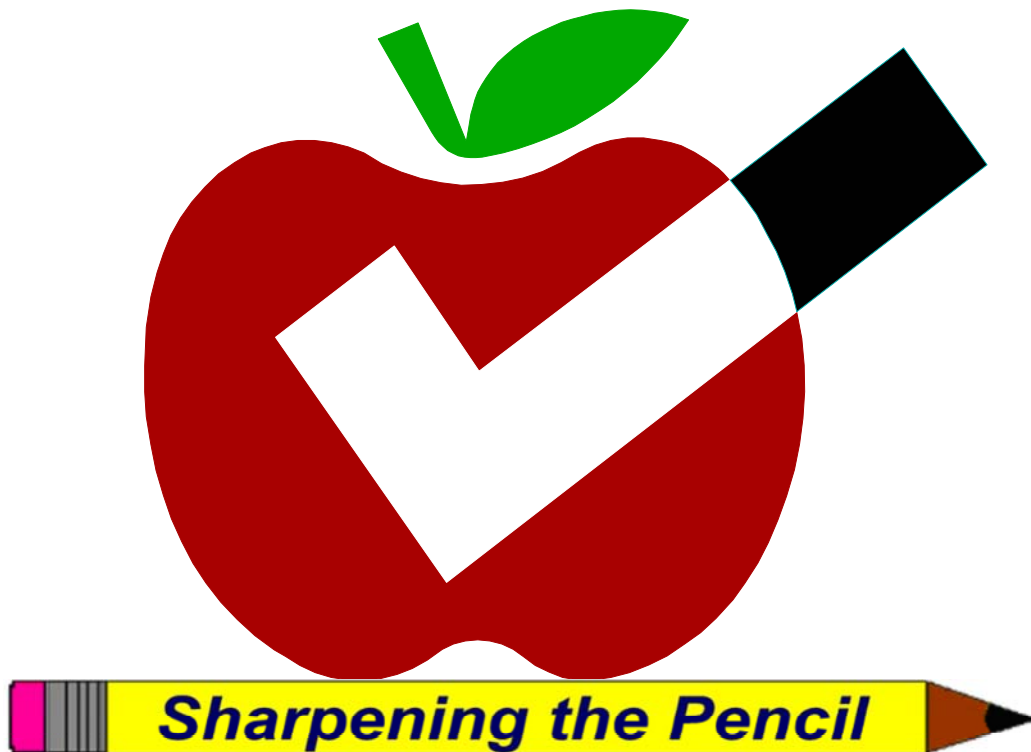


Sharpening the Pencil

Best Financial Management Practices Review

Sarasota County School District





The Florida Legislature

OFFICE OF PROGRAM POLICY ANALYSIS AND GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY



John W. Turcotte, Director

June 2003

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

I have directed that a Best Financial Management Practices Review be conducted of the Sarasota 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, Sarasota 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.

This review was conducted by Berkshire Advisors, Inc. of Austin, TX, OPPAGA; and the Auditor General. Berkshire Advisors, Inc. was primarily responsible for fieldwork and developing report findings and recommendations. OPPAGA and the Auditor General attended site visits to monitor fieldwork, conducted meetings with district staff to receive input on the draft, and reviewed and edited the report. OPPAGA made the final determination on the district's use of Best Financial Management Practices, based on information in the final report and in consultation with Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Curtis Baynes was the contract manager for this review, which was supervised by David Summers. Other OPPAGA staff included Julie Golding, Steve Harkreader, Bill Howard, Wade Melton, Lyndon Rogers, Jenny Wilhelm and Don Wolf. Auditor General staff included Jim Kiedinger and Bob Jones under the supervision of David Martin.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W. Turcotte".

John W. Turcotte
Director

JWT/mc

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

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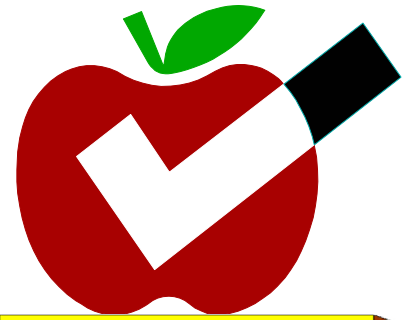
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Digest of the Best Financial Management Practices Review

Sarasota County School District



Sharpening the Pencil

Report No. 03-34A

June 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. Florida Law 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 Sarasota County School District during Fiscal Year 2002-03.¹ The Sarasota County School District currently is using 72% (107 of 148) of the best practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education. The district is using a majority of the best practices in nine of the 10 areas reviewed. 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 7 of this digest report.

Exhibit 1 The District Is Using 72% of the Best Practices

Best Practice Area (Total Practices)	Is the District Using Individual Best Practices?	
	Yes	No
Management Structures (14)	8	6
Performance Accountability System (3)	1	2
Educational Service Delivery (12)	11	1
Administrative and Instructional Technology (9)	7	2
Personnel Systems and Benefits (11)	9	2
Facilities Construction (24)	19	5
Facilities Maintenance (22)	14	8
Student Transportation (20)	18	2
Food Service Operations (11)	7	4
Cost Control Systems (22)	13	9
All Areas (148)	107	41

As seen in Exhibit 2, the review identified additional opportunities to reduce costs and increase revenues. Implementing these opportunities would have a positive impact of \$4,880,170 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 making improvements suggested by this report.

¹ This review was conducted by Berkshire Advisors, Inc. of Austin, TX under contract with the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA).

Exhibit 2

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

Ways to Save	Projected Five-Year Cost Savings or Increased Revenue
<u>Administrative and Instructional Technology</u>	
• Standardization. (Best Practice 2)	\$ 1,425,000
• Tech support re-allocate, re-design, re-engineer. (Best Practice 4)	1,083,000
<u>Personnel Systems and Benefits</u>	
• Implement an auto-mated substitute deployment system. (Best Practice 6)	103,050
<u>Facilities Maintenance</u>	
• Revise the management structure in the trades areas. (Best Practice 6)	300,600
<u>Student Transportation</u>	
• Reduce spare buses. (Best Practice 8)	1,003,520
• Reduce parts inventory. (Best Practice 12)	50,000
• Collect Medicaid reimbursement. (Best Practice 14)	255,000
<u>Food Service Operations</u>	
• Modified use of USDA commodities. (Best Practice 6)	300,000
• Update operational standards. (Best Practice 7)	360,000
TOTALS	\$4,880,170

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.² 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 intent of the Sharpening the Pencil Program is to improve school district management and use of resources and to identify cost savings. Two of the most important provisions of the program 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.

Florida Law 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 Florida law, OPPAGA contracted with Berkshire Advisors, Inc. of Austin, TX, a private consulting firm, to conduct this review. Berkshire Advisors, Inc. was primarily responsible for fieldwork and developing report findings and recommendations. OPPAGA and the Auditor General staff monitored the firm throughout the review process to ensure that the best practices and indicators were applied in the district consistent with reviews by consultants and OPPAGA in other districts. OPPAGA and the Auditor General staff attended site visits and provided assistance to the consultant during the course of the review, which included report drafting.

² A list of cost saving opportunities identified in prior best practices reviews is available at OPPAGA's Florida Monitor under [Ways to Save](#).

With 37,048 students, the Sarasota County School District is the 18th largest school district out of 67 school districts in the state. Located in southwest Florida, south of the St. Petersburg-Tampa area, the district operates 44 schools and programs, including 19 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, 4 senior high schools, and 16 other types of schools and programs.

The consultant's 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. 1008.35, *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 Sarasota County School Board and district employees who provided information and assistance during the review.

General Overview and District Obligations

Currently, the Sarasota County School District is using 72% 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 Sarasota County School District is using 8 of 14 of the Best Practices in Management Structures. Especially noteworthy is the progress the district has made in assigning school principals the authority they need to improve student achievement, the district's efforts with regard to community involvement, the district's willingness to pursue new sources of revenue, and the accuracy of the district's enrollment projections. The school board and the superintendent also have established a constructive working relationship and work together effectively to serve the Sarasota community.

To use the remaining best practice standards the district should establish written procedures governing the interactions of the superintendent, district administrators, and the board attorney and also should establish a process for evaluating the board attorney and legal costs. In addition, the district should review its organizational

Digest: Best Financial Management Practices Review

structure, administrative staffing and business practices on a regular basis. The district also should strengthen strategic planning. While revising its strategic planning process, the district also should strengthen the link between its instructional and non-instructional priorities and ensure its financial plans and budgets reflect an appropriate balance between instructional and non-instructional priorities.

Performance Accountability System

The district is using one of the three Performance Accountability Best Practices. The district has some performance and accountability mechanisms for instructional programs, but lacks similar mechanisms for most of the non-instructional programs and services such as Transportation and Food Services.

To use the remaining best practice standards, the district should establish goals and measurable objectives for all programs and services, develop systems that evaluate performance and cost for each of these areas, and report additional information on the performance and cost-effectiveness of programs to parents and taxpayers.

Educational Service Delivery

The Sarasota County School District is using 11 of the 12 Educational Service Delivery Best Practices. The district has a strong system of school-based accountability that is grounded in the ongoing use of students' academic and nonacademic performance data to drive instructional design and delivery and teacher professional development. The district has developed, and made easily accessible to principals and teachers, data management tools that support schools in disaggregating and analyzing school, class, and individual student performance data. The district also provides an array of effective support to serve students.

To use the remaining best practice standard, the district needs to complete a comprehensive review of the Sarasota County Technical Institute to improve the institute's responsiveness to district and community needs, assess the courses provided through the institute, and evaluate secondary career development programs to determine programming needs and to better coordinate offerings among schools.

Administrative and Instructional Technology

The Sarasota County School District is using seven of nine of the Best Practices in Administrative and Instructional Technology. The district does a good job of planning for its technology needs and of providing training for the various technology applications purchased. In addition, the district's network infrastructure is dependable and makes good use of the Internet to support both internal and external communications.

To use the remaining best practice standards, the district should establish standards for hardware and software acquisition. Standardizing hardware and software will allow the district to establish centralized purchasing procedures which, in turn, will facilitate the district's ability to realize economies of scale. The district also should change its technical support structure. Reengineering campus technical support personnel duties will increase efficiencies and reduce costs.

Personnel Systems and Benefits

The Sarasota County School District is using 9 of the 11 Personnel Systems and Benefits Best Practices. The district effectively recruits and hires qualified instructional and noninstructional personnel. In addition, its professional development programs for instructional staff are very good, as is the system used to evaluate teacher performance. The district also moves aggressively to deal with employees who repeatedly fail to meet its performance expectations.

To use the remaining best practices, the district should conduct an internal pay analysis that will align job responsibilities and compensation for classified staff, develop and implement a pay for performance plan that includes hiring incentives, retention incentives, and performance criteria for the selection of personnel for supplemental pay assignments. The district should also implement a plan for recruiting and training substitute teachers and implement a plan to manage and improve staff attendance. Finally, the district should develop a strategic plan for human resources, implement recruitment strategies for both instructional and classified employees, and review the department's organizational and staffing levels.

Facilities Construction

The Sarasota County School District is using 19 of 24 of the best practices in facilities construction. The district effectively manages the funding, design, and construction of its projects. However, to use the remaining best practice standards, the district should establish long-range educational facility planning capacity, create an information system to support facility management, expand its use of performance standards and accountability measures. The district should reevaluate its capital priorities, create a new capital plan, and move quickly to implement this revised plan.

Facilities Maintenance

The Sarasota County School District is using 14 of 22 of the best practices relating to facilities maintenance. The district's performance is particularly strong in areas relating to health and safety and energy management. In addition, the Facilities Services Department has done a credible job of maintaining district facilities in the face of

ever-shrinking budgets. To use the remaining best practice standards, the district should substantially improve its work order data collection and analysis and institute better performance measurement systems.

Transportation

The Sarasota County School District is using 18 of 20 of the Best Practices in Student Transportation. While the district effectively transports some 17,000 students to and from school each day, it can improve accountability and efficiency. To begin using the remaining best practice standards, the district should review the prospect for privatizing transportation functions by developing and comparing key unit cost information for transportation functions with private providers. The district also should establish an accountability system for transportation with quantifiable goals and measurable performance objectives, and regularly assess and report on its performance and cost in comparison with established benchmarks.

Food Service Operations

The Sarasota County School District is using 7 of the 11 food service operations best practices. The district complies with federal, state and its own policies relating to nutrition and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), works proactively to ensure that customer needs are met, takes appropriate steps to improve services and food quality where needed, and manages the program to optimize its financial opportunities. The program is well organized and provides an employee training.

To use the remaining best practice standards the district should negotiate removal of all cafeteria managers from the same bargaining unit as the employees they supervise to facilitate full managerial responsibilities, charge the food services program for indirect expenses, improve purchase practices and perform simple time and motion studies to determine the actual labor hours needed to perform the work required (Action plan 10-4).

Cost Control Systems

The Sarasota County School District is using 13 of the 22 cost control systems best practices. The district has established a comprehensive set of internal controls, employs effective financial systems, manages cash and investments effectively, and works aggressively to address any internal control weaknesses that are identified. To use the remaining best practice standards, the district should establish an internal audit function and develop comprehensive procedures manuals. In addition, the district should assess the use of purchasing cards for certain purchases. The district also should better strengthen its efforts to tie financial objectives to strategic plan goals.

Sarasota County School District Best Financial Management Practices

Currently, the Sarasota County School District is using 72% (107 of 148) 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.

<i>Best Practices</i>	<i>Is the District Using Best Practices?</i>		
<u>MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent have been clearly delineated, and board members and the superintendent have policies to ensure that they have effective working relationships.	✓		2-6
2. The board and superintendent have procedures to ensure that board meetings are efficient and effective.	✓		2-7
3. The board and superintendent have established written policies and procedures that are routinely updated to ensure that they are relevant and complete.		✓	2-8
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.		✓	2-9
5. The district's organizational structure has clearly defined units and lines of authority that minimize administrative costs.		✓	2-12
6. The district periodically reviews its administrative staffing and makes changes to eliminate unnecessary positions and improve operating efficiency.		✓	2-16
7. The superintendent and school board exercise effective oversight of the district's financial resources.	✓		2-17
8. The district has clearly assigned school principals the authority they need to effectively manage their schools while adhering to districtwide policies and procedures.	✓		2-18
9. The district has a multi-year strategic plan with annual goals and measurable objectives based on identified needs, projected enrollment, and revenues.		✓	2-21
10. The district has a system to accurately project enrollment.	✓		2-23
11. The district links its financial plans and budgets to its annual priorities in the strategic plan and its goals and objectives; and district resources are focused towards achieving those goals and objectives.		✓	2-24
12. When necessary, the district considers options to increase revenue.	✓		2-26
13. The district actively involves parents and guardians in the district's decision making and activities.	✓		2-28
14. The district actively involves business partners and community organizations in the district's decision making and activities.	✓		2-28

Best Practices

Is the District Using Best Practices?

<u>PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM</u>	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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocational/Technical Education, English for Speakers of Other Languages Education, Facilities Construction, Facilities Maintenance, Transportation, Food Services, and Safety and Security.³ 		✓	3-3
2. 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.		✓	3-4
3. 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.	✓		3-6

<u>EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
1. District administrators use both academic and nonacademic data to improve K-12 education programs.	✓		4-9
2. The district provides effective and efficient Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs for students with disabilities and students who are gifted. ⁴	✓		4-10
3. The district provides effective and efficient programs to meet the needs of at-risk students [including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Title I, and alternative education]. ⁵	✓		4-12
4. The district provides an appropriate range of accelerated programs (such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and Dual Enrollment).	✓		4-13
5. The district provides effective and efficient workforce development programs (such as vocational-technical, adult basic education, and adult high school programs).		✓	4-13
6. The district ensures that schools use effective planning and evaluation processes to improve student outcomes, including school improvement plans and other data driven processes such as the Sterling process.	✓		4-16
7. The district ensures effective progression of students from kindergarten through grade 12 that maximizes student mastery of the Sunshine State Standards and prepares students for work and continued education	✓		4-17
8. The district's organizational structure and staffing of educational programs minimizes administrative layers and processes.	✓		4-18
9. The district ensures that students and teachers have sufficient current textbooks and other instructional materials available to support instruction in core subjects and to meet the needs of teachers and students.	✓		4-19

³ Each district should define those programs considered "major" within these two broad areas. At a minimum, they should include the programs listed. However, the district should have some defensible, logical criteria to identify major educational and operational programs. Criteria may include funding, number of children or full-time equivalents (FTEs) served, or state or federal requirements.

⁴ Programs for students with disabilities are required by federal law to serve children aged 3 through 21.

⁵ These are students who need academic and/or social skills interventions to assist them to perform to their capacity.

Best Practices

Is the District Using Best Practices?

<u>EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
10. The district has sufficient school library or media centers to support instruction.	✓		4-20
11. The district utilizes instructional technology in the classroom to enhance curriculum and improve student achievement.	✓		4-20
12. The district provides necessary support services (guidance counseling, psychological, social work and health) to meet student needs and to ensure students are able to learn.	✓		4-21

<u>ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The district has a comprehensive technology plan that provides direction for administrative and instructional technology decision making.	✓		5-5
2. The district acquires technology in a cost-effective manner that will best meet its instructional and administrative needs. ⁶		✓	5-6
3. District and school-based staff receive professional development training for all technologies used in the district.	✓		5-9
4. The district provides timely and cost-effective technical support that enables educators and district staff to successfully implement technology in the workplace.		✓	5-11
5. The district maintains a dependable, standards-based infrastructure employing strategies that cost-effectively maximize network and Internet access and performance.	✓		5-13
6. The district uses technology to improve communication.	✓		5-14
7. The district has written policies that apply safe, ethical, and appropriate use practices that comply with legal and professional standards.	✓		5-15
8. 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.	✓		5-15
9. The information needs of administrative and instructional personnel are met by applying appropriate project management techniques to define, schedule, track and evaluate purchasing, developing, and the timing of delivering IT products and services requested.	✓		5-16

<u>PERSONNEL SYSTEMS AND BENEFITS</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The district efficiently and effectively recruits and hires qualified instructional and non-instructional personnel.	✓		6-6
2. To the extent possible given factors outside the district's control, the district works to maintain a reasonably stable work force and a satisfying work environment by addressing factors that contribute to increased turnover or low employee morale. ⁷	✓		6-7

⁶ Instructional needs include incorporating technology into the curriculum and needs of students learning how to use technology.

⁷ A reasonably stable work force is characterized by a turnover rate that is low enough so that vacancies can be filled in a timely manner without requiring extraordinary recruitment efforts. This includes both a focus on the district as a whole as well as individual schools and departments. Evidence of an unstable work force could include situations in which school sites or a support departments have been beset by an extremely high turnover rate so that programs and activities have been disrupted, discontinued or have decreased value.

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?
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<u>PERSONNEL SYSTEMS AND BENEFITS</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
3. The district provides a comprehensive staff development program to improve student achievement and to achieve and maintain high levels of productivity and employee performance among non-instructional, instructional, and administrative employees. ⁸	✓		6-9
4. The district’s system for formally evaluating employees improves and rewards excellent performance and productivity, and identifies and addresses performance that does not meet the district’s expectations for the employee.	✓		6-10
5. 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 the person’s employment. ⁹	✓		6-11
6. The district has efficient and cost-effective system for managing absenteeism and the use of substitute teachers and other substitute personnel.		✓	6-11
7. The district maintains personnel records in an efficient and readily accessible manner.	✓		6-15
8. The district uses cost containment practices for its Workers’ Compensation Program.	✓		6-16
9. The district uses cost-containment practices for its employee benefits programs, including health insurance, dental insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, and retirement.	✓		6-16
10. The district’s human resource program is managed effectively and efficiently.		✓	6-17
11. For classes of employees that are unionized, the district maintains an effective collective bargaining process.	✓		6-19

<u>FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The district has effective long-range planning processes. ¹⁰		✓	7-9
2. When developing the annual five-year facilities work plan the district evaluates alternatives to minimize the need for new construction.	✓		7-12
3. The five-year facilities work plan establishes budgetary plans and priorities.	✓		7-12

⁸ In some districts, the staff development programs and issues related to non-instructional, instructional, and administrative employees may vary widely. In such cases, it is acceptable to separate this best practice into two or three separate best practices, and to deal with these employee groups separately.

⁹ Evidence of a problem in this best practice area could include one or more of the following examples:

- the forced reinstatements of employees who had been dismissed;
- large monetary settlements to employees who had been dismissed;
- public forum, survey or focus group results that suggest that poor performing employees are transferred from site to site rather than being dismissed; or
- incidents occur that are adverse to students involving employees who had previously been identified by the district as poor-performers or as potentially harmful to students.

Evidence that a district is performing this best practice should include

- general consensus from the public forum, survey, and/or focus groups that behavior and performance problems are dealt with effectively by the district;
- if there are cases or incidents as those described above, the district should be able to explain how such cases or incidents were exceptional and should not repeatedly occur within the district; and
- on the indicators listed under this best practice, it is more important that the district provide examples of the application of these procedures than that it provide evidence that a particular procedure is written down some place.

¹⁰ Long-range covers 5-20 years out.

Best Practices

Is the District Using Best Practices?

<u>FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
4. The school board ensures responsiveness to the community through open communication about the construction program and the five-year facilities work plan.	✓		7-13
5. The district has an effective site selection process based on expected growth patterns.		✓	7-14
6. The board considers the most economical and practical sites for current and anticipated needs, including such factors as need to exercise eminent domain, obstacles to development, and consideration of agreements with adjoining counties.	✓		7-15
7. Funds collected for school projects were raised appropriately.	✓		7-15
8. The district approves and uses 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.	✓		7-16
9. The district develops thorough descriptions and educational specifications for each construction project. ¹¹	✓		7-16
10. The architectural design fulfills the building specification needs as determined by the district.	✓		7-17
11. New construction, remodeling, and renovations incorporate effective safety features.	✓		7-18
12. The district minimizes construction and maintenance and operations costs through the use of cost-effective designs, prototype school designs, and frugal construction practices.	✓		7-18
13. The district has effective management processes for construction projects.	✓		7-19
14. District planning provides realistic time frames for implementation that are coordinated with the opening of schools.	✓		7-20
15. All projects started after March 1, 2002, comply with the Florida Building Code.	✓		7-21
16. The district requires appropriate inspection of all school construction projects.	✓		7-21
17. The district retains appropriate professionals to assist in facility planning, design, and construction.	✓		7-22
18. The district follows generally accepted and legal contracting practices to control costs.	✓		7-23
19. The district minimizes changes to facilities plans after final working drawings are initiated in order to control project costs.	✓		7-23
20. The architect recommends payment based on the percentage of work completed. A percentage of the contract is withheld pending completion of the project.	✓		7-24
21. The district conducts a comprehensive orientation to the new facility prior to its use so that users better understand the building design and function.	✓		7-25

¹¹ This includes such descriptions as a rationale for the project; a determination of the size of the facility and that it meets the space requirements of current *Laws of Florida*; a determination of the grade level the facility will serve; a determination of whether the new facility will serve all parts of the district on an open enrollment basis or will be a "magnet" school or a special school; a map has been prepared that shows the location of the planned facility within the community and the proposed attendance area of the school; construction budget that meets the state averages or requirements of current *Laws of Florida*, relative to cost per student station; the source of funding for the project; planning and construction time line; durability and maintenance costs; an estimate plan for the time of construction; the date of completion and opening.

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?
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<u>FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
22. 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.		✓	7-26
23. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the construction program.		✓	7-27
24. The district regularly evaluates facilities construction operations based on established benchmarks and implements improvements to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.		✓	7-28

<u>FACILITIES MAINTENANCE</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The district’s maintenance and operations department has a mission statement and goals and objectives that are established in writing.		✓	8-6
2. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance and efficiency of the maintenance and operations program.		✓	8-7
3. The district obtains and uses customer feedback to identify and implement program improvements.		✓	8-9
4. The district has established procedures and staff performance standards to ensure efficient operations.		✓	8-10
5. The department maintains educational and district support facilities in a condition that enhances student learning and facilitates employee productivity.		✓	8-22
6. The district regularly reviews the organizational structure of the maintenance and operations program to minimize administrative layers and assure adequate supervision and staffing levels.		✓	8-14
7. Complete job descriptions and appropriate hiring and retention practices ensure that the maintenance and operations department has qualified staff.	✓		8-16
8. The district provides a staff development program that includes appropriate training for maintenance and operations staff to enhance worker job satisfaction, efficiency, and safety.	✓		8-17
9. The administration has developed an annual budget with spending limits that comply with the lawful funding for each category of facilities maintenance and operations.	✓		8-18
10. The district accurately projects cost estimates of major maintenance projects.	✓		8-19
11. The board maintains a maintenance reserve fund to handle one-time expenditures necessary to support maintenance and operations.	✓		8-19
12. The district minimizes equipment costs through purchasing practices.	✓		8-19
13. The district provides maintenance and operations department staff the tools and equipment required to accomplish their assigned tasks.	✓		8-20
14. The district uses proactive maintenance practices to reduce maintenance costs.	✓		8-20
15. The maintenance and operations department identifies and implements strategies to contain energy costs.	✓		8-21
16. The district has an energy management system in place, and the system is maintained at original specifications for maximum effectiveness.	✓		8-22

Best Practices

Is the District Using Best Practices?

<u>FACILITIES MAINTENANCE</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
17. District personnel regularly review maintenance and operation's costs and services and evaluate the potential for outside contracting and privatization.		✓	8-22
18. A computerized control and tracking system is used to accurately track work orders and inventory.		✓	8-24
19. The maintenance and operations department has a system for prioritizing maintenance needs uniformly throughout the district.	✓		8-26
20. District policies and procedures clearly address the health and safety conditions of facilities.	✓		8-27
21. The school district complies with federal and state regulatory mandates regarding facility health and safety conditions.	✓		8-27
22. The district is aware of and prepared for the permitting and inspection requirements of the Florida Building Code.	✓		8-28

<u>STUDENT TRANSPORTATION</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The district coordinates long-term planning and budgeting for student transportation within the context of district and community planning.	✓		9-10
2. 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.	✓		9-10
3. The transportation office plans, reviews, and establishes bus routes and stops to provide cost-efficient student transportation services for all students who qualify for transportation. ¹²	✓		9-11
4. The organizational structure and staffing levels of the district's transportation program minimizes administrative layers and processes.	✓		9-12
5. The district maintains an effective staffing level in the vehicle maintenance area and provides support for vehicle maintenance staff to develop its skills.	✓		9-13
6. The district effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants it needs.	✓		9-14
7. The district trains, supervises, and assists bus drivers to enable them to meet bus-driving standards and maintain acceptable student discipline on the bus.	✓		9-15
8. The school district has a process to ensure that sufficient vehicles are acquired economically and will be available to meet the district's current and future transportation needs.	✓		9-16
9. The district provides timely routine servicing for buses and other district vehicles, as well as prompt response for breakdowns and other unforeseen contingencies.	✓		9-17
10. The district ensures that fuel purchases are cost-effective and that school buses and other vehicles are efficiently supplied with fuel.	✓		9-18
11. The district maintains facilities that are conveniently situated to provide sufficient and secure support for vehicle maintenance and other transportation functions.	✓		9-18

¹² Measures of cost-efficient student transportation services include reasonably high average bus occupancy and reasonably low cost per mile and cost per student.

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?
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<u>STUDENT TRANSPORTATION</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
12. The district maintains an inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment needed to support transportation functions that balances the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs.	✓		9-19
13. The district ensures that all regular school bus routes and activity trips operate in accordance with established routines, and any unexpected contingencies affecting vehicle operations are handled safely and promptly.	✓		9-20
14. The district provides efficient transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students.	✓		9-21
15. The district ensures that staff acts promptly and appropriately in response to any accidents or breakdowns	✓		9-22
16. The district ensures that appropriate student behavior is maintained on the bus with students being held accountable for financial consequences of misbehavior related to transportation.	✓		9-23
17. The district provides appropriate technological and computer support for transportation functions and operations.	✓		9-23
18. The district monitors the fiscal condition of transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget.	✓		9-24
19. The district has reviewed the prospect for privatizing transportation functions, as a whole or in part.		✓	9-25
20. The district has established an accountability system for transportation, and it regularly tracks and makes public reports on its performance in comparison with established benchmarks.		✓	9-26

<u>FOOD SERVICE OPERATIONS</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The program has developed strategic or operational plans that are consistent with district plans, the program budget, and approved by the district.	✓		10-7
2. The district and program are organized with clear lines of responsibility and in a manner that provides the food service program sufficient authority to succeed.		✓	10-7
3. Program management has developed training designed to meet basic program needs as well as improve food services, both based on a needs assessment.	✓		10-8
4. Program management has developed comprehensive procedures manuals that are kept current.	✓		10-9
5. The district performs sound cash and account management.		✓	10-10
6. District and program management optimizes its financial opportunities.		✓	10-11
7. Food service program management has developed comprehensive performance and cost-efficiency measures that provide management with information to evaluate program performance and better manage operations.		✓	10-12
8. At least annually, the program inspects and evaluates its operational components and the system as a whole, and then takes action to initiate needed change.	✓		10-14

Best Practices

Is the District Using Best Practices?

