts allocated to each school's SAC.

Exhibit 8-3

The District's School Advisory Council Allocation
for the 2001-02 Fiscal Year as Required by Law

School Name		Projected 2001-02 UFTE	SAC Allocation 2001-02
Elementary	Bayshore	774	$ 7,849
	CA Moore	561	5,689
	Fairlawn	598	6,064
	FK Sweet	592	6,003
	Floresta	708	7,180
	Ft. Pierce Magnet	326	3,306
	Garden City	514	5,212
	Lakewood	698	7,078
	Lawnwood	735	7,453

School Name		Projected 2001-02 UFTE	SAC Allocation 2001-02
	Manatee	785	7,961
	Mariposa	697	7,068
	Morningside	651	6,602
	Parkway	606	6,145
	Port St. Lucie	858	8,701
	Rivers Edge	805	8,163
	Savanna Ridge	586	5,943
	St. Lucie	648	6,571
	Village Green	808	8,194
	Weatherbee	765	7,758
	White City	634	6,429
	Windmill Point	710	7,200
Middle	Dan McCarty	981	9,948
	Forest Grove	1,169	11,854
	Northport	949	9,624
	Southern Oaks	1,027	10,415
	Southport	1,155	11,712
	St. Lucie West	907	9,198
Middle/High	Lincoln Park Academy	1,827	18,527
High	Centennial	1,611	16,337
	Ft. Pierce Central	1,624	16,469
	Ft. Pierce Westwood	1,441	14,613
	Port St. Lucie	1,792	18,172
Other	Anglewood Teen/Parent Center	42	426
	Dale Cassens	111	1,126
	Detention Center	99	1,004
	District	148	1,501
	Ft. Pierce Central PBD	158	1,602
	Homebound	42	426
	Sunrise Academy	47	477
Total		**29,189**	**$296,000**

Source: St. Lucie County School District – Finance Office Budget Documents.

The language in the appropriations act stipulates that lottery proceeds provided to the SACs be allocated directly to the councils, be clearly earmarked for their use, and not be subject to override by the principal or interim approvals by school district staff. A portion of the lottery moneys allocated to the SACs should be used to implement the school improvement plan, which must be based on the statewide and districtwide school improvement plans.

Lottery Allocations to Charter Schools

If the district has charter schools, the district is required, pursuant to s. 228.056(13)(b), *Florida Statutes*, to provide each of the charter schools its allocable share of lottery moneys based on the number of students attending the charter schools. The St. Lucie County District School Board currently has no charter schools in operation.

Use of Lottery Proceeds

1   The district has defined "enhancement" in a way that the public clearly understands.

The district has defined enhancement

According to Florida law, prior to the expenditure of educational enhancement (lottery) proceeds, each school district is required to:

- Establish policies and procedures that define enhancement,
- Identify the types of expenditures that are considered consistent with its definition, and
- Provide the Florida Department of Education a copy of all procedures that relate to the use of enhancement moneys.

The district's definition for enhancement identifies the allowable categories of expenditures that the district considers enhancing education. For the 2001-02 fiscal year, these categories include:

- Costs related to accountability and school improvement activities;
- Costs of new program development and implementation;
- Cost of replacement funding for programs that were eliminated from state funding;
- Cost of reduction of class size and teaching workloads;
- Cost of salary and benefit increases which permit the county to compete favorably for quality teachers needed to serve our growth needs;
- Cost of additional staff other than teachers to open and operate new facilities and meet the needs created by growth;
- Cost of operations for new facilities other than staff costs;
- Costs of goods or services in the budget which rise far beyond normal inflationary levels; and
- Cost of covering expenses which are affected by reduction of revenues from the state due to budgetary problems.

2   The district uses lottery moneys consistent with its definition of enhancement.

The district can demonstrate that it uses lottery proceeds consistent with its definition of enhancement

After allocating proceeds to the SACs as shown in Exhibit 8-3, the district can use the remaining lottery moneys for educational enhancement. The district uses its lottery proceeds to support activities consistent with its definition of enhancement. Our review of district records showed that over the past three years, the district has consistently spent lottery proceeds on additional staff to meet the needs created by growth.

3 The district allocates lottery proceeds to the school advisory councils as required by law.

School advisory councils receive guidance for use of lottery proceeds

District guidelines and training for SACs are appropriate and comprehensive. District staff present a workshop at the start of each school year to representatives from all school SACs. During this workshop, SAC members receive information about how the district receives lottery proceeds, how it is distributed and guidelines for the use of the allocation given to each SAC. The SAC representatives receive instruction on the budgeting process for the proceeds, approving expenditure of the proceeds, the school improvement plan, and so on. Additionally, district staff schedule meetings on an as needed basis with the SACs requesting assistance throughout the school year.

Each school has an approved school improvement plan

As required by Florida law, each school must have a school improvement plan before $10 per UFTE may be allocated to its SAC. Section 230.23(16), *Florida Statutes*, requires school boards to annually approve and require implementation of a new, amended, or continuation school improvement plan for each school in the district. The design of the plans should be to achieve the state education goals and student performance standards. The St Lucie County School Board has approved school improvement plans for all district schools and centers.

SAC lottery allocations are used to implement school improvement plans

Florida law also provides that at least a portion of the SAC lottery proceeds should be used to implement school improvement plans. At the same time, the Legislature intentionally provided SACs considerable flexibility in how they may spend their lottery proceeds. Our review of district records, school improvement plans, and school accountability reports showed that nearly all SAC lottery proceeds for St. Lucie schools were used to implement school improvement plans.

4 The district accounts for the use of lottery moneys in an acceptable manner.

The district uses a unique funding code to account for lottery proceeds

School districts are required to use a uniform chart of accounts established by the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) to record accounting transactions. The Florida Department of Education has established revenue account code number 3344 to account for lottery moneys received by the districts. St. Lucie County School District uses this revenue code to account for its lottery proceeds.

The district has established specific project codes to account for expenditures of lottery proceeds

The district uses project numbers to separately account for SAC expenditures and lottery (enhancement) expenditures. The district's recorded enhancement expenditures equaled the amount of lottery proceeds allocated to the district per the annual lottery report submitted to the FDOE.

As indicated in Exhibit 8-1, in prior fiscal years the district's lottery proceeds were much higher than they are now. During these earlier years, the district identified specific positions it planned to support using lottery proceeds and budgeted for these positions accordingly. If lottery proceeds were less than the amount needed to pay for the earmarked positions, the district would supplement the lottery proceeds so that the earmarked positions were budgeted. The district continued to budget for these positions in more recent years, even though the lottery proceeds have decreased. As long as there are sufficient expenditures that meet or exceed the district's enhancement definition, the district can report enhancement expenditures to the FDOE to the extent of the revenues received.

5   The district annually evaluates and reports the extent to which lottery expenditures have enhanced student education.

The district reports lottery expenditures to the public

Florida law requires each school district to make available and distribute to the public on a quarterly basis the expenditure of lottery proceeds in an easy to understand format. The district has been reporting lottery expenditures on a quarterly basis. Presently, the school principals at each school receive expenditure information to distribute to parents and interested parties through a memorandum from the Finance Department.

Lottery expenditure information is provided to the school board, district administrators, and the public

School board members and district administrators receive monthly budget reports showing budget versus actual comparisons for project transactions, which include both lottery enhancement and SAC lottery transactions. These reports assist in monitoring available budget and they summarize expenditure information by expenditure type within each project.

9 Use of State and District Construction Funds

The St. Lucie County School District has made effective use of state and district construction funds.

Conclusion

The St. Lucie County School District is using all four best practices regarding the use of state and local construction funds. The district has spent more than $150 million in capital funds since 1996 on new school construction, renovations, and clearing out a backlog of capital projects. Many of these projects have been financed from local resources. Consequently, today much of the revenue from capital improvement funds is going to pay debt service and to support the district maintenance program to prevent deterioration of facilities.

With the recent downturn in the economy and the resulting budget shortfalls, the district may be forced to cut additional staff and curtail preventative maintenance and the purchase of equipment for existing facilities unless it finds additional sources of state and local revenues. In addition, a recently completed demographic study revealed that the district school population is expected to increase 1,000 students per year due to in migration. New facilities will be needed and several existing facilities need major renovations. The district needs to develop strategies now to finance its future construction and maintenance needs for school facilities.

During the course of this review, OPPAGA identified a number of district accomplishments in the use of state and district construction funds, some of which are included in Exhibit 9-1 below.

Exhibit 9-1

**The District Has Had a Number of Notable Accomplishments
in Use of State and District Construction Funds in the Last Three Years**

- New school construction costs per student station are below the state average.
- The district maximized the use of local revenue to fund capital construction projects.
- The district has established a track record for delivering projects on time and within budget.
- The district won five School Infrastructure Thrift (SIT) awards totaling $6.8 million for new construction.

Source: OPPAGA.

Overview of Chapter Findings

OPPAGA reviewed the district's use of state and district construction funds using the Best Financial Management Practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education and associated indicators. The team employed several methodologies to develop chapter conclusions and action plans. For instance, we conducted on-site interviews with district level managers and gathered information on the use of state and district construction funds policies and procedures and relevant audit reports. Questions varied depending

on the groups surveyed and the results have been validated and incorporated into this chapter where applicable.

An overview of chapter findings is presented below.

Facilities Construction Funds

1. The district approves use of construction funds only after determining that the project(s) are cost-efficient and in compliance with the lawfully designated purpose of the funds and the district's five-year facilities work plan. (Page 9-2)
2. The district uses capital outlay and operational funds appropriately, lawfully, and in accordance with its adopted five-year facilities work plan. (Page 9-7)
3. The district minimizes construction costs by using appropriate measures from the SMART (Soundly Made, Accountable, Reasonable and Thrifty) Schools Clearinghouse Frugal Construction Standards. (Page 9-8)
4. When designing and constructing new educational facilities, the district incorporates factors to minimize the maintenance and operations requirements of the new facility. (Page 9-9)

Background ───────────────────────

On March 12, 1996, the taxpayers of St. Lucie County passed the sales tax referendum, which called for a ½ cent sales tax surcharge for a period of 10 years. The sales tax revenue, combined with other local debt issues and state funding has allowed the district to complete more than $151 million in capital construction projects since 1996. These projects included the construction of five new schools and an auditorium, two school replacements, and substantial renovation and additions to five schools in addition to numerous re-roofing projects, HVAC upgrades and restroom renovations. (Refer to Exhibit 9-6 for a list of completed projects.) The district has developed a solid track record of delivering projects on time and within budget.

Facilities Construction Funds

1 **The district approves use of construction funds only after determining that the project(s) are cost-efficient and in compliance with the lawfully designated purpose of the funds and the district's five-year facilities work plan.**

The district uses construction funds in accordance with the law on cost-effective projects included in the five year facilities work plan

The finance director administers capital projects funds according to the guidelines published in Department of Education's *Fixed Capital Outlay Public School Finance Manual* (2001 Edition) and statutes governing use of Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) funds, Capital Outlay Bond Issue Funds, Capital Outlay and Debt Service (CO & DS) funds, and capital outlay millage and loans. She uses the fund names and numbers prescribed in *Financial and Program Cost Accounting and Reporting for Florida Schools* (Red Book) to account for capital projects funds. Fund codes are assigned to indicate the

fund, function, object, cost center, and project. Expenditures are tracked by project. The finance director and a senior accountant share the responsibility for administering, monitoring, and assuring compliance with fund and expenditure rules and regulations. These expenditures are subject to audit annually. The most recent Auditor General's report for the period ending June 30, 2000, and the audit report for the period ending June 30, 2001, did not identify any problems associated with the use of construction funds. Exhibit 9-3 lists the sources of funds to finance capital projects.

Exhibit 9-3

Sources of Funds to Finance Capital Projects Such as New Schools, Major Remodeling/Renovation Projects Include Those Below

State Funds

- **Capital Outlay Bond Issue Funds.** Bond issue proceeds received from the State Board of Education issued at the request of the district based on bonding capacity. The fund source is the state motor vehicle license revenue.

- **Capital Outlay and Debt Service Funds.** Funds received from the state based upon the constitutional funding formula. The fund source is state motor vehicle license revenue.

- **Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) Funds.** Funds received the state for the construction and maintenance of schools. The fund source is the state gross receipts tax revenue.

- **Classrooms First Fund.** Funds received from the state for construction of new school buildings, additions to existing buildings or for major remodeling and/or renovation projects based on specific criteria. The fund source is state lottery revenue.

- **School Infrastructure Thrift (SIT) Funds.** Incentive award program to encourage functional, frugally constructed facilities. The program encourages districts to find ways to reduce the cost of, or eliminate the need for, constructing educational facilities. The fund source is state lottery and state non-recurring general fund.

Local Funds

- **Capital Improvement Tax Construction (2-Mill) Funds.** Funds received locally from the assessment of property taxes (maximum levy is 2 mills) for the construction and maintenance of schools. The fund source is local property tax revenue.

- **Section 237.161 and Section 237.162, *Florida Statues*, Loan Funds.** Funds for capital projects financed by cited statutory provisions for loans. The fund source is the local lending institutions based on borrowing capacity.

- **Local Capital Improvement Funds.** Funds received locally. The fund source is local revenue.

- **Certificates of Participation** Funds received from the issuance of Certificates of Participation used for acquisition and construction of schools and ancillary facilities. The fund source is local lending institutions based on borrowing capacity.

- **Half Cent Sales Tax**. Funds received from a tax levied pursuant to the vote of the people of the district. The fund source is a local sales surtax.

Source: OPPAGA.

The district's Controlled Choice Student Assignment Plan helps the district make maximum use of school facilities

In September 1970, the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida found that the school board was operating a dual, segregated school system to the detriment of African-American students. The district was required to remedy the violation by eliminating all vestiges of segregation in schools. The county's segregated housing patterns that had evolved over time and its rapid growth in the southern part of the county made student assignment a difficult problem to solve. Finally in 1989, the

district adopted the controlled choice model for student assignment as the best method of preventing the recurrence of segregation in the future.

The controlled choice model divides the school district into three geographic zones, each containing several elementary schools, and one or more middle schools and high schools. There is no individual residential attendance zone for each school. Students are assigned according to their first, second, or third choice by zone based on space availability, transportation, diversity guidelines and a number of other factors. Students may also request assignment to one of the district's magnet programs specializing in music, and the arts. This plan has allowed the district to make maximum use of its school facilities regardless of location.

New schools construction costs below state average

In 1997, the state set maximum allowed costs per student station for all schools constructed with Public Education Capital Outlay and Debt Service Trust Fund for elementary, middle, and high schools. According to s.1013.64 *Florida Statutes*, schools that exceed these costs without obtaining a waiver must pay the excess costs, including those for change orders, out of operating costs. The district's new schools were financed with Classroom First (Lottery) funds, PECO/New Construction allocations, local millage, local bonds and impact fees. Exhibit 9-4 reflects the district construction project information provided to the Department of Education, Office of Educational Facilities. A comparison of the district's construction costs to the state average for elementary and middle schools in 1997 demonstrates that the district's construction costs were below the state average for costs per student station. The district finance director reports that the district has never sought a waiver for construction costs that exceeded the statutory limits.

Exhibit 9-4

Construction Costs Below State Averages

Elementary Schools-1997			
	Total Costs	**Student Stations**	**Per Student Station**
C.A. Moore	$9,294,225	1,079	$8,614
Savanna Ridge	9,458,851	1,003	9,431
Statewide Average for Elementary Schools	$10,961,218	970	$11,300
Middle Schools-1997			
	Total Costs	**Student Stations**	**Per Student Station**
St. Lucie West Middle "DD"	$16,636,627	1,458	$11,411
Statewide Average for Middle Schools	$15,959,867	1,251	$12,758

Source: St. Lucie School District.

The district uses "2-mill" money for lawfully designated purposes

The Capital Outlay Budget for Fiscal Year 2001-02 lists $32 million estimated state, local and other revenue sources. Exhibits 9-5 shows estimated revenues for Fiscal Year 2001–02 including the local Capital Improvement Tax Construction or 2-mill funds received from the assessment of property taxes on county property valued at approximately $8.7 billion for the construction and maintenance of schools. Exhibit 9–5 shows the district plans to spend the bulk of the $32 million in projected revenue on building, equipment, vehicles, renovations and debt service. These expenditures comply with designated purpose of the district school tax under s. 236.25(2), *Florida Statutes*. All 2-mill expenditures are advertised in the newspaper with the district's proposed budget.

Exhibit 9-5

St. Lucie County School District Estimated Revenues and Expenses Decline by $15 Million

	2000-01 Budget	2001-02 Budget
Estimated Revenues		
Building Millage (2.00)	$15,484,474	$16,493, 726
Capital Outlay and DS Distribution to Counties	100,000	100,000
PECO	2,819,425	3,014,873
Impact Fees	1,200,000	1,000,000
COP	0	8,800,000
Sales Tax Revenue Bonds	0	2,600,000
Total Estimated Revenue	**$19,603,899**	**$32,008,599**
Beginning Fund Balance	25,551,260	5,824,042
Prior Year Encumbrances	13,819,724	6,176,383
Total Estimated Revenues	**$58,974,883**	**$44,009,024**
Appropriations		
Library Books (610)	$0	$513
AV Materials (620)	0	5,708
Building (630)	16,746,047	9,206,839
Equipment (640)	6,264,353	7,426,663
Vehicles (650)	1,000,000	1,000,000
Site Improvements (670)	267,000	77,109
Renovations (680)	6,665,801	3,763,366
Software (690)	0	10,009
Transfer to Debt Service COP	8,315,000	8,315,000
Transfer to Debt Service - 237 Loan	1,808,000	3,891,000
Transfer to Debt Service - Capital Lease	127,000.00	175,548
Transfer to Debt Service	0	0
Transfer to Debt Service – County	152,000	151,000
Transfer to General Fund	3,800,000	3,800,000
Total Appropriations	**$45,145,201**	**$37,822,755**
Prior Year Encumbrances	13,819,724	6,176,383
Unappropriated	9,958	9,886
Total	**$59,974,883**	**$44,009,024**

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

The district uses construction funds in a timely manner

The district has done a good job of matching capital projects to projected revenues. District records show that since 1996, it has completed $150.8 million in capital projects. The finance director reports that the board, superintendent, and district administrators did a great deal of community outreach to encourage voter approval of the 1995 bond referendum to fund needed capital construction projects. Voters passed the bond referendum on October 3, 1995 but failed to pass the sales tax referendum. However, a second sales tax referendum passed on March 12, 1996, which called for a one-half cent sales surtax for 10 years. By 2001, almost all the projects funded by local debt issues had been completed; no small undertaking for a medium sized school district. Exhibit 9–6 shows the list of completed projects. Our review of project

schedules and costs indicate that the district has developed a solid track record of delivering projects on time and within projected revenues and budgets.

Exhibit 9-6

St. Lucie County School District Complete Projects List Since 1996

Project	Cost	Project	Cost
C.A. Moore Elementary Replacement	$ 8,907,812	Lakewood Park Roof Replacement	$230,419
Dan McCarty Middle Renovations, Cafeteria and Academic Building	12,432,803	Manatee Roof Replacement	263,790
		Westwood High HV AC Upgrades	1,074,398
Fairlawn Elementary Replacement	9,500,000	Southern Oaks Middle HV AC Upgrades	246,780
F.K. Sweet Elementary Classroom	1,550,000	Northport Middle HV AC Replacement	2,082,384
F.K. Sweet Elementary Replacement	7,500,000	Dale Cassens Admin/Media	454,088
Fort Pierce Magnet School of the Arts	9,743,665	Dale Cassens Fence Installation	24,738
Fort Pierce Westwood High	600,000	Means Court Parking Garage for TV Van	43,493
Garden City Elementary Cafeteria	1,375,000	White City Elementary Additional Covered	17,500
Lawnwood Elementary Renovation including	6,250,000	White City PMH Restroom	19,558
Lincoln Park Academy Auditorium	4,424,471	Fort Pierce Central Girls Locker Room	145,013
Lincoln Park Academy Gymnasium	419,744	Fort Pierce Central PMH Restroom	19,169
Lincoln Park Academy High School	9,000,000	Fort Pierce Central Autotronics Lab	191,541
Means Court Parking Lot Restoration	150,000	Fort Pierce Central Landscape & Irrigation	47,990
Port St. Lucie Elementary Walkways	45,000	Fort Pierce Central Gym Bleacher	124,875
Savanna Ridge Elementary	9,800,000	Fort Pierce Central Building "F" Renovation	787,705
St. Lucie West Centennial High	30,800,000	Fort Pierce Central Gym Lobby Renovations	218,770
St. Lucie West Middle	15,900,000	Fort Pierce Central Faculty & Staff Parking	337,900
Weatherbee Elementary	8,500,000	Westwood High Girls Locker Room	88,779
White City Elementary Addition	4,200,000	Westwood High Vet Tech Lab Renovation	328,500
Northport Middle Academic Wing	264,500	Westwood High Art Labs and Hallway	137,668
Village Green Elementary Roof Replacement	291,785	Westwood High Gym Lobby Restroom Renovations/ADA Restrooms	85,312
Northport Middle Admin, Gym, Cafe & 900 - Wing Roof Replacement	274,785	Westwood High Fence Installation	28,052
Windmill Point Elementary Roof	296,100	Westwood High Parking Lot Seal Coating	11,431
Port St. Lucie Elementary Roof	64,541	F.K. Sweet Art Lab Renovation	37,798
Morningside Elementary Roof	274,368	F.K Sweet Additional Restrooms in Café	64,600
Garden City Academic Wing Roof	193,743	Fairlawn Additional Restrooms in Café	66,200
Manatee Gutter/Rain Leader	145,000	Windmill Point PMH Restroom	22,958
Westwood High Roof Replacement on	229,264	Rivers Edge Stucco Repair & Painting	70,365
Parkway Elementary Roof	333,490	Lawnwood Stadium Handicap Parking Lot	64,000
		Total	**$150,801,845**

Source: St. Lucie School District.

2 The district uses capital outlay and operational funds appropriately, lawfully, and in accordance with its adopted five-year facilities work plan.

The board approves construction funds in accordance with the approved five-year facilities work plan

The five-year facilities work plan serves as the master plan for the district. The plan is a one- and five-year schedule of major repair and renovations projects necessary to maintain and meet the educational needs of the district. The plan is created with input from principals, facilities, maintenance staff, finance office, superintendent, board, and other district staff. It takes into consideration the recommendations found in the Educational Plant Survey that Florida law requires the district to conduct every five years. The survey is a formal, systematic study of the present condition of schools and ancillary facilities and the determination of future needs. District staff also consider the data found in the Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH), attendance zone maps, student membership trends, board policies, construction projects under contract, instructional programs, and any other information such as population trends to arrive at recommendations for the five-year work plan. The capital budget for Fiscal Year 2001-02 contains $9.8 million in new projects.

The financial audit conducted by the Auditor General for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2000, and the financial audit for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2001, did not identify any problems with the lawful use of capital construction funds. In addition, the finance director stated that all capital outlay funds are spent only for projects included in the five-year facilities work plan and approved by the board.

As stated earlier the district has maximized the use of local revenue sources, including spearheading support of the one-half cent sales tax surcharge to construct, renovate and remodel numerous facilities. Exhibit 9–7 shows the district's outstanding local debt issues as of May 1, 2002

Exhibit 9-7

St. Lucie County School District
Outstanding Local Debt Issues as of May 1, 2002

Debt Issue	Amount
General Obligation Refunding Bonds, Series 1992	$ 8,480,000
General Obligation Bonds, Series 1996A	13,895,000
General Obligation Bonds, Series 1997	16,025,000
Certificates of Participation, Series 1993	37,330,000
Certificates of Participation, Series 2001	70,400,000
Sales Tax Revenue Bond, Series 2001	3,370,000
Section 237.161 Loan	2,000,000
Total	**$151,500,000**

Source: St. Lucie School District.

3 The district minimizes construction costs by using appropriate measures from the SMART (Soundly Made, Accountable, Reasonable and Thrifty) Schools Clearinghouse Frugal Construction Standards.

District schools win SIT awards

During the 1997 special session, the Florida Legislature established the Soundly Made, Accountable Reasonable and Thrifty Schools Clearinghouse (SMART) to assist and encourage Florida school districts to reduce the cost of building and maintaining schools by using practical and cost-effective school designs. Districts were provided financial incentives in the form of SIT awards to use already approved plans in the SMART directory or develop similar plans that incorporated frugal construction standards.

The director of facilities reports that the district has not developed a written policy or guidelines that address SMART school construction. However, the district has applied for and received 5 SIT awards totaling $6,797,994. Exhibit 9-8 lists the schools receiving awards. The district has used the same elementary design, with slight modifications for site differences, for Weatherbee, Savanna Ridge, C.A. Moore, Fairlawn, and F.K. Sweet Elementary schools. In addition, Southern Oaks Middle School and St. Lucie West Middle School use the same basic design. Since recent turnover in the Office of Facilities and Support Services has caused the department to essentially lose all of its institutional memory, we recommend that the facilities department adopt written policies or guidelines that articulate the district's success in incorporating the SMART schools' frugal design principals into its design standards.

Exhibit 9-8

School Infrastructure Thrift (SIT) Awards

School	Date	Award
St. Lucie West Middle School	March 16, 1999	$ 1,175,713
Savanna Ridge Elementary	March 16, 1999	841,322
Orange Avenue Charter School	March 16, 1999	536,500
St. Lucie West Centennial H.S.	July 13, 1999	3,122,719
C.A. Moore Elementary	June 29, 2000	1,121,740
Total		**$ 6,797,994**

Source: St. Lucie School District.

Recommendations ———————————————————

- *Formalize written guidelines that incorporate the recommendations of the SMART Schools Clearinghouse into construction planning and development operations.*

Action Plan 9–1 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 9-1

Create SMART Schools Guidelines		
Strategy	Create written guidelines that formally incorporate the recommendations of the SMART Schools Clearinghouse into the construction planning and development process.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Obtain SMART Schools recommendations from the state, and summarize those that are applicable to the district.
	Step 2:	Create a portfolio of SMART Schools' designs used by the district.
	Step 3:	Document the efficiencies or cost savings realized. (Reuse of architectural plans.)
	Step 4:	Establish procedures to ensure that SMART Schools recommendations are included as an integral part of the process to plan, select and construct schools.
	Step 5:	Implement a step in the approval process to require evidentiary support that SMART recommendations were considered.
	Step 6:	Make these recommendations part of the district's design criteria and revised general educational specifications for elementary, middle and high schools.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of Facilities Services	
Time Frame	June 2003	

Source: OPPAGA.

4   When designing and constructing new educational facilities, the district incorporates factors to minimize the maintenance and operations requirements of the new facility.

The district's design standards help keep costs down

The underlying purpose of the district's construction design standards is to keep construction and maintenance costs down through standardization and use of products and designs that in the district's collective experience, work. The district has developed standards for HVAC equipment, mechanical and electrical systems, plumbing and hardware. These standards are based less on industry standards than on the district's staff trial and error experience with various systems over time. Districtwide standardization of fire protection equipment, doors, lights, hardware, windows, and flooring minimize the maintenance and operations costs of new facilities. The standards, including preferred manufacturers, are provided to architects at the pre-design meeting. Architects are required to incorporate these standards into the design of new schools. We recommend in Chapter 10, Facilities Construction*,* that the design criteria be codified into a manual to protect against institutional memory loss as staff turns over.

Value engineering and life cycle cost analysis save on long-term maintenance costs

The district incorporates value engineering and life cycle cost analysis as part of its construction management process. The value engineering process is a cost control technique based on bringing construction expertise into the design process early on to control costs before drawings have progressed too far. A team of design professionals, construction professionals, and district project managers come together to form a value engineering analysis at the schematic design phase when there is sufficient information on the project, but it is not too late to make cost-saving changes. For example, the project progress report for construction of the Lincoln Park Academy Auditorium includes a schedule of value engineering recommendations valued at savings of $96,216 to be considered by the district. Value engineering options are a routine part of all district construction projects. Managers evaluate these

options and cost-saving items selected are put into writing and the guaranteed maximum price of the project is adjusted accordingly.

Life-cycle cost analysis takes into consideration the cost-effectiveness, durability and ease of maintenance of materials, equipment and other building components. The *Maintenance and Operations Administrative Guidelines for School Districts and Community Colleges,* published by DOE, advises administrators to use life-cycle cost (LCC) analysis in making decisions about which materials and systems to incorporate into their facilities. The process is intended to provide an objective evaluation of materials and equipment alternatives by applying long-term economic considerations to help determine total or actual costs. Additionally, these analyses are beneficial because they ensure that school facilities can withstand the vary levels of usage they will be subjected to and that the useful life of the building components and equipment have been considered to avoid higher maintenance costs. St. Lucie School District has very effectively used life-cycle cost analysis to help district administrators make the difficult decision of whether it was more cost-effective to renovate an existing school or tear it down and start over. The culmination of the assessment of Frances K. Sweet Elementary Magnet School performed by Stebbins, Scott & Bergman, Architects, and Jenkins and Charland, structural engineers was the recommendation that it was more cost-effective for the district to tear down and start over with new construction. This also proved to be the case with Fairlawn Elementary School.

10 Facilities Construction

The St. Lucie County School District has successfully privatized much of its construction program. It has developed an award winning, cost-effective construction program that has allowed the district to upgrade and construct modern facilities district wide. However, paying for new facilities puts a strain on the capital budget.

Conclusion

The St. Lucie County School District is using 29 of the 32 best practices for facilities construction. The district operates a well-managed, cost-effective facilities construction program that delivers facilities on time and within budget. However, the district needs to develop a master plan for facilities that considers new growth projections, projected revenues, and the cost to acquire new sites and renovate and construct facilities. The district can further improve the facilities construction program by updating its general educational specifications, codifying its facility design criteria into a manual, and developing an effective post-occupancy evaluation program for facilities.

The district has done a good job of thoroughly assessing the physical condition of its facilities to provide data for planning and financial commitments. In many cases the district has made the hard decision to tear down and start over rather than renovate. However, upgrading inferior schools and constructing new ones to keep up with growth in the southern part of the county has not come without a large price tag, approximately $157 million when the administrative complex is finished. And the district is not finished. It still houses 14% of its students in temporary classrooms.

The district needs revenue, at least $103 million in the near term to construct a two new high schools and an elementary school. The district is already thinking outside the box to come up with options to fund new construction. District officials have met with local developers to secure commitments on sites and school construction, but it may not be enough to accommodate expected growth. The district was surprised when 700 more students than expected showed up in August 2002. According to a new demographic study, the district can expect between 850 to 1,000 new students each year in the foreseeable future. The district cannot rely on its controlled choice plan alone to solve future facility needs.

Exhibit 10-1

The District Has Had a Number of Notable Accomplishments in Facilities Construction in the Last Three Years

- The district makes good use of joint use agreements to minimize the need for new construction.
- The district has developed a prototypical design for elementary and middle schools.
- New schools incorporate advanced technology.
- The district utilizes the project management information system (PMIS) to track project costs.

Source: OPPAGA.

Overview of Chapter Findings————————

The OPPAGA team reviewed the district's facilities construction using the Best Financial Management Practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education and associated indicators. The team employed several methodologies to develop chapter conclusions and action plans. For instance, the team conducted on-site interviews with district level managers and gathered information on the facilities construction activities such as policies and procedures, planning and procurement methods, and community involvement. To receive additional input, the team visited facilities and interviewed district-level staff, principals, teachers, and parents. Questions varied depending on the groups surveyed and the results have been validated and incorporated into this chapter where applicable..

An overview of chapter findings is presented below.

Facilities Work Plan

1. The district has established a facilities planning committee that includes a broad base of school district personnel, parents, construction professionals, and other community stakeholders. (Page 10-4)

2. The district has established authority and assigned responsibilities for facilities planning. (Page 10-5)

3. The five-year facilities work plan provides budgetary plans and priorities based on input from the facilities planning committee; however, the district has not developed a master plan. (Page 10-5)

4. The five-year facilities work plan is based on a thorough demographic study and enrollment projections. (Page 10-7)

5. The five-year facilities work plan is based on an evaluation of the physical condition and the ability of facilities to meet educational needs. (Page 10-9)

6. When developing the annual five-year facilities work plan the district evaluates alternatives to minimize the need for new construction. (Page 10-11)

7. District planning prioritizes construction needs. (Page 10-12)

8. The district can demonstrate that the construction program complies with the current Laws of Florida. (Page 10-13)

9. For all projects with dates of construction contracted after July 1, 2001, the district can demonstrate that the construction program complies with the Florida Building Code. (Page 10-13)

10. The school board ensures responsiveness to the community through open communication about the construction program and the five-year facilities work plan. (Page 10-14)

Educational Specifications

11. The district develops descriptions and educational specifications for each project. (Page 10-14)

12. Educational specifications for new construction, remodeling, and renovations include a description of activity areas. (Page 10-16)

13. The architectural design fulfills the building specification needs as determined by the district. (Page 10-16)

14. New construction, remodeling, and renovations incorporate effective safety features. (Page 10-17)

Acquisition of School Sites

15. The district begins school site selection well in advance of future need based on expected growth patterns. (Page 10-18)

16. The board considers the most economical and practical locations for current and anticipated needs, including such factors as need to exercise eminent domain, obstacles to development, and consideration of agreements with adjoining counties. (Page 10-20)

Construction Costs

17. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the construction program. (Page 10-20)

18. The district has considered and, where possible, implemented the general requirements recommended in the SMART Schools Clearinghouse Frugal Construction Standards. (Page 10-21)

19. The district minimizes construction costs through the use of prototype school designs and frugal construction practices. (Page 10-21)

20. The district secures appropriate professional services to assist in facility planning, design, and construction. (Page 10-22)

21. The district can demonstrate that funds collected for school projects were raised appropriately. (Page 10-23)

Timely Completion of Projects

22. District planning provides realistic time frames for implementation that are coordinated with the opening of schools. (Page 10-23)

23. For each project or group of projects, the architect and district facilities planner develop a conceptual site plan and building specifications. (Page 10-24)

24. The district follows generally accepted and legal contracting practices to control costs. (Page 10-25)

25. The district has assigned one person with the authority and responsibility to keep facilities construction projects within budget and on schedule. (Page 10-26)

26. The board minimizes changes to facilities plans after final working drawings are initiated in order to minimize project costs. (Page 10-26)

27. The architect recommends payment based on the percentage of work completed. A percentage of the contract is withheld pending completion of the project. (Page 10-27)

28. The district requires appropriate inspection of all school construction projects. (Page 10-27)

Construction Program

29. The district conducts a comprehensive orientation to the new facility prior to its use so that users better understand the building design and function. (Page 10-28)

30. The district does not conduct comprehensive building evaluations at the end of the first year of operation and regularly during the next three to five years to collect information about building operation and performance. (Page 10-29)

31. The district does not analyze building evaluations to determine whether facilities are fully used, operating costs are minimized, and changes in the district's construction planning process are needed. (Page 10-30)

32. The district analyzes maintenance and operations costs to identify improvements to the district's construction planning process. (Page 10-30)

Background

Currently, the district is winding down its accelerated construction program that began in 1996 with the passage of the ½ cent sales surtax. Once the build-out of the new administrative complex is complete, the

district will have spent approximately $156 million on capital projects to upgrade and construct new schools and provide modern administrative offices. The district has 43 facilities consisting of approximately 4.4 million gross square feet of space.
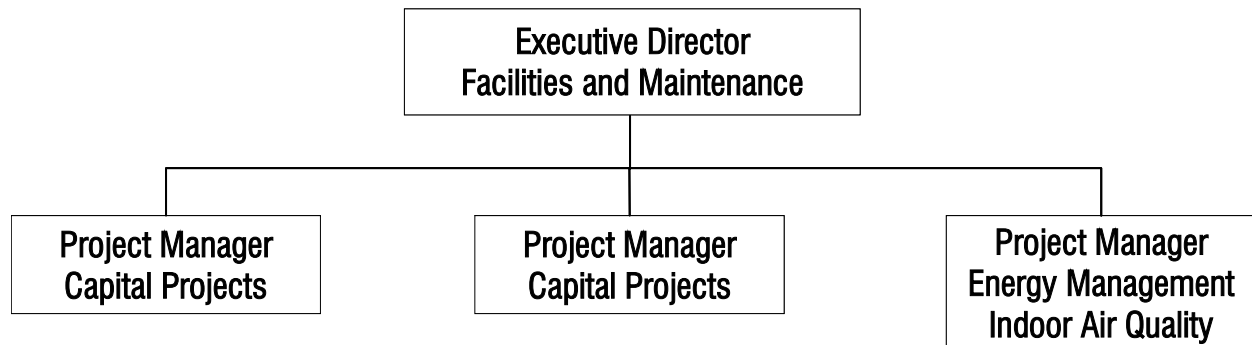
The district has determined that the construction management "at risk" method of constructing large projects has worked well for them. The district has been able to tackle many projects simultaneously without having to hire a large in-house staff. The "at risk" part of the contract transfers responsibility for meeting deadlines and staying within budget to the construction management firm since it is responsible for cost overruns. New schools consistently come in below the state average for new construction.

The director of facilities position was deleted July 1, 2001 due to statewide budget cuts for education. The new executive director for facilities services has assumed responsibility for facilities planning in addition to his other responsibilities.

The $9.2 million dollars the district pays annually in debt service for its new and upgraded facilities has put a strain on the capital budget. There are no funds available for major capital construction projects beyond maintaining facilities until 2005-2006. In the meantime, the facility planning committee is working diligently to find additional sources of revenue to meet future facility needs.

Exhibit 10-2

Facilities Department Organizational Chart

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               ┌─────────────────────────┐
               │    Executive Director    │
               │ Facilities and Maintenance│
               └─────────────────────────┘
        ┌───────────────┼───────────────┐
┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐
│Project Manager│ │Project Manager│ │Project Manager│
│Capital Projects│ │Capital Projects│ │Energy Management│
│              │ │              │ │Indoor Air Quality│
└──────────────┘ └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘
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Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Facilities Work Plan

1 The district has established a facilities planning committee that includes a broad base of school district personnel, parents, construction professionals, and other community stakeholders.

The district solicits input from a facilities planning committee

Throughout its accelerated construction program from 1996 to 2001 the district had an active facilities planning committee consisting of district staff, parents, and community stakeholders that met regularly to make decisions about construction projects. According to the director of facilities, consultants were included, as needed, to provide technical expertise required for informed decision making. Design and

construction professionals were not included on committees because of possible future conflict of interest should they want to bid on district contracts.

The director of facilities stated that the district also works closely with county and local governments on committees that have a jurisdiction over matters pertaining to construction. The district has a representative on the regional planning council, and the superintendent serves on the Economic Development Council and the Chamber of Commerce, both of which provide business input on the educational needs of the community. In addition, district construction needs are expressed through various forums such as board meetings, public hearings, PTO, and school advisory committees.

The district reports that the planning committee and district staff analyze the district's needs and conduct feasibility studies that take into consideration growth projections, site availability, cost analysis and programmatic options of potential designs, and compliance with the various state, local and district mandates. The district also considers the viability and cost-effectiveness of alternatives to program solutions relating to site selection and the actual construction of facilities. Contractors, design professionals, and staff also review plans and projects for value engineering to save costs. The planning committee then prepares a draft report for distribution to key staff for review and direction.

2 The district has established authority and assigned responsibilities for facilities planning.

The district has assigned the primary responsibility for facilities planning to the executive director of facilities services, who joined the district in January 2002. The director of facilities position was deleted July 1, 2002 as a cost saving measure after state budget cuts in the fall. The district has established in writing the roles and responsibilities for the various entities involved in the facilities planning process in its policies and procedures manual. Defining these responsibilities is important because a significant amount of district resources are at stake and so many people are involved in the planning process. Clearly defined responsibilities also support accountability to the board and to the public.

With the occupancy of F.K. Sweet Elementary Magnet School in January 2001, the district completed approximately $151 million in construction projects. As stated earlier in Chapter 9 on the use of construction funds, much of the capital budget, $9.2 million annually, is going to pay off construction debt. Once the build-out of the administrative office complex is completed later this year, no new major construction is planned until 2005-06. Consequently, the present facility planning committee, made up of district staff, is concentrating on strategies for financing projects for 2005-06 when the sales surtax expires.

3 The five-year facilities work plan provides budgetary plans and priorities based on input from the facilities planning committee; however the district has not developed a master plan.

The district presents its construction priorities and budgetary plans in the five-year facilities work plan. The plan is a Department of Education required schedule of major repair and renovation projects necessary to maintain the educational plan and ancillary facilities. The plan is updated annually, and shows the source of capital funds by year and the estimated costs of each project. The work plan functions as the district's master plan; however, it does not articulate the district's long term goals and

objectives for the construction program. The district needs to develop a long term ten- and twenty-year master plan for facilities construction in addition to the five-year capital plan.

In developing the plan, the district considers planning data that includes student projections, population migration, the educational plant survey and project requests that are submitted by the maintenance department and schools to set priorities in the five-year facilities work plan. Cost estimates for the plan are based on the educational plant survey (a building condition assessment required every five years), district staff reports and the past history of similar work performed. According to the former director of facilities, the consultants used to assess facilities also have input on specific projects cost data and cost escalation factors in making budgetary projections. All projects requests and cost estimates are submitted to the assistant superintendent for business services, who, in turn, presents the entire capital budget request package to the superintendent's senior staff. The senior staff, made up of the assistant superintendent for business services, executive directors of facilities and maintenance, transportation and food service, and the three zone executive directors of school operations, decide what will be funded.

The district needs additional revenue

Each year the director of facilities reviews the five-year work program. Projects that have been completed are deleted from the list and new projects are added. If funding is available, projects are placed in the current year; if not, they are scheduled in a future year. The district's Capital Outlay Budget and five-year facilities work plan for Fiscal Years 2002-2003 projects total expenditures of $23.8 million, $9.2 million of which is dedicated to debt service. Because of high debt service, state budget cuts, and limited additional revenue, projects have been scaled back to the bare minimum necessary to prevent deterioration of existing facilities. No funding exists for $102.8 million in projects which include a new elementary school, high school and extensive renovations or replacement of Ft. Pierce Central High School where the entire 9th grade is currently housed in relocatable classrooms. According to the Department of Education's review of the district 2000-01 five-year work plan, it has 14% of its students housed in relocatable classrooms with no plans to reduce this number through 2005-06.

The draft five-year work plan includes projects totaling $26.7 million that must be delayed due to lack of funds for capital projects. Since the district cannot have a deficit, and debt service remains constant at $9.2 million over the next five years, the district has no other choice than to cut spending for school based capital budgets, athletic equipment, music allocations, technology, and anything else not absolutely necessary to keep facilities operating. Unless additional sources of revenue are identified, taxpayers may find district facilities deteriorating due to lack of funds for upkeep.

Recommendations —————————————————

- *The district needs to develop a long term ten- and twenty-year master plan for facilities construction in addition to the five-year capital plan.*

- *Establish a Financing Task Force to identify revenue resources.*

  Action Plan 10-1provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 10-1

Develop a Long-Range Facilities Master Plan	
Strategy	Develop a long-range educational facilities master plan with community input and update it on a regular basis.

Action Needed	Step 1:	Establish a master planning work group.
	Step 2:	Devise a plan with public input that provides a framework for the district's short and long term decisions regarding facilities that are consistent with the district's priorities and needs. The plan should consider the following:
		• Educational mission, goals and community values,
		• The most recent educational plant survey and demographic study,
		• Local government's planning and development plans
		• The most practical and economical site selection and land acquisition for current and anticipated needs that reflects intergovernmental, higher education and business coordination.
		• Financing options.
		• General educational specifications for facilities, and
		• Project requests.
	Step 3:	Use the master planning work group to synthesize the values, concerns, and priorities of the community and district into a draft long-range plan.
	Step 4:	Hold a public meeting to receive feedback on the draft master plan.
	Step 5:	Revise plan if needed.
	Step 6:	Present long-range master plan to the board for approval.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services	
Time Frame	January 2004.	

Source: OPPAGA.

4   The five-year facilities work plan is based on a thorough demographic study and enrollment projections.

The district can no longer rely on the controlled choice plan to solve its facility needs

In 2001, the district was caught off guard when 700 more students than expected enrolled in its schools. In addition to DOE cohort survival projections, the district had contracted to have a local consultant perform its own demographic study. However, his projections used the DOE cohort survival method and he also failed to take into consideration the in migration of students from other Florida counties.
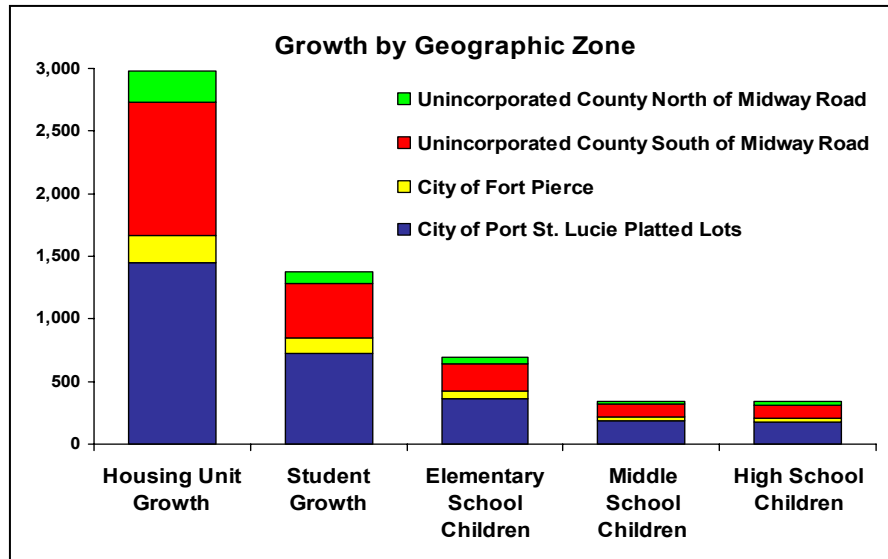
The district's school choice plan and excess capacity as a result of its recently completed construction program allowed the district to absorb the influx of new students within existing facilities. The district adopted controlled choice as a method of student assignment in 1989 to ensure continued desegregation of schools. The district is divided into three choice attendance zones and students are assigned on their 1st, 2nd or 3rd choice to schools based on availability, diversity goals, transportation and other factors. This method has worked well to fully utilize school facilities.

However, with growth on the rise, particularly in the southern part of the county, the district can no longer rely on its controlled choice plan alone to solve its future facility needs. A second demographic study completed June 18, 2002 conducted by Fishkind & Associates, Inc. predicts overall student population will increase by more than 830 to 1,330 students per year, from 31,338 in 2003 to 36,705 by 2008. Most of the increase in school population will occur in the rapidly developing south county based on the consultant's study of housing unit growth and land development patterns by school zone. Exhibit 10-3

provides these projections. The district is developing a new master plan with a longer planning horizon than 5 years based on its new demographic study, development patterns and revenue projections.

Exhibit 10-3

New Growth Management Legislation Affects Facilities Planning

Growth by Geographic Zone

Legend:
- Unincorporated County North of Midway Road
- Unincorporated County South of Midway Road
- City of Fort Pierce
- City of Port St. Lucie Platted Lots

Categories: Housing Unit Growth, Student Growth, Elementary School Children, Middle School Children, High School Children

Source: Fishkind & Associates, Inc.

The district's master plan will need to take into consideration new growth management legislation passed in the 2002 legislative session and signed by the Governor on May 31, 2002. This legislation amending s. 163.31777 and 235.193, *Florida Statutes,* requires local planning agencies and school boards to enter into an inter-local agreement(s) to define the specific ways in which both entities will coordinate their plans. This agreement should address their future development plans based on consistent projections of the amount and distribution of population growth and student enrollment. The requirement that both school boards and local governments coordinate their plans for development based on school capacity levels and plans for existing and new schools should lead to better identification of needs and timing for the delivery of schools. The district has already updated its policies and procedures regarding facility planning, site selection and land acquisition to reflect the requirement for intergovernmental coordination. District policies provide that copies of the board adopted facilities work program be provided to St. Lucie County, the City of Fort Pierce, the City of Port St. Lucie and the village of St. Lucie.

The district is looking for local alternatives to fund new construction

Because projected state revenues will not cover the need for new schools, the district planning committee is working on innovative ways to come up with alternative local funding to construct new schools. District officials are exploring the potential for developers to build schools within their developments in areas where the district needs future student stations. The district would provide the developer with school impact fee credits and lease or repurchase the school at a future date based on district needs.

As property values continue to climb at the projected rate of 3% per year, the district will also benefit from the additional 2 mill revenue based on the gross taxable value of real estate. However, St. Lucie County real property values estimated at $9.7 million for 2002-03 are still well below its wealthier neighbor, Martin County at $11.9 million. We recommend that the district carefully monitor enrollment and continue to work diligently to identify additional sources of revenue to meet projected school needs.

Recommendations ———————————————

- *Establish a Financing Task Force to identify revenue resources.*

  Action Plan 10-2 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 10-2

Establish a Financing Task Force		
Strategy	Establish a school construction and modernization task force to develop financing proposals for implementation of the long-range educational facilities master plan.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Announce the creation of a construction financing task force.
	Step 2:	Appoint a small, but recognizably influential group of business leaders to serve on the financing task force after soliciting advice from county leaders, business leaders and the Board of Education members.
	Step 3:	Charge the task force with finding ways to fund the implementation of the long-range master plan.
	Step 4:	Use the task force to develop recommendations for the superintendent.
	Step 5:	Publicize task force recommendations.
	Step 6:	Hold public hearings on financing options.
	Step 7:	Submit recommendations to the Board of Education for review and action.
Who is Responsible	Superintendent	
Time Frame	January 2004; Task force is put in place near the end of the master planning process.	

Source: OPPAGA.

5   The five-year facilities work plan is based on an evaluation of the physical condition and the ability of facilities to meet educational needs.

The district accurately assesses district facilities' needs

The district uses a three-tier process to assess its facility needs. The process takes into consideration the recommendations of the educational plant survey, district staff, and the design and construction management professionals the district hires to perform facility assessments.

Facilities assessment is the critical process for providing data the school board and district administrators need to make effective decisions for master planning and financial commitments. The Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH) serves as the starting point for assessing district facilities. It is a complete inventory of the district's educational facilities containing information on parcels, buildings and rooms assigned to individual administrative centers. The district uses a direct computer network connection to the Office of Educational Facilities Information System (OEFIS) to regularly update district FISH data.

The district uses data in the FISH report to conduct the educational plant survey. Florida law requires school districts to complete and submit a survey of all district facilities to DOE every five years. The survey is a systematic study of present educational and ancillary facilities and the determination of future needs. Its purpose is to aid the district in formulating plans for housing the educational activities of students and staff for the next five years. It also assists the district with setting priorities and cost

estimates in the five-year facilities work plan. The district has contracted to have the 1998 Survey of Educational Facilities updated and the results are due soon. It will contain detailed cost estimates and estimated revenues for remodeling, renovation, and new construction through 2006-07.

The executive director of facilities services is responsible for putting together the five-year facilities work plan to meet the educational needs of the district based on recommendations from the educational plant survey, assistant superintendents, principals, project managers, maintenance staff, and consultants hired by the district. Recommendations are based on observed conditions relating to aesthetics, acoustics, equipment, safety issues, and future operational and maintenance costs.

The five-year plan for Fiscal Year 2002-03 contains $23.8 million in new and existing projects. These projects include approximately $4.4 million in projects recommended by the facilities department, $1.2 million in bus purchases, $2 million to support the district's technology program, $4.4 million to support the maintenance program, and $9.2 million in debt service.

The construction professionals perform a through physical condition assessment of facilities

The district has privatized much of its construction program. It maintains continuing services contracts with design and construction professionals to assist in assessing district facilities. A construction management firm must thoroughly assess the physical condition of facilities in order to arrive at a guaranteed maximum price for capital construction projects. When trying to decide whether to renovate a school or tear it down and start over, the district makes use of its continuing services contract with an architectural firm to do a feasibility study. The firm sends in a multidisciplinary team of professionals to ascertain the school's adequacy.

The assessment data allows the district to make a decision whether it is more cost effective to renovate or tear down and start over. For example, the master plan and structural condition assessment conducted by Stebbins, Scott & Bergman Architects and Jenkins & Carland, structural engineers, for F.K. Sweet Magnet School is a first hand analysis of existing site conditions and the interior and exterior structure of F.K. Sweet School. Project scope items include a complete structural assessment and an analysis of the school's electrical, plumbing and mechanical systems. The assessment also included responses to a teacher/PTO questionnaire and a plan and estimate worksheet for new construction. In the case of F.K. Sweet, the assessment data revealed that it was more cost effective for the district to tear down and start over rather than renovate.

The facilities department also provided an executive summary of a district wide roof survey of 4.3 million square feet of roof systems conducted by Law Engineering and Environmental Services, Inc., between February 13, 2002 and March 20, 2002. The purpose of the evaluation was to establish an enabled roof asset management program (RAMP). The five-year budget for maintenance, repair and replacement is estimated at $4.9 million. The thoroughness of these assessments helps the district assess conditions and the financial implications of maintenance, repair and replacement alternatives. Consequently, the district can budget accurately for capital outlay projects.

Exhibit 10-4

Districtwide Roof Inventory

Facility Type	No. of Sites	No. of Buildings	Square Footage	Replacement Value
High Schools	5	53	1,018,166	$ 6,108,996
Middle Schools [1]	8	72	1,170,548	7,023,288
Elementary Schools	21	115	1,874,919	11,249,514
Support Facilities	4	12	190,911	1,145,466
Totals	**38**	**252**	**4,254,544**	**$25,527,264**

[1] Lincoln Park Academy and Ft. Pierce Magnet School are categorized as middle schools.

Source: Law Engineering & Environmental Services, Inc.

6 When developing the annual five-year facilities work plan the district evaluates alternatives to minimize the need for new construction.

The district has relied on its school choice plan to minimize the need for new construction

In September 1970, the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida found that the school district was operating a dual, segregated school system to the detriment of African-American students. The school board was required to rectify the situation by eliminating all vestiges of segregation in schools. Over the years, the district experimented with various methods of student assignment that would overcome the county's historically segregated housing patterns.

In 1989, the board adopted a controlled choice plan as its method of student assignment. Under the controlled choice plan a student's assignment is not based on individual residential attendance zones. Rather, the district is divided into three choice zones made up of several elementary schools and one or more middle and high schools. Parents and students can choose from among the schools listed in their choice zones or from district-wide magnet schools, zone magnet schools and high school career and technical academies. Assignment is based on availability, transportation, parental choice, and diversity goals among other factors.

The school district carefully monitors the enrollment at each school. Each year prior to the start of school, the student assignment officer recommends to the Controlled Choice Planning and Implementation Committee the initial student enrollment capacity at each school and at each grade level within each school. The superintendent or his designee then sets the initial capacity of each school after reviewing the recommendation. Section 5.84 of the *Controlled Choice Student Assignment Plan* requires that enrollment capacities must take into account the need to maintain diversity and provide equitable transportation. The district tracts enrollment monthly using a computer program developed for enrollment.

As stated earlier, the controlled choice plan has worked well to ensure maximum utilization of school facilities; however with projected future enrollments of 830 or more per year for the foreseeable future, the district is going to soon reach capacity and will have no other option but the construction of new facilities. It is already making use of 190 relocatable classrooms at Ft. Piece Central High School, Port St. Lucie Elementary and other district schools. Therefore, the executive director of facilities and maintenance states that the five-year work plan only provides for construction that cannot be met through other means.

The district makes use of joint use agreements to minimize the need for new construction

The district has developed strong partnerships with private business, governmental agencies and educational institutions for the betterment of the community. The district has entered into joint use agreements for county-wide improvements valued at over $18 million as a result of joint use agreements with the County, Indian River Community College, City of Ft. Pierce and City of Port St. Lucie. The district has successfully entered into inter-local note agreements for $410,000 and $731,063 with St. Lucie County to finance and construct a south county regional stadium for use by the school board, county and other municipalities. It has operated a multi-use stadium with the county in north St. Lucie County for many years. The county operates both stadium facilities with the district given first use priority. According to the district representative to the Master Park Planning Commission, the arrangement has worked well so far. Other joint projects include Morningside Library, WLX Channel 13, the Manatee Center and the emergency operations center. As stated earlier, the district is now exploring the possibility of a joint use agreement with a local developer and Florida Atlantic University to construct a new charter school in a new subdivision.

The district has revised its cost schedule for after hour use of facilities

The district regularly makes its facilities available to community groups including its state-of-the-art $3.7 million auditorium at Lincoln Park Academy. The school board's 21st century community learning centers advertised on the district's web site offer free after school and weekend programs for adults and children. These centers are located in Fort Pierce at Garden City Elementary, Forest Grove Middle School and Lincoln Park Academy. The programs are coordinated by site administrators and the use of facilities is offered free of charge for these district sponsored programs.

The district has revised its cost schedule for civic and other non-profit groups' use of facilities. These groups used to be charged a flat $90 fee per use to offset the district's cost of providing after-hours custodial services. The draft revised cost schedule in the *Facility Usage Manual* now takes into consideration the cost of providing air conditioning and additional security personnel and sound technicians for the auditorium. The fee schedule is to be revisited annually at the January board meeting. Considering the district's present budget situation, we commend the district's effort to offset facilities' operating costs when allowing community groups to use facilities.

7   District planning prioritizes construction needs.

Facilities with the greatest needs get first priority

The former director of facilities stated that the district sets its construction priorities based on identified need. Those facilities with the greatest needs are addressed first. In addition, the 1997 federal court stipulations for the motion of approval granting the district release from federal supervision of its ongoing desegregation plan required equitable distribution of capital outlay expenditures to bring older and historically black schools into parity. The district voluntarily agreed to outside monitoring of these efforts to ensure no facility inequity between northern and southern sector schools.

In an effort to ensure equity, the district's bond and Certificate of Participation programs provided projects for all schools. In addition, taxpayers supported approval of the ½ cent sales surtax based on funds being spent equitably on facilities district wide. The district applies all capital resources towards projects identified in the five-year work plan; it does not divert resources to lower priority allowable uses. According to the director of facilities, instructional capacity is given first priority because no new administrative or support space has been constructed in the past eight years. The board approves all

capital projects and the public is made aware of all planned projects through required newspaper advertisements and public meetings. Our visits to numerous district facilities and interviews with principals confirmed that schools appear to receive equitable treatment.

8 The district can demonstrate that the construction program complies with the current Laws of Florida.

As shown in Exhibit 9-4, the district's cost per student station is below the state average. Thus, according to the district finance director, the district has never applied for a waiver to exceed the amount legally allowed under s. 1013.64(6)(b)1, *Florida Statutes*.

The district submits the following reports to the Department of Education as required by law:

- Survey for Validation
- Educational Plant Surveys are performed and submitted to the state every 5 years.
- Survey Supplements
- Project Implementation Information for projects over $200,000 (SREF 4.1)
- Certificate of Occupancy
- Certificate of Final Inspection for projects over $200,000
- Project Priority List for use of CO&DS bond funds (These forms are prepared and submitted to the state every 5 years.)
- Twelve-month PECO Capital Outlay Projection and Request for Project Encumbrance Authorization
- Report of Cost of Construction
- Florida Inventory of School Houses Update

9 For all projects with dates of construction contracted after July 1, 2001, the district can demonstrate that the construction program complies with the Florida Building Code.

As discussed in detail under best practice #26, in Chapter 11, Facilities Maintenance, the district is well prepared for the changes brought about as a result of the revised Florida Building Code. To ensure compliance, the district housed the Building Code Administration Program in the newly created Building Department that reports directly to the superintendent. The district is fortunate to have in its employ a licensed building code administrator and a licensed commercial building code inspector qualified by 9 licenses to perform inspections for demolition, electrical, mechanical, plumbing, gas, foundation framing, sheathing and roofing. Districts that do not employ individuals with multi-licenses will incur the additional expense of contracting with several individuals qualified to perform the required inspections prior to final inspection.

10 The school board ensures responsiveness to the community through open communication about the construction program and the five-year facilities work plan.

The school board communicates information regarding its construction program by including reports on facilities construction on each board meeting agenda. In addition, the district posts copy of the public notice of construction projects on its web site. The school board also conducts workshops to review the five-year facilities work program prior to formal presentation at the regular board meeting. This provides a less structured setting for general public input.

Educational Specifications

11 The district develops descriptions and educational specifications for each project.

The educational specifications developed for F.K. Sweet Magnet Elementary School, located in an older section of Ft. Pierce, provides an example of the district's educational specification development process for all schools. The specifications were developed with school stakeholders in association with Donadio and Associates, Architects and Stebbins, Scott & Bergman, Architects. Construction began in October 1999 when the main building was demolished to make room for the new school. The school was occupied in January 2001. It currently has an enrollment of 600 and serves as a district magnet school.

OPPAGA staff toured the school and interviewed the principal on the specification development and construction processes. The principal stated that F.K. Sweet had very good stakeholder involvement with planners. She and a parent, who was an architect, also participated in the selection of the construction management firm. The construction management firm conducted weekly project team meetings with school staff, the district project manager, and architects. Today, school staff, parents and students cannot be more pleased with how the school turned out.

The design of F.K. Sweet is flexible enough to allow for a variety of organizational patterns and also allows the district re-use of the facility design with limited modifications. Weatherbee, Savanna Ridge, C.A. Moore, and Fairlawn Elementary Schools all used the same design with slight modifications for site variations. The introduction to the educational specifications indicates that the building components are organized into a prototypical school campus that reflects the design philosophy of the district and F.K. Sweet Magnet School:

- Integration of high level of education and modern technology;
- Provision for a physical environment that is user friendly and fits the surrounding community and provides for student, parents and staff health, safety and welfare; and
- Meets the comprehensive planning needs of the St. Lucie County School District.

In addition to meeting the needs of the school district, the prototypical school design fulfills the Department of Education smart schools guidelines that require new school designs to be more efficient and cost effective.

The educational specifications for F.K. Sweet present the general educational philosophy of the district and the school. F.K. Sweet is a traditional academic, multi-cultural magnet school whose staff is dedicated to empowering all students with a positive self-image, knowledge, and confidence to strive for excellence. The specifications outline 9 educational goals relating to reading readiness, student performance, learning environment and planning for achieving quality instructions for all learners. These goals are further broken down into program goals and program activities by grade level. The district provided surveys of faculty and staff that addressed individual program philosophy and goals, space relationships and equipment needs, and special considerations for the physical environment by activity and grade level.

Our subsequent interviews with staff at F.K. Sweet confirmed they had significant input into the design of their respective areas, particularly the media/art center and music room. The principal said that design staff and construction managers provided teachers and the school advisory committee ongoing communication throughout the entire design and construction process. The construction management team offered four tours of the school during the construction phase.

The principal at St. Lucie Centennial High School said that he, parents, and community leaders also had significant input into the educational specification development process. Construction managers conducted 10 focus groups with community leaders. Over 200 people were involved in the process. The new high school is organized around learning communities designed around the "small schools" concept of schools within schools.

The district needs to update its general specifications for schools

Although the district has an effective process in place for developing educational specifications for individual projects, it has not updated its general specifications for schools since 1978 for elementary schools, 1981 for middle schools, and 1986 for high schools. These specifications need to be updated with stakeholder input to reflect the district's current educational philosophies, educational goals and advances in building systems and technology.

Recommendations ———————————————

- *The district needs to update its general specifications for schools.*

  Action Plan 10-3 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 10-3

Update General Specifications for Elementary, Middle and High Schools
Strategy   Appoint an educational specification committee consisting of administrative, instructional, business and community leaders and design professionals.

Action Needed	Step 1:	Develop general educational specifications design criteria for elementary, middle and high schools that:
		• Include a statement of the district's educational philosophy, goals, objectives and teaching strategies,
		• Address curriculum, staffing, support services and exceptional and vocational education,
		• Provide for a physical environment that fits the surrounding community and provides for the health, safety and welfare of users,
		• Provide for integration of modern technology,
		• Incorporate the district's cost-effective prototypical design principals,
		• Consider the needs of the business community and school-community relationships,
		• Meet the comprehensive planning needs of the district,
	Step 2:	Present general educational specifications to the board for approval.
	Step 3:	Ensure that general educational specifications are made available to design professionals and construction managers prior to the design of new projects.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services	
Time Frame	January 2004	

Source: OPPAGA.

12 Educational specifications for new construction, remodeling, and renovations include a description of activity areas.

The faculty and staff surveys conducted by the design firm for Fairlawn Elementary and F.K. Sweet address activity areas and adjacency issues. For example, an instructor for the Challenge Program, which serves gifted students in grades 3-5, indicated that the program needed to be near the technology area in order to fulfill one of its goals for the development of research skills by providing students the opportunity for Internet research. The teacher also wanted to be located close to the science resource room and the media center since other program goals called for students to keep up with current events in the fields of science and health and exposure to and appreciation of art and great artists. The music teacher drew a diagram of her desired activity areas in the space relationships section of the questionnaire.

The educational specifications provided by Donadio and Associates, Architects and Stebbins, Scott & Bergman, Architects translate these desired space relationships into a space chart. Spaces are identified by name, number, square footage, and occupant capacity. Diagrams indicate space relationships to other spaces such as teacher planning, resource rooms and toilets. Descriptions of activity areas are defined for each grade level, special programs and custodial areas.

13 The architectural design fulfills the building specification needs as determined by the district.

The purpose of the educational specifications development process is to communicate all program requirements to the architect prior to the beginning of schematic drawings. The facility users and planners must then ensure that the resulting architectural design fulfills the specifications and meets the

needs of the district. The director of facilities states that the district meets with the design team and facility users to ensure compliance with design specifications during the design phase and again after occupancy. It saves the district both time and money to get the design right the first time.