<u>FOOD SERVICE OPERATIONS</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
9. District and program administrators effectively manage costs of the food services program and use performance measures, benchmarks, and budgets on a regular basis to evaluate performance and use the analysis for action or change.	✓		10-15
10. The food service program and district complies with federal state and district policy.	✓		10-16
11. The district conducts activities to ensures that customer needs are met and acts to improve services and food quality where needed.	✓		10-16

<u>COST CONTROL SYSTEMS</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
1. The district periodically analyzes the structure and staffing of its financial services organization.	✓		11-8
2. Management has developed and distributed written procedures for critical accounting processes and promotes ethical financial management practices.		✓	11-8
3. The district has adequate financial information systems that provide useful, timely, and accurate information.	✓		11-10
4. District financial staff analyzes significant expenditure processes to ensure they are appropriately controlled.	✓		11-11
5. The district has established adequate internal controls.	✓		11-11
6. Management proactively responds to identified internal control weaknesses and takes immediate steps to correct the weaknesses.	✓		11-12
7. The district produces an annual budget that is tied to the strategic plan and provides useful and understandable information to users.		✓	11-12
8. Management analyzes strategic plans for measurable objectives or measurable results.		✓	11-13
9. The district ensures that it receives an annual external audit and uses the audit to improve its operations.	✓		11-14
10. The district has an effective internal audit function and uses the audits to improve its operations. ¹³		✓	11-14
11. The district ensures that audits of internal funds and discretely presented component units (foundations and charter schools) are performed timely.	✓		11-16
12. The district periodically reviews cash management activities, banking relationships, investment performance, and considers alternatives.	✓		11-17
13. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of capital assets.	✓		11-18
14. The district ensures significant capital outlay purchases meet strategic plan objectives.		✓	11-19
15. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective debt management.	✓		11-19
16. The district ensures that significant debt financings meet strategic plan objectives.		✓	11-20

¹³ Most school districts do not have an internal auditor. They generally do have internal accounts auditors, whose responsibility is to audit the school internal accounts. These internal accounts auditors should not be confused with internal auditors. However, school districts that do have internal audit functions often assign the audits of the school internal accounts to the internal auditor for efficiency purposes.

Best Practices

Is the District Using Best Practices?

<u>COST CONTROL SYSTEMS</u>	YES	NO	PAGE
17. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective risk management		✓	11-21
18. District staff periodically monitors the district's compliance with various laws and regulations related to risk management.	✓		11-22
19. The district prepares appropriate written cost and benefit analyses for insurance coverage.		✓	11-22
20. The district has established written policies and procedures to take maximum advantage of competitive bidding, volume discounts, and special pricing agreements.	✓		11-23
21. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of inventories.	✓		11-25
22. The district periodically evaluates the warehousing function to determine its cost-effectiveness.		✓	11-25



The Florida Legislature

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[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.

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1 Introduction

Overview

Sharpening the Pencil Act

The 2001 Florida Legislature passed the Sharpening the Pencil Act to improve school district management and use of resources and identify cost savings. The act requires each school district to undergo a Best Financial Management Review once every five years, and provides a review schedule. The best practices are designed to encourage school districts to

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

The Florida Legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) and the Auditor General developed the Best Practices, which were adopted by the Commissioner of Education. Under these reviews, OPPAGA and the Auditor General 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. OPPAGA contracted the review of the Sarasota County School District to Berkshire Advisors, Inc. As illustrated in Exhibit 1-1, the practices include 10 review areas.

Exhibit 1-1 Best Financial Management Practices Review Areas

Management Structures	Facilities Construction
Performance Accountability Systems	Facilities Maintenance
Educational Service Delivery	Student Transportation
Administrative and Instructional Technology	Food Service Operations
Personnel Systems and Benefits	Cost Control Systems

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.

Key Findings

The Sarasota County Public Schools does good job of addressing its core responsibility—providing a high quality education to Sarasota County students. The district’s approach to the delivery of educational services is thoughtful and rigorous, reflects a commitment to school-based decision-making and is consistently implemented throughout the district. The district’s strong performance on a range of educational indicators (most notably FCAT results for district schools) is a testament to both the effectiveness of these systems and practices as well as to the commitment and ability of principals, teachers and staff from throughout the district.

The district’s performance in non-instructional areas, by contrast, is not consistently strong.¹ Numerous opportunities to strengthen non-instructional operations and the systems and practices used to manage them are detailed throughout this report. It should be noted, however, that in the preponderance of these areas the district has already identified the need to strengthen performance and is taking positive steps to address these needs. (In many cases, these improvement initiatives began prior to this review being initiated and have proceeded as the fact-finding and analysis needed to prepare this report was being undertaken.) Notably, the superintendent identified as one of her priorities for the year to “implement a strategic planning process (including accountability measures) within the Business Services Division.”

The district is well positioned to address the improvement needs identified in this report. The leadership of the non-instructional areas is quite strong and the superintendent and her staff are committed to strengthening non-instructional performance. Moreover, the district’s success in managing its instructional operations bodes well for the success of efforts to strengthen non-instructional operations. The preponderance of the study recommendations to strengthen the systems and practices for managing non-instructional operations are either identical or analogous to the approaches that are already in place to manage instruction.

It should be noted, however, that leadership will and management capacity alone will not be sufficient to implement all the recommendations presented in this report. For a number of recommendations negotiations with the district’s union will be needed. To facilitate these negotiations district and union representatives should be trained in interest based bargaining.

Methodology

Berkshire Advisors used a variety of methods to collect information about the district's use of the Best Financial Management Practices. The evaluation team made several site visits to the Sarasota County School District and public schools. The evaluators interviewed district administrators and personnel, held two public forums, conducted focus groups with principals and teachers, and attended school board and School Advisory Committee meetings. Evaluators also gathered and reviewed many program documents, district financial data, data on program activities, and data on student performance.

To put Sarasota’s programs and activities in context with other Florida school districts, Berkshire Advisors gathered information from five peer districts around the state: Charlotte, Leon, Manatee, Martin, and Santa Rosa. The peer districts were selected based on their similarities across a number of categories, including the size of the student population and demographic information.

¹ This situation results in part from a conscious decision on the part of the district to focus its resources and management attention on improving student achievement (an effort which, as previously noted, has yielded positive dividends).

County Profile

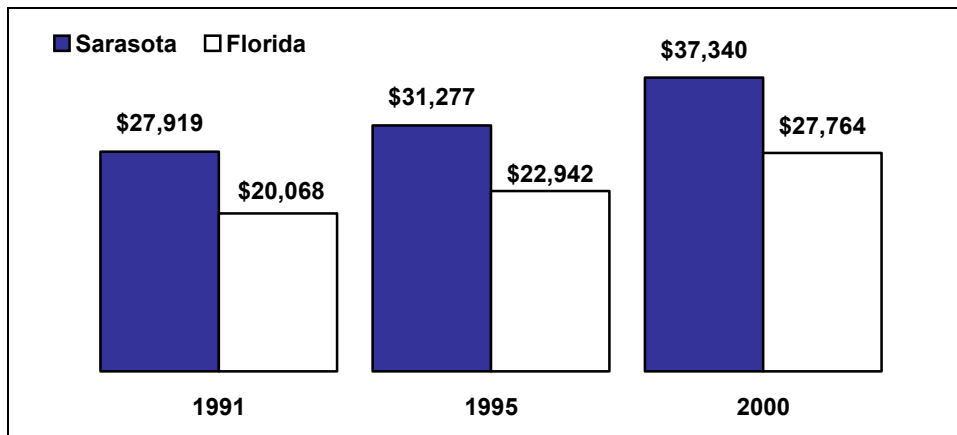
As of July 1, 2001, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that the total population of Sarasota County was 335,323. The county's population increased by 17.3% between 1990 and 2000, which was slower than the state's growth rate of 23.5% during that same time period. The major population centers include Sarasota (the county seat), Venice, Northport, and Longboat Key.

The largest proportion of the population is white, with persons of Hispanic or Latino origin comprising 4.3% of the population, a fraction of the statewide figure of 16.8%. In addition, 4.2% of the county's residents are Black or African American, which is also a fraction of the statewide figure of 14.6%. These percentages are similar to the racial/ethnic composition of the student population.

A small percentage of Sarasota County's population (11.9%) is of school age (5 to 19 years old) while an additional 3.8% are less than five years old. By contrast, 30.5% of the county's population is 65 years old or older. Approximately 87.1% of the county's residents aged 25 years or older are high school graduates, while 27.4% have graduated from college. These percentages are higher than the statewide figures of 79.9% and 22.3%, respectively. This means that the level of educational attainment in Sarasota County is higher than it is across the state.

Sarasota County's per capita income in 2000 was \$37,430 which was \$9,576 above the state average. As shown in Exhibit 1-2, the per capita income of Sarasota County residents has been consistently higher than the per capita income of the state as a whole. This can affect the school district's Workforce Development Education Performance Funding.

Exhibit 1-2 Per Capita Income of Sarasota County Residents Was \$9,576 the State Average in 2000



Source: Florida Research and Economic Database, 2002.

While 7.5% of the county's residents live below the poverty level, a larger percentage of the county's children (13.9%) live below the poverty level. These figures are lower than for the state as a whole. This corresponds with the relatively lower percentage of school children that are eligible for a free or reduced price lunch.

Introduction

The unemployment rate in Sarasota County has been consistently lower than the state's rate for the past five years. This suggests that students who graduate from high school in Sarasota County should have less difficulty finding employment than graduates in other parts of the state. Sarasota County has a civilian workforce of 160,765 people. The county's primary sources of employment include professional and business services, health care and social services and the service industries related to retail trade, manufacturing and local government. The major employers of the school district have an influence on the workforce development programs offered by the district.

School District Profile

The district operates 46 schools, as shown in Exhibit 1-3.

Exhibit 1-3 Sarasota County Operates 46 Schools

Number and Type of School		
19 - Elementary Schools	1 - K to 8	3 - Charter Schools
5 - Middle Schools	1 - Vocational Schools	2 - Exceptional Student Education Schools
5 - High Schools	1 - Adult Schools	9 - Alternative Schools

Source: Sarasota County District Profile (2002-03).

With 37,048 students in 2001-02, the School District of Sarasota County is the eighteenth largest school district in the state. The student population growth has increased between 1997-98 and 2001-02, for a total net increase of 14%. This rate was higher than the 8.94% increase in enrollment across the state.

Sarasota County School District expended \$232.08 million for the 2001-02 fiscal year. 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). The FEFP takes into consideration a number of factors in distributing funding to Florida's 67 school districts, 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, established by the Legislature, 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 1-4 describes the district's revenue, expenditures, and fund balances for the 2001-02 fiscal year.

Exhibit 1-4
District Funds Include Federal, State, and Local Sources
and Expenditures Are Primarily Related to Instruction

Revenues and Expenditures		Total
Revenues		
Federal Direct		\$ 736,366
Federal Through State		16,600,910
State		66,299,886
Local		230,888,494
Other		9,473,879
Total Revenues		\$323,999,535
Expenditures		
Instruction		\$144,576,616
Pupil Personnel Services		422,678,317
Instructional Media Services		14,659,781
Instruction and Curriculum Development Services		5,116,905
Instructional Staff Training		4,451,254
Board of Education		2,304,989
General Administration		808,281
School Administration		1,457,765
Facilities Acquisition and Construction		11,201,015
Fiscal Services		1,419,090
Food Services		10,959,493
Central Services		6,212,295
Pupil Transportation Services		10,973,358
Operation of Plant		19,358,440
Maintenance of Plant		10,693,704
Community Services		2,022,327
Other		9,575,453
Fixed Capital Outlay:		
Facilities Acquisition and Construction		65,243,314
Other Capital Outlay		3,587,830
Debt Service		
Principal		7,408,896
Interest and Fiscal Charges		4,969,266
Total Expenditures		\$337,000,072
Excess (Deficiency) of Revenue Over Expenditure		(\$13,000,537)
Other financing sources:		
Loan Proceeds		\$ 100,000
Capital Lease Financing		617,762
Operating Transfers In		24,999,353
Insurance Loss Recoveries		7,673
Operating Transfers Out		(25,555,353)
Total other financial sources		169,435
Total Excess or Deficiency		(\$12,831,102)
Fund Balances, June 30, 2001		\$ 73,546,978

Source: Superintendent's Annual Financial Report for 2000-01 School Year.

Introduction

As Exhibit 1-5 illustrates, the percentage of administrators and instructional staff is lower in the Sarasota County School District than in the districts used for comparison. Exhibit 1-6 illustrates the actual numbers of administrators, instructional personnel, and support positions in the district.

Exhibit 1-5 Staffing Ratios Fall in the Middle for Comparisons of Ratio of Teacher to Student and Aide to Teacher But Is Considerably Higher Than Peer Districts and The State In Ratio of Administrators to Teachers, Instructional Staff and Total Staff and Guidance Counselors to Students

School District	Staff Ratios					
	Administrators to Classroom Teachers	Administrators to Total Instructional Staff	Administrators to Total Staff	Classroom Teachers to Students ¹	Teacher Aides to Classroom Teachers	Guidance to Students
Charlotte	1: 12.98	1: 15.22	1: 30.36	1: 18.17	1: 2.87	1: 465.36
Leon	1: 12.79	1: 14.66	1: 28.35	1: 16.66	1: 3.01	1: 414.98
Manatee	1: 14.58	1: 16.19	1: 32.54	1: 16.64	1: 2.99	1: 443.10
Martin	1: 13.16	1: 14.72	1: 26.45	1: 16.89	1: 4.17	1: 386.57
Santa Rosa	1: 15.37	1: 17.20	1: 27.25	1: 17.41	1: 4.87	1: 444.52
Sarasota	1: 16.95	1: 18.45	1: 37.01	1: 17.78	1: 3.78	1: 707.80
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.

Source: Florida Department of Education, Profiles of Florida School Districts, 2000-01.

Exhibit 1-6 Sarasota County School District Employed 4,258 Staff in Year 2002-03

Full-Time Employees	Number	Percentage
Administrators	115	2.7%
Instructional	2,134	50.1%
Support	2,009	47.2%
Total	575	100.0%

Source: Sarasota County District Profile 2002-03.

2 Management Structures

Summary

The Sarasota County School District is using 8 of 14 of the Best Practices in Management Structures. Especially noteworthy is the progress the district has made in assigning school principals the authority they need to improve student achievement, the district's efforts with regard to community involvement, the district's willingness to pursue new sources of revenue, and the accuracy of the district's enrollment projections. The school board and the superintendent have also established a constructive working relationship and work together effectively to serve the Sarasota community.

To use the remaining best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its management structures, the district should establish formal procedures governing the interactions of the superintendent, district administrators, and the board attorney and should also establish a formal process for evaluating the board attorney on an annual basis and their legal costs periodically. In addition, the district should evaluate its organizational structure and develop a schedule and process for reviewing organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practices on a regular basis. The district should also take steps to strengthen its approach to strategic planning for instructional activities and continue its efforts to establish a strategic planning process for the Business Services Division. While revising its strategic planning process, the district should also strengthen the link between its instructional and non-instructional priorities and should take steps to ensure its financial plans and budgets reflect an appropriate balance between instructional and non-instructional priorities.

Background

The Sarasota County School District's management structure has a standard hierarchical structure, with a five-member, policy-setting board elected by the general public and a superintendent, appointed by the board, who oversees the district's management and administration. Each board member is elected to serve 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.

Of the current five board members, only one is serving a second four year term. Two members came on the board in 2000 (one was elected and one was appointed by the governor) and two were elected in 2002. Exhibit 2-1 shows the length of time board members have served.

Exhibit 2-1

Only One Board Member Has Been Elected to More Than One Term

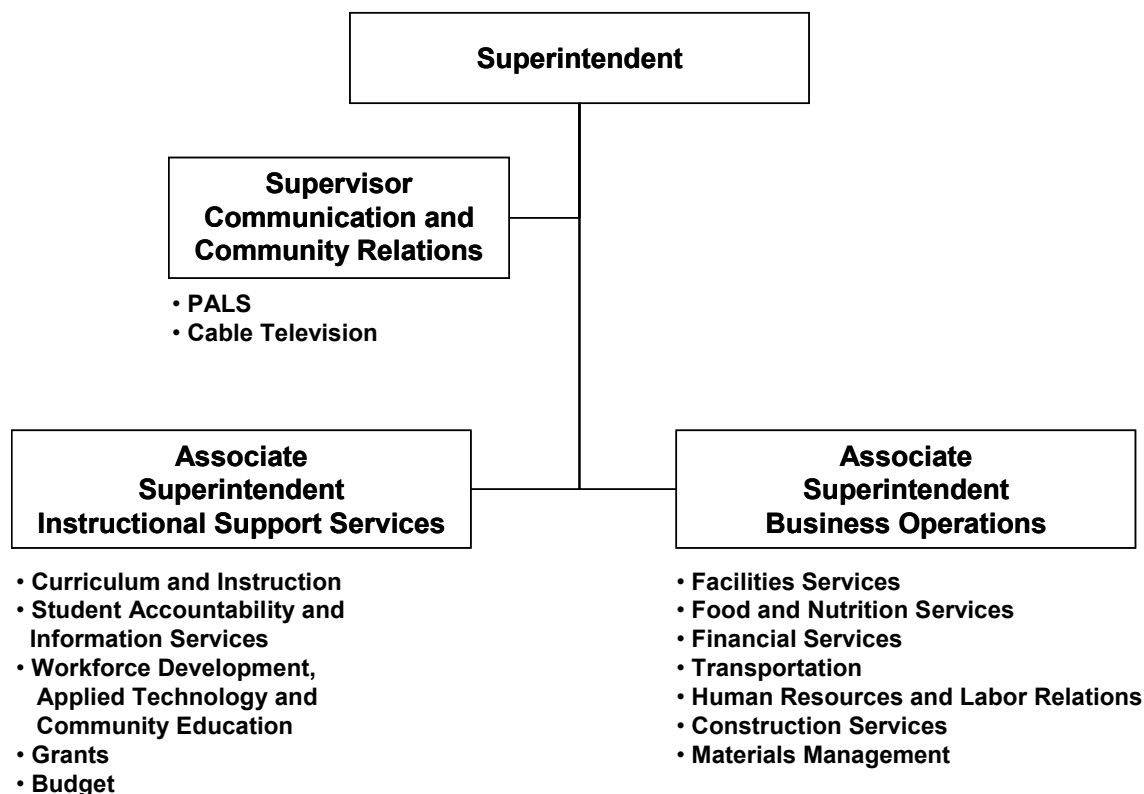
Board Member	Tenure
Carol Todd	Elected for first term in 1998, reelected in 2002, up for reelection in 2006
John Lewis	Appointed to first term in 2000, elected to complete term in 2002, up for reelection in 2004
Frank Kovach	Elected for first term in 2000, up for reelection in 2004
Laura Benson	Elected for first term in 2002, up for reelection in 2006
Kathy Kleinlein	Elected for first term in 2002, up for reelection in 2006

Source: Sarasota County School District.

The current superintendent, Wilma Hamilton, first came to the district in 1984 and served as principal of the Pine View School for three years. Prior to being appointed superintendent in 2000, she also served as the director, exceptional student education, program development; executive director of secondary schools; executive director, student achievement: curriculum, instruction and assessment; and assistant superintendent, student achievement, school administration, curriculum and instruction. Before joining the Sarasota County School District, Ms. Hamilton served as the coordinator, gifted and talented education for School District Six in Greeley, Colorado and served as an assistant professor, special education at the University of Northern Colorado. Ms. Hamilton holds a bachelor's degree from Miami University (Oxford, Ohio), a B.A.E. degree in Special Education from Florida Atlantic University, and an M.A., degree from Florida Atlantic University.

The superintendent is responsible for the administration of the entire school system and also serves as the secretary and executive officer of the school board. As Exhibit 2-2 shows, the superintendent has two key administrators reporting directly to her—an associate superintendent, instructional support services and an associate superintendent business operations. In addition, a supervisor of communication and community relations reports to the superintendent.

Exhibit 2-2
The Sarasota County School District's Organizational Structure
Is Divided into Two Principle Functions



Source: Sarasota County School District.

As Exhibit 2-3 illustrates, the district's revenues declined somewhat over the past three fiscal years. General fund revenues increased during this period (by more than \$13 million) while capital projects fund revenues decreased by slightly less than \$28 million.

Exhibit 2-3
The Sarasota County School District's Budget Has Fluctuated Over the Past Three Years

Revenue	Fiscal Year		
	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
General Fund	\$206,040,045	\$216,989,607	\$219,872,840
Debt Services Fund	1,813,744	1,854,140	1,797,162
Capital Projects Fund	100,125,203	69,267,518	72,148,834
Food Services Fund	10,487,188	11,396,601	11,962,010
School Internal Funds	9,137,942	9,473,879	9,344,527
Special Revenue Funds	10,529,798	12,283,111	15,872,074
Other Revenue	3,976,047	3,134,012	2,703,442
Total Revenue	\$342,109,967	\$324,398,868	\$333,700,889

Source: Sarasota County School District, *Finances: A Historical Summary (1990-91 Through 2001-02)*.

Activities of particular interest

Over the years the district has had a number of independent assessments of its management and operations performed. Most recently the district contracted with an outside consulting firm—SchoolMatch—to conduct a review. (In addition, Deloitte Touche did a study in 1986 and in 1994 the Florida School Board Association conducted a review of administrative positions.) The SchoolMatch reports, while providing valuable recommendations, generally did not include a detailed review of business operations.

In addition, work done by the volunteer Financial Advisory Committee to the school board, while not representing a detailed review of business practices, offered helpful suggestions for saving money. One operational suggestion that was made was to explore ways that the district could work with Sarasota County and other local jurisdictions to provide services on a shared services basis. A committee consisting of representatives of the various local government entities has been established to explore this concept and this committee has been meeting regularly.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Conclusions for Management Structures Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice?	Page No.
Board and Superintendent Roles and Responsibilities	1. The roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent have been clearly delineated, and board members and the superintendent have policies to ensure that they have effective working relationships.	Yes	2-6
	2. The board and superintendent have procedures to ensure that board meetings are efficient and effective.	Yes	2-7
	3. The board and superintendent have established written policies and procedures that are routinely updated to ensure that they are relevant and complete.	No	2-8
	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.	No	2-9
Organization, Staffing and Resource Allocation	5. The district's organizational structure has clearly defined units and lines of authority that minimize administrative costs.	No	2-12
	6. The district periodically reviews its administrative staffing and makes changes to eliminate unnecessary positions and improve operating efficiency.	No	2-16
	7. The superintendent and school board exercise effective oversight of the district's financial resources.	Yes	2-17
	8. The district has clearly assigned school principals the authority they need to effectively manage their schools while adhering to districtwide policies and procedures.	Yes	2-18
Planning and Budgeting	9. The district has a multi-year strategic plan with annual goals and measurable objectives based on identified needs, projected enrollment, and revenues.	No	2-21
	10. The district has a system to accurately project enrollment.	Yes	2-23
	11. The district links its financial plans and budgets to its annual priorities in the strategic plan and its goals and objectives, and district resources are focused towards achieving those goals and objectives.	No	2-24
	12. When necessary, the district considers options to increase revenue.	Yes	2-26
Community Involvement	13. The district actively involves parents and guardians in the district's decision making and activities.	Yes	2-28
	14. The district actively involves business partners and community organizations in the district's decision making and activities.	Yes	2-28

BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Best Practice 1: Using

The roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent have been clearly delineated, and board members and the superintendent have policies to ensure that they have effective working relationships but the board should be evaluating its performance.

To be effective, school districts must have a constructive, trusting relationship between their school boards and superintendents. This relationship is jeopardized most often when the parties do not understand or fail to adhere to their distinct roles in the educational process. Thus, districts should have mechanisms in place to maintain a distinct separation of roles and responsibilities between the school board and superintendent. In the most simple of terms, the school board should be the policymaking entity in the district, and the superintendent should have the primary responsibility for implementing these policies during the course of his/her daily administration of the district. School board members should not be directing daily operations and should address operational concerns through the superintendent. The superintendent should not make broad, districtwide policies without the approval of the board. A district may use both formal and informal mechanisms to ensure that each entity adheres to its proper roles and responsibilities. At a minimum, the district (regardless of size) should have policies in place that comply with state statutes regarding these roles and responsibilities.

In the Sarasota County School District, the roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent have been clearly delineated, and board members and the superintendent have established practices to ensure effective working relationships. In particular, the district has done a good job of developing written policies that clearly delineate the responsibilities of the board and the superintendent. (A survey of board members conducted as part of this engagement indicates that these responsibilities are understood and adhered to by board members.) Board members also understand and adhere to informal practices the district has established to govern how board members access district staff and direct staff to adhere to these procedures. The district also does a good job of making sure that new board members are aware of their duties and responsibilities. Not only do all board members receive an orientation when first elected but candidates for election to the board also receive training. (The district also demonstrates a commitment to the ongoing training of board members.) Effective procedures for handling items with the potential to become controversial are well established and effective.

In one area relating to this best practice, however, the district's performance can improve. While the district should be commended for the process it has established for evaluating the performance of the superintendent, a similar process for assessing the board's performance has not been established. Establishing a process for evaluating the board's performance is not a new idea for the district. Indeed, over the years, the benefits of establishing a process for evaluating the board's performance have been discussed.

We recommend that the district establish a process for the board to conduct a self-assessment of its performance once a year. This process should not be structured to focus on the performance of individual board members. Rather, it should focus on whether the board as a whole has worked effectively in providing the overall guidance and direction needed for the district to achieve its objectives.

One way to structure this assessment would be for the board to set expectations for its performance at the beginning of the year. At a specified point before the year's end, each board member could individually rate the board's performance against those expectations. The results of this individual assessment could then be used to facilitate a discussion of the board's overall performance and how, as appropriate, it can improve.

Best Practice 2: Using

The board and superintendent have procedures to ensure that board meetings are efficient and effective but citizen participation and agenda item information could be improved.

The primary goal of all school board meetings should be to come to a decision on the majority of policy issues presented during a particular meeting. To meet this best practice, the school board and superintendent should have formal and informal mechanisms in place to ensure that board meetings run efficiently and effectively, and to ensure all policy discussions and decisions are open and accessible to the public. Board meetings that consistently last longer than the time allotted are usually a telling sign that appropriate mechanisms are not in place, or are ineffective. Board members should not have to ask staff frequently for more information on agenda items, or ask for clarifications of the materials provided. More importantly, regardless of how well board meetings are run, board members and the superintendent should ensure that meetings are accessible and open to the public at large. For example, meetings should be located in large population concentrations at times that are not in conflict with the work hours of the majority of the public (e.g., board meetings should usually begin after 6:00 p.m.). If possible, board meetings should be broadcast live, or taped for later broadcast, on local public access television channels.

The Sarasota County School District has implemented a number of effective practices to ensure that the public can participate in and observe board meetings and that the time spent in board meetings is productive. Board meetings, which are held twice a month on Tuesdays, are scheduled at times convenient for most citizens of Sarasota County who want to attend in person. One meeting a month is held at 6:30 p.m. (so people who work during the day can attend) and the second meeting of the month is held at 3:00 p.m. (so people who do not want to leave home at night can attend). In addition, the meetings are broadcast by cable television at various times during the week so that people who cannot attend the meetings in person can observe them. To ensure the time spent in meetings is productive, both for the board members and members of the public, the district makes effective use of consent agendas and ensures that meeting materials are shared with board members sufficiently in advance of the meeting (the Friday before the Tuesday meeting) to allow these materials to be thoroughly reviewed. In addition, the district makes effective use of workshops and work sessions to allow board members to hold preliminary discussions of items with each other and with staff. This process allows the most substantive issues relating to an item to be the focus of the discussion during board meetings.

The district should consider one additional step to support efforts to ensure that a thorough and productive discussion of major items is presented at board meetings. At present, the level and type of information board members receive relating to major agenda items is inconsistent. While board members are generally satisfied with the information they receive, a review of the information board members received relating to a number of major items – the Charter District Plan, the proposed contract with CEP Sarasota, Inc. to provide an alternative education for low performing and disruptive students, the approval of a resolution to call an election for a millage increase, and a proposal to place a moratorium on new charter

school applications – indicates that the level and quality of information board members receive in writing varies considerably.

We recommend that the district establish a consistent expectation with regard to what information board members receive relating to major agenda items and how that information is presented. This information should typically include:

- **The reason for the recommended action on the item**
- **How the action will be accomplished**
- **What the desired results are**
- **What alternatives have been considered**
- **What resources will be needed**
- **Who will be affected and whether they have been advised of and given opportunity for input on the proposed action**
- **How the proposed action will affect students and parents**
- **What policy of law may apply to the item**
- **Whether the item complies with, duplicates, modifies, or affects existing policies or procedures**
- **Whether a new policy is needed to implement the proposed action**
- **What the time frame is for implementing and completing the proposed action**
- **Who will evaluate the proposed action and how it will be evaluated**

While in an ideal world this information would be provided for all agenda items, establishing such an expectation would create an unreasonable burden on staff. However, providing this level of information for items that the board chair—after discussions with the superintendent—deem to be “major” would be beneficial.

Best Practice 3: Not Using

The board and superintendent have established written policies that are routinely updated by legal counsel to ensure that they are relevant and complete but access to procedures and review by legal counsel could be improved.

To meet this best practice, school districts must have relevant and complete policies in order to remain in compliance with federal and state laws. Up-to-date districtwide procedures, when coupled with appropriate policies, ensure that activities are carried out in an efficient and effective manner. Appropriate procedures also ensure that staff and students are treated equally and consistently when applying board policies. The larger the district or the more decentralized its administration, the more important the overarching set of extensive policies and procedures. All districts should have, at a minimum, written board policies that are consistent with the *Florida Statutes*. Most districts should also have detailed written policies pertaining to specific areas like pupil progression, transportation, and services for Exceptional Student Education (ESE) populations. Districts also should have procedures to ensure that these policies are implemented consistently within administrative units, grade levels, and among schools. Finally, districtwide policies and procedures should be readily accessible by staff, students and their guardians, and the general public.