Prior to construction, the architects for F.K. Sweet and St. Lucie West Middle School transmit to the principals survey responses and educational specification program notes for review and comment. District staff are also provided a site plan concept, a water and sewer plan, a facilities project estimate worksheet, and an overall floor plan layout to demonstrate that the educational specifications were incorporated into the final architectural plan. Educational specifications provided for St. Lucie West Middle School outline the same basic development process from identifying school philosophy and goals, curriculum, staffing, and special program needs to designing a school to meet those needs.

New Schools incorporate advanced technology

F.K. Sweet Magnet School offers students a state-of-the-art technology program with two fully equipped computer labs and 5 or more computers connected to the Internet in every classroom. St. Lucie West Middle School is equipped with a large state-of-the-art technology center that includes an aerospace program that received design input from the private sector. The district's director of vocational education and applied technology served on the educational specifications committee for St. Lucie West Middle School. Our interviews with the staff of both schools indicated that staff, parents and community leaders were very pleased that the final school built matched their design specifications.

14 New construction, remodeling, and renovations incorporate effective safety features.

The district ensures that safety features are incorporated in the design of all new construction by including this requirement in its *New Construction Agreement for Professional Services*. The agreement requires that the design meets all safety codes including those listed in the *State Requirements for Educational Facilities* (SREF), state and local building codes, and other appropriate codes. The resulting design is then reviewed by the DOE, Office of Educational Facilities, for code compliance.

The general design specifications for both F.K. Sweet Magnet School and St. Lucie West Middle School demonstrate that safety and security issues are addressed in the design process. The specifications for F.K. Sweet direct designers to follow the Department of Education's 15 step guide for *Safe School by Environment Design*. Other safety features addressed in the design specifications include the following:

- A fire alarm system that meets state regulations
- Fire extinguishers in all areas
- Secured, enclosed hallways
- Restricted areas for after school use
- Exit signage and lights, panic hardware and all other safety features required by accessibility, life-safety and building code.
- Wall mounted door stops and holders
- Rooms equipped with exhaust vents for chemical storage.
- Flammable storage areas open to the outside of building
- Interior finishes that comply with minimum material life-safety and building code requirements.

In addition, the educational specifications listed numerous safety considerations for vehicular traffic and pedestrians, bus traffic, signage, placement of landscaping to prevent concealment, use of glass in play areas and obstruction-free athletic fields.

Acquisition of School Sites

15 The district begins school site selection in advance of future need based on expected growth patterns.

The district's desire to maintain desegregated schools influences school site selection

The school board's responsibility for maintaining a unitary public school system drives the process for school site selection in St. Lucie County. The selection process must not only take into consideration accommodating growth in a cost effective manner, but also the need to maintain desegregation of student enrollment and a balanced burden of busing to achieve desegregation. Preventing minority group isolation has not been an easy task for the St. Lucie County School district especially in light of the fact of the county's uneven population growth. The *Plan for School Site Selection Construction and Zoning 1988-1995* demonstrates that according to census figures, the county's population growth from 1980 to 1987 increased 47.3%, from 87,182 to 128,381. Most of that growth was in the relatively new city of Port St. Lucie. However, the report notes that most of that population growth was in the white segment of the population. Black population growth from 1980 to 1985 increased by 2,893 while the white population grew by 26,160. The report draws the conclusion that while the total number of blacks in the county has grown, their number has declined as a percentage of the total population (from 21.8% of the total in 1980 to an estimated 18.9% in 1985). The Fishkind & Associates, Inc., study of student enrollment projections completed June 18, 2002 shows that student population growth has mirrored that of the county as a whole with white student growth projections basically unchanged, black population growth declining by 2.7%, but Hispanic growth increasing by 3%.

Exhibit 10-5

Distribution of Student Growth

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
White by Zone						
Zone 1	3,097	3,087	3,091	3,105	3,139	3,153
Zone 2	8,128	8,237	8,469	8,781	9,220	9,545
Zone 3	5,790	6,000	6,248	6,526	6,864	7,142
Total	**17,015**	**17,324**	**17,808**	**18,412**	**19,223**	**19,840**
Black by Zone						
Zone 1	2,380	2,441	2,504	2,615	2,716	2,898
Zone 2	3,693	3,804	3,803	3,914	3,726	3,722
Zone 3	2,925	2,963	2,946	2,997	2,903	2,914
Total	**8,998**	**9,208**	**9,253**	**9,526**	**9,345**	**9,534**
Hispanic and Other by Zone						
Zone 1	1,185	1,196	1,226	1,260	1,351	1,449
Zone 2	2,568	2,778	2,983	3,097	3,453	3,725
Zone 3	1,572	1,664	1,760	1,815	2,004	2,157
Total	**5,325**	**5,638**	**5,969**	**6,172**	**6,808**	**7,331**

All Students by Ethnicity by Zone						
Zone 1	6,662	6,724	6,821	6,980	7,206	7,500
Zone 2	14,389	14,819	15,255	15,792	16,399	16,992
Zone 3	10,287	10,627	10,954	11,338	11,771	12,213
Total	**31,338**	**32,170**	**33,030**	**34,110**	**35,376**	**36,705**

Source: Fishkind & Associates, Inc.

The district's *Plan for School Site Selection Construction and Zoning 1988-1995* recognizes that site selection based on growth alone would dictate locating new elementary schools in the rapidly developing southern part of the county; however, this consideration alone would diminish the district's desegregation effort. Therefore the plan offers the school board guidelines for school site selection based on student assignment guidelines, residential attendance zones, transportation, the location of magnet schools and older schools so as not to place an undue burden on individual students or a particular race of students.

Developers donate sites for schools

Historically, the district has relied heavily on donated sites to solve its need for schools. The City of Port St. Lucie was originally a housing development project begun by General Development Corporation in the mid-1960's, but it was not until the late 1980's that the development of the 80,000 predominately single family lots in Port St. Lucie began to affect the school district. Three other large developments within the municipal limits of Port St. Lucie and a fourth develop adjacent to Port St. Lucie also had substantial effect on the school system. As developments of regional impact, the developers were required under Ch. 380, *Florida Statutes,* to set aside land for school sites. The district entered into agreements with two large residential developers for donations of numerous sites to construct elementary, middle and high schools.

The district cannot continue to postpone acquisition of school sites

As stated earlier district officials are exploring the possibility of having a large local developer donate a school site and construct a school in exchange for impact fee tax credits. The district would then lease the school and consider purchasing it at a later date depending on district needs. However, growth projections indicate the need for several school sites. The proposed facilities five year work plan through 2005-06 has only $800,000 set aside for site acquisition. In light of continued population growth, the district may not be able to depend on land donations for school sites and therefore, should pursue the purchase of sites for new schools.

The district has formal site selection procedures

The district has adequate policies and procedures in place for site acquisitions. The district's policies and procedures manual cover detailed procedures and criteria for site acquisition that incorporates all of the best practices. These include cost, location, minimum site size, infrastructure requirements, land use patterns and regulations, and proximity to arterial roadways. District site selection policies also consider whether the site will maintain an equitable burden among all races for transportation to sustain segregation in student assignment. Recommended sites are then short listed to three and sent to the superintendent for a recommendation. The district provides a copy of the superintendent's recommendation to all committees involved in the selection process and to any unit of local government that has regulatory authority over land use. Upon receiving the superintendent's recommendation, the board is required to conduct a public hearing on the proposed acquisition before moving ahead with a purchase option.

16The board considers the most economical and practical locations for current and anticipated needs, including such factors as need to exercise eminent domain, obstacles to development, and consideration of agreements with adjoining counties.

The district has delegated primary responsibility for negotiating site acquisitions to the school board attorney. The facilities department works with the board attorney to evaluate potential sites. Almost all school sites were acquired 10 or more years ago. However, in 1998 the district recognized the need to acquire additional land to expand the C.A. Moore Elementary School campus and began negotiating with the Ft. Pierce Housing Authority. The purchase was complicated in that it required approval of the federal government since the property was owned by the Ft. Pierce Housing Authority and was occupied by 21 tenants housed under the provisions of Section 8 of the United States Housing Assistance Act.

The agreement to purchase, the board resolution, appraisal, and Phase I environmental study for the purchase of the 3.6 acres indicate that the district followed its policies and procedures for site acquisition. The purchase price included an in-kind trade of a school bus to the Ft. Pierce Housing Authority. The purchaser and seller agreed to split other expenses incidental to the sale such as the appraisal and environmental Phase I study. Florida Property Consultants Group appraised the property at $440,000 using both the income comparison and sales comparison approach to value. The site acquisition process followed district guidelines and met the best practice of being the most practical and economical site.

The results of the environmental study revealed no condition that would require a Phase II study. The study did note the presence of an underground storage tank on land adjacent to the property, and the present of asbestos in the buildings.

Construction Costs

17The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the construction program.

The district compares costs

The district's priority goals and strategies for 2001-02 list the following goal for facilities: Complete building projects on time, on budget and with high quality. The district uses several accountability mechanisms to evaluate its construction program.

- *Comparison to other school districts.* One of the benchmarks used to measure the cost effectiveness of the construction program is a comparison to other school districts. The Department of Education releases its new construction costs for school districts annually with statewide average costs for elementary schools, middle schools and high schools. As discussed in Chapter 9, *Use of Construction Funds*, the district has consistently been below the statewide average for new construction costs.

- *Privatization of the construction program.* Except for project management, the district has found it very cost effective to privatize its construction program to outside construction management firms. District project managers are assigned to oversee the work of construction managers. The district determined through experience that construction management "at risk" provides the best delivery method on large projects, but uses conventional bidding on smaller projects. The construction management firm is required to come up with a guaranteed maximum price (GMP) for each capital construction project. By contract, the construction management firm is responsible for any costs that exceed the GMP, hence the contractor is "at risk' for cost overruns. The benefit of the GMP is that the district knows up front exactly what its construction costs will be for listed projects.

- *Comparison of construction management costs.* The district compares cost data of the various construction managers and design professionals to ensure costs are competitive and remain as low as possible and projects are completed on time.

- *Frugal construction designs.* The district incorporates DOE's frugal construction standards into its designs in order to hold down construction costs and win state SIT awards. Winning 5 SIT awards attest to the effectiveness of the program.

18 The district has considered, and where possible implemented, the general requirements recommended in the SMART Schools Clearinghouse Frugal Construction Standards.

District receives 5 SIT awards

As discussed above and in detail in Chapter 9, Use of Construction Funds, the districts incorporates the principles established by the Soundly Made, Accountable, Reasonable and Thrifty Schools Clearinghouse (SMART) into its school designs. It has developed practical and cost effective school designs for its elementary and middle schools in order to win SIT awards. These designs can be re-used with limited modifications to account for differences in sites. Re-use of plans saves significantly on architectural design fees, and also allows the district to perfect the design with each successive school built.

Although the district has not developed a written policy regarding its SMART school designs, it has applied for and received 5 SIT awards totaling $6,797,994 from the State of Florida. We recommend in Action Plan 9-1 that the district formalize written guidelines that incorporate the recommendations of the SMART Schools Clearinghouse into its construction planning process to guard against the loss of institutional memory when staff leaves.

19 The district minimizes construction costs through the use of prototype school designs and frugal construction practices.

Prototype designs save time and money

Re-use of local prototype designs for elementary and secondary schools in the design/build process has helped the district accelerate timetables for construction projects and reduce costs. Using the prototypical design developed by the district, both F.K. Sweet Magnet School and Fairlawn Elementary were constructed in just over a year.

20 The district secures appropriate professional services to assist in facility planning, design, and construction.

The district uses a request for qualification process to select design professionals and construction managers

The district secures construction management firms and design professionals using a request for qualification process. It developed selection procedures in accordance with the State of Florida's Consultants' Competitive Negotiation Act, ss. 287.055 and 1013.45, *Florida Statutes*. Selection procedures dictate that the selection committee interviews a minimum number of firms. The district advertised for construction management firms in the *Palm Beach Post* for the construction of F.K. Sweet and Fairlawn Elementary Schools.

The advertisement entitled the *Notice of Request for Professional Architectural Services* for both schools requested the following data:

- Letter of Interest,
- GSA Form listing personnel within the firm who have expertise in architecture,
- A completed consultant questionnaire,
- Five letters of recommendation,
- Current Florida professional registration and license, and
- Registration with the Secretary of State, Division of Corporation, if the firm is a corporation.

In addition, interested firms must provide evidence of professional liability insurance and commercial general liability insurance, business automobile liability, and Workers Compensation. Responses must be received by the advertised deadline and incomplete responses would not be considered.

A selection committee made up of representatives from Facilities, Finance, Purchasing, and schools, and in the case of F.K. Sweet, a parent architect, interviewed and scored the respondents on the following criteria:

- Project experience, especially K-12 schools' capital improvement program experience;
- Experience and qualifications including the firm's size, resources and capabilities;
- Financial strength and previous performance evaluations;
- Minority business representation; and
- Experience in dealing with contractors.

The district conducted reference checks by interviewing at least two former clients on matters relating to timeliness, cost efficiency, quality, and willingness to hire the firm for future projects. The district did not conduct visits to projects and offices due to the volume of applicants and the number of projects involved.

Interviews with district project managers and principals revealed that the district was very satisfied with the quality and work of the professionals selected. The former director of facilities states that each project had an assigned team consisting of the project architect, construction manager, the district's project manager, and the uniform building code inspectors in addition to other key staff from various

departments. The project team remained intact for the life of the project, attending team meetings as equal partners to the project. He believes the construction management approach enhances the cooperative partnering spirit.

21 The district can demonstrate that funds collected for school projects were raised appropriately.

Copies of resolutions for the sale of both Education Lottery Revenue Bonds and local general obligation bonds to fund capital construction projects indicate that the district raised school construction funds appropriately. The bond resolution for lottery funds clearly spells out the cost of each project, estimated construction contract award date, and the estimated completion date. Most projects would be completed in a year or less. The appendix to the bond resolution contained the district facilities work plan and an analysis of financing options.

The district issued a resolution in 1995 to hold a referendum for voter approval of the issuance of $60 million in general obligation bonds with debt service to be paid by a sales surtax. Notice of the referendum election was publicized, as required, in the local newspaper. The exhibits to the resolution contained a description of all construction projects, the largest of which was $29.5 million for the construction of new high school and $16.3 million for a new middle school.

Timely Completion of Projects

22 District planning provides realistic time frames for implementation that are coordinated with the opening of schools.

The district has developed a solid reputation for delivering projects on time and within budget.

The district addresses cost controls and project scheduling by requiring contractors to utilize its project management information system (PMIS) throughout the life of the project. The master agreement for construction management services requires the contractor to provide an accurate assessment of the current status of each project through reports, documents and data generated by the system. The PMIS includes these major subsystems:

- Narrative reporting
- Schedule control
- Cost control and estimating
- Project accounting

The district requires the contractor to monthly submit written cost and scheduling narratives to update the district on cost estimates and project status including work remaining. These reports allow district project managers and the construction team members to adjust project requirements, needs, materials and equipment so that the project will not exceed the maximum total project budget. The board is routinely updated at board meetings on the status of the budget and timeframes for project delivery.

The construction team attempts to coordinate timeframes for the completion of projects with the opening of schools. Some projects are phased in order to ensure the opening of classroom spaces at the earliest realistic date. The project team holds regular bi-weekly and monthly meetings with all stakeholders to review the schedule progress and make adjustments.

Our interviews with district project managers revealed that construction managers have performed well in meeting deadlines. The only exception identified was the deadline for delivery of Lincoln Park Academy Auditorium. However, F.K. Sweet and Fairlawn Elementary schools were completed in just over a year. Projects came in at or under the guaranteed maximum price. With the completion of $151 million in projects from 1996 through 2001, the district has developed a solid reputation for delivering projects on time and within budget.

23 For each project or group of projects, the architect and district facilities planner develop a conceptual site plan and building specifications.

As stated earlier, design professionals are required to complete detailed conceptual site plans and building specifications prior to construction. The architect works with the educational specifications developed for each facility to design building specifications and a conceptual site plan. The OPPAGA team reviewed detailed building specifications and site plans for F.K. Sweet Magnet School, and St. Lucie West Middle School. These drawings included exterior elevations of the building, a layout plan, grading paving/plan, utility plan, lift station details and all other required building and site specifications. Each school has its own unique building specifications. However, all new elementary and middle schools are designed with common elements, including flexible areas and wings that allow for economical and easy expansion, to reduce costs. Above all, the district wanted a functional school design that would last and be cost-effective to build and operate.

The district has developed general building specifications to ensure durability and ease of maintenance

The district has developed general building and equipment specifications to serve as guidelines for capital construction and remodeling or renovation projects. Although the criteria have not been codified into a design criteria manual, as recommended by the Department of Education in its 1997 management review of the facilities program, the standards are provided to design professionals and construction managers prior to the commencement of construction. The architects and construction management firms hired to build district facilities are required to adhere to these standards.

The district is making every attempt to standardize building systems and equipment that work and require the least amount of maintenance over time. The standards for facilities are based on the combined input and experience of the maintenance, construction, and custodial staff. Design firms and construction managers must adhere to standards for HVAC, plumbing fixtures, mechanical and electrical equipment, door hardware, and security and fire alarm systems. The facilities department recommends several manufacturers for items such as VAV boxes, controls, chillers and air handlers based on the district's desire for standardization and knowledge of systems that work.

Recommendations ———————————————

- *Codify design standards into a design manual.*

Action Plan 10-4 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 10-4

Codify Design Standards Into a Design Manual		
Strategy	District maintenance staff and construction project managers should meet to decide what needs to be included in the facilities design manual.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Collect all relevant data used informally to set standards.
	Step 2:	Analyze maintenance repair data captured in the electronic work order system.
	Step 3:	Solicit input from maintenance trades staff and custodial workers and educational specifications committee.
	Step 4:	Update and expand standards to include roofing systems and lawn sprinkler systems.
	Step 5:	Prepare a draft manual.
	Step 6:	Solicit input from design and construction professionals.
	Step 7:	Adopt the final design criteria manual.
	Step 8:	Institute a policy that requires district personnel and all contractors to adhere to the design standards for repair, renovation and new construction.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services	
Time Frame	January 2004	

Source: OPPAGA.

24 The district follows generally accepted and legal contracting practices to control costs.

With the exception of district owner representative project managers, the district has privatized its construction program. As stated earlier, the district uses construction management "at risk" on larger projects, but uses conventional bidding on smaller projects.

The board uses generally accepted bidding procedures to select design and construction professionals. Those procedures are found in Section 6 of school board policy:

- Each bid must be delivered by hand, US mail, or express courier service to the purchasing department prior to the time specified in the advertisement.

- At the advertised time and place, unless the bid is officially postponed or cancelled, the bids are opened in a public forum. Each bid is examined and the results are stated aloud for the record. The bid amount, alternate bid amounts, addendum are acknowledged. The presence of the bid bond and Trench Safety Act forms are stated and recorded on the bid tabulation. Only pre-qualified bidders may bid. Bids received from contractors who have not been pre-qualified bidders may bid. Bids received from contractors that have not been pre-qualified are not opened. Nor are bids received after the appointed date and time.

- The board agenda award item is prepared by the purchasing department based on the written recommendations of the project manager and architect. Contract awards are made to the lowest responsible bidder that meets the specifications. The agenda item is reviewed by the superintendent's senior staff and the board attorney. The item is then included in the agenda. Only after board approves the award does the contract specialist issue a *Notice to Proceed* to the contractor.

- When the construction manager "at risk" solicitation is used, the bids are conducted in the same manner, except that the board is presented with a guaranteed maximum price (GMP) for approval.

When negotiated contracts are used for consultants, the district uses board approved formal selection procedures in conformity with the Consultants' Competitive Negotiation Act for each class of consultant.

District official sign the appropriate contract, and the contractor is required to submit the required insurance and a performance bond which guarantees completion of the project within the time required.

25 The district has assigned one person with the authority and responsibility to keep facilities construction projects within budget and on schedule.

District project managers are assigned the responsibility for keeping projects on schedule and within budget. Each project manager reports to the director of facilities, now the executive director of facilities and maintenance, who is responsible for implementing the five year work plan.

The district has developed job descriptions for project managers which spell out the required experience and credentials necessary to perform the job. The district project manager is part of the project team throughout the life of the project.

26 The board minimizes changes to facilities plans after final working drawings are initiated in order to minimize project costs.

Change orders require board approval

The district states that another reason it prefers the construction management "at risk" method of construction is that it minimizes change orders. The district states that all projects that have used this delivery method have minimal change order requests, all of which require board approval.

Each change order presented to the school board for approval is accompanied by a written justification. The change order request is presented to the board as a separate agenda item for confirmation or approval. The change order has a detailed description of each item including originator, type, cause, amount requested and amount and dollars approved by staff. Project level summary information is also required including original award amount, changes-to-date, adjusted contract amounts and dates, project-to-date breakdown of total charges in dollars and days by type.

The facilities staff report that sometimes change orders require a budget adjustment. Since the construction and renovation process always involves unknowns, it is sometimes in the district's best interest to make changes that require a budget adjustment. However, according to staff, these occasions are rare. Our review of district documents confirmed this statement. Change orders are not allowed to compromise educational specifications and are well within industry standards.

Change orders can also be deductive to account for the actual cost of materials or sales tax savings due to direct purchase of supplies by the district. The district presented a deductive change order of $367,754 to reflect sales tax savings for direct materials purchased by the district. Some other acceptable reasons for

change orders include the extension of completion dates for various reasons including unforeseen conditions, transfer of owner's contingency funds to other projects, claims and disputes, and errors and omissions.

27 The architect recommends payment based on the percentage of work completed. A percentage of the contract is withheld pending completion of the project.

The district has established procedures to carefully monitor payments to contractors

According to district construction procedures, payments to contractors are based on the percentage of project completion as recommended by the project architect. The document used to request payment is the contractor's requisition for partial payment that contains the architect's payment certification. The proper execution of this document is verified by the district project manager, the contract specialist, and accounts payable staff prior to payment. A 10% retainage is normally withheld on every job until final completion.

The district contract specialist updates payment information on a continual basis in the PMIS, a project accounting subsystem which allows the district and project team to monitor and control funds and expenditures for a project. The payment status report shows the value in place (both current and cumulative), the amount invoiced (both current and cumulative), and the balance remaining. A summary of the report is required to accompany each payment request.

The district contract specialist will only process release of retainage payments after receipt of the Retainage Release Form executed by both the design professional and project manager. The contract specialist returns improperly executed forms the project manager, and final payments constituting the unpaid balance of the cost of the project and contractor's fee are not paid until after the district has taken occupancy of the project. If work remains on a project after occupancy, the contract allows the district to retain up to 200% of the estimated cost of completing any unfinished items. According to the district, the number of working days from receipt of properly executed forms to payment check varies from three to ten days.

28 The district requires appropriate inspection of all school construction projects.

The district requires that all construction projects be continuously inspected in accordance with State Requirements for Educational Facilities (SREF) by certified uniform building code inspectors during construction and at final completion prior to occupancy. Article 4 of the Master Agreement for Construction Management Services addresses code inspection procedures. It states that code inspections for compliance with drawing specifications and quality will be performed by the owner (district) or outside consultants hired by the district.

An inspector approves occupancy only after the final inspection has been performed and any identified deficiencies affecting occupancy have been corrected. Inspection reports indicating the deficiencies to be corrected are tracked by database and are filed in electronic and hard copy form. The district constantly tracks the status of all inspection and re-inspection certification forms and produces reports for all

projects. The records of inspections, code citations and corrections are kept in the facilities database for future reference. The signatures and dates on the certificate of occupancy reflect the sequence of events prior to occupancy.

Construction Program

29 The district conducts a comprehensive orientation to the new facility prior to its use so that users better understand the building design and function.

The district construction contract requires that project contractors conduct a building orientation to train district and school personnel in the proper operation of equipment included in construction contracts. Building orientation provides users with a better understanding of building design and function. The contractor, architects, facilities planners and school administrator all share in the responsibility to orient staff to the new facility. According to the district, orientation is made easier through use of prototypical design and standardization of systems.

Sign-in sheets for St. Lucie West Centennial High School indicate that contractors conduct building orientations with maintenance and school level employees for the following systems:

- Book theft detection system
- Building management systems
- Fire alarm and security systems
- Generator
- HVAC mechanical/general
- Food service equipment
- Wheelchair lift

In addition to general building orientation, the contractor conducts warranty meetings to explain to facilities, custodial, maintenance, and school staff the mandatory requirements for use for the various equipment and system warranties. The contractor is required to collect and catalog all equipment warranties and conduct warranty inspections nine months after district occupancy. The contractor is also required to warrant subcontractor's work for a period of one year after occupancy.

30 The district does not conduct comprehensive building evaluations at the end of the first year of operation and regularly during the next three to five years to collect information about building operation and performance.

The district does not have a formal post-occupancy building evaluation process

The purpose of post-occupancy building evaluations is to determine how well the facility is serving the purpose for which it was originally designed and how well the various features serve user needs. A comprehensive evaluation should not only evaluate the building itself, but also the building program including design principals and the process for procuring and delivering facilities. The reasons to conduct post-occupancy evaluations are to:

- Determine how well the facility meets its intended purpose, and what, if any, changes need to be made to improve the facility.
- To learn from the experience in order to improve planning and construction procedures.
- Identify features which should be repeated in future projects

The district does not have a formal post-occupancy building evaluation process. The documentation provided relating to the post-occupancy evaluation of Fairlawn Magnet School is actually a list of warranty items and a punch list of deficiencies such as missing bolts. Staff report that informal evaluations are performed during the first 3 to 5 years of operation on schools where the design is going to be re-used. As stated earlier, the district conducts a warranty item(s) evaluation at each new facility at the end of the first year of occupancy as part of the warranty procedures. Satisfactory operation and performance of building equipment and systems is required to close-out the contractor's responsibility for the one year warranty for construction related items. This, of course, is not the same as a comprehensive building evaluation.

We recommend that the district develop a structured post-occupancy building evaluation program which includes a questionnaire to be administered to building users, educational specifications committee members, maintenance and custodial personnel, facility planners, and contractors to determine the level of satisfaction with various building and site features. Questions will vary depending on the group. The Department of Education, Office of Educational Facilities, has developed a process for post-occupancy building evaluation, including sample questionnaires that can serve as a model to the district. The district may also elect to conduct interviews with school staff and should visit facilities to observe how the facility is being used. The collected data can then be analyzed to suggest improvements in existing and future facilities.

Recommendations ———————————————————————

- *The district should develop a structured post-occupancy building evaluation.*

  Action Plan 10-5provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 10-5

Develop a Structured Post-Occupancy Building Evaluation		
Strategy	Require post-occupancy building evaluations for all construction projects.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Develop procedures to ensure that post-occupancy evaluations regularly occur. The post-occupancy review process should focus on building performance from the point of view of school-based staff, students, custodians and maintenance staff.
	Step 2:	The evaluation should include
		• A survey of users,
		• An operational cost analysis,
		• Comparison of the finished product with the educational and construction specifications,
		• Recommendations for future improvements, and
		• An analysis of educational program improvement for consideration by future educational specification committees.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services	
Time Frame	January 2004	

Source: OPPAGA

31 The district does not analyze building evaluations to determine whether facilities are fully used, operating costs are minimized, and changes in the district's construction planning process are needed.

As stated above the district does not have a formal building evaluation process in place. However, it does use the data gained from its informal assessments through discussions with users and technical staff to make changes to its design criteria which is provided to architects and construction managers in the next planning cycle. The district reports that corrective feedback is also provided to contractors during close-out warranty meetings.

Please refer to Action Plan 10–5 for the steps needed to implement a formal post-occupancy building evaluation program.

32 The district analyzes maintenance and operations costs to identify improvements to the district's construction planning process.

The district considers maintenance and operating costs in its design criteria

The district does not have a formal system to collect the cost of maintenance and operations for each facility. However, it has analyzed some of its maintenance and operating costs for facilities. The result has been incorporated into design criteria derived from the maintenance and construction project management staff. These guidelines reflect what facilities staff have learned from past failures, and their desire to improve the quality of all systems. For example, the maintenance department, using the data collected in its electronic work order system, analyzed the repair histories of various HVAC systems to

select equipment manufacturers which have the best service record. They recently conducted a comparative analysis of flooring costs (tile vs. carpet) which determined that tile was more cost effective to purchase and maintain. This analytical approach has typically been used on specific systems rather than entire facilities.

The preferences outlined in the design criteria covers electrical, mechanical, plumbing and roofing systems, site work, thermal and moisture protection, preferred building construction materials, and communication networks. The district has also found that standardization of systems such as energy control systems also lowers overall costs. Other requirements address safety and ADA requirements. Contractors are expected to use the design criteria consistently throughout the district for new construction. To the extent that this criteria represents the sum of what the district has learned from evaluating past construction projects, this would satisfy the best practice for improving the construction planning process.

11 Facilities Maintenance

The St. Lucie County School District is cost-effectively operating and maintaining its schools; however, further opportunities exist to improve efficiency, performance and program costs for the Maintenance Department.

Conclusion ──────────────────────────

The St. Lucie Maintenance Department is doing an adequate job of maintaining its school facilities considering the department's present manpower and resources. The district is using 17 of the 26 best practices for facilities maintenance; therefore, further opportunities for improving service delivery still exist. The district's cost for facility maintenance ranks it next to the lowest among peer districts. However, the district is plagued with work backlogs. Furthermore, its operation of plant costs is the highest of its peers. Some of these higher plant-operating costs are attributable to high energy costs.

The district's work backlogs and high energy costs can be attributed to inadequate supervision of maintenance workers, inefficient administrative processes that hamper worker productivity, and insufficient maintenance staff, particularly heat and air conditioning specialists. In addition, making schools responsible for paying for their utility costs will give them an incentive to reduce these costs.

During the course of this review, OPPAGA identified a number of district accomplishments in facilities maintenance and operations, some of which are included in Exhibit 11-1 below.

Exhibit 11-1

The District Has Had a Number of Notable Accomplishments in Facilities Maintenance in the Last Three Years

- The district implemented an air quality control program to address potential air quality problems.
- The Maintenance Department makes use of customer service surveys to improve service delivery.
- The Maintenance Department has developed a career development program for technicians.
- The Maintenance Department has developed an employee recognition program.
- The district created a Building Department to meet the requirements of the revised Florida Building Code.

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Overview of Chapter Findings ──────────────

OPPAGA reviewed the district's facilities maintenance program using the Best Financial Management Practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education. The OPPAGA team employed several methodologies to develop chapter conclusions and action plans. For instance, we visited facilities and conducted on-site interviews with district level managers and gathered information on facilities maintenance activities. To receive additional input, we conducted surveys and focus groups and

interviewed district-level staff, principals, maintenance staff, and school custodians. Questions varied depending on the groups interviewed. The results have been validated and incorporated into this chapter where applicable.

An overview of chapter findings is presented below.

Maintenance and Operations Functions

1. The district's Maintenance Department's mission, organizational structure, and operating procedures are established in writing; however, several critical operating procedures and policies have not been addressed. (Page 11-6)
2. The district has not established maintenance standards in its short- and long-term plans for providing appropriately and equitably maintained facilities within budget and in accordance with the district's five-year facilities work plan. (Page 11-7)
3. The district does not identify and communicate performance standards and expected outcomes to maintenance and operations staff. (Page 11-9)
4. Although the district has not developed maintenance and custodial standards, it is making use of technological advances to improve service delivery. (Page 11-12)
5. The district obtains and uses customer feedback to identify and implement program improvements. (Page 11-13)
6. The district has not established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance and efficiency of the maintenance and operations program. (Page 11-13)

Budget for Facilities Maintenance

7. The district accurately projects cost estimates for major maintenance projects. (Page 11-16)
8. The administration has developed an annual budget with spending limits that comply with the laws governing each category of funds available for facilities maintenance and operations. (Page 11-19)
9. The district has a maintenance reserve fund to handle one-time expenditures necessary to support maintenance and operations. (Page 11-21)
10. The Maintenance Department evaluates some maintenance and operations activities to determine the most cost-effective method of providing needed services, but others need to be evaluated. (Page 11-22)
11. The district minimizes equipment costs through purchasing practices and maintenance. (Page 11-26)
12. The district is improving proactive maintenance practices to reduce maintenance costs. (Page 11-28)

Maintenance Program Goals and Outcomes

13. The maintenance and operations department reviews the organizational structure of the maintenance and operations program; however, field managers' span of control is too great for them to effectively manage operations. (Page 11-29)
14. The Maintenance Department needs to review the staffing levels of the maintenance and operations program to maximize the efficient use of personnel. (Page 10-30)
15. The Maintenance Department uses appropriate hiring practices to ensure it obtains qualified staff. (Page 11-33)
16. The Maintenance Department has a written job description for each position within the department. (Page 11-34)
17. The district does not provide appropriate supervision of maintenance and operations staff. (Page 11-35)

18. The district provides a staff development program that includes appropriate training for maintenance and operations staff to enhance worker job satisfaction, efficiency, and safety. (Page 11-36)

19. The district provides maintenance and operations department staff the tools and equipment required to accomplish their assigned tasks. (Page 11-37)

Computerized Maintenance Management System

20. The district uses a computerized control and tracking system to accurately track work orders and inventory. (Page 11-37)

21. The Maintenance Department has a system for prioritizing maintenance needs uniformly throughout the district. (Page 11-39)

School Equipment and Facilities

22. District policies and procedures clearly address the health and safety conditions of facilities. (Page 11-39)

23. The Maintenance Department needs to identify and implement better strategies to contain energy costs. (Page 11-40)

24. The district has an energy management system, and has budgeted to expand the system in each year of the five-year facilities work plan. (Page 11-44)

25. The school district complies with federal and state regulatory mandates regarding facility health, safety, and energy efficiency conditions. (Page 11-45)

26. The district is aware of and prepared for the permitting and inspection requirements of the Florida Building Code. (Page 11-45)

As seen in Exhibit 11-2, the district has two opportunities to save in facilities operation and maintenance.

Exhibit 11-2

The District Can Save on Operations and Maintenance Costs

Ways to Save	Potential Savings
• Close or downsize the maintenance warehouse and negotiate volume discounts for parts and custodial supplies. (Page 11-25)	• $74,000 estimated annual reduction in overhead and operating costs including a 5% volume discount for parts and supplies.
• Establish an incentive-based comprehensive energy management program. (Page 11-43)	• Net annual cost savings is $317,200 annually or $1,586,000 over five years. This consists of a $530,000 reduction in energy costs and a $212,800 increase in salary and benefits for maintenance staff.

Source: OPPAGA.

Determining whether to take advantage of these opportunities is a district decision and should be based on many factors including district needs, public input, and school board priorities. If it uses the opportunities to achieve increased revenues or reduce costs, the district would be able to redirect the funds to other priorities, such as putting money into the classroom and addressing deficiencies identified in this report.

Background

The St. Lucie County School District's 58-member maintenance staff maintains approximately 4.5 million gross square feet of space consisting of 43 facilities. These facilities include 21 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, 4 high schools, Dale Cassens School, Fort Pierce Magnet School and the historic Lincoln Park Academy, and other district facilities including the administrative center and maintenance complex. Since the passage of the 1995 facilities projects' bond issue, the district has completed $151 million in new construction and major renovations.

The district is divided into 3 zones to accommodate its school choice plan. At the time of our site visits, facilities maintenance was divided into north and south zones with a maintenance manager in charge of each zone. The north zone maintenance manager position was eliminated July 1, 2002, when district wide budget cuts forced the district to reduce district employees by sixteen positions. Subsequently, the maintenance department was reorganized into three sections: operations, HVAC and central services. A maintenance technician has been temporarily assigned as acting manager until a decision can be made about future staffing. The Maintenance Department organizational chart is displayed in Exhibit 11-1. The district spent approximately $4.2 million on school maintenance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2001. Maintenance employees are responsible for the following activities:

- Maintenance and upkeep of all facilities
- Maintenance of audio/visual equipment
- Turf management and athletic fields (not lawn care)
- Operation of the maintenance warehouse
- Miscellaneous construction projects

The district is organized around site-based management of facilities. This structure creates dual and sometimes conflicting responsibility for the operation and management of facilities. The district's 187 custodians or site-based foreman fall under the jurisdiction of principals and other site-based managers. The Maintenance Department has limited knowledge of their activities; however, the custodial training program is assigned to the central facilities department. Site-based managers are responsible for hiring and supervising custodial staff and are accountable for the cleanliness of their schools. The district spent $15,344,639 on operation of plant functions for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2001.

In May 1997, the St. Lucie School District requested the Department of Education, Office of Educational Facilities, to perform a thorough review of its facilities unit to improve in-house operations. According to the study, the Maintenance Department, at the time, was plagued by work backlogs, redundant work efforts, lost production time spent due to travel, and lack of manpower. Employee morale appeared to be at an all time low, and the department lacked leadership. The management study team recommended reorganization of the department and the hiring of a permanent director to give it uniform direction and leadership. The Maintenance Department has since adopted many of the report's recommendations. These include the following:

- Hiring a maintenance director,
- Creating a mission statement for support services,
- Developing a policy and procedures manual for maintenance staff,
- Updating the work order system to allow single entry of work orders,
- Providing a two way radio system to improve response time,

- Transferring of the safety, sanitation, and fire inspector to a central office department within facilities, and

- Transferring couriers to the central warehouse

Recommendations that have not been fully adopted or need further work include:

- Adequate budgetary support of a preventive maintenance program,

- Board approval of job descriptions that are consistent with today's standards and depict the work of employees (these have been developed but not adopted),

- Regionalizing maintenance teams so all employees do not have to report to one location in the morning and afternoon,

- Stocking maintenance trucks with repair parts to increase productivity

- Implementing operating procedures that enhance overall worker productivity

This report will focus on those recommendations that have not been adopted and other best financial management practices that the School Board of St. Lucie County may want to consider adopting to improve service delivery.

Exhibit 11-3

School Board of St. Lucie County
Maintenance Department Organization Chart
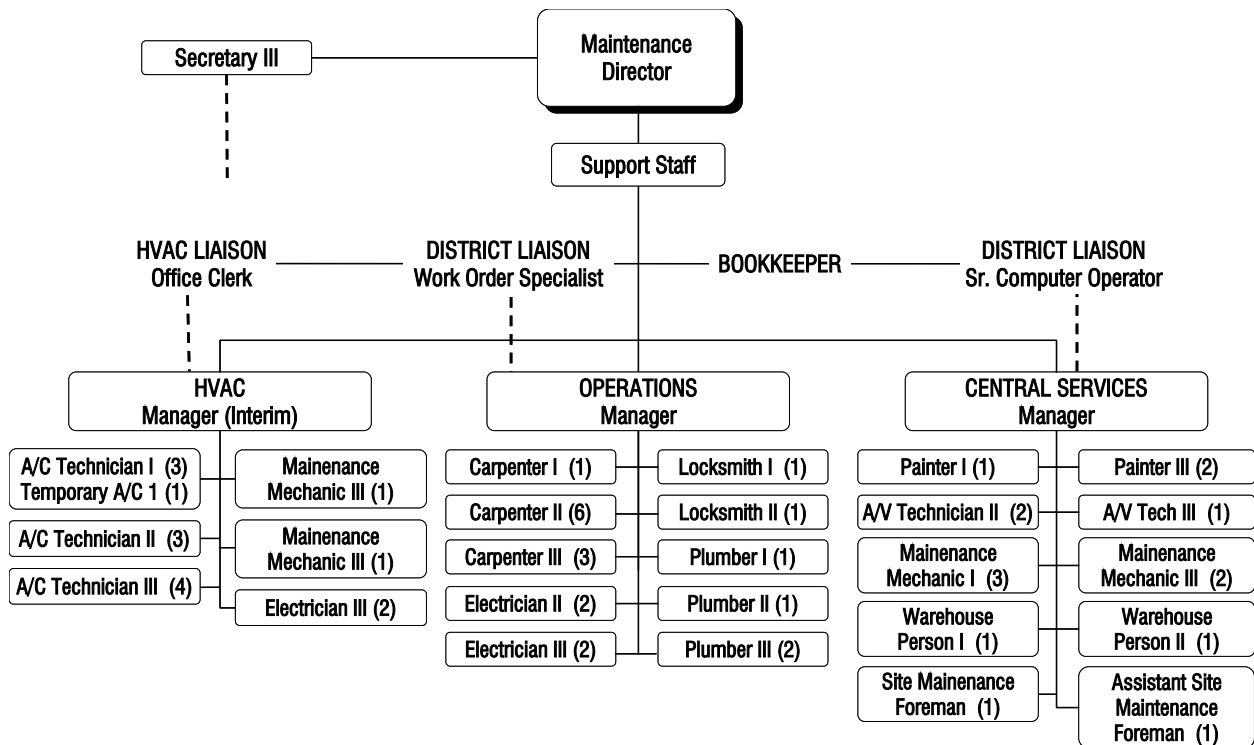
Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Maintenance and Operations

1 **The district's maintenance and operations department mission, organizational structure, and operating procedures are established in writing; however, its procedures are inefficient and several critical operating procedures and policies have not been addressed.**

The Maintenance Department mission statement and operating procedures are documented in the maintenance handbooks. The mission statement defines the purpose of the department and follows the superintendent's opening message in the *Maintenance Procedural Handbook* urging employees to work as a team to serve the district's customers. It says:

> *"The mission of the Maintenance Department is to plan, construct and maintain efficient, functional, and safe learning environments."*

Department operating procedures are contained in both the *Maintenance Procedural Handbook* and the *Maintenance Operational Handbook.* The procedures cover acquisition and use of equipment, supplies and materials, work order priorities, use of facilities and vehicles, emergency procedures and personnel issues. Interviews with staff confirmed that the department operates according to its written operating procedures covering purchase of equipment, supplies and materials, budget criteria and use of facilities and equipment. The handbooks and Maintenance Department organizational chart are readily available to all employees.

However, the district has not developed sufficient operational procedures, standards and policies identified in the best practices for the following

- replacement and selection of equipment;
- establishing a level of maintenance standards;
- management of facilities;
- facility standards; and
- personnel staffing policies.

In addition, our interviews with maintenance management and technicians revealed a high level of frustration with the current operating procedures. For example, prescriptive procedures for obtaining parts from the warehouse as another factor affecting performance. The chain of approvals for parts for routine work orders can take 5 days or more. The system is set up to for control – not efficiency. Maintenance managers and technicians need to be empowered to make decisions on how to most efficiently and cost effectively get the work done without having to wait for approvals. All administrative support staff should support the efforts of maintenance managers to get the work done as quickly as possible. Current operating procedures should be reviewed. Those procedures that do not enhance the decision-making authority of zone maintenance managers should be streamlined or eliminated entirely.

Since our site visits, the district reports that it has streamlined its operating procedures by issuing blanket purchase orders to some vendors. To more efficiently issue parts to its technicians, the department has implemented a "fast track" system in its warehouse operations. In addition, the maintenance team is

reviewing all maintenance procedures to ensure that they support the technicians getting the work done as quickly as possible.

Recommendations

- *The district needs develop additional operating procedures and policies for the Maintenance Department.*

- *The district needs to streamline its operating procedures to allow work to be done more efficiently.*

Action Plans 11-1 and 11-2 provide the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-1

Develop Maintenance Additional Operating Procedures		
Strategy	Codify additional operating procedures and policies for the Maintenance Department.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Develop operating procedures and policies that includes routines and maintenance for:
		- management of facilities - selection and replacement of equipment - personnel staffing - energy management and indoor air quality - preventive maintenance - site and grounds upkeep
	Step 2:	Present operating procedures to the superintendent for approval.
	Step 3:	Incorporate procedures into maintenance manual
	Step 4:	Provide training to employees on operating procedures
Who Is Responsible	Maintenance director; executive director of facilities services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Action Plan 11-2

Streamline Operating Procedures		
Strategy	Evaluate all work procedures to determine how each contributes to the cost effectiveness and efficiency of the maintenance department.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Operating procedures should be evaluated using the following guidelines:
		- How they increase efficiency, response time and streamline workflow; - How they contribute to cost-effective operations; - How they enhance the decision making authority of managers & leads; - How they provide for adequate control of resources and supervision of staff; and - How they enhance customer service.
	Step 2:	Involve maintenance employees in revision process.
	Step 3:	Incorporate relevant Gateway system work order data.
	Step 4:	Codify revised procedures into the maintenance manual.
	Step 5:	Provide staff training on revised operating procedures.

Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services; maintenance director
Time Frame	January 1, 2004
Fiscal Impact	This recommendation can be accomplished with existing resources.

2 The district has not established maintenance standards in its short- and long-term plans for providing appropriately and equitably maintained facilities and in accordance with the district's five-year facilities work plan and annual budget.

The district does not have a capital maintenance plan that articulates its goals and objectives

The five-year facilities work plan is developed from the input of district staff and serves as the planning tool for the district. It identifies future capital projects by site, trade, or type of work by year. However, it does not articulate the specific goals and objectives the Maintenance Department expects to accomplish during each year of the plan. The district has not developed a maintenance plan beyond the five-year work plan. The Maintenance Department needs to develop annual and long-range plans that address its goals and objectives, resources and staffing needs.

The district has established procedures to ensure all schools are created equitably

Our interviews with principals and visits to school throughout the county indicate that the district has adequate procedures in place to ensure that schools are treated equitably in terms of capital spending and maintenance services. As part of the 1997 federal court stipulations to release the district from federal supervision, the district was required, as part of its ongoing desegregation plan, to provide equitable distribution of capital outlay expenditures to bring older, and historically black schools into parity. The district voluntarily agreed to outside monitoring of these efforts to ensure that no future facility inequity evolved between northern and southern sector schools. Our school site visits confirmed that the district has done a good job of equitably distributing capital and maintenance resources.

Recommendations ——————————————————

- *The Maintenance Department needs to develop short- and long-term maintenance plans that include maintenance standards and specific goals and objectives for maintaining its facilities.*

    Action Plans 11-3 provides steps for accomplishing this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-3

The Maintenance Department Needs To Develop a Maintenance Plan	
Strategy	Develop a maintenance plan based maintenance standards and the district's goals and objectives for appropriately and equitably maintained facilities.
Action Needed	Step 1: Work with maintenance employees to create a district-wide maintenance plan that incorporates goals and objectives for maintaining district facilities.
	Step 2: Develop maintenance and operations criteria that address these board facility goals: • Safety-environmental and occupational risks

- sanitation – frequency of cleaning

- security – protection of occupants and property

- functional performance – operating efficiently and economically

- physical condition – sound condition

- appearance – desired level of appearance

	Step 3: Include in plan development manpower projections, equipment replacement estimates, budget projections, maintenance and facility standards.
	Step 4: Present the maintenance plan to the executive director of facilities for approval.
Who is Responsible	Maintenance director
Time Frame	January 1, 2004

3 The district does not clearly identify and communicate performance standards and expected outcomes to maintenance and operations staff.

Imposing performance standards on maintenance staff hampered by cumbersome operating procedures is negatively affecting employee morale

To encourage timely work completion, the Maintenance Department recently began posting work orders each employee was assigned and subsequently closed during the prior month. Managers used to post the percentage of closed work orders by team, but according to at least one manager, the employees did not pay much attention to team ratings. However, individual postings of closed work orders have gotten their attention, albeit negative attention.

The overall monthly work order closure rate was a relatively low 52% districtwide in August 2002. Work order closure rates ranged from 44% to 61% depending on the area. However, our focus group interviews with maintenance employees revealed they felt that the new work performance measure does not accurately reflect the work being performed for the following reasons:

- employees are not given credit for work orders completed from carryover from the previous month;

- work orders assigned at the very end of the month cannot be completed; and

- due to difficulty some work orders take longer than others to complete.

Since our site visits, the district reports that it has taken steps to improve the reporting system by changing to a quarterly reporting period. In addition, the maintenance director plans to contact other school districts to identify best practices on work order reporting systems.

The district needs to involve maintenance employees in the development of performance standards

Performance standards serve as a basis for measuring how well maintenance and custodial employees meet or adhere to board policies, standards, and objectives. The standards set clear expectations for job performance and give managers consistent tools for evaluating performance. Ineffective performance standards make it difficult for managers to hold maintenance staff accountable for their work. This can create problems if the district wishes to terminate the employment of an under-performing employee. To be effective, performance standards must be established in writing with input from the staff and clearly communicated to employees.

The maintenance employees in our focus group said they felt left out of the performance standard development process. The maintenance director states that one of the Maintenance Department's goals is to achieve and maintain a 70% completion rate for work orders on a monthly basis. It is unclear what input the employees had, if any, in establishing this goal. Maintenance workers feel they cannot achieve this goal with the present system for reporting closed work orders and the inefficient parts procurement system.

The system for monthly work order reporting needs to be adjusted to reflect when the work order is assigned and to capture carryover from the previous month(s). Morale will continue to be an issue if maintenance workers do not believe the system accurately reflects the work being performed. The closure rate should improve by adjusting the reporting system. Despite the problems identified above, the maintenance director reports that the department has experienced a 15% increase in worker productivity as a result of posting the monthly work order closure rates and meeting with managers and technicians to address open work orders.

The district needs to develop performance standards based on benchmarks

A more effective way of judging employee performance implemented by two Florida school districts uses the tracking ability of the electronic work order system to evaluate employees' use of time and to create task oriented benchmarks. The Okaloosa School district's central maintenance zone uses its electronic work order system to evaluate employee time worked compared to time spent on work orders. The "report card" as it is commonly known holds maintenance staff accountable for their work time. The Manatee School district has further refined the time spent on work orders versus time worked by developing task oriented performance standards in conjunction with maintenance staff from data collected in its work order system. As a result the district has realized a 5% to 35% increase in productivity depending on the task.

Another approach to developing work standards is to begin with industry standards and modify them based on district experience. As Exhibit 11-4 demonstrates, the Osceola School District has successfully developed task oriented benchmarks based on the industry standards and district experience with similar tasks:

Exhibit 11-4

Example of Maintenance Standards

	Job Allocation Times	
Description	**Industry Standards**	**School District of Osceola County**
Boiler: Replace circulator pump 1 hp	7.80	2.00
Construction Trades: Install weather strip	3.40	2.50
Concrete: Refinish concrete floor	4.16	4.00
Electrical: Replace emergency fixture	2.69	1.50
Fire Alarm: Replace smoke detector	1.75	1.50

Source: Osceola School District.

The Department of Education provides guidance on using electronic work order systems to establish performance standards based on benchmarks in Section 5.5 of the *Maintenance and Operations Administrative Guidelines for School District and Community Colleges.* It states that a good place to start for defining benchmark standards is an analysis of historical data for work tasks. From this data, time requirements for a variety of tasks along with benchmark standards can be developed. Collecting and analyzing this data can provide management a useful tool for measuring worker productivity, comparing

labor costs, justifying staffing levels, and comparing district performance with other peer districts and private industry standards.

The district's Gateway System already has the capability of collecting the data required to establish similar performance measures. To improve overall efficiency and worker morale, the district needs to make its operating procedures more efficient while holding maintenance workers accountable for work performance standards. These standards should be developed with input from staff and based on benchmarks developed using Gateway System data.

Custodians fall under the supervision of site-based managers

Custodians fall under the jurisdiction of principals and other site-based managers. As stated earlier, site-based managers are responsible for supervision and are accountable for the cleanliness of schools. Training is, however, coordinated through the facilities central office. The district has an adequate training program for custodial workers, but responsibility for developing performance measures and standards has not been assigned. We saw no evidence that performance measures or standards had been developed for the district's 187 custodians.

Recommendations ————————————————

- *Develop a method of evaluating maintenance and custodial performance based on standards.*

   Action Plan 11-4 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-4

The Maintenance Department Needs To Develop Work Performance Standards for Maintenance and Custodial Staff	
Strategy	Develop a method for evaluating maintenance and custodial performance based on standards.
Action Needed	Step 1: Assign responsibility for creating maintenance and custodial performance standards.
	Step 2: Develop work standards for each task that may include
	• frequency of task,
	• duration of task,
	• materials cost of task,
	• labor cost of task, and
	• comparisons to applicable professional standards and peer districts.
	Step 3: Inform maintenance and custodial personnel of the work performance standards.
	Step 4: Track the implementation of work performance standards and how employees meet those standards.
	Step 5: Evaluate employee performance based on the standards.
Who is Responsible	Maintenance director
Time Frame	January 1, 2004

4 **Although the district has not developed maintenance or custodial standards, it is making use of technological advances to improve service delivery.**

As stated above the district has not developed maintenance and custodial standards; however, the district attempts to take advantage of new technology to improve service delivery as illustrated in the following examples:

- The district has implemented an electronic work order system known as the Gateway System to enter and track all work orders. A barcode system linked to warehouse inventory allows the Gateway system to record, reorder and adjust inventory. The system is also used to track labor and materials costs and repairs to equipment.
- All managers and many technicians are equipped with cell phones, pagers, and walkie-talkies to improve response time to customers.
- The district uses an intelligent metering system to assist in monitoring the energy management system district-wide. Currently 26 schools are equipped with HVAC computerized monitoring system. Air conditioning technicians equipped with laptops can access HVAC systems to modify and troubleshoot problems with schools.
- The district is piloting a restricted patent key access control program at Windmill Point Elementary School. The keys will be tracked through a computerized system that allows the Maintenance Department employees secure control over the distribution of keys within a facility.
- Periodicals are made available to staff in the warehouse break area. The department plans to increase distribution.

The district does not have a means of distributing periodicals to custodial workers because they are decentralized to schools; however, it should ensure that site-based maintenance workers have access to free trade publications and Web based facilities maintenance information.

Recommendations ──────────────────────────

- *The district needs circulate trade information to maintenance and custodial staff.*

Action Plan 11-5 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-5

Increase Circulation of Trade Related Information		
Strategy	Circulate trade related publications and web pages to ensure maintenance and custodial staff are informed of new procedures, technology, equipment and materials.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Review trade publications to determine which would best meet the needs of the district.
	Step 2:	Provide access to free web based information on maintaining facilities. Examples include: FM Link Newsletter and Schoolhouse Beat from American School & University Magazine
	Step 3:	Survey custodial and maintenance staff for input.

	Step 4: Ensure publications and updates are made available to district staff.
Who is Responsible	Maintenance director
Time Frame	Fall 2003

5 The district obtains and uses customer feedback to identify and implement program improvements.

The Maintenance Department surveys its customers

The Maintenance Department performed a districtwide survey of school principals in October 2001. The customer evaluation survey asked principals to rate the department on prompt response, turnaround time, quality of work, and professionalism of employees. The survey also included an area for comments and suggestions on how to improve service. A sample of surveys reviewed by our team indicated that turnaround time for completing repairs is a consistent problem.

After analyzing survey responses, a manager and an assistant met with each school administrator to discuss open work orders and other issues. To ensure that a corrective action plan was created to address deficiencies, notes from these discussions were supplied to maintenance technicians. A follow-up interview with each school administrator was planned to ensure customer satisfaction.

Our interviews with principals in three focus groups indicated that maintenance services have improved since the survey, particularly response time and communication. The Maintenance Department has assigned managers and teams to schools; consequently principals and site-based foreman are being kept better informed about the status of work. Each school has a contact person; however, better use of the Gateway System for communication could reduce phone calls to schools and the Maintenance Department.

The Maintenance Department's use of surveys, self-analysis, and subsequent follow-up on identified problems is a good example of meeting the best practice for program improvement based on customer feedback. Survey results were shared with both customers and maintenance employees. We encourage the Maintenance Department to continue surveying its customers on an annual basis to identify further improvements in service delivery.

6 The district needs to develop additional accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance and efficiency of the maintenance and operations program.

The maintenance department needs to develop a comprehensive set of accountability measures and performance objectives to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the maintenance program. These measures and objectives indicate how successful various maintenance units are in maintaining school facilities and supporting educational activities. By periodically comparing desired performance objectives to actual performance, the district can determine whether tasks are being performed efficiently and what improvements may be needed. Some examples of maintenance and operations department measures that should be considered for evaluating the maintenance program are cost per square foot, number for full time FTE per square foot cleaned, and cost per student. Chapter 11.1 of the DOE, *Maintenance and Operations Administrative Guidelines for School Districts and Community Colleges* provides other

examples of maintenance and operations department effectiveness categories that could be considered for evaluating a maintenance program:

Exhibit 11-5

DOE Provides a Number of Performance Categories for Maintenance and Operations Programs

Standard Category	Accountability Questions
Adequate levels of maintenance	Did the department provide maintenance, custodial, and grounds services that were adequate to meet board, administration, and the general public's expectation?
Improved facility conditions	Did the department provide services that resulted in improved or enhanced conditions?
Cost effectiveness	Did the department conduct maintenance and operations activities in a cost-effective manner?
Strategic plan implementation	Did the department develop and implement a strategic plan aimed at defining and addressing facility needs, shortcomings, and deficiencies in the years to come?
Cost-saving measures	Did the department implement measures to contain or reduce costs in certain areas of operation?
Overall effectiveness	Did the department achieve a level of effectiveness that is reflected in customer attitudes and perceptions?

Source: Department of Education, Maintenance and Operations Administrative Guidelines for School Districts and Community Colleges.

In its strategic plan, the Maintenance Department has developed several strategies related to its mission of providing an efficient, functional and safe learning environment. The plan lists five strategies related to providing safe schools and improving efficiency in the maintenance department. These include implementing a key access control policy, reorganizing the department, creating an operations handbook and implementing a bar coding system in the warehouse. As stated earlier, the maintenance department conducted a customer service survey to evaluate customer attitudes regarding its level of overall effectiveness regarding issues such as quality of work, professionalism, and response time.

However, the Maintenance Department has not developed outcome measures and objectives it can use to determine whether these strategies have improved the efficiency or effectiveness of its services. For example, the district needs to develop measures and associated objectives and strategies to increase worker productivity. The maintenance director states that one of his goals this coming year is to increase productivity by setting the quarterly work order closure rate at 70%. He also wants to revamp the work order reporting and priority system, and determine the cost of operations for the warehouse and overall service delivery. All of these goals are aimed at improving the performance, efficiency and accountability of the Maintenance Department. However, the measures, objectives, and strategies with timeframes for achieving these goals have not been developed.

In addition, the district has not established performance measures for general maintenance operations. The department collects maintenance and operations cost data in the Gateway System that it reports to the Department of Education; however, it does not appear to analyze it to evaluate overall program effectiveness.

With site-based management, the Maintenance Department has limited control over school-based operation of plant costs other than its indirect impact on energy costs though efficient operation and maintenance of the HVAC systems. District wide coordination of the custodial training and operating procedures is assigned to an individual under the executive director of facility services. The district has

developed operating procedures for custodial staff; however, performance and accountability measures have not been developed.

The department does an above average job of tracking costs and controlling inventory, but sacrifices efficiency in the process. Additional accountability measures will enhance the district's ability to assess the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the Maintenance Department's functions.

Recommendations ——————————————

- *The Maintenance Department needs to develop additional accountability mechanisms to evaluate the maintenance program.*

    Action Plan 11-6 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-6

The District Needs to Develop Additional Accountability Mechanisms to Evaluate Program Effectiveness	
Strategy	Develop accountability measures for maintenance and custodial operations based on recognized industry benchmarks and comparisons with peer districts.
Action Needed	Step 1: Develop effectiveness measures based on the following: • maintenance cost per square foot • maintenance cost per student • custodial costs per square foot • square feet of building per FTE custodian • square feet of building per FTE maintenance staff • lower energy costs • improving work order closure rates • customer satisfaction Step 2: Set goals and objectives that articulate what the department plans to accomplish within certain timeframes. Step 3: Contact peer districts to identify information sharing opportunities on comparable maintenance and operations costs and staffing levels. Step 4: Obtain historical data from budget and work order system. Step 5: Calculate and verify measures. Step 6: Evaluate costs per square foot/per student annually for cost efficiency. Review customer satisfaction surveys at least annually to identify areas for improvement. Step 7: Select a few critical performance and cost efficiency measures that should be reported annually to the school board and superintendent.
Who is Responsible	Maintenance director
Time Frame	January 1, 2004

Source: OPPAGA.

Budget for Facilities Maintenance

7 **The district accurately projects cost estimates of major maintenance projects.**

The district accurately projects cost estimates of major maintenance projects

Major maintenance projects are capital projects; those generally costing over $200,000 and funded primarily out of state Public Education Capital Outlay Funds (PECO) maintenance dollars and the District Local Capital Improvement Tax or 2 Mill funds. The district lays out its capital maintenance projects in the five-year facilities work plan. It established priorities with input from principals, site-based foreman, field technicians and facilities staff, outside professionals, and district area liaisons. The assistant superintendent for business services reviews the proposed work plan. Site-based administrators interviewed seemed satisfied that they had adequate input into the decision making process for setting priorities for capital projects.

The department estimates costs using its experience with similar projects, cost estimating standards for materials, market conditions and labor bids. In addition, the maintenance director uses the Gateway work order system to analyze repair histories of equipment, material costs and labor. A five percent inflation factor per year is added to projected costs for equipment. Costs for life safety projects are based on inspections performed at each facility by a certified inspector from the facilities department.

The district may want to consider dividing control of school-based capital allocations with the Maintenance Department

Since the school district is organized around site-based management, the individual schools receive a capital budget to spend at the administrator's discretion on equipment and smaller school construction and maintenance projects. The criteria used to allocate these funds to schools are based on projected FTE, and age of school. The Facilities Department has established procedures for site-based managers to use when requesting project management assistance on pricing and contracting with outside vendors for small school construction projects.

Exhibit 11-7 shows that the school based allocation for 2002-03 is $623,739 dollars. The district has limited capital maintenance and construction dollars, and the facilities department has no oversight authority over school expenditures. Therefore, the district does not have a mechanism for ensuring that these dollars are spent on needed maintenance and construction projects to prevent further deterioration of facilities. School principals believe that the maintenance department should be responsible for repairing facilities, and the finance director reports that most schools spent their capital budgets on equipment and software last year. The district did not specify what kind of equipment or software was purchased.

The district should consider dividing control and management of school-based capital allocations between principals and the Office of Facilities and Support Services. The executive director of facilities services could hold 50% of the school-based allocations to spend on school capital projects; for example, to offset contract labor to refurbish portables. The executive director of facilities services would have to approve school capital expenditures from funds under his control as necessary to preserve the infrastructure. Since the facilities department regularly assesses maintenance deficiencies as part of its budget planning process, departmental oversight of capital expenditures would ensure that funds are spent for needed rather than elective projects. Sharing control of school allocations would increase the resources and

effectiveness of the facilities and maintenance staff, and the schools would benefit from group purchasing.

Exhibit 11-7

Schools Receive 2002-03 Capital Allocations for School Based Capital Projects

School Name	2001-02 Count 3 WFTE	Campus "Age Factor"[1]	WFTE for Allocation	SBC Allocation	"Base" SBC Allocation	Total 2002-03 Allocation
Elementary School						
White City	641.35	1.00	641.35	16.56	$10,620.76	$10,620.76
Weatherbee	784.78	1.00	784.78	16.56	12,995.96	12,995.96
Fairlawn	596.80	1.00	596.80	16.56	9,883.01	9,883.01
Magnet School of Arts	316.38	1.00	316.38	16.56	5,239.25	5,239.25
Lawnwood	703.52	1.00	703.52	16.56	11,650.29	11,650.29
St. Lucie	742.94	1.00	742.94	16.56	12,303.09	12,303.09
FK Sweet	590.80	1.00	590.80	16.56	9,783.65	9,783.65
Savanna Ridge	740.31	1.00	740.31	16.56	12,259.53	12,259.53
Garden City	505.08	1.50	757.62	16.56	12,546.19	12,546.19
CA Moore	578.58	1.00	578.58	16.56	9,581.28	9,581.28
Port St. Lucie	891.20	1.50	1,336.80	16.56	22,137.41	22,137.41
Morningside	682.06	1.50	1,023.09	16.56	16,942.37	16,942.37
Lakewood Park	759.66	1.50	1,139.49	16.56	18,869.95	18,869.95
Floresta	727.00	1.50	1,090.50	16.56	18,058.68	18,058.68
Bayshore	827.12	1.00	827.12	16.56	13,697.11	13,697.11
Windmill Point	723.88	1.50	1,085.82	16.56	17,981.18	17,981.18
Village Green	803.91	1.50	1,205.87	16.56	19,969.12	19,969.12
Parkway	655.58	1.00	655.58	16.56	10,856.40	10,856.40
Mariposa	703.37	1.00	703.37	16.56	11,647.81	11,647.81
Manatee	804.43	1.00	804.43	16.56	13,321.36	13,321.36
Rivers Edge	843.40	1.00	843.40	16.56	13,966.70	13,966.70
Total	**14,622.15**				**$284,311.11**	**$284,311.11**
Middle School						
Dan McCarty	1,206.59	1.00	1,206.59	16.56	$ 19,981.13	$ 19,981.13
SLW	927.12	1.00	927.12	16.56	15,353.11	15,353.11
Northport	1,142.32	1.50	1,713.48	16.56	28,375.23	28,375.23
Southport	1,034.95	1.00	1.034.95	16.56	17,138.77	17,138.77
Forest Grove	1,277.66	1.00	1,277.66	16.56	21,158.05	21,158.05
Southern Oaks	1,014.95	1.00	1,014.95	16.56	16,807.57	16,807.57
Total	**6,603.59**				**$118,813.86**	**$118,813.86**
High School						
Lincoln Park	2,010.96	1.50	3,016.44	16.56	$ 49,952.25	$ 49,952.25
Central	2,064.41	1.50	3,096.62	16.56	51,279.94	51,279.94
Westwood	1,673.36	1.50	2,510.04	16.56	41,566.26	41,566.26
PSL	2,164.10	1.00	2,164.10	16.56	35,837.50	35,837.50
Centennial	1,840.00	1.00	1,840.00	16.56	30,470.40	30,470.40
Total	**9,752.83**				**$209,106.35**	**$209,106.35**
Other Schools						
Central Performance Based	150.14	1.50	225.21	16.56	$ 3,729.48	$ 3,729.48
Anglewood /LAPP	43.10	1.00	43.10	16.56	713.74	713.74
Woodlands /Excel	167.15	1.00	167.15	16.56	2,768.00	2,768.00
Sunrise	55.63	1.00	55.63	16.56	921.23	921.23

School Name	2001-02 Count 3 WFTE	Campus "Age Factor"[1]	WFTE for Allocation	SBC Allocation	"Base" SBC Allocation	Total 2002-03 Allocation
Dale Cassens	504.16	1.00	504.16	16.56	8,348.89	8,348.89
Detention Ctr	115.58	1.00	115.58	16.56	1,914.00	1,914.00
Data House	17.02	1.00	17.02	16.56	281.85	281.85
Homebound	110.54	1.00	110.54	16.56	1,830.54	1,830.54
Total	**1,163.32**				**$ 20,507.73**	**$ 20,507.73**
Total All Schools	**32,141.89**				**$623,739.05**	**$623,739.05**

Note: Base and Total Allocation columns may not add due to rounding.