The Sarasota County School District policies are current and widely available both to district staff and to the public. The district posts its policies (and many of its procedures) on the district’s website. In addition, the district contracts with an outside firm—Educational Management Consultant Services, Inc.—to update its policies, as necessary, on an annual basis. Educational Management Consultant Services was also retained to ensure that district policies do not cover procedural matters. (Where appropriate, however, district policies do reference the procedures that have been established to implement the policy.) The district also trains staff on key procedures both during orientation sessions for new employees and through refresher training that is provided to existing employees.

Although the district ensures that its policies are current and readily available to staff, the district is not using this best practice because improvement is needed in ensuring procedures are up-to-date and accessible to all staff. While procedures in some areas are posted on the district’s website, most are only available through individual departments. In addition, the district has not established procedures for all administrative activities (although procedures for a number of administrative operations—e.g., employee recruiting and hiring and suspensions and dismissal—have been established). Finally, while the district requires the board attorney to review all proposed policy revisions to ensure that they comply with state requirements, he does not currently review all procedures.

The district should strengthen its efforts to establish and disseminate procedures in all areas. In particular, administrative procedures should be summarized in a single document. Action Plan 2-1 sets out the steps necessary to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 2-1

We recommend that the district strengthen its efforts to establish and disseminate procedures and that administrative procedures be summarized in a single document.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify the administrative procedures that have been established by individual district departments.
	Step 2.	Review these procedures and determine where procedures are not current or lack sufficient specificity.
	Step 3.	Revise administrative procedures using the existing approaches; however, modify these approaches to ensure a review by the Board Attorney prior to the procedures being reviewed by the superintendent, the superintendent’s cabinet and the school board.
	Step 4.	Develop and provide training on any new administrative procedure or for any procedure that has been significantly modified.
	Step 5.	Post the updated administrative procedures on the district’s website.
	Step 6.	Post the procedures for individual departments on the website as well.
Who Is Responsible	Board Attorney, Associate Superintendents	
Time Frame	December 31, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 4: Not Using

The district routinely obtains legal services to advise it about policy and reduce the risk of lawsuits; however the process for evaluating legal services can be strengthened.

School boards should have appropriate, responsive legal counsel. Legal services should be comprehensive, providing input on district policies, personnel issues, and advice to ensure that the district complies with federal and state legal requirements. Legal services should support the board, its individual members, the superintendent and district staff. In smaller districts, legal services are more likely to be contracted out, while the largest districts may have several in-house attorneys as well as contracted

attorneys. As small districts grow in size, they should periodically evaluate whether hiring a full-time, in-house attorney would be more cost-effective for the districts. Regardless of the district's size, legal expenditures (including hourly rates, retainer fees and total annual expenditures) should be evaluated for accuracy and appropriateness.

The Sarasota County School District employs a private law firm to advise the school board, review policies, to represent the district in litigation, and to represent the district in labor negotiations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the firm provides high quality legal counsel to the district. Indeed, the fact that the district has used the same law firm since 1986 through the tenure of five superintendents and many board members (of whom only three are needed to dismiss the firm) speaks to the district's satisfaction with its current legal counsel. While the district's primary law firm handles the predominance of the district's legal matters, the firm makes effective use of outside legal counsel when specialized expertise is needed. Other outside law firms are currently used to address FCC related issues, copyright issues, real estate issues, bond issues and to develop an eagle management plan.

The district does not fully use this best practice in part because relationships with the district and the attorney have not been adequately formalized. For example, while informal procedures governing board access to the attorney are in place, are understood by board members and are considered effective, formal procedures governing how the board (or individual board members) confers with the board attorney have not been established. In addition, while the board attorney meets with the superintendent on a weekly basis, formal guidelines for the board attorney's overall interactions with the superintendent have not been established. (Establishing such guidelines would be helpful because while the superintendent appropriately seeks legal counsel from the board attorney, the board attorney reports directly to the board. The possibility exists that on an individual matter the superintendent may need counsel independent of that provided to the board. In such a situation, clearly defined procedures governing the superintendent's access to legal counsel would be extremely helpful.) Finally, no formal procedures have been established to determine when other staff should have access to the attorney. An expectation has been established, however, that only department heads can directly consult with the board attorney without prior approval. (Per board policy, however, any school board member or employee who is sued for any action arising out of or in the course of employment by the district will be provided legal counsel.)

The district should establish formal procedures to govern the interactions of the superintendent, district administrators and staff with the board attorney. Action Plan 2-2 sets out the steps necessary to establish formal procedures governing the interactions of the superintendent, district administrators and staff with the board attorney.

Action Plan 2-2

We recommend that the district establish formal procedures governing the interactions of the superintendent, district administrators and staff with the board attorney.

Action Needed	Step 1. Categorize the types of legal assistance provided by the board attorney.
	Step 2. For each type of legal assistance, determine who (e.g., board members, the superintendent, department heads, other district staff) typically require the assistance.
	Step 3. Make an overall assessment (high, medium, low) of the typical costs associated with providing legal assistance of each type.
	Step 4. For each category of legal assistance consider the extent to which conflict of interest issues might arise.
	Step 5. Use the information developed in the previous steps to establish formal procedures governing the interactions of the superintendent, district administrators, and staff with the board attorney.

Who Is Responsible	Board Attorney, Associate Superintendents
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

The district would also benefit from performing a more rigorous assessment of the services provided by the board attorney each year. At present, a formal annual evaluation of the board attorney is not performed and no formal evaluation of legal costs has been conducted by the district. (As Exhibit 2-4 shows, a range of approaches to providing legal services are provided in Sarasota and its peer districts and legal costs vary considerably. The fact that Sarasota’s legal expenditures are higher than all but one of the peer districts should not be construed to mean that the district spends too much on legal expenditures—or that the other districts spend too little. A wide variety of factors affect the legal expenditures that will be incurred by a district.) However, given this variation in legal expenditures (and the fact that many factors affect what legal expenditures are appropriate) establishing a process to ensure that the value of the services provide by the board attorney (and outside counsel) justify the cost would be worthwhile. ¹

**Exhibit 2-4
Legal Fees for the Sarasota County School District
and Peer Districts Vary Considerably**

Fiscal Year 2001-02	Sarasota	Charlotte	Martin	Santa Rosa	Manatee	Leon
Staff or Contract Attorney	Contract	Contract	In-House	Contract	Contract	Contract
Total Legal Fees	\$438,967	\$154,515	\$239,061	\$40,666	\$460,614	\$417,952
Annual Retainer Fee	\$36,000	None	N/A	n/a	None	\$41,000
Hourly Rate	\$162 ¹	\$125	N/A	n/a	\$135	\$165

¹ Average billing rate for services provided in 2001-02.

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

The district should establish a formal process for evaluating the board attorney on an annual basis. Action Plan 2-3 sets out the steps necessary to develop a formal process for evaluating the board attorney. In addition, every three to five years the district should perform an assessment of legal fees. As part of this assessment, the hourly rate charged by the existing board attorney should be assessed based both on comparisons with other districts and based on an assessment of the local market for legal services. Given existing budget constraints, the district should examine staff workload and priorities, and if at all possible, conduct this assessment in-house. However, if the district determines that it cannot effectively conduct its own assessment it may choose to retain a third-party firm with legal expertise to perform an the assessment. We estimate that contracting with a third-party firm would cost the district \$15,000 over three years. (This estimate assumes that the third-party assessment of legal fees could be conducted in 150 hours an average cost per hour of \$100.)

Action Plan 2-3

We recommend that the district establish a formal process for evaluating the board attorney on an annual basis and assessing legal fees every three to five years.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop and implement an annual evaluation process for the board attorney.
	Step 2.	Establish a schedule—every three to five years depending on the needs of the district—to conduct a review of legal fees.
	Step 3.	The district should annually monitor its total legal costs and, if legal costs show an unusual increase, the district should investigate the cause of this increase.
Who Is Responsible	Board Chair, Superintendent	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

¹ Please note that because the district pays a higher hourly rate for legal services than at least one of the comparison districts should not be construed by itself to mean the hourly rate the district pays for legal services is excessive. In some cases, paying a higher hourly rate for services can be cost-effective when viewed from the perspective of the value of services provided. In other cases, however, employing a firm that charges a comparatively high hourly rate simply increases costs without creating the value that justifies the higher fees. Moreover, market conditions can vary dramatically from community to community and these factors, in turn, can affect the hourly rate charged for legal services.

ORGANIZATION, STAFFING AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Best Practice 5: Not Using

The district's organizational structure has clearly defined units and lines of authority that minimize administrative costs. However the development of a process to review the organizational structure on a regular basis is needed.

A school district's organizational structure should enable the effective and efficient delivery of support services to the schools, teachers, and students. In general, school districts should organize their administration so that similar support services are grouped together and lines of authority are clear to staff and the general public. In addition, school districts should minimize administrative staff, especially at the district level. There is no one-size-fits-all district organizational structure, although there are several common administrative structures employed by school districts statewide. Smaller districts are more likely to have a simple hierarchical structure with all administrative units reporting directly to the superintendent and ultimately to the board. Larger districts may group their administrative units by distinct functions [i.e., school operations; instructional support services (curriculum, evaluation); business support services (finance, budgeting, MIS); operational support (food services, transportation, safety and security)]. Irrespective of organizational structure, staff and the general public should be able to clearly understand who is responsible for what in the district.

For the most part, the Sarasota County School District has established an effective organizational structure. The structure is streamlined and the overlap among organizational units has been minimized.² In addition, the structure does not have excessive organizational layers and the responsibilities of key administrators are well defined. The district also does an extremely good job of ensuring that organizational charts are current. Indeed, whenever a new position within the district is established, an updated organizational chart is provided to the board. The district's current organizational structure has supported its primary goal—improving student achievement. Assigning direct control of the budget function to the associate superintendent—instructional support services has helped to ensure sufficient financial resources have been allocated to support efforts to improve instruction. Likewise, having the information services function report to the associate superintendent—instructional support services has facilitated efforts to develop the technology and information infrastructure the district has used so successfully to improve student performance.

However, the district does not regularly review its organizational structure and, as a result, its organizational structure may no longer be effective or appropriate for the district's needs. The district could improve its organizational structure and use this best practice by implementing several changes. First, the district could establish a more independent information systems function. The current organizational structure has been more effective integrating technology into the district's instructional programs than its non-instructional activities. The district should have the executive director of student accountability and information services report directly to the superintendent (see Exhibit 2-6 at the end of this section). Under the proposed organizational structure, the need to use information systems and technology to improve non-instructional performance will likely be easier.

Reorganizing the district's Student Accountability and Information Services could benefit the district in a number of ways. In particular, the re-organized student accountability function would have additional organizational status for the assessment of student performance. By having the Student Accountability

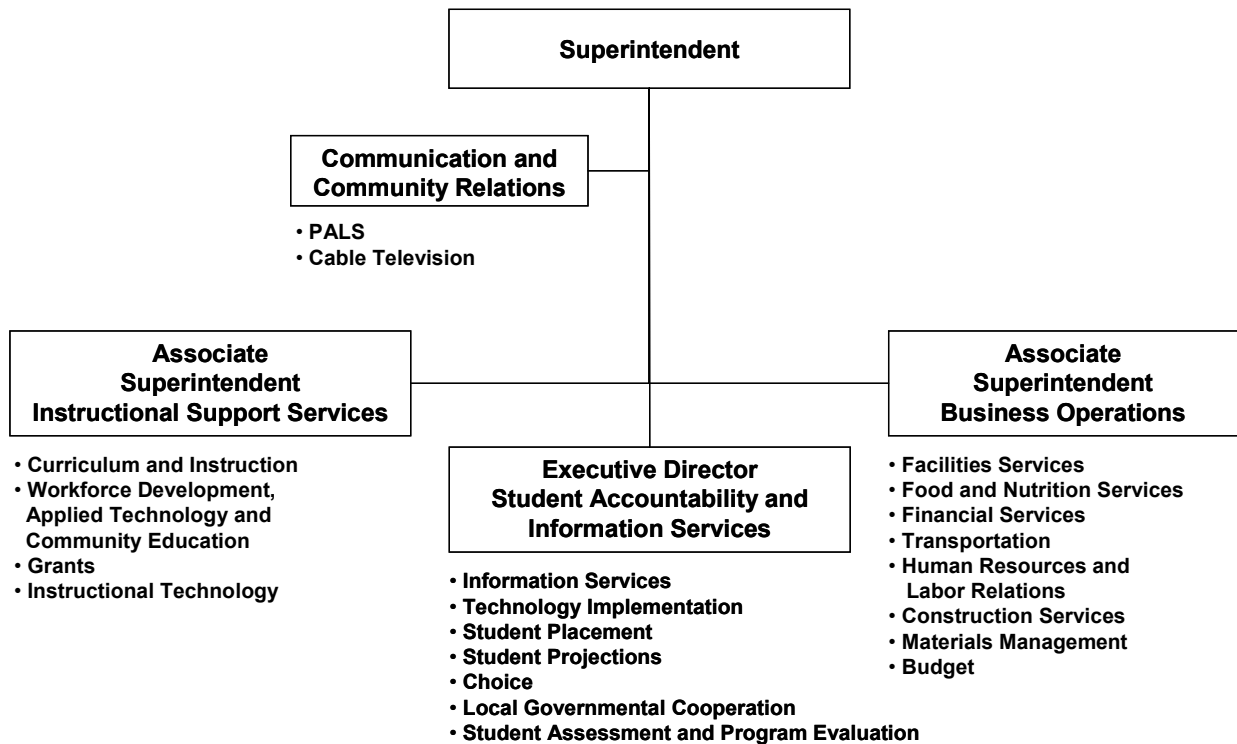
² For the purposes of this analysis an overlapping function is defined as one where two or more units have responsibility for the same function or activity and where roles in performing the function or activity have not been adequately defined.

and Information Services Division report directly to the superintendent, the superintendent will be able to ensure that this unit better focuses on addressing district needs and priorities. This reporting relationship could improve consistency in the use of technology to control costs and enhance effectiveness and the needs of schools to directly control the technology resources that affect their instructional program. The suggested structure could also enhance the accountability function and coordination of technology-related activities such as standardizing technology acquisitions (for more information about this issue, see Chapter 5—Administrative and Instructional Technology).

The second organizational change the district should evaluate is the placement of the budget function. As noted, the current organizational location has facilitated efforts to ensure that district resources have been available to support instructional improvement. However, because the budget function is not only responsible for resource allocation but also for budget compliance and monitoring, from an “internal control” perspective having the budget function report directly to one of the district’s largest users of financial resources is somewhat problematic. Among the options the district should consider to address this issue is having the budget function report to the associate superintendent/chief financial officer, a more traditional placement, where the function could be more closely linked with other financial activities (see Exhibit 2-5). Another option would be to have the function report directly to the superintendent (however, for this alternative to be viable the role of the function should be expanded to include district wide planning). In addition, leaving the current placement of the function unchanged is a viable alternative as long as procedures are established to ensure that the function’s compliance and budget management functions are appropriately independent.

Exhibit 2-5

Suggested Organizational Structure: Student Accountability and Information Services Unit Would Report Directly to the Superintendent; Budget Function Reports to Associate Superintendent Business Operations



Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Implementing the recommended organizational structure will create a number of benefits. First, the Information Service Division reports directly to the superintendent in the recommended structure. The superintendent will therefore be positioned to ensure that this unit focuses on addressing overall district needs and priorities and that both instructional and non-instructional needs are met. This “independent” reporting relationship will also facilitate a constructive dialogue about the need for consistency in the use of technology (to control costs and enhance effectiveness) and the needs of schools to directly control the technology resources that affect their instructional program. In addition, in the suggested structure the accountability function reports independently of instructional operations and coordination of technology related activities will be enhanced.

The district should evaluate its organizational structure. Action Plan 2-4 sets out the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 2-4

We recommend that the district evaluate its current organizational structure.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Review the organizational suggestions presented in this chapter and assess their merits.
	Step 2.	Evaluate the organizational placement of the budget, student accountability and the information services functions.
	Step 3.	If the organizational placement of the budget function is not changed, develop procedures to ensure the independence of the budget compliance function.
	Step 4.	Clarify roles and responsibilities and reporting relationships in the approved structure.
	Step 5.	Seek board approval for the revised organizational structure.
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

The district does not, however, do a good job of communicating its use of contract employees. Such employees are not included in district organization charts and are not included in summaries of administrative staffing. Consequently, it is difficult for the district to obtain an accurate “snapshot” of its actual staffing levels. Without explicitly including contract employees (on an FTE basis) in its staffing and budget summaries, decision makers (as well as interested members of the public) cannot accurately understand the total capacity that is available to perform a specific problem or to address a specific need.

The district should revise its staffing summaries to include an indication of the number of contract employees (on an FTE basis) assigned to a given unit. Action Plan 2-5 sets out the steps needed to update existing staffing rosters and to establish a process for tracking contracted staffing on an ongoing basis.

Action Plan 2-5

We recommend that the district include the number of contract employees assigned to a given unit on staffing rosters and staffing summaries.

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Require each department manager to develop a list of the contract employees that are currently employed on a full-time or part-time basis in their unit.¹</p> <p>Step 2. For each function or activity performed by these contract employees determine the full-time equivalent (FTE) capacity that is currently employed.²</p> <p>Step 3. Update staffing rosters to indicate the number of FTE contract employees currently employed.</p> <p>Step 4. Establish a procedure for updating staffing rosters when new contract employees are hired (or the contracts of existing employees are not renewed).</p> <p>Step 5. Require that information on contract employees be included in staffing summaries provided to the board.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent – Business Operations
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

¹ For the purposes of this analysis contract employees should include both individual contractors and the employees of firms with which the district contracts to provide services; however, contract employees who are used on an intermittent basis or for modest amounts of time (less than .25 FTE) can be excluded from this analysis.

² Some contract employees may be year-round employees who work on a part-time basis. Other contract employees may be seasonal workers who work full time during a specified period of the year but are not employed at other times of the year.

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

The district would also benefit from conducting a systematic review of its business practices and organizational structure on a regular basis. To the district’s credit, it contracted with an outside consulting firm to review selected areas. The report, however, while providing valuable recommendations, did not include a detailed review of business practices and operations. In addition, work done by the volunteer Financial Advisory Committee, while offering helpful suggestions for saving money, does not purport to be a detailed review of business practices.

The need for the district to conduct a comprehensive review of business practices and organizational structure from time to time is reflected, in part, by the fact that in some areas spans of control in the district are too broad. At the time this study was initiated—in October 2002—spans of control for supervisors were excessively broad in a number of areas including custodial services, human resources, and food services. At a minimum, a thorough review of organizational structure and business practices would identify such problems and develop recommendations to address them. It should be noted that instructional support division currently reviews each of its major programs on a regular basis (typically once every two years). While the primary focus of this recommendation is to extend this effective practice to the non-instructional areas, the scope of the reviews currently conducted in the instructional area should be evaluated to ensure these reviews incorporate an assessment of business practices, organizational structure and administrative staffing.

The district should develop a schedule and process for reviewing organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practices for all of its core functions on a regular basis. Action Plan 2-6 sets out the steps necessary to do so.

Action Plan 2-6

We recommend that the district develop a schedule and process for reviewing organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practices on a regular basis.

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Review the scope of the reviews currently conducted of instructional functions to ensure they assess organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practices.</p> <p>Step 2. Articulate the objectives of the recommended reviews of organizational structure, administrative staffing, and business practices for non-instructional functions.</p> <p>Step 3. Establish a framework for conducting reviews of organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practices to ensure a consistent approach is taken when conducting reviews of all district departments.</p> <p>Step 4. Develop strategies and approaches to communicate the results of organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practice reviews to the board, district staff, and the community.</p> <p>Step 5. Select one department and test the framework to conduct a review of organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practices.</p> <p>Step 6. Communicate the results of this initial review.</p> <p>Step 7. Modify the framework and communications approaches based on the results of this review.</p> <p>Step 8. Develop a schedule for completing reviews of organizational structure, administrative staffing, and business practices for all departments every four years.</p> <p>Step 9. Include in this schedule a review, at least once every four to five years, of the district's overall organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practices.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent—Business Operations
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 6: Not Using

District staff reductions have been based on budgetary expediency and not systematic reviews. The district does periodically review its administrative staffing and makes changes to eliminate unnecessary positions and improve operating efficiency.

Well-run school districts are lean administratively and maximize funds available to support their primary mission, educating students. To accomplish this, school district staffing should promote efficiency and effectiveness while minimizing administration, especially at the district level. Low administrative to instructional staff ratios generally indicate that resources are being concentrated in the classroom, the main objective of most school boards and the state. However, districts must balance the goal of minimizing administration with the fact that some support services provided at the district level are more cost-effective than multiple site-based staff.

The Sarasota County School District has reduced administrative staffing levels to the point where—based on comparative data—its ratio of administrators to non-administrators is among the lowest in the state. A comparison of administrative expenditures completed in February 2002, for example, found that the Sarasota County School District has the lowest percentage of administrative expenditures of any school district in Florida. In addition, a comparison of total administrators per student revealed that the ratio of administrators to students in the district—one administrator for every 308.73 students—was the sixth lowest in the state.

While the district is to be commended for its diligence in keeping administrative staffing low, these efforts have primarily been taken in response to budgetary needs rather than as part of an ongoing effort to improve operating efficiency. Moreover, as discussed in section five, in a number of areas (e.g., food services, custodial, and human resources) operating efficiency has been compromised because administrative staffing levels have been cut too deeply. A more comprehensive and systematic review of administrative staffing levels is needed to ensure that the district achieves an appropriate balance between the need to keep costs low and the need to provide adequate oversight over district operations.

Implementing Action Plan 2-6, presented in the previous section, will also address the issues relating to administrative staffing presented in this section.

Best Practice 7: Using

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

The school board and superintendent must have a clear and up-to-date understanding of the financial condition of their district in order to exercise effective oversight. To meet this best practice, board members should be able to understand the fiscal effects of their decisions, both short- and long-term. When fiscal problems arise, the district should be able to react quickly in a manner that prevents significant disruption of school operations. In general, financial reports and budget information should be clear and useful to board members and the general public. These documents should not require extensive explanation by district staff or the superintendent. Financial information should be updated and presented to the board on a regular basis, and all agenda items that have an impact on the budget should include detailed explanations of these effects.

Sarasota County school board members and the superintendent take a number of appropriate steps to ensure they exercise effective oversight of the district's financial resources. In particular, the district is proactive in ensuring that board members receive training and understand school district budgeting and finance. To this end, when they are first elected to the board, board members meet with the budget and finance directors to receive an overview of financial issues. "On the job" training is also provided at budget workshops that cover financial matters. In addition, to facilitate understanding of the budget document, an executive summary is prepared that highlights key budgetary issues. Board members also indicate that they find the budget to be presented in an easy-to-read, understandable format. The district also does a good job of providing board members with an historical context for the current year's budget. To this end the district has prepared a document—*Finances: A Historical Summary 1990-91 Through 2001-02*—that summarizes district revenues and expenditures for the past eleven years. Moreover, to ensure board members have a sound understanding of the short- and long-range fiscal implications of budget amendments, workshops are held to discuss the amendments and the amendments themselves are presented in a concise and understandable manner. Changes or concerns about the district's financial condition are also reported to the board in a timely manner. When a significant budgetary shortfall exists (for example, a state funding shortfall that has an adverse affect on the district) staff work with the board to communicate the implications of the shortfall and propose alternative approaches to addressing the shortfall. In some cases, the activities proposed are drastic. In the 1990-91 school year, for example, district contracts were frozen and employees did not receive the regular step increases. More recently, class sizes have been increased due to budgetary shortfalls at the state levels.

Although the district is using this best practice, as previously discussed, the district has not systematically evaluated opportunities to improve management structures, increase efficiency and effectiveness and reduce costs although the district has consulted with an outside consulting firm—SchoolMatch—to review selected areas and work done by the volunteer Financial Advisory Committee has offered helpful suggestions for savings money. Action Plan 2-6 presented in the previous section, addresses the need for

the district to develop a schedule and process for reviewing organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practices on a regular basis.

Best Practice 8: Using

The district clearly has assigned school principals the authority they need to effectively manage their schools. . However, the district should establish a process for regularly assessing this authority and ensure they are adhering to districtwide policies and procedures.

Principals should have the authority and ability to manage the day-to-day operations of their schools with minimal oversight from the district. At the same time, it is important that principals adhere to districtwide policies and procedures so that students are treated equally from school to school. Principals, as the top administrators in the schools, should have the ability to respond to most situations in their schools without first having to receive approval or acknowledgment from the district. Principals should be held accountable for the performance of their faculty and students, but should also have the authority to modify programs to improve this performance. To this effect, principals should have discretion in the way they allocate their school funds that is consistent with the level of accountability required by the district. Principals must be aware of and adhere to districtwide policies and procedures, regardless of the level of “site-based management” used in the district. Districtwide policies and procedures ensure legal compliance and promote the equal treatment of students from school to school, and among grade levels.

The Sarasota County School District has moved sufficient authority to principals (and their school-based teams) for these school-based managers to make a substantive difference in the quality of education provided at the schools they oversee. In particular, school administrators have significant budget and staffing authority. With the exception of staffing allocations for principals, assistant principals, secretaries, guidance counselors, and exceptional student education (ESE) liaisons, school administrators are given a lump sum personnel budget with which they can “purchase” staff using the average salary for each position. (Principals are not, however, granted operational authority for operational, maintenance and utility budgets.) In addition, discussions with individual principals and the results of an employee survey that was conducted as part of this engagement strongly indicate that the district has effectively communicated the authority it has assigned to school administrators. The district consistently communicates a clear expectation that principals are the instructional leaders at their schools and that the model for decision-making at schools is one of shared decision-making.

It should also be noted, that not only has the district delegated meaningful authority to principals, it holds them strictly accountable for the results they achieve in exercising that authority. Principals are evaluated both in terms of whether their school achieves its goals (as reflected in School Improvement Plans) and whether principals achieve personal performance goals. Principals who do not meet performance expectations are provided assistance. For example, principals who do not meet performance expectations meet with their supervisor on a more frequent basis than other principals at which times problems and improvement strategies are discussed, are formally evaluated four times a year (as compared to twice a year for other principals), and are teamed with a successful principal. If their performance does not improve, however, their contract will not be renewed.³ While the district should be commended for its commitment to school-based management, this commitment, in some cases, is not appropriately balanced with the needed to ensure appropriate consistency across all district schools. For example, while the district has established a strong system of checks and balances relating to the use of instructional materials funds, no monitoring system is in place to ensure categorical funds provided to a school for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students are in fact spent to support ESOL students.

³ Principals often resign or accept another position (for example, as a teacher or assistant principal) during the evaluation process and therefore do not need to be terminated. When necessary, the district has removed principals from district employment.

Although the district is using this best practice, we recommend that it establish a process for regularly assessing the authority it has assigned to school-based administrators and for ensuring appropriate consistency across all district schools. To implement this recommendation the district should first develop a comprehensive list of the various functions performed by the district (a preliminary list of such functions is presented in Exhibit 2-6). Next, the district should establish criteria for determining what functions should be centralized and what functions should be decentralized. (As a starting point, these criteria might include the extent to which

- specialized skill is needed to perform the function,
- consistency in performing the function is needed,
- the costs of performing a function will be increased if the function is decentralized and
- the effectiveness with which the function is performed will be reduced if it is decentralized.)

These criteria should then be used to assess whether overall responsibility for a function should be centralized or decentralized. If it is determined that a function should be decentralized any risks associated with decentralization (e.g., that the function will not be consistently performed across the district) should be identified. In addition, the district should articulate how centralized and decentralized functions will be assigned. The results of this analysis should then be used to determine how authority for performing various functions should be assigned and how the risks associated with decentralization will be managed. Specifically the controls that are currently in place to ensure consistent operations across all schools should be evaluated (for those functions where consistency is needed) and, as necessary, procedures should be strengthened to ensure principal accountability for complying with these standards and expectations.

While such a detailed analysis need not be performed each time the district reevaluates the authority that should be assigned to school-based administrators, undertaking this type of detailed analysis initially will be beneficial because it will help district leaders consider, at a fundamental level

- what authority should be assigned to school level administrators,
- why it is beneficial to make these assignments, and
- what potential problems associated with decentralization need to be anticipated and managed.

The district should repeat this review every three or four years, taking into consideration changes in conditions affecting the district's practices. In addition, reviewing this analysis on a scheduled basis will provide a mechanism for the district to address issues where fundamental changes in the assignment of authority is not needed but some modifications are necessary. To this end, a schedule for completing both the initial assessment and follow-up assessments should be prepared.