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Recommendations

- *OPPAGA recommends that the district consider sharing control and management of the school based allocations for capital projects with the Office of Facilities and Support Services.*

Action Plan 11-7 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-7

To Increase the Resources and Effectiveness of the Facilities Department, the District Should Consider Splitting School Based Capital Allocations 50/50 With the Office of Facilities and Support Services		
Strategy	Meet with principals and other stakeholders to explain the rationale behind sharing control of school based capital allocations with facilities.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Communicate to stakeholders priorities for capital fund expenditures.
	Step 2:	Transfer 50% of school based allocations to the Office of Facilities and Support Services.
	Step 3:	Set aside at least 20% of transferred capital allocation to fund projects that benefit all schools.
	Step 4:	Develop an approval procedure for expenditures of school capital funds under the control of the Office of Facilities and Support Services.
	Step 5:	Review school based expenditures periodically to ensure expenditures match identified needs.
	Step 6:	Report expenditures to schools and other stakeholders.
Who is Responsible	Assistant s Superintendent for Business Services and Executive Director of the Office of Facilities and Support Services.	
Time Frame	July 1, 2003	

8 The administration has developed an annual budget with spending limits that comply with the lawful funding for each category of facilities maintenance and operations.

The district spends capital funds appropriately

The finance director reports that capital budgets are prepared to ensure that facilities projects agree with the restrictions on the funding source. The assistant superintendent for business services and the finance director are both aware of the various capital fund sources and restrictions. A senior accountant receives all budget amendments and reviews them for compliance before recording them in the TERMS accounting system. As part of the finance department's financial audit, state auditors select a sample of expenditures and test to determine if restricted sources were spent in accordance with restrictions. The district has not had any negative audit findings pertaining to the lawful spending of capital funds.

The district receives PECO funds from the state for the construction and maintenance of schools. Our review of district documents indicates that the district spends capital dollars lawfully. PECO funded priority capital projects budgeted for 2001-02 totaled $1,354,896 million and included the following projects:

Exhibit 11-8

PECO Funds Support School Maintenance and Construction Projects

PECO Maintenance Projects	
Exterior Painting	$ 60,000
Carpet Replacement	110,000
Fire Alarms	110,000
Security	100,000
Life Safety	150,000
Wetlands Monitoring	20,000
Stormwater Maintenance	170,000
Gym Floors Repair	82,000
Elevator Servicing	7,200
Door Hardware	10,000
Portable Roof Repair	20,000
Portable Relocation	106,065
Hot Water Heater Replacement	9,000
Water Coolers Replacement	22,000
Indoor Air Quality – Remediation	200,000
Indoor Air Quality – Bard Units	25,000
ADA	27,696
HVAC	125,935
Total	**$1,354,896**

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

The district lacks sufficient resources to fund all of its facilities maintenance needs

Although the district's resources are clearly focused on facilities maintenance priorities, the district lacks the resources to adequately fund all of its needs. Even though the district has added more than 659,450 million square feet in new or renovated facilities since 1996, it has not increased the number of employees

in the Maintenance Department. For the first time in history, according to district officials, the district has been forced to lay off employees districtwide due to budget constraints. As a result, the Maintenance Department lost one of its three maintenance managers critical to workflow management. In addition, to save money, the district has deployed maintenance staff to relocate portable classrooms and undertake construction projects. Routine maintenance suffers when technicians are diverted to projects that could be performed by outside contract labor if more capital funds were available. The district's current budget practices reflect the realities that all the resources needed to address maintenance priorities are unlikely to be available anytime in the near future. However, shared management of school based capital allocations could improve the resources of the facilities department.

The Maintenance Department spent next to the lowest amount on facilities maintenance in Fiscal Year 2000-01, 93 cents per gross square foot. Exhibit 11-9 provides the comparison on the amount districts spent on maintenance and operation of plant activities in fiscal year 2000-01.

Exhibit 11-9

Peer School District Annual Maintenance and Operations Cost Information, 2000-01 Costs Per Gross Square Foot

District	GSF	Maintenance Costs	Operations Costs	Maintenance Per GSF	Operations Per GSF	Total
St. Lucie	**4,516,493**	**$4,187,795**	**$15,344,639**	**0.93**	**$3.40**	**$4.32**
Charlotte	2,481,524	3,001,623	7,678,881	1.21	3.09	4.30
Martin	2,791,460	2,536,691	8,402,091	0.91	3.01	3.92
Okaloosa	4,285,922	4,835,101	11,679,420	1.13	2.73	3.85
Leon	5,290,924	6,657,082	13,161,014	1.26	2.49	3.75
Lake	4,987,891	4,615,070	11,448,540	0.93	2.30	3.22

Source: DOE, Office of Educational Facilities.

Excluding salaries, the Maintenance Department budget for Fiscal Year 2002-03 is $753,172, a 13.8% increase over 2001-02. These are the only funds that the maintenance director controls. The district plans to transfer $4.4 million dollars from Capital Projects Funds (2 Mill funds) to the general fund to support the salaries, budget, and activities of the Maintenance Department. Transfer of these capital funds to offset maintenance expenses is an allowed expense; however, better support of the maintenance program through the general fund would allow these dollars to be spent on much needed deferred maintenance projects.

The district reported $15,344,639 in operation of plant costs for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2001; the highest among the peer districts. These are the expenses incurred to operate school plants including salaries and benefits for the districts 187 custodians, workers' compensations costs and benefits, utility, water, sewer and garbage costs among other costs. As indicated in Exhibit 11-13, the district's higher energy costs contributes to its higher operation of plant costs. The Maintenance Department has little input into the budget for plant operations due to the site-based management structure adopted by the district. The budget appears to be based on the district's historical data for plant operations rather than any professional standards. School administrators are responsible for their individual budgets and utility costs are paid at the district level.

The district needs to identify additional sources of revenue to fund future projects

The district's five-year facilities work plan identifies construction and maintenance projects that cannot be funded from current revenues projected over the next five years. The five-year total through the 2005-06 Fiscal Year amounts to $174,668,598. This total includes many deferred maintenance projects

for drainage problems; HVAC renovations, repairs, and energy controls; paving and resurfacing; painting and carpeting as well as major construction projects for new schools. The district needs to begin to develop a strategy and plan now for raising the necessary funds locally to meet the future needs of the district.

Recommendations

- *Implement guidelines for budgeting Maintenance Department functions.*

    Action Plan 11-8 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-8

Create Guidelines for Budgeting Maintenance Department Functions	
Strategy	The assistant superintendent of business services, executive director of facilities services, maintenance director and finance director should develop guidelines for funding maintenance functions.
Action Needed	Step 1: Guidelines for budgeting maintenance functions should be based on the following items: • funding levels for recurring and routine maintenance • funding level for major maintenance • funding for preventative maintenance • funding for school improvements • staffing levels • training Step 2: These guidelines should be made reflecting: • industry standards • comparisons to peer districts • historical district data Step 3: The guidelines should be periodically re-evaluated for improvement.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services
Time Frame	January 1, 2004

9 The district has a maintenance reserve fund to handle one-time expenditures necessary to support maintenance and operations.

According to the maintenance director, the district's budgetary policy is flexible enough to meet unforeseen emergency maintenance needs that could adversely affect its mission. The 2002-03 capital budget identifies $729,600 in contingency funds for various projects including HVAC repairs/replacement/controls, life-safety projects, and projects relating to roofing, electrical, and floor repairs and site work. In addition, the district reserve fund balance is a source for emergency funds for operations and maintenance.

10The maintenance and operations department evaluates selected maintenance and operations activities to determine the most cost-effective method of providing needed services, but others need to be evaluated.

The maintenance director evaluates the least costly method for labor contracts to supplement maintenance staff

The maintenance director solicits bids for labor contracts to supplement maintenance staff. The district recently lost two of its skilled HVAC technicians. With this loss, 16 schools do not have a HVAC technician assigned to oversee maintenance. Difficulty in keeping skilled staff has forced the maintenance director to negotiate hourly rates with private providers to assist with the workload. The district was successful in negotiating a discounted labor rate of $52.00 per hour during the week and $104.00 per hour on Sundays and holidays for mechanical support of the HVAC. The district has also negotiated additional contracts with providers for carpentry, welding, elevator services, fencing, and parking lot re-surfacing. It cooperated with Miami-Dade schools on a bid for floor repair and refinishing. The Maintenance Department also makes limited use of contract labor for small construction projects. According to the maintenance director, use of labor contracts and other vendor contracts helps the department balance the workload with the present manpower shortage.

The district has not evaluated the cost effectiveness of its parts procurement process and warehouse operation

The Maintenance Department has not systematically reviewed its operating procedures to ensure that they reflect the most cost efficient practices. Because the district has not implemented the Department of Education management study recommendation to stock maintenance vehicles with commonly used parts, maintenance staff more often than not cannot fix a problem on the first visit to a school site. Maintenance staff time is spent assessing the problem, communicating the problem to the maintenance manager, writing up paper work for parts or securing telephone quotes, waiting for a chain of approvals to get the parts, and then finally returning to the facility to fix the problem. This is compounded by the fact that multiple work orders are often generated for repairs in a single room. The district averages 900 work orders per month to be handled by 53 maintenance workers. The closure rate on work orders is a low 52% under the current reporting system and there is always a backlog of work. Stocking maintenance vehicles with commonly used parts will help increase productivity.

In addition, the district needs to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of its procedures for maintaining and securing parts from the warehouse and making "spot buys" of parts not carried in the warehouse. As stated earlier, the system is set up for control, not efficiency. The *Maintenance Operational Handbook* has nine steps in the request for material process and eight steps for "spot buys." Administrators appear to have little confidence that maintenance employees will properly use and account for materials without top down approvals. Cumbersome procedures undermine efficiency and independent employee action to solve problems.

The district has not performed a cost-benefit analysis of maintaining the maintenance warehouse. This analysis would include, at a minimum, the cost of salaries, inventory, utilities and floor space and the turnover ratio of inventory. At the end of April 2002 the district had in excess of $429,000 in inventory. The Maintenance Department charged $32,951 in materials against that inventory in April. This is a thirteen to one turnover ratio, which indicates that much more inventory is sitting on the shelf than being

used. Exhibit 11–10 shows similar turnover in inventory from January through June 2002. The warehouse manager confirmed that much of the inventory was not being used, and he had instructions to reduce unused stock over time. Nevertheless, the department had a priority two request in the 2001-02 capital outlay needs budget for a $30,000 warehouse mezzanine system to increase warehouse inventory space. Needless to say, the warehouse should not obtain more stocking space until the district disposes of inventory not being used. Closing the warehouse could reduce district costs by about $74,000 annually.[1]

Exhibit 11–10

Unused Inventory Increases District Overhead Costs

Month	Inventory Value	Transaction	Turnover Ratio
January	$463,912	$41,450	11
February	455,629	30,230	15
March	440,843	37,137	12
April	429,032	32,951	13
May	423,409	31,166	14
June	451,171	21,171	21

Source: St. Lucie School District.

According to maintenance staff, the paperwork associated with returning unused materials to the warehouse discourages the return of unused materials. Consequently, materials are stored all over the district. Materials not returned to the warehouse also undermine the cost-effectiveness of warehouse operations. The unused materials are charged to the job, which overstates the repair costs.

Implementing a purchasing card would increase the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the Maintenance Department

The district may find it more cost-effective to issue purchasing cards technicians can use to buy parts at area vendors than to maintain a parts warehouse. Local governments, state agencies, colleges and universities and some school districts have implemented the use of purchasing cards to save time and money on purchasing. At the time of our visit, the former purchasing director had already secured a $2 million dollar line of credit from Bank of America to implement the system. However, the finance director reported that the district is no longer interested in the purchasing card because of reports on misuse of the purchasing cards within the federal government and concerns over budgetary control. Unlike some government agencies, the St. Lucie County School District has well entrenched procedures in place to monitor purchases that should adequately guard against purchasing card misuse. Furthermore, inefficient, outdated purchasing practices and the cost of overhead associated with operating the maintenance warehouse far outweigh the risk of misuse.

If the district elects to try the purchasing card with the Maintenance Department, it needs to put the cards in the hands of the people using and ordering the supplies, the technicians. Over restricting use of cards to maintenance managers' defeats the purpose of having the system in the first place. Additionally, purchase order approval prior to use of the card will negate efficiency. To control misuse, the district can set individual limits on spending and limit what the card can be used for. The district should establish post audit procedures within the Maintenance Department and offer training on the proper use of the card prior to issuance. Support staff currently track all purchase orders, warehouse inventory, and use of materials. Their time can easily be redirected to the post audit function for the purchasing card. Routine management oversight and regular reporting of expenditures to the finance department should ensure that

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[1] Reduction consists of salaries for half-time central maintenance manger, $19,688 and storekeepers I, $21,464; benefits at $13,580; and parts and supplies discount from vendors, $19,400.

spending remains within the budget. (The use of a purchasing card is also discussed on page 25, under Cost Controls.)

Maintenance employees need to devote their time to maintenance activities that require their skill and experience

The district needs to evaluate the cost effectiveness of using maintenance employees on construction projects. Maintenance employees recently constructed approximately 3,000 square feet of space at the south maintenance complex to house district purchasing staff. According to a maintenance manager, the district "saved" $14,000 by having the maintenance employees construct the offices. However, this limited their ability to perform needed preventive maintenance work.

Maintenance staff time should be spent on proactive maintenance while school is out. This is the time that maintenance staff can get into the schools to thoroughly assess problems, write up work orders, and take care of bathrooms and other maintenance problems that are difficult to get to while school is in session. Last summer maintenance staff moved 50 relocatable classrooms instead of doing in-school maintenance work. Time spent on construction tasks and moving classrooms is not making the best use of maintenance workers especially since the district is already understaffed for its current workload. The hidden cost of not performing proactive and preventative maintenance work will cost the district more in the long run.

As stated earlier, the maintenance director cannot be held fully accountable for cost-effective use of all maintenance and operations spending because of the site-based management structure. Operation of plant costs and school based capital allocations are controlled by principals and other site-based managers. The district has already taken steps to increase efficiency. According to the maintenance director, as of July 1, 2002 maintenance trucks are now equipped with 25 of the most commonly used parts and the district has introduced blanket purchase orders at some vendors and implemented a fast track system for getting parts out of the warehouse. Adopting our recommendation in Action Plan 11-7 to share control of school based capital allocations with the Office of Facilities and Support Services should increase departmental resources and ensure that capital resources are spent on projects necessary to maintain schools and allow the schools the benefit of group purchasing. Reducing costs must be a team effort involving school administrators, site-maintenance foreman, maintenance staff, purchasing and facilities.

Recommendations ──────────────────────

- *Implement a pilot purchasing card program.*

- *Close or combine a smaller maintenance warehouse with the stores warehouse.*

- *Refrain from deploying maintenance staff on construction tasks better performed by contract labor.*

  Action Plans 11-9, 11-10 and 11-11 provide the steps needed to implement these recommendations.

Action Plan 11-9

Implement a Purchasing Card System for the Maintenance Department
Strategy — The executive director of business services, purchasing director, executive director of facilities services, and maintenance director should meet to establish guidelines for a pilot purchasing card system in the maintenance department.

Action Needed	Step 1:	Solicit information on establishing a successful purchasing card system from peer districts.
	Step 2:	Secure a line of credit to establish a district purchasing card.
	Step 3:	Determine card recipients, credit limits and restrictions on use.
	Step 4:	Establish a training program for employees on the appropriate use of the district purchasing card.
	Step 5:	Establish audit procedures for purchases.
	Step 6:	Reconcile card purchases with the maintenance budget on a regular basis.
Who is Responsible	Purchasing director, executive director of facilities services and maintenance director.	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Action Plan 11-10

Close or Reduce the Size of the Maintenance Warehouse		
Strategy	Conduct a business case analysis of the impact of closing or reducing the size of the maintenance warehouse.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Identify the benefits of the current plan.
	Step 2:	Identify the costs of operating the warehouse including:
		• Cost of personnel and delivery vehicles
		• Cost of floor space and inventory
		• Turnover of inventory
	Step 3:	Compare district costs to maintain the warehouse to purchasing parts on an as needed basis from vendors.
	Step 4:	Explore the alternative of combining the district warehouse with the stores and distribution warehouse.
	Step 5:	Stock maintenance trucks with routinely used parts to increase efficiency.
	Step 6:	Identify how maintenance operations will be affected.
	Step 7:	Revise operating procedures for acquiring and returning parts.
	Step 8:	Determine the acceptability of the plan, or to what extent those who must work with it support this alternative.
	Step 9:	Present finding to the board for approval.
	Step 10:	Develop a transition plan.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Action Plan 11-11

Refrain From Using Maintenance Staff on Non-Maintenance Projects		
Strategy	Assign small construction projects and relocation of portables to outside contract labor.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Develop an estimate of time and costs for projects.
	Step 2:	Get project cost estimates from the private sector.
	Step 3:	Charge appropriate school/department budgets for the cost of the project.
Who is Responsible	Construction project manager	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

11 The district minimizes some equipment costs through purchasing practices and maintenance, but needs to formalize equipment standards and negotiate volume discounts for maintenance and custodial supplies and materials.

Knowledgeable employees provide input into the selection of equipment

The Maintenance Department analyzes the repair data collected in the Gateway work order system to provide input on decisions regarding the selection of large equipment purchases such as HVAC systems for new construction. For example, the department discovered that a new chiller system used in several schools was experiencing repeated breakdowns. The district no longer uses the equipment, and according to the superintendent, alerted other school districts to the problems they had experienced.

The district needs to formalize equipment standards

The Department of Education study recommended that the district develop design standards for fixed capital outlay projects and work order projects. These material and equipment standards should be derived from the collective experience of knowledgeable staff. Equipment, furniture, materials and design standards promote district-wide standardization and prevent substitutions of inferior equipment that, in the long run, should lower overall maintenance costs. Published standards also prevent what DOE called the requirement to "reinvent the wheel" each time a design consultant does work for the district.

Although the district has not developed a design manual, the district provided us with its preferred mechanical, electrical and plumbing equipment standards for Fairlawn and F.K. Sweet Elementary Schools. At the pre-design meeting, the district presented these standards to the architect, who was required to incorporate them into the design of the new schools. According to the construction project manager, the Facilities Department has not developed a design manual at the direction of a former district official who believed such a manual would hinder the district from getting the lowest bid price from potential construction management firms. However, when provided to all bidders, we believe a design manual levels the playing field for bids and prevents substitutions of inferior equipment at a later date.

The district does not take advantage of volume discounts for maintenance and custodial materials and supplies

School centers and the various district divisions are responsible for purchasing. The purchasing department has no buyers although the previous purchasing director sent some staff members for training to work toward the Certified Professional Public Buyer designation, and the district plans to follow up with this training. Each school center and division must research and purchase their own equipment, furniture, custodial supplies, and equipment.

The district identified in its strategic plan a purchasing department goal to review all purchases and consolidate common commodities for maximum economy and efficiency. To achieve this goal a common commodity code would be implemented in the TERMS financial system by June 2002. The district also directed a purchasing manual to be written to guide users through the purchasing process. A draft manual has been written, but at the time of our review the district had not implemented common commodity codes to consolidate purchasing.

Our interviews with district staff confirmed that historically most purchasing for custodial and maintenance needs is based on relationship buying rather than standardized lists and volume purchase

contracts. However, because of recent air quality problems, custodial supplies must now be tested and approved by the maintenance department prior to purchase. We recommend that the purchasing department negotiate volume discounts for custodial supplies, based on Maintenance Department recommendations, which all schools can take advantage of. Approved vendors can be listed on a purchasing department Web site.

The former purchasing director stated that she was not in the loop regarding facilities purchasing. The Maintenance Department uses telephone quotes and bids to get the best price for materials and services. Maintenance managers are responsible for day-to-day purchasing in addition to assigning work tasks. The district presented no evidence that the Maintenance Department has negotiated volume discounts with area vendors for small parts or with other suppliers of materials. Based conservatively on 6 months warehouse inventory use of $194,105, we estimate the district can save approximately $19,000 annually with a 5% contractor volume discount for parts. The department may also want to consider purchasing training for the new central zone manager responsible for the warehouse. A trained in-house buyer for the facilities department can relieve the remaining zone managers of the responsibility of day-to-day purchasing and allow them to spend more time on supervision and maintenance related tasks.

Recommendations

- *Adopt a design criteria manual that incorporates the district's standards for equipment.*

  Action Plan 10-4 in Chapter 10, Facility Construction, provides the steps to implement this recommendation.

- *Negotiate volume discounts for routinely purchased parts and custodial supplies.*

  Action Plan 11-12 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-12

Negotiate Volume Discounts for Parts and Custodial Supplies		
Strategy	Contact area vendors to negotiate contractor rates for routinely used parts. Initiate a bid for approved custodial supplies routinely used by schools.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Analyze warehouse inventory turnover data to identify commonly used parts.
	Step 2:	Contact area vendors to negotiate a volume discount for routinely used parts and supplies.
	Step 3:	Survey schools to identify preferred custodial supplies.
	Step 4:	Ensure that preferred supplies are approved by the Maintenance Department for air quality control.
	Step 5:	Advertise a bid for custodial supplies based on volume purchasing.
	Step 6:	Notify schools of preferred vendor (s) and prices.
	Step 7:	Periodically compare prices with historical data to ensure best pricing.
Who is Responsible	Maintenance director; purchasing director; coordinator of custodial services	
Time Frame	July 2003	

12 The district is improving proactive maintenance practices to reduce maintenance costs.

As stated earlier, the Maintenance Department provides input on the selection of equipment and materials by using the data the department routinely collects in the electronic work order system. The maintenance director has performed an analysis of the costs of operating alternative HVAC systems based on equipment repair data collected in the Gateway work order system. His recommendations have been incorporated into the department's preferred design criteria guidelines provided to architects, construction managers and contractors. The department also performed a recent evaluation of the costs of maintaining tile floors as compared to carpet. In addition, the district recently hired an experienced energy management professional as a project manager in the facilities department.

The maintenance director has negotiated contracts for preventive maintenance to reduce long-term maintenance costs and service outages for the following:

- HVAC performance contract,
- HVAC filter replacement,
- HVAC preventive maintenance,
- Gym floors,
- Athletic fields,
- Fire alarms, and
- White fleet.

The district has outsourced to private contractors $156,000 annually in basic contracted services and $336,000 annually in HVAC related preventative maintenance. The HVAC performance contract attempts to lower district energy costs in some schools by using performance contracting in which the contractor guarantees savings on energy costs when equipment is used according to the manufacturers warranties. However, one manager reported that the monitoring equipment often does not work properly, and the district can void the warranty by not following manufacturers warranty instructions.

Because contracted services cannot meet all the needs for preventive maintenance, maintenance technicians also perform preventative maintenance tasks. According to one manager, the department is always playing catch up on preventative maintenance. Exhibit 11-11 indicates that employees are already spread thin with day-to-day responsibilities, as evidenced by the higher ratio of square footage to maintenance worker (85,217 sq.ft. /1 worker) when compared to most peer districts. The district has worked to improve preventive maintenance but, as recent air quality problems indicate, not enough attention has been paid to districtwide preventative maintenance to air conditioning units. However, in response to recent air quality complaints, the maintenance director has taken action to create an air quality response team and provide training to both maintenance and custodial staff on preventing air quality problems.

Surplus Property Disposal

The purchasing director is responsible for surplus property disposal. The purchasing department advertises and conducts auctions once a year for buses, computers and other district equipment. The district has also conducted a joint sale with the county. The district often donates items that do not sell to not-for-profit organizations.

Maintenance Program Goals and Outcomes

13The maintenance and operations department reviews the organizational structure of the maintenance and operations program; however, field managers' span of control is too great for them to effectively manage operations.

The Maintenance Department needs to develop mechanisms for more effectively supervising field operations

As previously discussed, the district has a number of maintenance problems including a high work backlog, inadequate preventive maintenance, and high energy costs. A number of factors contribute to these problems. These include:

- Inefficient administrative processes that hamper efficiency (discussed on page);
- Insufficient number of maintenance technicians (discussed on page 11-27); and
- Inadequate supervision.

Without adequate supervision, maintenance employees may not work efficiently. Common problems can include spending too much time on breaks and scheduling work for the convenience of employees rather than for efficiency. According to district employees these problems exist in the district.

Following the 1997 Department of Education management review, the district changed the structure of the Facilities and Support Services division to include a director of facilities, director of maintenance, director of transportation, and a coordinator of safety and security. The organizational chart for the Maintenance Department is shown in Exhibit 11–3. The maintenance director was hired to provide leadership and direction to the department.

The 60-member Maintenance Department, which includes 7 support employees, is responsible for upkeep and maintenance of 43 facilities consisting of 4.5 million gross square feet and 1 million square feet of turf divided among two geographic maintenance districts or zones. Until July 1, 2002, each zone was headed by a foreman who acts as the manager responsible for assigning work tasks to the technical trades and purchasing maintenance materials for the schools under the direction of the department maintenance director. Breaking the district into zones is a common organizational structure in other medium sized Florida districts.

After July 1, 2002 management decided to reorganize the maintenance department around functions rather than zones. The three primary functions are HVAC, operations and central services. The HVAC team was created to concentrate on reducing the district's energy costs through better energy management and preventative maintenance. The central services team is responsible for warehouse operations, custodial training, audio visual equipment repair and painting services. The operations team directs the work flow for the routine day-to-day maintenance functions. Each operations unit is headed by a manager with the exception of the HVAC team. As stated earlier, a management position was deleted in July. In the meantime, a HVAC technician is serving as interim manager.

Since HVAC work orders make up 25% of all work orders and the district has higher than average energy costs, we recommend that the deleted maintenance manager position be restored to direct the work of the new HVAC team. In addition, the maintenance department organizational structure does not have foreman/team leader positions established to directly supervise the work of technicians in the field. Consequently, there is little or no supervision of maintenance employees.

One way the district could increase supervision of maintenance employees is to reinstate the position of the maintenance manager and also upgrade the positions of some technicians to provide greater supervision of employees in the field. If the district selects this option, the cost would be approximately $87,900 per year. Reinstating the maintenance manager position would cost a total of $55,900 per year, $42,000 for salary with and $13,900 for benefits. If the district created 8 lead technician positions to supervise work crews in the field, the cost would be $24,000 per year, or $3,000 in salary supplement per lead position.

Other options would be for the district to contract out more maintenance work and let the contractors handle the supervisory work or to create better work standards to better monitor employee performance without directly supervising each technician.

Recommendations ———————————————————

- *Increase management and supervision in the Maintenance Department.*

  Action Plan 11-13 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-13

Increase Management and Supervision in the Maintenance Department		
Strategy	Increase supervision of maintenance work.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Determine the most cost effective means of increasing management and supervision in the Maintenance Department.
	Step 2:	Involve staff in the examination of alternatives.
	Step 3:	Select the most cost effective alternative and present it to the superintendent and board for approval.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

14 The maintenance and operations department needs to review the staffing levels of the maintenance and operations program to maximize the efficient use of personnel.

The district needs to maximize the efficient use of personnel prior to deciding on what resources it needs

As discussed previously, a low number of maintenance technicians may be one of the factors contributing to the district's high backlog of maintenance work orders and high energy costs. Since 1996, the district

has added 659,450 square feet of space, but has not had a corresponding increase in maintenance employees.

The district does not have formal staffing levels for maintenance personnel. The maintenance manager states that he uses the recommendation of the 1997 Department of Education Management Study of 30,000 square feet of facility space per maintenance worker as his benchmark for staffing. The DOE *Maintenance and Operations Administrative Guidelines for School Districts and Community Colleges* recommends a staffing formula of 45,000 gross square feet of building space maintained per employee. As the chart below indicates, none of the peer districts approach this level of staffing. Nevertheless, the district's ratio of maintained square footage to maintenance worker is high when compared to most peer districts.

Exhibit 11–11

Comparison of Maintenance Staffing Levels with Peer Districts 2001-02

District	Total Gross Square Feet	Number of Maintenance Staff	GSF per Maintenance Staff
Charlotte	2,481,524	23	107,892
Martin	2,791,460	33	84,590
Lake	4,987,891	73	68,327
Okaloosa	4,285,922	66	64,938
Leon	5,290,924	109	48,540
Peer district average	**3,967,544**	**61**	**65,256**
St. Lucie	**4,516,493**	**53**	**85,217**

Source: Department of Education and OPPAGA.

Current budget resources can support only limited additions and upgrades to staff at this time, and as previously discussed, the district has inefficient operating procedures for maintenance work. We recommend that the district work to increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of its present workforce by implementing the recommendations made in previous sections of this report, and then systematically increase the number of technicians it employs until it relieves work backlogs and adheres to an adequate preventive maintenance schedule. If this increases the number of district maintenance staff to the level of peer districts, the district would create and fill 5 additional technical positions, which would cost an estimated $212,800. As an alternative, the district could contract more maintenance work if doing so would be more cost effective.

As discussed on page 43, the cost of implementing this recommendation should be more than offset by savings in energy costs due to improved energy management and should lower future maintenance costs. The 2002-03 capital projects budget alone contains $250,000 for district wide air quality remediation projects, which might have been avoided if adequate resources had been available to implement a comprehensive HVAC preventative maintenance program. Without an investment in additional maintenance for HVAC systems, the district is unlikely to be able to realize any energy cost savings.

After establishing efficient operating procedures, the district needs to develop a staffing or resource formula for the Maintenance Department that considers the square footage and condition of district schools and other buildings. We agree with the 1997 DOE management study recommendation that Maintenance Department resources should increase when the district adds new facilities and classrooms. Failure to systematically increase resources as responsibilities increase will have a negative impact on the condition of facilities and equipment and will cost the district more in the long run.

The custodial staffing levels meet industry benchmarks

The district uses a staffing formula to assign custodial staff to schools. The formula is based on building square footage and rooms, number of pupils, teachers and grounds kept. The custodial program coordinator stated that generally four custodians are assigned to elementary schools, eight to middle schools and 12 to high schools. The total number of custodians employed by the district is 187.

American School and University Magazine recommends a standard of 21,429 square feet per custodian. Taking into consideration the additional responsibilities, such as lawn care, of many custodial employees, the standard could be adjusted down to 20,000 square feet per custodian. The districts 187 custodians are responsible for 22,683 square feet based on approximately 4.2 million *net* square feet of space. It appears that the district is appropriately staffed with custodial employees. Although the staffing formula is not based on private industry benchmarks, the current staffing formula seems to be working. Exhibit 11-12 shows a comparison of staffing levels to peer districts.

Exhibit 11–12

Comparison of Staffing Levels with Peer Districts 2001-02

District	Total Net Square Feet	Number of Custodial Staff	Net Square Feet Per Custodian
Leon	4,809,352	195	24,663
St. Lucie	**4,241,639**	**187**	**22,683**
Martin	2,620,155	128	20,470
Okaloosa	4,018,807	199	20,195
Charlotte	2,292,481	114	20,109
Lake	4,460,457	256	17,424

Source: Leon County, St. Lucie County, Martin County, Okaloosa County and Charlotte County School Districts.

Recommendations

- *If needed after streamlining operating procedures, develop and implement a plan to increase Maintenance Department resources, either by creating additional technician positions or by contracting out more maintenance work.*

Action Plan 11-14 contains the action plan for this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-14

Increase Management and Supervision in the Maintenance Department	
Strategy	Develop and implement a plan to increase Maintenance Department resources.
Action Needed	Step 1: After streamlining operating procedures, determine whether more resources are needed to reduce maintenance backlogs and implement a deferred maintenance schedule.
	Step 2: Determine the most cost effective means of performing needed maintenance work—hiring additional staff, contracting, or both.
	Step 3: Involve staff in the examination of these alternatives.
	Step 4: Determine the resources available to meet maintenance needs.
	Step 5: Select the most feasible and cost effective alternative and present it to the superintendent and board for approval.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services

Time Frame	January 1, 2004

15 The maintenance and operations department ensures qualified staff by using appropriate hiring practices.

The district uses appropriate hiring practices to attract qualified staff. Job vacancy notices adequately describe job responsibilities, qualifications, and educational and professional requirements. Salary, benefits and selection criteria are also included. All vacancies are open to qualified internal transfers. The personnel department pre-screens job applicants. The maintenance director reports that he or the department secretary check personal references on all potential new hires.

The district had three vacant air conditioning technician positions being advertised by the personnel department at the time of our site visit. According to the maintenance focus group, HVAC technicians are difficult to attract and keep because of the required technical skill level and low pay offered by the district. One maintenance worker wrote that HVAC technicians are required to have more technical skills in complex energy management systems than all other trades. Yet, all trades are paid the same across the board.

The same holds true for employees of the new building department. The revised building code requires inspectors to have the FDOE endorsement as a UBCI inspector and be licensed by the Department of Business and Professional Regulation. The law has created more rigorous qualifications requiring multiple licenses for district inspectors to issue building permits and inspect facilities. Consequently, inspectors with multiple licenses are in high demand and short supply. With no change in salary, the district is likely to continue to experience turnover in technical positions.

The district needs to conduct a market survey of all positions subject to increased turnover, including maintenance management positions, to determine if the compensation it offers can attract and retain qualified candidates, and if not, investigate ways to increase compensation which may require negotiation with the union.

Recommendations

- *Create a plan to reduce maintenance department turnover.*

   Action Plan 11-15 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-15

Create a Plan to Reduce Turnover in the Maintenance Department		
Strategy	Use historical data, market conditions, and exit interviews to determine positions subject to high turnover and the reasons for leaving.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Use Gateway work order data to identify technical positions in the most demand by the district.
	Step 2:	Conduct a neighboring peer district and private sector market analysis of compensation to positions subject to high turnover
	Step 3:	Devise a strategy to address non-compensation related issues to turnover such as employee recognition programs.

	Step 4:	Investigate with the personnel department cost-effective strategies to reduce turnover.
	Step 5:	Develop a promotional track and compensation structure for managers based on education and experience.
	Step 6:	Develop a new salary structure for affected positions.
	Step 7:	Present compensation package to the board for approval.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services; maintenance director	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	
Fiscal Impact	The outcome of this recommendation is dependent on market surveys and negotiation with the union; therefore, cost cannot be determined at this time.	

Source: OPPAGA.

16 The maintenance and operations departments have a written job description for each position within the department.

The district needs to revise job descriptions with input from staff

The 1997 Department of Education's *Educational Facilities Management Study* recommended rewriting job descriptions with employee input to include obtainable measurable qualifications and delete obsolete qualifications. The study recommended eliminating restrictions to employment such as only accepting candidates with experience in the St. Lucie School District. These restrictions limited the district's ability to hire qualified candidates from outside the system. Some job descriptions did not add responsibility as employees progressed through higher levels. For example, maintenance mechanics I and II had the same responsibilities, and advancement is based on experience rather than any measurable skill or educational requirement. In addition, upward mobility in management positions is based on years of service rather than acquired skills or further education. Updating job descriptions to reflect the work performed such as preventative maintenance and construction projects was also recommended.

As recommended, the department began to revise the job descriptions. The maintenance director made available several draft job descriptions for maintenance and technical staff. The requirements for carpenter, journeyman carpenter and senior carpenter demonstrate the additional skills required for each skill level. The same progression is reflected on the job descriptions and responsibilities for electrician, journeyman electrician and senior electricians and equipment operators. The experience and requirements for a senior painter are more than those of a painter. Most senior positions require an associate degree in building/facilities or construction management or a certificate in the appropriate field and 5 or more years of experience. Essential job functions are highlighted.

The district may have unwittingly set up barriers to employment and advancement in the revised job descriptions. The qualifications for journeyman painter and a senior painter require that applicants must have completed college courses in supervision, business communications, management, computer operations and leadership. The same is true for journeyman carpenter, senior plumber, senior refrigeration and senior utility worker. The senior refrigeration position requires completed courses in business writing, introduction to Microsoft Windows, customer relations and professional development. Senior painters are also required to hold an associate degree in building, facilities management in addition to 3 years of experience or a certificate and 5 years experience or eight years of experience in the proper application of paint, sealers, etc. By requiring the completion of these college courses as a condition of employment, the district may be setting up barriers to employment of otherwise qualified applicants. As

these job descriptions are currently written in draft form, it appears that all of the required college courses must be completed *prior* to employment.

The Maintenance Department has developed professional development course modules for the required courses with the Business Development Center at Indian River Community College. We recommend that the department carefully consider the needs of the job and make professional development courses available to otherwise qualified, experienced employees *after* employment. We recommend that the Maintenance department revisit the rewriting of job descriptions and professional development courses with input from the maintenance staff. Unnecessary barriers to employment of otherwise qualified candidates should be eliminated.

Recommendations

- *Revise job descriptions with input from maintenance staff*

- *Eliminate unnecessary barriers to employment and advancement of otherwise qualified candidates*

  Action Plan 11-16 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-16

Revise Job Descriptions with Staff Input		
Strategy	Set up meetings with maintenance staff to revise job descriptions.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Revise descriptions based on required certifications, skills, experience and actual work performed.
	Step 2:	Ensure that progression to the next level is based on educational advancement, licensing and job certifications, and acquired job skills.
	Step 3:	Upgrade technical job descriptions to include supervisory responsibilities as team leaders/foreman.
	Step 4:	Upgrade management positions to the equivalent of project managers in construction.
	Step 5:	Present revised job descriptions to the superintendent for approval.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services; maintenance director	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	
Fiscal Impact	This recommendation can be accomplished with existing resources.	

Source: OPPAGA.

17 The district does not provide appropriate supervision of maintenance and operations staff.

The Maintenance Department needs better supervision, but annually evaluates its employees

The district has a published organizational chart for the Maintenance Department that identifies the level of authority in broad terms. As stated earlier, the department needs to consider alternative ways of better supervising maintenance work and implement the most cost effective solution.

Maintenance supervisors annually evaluate all maintenance employees, who have an opportunity to respond to evaluations. As already discussed, the weakness of the evaluation system rests in the fact that no formal performance standards have been developed to serve as a benchmark to evaluate employee work performance. Performance is based on supervisor observations and informal feedback from school personnel. The department should use standard labor estimates, such as R S Means software, or performance measures derived from data in the district's work order system to evaluate employee performance on an ongoing basis.

Recommendations

- *Increase management of maintenance workflow and supervision of technicians.*

Please refer to Action Plan 11–14 for the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

18 The district provides a staff development program that includes appropriate training for maintenance and operations staff to enhance worker job satisfaction, efficiency, and safety.

The Maintenance Department seeks training opportunities and staff development programs for employees

The maintenance director makes training a priority for employees. During budget crises, training opportunities for employees are often curtailed. The maintenance director has been very diligent in seeking out low or no cost training opportunities for support staff and technicians to upgrade computer skills, enhance customer service, and upgrade technical skills in HVAC operations, air quality, safety, and energy management. Custodial and maintenance workers recently participated in a district wide air quality training program on preventative maintenance and custodial cleaning methods to prevent further problems. The department presented a log of 41 training opportunities offered to employees from July 2000-01. These included participation in the Florida School Plant Managers Convention, the Educational Energy Manager's Association conference, the Sports Turf Managers Association conference and several workshops on HVAC design, operation and maintenance for HVAC engineers and maintenance professionals.

The maintenance director has also developed a professional development program to offer a career path for employees in three categories: technician III, journeyman technician and senior technician. The department worked in conjunction with the district's personnel department and Indian River Community College, Business Development Center to develop training modules. The journeyman technician track offers courses in supervision, mid-management, business communication, building systems operations and advance computer operations. The senior technician modules offer course in management skills, time and stress management, and basic computer operations. Employees who complete the program are eligible for promotions. The district hopes to attract and retain qualified employees by offering a career development plan.

The attendees at the maintenance focus group stated that they wanted more technical training opportunities to upgrade skills particularly in HVAC and to gain certification in the various trades. A manager stated that these opportunities have been made available in the past, but often the employee wanted to be paid overtime to attend. The district cannot afford to pay for both the training and overtime.

With recent state funding cuts, the department has not been able to offer additional technical training other than in a seminar setting.

The district offers an upward mobility-training program for custodial workers

The district has appointed a coordinator certified by the Department of Education in instructor training and custodial staffing and standards to conduct in-service training for custodial workers, who are called site administrators in St. Lucie County. The district offers site administrators the opportunity to progress to higher pay classifications by acquiring 60 in-service training points (equivalent to 3 semester hours) in course work covering code compliance, clean air environments, safety in school operations, and cleaning methods. The district ensures that all site maintenance workers receive the "Right to Know" training regarding the handling of hazardous materials. Upon completion, workers are issued certificates for Site Maintenance I and II training and are eligible for pay raises.

19 The district provides maintenance and operations department staff the tools and equipment required to accomplish their assigned tasks.

After a six-month probationary period, the district provides a $140 employee hand tool reimbursement allowance. New hires are expected to report to work with hand tools. Our maintenance focus group did not identify this requirement as a problem or barrier to employment.

Commonly used power tools are available for check out from the central warehouse and must be returned promptly in good condition. The Maintenance Department maintains an inventory of all power tools and has established procedures for securing and returning tools to the warehouse. The *Maintenance Operational Handbook* also provides procedures for renting infrequently used specialty tools.

Since our site visits, the district now stocks maintenance trucks with 25 commonly used parts. This should help with the redundant work effort and enhance staff performance and efficiency. Stocking trucks with commonly used parts will allow the Maintenance Department to operate more cost effectively by reducing travel time and mileage on maintenance vehicles. It may also allow the Maintenance Department to reduce courier positions and vehicles assigned to the warehouse.

Computerized Maintenance Management Systems

20 A computerized control and tracking system is used to accurately track work orders and inventory.

The district uses the Gateway System to track work orders and inventory

The district purchased the Gateway Software Corporation's warehouse maintenance, work order maintenance, and vehicle maintenance software in December 1997. Schools can enter work order requests directly into the system and track the status of work orders once they have been submitted to the Maintenance Department. The Maintenance Department also uses the system to control inventory and track parts, materials and equipment to individual work orders. When evaluating whether to use an outside vendor, the department uses the system to track labor and materials costs. The Maintenance

Department does an above average job of controlling and accounting for inventory and equipment. The department generates an average of 900 work orders monthly.

The department does a good job of tracking repair history for equipment. The district's desire to track repair history is in part responsible for the generation of so many work orders during the month. Work orders are generated by location, room, if applicable, technical trade and equipment in order to have a precise repair history. Although tracking repair histories of equipment and charging the proper account is important, we recommend that the department investigate ways to consolidate work orders and reduce the number generated.

Work order data could be more effectively used to improve performance

The ability to access historical data and compare it with current data such as hours spent per project and cost of materials used per project has the potential to be a critical tool in developing building and equipment life cycle cost data, projecting staffing needs, and controlling material costs and inventory levels. In addition, comparing maintenance worker time and materials used on a project with previously developed standards can be a powerful tool for analyzing the efficiency of maintenance operations and evaluating the performance of individual workers. The Maintenance Department could more effectively use the data it already collects in the Gateway System to create task oriented benchmarks, evaluate the cost-effectiveness of maintenance activities, measure work productivity, and compare district performance to industry standards and peer districts.

Recommendations ───────────────────────

- *Use Gateway System data as a management tool to increase cost-effective operations and improve performance.*

  Action Plan 11-17 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-17

Use the Gateway System As a Management Tool To Improve Cost-Effective Operations and Performance		
Strategy	Systematically collect and analyze performance and cost data in the Gateway System to identify opportunities to increase effectiveness, efficiency and reduce costs.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Meet with supervisors to identify what data needs to be collected, how often and what report format is needed to determine progress toward cost-efficiency goals.
	Step 2:	Set up a procedure to routinely generate work orders for analysis.
	Step 3:	Analyze reports to identify trends and opportunities to reduce costs.
	Step 4:	Meet with staff to identify strategies to increase productivity and lower costs.
	Step 5:	Use data/operational information to make operational improvements; establish timeframes for routine tasks.
	Step 6:	Discuss expectations with maintenance staff on ways to work more efficiently and effectively.
	Step 7:	Routinely report performance and cost-efficiency results to staff.
	Step 8:	Use data to make routine comparative analysis between actual and budgeted costs.
	Step 9:	Evaluate performance and costs to include potential for cost-saving alternatives for providing services.

Who is Responsible	Maintenance director and supervisors
Time Frame	July 1, 2003
Fiscal Impact	This recommendation can be accomplished with existing resources.

Source: OPPAGA.

21 The maintenance and operations department has a system for prioritizing maintenance needs throughout the district.

The district takes care of emergencies first

The Maintenance Department's first priority is emergency maintenance and repair. Employees are expected to respond to an emergency situation even when the requirements for a specific job may be outside of their job fields. In the event of an emergency, all maintenance personnel can be radio-dispatched to respond within minutes. The maintenance director calls for outside service if maintenance staff are not available.

According to emergency work order procedures in the department's *Maintenance Operational Handbook,* emergency repairs are to be completed within the same day. Emergency work orders are pink to distinguish them from routine blue work orders. The work order priority list supplied by the district identifies emergency air conditioning calls, main water line breaks, and vandalism as priority one. These emergencies must be taken care of within 12 hours.

The Gateway System has a priority rating for all work orders. For routine work orders, managers review work orders in the system and set daily priorities. Although the district has not developed priority guidelines, work orders appear to be equitably addressed and reflect the needs of the district. However, customer service surveys conducted by the Maintenance Department in October indicated that until recently response time has clearly been a problem. The department is attempting to correct this deficiency by having managers meet with school principals to discuss outstanding maintenance issues and develop corrective action plans. By collaboratively working with school-based managers and instructional staff, maintenance operations is striving to ensure that changes in priorities are understood and acceptable to school and maintenance staff.

School Equipment and Facilities

22 District policies and procedures clearly address the health and safety conditions of facilities.

Florida law requires each participating school district to establish and maintain a comprehensive safety and health program. The district has joined with a consortium of ten county school boards to participate in the South Central Educational Risk Management Program (SCERMP) to promote employee and student safety. The program provides participating school districts with minimum standards to improve the safety, health, and welfare of employees and students. The consortium's *Employee Safety Handbook* provides safety rules, policies, and procedures for custodians, maintenance workers, and mechanics. Topics covered include safety procedures for operating heavy equipment, handling materials, welding,

electrical, and safe use of machine/power tools, ladders, and scaffolds. The introduction to the *Handbook* states that the SCERMP plan has been approved by the Division of Workers' Compensation and meets the requirements of the law for all school districts participating in the program.

The district is also required by law to conduct annual inspections of each facility and ancillary plant to determine compliance with sanitation and casualty safety standards prescribed in the rules of the Commissioner of Education. Fire safety inspections are also required annually. The Office of Facilities and Support Services has three certified building inspectors and a certified fire inspector for school facilities to conduct annual inspections. The employee primarily responsible for health, fire and safety inspections has completed training or is certified in building inspection, fire inspection practices, asbestos abatement and survey techniques, federal hazardous materials regulation, LP gas safety and inspection fundamentals, boiler operations, and radon measurement. He also conducts "Right to Know" training on the handling of hazardous materials for custodial workers.

The district presented documentation that individuals certified to perform health and safety inspections conduct a comprehensive safety inspection at each school. The resulting report is used as a basis for setting priorities for capital maintenance improvements and to generate work orders to rectify problems.

23 The maintenance and operations department needs to identify and implement better strategies to contain energy costs.

The districts energy costs are the highest among its peer districts

The district needs to develop a comprehensive energy program to lower energy costs with the collaboration of district stakeholders including the Maintenance Department, custodians, site-based administrators, instructional personnel, and utility providers and other experts on energy conservation. As Exhibit 11-13 illustrates, the districts annual energy costs are the highest among peer districts.

Exhibit 11-13

Peer School District Annual Energy Cost Information
2000-01 Costs Per Gross Square Foot

District	Natural Gas	LP Gas	Electricity	Heating Oil	All Energy	Square Foot Cost	
						All Energy	Electricity Only
St. Lucie	$0	$120,091	$5,208,479	$0	$5,328,570	$1.18	$1.15
Charlotte	48,308	26,186	2,425,935	2,360	2,502,790	1.01	0.98
Martin	26,263	23,436	2,782,941	0	2,832,640	1.01	1.00
Leon	391,746	67,349	4,541,184	24,718	5,024,997	0.95	0.86
Okaloosa	632,196	7,124	3,345,520	0	3,984,840	0.93	0.78
Lake	328,184	14,136	3,787,622	20	4,129,962	0.83	0.76

Source: 2000-01 School Districts' Financial Report.

The district is spending much of its limited capital projects budget on HVAC related problems including air quality. Data derived from the electronic work order system shows that 25% of all work orders are for HVAC related problems. Managers concede that they have had chronic problems with HVAC systems. The district has recently taken steps toward addressing energy cost containment by hiring an experienced energy management/air quality professional as a project manager within the Office of Facilities and

Support Services. However, the district could do more by developing an energy management plan that provides monetary incentives to schools to save energy, provides for energy audits, implements effective demand-side energy management, and takes advantage of energy rebate programs or other lower rate incentives offered by utility companies. Although he has not looked at St. Lucie's specific circumstances, the energy consultant with the Energy Conservation Assistance Program with the University of West Florida, predicted that the district could lower its overall energy cost by 5%-10% annually, or between $266,000-$530,000, by implementing better energy demand management and adopting energy cost saving strategies similar to those used by the Okaloosa County School District. However, as discussed earlier, implementing these strategies will require additional resources, either in the form of staff or contractors. If the district needs as many as 5 new maintenance technicians, the net savings from better energy management will be $317,200 based on $530,000 in annual savings.

Put principals in control of energy bills

One of the most effective strategies to contain energy costs the Okaloosa County School District adopted was to have principals pay their energy bills. After implementing an incentive based energy program, the district experienced a 12% decline in energy costs and a 15% decline in all utility costs within six months. Although the Okaloosa Maintenance Department had been providing school administrators with information on their monthly utility usage, it could not really get their attention until principals had to pay the bills out of their school budgets. To encourage energy conservation, principals got to keep 100% of the saving below the previous year's benchmarks.

In addition, the Okaloosa Maintenance Department took advantage of the free energy audits offered by the University of Florida, Energy Conservation Assistance Program. The program is grant funded by the Department of Community Affairs, Florida Energy Office to recommend energy consumption measures to be taken by schools to reduce energy consumption and utility costs. The department arranged for a comprehensive audit of all school facilities. While the recommendations in the report are specific to Okaloosa schools, some of the recommendations apply to any Florida school district:

- Indoor temperature should be maintained at 75-78 degrees during warmer months and 68 degrees in cooler months.
- Routinely replace filters in air conditioning/heating systems.
- Chemically clean all HVAC evaporator and condenser coils approximately every three years for savings of 15-30% in air conditioning costs.
- Insulate roof top air conditioning refrigerate lines.
- Convert any constant-volume fan systems to variable air volume (VAV) systems. Equip existing VAV systems with variable frequency drive (VFD) air controls.
- Paint outside air conditioning equipment white to reduce solar energy
- Paint darker roofs with white elastomeric paint to lower solar energy costs.
- Replace 8 foot, 60 watt, T-12 fixtures with more efficient T-8 fixtures with electronic ballast for a 30% gain in lighting energy. Payback can be expected in three years.
- Weather-strip door and thresholds.
- Turn down temperatures on water heaters if higher temperatures are not needed. Disconnect those not being used.
- During outdoor sports season monitor on/off times for gym lights.
- Convert all EXIT signs to LED EXIT signs.
- Turn computers off when not in use.

- Conduct an energy survey of all athletic field lighting.

The Office of Facilities and Support Services currently collects data on energy consumption for district schools and makes this information available to site administrators. We recommend that the district have site administrators pay their utility bills and include in their energy management plan an incentive program to schools that allows schools to benefit from the savings realized from lowering energy costs.

The district should also contact the Florida Energy Office at the Department of Community Affairs or the local utility provider to determine if free energy audits are offered in their area.

The district needs to do a better job of managing energy demand and servicing equipment

District management concedes that it could also save on energy costs by doing a better job of managing demand and improving preventive maintenance to equipment. Chillers are not sequenced; consequently, when demand is up, the chillers come on all at once spiking demand causing the district to pay a higher rate. In addition, management was unsure of whether the district had ever tried to negotiate lower overall rates or take advantage of rebates offered by the utility company.

Currently, the district is understaffed by three HVAC technicians. Sixteen schools do not have a technician assigned. The remaining technicians get multiple calls for service. Often systems are put "in hand" to override the energy management control system to keep the units running 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to reduce complaints. The district is advertising for three HVAC technicians, but maintenance staff complained in our focus group that the district compensation offered is too low to attract and keep qualified applicants. Although the district has negotiated with Siemens Building Technologies to offer back-up HVAC support, one district manager stated that outside technicians are often not familiar with district equipment and do not have laptops or know passwords to access the systems. In addition, the district has experienced difficulty in getting outside technicians qualified to service chillers to respond quickly to emergencies.

The district is understaffed with HVAC technicians; consequently, they do not have time to do preventive maintenance to service units on a regular basis. The Maintenance Department has contracted out for preventative maintenance to supplement the efforts of district staff, but all schools are not covered and the district needs blowers, air handlers and pans cleaned on a regular basis. Older schools have older equipment, more individual window units and fewer emergency management system (EMS) controls. Units that are not properly monitored and serviced contribute to higher operating costs and poor indoor air quality.

The district has made indoor air quality a priority

In response to indoor air quality complaint at Rivers Edge Elementary School, the Maintenance Department created an indoor air quality response team and beefed up training to HVAC technicians and custodial workers. The district discovered some mold and mildew problems at Rivers Edge due to an inoperable exhaust fan. The Maintenance Department hired Pure Air Control Services, Inc. to perform remediation at the school. The maintenance director reports that the department changed out equipment, repaired roof leaks, installed VCT tile and met with a task force committee on a monthly basis to ensure that the problem was corrected to the satisfaction of parents. The department contracts with Siemens Building Technologies to perform preventive maintenance and monitor indoor air quality at six sites. The maintenance director states that he is in the process of developing an indoor air quality evaluation and assessment form for the department.

The department also discovered that improper cleaning methods particularly for carpet were contributing to poor indoor air quality in schools. District custodians received training on proper cleaning methods

and, in the future, the district is considering replacing carpet with tile. The district is to be commended for developing a process for corrective action when air quality problems arise and training employees to identify and prevent air quality problems.

Recommendations ————————————————

- *Develop a district wide energy management plan that includes monetary incentives to schools to reduce energy costs, provides for energy audits, implements effective demand-side energy management, and takes advantage of energy rebates or lower rates offered by the utility provider(s).*

Action Plan 11-18 will identify the necessary steps to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 11-18

Implement an Incentive Based Comprehensive Energy Management Plan	
Strategy	The energy management project manager should contact peer districts, state and local agencies, utility providers and other stakeholders to identify resources available to the district for energy management.
Action Needed	Step 1: Develop a written energy plan that includes: • Transferring primary responsibility for controlling costs and payment of bills to users; • Goals and incentives to reduce usage, including sharing in savings; • Assistance with energy audits and reports on monthly usage; • Energy management training for administrators, principals, teachers, custodial workers and maintenance staff. Step 2: Meet with local utility providers to discuss options for rate reductions including rebates. Step 3: Create a plan to manage peak demands on HVAC systems to reduce operating costs. Step 4: Establish an effective preventative maintenance program. Step 5: Determine staffing levels to service district equipment. Step 6: Continue to expand and standardize EMS controls to monitor equipment. Step 7: Evaluate all long term energy management contracts to determine if continuation is warranted. Step 8: Provide regular feedback on energy savings to schools and school board.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services; energy project manager; maintenance director
Time Frame	January 1, 2004
Fiscal Impact	$530,000 annually based on an estimated 10% saving in electrical costs of $5.3 million annually. (Okaloosa School District experienced 12% in savings in six months after implementing an incentive based energy program.)

Source: OPPAGA.

24 The district has an energy management control system in place, and it is systematically expanding the system to all schools.

The district uses energy management controls for energy management

The St. Lucie School District is working toward an integrated district-wide energy management system (EMS) to remotely operate and monitor energy efficiency through systematic installation and replacement of equipment. Currently its monitoring systems are a hodgepodge of EMS, computerized thermostats and regular thermostats. This equipment varies in age and capability. As stated earlier, older north county schools have more individual air conditioning units, fewer EMS controls and experience more problems with chill water valves, dampers, and actuators that don't work properly.

To better control energy costs, the district recently hired an energy/air quality manager to fill a vacant project manager position in the Office of Facilities and Support Services. This individual is highly qualified and has good experience with district HVAC systems. He will be working with district personnel to coordinate the district's energy conservation effort and develop an energy management manual.

The department has 26 schools under HVAC controls. Siemens Building Technologies has seven performance schools; 14 other schools have HVAC controls and 6 have Teletrol Control Systems. However, according to one manager at any given time 9 or 10 of the 26 schools with HVAC controls have monitoring systems that are down. He attributed this to the sensitivity of the monitoring equipment which makes it prone to break down.

The energy management system allows HVAC technicians equipped with laptops to access the HVAC system to modify and troubleshoot problems within the district. Management can use reports from the intelligent metering system to identify inefficiently operating systems that may need to be serviced or upgraded. These reports are only now beginning to be used to target problems for corrective action.

The district has two long-term contracts in place to assist the district in lowering energy costs. One pays a bonus or split to the company on lowered energy bills; however, management could not satisfactorily explain what the district was getting for its money. These contracts were put in place several years ago under a previous administration and have not been updated or reviewed in years. The district needs to evaluate these contracts to determine if continuation is warranted as part of its overall energy management plan.

Standardization of equipment across the district is an expensive undertaking. However, the district's higher energy costs makes it necessary for it to move forward with systematically replacing old equipment with new system compatible equipment. The district has budgeted $3.4 million for additional EMS controls in its five-year facilities work plan. We encourage the district to continue with its planned program of standardizing the EMS control equipment.

25 The school district complies with federal and state regulatory mandates regarding facility health, safety, and energy efficiency conditions.

The district has a health and safety training program for maintenance and custodial staff which complies with the following federal and state regulations:

- EPA guidelines
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration's communication standards
- Federal and state regulations regarding the handling of hazardous materials
- Asbestos Hazardous Emergency Response Act rules
- Florida Department of Labor and Employment regulations

The district's health and safety training instructor is certified or has completed coursework to train in asbestos abatement, handling of hazardous materials, LP Gas Safety and Inspection Fundamentals, Radon measurement and numerous courses in fire safety. All custodians are required to complete "Right to Know" training that deals with the use and storage of hazardous chemicals.

Although the district has qualified inspectors and health and safety policy and procedures in place, the district received an audit finding for failure to timely correct deficiencies from the Auditor General on its last report released March 5, 2001. The district was cited for failure to timely correct safety and maintenance deficiencies disclosed in the annual facility inspections. The report warned that failure to correct these deficiencies could increase the risk that facilities would become unsafe for occupancy and could result in additional costs due to further deterioration.

The district responded that school administrators are responsible for correcting safety deficiencies paid for out of their school-based capital budgets. The Maintenance Department assists schools when requested on complex repairs. The inspection reports provided by the district indicated that most of the lack of follow up related to ADA issues. Additionally, the district's financial and compliance audit for fiscal year 2001 reported that appropriate action had been taken or is in the process of being taken to correct prior year findings. OPPAGA believes that giving the Office of Facilities and Support Services control and oversight of 50% of school based capital allocations will ensure that identified safety and maintenance deficiencies are corrected in a timelier manner.

26 The district is aware of and prepared for the permitting and inspection requirements of the Florida Building Code.

The district created a new Building Department to ensure compliance with the new permitting and inspection requirements of the Florida Building Code

To address the changes mandated by the new Florida Building Code effective July 1, 2002, the district created a separate Building Department administratively housed within the Office of Facilities and Support Services. The Building Department reports directly to the Superintendent of Schools. The district appointed a qualified Building Code Administrator, as defined in Section 468.603, *Florida Statutes,* who is certified by the Department of Business and Professional Regulation to serve as the building official to carry out the Building Code Administration Program. The new department will issue

building permits and review construction plans in-house for the district. It will serve as a check and balance for facilities to make sure things are built to code.

Prior to the revision of the Florida Building Code, schools were not subject to the code. Building permits were not required for construction. Under the revised code, school districts are allowed to issue their own permits and conduct required inspections by certified inspectors or seek permits and inspections from the local governing authority. Some of the key provisions for school districts include the following:

- It is unlawful for any person, firm or corporation to construct, alter, repair or demolish any building without a permit.
- No enforcing agency may issue a permit until the plans have been reviewed and found in compliance with the Florida Building Code (s.553.79, *Florida Statutes)*.
- No enforcing agency may issue a permit until the plans have been reviewed by a certified fire safety inspector (s.633.081, *Florida Statutes*) and certified to be in compliance with the Florida Fire Prevention and Life Safety Code (s.553.79, *Florida Statutes*).

The Florida Building Code applies to all:

- New construction
- Remodeling
- Renovations
- Repairs and maintenance
- Demolition

The new code requires:

- Plan review
- Product approval
- Building permits
- Inspection
- Certificate of Occupancy
- Maintenance permits
- Document tracking and control
- Permanent archival of documents

The district is fortunate to have a licensed building code administrator and, serving under him, a licensed commercial building code inspector qualified by 9 licenses to perform multiple inspections and plans review. Other school districts that do not have individuals licensed to perform multiple inspections for demolition, electrical, mechanical, plumbing, gas, foundation framing, sheathing, and roofing will need to rely on several individuals licensed to perform the required inspections prior to final inspection. The district is already in compliance with the licensing requirements outlined in Ch. 468, *Florida Statutes.*

The Building Department has published a manual with policies and procedures to be used by all district personnel to comply with the requirement that all school board entities conducting building construction, repair or modifications must submit construction plans and specifications to the Building Department State Fire Marshall for review prior to issuance of a building permit.

12 Student Transportation

The St. Lucie County School District operates an effective student transportation system. However, it can increase transportation revenues by seeking Medicaid reimbursement and decrease costs by taking steps to reduce bus vandalism.

Conclusion

The St. Lucie County School District's transportation department is generally effective in providing school-related transportation, and it is using 17 of the 20 best practices in this area. However, the district can improve transportation efficiency by examining opportunities to improve bus routing, documenting the need for students to ride specialized buses, and examining outsourcing opportunities. In addition, the district could bring in additional revenue by billing Medicaid for eligible transportation services.

During the course of this review, OPPAGA identified a number of district accomplishments in the student transportation, some of which are included in Exhibit 12-1 below.

Exhibit 12-1

The District Has Had Notable Accomplishments
in Student Transportation in the Last Three Years

- The district has an innovative program that allows the district to eliminate routine oil changes.
- As the result of a route audit conducted in May 2001, the school board approved going to a three-tiered bus routing system, which allowed it to reduce the number of bus routes.
- The district reduced the number of ineligible riders for school year 2002-03.
- The district has developed goals, measurable objectives, and associated strategies for its transportation program.

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Overview of Chapter Findings

OPPAGA reviewed the district's student transportation using the Best Financial Management Practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education and associated indicators. OPPAGA used several methodologies to develop chapter conclusions and action plans. For instance, on-site interviews with district-level managers were conducted and information was gathered from such sources as the district's student transportation activities, policies, and procedures. To receive additional input, OPPAGA interviewed district-level employees, route coordinators, bus drivers, shop foremen, principals, and teachers. Questions varied depending on the groups interviewed with their answers incorporated into this chapter where applicable.

An overview of chapter findings is presented below.

Transportation Services

1. The district improved the efficiency of its transportation function by discontinuing services to students that are not eligible for state funding and who can safely walk to school and by lengthening the distance between bus stops. However, it needs to develop a policy defining unsafe walking conditions and continue to review ways to reduce transportation routing costs. (Page 12-6)

2. The district ensures that all regular school bus routes and activity trips operate in accord with established routines and safely and promptly handles most unexpected contingencies affecting those operations. However, the district experiences problems caused by bus driver absenteeism. Additionally, district schools do not pay the full costs of transportation services for field trips. (Page 12-13)

3. The district effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants it needs. (Page 12-16)

4. The district trains, supervises, and assists bus drivers to enable them to meet bus driving standards and maintain acceptable student discipline on the bus. (Page 12-19)

5. The district provides student transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students. However, exceptional education employees are not always documenting the reasons students need to ride on specialized buses. Additionally, the district does not see reimbursement for Medicaid transportation. (Page 12-20)

6. The district acts promptly and appropriately in response to any accidents that occur. (Page 12-23)

7. The district needs to strengthen its efforts to ensure that students behave appropriately on buses and take action to identify and seek reimbursement from students who vandalize buses. (Page 12-23)

Vehicle Acquisition and Maintenance Functions

8. The district has reduced its spare bus inventory, but needs a bus replacement policy. (Page 12-25)

9. The district provides timely routine servicing for buses and other vehicles and responds promptly to breakdowns and other unforeseen contingencies. (Page 12-27)

10. The district ensures that fuel purchases are cost-effective and efficiently supplies school buses and other vehicles with fuel. (Page 12-29)

11. The district maintains secure, conveniently located transportation facilities. (Page 12-30)

12. The district has a lower maintenance staff-to-vehicle ratio than state guidelines suggest, but provides them with professional development opportunities. (Page 12-31)

13. The district maintains a cost-effective inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment for its transportation department. (Page 12-32)

Managerial Oversight

14. The district provides appropriate technological and computer support for student transportation operations. (Page 12-33)

15. The district has a student transportation accountability system with goals, measurable objectives, and strategies but could make minor improvements to its system. (Page 12-34)

16. The district coordinates transportation planning with other departments and community entities but does not provide the board with sufficient options on how changes in policies would affect transportation expenditures. (Page 12-35)

17. The district monitors the fiscal condition of student transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget. (Page 12-37)

18. The district provides regular, accurate, and timely counts to the Florida Department of Education of the number of students transported. (Page 12-37)

19. While the district has outsourced some transportation functions, it has not developed cost information it needs to determine whether further outsourcing would reduce costs. (Page 12-38)

20. The district periodically reviews the organizational structure and staffing levels of the student transportation program to minimize administrative layers and processes. (Page 12-39)

As seen in Exhibit 12-2, the district has two opportunities to save money on its transportation services.

Exhibit 12-2

Our Review Identified Two Ways the District
Could Reduce Transportation Costs or Increase Revenues

Ways to Save	Potential Savings
• Seek reimbursement for Medicaid transportation it currently provides to some district students will reduce uncompensated transportation expenses. (Page 12-22).	• The district can receive an estimated $68,326 annually or $341,630 over five years from obtaining Medicaid reimbursement for transportation services to eligible students.
• Reduce school bus-related vandalism and its unreimbursed costs. (Page 12-24).	• The district could save up to $69,000 per year or $345,000 over five years if it halved its costs by reducing or collecting reimbursement for school bus vandalism.

Source: OPPAGA and St. Lucie County School District.

Determining whether to take advantage of these opportunities is a district decision and should be based on many factors including district needs, public input, and school board priorities. If it uses the opportunities to increase revenues or reduce costs, the district would be able to redirect the funds to other priorities, such as putting money into the classroom or addressing deficiencies identified in this report.

Background

Located on the Atlantic Ocean, St. Lucie County covers 581 square miles in the southeast Florida area. The two main population centers in the county are Fort Pierce in the northern coastal portion of the county and Port St. Lucie in the southern coastal area. The western part of the county largely contains citrus groves and cattle ranches, and the middle part has no major population centers. The main growth areas are in the south and southwestern portions of the county.

The school district's transportation facilities consist of a main transportation facility in the west Port St. Lucie area and two secondary facilities in the Fort Pierce area. These facilities provide for the storage of buses as well as office and meeting spaces for operations employees.
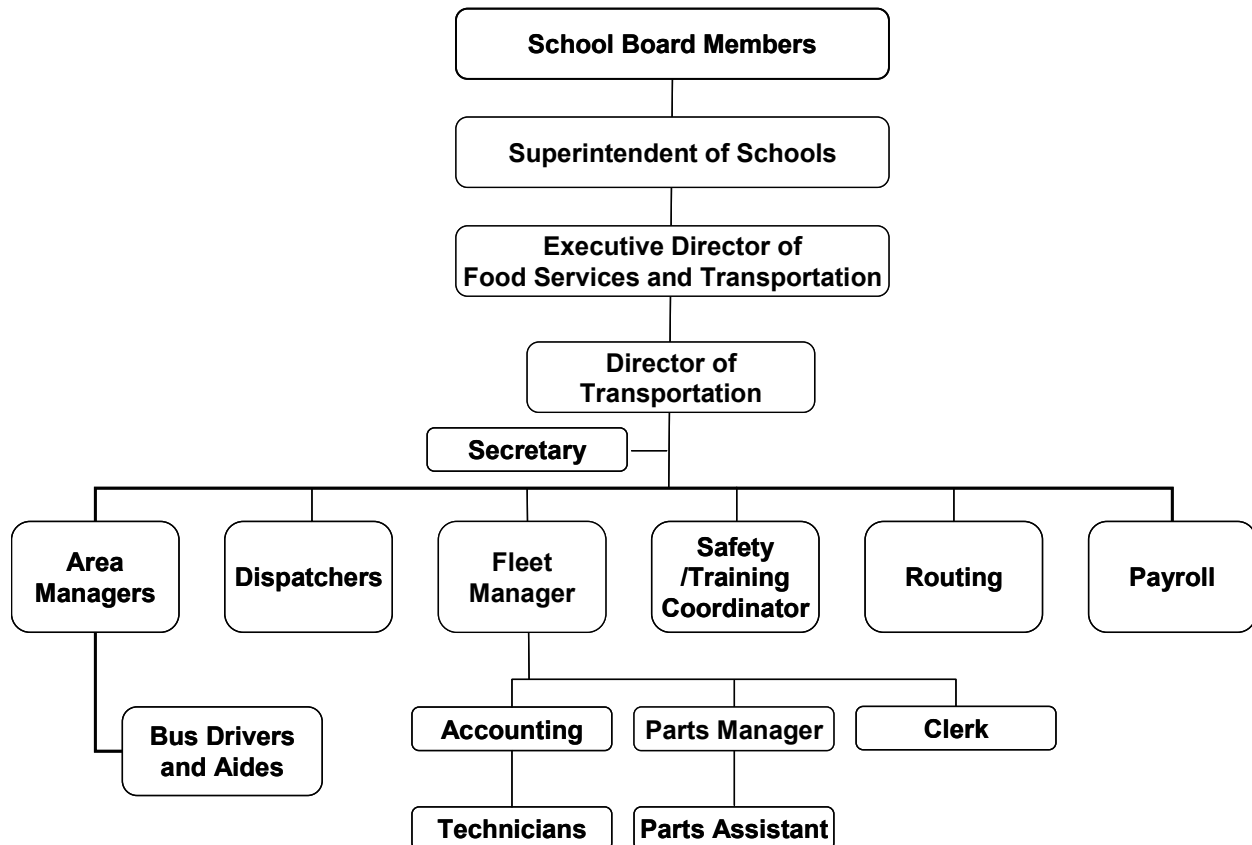
The geographic distance between the Fort Pierce and the St. Lucie areas presents significant challenges to the school district's transportation department. To help meet these challenges, the St. Lucie County School District has organized student transportation by functions. The operational function (managing and driving of bus routes) is split into four units, three of which are responsible for transporting students

within specified geographic zones and the fourth is responsible for county transportation of students whose disabilities prevent them from riding regular buses. Bus maintenance is generally centralized with the main transportation facility in west Port St. Lucie performing most maintenance functions and one of the Fort Pierce facilities performing some minor repairs. The remaining functions such as the design of bus routes, dispatching, and overall transportation management are centralized in the main west Port St. Lucie facility (see Exhibit 12-3).

Exhibit 12-3

The Transportation Department Is Organized by Function

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                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │ School Board Members │
                        └─────────────────────┘
                                  │
                        ┌─────────────────────────┐
                        │ Superintendent of Schools │
                        └─────────────────────────┘
                                  │
                    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                    │     Executive Director of     │
                    │ Food Services and Transportation │
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                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │   Director of   │
                        │ Transportation  │
                        └─────────────────┘
           ┌──────────┐        │
           │ Secretary │───────┤
           └──────────┘
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Area Managers	Dispatchers	Fleet Manager	Safety /Training Coordinator	Routing	Payroll

- Bus Drivers and Aides (under Area Managers)
- Accounting, Parts Manager, Clerk (under Fleet Manager)
- Technicians (under Accounting), Parts Assistant (under Parts Manager)

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

During the 2000-01 school year, the district provided transportation to 20,862 of its 29,538 students at 38 school centers throughout the county. Among those being served were 1,008 students in exceptional education programs who needed special transportation.

During the 2001-02 year, the district had 377 school buses (including spares) in service on 306 school bus routes. It also used these school buses for transporting students on approximately 2,774 extracurricular field trips and for transporting other community groups and organizations. The district operated most buses on three routes each morning and afternoon (providing transportation to an elementary school, a middle school, and to a high school), which was made possible by the use of staggered school opening and closing times. Such staggered times improve the efficiency of bus use.

Exhibit 12-4 presents selected student transportation data for the St. Lucie County School District and some of its peer districts in the state for the 2000-01 school year. This data indicates that the district's

performance fell within the middle of that of its peers on transportation operating cost per student and percent of expenditures paid from local funds. The district performed better than all but two of its peers on operating expenditures per mile. However, its bus occupancy rates were lower than all but one of its peers. To improve occupancy rates, the district moved to the three-tiered routing system in 2001-02. This increased its average occupancy rate from 66.76 to 70.27.

Exhibit 12-4

Comparative Student Transportation Data for St. Lucie County and Some of The Peer Districts Chosen by St. Lucie County School District

Measure	St. Lucie	Alachua	Escambia	Marion	Polk	Sarasota	Seminole	Peer Average
Square Miles	581	902	661	1,610	1,823	573	298	978
Number of Students Enrolled	29,538	29,673	45,007	38,555	79,479	35,499	60,729	48,157
Number of Students Transported	20,862	15,120	30,347	22,849	41,403	16,241	24,771	25,122
Percentage of Ineligible Students Transported	1.87%	10.28%	5.21%	3.48%	4.17%	5.25%	12.18%	5.9%
Number of Buses in Daily Service	313	180	382	380	469	221	342	329
Number of Miles Driven	6,626,589	4,913,208	6,341,215	8,566,053	6,394,199	5,281,000	7,552,914	6,508,098
Total Student Transportation Expenditures	$12,840,508	$10,479,891	$18,534,858	$16,669,308	$20,714,898	$12,564,399	$16,932,673	$15,982,671
Operating Expenditures per Annual Mile [1]	$1.80	$1.62	$2.57	$1.75	$2.82	$2.06	$2.09	$2.15
Average Bus Occupancy	66.76	84.00	79.55	60.13	88.28	73.65	72.53	76.36
Operating Percentage State Funding [1]	64.67%	79.57%	74.73%	63.34%	97.99%	56.46%	58.54%	71.77%
Operating Percentage Local Funding [1]	35.33%	20.43%	25.57%	36.66%	2.01%	43.54%	41.46%	28.23%
Total Operating Transportation Expenditures per student [1]	$570	$515	$529	$645	$432	$666	$628	$569

[1] Does not include any funds spent for the acquisition of school buses.

Source: *Q-Links: Florida District Transportation Profiles,* July 2002 for School Year 2000-01, Florida Department of Education.

Student Transportation Services

1 **The district improved the efficiency of its transportation function by discontinuing services to some students that are not eligible for state funding and by lengthening the distance between bus stops. However, it needs to develop a policy defining unsafe walking conditions and continue to review ways to reduce transportation routing costs.**

Routing specialists are responsible for the day-to-day routing functions of the school district

The district creates and updates bus routes with the assistance of a computerized routing program. The responsibility for creating and updating the bus routes falls on the four routing specialists, who are located in the main transportation facility in west Port St. Lucie. The district uses a computerized routing program to assist the routing specialists in creating and updating the bus routes. This program stores student addresses, displays these addresses on computerized maps of the county, and creates bus routes. The routing specialists review the proposed bus routes and modify them based on their knowledge of the area, input from other district transportation employees, or the public. Detailed directions, bus stop times, number of expected students at each bus stop, and maps are distributed to bus driver on the routes they are to drive. This same information is made available to substitute bus drivers as needed.

Bus routes are frequently changed during the year. In school year 2000-01, the district had 1,835 bus routes comprising 10,578 bus stops. District routing specialists estimate that during that year 1,000 of the bus stops were changed. Changes in the location of bus stops can be usually attributed to one of four reasons:

- growth in student population,
- changes in home addresses,
- request of parents, or
- changes in assigned schools (allowed at the end of each nine-week school period).

Other modifications include having to move a bus stop to correct a problem, such as those related to youth gangs or changing a bus route to eliminate overcrowding. In general, more changes occur in exceptional student education (ESE) routes than in regular student routes.

When they receive complaints, transportation employees fill out a standard complaint form. The routing department handles complaints dealing with bus routing and stops. If changes are made in a bus route or stop, a memo is issued to the parents and the school for the route. Other complaints such as those dealing with driver performance are turned over to the area managers or the transportation director for action. The transportation department logs complaints and responds to the individuals making the complaints. However, it does not systematically evaluate complaint logs to identify trends that indicate systematic problems.

The district modified school bell times to better ensure timely service

In 2001-02, the St. Lucie County School District changed its staggered school start times to help improve its use of buses. As a result, it was able to eliminate nine bus routes and the need for 18 buses. In the first year of implementing the new schedule; however, the district had problems with the timely pickup and discharge of students, especially those in middle school. Our May 2002 survey of 868 teachers in the district showed that 31% did not believe that school bus pickup and delivery was timely. Because middle schools had the last opening and closing times, they were most affected. Middle school principals estimated that buses were usually 15 to 20 minutes late each day in picking up middle school students in the afternoon with some buses having been over an hour late.

To address the timeliness issue, the district further modified its bell schedules for the 2002-03 school year. These schedules increased the time between elementary and middle tiers by 15 minutes. In addition, the district trained all school administrators assigned to ramp management duties in bus loading and unloading procedures. This training emphasized the importance of timeliness and maintaining schedules. According to transportation employees and middle school principals, the timeliness of bus arrival and departure times improved significantly in school year 2002-03.

Then district increased the number of on-site safety reviews it conducts for proposed changes to bus routes and stops prior to approving the changes

According to district employees, the routing employees or district safety/security officers are to physically inspect proposed bus routes or bus stop locations to ensure their safety. However, district employees reported that only an estimated one-third of all new stops used in school year 2001-02 had been reviewed for safety by December 2001.

For school year 2002-03, the district resolved this issue though the use of "dry runs" and area managers riding routes. Before schools opened in the fall, bus drivers completed "dry runs" (without students onboard) of their assigned routes and reported any problems to the routing department for modification. After schools opened, route managers and the safety/training conduct route verifications and assessments by riding a minimum of 10 complete routes per week. By November 2003, all bus routes and stops were checked for safety and practicality.

In 2001-02, the district reduced the number of students it transports who are ineligible for state transportation funding

The state provides transportation funding for all students who live more than two miles from their assigned schools, elementary students living closer to their schools if they would walk under hazardous conditions as defined by state guidelines, and those students who require specialized transportation to attend school. All other students are not eligible for state transportation funding. In 2000-01, the St. Lucie County School District transported 398 students who were not eligible for state transportation funding. This amounted to 1.9% of the students the district transports, which was lower than the percentage of ineligible riders in peer districts and the seventh lowest percentage of ineligible riders in the state.

In response to questions we posed during our fieldwork, the district reduced the number of ineligible riders it transports to 273 students, with an estimated annual savings of $47,975 ($242,125 over five years). The district could save an additional $49,025 if it discontinued transporting the remaining students who do not meet state guidelines for transportation funding. However, district safety employees examined the routes and determined that the remaining 273 students that do not meet state guidelines would be subject to unsafe walking conditions if they were not riding a bus.

It can be an appropriate local decision for districts to provide transportation to some students who face unsafe walking conditions that do not meet the hazard threshold established in state law. However, districts need to have formal policies that establish under what circumstances they will do so and what actions they will subsequently take to resolve the unsafe walking conditions and districts should identify the cost of providing this supplemental transportation.

The St. Lucie County School Board has established guidelines transporting students, but these policies need to be enhanced. The board's transportation policy provides that

> *Any student who resides more than a reasonable walking distance from the nearest appropriate school is eligible to ride a district school bus to and from school….*

> - *Students with special transportation needs as defined by s. 236.083(1) (b), (c), and (f), Florida Statutes, may ride a school bus regardless of distance.*
> - *The Board will transport children attending the public schools of the district within the limits of the law. A student who is subject to hazardous walking conditions, as determined by the Board, whose grade level does not exceed grade 5 may be transported to school by bus.*

This policy does not provide guidelines for what constitutes "reasonable walking distances" or "hazardous walking conditions." This creates the potential that parents seeking to have their children transported will not be subject to the same standards. The policy also does not identify what the district will do (such as working with local law enforcement and transportation officials) to address the hazardous walking conditions, such as requesting that sidewalks be added along roads that students must walk along. The district also has not regularly identified the cost of providing the supplemental transportation; this information should annually be reported to the superintendent and the board to allow the district's elected representatives to monitor the cost of this activity. (See Transportation Best Practice 16, below.)

In 2001-02, the district took steps to increase average bus occupancy, but should continue to look for opportunities to increase routing efficiencies

An important measure of transportation efficiency is average bus occupancy. Average bus occupancy is determined by dividing the number of students transported by the number of buses on scheduled bus routes. St. Lucie County School District's average bus occupancy rate in school year 2000-01 was 66.76 students per bus and in school year 2001-02 it was 70.27.

If a known number of students can be appropriately served using fewer buses, the average bus occupancy rate and the overall efficiency of the student transportation system will be improved. Given that not all buses in the district are operated at capacity, the key item that limits bus occupancy is time. The state has a policy recommending that elementary student bus routes times are limited to no more than 50 minutes with secondary student bus routes to no more than 60 minutes.

Working within this policy, the district can improve its average bus occupancy rate by

- increasing the distance between bus stops to a minimum of one-half (1/2) mile which reduces the time necessary to pick up a given number of students and enables the district to increase the area served and pick up more students and
- studying potential revisions to how students are transported for the controlled choice student

assignment plan.

The district increased the distance between bus stops

Bus drivers have to perform a number of functions from the time they leave one bus stop to the time they are ready to leave the next bus stop. These functions include

- checking to see if all students are properly seated in the bus;
- retracting electrically operated bus stop signs mounted on arms on the side of the bus and front bumper safety arm;
- accelerating the bus to the posted speed limit;
- starting to decelerate the bus;
- deploying the warning lights indicating that the bus is preparing to stop;
- stopping the bus and deploying the electrically operated bus stop signs and front bumper safety arm;
- opening the front bus door; and
- waiting for students to get on the bus and seat themselves.

Because all of these functions take time to perform, reducing the number of bus stops can either reduce the time it takes a bus to get to its final destination or increase the distance it travels and thereby increase the number of children it can pick up within established time limits.

Currently, the St. Lucie School District's policy is that bus stops will be placed so that high school students walk approximately one half mile or less from their homes to a bus stops and elementary students walk approximately one quarter mile or less. This is less than the state guideline of 1.5 miles. As a result of this policy, bus stops for elementary students are frequently placed less than one half mile apart. For example, in 2001-02, district employees analyzed a random sample of 30 bus routes (10% of the total routes) and found that of the 684 stops made during these routes, 276 stops (40%) occurred within one half mile of the previous stop. Most of stops less than one-half mile apart were located on elementary school routes.

In preparation of the 2002-03 school year and in response to questions we asked during this review, the district reviewed the placement of all bus stops to reduce the number of times each bus stops and increase average occupancy rates. As a result, the district decreased the number of stops by 33%, from 10,587 in school year 2001-02 to 7,112 in school year 2002-03. However, the district may be able to further increase reduce bus stops and increase occupancy rates if it changed its policy regarding the distances students walk from their homes to their bus stops.

The district has taken steps to reduce to costs of transporting students to magnet schools, but should consider other ways of reducing costs within the context of its controlled choice program

Another area for potential improvements in transportation efficiency is to consider changing how students are transported within the district's controlled choice student assignment plan. In 1970, a U.S. District Court found that the St. Lucie County School Board was operating a dual, segregated school system. To remedy this situation, school board adopted a controlled student assignment plan in 1991. School board policy 5.80 (2) (a) defines controlled choice as

> *…a student assignment methodology that permits parents to select the school their child will attend within the limits set by physical space and diversity goals. There is no individual residential attendance zoned for*

> *each school. Instead, the St. Lucie County controlled choice model divides the District into three geographically described choice zones, each containing several elementary schools, one or more middle schools and one or more high schools. Parents and students list their preferences from among the schools located in their choice zone, in rank order, with no guarantee of assignment to any particular school. Students are then assigned to a school based on physical space, diversity guidelines, transportation availability, parental choice, sibling priority, school-in-the-workplace priority, proximity priority, and lotteries. If the student is not assigned to his or her first or second choice school, the student will be placed on the waiting list for his or her first choice school according to the policies of this Plan.*

To achieve its diversity goals, the district created 3 zones that are primarily oriented in a north-south alignment and run most of the length of the county. Children receive bus transportation to any school within their zone. The controlled choice student assignment plan also includes five district magnet schools. Attendance to these schools is limited using the criteria such as diversity guidelines, date of application, and geographic restrictions as seen below.

- Village Green Elementary Extended Day Magnet School—Districtwide
- Fort Pierce Magnet School of the Arts—Districtwide grades 3-8
- Fairlawn Elementary Academic Magnet School—Zones 1 and 3
- Frances K. Sweet Elementary Academic Magnet School—Zone 2 [1]
- Lincoln Park Academy—Districtwide grades 6-12

The U.S. District Court reviewed the existing situation in St. Lucie County and ruled in September 1997 that the school district had eliminated vestiges of the past dual and segregated school system. As a result, the court withdrew its jurisdiction over the matter and returned authority over all school district decision-making to the appropriate local and state authorities.

The controlled student choice assignment plan has addressed the district's historical segregation problem, but raises the district's transportation costs. [2] With the controlled choice plan, students in the same neighborhood can be bused to many different schools; and, as court records show, "the district is finding that more and more parents and students are choosing schools farther from their residence in order to obtain an educational program they want or in order to attend a school they perceive as first rate." These choices come with increased transportation costs and student time spent on buses as the travel distances between homes and schools increase.

The district is attempting to reduce the cost of transporting magnet school students by establishing three transfer centers (located at C.A. Moore, Dan McCarty and Forest Grove) for the students attending the two secondary age group district wide magnet schools beginning in school year 2002-03. Students attending a magnet school at the other end of the county from where they live will be taken from their local bus stop to the transfer center located in their zone, and then ride a different bus to their magnet school. During the first four weeks of school, district employees report using the transfer centers has

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[1] Although the district considers this a magnet school, it only serves students in one zone. Therefore, it poses no more transportation issues than regular schools.

[2] Controlled choice also allows the district to maximize its use of classroom space, thereby reducing its construction and instructional costs. See Chapter 10, Facilities Construction. The district has not analyzed the effects of the controlled choice program to determine how its overall expenditures have been affected by controlled choice.

been successful in reducing the number of buses going to magnet schools by 25 buses. The district estimates that this will save $133,556 annually.

The district should continue to monitor the impact of the transfer centers and expand this practice to the other schools if it is successful. It also should consider alternative busing strategies such as

- monitoring county demographics and, if possible, creating more compact zones;
- using "corridor" or "arterial" busing, by which parents transport their children to central pick-up points;
- limiting the number of times students may change schools during the school year; and
- requiring magnet school students living outside the normal attendance areas for their schools to obtain their own transportation.

These options could reduce district transportation costs and increase the level of district resources that could be devoted to instruction, but would require careful study and community input.

Recommendations ─────────────────────

- *We recommend that the district adopt a policy defining what it considers to be "reasonable walking distances" and "hazardous (unsafe) walking condition," what actions it will take to work with local law enforcement and transportation officials to address these conditions, and annually report the board and superintendent its costs of providing transportation to students who do not meet the state transportation criteria.*

- *We recommend that the district examine its policy regarding the distances students walk from their homes to bus stops to determine if longer walking distances would allow it to spread bus stops further apart thereby increasing occupancy rates or reducing bus travel times. The district should continue to strive to place bus stops at least one-half mile apart.*

- *We recommend that the district consider alternative busing strategies such as use of corridor busing, creating more compact zones, and limiting or eliminating magnet school transportation.*

    Action Plans 12-1, 12-2, and 12-3 provide the steps needed to implement these recommendations.

Action Plan 12-1

Developing Criteria for "Reasonable Walking Distance" and "Hazardous (Unsafe) Walking Conditions" and Encouraging the Creation of Safe Walking Environments		
Strategy	Develop criteria for "reasonable walking distances" and "hazardous (unsafe) walking conditions" and encourage the creation of safe walking environments.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The transportation department and safety team should develop draft criteria for what the district will consider "reasonable walking distances" and "hazardous (unsafe) walking conditions" and present the draft criteria to the superintendent.
	Step 2:	The superintendent should present draft criteria to the school board for approval.
	Step 3:	The school board should adopt the criteria.
	Step 4:	The transportation department should make any necessary changes to routes in compliance with changed criteria.

	Step 5:	The transportation department should continue to actively coordinate with local governments, law enforcement agencies, and community coalitions on ways to improve student walking conditions such as crosswalks and crossing guards.
Who Is Responsible	Transportation managers, superintendent, school board, routing employees.	
Time Frame	June 2003 and ongoing.	

Action Plan 12-2

Increase Distance Between Bus Stops		
Strategy	Examine the policy on walking distance between homes and bus stops to determine whether increasing those distances would enable the district to increase average occupancy rates.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The transportation department should comprehensively review the impact of lengthening the distance students walk between their homes to increase bus occupancy rates and present the results to the superintendent.
	Step 2:	The superintendent should present the report and any recommendation to change the policy on the distance students walk between their homes and bus stops to the school board.
	Step 3:	The school board should vote for any proposed change in its policy on the distance students walk between their homes and bus stops.
	Step 4:	Transportation department should make necessary changes to routes in compliance with changed board.
Who Is Responsible	Transportation managers and route coordinators, superintendent, and school board.	
Time Frame	June 2003	

Action Plan 12-3

Conduct Study to Reduce Transportation Costs within Controlled Choice Student Assignment Plan		
Strategy	Study ways to reduce transportation costs by modifying the controlled choice program.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The district should examine the transportation and other costs associated with the controlled choice program as well as the potential costs associated with modifying the program. Changes to be considered include the current pilot magnet school transportation system, choice zones and their boundaries and the use of corridor busing. This review would present the impact of changes on the student transportation system including number of buses needed, drivers needed, and savings to the district. It would also present the potential effect of these changes on the district's ability to achieve diversity in its school populations and on the costs of constructing and operating schools. The results of the review should be given to the superintendent.
	Step 2:	The superintendent should present the report to the school board and recommend any changes that could reduce transportation costs without having an unreasonable effect on the district's achievement of its diversity goals.
	Step 3:	School board should vote upon the proposed changes in board policies regarding the controlled choice program.
	Step 4:	The transportation department should make necessary changes to routes in compliance with changed board policy.
Who Is Responsible	Transportation managers and route coordinators, finance personnel, facilities personnel, superintendent, and school board.	
Time Frame	July 2003	

2 The district ensures that all regular school bus routes and activity trips operate in accord with established routines and safely and promptly handles most unexpected contingencies affecting those operations. However, schools do not pay the full costs of transportation services for field trips.

The district has established policies and procedures to deal with overcrowding, students leaving the bus at other than their normal bus stop, and bus breakdowns

Bus overcrowding is an infrequent problem in the school district. According to route coordinators, the beginning of the school year is the most frequent time when overcrowding occurs. The drivers who find that their buses are over capacity at afternoon dismissal will notify the dispatcher of the situation and either get permission to proceed or have students transferred to another bus. In morning pickup overflows, the driver will take a head count with names to determine if students belong on another bus or are unauthorized riders. If the new riders are legitimate, bus stops will be adjusted or a larger bus assigned within 24 hours.

The district has a policy that states that students cannot get off the school bus at stops other their assigned home stops without the written permission of their parents or guardians and principals. The district has established procedures to use in case of bus breakdowns. These procedures have been distributed to shop foremen, area managers, dispatchers, security officers, and bus drivers.

Some students have longer bus rides than provided by board guidelines

State policy limits the time students ride buses to 50 minutes for elementary students and 60 minutes for secondary school students. However, some students have bus rides that exceed these limits. In the fall of 2002, 464 elementary school students rode buses in excess of 50 minutes and 509 middle and high school students rode buses in excess of 60 minutes. The primary reason for these excessive ride times is the long distances between the students' homes and their assigned schools.

The district did not have an effective process to deal with the impact of driver absences on bus schedules, but now has more substitute drivers

The district has procedures to limit driver absenteeism. It gives bus drivers four days of sick leave on the first pay period of each year. Drivers then earn one additional day in September, October, November, December, January, and February for a total of nine sick days per year. Drivers may use up to five (5) days of their sick leave as personal leave with pay. They must request permission to use leave other than sick or emergency leave from their immediate supervisor at least 48 hours in advance of taking the leave. This allows the supervisor to arrange for a substitute driver.

However, these procedures are ineffective in ensuring that the district has sufficient drivers to operate all bus routes in a timely manner. A primary problem is that the district lacks enough substitute bus drivers. The district had 28 substitute drivers as of May 2002. However, district employees indicated that two of these substitute bus drivers were driving regular bus routes for months and were thus not available to substitute on other routes. Other substitute bus drivers are not available due to their wish to drive only field trips. As a result, the district had few available substitute drivers available to substitute for regular bus drivers. For example, during our initial field visit in May 2002, only 9 drivers were available for

substitute work. In contrast, the district had an average of 21 drivers absent per day during school year 2001-02.

The district has made efforts to recruit additional substitute drivers and reports that as of September 2002, it employed 47 substitute bus drivers. However, some of these drivers were classified as "waiting to be permanent", which indicates that they have been assigned regular routes. This left 24 drivers available for substitute work.

When there are insufficient substitute drivers, area transportation managers resort to "patching" routes. "Patching" routes involves broadcasting a call to all bus drivers to identify those who believe that they have sufficient time and bus capacity to pick up students at bus stops that will not have regular bus service due to lack of bus drivers. While this method allows students to be picked up from bus stops who would otherwise not have service, it contributes to the problem of buses arriving late to school due to driver inexperience with the service area and lack of time between bus routes on the current three-tier bus schedule.

In addition to employing more substitutes, the district can take other actions to reduce problems associated with regular driver absenteeism. For example, the district could develop a driver attendance incentive program to offer drivers incentives for not being absent from work. The district should determine whether employing more substitutes or providing driver attendance incentives is more cost effective in reducing problems caused by driver absenteeism.

The district's field trip manual contains rules and procedures regarding field trips

The district schedules buses and drivers for the many miles of trips taken by students for educational, extracurricular, and athletic purposes. Students in the district traveled 262,689 miles on field trips using district-provided transportation in school year 2000-01. Field trip miles accounted for 4% of all school bus miles during the year (6,626,589 miles). The current field trip manual requires that the transportation department receive bus trip requests at least 14 days (10 working days) in advance of the trip. While only authorized exception to this time-line is for athletic competitions in which trips are contingent upon game results, transportation employees have said schools schedule field trips only 48 hours in advance. Schools canceling trips less than 24 hours in advance are charged a fee based on the estimated time and mileage requested on the trip form.

The bus drivers for field trips are selected based on a seniority system in accordance with the negotiated union contract. At the beginning of the school year, the most senior driver is offered the opportunity to drive the first field trip. If the driver declines the field trip, the driver is put on the bottom of the seniority list and the next senior driver is offered the field trip. This continues until a driver is found for the trip. After completing the field trip, the bus driver is put on the bottom of the seniority list. The one exception to this procedure occurs for field trips taken during the morning and afternoon bus routes. Substitute bus drivers who wish to drive only field trips are used for these field trips.

Schools are not fully compensating the transportation budget for school-controlled trips using district buses

The St. Lucie County School District provides four types of transportation for its students.

- Core bus routes. These trips take students from their bus stops to schools in the morning and return them in the afternoon. They account for the majority of miles driven by school buses. These trips are controlled by the district and paid for by districtwide allocations.
- After-school activity trips. These trips involve transporting students to or from district-wide extracurricular activities and thereby facilitate student participation in these programs as part of the

district's school choice program. Generally, these trips take students from their schools to centralized neighborhood drop-off points (not regular bus stops). The trips are controlled by the district and paid from district-wide funds.

- Field and athletic trips. These trips take students from their schools to places where they can observe real-life educational or instructional situations or participate in athletic events. They are generally requested by schools and paid for from school budgets.

- After school tutorials. These trips take students participating in after-school tutorial programs from their schools to neighborhood drop off points. These trips are also scheduled and paid for by individual schools.

Schools may not be fully reimbursing the transportation department for the transportation costs school-controlled trips. The district charges schools $.50 per mile and $20 per hour for driver time for their school-controlled trips. These reimbursement rates were set in the 1998-99 school year and have not been adjusted since that time. District transportation believes that these rates do not fully cover the cost of school-controlled trips. The district charges other organizations such as the YMCA and local city parks and recreation programs $1 per mile per bus for use of district buses, with those organizations directly paying for driver time.

Based on a district analysis of school-controlled trips taken in the 2001-02 school year, the district estimates the unreimbursed cost of providing the trips was $176,000. According to district employees, the district has modified the procedures used to account for the cost of transportation services in order to isolate the costs of each type of transportation service. In school year 2002-03, schools will be responsible for managing the budgets for school-controlled trips. This will benefit the district in two ways. First, it will give the district a more accurate picture of the cost associated with each service the transportation department provides. Second, it will allow schools to more effectively manage their resources according to their individuals needs.

Recommendations

- *We recommend that the district evaluate its options to reduce the impact of current levels of bus driver absenteeism to improve the timeliness of bus service.*

- *We recommend that the chief financial officer, with the assistance of the transportation department, set field trip transportation fees that will fully compensate the transportation department for all school-controlled trips. We further recommend that the revised fees be implemented immediately.*

  Action Plans 12-4 and 12-5 provide the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 12-4

Evaluate options to reduce impact of bus driver absenteeism on operations	
Strategy	Evaluate options available to reduce the impact of current levels of bus driver absenteeism to improve the timeliness of service.
Action Needed	Step 1: The transportation department should examine the impact of absent drivers on district transportation operations including the timeliness of bus routes and the need for substitute bus drivers and consider options such as hiring additional substitute bus drivers and establishing a bus driver attendance incentive to reduce the impact of absent drivers on operations.

	Step 2: The transportation department should present the study to the superintendent. In turn, the superintendent will present the study to the school board with a recommendation that the board adopt the study and its recommendations.
	Step 3: The school board should adopt the study and recommendations.
	Step 4: The district personnel and transportation departments should implement the approved recommendations.
Who is Responsible	Transportation managers, district superintendent, school board, district personnel office
Time Frame	The beginning of school year 2003-04

Action Plan 12-5

Schools Fully Reimburse the Transportation Department for School-Controlled Trip Costs Using District Buses	
Strategy	Establish school-controlled trip transportation fees that fully reimburse the transportation department for trips using school buses.
Action Needed	Step 1: The chief financial officer, with the assistance of the transportation department, should calculate the transportation department's current cost associated with school-controlled trips (e.g., cost of drivers, equipment, and administration) and devise a school-controlled trip rate structure that allows all of these costs to be reimbursed to the transportation department.
	Step 2: The chief financial officer should request that the school board, through the district superintendent, make the new school-controlled trip rate structure effective immediately.
	Step 3: The school board should approve the new school-controlled trip rate structure and makes the new rate structure effective immediately.
	Step 4: The chief financial officer, with the assistance of the transportation department, should disseminate this information to the district schools.
	Step 5: The chief financial officer, with the assistance of the transportation department, should calculate the cost of school-controlled trip transportation prior to the beginning of each school year and disseminate this information to the district schools.
Who is Responsible	Chief financial officer, transportation department managers, district superintendent, school board
Time Frame	Completion of the above steps by the beginning of school year 2003-04 and each subsequent school year.

3   The district effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants it needs.

The St. Lucie County School District has some turnover in its bus drivers and assistants. For the school year beginning in August 2001, the district started out with 307 drivers and 42 attendants. As of April 2002, 40 drivers (13%) and seven attendants (16.67%) had left their positions. The district estimates that ten percent to 15% of drivers terminate employment with the district annually. According to district employees, this type of turnover is expected; they would be concerned if turnover rates were 25% or more.

The school district does not systematically collect information on why bus drivers and assistants leave their positions by holding formal exit interviews with personnel who are leaving their positions. However, from informal interviews, transportation department managers believe that half of the drivers

terminated their bus driving jobs to work for different employers and the remaining drivers retire, resign for poor health, or were terminated for poor performance. Further, it is believed that drivers continue on the job because they want the district's benefit package, want the independence of being a bus driver, and enjoy serving their students. However, by developing a more formal system of conducting exit interviews with transportation personnel, the district may be able to obtain more accurate information on the district's relative competitiveness for bus drivers and the changes it may need to make to more effectively recruit and retain bus drivers and assistants.

The district has several means of advertising bus driver positions

The district uses several methods to notify the public of job opportunities for bus drivers. It places ads for drivers on local cable TV channels and in local newspaper classified advertising sections. For example, the district has placed newspaper ads that solicit substitute bus drivers and informs applicants that no high school diploma or GED is required, training is provided at no cost, the applicants need a good driving record and the ability to work with small children, and starting pay is $8.50 an hour. [3] The district also posts position vacancies at school locations, on the district web page and recruits at job fairs.

The transportation department gives individuals inquiring about bus driver or attendant jobs employment applications and refers them to the personnel office. The personnel office takes the completed application and conducts background checks while the transportation department checks driving records from the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. The district provides commercial driver license training through a contract with Indian River Community College at no cost to the driver. After drivers complete the training and are hired, they are given drug-screening tests.

The district offers higher starting salaries for bus drivers than neighboring districts

The starting salary for regular bus drivers is higher in St. Lucie County School District than starting salaries in nearby counties. The district's starting salary for regular bus drivers is $12.19 per hour (2001-02 salary schedule). In August 2002, school districts in neighboring counties (Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, and Palm Beach) had starting salaries for bus drivers that ranged from $8.00 to $9.98 per hour with an average salary of $9.08. Although relatively high starting salaries can help it attract bus drivers, the district should periodically study local labor markets to ensure that it is not offering bus drivers higher starting salaries than necessary and use the results of the study in labor negotiations.

Recommendations────────────────────

- *We recommend that the district improve the data it collects to assist it in meeting the challenge of recruiting and retaining the bus drivers and attendants it needs.*

- *We recommend that the district examine the local labor market to determine whether it should negotiate changes in starting bus salaries*

  Action Plans 12-6 and 12-7 provide the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

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[3] The $8.50 per hour starting pay is for substitute bus drivers. Starting salary for regular bus drivers is $12.19 per hour (2001-02 salary schedule)

Action Plan 12-6

Employment-Related Data Collection and Analysis	
Strategy	Collect and analyze bus driver and attendant exit interviews to help formulate and implement plans to improve the district's efforts to recruit and retain bus drivers and attendants.
Action Needed	Step 1: Transportation managers, with the assistance of the district's Personnel Department, should take the necessary steps determine what information should be collected from employees resigning their bus driver and attendant positions.
	Step 2: The personnel department, with the assistance of transportation managers, should create a bus driver and attendant exit interview guide to assist interviewers in conducting exit interviews.
	Step 3: The personnel department should conduct exit interviews with resigning bus drivers and attendants and share the results with the transportation department.
	Step 4: Transportation managers, with the assistance of the district's personnel department, should determine what information on wages and benefits need to be collected from adjacent school districts and local employers that are likely to be competing for the pool of applicants for positions as bus drivers and attendants. They should also determine what school districts and local employers this information should be collected from.
	Step 5: The personnel department, with the assistance of transportation managers, should survey the adjacent school districts and local employers for wage and benefit information as determined above on an annual basis and share the results with the transportation department.
	Step 6: Transportation managers, with the assistance of the personnel department, should periodically analyze exit interview and wages and salary information to formulate and implement plans for the recruitment and retention of bus drivers and attendants.
Who is Responsible	Transportation managers, personnel officer
Time Frame	June 2003 annually thereafter

Action Plan 12-7

Determine the Need to Negotiate For Changes in Starting Bus Driver Salaries	
Strategy	Determine whether to negotiate with the union for changes in starting bus salaries.
Action Needed	Step 1: Using wage and benefit information obtained above, transportation managers (with the assistance of the district's personnel department) should determine salaries and benefits the district needs to offer in order to effectively compete with neighboring districts and the local labor market for bus drivers .
	Step 2: If necessary, district negotiators should use the collective bargaining process to bring bus driver starting salaries in line with the local market.
Who is Responsible	Transportation managers, personnel officer
Time Frame	May 2004 and periodically thereafter

Source: OPPAGA.

4 The district trains, supervises, and assists bus drivers to enable them to meet bus driving standards and maintain acceptable student discipline on the bus.

The district provides bus drivers sufficient training, supervision, and support

The district offers initial training classes for prospective bus drivers through a contract with Indian River Community College. Training classes allows prospective bus drivers to receive a class B (school bus) commercial driver's license. Training consists of 25 hours of classroom training covering topics such as student discipline, safe driving skills, and district policies and procedures. The trainees also receive 30 hours of behind the wheel training. The district also provides drivers with a physical examination to ensure that they are physically capable of safely operating buses.

The district also provides in-service training and testing for current bus drivers and monitors. Each driver receives three training days each year. In addition to "dry" (no students onboard) bus runs conducted just prior to the beginning of the school year, this training includes topics such as defensive driving, behavior management, emergency procedures, first aid, fire safety, and standard operating procedures. The drivers also receive yearly dexterity testing at the same time that they receive their annual driving physicals.

Transportation managers have regular interactions with and oversight of bus drivers. All area managers and training employees have district-assigned automobiles to enable them to observe drivers performing their duties; however, the area managers are frequently "tied down" to the bus compound taking care of immediate problems such as absentee drivers and complaints. According to transportation managers, district employees ride with bus drivers on an as-needed basis.

Driver performance is evaluated in writing annually through the personnel evaluation process but this process should be strengthened. A sample of evaluations reviewed showed deficiencies such as the driver lacking bus seating charts (a violation of both Florida Law and School Board Operating Policy) or excessive use of the radio. While the evaluation form requires that suggestions to correct deficiencies be written in the comment section of the form, the sampling of forms did not include comments for improvement in areas found deficient.

The district has a safe driver policy. This policy assigns points to various violations and outlines the actions the district will take as points accumulate. For example, a bus driver who was at fault but not cited in an accident involving property damage of less than $100 would be assessed one point. A driver accumulating one point within a year would receive a written reprimand. A driver who failed to stop at a railroad crossing in a bus loaded with children would be assessed 10 points. A driver accumulating 10 points in one year would have his or her employment terminated. An employee who commits a violation of the safe driver policy while in their own personal vehicle and elects to attend a defensive driving school to settle the citation will not be assessed points.

The transportation department has taken steps to ensure that all employees who are authorized to drive school buses either remain qualified or else receive appropriate suspension or retraining. The safety specialist reviews the DHSMV reports on all district drivers weekly. If a problem is found, the driver is contacted and informed that he or she must clear up the deficiency before driving again. The transportation department also places printouts from the state's traffic violation database in personnel files three times a year.

The St. Lucie County School District uses a drug and alcohol testing program to deter bus drivers and other employees holding commercial drivers licenses from using drugs and alcohol in the workplace. The personnel office uses private contractors to provide pre-employment drug screening for all new driver trainees. Using a random process, the personnel office selects regular drivers for testing each quarter. During the course of a school year, 50% of the drivers are tested drugs and 10% are tested for alcohol. Other drug and alcohol tests administered include those for drivers who have been involved in accidents in which the employee receives a citation and a vehicle was towed, who show symptoms of drug or alcohol abuse, and when need follow-up testing. District employees who test positive for alcohol or drugs are subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. According to district administrators, few tests have yielded positive results in the past seven years.

The district has an employee assistance program to assist employees who admit to substance abuse problems prior to test results being received. While in the employment assistance program, employees are not allowed to drive or repair buses.

Recommendations ───────────────────────────

- *None, as the district meets this best practice.*

5 The district provides student transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships. However, exceptional education employees are not always documenting the reasons students need to ride on specialized buses. Additionally, the district does not seek reimbursement for Medicaid transportation.

ESE employees do not always document reasons for placing students on specialized buses

Exceptional education (ESE) students need special services to meet their educational goals. These include students who are gifted or have learning disabilities, physical disabilities, or emotional handicaps. Some ESE students ride regular buses to their assigned schools. However, others need specialized transportation services such as wheelchairs lifts, supplemental medical oxygen, special transportation restraints, or controlled temperature environments. The district transportation program handles such needs by transporting these students using a number of specially equipped buses and their drivers and aides. Special transportation services cost more to provide than regular transportation services. Currently the district operates 53 of the specially equipped buses on daily runs and has six of these buses for use as spares.

Specialized student transportation needs are determined in meetings where teachers, psychologists, and parents develop individual education plans (IEPs) that specify the services the students need to receive. After the IEP is developed, transportation employees are informed about any needed specialized transportation services. Transportation routing employees take this information and subsequently adjust bus routes to provide the specialized services.

District employee interviews indicate that ESE personnel and the transportation department personnel frequently communicate about the transportation of ESE students and on counting numbers of ESE students for funding purposes.

As outlined in Chapter 5 of this report, district policy regarding ESE Students in general requires that students be placed in the least restrictive learning environment available to them. However, current school board policy is silent regarding specific guidelines for the provision of transportation services for ESE students, only saying that students with special transportation needs as defined in statutes (e.g., dual enrolled students and pregnant students) may ride a school bus regardless of distance.

IEPs should contain sufficient information adequately documenting the need for specialized transportation. However, our review of 25 IEPs of students receiving specialized transportation in school year 2001-02 found that only 14 of these IEPs contained sufficient information adequately documenting the need for specialized transportation.

Unnecessary specialized transportation of ESE students can increase transportation costs and reduce state funding. Lack of clarity regarding the district's policy on transporting ESE students can result in the district using more expensive specialized transportation services for students who can ride regular buses. The buses used by the school district for specialized transportation hold fewer students, frequently have longer bus runs, and cost up to three times more to per student operate than regular buses. District policy should ensure that ESE students ride a regular school bus whenever possible and appropriate. In addition, the district could lose state funding for transporting ESE students on specialized buses if their need for the specialized transportation is not documented.

The district does not seek Medicaid transportation reimbursements

Medicaid will reimburse the school district for transporting eligible exceptional education students to places where they receive medical treatments or services. For example, the district could receive a Medicaid reimbursement for transporting an eligible exceptional education student to and from school if the student receives physical therapy at the school site as part of his or her individual educational plan.

The district has not applied for Medicaid transportation reimbursements. District employees report that the ESE and transportation offices are working together to identify cost effective means to collect and verify the data the district needs to receive Medicaid reimbursement. However, these employees believe that the cost of submitting the claims would probably exceed the potential reimbursement.

The Department of Education has recently issued information on the Medicaid Certified Match Program for school districts. This information includes a spreadsheet districts can use to estimate the revenue they could receive if they billed Medicaid for transportation services. Using this spreadsheet and updated figures provided by the district, we estimated that the district would generate $146,626 a year in Medicaid reimbursements. If, as district employees believe, the district would have to hire two employees at an annual cost of $78,300 to provide the documentation needed to bill Medicaid, the district should be able to net $68,326 by billing Medicaid for transportation services.

Currently 10 school districts in the state are either filing for Medicaid reimbursement for transportation services or are in the process of doing so. The Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) is funding a pilot project in Orange County to enable the district to process its own Medicaid forms instead of using a third party billing agent. If the project is successful and moves to other districts, the St. Lucie County School District will be able to reduce its costs of processing Medicaid reimbursement claims.

Recommendations ───────────────────────

- *We recommend that the district review and modify its exceptional student education (ESE) procedures to ensure that students ride regular buses whenever possible and appropriate.*

- *We recommend that the district apply for Medicaid reimbursement for all qualified exceptional education trips.*

  Action Plans 12-8 and 12-9 provide the steps needed to implement these recommendations.

Action Plan 12-8

Improve Exceptional Student Transportation Procedures		
Strategy	District to review and modify its exceptional student education procedures to ensure that students ride regular buses whenever possible and appropriate.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The district exceptional student education (ESE) office, with the assistance of the transportation department, should recommend to the superintendent that the school district adopt a policy requiring that students ride regular buses whenever possible and appropriate.
	Step 2:	Based on this recommendation, the superintendent should approve the change to district transportation policy.
	Step 3:	The district exceptional student education (ESE) office, with the assistance of the transportation department, should modify the district's ESE manual to include guidelines regarding the use of specialized student transportation. The guidelines should include examples of situations where the use of specialized student transportation is and is not appropriate. The guidelines should also require adequate documentation of the necessity of any student who is approved to receive specialized transportation services.
	Step 4:	The district ESE department should disseminate the revisions to appropriate ESE employees, school employees, and transportation employees and take steps to ensure that Individual Education Plans contain documentation of the need for specialized transportation services.
	Step 5:	The district ESE office should design and implement an ongoing monitoring program to ensure compliance with the guidelines.
Who is Responsible	Transportation managers, exceptional student education (ESE) program manager, and superintendent.	
Time Frame	August 2003	

Action Plan 12-9

Obtain Medicaid Reimbursement for Transporting Eligible Exceptional Students		
Strategy	District to apply for Medicaid reimbursement for transportation provided to Medicaid-eligible exceptional education students.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The chief financial officer should obtain billing information on Medicaid-reimbursable transportation expenses and set up a system to bill Medicaid for these expenses.
	Step 2:	The chief financial officer, with the assistance of the transportation manager, should collect data necessary to bill Medicaid for reimbursable transportation expenses and bill Medicaid for these expenses.
Who is Responsible	Chief financial officer, transportation program manager	
Time Frame	Medicaid billing system to be operational by the beginning of school year 2003-04.	

Source: OPPAGA.

6   **The district acts promptly and appropriately in response to accidents.**

The transportation department takes various steps to prevent and minimize problems arising from accidents

Given the amount of time school buses are on the road each school day, it is almost inevitable that they will be involved in accidents. All school districts are required to report bus accidents involving $500 or more damage to the Florida Department of Education. The St. Lucie County School District had 46 accidents involving its school buses during school year 2000-01. Of these accidents, bus drivers were responsible for 17 and other drivers were responsible for 24. [4] Accidents ranged in severity from minor damage to $9,800 in damages.

The district helps prevent accidents by requiring bus drivers to conduct pre-trip inspections prior to all bus runs. Drivers document the inspections on written forms, which they turn in each week, and report any problems to shop foremen for repairs. To ensure that drivers are reporting all problems, the shop foremen spot-check the forms. Transportation managers also periodically observe the pre-trip inspections of the buses at the bus compounds. The district has disciplined drivers for not conducting the pre-trip inspections.

The district has taken various preparations in order to minimize additional problems arising from accidents. All buses on routes and field trips are equipped with two-way radios that are monitored by dispatchers from 4:30 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. on school days. Transportation supervisors (area managers and transportation managers), vehicle maintenance foremen, the routing section, and the district security office also monitor bus radio transmissions. Bus drivers conduct bus evacuation drills that principals observe and coordinate each semester. The district has procedures employees are to use when bus accidents occur. These procedures direct specific transportation employees (e.g., supervisors, the safety specialist, and district security officers) what actions to take when they find out that a bus has been involved in an accident or other emergency.

Recommendations —————————————————————

- *None, as the school district meets this best practice.*

7   **The district needs to strengthen its efforts to ensure that students behave appropriately on buses and it should take action to identify and seek reimbursement from students who vandalize buses.**

District policies guide student discipline actions

The district annually adopts codes of student conduct for elementary and secondary schools. Included in these codes are rules governing the conduct of students while walking to or from or waiting at district bus stops and while traveling on district buses. The codes establish four levels of infractions and a variety of disciplinary responses. For example, a level one school bus infraction such as refusing to obey driver

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[4] The responsible party was not documented in the reports of the remaining five accidents.

instructions can result in discipline ranging from a driver/student conference to the loss of bus riding privileges from 1 to 10 days. A level four school bus infraction such as an intentional threat to use deadly force against a bus driver can result in suspension from the bus for the remainder of the semester along with a mandatory parental conference with transportation and a school administrator.

To help bus drivers facing discipline problems on their buses, district drivers receive in-service training from the district on how to maintain bus discipline. Board policy requires that bus drivers submit written school bus incident reports of student misconduct to school principals. The district transportation office periodically schedules conferences between parents, bus drivers, and other appropriate district employees to help resolve perceived discipline problems on buses.

Despite the training they receive, bus drivers still have disciplinary problems some of which involve vandalism to school buses. The vandalism ranges from pornographic graffiti to destruction of bus seat covers and protective safety foam.

A weakness in school board policy is that it does not require principals to assess restitution of damage repair costs due to vandalism of a school bus. Instead, principals are allowed to administer disciplinary responses such as changing the student's seat on the bus or giving the student a verbal warning. In Fiscal Year 2001-02, the school bus vandalism cost the district $138,624. According to district employees, bus drivers frequently cannot identify perpetrators of many incidences of vandalism, which makes collecting restitution impossible**.** While identifying perpetrators can be difficult, other school districts attempt to reduce vandalism though the use of required assigned seating on buses, requiring bus drivers to check for vandalism in their bus at the end of each tier of a bus route, and the use of video cameras to monitor student activities while in transit. If, by taking more active approach to identifying perpetrators of vandalism and seeking restitution for the damages they cause, the district halved its uncompensated damage from school bus vandalism, it could reduce its costs by up to $69,000 a year.

Recommendations

- *We recommend that the transportation department take actions to reduce vandalism and the unreimbursed costs associated with it by taking actions such as improving the identification of vandals on buses by using required assigned seat policies, requiring that bus drivers check the insides of buses after each tier of a bus route for vandalism, and increasing the use of video cameras.*

    Action plan 12-10 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 12-10

Actions to Identify Reduce Vandalism on Buses and Associated Unreimbursed Costs	
Strategy	The district takes action to reduce bus vandalism and increase collection of restitution for bus damage.
Action Needed	Step 1: The superintendent should recommend a policy to the school board that requires principals to assess restitution and attempt to collect restitution when students vandalize school buses. The policy should specify actions principals and the transportation department should take when restitution is not paid.
	Step 2: The board should review and adopt the recommended policy.

	Step 3: Transportation managers should review the effectiveness of current procedures and techniques other districts use to reduce vandalism on buses. Based on this review, transportation managers should identify improved methods and techniques to prevent bus vandalism and associated unreimbursed costs.
	Step 4: Transportation managers should implement the improved methods of reducing vandalism on buses and the associated unreimbursed costs.
	Step 5: Transportation managers and the finance department should periodically review the district's cost to repair damage from bus vandalism and the amount of restitution it collects for this damage and, if needed, recommend any other changes necessary to reduce school bus vandalism costs.
Who is Responsible	Transportation managers, principals, superintendent, school board
Time Frame	August 2003

Source: OPPAGA.

Bus Acquisition and Maintenance

8 The district has taken action to minimize the number of spare buses it maintains, but needs to establish a bus replacement policy.

The district uses standard bus procurement and retirement practices

The transportation department in the St. Lucie County school system uses standard practices for the procurement and retirement of buses. Transportation department employees annually determine how many buses need to be replaced by examining bus records for factors such as high mileage and operating costs.

The district orders buses through the Florida Department of Education's bus purchasing pool. Transportation employees inspect all buses prior to placing them in service and assign newer buses to longer routes. Buses being replaced are declared surplus equipment and turned over to district purchasing for sale at auction. The district receives between $350 and $3,750 per bus at auction.

The district has reduced its spare bus inventory

In 2002, the St. Lucie County School District had a high percentage of spare buses. In February 2002, the district had had a fleet of 374 buses, 307 (82.1%) regular route buses and 67 (17.9%) spare buses. Approximately 40 of these spare buses were needed to temporarily replace buses undergoing planned and unplanned maintenance. In addition, according to district employees, the district needed an additional 8 buses for field trips. [5] This left the district with a surplus of 19 spare buses. By keeping buses it does not need, the district forgoes the revenue it could receive from their sale. In addition, since all buses including spares must be maintained in accordance with state standards, maintaining excess spare buses places unnecessary work on vehicle maintenance employees.

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[5] District policy prohibits the use of buses for special trips that would "alter, interfere, or interrupt" regular school routes. However, in recognition that the staggered school start- and end-times leave a small window of time available for field trips, the district does allow some field trips during scheduled bus routes with the buses driven by substitute bus drivers.

However, since the initiation of this review, the district has reduced the percentage of spare buses in its inventory. As of January 2003, the district school bus fleet consisted of 379 buses, 333 (87.9%) regular route buses and 46 (12.1%) spares. Of the spare buses, 4 are damaged and not in service, 35 are used to replace buses undergoing planned or unplanned maintenance, and 7 are used for field trips, or replacements for regular route buses.

The district has not established a bus replacement policy

Like all districts, the St. Lucie School District has an ongoing need to replace aging buses. To retire older buses and meet increases in demand, the transportation department purchased 16 buses at a cost of $944,466 in school year 2001-02 and 29 buses for $1,745,687 in school year 2002-03. While the district has purchased an average of 24 buses a year over the past 10 years, it has a large number of buses older than 10 years of age. As can be seen in Exhibit 12-5, as of December, 2002, 134 or 35% of St. Lucie County's bus fleet was 10 years or older.

Exhibit 12-5

In December 2002, the St. Lucie County School District's Bus Fleet Has Many Buses 10 Years Old and Older

Age in Years	Number of Buses	Percentage of Total
12	64	17%
11	70	18%
10	0	0%
9	25	7%
8	26	7%
7	24	7%
6	22	6%
5	25	7%
4	34	9%
3	26	7%
2	18	5%
1	16	4%
>1	29	8%
TOTAL	**379**	**100%**

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

An essential element for the operation of a school bus fleet is to ensure that buses within the fleet are replaced on a regular basis. Establishment of replacement schedules for equipment allows entities to budget for and replace equipment in an orderly manner. The St. Lucie County School District has not established such a policy. While exhibit 12-5 above shows that district bought buses in most years, it also shows the district did not replaced buses on a set schedule.

In the past, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) has recommended a 10-year replacement cycle for all public school buses in the state. However, FDOE no longer recommends a specific time frame in which school buses should be replaced. St. Lucie County School District transportation department employees are considering recommending that the board adopt a 10-year bus replacement schedule for the district, but decided to wait for new state guidelines.

Daily mileage and road conditions can affect the useful life of buses. For example, travel on unpaved or unimproved roads causes more stress on buses, which reduces their useful life. St. Lucie County buses used in daily route service travel an average of 20,573 miles per year for regular buses. ESE buses travel

an average of 22,349 miles per year. Approximately 12% of the roads buses in St. Lucie County are unpaved.

Many Florida school districts are successfully using bus replacement schedules that range from 12 to 15 years. St. Lucie County is currently essentially using a 12-year replacement cycle as evidenced by the age of bus found in Exhibit 12-5. If the district sets a formal 12-year replacement schedule, it will need to replace 209 buses over the next five years.

Recommendations ────────────────────

- *We recommend that the transportation department recommend a bus replacement schedule to the school board and that the board adopt a formal a school bus replacement policy.*

    Action Plan 12-11 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 12-11

Establish Bus Replacement Policy		
Strategy	School district to establish a bus replacement policy.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Transportation managers, with the assistance of the vehicle maintenance manager, should conduct a study using district data and professional judgment, to determine the optimal life cycle of buses operated in St. Lucie County. The study and its recommendations would be presented to the superintendent.
	Step 2:	The superintendent should recommend a bus replacement policy for school board approval.
	Step 3:	Once board approval is received, yearly bus purchases should be made in accordance with this policy.
Who Is Responsible	Transportation managers, vehicle maintenance manager, superintendent, school board.	
Time Frame	July 2003	

Source: OPPAGA.

9 The district provides timely routine servicing for buses and other district vehicles and responds promptly to breakdowns and other unforeseen contingencies.

Bus inspections comply with rules

State-required bus inspections are the foundation for most bus-related repair work. The state currently requires districts to inspect buses on a 20-day cycle, but is considering allowing districts to extend this schedule up to 30 days. These inspections cover all major operating and safety systems. District shop foremen schedule the inspections in advance for the entire school year and distribute inspection schedules to shop employees, area managers, and bus drivers. Inspection notices on bus dashboards remind drivers of scheduled bus inspections. If a bus misses its scheduled inspection, fleet maintenance employees notify area managers, who then notify drivers of the required inspections. Buses that are not in compliance with the 20-day inspection regulations have tags placed on the windshield to notify drivers that the bus is not to be driven without permission from fleet maintenance employees.

Transportation vehicle maintenance employees inspect buses at the district's south bus compound, as other bus facilities in the district are not equipped to conduct these inspections. [6] For buses that are stored in locations other than the south bus compound, the bus drivers come into the bus facility after their bus runs and receive a spare bus for use while their buses are being serviced. Transportation employees file bus inspection records in individual bus files in the shop foremen/vehicle maintenance administration areas. A Department of Education review of bus records in April 2000 showed that the district complied with the laws and rules requiring 20-day bus inspections.

OPPAGA observations indicated that vehicle maintenance foremen frequently "walk the floor" of the south bus compound observing inspections and repairs to ensure quality. Vehicle maintenance employees appear to be well organized and carry out their jobs efficiently.

The district effectively tracks and handles vehicle repairs

The district has effective procedures for responding to bus breakdowns and accidents. The transportation department documents locations of breakdowns, when the maintenance technician was dispatched, the nature of the problem, when the bus driver was back on the road, and when the technician was back at the shop. The district reports that it had 291 service calls in school year 2000-01 for the 7,087,488 miles the buses traveled during this period (4.1 service calls per 100,000 miles). These service calls range from vehicle collision damage to electrical problems on a bus.

The vehicle maintenance employees do not have formal guidelines to assist them on making cost-effective decisions regarding whether to make expensive repairs on older buses or to retire the buses needing these repairs. However, the vehicle service manager reports using an informal practice of looking at the cost of the repairs and, if the cost is more than $400 or fleet averages, examining the vehicle's records to determine whether the repairs are cost-effective.

The district tracks bus inspections and repairs using an automated maintenance program that the district obtained from a bus vendor. The district is currently working with the maintenance program's vendor to allow an automated 20-day inspection cycle instead of the 30-day inspection cycle presently built into the system. The only cost, performance, and operational data that the system is unable to supply is fuel-related information. The district is in the process of completing the fueling system to allow fueling information to be automatically input into the vehicle maintenance system.

Vehicle maintenance employees do not provide or track the routine maintenance performed for district vehicles other than school buses. In the past, maintenance employees reportedly took up to four days to service non-school bus vehicles. The district now contracts out maintenance of these vehicles to an area auto dealer who charges the district a $50-per-hour labor rate and keeps an open rack (repair space) for district vehicles. The departments owning these non-school bus vehicles are responsible for the upkeep these vehicles. In those cases where the vehicle maintenance employees do provide repairs to non-school bus vehicles, the vehicle maintenance function bills for work performed and is reimbursed by the appropriate department.

Innovative oil program saves district funds

The district has a preventive maintenance program to provide timely routine servicing of its bus fleet. District mechanics replace mileage-based service items such as coolant and fuel filters at the time of the 20-day bus inspection that is closest to the recommended replacement mileage.

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[6] In January 2003, District personnel reported that two bays in the north county transportation compound are again being used to perform routine bus inspections.

The district has established an innovative program to eliminate routine oil changes. The district uses engine oil that meets and/or exceeds the engine manufacturer's specifications, but needs to be changed only when indicated by an oil analysis taken every 9,000 miles of travel. [7] The oil manufacturer has given the district a product warranty that backs up all failures that are caused by its product. The district estimates that extending the mileage between oil changes has reduced labor costs and the amount of used oil that needs to be stored and disposed according to hazardous waste guidelines. District employees say that the superior lubricating qualities of the oil have increased the fleet fuel efficiency from 7.54 miles per gallon to 7.89 miles per gallon, thus saving the district approximately $15,000 per year. The School Transportation Management section of the Florida Department of Education has reviewed St. Lucie's information and believes that this oil system will save the district money each year.

Recommendations

- *We recommend that the district establish formal guidelines to assist the vehicle maintenance service manager in making cost-effective decisions on whether to make expensive repairs on older buses.*

Action Plan 12-12 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 12-12

Vehicle Repair Guidelines		
Strategy	Establish formal vehicle repair guidelines.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Transportation managers, with the assistance of the vehicle maintenance service manager, should evaluate repairs performed in the 2002-2003 school year. This evaluation will be used to establish vehicle repair guidelines to assist the vehicle maintenance service manager make cost-effective decisions on whether to make expensive repairs on older buses.
	Step 2:	These guidelines should be periodically updated.
Who is Responsible	Transportation managers and the vehicle maintenance service manager.	
Time Frame	August 2003	

Source: OPPAGA.

10 The district ensures that fuel purchases are cost-effective and that school buses and other vehicles are efficiently supplied with fuel.

District fueling system is effective but needs additional security

The district transportation department controls the district's fueling system. Fuel is obtained via a cooperative bid for the Indian River, Okeechobee, and St. Lucie school districts. The district has two fueling facilities: one in the southern compound has 20,000-gallon diesel tank and a 10,000-gallon gasoline tank and one north compound has two 10,000-gallon diesel tanks and a 7,500-gallon gasoline tank.

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[7] Normal oil is changed at a set interval, such as every 15,000 miles.