**Exhibit 2-6
The District Performs a Broad Range of Functions**

Accountability – School	Guidance Services – Supervision	Position Control
Accountability – System	Guidance Services – Delivery	Printing
Accreditation – School	Health Care Services	Procurement
Accounting	Human Resources – Policy Development	Professional Moving
Accounts Payable	Human Resources – School Staffing	Public Relations/Marketing
Accounts Receivable	Human Resources – Recruiting	Purchased Professional and Technical Services
Actuarial Services	Human Resources – Hiring	Purchased Property Service (e.g., repair, maintenance)
Attendance Services – Truancy	Human Resources – Transfer	Rental Of Equipment And Vehicles
Attendance Services – Due Process	Human Resources – Termination	Rental Of Land And Buildings
Auditing	Human Resources – Promotion	Research
Benefits	Human Resources – Classification	Risk Management
Budgeting – System	Human Resources – Salary Management	Safety
Budgeting – School	Human Resources – Records	School Management – Principal Evaluation
Building Purchase	Human Resources – Certification	School Management – Teacher Evaluation
Capital Project Management	Information Systems – Needs Identification	Security – Administration
Cash Management	Information Systems – System Development	Security – Supervision
Charter Schools	Information Systems – System Maintenance	Security – Delivery
Child Care Services	Information Systems – User Support	Special Programs(a) (School) – Identification of Needs
Community Relations	Instructional Delivery	Special Programs(a) (School) – Development
Contracted Renovations And Remodeling	Instructional Support – Identify Needs	Special Programs(a) (School) – Implementation
Coordination With Election Officials	Instructional Support – Mobilize Resources	Special Programs(a) (School) – Assessment/Evaluation
Curriculum – Writing/Development	Instructional Support – Delivery Services	Special Programs (System) – Identification Of Needs
Curriculum – Maintenance	Insurance Services	Special Programs (System) – Development
Curriculum – Assessment/Evaluation	Interagency Relations	Special Programs (System) – Implementation
Custodial Services	Investigations Of Personal Property Loss	Special Programs (System) – Assessment/Evaluation
Development	Labor Relations	Staff Development – Identification Of Needs
Disciplinary – Incident Reporting	Land Improvement	Staff Development – Determination Of Program Offerings
Disciplinary – Appeals	Land Purchase	Staff Development – Program Design
Facilities Maintenance	Legal	Staff Development – Program Delivery
Field Trip Services	Out Of Town Travel	Staff Development – Coordination
Food Services	Payroll	Student Placement
Government Relations	Planning (School) – Development	Testing
Grants (systemwide)	Planning (School) – Approval	Transportation
Grants (schools)	Planning (System) – Enrollment Projection	Tuition Rate Setting And Payment
Grievances	Planning (System) – Operational	Vehicle Maintenance
Grounds Maintenance	Planning (System) – Strategic	Warehousing
Guidance Services – Administration	Planning (System) – Capital	Workers Compensation Claims

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

PLANNING AND BUDGETING

Best Practice 9: Not Using

The district does not have a multi-year strategic plan for non instructional programs (although its strategic plan for instructional programs is well defined.) Overall strategic planning would benefit from incorporating districtwide priorities into the plan and formally assessing progress against the plan each year.

To meet this best practice, school districts should have a multi-year strategic plan. A strategic plan enables the district to identify its critical needs and establish strategies on how to address these needs. A strategic plan should provide guidance to a district both in policymaking and program development. A strategic plan must address both instructional and non-instructional programs and have reasonable goals and objectives that can be accomplished, in most cases, within existing resources. All strategic plans should be developed with broad stakeholder input. The complexity and breadth of the strategic plan will vary based on the size of the district. All strategic plans should include an accountability and evaluation component or else the plan becomes ineffectual.

The Sarasota County School District's strategic plan—which is also referred to as the Campaign for Excellence—provides the overall direction for the district's instructional program through the year 2005. The plan, which includes explicit links to state education goals, is divided into 10 goal areas (reading, mathematics, writing, science, the arts, technology, career preparation, citizenship, safe and orderly schools, and family and community involvement). In each area, one or two goals are established that are—with minor exceptions—quantifiable and easy to measure. Perhaps most noteworthy, the district's approach to strategic planning for instructional activities appropriately balances the need to provide a “top down” strategic direction for the entire district with the need to demonstrate a clear commitment to school level decision-making and authority. To achieve this balance the Campaign for Excellence (that is, the strategic plan) articulates for each goal area quantifiable expectations and potential strategies that schools can use to address those expectations. Schools then select from these potential strategies to address specific needs in their schools and incorporate these strategies into their school improvement plans.

Despite the thoughtful and creative approach the district takes to strategic planning for instructional activities there are a number of ways its strategic plan can be strengthened. The most significant shortcoming in the district's current approach to strategic planning (related to instructional activities) is that the plan itself does not clearly articulate a small number of priorities to guide the district's strategies and major financial and program decisions. This shortcoming is rectified somewhat by the fact that the superintendent identifies a small number of goals each year on which the district will focus (and the superintendent will be evaluated). For the 2002-03 school year, three of these four priorities related directly to objectives included in the Campaign for Excellence. Nonetheless, articulating priorities as part of the strategic plan itself would be beneficial. In addition, the district would benefit from undertaking a more formal review of progress against the strategic plan and a more formal assessment of whether the strategic plan should be modified to address changing district circumstances and needs. At present, the school board reviews progress against various strategic plan goals at different points during the year but a formal assessment of the district's progress against the overall plan is not performed. Moreover, while the plan has been changed three times since its inception four years ago, a formal process to ensure that strategic plan priorities and goals continue to reflect community standards, student needs, and board direction is not undertaken on a scheduled basis.

To begin using this best practice, the district must improve its strategic planning process in several ways. Action Plan 2-7 sets out the steps necessary to strengthen strategic planning for instructional activities.

Action Plan 2-7

We recommend that the district take steps to strengthen its approach to strategic planning for instructional activities.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Review the district’s current approach to strategic planning (e.g. the need to integrate priorities into the plan itself, the need to formally review progress in achieving the plan; and the need to determine what modifications, if any, are needed to the plan at regularly scheduled intervals).
	Step 2.	Modify the plan to include clearly defined strategic priorities.
	Step 3.	Develop a schedule for reviewing progress against the plan and for assessing whether the plan should be modified to reflect changing conditions, needs, or board direction.
	Step 4.	Implement the recommended changes.
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendents	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

While the district’s approach to strategic planning for instructional activities is, for the most part, outstanding, its approach to strategic planning for non-instructional activities is, for the most part, non-existent. Only one of the ten goal areas included in the current Campaign for Excellence—the goal area related to safe and orderly schools—relates to non-instructional activities. This shortcoming has not gone unnoticed by the district’s leadership. Indeed, the one priority established by the superintendent for the current year that does not relate directly to the strategic plan for instructional activities is to “implement a strategic planning process (including accountability measures) within the Business Services Division.” To address this priority, the associate superintendent – business operations is currently spearheading an effort to establish a strategic plan for business services.

The district should continue its efforts to establish a strategic planning process for the Business Services Division. Action Plan 2-8 sets out the steps necessary to do so.

Action Plan 2-8

We recommend that the district continue its efforts to establish a strategic planning process for the Business Services Division.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Complete efforts to establish a strategic planning process for the Business Services Division.
	Step 2.	Integrate the Business Services Division’s strategic plan with the existing Campaign for Excellence.
	Step 3.	Establish overall priorities for the entire district (including both instructional and non-instructional activities) and incorporate them into the integrated strategic plan.
	Step 4.	Monitor progress against strategic plan goals and objectives using the schedule developed in Action Plan 2-7.
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent, Associate Superintendents	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 10: Using

The district has a system to accurately project enrollment but its methodology needs to be documented.

To meet this best practice, school districts must have a system to provide the most accurate student enrollment projections possible. Full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment projections are used for many purposes in districts including budgeting and funding, zoning, estimates of facility requirements and staffing ratios. Because of the critical nature of FTE projections, districts must have trained staff and formal procedures for applying both the state projection methodologies and local corrective methodologies. At a minimum, the district must use the cohort survival methodology provided by the Florida Department of Education (DOE) to establish its FTEs for the coming year. However, medium to large districts or districts with above average student growth rates should supplement the DOE models with additional projection methodologies. These additional methodologies should include in-depth demographic information, not used in the DOE models. The information from each methodology should be reconciled to produce the actual FTE projection. Districts may choose to supplement the DOE model with information from local planning departments, state universities, or private demographers.

The Sarasota County School District accurately estimates its enrollment. Until the most recent school year, projected enrollment over the past three years had been at worst, within 0.11% of actual enrollment. (In the most recent school year, enrollment projections were off by 2.3% primarily because the opening of a new high school and middle school caused many students who had been home schooled to enter the system.) While the district uses a cohort survival model as a starting point for its enrollment projections, its success in accurately projecting enrollment stems from the fact that the team of district staff who work together to develop the projections spend a great deal of time discussing expected enrollment with principals, district department heads and county officials to ensure a sound understanding of the myriad factors that affect enrollment. In addition to the enrollment projections themselves, the district has also developed an effective process for minimizing the adverse effect of the modest projection errors that are inevitable in any forecasting exercise and has taken appropriate steps to ensure that the school counts that are reported to the state are accurate.

Although it uses this best practice, the district could further enhance its current operations by better documenting the approach it uses to develop enrollment projections. Documentation is especially needed because many of the relationships between employment and residential growth, student programs and school enrollment, and the likely impact of school marketing on future enrollment reside in the minds of the two key staff who are responsible for developing the projections. If either of these staff were to leave the district, it might take some time for their replacements to develop the understanding of these issues needed to develop accurate enrollment projections. Indeed, in interviews the budget director noted that school districts where enrollment projections are not accurate often have a new person responsible for developing these projections.

We recommend that the district document the methodologies and processes it uses to forecast student enrollment. This documentation effort should be conducted using a two-step process. First, the overall process for conducting the enrollment projections should be memorialized. This initial documentation, for example, would describe the various steps that are taken to develop projections (e.g., prepare cohort survival analysis, meet with principals, meet with department heads, meet with county staff, etc.). The second and more important part of this effort should take place as interviews are conducted and modifications to initial enrollment projections are made. To the extent possible the staff responsible for developing the projections should document the factors that are considered each time they modify enrollment projections (for a given school or for the district as a whole), the assumptions that they make about how each factor affects enrollment, and, their overall rationale for making adjustments. While the initial documentation of this information will, by necessity, be time-consuming, in future years updating this information should be relatively easy. Given the importance to the district of continuing to accurately project enrollment, however, the investment required to document this methodology and process is certainly warranted.

Best Practice 11: Not Using

The district should clarify the links between its non-instructional and instructional priorities and its financial plans and budgets.

To meet this best practice, school districts' financial information should reflect the district's priority goals and objectives. These goals and objectives (which should be part of a strategic plan) may either be explicitly stated in the budget or may be reflected in changes in allocations that are concurrent with the district's shifting priorities. For example, if improving reading scores is a priority goal, then the district's budget should include resources that assist schools in pursuing this goal (e.g., hiring additional resource teachers or purchasing a new reading curriculum).

The district has taken a number of steps to align its overall financial plans and budgets to the goals articulated in its strategic plan. Most notably, over the past several years the district has consistently focused increased revenues to support improved student performance. (Resources devoted to instruction have grown from 58% of total expenditures in 1990-91 fiscal year to 62% percent of total expenditures in 2001-02 fiscal year). In addition, in a number of specific areas—professional development and curriculum—increased expenditures can be related to specific Campaign for Excellence goals. Mini-grants are also used to encourage schools to participate in some districtwide programs (e.g., Safe and Drug Free Schools) that, in turn, directly support a Campaign for Excellence objective (e.g., safe and orderly schools.)

While, as discussed, the district's efforts to ensure its overall financial plans and budgets support strategic plan objectives is commendable, these financial plans and budgets do not directly support specific district priorities. In part, this results because overall district priorities are not articulated in the strategic plan (although they are reflected in the annual goals established by the superintendent). More likely, however, this shortcoming relates, at least in part, to the district's commitment to school-based management. Because how individual schools use their resources is based on the school's assessment of its needs (and how those needs relate to Campaign for Excellence goals) it is difficult to systematically capture this "grass roots" use of resources in the district's overall budget. (The fact that school improvement plans are included in the budget document, however, reflects an effort on the district's part to demonstrate how resources are used to support school level objectives.)

The budgeting component of the school improvement planning process should be strengthened to facilitate efforts to link a school's use of resources to its objectives (which, in turn, are linked to the

Campaign for Excellence goals). The approach schools currently use to specify how lottery funds will be used to achieve school improvement goals can provide a starting point for this effort.

The district could strengthen the link between its instructional priorities and its financial plans and budgets. Action Plan 2-9 sets out the steps necessary to strengthen the link between the district’s financial plans and budgets for non-instructional and support services.

Action Plan 2-9

We recommend that the district strengthen the link between its instructional priorities and its financial plans and budgets.

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Develop strategies for allocating budgeted resources to priority areas established by the board and included in the district’s strategic plan.</p> <p>Step 2. Develop and implement approaches to communicating these strategies to schools.</p> <p>Step 3. Modify existing budgetary practices to identify the funds that are being provided to support improvement efforts.</p> <p>Step 4. Require schools to articulate how budgeted resources (in addition to lottery funds) provided at the school level are being used to address school needs.</p> <p>Step 5. Assess the extent to which school level budgeting tools are adequate to strengthen the link between school improvement planning and budget.</p> <p>Step 6. Develop additional school level budgeting tools as necessary.</p> <p>Step 7. Modify budget systems and reports to facilitate the “rolling up” of school level budgetary information to the district budget in a way that will demonstrate how the overall budget supports efforts to achieve district objectives.</p> <p>Step 8. Redesign the budget process, as necessary, to reflect the modified budgeting and financial planning process.</p> <p>Step 9. Train staff from throughout the district on the modified budget process.</p> <p>Step 10. Provide schools with training on the budgeting tools they will be provided to strengthen the link between school needs, strategies for addressing those needs and budget.</p> <p>Step 11. Implement the modified budget process.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendents, Budget Director
Time Frame	December 31, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

While the district has taken a number of steps to ensure its overall priorities are reflected in how it uses its resources from an instructional perspective, little if any progress has been made with regard to linking non-instructional and support service priorities with the district’s budget. This finding is not surprising, however, because, as previously noted, district efforts to establish strategic priorities and objectives for non-instructional and support services are nascent. Clearly, linking financial plans and budgets to non-instructional goals and objectives cannot begin until a strategic process for defining those goals and objectives has been completed.

The district could strengthen the link between its priorities for non-instructional and support services and its financial plans and budgets. Action Plan 2-10 sets out the steps necessary to strengthen the link between the district’s financial plans and budgets for non-instructional and support services.

Action Plan 2-10

We recommend that the district strengthen the link between its priorities for non-instructional and support services and its financial plans and budgets.

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Using the goals and priorities for non-instructional and support services (developed as part of Action Plan 2.8) identify the key factors in each business and support area that affect the district’s ability to achieve its objectives.</p> <p>Step 2. At the same time, identify factors that are less central to the district’s ability to achieve its objectives.</p> <p>Step 3. Assess existing budgetary allocations to ensure budgeted resources have been allocated to optimize efforts to achieve objectives for non-instructional and support services.</p> <p>Step 4. Modify budget allocations as appropriate.</p> <p>Step 5. Develop a process to systematically assess budget allocations as part of the annual budget and financial planning effort.</p> <p>Step 6. Provide training to affected staff on the recommended budgetary approach.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent—Business Operations, Budget Director
Time Frame	December 31, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Because priorities for non-instructional and support operations have, historically, not been established, no process is in place for balancing educational priorities with priorities for non-instructional activities. While it is appropriate for the district to continue to place its highest priority on achieving its educational goals and objectives, at the same time its non-instructional and support needs cannot be ignored.

The district should take steps to ensure its financial plans and budgets reflect an appropriate balance between instructional and non-instructional priorities. These steps are set out in Action Plan 2-11 below.

Action Plan 2-11

We recommend that the district takes steps to ensure its financial plans and budgets reflect an appropriate balance between instructional and non-instructional priorities.

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Using the strategic plan as a starting point, incorporate as part of the district’s financial planning and budgeting process an explicit step in which instructional and non-instructional priorities are weighed and balanced.</p> <p>Step 2. Review budget allocations and priorities with the school board as part of the annual budget process.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendents, Budget Director
Time Frame	December 31, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 12: Using

When necessary, the district considers options to increase revenue.

To meet this best practice, a school district should be able to demonstrate that it has considered raising additional revenue if cost-efficiencies have been maximized yet there are still student and/or staff needs. In general, districts usually need to increase revenue in times of rapid growth or when demographics within the district change significantly. However, the ability to raise funds varies considerably among districts and is dependent on a district’s ability to levy additional taxes (if not already at the maximum allowed by law) and their current debt load. There are several options available to school districts to increase revenues. These additional revenue sources may include property taxes, sales taxes, bond issues,

impact fees, or grants in aid. Some revenue sources can be used only for operational expenses, while others can be used only for capital expenditures, and still others can be used for both.

The Sarasota County School District has pursued a broad range of approaches to increase revenue and reduce financing costs. For example, in 1997 Sarasota County voters approved an extension of a one-cent sales tax that will be effective until 2009. (25 percent of this sales tax comes to the school district and is used for capital projects. In calendar year 2003, more than \$12.4 million was received.)⁴ In addition, in March 2002, voters approved a four year operating millage of 1 mill that will increase district revenues by approximately \$28 million per year.⁵ Most recently, on December 17, 2002 at a special meeting, the board recommended that Sarasota County impose an impact fee on new residential housing; however, this impact fee must be approved by the County of Sarasota which has not done so thus far.⁶

To reduce interest expense, the district is also planning to refinance its lease revenue bonds. As a result of this refunding, existing lease revenue bonds will be converted into certificates of participation (COPS). The refunding is expected to generate savings of about \$3.2 million over the life of the bond issue (for which a final payment will be made on July 25, 2010). The district is also considering a new construction bond issue of up to \$60 million for the 2003-04 fiscal year. The school board is in the process of selecting and approving appropriate projects for this bond issue.⁷ Another, similarly sized issue is also being considered within the next two years. Moreover, to save money the district recently refinanced approximately \$3.2 million of race track revenue bonds which will reduce its interest expenditures by more than \$451,000 over the life of the bonds. (The savings generated from this refinancing is being used to support a classroom wing for Brentwood Elementary School.)

The district also has an active foundation that provides financial support for the district. In addition, the district has established a beverage contract, which generated more than \$1 million in its first year and will generate a minimum of \$250,000 per year in revenue in the future. The special revenue fund also reports revenues of more than \$15.1 million from state, federal and local grants. Other interesting approaches the district has taken to raising revenues has been to sell “naming” rights to school facilities and by allowing cell phone towers to be placed on district property (which has generated approximately \$100,000). The district has also pursued other approaches to raising revenue (e.g., selling advertising on non-school vehicles.)

⁴ The growth in sales tax revenue has average 2.5 percent over the past two fiscal years.

⁵ The revenues from this millage must be used for operating purposes and cannot be used for capital purposes. As indicated in the district’s 2002-03 budget executive summary referendum dollars will be used during the 2002-03 fiscal year to improve or preserve: reasonable class size; quality pay for teachers, music, art and honors classes; technical and dropout prevention programs, extracurricular and athletic programs; and up-to-date textbooks and technology.

⁶ The board placed a restriction on the value of the residence to which the impact fee would be applied (exempting lower cost housing) and, reportedly, this has become a problem for the County Commission.

⁷ The district is currently using .36 mills of the 2.00 mill capital projects millage levy for lease payments (debt) and is authorized to utilize up to 1.5 mills for the 2.0 mill capacity for lease payments. However, existing capital projects and expenses for debt service, equipment and maintenance consume the total revenues generated from the capital millage fund authorized by Florida Statute 1011.71(2). If the district made significant changes in how it used its 2.00 mill capital projects millage (for example, by funding some maintenance costs currently supported by capital funds through the general fund) it could, from a technical perspective increase its debt. At present, \$42.75 million per year is technically available to support debt service. Assuming that only 90 percent of these revenues were used to support debt service payments (as recommended by debt rating agents) \$38.475 million could be used to support debt service. Of this amount, \$10.3 million is currently allocated to support debt service through fiscal year 2009-10 so \$28.175 million could, theoretically be used to support debt service payments. If the district were able to borrow at three percent interest for ten years this would mean the amount of debt outstanding could be increased by more than \$240 million. (If interest costs were 3.5 percent per year \$234.3 million in additional debt could be supported). Please note that the consultants are not recommending that the district increase its debt or change the way its 2.0 mill capital projects millage is used. This data is presented for informational purposes only.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Best Practice 13: Using

The district actively involves parents and guardians in the district's decision making and activities.

School districts must actively engage parents and guardians in the activities of the district and the individual schools. The greater the parental involvement, the better most schools perform. However, in order to involve parents, they must be well informed. The extent to which schools and the district are able to reach parents is directly linked to their involvement in activities and decision making. Parents should be encouraged to participate in district and school activities and in certain decision-making processes. Some educational activities require parental involvement (e.g., development of the school improvement plans by participating on the School Advisory Councils, development of academic improvement plans (AIP), while others may just benefit from their participation (e.g., school carnivals, parent-teacher associations {PTA/PTOs} is this the appropriate punctuation for PTA/PTOs? meetings).

The Sarasota County School District effectively involves parents and guardians in the district's decision-making and activities. The district strongly promotes the values of active parental and guardian involvement through the maintenance of communication/information channels and various decision-making opportunities. The district also uses a variety of communication mechanisms to ensure a constant flow of information to parents and guardians, including a district website, individual school websites, handbooks, calendars, email, phone calls, newsletters, and the district's cable television channel. In addition, face-to-face communication takes place through school open houses, community forums, parent/teacher conferences, and open discussion sessions at the monthly board meetings. Parents and guardians are involved in key decision-making activities, including participation on School Advisory Councils, parent/teacher associations, and financial and legislative advisory committees. These opportunities give parents and guardians the chance to weigh in on school improvement plans, academic and extra-curricular priority setting, and budgetary and fundraising decisions. The district also encourages parents and guardians to become school volunteers through the Partnerships and Alliances Linking Schools (PALS) program and to serve on the PALS Community Advisory Board. Participation on the PALS Advisory Board (as well as the School Advisory Councils) gives parents the opportunity to share ideas and collaborate with external stakeholders in the educational process.

Best Practice 14: Using

The district actively involves business partners and community organizations in the district's decision making and activities.

School districts and individual schools should actively engage local and regional businesses and community groups so that these entities will participate in educational activities. Business and community groups are able to provide not only financial assistance, but also in-kind services, mentoring, and other support services that benefit students and their schools. Some of the major ways to involve businesses and community groups include direct contact and solicitation for services, participation in educational committees of service and business associations, and encouraging business and community group leaders to participate in the School Advisory Councils (SACs). Districts also should coordinate with these groups to create a fundraising foundation. These non-profit foundations can better leverage contributions and can often receive matching funds from the state or federal government for certain projects (i.e., the Take Stock in Children scholarship program). Regardless of how business partners and community groups are approached, the district and schools should work to ensure that business and community leaders have an impact on school performance. This requires more than accepting money or services from these entities.

The Sarasota County School District has been very successful in its efforts to include a broad representation of business partners and community organizations in decision making and activities. The Sarasota County Education Foundation, an independent entity, has primary responsibility for the solicitation and collection of monetary and in-kind contributions from business and community organizations, as well as the identification and collection of government matching funds. The foundation distributes these dollars and services to the schools through grants, mini grants, scholarships, and awards. In addition, through an annual grant, the Foundation funds the major events coordinated by the district's Partnerships and Alliances Linking Schools (PALS) program. Several other foundations (including the Venice Foundation, the Community Foundation, and the William and Marie Selby foundations) also provide financial resources in support of the district's priority programs and projects. Business partners have the opportunity to provide input to the district's decision-making process by serving as members of the School Advisory Councils, the Sarasota County Education Foundation, and the PALS board. The district also encourages business partners to support the district's educational process by serving as volunteers and sponsors. Through PALS, each school has an identified volunteer coordinator who is responsible for communicating to, recruiting, and training volunteers. Volunteers provide services ranging from mentoring, tutoring, and sponsorships. More than 13,000 volunteers support the school district. In addition, each school has a business coordinator who is responsible for ensuring continuous contact with the business community. In 2002, every school had at least one business partner.

3 Performance Accountability Systems

Summary

The district is not using the three Performance Accountability Best Practices. The district has performance and accountability systems for most instructional areas and for safety and security, but for most of the non-instructional areas even the rudiments of an effective performance evaluation system are not in place.

To begin using these best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its performance accountability system, the district needs to establish goals and measurable objectives for all functional areas, develop systems that evaluate performance and cost for each of these areas, and develop consistent approaches to report on the performance and cost-effectiveness of programs to parents and taxpayers.

Background

The Sarasota County School District's strategic plan—which is also referred to as the Campaign for Excellence—provides the overall direction for the district's instructional program through the year 2005. The plan, which includes explicit links to state education goals, is divided into 10 goal areas (reading, mathematics, writing, science, the arts, technology, career preparation, citizenship, safe and orderly schools, and family and community involvement). In each area, one or two goals are established that are—with minor exceptions—quantifiable and easy to measure.

While the district's approach to strategic planning for instructional activities is, for the most part, quite sound, to date the district's strategic planning efforts have focused little to no attention on establishing strategic goals and priorities for non-instructional activities. Only one of the 10 goal areas included in the current Campaign for Excellence—the goal area related to safe and orderly schools—relates to non-instructional activities. The district is taking steps to develop more goals for its non-instructional activities. One of the superintendent's priorities is to implement a strategic planning process (including accountability measures) within the Business Services Division.

Activities of particular interest

Strategic planning is difficult in any organization that strives to set an overall organizational direction while also encouraging decentralized decision-making. Perhaps most noteworthy about the district's

approach to strategic planning and goal setting for instructional activities is the way it balances the need to provide a “top down” strategic direction for the entire district with the need to demonstrate a clear commitment to school level decision-making and authority. To achieve this balance the Campaign for Excellence (that is, the strategic plan) articulates for each goal area quantifiable expectations and potential strategies that schools can use to address those expectations. Schools then select from these potential strategies to address specific school needs and incorporate these strategies into their school improvement plans. In the area of safe and orderly schools, for example, the district provides “top down” incentives to focus on district-wide initiatives by giving individual schools the opportunity to apply for mini-grants that are linked to specific district-wide initiatives. Individual schools are also required, however, to develop plans for addressing school specific safety and security issues based on school level assessments of need (as reflected in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey results for the school and an analysis of incident reports).

Conclusion and Recommendations _____

Summary of Conclusions for Performance Accountability Systems Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice?	Page No.
Goals and Measurable Objectives	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 Basic Education (K-3, 4-8, 9-12), Exceptional Student Education, Vocational/Technical Education, English for Speakers of Other Languages Education, Facilities Construction, Facilities Maintenance, Transportation, Food Services, and Safety and Security. ¹	No	3-3
	2. 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.	No	3-4
	3. 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.	Yes	3-6

¹ Each district should define those programs considered “major” within these two broad areas. At a minimum, they should include the programs listed. However, the district should have some defensible, logical criteria to identify major educational and operational programs. Criteria may include funding, number of children or full-time equivalents (FTEs) served, or state or federal requirements.

GOALS AND MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES

Best Practice 1: Not Using

The district does not have clearly stated goals and measurable objectives that can be achieved within budget for each major operational program.

Like other publicly funded entities, a school district should be held accountable for and provide information to parents and other taxpayers on the performance and cost of its major programs. To do this, school districts should have an effective accountability system that includes clearly stated goals and measurable objectives that provide performance expectations for their instructional and non-instructional programs, and mechanisms for measuring the district's progress in meeting these expectations.

Objectives should include high-level outcome measures that board members and the public can use to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the district's programs. Objectives also should include lower level interim outcome or process measures that managers can use to administer programs effectively. To assess the progress of its programs toward achieving desired results, school districts should establish standards for the progress they would like to obtain within available resources. Districts should also benchmark their performance data against past results or the results of other, comparable districts.

With regard to educational service delivery and safety and security the Sarasota County School District has set overall program goals and objectives and monitors performance against those goals and objectives by comparing the district against other districts using various benchmarks and performance measures. In particular, the district has done an effective job of ensuring that the objectives schools address in their school improvement plans are linked to overall district objectives and also assess school specific improvement needs. (In the same way, the Safe School Action Plans each school is required to develop, are linked to overall district objectives but also reflect school needs based on Youth Risk Behavior Survey results and an assessment of incidents at the school.) Moreover, systems to rigorously track performance in achieving school level instructional goals are in place and are proactively used to monitor progress and make "mid-course corrections" if goals are not being achieved. In addition, at the end of each school year, each school's School Advisory Council prepares a "Strategic Plan for Excellence Report" which reports to the school community, the district, and the public the school's performance against established goals. The board is also briefed at various times during the school year about progress in meeting selected strategic plan goals, although (as discussed in Chapter 2) no formal meeting to review the district's overall progress in meeting strategic plan objectives is held. Annual results of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey are also presented to the school board each year.

However, with regard to non-instructional programs and services (other than safety and security related activities), a systematic approach to setting goals and monitoring performance against those goals has not been established. Specific goals for key support activities (e.g., transportation, facilities maintenance, and facilities construction) have not been established and even when such goals have been established (for example, food service has set a goal of ending the year with a positive cash balance) these goals are not linked to district level strategic objectives. This finding is not surprising, of course, because until recently district strategic planning efforts have focused almost exclusively on instructional activities and therefore there have been no strategic priorities to guide non-instructional operations.

The district should expand its performance accountability system. Such a system could be developed in coordination with the district's ongoing efforts to establish a strategic planning process. Action Plan 3-1 below sets out the steps the district could take to accomplish this.

Action Plan 3-1

In coordination with the district’s ongoing efforts to establish a strategic planning process for the Business Services Division we recommend that a performance accountability system be established.

Action Needed	Step 1. Review overall district strategic plan objectives that will be articulated as part of the strategic planning process being developed by the Associate Superintendent – Business Operations. Step 2. Identify core activities performed by each non-instructional support unit that supports (either directly or indirectly) the articulated strategic priorities. Step 3. Identify other core activities that must be performed even if they do not directly or indirectly support achieving a strategic objective. Step 4. Assess the impact each core activity has on a strategic objective (high, medium, or low). Step 5. Gather information on the district’s performance for each core activity identified in Steps 2 and 3. Step 6. Determine the impact improving (or reducing) performance related to each core activity will have on the district’s overall priorities as well as on its ability to perform other necessary activities that are not priorities. Step 7. Assess the cost of improving (or reducing) performance. Step 8. Establish performance goals and objectives that can be achieved within existing resources for each core activity. Step 9. Identify appropriate benchmarks and performance measures. Step 10. Develop systems to collect performance data and monitor progress in achieving goals and objectives. Step 11. Provide training on how managers can use information to optimize performance against goals and objectives. Step 12. Develop strategies for communicating information on performance accountability to district stakeholders. Step 13. Implement the recommended performance accountability system. Step 14. Implement the recommended communication strategies. Step 15. Monitor implementation efforts and make adjustments as necessary.
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent, Associate Superintendents
Time Frame	December 31, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 2: Not Using

The district does not formally evaluate the performance and cost of its major operational programs and does not use these evaluation results to improve program performance and cost-efficiency.