Under established procedures, the district orders additional fuel when gasoline tanks are at 500 gallons residual and diesel tanks at 8,500 gallons residual. In emergency situations such as hurricane alerts, the district keeps fuel tanks full to allow buses to be used as part of the county's established emergency evacuation system.

The fueling system is not automated. If they are available, attendants fuel both buses and other district vehicles. Otherwise, drivers fuel the vehicles. Attendants or drivers enter the amount of fuel taken, the vehicle's assigned number, and its odometer reading in log books. District employees expect that the district will have the fueling system fully automated in the near future.

Currently, security at the fueling facilities consists of security cameras, fences, and locked attendant's doors (locked except during 5 a.m. and 6 p.m. on weekdays). Several district employees have keys to the attendant's doors to allow for after-hours and weekend fueling. However, transportation employees do not routinely review video tapes showing the fueling islands to ensure that only district vehicles use the facilities. Instead transportation department employees take daily stick readings of tank contents and compare them to log information to check the accuracy and usage of the system. If they find a variance of 50 or more gallons in a three-day period, they then verify the fuel charge-out records (fueling logs) against fuel pumped. However this system may not detect all unauthorized use of fuel. Since most vehicles have fuel tanks substantially less than 50 gallons in capacity, it is possible that a non-district sedan or a pickup truck could fuel without being detected. District employees expect that full implementation of the automated fueling system will eliminate these security concerns.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection inspection records indicate no environmental problems with district fueling facilities.

Recommendations ───────────────

- *None, as the district will meet this best practice with the completion of the automated fueling system.*

11 The district has conveniently located and secure transportation facilities.

Transportation facilities are appropriately located and equipped

The St. Lucie County School District has transportation facilities in the West Port St. Lucie area (south bus compound), the Fort Pierce area (north bus compound) and the north Fort Pierce area (Westwood High School). All the compounds are fenced and lighted and have parking for all buses that are not in use. South compound employees perform all bus inspections and most repairs, with north compound employees performing only minor repairs such as replacing light bulbs. The south bus compound vehicle service center is a comprehensive, covered 8-service-bay facility. The north bus compound has two service bays but they are unused. The district is currently conducting a study to evaluate renovating the north bus compound service bays for use in bus inspections. [8]

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[8] In January 2003, District personnel reported that two bays in the north county transportation compound are again being used when perform routine bus inspections. If any repairs are required as a result of routine inspection, the bus is taken to the South County repair facility.

The south bus compound vehicle service center's floor layout appears to be appropriate. The facility has safety apparatus such as fire extinguishers, eye washes, and emergency showers. The facility also houses transportation maintenance and operational employees and associated files. The district has established procedures to deal with hazardous wastes generated at the service center. Antifreeze and used oil filters are collected and placed in labeled hazardous waste drums. Waste oil is collected and placed in a labeled used oil tank. When the drums or tank are full, the shop foremen call a specialized environmental company who is under contract to pick up these items and safely dispose their contents.

The south bus compound vehicle service center is equipped with a parts room. The rooms contain a limited amount of parts such as a few tires, light bulbs, and an alternator. The district has two employees dedicated to acquiring and distributing bus repair parts and supplies. Access to the parts room is limited to the parts men and shop foremen (shop foremen have access when parts employees are unable to be physically present in the shop).

Recommendations —————————————————————

- *None, as the district meets this best practice.*

12 The district has a lower maintenance staff-to-vehicle ratio than state guidelines suggest, but provides them with professional development opportunities.

The district's vehicle maintenance staffing level is lower than state guidelines

The transportation department currently employs 14 technicians to maintain the district's school bus fleet. The fleet maintenance service manager said that additional technicians are needed to perform necessary maintenance and inspections. According to a Florida Department of Education spreadsheet, St. Lucie needs 18 technicians to handle the present workload of 379 buses, an increase of 4 technicians.

However, DOE may be changing the current inspection standards. The current standard requires buses to be inspected every 20 days, but DOE is considering modifying its rules to allow up to 30 days between inspections. This would effectively reduce the district's inspection workload by 50%, and could allow it to better meet workload demands with its current staffing level.

The district encourages maintenance employees to improve their job skills

The school district provides training opportunities and financial incentives to encourage vehicle maintenance technicians to improve their job skills. In the past, selected mechanics attend Florida Association for Pupil Transportation (FAPT) bus repair classes in the summertime; however, this training has been eliminated due to district budgetary constraints. The district also provides training through periodic in-service sessions. One of the district's foremen who is a certified bus inspector trainer provides training to all new technicians employed by the district, enabling these employees to become certified as state inspectors. The district reimburses technicians who successfully take the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) tests for the costs they incur to travel to and take the test. It also requires its technicians to successfully complete the test before they can qualify for a position as a district certified school bus technician.

Bus technicians who own and use a full complement of tools in performing their assigned duties are allowed to use an annual one-time purchase order of up to $285 per year to cover tool loss, "wear and tear", theft, and breakage.

Recommendations

- *We recommend that the district review number of technicians if the state modifies its bus inspection requirements.*

  Action Plan 12-13 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 12-13

Determine the Number of Technicians Needed		
Strategy	Determine the number of technicians needed if the state modifies bus inspection requirements.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	After DOE issues new inspections guidelines, the district should determine the number of technicians it needs to meet the bus maintenance workload.
	Step 2:	If a change in the number of technicians is appropriate, transportation managers should make a recommendation to the district superintendent for action.
	Step 3:	If resources are available, the superintendent should recommend that the board authorize the hiring of additional vehicle technicians if needed.
Who is Responsible	Transportation managers	
Time Frame	Dependent on changes in the vehicle maintenance workload	

Source: OPPAGA.

13 The district maintains a cost-effective inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment for its transportation department.

Parts inventories are adequate in size and appropriately obtained

The St. Lucie County School District has one transportation parts room located in the south county bus compound. The parts manager and his assistant staff the parts room using overlapping shifts covering the time period of 5 a.m. to 6 p.m. during school workdays. Access to the parts room is restricted to the parts room employees and shop foremen (just for those times when parts room employees are unavailable).

The district properly inventories and accounts for vehicle parts. Transportation employees check new parts to ensure that they are correct, properly priced, and of appropriate quality. Parts coming into district parts rooms are properly inventoried and accounted for. They also check parts such as alternators that private vendors rebuild or service. The transportation department keeps its parts inventory on a computerized perpetual inventory program. Annual audits of the parts rooms show that little inventory is unaccounted for. For example, the parts inventory taken in June 2001 showed five errors in the 1913 line items inventoried with only one of these items being "short" with the shortage totaling $1.19 on an inventory of $202,000.

The district transportation parts room has relatively small amounts of inventory on hand. This can be attributed to use of "just in time" inventory practices and the return of unneeded items. The transportation parts computer system generates on-hand reports and reorder reports daily to assist parts employees in reordering items based on pre-determined minimum-maximum ("Min-Max") reorder points. The district returns parts that it no longer needs to vendors for credit. As the district continues to standardize its bus fleet, the transportation parts operation is able to continue to reduce the amount of inventory on hand.

The district obtains parts and supplies in an economical manner. District purchasing employees works with transportation employees to obtain necessary parts while minimizing costs. The district solicits bids from local and distant companies to supply items such as rebuilt alternators. The St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce has recognized that the district's transportation parts operation was very supportive of doing business locally but also had to spend the taxpayers' dollars in the most economic fashion. Service items such as towing contracts are also bid out. The district uses state contracts to obtain parts and supplies when appropriate.

Observations and discussions with fleet maintenance employees indicate that warranty information is tracked with warranty claims made as appropriate.

Recommendations ———————————————

- *The district meets this best practice.*

Managerial Oversight

14 The district provides appropriate technological and computer support for student transportation functions and operations.

Transportation operations have adequate computer support

The transportation department has a number of computer systems that assist it in conducting operations. The district uses one system for all district financial record keeping and budgeting. As previously described, the transportation department has computerized maintenance and parts systems; a timekeeping system to assist in the logging in of bus drivers and ensuring accurate time sheets, and a system for bus routing. As previously discussed, it plans to automate the vehicle fueling system in the near future.

Some functions such as the tracking of substance abuse testing records and personnel performance are not computerized. At present, it appears to be appropriate that these functions are done manually.

There appears to be adequate levels of coordination between the district's transportation and management information systems departments. This coordination is not done on a formal basis but is a continuous dialogue.

Recommendations ———————————————

- *The district meets this best practice.*

15 The district has a reasonable accountability system for student transportation but could improve it.

The district has established goals, measurable objectives, and strategies for student transportation

In its strategic plan, the St. Lucie County School District has established three goals for its student transportation program.

- Goal 1 – School transportation services will be provided safely and reliably.
- Goal 2 – Transportation services will be provided to all eligible students efficiently and within available budget allocations.
- Goal 3 – Transportation employees are well-trained, highly qualified, and motivated to meet the needs of the district.

The plan also contains measurable objectives and associated strategies for each goal. For example, the objective for goal 1 is to reduce the number of accidents involving student or passenger injury by 5% and associated strategies include training drivers in behavioral management and purchasing video cameras. In addition, the transportation department has a more detailed plan containing additional objectives and strategies.

The transportation objectives and strategies address three major aspects of transportation efficiency and effectiveness: safety, efficiency, and staff development. However, the objectives do not address one other major aspect of the program, service timeliness. Objectives for service timeliness could include the percentage of students whose travel time is at or below district standards, or the percentage of times buses operate on schedule. Related strategies could include reducing driver absenteeism, recruiting and retaining substitute drivers, inspecting buses according to schedule, or reducing unplanned bus maintenance.

The district compares selected transportation performance data to data of peer districts

The district has identified other Florida school districts it considers to be peers and exemplars against which it can compare its performance. The district compared its performance to that of peer districts on three measures: cost per mile, average bus occupancy, and staffing ratios. In the first measure (cost per mile), the district compared itself to 20 different peer districts. These districts ranged from Calhoun to Polk county school districts. In the remaining two measures (average bus occupancy and staffing ratios), the district compared itself to six districts each (a total of eight different districts). However, the district may be able to obtain more useful information if it used transportation characteristics such as number of miles driven to identify a standard set of peer districts looked at additional measures such as the such as percentage of state/local funding and percentage of number of non-eligible students transported.

Transportation performance is routinely reported to senior employees and the superintendent

School transportation managers provide senior employees and the superintendent with regular updates of the performance of the department on its goal and objectives. In addition, district progress on transportation goals will be assessed by peer committees as part of a districtwide performance assessment. (See discussion in Chapter 4, Performance Accountability).

Recommendations ───────────────────────

- *We recommend that the school transportation department establish objectives and related strategies concerning the timeliness of transportation services.*

   Action Plan 12-14 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 12-14

Develop Objectives and Strategies on Timeliness of Transportation Services		
Strategy	Develop objectives and strategies related to the timeliness of student transportation.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Transportation managers should determine which objectives to use for service timeliness and the strategies related to those objectives.
	Step 2:	Transportation managers shall recommend one or more objectives and strategies related to service timeliness to the superintendent for inclusion in the district's strategic plan.
	Step 3:	The superintendent will recommend that the board include the objectives and strategies in the strategic plan, and the board will include the objective and strategies in the plan.
	Step 4:	Transportation managers will provide district administrators and the school board an annual "report card" that shows actual performance for all selected performance and cost-efficiency measures in comparison with standards or the performance of peer districts.
Who is Responsible	Transportation managers, superintendent, school board	
Time Frame	July 2003 and annually thereafter	

Source: OPPAGA.

16 The district coordinates transportation planning with other departments and community entities but does not provide the board with sufficient options on how changes in policies would affect transportation expenditures.

No regular and systematic financial analysis of transportation needs and priorities

Although the transportation department coordinates its budget needs with other departments within the school district, it does not routinely provide the superintendent and board with a systematic assessment of student transportation policy options and areas of potential cost savings. Assessment of student transportation policy options should include discontinuing bus service to students who are not eligible for state funding and can safely walk to school, reducing the number of spare buses, realigning routes, and

reviewing the types of buses purchased. The transportation department should also work with the finance department to develop and present to the school board information on the transportation and other cost implications of board decisions regarding education programs such as school choice and magnet schools, charter schools, exceptional education programs, and transporting students who do not meet the state transportation criteria.

Consulting with others on areas impacting student transportation

Transportation employees have been involved in planning for decisions such as the location of the bus ramp at Dan McCarty Middle School and the future growth plans of the district. Transportation employees also communicate regularly with school district security officers and school resource officers on student loading and unloading issues.

Recommendations ————————————————

- *We recommend that the school transportation program, as part to the annual budget development process, review current and planned future operations to identify areas of potential cost savings. This information should be presented to the superintendent and the school board.*

  Action Plan 12-15 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 12-15

Develop and Present Information on Potential Cost Savings from Policy Changes		
Strategy	Develop and present information on areas of potential cost savings as part of budget process.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Transportation managers should review current and planned future operations to identify areas of potential cost savings. Areas of potential savings include eliminating transportation services to courtesy bus riders, reducing the number of spare buses, realigning bus routes to increase efficiency and effectiveness, changing transportation staffing, and reviewing the types of buses and equipment purchased.
	Step 2:	Transportation managers will present projected cost savings including the pros and cons of each option that decision makers can use to make informed decisions during budget discussions.
	Step 3:	This information will be presented annually to the superintendent, and school board.
Who is Responsible	Transportation managers, selected transportation employees, chief financial officer, superintendent, and school board.	
Time Frame	May 2004 and annually thereafter as part of the budget process	

Source: OPPAGA.

17 The district monitors the fiscal condition of student transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget.

Generally adequate district fiscal monitoring

The transportation department generally monitors its expenditures in an adequate manner. Transportation employees review expenditures on a regular basis with the exception of expenditures involving workers' compensation, utilities, and maintenance of facilities as these expenditures are not included in the district transportation budget. Budget amendments are made as necessary and coordinated with the district finance department. The vehicle maintenance manager regularly tracks vehicle maintenance repairs and costs to identify maintenance cost concerns that can adversely impact district student transportation maintenance and operations. Transportation managers regularly monitor payroll costs including any overtime, field trips, and training hours.

Recommendations ───────────────────────

- *None, as the district meets this best practice.*

18 The district provides the Florida Department of Education with regular, accurate, and timely counts the number of students it transports.

The transportation department performs student counts

The school district surveys the number of students riding its buses through sample counts conducted during October and February of each school year. The district sends these counts to the Florida Department of Education for use in determining the state funds the district will receive for student transportation. The district transportation employees notify bus drivers via memos of the actual student count days and instructions on how to fill out the forms. A sample of a correctly completed student count form is included in the driver handbook. To increase the number of students riding the buses during weeks in which student counts will be taken, the transportation department will contact schools to lift bus suspensions during those weeks. The transportation area managers review all completed count sheets for accuracy. Routing personnel and transportation managers randomly conduct additional reviews of the completed count sheets to ensure accuracy. The completed sheets are used to adjust bus routes as necessary to improve bus utilization.

The most recent Auditor General report dealing with this subject (dated July 25, 2000) found discrepancies that did not materially affect the district's compliance with the provisions of the Florida Education Finance Program. These discrepancies included reporting some prekindergarten students in the wrong ridership category and students reported in the two miles or more ridership category but lived less than two miles from school.

Recommendations ——————————————————

- *None, as the district meets this best practice.*

19 While some of the fleet maintenance functions are outsourced, the district has not systematically reviewed the prospect for privatizing all student transportation functions such as transportation of students or the fleet maintenance operation.

Selected maintenance repairs are privatized

While some of the fleet maintenance functions are outsourced to private vendors, the St. Lucie school transportation program has not systematically reviewed the prospect of privatizing all student transportation functions, including such functions as the driving of regular school bus routes and all maintenance operations associated with school buses. District transportation managers have not systematically broken down operations into functions, nor have they considered certain costs such as utilities, maintenance, and unemployment compensation when determining the full cost of its student transportation. Without this information, the district cannot establish reliable cost information for the each of the various student transportation functions that compose the St. Lucie County student transportation system. Reliable unit cost data would enable the district to compare its in-house costs to those of private vendors and determine whether privatization would be desirable.

The district currently contracts out certain vehicle maintenance functions such as the rebuilding of transmissions and alternators, towing and wrecker services, glass repair, radiator work, and tire mounting and balancing. It also contracts for charter bus service. The district contracts out maintenance on district vehicles other than school buses. The decisions to contract out these services resulted from the review of in-house capabilities and cost versus the cost to outsource these services. Vendors are selected based on bid comparisons, warranties, and experience with the quality of services provided by various vendors. Vehicle maintenance foremen check the quality of the services received to ensure standards are met. The district should systematically review its functions after establishing reliable unit cost information to determine which additional functions, if any, would be beneficial to privatize.

Recommendations ——————————————————

- *We recommend that the school transportation program review all school transportation functions every five years to determine if the district could save money and/or improve service quality by privatizing selected transportation functions.*

  Action Plan 12-16 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 12-16

Review Transportation Functions for Privatization Opportunities	
Strategy	Review student transportation functions every five years to determine if the district could save money and/or improve service quality by privatizing selected transportation functions.

Action Needed	Step 1:	Transportation managers, with the assistance of transportation employees, should divide the district's student transportation operation into functions such as school bus routing, operation (driving) of school buses, and vehicle maintenance and sub-functions such as operation of school buses on regular bus runs, operation of school buses on field trips, oil changes, and bus inspections.
	Step 2:	Assigned transportation employees should, with the assistance of district financial employees, determine the full and marginal cost of the district performing the function and sub-functions identified above and the quality level of the service
	Step 3:	Assigned transportation employees, with the assistance of district purchasing employees, will contact appropriate vendors or other districts to determine the probable cost of having private vendors perform various transportation functions and sub-functions.
	Step 4:	Assigned transportation employees will compile and present to transportation managers information comparing the cost of performing transportation functions and sub-functions by district employees versus private contractors.
	Step 5:	Transportation managers will incorporate this information in budget discussions and reports on the performance of the student transportation program to the superintendent, the school board, and the public.
Who is Responsible		Transportation managers, assigned transportation employees, assigned district financial employees, assigned district purchasing employees, the superintendent, and the school board.
Time Frame		March 2005 and every five years thereafter

Source: OPPAGA.

20 The district periodically reviews the organizational structure and staffing levels of the student transportation program to minimize administrative layers and processes.

The district has a relatively "flat" transportation organizational structure

As seen in Exhibit 12-3, student transportation in St. Lucie County School District has a relatively flat organizational structure, with a limited number of management layers. With a small number of managers, this type of organizational structure emphasizes the personal responsibility and accountability of front line employees. For example, the only management layer between bus drivers and the director of transportation are the area managers. Transportation managers have not formally compared the department's organization to that of peer counties; however, St. Lucie's transportation organization does appear to be efficient.

Recommendations —————————————————————

- *None, as the district meets this best practice.*

13 Food Service Operations

The St. Lucie County School District has a fiscally sound food service program that is well managed and provides nutritious meals, but needs to clarify management roles and resolve maintenance issues.

Conclusion

The St. Lucie County School District is using 15 of the 17 best practices for food services. Overall, the district has a self-supporting food services program that provides nutritious meals in a safe and sanitary environment. The program has performance benchmarks and accountability mechanisms, but some outcomes, strategies, and measures could be aligned better with program goals. Further, the district needs to clarify school-based and food services responsibilities and establish a mechanism to deal with related problems as they arise. The program also needs to develop a formal equipment repair and replacement plan.

Although the food services program is self-supporting, revenue growth is beginning to slip behind the growth in costs. If this trend continues, the district will likely face a decline in the food services fund and needs to monitor these growth patterns and funding demands and consider future meal price increases if necessary to avert a funding problem. This would assure that the food services program continues its fiscal and operational effectiveness.

The district has achieved some notable accomplishments in food services over the past few years. The food services management has used peer comparisons to develop benchmarks and performance measures that are used effectively to manage cafeteria operations. Also, the food services program and district schools have received several Florida School Food Service Association awards of recognition over the past six years, which are included in Exhibit 13-1 below.

Exhibit 13-1

District Food Services Management and Schools Have Achieved Some Notable Accomplishments Over the Past Six Years

- The Use of Benchmarks and Performance Measures to Effectively Manage Cafeteria Operations
- Florida School Food Service Association Awards
  - Outstanding Food Service Director of the Year
  - Nutrition Award—St. Lucie Elementary
  - Super School Award—Morningside Elementary
  - Louise Sublette Award of Program Excellence—Morningside Elementary
  - Nutrition Award—Morningside Elementary
  - Smart Start Award—Morningside Elementary
  - Nutrition Advisory Council of the Year—Morningside Elementary
  - Innovative Idea Award—Fairlawn Elementary

Source: The St. Lucie County School District and OPPAGA analysis of benchmarking system.

Overview of Chapter Findings ————————————

OPPAGA reviewed the St. Lucie County School District food service operations using the Best Financial Management Practices and associated indicators adopted by the Commissioner of Education. The OPPAGA team employed several methodologies to develop conclusions and action plans. For instance, OPPAGA conducted on-site interviews with district level managers and gathered information on the district's operations, activities, policies and procedures. To receive additional input, we held focus groups with food services managers, principals, and teachers. Questions varied depending on the groups surveyed, and the results have been incorporated into this chapter where applicable. An overview of chapter findings is presented below.

Accountability Mechanisms

1. The district's food services program has a mission statement, comprehensive written program procedures, and clear goals, strategies, and measurable objectives, but some outcomes, strategies, and measures could be improved. (Page 13-7)

2. The district regularly reviews the organizational structure and staffing levels of the food services program to enhance the efficiency of program operations but has not developed policies to clarify roles related to school-based cafeteria management and employee performance evaluation. (Page 13-9)

3. The district uses a comprehensive food service training program to increase productivity, improve employee performance, and enhance the food services program. (Page 13-17)

4. The district identifies barriers to student participation in the school meals program and is developing strategies to minimize the effect of the barriers and increase participation. (Page 13-19)

5. The district has established cost-efficiency benchmarks based on comparable food services programs in other school districts. (Page 13-23)

6. The district regularly evaluates the school food services program based on established benchmarks and implements improvements to increase revenue and reduce costs. (Page 13-25)

7. The district regularly assesses the benefits of service and service delivery alternatives and implements changes to improve efficiency and effectiveness. (Page 13-26)

Financial Accountability and Viability

8. The district's food services budget is based on projections of student enrollment and revenues and expenditures but is not linked with specific program goals. (Page 13-27)

9. The district's financial control process includes an ongoing review of the food services program's financial and management practices. (Page 13-28)

10. The district accounts for and reports meals served by category. (Page 13-30)

11. The district regularly evaluates purchasing practices to decrease costs and increase efficiency. (Page 13-31)

12. The district has developed an effective inventory control system that is appropriate to the size of the school food services program. (Page 13-32)

13. The district has a system for receiving, storing, and disposing of food, supplies, and equipment. (Page 13-33)

14. The district has procedures for the repair and replacement of equipment that includes preventive maintenance practices but needs to develop a formal plan to better coordinate maintenance. (Page 13-34)

Preparation and Nutrition

15. The district provides school meals that are planned to meet the nutritional needs of students and comply with recognized dietary guidelines.
(Page 13-36)

16. The district's food production and transportation system ensures the service of high quality food with minimal waste. (Page 13-37)

Safety and Sanitation

17. The district follows safety and environmental health practices and regulations. (Page 13-38)

Background

The St. Lucie County School District includes 35 schools serving 30,562 enrolled students in school year 2001-02. The district operates its food services program through the food services department. The program served 30,039 meals daily to students and staff throughout the district. Staffed with 248 employees, the department's 2002-03 budget is $11.2 million. The department's functional organization chart is shown in Exhibit 13-2.

Exhibit 13-2

The School Food and Nutrition Services Functional Organization (248 Funded Employees)
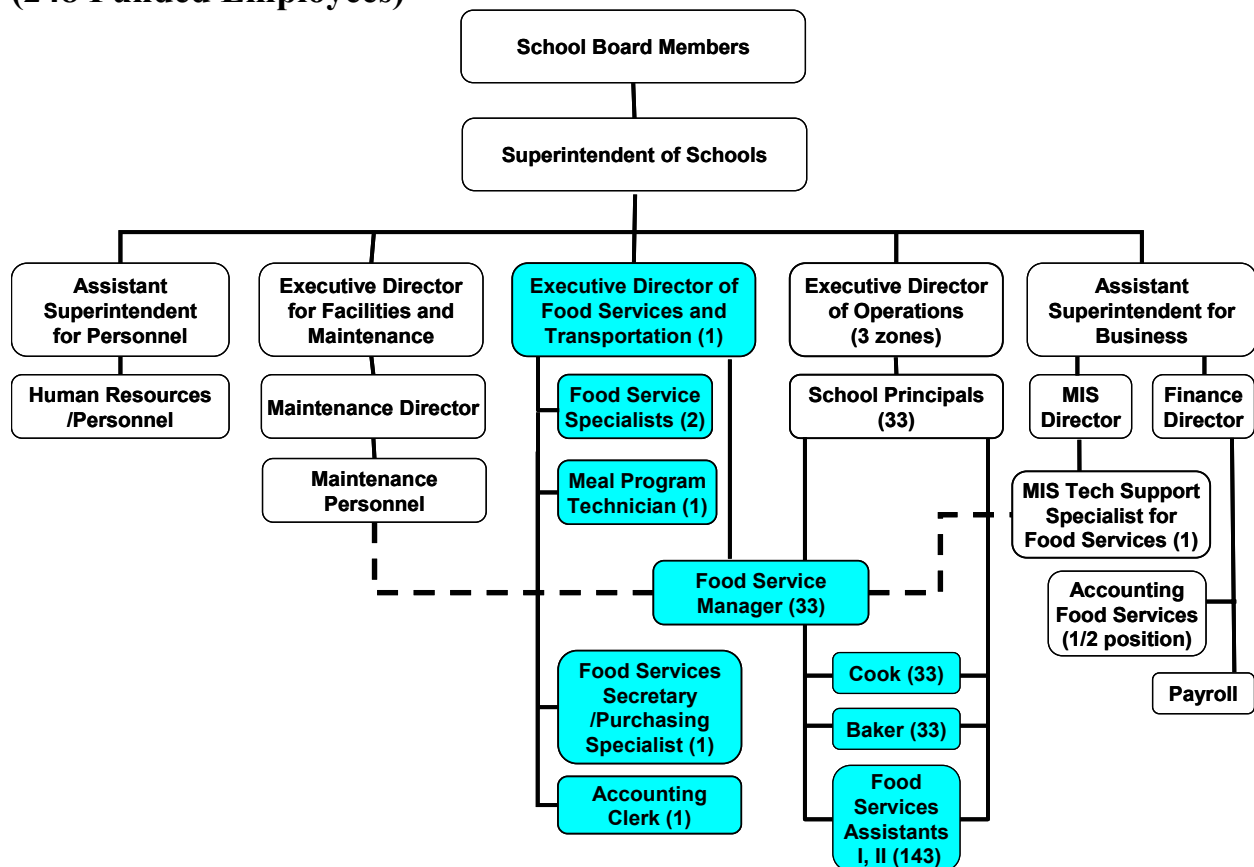
Source: The St. Lucie County School District.

The district's schools are organized into three geographic zones, each administered by a separate executive director of operations. Thirty-three schools have site-based cafeterias which are staffed with a food services manager, cooks, bakers, and food service assistants. [1] As shown in Exhibit 13-2, the school principals and the food services director share the oversight of food service managers. The food services director is responsible for the overall operation and success of the school cafeterias and kitchens and provides feedback to the managers on their kitchen operations. Principals provide a more direct oversight role in that they conduct the managers' annual evaluations and have specific authority for their day-to-day direct supervision. The food services managers conduct the annual evaluations of cooks, bakers, and food services assistants. The principals approve and sign the evaluations. The food services director gives input and signs off on the annual evaluations of managers but does not approve or sign off on evaluations of cooks, bakers, and food services assistants.

In addition to the overall coordination of the food services department, the food services director is responsible for coordinating long-term and short-term equipment repairs, equipment procurement, and new kitchen construction or renovation. The maintenance department performs food services technical preventative maintenance and equipment repairs based on requests submitted through the district's automated work order system. One accounting position in the district's finance office devotes 50% of her time to food services bookkeeping duties. In addition, a department-level technology specialist located in the district's technology office oversees the food services automated network and deals with software issues related to the point-of-sale terminals in all cafeterias.

Two food service specialists, as shown in Exhibit 13-2, assist and monitor all the food service managers falling within the three geographic zones. One food service specialist oversees 13 secondary schools, and the other specialist oversees 20 elementary schools. The food service specialists' primary responsibility is to assist the schools in providing healthful, attractive, nutritious meals within the guidelines of state and federal regulations. These duties include visiting school cafeterias to inspect kitchen and business operations, review systems for meal accountability, address staffing issues, oversee the cash deposit function, and conduct annual Five-Star Quality and Accuclaim Reviews. [2]

Revenue and Fund Balance

The program's revenue for Fiscal Year 2001-02 totaled $11,180,424. A significant portion of the food services program's revenues (67% for Fiscal Year 2001-02) comes from reimbursable student meals. The next largest revenue item for the food service is a la carte sales, followed by meals sold to teachers and staff at full price. Other sources of revenue come from contract feeding programs, catering projects and nutrition services, such as Headstart, Eckerd Leadership, After-School Snack Programs, pre-K programs, and summer school meals. The district's food service operation maintains a fund balance totaling $3.8 million for Fiscal Year 2001-02.

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[1] The Dale Cassens School cafeteria serves a small number of students with special needs and is operated by a cook with offsite supervision from an elementary school food services manager.

[2] Five-Star Quality and Accuclaim Reviews annually evaluate school programs to determine efficiency of operations, accountability, financial status, and adherence to policies, procedures and regulations, as required by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Other responsibilities of the food services specialists include: monitoring food items for taste, appearance, and quality guidelines; assisting principals regarding free and reduced price meal applications, meal collection procedures, and adherence to USDA policies and procedures; assisting cafeteria managers in record keeping, menu compliance, nutritional analysis, and buying procedures; planning and developing in-service training courses; coordinating the manager intern program and new employee orientation program; and providing other resource services to managers, students, principals, PTA's and community groups as needed.

Financial History

The food services department is financially self-sustaining and has not required additional funding from the district's general fund. The department has an annual operating budget of $11.2 million for 2002-03. Revenue to support these operations comes from three main sources: federal, state, and local monies. During 2001-02, the district received the majority of its revenue, $7.5 million, or 67%, from federal sources. Although the food services fund has maintained its favorable financial position, revenues have not increased as much as the operating costs of providing meals. Since 1997-98, the district has seen a 24.6% increase in total revenue, while expenditures have increased by 26.7% over the same period, resulting in a decrease in net operating income during this period. Part of the increase in costs is due to the district beginning to prorate its warehouse and energy costs to food services and to the fuel costs for two additional vehicles. Exhibit 13-3 summarizes the actual revenues, expenditures and changes in the fund balance between 1997-98 and 2001-02.

Exhibit 13-3

Statement of Actual Revenues, Expenditures and Changes in Fund Balance Fiscal Years 1997-98 Through 2001-02 (Expressed in Thousands)

Actual	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	Percentage Change
Revenues						
Local Sources	$ 2,635	$ 2,900	$ 3,238	$ 3,576	$ 3,422	29.9%
State Sources	282	256	300	287	305	8.2%
Federal Sources	6,058	6,413	6,694	7,060	7,453	23.0%
Other Sources (Transfers In)	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Total Revenues	**8,975**	**9,569**	**10,232**	**10,923**	**11,180**	**24.6%**
Expenditures						
Salaries and Benefits	3,816	4,195	4,489	4,985	5,110	33.9%
Food Purchased and USDA Food	3,716	3,984	4,340	4,520	4,728	27.2%
Supplies and Other Expenses	786	765	819	695	686	-12.7%
Purchased Services	53	43	54	305	169	218.9%
Energy Services	0	1	1	1	211	N/A[1]
Capital Outlay	330	468	203	369	127	-61.5%
Other Uses (Transfers Out)	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Total Expenditures [2]	**8,703**	**9,456**	**9,906**	**10,879**	**11,031**	**26.7%**
Excess (Deficiency) of Revenues Over (Under) Expenditures	272	113	326	44	149	-45.2%
Fund Balance at Beginning of Year	**2,903**	**3,175**	**3,288**	**3,614**	**3,658**	**26.0%**
Fund Balance at End of Year	**3,175**	**3,288**	**3,614**	**3,658**	**3,807**	**19.9%**

[1] Energy services has increased due to districtwide allocations paid by the food services fund.

[2] Columns may not add due to rounding.
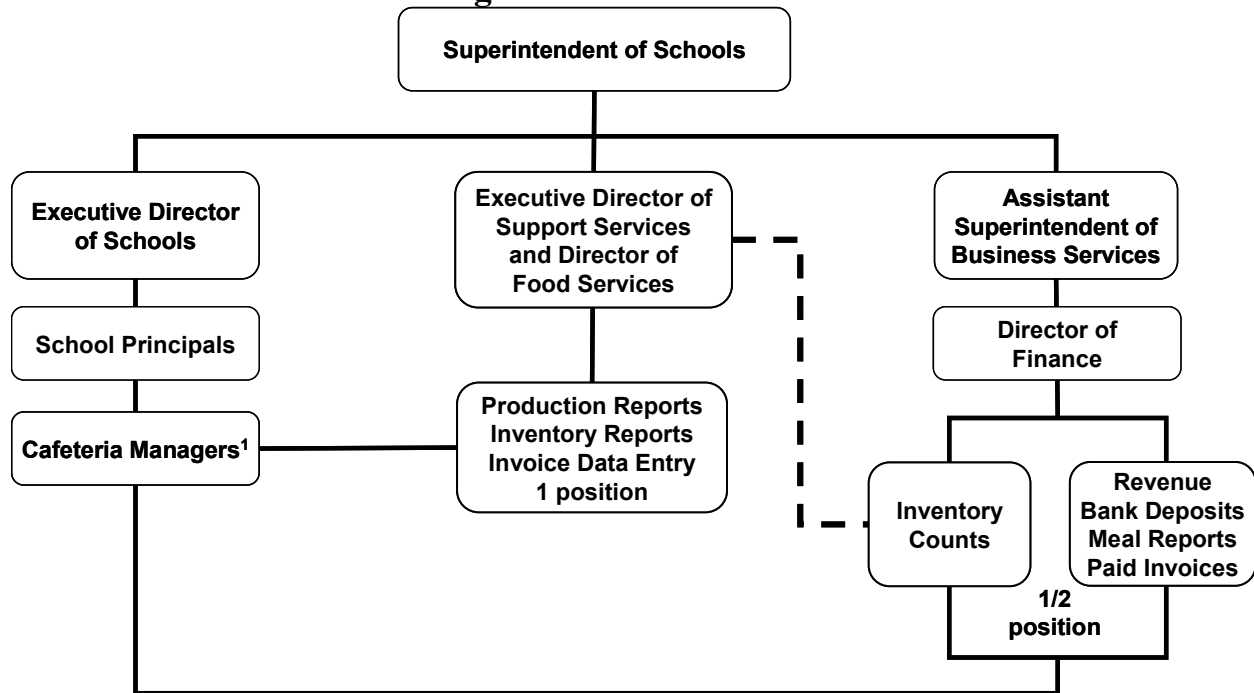
Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Financial Responsibility

The director of food services is responsible for the accountability and viability of the School Food and Nutrition Services program. After verifying meal count data for accuracy, the director submits the monthly reimbursement claims for the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs to the DOE. The director also reviews expenditures and charges for the cafeteria cost centers and monitors the food

services budget. The district finance officer oversees general financial accounting and reporting for the food services department, as well as all other district departments. Staff located in the finance director's office verifies daily cafeteria cash deposits and meal service reports and prepares the cafeterias' bank reconciliations. Finance office staff also performs periodic test counts of the district's inventory of food and supply items. Exhibit 13-4 presents the organization chart for the financial functions of the School Food and Nutrition Services Department.

Exhibit 13-4

Organization Chart—School Food and Nutrition Services Accounting Functions

[1] Cafeterias are located inside zoned schools under an executive director of schools.

Source: OPPAGA, based on St. Lucie County School District information.

Compliance Reviews

The Florida Department of Education (DOE) performs a Coordinated Review Effort (CRE) of every school district's food services program in the state to ensure compliance with the federal requirements of the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs. The DOE has the ability to withhold funding or can reclaim money from school districts not in compliance or having over-claimed the number of eligible free or reduced price meals.

During a coordinated review effort in January 2001, the DOE found clerical errors in production records at four schools and over claiming the number of meal counts for eligible students at three schools reviewed. The DOE required the district to submit a revised December 2000 claim reducing the number of free lunches by 118, reduced lunches by nine, and all lunches by 136. This action reduced overall annual district revenues by the small amount of $238. The district addressed all corrective actions recommended and received notice from DOE on April 5, 2001, that the review is closed.

Food Programs

The food services program receives two categories of USDA food commodities: Group A Commodities include meat, fish, poultry, fruits, and vegetables, and Group B Commodities include grains, oil, shortening, cheese, and peanut products. These food commodities are received through a USDA-approved storage facility from which they are transferred to the district's central warehouse and delivered to schools when ordered by food service managers.

The food services department participates in several innovative programs that have enhanced the department's non-traditional food service offerings, such as

- after-school snack programs at 18 schools (snack program contracts are renewed annually based on requests from the school site);
- summer school meal programs at 8 school sites (all programs are evaluated financially either through DOE reporting requirements, or through compiled billing data); and
- annual contracts with outside agencies for breakfast and lunch meal service at Headstart sites, the Eckerd Leadership Program, the Boys and Girls Club summer program, and a pre-K program at St. Lucie West Centennial High School.

Accountability Mechanisms

1 The district's food services program has a mission statement, comprehensive written program procedures, and clear goals, strategies, and measurable objectives, but some outcomes, strategies, and measures could be improved.

The food services director developed the food service's mission statement with input from school-level food service staff

The district has a mission "…to provide the students of St. Lucie County with nutritious, high-quality food choices to enhance their ability to learn." The food services director developed the mission statement with input from cafeteria managers, food services staff, school principals, and with consideration given to American School Food Services Association (ASFSA) standards of excellence. The mission development was a food services program effort and did not directly involve parents, students, or any school board committees. The school board approved the mission as a part of the district's strategic plan. The food services program communicates the mission statement in printed materials distributed to food services managers and employees and to school and district administrators. The mission is included in a program handbook given to all new employees involved with school meals. Employees sign and date that they have read the handbook. The district also maintains a publicly accessible Internet homepage with a link to the food services site at www.stlucie.k12.fl.us/food/, which displays the mission statement.

The district has comprehensive written procedures for the food services program

The district has written operating procedures that are codified in the *Handbook for Managers*. The handbook is issued to assist food services managers in carrying out their daily program responsibilities, and to serve as a reference regarding program policies, regulations, and procedures pertinent to the food services program. The food services director completed the last annual comprehensive review and update

of the handbook in August 2001. When changes and revisions are made, the director prepares an "update" packet for the cafeteria managers and holds a meeting to go over the changes annually or more frequently if needed.

The *Handbook for Managers* is comprehensive. It covers program authority, objectives, organization, general policies, accountability, free and reduced meal applications, meal and menu requirements, food preparation, serving, storage, purchasing, receiving, inventory, equipment and facilities management, personnel and professional development, quality enhancement, and best financial practices.

The food services department has developed clearly stated program goal and measurable objectives, but some outcomes, strategies, and measures could be improved

Program administrators have identified long-range goals and objectives intended to accomplish the district's mission. The goals are referenced to state/district goals and school board policies, and cover the four major program aspects: 1) communication/marketing, 2) administration, 3) operations, and 4) nutrition. The program's 15 objectives all have target completion dates, are relevant to the goals, and have outcomes measurable as a percentage of accomplishment. The program's 46 strategies are consistent with goals and objectives and measures are consistent with their related strategy. Appendix C, Table C-1 outlines the mission, goals, and objectives the School Food and Nutrition Services use to guide program efforts.

Administrators have also identified expected outcomes and measurement methods to accomplish the district's objectives. However, the goals, objectives, and strategies are not well-aligned. Some outcomes, strategies, and measures could be improved by recognizing more clearly an objective from a strategy. For example, the objectives listed under Goal 1 (and throughout) are actually strategies. In another example, an outcome related to Goal 3, Objective IV, is that Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) checklists will be implemented, and the measure is that the checklists will be completed and submitted to the food services office weekly. A more meaningful measure would be that the checklists show a desired level of compliance with HACCP practices. Other outcomes and measures, such as Goal 4, Objective I, which states that a new process will result in a high degree of accountability, and the software at school sites will electronically update student and meal status, are more in the nature of factual statements, or tasks, and need to be expressed as quantifiable actions that are specific and clear. Appendix C, Table C-2 summarizes the district's objectives, expected outcomes, and the means by which they are measured.

Recommendation

Although the district meets this best practice, some improvements are needed to make the objectives, outcomes, and strategies more aligned and quantifiable.

- *We recommend that the district improve its measurement methods to make them less statement- or task-oriented and more specifically focused on the outcomes selected. The outcomes and measurement methods should be constructed to assure that they are clearly aligned with and complement program goals.*

Action Plan 13-1 provides the steps needed to implement these recommendations.

Action Plan 13-1

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">**Define Specific Program Outcomes and Measurement Methods in the District's Three-Year Strategic Plan Currently Being Developed**</td></tr>
<tr><td>Strategy</td><td colspan="2">Establish clearly stated objectives that are expressed in a quantified manner as expected percentages of accomplishment. Measurement methods and strategies should be developed that facilitate determining the degree of accomplishment of the related outcome.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Action Needed</td><td>Step 1:</td><td>The food services director evaluates the program's current performance, objectives, and strategies.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Step 2:</td><td>The analysis is used to improve quantified program objectives, outcomes, and measurement methods.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Step 3:</td><td>The food services director completes the district's three-year strategic plan including the revised program outcomes and measurement methods.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Step 4:</td><td>The superintendent reviews, approves, and prepares a board agenda item for approval of the three-year strategic plan.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Step 5:</td><td>Board must approve.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who is Responsible</td><td colspan="2">The executive director of Support Services</td></tr>
<tr><td>Time Frame</td><td colspan="2">2003-04 school year</td></tr>
</table>

Source: OPPAGA.

2   The district regularly reviews the organizational structure and staffing levels of the food services program to enhance the efficiency of program operations but has not developed policies to clarify roles related to school-based cafeteria management and employee performance evaluations.

The St. Lucie County School District generally manages the food services program well. Food services personnel are well qualified, dedicated, and properly positioned in the organizational structure. The food services director regularly reviews staffing levels and appropriateness. However, the food service program needs to pay its own facility maintenance expenses to allow general funding to be made available for the classroom. Further, some policies could be amended to improve personnel performance evaluations, and the roles and responsibilities of school-based management and food services management could be clarified.

The district has a qualified staff member who is responsible for the management of the food services program

The food services director is a registered dietitian and holds a master's degree from both the University of Wisconsin and Florida Atlantic University. The director has published numerous articles pertaining to school food services and is the 2001-02 National Research Committee chairperson for the American School Food Services Association. The director has been employed in the school food services industry for 17 years and began her career as a food services consultant in the Wisconsin public school system.

The district employs two additional food service specialists who report to the food services director. Their duties include implementing and overseeing employee training programs, coordinating satellite meal service centers, and overseeing school cafeteria operations through monthly visits and annual performance reviews. In addition, one of the field specialists is a registered dietitian who is responsible for menu nutrient analysis. The district also employs 33 cafeteria managers and other food services

employees who attend mandatory and voluntary training classes throughout the year. These training opportunities ensure that the department has qualified managers and staff to operate the school food services program.

The district has an organizational chart that identifies all food service operational and supervisory positions

The district's organizational structure, as presented in Exhibit 13-2, delineates department positions and locations. Further, job descriptions and stated responsibilities provide employees with direction as to who handles what functions in the district. This information is communicated on a regular basis through employee manuals, instruction guides, internal memos, and meetings.

Staffing levels are appropriate compared to the number of meals served and student enrollment figures

Cafeteria managers track labor hours daily at the school and are able to recognize the need for additional hours to meet food service demands. The managers send their daily tracking forms to the food services central office. The food services office reviews the forms monthly, and data is included in a monthly Meals Per Labor Hour Report, which is used for comparison with the district's benchmark (standard) for productivity of each day's total labor hours used to prepare each day's meals. [3, 4] When the number of meals served warrants the addition of labor hours, the central office approves the hours if supported by productivity data that shows that additional staff will not compromise the school site's ability to meet the district benchmark. Staffing is evaluated at least once per semester (usually in July for the next school year and again in December) through

- reviewing meals per labor hour calculations and comparison to benchmarks;
- evaluating the number of meal periods (breakfast and lunch) and length of meal periods to ensure adequate serving staff coverage; and
- discussions with cafeteria managers to evaluate production staff needs.

The food services director and district staff regularly review the program's organizational structure and staffing levels to minimize administrative layers and processes, but some shared employees are funded by the district's general fund

The food services director annually evaluates the program's organizational structure to determine the minimum number of staff for the food services program and makes appropriate changes as needed. The district uses the DOE staffing formula stipulated in Rule 6A-7.045, *Florida Administrative Code*. Each school is allocated 'allowed' labor hours, and this is compared to the actual used hours. The food services director recommends staffing adjustments to maintain the minimum staffing allowed (School Board Policy 6.64). This figure is reviewed each year during budget preparation.

The food services director reports that cafeteria managers are included in assessing organizational needs through discussions at monthly manager meetings. Additionally, teachers and principals provide feedback on staffing needs and organizational issues. Recent staffing adjustments resulting from the annual reviews and staff feedback were

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[3] MPLH is a ratio of meals served to the labor hours taken to produce them.

[4] The food services director compares relevant cost factors to peer districts selected for benchmarking purposes. Selection of peers was based on the number of meals served annually, similarities in menu planning systems, economically needy population levels, and decentralized preparation facilities. Other selection criteria used included the method of meal preparation (conventional vs. convenience), program size, privatization levels, state and district averages, the median and average for the selected peer districts, and other information gathered from district food services directors.

- the addition of a districtwide Computer Support Technician in 1998 to facilitate maximum use of technology;
- the elimination of a full time bookkeeping position in 2000 assigned to food services and allocation of half of a bookkeeping position in the finance department;
- the inclusion of one additional food services specialist position in the 2001-02 food services budget request; and
- the inclusion of a percentage of paraprofessional aides' salary and benefit costs at elementary schools to pay for student supervision in all elementary cafeterias.

The food services fund pays the salary and benefits associated with any district staff member who spends time regularly on food services issues. [5] The district assesses the food services fund a per-case handling fee to reimburse the general fund for payroll costs associated with the central warehouse for handling and delivering food and cafeteria supplies. The food services program also receives periodic services from the MIS/Finance department, which are covered under a 3.48% indirect cost assessment charged the food services fund to also reimburse the general fund. The district assesses the indirect charges to cover costs based on rules outlined by OMB Circular A-87, certified by the state Department of Education, and monitored by the Florida Auditor General's office. [6] However, a portion of maintenance/custodial salaries at each campus is not being charged to the food services budget each month. [7]

Our analysis was not able to assess the percentage of time employees actually spend on food services tasks because the district does not routinely track this data since the services are sporadic. To ensure that scarce classroom general fund dollars are used for classroom purposes, the amount of time spent by custodial/maintenance personnel on food services concerns should be assessed and paid for with food services funds as appropriate.

The district should clarify the roles and responsibilities related to some school-based cafeteria management issues and employee performance evaluations

The food services organizational charts and school board policies indicate that a dual-supervisory relationship exists where the cafeteria managers and staff are under the authority of both the school principals and the food services director. This dual supervision model, combined with the district's unclear authority pertaining to the roles and responsibilities of the food services director and principals, presents some intrinsic difficulties in managing the food services personnel-related and program issues. Exhibit 13-5 shows the applicable school board policies regarding the roles and responsibilities for the food services program.

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[5] The food services fund also pays for all workers compensation insurance premiums and retirement payouts associated with food service employees, as well as the full cost of gas/electric based on a square footage assessment, and trash collection services. The general fund pays for maintenance and custodial costs.

[6] The assessment is calculated by taking total cost of central services and business services for the district and dividing this total by the district's total general fund budget. This percentage is then applied to the food services budget fund as an assessment for the cost of overhead theoretically provided to the food services program. This overhead is designed to cover the cost of payroll data entry and the programmer who updates back-to-school records annually.

[7] The district employs 60 maintenance staff and 202 custodial staff that provide services to school campuses.

Exhibit 13-5

School Board Policies and Rules for Roles
and Responsibilities of the Food Services Program

Policy	Policy Excerpts	OPPAGA Comments
Policy 6.52	The director of School Food Services and Nutrition Department shall be responsible for the direct supervision of the district school food services program. The director will assist in the development of rules to effectuate the efficient operation of the food services program. The director will be responsible to the superintendent or designee and will work in cooperation with the principal of each school in evaluating and improving the program in each school.	This policy does not address the food services director's role or authority in personnel issues of hiring, evaluation, and discipline of food services managers and employees related to food services expertise and technical issues.
Policy 6.52	The food services department manager shall be responsible for the direct supervision of the staff and program of the food service operation of the school to which assigned. The manager will be responsible to and cooperate with the principal and director in furthering the food services program at that school.	This policy is not specific on the issue of being responsible to both the principal and the food services director; it does not address related priorities, areas of technical expertise, or areas of responsibilities for each.
Policy 6.52	The building principal at each school shall be responsible for the general operation of the cafeteria as a part of the total school.	This policy does not clarify the principal's role versus the food services director's role as being responsible for the operation and supervision of the food services program.
Policy 6.52	The principal is responsible for the administration and operation of the school food service program in compliance with federal and state laws, State Board of Education Rules, and district board rules and regulations.	This policy is not clear in its impact upon the food services director's responsibility for the direct supervision of the district's food services program.
Policy 6.52	The principal is responsible for scheduling meal service time periods to effect the greatest participation in the school food service program.	This section is not clear as to how scheduling will be coordinated with the food services program needs.
Policy 6.52	All matters of discipline and order shall be taken care of by the principal or members of the instructional staff assigned to this duty by the principal.	This policy does not distinguish or address matters of disciple or order related to the technical aspects of the food services program.
Policy 3.83	The principal or administrator supervising personnel shall arrange for the assessment of all employees under his or her supervision in accordance with district procedures and any applicable collective bargaining agreement.	This policy does not address the food services director's role or authority in personnel evaluations of food services managers and employees related to food services expertise and technical issues.

Policy	Policy Excerpts	OPPAGA Comments
Policy 3.79	This policy outlines procedures that the principal or supervising administrator should follow for the selection of professional support staff. [1] The principal or administrator of a unit shall initiate requests for employment, re-employment, promotion, reclassification, or dismissal of professional support staff employees in the unit. The principal or administrator shall be required to secure references from the most recent place of employment.	This policy does not address the food services director's role or authority in personnel issues of hiring, evaluation, and discipline of food services managers and employees related to food services expertise and technical issues.

[1] School Board Policy 3.05 defines professional support personnel to include all clerical, maintenance, custodial, transportation, school food service, teacher paraprofessionals, health paraprofessionals, nurses, and all other specialized or technical employees not required to hold a teaching certificate for the position held.

Source: St. Lucie County School Board policies.

Organizational Responsibilities and Supervision

The food services director has overall responsibility for the success of the School Food and Nutrition Services program. However, school board policy has no expressed specific authority assigned to the food services director for the hiring, dismissal, or evaluation of food services managers or employees. Board policies specifically assign these functions to the principals and do not require any involvement or input from the food services director beyond recommending changes to job descriptions and qualifications for employment. Consequently, the food services director is without any authority in recommending employee and manager appointments under current school board policy.

The supervision of each school's food service manager falls to two management positions – the food services director and the principal at each school. This dual supervision model presents some intrinsic difficulties in managing the district's food services program. For instance, the principals directly supervise the food service managers who are responsible to the food services director for specific program results, such as control of food and labor costs.

The food services director noted that in the past year the timeliness of interviewing applicants for manager vacancies was subject to each building principal's timeline. The principal's timeline sometimes did not align as well as it might have with the food service director's need to plan for the upcoming school year. The food services director also noted that participation in five manager interview processes (five vacancies this spring/summer) indicated that school-based needs and food services needs are both important but are not the same. The food services goal is to find someone who is technically capable and able to demonstrate leadership through confidence in managerial ability and decision making, while the school-based goal is to find someone who is going to "fit in" or interact well with school staff and students. This difference in needs becomes challenging when one person wants to recommend someone who is personable, yet there are questions about technical knowledge.

Because of the technical aspects and importance of the food services program, both principals and the food services director should have authority for the hiring, firing, and evaluation of food services managers and food services employees. There also should be some level of veto or resolution authority established for instances when the technical aspects of the cafeteria managers' and employees' duties become an issue. Otherwise, the food services director cannot reasonably be expected to consistently influence behavior or expertise upon which a successful food services operation ultimately depends. Since the existing policy authorities are silent on competing program needs and lack any related resolution mechanisms, such as decision models or veto authorities, the food services director and principals are left to work out such matters informally.

Managers' Performance Evaluation

Cafeteria managers as a group do not feel that their annual evaluations reflect their performance in their job class responsibilities. Even though each food service manager receives cafeteria and operational inspections and evaluations from food services specialists, this information is rarely incorporated into the manager's annual employee performance review conducted by the school principal. These operational inspections and evaluations concern the technical aspects of food services for which the principal is not responsible and lacks knowledge. In cases in which managers may be performing below standard, and may be in need of additional training or counseling, annual evaluations completed by the principal do not necessarily reflect such performance deficiencies or outline corrective action, unless the deficiency is related to a school-based concern (i.e., students or staff being treated inappropriately, poor attendance, and tardiness).

The St. Lucie County School Board has implemented a Food Services Manager Evaluation form (PER0017) that is intended to record both the principal's and the food services director's performance ratings of the cafeteria manager. The manager's form requires sign-off by the food services director. A copy of the manager's evaluation is distributed to the food services department. However, school board policy does not reference the forms to effectuate an official dual-evaluation. The lack of reference does not ensure that all evaluations systematically receive both sets of comments or establish equal consideration of both sets of comments. The food services director noted that there have been instances when the principal's portion of the form was not completed, although the manager received the form for his/her signature with no principal evaluation included on the form.

The food services director also noted that, in past years, she initiated the employee performance evaluation process by completing the food services director's portion of the evaluation form and then forwarded the form to building principals for their completion and distribution to the manager. Upon receipt of the completed manager evaluations, it became clear that, in some instances, principals do not understand the food services standards used in the evaluation process, especially in food production, accountability, and financial indicator areas. School cafeteria managers reiterated this lack of principal understanding during site visits.

In school year 2001-02, the food services program piloted the annual Five-Star Quality and Accuclaim Review process. School principals receive copies of the review reports, but the program has not formalized a process to incorporate the results of these reviews into the food service managers' annual evaluations. Consequently, there is no assurance that principals use the review results in conducting the manager evaluations. Without formalizing this process, food service managers are not held accountable for the operations of their cafeteria, yet the food services director is held accountable for districtwide program performance. The district has not made changes to the manager employee evaluation form. However, the food services director plans to suggest changes in the annual form for managers and to implement them for the 2002-03 school year.

Food Services Employees' Performance Evaluation

A form (PER0016) for evaluating food services cooks, bakers, and assistants requires neither signature nor input by the food services director. Food services employees who disagree with their evaluation are directed in form PER0016 to file a response with the assistant superintendent for Human Resources but not with the food services director, their immediate parallel link in the supervisory chain relative to their job performance. The district has no method specified in policy or procedure to provide for or resolve issues of employee evaluation disagreement between the principal, the food services director, and the manager. These mechanisms need to be recognized and authorized to allow efficient and effective disposition of personnel matters before involving the top level of management. Based on these circumstances, the district is planning on revisions during the 2003-04 school year.

Other Considerations

The dual responsibilities and management roles related to the food services program results in several potentially conflicting areas of concern between school-based needs and food services program needs.

- Principals may decide to adjust lunch periods—too short a time can negatively affect menus and participation rates and result in students not getting an opportunity to eat. Limiting the number of meal service periods can also negatively affect program participation because of large numbers of students trying to access the cafeteria at the same time.

- School-based decisions regarding the a la carte item choices can affect menus and participation rates (for example, removing menu and/or ala carte items as a disciplinary measure for student behavior negatively affects program revenues).

- Current practice in the hiring of food services managers requires that applicants must meet the job qualifications as outlined in the job description and salary schedule. The principal and food services director then interview qualified applicants jointly. The principal and director make the hiring decision jointly. Either party can carry out disciplinary action, based on the situation (i.e., action for a policy violation related to food services operations would be carried out by the food services director, but one for a violation of school-based policy would be carried out by the principal). However current policy does not formally recognize this practice.

Existing Resolution Mechanism

Most problems that arise are being averted due to the personalities involved in the food services program and school administration. In most cases, the school principals and food services director work informally to address and resolve issues of mutual concern, but the district has no clear policy ensuring that this cooperation continues if personalities change. The lack of formalized mechanisms to deal with problems and concerns makes it more difficult to manage. Furthermore, the principals and food services director report to different assistant superintendents, and the district has no formal resolution mechanism, veto authority, or broadly directed policy to resolve issues of disagreement other than an appeal to the superintendent.

Recommendations——————————————————————

- *We recommend that the district develop school board policies to clarify the roles of the food services director and the school principals in regard to school-based cafeteria management. The policies should address, at a minimum, manager hiring, evaluation, discipline, and termination authorities and responsibilities. We also recommend a policy to provide a veto and resolution mechanism that addresses school-based and food service conflicting needs. These policies also should address relevant food services concerns, such as a la carte menu choices, lunch periods, and vending machine enforcement responsibilities of the food services department.*

- *We recommend that the district develop a policy that requires performance evaluations of food services managers to be based on both food services technical aspects and school-based personnel issues. We also recommend a process be formalized to provide a veto and resolution mechanism to address conflicting concerns that might arise.*

- *We recommend that the district perform regular evaluations of employee time to determine the extent to which the School Food and Nutrition Services program is supported by general fund dollars that otherwise could be made available to the classroom. The district should then make regular budgetary allocation adjustments to shift obligations from the general fund to the food*

services fund for personnel activities performed for the food services program but paid for by the general fund.

Action Plan 13-2 provides the steps needed to implement these recommendations.

Action Plan 13-2

Develop Board Policies to Clarify the Roles and Responsibilities of the Food Services Director and the School Principals in Regard to School-Based Cafeteria Management	
Strategy	To ensure consistent application of procedures related to hiring, evaluating, disciplining, and terminating food service managers and staff, as well as coordinating cafeteria-related school-based needs with food services program needs and best practices.
Action Needed	Step 1: Develop school board policies addressing areas of concern.
	Step 2: Develop and document formal procedures to coordinate processes related to these policies.
	Step 3: Prepare proposed policy statements and rules that establish the food services authorities necessary for the process.
	Step 4: Board approves and school board policies are amended.
Who is Responsible	The executive director of Support Services and the zone executive directors.
Time Frame	July 15, 2003

Develop a Food Services Manager Evaluation Policy That Requires Performance Reviews to Be Based on Both Food Services Technical and Personnel Aspects	
Strategy	Improve the evaluation process of food services managers to provide a comprehensive picture of their performance.
Action Needed	Step 1: Obtain approval from the assistant superintendent for Human Resources to provide separate evaluations of food service managers by principals and the food services director.
	Step 2: Develop separate evaluation forms to be used in evaluating food service managers in both food service technical and personnel aspects.
	Step 3: Require the food services director to perform all food service-related manager evaluations, incorporating the results of the annual Five-Star Quality and Accuclaim Review.
	Step 4: Prepare proposed policy statements and rules that establish the food services authorities necessary for the process.
	Step 5: Board approves and school board policies are amended.
Who Is Responsible	The executive director of Support Services and the zone executive directors.
Time Frame	August 31, 2003

Ensure That All District Positions That Are Funded by or Shared With the School Food and Nutrition Services Program, or Provide Services to the Program, Are Funded by the Food Services Fund, According to a Prorated Share of Duties Performed		
Strategy	Ensure that food services-related activities are funded by food services funds.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Identify district and/or school-based employees that perform services for the food services program that are not funded through food service funds.
	Step 2:	Assess the need for the service provided and the amount of time spent on food services activities by those employees to determine costs as a direct charge to the food services fund or within the scope of overall indirect charge.
	Step 3:	Update payroll records to reflect the percentage of salary/benefits that should be charged to the food services program to prevent general funds from being used to pay for food services related activities.
Who Is Responsible	The assistant superintendent for Business Services and the executive director of Support Services	
Time Frame	May 31, 2003	
Fiscal Impact	This can be completed with existing resources. This does not require shifting positions within the district but shifts funding to assure that the food service fund pays all of its proper costs and allow more general funds to be made available for the classroom.	

Source: OPPAGA.

3 The district uses a comprehensive food service training program to increase productivity, improve employee performance, and enhance the food services program.

The district has established and follows a formal food services training plan

The district provided its *Total Quality Food and Nutrition Services Training Plan* for 2001-02 and a summary of all district training programs offered during the period 1998-2001. The food services training plan includes a statement of purpose, a statement of goals, a statement of commitment to perform, performance of training, training activities performed, and measurements of training status and quality. The training process consists of six phases beginning with a needs assessment phase in April 2001 and progressing to a "Train-the-Mentor" workshop in December 2002. The district's formalized training programs are

- Total Quality Food and Nutrition Services Training Program;
- Managers Leadership Training Program (leadership skills for career enhancement);
- Certification Training (food safety, dietary guidelines and regulations, basic food preparation, and culinary techniques); and
- Managers Intern Training Program (a career enhancement program for cooks and bakers; completion of program criteria allows acceptance into internship training program).

The district also tracks attendance. All employees attended training in customer service, safety and sanitation, dietary guidelines, and USDA guidelines. In addition, all cooks and bakers attended training in standardized recipes and production records. All cafeteria managers attended training in promotions and marketing, leadership skills, ordering and receiving, cashiering, and personnel practices. Twenty-five food services employees attended courses offering credits toward American School Food Service Association (ASFSA) and six employees attended Manager Intern Program training. Fifty new

employees attended New Employee Orientation, which included materials on breakfast and lunch training and evaluation.

The district sponsors training in food safety and sanitation practices to assist employees in obtaining Continuing Education Units (CEUs) recognized by the ASFSA. ASFSA recommends and endorses a career ladder for food service personnel and encourages all employees to be involved in continuing education related to a food service career. ASFSA offers three levels of certification that a school food service employee can attain. Successful candidates can acquire the ASFSA designation "School Food Service and Nutrition Specialist". Nineteen out of 33 food service managers hold the "Food Service Professional" certification.

Training objectives are clear and classes are evaluated to ensure objectives have been achieved

The district's training plan states a general purpose to develop skills and knowledge of individuals so they can perform their roles effectively and efficiently. The plan has nine training objectives. Trainers distribute class packets at each training session that include a description of the course, a detailed agenda, and course objectives. For example, training materials for the USDA course "Serving it Safe: A Manager's Tool Kit" has the objective of teaching participants to recognize the five basic hazards common to any food service environment.

The district uses a Food and Nutrition Services Evaluation Form to gather feedback on training courses. The document asks individuals to rate, on a scale of 1-5, the presenter and workshop specifics. Additionally, the form solicits written comments. Food services staff summarize the data for each workshop and use it to plan future classes and workshops.

Training addresses the planning, preparation, delivery and accountability of healthy meals

The district organizes its food services training classes into a Five Quality Steps Program. The Five Quality Steps Program, augmented by other training materials, covers the best practices components. For example, portion control, serving utensils, special diets, meal count procedures, and emergency procedures are included in the following training materials:

- Culinary Techniques for School Food Service Curriculum;
- USDA Meal Count/Offer versus Serve Curriculum;
- Beginning Food Service Employees Curriculum;
- USDA Serve Safe Training Curriculum;
- Florida DOE Child Nutrition Program documents;
- CAFS Software/Meal Count Procedures documentation;
- portion control; and
- cashiering and meal count training.

Special diets are a limited training topic because they do not pertain to everyone. The district has four sites that have students with special dietary needs. The program does this type of training only when switching managers or bringing in a new manager at these four locations.

4 The district identifies barriers to student participation in the school meals program and is developing strategies to minimize the effect of the barriers and increase participation.

The district has identified meal participation barriers and has taken or plans action to eliminate or minimize these barriers

Student meal participation in the St. Lucie County School District is higher than most of its peer districts (two districts have higher participation and nine districts have lower participation). Exhibit 13-6 compares participation rates for school year 2001-02.

Exhibit 13-6

St. Lucie County's Student Meal Participation Is Higher Than Most of Its Peer Districts

Districts [1]	Reported Student Population (FY 2001-02)	Total Schools in District Serving NSLP Meals (FY 2001-02)	Total NSLP Claimed Meals Served (FY 2001-02)	Meals Served per Student for the Year (FY 2001-02)	Free and Reduced Eligibility Percentage (Elementary) (FY 2001-02)[2]	Free and Reduced Eligibility Percentage (Middle) (FY 2001-02)[2]
St. Lucie	**29,546**	**39**	4,641,203	157	**60.3%**	**52.0%**
Alachua	28,860	55	3,624,601	126	56.2%	42.8%
Bay	25,634	38	3,502,360	137	56.2%	46.6%
Brevard	70,071	102	5,877,319	84	33.7%	21.9%
Indian River	14,676	24	2,808,449	191	45.6%	38.7%
Lake	28,637	42	3,590,464	125	49.7%	39.7%
Martin	17,192	19	1,825,219	106	39.7%	30.6%
Okeechobee	6,649	10	1,060,705	160	64.7%	53.8%
Osceola	35,913	36	4,004,933	112	53.2%	48.3%
Palm Beach	156,910	169	16,150,650	103	50.3%	41.7%
Santa Rosa	22,547	33	2,494,933	111	39.6%	29.7%
Sarasota	36,317	44	3,618,949	100	39.5%	35.3%

[1] The district included Brevard, Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, and Palm Beach in its peer group because of geographic proximity and similarities in meal pricing and wage benchmarks. The district included Alachua, Osceola, Sarasota, and Bay because of similar size, scope of school lunch and breakfast programs, menu planning, meal preparation practices, snack programs, and summer food programs. The district included Santa Rosa and Lake because of similar size, menu-planning systems, and privatized services. Indian River and Lake are also members of the district's purchasing consortium.