School districts should periodically evaluate their operations to identify ways in which they can improve their efficiency and effectiveness and then use evaluation results to improve program performance either by implementing new strategies or by outsourcing. Districts should use performance data and other relevant information (such as the cost of a program or service, or the potential detrimental effect that poor program performance might have on students) to determine which programs to evaluate. The findings and recommendations resulting from these evaluations should be presented in writing to district administrators and, if needed, the school board and used to improve district operations. Districts should also have interim performance measures that assist in the daily administration of its programs.

With regard to instructional services and safety and security related activities the Sarasota County School District is extremely proactive in evaluating its programs and services. Indeed, a commitment to evaluating success before continuing a program is deeply embedded into the district’s overall approach to instructional management. In particular, the school improvement planning process provides the district with an annual evaluation of its school operations. The district also performs internally, or contracts externally, regular evaluation of its education programs including its “Second Chance Schools”; the Pineview School (a school for the gifted), the Oakpark School (a school for students with severe special needs), and the ESOL, Title I, and the extended school year programs. Similar evaluations are performed on programs relating to safe and orderly schools. The program evaluations include recommendations to address program effectiveness and also evaluate whether the programs are cost-effective and represent a good use of the district’s scarce resources.

Systemic program evaluations are not performed, however, for non-instructional support functions. While various state agencies review specific aspects of these programs (for example, whether counts of the number of students being transported are accurate or whether the district is making appropriate use of food commodities) these evaluations do not reflect a systemic assessment of efficiency and effectiveness.

The district should develop a process to identify potential problem areas, using performance data, program accountability systems, and other relevant information (such as the potential detrimental effects that poor program performance could have on students). When the district identifies potential problems, it should schedule formal evaluation of those areas. Action Plan 3-2 below sets out the steps the district should take to accomplish this.

Action Plan 3-2

We recommend the district establish a process for evaluating potential problem areas and opportunities for improvement relating to non-instructional areas.

Action Needed	Step 1. Use the results of the performance accountability system developed in Action Plan 3-1 to identify potential problem areas and opportunities for improvement and develop a list of these problems/opportunities. Step 2. Prioritize each problem/opportunity based on its impact of achieving district objectives and/or the opportunity for reducing costs. Step 3. Discuss each issue to determine whether any “quick fixes” for addressing the problem and/or taking advantage of the opportunity for improvement exist. Step 4. Make an order of magnitude estimate of the level of effort required to evaluate the problem and develop recommendations for improvement. Step 5. Determine whether this effort is warranted given the magnitude of the problem/opportunity for improvement. ¹ Step 6. If the potential benefits of conducting a formal evaluation outweigh the costs develop an evaluation plan (including whether the evaluation will be performed by internal staff or external consultants). ² Step 7. Implement the evaluation plan. Step 8. Document evaluation findings in a written report and prepare a plan to implement evaluation recommendations. Step 9. Review the evaluation findings, recommendations, and implementation plans with senior district managers and make modifications as appropriate. Step 10. Review the evaluation findings, recommendations, and implementation plans with the school board and make modifications as appropriate.
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent, Associate Superintendents
Time Frame	December 31, 2004

¹ If the level of effort needed to complete this formal evaluation does not seem cost-effective the issue should be “tabled” and addressed as part of the formal review of unit organization, administrative staffing, and business practices recommended to be performed once every four years.

² If the evaluation is performed by internal staff, these staff should be independent of the program they are evaluating. For example, the evaluation should not be supervised by the manager of the program being evaluated.

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 3: Using

The district reports on the performance and cost-efficiency of its instructional programs to ensure accountability to parents and other taxpayers, but does not report such information for its major non-instructional programs.

Without regular performance reports, school board members and the public may not be aware of the efficiency and effectiveness of the school district in meeting its major goals and objectives. Therefore, school districts should clearly report on the performance and cost-efficiency of its major educational and operational programs. School districts that can demonstrate their ability to manage their programs efficiently and effectively are likely to receive greater support than those who do not provide accountability information.

The Sarasota County School District communicates information on the performance of its instructional programs and success in addressing issues relating to safe and orderly schools to the school board, parents, and stakeholders. In particular the district makes effective use of School Advisory Council meetings and required presentations of School Improvement Plans (and progress in achieving School Improvement Plans goals) to keep parents and local community members informed about school performance. Regular updates on the progress of major educational programs are provided to the board and superintendent. In addition, the district makes effective use of its cable channel (Education Channel 20) to communicate progress in achieving objectives, most recently by preparing a video version of the district's annual report and broadcasting this video throughout the first half of the school year. In addition, the district uses a variety of approaches to share information from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey including workshops, presentations, meetings with community groups, and community forums.

However, the district does not have an effective reporting process or system of reporting the performance of its major non-instructional programs. The district has not developed a consistent method of communicating information relating to all non-instructional functions and services. Food service managers make a concerted effort to communicate information on the food and nutrition program and actively solicit feedback from parents and students. Although this information is presented periodically at board meetings, the district does relatively little else to make it available to the public.

To improve accountability to parents, taxpayers, and other stakeholders, we recommend that the district develop more consistent strategies of communicating the performance results of its non-instructional activities. These communication strategies should be incorporated into, and become an integral part of, the district's overall performance accountability system. For its non-instructional programs, the district should use communication strategies similar to those used by the instructional programs. Action Plan 3-1 outlines the steps that should be taken to expand the district's performance accountability system for non-instructional activities. Specifically, step 12 calls for developing strategies for communicating performance information to stakeholders, which is the purpose of this best practice.

4

Educational Service Delivery

Summary

The Sarasota County School District is using 11 of the 12 Educational Service Delivery Best Practices. The district has developed a strong system of school accountability that is grounded in the ongoing use of students' academic and nonacademic performance data to drive instructional design and delivery and teacher professional development. The school improvement planning process ensures the needs of all students are addressed and the effectiveness of plans is assessed and modified on an ongoing basis. The district has developed, and made easily accessible to principals and teachers, data management tools that support schools in disaggregating and analyzing school, class, and individual student performance data. The district also provides an array of effective support to serve students with a range of needs including Exceptional Student Education (ESE) services, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services, Title I support, alternative school programs, and academic remediation.

To meet the remaining best practice standard and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its educational service delivery program, the district needs to complete a comprehensive review of the Sarasota County Technical Institute (SCTI) to create an effective and cost-efficient program responsive to the needs of the district, develop a system to regularly assess the programs provided through SCTI to ensure course offerings are adjusted based on cost-efficiency and effectiveness, and evaluate secondary career development programs to determine programming needs and to better coordinate offerings among schools.

Background

The Sarasota County School District served 37,048 students during the 2001-02 school year. The ethnic breakdown of these students was 78% white, non-Hispanic, 9.6% black, non-Hispanic, 8.3% Hispanic, 2.5% multiracial, 1.5% Asian/Pacific Islander and less than 1% American Indian/Alaskan native. The district has 46 schools, including 19 elementary schools, five middle schools, one K-8, five high schools, two exceptional student education schools, three charter schools, one adult school, one technical school, and nine alternative education schools. For Fiscal Year 2001-02, the operating costs in the district were \$5,805 per pupil (\$625 more per pupil than the state's average operating cost of \$5,180 per pupil).

As Exhibit 4-1 shows, the Sarasota County School District has experienced moderate student enrollment growth over the past five years. This growth has resulted in the need to expand the capacity at many district schools and build new schools. The district also has an increasing percentage of students served

in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program and the percentage of students who are eligible free or reduced priced lunch is consistent with its peer districts and lower than the state average.

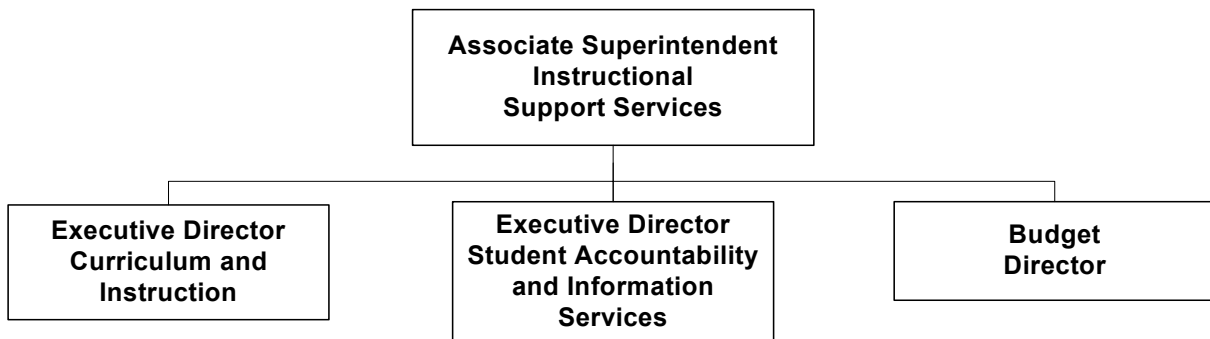
**Exhibit 4-1
The Sarasota County School District Has Experienced Moderate Student Growth in Student Enrollment Over the Past Five Years**

District	Total Students	Percentage Increase, 1997-2001	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)	Percentage Eligible for Free or Reduce Price Lunch
Charlotte	17,302	8%	1%	41%
Leon	31,802	6%	1%	30%
Manatee	38,250	17%	8%	36%
Martin	16,790	12%	10%	31%
Santa Rosa	23,228	8%	<1%	32%
Sarasota	37,048	14%	7%	34%
State	2,431,521	9%	8%	44%

Sources: DOE Florida School Indicators Report 2002 and DOE LEA Profile 2002.

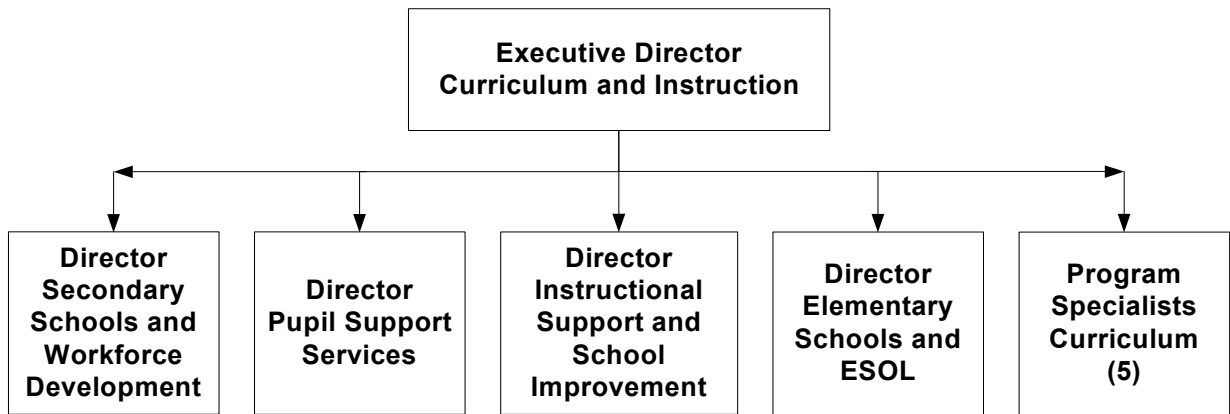
The Sarasota County School District’s associate superintendent for instructional support services is responsible for three units- curriculum and instruction, student accountability and information services, and budget. Exhibit 4-2 shows that three administrators report directly to the associate superintendent. The executive director- curriculum and instruction supervises the departments that provide instructional and support services to the district’s schools. These services include elementary schools and English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL), secondary schools and work force development, pupil support services, curriculum development, and instructional support and school improvement. As Exhibit 4-3 shows, four administrators report directly to the executive director. The executive director also supervises five program specialists in curriculum.

**Exhibit 4-2
Three District Units Report to the Associate Superintendent—
Instructional Support Services**



Source: Sarasota County School District.

**Exhibit 4-3
Five District Departments Perform the
District Level Educational Service Delivery Functions**



Source: Sarasota County School District.

The Sarasota County School District serves students through several types of programs. These include the K-12 basic education program, the Exceptional Student Education program (ESE), at-risk programs, accelerated programs, and vocational and adult education programs.

K-12 Basic Education. Basic education refers to a wide array of curriculum and instruction offered to students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. In 1996, the State Board of Education approved the Sunshine State Standards (SSS) for student achievement in basic education. These standards apply to seven subject areas and are divided among four separate grade clusters (PreK-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12). The grade division provides flexibility to school districts in designing curricula that are based on local needs. In language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, the Sunshine State Standards are further defined to include grade-level expectations that are the basis for the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

The purpose of the FCAT is to assess achievement of the Sunshine State Standards (SSS) in reading, mathematics, and writing. The FCAT also includes a norm-referenced test (NRT), which reports the performance of Florida students compared to students nationwide. Currently, students in grades 3 to 10 take the FCAT (SSS) and FCAT (NRT) reading and mathematics tests. Students in grades 4, 8, and 10 take the FCAT Writing Test.

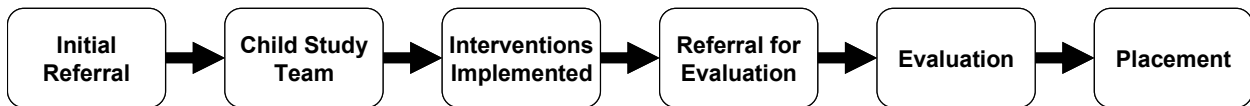
Exceptional Student Education (ESE). Exceptional Student Education is designed for students who meet specific federal and state criteria. In Florida, an “exceptional student” is a student with disabilities or a student who is gifted and is enrolled in (or eligible for enrollment in) a district public school. School districts must provide students with disabilities and students who are gifted the opportunity to receive a free appropriate public education that will maximize their learning. Schools use a variety of strategies, such as modifying schedules, changing teachers, or varying instructional techniques to help ESE students meet their potential and succeed in the classroom. Districts are also responsible for identifying students who are eligible for ESE programs and provide special education programs and related services to meet the individual needs of those students.

The percentage of Sarasota County School District students identified and served in the district’s ESE program (26%) is higher than all of its peers. Seventeen percent of the district’s students (consistent with

the peer districts) have disabilities while 9% are gifted (a higher percentage than in peer districts). The high percentage of gifted students can be attributed to the district's center school for gifted students, which attracts students to the district.

Teachers, parents, or guidance counselors begin the ESE process by referring students for assessment. Child study teams (comprising the assistant principal, teachers, psychologist, social worker, guidance counselor, and ESE liaison) initially screen students at the school level by reviewing the case, assessing the student, and determining appropriate interventions to help the student succeed. School personnel then implement these interventions over the course of six to nine weeks. If the child study team finds that these attempts prove unsuccessful, the team refers the student to a school psychologist for evaluation. The results of this evaluation determine the student's ESE status. If the student requires ESE services, the child study team meets to decide the most appropriate placement for the student. Exhibit 4-4 illustrates this process.

Exhibit 4-4
The Child Study Team Referral Process Has Six Key Steps



Source: Sarasota County School District.

At-Risk Programs. The Sarasota County School District provides several programs for students who need academic or social skills interventions to assist them in being successful including Title I, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), intervention assistance programs, and alternative education programs. Title I provides schools with additional funds for ancillary support services and additional instructional staff. These programs support general education teachers and support service staff in providing additional support to students who need assistance by providing instruction that reinforces the curriculum and helps students with deficient skills. Title I is funded by both federal and state sources and provides services to schools with high concentrations of poverty as determined by the number of students who receive free or reduced lunch. For a school to qualify for school-wide Title I services, 50% or more of its students must meet the criteria for free or reduced lunch. Eight of the district's schools qualify for school-wide Title I programs.

As noted earlier, the percentage of students in the district's ESOL program has increased over the past five years. The ESOL program currently serves seven percent of the student population. The district uses a variety of instructional approaches to educate ESOL students, based on the number and needs of the ESOL students served at each school site. School administrators identify ESOL students based on the results of the home language survey administered through the ESOL liaison at the school. ESOL liaisons are responsible for ensuring that students progress and that individual needs are met. To exit the program, students must achieve specific English literacy criteria in reading and writing.

The district also offers several alternative education programs. It contracts with a number of community agencies to provide seven "Second Chance School" programs through which students with discipline problems are placed in alternative settings. Upon entrance to these programs, students, with the assistance of sending and receiving school teams, establish specific behavioral and academic goals and are evaluated, based on their individual contract, on their progress toward meeting these goals. The ultimate goal of these programs is to either complete the program or return to a local middle or high school. In another alternative program, CYESIS (named for the Greek word for pregnancy), the district provides instruction in a modified format for middle and high school students who are either pregnant or

parents of young children. The CYESIS Program focuses on providing a comprehensive educational program, aligned with the district's graduation requirements and Sunshine State Standards while coordinating comprehensive wrap-around services for expectant mothers, young parents and their children.

Accelerated Programs. The Sarasota County School District provides students several accelerated opportunities, including Advanced Placement (AP), Dual Enrollment, an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program, honors classes, early admission to postsecondary education, and access to the Florida Virtual School.

Dual Enrollment Programs allow high school students to enroll in courses for which they can receive both high school and college credit. These courses can be academic courses that count toward an associate or baccalaureate degree or vocational courses that count toward meeting vocational certificate requirements. Manatee Community College instructors teach dual enrollment classes at Venice High School and students from other district high schools may enroll in classes at a Manatee Community College campus.

The Advanced Placement program allows high-achieving and self-motivated students in grades 11 and 12 to enroll in advanced courses of study and earn college credit and/or advanced placement credit while still enrolled in high school. The district offers a range of AP courses across all curriculum areas. During the 2001-02 school year, 605 students were enrolled in AP courses at the high school level. This accounts for an increase of student participation of 31.8% since 1998, which compares favorably with peer districts.

The International Baccalaureate (IB) program is a course of study that provides an advanced level of high school coursework based on a specific curriculum designed to allow students to meet the requirements of various international universities. This program is located at Riverview High School.

Honors classes are offered at district high schools at all grade levels across the core academic areas. Additionally, honors academies, each with a particular career focus, are housed at high schools across the district. Examples of these honors academies include the Graphics Art Academy at Venice High School and the Fine and Performing Arts Academy at Booker High School.

Sarasota County students may also take advanced courses through the Florida Virtual School. Students who enroll in this on-line school take classes for graduation credit over the Internet and are allowed to learn at their own pace. Participating students do not physically meet as a group but access coursework over the Internet, using email, fax machines, and telephones to communicate with teachers and other students. School-based teachers or district administrators proctor required exams.

Vocational and Adult Education. The district's secondary and postsecondary vocational and technical education program, located at the Sarasota County Technical Institute (SCTI) served approximately 7,442 secondary and post-secondary students during the 2001-02 school year. Approximately 60% of enrolled students are adult learners. SCTI integrates 11th and 12th grade secondary students and postsecondary students in programs such as culinary arts, automotive and marine technologies, horticulture, construction technologies, telecommunications, Cisco, computer repair, business technology, medical machine transcription, certified nursing assistant, and home health aide. Through the adult general education program, the district offers instruction to individuals who do not have a high school diploma (or who test below the ninth grade level), whether or not they are enrolled in a regular day school. This program serves adult limited English proficient (LEP) students and a range of community members through the continuing education enrichment classes. The district enrolled 10,809 adult education students in 2001-02.

Districts that provide postsecondary vocational instruction can receive additional funding through the Workforce Development Education Program. The state funds postsecondary vocational programs using a

formula based on both need and performance. Each district receives 85% of its previous year's appropriation as a base allocation. The remaining amount, up to 15%, is based on how well a district performs on established measures such as the level of student skills, program completion, and student placement in the workforce. Districts use these funds to maintain or enhance their postsecondary vocational and technical programs.

Student Support Services. The district's Student Services Department provides psychological services, social work services, and guidance/counseling services to district students. The district also collaborates with the Sarasota County Department of Health and local hospitals to provide students with school health services. This partnership provides financial support for a fulltime health aide in each school as well as a team of registered nurses who provide support, oversight of services, and training to all schools. The objective of these student support services is to provide support outside of the classroom, which helps students to overcome problems that could interfere with their academic success and broadens their education experience. A more detailed description of student support services appears later in this chapter.

Activities of particular interest

Some school districts have developed programs that are especially noteworthy and can serve as a model for other school districts to follow. In the Sarasota County School District, these include the Pineview School and the CYESIS Program.

Pineview School. Pineview School, established in 1969 is one of the only public center-based schools serving intellectually gifted and motivated students (in grades two through 12) in the country. Pineview offers an accelerated curriculum at a minimum of one grade level ahead of the standard state and district curriculum and offers additional self-pacing, independent study, and ungraded classes. Students at Pineview are able to access curriculum at whatever level meets their cognitive and achievement needs. Many children are enrolled in courses that cross grade levels. Additional support is provided for students with special needs to ensure their success in the program. The school offers a range of honors classes at all levels across all academic areas and 24 advanced placement course offerings for 11th and 12th grade students. The success of this school is evidenced by its 100% graduation rate, high FCAT performance and, for the past two years, the highest number of National Merit Scholars of any public or private school in Florida.

CYESIS Program. The district established the CYESIS Program in 1978, in collaboration with community service agencies and the local health department, to provide an educational program for pregnant teens and young parents. The goal of the program is to strengthen young families and enable students to become self-sustaining members of the community. The CYESIS Program is a nationally recognized model, which operates in partnership with a range of community agencies including Sarasota County Child Protection Services, Sarasota Memorial Hospital, Forty Carrots Parenting Center, Sarasota County Health Department, the Child Development Center, and the Reading Mentor Program. Students remain in school, have babies of adequate birth weight, and receive ancillary support services, including quality infant/toddler care and preschool education for their children through graduation. The school's curriculum infuses functional living skills and childcare skills into the district's core middle and high school program. Students who participate in this program are required to not only complete standard course requirements but also complete a childcare course, which includes time providing assistance in the infant/toddler/preschool program. The district provides transportation and food services to both students and their children. The program also provides nurses to assist students in meeting their and their children's health needs and social services to support students in accessing community services. The availability of these services within the school program keeps students in school. With the opening of

Northport High School, the district opened a satellite CYESIS program to support students who live in the southernmost part of the county so they can attend school closer to home.

Other Activities of Interest. The district has developed several noteworthy programs to meet the needs of students who are performing below district and state averages. Booker Middle School has developed a comprehensive reading program to address the needs of students who require intensive reading instruction. This program has been successful in increasing the reading performance of Booker students. Tuttle Elementary School and Emma Booker Elementary School have developed strong intervention assistance teams to provide students and classroom teachers with proactive support to address students specialized needs. Members of the team, including guidance, social worker and psychology professionals, not only provide consultation to classroom teachers and hands-on support in the classroom but also provide study skills classes and specialized small group remedial instruction. Student performance data indicates these proactive interventions have been successful in increasing student performance and decreasing referrals to special education.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Conclusions for Educational Service Delivery Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice?	Page No.
Effective and Efficient Instructional Programs	1. District administrators use both academic and nonacademic data to guide them in their decision making about improving K-12 education programs.	Yes	4-9
	2. The district provides effective and efficient Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs for students with disabilities and students who are gifted.	Yes	4-10
	3. The district provides effective and efficient programs to meet the needs of at-risk students (including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Title I, and alternative education).	Yes	4-12
	4. The district provides an appropriate range of accelerated programs (such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Enrollment).	Yes	4-13
	5. The district provides effective and efficient workforce development programs (such as vocational-technical, adult basic education, and adult high school programs).	No	4-13
	6. The district ensures that schools use effective planning and evaluation processes to improve student outcomes, including school improvement plans and other data driven processes such as the Sterling process.	Yes	4-16
	7. The district ensures effective progression of students from kindergarten through grade 12 that maximizes student mastery of the Sunshine State Standards and prepares students for work and continued education.	Yes	4-17
	8. The district's organizational structure and staffing of educational programs minimizes administrative layers and processes.	Yes	4-18
Effective and Efficient Instructional Support	9. The district ensures that students and teachers have sufficient current textbooks and other instructional materials available to support instruction in core subjects and to meet the needs of teachers and students.	Yes	4-19
	10. The district has sufficient school library or media centers to support instruction.	Yes	4-20
	11. The district utilizes instructional technology in the classroom to enhance curriculum and improve student achievement.	Yes	4-20
	12. The district provides necessary support services (guidance counseling, psychological, social work, and health) to meet student needs and to ensure students are able to learn.	Yes	4-21

EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

Best Practice 1: Using

District administrators use both academic and nonacademic data to guide them in their decision making about improving K-12 education programs.

Effective school districts use academic and nonacademic data to drive decisions related to their instructional programs and to improve the performance of all students. To meet this best practice, districts should collect, analyze, and use data regularly to monitor the performance of its schools and subgroups of students, identify areas requiring intervention strategies, and evaluate the effectiveness of intervention strategies. In addition to performing well or showing steady improvement, an effective district uses academic and nonacademic data to establish district goals and priorities, target interventions, and allocate resources.

The Sarasota County School District has strong systems for utilizing both academic and nonacademic data to drive change and improve instruction at the district, school, classroom, and individual student level. The Equip data system the district has developed provides each school disaggregated data on student performance on the FCAT, analyzed by sex, race, socio-economic status (SES), exceptional student education (ESE) status, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) status. This data includes the school's performance at each grade level and provides benchmarks to other district schools and to the state. Schools also utilize data from both paper and technology based formal and informal assessments throughout the school year to evaluate student performance and make shifts in instruction where needed. In addition, the district's Test Trakker system provides principals and teachers access to all student data, from both Equip and the AS-400, sorted by district, school, class grouping and individual student and integrates this information with school-based data from the Successmaker and Compass Learning Systems (Successmaker and Compass Learning Systems are technology based instructional courseware that is aligned with state and district benchmarks and standards and provide computer based instruction and detailed analysis of individual student performance in relationship to these benchmarks and standards).

Additionally, schools receive comprehensive disaggregated nonacademic data reports from state databases and the District's AS-400 system on attendance, dropout rates, retention rates, and graduation rates. The district and individual schools also analyze the results of school climate surveys and risk behavior surveys to set objectives related to safety and parent participation and to determine school's strengths and areas of concerns in developing strategies to address other goal areas. At both the school and district levels this data is monitored and analyzed throughout the school year both to make midcourse adjustments in programming, services and resource allocation and to begin planning for the next school year

Compared to the state and peer districts the students in the Sarasota County School District score well on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). A majority of the district's students score at a Level 3 or above. Students performing at Level 1 and 2 have little success with the challenging content of the Sunshine State Standards. Students performing at Level 5 have success with the most challenging content of the Sunshine State Standards (see Exhibit 4-5).

Exhibit 4-5

Students of the Sarasota County School District Score Well on the FCAT

District	FCAT Reading—Percentage of Students Scoring Level 3 or Higher							
	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10
Santa Rosa	77%	71%	69%	72%	70%	64%	43%	48%
Martin	71%	67%	60%	63%	62%	57%	40%	40%
Leon	70%	67%	66%	64%	63%	57%	43%	47%
Sarasota	70%	67%	65%	60%	60%	55%	39%	46%
Charlotte	66%	64%	62%	59%	57%	54%	39%	39%
Manatee	61%	54%	59%	58%	52%	46%	29%	37%
State	60%	55%	53%	51%	50%	45%	29%	36%

District	FCAT Math—Percentage of Students Scoring Level 3 or Higher							
	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10
Santa Rosa	75%	66%	58%	56%	66%	73%	68%	77%
Martin	73%	63%	58%	51%	61%	63%	60%	68%
Sarasota	72%	64%	61%	52%	59%	67%	62%	71%
Leon	71%	64%	56%	52%	62%	66%	65%	70%
Charlotte	67%	56%	57%	51%	60%	66%	64%	67%
Manatee	56%	48%	48%	43%	47%	57%	52%	63%
State	59%	51%	48%	43%	47%	53%	47%	60%

Source: Florida Department of Education, 2002 FCAT.

Relatively high FCAT scores translate into a large proportion of the schools in the district earning an “A” grade. Exhibit 4-6 compares Sarasota’s most recent school grades with those of its peer districts. The Sarasota County School District has the highest percentage of “A” schools. Almost three out of four schools received an “A” in 2002.

Exhibit 4-6

The Sarasota County School District Had the Largest Percentage of “A” Schools Compared to Peer Districts

District	Number of Schools Receiving Grades	Percentage of “A” Schools	Percentage of “B” Schools	Percentage of “C” Schools
Sarasota	32	72%	13%	13%
Charlotte	17	71%	24%	6%
Leon	41	54%	5%	29%
Manatee	43	37%	28%	23%
Martin	17	59%	24%	12%
Santa Rosa	25	68%	28%	4%

Source: Florida Department of Education, 2001-02.

Best Practice 2: Using

The district provides effective and efficient Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs for students with disabilities and students who are gifted.

Under federal and state law, school districts must provide appropriate services designed to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities and students who are gifted. To meet this best practice, school districts should identify and place students who require Exceptional Student Education (ESE) services in

a timely manner and ensure access of minority students to the gifted program. To increase student success, districts should promote parent involvement and ensure that teachers receive adequate support and training. Districts should also periodically assess the needs and progress of ESE students and make adjustments as needed to ensure that students perform to their capacity.

The Sarasota County School District provides effective and efficient quality education services in compliance with all state and federal requirements to Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students with special education and/or gifted education needs. Evaluation of students for special education services occurs within sixty days 95.6% of the time. The district also ensures Individual Education Plans (IEP) to support special education students occur within thirty days of evaluation completion with the full involvement of the school team and parents.

A range of support models exist including full inclusion, resource, self-contained special education classrooms, pull-out gifted programs, cluster programs for low-incidence special education students, gifted cluster programs, self-contained gifted classrooms, and two center programs—one for low incidence special education students and one for gifted students. Within these models, the district provides ancillary services as specified in the IEP. The district has an effective system in place to obtain reimbursement for these ancillary services for Medicaid eligible students and for the administrative claims and has increased Medicaid revenue by 35% over the past three years. In 2001, the district received a total of \$522,552 for administrative claiming and direct services provided to students. The district has maximized its Medicaid reimbursement through renegotiating the fee paid for individual student claim processing and by participation in the Seminole County Administrative Claim Medicaid consortium.

Students in self-contained programs are integrated into the school milieu and mainstreamed in accordance with their Individual Education Plans (IEP). The district has developed a strong professional development program to support regular and special education teachers in analyzing student performance data and then, based on that analysis, to modify instruction and adapt curriculum materials to promote the achievement of students with the range of special education needs. ESE program specialists, psychologists, and social workers provide additional disability specific consultation to school teams to assist them in helping students maximize their potential. As demonstrated in Exhibit 4-7, disabled ESE students in Sarasota County School District compare well with similar students from peer districts on performance on the FCAT assessments.

ESE parents are actively involved in the development and implementation of their children’s instructional programs. The ESE Parent Advisory Committee works with the district to increase parent involvement, plan parent training and solicit input from parents.

**Exhibit 4-7
Disabled ESE Students in Sarasota County School District Compare Well with Similar Students in Peer Districts on Scoring Achievement Level 3 or Above on the FCAT**

District	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 8		Grade 10	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Sarasota	32%	25%	31%	35%	17%	43%
Leon	38%	34%	31%	39%	18%	37%
Martin	31%	32%	26%	34%	21%	33%
Santa Rosa	38%	30%	24%	34%	13%	31%
Charlotte	31%	19%	19%	27%	6%	19%
Manatee	28%	23%	13%	21%	7%	15%

Source: Florida Department of Education, 2002 LEA Profiles.

Best Practice 3: Using

The district provides effective and efficient programs to meet the needs of at-risk students including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Title I, and alternative education.¹

Students at risk for failing or falling behind grade level often have significant barriers to learning, and therefore, need various specialized services and programs to address these barriers and to be academically successful. School districts should have programs in place to meet the diverse needs of these students, especially those students who need academic and/or social skills interventions to assist them to perform well. To meet this best practice, school districts should periodically assess the academic and social needs of their students and use this information to identify or develop programs to meet those needs. To increase student success, districts should promote parent involvement and provide teachers adequate training and support. Districts should also periodically assess the progress of at-risk students adjusting programs as needed to ensure that students perform to their capacity.

Students who are at-risk in the Sarasota County School District are supported through effective English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) programs, Title I programs, intervention assistance programs and alternative education programs. These programs provide at-risk students services to increase their academic achievement and to enhance their ability to be successful in a regular education setting. (The performance of district students supported through these programs is high when compared to students in peer districts from similar programs.) The district uses analysis of data, ongoing student assessment results, as well as professional development and supplementary instructional materials to assist students and teachers in remediating difficulties and in narrowing achievement gaps. The intervention assistance team process brings together support staff, general education teachers, school administrators, parents and other curriculum specialists to develop strategies that support students experiencing difficulties or who need extra support. Parental involvement is a key component of the district's at-risk programming and parents are viewed as critical to the success of these programs in improving student achievement.

District schools that receive Title I support plan the utilization of these funds through the school improvement planning process, using disaggregated student performance data to determine the areas of greatest support need. Based on this assessment Title I funds are used for a variety of purposes including providing support for reduced class sizes, to purchase supplementary instructional materials, to support additional professional development, to provide parent education and training, and to provide additional support services to assist both students and their families.

ESOL services are provided to eligible students in their local schools and are supported by staff designated as ESOL liaisons and teachers with ESOL endorsement. The district has comprehensive systems in place for identification, evaluation, and plan development for students with ESOL needs, and these systems comply with all state requirements.

At-risk students who demonstrate repeated discipline problems, have repeated suspensions, or meet the district's criteria for expulsion are placed in "Second Chance Schools". These schools are privately contracted educational programs that specialize in providing alternative education services in small settings incorporating a range of therapeutic interventions to promote student success. Intervention models include drug and alcohol education and/or treatment, mental health services, intensive individual counseling, outdoor education, and on-the-job training. Through a comprehensive referral process, placement in the most appropriate educational and treatment program occurs. These programs include behavioral contracting with both the students and their parents and the development of both a program plan and criteria for return to a district secondary school.

¹ These are students who need academic and/or social skills interventions to assist them to perform to their capacity.

Best Practice 4: Using

The district provides an appropriate range of accelerated programs (such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Enrollment).

Highly motivated and academically talented high school students need educational challenges and opportunities to accelerate their learning and meet their academic potential. To meet the needs of these students, districts should provide an appropriate number and type of accelerated programs, such as advanced placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Enrollment. Districts should periodically assess the needs of their highly motivated and academically talented high school students and use this information to identify and develop accelerated programs to meet those needs. Districts should ensure that accelerated programs are made accessible to all eligible students and that teachers, parents, and students are aware of such opportunities. To increase student success, districts should ensure that teachers receive adequate support and training. Districts should also take advantage of incentives and technical assistance offered through the Florida Department of Education and the College Board.

The Sarasota County School District provides a wide array of accelerated programs including an International Baccalaureate program at Riverview High School, a comprehensive school for gifted students (Pineview), a range of gifted programs, advanced placement courses at all district high schools, dual enrollment programs with Manatee Community College, and a range of magnet/choice programs at district high schools. As part of the district's small learning community initiative, academies are being developed at all district high schools. These academies will include advanced coursework designed to meet the needs of students in targeted career pathways. A review of district data indicates the number of students enrolled in accelerated programs has increased by 32% over the past five years. Accelerated program options exist in every high school and are geared to meet a wide range of student's interests and career goals, including performing arts, marine science, graphic design, and traditional academic areas

Best Practice 5: Not Using

While the district provides effective and efficient adult community education programs, the district does not provide effective and efficient secondary and postsecondary vocational/technical and career development programs.

Students who do not plan to attend college immediately after high school need to enhance their ability to be economically self-sufficient. Many of these students benefit greatly from workforce development programs, such as career and technical education, which help them to attain the skills that will need to become or remain employed. These programs are designed to provide training to meet local and state workforce needs and to help Florida compete in a global economy by building a broadly based, highly skilled, more productive workforce. The programs also provide a broad variety of services including literacy training, English language skills, and/or attainment of high school diploma for adults who need these skills to enter the labor market. Districts should have workforce development programs in place that meet the needs of business and industry in their areas, including high skills/high wages occupations as well as occupations that are in critical demand by the community. Districts should periodically assess workforce development program offerings to ensure that needed programs and newly emerging occupations are addressed. Districts should also provide adult basic education programs that reach all sectors of the population and meet the needs of students at all literacy levels. To assess student success and improve programs, districts should monitor changes in performance funding, student completion, and job placement.

The Sarasota County School District's work development program includes Adult and Community Education (ACE), Sarasota County Technical Institute (SCTI), and the district's secondary career development program. These programs provide workforce development opportunities at numerous settings across the county and provide a range of services to residents from high school through retirement age. (Of particular note is the very successful Adult and Community Education program. The

performance on the General Education Diploma (GED) test of students who participate in this program outstrips state and national averages by a significant margin.)

Though the district offers a number of excellent workforce development programs, there is inconsistency in the coordination and cost-effectiveness of the programs offered through the three components of the workforce development program (e.g., ACE, SCTI, and the secondary career development program). The ACE program operates adult basic education programs, the adult high school program, and the continuing education enrichment program. These programs serve over 10,000 residents and are offered in a variety of settings, from the adult high school to assisted living facilities, throughout the district based on student need and demand. The programs are effectively managed in part because managers use an ongoing assessment of program outcomes, program enrollment, literacy completion points (LCP), occupational completion points (OCPs) and state FETPIP data to drive decision-making regarding program offerings, program locations and program content.

SCTI provides secondary and postsecondary vocational/technical programs for over 6,000 students participating at some point throughout a school year. The enrollment of postsecondary students has been declining over the past three years. Total postsecondary enrollment peaked in the 2000-01 school year at 5,744 students, with a decline to 4,466 in 2001-02, and 2,965 in 2002-03. The school operates a number of programs that have been recognized as highly successful, especially in the areas of health care and information technologies. Other programs, including horticulture, agribusiness, and construction technologies, show a long pattern of under-enrollment (courses offered with a number of students that does not support the operating costs) yet no action has been taken to either eliminate these programs or increase their enrollment. Data indicates that many of these courses operated with as few as four students enrolled for a given grading period. Though the district and state provide the school detailed data related to enrollment and student outcomes, SCTI has had neither the systems nor the will to utilize this information to adjust course offerings. As a result, many programs and courses that have been under-enrolled for several years. While a plethora of data existed related to technical/vocational program enrollment and school/community needs, school managers have in the past hesitated to eliminate longstanding programs and to adjust program offerings in response to this data. In addition, little coordination with programs offered within the district's comprehensive high schools occurs, resulting in a duplication of program offerings between SCTI and several schools.

The district is in the process of restructuring the operation of career/technical education programs in the district and efforts are underway to evaluate the present and future role of SCTI and the current and future workforce development needs of Sarasota County students and employers. Additionally the district is embarking on an evaluation of the career preparation programs offered throughout district schools and developing a structure to coordinate course offerings to both increase access to quality career preparation programs for Sarasota students as well as to improve the efficient use of district fiscal resources.

The district should conduct a comprehensive review of the Sarasota County Technical Institute (SCTI) to create an effective and cost-efficient program responsive to the needs of the district, which would reduce duplication. By reducing duplication, the district could potentially increase revenue and decrease costs associated with the operation of SCTI. In addition to reducing duplication, the district could develop a system to regularly assess the programs provided through SCTI to ensure course offerings are adjusted based on cost-efficiency and effectiveness, which could enable the district to potentially increase tuition revenue and decrease expenditures.

Action Plan 4-1

We recommend that district complete a comprehensive review of the Sarasota County Technical Institute (SCTI) to create an effective and cost-efficient program responsive to the needs of the district.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Evaluate enrollment data in each SCTI course offering for the past three years.
	Step 2.	Determine courses that have been at or above enrollment capacity.
	Step 3.	Determine if any current courses have had identified waiting lists.
	Step 4.	Determine the per course cost based on staffing and operating costs.
	Step 5.	Determine an acceptable per pupil cost for providing each course at SCTI.
	Step 6.	Determine the minimum enrollment required (based on type of course, teaching stations available for that type of course and district and state funding) for each course.
	Step 7.	Based on enrollment and course cost, determine current cost per pupil for each course.
	Step 8.	Based on all of the above, determine courses where enrollments have and have not supported staffing and operating costs.
	Step 9.	Use this data to determine those courses whose enrollments have not supported operating costs and should be discontinued or should have a short term recruitment plan developed to increase enrollment before opting to discontinue.
	Step 10.	Use this data to determine those courses whose enrollments and waiting lists indicate the need for additional sessions.
	Step 11.	Revise course offerings and staffing based on the above.

Who Is Responsible:	Director of Secondary Schools and Workforce Development
Time Frame	July 2003-July 2004

Action Plan 4-2

We recommend that district develop a system to regularly assess the programs provided through SCTI to ensure course offerings are adjusted based on cost-efficiency and effectiveness.

Action Needed	Step 1.	When developing budget and program plan for the school year, evaluate student enrollment and performance data for each program and course provided at SCTI for the current and previous school year.
	Step 2.	Determine courses and programs where enrollment does not support and has not supported the costs associated with providing the course or program.
	Step 3.	Determine courses and programs where demand for slots has exceeded availability.
	Step 4.	For under enrolled courses and programs that the school wants to continue to offer, develop a short term recruitment plan designed to increase course and program enrollment within one year.
	Step 5.	Develop new course and program schedule based on data analysis and review.
	Step 6.	Determine staffing needed to offer scheduled courses and programs.
	Step 7.	Repeat this process each semester.

Who Is Responsible:	Director of Secondary Schools and Workforce Development
Time Frame	July 2004

The technical and vocational programs offered throughout the district, at the comprehensive high schools and SCTI, are not well coordinated, and result in duplication of programs and in most high school a lack of sufficient career development opportunities. One example of this duplication is in the area of business education, where several high schools offer a program and a duplicate program is provided at SCTI. As

budget cuts were implemented over the past five years, high school principals and school advisory councils, in an attempt to preserve the core academic curriculum, made cuts in career development programs and services offered. This has resulted in the elimination of many career development opportunities at the high schools for students who do not aspire to attend college. The district recently received a federal grant to implement small learning communities in their comprehensive high schools. As part of its effort to implement this program, which involves dividing each high school into small academies based on a specific career pathway, the district is working towards coordinating these programs across all schools to provide a broad range of offerings across schools and prevent duplication.

The district should evaluate its secondary career development programs to determine programming needs and to coordinate offerings among schools.

Action Plan 4-3

We recommend that the district evaluate its secondary career development programs to determine programming needs and to coordinate offerings among schools.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop a comprehensive matrix (to include specific focus of each program, number of courses offered and number of teachers assigned to each program) of specific career/technical programs offered at each comprehensive high school and SCTI.
	Step 2.	Determine, in collaboration with high school teams and SCTI Director, which programs would be most cost-effectively operated at SCTI rather than across the district focusing on offering most specialized, highly technical programs at SCTI.
	Step 3.	Determine where any of high school programs are under-enrolled, overcapacity, or have waiting lists.
	Step 4.	Determine where similar programs are offered in more than one setting and one or more program is below capacity.
	Step 5.	Based on each schools' strategic plan, determine what programs each school is planning based on small learning communities and other initiatives.
	Step 6.	Review data gathered above, school strategic plans, and district strategic plan and come to agreement regarding the specific career/technical programs for each high school and the specific capacity of each program.
	Step 7.	Determine, based on district demography, where discrepancies exist in providing all students access to each type of career/technical program.
	Step 8.	Make adjustments in projected offerings at each high school to ensure equal access in north and south areas of district and to ensure optimal program capacity.
	Step 9.	Adjust staffing and course offerings at each high school and SCTI as required.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Secondary Schools and Workforce Development	
Time Frame	July 2004	

Best Practice 6: Using

The district ensures that schools use effective planning and evaluation processes to improve student outcomes, including school improvement plans and other data driven processes such as the Sterling process.

High-performing districts and schools use effective processes to assess and improve student outcomes. Florida law requires that each district school have a school improvement plan (SIP) that establishes the school's specific goals, objectives, and strategies to meet the educational needs of their students. Districts should ensure that all schools effectively plan and evaluate programs and strategies to improve student outcomes. Districts should ensure that each school's improvement plan addresses the needs of major

subgroups of students (regular, ESE, ESOL, Title 1, etc.) and incorporates and integrates to the extent possible other school level improvement planning processes (Title I, technology, school improvement, Sterling, etc.). To increase effectiveness of the school improvement process, districts should provide training for school improvement teams that includes using academic and non-academic data to identify areas needing improvement, developing measurable objectives, and evaluating progress in meeting objectives. Districts also should oversee the school improvement planning process and provide additional assistance to schools that do not make adequate progress.

All schools in the Sarasota County School District have established board approved school improvement plans. These plans are linked to the district's Campaign for Excellence Strategic Plan III and are aligned with state education goals. The district's school improvement planning process integrates all major school improvement planning mandates to ensure each school advisory council (SAC) develops one integrated plan to address the unique needs of all students served across all program components provided at the school. The school's budget, intervention assistance plan, and technology plan are integral components of each school's improvement plan and are linked through strategies to implement specific goals and objectives targeted for that school year.

The district has an effective school improvement planning process with clear, specific measurable objectives. It also has a reliable system for collecting performance data. The district assesses school improvement throughout the school year based on quarterly assessment data that provides information on students' success in meeting curriculum benchmarks and standards. Based upon those assessments, the district takes appropriate actions. Support is provided to schools identified as not making adequate yearly progress to assist them in developing strategies to improve student performance. These schools have been targeted for specific grants designed to provide support in areas identified by data analysis as having an impact on improved performance. For example, grants have been provided for additional psychologist and counselor services to support study skills training and instructional strategy development for students requiring remediation and to fund reading coaches and reading teachers to support content area teachers in working with students to develop reading skills in their classes.

The district also has a comprehensive system for providing training and assistance to district staff and SAC members in developing school improvement plans. Training is provided semi-annually to all principals. This training covers revisions to the planning process, new federal requirements that affect the planning process and any district initiatives related to the planning process. The district also provides annual training for all new SAC members and to individual school SACs upon request.

Best Practice 7: Using

The district ensures effective progression of students from kindergarten through grade 12 that maximizes student mastery of the Sunshine State Standards and prepares students for work and continued education.

In 1996, the State Board of Education adopted the Sunshine State Standards as content expectations for K-12 students in Florida. Since that time, the standards have been refined and expanded to include grade level expectations and represent the academic expectations for Florida students by grade level and subject. Florida districts and schools should have modified their instructional programs and aligned curriculum to include the standards to ensure that students master necessary skills and will be able to perform at the next grade level. Thus, districts must have a clear, comprehensive, easy to follow student progression plan that meets state requirements and incorporates the Sunshine State Standards. The plan should be specific, informing teachers and school administrators of factors to consider in deciding whether to promote or retain a student. The plan should also specify the steps schools should take to ensure that retained students either receive intensive remedial assistance or are placed in a program different from what the student received the previous year. To ensure that students progress as expected

from kindergarten through grade 12 and are prepared for work and continued education, districts should have and use strategies that facilitate smooth transitions from one school level to the next. Districts should also periodically assess how well their students' progress and use this information to make adjustments as needed.

The Sarasota County School District's curricular framework and correlation guides are aligned across all content areas with Sunshine State Standards and Florida's accountability standards. Each district standard in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies is cross-referenced to the state standards. Assessments used in main curricular areas to gauge student progress on meeting curriculum benchmarks and standards are also aligned to the state benchmarks and give teachers and parents ongoing feedback related to student progress in meeting these benchmarks. The district recently revised its pupil progression plan to ensure that it is consistent with recent revisions in Florida school code. The progression plan is clear and succinct and training has been provided to teachers and parents on the implications of the Florida school code revisions.

The district has a comprehensive data management system in place to regularly assess student progress in meeting performance targets. This system includes ongoing classroom and district assessments to ensure student's mastery of student performance benchmarks. The system provides teachers and school teams the ability to analyze all student performance data. This data is then used to determine specific performance levels, instructional needs of individual students, class grouping, grade, and school levels. Academic improvement plans, as required by Florida statute, are developed for all students who are not meeting district and state proficiency criteria with particular priority given to students who are at risk of retention. Support is provided in developing strategies for supporting these students by intervention assistance teams who then monitor the effectiveness of these strategies and make modifications as needed.

Best Practice 8: Using

The district's current organizational structure and staffing of educational programs minimize unnecessary administrative layers and processes.

School districts that operate efficiently meet the needs of their teachers and students with minimal administrative layers and staff. To meet this best practice, school districts should have a central office organizational structure that ensures adequate administrative oversight of education programs, adequate curriculum and instructional support for teachers, and adequate support to enable schools to identify their needs and evaluate their effectiveness. In addition, districts should ensure that individual school staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of students and are comparable across schools in the district.

The Sarasota County School District's organizational structure in the area of curriculum and instruction provides schools with the support and oversight needed to provide effective educational services to district students. The district provides a comprehensive system of professional development and teacher and principal support throughout the school year and during the summer. Teachers and intervention assistance team members are also able to access curriculum support at the district level when needed to support the selection of alternative instructional materials and to request onsite training relating to a particular curricular area or support strategy. School teams also receive strong support from the district in the areas of data analysis, school improvement planning, and grant procurement.

The district provides each school with a budget that specifies some basic staffing positions (i.e. minimum classroom and ESE teacher requirements, positions supported through other funding sources such as ESE liaisons or through specific staffing formulas). The district also uses a staffing ratio of one assistant principal per 800 students for all school levels which results in considerably fewer assistant principals than its peers. In addition, the district typically assigns only one dean to each high school, which also

results in fewer deans than its peers. As long as these requirements are met, schools have the flexibility to utilize any additional budgeted resources to purchase positions based on school and community needs. The district reviews and compares staffing levels at schools on a formal basis twice per year, during the budget development process (based on projected enrollment) and after the 10-day count (based on actual enrollment). Budget and staffing adjustments are then made to ensure reasonable and consistent student-teacher ratios where enrollment projections and actual enrollment differ.

EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

Best Practice 9: Using

The district ensures that students and teachers have sufficient current textbooks and other instructional materials available to support instruction in core subjects and to meet the needs of teachers and students.

To meet the needs of teachers and students, school districts should ensure that all schools have sufficient numbers of current, state-adopted textbooks and other instructional materials available to support instruction in core subjects. Districts should solicit input from teachers when selecting textbooks and other instructional materials. To increase availability of textbooks, districts should seek to purchase, maintain, and dispose of textbooks in a cost-effective manner. Districts should collect monies from students who have damaged or lost textbooks and use these monies to offset materials costs or to purchase additional materials.

The Sarasota County School District ensures students and teachers have sufficient and current textbooks and instructional materials through an integrated curriculum selection and material management system. To begin the selection process the district establishes adoption selection committees that include teachers from across the district who review state adoptions and determine what materials the district will select. When possible, the district selects three texts or series in each area to allow schools flexibility in selecting from a number of options. The district then allocates categorical funding to the schools to purchase texts in accordance with the state adoption cycle. District policies clearly indicate that schools have the flexibility to purchase non-state adopted instructional materials provided an evaluation has occurred to ensure the materials align with Sunshine State Standards and that materials support the goals of the school and district. The district provides additional flexibility to specialized programs, such as the Oakpark School, where alternative instructional materials are required to meet student needs.

As a system check and balance all textbook and instructional material orders are processed through the Media/ Instructional Materials office. This allows for economy of scale in ordering and provides a check to ensure materials are purchased in accordance with state law and district policy. The Media/Materials Management unit maintains a comprehensive inventory of all non-disposable instructional materials and media materials. Before materials are sent to schools, they are inventoried and catalogued by this unit. The Media/Instructional Materials office also monitors the district's policy for collection of fees for lost/damaged books. This policy ensures that students are held responsible for replacement costs and that schools have monetary incentives to collect these replacement costs. Replacement costs collected are deposited into each school's instructional materials account and costs not collected are deducted from each school's instructional materials allocation.

Best Practice 10: Using

The district has sufficient school library or media centers to support instruction.

To meet this best practice, school districts should have sufficient school library/media center resources to support instruction. Library materials and equipment should be up-to-date and centers should operate during hours that meet the needs of students. To maximize the availability of library materials, the district should have and regularly use procedures to reduce library and media costs, such as coordinating orders across schools to take advantage of bulk rate discounts.

The Sarasota County School District maintains well-equipped, up-to-date libraries through a comprehensive system of automated inventory, collection weeding, and centralized order management. The Media/Materials Management Unit implements a weeding cycle for each school in conjunction with school media specialists, reviews each school's inventory, and then works with principals and media specialists to purchase new materials. These purchases are coordinated through the Media/Materials Management Unit to consolidate purchases across the district into one order and thereby enable the district to take advantage of bulk purchasing rates. All school media center computer equipment is required to run the MediaTrack library automation program and is replaced on a five-year basis through the use of district capital funds. The necessary hardware and software are purchased and installed by Media/Instructional Materials Fixed Assets department staff at each school site.

School district policy defines purchasing procedures for media centers that ensure media materials are purchased centrally in bulk and in a cost-effective manner. The district's approach to purchasing licenses for reference databases is especially noteworthy. Bulk purchasing licensing agreements have been acquired for four reference databases. Individual schools then purchase additional licenses as needed. The district is working to expand the number of bulk licenses available while still allowing for individual school choices. School level purchases of licensing agreements are monitored in conjunction with the Instructional Technology Department. When the number of schools purchasing a license reaches the level a volume discount can be obtained, then a bulk purchasing approach is pursued.

Best Practice 11: Using

The district utilizes instructional technology in the classroom to enhance curriculum and improve student achievement.

Technology has the potential to enhance curriculum and instruction, help improve student achievement, and assist students in attaining basic computer skills needed for the 21st century. Whenever possible, districts should use technology to support classroom learning. For instance, districts should offer a variety of courseware focused on helping students achieve grade level academic benchmarks as well as common basic software packages. To increase student success, districts should ensure that all students have opportunities to use computer software while in school. Districts should also periodically obtain feedback from teachers and principals related to the usefulness and adequacy of instructional technology and use this information when selecting future materials.

The Sarasota County School District has invested significant resources in providing schools the resources, both human and equipment, to implement the integrated use of instructional technology across the curriculum. All schools are equipped with one to three technology labs that are fully utilized throughout the school day (and before and after school), mobile technology carts, and computers in all classrooms. The district has also invested heavily in a range of educational software designed to complement the curriculum and in technology-based programs designed to support individualized instruction and data analysis. Computer labs have also been provided at several high schools to assist students in college/career exploration, online SAT/ACT preparation, and to assist them in applying to college and for scholarships. The integration of technology across the curriculum is greatly enhanced by the district's

financial commitment to an instructional technology facilitator at each school. The primary responsibility of these positions is to support teachers and school-based staff in the use and integration of technology in the curriculum through training, coaching and role modeling.

Best Practice 12: Using

The district provides necessary support services (guidance counseling, psychological, social work, and health) to meet student needs and to ensure students are able to learn.

To be successful learners, students often need a variety of non-academic services to meet their health, social, and emotional needs, which if left unattended may present significant barriers to their ability to learn. Districts should ensure that schools offer sufficient support services, such as counseling and social work to help maintain the overall well being of students. An effective district periodically reviews and assesses its support services plan and uses this information to make adjustments as needed to help resolve barriers to student learning.

The Sarasota County School District deploys psychology, social work, truancy specialists, parent liaisons, and health support staff to all schools. Guidance counselor positions are assigned to each school-based on student enrollment. Additional supports are provided in these areas to schools with high student need based on socio-economic status and enrollment of ESOL and ESE students. Schools also have the ability to purchase additional counselor and support positions from their budget based on their school improvement plans. The district uses a wide range of databases to analyze student needs. These include: The Annual Youth Risk Behavior Survey, The Elementary Counseling Grant Needs Assessment, The Middle Years Safe Schools Grant Needs Assessment, and the Annual School Feedback on Student Services Survey.

The district has shown a strong commitment to increasing the level of support services provided to schools and has worked collaboratively with community agencies to provide the resources to fund additional student support positions. The district should be commended for its collaboration with the Sarasota County Health Department and several area hospitals to provide funding to support health aides in every school and a team of registered nurses that support all schools. At minimal cost to the district, all Sarasota students are provided comprehensive health services. These health care professionals also provide linkage to the community health care system ensuring students are referred for needed services and follow-up as health care issues occur. Additionally, although the district's ratios of psychologist to student and social worker to student are well below national caseload norms, the district has ensured compliance with all state and federal mandates by utilizing supplementary contracted services during peak evaluation seasons and by scheduling summer evaluation clinics. The system developed by the Support Service Department to monitor compliance and maximize its resources should also be commended. In the face of staffing constraints, the department not only meets evaluation timelines but also exceeds them, while also continuing to maintain a significant level of additional direct support services to teachers and students.

5 Instructional and Administrative Technology

Summary

The Sarasota County School District is using seven of nine of the Best Practices in Administrative and Instructional Technology. The personnel in the information services and instructional technology departments are committed to establishing the district as a leader of instructional technology and the district has demonstrated a willingness to expend the resources needed to make that commitment a reality. In particular, the district does a good job of overall planning for its technology needs and of providing training for the various technology applications purchased. In addition, the district's network infrastructure is dependable and district staff makes good use of the Internet to support both internal and external communications. To meet the remaining best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its instructional and administrative technology, the district should establish standards for hardware and software acquisition. Standardizing hardware and software will allow the district to establish centralized purchasing procedures which, in turn, will facilitate the district's ability to realize economies of scale. The district also should change its technical support structure. Reengineering campus technical support personnel duties will increase efficiencies and reduce costs. As shown in Exhibit 5-1, the fiscal impact of implementing the recommendations to improve in the area of administrative and instructional technology would result in savings of \$2.5 million over the next five years.



As seen in Exhibit 5-1, the district has two opportunities to reduce costs and increase revenues in this area. 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 implements these action plans, it would be able to redirect the funds to other priorities, such as putting more money into the classroom or addressing deficiencies identified in this report.

Exhibit 5-1

The District Could Save About \$2.5 Million Over the Next Five Years by Modifying its Administrative and Instruction Technology Practices

Fiscal Impact: Cost Savings						
Best Practice Number	Year 2003-04	Year 2004-05	Year 2005-06	Year 2006-07	Year 2007-08	Total
2 Standardization	\$0	\$375,000 ¹	\$350,000 ²	\$350,000	\$350,000	\$1,425,000
4 Tech support re-allocate, re-design, re-engineer	\$0	(48,000)	377,000	377,000	377,000	1,083,000
Total	\$0	\$327,000	\$727,000	\$727,000	\$727,000	\$2,508,000

¹ The figure for 2004-05 is elevated due to network expenditures that have been budgeted.

² For Fiscal Years 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08, dollar amounts are estimated based on historical spending for technology.