[2] Latest information available.

Source: Florida Department of Education data sources.

Cafeteria managers and district office staff have identified several barriers to meal participation. Exhibit 13-7 outlines the meal participation barriers identified and the district's solutions aimed at increasing participation and preventing a decrease in the program's effectiveness and profitability.

Exhibit 13-7
Barriers to Meal Participation and Solutions Implemented

Barrier	Example	Solutions Implemented
Charge limit reached	A student has reached his/her charge limit, and the computer will not allow the sale to be recorded. Historically the meal would be taken away from the student or, most frequently, the meal would be given to the student, but the district would lose the reimbursement for it because it was not counted.	Implemented changes to increase the charge limit to three meals at elementary schools in 1997. A review of outstanding charges at the end of six months of increased charge limits showed no increase in the amount of money owed districtwide. The district has continued with the three meal limit to date. For students who have reached their limit, the district provides an alternative meal (peanut butter and jelly sandwich and milk) and contacts their parents either through a phone call or charge slip from the principal to send the money owed. Some elementary schools have used PTA funds to implement internal "loan" systems for meal money. When charges are repeatedly incurred, the district contacts the parents and a free/reduced priced meal application is sent home.
Free/reduced priced meal application not processed	In 1995, meal applications were processed through each school office. Turn around time was 2-5 days depending on the time of year.	In 1996, meal application processing was moved to the food services manager at each school. Turn around time is now within one day if the application is complete when received.
Lack of space in dining/serving area to seat all students	At Weatherbee Elementary, district contractor/facilities staff reduced the cafeteria space in order to control costs. The smaller space limits the number of students accommodated at one time, which is a problem, especially during breakfast service.	In 1997, the principal and food services department employees worked to develop a "grab and go" breakfast program that allowed students to move through the serving line quickly, get to their table, and eat, so that the next round of students could be accommodated more quickly. Through this menu and service change the district was able to minimize the number of students still at breakfast after the first bell rings each morning.
Bus arrival times in the mornings	Buses from the far corners of the county will not arrive until after school starts, which prohibits students from accessing the breakfast program.	In 2001-02, the district routed buses to accommodate a minimum of 20 minutes for breakfast at each elementary school and 15 minutes at each secondary school. However, the later start time of middle school students adversely affected participation in the breakfast program at middle schools. Routes have been developed to ensure that middle school students have time to eat and principals are being encouraged to allow students to go to the breakfast program once they arrive on campus. New/different breakfast entrée items are being identified for evaluation (nutritional quality, student acceptability, cost) and potential incorporation into the middle school breakfast menu.

Source: The St. Lucie County School District.

Competition with reimbursable meals is minimized

The *Handbook for Managers* contains a statement of School Board Policy 6.60 that only items offered and sold by the food services program will be made available to students at *elementary* schools. Non-food services food items may be made available to students at *secondary* schools, beginning one hour

after the close of the last lunch period. The handbook also states that foods may not be sold in competition with the school meals program prior to the start of the school day. The food services director assesses meal prices annually and stated that prices are not "loaded" for any "price competition factor" to offset meal sales lost through a la carte sales. The district has not increased meal prices since 1991, due to the food services fund continuing to operate in a surplus position. Exhibits 13-8 shows full meal prices.

Exhibit 13-8

Full Meal Prices for School Year 2001-02

Item	Price	Item	Price	Item	Price
Reduced breakfast (all schools)	$ .30	Reduced lunch (all schools)	$ .40	Adult breakfast	$ 1.00
Paid breakfast (all schools)	.60	Paid lunch (elementary)	1.25	Adult lunch	2.00
		Paid lunch (secondary)	1.50		

Source: The St. Lucie County School District, *Handbook for Managers*.

School Board Policy 6.53 (6), states that a la carte food items in addition to the meal unit are available for purchase in all cafeterias. [8] However, the sale of a la carte food and beverage items competes with reimbursable meals. Consequently, the district prices a la carte items according to DOE pricing policies intended to ensure that reimbursable meals are more economical. In most instances, a la carte item prices are higher than the price of a reimbursable meal, especially when items are combined. Exhibit 13-9 shows a la carte prices.

Exhibit 13-9

A La Carte Prices for School Year 2001-02

Item	Price	Item	Price	Item	Price
Milk	$ .25	Juice (4 oz.)	$ .25	Coffee/tea/iced tea	$.25
Juice (20 oz.)	1.00	Hot lunch entree	1.25	Vegetable/fruit	.30
French fries	.60	Salad bar	2.00	Garden salad	.75
Chef salad	1.25	Dessert (elementary)	.35	Dessert-sec	.50
Ice Cream	.50/.75	Specialty sandwiches (secondary)	1.50	Hot breakfast entree	.60
Boxed pizza	2.00	Juice (canned-secondary)	.75	Cereal	.25
Toast/breakfast bread	$ .15	Specialty drinks (secondary)	$1.00	Snacks	$.50

Source: The St. Lucie County School District, *Handbook for Managers*.

Soda and snack vending machines are located at secondary schools throughout the school district. Chapter 6-7, Special Programs II, *Florida Administrative Code*, allows the sale of food and beverage items in competition with the district-approved food service program only at secondary schools, if approved by the school board. These sales may occur one hour following the close of the last lunch period. However, carbonated beverages may not be sold where breakfast or lunch is being served or eaten.

The food services director responded to us that the school board delegated to the principals the approval of contracts for vending operators. The school board sends written notification to remind all principals annually of rules pertaining to competitive food sales, specifically,

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[8] School Board Policy 6.53 (6): A la Carte Food Service. Food items in addition to the meal unit are available for purchase in all cafeterias. Food items selected for a la carte sales shall be approved by the food services director based on cost and nutritional contribution. Pricing of all a la carte items shall be approved by the superintendent or designee. All proceeds of a la carte sales shall accrue to the food services program.

- sales of food and beverage items in competition with the district-approved food service program are prohibited in all school district elementary schools;
- competitive food and beverage items may be sold in secondary schools only, with the approval of the school board, one (1) hour following the close of the last lunch period; and
- the rules apply to all fund raising activities involving the sale of food or candy items.

Food services managers at each school monitor compliance with this policy. District food services staff also monitor compliance during school visits. When non-compliance is discovered, district food services staff bring the problem to the principal's attention by reviewing the board policy and the needed change to become compliant. If non-compliance continues, the appropriate zone executive director is notified and follows up with the principal regarding compliance.

The district uses student input and feedback to plan menus and improve the food services program

The *Handbook for Managers* requires cafeteria managers to weekly evaluate student meal acceptability by completing a Meal Quality Checklist, signing it, and submitting the form to the food services district office. The checklist monitors six points of food quality and preparation and six points of meal service. Two of the six points on meal service monitor meal acceptability by identifying student plate waste.

In addition, the food service director informed us that the food service administration held focus groups with students in year 2000 to evaluate menu quality and variety. Other efforts to obtain student input and feedback on menus involved middle school surveys and elementary school Nutrition Advisory Councils. Cafeteria managers have also been asked to get feedback from students during mealtime and to offer tasting portions of new menu items. Further, the district tests new products at individual school sites prior to selecting product vendors.

Food services dieticians and teachers have partnered to distribute nutritional materials and develop an academic curriculum that encourages healthy eating habits and food services program participation

Food service training schedules indicate that food service trainers offered classroom nutritional education to teachers in October 1999. [9] The trainers provided participating teachers with the brochure, *A Teacher's Guide to Incorporating School Meals in Nutrition Education Learning Experiences for Students*, and the nutrition booklet, *Welcome to the St. Lucie County School Food and Nutrition Services After-School Program*. These brochures included information on kitchen tours, Nutrition Advisory Council participation, nutrition resources and presentations, tasting experiences, and the nutrition information for food groups required to be included in snacks in order to receive federal reimbursement for the cost of the snacks.

The School Food and Nutrition Services program publishes monthly menus for elementary and secondary schools. In *elementary* schools, the food services office distributes menus to each teacher for all members of his/her class, and the teacher then distributes these to the students. In *middle and high schools*, menus are available in the administrative office and dean's offices, as well as in the cafeteria, for students who request them. The food services office also sends the school menus to the local newspapers and television station for publication.

The district sends a welcome letter to parents of kindergarteners new to the district. The letter includes information on menus, hot meals, student meal accounts, meal prices, a la carte offerings, economically needy applications, and solicits parental visitations, ideas, recipes, suggestions, and concerns. The food services program also sends a letter to staff at the beginning of the school year that shares vital

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[9] The training was offered to all teachers. Teachers choosing to participate were kindergarten through grade 3.

information on the Federal School Lunch and Breakfast Programs which govern and partially fund the district's lunch and breakfast programs. The school district's web page at www.stlucie.k12.fl.us/food includes on-line menus, program and nutrition information, nutrition links, and food services administrative contact information.

5 The district has established cost-efficiency benchmarks based on comparable food services programs in other school districts.

The district has established appropriate, reasonable, and well-defined benchmarks

The food services director developed initial benchmarks in 1996 based on her analysis of St. Lucie County School District cost data and student meal participation rates. The director compared St. Lucie County data to peer district data to set reasonable benchmarks. [10] The district contracted with the Florida State University Business School to validate the method used to set the benchmarks. [11] The food services director annually uses peer district costs to identify St. Lucie's relative cost ranking and then determines if the St. Lucie food services program met established benchmarks. Exhibits 13-10 through 13-12 show current district benchmarks and performance for school year 2001-02.

Exhibit 13-10

**School Food and Nutrition Services Is Meeting Meals
Per Labor Hour Benchmarks in All Schools
Except Elementary Schools With the Lowest Meal Counts**

Financial Reporting Category	2001-02 Actual Mplh			2001-02 Mplh Benchmarks		
Meals Per Labor Hour [1]	*E*	*M*	*H[3]*	*Elementary*	*Middle*	*High*
MPLH at 0-599 meals per day [2]	14.3			17		
MPLH at 600-699 meals per day	18.0			18		
MPLH at 700+ meals per day	20.6			19		
MPLH at 0-999 meals per day		18.5			17	
MPLH at 1000+ meals per day (five or fewer cash registers)		22.9			18	
MPLH at 1000+ meals per day (more than five cash registers)		22.8	16.2		16.5	16.5

[1] Meals per labor hour is the number of meals prepared and served per hour of labor designed to assess efficiency and staffing needs for each production kitchen.

[2] Meals per day is measured at different levels of ATM/ES, or "average total meals and equivalent served". ATM/ES is used to compare each kitchen's production to the meals per labor hour benchmark.

[3] All high schools have five or more cash registers.

Source: OPPAGA from district data.

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[10] The food services director selected peer districts for benchmarking purposes based on comparability of data, such as the number of meals served annually, similarity in menu planning systems, economically needy populations, decentralized preparation facilities, and other appropriate factors.

[11] The Florida State University Graduate Business School affirmed the district's developmental methodology by a 1998 analytical model under contract with the Florida Department of Education. The model recommended the use of accurate and current financial reporting data coupled with peer district comparisons in setting benchmarks for evaluating program performance.

Exhibit 13-11

School Food and Nutrition Services Is Meeting Participation Benchmarks in Elementary Schools but Not in Secondary Schools

Financial Reporting Category	2001-02 Actual Participation			2001-02 Participation Benchmarks		
Meal Participation	*E*	*M*	*H*	*Elementary*	*Middle*	*High*
Lunch only	81.6%			80%	NOTE 1	NOTE 1
Lunch for economically needy	94.0%	83.7%	64.8%	88-92%	85-92%	80-92%
Breakfast	40.1%	19.3%	10.0%	40-45%	25-30%	25-30%
Lunch (with a la carte sales)	84.6%	87.9%	65.2%	NOTE 2	75-80%	70-75%

Note 1: The food services director has not set benchmarks for "lunch only" in secondary schools because lunch by itself in those schools is a minimal effect, and so is grouped with a la carte sales.

Note 2: The food services director informed us that the program does not encourage a la carte sales in elementary schools and, accordingly, does not set any benchmarks.

Source: OPPAGA from district data.

Exhibit 13-12

School Food and Nutrition Services Is Generally Meeting All Cost per Meal Benchmarks

Financial Reporting Category	2001-02 Actual Cost per Meal			2001-02 Cost per Meal Benchmarks		
Cost per meal	*E*	*M*	*H*	*Elementary*	*Middle*	*High*
Labor cost per meal	$.75	$.71	$ .85	$.75 to .77	$.80 to .83	$.80 to .83
Purchased food cost per meal	.69	.76	.84	.82 to .87	.85 to 1.00	.85 to 1.00
Commodities cost per meal	.13	.12	.13	.12 to .15	.12 to .15	.12 to .15

Source: OPPAGA from district data.

In general, the district performs well but has some challenges related to performance. For example, factors contributing to missed benchmarks could include incomplete or inappropriate work scheduling, work inefficiencies, absenteeism, non-comparison of pre-planned production with actual meals served, lack of communication between managers and staff, and faulty cashiering procedures affecting meal counts. Transportation scheduling has had some adverse impact on breakfast participation in middle schools. And food services administrators have asserted that meals in high schools typically have higher labor costs because of the increased points of service that require staff operation during meal periods. Purchased food costs could possibly be lowered through greater use of commodities.

The district has strategies to continually assess the reliability of performance and cost data

The district uses two computerized programs to record and monitor program performance and cost data. The Computer Assisted Food Services (CAFS) program records daily meals served, and the TERMS program is used to record the district's financial transactions. The food services director assesses the reliability of performance and cost data collected by these programs by conducting verifications and analyses based on reports from these automated systems. The director monitors cash sales, meal reimbursements, budget data, monthly financial position, and year-to-date financial data. The food services director conducts data verification steps using edit check reports. The director prepares monthly financial reports showing the sources and uses of revenues by school cafeteria.

The district communicates performance evaluations to appropriate school administrators and food services personnel

The food services director holds monthly cafeteria manager's meetings with agendas that include discussion of school cafeteria monthly operating statements and benchmarks. A typical monthly meeting includes agenda items on sanitation and safety, training updates, manager's handbook updates, and financial operating statements for the prior month. Agendas also include the district's financial benchmarks for staffing (meals per labor hour), meal participation, and cost per meal. Actual data for each school is presented by categories for lunch, economically needy lunch, a la carte lunch, breakfast, economically needy breakfast, and economically needy percentage of enrollment. The data also reports the averages of these categories by type of school group (high, middle, and elementary).

The food services director provides financial operating statements to the managers at all monthly managers' meetings. The financial statements give the managers feedback using a "smiley face" if benchmarks are met, or a down arrow if benchmarks are not met. In addition, the managers' current evaluation form references financial performance indicators, including meals per labor hour, purchased food cost per meal, and USDA commodities value used per meal. The district also uses the newly implemented Five-Star Quality review to assess the food services program's overall performance compared to benchmarks in these areas. Although the food services director has provided monthly financial statements to the principals, according to the cafeteria managers the principals usually give them to the managers and do not use them for any management purposes.

6 The district regularly evaluates the school food services program based on established benchmarks and implements improvements to increase revenue and reduce costs.

Annual cafeteria evaluations include an analysis of performance and cost-efficiency related to benchmarks, an inspection of facilities and procedures, action plans, and follow-up

The food services department's overall monitoring and oversight of cafeterias has weekly, monthly, and annual components.

- *Weekly*—The cafeteria managers use the Managers Weekly Checklist and Meal Quality Checklist, and HACCP checklists, to remind food cooks and bakers about proper food temperatures, menu planning, and plate waste.
- *Every two weeks*—District food services specialists observe menus at the serving line, take food temperatures, and look for problems, such as warming foods too long.
- *Monthly*—A company, under contract to provide cleaning compounds and technical assistance, comes in to check chemical compound inventories, check on proper mixing and dilutions, and test the water for chemical makeup. The company provides the food services director with a monthly report.
- *Annually*—District food services specialists conduct Five-Star Quality and Accuclaim Reviews.

The district's food service specialists conduct an annual Five-Star Quality and Accuclaim review of each school cafeteria to monitor program accountability. The review is intended to ensure that each school's claim of meals served is based on authorized counting systems and that the systems result in accurate counts of meals reported for reimbursement. If the review identifies problems of procedural compliance requiring corrective action, a follow-up review is required within 45 days to determine that the problems have been resolved. The Accuclaim portion of the review must include, at a minimum,

- an audit of a random sample of 10% of free/reduced applications,

- a comparison of student's approved meal benefit applications to the roster of at each school,
- observance of the lunch meal service to ensure a complete menu is offered,
- observance of "offer vs. serve" being correctly implemented, and
- observance of meals being recorded through the CAFS program.

The review also encompasses a facilities inspection, which covers the following elements:

- *Food Safety*—maintaining proper food temperature and fresh appearance within two hours of serving;
- *Food Quality/Quantity*—maintaining adequate food quantities through meal service, proper portioning, fresh salads/fruits, palatable/appealing menu items, offer vs. serve provisions, adherence to published recipes, and updated recipe books;
- *Marketing and Merchandising*—having cafeteria uniforms in effect, displaying food attractively, following a county-wide menu, general ambience, and proper posted displays;
- *Cleanliness*—cleanliness of serving lines, staff, and kitchen, organized storage areas with food off the floor, effective pest control, and passing marks on Health Inspection Forms;
- *Record Keeping*—complete post-production records, complete pre-planning records, current health permit, displaying recent health inspection notice, maintaining daily temperature charts, keeping pack dates facing out on case and opened goods, having Meal Quality and HACCP Weekly Checklists on file in the food services office, requiring students to input their own PIN numbers and say their names aloud, and following approved cash collection and deposit procedures;
- *Accuclaim Review*—no meal eligibility or meal composition errors; and
- *Fiscal Performance*—meeting MPLH staffing benchmarks, participation benchmarks, and cost per plate benchmarks.

Upon completion of the review, the cafeteria manager and food service staff all sign and date the review form and reviewer comments. These annual reviews must be completed for each school by February 1 of the operating year.

Management annually evaluates the food services program as a whole

The district annually assesses the food services program. The food services director has developed benchmarks and assesses these annually through comparisons with a group of peer districts using a number of operating financial indicators, such as salaries, benefits, purchased services, supplies, energy, purchased foods, and other expenses. These comparisons include state averages and regional averages. The food services director uses DOE data to make the comparisons with Florida peer school districts. Annual program performance is also compared to previous years' performance. See the discussion in Section 5 of this report for further information on benchmark assessments.

7 The district regularly assesses the benefits of service and service delivery alternatives and implements changes to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Service delivery alternatives are regularly examined and evaluated

The district is active in its effort to improve or increase services and enhance efficiency while reducing costs. For example, the district recently assessed the food services program its attributed cost of in-house warehouse deliveries and central food warehouse functions. The district also changed its purchasing practices by acquiring low volume food and supply items through a contracted distributor to reduce waste

and out of date food items. The district continued to use its central food warehouse to store and deliver some food and non-food items resulting in economic benefits compared to using a food distributor. The food services director will complete another assessment in October 2002 and every six months thereafter to determine the cost-efficiency of continuing to use the district central warehouse to deliver food services items.

The district participates in a variety of nutritional programs and regularly evaluates their profitability

The food services program provides meal services to four satellite programs that contract with the district for meals. Other agencies sponsor the Eagle's Nest Daycare, Eckerd Leadership Program, Morningside Headstart, and Village Green Headstart programs for school-aged children (aged 3 to 18 years). The district invoices these programs for meals served. In addition, the food services program provides meals to St. Lucie County School District-sponsored satellite sites, such as PACE, Excel Alternatives, and Project ROCK. Districtwide snack programs were started in 1999 for after-school educational programs. Since 1997, the School Food and Nutrition Services department has provided meals for the summer program administered through the county Boys and Girls Club. From 1997 through 1999, the program provided meals to the Orange Avenue Charter School as well.

The district meets the needs of satellite programs with existing labor, which improves its overall efficiency. The program provided information showing that related meal-per-labor-hour efficiency has increased from 20% to 51% from 1995 to 2002 where satellite programs have been implemented. The department evaluates all programs financially either through DOE reporting requirements, or through the compilation of billing data. [12] The department signs annual contracts with outside agencies with per-meal pricing based on current meal costs. Each school site requests the renewal of snack programs annually. The department distributes snack program information to all school principals at the beginning of each school year and surveys summer school sites to determine the type of meal service needed for the site.

Financial Accountability and Viability

8 The district's food services budget is based on projections of student enrollment and revenues and expenditures but is not linked with specific program goals.

The School Food and Nutrition Services budget is based on program needs

The district has no districtwide policy to clearly link goals with its budget. The food services director prepares the annual budget according to zero-based budgeting concepts. This produces an annual budget based on estimates of the number of students to be enrolled, the number of meals projected to be served, and dollars expected to be available. The food services director includes specific renovation and equipment replacement requests within the food services budget, as well as critical assumptions for factors affecting items in the budget, such as changes (increases/decreases) in participation rates or interest rates.

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[12] Billing data includes the number of meals prepared and the per-meal billing price, which when multiplied results in the total revenues earned. This revenue information is compared with the actual cost to produce meals to ensure that total costs of providing contracted meals are covered through contracted revenues.

Although the budget is not formally linked to specific program goals, the food service operation uses well-developed measurable objectives and rigorous monthly financial statement analyses to manage cafeteria operations. This process is intended to ensure that budgeted resources are used to achieve program goals.

9 The district's financial control process includes an ongoing review of the food services program's financial and management practices.

Financial controls include written procedures for collecting, depositing, and disbursing money and accounting for reimbursable meals and other sales

The food services director maintains and updates procedures in the *Handbook for Managers* that address handling cash at each cafeteria site. These procedures also cover the use of the Cafeteria Assisted Food Service (CAFS) program, the district's automated system to collect cash from meals at the point of sale. The handbook includes specific procedures for collecting cash at 11 satellite meal service locations that do not have the automated system available. [13] Every manager and cashier receives training to ensure they understand and follow the procedures for collecting, depositing, and disbursing money.

The CAFS system also collects meal counts at the point of sale. The district reports the counts for reimbursement allowed through participation in the National School Lunch and Breakfast program. The *Handbook for Managers* includes procedures for using the CAFS system to collect automated meal count data, as well as manual collection procedures for satellite locations that do not have the computer system available. Cafeteria managers are responsible for ensuring that all staff members and cashiers at the point of sale adhere to the procedures.

A process is in place to ensure that each cafeteria complies with written financial control procedures

The School Food and Nutrition Services food services specialists assess financial control procedures using the Five Star Quality and Accuclaim Performance Review form. The form specifically addresses cash handling and deposits on page 4, Section V, 9 to answer the question, "Are the DOE-approved cash collection procedures being followed and deposits made according to school board policy?" A review of each of the district's 33 schools must be completed by February 1 of the operating year. All corrective action must be completed within 45 days of the completed review.

Automated data processing is used for financial reporting

Since 1987, the district has used the Total Education Resource Management System (TERMS) financial software to collect school cafeteria revenue and expenditure data, manage the cafeterias' finances, and prepare routine financial reports. The program records revenues and expenditures and provides detailed general ledger summaries. The program also compiles monthly financial statements by school cafeteria and annual district financial statements.

Per-meal costs are identified for each menu and are monitored and controlled

The food services director plans menus and has access to necessary financial and peer district data to determine appropriate meal costs and meal prices. The director also monitors and revises cost per-meal benchmarks. The district costs out each of its meals using per-meal cost guidelines. Data shows that salaries and benefits are the largest cost components of meal costs, so meal labor costs are typically

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[13] The district uses a manual roster method approved by the Florida Department of Education to collect meal counts at locations serving fewer than 50 meals per meal service and unable to justify the cost of installing and operating the automated system.

higher than their respective benchmarked costs. Although the food services director compares several cost components to peer districts, per-meal cost information is not used as a peer comparison for menu planning purposes, as this information is not readily available from peer districts in a daily per menu format.

School board policy requires that the food services director approve changes in menus. The district uses food production records to document the amounts and types of food items used in serving meals claimed for reimbursement. The cafeteria managers complete the production record daily showing the number of servings, recipes and ingredients, and the menu items prepared. The manager keeps the original and submits a copy of the daily records to the food services office for review at the end of each week.

The district's average meal costs are in the mid-range of costs among its peers

St. Lucie meal costs for both breakfast and lunch are slightly above the average costs for the 11-member peer group. Eight districts have lower breakfast costs and seven districts have lower lunch costs. Exhibit 13-13 illustrates the comparison between the St. Lucie County School District and its peer districts for breakfast and lunch meal costs for Fiscal Year 2001-02. In addition, it presents the utilization of USDA commodities.

Exhibit 13-13

Average Meal Costs for St. Lucie County School District
Are About Mid-range of Peer District Costs for Fiscal Year 2001-02

Peer Districts	Total Per Breakfast Cost	Total Per Lunch Cost	USDA Commodities Cost
St. Lucie	**$ 1.5349**	**$ 2.0426**	**$ .1687**
Alachua	1.6605	2.2097	.1973
Bay	1.6990	2.2606	.1239
Brevard	1.4150	1.8826	.2256
Indian River	1.3502	1.7976	.1677
Lake	1.4769	1.9648	.1041
Martin	1.4953	1.9898	.1639
Okeechobee	1.4982	1.9937	.1155
Osceola	1.4523	1.9325	.1420
Palm Beach	1.5672	2.0854	.2340
Santa Rosa	1.5248	2.1622	.1790
Sarasota	1.5326	2.0392	.2307
Median	1.5115	2.0165	.1682
Average	$ 1.5172	$ 2.0301	$ .1710

Source: The St. Lucie County School District.

The district's meal prices are among the lowest of its peers and have not increased, although program operating costs are beginning to rise at a greater rate than revenues

The food services program has not needed to increase breakfast or lunch prices since 1991. St. Lucie meal prices for both breakfast and lunch are below average for the 11-member peer group. Seven districts have higher breakfast prices, as well as higher lunch prices, while no district has lower breakfast prices but three have the same prices at the elementary school level. Secondary schools have lunch prices that are the same as St. Lucie's or higher except for Osceola, which has a lower lunch price for middle schools. The food services director prefers that district meal prices remain unchanged as long as certain conditions remain the same, such as the federal cost of living increases, the numbers of economically needy students, and if food costs increase only moderately. Exhibit 13-14 presents a comparison of meal

prices charged by the district to those charged by its peer districts showing that the district's prices are below average.

Exhibit 13-14

St. Lucie County School District Meal Prices Are Among the Lowest Within Its Peer Districts—Fiscal Year 2001-02

	Breakfast			Lunch				Adult	
County	*Elem.*	*Middle/High.*	*Reduced*	*Elem.*	*Middle*	*High*	*Reduced*	*Breakfast*	*Lunch*
St. Lucie	**$ .60**	**$ .60**	**$ .30**	**$ 1.25**	**$ 1.50**	**$ 1.50**	**$ .40**	**$ 1.00**	**$ 2.00**
Alachua	1.00	1.00	.30	1.50	1.65	1.65	.40	1.25	2.00
Bay	.70	.70	.30	1.50	1.75	1.75	.40	1.25	2.50
Brevard	.60	.60	.30	1.40	1.50	1.50	.40	1.00	2.25
Indian River	Free[1]	Free	Free	1.50	1.50	1.75	.40	1.00	2.00
Lake	.75	.75	.30	1.25	1.50	1.50	.40	N/A	2.00
Martin	.75	.75	.30	1.25	1.50	1.75	.40	1.00	1.95
Okeechobee	.75	.75	.30	1.25	1.50	1.50	.40	N/A	2.00
Osceola	.60	.60	.30	1.35	1.45	1.50	.40	1.00	2.00
Palm Beach	.90	.90	.30	1.25	1.50	1.50	.40	N/A	1.95
Santa Rosa	.60	.60	.30	1.50	1.75	1.75	.40	1.00	2.25
Sarasota	.75	1.00	.30	1.50	1.75	1.75	.40	1.50	2.00
Peer Average	**$ 0.73**	**$ 0.75**	**$ 0.30**	**$ 1.38**	**$ 1.57**	**$ 1.62**	**$ 0.40**	**$ 1.11**	**$ 2.08**

[1] Indian River County provides breakfast at no cost to all students through National School Lunch Program Provision 2 regulations.

Source: The St. Lucie County School District.

Despite the fact that the food services program is currently paying for itself and maintaining a fund balance, its financial statement indicates a trend of revenues not keeping pace with rising program operating costs (page 5 of report). Consequently, the food services fund balance may erode over time if meal costs continue to rise and become even more under funded by meal prices. Furthermore, if the fund also becomes stressed by other budgetary needs, such as non-structural service area renovations and more indirect cost assessments, then the fund's health may decline and place the quality of food services at risk. As a part of the district's ongoing review of the food services program's financial health, the food services director compares the district's meal prices to peer district prices annually and should closely monitor the balance between meal costs and meal prices.

10 The district accounts for and reports meals served by category.

The Cafeteria Assisted Food Service (CAFS) program is the point-of-sale system the district uses to account for meals served by category. This system accounts for the number of daily meals served and reported to the Florida Department of Education (DOE) for reimbursement through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and National Breakfast Program (NBP). All programs must be approved by the DOE and audited on a regular basis to ensure that the funds are appropriated fairly and correctly. The district submits an on-line monthly reimbursement voucher to the Department of Education and has had no significant uncorrected meal count accuracy issues or problems.

The CAFS point-of-sale program assures accurate meal counts to facilitate the district's participation in the National School Lunch Program and National Breakfast Program. During Fiscal Year 2001-02 (school year), 53.6% of students were approved to receive free or reduced-price meal benefits through the national school meal programs. As a participant in these programs, the district receives federal reimbursement income for free, reduced, and paid breakfast and lunch meals served and based on whether

schools are designated as having a maximum severe need population (greater than 60% economically needy). The State Department of Education's Food and Nutrition Program Section evaluates each school's student enrollment to determine whether they are less than or greater than 60% economically needy. Exhibit 13-15 shows the reimbursement rates for the Fiscal Year 2002-03.

Exhibit 13-15

USDA Meal Reimbursement Rates, Fiscal Year 2002-03

Meal	Designation	Reimbursement Rate
Free Lunch	Population > 60% Economically Needy	$ 2.16
Reduce-Price Lunch	Population > 60% Economically Needy	1.76
Breakfast	Free	1.17
	Reduced	0.87
	Maximum Free	1.40
	Maximum Reduced	1.10

Source: USDA.

11 The district regularly evaluates purchasing practices to decrease costs and increase efficiency.

The district regularly evaluates purchasing practices for food, supplies, and equipment to decrease costs, increase efficiency, and ensure quality.

Staff from the district finance office conduct an annual review of food services procurement procedures. Directives issued by the Florida Department of Education (DOE) in its Technical Assistance Note stipulate that the reviews are to be performed by district staff with no direct control or supervision over procurement and bidding practices and procedures. These independent reviews are intended as internal district oversight to ensure competition maximization and procurement of the best products and services at the lowest possible price. The Procurement Review Instrument provided by DOE is a 10-point instrument covering

- written procurement plans and policies,
- USDA-approved procurement methods,
- type of bid format used,
- public advertisement of bids,
- code of conduct,
- requirement for yearly independent review,
- bid protest timeframes and guidelines,
- Public Entity Crimes Act forms on file,
- Debarment and Suspension Forms on file, and
- inclusion of economic loss protection clauses in contracts.

The food services director plans menus to maximize the use of USDA commodity food items and reviews food orders to substitute available USDA commodities when other similar food items are ordered. Staff of the district's purchasing department use formal bids to the maximum extent possible when purchasing food and supplies for use in the School Food and Nutrition Services program.

The district reviews food, supply, and equipment specifications annually

The food services director (a registered dietician) develops food item specifications and forwards them to the purchasing department for bid solicitation. The Food Services Purchasing Plan and school board policy stipulate that food services administrative personnel specify all food and supply items. Item specifications are based on nutritional information, product availability, student acceptance and other factors that affect overall acceptability. The food services director reports that cafeteria managers provide input regarding food and non-food items they need.

The district purchases canned groceries, dry goods, paper products, and non-food items semiannually using district bids. A consortium of 15 school districts purchases frozen and refrigerated food items to take advantage of quantity pricing. The consortium member districts meet monthly to review new products and report on product tests completed in individual districts as a part of the product review process.

The School Food and Nutrition Services program teams with the district purchasing department to ensure compliance with purchasing procedures

The food services director stated that food services personnel do not actively recruit vendors and that vendor inquiries are passed to the purchasing department. The purchasing department executes the bid process and purchases advertising as required. The purchasing director posts notices of bid requests to an industry on-line service, which allows vendors to learn of opportunities to bid and provide the district with products. The food services director and the district purchasing agent review bid tab sheets prior to sending purchasing recommendations to the school board for approval. This review is to ensure that quality, service, and price offered are of greatest value to the school district. The purchasing department handles the specifics of bid award and requires that two people open and sign all bids.

12 The district has developed an effective inventory control system that is appropriate to the size of the school food services program.

The district uses the CAFS system at school cafeterias. The CAFS system has an inventory control component that records the number of food items sold for completion of daily production records and calculates monthly inventory quantities and dollar inventory values in school kitchens. The *Handbook for Managers* contains written procedures for using the CAFS computerized inventory system in maintaining and calculating monthly inventory amounts. The procedures require the cafeteria managers to print out monthly inventory worksheets and perform inventory counts of selected items and to forward these counts to the food services central office monthly.

The district uses another system, the Gateway system, at its central food services warehouse to account for receipts, shipments, and food stock transfers between schools. This is a perpetual inventory control system with automated management of inventory quantities on hand, warehouse row location, low stock order points, and cost values. The system also automates records for requisitioning from warehouse stock, order filling, delivery, receiving, shipping, item stock numbers, and item history. The system is designed to be accessible from workstations in the cafeterias and is capable of providing cafeteria managers with on-line ordering and low stock order-point control. The district has developed and completed a training session for the cafeteria managers in the use of this system with implementation planned for September 2002.

The food services and finance central offices together provide guidance and overall inventory monitoring, testing of monthly cafeteria inventory counts, and reconciliation functions. Cafeteria managers coordinate monthly inventories at all schools and submit the counts to the food services office. District procedures require food service employees, other than the school cafeteria managers, to conduct the

counts of physical inventory on hand at the end of every month. Additionally, the district hires a private inventory company to do an independent count of inventory on hand in the central food services warehouse on June 30. The warehouse manager reviews counts, conducts verified recounts, and manages the warehouse perpetual inventory records system.

13 The district has a system for receiving, storing, and disposing of food, supplies, and equipment.

The district has guidelines for receiving, storing, and disposing of food, supplies, and equipment

The *Handbook for Managers* and Inventory Procedures for District Stores/Distribution include proper procedures for receiving, storing and disposing of food and supplies. Receiving procedures require that the cafeteria manager and/or a designee receive and sign for purchased items. Managers send signed invoices to the food services central office weekly where staff review them for accuracy and completeness before entering them for payment.

At delivery, the cafeteria manager or his/her designee checks in the order, matches the items to the invoice, and signs and dates the invoice. In the case of items delivered from the district's warehouse, the warehouse picker, the deliverer, and the cafeteria recipient all sign the invoice. If there are any errors, the manager notes them for food services central office staff's attention. The district obtains credit for unacceptable products. If a product is unacceptable or is not listed as being ordered, then the receiving employee indicates by writing "refused" next to the product and initials the invoice or delivery ticket.

During our site visits to school kitchens, we observed storage conditions in dry goods areas, coolers, and freezers. Dry goods areas in school kitchens were easily accessible and countable. We observed that USDA commodities always had dates on the cans, but cans dropped shipped from US Foods did not always have dates entered by receiving employees (most of the time they did not). Kitchen coolers are typically holding areas for prepared foods to be put on the serving line or leftovers. The freezers are small and bulging with stacks of cartons after shipments are made, and we observed this condition at every site visited. Verifying dates on frozen foods was, therefore, impractical under the circumstances. Managers explained that these foods would be almost fully consumed by the end of the school week.

Procedures require the cafeteria manager to be responsible for storage facility security in the school kitchen. Each facility (walk-in coolers and freezers, dry storage areas, chemical/paper storage areas, and other kitchen areas) must be secured by lock and key to prohibit unauthorized access. Overall security of inventory, as well as building keys, is the responsibility of the school principal. Procedures suggest three sets of keys: one for the principal and two for the school cafeteria manager in the event of illness or emergency. Procedures suggest that locks are changed when management personnel changes occur.

Storage space is extremely limited at some schools. Items generally must be used before there is space for anything else in some of the school kitchens. As a result, the schools do not typically rely on automatic reorder points, such as used in the central food services warehouse, and we noted nothing to indicate any significant problems with over-ordering. The district minimizes space problems by adhering to staggered deliver schedules from the central food services warehouse to the school kitchens.

The central food services warehouse maintains a perpetual inventory of items in stock. Staff date the boxes before they go on the shelf to ensure that FIFO (first-in, first-out) is practiced. In the central warehouse, new stock is typically placed on pallets high above accessibility of picking teams who work out of open cases in lower bin locations. Cafeteria managers manually submit a requisition order to the central warehouse for goods they need to be delivered. The central warehouse automated system generates a paper pick-list and warehouse employees fill the order and deliver the goods to the school

placing the order. The central warehouse manager is responsible for the security of goods within the central warehouse.

14 The district has procedures for the repair and replacement of equipment that includes preventive maintenance practices but needs a formal plan to better coordinate maintenance.

The district does not have an adequate long-range equipment repair and replacement plan. District administrators assess large equipment annually and make recommendations for equipment replacement in each kitchen, but some needed repairs are going undone. For example, the manager of an elementary school requested the repair of a sink drain hole that we observed draining into a catch-pan three weeks after the request was said to have been made. Further, the food services director noted that this needed repair does not show up in the maintenance request system.

In another example we observed, a dishwashing machine stood unused in an elementary school we visited. The manager informed us that work needed to be done to cut a space into the steel counter to accommodate the dishwasher before it could be put into service. The machine was transferred from another school in August 2001 based on the recommendations of the manufacturer's representative and maintenance personnel. The dishwasher has been unused ever since. The food services director stated that the maintenance person assigned this project was transferred to general electrical work. In the meantime, the school has unnecessarily expended $5,399 for disposable trays pending completion of the work and putting the dishwasher back into service.

Repair and Replacement

The *Handbook for Managers* contains written procedures for obtaining repair and replacement of food services equipment from the district's central maintenance facility. The procedures instruct food services employees to initially contact school custodial employees to help diagnose and solve maintenance problems. If the problem is not initially corrected, the cafeteria manager initiates a maintenance work order request through the school administrative office. This is done through an automated system that generates a work order at the maintenance office. In case of emergency, the cafeteria manager is instructed by procedure to call the maintenance office and make a verbal request for emergency service. For computer equipment malfunctions, the procedures instruct the cafeteria manager to contact the food services district office.

The district has established equipment useful lives as criteria and guidelines for replacing large equipment. The food services director based the useful lives on her personal experience and district maintenance observations. The useful lives range from 15 to 30 years depending on the type of equipment. The food services director reported that the district maintenance department's appliance and refrigeration technicians evaluate equipment and make recommendations for replacement using these guidelines.

Preventative Maintenance

The *Handbook for Managers* contains procedures for preventative maintenance practices for various pieces of kitchen equipment. The food services director emphasizes "deep" cleaning as a preventative maintenance measure. Food services employees do "deep" cleaning on all equipment three times a year, while equipment such as ventilation hoods is cleaned two times per year. District maintenance personnel clean overhead ventilation equipment at least twice annually. Maintenance personnel also service coolers and freezers over the summer months initiated through a food services district office work/service request. The district completes a districtwide work/service request to assess serving equipment for

operability and safety (including sneezeguard replacement) at all schools in the fall of each school year. Private contractors evaluate dishwashers and perform related preventative maintenance.

Equipment Warranties

When new food services equipment is in need of repair, the food services manager contacts the district food services office to determine if the equipment is still within the warranty period. If so, then the food services office places a call to the vendor/authorized service repair company to request warranty work. The district food services office notifies the food services manager that the call was placed and when to expect the service personnel at the school. Each school kitchen has equipment manuals on hand for reference when placing service calls.

Once equipment warranty periods expire, the equipment repair requests are placed with the district maintenance department instead of the food services office using the work/service computer program. The director of the district's maintenance department informed us that the food service director is responsible for handling all kitchen equipment-related preventive maintenance and warranty issues. However, the maintenance department handles air conditioning systems and warranties.

Recommendations────────────────────

- *We recommend that the district develop a long-range equipment repair, replacement, and preventative maintenance plan to assure that equipment is repaired timely and is useful throughout its useful life in order to avoid unnecessary operating costs.*

    Action Plan 13-3 provides the steps needed to implement these recommendations.

Action Plan 13-3

Assure That Equipment Is Repaired In a Timely Manner to Avoid Unnecessary Operating Costs		
Strategy	Develop a long-range equipment repair, replacement, and preventative maintenance plan.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The food services director and maintenance director develop the long-range equipment repair, replacement and preventative maintenance plan.
	Step 2:	The superintendent approves the request.
Who Is Responsible	The food services director and maintenance director	
Time Frame	July 2003	

Source: OPPAGA.

Preparation and Nutrition

15 The district provides school meals that are planned to meet the nutritional needs of students and comply with recognized dietary guidelines.

Meals are planned to meet the nutritional needs of students and comply with appropriate, nationally recognized dietary guidelines

The food services department uses enhanced food-based menu planning to ensure that students receive age-appropriate Recommended Daily Allowances equal to one-quarter at breakfast and one-third at lunch. Menu planning procedures outline the meal components allowed and stipulates adjusted serving sizes for grades K-6 and 7-12 for breakfast, lunch, and snacks. Food services employees analyze menus for nutritional needs using the CAFS system nutritional analysis software approved by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Managers complete food production records daily to document the amounts and types of food items used in serving meals claimed for reimbursement, as outlined in the *Code of Federal Regulations*. These records also document the use of USDA commodities.

Menus are planned to meet the nutritional needs of special needs students

The food services department modifies district menus to fit the needs of special students on a case-by-case basis. National School Lunch Program guidelines require a medical request for such meals, and the district's food services director (a registered dietician) assists cafeteria managers to ensure that medical directions are understood and correctly implemented. School staff (nurses and psychologists) explain the needs to the manager. The department will buy special products needed, if prescribed by a doctor. Meals served to students that are modified or supplemented due to the student's special need are counted and claimed for reimbursement according to the student's approved meal status.

Convenience and pre-packaged foods are evaluated for cost-effectiveness, nutritional value, and student acceptance prior to use

As part of the food specification and product testing process, a consortium of 15 school districts meets monthly to address product testing and evaluation with district representatives. Written procedures state that the consortium identifies a proposed list of products or types of products they review and evaluate prior to menu placement. Throughout the school year, brokers or manufacturers may introduce products at the monthly meetings. The consortium's evaluation includes a review of the nutritive value, cost, ease of preparation, and student acceptance, as well as identification of products for student testing. Each district designates a minimum of two schools as testing sites and provides the locations to the appropriate brokers and manufacturers. The districts then test the selected products with students at the designated sites using guidelines the consortium district members developed.

16 The district's food production and transportation system ensures the service of high quality food with minimal waste.

USDA commodities are maximized

In 1998, the Florida Commodities Office instructed the School Food and Nutrition Services department to request no more than the annual planned assistance level (PAL) value of commodities. If a shipment of a type of commodity were cancelled, the district would lose out on the value of that commodity. Since this directive caused a problem for every district in that actual receipts were lower than PALs, the directive was changed in 2000 so that districts now request as much of a food item as can be used in a school year, regardless of whether or not the PAL is exceeded. As a result, the district now actually receives more (and is using more) in commodity value annually. [14] It is intended that commodity usage will eventually be shown to return to the higher levels experienced prior to the 1998 directive.

Food service managers use standardized recipes and portion control utensils

Each school kitchen uses standardized recipes contained in the *USDA Recipe Book*, the School Portfolio book, and the *St. Lucie County Recipe Book*. The district also uses the USDA publication, *A Menu Planner for Healthy School Meals*, which is available in every cafeteria manager's office. The recipe books include ingredients, preparation steps, portion control measures, nutrient contents, yield, and suggested marketing tips. We observed small portion control utensils being used in the cafeteria lines at schools we visited.

The School Food and Nutrition Services employees observe returned trays to identify waste

The *Handbook for Managers* includes a procedure to document the weekly evaluation of student meal waste. The cafeteria managers complete a Meal Quality Checklist, sign it, and submit the form to the food services district office. The checklist monitors six points of food quality and preparation and six points of meal service. Two of the six points on meal service monitor student meal waste by identifying plate waste.

Food service managers complete production records and food service specialists regularly review the records

Cafeteria managers complete a daily menu production worksheet and submit it to the food services central office. A food services specialist scans the worksheets weekly for any over- or under-production and reviews the worksheets in detail prior to site visit evaluations. If either over- or under-production is noted from these worksheets, the specialist schedules a meeting with the manager to correct the problem and improve production forecasting.

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[14] The USDA makes bonus commodities available to school districts regardless of PAL limits.

Safety and Sanitation

17 The district follows safety and environmental health practices and regulations.

The district provides food services in a safe and sanitary environment

The School Food and Nutrition Services Department provides safety and health practices and regulations to the cafeteria managers. These are included in the *Handbook for Managers*, Meal Safety Data Sheets, and Chapter 64E, *Florida Administrative Code*. We observed these materials on hand at the cafeteria sites visited. The *Handbook for Managers* contains written procedures for safe and healthy food service practices. The handbook covers 1) food handling and preparation procedures, 2) meal production scheduling, 3) safety and sanitation, 4) food service procedures, 5) Meal Quality Checklist, 6) Manager Self-Inspection Checklist (HACCP), 7) and food storage. The manual addresses cross-contamination of foods, food handling temperatures, thawing frozen foods, leftover foods, refrigeration equipment failure, transporting food, and other food safety and cleanliness concerns. The district includes safety and sanitation training in its training program. This training is required of all food services employees.

The St. Lucie County Health Department inspects all cafeterias three times during the school year and kitchens annually. Each site has copies of the report posted, as required by law. In addition, each cafeteria manager forwards a copy of the report to the central food services office. Copies of state and local health regulations are on file at all school sites.

The School Food and Nutrition Services Department distributes emergency procedures and plans for reporting and investigating accidents to all School Food and Nutrition Services employees

The cafeterias have emergency procedures on site for choking, food-borne illness, and catastrophic incidences requiring emergency response. The district's Risk Management department handles school-based emergency procedures. The main office of each school has accident forms available. Cafeteria managers have been instructed in accident form completion and accidents on an as-needed basis, and accident prevention is routinely discussed at the monthly manager meetings. Chapter 9 of the *Handbook for Managers* contains procedures for reporting injuries and completing a Notice of Injury form available in each school office. Although the food services procedures do not address cafeteria-wide steps that should be followed for student safety in the event of wide-spread catastrophic emergency conditions or events, the principals have provided these steps in school-based directives which are on hand in the food services manager's office.

14 Cost Control Systems

The district's cost control systems include internal auditing, financial auditing, asset management, inventory management, risk management, financial management, purchasing, and payment processing. Overall, the district has established effective cost control systems in these areas. However, certain enhancements could be made in the areas of internal auditing, inventory management, financial management, and purchasing.

Conclusion

The St. Lucie County School District generally has established effective cost control systems. The district uses all of the best practices for financial auditing, asset management, risk management, and payment processing. The district could make improvements in the best practices areas of internal auditing, inventory management, financial management, and purchasing. Overall, the district is using 30 of the 31 best practices for cost controls.

Overview of Chapter Findings

The Auditor General reviewed the district's cost control systems using the Best Financial Management Practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education and associated indicators. We employed several methodologies to develop chapter conclusions and action plans. For instance, we conducted on-site interviews with district level managers and gathered information on the cost control systems activities, such as reviewing policies and procedures, analyzing financial data, including general ledger reports, budget reports, reports made to the district, and audited financial reports.

An overview of chapter findings is presented below.

Internal Auditing

1. The district does not have an internal audit function. (Page 14-6)

Financial Auditing

2. The district obtains an external audit in accordance with government auditing standards. (Page 14-8)
3. The district provides for timely follow-up of findings identified in the external audit. (Page 14-8)
4. The district obtains and reviews required financial information relating to school internal accounts and direct-support organizations (DSOs). (Page 14-8)

Asset Management

5. Segregation of Duties: The district segregates responsibilities for custody of assets from record keeping responsibilities for those assets. (Page 14-11)

6. Authorization Controls: The district has established controls that provide for proper authorization of asset acquisitions and disposals. (Page 14-11)

7. Project Accounting: The district has established records that accumulate project costs and other relevant data to facilitate reporting construction and maintenance activities to the district, public, and grantors. (Page 14-11)

8. Asset Accountability: The district provides recorded accountability for capitalized assets. (Page 14-12)

9. Asset Safeguards: Assets are safeguarded from unauthorized use, theft, and physical damage. (Page 14-12)

Inventory Management

10. Segregation of Duties over Inventory: The district segregates responsibilities for custody of inventories from record keeping responsibilities for those assets. (Page 14-13)

11. Inventory Requisitioning Controls: The district has established and implemented controls that provide for proper inventory requisitioning. (Page 14-13)

12. Inventory Accountability and Custody: The district has established controls that provide for inventory accountability and appropriate safeguards exist for inventory custody. (Page 14-14)

13. Inventory Management: The district does periodically review the inventory function; however, the district has not formally evaluated the school and office supplies inventory and the maintenance supplies inventory functions to determine cost-effectiveness. The district should also analyze the costs and benefits of other alternatives for its inventory functions. (Page 14-14)

Risk Management

14. General: The district has a process to set objectives for risk management activities, identify and evaluate risks, and design a comprehensive program to protect itself at a reasonable cost. (Page 14-16)

15. Providing for Coverage Against Risk Exposure: The district has comprehensive policies and procedures relating to acquiring and reviewing coverage for risks of loss. (Page 14-17)

Financial Management

16. Management Control Methods: District management communicates its commitment and support of strong internal controls. (Page 14-21)

17. Financial Accounting System: The district records and reports financial transactions in accordance with prescribed standards. (Page 14-22)

18. Financial Reporting Procedures: The district prepares and distributes its financial reports timely. (Page 14-22)

19. Budget Practices: The district has a financial plan serving as an estimate of and control over operations and expenditures; however, the district needs to increase its unreserved general fund balance through budgeting processes. (Page 14-23)

20. Cash Management: The district has effective controls to provide recorded accountability for cash resources. Cash management could be more efficient with a consolidation of accounts and banks used by the district. (Page 14-25)

21. Investment Practices: The district has an investment plan that includes investment objectives and performance criteria designed to maximize return consistent with the risks associated with each investment, and specifies the types of financial products approved for investment. (Page 14-26)

22. Receivables: The district has established effective controls for recording, collecting, adjusting, and reporting receivables. (Page 14-27)

23. Salary and Benefits Costs: The district has effective controls that provide accountability for the payment of salaries and benefits; however, a direct deposit initiative would enhance controls and payment processes. (Page 14-27)

24. Debt Financing: The district analyzes, evaluates, monitors, and reports debt-financing alternatives. (Page 14-30)

25. Grant and Entitlement Monitoring: The district effectively monitors and reports grant activities. (Page 14-30)

Purchasing

26. Segregation of Duties: The district segregates purchasing responsibilities from the requisitioning, authorizing, and receiving functions. (Page 14-32)

27. Requisitioning: The district has established controls for authorizing purchase requisitions. However, the district should consider implementing a purchasing card program to achieve purchasing efficiencies. (Page 14-33)

28. Purchasing: The district has established authorization controls over purchasing. However, the district should consider restructuring the Purchasing Department to improve efficiency and strengthen internal controls. (Page 14-35)

29. Receiving: The district has established controls to ensure that goods are received and meet quality standards. (Page 14-37)

Payment Processing

30. Disbursements: The district has established controls to ensure disbursements are properly authorized, documented, and recorded. (Page 14-38)

31. Invoice Processing: The district has established controls for processing invoices to ensure that quantities, prices, and terms coincide with purchase orders and receiving reports. (Page 14-39)

As seen in Exhibit 14-1, the district has an opportunity to save in cost controls.

Exhibit 14-1

The District Can Save Money By Using Purchasing Cards

Way to Save	Five Year Savings
• Implement a purchasing card system. (Page 14-34).	• Estimated five-year savings is $26,000.

Source: Auditor General.

Determining whether to take advantage of these opportunities is a district decision and should be based on many factors including district needs, public input, and school board priorities. If it uses this opportunity to reduce costs, the district would be able to redirect the funds to other priorities, such as putting money into the classroom and addressing deficiencies identified in this report.

Background

The district, as provided in s. 230.03(2), *Florida Statutes*, is required to operate, control, and supervise all free public schools in the district. Laws, rules, regulations, and grantor restrictions applicable to the district's activities define, among other matters, the purposes for which resources may be used and the manner in which authorized uses shall be accomplished and documented. Section 230.23(3), *Florida Statutes*, provides that the responsibility for the administration of the district is vested with the superintendent as the secretary and executive officer of the district. To assure the efficient and effective operation of the district in accordance with good business practices and with applicable legal and contractual requirements, effective cost control systems must be established and maintained.

The superintendent is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective cost control systems. The objectives of efficient and effective cost control systems are to

- provide management with reasonable, but not absolute, assurance that assets are safeguarded against loss from unauthorized use or disposition;
- ensure that transactions are executed in accordance with the district's authorization;
- ensure that transactions are recorded properly to promote reliable financial data;
- ensure that restricted assets are managed in compliance with applicable laws, rules, regulations, and contracts; and
- within the constraints established by applicable laws, rules, regulations, and contracts, ensure that operating policies and procedures promote cost-effective and efficient methods of operation.

Exhibit 14-2 presents the organizational structure of the business services function at St. Lucie County School District.

Exhibit 14-2

The Assistant Superintendent for Business Services Manages Accounting and Finance Functions
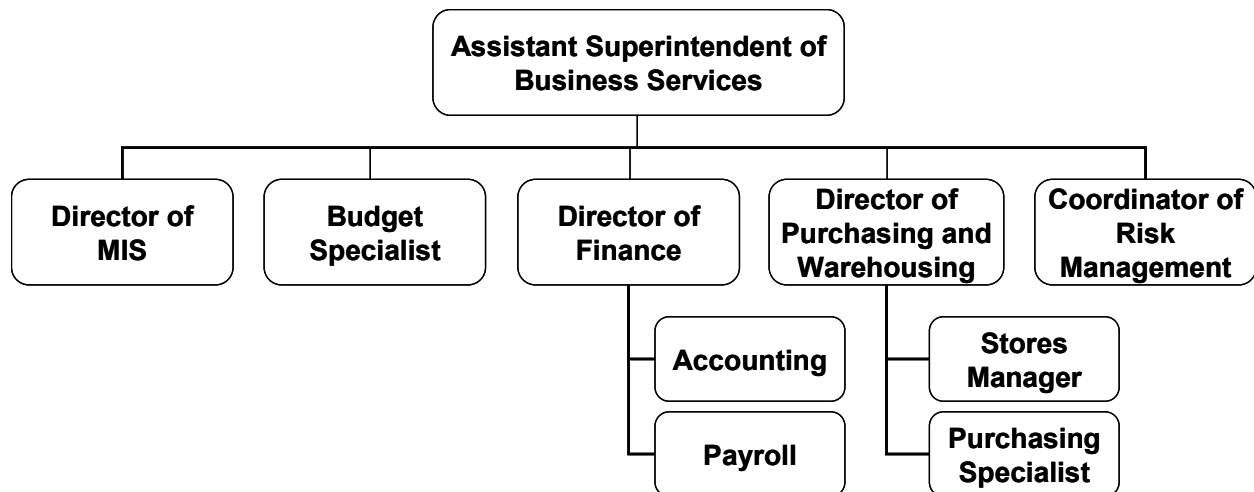
Source: St. Lucie County School District Organization Chart.

The district's business services function is similar to business services departments in other similarly sized school districts in the state. The business services function, headed by the assistant superintendent of Business Services, is responsible for ensuring efficient and effective cost control systems. To develop a better understanding of the financial operating processes, we evaluated the district's efforts to meet best financial management practices in the following eight cost control systems areas:

- Internal auditing
- Financial auditing
- Asset management
- Risk management
- Inventory management
- Financial management
- Purchasing
- Payment processing

Internal Auditing

An established internal audit function can add value to district operations

The Institute of Internal Auditors defines internal auditing as "an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organization's operations. It helps an organization accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control, and governance processes." An established internal audit function's responsibilities (scope) can include:

- verifying the reliability and integrity of information;
- determining compliance with law, regulations, policies, procedures, and contracts;
- ensuring the safeguarding of assets;
- appraising the economical and efficient use of resources; and
- determining and/or measuring whether established objectives and goals for operations or programs have been accomplished.

The scope of many internal audit functions may not include all of the above responsibilities. Management decisions, the scope of entity operations, and the regulatory environment that the entity exists in can impact the degree of responsibility given an internal audit function. Section 230.23(10)(l), *Florida Statutes* (2001), provides that school districts may employ an internal auditor to perform ongoing financial verification of the financial records of the school district. This law also provides that the internal auditor shall report directly to the school board or its designee.

In addition to resources received at the district level, the individual schools also receive moneys for club and class activities. These moneys are deposited in each school's internal accounts, which are commonly referred to as school internal funds. Rule 6A-1.087, *Florida Administrative Code*, requires school districts to provide for annual audits of the school internal funds. As a practicality, internal auditors employed pursuant to s. 230.23(10)(l), *Florida Statutes* (2001), may also be assigned the responsibility for auditing the school internal funds.

St. Lucie County School District has an employee who performs the primary school level internal account audits and contracts with an outside accounting firm to perform the secondary school level internal accounts audits, both on an annual basis. The district employee has no other responsibilities typically assigned to a true internal audit function.

1   The district does not have an internal audit function.

The St. Lucie County School District's decision to not have an internal audit function is consistent with its peer districts. A review of the internal audit function in peer school districts shows that most do not have an in-house internal audit function.

The district should conduct a risk assessment of its activities and operations

Given current economic conditions, it may not be financially feasible to establish an internal audit function. Regardless of whether or not the district has an internal audit function, a risk assessment of the district's operations and activities should be conducted to determine if there exist potential risks that can adversely affect the district. Risk assessments are typically conducted in all large organizations as a means to protect against unnecessary risks and to identify means to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of operations. Without a properly conducted risk assessment, the district cannot determine if potential risks exist which should be addressed. The district currently uses risk assessment forms for school internal account audits which could be modified for use in other functional areas.

Internal audit functions are typically used to perform risk assessments so that identified risks can be prioritized and addressed. Risks addressed by the internal audit functions, depending on their nature, can be eliminated or minimized through the recommendation of enhanced control processes or other practices that reduce exposure to the risk. These benefits can possibly offset the costs of an internal audit function.

A risk assessment should include input from many stakeholders to be effective. This would include the superintendent, board members, and financial and operational management, including school principals. Using many stakeholders helps in identifying the level of concern for specific high-risk activities and is useful in assigning priority.

An annual risk assessment could be performed by the district's existing financial staff. However, if current work requirements do not provide financial staff sufficient time to perform the risk assessment, the district should consider using a certified public accounting firm to perform the annual risk assessments. The district can use the experiences of other school districts that have out-sourced the risk assessment process to better prepare for its own risk assessment. The average annual cost is estimated at approximately $20,000. Although first-year costs may be higher, efficiencies gained during the first year should result in lower costs in subsequent years. Using the average of $20,000 for each year will result in a cost of $100,000 over five years.

It is likely that the addressing of risks identified in the risk assessment will result in cost savings and avoidances that will offset the cost of the risk assessment. However, the cost impact of these potential savings and avoidances cannot be determined at this time.

Recommendation———————————————

- *We recommend that the district implement a risk assessment process that will enhance the identification of high-risk operations and activities and will assist in prioritizing these risks for purposes of resolving them.*

  Action Plan 14-1 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 14-1

Implement Risk Assessment Process	
Strategy	Implement a risk assessment process to enhance identification of high-risk activities which will result in prioritizing these activities in order of highest risk for purposes of resolving them.
Action Needed	Step 1: Develop and distribute request for proposal for risk assessment.
	Step 2: Select firm that will perform risk assessment for the district.
	Step 3: Review results of risk assessment and prioritize high-risk activities.
	Step 4: Assign responsibility for addressing and resolving prioritized risks.
Who Is Responsible	Assistant superintendent for Business Services in lieu of internal auditor
Time Frame	October 31, 2004

Source: Auditor General.

Financial Auditing

State law governs the district's responsibility to obtain annual financial audits. Section 11.45(2)(i), *Florida Statutes*, provides that the Auditor General will conduct financial audits of the accounts and records of all school districts in counties with populations under 150,000 and conduct financial audits of school districts with populations of 150,000 or more once every three years. Section 218.39(1), *Florida Statutes*, provides that during the other two years, those school districts with populations of 150,000 or more shall have annual financial audits conducted of their accounts and records by certified public accountants. Certified public accountants performing such audits shall be retained by each school district and paid from its public funds, and each audit shall be completed within 12 months after the end of the fiscal year. Section 11.45(c), *Florida Statutes*, defines a financial audit as an examination of financial statements in order to express an opinion on the fairness with which they are presented in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles and an examination to determine whether operations are properly conducted in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements. Financial audits must be conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and government auditing standards as adopted by the Board of Accountancy.

In addition to requirements for annual audits of the district's records, certain components of the district have other provisions for audit. These include the district's school internal accounts, foundations, and charter schools. Audit requirements for these activities are discussed below.

The individual schools also receive moneys for club and class activities. These moneys are deposited in each school's internal accounts, which are commonly referred to as school internal funds. Rule 6A-1.087, *Florida Administrative Code*, requires school districts to provide for annual audits of the school internal

funds. Most school districts employ internal accounts auditors to perform the audits of the internal funds. Others contract with certified public accountants to perform the audits. St. Lucie County School District uses a district employee to perform audits of the internal accounts for its elementary schools and an independent certified public accounting firm to audit those of its secondary schools**.**

For financial reporting purposes, school districts are primary governments and may include one or more component units within their financial statements. Component units can either be "blended" into the financial transactions of a particular fund, or they may be "discretely presented" in separate column(s) in the financial statements. Accounting standards provide specific criteria that are used to identify component units and to determine whether they should be blended or discretely presented. At June 30, 2001, St. Lucie County School District had one blended component unit, a leasing corporation; and one foundation, a direct-support organization, that is considered to be a discretely presented component unit.

2   The district obtains an external audit in accordance with government auditing standards.

Annual financial audits are performed in accordance with government auditing standards

The last census determined that the population of St. Lucie County currently exceeds 150,000. As such, the St. Lucie County School District contracts for annual audits performed by certified public accountants for two of every three years. The audit for the third year is conducted by the Auditor General. Our review of annual financial audits for each of the last three years showed that the audits were performed in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and government auditing standards.

3   The district provides for timely follow-up of findings identified in the external audit.

The district makes reasonable efforts to resolve findings noted in annual audits

State law requires, as applicable, the Auditor General or the certified public accountant to provide the district with a list of findings that may be included in the audit report. Although the law provides for different methods of response depending on who is performing the audit, the district is required to provide a written statement of explanation concerning all of the findings, including corrective actions to be taken to prevent a recurrence of the findings. Our review of past reports shows that the district makes reasonable efforts to resolve findings noted in annual audits.

4   The district obtains and reviews required financial information relating to school internal accounts and direct-support organizations (DSOs).

Although not significant when compared to overall district financial operations, a substantial amount of money flows through the district's school internal funds. At June 30, 2001, the net assets of these funds totaled $1,282,672.

Audits are conducted of school internal accounts annually

Since these funds are controlled primarily at the school level, it is important that the district periodically monitor this activity to ensure that the funds are being used as directed in the district's *School Internal Funds Manual*. Rule 6A-1.087, *Florida Administrative Code*, requires that the district provide for an annual audit of these funds. One of St. Lucie County School District's employees performs the audits of the school internal funds of the district's elementary schools and centers. The audits of the middle and high schools are performed by an independent certified public accountant. This employee also reviews the monthly financial information received from each school and acts as a liaison for the school's internal accounts bookkeepers, answering questions and providing training as needed. Our review showed that the required audits for the 2000-01 fiscal year were completed on a timely basis.

Annual audits are conducted of the district's direct support organization (DSO)

The district has one DSO, the St. Lucie County Education Foundation, Inc. The foundation is incorporated under the laws of Florida as a separate not-for-profit corporation operated as a DSO pursuant to s. 237.40, *Florida Statutes*. This law also requires that each DSO provide for an annual financial audit of its accounts and records to be conducted by a certified public accountant in accordance with rules adopted by the Auditor General and the Commissioner of Education. The district has received the required annual audit of the DSO. The most recent audit was for the 2000-01 fiscal year and was dated September 26, 2001. This audit was approved by the board on August 27, 2002.

Exhibit 14-3 provides a district-wide summary of DSO financial activity over the last three years.