Background

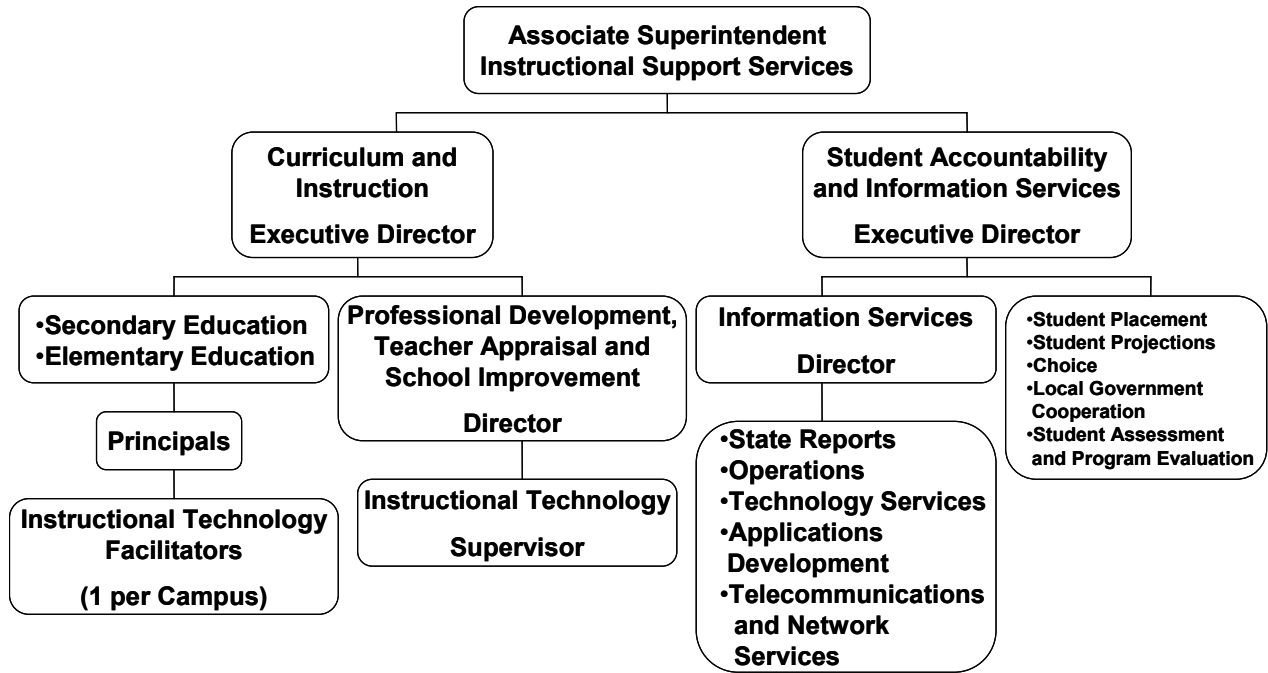
Instructional and administrative technology is an important aspect of school district operations. Technology affects student performance by enabling students to access and analyze information, solve problems, collaborate with others, and effectively communicate their thoughts and ideas. Teachers use technology as a tool to assist in administrative duties, provide curriculum support, and prepare students for life after graduation. Administrators and district employees use technology to provide timely information to effectively manage the district’s resources and make informed decisions.

The instructional and administrative technology resources in the Sarasota County School District serve 19 elementary schools, 1 K-8 school, 5 middle schools, 6 high schools, the district office and 4 education centers. The district has provided a wide variety of technology resources throughout the district and has established infrastructure to support networking and telecommunications.

The Sarasota County School District has invested in both personnel, and hardware and software, to ensure students and administrators have technology resources readily available to them. Computers and other technology are available in all district classrooms. All have access to the Internet and multiple software programs. Each school uses computer labs to assist with instruction in a variety of ways including using integrated learning systems, drill and practice, business applications, Internet research and industrial arts.

Two units manage the district’s use of technology resources (see Exhibit 5-2). A centralized information systems department supports the administrative technology programs. This department handles the operation and support of all financial and student data records. It also supports the campuses and instructional programs by maintaining the district technology and communications infrastructure. The instructional technology section is responsible for designing the district’s instructional technology program and for providing the professional development needed to implement this program. While these two units primarily are responsible for the use of technology resources, another group also has responsibilities in this area. At each school, instructional technology facilitators (who report to school principals) are responsible for facilitating school-level implementation of both instructional and non-instructional technology applications.

**Exhibit 5-2
Sarasota County School District's Organizational Structure for the Information Services
and Instructional Technology Departments**



Source: Sarasota County School District.

Activities of particular interest

The district's approach to network design and implementation is an area of particular interest. The district has invested over eight million dollars to ensure the stability and integrity of its network. Similar to most districts, the Sarasota County School District makes extensive use of leased T-1 circuits to provide connectivity to schools throughout the district. This model has been used for many years and is found to be quite stable. However, there are bandwidth restrictions associated with the use of T-1 circuits, which can limit the type of programming offered (which in turn can limit instructional and training opportunities). To address this problem, the district is working with the local and regional utilities to develop fiber connectivity throughout the district. The increased bandwidth that will result will remove virtually all limitations to the types of services the district can provide over its network. In preparation for implementing this type of system the district has encouraged training with the result that two network technicians now hold Registered Communications Distribution Designer (RCDD) certification. This certification is a standard that many network professions strive to achieve. The fact that the Sarasota County School District employs two of these individuals is a testament to its commitment to ensuring the integrity of the network infrastructure.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Conclusions for Administrative and Instructional Technology

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice?	Page No.
Technology Planning	1. The district has a comprehensive technology plan that provides for administrative and instructional technology decision making.	Yes	5-5
Cost Effective Technology Acquisition	2. The district acquires technology in a manner that will best meet its instructional and administrative needs.	No	5-6
Technology Professional Development	3. District and school staff receive professional development training for all technologies used in the district.	Yes	5-9
Technical Support	4. The district provides timely and cost effective technical support that enables educators and district staff to successfully implement technology in the workplace.	No	5-11
Infrastructure and Network Communications	5. The district maintains a dependable, standards-based infrastructure employing strategies that cost-effectively maximize network and Internet access and performance.	Yes	5-13
	6. The district uses technology to improve communication.	Yes	5-14
	7. The district has written policies that apply safe, ethical, and appropriate use practices that comply with legal and professional standards.	Yes	5-15
Information Management and Delivery	8. 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.	Yes	5-15
	9. The information needs of administrative and instructional personnel are met by applying appropriate project management techniques to define, schedule, track, and evaluate purchasing, developing, and the timing of delivering IT products and services requested.	Yes	5-16

TECHNOLOGY PLANNING

Best Practice 1: Using

The district has a comprehensive technology plan that provides direction for administrative and instructional technology. However, specific action plans should be included in the document. Additionally, the district technology plan should be evaluated.

Planning is the key to a well-implemented, well-delivered technology system. Effective planning helps ensure that district technology meets the instructional needs of students and teachers and should also serve to meet the administrative needs of decision makers, including administrators, teachers, and non-instructional personnel. An effective planning process identifies and addresses the technology needs of users, develops strategies to acquire needed technology in a cost-effective manner, and identifies funds available required for acquisitions. To ensure that all critical needs are identified, the planning process should include broad stakeholder input. The decisions made during the planning process should be in writing and the resulting plan should guide technology-related policymaking and acquisitions. While the complexity and breadth of the technology plan will vary based on the size of the district, it should include a mission statement and reasonable goals and objectives that can be accomplished, in most cases, within available resources. The district's budget also should reflect the financial commitment to major technology initiatives included in the technology plan. In addition, the planning process should include mechanisms that allow decision makers to assess the benefits of district investments in technology and abandon or modify failed strategies in favor of more successful ones. Districts should identify who is responsible for implementing and updating the technology plan.

The Sarasota County School Board adopted a comprehensive technology plan in December 2001. The plan contains broad goals addressing both administrative and instructional technologies. These goals were developed from input by individuals from the community, administrative and campus levels through a series of bi-monthly meetings. The district's Technology Steering Committee is responsible for creating the technology plan; this committee is comprised of information and instructional technology staff. However, since the plan's inception, the district formed a technology oversight committee to ensure the plan is executed in the manner designed. This committee, comprised of both deputy superintendents and other central district staff and campus principals, meets once a quarter to discuss implementation progress and reports back to the superintendent. In addition, the technology department holds regularly scheduled workshops with the school board to discuss and exhibit the improvement the district is making in its use of technology.

Although the district has a comprehensive technology plan that provides direction for administrative and instructional technology, there is one area in which the district could enhance its operations. Technology planning would be strengthened if implementation action plans were integrated into the district's technology plan. Implementation activities are not specifically listed in the existing technology plan. Instead, the plan calls for the Technology Steering Committee to create an action plan. This action plan, which has been completed, addresses all technology plan goals in detail. The Technology Steering Committee and the Technology Oversight Committee review this action plan annually and present progress against the plan to the school board. However, the action plan has never been submitted for formal board approval. The technology plan also outlines a process to evaluate the progress of the plan. The plan assigns responsibility for evaluating progress to Technology Steering Committee. To date, there has not been a formal evaluation of the technology plan.

We recommend that the Technology Steering Committee’s action plan be formally incorporated into the overall technology plan and submitted to the school board for approval. Taking this step will ensure that the school board has the opportunity to formally deliberate, review, and assess implementation approaches and provided direction and feedback as appropriate. The district should take a two-step process to implement this recommendation. First, the Technology Steering Committee should revise the technology plan by incorporating the action plan that it already has prepared. This revised plan should then be presented to the superintendent, and subsequently the board, for approval.

Second, the Technology Steering Committee should evaluate the district technology plan as outlined in section 9 of the plan. This evaluation should take place annually.

COST EFFECTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACQUISITION

Best Practice 2: Not Using

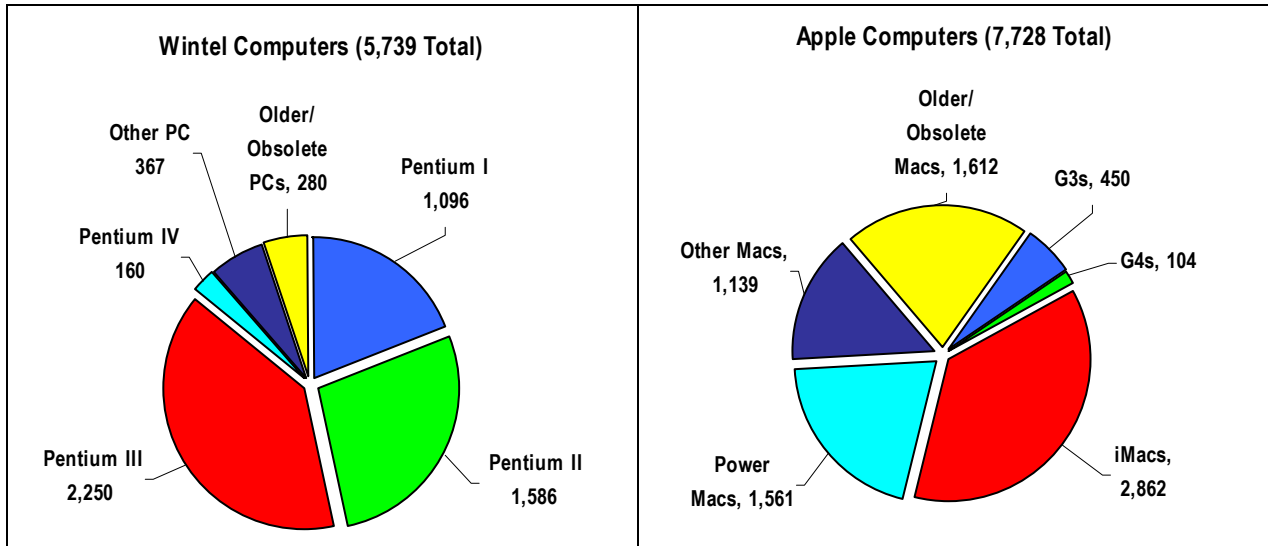
The district does not acquire technology in a manner that will best meet its instructional and administrative needs.

Districts can reduce or better anticipate technology-related expenses and avoid downtime by developing acquisition strategies that consider not only the initial purchase price, but also the cost of fully implementing and supporting the systems. Implementation and support cost considerations should include professional development requirements, standardization of equipment, system interoperability, technical support, and disposal costs. In addition, districts should base technology acquisitions on need and ensure that technology resources are equitably distributed throughout the district.

The Sarasota County School District’s approach to acquiring technology has a number of sound features. For example, the district’s technology acquisitions are based on district needs that are reflected in its overall technology plan. In addition, the district does a good job of using research and evaluation results to identify technology that will best meet its administrative and instructional needs. For example, when developing the request for proposals for an electronic attendance and grade collection system and a high-speed scanner, the district reviewed data and conducted research to develop specifications and criteria for evaluating proposals. The district also actively works to identify ways to improve technology acquisition. For example, the district has been evaluating “total cost of ownership” as it relates to technology-based packages. One result of this effort was the recent decision to lease technology for a middle school instead of purchasing systems.

However, the district can improve its operations by addressing two issues. First, the district has not provided technology that is meeting the instructional and administrative needs of all campuses. Indeed, there is a wide discrepancy in the technology used by the various school campuses. Many campuses use technology or equipment that is less than four or five years old while other campuses have equipment that is well over five years old. For example, Intel 486 computers are still being used in some instructional areas (see Exhibit 5-3). To address this issue the district should conduct a thorough assessment of its technological inventory and create a plan to replace technological resources to ensure appropriate equity among all schools.

**Exhibit 5-3
Type and Quantity of District Desktop Computers for Instruction**



Source: Florida Department of Education 2001 Technology Resources Survey.

Action Plan 5-1 describes the steps necessary for the district to establish a replacement cycle for all technologies. However, implementing this action plan will enable the district to forecast technology expenditures based on need and assess what will be required to replace and refresh aging technologies.

Action Plan 5-1

We recommend that the district establish a replacement cycle for all technologies.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish guidelines for the acceptable age of technology equipment and software for various software and equipment categories
	Step 2.	Use the detailed Technology Resource Survey inventory established for the Florida Department of Education or another method to assess existing equipment and software. Focus on inequalities by campus and department.
	Step 3.	Develop a cycle that will address every campus and department. (The cycle should be developed using the information developed in Steps 1 and 2 above.)
Who Is Responsible	Technology Oversight Committee	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

A second way the district could improve operations is by standardizing technology purchases. The district has not achieved an appropriate balance between the need to give school-based decision makers flexibility in selecting the technology they acquire and the need to standardize acquisitions to ensure quality while controlling costs. At present, the “pendulum” between these competing imperatives has shifted too far in the direction of providing principals and school-based instructional technology facilitators significant autonomy with regard to selecting and purchasing technology products. There are no guidelines to help campus administrators make purchasing decisions or to limit the range of alternatives they consider. (The Technology Oversight Committee is working to establish such guidelines but to date it has not established technology standards.)

The current approach to selecting and acquiring technology could be more effective. There are three factors that reduce the district's effectiveness in this area. First, while the current system appears to support efforts of school-based staff in tailoring their technology acquisitions to local needs, in fact, staff often lack the knowledge to make informed decisions about such issues. Second, the current decentralized approach to technology acquisition is expensive. The district could reduce the cost of purchases by taking advantage of economies of scale and negotiating district-wide buying options. Third, the current decentralized purchasing approach often results in a situation where a school will purchase items that do not arrive until the middle or latter part of the instructional year. If purchasing decisions were made at the district level, the installation of equipment could be coordinated to ensure instructional items are in place before the start of the school year.

To address these issues, the district should develop a standards-based approach to technology purchasing, which will enable it to reduce technology costs. The standards should be broad enough to allow campuses the ability to purchase products based on their individual needs while limiting the "free spending" process now used. The standards should include options that have been reviewed by instructional leaders to ensure educational relevancy, and by information services staff to ensure supportability. A precedent for this recommendation is already in place in the district. At present, school-based decision makers are limited to three textbooks per subject when determining what textbook will be used at their school. They are only allowed to select an alternative textbook if they can make a compelling case for doing so and can show that the selection is consistent with state and district standards. Standardizing technology purchases will enable the district to buy and use common hardware and software, focus employee training in a few products instead of many, and buy in volume to reduce acquisition costs. Information technology trends indicate a savings of at least 10% from current spending methods. For the district, a 10% cost reduction could save about \$1.4 million over the next five years, and does not anticipate any savings for Fiscal Year 2003-04 due to the time needed to implement this recommendation. Action Plan 5-2 shows the steps necessary to implement this recommendation

Action Plan 5-2

We recommend that the district develop a standards-based approach to technology purchasing.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish a list of all technologies currently purchased by the district and include a brief description of how the technology is used.
	Step 2.	Group items that perform the same function, (e.g., desktop computers, printers, etc.) while considering the specific use for which the technology is intended (technology should not be removed from service when it is need for a very specific function or instructional need).
	Step 3.	Compare the listed items with the industry information technology market.
	Step 4.	Compare supportability and cost for alternatives.
	Step 5.	Develop a schedule for removing items that duplicate function and/or increase cost.
Who Is Responsible	Technology Oversight Committee	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

TECHNOLOGY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Best Practice 3: Using

District and school staff receive professional development training for all technologies used in the district, but the district could improve employee skill development by better tracking and reporting all training provided to and by instructional technology facilitators.

Professional development is essential to ensuring that district employees maximize their use of existing technology. However, given the potentially wide range of knowledge and abilities among its staff, it is essential that districts identify the employees and specific areas in which employees are in the greatest need of professional development and then focus training efforts using this information. The district must define the level of competency to be mastered, clearly state the training expectation, and develop strategies to provide the needed training. The level of competency is related to the job function of the employee. For example, classroom teachers will use word processing software differently than a clerical employee in the personnel office. Strategies for providing training include traditional classroom, one-on-one, and computer lab instruction, as well as web-based instruction, electronic bulletin boards, videotapes, and other self-directed, technology-based methods. In evaluating the effectiveness of training, districts should strive to go beyond issues such as whether participants liked the professional development opportunity and should focus on the intended outcomes and skills to be mastered. Assessing the effectiveness of training is important to plan and budget for future training initiatives.

The Sarasota County School District's professional development department provides training for each technology application purchased by the district. The department uses multiple training approaches to ensure all district personnel receive technology training they need. (Section B of the district technology plan outlines the guidelines for technology training in the district.) By far, the largest group to be trained is teachers. To provide teachers with technology-related development needs, each campus is assigned an instructional technology facilitator who conducts teacher training by modeling lessons in the classroom and conducting training courses. Central office administrative staff provide additional teacher training via distance learning, online training, and traditional lab settings. Administrative and clerical personnel participate in general productivity program training, which includes operating systems, spreadsheet, word processor and presentation software training. Information technology department staff seek specialized training at district training centers. These centers offer training specific to the job function of technical personnel. To ensure that employees are aware of the training opportunities available to them, a detailed staff development calendar is located on the district website. This calendar of events also facilitates course registration by allowing users to register for training on-line.

Although district and school employees receive technology training, the district does not maintain an effective system for tracking and monitoring technology-related training to ensure that employees are receiving the training they need. As a result, the district cannot ensure that instructional technology facilitators receive the training they need to be proficient in the use of the district's instructional technology, nor can it be assured that the instructional technology facilitators are providing consistent training for the employees at each school.

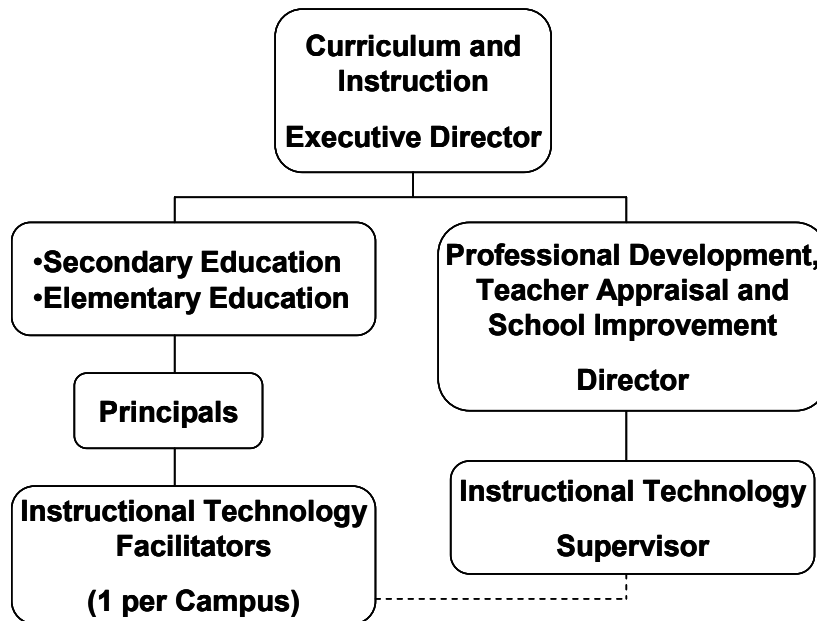
To ensure that facilitators are prepared for the instructional technology needs of their schools, they should attend periodic training developed by the Instructional Technology Department. According to interviews with district staff, the district instructional technology supervisor is responsible for developing training curriculum and teaching facilitators about various instructional technology software. However, the district currently has no requirement that instructional technology facilitators attend this training. Interviews with district staff revealed a number of times when 10% or 20% of the district's 35 facilitators did not attend the scheduled classes. While instructional technology facilitators at each campus report to

their school principal, these positions also have a responsibility to meet the professional development standards developed by the Instructional Technology Department at the district.

And while it cannot ensure that instructional technology facilitators receive the training they need, the district also cannot be assured that the instructional technology facilitators are providing consistent training for teachers at each school. Currently, technology training conducted by instructional technology facilitators at the school level is not recorded. Consequently, it is hard to determine what centralized training is needed because central managers do not know what issues instructional technology facilitators covered.

The district could improve its practices by enhancing systems to track technology-related training. Accordingly, the Instructional Technology Department should establish a tracking and monitoring system for instructional technology facilitators and periodically report on their training to the executive director, curriculum and instruction who can ensure that instructional facilitators receive the requisite district training (see Exhibit 5-4). Establishing such a reporting requirement should accomplish several things. It would ensure that principals are held accountable for instructional technology facilitators' professional development; that instructional technology facilitators regularly attend training and have consistent technical skills; and that technology support efforts are consistent across all schools.

**Exhibit 5-4
Proposed Monitoring Relationship Between Instructional
Technology Department and Instructional Technology Facilitators**



Source: Berkshire Advisors Inc.

We recommend the district develop a system that is integrated with personnel records to track technology training. When this system is implemented, school-based personnel could send training information to personnel office staff where it could be entered into the tracking system or, alternatively, the system could be designed to have instructional technology facilitators enter this information into the system themselves. Likewise, the instructional technology supervisor could report this information to personnel for the school instructional technology facilitators, or enter the information oneself.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Best Practice 4: Not Using

The district provides timely technical support that enables educators and district staff to successfully implement technology in the workplace, but it does not provide these services in a cost effective way.

Timely, helpful technical support can be a determining factor in whether technology is used or abandoned, decisions are made in a timely manner, and essential district services are interrupted. Districts should provide responsive technical support to all users, regardless of location and job function. Instructional personnel should provide media-rich curricula and non-instructional personnel should conduct administrative tasks without technical interruptions. Areas of technical support include email support, intranet/Internet access, software application support, web development, and computer hardware installation and maintenance. Providing technical support can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including providing a trained non-instructional technology support person or providing a technology facilitator in each school; managing a central help desk at the district; implementing a work order tracking system; and contracting for regional or vendor support services. In addition, districts can minimize the cost of supporting out-of-warranty equipment by establishing replacement guidelines that specify a time frame for when technologies should be recycled or replaced.

The Sarasota County School District has focused considerable resources and attention on ensuring high quality technical support. While there are strains on the technical support system, these efforts have generally been effective for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the district is committed to technical support. The district's technology plan reflects this commitment and clearly articulates the need to provide technical support for all users. The district's commitment to technical support is also reflected in the fact that it provides sufficient resources to support this effort. Under its current practices, the district assigns one technology support aide to each school to conduct level I support for the campus' technology. Level I technical support includes setting up computers and peripherals, loading software and responding to simple technical needs associated with those activities. Issues that cannot be handled by the technology support aides are referred to the Information Services Department through a work order tracking system where they will be addressed by an information services department technician. The district has taken steps to ensure these technicians have the requisite skills needed to provide effective technical support. Indeed, the district-level technical support personnel hold technology certifications in Apple, Microsoft, and networking standards. The district also is testing a seat management process, which is a process of outsourcing support for desktops and laptops. Industry has shown the seat management model reduces costs for most organizations and likely would result in significant savings for the Sarasota County School District as well.

However, the district does not provide technical support in a cost-effective way, because the district's practice of assigning a technology support aide to each school, without regard for workload at that school, is inefficient. As a result, workload for the district's 35 technology support aides is disproportionate, ranging from supporting a low of 111 computers in one school to a high of 867 computers in another. Because the number of computers alone does not dictate workload, other factors should be considered. For example, schools with roughly the same number of computers and associated peripherals do not have the same technology support needs. The workload of a technology support aide relates directly not only to the number of pieces of equipment supported but also to the age of that equipment. Nevertheless, the district could better allocate technology support aides to significantly increase its efficiency and the effectiveness of its technology support function. The district could also re-design and re-engineer the technology support aide position to reduce costs. If the district were to re-allocate, re-design, and re-

engineer its technology support aide positions, it could reduce costs by about \$1.1 million over the next five years, and increase the amount of technical support available to the district.

Re-Allocate Technology Support Aides More Efficiently. One way the district could improve its cost-effectiveness is by re-allocating its technology support aides to make more efficient assignments. At present, the district has a practice of assigning a full-time technology support aide to each school, which is not an efficient way to make staffing assignments because the number of computers the aides support is not uniform across schools. According to our analysis of the workloads in the district's 24 most productive schools (the upper two-thirds of the productivity as measured by the number of computers each technology support aide supports), only 11 of the district's 35 schools have a sufficient number of computers to warrant a full-time technology support aide and one of those schools probably needs a second aide. The remaining 24 of the district's 35 schools, primarily elementary schools, do not have sufficient workload to justify a full-time technical support aide and should be combined in ways that share the remaining technical support aides. Because of the district's practice of assigning a full-time technical support aide to each school, the district probably has about nine too many technical support aides, costing about \$242,400 per year more than necessary. By assigning aides to multiple schools where the workload requires and better justifies it, the district could save about \$1.2 million over the next five years. We anticipate that the district will not be able to effect these re-assignments during Fiscal Year 2003-04, so we based our cost savings on the efficiencies to be realized in the second through fifth years of the recommendation.

Privatize Part of the Technology Support Aides' Work. A second way the district could improve the efficiency of its technical support practices is to privatize some of its technical support aides' workload. The district's support aides spend a significant amount of their time setting up computers and peripherals, loading software and responding to technical needs associated with those activities. Observations and interviews with technology support aides indicate that they spend about 50% of their time setting up new computers and configuring software, but the district believes that the aides spend less than 40% of their time on such tasks. Even if technology support aides spent half the time they claim (or about 25% of their time) setting up new computers and configuring software, a more cost-effective approach to performing these tasks could be to establish a relationship with a value added reseller. A value added reseller would work with the manufacturer of the district's newly acquired computers to install and configure the district's software, which is a substantial part of the technology support aide's duties now. Using a value added reseller would enable the district to reduce the number of technology support aides by another five positions. The savings from using a value added reseller are a relatively modest \$62,800 per year, or about \$251,000 over the next five years, assuming that the district will not be able to implement this recommendation before the beginning of July 2004. While the savings from this recommendation are relatively modest, there are a couple of other significant benefits of using a value added reseller. First, using a value added reseller could enable the district to receive pricing discounts that are not promoted directly from the manufacturer. In addition, using a value added reseller to relieve technology support aides of the responsibility for setting up new computers and configuring software permit the technology support aide function to be re-engineered.

Re-engineer Technology Support Aide Function. A third way the district could improve its technology support is by using some of the previously noted efficiencies to re-engineer the technology support aide function. Technology support aides assigned to each school are not highly skilled or trained technologically. Consequently, the type of technology-related problems that they are capable of handling on-site is limited. As systems become more complex, the number of issues that technology support aides can handle will decline at the same time total technical support needs are increasing. As the district's use of technology continues to expand, demand for more highly skilled, centralized technology support staff will increase.

To meet this challenge, the district could use some of the savings generated by the previously noted efficiencies to increase the skills of the current technology support aides and provide additional technological support throughout the district. If it were to implement the previous efficiencies, the district would need only about 21 of the 35 technology support aides. With a smaller, more efficient cadre of employees, the district would be able to provide the 21 remaining technical support aides with additional training and responsibility, redefine their duties, and re-classify them to compensate them accordingly. Re-engineering the technology support aide function would cost the district about \$425,000 over the next five years, excluding Fiscal Year 2003-04, which may be too early to fully re-engineer the technology support aide position.

Action Plan 5-3

We recommend that the district re-allocate, re-design, and re-engineer the technology support aide function.

Action Needed	<p>Re-allocate technology support aides:</p> <p>Step 1. Develop a way/method to collect workload data.</p> <p>Step 2. Monitor workload and performance.</p> <p>Step 3. Reassess workload based on assessment of demand analysis.</p> <p>Step 4. Reassign technical support staff as needed to meet demand.</p> <p>Privatize part of the technology support aide's work:</p> <p>Step 5. Contact hardware manufactures to recommend value added resellers (VARs) with whom they have established working relationships</p> <p>Step 6. Interview VARs to find a company that will meet the needs of the district.</p> <p>Step 7. Select a VAR using an established process for selecting purchased services.</p> <p>Step 8. Use the VAR for imaging and installations, thus reducing the level I work of the technical support aide.</p> <p>Re-engineer technology support aide function:</p> <p>Step 9. Redefine level I support to include simple repair, e.g., opening computers and upgrading memory.</p> <p>Step 10. Re-train technology support aides to perform their newly defined duties.</p> <p>Step 11. Re-title and re-classify the technology support aide to Technology Support Specialist I and increase compensation to MIS2 salary scale.</p> <p>Step 12. Align the technology support specialists under the Information Services Department.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Technology Oversight Committee, Information Services Department
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

INFRASTRUCTURE AND NETWORK COMMUNICATIONS

Best Practice 5: Using

The district maintains a dependable, standards-based infrastructure employing strategies that cost-effectively maximize network and Internet access and performance.