Exhibit 14-3

Three Year Financial Summary of DSO Activities

	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01
Assets	**$ 57,062**	**$ 145,276**	**$ 129,061**
Liabilities	-	-	-
Fund Equity / Net Assets	57,062	145,276	129,061
Total Liabilities & Fund Equity / Net Assets	**$ 57,062**	**$145,276**	**$129,061**
Revenues	$150,300	$156,603	$188,055
Expenses / Expenditures	179,624	130,402	204,270
Net Increase (Decrease)	**(29,324)**	**26,201**	**(16,215)**
Beginning Fund Equity / Net Assets	86,386	119,075	145,276
Ending Fund Equity / Net Assets	**$ 57,062**	**$145,276**	**$129,061**

Source: St. Lucie County School District audited financial statements.

Asset Management

The district has a fiduciary responsibility to protect publicly financed fixed assets and tangible personal property acquired to educate students. To carry out this fiduciary responsibility, the district must develop effective accounting and tracking processes that will ensure that these assets are properly accounted for, reported, and safeguarded

Cost Controls

Accounting for fixed assets involves tracking and reconciling additions and deletions to property and performing physical verifications of the existence of the property. The most important purposes for keeping and maintaining accurate accounting records of fixed assets are:

- properly kept property records furnish taxpayers with information about the investment of tax dollars in the district;
- adequate property records provide the basis for insurance coverage;
- reliable information about currently owned fixed assets and tangible personal property can provide material assistance in determining future requirements (replacement, etc.); and
- periodic physical inventories identify lost or stolen items so that insurance claims can be filed, additional controls instituted, and accounting records adjusted to reflect the losses.

The district records expenditures for the acquisition or construction of fixed assets in the governmental fund type or expendable trust fund that paid for the acquisition or construction. The fixed assets so acquired are recorded at cost in the general fixed assets account group on the financial statements. Effective with the 2001-02 fiscal year, accounting practices relating to the reporting of fixed assets, including depreciation on these assets, will change as the district implements Governmental Accounting Standards Board Statement 34. However, for the purposes of this report, information is presented using current accounting standards.

The district's Finance Department is responsible for accounting for tangible personal property. The Property Records Department is responsible for assignment of property record numbers and issuance of property tags for all items of property requiring accountability. School principals and department heads have custodial responsibilities for property charged to and under their areas of responsibility.

State law and *Rules of the Auditor General* govern school district responsibilities relative to fixed assets. State law defines property as fixtures and other tangible personal property of a nonconsumable nature, the value of which is $750 or more, and the normal expected life of which is one year or more. School districts are permitted to use lower capitalization thresholds if desired. St. Lucie County School District uses a capitalization threshold of $750.

Information related to general fixed asset balances over the most recent three fiscal years is shown in Exhibit 14-4.

Exhibit 14-4

Three-Year Summary of General Fixed Assets

General Fixed Assets	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01
Land	$ 13,621,655	$ 13,621,655	$ 13,621,655
Improvements Other than Buildings	4,788,011	5,142,272	5,575,915
Buildings and Fixed Equipment	233,771,352	240,567,982	255,935,162
Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment	36,606,196	40,555,322	41,859,259
Motor Vehicles	14,350,958	15,733,036	16,838,577
Construction in Progress	5,386,307	6,890,190	14,735,998
Audio Visual Materials and Computer Software	2,739,824	3,085,902	4,156,272
Total General Fixed Assets	**$311,264,303**	**$325,596,359**	**$352,722,838**

Source: Audit Reports of the St. Lucie County School District.

The Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment; Buildings and Fixed Equipment; and Construction in Progress categories are the most active and are the accounts for which effective cost controls are most needed.

5   Segregation of Duties: The district segregates responsibilities for custody of assets from record keeping responsibilities for those assets.

School principals and department heads initiate capital expenditures. The Finance Department maintains the record keeping for capital expenditures. School principals and department heads have custodial responsibilities for the assets. Employees other than the property custodian conduct the annual physical inventory of all tangible personal property for each school or department. The Records Department reconciles the results of the physical inventory with the property records at both the school and department level.

6   Authorization Controls: The district has established controls that provide for proper authorization of asset acquisitions and disposals.

Appropriate policies and procedures govern the acquisition and disposal of assets

All asset acquisitions, which are initiated by principals and department heads, are controlled by the Purchasing Department, and follow controls established for requisitioning, authorizing, and receiving. Decisions regarding financing alternatives and the use of appropriate accounting procedures are made using guidance provided by the assistant superintendent for Business Services and the director of the Finance Department. Separate capital project budgets and accounts are maintained, and the board approves all material capital asset projects or acquisitions.

7   Project Accounting: The district has established records that accumulate project costs and other relevant data to facilitate reporting construction and maintenance activities to the district, public, and grantors.

The district has implemented procedures and maintains records to ensure that costs are properly accounted for and documented.

The district's accounting system accommodates accounting for the cost of construction projects

To ensure proper accounting of construction project costs, information involving a variety of cost factors should be maintained. Large construction projects typically have an architect and a general contractor, and often will include engineers and various other subcontractors. Depending on the scope and funding of the project, initial equipment purchases may also be a part of the project costs.

When construction projects are initiated, the district assigns project numbers to each contracted capital outlay and maintenance project. Also, the district assigns project numbers to all material in-house capital outlay and maintenance projects. The district's accounting system is designed to generate reports on a

project basis. This feature allows the district to identify costs on a project basis. The district charges costs within a project to various object codes to separately identify the various costs of the project.

8 Asset Accountability: The district provides recorded accountability for capitalized assets.

The district has established procedures that ensure that capital expenditures are identified and properly recorded in the appropriate asset subsidiary records. Annual physical inventories of tangible personal property are performed which are then reconciled to the property records by the Property Records Department.

9 Asset Safeguards: Assets are safeguarded from unauthorized use, theft, and physical damage.

The district's tangible personal property is adequately safeguarded

Capital property is safeguarded and controlled pursuant to policies adopted by the district. These assets are acquired in accordance with established procedures and their ownership is documented in the property records. Each item of tangible personal property is assigned to a custodian (principal or department manager) who is responsible for safeguarding the property. The custodian is held accountable through an annual physical inventory, whereby all items are either located or identified as missing. Reports of missing property are prepared and custodians are required to make every effort to locate each item. The property custodian must give a satisfactory explanation for property items that cannot be located. Reports detailing missing property items, as well as surplus or obsolete items, are prepared and presented to the district on at least an annual basis.

The district uses a pre-numbered sticker in labeling each asset and has established accountability for each asset. A capitalization threshold of $750 has been established and approved by the district. The property clerk indicates the cost center and department that the asset was assigned to, as well as the fixed asset number, maintains detailed property records for all assets in the district, and the purchase order that authorized its acquisition.

Tangible personal property is tagged when purchased, thereby facilitating the periodic inventories and assisting in searches for missing items. Detailed property records are maintained and are periodically reconciled to the general ledger control accounts.

Property dispositions are made in accordance with Florida law and policy. Accounting records are properly adjusted when dispositions occur.

Inventory Management

Inventories consist of expendable supplies held for consumption in the course of district operations. The maintenance, warehouse, transportation, and gas supplies are recorded in the General Fund; purchased food, commodities, and related non-food items are reported in the Special Revenue Fund. Inventories are stated at cost valued on a weighted moving average basis, except that United States Department of Agriculture surplus commodities are stated at their fair value as determined at the time of donation to the district's food service program by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Bureau of Food Distribution. The costs of inventories are recorded as expenditures when used rather than purchased. Exhibit 14-5 shows the district's inventory amounts for the 1998-99 through 2000-01 fiscal years.

Exhibit 14-5

Three-Year Summary of Inventories

Inventories	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01
General Fund	$1,241,569	$1,181,097	$1,211,504
Special Revenue Fund	665,022	716,730	798,777
Total	$1,906,591	$1,897,827	$2,010,281

Source: St. Lucie County School District-Audit Reports.

10 Segregation of Duties over Inventory: The district segregates responsibilities for custody of inventories from record keeping responsibilities for those assets.

Responsibilities for inventory custody and accounting for inventory transactions have been adequately segregated

To the extent practical with available staff, district staff assigned inventory record keeping responsibilities do not also have responsibility for custody of the inventories. The Finance Department maintains general ledger control accounts. These accounts are periodically reconciled with the perpetual inventory records. Write-downs of inventory are initiated only after the physical inventory and the reconciliation process has determined that such a procedure is needed.

11 Inventory Requisitioning Controls: The district has established and implemented controls that provide for proper inventory requisitioning.

The district has established effective inventory requisitioning controls

Inventory transactions are initiated by purchase orders that are subject to the Purchasing Department's approval. Once the goods are received, a receiving report is issued and inventory stock records are updated. Warehouse inventory transactions are recorded in the financial accounting system daily to charge the appropriate school and department budgets for the issued supplies. Amounts reported as

inventory in the district's annual financial report are based on the year-end physical inventory counts. Differences found during the counting process are investigated by warehouse managers.

12 Inventory Accountability and Custody: The district has established controls that provide for inventory accountability and appropriate safeguards exist for inventory custody.

Inventories are effectively accounted for and safeguarded

The district accounts for its school supply and maintenance supply inventories on a perpetual basis. To effectively account for inventories on a perpetual basis, an effective system of documentation must be developed to support transactions recorded in the perpetual accounting system. The district has developed inventory requisitioning and approving procedures that effectively support entries made to the perpetual inventory accounting subsystem. Annually, the district conducts physical counts of inventory stocks to verify back to the perpetual inventory records. Variations between counts and records are investigated and resolved before any adjustments are made to the accounting systems. All inventories are maintained in locked warehouses.

13 Inventory Management: The district does periodically review the inventory function; however, the district has not formally evaluated the school and office supplies inventory and the maintenance supplies inventory functions to determine cost-effectiveness. The district should also analyze the costs and benefits of other alternatives for its inventory functions.

The district has been reevaluating inventory practices

Traditionally, many school districts have used centralized warehouses to store consumable items that are used regularly in school district operations. In earlier years, purchases of such items in bulk generally resulted in significant savings that offset the overhead cost of warehousing operations. Efficient warehouse operations ensured that all purchases and deliveries to schools and departments were complete and timely and that inventory levels were sufficient to meet requests for supplies from individual schools and departments.

In recent years, competitive market conditions and service-driven marketing by inventory suppliers have caused many organizations to reevaluate the need to have warehousing operations. In many instances, organizations have found that inventory suppliers can provide services nearly equivalent to in-house warehouse operations at lower overall costs. In these instances, many organizations have phased out in-house warehouse inventory operations in favor of inventory vendors providing next day or similar delivery of consumable supply items.

The district maintains a central warehouse for school, office, and janitorial supplies and food. Warehouses are also used for maintenance and transportation supplies. The reviews for inventories of

maintenance, transportation, and food service are presented in Chapters 11, 12, and 13. Our review of the school and office supplies inventory found that although the district has not conducted a formal analysis of any of the inventories, various options for these inventories have been given consideration. Principals are being encouraged to purchase from vendors that provide delivery of the supplies directly to the schools. An analysis of this function would provide the district with a better determination regarding cost savings. This analysis should be performed periodically to determine whether the market conditions have changed.

Recommendation ──────────────────────────

- *We recommend that the district research alternative inventory services for its school and office supply items.*

    Action Plan 14-2 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 14-2

Alternative Inventory Services	
Strategy	Analyze the costs and benefits of contracting the storage and distribution of school and office supplies to private companies.
Action Needed	Step 5: Determine the costs associated with maintaining inventories by review and analysis of activity cost reports.
	Step 6: Ascertain the types of inventory-related services available in the industry and the costs associated with the services.
	Step 7: Determine the costs and benefits associated with utilizing alternative inventory management resources.
	Step 8: Document the result of the study and present the analysis and recommendations to the superintendent.
	Step 9: If more beneficial, the district should pursue contracting the storage and distribution of supplies to private companies.
Who is Responsible	Assistant superintendent for Business Services
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Source: Auditor General.

Risk Management

14General: The district has a process to set objectives for risk management activities, identify and evaluate risks, and design a comprehensive program to protect itself at a reasonable cost.

The district has identified risks and manages them effectively

The district is exposed to various risks of loss related to torts; theft of, damage to, and destruction of assets; errors and omissions; injuries to employees; and natural disasters. Florida law requires school districts to provide effective protection against these risks. Section 230.23(9)(d), *Florida Statutes*, requires a school district to carry insurance on school property, including contents, boilers, and machinery. Section 230.23(10)(h), *Florida Statutes*, requires that school districts carry insurance (bonds) on all employees who are responsible for school funds. Section 230.23(10)(k), *Florida Statutes*, requires school districts to provide adequate protection against any loss or damage to school property or loss resulting from any liability for which the district or its officers, agents, or employees may be responsible for under law. This section also provides that a school district is authorized to purchase insurance, to be self-insured, to enter into risk management programs, or to have any combination of the above in any area to the extent the district is either authorized or required by law to contract for insurance.

The district is a member of the South Central Educational Risk Management Program (consortium) under which several district school boards have established a combined limited self-insurance program for property protection, general liability, automobile liability, workers' compensation, money and securities, employee fidelity and faithful performance, boiler and machinery, and other coverage deemed necessary by the members of the consortium. The consortium is self-sustaining through member assessments (premiums) and purchases coverage through commercial companies for claims in excess of specified amounts. However, member school boards are subject to supplemental contributions in the event of a deficiency except to the extent that the deficiency results from a specific claim against a member school board in excess of coverage available then such deficiency is solely the responsibility of that member school board. The board of directors for the consortium is composed of superintendents of all participating districts. Employers Mutual, Inc., serves as fiscal agent for the consortium. It is the property and casualty group's policy to reinsure through commercial insurance carriers for workers' compensation and property loss claims in excess of $300,000 and $50,000, respectively. Settled claims resulting from the risks described above have not exceeded commercial insurance coverage for the past three fiscal years.

As a result of incurred claims exceeding member contributions, the property and casualty group has a contribution deficiency of $2,897,526 at June 30, 2001. The district's portion of the contribution deficiency is $625,925. The member school boards have agreed to a funding plan to cure the deficiency. The member school boards also increased their overall 2001 contributions by 15 percent over the previously adopted funding requirement and will increase subsequent year's contributions as needed until the deficiency is corrected.

The district also participates in an employee group health and life insurance program administered through the consortium. Premiums for the group health program are charged to the districts based on each individual district's claims experience, and the program operates as an individually funded plan by

each participating district with shared administrative costs and a pooling of plan assets for working capital. Ultimate liability for claims remains with the respective districts and, accordingly, the insurance risks are not transferred. Participating districts withdrawing from the group health insurance program would be responsible for any deficit in their account plus any pending claims paid for their district subsequent to withdrawal. According to the records maintained by the fiscal agent of premiums received for and claims (and other expenses) paid on behalf of the district employees and their dependents, the district reports in the internal service fund the amounts held by the consortium on its behalf as due from fiscal agent and also reports the district's estimated liability for unpaid claims. A liability in the amount of $2,625,000 was actuarially determined to cover estimated incurred but not reported insurance claims payable at June 30, 2001.

15 Providing for Coverage Against Risk Exposure: The district has comprehensive policies and procedures relating to acquiring and reviewing coverage for risks of loss.

The district's procedures generally ensure that coverages are obtained at reasonable prices

The Risk Management Department oversees the insurance needs of the district. The department has established processes to determine current valuations of district assets to ensure that insurance policies cover changes in assets. Periodically, it reviews the insurance lines to determine the adequacy of services provided relative to the cost of the insurance.

Financial Management

A business services section headed by the assistant superintendent for Business Services, has been established within the district organization. The functional areas that make up the business services section are management information systems, budget, finance, purchasing and warehousing, and risk management departments (see organizational chart Exhibit 14-2). The Finance Department is further split into the functional areas of financial accounting, payroll, and accounts payable to assist with issues relating to segregation of duties. The finance section is responsible for or assists with all accounting issues, financial reporting, cash management, investment practices, receipts, and disbursements.

During the 2000-01 fiscal year, St. Lucie County School District's revenues from all governmental funds were approximately $230,154,000 and expenditures were approximately $255,865,000. These amounts include both restricted and unrestricted sources and uses of resources. The district's General Fund is used to account for most of the general operating activities of the district. During the 2000-01 fiscal year, the district reported General Fund revenues and other sources of funds of approximately $157,966,000 and General Fund expenditures and other uses of approximately $157,705,000.

Revenues were generated from federal, state, and local sources. Exhibit 14-6 provides information related to the district's General Fund revenues and other sources.

Exhibit 14-6

The State Provided Most of the District's 2000-01 Fiscal Year General Fund Resources
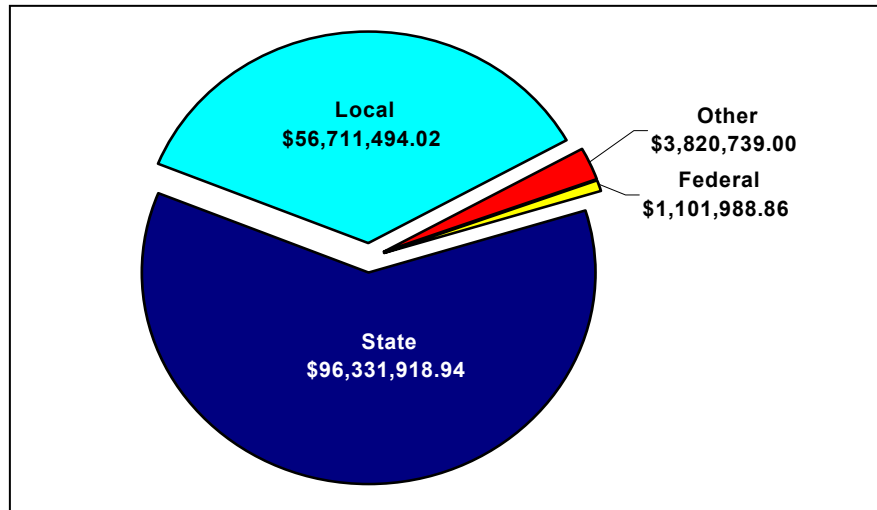
Source: St. Lucie County School District audited financial statements.

Three state revenue sources, administered by the Florida Department of Education, comprise essentially all state revenue accounted for in the district's General Fund. First is the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) proceeds used for current operations. Second is categorical education program proceeds earmarked for certain programs such as instructional materials and transportation. And third is lottery proceeds earmarked for educational enhancement and school advisory council activities.

Local revenues are primarily generated from ad valorem (property) taxes. Exhibit 14-7 shows the taxes levied for education for the 2000-01 fiscal year.

Exhibit 14-7

Ad Valorem (Property) Taxes Levied for District Purposes

Type	Millage	Taxes Levied
General Fund:		
Required Local Effort	6.056	$ 49,409,955
Basic Discretionary Local Effort	0.510	4,161,004
Supplemental Discretionary Local Effort	0.187	1,525,759
Debt Service Funds:		
District Interest and Sinking Fund	0.300	2,447,660
Capital Project Funds:		
Local Capital Improvements	2.000	16,317,696
Total	**9.053**	**$ 73,862,074**

Source: St. Lucie County School District 2000-01 audited financial statements.

The General Fund and Capital Project Funds levies are non-voted levies provided by law and appropriations act provisions. The required local effort is tied to state FEFP funding and represents the amount school districts must levy in order to receive FEFP funding. Also, school districts are authorized by law to levy up to two mills for local capital improvements. The Debt Service Funds levy represents a levy approved by the voters in St. Lucie County to finance a general obligation bond issue.

Total General Fund revenues have increased 8.21 percent over the past three years. Exhibit 14-8 shows the changes by source during this period.

Exhibit 14-8

The District's General Fund Revenues and Other Sources Increased by 8.21 Percent Over the Past Three Years

			Change	
Revenues	**1998-99**	**2000-01**	**Dollars**	**Percentage**
Federal	$ 802,922.66	$ 1,101,988.86	$ 299,066.20	37.25%
State	83,842,836.54	96,331,918.94	12,489,082.40	14.90%
Local	56,971,236.81	56,711,494.02	(259,742.79)	-0.46%
Other Sources	4,360,437.10	3,820,739.00	(539,698.10)	-12.38%
Total	**$145,977,433.11**	**$157,966,140.82**	**$11,988,707.71**	**8.21%**

Source: St. Lucie County School District 1998-99 and 2000-01 audited financial statements.

The increase in revenue does not provide any indication of whether per-student funding increased, so we also analyzed the impact of the revenue change on a per-student basis. This analysis compared total actual General Fund revenues (but not other sources) received, and divided them by the unweighted full-time equivalent (UFTE) student membership. Due to changes in reporting UFTE student membership over these years, UFTE membership was modified to make it comparable from year to year. This revenue per UFTE student membership was also compared to the average of the district's peers. Exhibit 14-9 shows revenues per student for the district and the average of its peers for the six-year period ending with the 2000-01 fiscal year.

Exhibit 14-9

The District's General Fund Revenues per UFTE Student is Lower than the Averages Statewide and for Other Medium Sized Districts
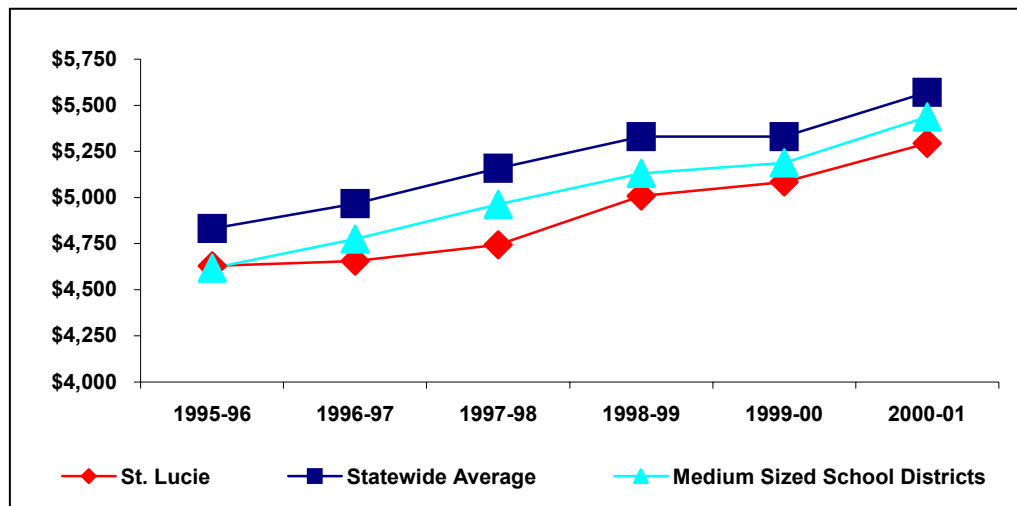
Source: St. Lucie County School District audited financial statements and FDOE UFTE data.

Exhibit 14-9 shows that, although revenues increased over the last six years, total revenues per student were less than the averages for other medium sized districts and the statewide average. District personnel believe that the district's rapid growth over this time and the district cost differential adjustment are the primary reasons for the lower per-student funding levels.

During the most recent complete three-year period, the district's General Fund spending increased by 7.95 percent, which is consistent with the increase in revenue. Exhibit 14-10 summarizes the change over the three-year period.

Exhibit 14-10

The District's General Fund Expenditures and Other Uses Increased by 7.95 Percent Over the Past Three Years

Expenditures	1998-99	2000-01	Change	
			Dollars	Percentage
Current				
Instruction	$85,020,895	$91,575,081	$6,554,186	7.71
Pupil Instructional Services	8,531,042	9,526,882	995,840	11.67%
Instructional Media Services	3,237,997	3,729,836	491,839	15.19%
Instruction and Curriculum Development Services	2,703,304	2,975,392	272,088	10.07%
Instructional Staff Training Services	623,717	938,851	315,134	50.53%
Board	420,927	460,733	39,806	9.46%
General Administration	1,396,136	1,314,464	(81,672)	-5.85%
School Administration	8,884,873	9,332,138	447,265	5.03%
Fiscal Services	1,060,732	1,011,304	(49,428)	-4.66%
Central Services	3,354,922	3,842,948	488,026	14.55%
Pupil Transportation Services	9,721,169	11,750,561	2,029,392	20.88%
Operation of Plant	14,525,723	15,339,451	813,728	5.60%
Maintenance of Plant	4,576,930	4,187,795	(389,135)	-8.50%
Community Services	113,509	46,425	(67,084)	-59.10%
Capital Outlay				
Facilities Acquisition and Construction	42,034	33,664	(8,370)	19.91%
Other Capital Outlay	1,728,319	1,639,952	(88,367)	-5.11%
Other Uses	151,500	-	(151,500)	-100.00%
Total Expenditures	**$146,093,729**	**$157,705,477**	**$11,611,748**	**7.95%**

Source: St. Lucie County School District 1998-99 and 2000-01 fiscal years audited financial statements.

Nearly all of the increases relate to increases in salary and benefit costs.

We analyzed the fund balance in the General Fund to determine if the district's efforts to control costs have had a beneficial impact on its financial position. The most common measure of financial position is the ratio of fund balance to operating activity. The fund balance of most school districts includes reserved and unreserved portions. Fund balances are often reserved for legal and other commitments of the entity. Common examples of reserves in Florida school districts include amounts reserved for outstanding purchase orders and contracts (encumbrances) and amounts reserved for restricted purposes (categorical programs). As a result, only the unreserved portion of the fund balance is actually available to offset unexpected needs and this portion is often referred to as the "rainy day" fund. For the purposes of our analysis, we compared the district's ratio of General Fund unreserved fund balance with expenditures to its peer districts and with the statewide average.

Exhibit 14-11 compares the district's financial position with its peers and statewide averages for the six-year period ending June 30, 2001.

Exhibit 14-11

The District's General Fund Financial Position
Is Lower Than the Statewide Average and the Average of Its Peers
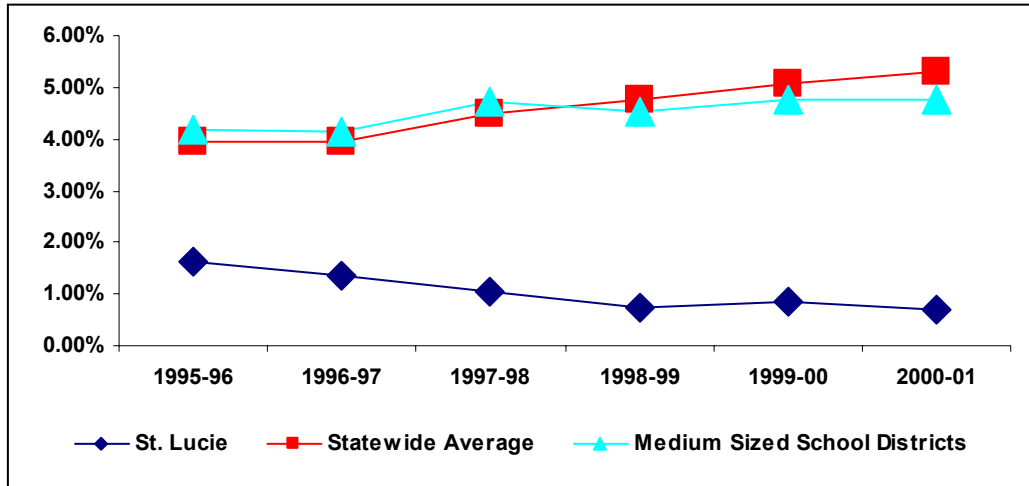
Source: Auditor General.

Over this period, the district has been in a weakened financial position during which the expenditure growth was not always kept at a level consistent with its revenue growth. As can be seen in Exhibit 14-11 above, the district's ratio of unreserved fund balance to revenues is consistently below the statewide average and the average of its peers.

16 Management Control Methods: District management communicates its commitment and support of strong internal controls.

District management communicates commitment and support of strong internal controls

The business services function established by the district provides for effective separation of various business activities to promote an adequate system of internal controls. As shown in Exhibit 14-2, functional responsibilities within the business services function are further segregated into management information systems, budget, finance, purchasing, and risk management. Finance is further segregated into accounting and payroll. Responsibilities assigned to various staff members within these functional responsibilities are such that a comprehensive system of internal controls has been established.

Additionally, the district developed several policies for the reporting of suspected improprieties. These policies demonstrate the district's encouragement of timely feedback of information from employees, particularly information relating to suspected improprieties. Through such a process, an organization becomes aware of internal control weaknesses that may otherwise be overlooked. These policies are beneficial to the organization because it provides a process that both the employee and the organization should follow, which will help protect the interests of the employee as well as reduce the organization's liability exposure.

17 Financial Accounting System: The district records and reports financial transactions in accordance with prescribed standards.

The district records and reports financial transactions in accordance with prescribed standards

The district's accounting system was designed to include a chart of accounts consistent with the requirements of FDOE's manual, *Financial and Program Cost Accounting and Reporting for Florida Schools* (known as the Red Book 2001), which is required under s. 237.01, *Florida Statutes*, and Rule 6A-1.001, *Florida Administrative Code*. The features of this system include account-coding information (fund, cost center, project, function, object, and program) to accumulate costs in accordance with prescribed standards.

18 Financial Reporting Procedures: The district prepares and distributes its financial reports timely.

The district established processes that ensure that required financial reports are submitted timely and within reporting deadlines

The district is governed by various laws, rules, and contract provisions relative to the required submission dates for various financial reports. For example, Rule 6A-1.0071, *Florida Administrative Code*, requires the district to have its annual financial report prepared and submitted to the Florida Commissioner of Education no later than September 11 of each year. Rule 6A-1.008, *Florida Administrative Code*, requires the superintendent to submit monthly financial statements to the board in the form prescribed by the board. Additionally, various federal grants and contracts provide for monthly statements of financial activity relating to the grants and generally provide for required submission dates.

The district established procedures to ensure compliance with these requirements. For example, district staff prepares and submits monthly financial reports to the board. These reports include a revenue budget analysis and expenditure budget analysis. The monthly budget analysis compares the revised budgeted amounts to the actual year-to-date amounts. This report also includes information on amounts that have already been encumbered and the percentage of the budget (including encumbrances) that has already been expended. Information is presented monthly to the board in summary format, making it practical for decision making, and includes the required information of grants and programs funded from restricted sources.

Our review of the processes in place to ensure compliance with these requirements indicated that the processes were effective to ensure that the required financial reports were timely submitted.

19 Budget Practices: The district has a financial plan serving as an estimate of and control over operations and expenditures; however, the district needs to improve its unreserved general fund balance through budgeting processes.

The district has a financial plan serving as an estimate of and control over operations and expenditures

The district's budget contains its financial plan, which serves as an estimate of and control over operations and expenditures. There are several state laws and administrative rules affecting the district relative to budgeting. For example, s. 230.23(10)(g), *Florida Statutes*, requires a school district to implement a system of accounting and budgetary control to ensure that payments do not exceed amounts budgeted. Section 237.031, *Florida Statutes*, requires a school district to establish a budget system. Section 237.041, *Florida Statutes*, requires the board to adopt an annual budget and submit the adopted budget to the Florida Department of Education. Rule 6A-1.006, *Florida Administrative Code*, provides guidelines for amending the budget and Rule 6A-1.007, *Florida Administrative Code*, requires the superintendent to ensure that obligations and expenditures are kept within budgeted income.

Budgets are formulated and adopted in accordance with applicable state laws and rules. A budget calendar is prepared and used for the orderly submission of the budget. Advertisements, including the required notification to the public concerning millage rates and notification of budget hearings, are placed in commonly available local newspapers. The district has established effective procedures to ensure that state requirements for budget preparation and subsequent amendments thereto are timely completed.

Budgets are prepared in sufficient detail to provide effective monitoring of restricted funds. Actual and budgetary amounts are compared on a monthly basis, and the budget is sent to the board for approval if revisions are necessary. Additionally, the district has implemented an encumbrance accounting system to provide a means of comparing budgeted amounts to actual and planned expenditures.

As part of the budgeting process, the number of personnel is managed through the use of a position control system. The district uses the automated position control module of TERMS, but also relies on a manual log as well. The current version of TERMS provides information based on the number of hours for each position, which must then be "translated" into the number of positions to be useful. The district is working toward implementing a new version of TERMS that will show the number of positions rather than the number of hours for each position.

The district should monitor and adjust its strategic plan goal of increasing the unreserved general fund balance as part of the budgeting process

As noted in Exhibit 14-11, the district's unreserved General Fund balance as a percentage of revenues is far below that of other school districts in Florida and has been for several years. The unreserved fund balance is designated to serve as a measure of net current financial resources available for general appropriation by the board. This unreserved portion represents the amount that can be used with the most flexibility for emergencies and unforeseen situations. Though a financial emergency did not result from a lower than average fund balance, in these circumstances, the district has fewer resources available for emergencies and unforeseen situations than other districts of comparable size. While school districts do not have sufficient resources to fund everything that school boards and administrators desire to

accomplish, this situation requires immediate attention by the board, as maintaining a sufficient fund balance is necessary to provide a "rainy day" fund for any emergencies and unforeseen events.

There are no legal requirements for school districts to maintain a specific amount of fund balance; however, auditors, educational administrators, and credit rating agencies generally recommend an unreserved fund balance of 3 percent to 5 percent of the current year's budget. A long-range goal in the district's current strategic plan is to gradually increase its fund balance over the next five years to build up to a 5 percent level. The district plans to accomplish this by budgeting expenditures relating to local property tax revenues at 95 percent each year, while placing the excess 5 percent in reserves. The board should strongly emphasize this goal to improve its unreserved General Fund balance as part of the annual budgeting process.

Recommendation ─────────────────────

- *We recommend that the board and all applicable district staff rigorously pursue the strategic plan goal to increase unreserved general fund balance as part of the budgeting process.*

   Action Plan 14-3 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 14-3

Increase Unreserved General Fund Balance		
Strategy	Monitor, and adjust as necessary, the strategic plan goal to increase unreserved general fund balance as part of the budget process.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Using final amounts for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2002, verify local property tax revenue amounts collected in excess of the 95 percent of the assessed levy proceeds were set aside to rebuild unreserved general fund balance. (NOTE: If less than 95 percent of local property taxes were collected an alternative plan should be developed.)
	Step 2:	Analyze the districts current year budget allocations for revenues and expenditures to verify that only 95 percent of local property tax revenues have been budgeted for expenditure per the strategic plan.
	Step 3:	Monitor collection of property taxes annually to verify that collections are greater than 95 percent to allow for the rebuilding of the district's unreserved general fund balance.
	Step 4:	Monitor unreserved general fund balance to ensure the current plan is effective and no other factors within management's control are adversely affecting the current plan. Make any adjustments to the plan as needed.
Who is Responsible	Board members, superintendent of schools, assistant superintendent of Business Services, director of Finance	
Time Frame	Current through October 31, 2005	

Source: Auditor General.

20 Cash Management: The district has effective controls to provide recorded accountability for cash resources. Cash management could be more efficient with a consolidation of accounts and banks used by the district.

The district's accounting procedures manual includes detailed procedures for cash collection and cash disbursement activities. The district receives the majority of its cash in the form of wire transfers from the state or the local tax collector, sent directly to the district's State Board of Administration (SBA) investment account.

The district has effective controls to provide recorded accountability for cash resources

Sufficient personnel in the Accounting and Finance Departments provide adequate segregation of duties for the cash receipts and disbursement functions. Additionally, the recording of cash receipts is functionally separate from the responsibility to make general ledger entries and to reconcile the bank accounts.

The Accounting Department performs all cash receipts functions, except for the school internal account funds. Procedures are in place to physically safeguard cash and collections on hand until deposit. Payroll and Accounts Payable Departments, within the finance function, perform all cash disbursement functions, except for the school internal account disbursements. An accountant within the Accounting Department, with no cash handling or recording responsibilities, performs the reconciliation process for the district's bank accounts.

District accounting staff currently prepares daily cash flow analysis worksheets for five of its eight bank accounts. Based on this analysis, excess funds are typically sent to the SBA for investment, while remaining funds are kept locally earning interest at the rate specified for each account. As noted in the paragraph above, consolidating some of the bank accounts could allow for more efficient monitoring of the daily cash flow.

The district should consider consolidating banks and/or accounts to achieve greater efficiencies in the cash management process

The district maintains eight separate bank accounts as follows: general, clearing, payroll, federal, food service, capital projects, debt service, and cafeteria (insurance). The eight accounts are located at four different banks, all of which are qualified public depositories. While the separate accounts do permit effective control to provide recorded accountability for cash resources, this may not be the most efficient method. Other district school boards have chosen to use a single bank with a pooled account for most funds and zero-balance accounts for payroll and clearing transactions, while maintaining detailed general ledger accounts to provide for accountability by fund. A pooled account would reduce the number of bank reconciliations to be performed, bank statements received/stored, excess cash sitting in accounts, paperwork associated with transfers between accounts, and provide improved cash management. District staff should consider analyzing current banking arrangements to determine if consolidating some of the bank accounts would be more efficient.

Recommendation ─────────────────────────────

- *We recommend that the district analyze its current banking arrangement to determine which banks and/or accounts could be consolidated to achieve greater efficiencies in managing cash.*

  Action Plan 14-4 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 14-4

Analyzing and Consolidating Banking Arrangements	
Strategy	Analyze current banking arrangements to determine which banks and/or accounts would achieve greater efficiency in the reconciliation and cash management processes through consolidation.
Action Needed	Step 1: Determine if the current accounting system is in such detail that individual fund balances could be tracked through the general ledger if pooled accounts were used.
	Step 2: Examine current bank account arrangements. For each bank and account this examination should include, but not be limited to, determining the number of transactions processed, monthly fees, interest earned, time required to reconcile, and storage space used.
	Step 3: Prepare a request for proposal (RFP) for banking services and obtain board approval to issue.
	Step 4: Analyze all responses to the RFP for banking services and make appropriate recommendations to the board.
	Step 5: Monitor transition as bank accounts are closed and consolidated into existing accounts or new accounts, as applicable.
Who is Responsible	Director of Finance
Time Frame	October 31, 2004

Source: Auditor General.

21 Investment Practices: The district has an investment plan that includes investment objectives and performance criteria designed to maximize return consistent with the risks associated with each investment, and specifies the types of financial products approved for investment.

District Policy 6.03, updated January 9, 2001, in conjunction with the district's written investment plan provides guidance on investing of excess funds. Investment objectives include (1) safety of principal, (2) maintenance of liquidity, and (3) return on investment. Performance benchmarks for short-term and long-term portfolios are also specified in the policy. Authorized investments are those through the Florida Local Government Surplus Funds Trust (SBA), United States Government Securities, United States Government Agencies, Federal Instrumentalities, interest bearing time deposits or saving accounts, repurchase agreements, commercial paper, bankers' acceptances, state and/or local government taxable and/or tax-exempt debt, registered investment companies (mutual funds), and intergovernmental investment pool. Derivatives and reverse repurchase agreements are specifically prohibited.

The district has procedures in place to ensure that investments made are consistent with the district's investment policy and to determine the performance of those investments

District accounting staff prepare a daily cash flow analysis to determine the amount of excess funds available for investment. The district currently invests all of its available funds with the State Board of Administration's Local Government Surplus Funds Trust Fund investment pool created by s. 218.405, *Florida Statutes*. This investment pool operates under the investment guidelines established in s. 215.47, *Florida Statutes*. This fund offers highly liquid investments with competitive rates.

The district's investments in the Local Government Surplus Funds Trust Fund, a Securities and Exchange Commission Rule 2a7-like external investment pool, are reported at amortized cost. This fund offers highly liquid investments with competitive rates and provides a simplistic conservative investment approach by allowing investments to remain with the fund and request withdrawals based on periodic cash needs with no type of withdrawal penalties.

The district's investment processes include the use of an outside consultant for comparisons of other investment opportunities to compensate for the recent reductions in interest rates paid by the State Board of Administration's Local Government Surplus Funds.

22 Receivables: The district has established effective controls for recording, collecting, adjusting, and reporting receivables.

The district has effective processes for recording, collecting, adjusting, and reporting receivables

As a service provider of free public education to children, the district generally does not have activities requiring it to bill for and attempt collection from others. Essentially all of the district's receivables relate to accounting entries to account for amounts due from other state and local governments. These amounts due from other governments are considered to be fully collectable.

Based on the limited volume and nature of receivables that the district has, its procedures are generally effective to provide for the proper reporting of receivables.

23 Salary and Benefits Costs: The district has effective controls that provide accountability for the payment of salaries and benefits; however, a direct deposit initiative could enhance controls and payment processes.

Section 236.02(4), *Florida Statutes*, and Rule 6A-1.052, *Florida Administrative Code*, require school districts to annually adopt salary schedules for employees that shall be the sole instrument used in determining employee compensation. The district annually adopts and includes in the board minutes the approved salary schedules for school personnel. Additionally, district procedures ensure that amounts paid to employees are consistent with amounts provided in the salary schedules. The payroll accounting program provides for the calculation of retirement plan contributions and district procedures ensure that those contributions are timely remitted.

As with most school districts, employee salary and benefits costs represent a significant portion of the expenditures of the district. Exhibit 14-12 presents salary and benefit costs for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2001.

Exhibit 14-12

Employee Salary and Benefit Costs for the 2000-01 Fiscal Year

Account	Amount
Salaries	$ 110,619,048
Employee Benefits	35,857,741
Total	**$146,476,789**

Source: District general ledger.

Controls provide accountability for the payment of salaries and benefits

Access to the district's master payroll file is limited to employees authorized to make changes. Personnel and Payroll Departments can both access employee payroll records, but update capability is segregated based on function. The Payroll Department can access the system to record changes to the payroll records of an existing employee, while access to input and/or record changes to new employee screens is restricted to the Personnel Department.

The district tracks the leave and vacation hours available for each employee, while reporting current leave and vacation balances to employees on each pay stub. The district sends the annual W-2 reports to the employees in a timely manner, and all returned W-2 forms are retained for the required period of time. Approximately 80 percent of district employees are on direct deposit for payroll.

A direct deposit initiative could enhance controls and payment processes

The district could enhance accountability and the efficiency and effectiveness of the payroll payment process by paying employees by direct deposit. Although each new employee of the district is afforded the opportunity to sign up for the direct deposit method of payroll, the district does not currently have a mandatory direct deposit requirement for new employees. The district has taken a proactive approach to encouraging current district employees to participate in the direct deposit program.

The district currently makes payroll payment distributions twice per month. We selected the June 13, 2002, payroll as a sample month to determine the number of employees receiving payroll checks and those on direct deposit. The June payroll included a total of 3,895 employees. Those employees were paid on June 13, 2002, as shown below in Exhibit 14-13.

Exhibit 14-13

Approximately 80 Percent of the District's Employees are on Direct Deposit

Type	Amount	Percentage
Received Payroll Checks	764	19.61%
Used Direct Deposit	3,131	80.39%
Total	**3,895**	**100.00%**

Source: District general ledger – TERMS HR Calculation Controls Report.

Based on the June 2002 payroll, about 20 percent of the current employees still receive a traditional manual paycheck. While outstanding paychecks do allow the district to earn interest on the "float" until

presented for payment, outstanding paychecks also require tracking and follow-up until they clear the district's bank account as part of the subsequent reconciliation process by district personnel. This time-consuming process can be eliminated or greatly reduced with the direct deposit payroll method. Also, processes can be developed that would provide for the electronic distribution of "pay stub" information to district employees, thereby eliminating the need for mailing or delivering the information by manual means.

The numerous control benefits associated with the direct deposit method of payroll processing would add greater efficiencies to the overall payroll transaction process, although there may not be significant cost savings. The efficiencies gained will allow the district to reallocate resources to other district priorities.

Recommendation ———————————————————————

- *We recommend that the district implement a mandatory requirement that all new employees must sign up for the direct deposit payroll method. In addition, the district should continue to proactively encourage current employees receiving payroll checks to convert to the direct deposit payroll method.*

  Action Plan 14-5 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 14-5

Direct Deposit Initiative		
Strategy	Require mandatory payroll direct deposit for all new employees and proactively encourage current employees to convert to the direct deposit payroll method.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Confer with district employees and related bargaining unions regarding the implementation of a mandatory direct deposit program.
	Step 2:	Obtain board approval for encouraging direct deposit.
	Step 3:	Develop mandatory direct deposit policy for new employees. Develop strategies for encouraging current employees to convert to direct deposit.
	Step 4:	Begin campaign to encourage direct deposit for those employees currently receiving paychecks. Information can be included in pay check materials, in employee newsletters, etc.
	Step 5:	Periodically report to the board the progress towards achieving 100 percent direct deposit.
Who is Responsible	Director of Finance and director of Personnel	
Time Frame	October 31, 2004	

Source: Auditor General.

24 Debt Financing: The district analyzes, evaluates, monitors, and reports debt-financing alternatives.

District processes ensure that various debt financing alternatives are evaluated, monitored, and analyzed

The district periodically enters into long-term financing arrangements. As needed, the district uses its retained financial advisor, who is experienced in the issuance and sale of debt instruments, to assist in determining the best financing alternatives given the district's specific needs. Based on the advice of the financial advisor, the board is presented with the best financing alternative for approval.

The district's June 30, 2001, outstanding debt-financing and interest rates are summarized in Exhibit 14-14.

Exhibit 14-14

The District Had $158,325,340 in Borrowed Debt at June 30, 2001

Debt Instrument	Principal Balance June 30, 2001	Date of Maturity	Interest Rates	
			Low	High
Bonds Payable	$55,240,000	2019	4.00%	6.00%
Notes Payable	6,741,523	2010	4.20%	6.56%
Installment-Purchases Payable	1,073,817	2009	5.06%	5.06%
Certificates of Participation	95,270,000	2005	4.50%	6.25%
Total	**$158,325,340**			

Source: St. Lucie County District School Board for 2000-01 Audited Financial Statements.

Total future interest to be paid on the above debt to maturity at June 30, 2001, was approximately $70,963,475 per the audited financial statements. During the 2001-02 fiscal year, the district issued Sales Tax Revenue Bonds in the amount of $3,370,000, issued Certificates of Participation in the amount of $70,400,000, and advanced refunded existing debt totaling $60,202,512 to take advantage of lower interest rates currently being offered.

While an initiative to reduce part of the outstanding debt could save the district interest costs over the next several fiscal years; consideration must be given to the district's current financial condition. Currently, the district is not in a financial position to allow for retiring any debt early. Should the financial condition improve in future years, the district should consider the possibility of retiring debt early to reduce interest payments at that time.

25 Grant and Entitlement Monitoring: The district effectively monitors and reports grants activities.

Grant monitoring and reporting

The district receives significant resources from federal grantors. Significantly all of these grant resources are accounted for in the special revenue funds. During the 2000-01 fiscal year, proceeds from federal

grantors totaled approximately $22,134,000. These grants provide resources for a variety of district programs. For example, during the 2000-01 fiscal year:

- the Child Nutrition Cluster (National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and Summer Food Service Program) provided $6,381,000 to supplement the district's food service program and to provide free and reduced-price meals to eligible children;
- the Title I – Grants to Local Education Agencies Program provided $4,891,000 to enhance delivery of educational services to elementary schools located in economically disadvantaged areas; and
- the Special Education – Grants to States Program provided $3,870,000 to help provide special education and related services needed to make a free appropriate public education available to all children with disabilities.

Most of these resources are derived from recurring grants that have been received by the district for many years. Accordingly, procedures to ensure compliance with these grants are well established. District personnel monitor changes in these grant requirements and, as appropriate, procedural changes are made to meet changing grant requirements.

The district has established practices to ensure monitoring of grant activities in accordance with grantor requirements. Reporting requirements for grants are determined and procedures are established to ensure that grantor-required reports are submitted within established deadlines. The district effectively monitors and reports grant activity by identifying the following for each grant that the district receives:

- Identification of the agency received from
- Grant name
- Project code assignment
- Granting agency project number
- Granting agency contact person
- Information about contract/grant terms and conditions
- Last date for incurring expenditures and issuing purchase orders
- Date that all obligations are to be liquidated
- Date that final disbursement reports need to be submitted

The district uses a unique number (project number) to identify each grant received. All expenditures on the grant will be coded to that project number. The district reviews the terms of the grant before any expenditure is made using related grant funds. The district monitors federal grant cash requirements on a monthly basis by tracking individual project expenditure needs.

If the terms of the grant extend over more than one fiscal year, district personnel will review and verify all amounts not yet expended, encumbered, or committed. The unencumbered and uncommitted remaining grant balance is rolled forward as the beginning grant budget for the next fiscal year.
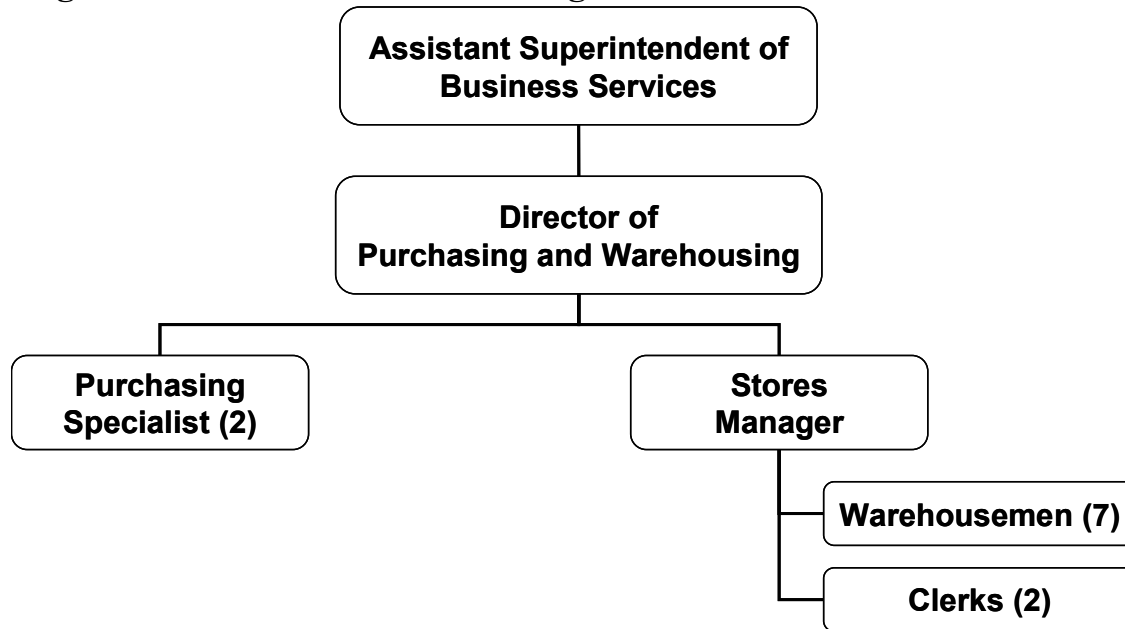
Purchasing

The district developed a purchasing function, which reports administratively to the assistant superintendent of Business Services. Currently, the district does not have any designated buyers, but

instead uses a director of Purchasing and Warehousing for buying and uses purchasing specialists for processing and approvals. These purchasing specialists are assigned to work on transactions for specific cost centers (i.e., schools and departments), rather than by purchased item type. The Purchasing Department is structured as noted in Exhibit 14-15 below.

Exhibit 14-15

Organizational Chart of Purchasing Process

Source: St. Lucie County School District Organization Chart.

Expenditures are subject to the district's various purchasing control processes. Total General Fund expenditures for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2001, excluding salaries and employee benefits, capitalized purchases, and debt service payments totaled approximately $24,230,930.

26 Segregation of Duties: The district segregates purchasing responsibilities from the requisitioning, authorizing, and receiving functions.

The district effectively segregates purchasing responsibilities

Section 237.02(1)(a), *Florida Statutes*, provides that each school district shall develop and adopt policies establishing a plan for making purchases as may be prescribed by the state board. State Board of Education Rule 6A-1.012, *Florida Administrative Code*, prescribes purchasing requirements for school districts. Generally, school districts must establish purchasing policies and procedures that, at a minimum, meet these requirements. Through developed policies and procedures, school districts may establish more comprehensive purchasing requirements.

The district has established a purchasing function as noted in Exhibit 14-15 above. The purpose of the Purchasing Department is to ensure that board-adopted purchasing policies and procedures have been followed. District procedures provide for the decentralized requisitioning and receiving of goods and services, and the Purchasing Department is physically and functionally separate from these activities.

27 Requisitioning: The district has established controls for authorizing purchase requisitions. However, the district should consider implementing a program to achieve purchasing efficiencies.

The district's purchase requisition controls are effective

The district established a comprehensive budgeting process that allocates budget to departmental, cost center (including school), and project levels. Department heads and principals in charge of activities at these levels are responsible for ensuring that required expenditures are kept within available budget. Consequently, authorization to request the expenditure of budgeted funds is also vested in these employees. As the need arises, the department head or principal submits on-line requisitions for the purchase of goods and services. Depending on the type and amount of the requisition, the standard approval levels are at the cost center, project, purchasing specialist, and accounts payable levels. The accounting system utilized by the district allows requisitions to be posted to the accounting system only if funds are available.

The district should reevaluate implementing a purchasing card program

The district currently does not have a purchasing card program. All purchases are processed either through the on-line purchasing system or by a direct payment request form. Both use hard copy documents requiring written approvals for processing. A purchasing card program established for use by district employees to make small purchases without going through the process of generating a purchase order could be more efficient by allowing district staff to obtain low cost items such as materials and supplies for immediate use. Purchasing card programs achieve efficiencies by reducing the number of invoices and checks processed by accounts payable and eliminating the associated expense.

During the 2001-02 fiscal year, the district was in the process of considering a purchasing card program. Current district staff noted that the former purchasing agent had applied and received credit approval in the amount of $2 million for the implementation of a purchasing card program for the district with Bank of America and had drafted policies and procedures for card use by employees. Documents remaining also indicate the district had planned to use the State Contract Purchasing Card Plan. According to current district staff, the program was dropped when district administration expressed reluctance to enter the plan due to internal control weaknesses exposed in negative press articles of various federal agency employees' misuse of the purchasing card program and concern over a lack of budgetary control of purchasing card usage. Instead, the district uses blanket purchase orders which allow for immediate access to specific items yet maintains control over vendor selection and budget availability. Despite initial misgivings by district administration, the board and district management should reconsider and re-evaluate the efficiencies and potential savings that can be achieved with a purchasing card program, including implementing a pilot program on a test basis.

Due to inherent risks with any purchasing card program, the district should develop a written policy designating allowable usage and consequences for improper usage. The district will need to establish effective controls for monitoring the use of the cards. The cards should have single transaction, daily, and

monthly purchase limits of varying amounts based on user responsibility levels. Card features should include identification of the employee name and department the cards were issued to so that purchases made on the cards will be charged to the specific department or school location that was issued the cards. Procedures should specify that users are required to verify that sufficient budget is available for any planned purchases prior to making the purchase. Users should obtain receipts or bills for purchases made with the purchase card. Purchasing specialists should review and approve the documentation and support for all purchases made with the cards before the district pays charge card balances.

During the 2001-02 fiscal year, the district issued 16,851 purchase orders of which 12,943 were for amounts less than $750, the current capitalization threshold for tangible personal property (to avoid capital purchases being made with purchase cards). The total value of the purchases made on the purchase orders under $750 was $2,606,743.26. By utilizing the State Purchasing Card system, the district would be able to take advantage of state contract prices through various vendors. If only half of the purchases noted above were eligible for purchasing card use and if the district received the four basis points savings (.004) from state contract pricing, the district still would have saved $5,213.49 on the 2001-02 fiscal year purchases. This would equate to a five-year cost savings of approximately $26,000.

We realize that some purchases, by their nature, will be better suited to issuing purchase orders. Additionally, this recommendation is not meant to imply that every employee should be issued a purchasing card. It is directed towards promoting use of the card for purchases under $750 that are currently being made with purchase orders to achieve greater efficiencies.

Recommendation ——————————————————

- *We recommend that the district reconsider and re-evaluate implementing a purchasing card program. A pilot purchasing card program for specific departments with specific restrictions could be implemented on a test basis. If successful, the district should expand the program to allow purchasing card usage for all purchases, as applicable, under the statutorily established capitalization threshold for tangible personal property (currently $750).*

  Action Plan 14-6 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 14-6

Evaluating Purchasing Card Programs Through Implementation of a Pilot Purchasing Card Program	
Strategy	Set up a pilot purchasing card program for specially selected departments/individuals to test the efficiencies and savings achievable with the use of a purchasing card program. If successful, expand the purchasing card program to allow for required purchases under the statutorily established capitalization threshold for tangible personal property (currently $750).
Action Needed	**Step 1:** Perform an analysis of the purchasing card programs offered by various vendors and the state; then select the program that would be most beneficial to the district. (NOTE: documents used by the former purchasing agent should be used to assist with this analysis)
	Step 2: Evaluate the district's organizational structure and select specific departments/individuals to participate in the pilot purchasing card program. Those selected should have a genuine need for the purchasing card and already be heavily involved in the purchasing process for their department/site.

	Step 3: Present the purchasing card program proposal to the board along with revised purchasing policies and procedures to include internal controls needed for the purchasing card program, including measures to be taken by the district for employees who misuse the cards, such as repayment through wage garnishment, termination, and prosecution.
	Step 4: Implement a pilot program in steps, starting with specific departments with specific restrictions on the cards to allow only those types of purchases that are unique to those departments and for which the card would be beneficial to test the effectiveness and internal controls of the purchasing card program.
	Step 5: Update the policies and procedures based on the results of this pilot program.
	Step 6: If the pilot program is successful, expand the use of the purchasing card program to additional departments/employees and promote greater use of the purchasing cards for purchases under $750. This will include evaluating and revising daily and monthly card purchase limits so that the purchases can be made. These procedures should address methods by which purchase cards can be used for purchase requisitions for amounts less than $750 made by employees who are not assigned purchase cards and address any purchase restrictions.
	Step 7: Present revised purchase and purchase requisition procedures to board for approval. Implement new purchasing procedures.
Who is Responsible	Assistant superintendent of Business Services and director of Purchasing
Time Frame	October 31, 2004

Source: Auditor General.

28Purchasing: The district has established authorization controls over purchasing. However, the district should consider restructuring the Purchasing Department to improve efficiency and strengthen internal controls.

The district has effective controls for authorizing purchases

In addition to state laws and rules governing purchasing requirements, the district's policies and procedures establish additional purchasing authorizing requirements and processes. The district's purchasing manual requires at least three verbal quotations for purchases between $2,000 and $4,499, at least three written quotes for purchases between $4,500 and $24,999, and formal bid rules must be followed for any purchases $25,000 or more. School Board Policy 6.07 allows for the district's bid threshold to match that specified in the state law, currently at $25,000.

Detailed specifications are submitted to vendors for all goods and services. District personnel monitor the quality of items purchased and vendor performance on contracts. Annual requirement contracts are established through a competitive bidding process for recurring demand products which require the vendor to supply these products at a fixed price in whatever quantities requested for one year. Examples of recent district bids for consolidated purchases are noted in Exhibit 14-16 below.

Exhibit 14-16

Example of Bid Requests

Bid No.	Purchase Types
0209002	Integrated Pest Management
0201006	Food Service Groceries
0201007	Food Service Paper Products
0201008	Diesel and Unleaded Fuel
0201009	Hourly Rate for Premise Distribution Wiring

Source: District Purchasing Department.

When practical, the district uses various state purchasing contracts, piggy-backs on the bids of other school districts, and conducts searches of various websites.

The district should consider restructuring the Purchasing Department to improve efficiency and strengthen internal controls

The district's Purchasing Department utilizes purchasing specialists for review, approval, and processing of purchase requisitions. As noted above, district procedures allow for consolidation of recurring purchases for bid, when feasible. Purchasing specialists determine feasibility through periodic reviews of like-item purchases which could be put out for public quote or bid; however, they are currently limited to reviewing the school and/or departments they are authorized to process. Also, since the district's current TERMS system does not have the capacity to pool all requisitions for the day and assign a single purchase order, it is possible that splitting purchases to avoid quote/bid requirements could be occurring. The district should consider reassigning work for the purchasing specialists to specific goods/services rather than by site to ensure all purchasing policies and procedures regarding quotes and bids are followed. District staff also noted that the purchasing specialists had taken the first of three courses for buyer status, but had not yet taken the others. However, staff did indicate that the purchasing specialists would continue their coursework during the 2002-03 fiscal year. With buyer status, the purchasing specialists would be better prepared to provide more advanced purchasing services for the district.

An additional cost for the purchasing specialists to attend the buyer status training program would amount to approximately $2,000 (two purchasing specialists at $500 each for the remaining two portions of the class). This recommendation would allow the district to achieve some costs savings by ensuring the consolidation of like-item purchases, but a dollar amount cannot be estimated. It would mainly provide a more efficient purchasing department.

Recommendation ——————————————————

- *We recommend that the district reevaluate the current organization of its Purchasing Department and consider work assignment changes and additional training for its purchasing specialists.*

    Action Plan 14-7 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 14-7

Implement Purchasing Department Changes		
Strategy	Require that the work assigned to each purchasing specialist be based on type of goods/services requested rather than based on specific schools/departments to ensure purchasing policies and procedures are followed. Additionally, finish buyer status training for purchasing specialists.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Determine the experience of each purchasing specialist, while arranging for them to attend the remaining portions of the buyer status training.
	Step 2:	Prepare a plan that will structure purchasing authorizations to give appropriate recognition to the nature and size of purchases and the experience of each purchasing specialist. Update any purchasing policies or procedures as necessary.
	Step 3:	Select a date or time frame to implement the new assignments while notifying all appropriate staff. Consideration must also be given to any purchases still open during the transition period.
	Step 4:	Update the written purchasing policies and procedures as necessary.
	Step 5:	Present revised purchase policies and procedures to board for approval, if required.
Who is Responsible	Assistant superintendent of Business Services and director of Purchasing and Warehousing	
Time Frame	October 31, 2004	

Source: Auditor General.

29 Receiving: The district has established controls to ensure that goods are received and meet quality standards.

District established controls are effective to ensure that goods are received and meet quality standards

The district has established controls ensuring goods received meet its quality standards. The individual school/department that ordered the item bears the ultimate responsibility for verification that the items ordered meet quality standards. Upon receipt of an item, authorized personnel at the school/department check to verify that the item meets quality standards. The receipt is then recorded on a receiving report (copy of the purchase order). If any problems are noted with the items received, the receiver notifies the Purchasing Department for follow-up. Accounts payable staff match this receiving report with the invoice, then process for payment. Payment documents are filed in the Finance Department after payment.
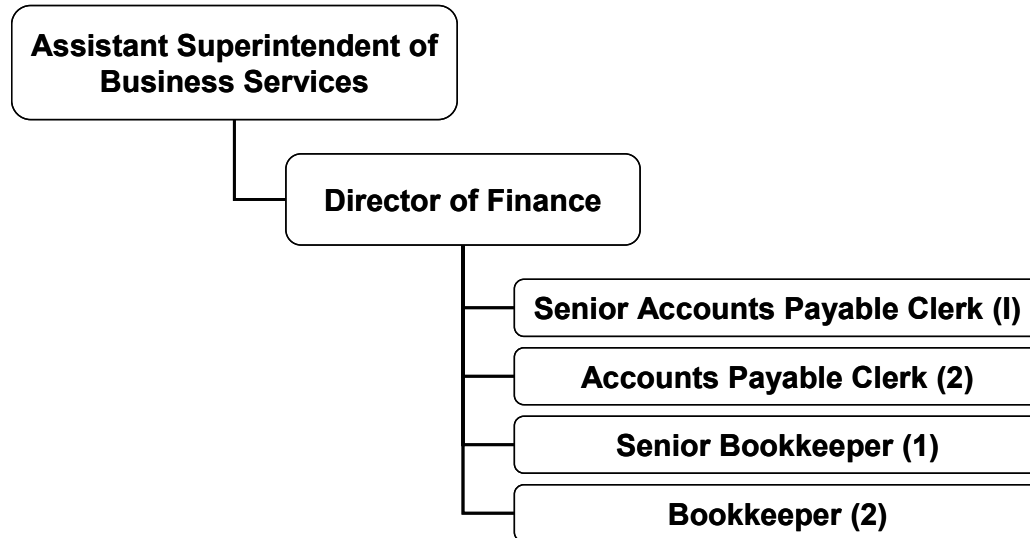
Payment Processing

Established controls for payment processing are vested with the Accounts Payable Department. The Accounts Payable Department is responsible for processing and reconciliation of bills and invoices

presented for payment; follows up on discrepancies, returns, partial orders; along with input of payment information for check runs. This department is staffed as noted in Exhibit 14-17 below.

Exhibit 14-17

Organizational Chart of Payment Process

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┌────────────────────────────┐
│ Assistant Superintendent of │
│      Business Services      │
└────────────┬───────────────┘
             │
        ┌────┴────────────────┐
        │ Director of Finance │
        └────┬────────────────┘
             │
             │   ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
             ├───│ Senior Accounts Payable Clerk (I) │
             │   └──────────────────────────────────┘
             │   ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
             ├───│   Accounts Payable Clerk (2)      │
             │   └──────────────────────────────────┘
             │   ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
             ├───│     Senior Bookkeeper (1)         │
             │   └──────────────────────────────────┘
             │   ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
             └───│        Bookkeeper (2)             │
                 └──────────────────────────────────┘
```

Source: St. Lucie County School District Organization Chart.

30 Disbursements: The district has established controls to ensure disbursements are properly authorized, documented, and recorded.

The district effectively monitors and controls cash disbursements through various control processes. Most vendor checks are computer generated, computer printed, and all checks require two facsimile signatures prior to issuance. Implicit in the control procedures are reconciliation processes that ensure that checks processed by the accounting system agree with control data, both in amount and in the number of checks.

During the requisition process, purchases are coded to ensure that sufficient budget exists for the payment. During the process of approving requisitions for payment, the coding information is verified and corrected if necessary. District purchasing staff searches for unusual account coding and re-verify as necessary when processing approved requisitions. Disbursements are made only for those goods/services documented as received.

31 Invoice Processing: The district has established controls for processing invoices to ensure that quantities, prices, and terms coincide with purchase orders and receiving reports.

Established procedures provide for invoices to be reviewed, verified, and approved for completeness of supporting documents by the accounts payable staff prior to disbursement. This procedure involves comparing the invoice for payment to the original purchase order/requisition and the receiving report. Accounts Payable Department personnel verify that the items submitted for payment on the invoice are those contained on the original purchase requisitions and that all items listed on the invoice have been received. If discrepancies exist between the invoices received and the supporting documentation maintained by the district, procedures are in place to ensure timely resolution of these discrepancies. Additional procedures are in place to ensure accurate account distribution of all entries resulting from invoice processing.

15 Community Involvement

The St. Lucie County School District is actively involved with the larger community. The district's District Communications activities meet all of the best financial management practices for this area.

Conclusion

The St. Lucie County School District is actively engaged with the larger community. The district is using all 11 best practices for community involvement. The district's community relation goals and objectives are coordinated with those of the overall district. The district also has strong accountability built into these activities and evaluates its programs to ensure performance, efficiency and effectiveness. The district is successful in soliciting and incorporating parent and community involvement and support for schools in the county. The district has several mechanisms in place for communicating with parents and the general public, most of which are school-based. The district has a positive relationship with the business community, an active volunteer program complete with adequate background checks, and procedures in place to solicit parental input. The district's community involvement provides active and effective support to its schools. Volunteers and business partners are the foundation of this effort.

During the course of this review, OPPAGA identified a number of district accomplishments in the community involvement, some of which are included in Exhibit 15-1 below.

Exhibit 15-1

The District Has Had a Number of Notable Accomplishments in Community Involvement in the Last Three Years

- The district has established strong accountability systems for its community involvement activities.
- The district has created strong business partnerships.
- The district Foundation has provided tens of thousands of dollars in scholarships.

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

Overview of Chapter Findings

OPPAGA reviewed the district's community involvement using the Best Financial Management Practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education and associated indicators. The OPPAGA team employed several methodologies to develop chapter conclusions and action plans. For instance, OPPAGA conducted on-site interviews with district level administrators and gathered information on the community involvement activities. To receive additional input, OPPAGA obtained documentation of methods used to conduct evaluations and reviewed website information. Information has been reviewed and validated, then incorporated into this chapter where applicable. An overview of chapter findings is presented below.

Effective Communication

1. The district has developed a community involvement mission statement and has detailed activities in a strategic plan directed toward performing that mission. (Page 15-4)

2. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its community involvement office. (Page 15-5)

3. The district solicits and incorporates parent and community involvement and support. (Page 15-7)

4. The district uses a variety of methods of communicating with parents. (Page 15-9)

5. The district periodically reviews the organizational structure and staffing levels of the District Communications section to minimize administrative layers and processes. (Page 15-9)

Parents and Decisions

6. The district has active Parent Teacher Associations /Parent Faculty Organizations (PTA/PFO) and other effective methods to involve and encourage parent leadership and participation. (Page 15-10)

7. The district provides activities that encourage families to be involved in the schools. (Page 15-10)

Community Involvement

8. The district uses community resources to strengthen schools, families, and student learning and consistently offers school resources to strengthen communities. (Page 15-11)

9. The district has developed school-business partnerships. (Page 15-12)

10. District schools maintain active and effective programs to involve volunteers in the education process. (Page 15-12)

11. District schools solicit economic support through school foundations. (Page 15-12)

Background ───────────────────────

Typically, a school district's community involvement function includes communicating with and engaging different segments of the community, including parents, local businesses, and other local groups. The notion of "community involvement" in a public school district includes activities to provide supplemental resources to the schools, get students involved with the community, and enhance parental involvement in student and school activities. In the St. Lucie County School District, the District Communications department and individual schools share responsibility for these activities.

The District Communications Department has district-level responsibility for community involvement activities in the St. Lucie County School District (refer to Exhibit 15-2).

The Director of District Communications Reports Directly to the Superintendent and Board
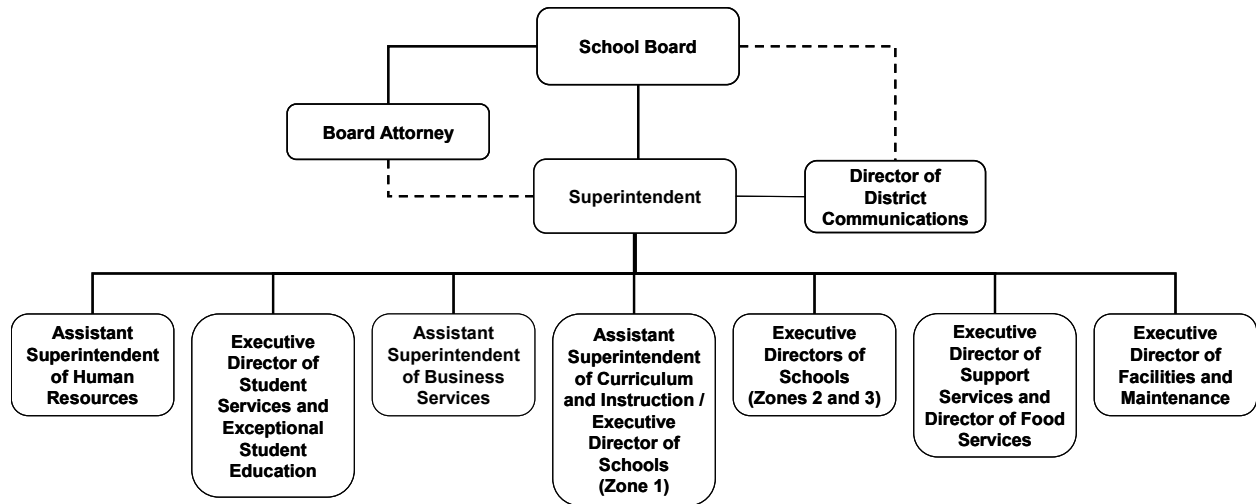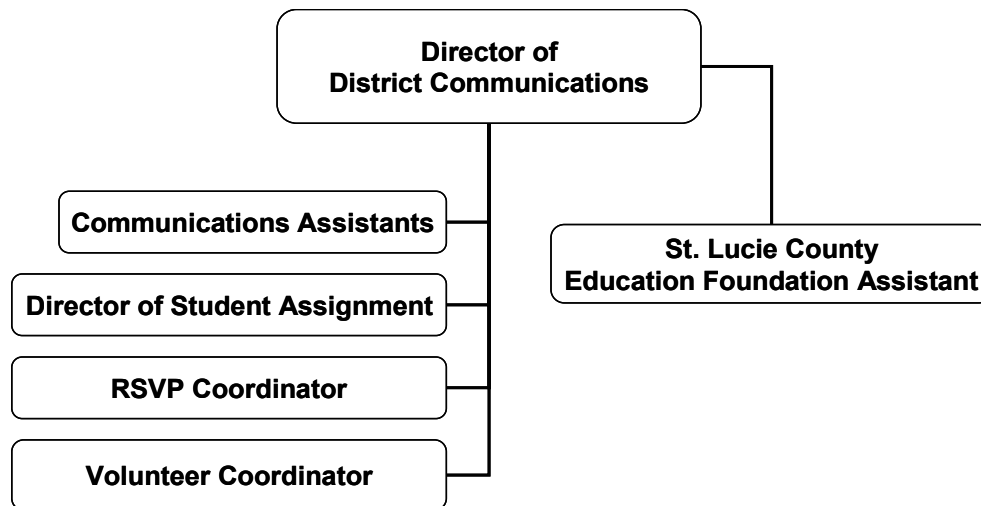

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

The Communication Department is staffed with a Director of District Communications who reports directly to the superintendent and the board. In this position, the director plans, directs, and coordinates the district's communications and information services designed to inform staff and the general public about what is happening in the schools and the district. The communications director also directly supervises the district's foundation assistant, the communications assistance, and the volunteer coordinator. The director has several reports, including the recent addition of a director of student assignment (see Exhibit 15-3).

Exhibit 15-3

The District Communications Director Also Oversees the District's Foundation and the Student Assignment Function

Source: St. Lucie County School District.

The Director of Student Assignment position identified in Exhibit 15-3 is of particular importance in the district and so needs additional discussion. The St. Lucie County School District was under a court-ordered desegregation decree for many years. In order to comply with the order, the district moved to a "controlled-choice" student assignment system. Under controlled choice, there is no zoning, at least not in the traditional form seen in most districts in Florida. Instead, the St. Lucie County School District is divided into three zones based on geographic regions (north, west, and south). Each zone includes a portion of the two incorporated cities in the county, Ft. Pierce and Port St. Lucie. All zones contain several elementary schools, one to three middle schools, and one or two high schools. The three zones serve as the only zoning requirement. [1] Students and their parents submit a first, second, third and fourth choice on their assignment application and a computer determines the final assignment. Once a student is assigned, they may re-apply to move to a different school within their zone or to a school in another zone if it offers a unique program that is not available in the student's primary zone. Students may stay in the same school without reapplying after the initial assignment. The siblings of these students automatically go to these same schools, or may apply to go to another.

Effective Communication

1   The district has developed a meaningful community involvement mission statement and maintains ongoing community involvement activities in its strategic plan directed toward performing that mission.

The District Communications department has a mission statement and goals and objectives consistent with the overall strategic plan

It is important for the Community Involvement function in a district to have a formal mission statement because it allows stakeholders to immediately understand the purpose of its activities. The mission statement, in turn, should be consistent with the goals and objectives of the district-wide strategic plan so that funding and community participation generated by the departments' activities are not misdirected.

The St. Lucie County School District has established a written mission statement for the District Communications department. The mission statement reads:

> *"The District Communications Department is committed to facilitating communication between St. Lucie County Public Schools and the community, whereby strengthening this partnership, encouraging community involvement and enhancing student achievement."*

A mission statement should help the public clearly understand the activities of the department. A parent or business partner should be able to articulate each department's primary function and understand to which entity they should request information about specific community involvement activities. These are indicators of well-developed mission statements.

More importantly, community involvement activities are coordinated with the overall strategic plan for the district. The departments' goals and objectives were developed in conjunction with the district's

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[1] Students may apply to attend a school in another zone if that school offers a unique program that is not available in any of the schools in his/her primary zone.

2001-2002 Strategic Plan. District Communications personnel met with community representatives as a workgroup and provided substantial input into this plan, including identifying three objectives for community involvement. The district recently updated its priority goals and objectives for 2002-03 and included community involvement activities as one of its major priorities. Specifically, the district's priority goals and objectives for the 2002-03 school year includes the community involvement goal described below.

Goal 5: School and Community Involvement **(State Goal #8)** Build a positive image and increase confidence in our schools through involving more citizens in the education process.

Objective: By May of 2003, community involvement in the St. Lucie County School system will increase by 5% when compared to 2001-2002 data as a result of the completion of the following strategies.

- Send a welcome packet to all new parents moving into the community.
- Increase the number of Seniors-On-Line.
- Provide public relations assistance and training to district schools and staff on an ongoing basis.
- Support advocacy groups for educational issues within the community.
- Increase community and business partnerships.

2 The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the Community Involvement Program.

The district has adopted strategies for implementing its objectives that include accountability measures

Efficient and effective community involvement activities can provide a school district many benefits, not the least of which are increased resources for programs and projects. Community involvement activities also allow parents, business partners, and others to have ownership in the performance of the school district. The District Communications department serves as the face of the school district to the larger community. Because of the role community involvement serves in the district's management structures, it is important that there is appropriate accountability of the department to ensure responsible ethical and fiscal behavior, efficient and effective operations, and performance that helps the district meet its overall goals and objectives.

The District Communications department has adopted strategies for implementing its objectives that include accountability measures. Each strategy includes a timeline for completing the strategy, specifies data analysis requirements and benchmarks, describes an evaluation methodology, identifies the person(s) responsible for implementation, and assesses whether there is any fiscal impact associated with implementing the strategy. Exhibit 15-4 illustrates the strategies the district will use to achieve its first objective of increasing community involvement in the district by 5%.

Exhibit 15-4

District Communications Strategies Include Evaluation Components

Strategy	Timeline	Data Analysis Requirements and/or Benchmarks	Evaluation	Person (s) Responsible	Financial Impact
Host a minimum of five events for volunteers, citizens, visitors and business partners to promote awareness of the school system and to recruit volunteers and partnerships including the realtor and senior tours, Foundation board meetings hosted by school, Night of the Stars and Chamber Leadership tours.	June 2002	Palm Beach County School District has such a network that will serve as a model.	By the end of June 2002, the district will have hosted at least five events and increased the number of business partners and volunteers by five percent.	Michelle Sjogren Susan Helms-Smith Kathy Schmidt	None
Develop a list of key stakeholders to help evaluate and communicate district goals and messages.	On-going		Completed list.	Michelle Sjogren	None
Support school district involvement with community organizations by serving on committees and boards.	Ongoing		The district will be represented on no fewer than eight community boards or committees by July 2002.	Michelle Sjogren Dr. William Vogel	None

Source: St. Lucie School District.

The department reports that the superintendent informally monitors the progress on these strategies on a daily basis and conducts a formal evaluation of the department's accomplishments twice a year. Based on the evaluations, staff decides whether to continue, modify, or eliminate each program. This information is then taken back to the board so that amendments to the strategic plan can be considered.

3 The district solicits and incorporates parent and community involvement and support.

The district receives input from parents and the larger community primarily through individual school annual surveys and Parent Teacher Organization attendance

The St. Lucie County School district provides a number of opportunities for parental, student and community input. These opportunities include annual surveys of students, parents, staff, and business partners, as well as, participation on its District Advisory Council (DAC), School Advisory Councils (SAC) and Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO).

District schools survey parents, students, and staff on an annual basis. These surveys ask questions pertaining to school safety, student performance, the nature of teacher-student interactions, and the overall condition of the schools. Teacher and staff surveys also include needs assessment questions. Survey questions generally only allow response on a scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," or some type of "grade." Most sample surveys provided by the district for review did not provide any opportunity for open-ended responses. When completed, surveys are returned or collected at the individual schools and any analyses are conducted on-site. The District Communications department is responsible for surveying business partners and certain volunteers and for analyzing the results.

However, as a result of design weaknesses in these surveys, we found that respondents' ability to answer questions with any level of knowledge is limited and the usefulness of survey results is questionable. In fact, the district was unable to demonstrate how survey information is used to change school operations in any meaningful way. The St. Lucie County School District is not dissimilar with other districts around the state in this regard. The district's survey design is very similar to those used in other districts around the state, and although common, we generally find that they have limited informative value. Based on our assessment, we recommend the district continue its efforts to reevaluate and change (where appropriate) the design of its main surveys. If needed, assistance with the revisions could be obtained through the professional associations in the state (e.g., FSBA or FADSS) or the local community college with little cost.

The St. Lucie County School District also provides opportunities for community input through its District Advisory Council (DAC), School Advisory Councils (SAC) and Parent/Teacher Organizations (PTO). The DAC is very active in the district and is used by the administration as a "sounding board" for problems in the district as well as for opinions on policy and budgetary decisions. The DAC meets once a month and membership includes a representative from each school who may be a parent, staff member, or business partner. In fact, for the purpose of this review, the DAC was the primary source of community feedback concerning challenges in the district and reviewed many sections of the report. Individual schools also have a SAC, and most elementary schools have a PTO. Schools advertise meetings for these groups in their school newsletters, flyers sent home with students, and on marquees in front of the schools. SACs help with the development of the school improvement plans in each school and PTOs help in certain fund-raising projects.

Each school in the district has SAC with reasonably active participation. SAC members are active engaged in the development of the school improvement plans, including parent representatives. The only issue of concern is the minimal minority representation on the SACs. The St. Lucie County School District has significant pockets of minority populations including African American, Hispanic migrants, and Caribbean Islander (especially Haitian). African-American representation is appropriate, but other minority groups are less represented. The district should increase efforts to recruit these individuals for

participation on the SACs. Action Plan 15-1 details the steps necessary to accomplish these recommendations.

Recommendations ─────────────────────

- *We recommend that the district continue its efforts to develop a standard, districtwide climate survey.*

- *We recommend that the district increase its efforts to improve minority representation on its SACs.*

Action Plan 15-1 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 15-1

District and School Surveys Need to be Evaluated and Redesigned	
Strategy	The district should evaluate each of the surveys used to obtain feedback on school operations for relevancy and appropriateness. When needed, the district should redesign its surveys.
Action Needed	Step 1: The District Communications department should collect a copy of each survey used for community input in the district.
	Step 2: The department should form an ad hoc committee to review the content of each survey for relevancy and appropriateness.
	Step 3: The committee should solicit assistance from the local community college or state-wide professional associations in redesigning surveys when needed.
	Step 4: The committee should recommend a method for collecting and analyzing survey responses.
	Step 5: The committee should present any new surveys and analysis methodologies to the board for consideration and approval.
Who is Responsible	District Communications Department
Time Frame	Completed and implemented by December 2003

Action Plan 15-2

The District Should Increase Efforts to Increase Diversity in SAC Mebership	
Strategy	The district should increase efforts to increase diversity on all SACs.
Action Needed	Step 1: The District Communication department should survey each SAC for minority representation and attendance.
	Step 2: For each SAC without minority representation similar to its student population, the district should consult with the principal and SAC members of the affected school to determine the barriers to participation.
	Step 3: If barriers seem minimal and representation is still low, the board should consider appointing representatives as allowed in state law.
Who is Responsible	District Communications, the superintendent, SAC members, the board
Time Frame	Completed and implemented by June 2004
Fiscal Impact	This recommendation can be completed with existing resources.

4   **The district uses a variety of methods of communicating with parents.**

Individual schools and the district share responsibility for communicating with parents

The St. Lucie County Schools district utilizes many techniques for communicating with parents and guardians. Individual schools are primarily responsible for communicating with parents, although the district is also active in disseminating information through various mechanisms.

Individual schools use a variety of techniques to communicate with parents. Each school has a website with a varying degree of information provided on each site including the school's mission statement, staff listing, events, and other information. Schools also use newsletters, pamphlets, and flyers that are sent home with students in an effort to make parents and guardians aware of policies and school activities. Most schools host open houses and encourage parent/teacher conferences for individual students. Parents and guardians are provided conference times before and after regular school hours to facilitate these meetings. Schools also use telephone contacts with parents on some occasions.

At the district level, the administration communicates with parents through newsletters, its official website, an annual report and articles in the local newspapers. The district distributes its newsletter as part of the *Newspapers in Education* program that obtains support from the two local newspapers in the district. The newsletter describes district policies, highlights special events, and details resources for parents and students. The district's website (http://www.stlucie.k12.fl.us) includes sections on the administration and school board, certain district policies, student performance, parent and teacher resources, and links to other educational websites. Finally, the district creates and distributes an annual report to the summarizing student performance, special programs, elements of the strategic plan, and budgetary information.

5   **The district periodically reviews the organizational structure and staffing levels of the community involvement program to minimize administrative layers and processes.**

The District Communications department assesses its staffing during the budget preparation cycle each year

The St. Lucie County School district reviews the District Communications department staffing levels on an annual basis as part of the budget process. The department holds planning sessions to assess staffing needs and the superintendent's cabinet recommends any changes in its budget recommendations to the board. The district also recently compared its costs with those of other districts (Alachua, Clay, Lake, Leon, Okaloosa, and Osceola) and found that their operational costs were low in comparison.

The department currently has a small number of staff (two professionals and two assistants) who reports that they feel their lines of authority and spans of control are appropriate to address the needs of the district as a whole. The district communications director serves as the Executive Director of the Education Foundation and directly supervises the foundation assistant, the communications assistance, and the volunteer coordinator. Principals reported no problems with district support, and even responded that they preferred the decentralized nature of community involvement in the district.

Parents and Decisions

6 The district has active Parent Teacher Associations /Parent Faculty Organizations (PTA/PFO) and other effective methods to involve and encourage parent leadership and participation.

The district's schools have active Parent/Teacher/Student Organizations

Most of the district's schools have Parent/Teacher/Student Organizations (PTSOs) that meet on a regular basis. These organizations are separate from the School Advisory Councils (SACs), although there is usually some overlap in membership. Schools provide information to parents concerning meeting times and locations for these organizations through newsletters, the Internet, school marquees, and community service announcements through local media outlets. Elementary schools are most likely to have a PTSO, while middle and high schools tend to have booster clubs to generate support for specific activities.

7 The district provides activities that encourage families to be involved in the schools.

The district provides opportunities for families to participate in school board meetings, school activities and on School Advisory Councils, but the district's controlled-choice program creates challenges to parental involvement

There are many opportunities for families to be involved in St. Lucie County school activities. Individuals in the community are provided opportunities to speak on board policies during meetings and parents are important participants in the schools and on each school's School Advisory Council (SAC). However, the district's controlled-choice student assignment system creates challenges to parental involvement.

Parents and other interested persons are provided opportunities to speak on any issue discussed during board meetings. Time is allocated on every school board agenda for public comment. Requests to speak on an issue are submitted in writing before each board meeting and submitted to the chair for consideration. School board meetings are held twice a month in locations reasonably accessible to the community and agendas are posted on the main webpage for easy access.

Parents and guardians are encouraged to participate in specific schools activities. Individual schools are responsible for encouraging parental participation, volunteerism, and business cooperation, although the district does provide some volunteer coordination and training materials in the form of a volunteer handbook. Parents are made aware of school functions through newsletters, flyers and websites and asked to volunteer or participate. Parents can participate as reading buddies, classroom assistants, front office volunteers, field trip chaperones and in other capacities. Another opportunity for parents to participate in school activities is through the School Advisory Councils (SACs). Each school has a SAC comprised of parents, faculty and community leaders. Staff reports that parents play an active role in SAC decisions and participate in the development of the schools' improvement plans.

One of the greatest challenges to parental involvement is the district's "controlled-choice" student assignment system. The St. Lucie County School District was under a court-ordered desegregation decree for many years. In order to comply with the order, the district moved to a "controlled-choice" student assignment system. Under controlled choice, there is no zoning, at least not in the traditional form seen in most districts in Florida. The district is divided into three large zones that have a similar number of elementary and secondary schools in each. A student may apply to attend any school within their zone, or apply to attend a school in another zone if it offers a unique program that is not available in the student's primary zone.

The challenge this creates for community involvement is that many students are bused considerable distances from their homes. Since the child may not be attending the school close to his or her home, the parent may not ever go by the child's school except for specific functions. District staff, principals, and members of the DAC all report that many parents do not feel a connection to the school, and even if they do, the distance between their home and their child's school may be a barrier to attending evening meetings for organizations like the school's SAC or PTO.

Community Involvement

8 The district uses community resources to strengthen schools, families, and student learning and consistently offers school resources to strengthen communities.

Schools invite community resources into their facilities to provided services for students and families, but also offer their facilities for use by the community

District and community resources are exchanged on a regular basis according to district administrators. Schools provide information to parents and students about community activities, offer facilities for community organizations and coordinate volunteers in the schools and with business partners.

Local church groups, public service organizations, scouts, and other groups often use district and school facilities as meeting locations or to host informational fairs. Other community organizations like the YMCA, youth athletic leagues, and organizations offering after-school activities regularly distribute information through the schools and use some district facilities for the actual programs. This allows student to more easily access these opportunities because they do not have to make transportation arrangements, which is a significant barrier in the district. Finally, many schools allow local businesses and service organizations to setup information booths at their open houses so that parents may be more easily exposed to the services.

But, students also give back to the community by volunteering and participating in fund-raising activities. Students annually raise funds for the United Way, recently participated in the Jump Rope for Heart (a program to create awareness of heart disease and to raise funds for research) and the annual Cancer Walk, and collaborate regularly with the local Big Brother/Big Sister chapter. This interchange of resources betters both the school district and the larger community. The schools and students benefit by gaining diverse educational opportunities, while the community benefits by helping students become productive members of society.

9   The district has developed school-business partnerships.

The district has developed school-business partnerships to provide mentoring, resources, and other educational and employment opportunities

The St. Lucie County School district is actively engaged with the local business community. The district hosts regular meetings with local businesses to provide information about the district and its programs. Business partners, in turn, help acquire additional resources for students and schools and participate in and facilitate mentoring programs in the district.

Business partners assist schools and students obtain additional resources. The district and individual schools share the responsibility for establishing and maintaining these relationships. For example, each school has a business partner contact, usually the principal, who may make special arrangements with local business partners for either dollars or services. One principal interviewed described how the school's goals and objectives are distributed to local business and prominently displayed in his office if a partner were to meet with him. This particular principal describes an arrangement with a local landscaping business that donated goods and services to the school. The principal later posted a "thank you" and endorsement of the business on the school's marquee, essentially providing free advertising for the business. At the district level, the Communications department helps to coordinate large business partners whose contributions may benefit the overall district, not just a single school. These partnerships often lead to grants from the business or contributions to the district's Foundation. Department personnel also make contacts with business partners by serving as support staff to the district's Foundation and serving on several of the local Chamber of Commerce's committees.

10 District schools maintain active and effective programs to involve volunteers in the education process.

The district has a strong volunteer program that has received state recognition

Interviews with district staff and documentation found that volunteers are a critical part of the district's resources. Staff reports that all schools have heavy volunteer participation (a total of 314,750 volunteer hours in 2000-01) and 34 schools have received the state's "Golden School" awards for the level of volunteerism. These awards recognize schools that meet the following criteria. A minimum of 80% of the school's staff participated in training related to school volunteerism.

- A school volunteer coordinator is designated for recruitment, placement, training, and supervision.
- The total number of hours in volunteer service hours equals twice the number of students enrolled in the school.

11 District schools solicit economic support through school foundations.

The district has a foundation whose main goal is providing scholarships for students

The district's primary development program is the St. Lucie Education Foundation, Inc. The foundation is a not-for-profit partnership between families, schools, the local community college and business. The

Foundation funds student scholarships, classroom grants to teachers whose innovative ideas support their individual school's improvement plan, and staff recognition awards for superior performance.

In 2000-01, the Foundation awarded 16 Scholarship Opportunities for At-Risk Students (SOAR) scholarships. These four-year scholarships are awarded to promising middle school students who are deemed at-risk and may be claimed upon high school graduation if certain contracted criteria have been met. In the same year, the district had eight students graduate and claim their SOAR scholarship awarded several years before. In addition to the scholarships, the Foundation awarded over $25,000 in classroom grants to teachers who help their school with its improvement plan.
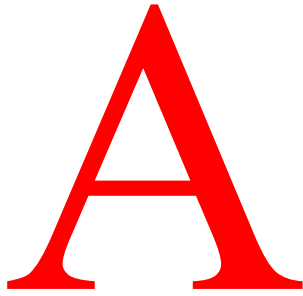
A Action Plans

Management Structures

Action Plan 3-2

School-Based Administrative Staffing Should Be Regularly Evaluated	
Strategy	The district should review its assistant administrative staffing ratios at all grade levels to those of its peers and SACS accreditation standards, and adjust the staffing formulas as necessary to minimize school-based administration.
Action Needed	Step 1: The board and superintendent should direct district employees to conduct an assessment of the number of assistant principals and deans in its peer districts' elementary, middle, and high schools. Step 2: The assessment should include determining the function of these assistant principals and deans (e.g., discipline, guidance, curriculum support), and should determine how districts with lower numbers of these administrators manage these functions. Step 3: The board and superintendent should review the SACS accreditation standards for assistant principals and deans to determine if they are an appropriate benchmark for the St. Lucie County School District. Step 4: District employees should compare these benchmarks to the actual staffing levels in each elementary, middle, and high school in the St. Lucie County School District. Step 5: The superintendent should recommend to the board changes to the staffing formula based on these assessments.
Who is Responsible	The board, superintendent, and district employees
Time Frame	December 2003

Performance Accountability Systems

Action Plan 4-1

Reevaluate and Modify the Strategies in the District's Strategic Plan	
Strategy	Reexamine and modify the strategies in the strategic plan to ensure that they are reasonable and able to be accomplished within the limitations of district's current and projected fiscal status.
Action Needed	Step 1: The committee and/or staff that developed the strategic plan should be reconvened. Step 2: The committee should reevaluate each strategy to determine if it is still a priority or should be excluded from the plan.

Action Needed	Step 3:	The committee should work with the Assistant Superintendent of Business Services to examine all remaining strategies to determine their individual and total fiscal impacts.
	Step 4:	These impacts should be considered in light of recent budget reductions.
	Step 5:	Revise the strategies as needed based on whether it is reasonable to expect that the district can afford to implement the strategies.
	Step 6:	Submit the modifications to the board for approval.
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent of Business Services, and the strategic plan committee	
Time Frame	August 2003	

Action Plan 4-2

Reevaluate and Modify the Strategies in the District's Strategic Plan

Strategy	Develop measurable long-term objectives for all district educational and support programs.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The strategic planning committee should include longer-term outcomes for presentation to the board and public.
	Step 2:	The committee should work with key staff in each program to develop useful long-term measures. Proposed measures should be made available to stakeholders for comment.
	Step 3:	Make proposed long-term measures available to stakeholders for comment.
	Step 4:	Revise the proposed measures as needed.
	Step 5:	Submit the long-term measures to the board for approval.
	Step 6:	Develop systems for collecting reliable data on the approved measures.
	Step 7:	Periodically review the measures to ensure that they're still useful or whether new measures should be developed.
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent and the strategic planning committee	
Time Frame	August 2003.	

Educational Service Delivery

Action Plan 5-4

Establish Mechanisms to Systematically Evaluate and Improve Processes Through Which Gifted Students Are Identified, Particularly Minority Students

Strategy	Increase the representation of minority students as gifted.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Establish a team comprising the ESE director, the ESOL specialist, and ESOL representatives at each school.
	Step 2:	Investigate other methods of identifying gifted students, particularly those methods which have been found effective with culturally and linguistically diverse students.
	Step 3:	Develop strategies to ensure that the representation of minority students in the gifted program is appropriate.
	Step 4:	Ensure that all necessary personnel are trained in these strategies.
	Step 5:	Train teachers to recognize possible giftedness in students. This may include, for example, a checklist to assist teachers in recognizing giftedness in their students.
	Step 6:	Monitor the implementation of the strategies, evaluate their effectiveness, and adjust as necessary.

Who is Responsible	Executive director of Student Services; zone directors; director of Exceptional Student Education; ESOL specialist; principals; assistant principals.
Time Frame	By the start of the 2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter.

Action Plan 5-5

Establish Mechanisms to Improve the Processes Through Which ESE Students are Identified and Evaluated	
Strategy	Improve the timeliness of evaluations, reduce pending referrals, and reduce the percentage of inappropriate referrals.
Action Needed	Step 1: Improve timeliness of evaluations by continuing to track referral and evaluation data. Establish mechanisms to reduce the time for student evaluations. Reducing pending referrals and reducing the percentage of inappropriate referrals will further help improve the timeliness of ESE evaluations.
	Step 2: Reduce pending referrals by continuing to use OPS psychologists during the summer to reduce the number of pending referrals over the summer months.
	Step 3: Reduce the percentage of inappropriate referrals by providing teachers with training in how to recognize students who may be in need of ESE services. This should include equipping teachers with appropriate interventions that should be used before referring a student for ESE evaluation.
	Step 4: After reducing the number of inappropriate evaluations, examine the workload of psychologists and, if necessary, make it a budget priority to find the funds to hire one or two school psychologists.
Who is Responsible	<u>Timeliness</u>: director of Student Support Services; Student Support Team trainers; principals; assistant principals; director of MIS. <u>Pending Referrals</u>: director of Student Services; Psychological Services manager; director of ESE; guidance counselors. <u>Inappropriate Referrals</u>: director of Student Services, director of Exceptional Student Education, principals, guidance counselors, ESE Department chairpersons, ESE Program specialist.
Time Frame	April 2003–June 2003; ongoing thereafter.

Action Plan 5-6

Work to Help ESE Students Improve Reading Skills	
Strategy	Evaluate current reading programs currently in use.
Action Needed	Step 1: Select a sample of students and compare reading post test scores with FCAT scores.
	Step 2: Using trend data (at least three years of data), determine which programs are the most successful in helping students improve their reading skills.
	Step 3: Focus resources only on those programs that significantly improve ESE students' reading skills.
	Step 4: Maintain data for all reading programs used, evaluate regularly, and make changes as needed.
	Step 5: If no reading program is found to be successful, contact other districts or DOE to locate effective programs.
Who is Responsible	Director of Exceptional Student Education, program specialist for Curriculum, Department chairpersons, director of Assessment and Evaluation, ESE Program specialist.
Time Frame	April 2003-July 2003; ongoing, thereafter.

Action Plan 5-7

Develop Mechanisms to Reduce the High Rate of Both in School and Out of School Suspensions and Ensure That Students with Disabilities are Not Being Suspended For Behaviors Related to Their Disability		
Strategy	Evaluate suspension data for students with disabilities.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Disaggregate suspension data by school, teacher, offense, and other pertinent criteria.
	Step 2:	Look for trends in the data to determine where (for example, certain schools or certain teachers) the highest percentages of suspensions occur and the reasons for these high rates.
	Step 3:	Focus resources on those sources. For example, if some schools have higher rates of suspensions than others, target those schools. This should include additional training in appropriate interventions and mechanisms to deal with difficult student behavior.
	Step 4:	Evaluate at least semi-annually and revise as needed.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of Student Services; zone directors; director of Alternative Student Placement; director of Exceptional Student Education, director of Student Services, principals, assistant principals, deans, behavior specialists, program specialists for compliance, ESE Department chairpersons; director of MIS.	
Time Frame	April 2003-June 2003; ongoing, thereafter.	

Action Plan 5-9

Establish an Accessible Method for Teachers to Obtain Teaching Strategies Linked to the Sunshine State Standards and Benchmarks. These Strategies Are Intended as Guides and are Not Intended To Be Prescriptive.		
Strategy	Provide access to specific teaching strategies for each grade level in the core subject areas.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Establish a committee to determine which option the district will use to provide teachers access to teaching strategies linked to the Sunshine State Standards and benchmarks.
	Step 2:	Determine which subject areas and grade levels the district will focus on first. For example, the district may choose to focus its efforts initially on grade 10 English and Algebra I.
	Step 3:	Develop a time frame for having teaching strategies available for all identified subject areas.
	Step 4:	Ensure that all teachers have easy access to these teaching strategies. This resource is not intended to be prescriptive, but to be available to help teachers teach specific standards using strategies that teachers have already found to be useful.
	Step 5:	Revise or add teaching strategies when curriculum changes or when teachers identify new strategies. The district may want to revise these guides based on the textbook adoption cycle.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of School Improvement and Title I; resource specialists; department chairpersons; Selected lead teachers in each grade level and core subject area.	
Time Frame	Summer 2003; ongoing thereafter.	

Action Plan 5-15

The District Should Include Age of Library/Media Collections of Individual Schools in Their Annual Library Media Services Report	
Strategy	As part of the annual Library Media Service Report, age of collections for individual schools by subject matter and/or type of book should be reported by each school and included in the report.

Action Needed	Step 1:	Using generally accepted weeding standards, Library and Media Specialists should annually assess the age and state (wear and tear) of their library collections.
	Step 2:	Library and Media Specialists should then report the age of their collections, by book type, to the district staff for inclusion in the Library Media Services Report.
	Step 3:	If Library/Media center collections are determined to be older than the standards dictate the district should develop and implement a plan to purchase books in order to update the library media collections of their schools. Plans should be implemented giving the schools with the greatest need priority for purchasing updated material.
Who is Responsible	Director of Staff Development and Learning Resources; school library and media specialists	
Time Frame	The policy should be in place before the beginning of the 2003-04 school year.	

Facilities Construction

Action Plan 10-1

Develop a Long-Range Facilities Master Plan		
Strategy	Develop a long-range educational facilities master plan with community input and update it on a regular basis.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Establish a master planning work group.
	Step 2:	Devise a plan with public input that provides a framework for the district's short and long term decisions regarding facilities that are consistent with the district's priorities and needs. The plan should consider the following:
		• Educational mission, goals and community values,
		• The most recent educational plant survey and demographic study,
		• Local government's planning and development plans
		• The most practical and economical site selection and land acquisition for current and anticipated needs that reflects intergovernmental, higher education and business coordination.
		• Financing options.
		• General educational specifications for facilities, and
		• Project requests.
	Step 3:	Use the master planning work group to synthesize the values, concerns, and priorities of the community and district into a draft long-range plan.
	Step 4:	Hold a public meeting to receive feedback on the draft master plan.
	Step 5:	Revise plan if needed.
	Step 6:	Present long-range master plan to the board for approval.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services	
Time Frame	January 2004.	

Action Plan 10-4

Codify Design Standards Into a Design Manual	
Strategy	District maintenance staff and construction project managers should meet to decide what needs to be included in the facilities design manual.

Action Needed	Step 1:	Collect all relevant data used informally to set standards.
	Step 2:	Analyze maintenance repair data captured in the electronic work order system.
	Step 3:	Solicit input from maintenance trades staff and custodial workers and educational specifications committee.
	Step 4:	Update and expand standards to include roofing systems and lawn sprinkler systems.
	Step 5:	Prepare a draft manual.
	Step 6:	Solicit input from design and construction professionals.
	Step 7:	Adopt the final design criteria manual.
	Step 8:	Institute a policy that requires district personnel and all contractors to adhere to the design standards for repair, renovation and new construction.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services	
Time Frame	January 2004	

Action Plan 10-5

Develop a Structured Post-Occupancy Building Evaluation		
Strategy	Require post-occupancy building evaluations for all construction projects.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Develop procedures to ensure that post-occupancy evaluations regularly occur. The post-occupancy review process should focus on building performance from the point of view of school-based staff, students, custodians and maintenance staff.
	Step 2:	The evaluation should include
		• A survey of users,
		• An operational cost analysis,
		• Comparison of the finished product with the educational and construction specifications,
		• Recommendations for future improvements, and
		• An analysis of educational program improvement for consideration by future educational specification committees.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services	
Time Frame	January 2004	

Facilities Maintenance

Action Plan 11-3

The Maintenance Department Needs To Develop a Maintenance Plan		
Strategy	Develop a maintenance plan based maintenance standards and the district's goals and objectives for appropriately and equitably maintained facilities.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Work with maintenance employees to create a district-wide maintenance plan that incorporates goals and objectives for maintaining district facilities.
	Step 2:	Develop maintenance and operations criteria that address these board facility goals:
		• Safety-environmental and occupational risks

	• sanitation – frequency of cleaning
	• security – protection of occupants and property
	• functional performance – operating efficiently and economically
	• physical condition – sound condition
	• appearance – desired level of appearance
	Step 3: Include in plan development manpower projections, equipment replacement estimates, budget projections, maintenance and facility standards.
	Step 4: Present the maintenance plan to the executive director of facilities for approval.
Who is Responsible	Maintenance director
Time Frame	January 1, 2004

Action Plan 11-4

The Maintenance Department Needs To Develop Work Performance Standards for Maintenance and Custodial Staff	
Strategy	Develop a method for evaluating maintenance and custodial performance based on standards.
Action Needed	Step 1: Assign responsibility for creating maintenance and custodial performance standards.
	Step 2: Develop work standards for each task that may include
	• frequency of task,
	• duration of task,
	• materials cost of task,
	• labor cost of task, and
	• comparisons to applicable professional standards and peer districts.
	Step 3: Inform maintenance and custodial personnel of the work performance standards.
	Step 4: Track the implementation of work performance standards and how employees meet those standards.
	Step 5: Evaluate employee performance based on the standards.
Who is Responsible	Maintenance director
Time Frame	January 1, 2004

Action Plan 11-6

The District Needs to Develop Additional Accountability Mechanisms to Evaluate Program Effectiveness	
Strategy	Develop accountability measures for maintenance and custodial operations based on recognized industry benchmarks and comparisons with peer districts.
Action Needed	Step 1: Develop effectiveness measures based on the following:
	• maintenance cost per square foot
	• maintenance cost per student
	• custodial costs per square foot
	• square feet of building per FTE custodian
	• square feet of building per FTE maintenance staff
	• lower energy costs
	• improving work order closure rates
	• customer satisfaction

	Step 2:	Set goals and objectives that articulate what the department plans to accomplish within certain timeframes.
	Step 3:	Contact peer districts to identify information sharing opportunities on comparable maintenance and operations costs and staffing levels.
	Step 4:	Obtain historical data from budget and work order system.
	Step 5:	Calculate and verify measures.
	Step 6:	Evaluate costs per square foot/per student annually for cost efficiency. Review customer satisfaction surveys at least annually to identify areas for improvement.
	Step 7:	Select a few critical performance and cost efficiency measures that should be reported annually to the school board and superintendent.
Who is Responsible	Maintenance director	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Action Plan 11-9

Implement a Purchasing Card System for the Maintenance Department		
Strategy	The executive director of business services, purchasing director, executive director of facilities services, and maintenance director should meet to establish guidelines for a pilot purchasing card system in the maintenance department.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Solicit information on establishing a successful purchasing card system from peer districts.
	Step 2:	Secure a line of credit to establish a district purchasing card.
	Step 3:	Determine card recipients, credit limits and restrictions on use.
	Step 4:	Establish a training program for employees on the appropriate use of the district purchasing card.
	Step 5:	Establish audit procedures for purchases.
	Step 6:	Reconcile card purchases with the maintenance budget on a regular basis.
Who is Responsible	Purchasing director, executive director of facilities services and maintenance director.	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Action Plan 11-10

Close or Reduce the Size of the Maintenance Warehouse		
Strategy	Conduct a business case analysis of the impact of closing or reducing the size of the maintenance warehouse.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Identify the benefits of the current plan.
	Step 2:	Identify the costs of operating the warehouse including:
		• Cost of personnel and delivery vehicles
		• Cost of floor space and inventory
		• Turnover of inventory
	Step 3:	Compare district costs to maintain the warehouse to purchasing parts on an as needed basis from vendors.
	Step 4:	Explore the alternative of combining the district warehouse with the stores and distribution warehouse.
	Step 5:	Stock maintenance trucks with routinely used parts to increase efficiency.
	Step 6:	Identify how maintenance operations will be affected.
	Step 7:	Revise operating procedures for acquiring and returning parts.
	Step 8:	Determine the acceptability of the plan, or to what extent those who must work with it support this alternative.

	Step 9: Present finding to the board for approval.
	Step 10: Develop a transition plan.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services
Time Frame	January 1, 2004

Action Plan 11-11

Refrain From Using Maintenance Staff on Non-Maintenance Projects	
Strategy	Assign small construction projects and relocation of portables to outside contract labor.
Action Needed	Step 1: Develop an estimate of time and costs for projects.
	Step 2: Get project cost estimates from the private sector.
	Step 3: Charge appropriate school/department budgets for the cost of the project.
Who is Responsible	Construction project manager
Time Frame	January 1, 2004

Action Plan 11-12

Negotiate Volume Discounts for Parts and Custodial Supplies	
Strategy	Contact area vendors to negotiate contractor rates for routinely used parts. Initiate a bid for approved custodial supplies routinely used by schools.
Action Needed	Step 1: Analyze warehouse inventory turnover data to identify commonly used parts.
	Step 2: Contact area vendors to negotiate a volume discount for routinely used parts and supplies.
	Step 3: Survey schools to identify preferred custodial supplies.
	Step 4: Ensure that preferred supplies are approved by the Maintenance Department for air quality control.
	Step 5: Advertise a bid for custodial supplies based on volume purchasing.
	Step 6: Notify schools of preferred vendor (s) and prices.
	Step 7: Periodically compare prices with historical data to ensure best pricing.
Who is Responsible	Maintenance director; purchasing director; coordinator of custodial services
Time Frame	July 2003

Action Plan 11-13

Increase Management and Supervision in the Maintenance Department	
Strategy	Increase supervision of maintenance work.
Action Needed	Step 1: Determine the most cost effective means of increasing management and supervision in the Maintenance Department.
	Step 2: Involve staff in the examination of alternatives.
	Step 3: Select the most cost effective alternative and present it to the superintendent and board for approval.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services
Time Frame	January 1, 2004

Action Plan 11-14

Increase Management and Supervision in the Maintenance Department	
Strategy	Develop and implement a plan to increase Maintenance Department resources.
Action Needed	Step 1: After streamlining operating procedures, determine whether more resources are needed to reduce maintenance backlogs and implement a deferred maintenance schedule.

	Step 2:	Determine the most cost effective means of performing needed maintenance work—hiring additional staff, contracting, or both.
	Step 3:	Involve staff in the examination of these alternatives.
	Step 4:	Determine the resources available to meet maintenance needs.
	Step 5:	Select the most feasible and cost effective alternative and present it to the superintendent and board for approval.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Action Plan 11-18

Implement an Incentive Based Comprehensive Energy Management Plan		
Strategy	The energy management project manager should contact peer districts, state and local agencies, utility providers and other stakeholders to identify resources available to the district for energy management.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Develop a written energy plan that includes:
		• Transferring primary responsibility for controlling costs and payment of bills to users;
		• Goals and incentives to reduce usage, including sharing in savings;
		• Assistance with energy audits and reports on monthly usage;
		• Energy management training for administrators, principals, teachers, custodial workers and maintenance staff.
	Step 2:	Meet with local utility providers to discuss options for rate reductions including rebates.
	Step 3:	Create a plan to manage peak demands on HVAC systems to reduce operating costs.
	Step 4:	Establish an effective preventative maintenance program.
	Step 5:	Determine staffing levels to service district equipment.
	Step 6:	Continue to expand and standardize EMS controls to monitor equipment.
	Step 7:	Evaluate all long term energy management contracts to determine if continuation is warranted.
	Step 8:	Provide regular feedback on energy savings to schools and school board.
Who is Responsible	Executive director of facilities services; energy project manager; maintenance director	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	
Fiscal Impact	$530,000 annually based on an estimated 10% saving in electrical costs of $5.3 million annually. (Okaloosa School District experienced 12% in savings in six months after implementing an incentive based energy program.)	

Student Transportation

Action Plan 12-8

Improve Exceptional Student Transportation Procedures		
Strategy	District to review and modify its exceptional student education procedures to ensure that students ride regular buses whenever possible and appropriate.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The district exceptional student education (ESE) office, with the assistance of the transportation department, should recommend to the superintendent that the school district adopt a policy requiring that students ride regular buses whenever possible and appropriate.

	Step 2:	Based on this recommendation, the superintendent should approve the change to district transportation policy.
	Step 3:	The district exceptional student education (ESE) office, with the assistance of the transportation department, should modify the district's ESE manual to include guidelines regarding the use of specialized student transportation. The guidelines should include examples of situations where the use of specialized student transportation is and is not appropriate. The guidelines should also require adequate documentation of the necessity of any student who is approved to receive specialized transportation services.
	Step 4:	The district ESE department should disseminate the revisions to appropriate ESE employees, school employees, and transportation employees and take steps to ensure that Individual Education Plans contain documentation of the need for specialized transportation services.
	Step 5:	The district ESE office should design and implement an ongoing monitoring program to ensure compliance with the guidelines.
Who is Responsible	Transportation managers, exceptional student education (ESE) program manager, and superintendent.	
Time Frame	August 2003	

Action Plan 12-9

Obtain Medicaid Reimbursement for Transporting Eligible Exceptional Students		
Strategy	District to apply for Medicaid reimbursement for transportation provided to Medicaid-eligible exceptional education students.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The chief financial officer should obtain billing information on Medicaid-reimbursable transportation expenses and set up a system to bill Medicaid for these expenses.
	Step 2:	The chief financial officer, with the assistance of the transportation manager, should collect data necessary to bill Medicaid for reimbursable transportation expenses and bill Medicaid for these expenses.
Who is Responsible	Chief financial officer, transportation program manager	
Time Frame	Medicaid billing system to be operational by the beginning of school year 2003-04.	

Action Plan 12-10

Actions to Identify Reduce Vandalism on Buses and Associated Unreimbursed Costs		
Strategy	The district takes action to reduce bus vandalism and increase collection of restitution for bus damage.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The superintendent should recommend a policy to the school board that requires principals to assess restitution and attempt to collect restitution when students vandalize school buses. The policy should specify actions principals and the transportation department should take when restitution is not paid.
	Step 2:	The board should review and adopt the recommended policy.
	Step 3:	Transportation managers should review the effectiveness of current procedures and techniques other districts use to reduce vandalism on buses. Based on this review, transportation managers should identify improved methods and techniques to prevent bus vandalism and associated unreimbursed costs.
	Step 4:	Transportation managers should implement the improved methods of reducing vandalism on buses and the associated unreimbursed costs.

	Step 5:	Transportation managers and the finance department should periodically review the district's cost to repair damage from bus vandalism and the amount of restitution it collects for this damage and, if needed, recommend any other changes necessary to reduce school bus vandalism costs.
Who is Responsible	Transportation managers, principals, superintendent, school board	
Time Frame	August 2003	

Action Plan 12-15

Develop and Present Information on Potential Cost Savings from Policy Changes		
Strategy	Develop and present information on areas of potential cost savings as part of budget process.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Transportation managers should review current and planned future operations to identify areas of potential cost savings. Areas of potential savings include eliminating transportation services to courtesy bus riders, reducing the number of spare buses, realigning bus routes to increase efficiency and effectiveness, changing transportation staffing, and reviewing the types of buses and equipment purchased.
	Step 2:	Transportation managers will present projected cost savings including the pros and cons of each option that decision makers can use to make informed decisions during budget discussions.
	Step 3:	This information will be presented annually to the superintendent, and school board.
Who is Responsible	Transportation managers, selected transportation employees, chief financial officer, superintendent, and school board.	
Time Frame	May 2004 and annually thereafter as part of the budget process	

Food Service Operations

Action Plan 13-2

Develop Board Policies to Clarify the Roles and Responsibilities of the Food Services Director and the School Principals in Regard to School-Based Cafeteria Management		
Strategy	To ensure consistent application of procedures related to hiring, evaluating, disciplining, and terminating food service managers and staff, as well as coordinating cafeteria-related school-based needs with food services program needs and best practices.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Develop school board policies addressing areas of concern.
	Step 2:	Develop and document formal procedures to coordinate processes related to these policies.
	Step 3:	Prepare proposed policy statements and rules that establish the food services authorities necessary for the process.
	Step 4:	Board approves and school board policies are amended.
Who is Responsible	The executive director of Support Services and the zone executive directors.	
Time Frame	July 15, 2003	

Develop a Food Services Manager Evaluation Policy That Requires Performance Reviews to Be Based on Both Food Services Technical and Personnel Aspects		
Strategy	Improve the evaluation process of food services managers to provide a comprehensive picture of their performance.	

Action Needed	Step 1:	Obtain approval from the assistant superintendent for Human Resources to provide separate evaluations of food service managers by principals and the food services director.
	Step 2:	Develop separate evaluation forms to be used in evaluating food service managers in both food service technical and personnel aspects.
	Step 3:	Require the food services director to perform all food service-related manager evaluations, incorporating the results of the annual Five-Star Quality and Accuclaim Review.
	Step 4:	Prepare proposed policy statements and rules that establish the food services authorities necessary for the process.
	Step 5:	Board approves and school board policies are amended.
Who Is Responsible	The executive director of Support Services and the zone executive directors.	
Time Frame	August 31, 2003	

Ensure That All District Positions That Are Funded by or Shared With the School Food and Nutrition Services Program, or Provide Services to the Program, Are Funded by the Food Services Fund, According to a Prorated Share of Duties Performed		
Strategy	Ensure that food services-related activities are funded by food services funds.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	Identify district and/or school-based employees that perform services for the food services program that are not funded through food service funds.
	Step 2:	Assess the need for the service provided and the amount of time spent on food services activities by those employees to determine costs as a direct charge to the food services fund or within the scope of overall indirect charge.
	Step 3:	Update payroll records to reflect the percentage of salary/benefits that should be charged to the food services program to prevent general funds from being used to pay for food services related activities.
Who Is Responsible	The assistant superintendent for Business Services and the executive director of Support Services	
Time Frame	May 31, 2003	
Fiscal Impact	This can be completed with existing resources. This does not require shifting positions within the district but shifts funding to assure that the food service fund pays all of its proper costs and allow more general funds to be made available for the classroom.	

Action Plan 13-3

Assure That Equipment Is Repaired In a Timely Manner to Avoid Unnecessary Operating Costs		
Strategy	Develop a long-range equipment repair, replacement, and preventative maintenance plan.	
Action Needed	Step 1:	The food services director and maintenance director develop the long-range equipment repair, replacement and preventative maintenance plan.
	Step 2:	The superintendent approves the request.
Who Is Responsible	The food services director and maintenance director	
Time Frame	July 2003	

Cost Control Systems

Action Plan 14-1

Implement Risk Assessment Process	
Strategy	Implement a risk assessment process to enhance identification of high-risk activities which will result in prioritizing these activities in order of highest risk for purposes of resolving them.
Action Needed	Step 1: Develop and distribute request for proposal for risk assessment.
	Step 2: Select firm that will perform risk assessment for the district.
	Step 3: Review results of risk assessment and prioritize high-risk activities.
	Step 4: Assign responsibility for addressing and resolving prioritized risks.
Who Is Responsible	Assistant superintendent for Business Services in lieu of internal auditor
Time Frame	October 31, 2004

B Appendix B
Management Structures

Table B-1

District Goals and Objectives Generally Have Several Strategies Associated

| Goals	Objectives	Strategies
A. Student Performance: Students in St. Lucie County Schools will successfully compete at the highest levels nationally and internationally and will be prepared to make well-reasoned, thoughtful, and healthy lifelong decisions.	By May of 2003, student performance at all grade levels will improve when compared to data from the 2001-02 school year.	Support a Comprehensive Balanced Approach to Reading K-12 by providing reading coaches at Title I elementary schools to aid in providing the quality of instruction necessary to have all students reading on grade level by third grade. Enhance K-8 math curriculum using Math Solutions by providing Level II training. Increase number of students enrolled in Advanced Placement and upper level classes at all high schools.* Provide an SAT summer school. * Pilot end of year exams using the ABACUS Instructional Management System for selected courses. Support the School Readiness Coalition of St. Lucie County.* Continue the use of St. Lucie County's Technology Literacy Standards K-12.* Study the reinstatement of Developmental Kindergarten and/or Transitional First grade in each zone. Commission a study to examine ways to make the senior year of high school curriculum more meaningful to students. Increase the number of schools using Curriculum Based Measurement and DIBELS. Increase the number of schools implementing Quality Designs of Instruction. Support research based state and district initiatives and standards for promotion, which will ultimately improve student achievement and reduce student retention rates.

B.	Career and Technical Education: The St. Lucie County School District will provide high skill, high demand technical programs that are aligned with industry standards and post secondary pathways which prepare students for lifelong learning.	By May 2003, the number of technical programs aligned with industry standards and articulated to post secondary options will increase when compared to 2001-2002 data.	Continue to expand articulation agreements. Continue to align technical programs with industry standards and certifications. Assess and respond to workforce development needs. Enhance the Agriscience Program through community collaboration. Increase number of advisory committees to assist all career and Technical Programs with industry alignment and workforce preparation.
C.	Teachers and Staff: The St. Lucie County School Board and Superintendent will work collaboratively to improve teacher salaries and will focus on recruitment and retention of teachers and staff who possess the competencies and demonstrate the performance needed to maximize learning among all students	By May of 2003, every effort will be made to recruit, retain and compensate the most qualified staff for all aspects of SLCSB operations as evidence by records maintained in the personnel department.	Invert the budget process placing salaries first.* Implement a 3-year Professional Development Plan, including monthly training for Principals and Assistant Principals. Provide information through the legislative delegation regarding the impending teacher shortage and salary crisis.* Work collaboratively with IRCC and FAU in the establishment of a ``Grow Our Own'' teacher recruitment program.* Offer a $750 signing bonus for new teachers. Provide staff development on the Comprehensive Balanced Approach to Reading for teachers and administrators K-12.* Continue to training for Advanced Placement, Pacesetter and Vertical Teaming teachers through the Florida partnership.* Provide staff development on ABACUS.* Expand the District's Recruitment/Retention packet in cooperation with Chamber of Commerce.*
D.	School Safety and Environment: St. Lucie County Schools will provide an environment that is drug free, protects student health, safety and civil rights and is conducive to teaching and learning.	By May of 2003, the St. Lucie County Schools crime report will be reduced when compared to the 2001-2002 school year.	Review the district Emergency Management Plan.* Continue to support alternative learning sites K-12.* Continue to promote Character Education programs. * Support the Youth Leadership program.* Continue to equip school buses with video cameras.* Support Tobacco Free partnership efforts.* Review and present Safe Passage checklist. Provide crisis communications assistance and training to district schools on an ongoing basis.
E.	School and Community Involvement: Build a positive image and increase confidence in our schools through involving more citizens in the education process.*	By May of 2003, community involvement in the St. Lucie County School system will increase by 5% when compared to 2001-2002 data.	Send a welcome packet to all new parents moving into the community.* Increase the number of Seniors-On-Line.* Provide public relations assistance and training to district schools and staff on an ongoing basis. Support advocacy groups for educational issues within the community. Increase community and business partnerships.

F.	Facilities: St. Lucie County Schools will plan, design, construct and maintain schools which are high quality, economically built and provide our students and teachers with an environment which is conducive to, and fosters, the educational process.	By May of 2003, building projects will be completed on time, within budget, with high quality and consideration of population growth.	Investigate creating multi-zone schools to facilitate school choice. Complete a plant survey and demographic study of St. Lucie County for future school sites. Fully implement energy management program to reduce electric consumption. Support the completion of projects to bring older schools up current design standards.
G.	Finance: The St. Lucie County School Board closely measures, distributes, and monitors its resources to ensure the financial stability of our schools.	By May of 2003, The St. Lucie County Schools Fund Balance will be at or above the June 2002 Fund Balance.	Implement the Board approved budget reduction plan, minimize the impact of the funding crisis on the classroom and stabilize the fund balance. Collaborate with legislators and local organizations to explore all vehicles for increasing per student funding at levels consistent with a financially stable organization. Continue to support a process of multi-year strategic budget planning.

* Strategies are continued or expanded from the previous year.

Source: St. Lucie School District.

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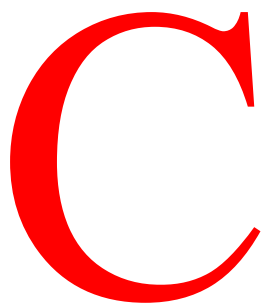
Appendix C

Food Service Operations

Table C-1

School Food and Nutrition Services Mission, Goals, and Objectives

Mission	The mission in School Food and Nutrition Services is to provide the students of St. Lucie County with nutritious, high-quality food choices to enhance their ability to learn.
Goals	1. School meals are valued as the meals of choice for all students in St. Lucie County Schools. 2. School meals are produced through a financially self-supporting, highly accountable program with no financial impact on the District General Fund. 3. School meals are viewed as highly acceptable, high quality meals prepared by competent and professional food services staff in a safe manner. 4. In recognition of the link between nutrition and learning, school meals are considered a vital component in the students' educational day.
Objectives	**Goal 1: School meals are valued as the meals of choice for all students in St. Lucie County Schools.** 1. Increase student participation in both breakfast and lunch programs. 2. Incorporate student preferences and nutritional guidelines in menus planned and offered to all grade levels. 3. Evaluate and renovate serving areas at high schools to encourage student participation, decrease theft, and reduce the number of adult supervisors needed. **Goal 2: School meals are produced through a financially self-supporting, highly accountable program with no financial impact on the District General Fund.** 1. To document evidence of best financial/management practices in the food services program. 2. Procedures for compiling monthly financial statements are readily available. 3. Cafeteria managers will utilize computer technology to increase efficiency. 4. Continue to maintain a cost effective program. 5. Evaluate purchasing procedures/practices to ensure highest quality for lowest cost of both food and supplies in the food services program—focusing on produce and cost of equipment parts. **Goal 3: School meals are viewed as highly acceptable, high quality meals prepared by competent and professional food services staff in a safe manner.** 1. Evaluate and revise current training to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for training for both food service employees and site managers. 2. Develop and implement a leadership-training program for current managers. 3. Explore potential for annual financial incentive paid to all employees who are certified through ASFSA. 4. Self-assessment tools will be developed and implemented in preparation sites to emphasize food quality, food safety and sanitation, and accountability. 5. Evaluate current practices regarding purchasing and maintaining capital food services equipment—specifically regarding procurement of parts and/or services and make recommendations for change. **Goal 4: In recognition of the link between nutrition and learning, school meals are considered a vital component in the students' educational day.** 1. Work to eliminate barriers to program access, including feasibility of family meal

benefit applications.

2. Provide increased resources to school efforts at nutrition education.

Source: The St. Lucie County School District, 3-Year Goals/Objectives Plan (2001-04) modified August 2001.

Table C-2

The School Food and Nutrition Services Program Objectives, Outcomes, and Measurement Methods

Goal Objectives (15)	Expected Outcome	Measurement Method	Target Completion Dates
Goal 1: I-Increase student participation in both breakfast and lunch programs.	Student participation will increase 5% for all schools.	Student meal counts for 1999-2000 compared to 2001-02 counts.	June 01, 2002
Goal 1: II-Incorporate student preferences and nutritional guidelines in menus planned and offered to all grade levels.	Menus will include student preferences and reflect food pyramid/RDA's for age groups.	Menu modifications are based on surveys, focus groups, and manager comments.	Ongoing
Goal 1: III-Evaluate and renovate serving areas at high schools to encourage student participation, decrease theft, and reduce the number of adult supervisors needed.	Serving area facilities will be remodeled.	Student participation will increase by 10%, per meal food cost will decrease by 10%, and per meal revenues will increase by 10%.	June 2003 through June 2005
Goal 2: I-To document evidence of best financial/management practices in the food services program.	Receive favorable rating as a result of OPPAGA visit.	OPPAGA report will document 15 of 17 best practices are implemented.	June 2002
Goal 2: II-Procedures for compiling monthly financial statements are readily available.	Procedures manual will be completed and available to the finance director.	Written documentation is available for review.	December 2001
Goal 2: III-Cafeteria managers will utilize computer technology to increase efficiency.	Food/supplies orders, Production records, and MPLH will be computerized and completed by managers. All managers will have access and use district e-mail system.	Food/supplies orders, Production records, and MPLH will be submitted electronically.	June 2002
Goal 2: IV-Continue to maintain a cost-effective program.	Fund balance will be maintained at 2000-01 levels (as a percentage of total revenues).	June 30 end-of-year district financial reports.	June 2002

Goal Objectives (15)	Expected Outcome	Measurement Method	Target Completion Dates
Goal 2: V-Evaluate purchasing procedures/practices to ensure highest quality for lowest cost of both food and supplies in the food services program—focusing on produce and cost of equipment parts.	Produce costs will decrease with no change in menus. Equipment parts costs will decrease with no change in time for delivery.	Produce costs will decrease by a minimum of 5% compared to 2000-01. Equipment parts costs will decrease by a minimum of 5% compared to 2000-01.	June 2002
Goal 3: I-Evaluate and revise current training to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for training for both food service employees and site managers.	Employees at all levels will participate in expanded training opportunities and apply skills learned through training.	Training attendance rosters; trainee evaluation of training documentation; site visit observations of employees using newly acquired skills.	June 2002 Ongoing
Goal 3: II-Develop and implement a leadership training program for current managers.	Managers will participate in leadership program activities and apply skills learned through training.	Principals' evaluations will reflect evidence of leadership skills. Employee turnover will decrease in 2002-03 compared to 2000-02 average.	June 2003
Goal 3: III-Explore potential for annual financial incentive paid to all employees who are certified through ASFSA.	All food services employees will have the opportunity to earn supplements for maintaining professional certification.	Survey employees to determine the number of employees already certified.	June 2003
Goal 3: IV-Self-assessment tools will be developed and implemented in preparation sites to emphasize food quality, food safety and sanitation, and accountability.	Forms will be revised and completed according to appropriate time lines. Meal Quality Program Checklist weekly, HACCP Checklist weekly, and Accuclaim site form annually.	Checklists will be completed and submitted to the food services office weekly. Revised Accuclaim site evaluation form will be piloted during 2001-02 and evaluated/revised as necessary for full implementation in 2002-03.	August 2001
Goal 3: V-Evaluate current practices regarding purchasing and maintaining capital food services equipment—specifically regarding procurement of parts and/or services and make recommendations for change.	A formalized preventative maintenance plan will be documented and implemented. A formalized procurement process for parts will be documented and implemented.	Preventative maintenance will be scheduled and performed at all sites by June 2003. Bid for parts will be awarded.	June 2003 and June 2002

Goal Objectives (15)	Expected Outcome	Measurement Method	Target Completion Dates
Goal 4: I-Work to eliminate barriers to program access, including feasibility of family meal benefit applications.	One application will be received from families and applied to all students. Site computers will be electronically updated to include all students' statuses. New process will result in high degree of accountability.	One application per family will be required for 2003-04 school year. Software at school site will electronically update students/meal statuses. Accuclaim reviews will reflect 99% accuracy in meal statuses.	July 2004
Goal 4: II-Provide increased resources to school efforts at nutrition education.	The Food and Nutrition Services Program will be viewed as the resource of choice for nutrition education in the classroom.	Nutrition resources available. Classroom activities/lessons.	Ongoing

Source: The St. Lucie County School District, 3-Year Goals/Objectives Plan (2001-04) modified August 2001.