A district's success in meeting the demands for information depends largely on the ability of its infrastructure to receive and transmit data for effective communication and resource sharing. Thus, districts should have a district-wide infrastructure that provides communication, data transmission, resource sharing, and Internet capabilities in a cost-effective manner. The district's network should be fully operational and consistently available to users. To help ensure network dependability, the district

protects its network from viruses and provides high-speed access standards for district network resources. Network access and dependability is crucial for meeting the information needs of students, teachers, administrators, and non-instructional personnel.

The Sarasota County School District has implemented and established a dependable infrastructure. The district's infrastructure includes a combination of leased T-1 lines and fiber optic cable to all facilities. The district supplies a standard data outlet of eight 10/100 megabits per second (mbs) "drops" for connecting each classroom computer or printer to the network. These drops are connected to a campus/building-wide network attached to localized file servers. The individual campuses/buildings are connected through the T-1 or fiber lines to give connectivity throughout the district. District personnel use this wide area network to connect to the district student management system and the Internet. Schools all have access to the Internet through the district's connection to the Florida Information Resource Network (FIRN). The network capacity provided in these classrooms demonstrates the district's understanding that classroom technology must be flexible. The hardware in all locations is industry standard equipment. By ensuring uniformity in the electronics used to support the network, the district also ensures its ability to provide a dependable network cost-effectively. The stability of the infrastructure, in turn, is essential to ensuring technology resources are available and will be used to improve classroom instruction. To further ensure the stability and reliability of the network infrastructure classroom computers house virus software configured to protect the integrity of the system.

Best Practice 6: Using

The district uses technology to improve communication. However, a web portal system would improve Internet communication.

Technology has revolutionized communications, providing tools to disseminate large amounts of information to a wide audience. Email, websites, and teleconferencing are examples of technologies that enhance communication within and beyond school boundaries. Whenever possible, districts should use web technologies, such as Internet and intranet sites, and email to improve and enhance communications. Using email can expedite communication between and among colleagues without having to wait for a meeting to discuss important issues, saving time and travel. Posting information on websites, such as policies, announcements, and calendars, improves access to important information district-wide and decreases the expense associated with sending hardcopy updates. Voice, email and website technologies can facilitate communication with parents by providing information regarding the expectation, progress, and well-being of their children, as well as providing general information about specific programs and course offerings.

The Sarasota County School District has embraced technology as a vehicle for communicating information both internally and to external stakeholders. Notably, the district has developed a comprehensive web presence that is used to share information with the community and staff. In addition, most departments have some form of a web page and use these web pages to describe services and present personnel directories. District schools also have embraced the Internet as a means of sharing information. Each school has established a website that is used to share program information and to facilitate communication with parents. It is also worth noting that the professional development unit has established online training and staff development catalog pages. These pages can be accessed through both the intranet and Internet.

In addition to making extensive use of websites to communicate needed information, district staff also makes extensive use of e-mail to communicate with each other and with stakeholders. E-mail has become the primary way staff shares documents and information with each other.

Although the district is using technology to improve communication, there is one area in which the district can enhance its operations. By using a web portal the district could enhance the uniformity of the

information presented on the district's various web pages while also making it easier for individual schools and departments to post this information. At present, the web pages produced by the departments and campuses lack uniformity. While the district employs one web master who is responsible for designing and working on the central office website, the demands of these responsibilities prevent the web master from focusing on campus websites. Establishing a web portal, which utilizes a uniform structure while allowing each campus or department to design the desired look for their site, would enable all users at a campus or in a department to post information without having to be trained extensively in detailed design software.

We recommend that the district establish a web portal. To implement this recommendation the district should develop goals for what the web should provide from central administration and each campus. From these goals the district should establish criteria for how the pages should look. Once these tasks are complete, the district can explore the option of purchasing a portal system through a request for proposal or the web master can develop the application in-house.

Best Practice 7: Using

The district has written policies that apply safe, ethical, and appropriate use practices that comply with legal and professional standards.

While technological innovations have provided districts with numerous opportunities to improve communication and increase efficiency and productivity, it can be inappropriately used causing potential harm to students and exposing districts to lawsuits. Thus, districts must develop effective strategies and comprehensive guidelines for the appropriate use of technology. Safe use of online resources is important to everyone. The federal Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) requires districts using E-rate funds to protect students from harmful online content. Because the infringement of copyright has legal ramifications, districts must provide guidelines for employees and others to comply with copyright laws.

The Sarasota County School District has taken steps to ensure the appropriate use of information technology. For example, the district has adopted an Acceptable Use Policy and district Network User Policy which address the proper use of all district technologies. In addition, each staff member and student, as appropriate, are required to review and sign a statement indicating their understanding of these policies and their willingness to comply with them. To filter out inappropriate content before it reaches district systems, the district uses a software solution. This software employs databases that filter content based on a human review of potentially inappropriate content as well as automated keyword searches.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY

Best Practice 8: Using

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.

Districts are becoming increasingly dependent on information systems to manage their operations. These systems are typically used to track student information and financial management. For example, the Florida Department of Education requires student data to be submitted electronically. Because student data is used for assessment and funding, it is important that controls are in place for the district to secure access and to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the data. Districts should have processes in place that ensure they are following typical electronic data processing (EDP) practices and have controls to promote the proper functioning of all information systems.

The Sarasota County School District has done a good job of establishing controls relating to its information and technology systems. Although an EDP report cited six areas of concern (relating primarily to the physical security of the Network Operating Center [NOC] and the need to limit access to the financial system), the department has taken proactive action to address and correct these issues.¹ The district ensures that all physical access to the NOC is restricted to information services staff only. Locks have been placed on all access points to ensure the security of the room. The information systems data, student and financial, resides inside the district's firewall. This ensures the data cannot be accessed from outside the district's intranet. Additionally, the system has inherent security features that require personnel to use a login and password within the intranet. The system forces the user to change passwords on a regular schedule. The Information Services Department has done a good job of documenting all procedures and practices associated with its responsibilities. Department managers review these procedures on a regular basis and make adjustments when required. The fact that the current leadership of the Information Services Department is well versed in information technology processes and procedures also contributes to the existence of effective control procedures.

Best Practice 9: Using

The information needs of administrative and instructional personnel are met by applying appropriate project management techniques to define, schedule, track, and evaluate purchasing, developing, and the timing of delivering IT products and services requested.

Because districts depend heavily on data from information systems to make informed decisions, this data must be accessible when needed and presented in useful report formats. To ensure that information needs of teachers and administrators are being met, districts should use common project management techniques to schedule and prioritize information system requests. Districts should have mechanisms in place to gauge user satisfaction with information systems and services. Districts then should analyze alternatives to identify the most cost-effective method of responding to these needs.

The Sarasota County School District considers both customer feedback and technological trends in determining what technology-related products and services to acquire and when to acquire them. The district relies primarily on the customer feedback function of the work order system to assess customer satisfaction. This feedback directly relates to whether the Information Services Department is meeting the needs of all instructional and administrative personnel. The Information Services Department performs an analysis of this customer feedback, which is then used to improve the management of technology-related services and to decide what types of technologies are needed. In making these decisions, the district also works to stay abreast of the latest technological trends and advancements. To this end, information services department personnel attend regular training sessions. The knowledge gained through these sessions is then shared with district leaders through the Technology Oversight Committee.

When making technology-related acquisitions, the district also does a good job of assessing what technologies are cost-effective for district use. All technologies the district considers acquiring are reviewed and studied to assess both their efficacy in supporting instructional or administrative processes and the extent to which these technologies can be cost-effectively implemented.

¹ [Florida Auditor General Report # 01-128](#), issued March 16, 2001.

6 Personnel Systems and Benefits

Summary

The Sarasota County School District is using 9 of the 11 Personnel Systems and Benefits Best Practices. One of the many effective practices currently in place is the Human Resources Department’s recruitment and hiring of qualified instructional and noninstructional personnel. In addition, its professional development programs for instructional staff are very good, as is the system used to evaluate teacher performance. The district also moves aggressively to deal with employees who repeatedly fail to meet its performance expectations. To meet the remaining best practices and ensure the performance efficiency and effectiveness of its human resources program, the district needs to address issues that are negatively affecting workforce stability. It should conduct an internal pay analysis that will align job responsibilities and compensation for classified staff, and develop and implement a pay for performance plan that includes hiring incentives, retention incentives, and performance criteria for the selection of personnel for supplemental pay assignments. The district can also improve its efficiency and cost-effectiveness by developing and implementing a plan for recruiting and training substitute teachers and by implementing a plan to manage and improve staff attendance. Finally, the district needs to develop a written, measurable strategic plan for human resources, implement recruitment strategies for both instructional and classified employees, and review the department’s organizational and staffing levels.



As seen in Exhibit 6-1, the district has an opportunity to reduce costs in this area. Determining whether to take advantage of this opportunity is a district decision and should be based on several factors including district needs, public input, and school board priorities. If the district implements this action plan it would be able to redirect the funds to other priorities such as the training recommendations identified in Best Practice 11.

**Exhibit 6-1
Implementing the Recommendations for Personnel Systems and Benefits Could Enable the District to Save Approximately \$103,050 Over Five Years**

Best Practice Number	Fiscal Impact: Increased Cost Savings					
	Year 2003-04	Year 2004-05	Year 2005-06	Year 2006-07	Year 2007-08	Total
6 Implement an automated substitute deployment system	\$ 20,610	\$20,610	\$20,610	\$20,610	\$20,610	\$103,050

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Background

The Sarasota School District employed 4,556 full-time employees during the 2002-03 school year, of whom 2,326 were full-time instructional personnel. (See Exhibit 6-2)

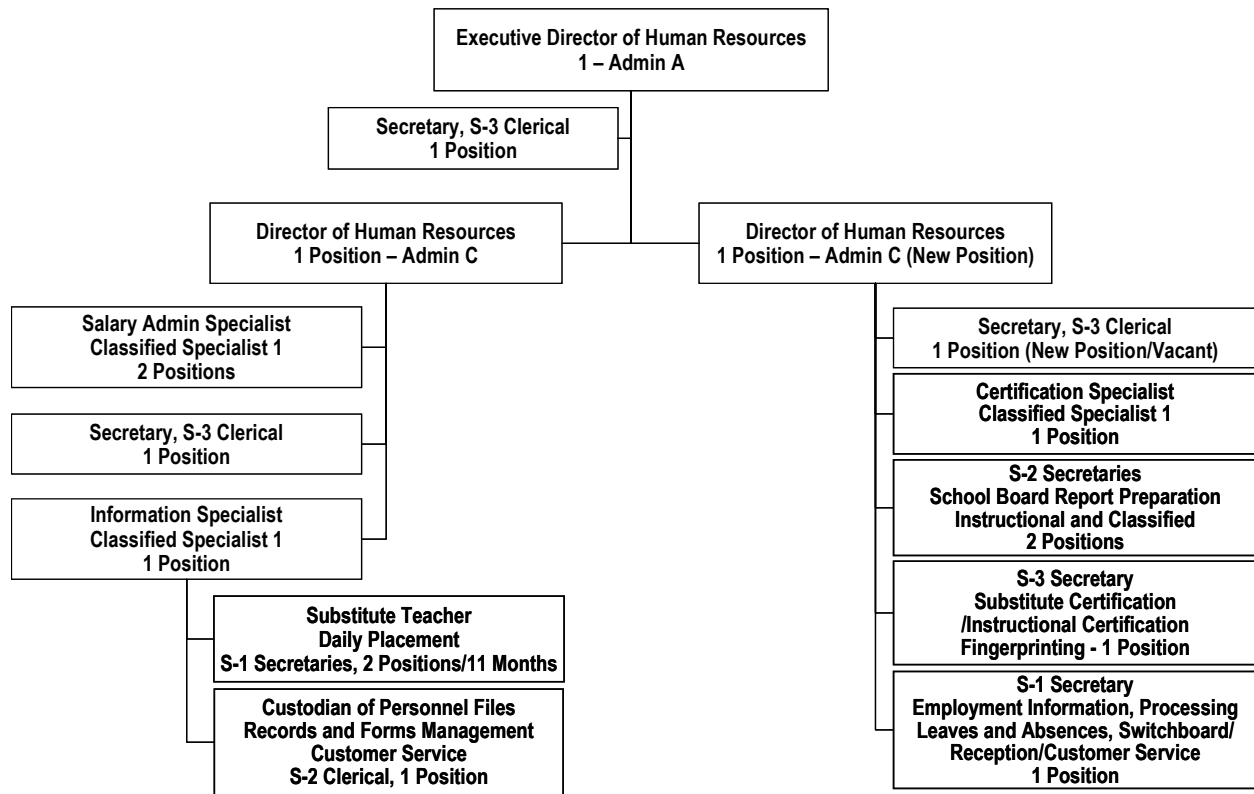
Exhibit 6-2
The Sarasota School District Employs
4,556 Full-Time and 56 Regular Part-Time Employees

Type of Employee	Full-Time	Regular Part-Time
Instructional Personnel	2,326	34
Instructional Aides	515	6
Principals/Consultants/Supervisors	89	0
Other Administrative Staff	61	0
Clerical/Secretarial Personnel	331	1
Plant Operation/Maintenance	344	1
Cafeteria Employees	330	10
Bus Transportation Employees	326	4
Health and Recreation Employees	15	0
All Other Employees (Technicians, Technology, Aides, & Other Support)	219	0
Total All Employees	4,556	56

Source: Sarasota County School District.

The district has assigned responsibility for personnel records, the application and hiring process, labor relations, and dismissal of unsatisfactory employees to the executive director of human resources, who leads the Human Resources Department. The executive director is assisted by 1 full-time director dedicated to personnel issues and a classified staff of 13 full-time employees. The district has recently allocated funds for a new director of human resources position and a secretarial position to provide the new director with support. (See Exhibit 6-3) One of the new director's main functions will be to provide technological expertise to the human resources staff in order to increase efficiency.

**Exhibit 6-3
When All Positions Are Filled the Human Resources Department
Will Be Led By an Executive Director and Two Directors**



Source: Sarasota County School District.

In the current structure, responsibility for a number of human resource related functions are assigned, at least in part, to other units. For example, workers’ compensation and employee benefit programs are primarily the responsibility of the risk manager, who reports to the director of finance. Responsibility for collective bargaining, on the other hand, is shared between the district’s chief negotiator (who is also the attorney for the district school board) and the executive director of human resources. In the same way, responsibility for professional development and training is shared between the human resources unit and the professional development and school improvement unit, which is assigned to the Instructional Support Services Division. Both the executive director and director for human resources work closely with the director of staff development and school improvement to provide orientation and mentoring for new employees and assistance plans for instructional staff who demonstrate performance weaknesses. The design and implementation of staff development programs for instructional staff, however, is primarily the responsibility of the director of staff development and school improvement. In addition, while the noninstructional (classified) department heads have the primary responsibility for staff development within their individual departments, the director of staff development and school improvement is available to support these staff development activities when needed.

The district has budgeted approximately \$1.1 million for human resources, including expenditures for salaries, benefits, materials and supplies, and capital improvement. This budget does not include the salaries, benefits or other costs associated with risk management or collective bargaining, however. (See Exhibit 6-4)

Exhibit 6-4
Human Resources Budget for the 2002-03 School Year
is \$1,111,190 with 65% Committed to Salary and Benefits

Allocation	Amount
Salary and Benefits	\$ 716,233
Other Purchased Services	175,808
Discretionary Funds	179,267
Capital Dollars	39,882
Total	\$1,111,190

Source: Sarasota County School District.

Activities of particular interest

The evaluation system the district has developed for instructional staff, the Teacher Performance Appraisal System (TPAS), represents an extremely thoughtful approach to ensuring a strong link between professional development and the evaluation process. In developing TPAS, the district incorporated the state-required Individual Professional Development Plan as an integral part of the appraisal process rather than as a separate function. At the beginning of the school year each teacher, in conjunction with the school site administrator, identifies a school or area improvement goal, a professional growth objective, expected student outcomes, and the professional development activities to be completed in order to attain the goal. Progress is reviewed during the school year and an evaluation of the activities completed, along with a description of parental input relative to the attainment of the goal, is part of the summative evaluation process. By incorporating the Individual Professional Development Plan into the performance appraisal system, the district has placed an additional emphasis on the role effective professional development plays in improving instruction and increasing student achievement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Conclusions for Personnel Systems and Benefits Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice	Page No.
Human Resource Management	1. The district efficiently and effectively recruits and hires qualified instructional and noninstructional personnel.	Yes	6-6
	2. To the extent possible given factors outside the district's control, the district works to maintain a reasonably stable work force and a satisfying work environment by addressing factors that contribute to increased turnover or low employee morale.	Yes	6-7
	3. The district provides a comprehensive staff development program to improve student achievement and to achieve and maintain high levels of productivity and employee performance among noninstructional, instructional, and administrative employees.	Yes	6-9
	4. The district's system for formally evaluating employees improves and rewards excellent performance and productivity, and identifies and addresses performance that does not meet the district's expectations for the employee.	Yes	6-10
	5. 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 the person's employment.	Yes	6-11
	6. The district has an efficient and cost-effective system for managing absenteeism and the use of substitute teachers and other substitute personnel.	No	6-11
	7. The district maintains personnel records in an efficient and readily accessible manner.	Yes	6-15
	8. The district uses cost-containment practices for its workers' compensation program.	Yes	6-16
	9. The district uses cost-containment practices for its employee benefits programs, including health insurance, dental insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, and retirement.	Yes	6-16
	10. The district's human resource program is managed effectively and efficiently.	No	6-17
	11. For classes of employees that are unionized, the district maintains an effective collective bargaining process.	Yes	6-19

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 1: Using

The district efficiently and effectively recruits and hires qualified instructional and noninstructional personnel, but could broaden its strategic plan to include recruitment efforts, and also address pay equity issues.

Well-run school districts are lean administratively and maximize funds available to support their primary mission of educating students. This requires districts to make the most effective use of funds allocated for administrative services, such as personnel. Thus, school districts should maintain efficient and effective processes for recruiting potential employees, reviewing applications for employment, and hiring new employees. These processes should not be unreasonably burdensome to the applicant or to the principals and department heads who must review applications and make hiring recommendations. School districts should maintain clearly defined position descriptions for all positions within the district and establish recruiting practices that generate a sufficient number of qualified applicants to fill vacant positions in a timely manner. In those areas in which the district has historically experienced a shortage of qualified applicants, the district should have developed and implemented both short- and long-term strategies to remedy these shortages, including making comparisons of entry level salaries and other key factors related to recruitment.

The Sarasota County School District has made a concerted effort to provide qualified applicants for all open positions and to enhance the ability of principals to utilize an automated applicant tracking system to identify eligible applicants for instructional positions. The district currently has adequate qualified applicants for full time positions, as verified through review of personnel records, the district's Internet web page, information on openings and available applicants, as well as the results of interviews with administrators and classified staff and focus groups with new teachers, seasoned teachers, administrators (school site and noninstructional) and noninstructional staff. The application process for new employees is well designed. This process includes reference and background checks as well as fingerprinting. (Applicants falsifying records are not considered for employment.) Board approved job descriptions are up-to-date and the district's employment procedures adhere to federal statutes relating to non-discrimination and give preference in hiring to veterans. The district has also increased the number of minority instructional staff over the past three years and continues to emphasize the need to encourage minorities to apply to work in the district.

While the district is using this best practice, anticipated retirements, expected increases in student enrollment, and other factors will increase the district's recruitment need. If the district is to continue to build on its good work in filling vacancies with well qualified staff, a strategic approach to addressing these future challenges will be needed.

We recommend that the Human Resources (HR) recruitment strategic plan become part of a more global HR strategic plan. It should include strategies and benchmarks for the recruitment of applicants for both instructional and noninstructional positions. It should also continue to increase efforts to attract minority instructional applicants. Implementation of the action plan for Best Practice 10 would accomplish this recommendation.

Best Practice 2: Using

The district maintains a reasonably stable work environment for teachers and is proactively addressing factors that may be contributing to turnover and low employee morale for non-instructional staff.

A stable workforce reduces costs, particularly those associated with recruiting and training of new employees, minimizes the disruption of essential district services, and allows management to focus on improving the quality of services provided. Each school district should be able to demonstrate that it has created a working environment for its employees that enhances worker satisfaction and minimizes employee turnover due to factors within the control of the district. A district can effectively manage employee turnover in a number of ways. For instance, it should maintain data on turnover rates for major classes of employees and on approaching retirements, and should be taking steps to remedy factors that are adversely affecting this working environment. The district also should conduct exit interviews with instructional personnel who separate from the district, and provide the data from those interviews to the state Department of Education. In addition, the district should maintain clear and effective channels of communication with its employees.

The Sarasota County School District does a good job of communicating with its employees and actively monitors school climate and the reasons why individuals leave the district's employment. To communicate with employees about human resource related issues, the district posts its policies on its website, distributes collective bargaining agreements and benefits information to all employees, and provides substitute teachers with a substitute teacher handbook. In addition, e-mail is used to communicate and notify employees of needed information including school board meeting information and actions. Union leaders meet regularly with the superintendent to receive information and provide feedback. Moreover, to understand the overall climate in the work place the district conducts an annual climate survey and reports the results to principals and cost center heads for appropriate action. Climate survey results are compared with the previous year's results. Exit interviews are also conducted with teachers and reported in accordance with the requirements of the Florida Department of Education

The district's efforts to create a stable work force and a satisfying work environment have proved quite successful for teachers. The turnover rate for teachers is about 3.5% per year as compared to 5.2% for the state. However, these efforts have proved less successful for classified workers. The turnover rate for bus drivers, for example, is 10% per year while the turnover rate for food services workers ranges between 50% and 60%. It should be noted that not all these workers leave the district's employment; many move to other positions within the district for higher wages, longer work hours, or a longer work year. While the climate survey data indicates no specific trends relative to dissatisfaction with the work environment, union leaders cite salary as a contributing factor in the turnover rate for food service workers and bus drivers.

These assertions are not necessarily supported when hourly salary ranges are compared. They might be true when simply comparing average annual salaries, but annual average salary data is not directly comparable since differences from district to district in work schedules and work days are reflected in salary differences. (See Exhibit 6-5)

Exhibit 6-5

Sarasota Food Service Workers' and Bus Drivers' Average Salaries and Hourly Salary Ranges Compared to Those of Peer Districts

County	Food Service Workers			Bus Drivers		
	Months Worked	Hourly Salary Range	Average Annual Salary	Months Worked	Hourly Salary Range	Average Annual Salary
Charlotte	9.1	\$6.50-12.67	\$10,091	9.1	\$9.48-14.28	\$10,649
Collier	10.0	\$7.56-10.86	\$13,762	10.0	\$10.67-15.05	\$15,876
Lee	10.0	\$7.49-12.01	\$16,720	10.0	\$9.77-15.67	\$16,306
Manatee	10.0	\$8.19-12.62	\$10,985	9.0	\$10.20-15.95	\$15,016
Palm Beach	9.6	\$7.56-14.60	\$15,004	9.0	\$10.25-16.92	\$16,277
Sarasota	10.0	\$6.62-13.84	\$9,403	10.0	\$10.27-14.58	\$9,104
Volusia	9.0	\$6.97-10.53	\$13,137	10.0	\$9.48-14.28	\$15,413

Source: Florida Department of Education.

At present, a significant variability exists internally relative to pay grades and levels of responsibility for classified workers. For example, data entry clerks are paid higher than office clerks even though the job responsibilities are similar, and the pay range for bookkeepers is based on school assignment rather than level of responsibility. To address these issues, the district is beginning the process of conducting a compensation study. This study will examine the internal and external pay issues for food service workers, bus drivers, custodians, and some MIS positions. The district is to be commended for recognizing the need and taking action to address internal compensation issues for these classes of employees. Additionally, the district would benefit from conducting and analyzing exit interviews for classified employees to determine if other reasons may be contributing to turnover for certain groups of classified employees and implementing appropriate remedies as determined by the results of the exit interviews.

Undertaking a pay study, however, will not by itself ensure that pay levels are internally equitable. A key reason internal pay is not consistently commensurate with job responsibilities is that the same union negotiates for both classified staff and teachers, and has had a longstanding practice of negotiating the same percentage pay increase regardless of position. This practice over time exacerbates internal pay inequities, and even small inequities in pay over time become pronounced. In addition, this bargaining practice makes it difficult for the district to adjust its pay levels to reflect changes in the market for various positions. Under the current arrangement, a position that becomes increasingly valuable in the external market will receive the same percentage increase in salary as all other positions. Inevitably, when such a situation takes place, turnover will increase.

While the district is currently in discussions with the union relative to pay for performance and has budgeted the costs of 5% bonuses for selected school site administrators and instructional staff (\$467,508), no definitive pay for performance plan has yet been established. As a result, incentive pay policies are not in place to encourage or reward effective teachers, address areas of critical teacher shortage, or to provide incentives for teachers to work in schools where it is historically hard to place teachers. In addition, no clear selection process exists to select teachers for supplemental pay positions based on performance criteria. (A district task force is currently working on developing the criteria to be used to identify staff eligible for performance-based compensation, however.)

Establishing a pay for performance plan to include retention incentives and performance criteria for the selection of personnel for supplemental pay assignments can be implemented within the \$467,508 currently budgeted by the district for pay for performance.

We recommend that the district develop a pay for performance plan to include retention incentives and performance criteria for the selection of personnel for supplemental pay assignments. This plan could include such options as skill-based pay for improved teaching through professional development activities, recognition for mentoring, National Board certification, improved student achievement, improved teacher attendance, contributions to district-wide school improvement initiatives, longevity, etc.

Best Practice 3: Using

The district provides a comprehensive staff development program to improve student achievement and to achieve and maintain high levels of productivity and employee performance among noninstructional, instructional, and administrative employees, but could improve professional development programs for clerical staff.

Training ensures that school district employees understand the scope of their responsibilities and performance expectations, and serves to update skills and knowledge necessary to effectively and efficiently carry out their duties. Thus, a school district should provide a comprehensive professional development program that includes orientation, mentoring, and job-related training for both instructional and noninstructional employees. The district's training plans should be based upon periodic training needs assessments. The training should be designed to improve student achievement and maintain high levels of productivity and performance among employees. The district should have a leadership training program that prepares future principals.

The Sarasota County School District has developed and implemented a comprehensive training program for administrators, instructional, and noninstructional (classified) staff. This program does an excellent job of serving the developmental needs of new employees, existing employees, and managers and leaders. Orientation for new employees is highly structured and topics are selected to address specific department and/or instructional needs. Training for new teacher mentors is intensive and the support provided, according to focus groups of new teachers and principals, is effective. New noninstructional staff also receives mentoring from peers in the department to which staff members are assigned with the exception of clerical staff. Professional development for this group of employees is the responsibility of the Office of Professional Development and School Improvement, and currently, clerical staff development offerings are voluntary. In addition, a formal training program has been implemented to meet the needs of National Board for Professional Teaching Standards applicants, 57 of whom have received National Board certification. The district has also implemented a leadership development program to provide leadership training to school based and district administrators as well as to teacher leaders, aspiring administrators, the school board, and the superintendent. (The district has just received a \$100,000 grant to support this training.)

Perhaps most noteworthy about the district's training initiatives is the way that training is used to support improved student achievement and improved performance for all employees. Focus group participants who were interviewed as part of this study strongly indicate that the district is committed to effective staff development as the key to improving student achievement and enhancing performance skills for all employees. The use of disaggregated testing data in the development of individual professional development plans has placed additional significance on the need to improve achievement for all students, regardless of ability level. Moreover, by incorporating the individual professional development plan into the instructional assessment process the district has elevated the role of effective professional development in improving student achievement.

Although the district is using this best practice and does an excellent job of providing effective staff development for the majority of its employees, and even though in-service records indicate needs assessments have been conducted and courses have been offered on a voluntary basis for clerical staff, additional emphasis should be placed on providing services to this group of employees. The district is aware of this need and has already begun to take the necessary steps to improve this area of training.

We recommend that the district review in-service courses for clerical staff and provide additional professional development activities for this group of employees as needed. Interviews with both supervisors and clerical staff indicate the current need for clerical training in high quality customer services techniques and updating technological skills; therefore, we suggest that activities provided by professional development staff include classes in both of these areas.

Best Practice 4: Using

The district's system for formally evaluating employees improves and rewards excellent performance and productivity, and identifies and addresses performance that does not meet the district's expectations for the employee.

Performance appraisals are an essential tool to be used by a school district to improve the quality of services delivered. By evaluating its employees, a district can determine the extent to which each employee is meeting performance expectations and identify ways in which individual and organizational performance can be improved. Each school district should have a system for formally evaluating the performance of its instructional and noninstructional employees. The system should include components that provide for the improvement and growth of employee performance, that reward excellent performance, and that identify those areas of performance that do not meet the district's expectations for the employee. The evaluation of district administrators should be made after feedback has been solicited and received from nonadministrative personnel and from parents.

The Sarasota County School District generally makes extremely effective uses of performance appraisals as a tool to improve employee performance. As discussed above under Activities of Particular Interest, the state approved the district's Teacher Performance Appraisal System (TPAS), which provides written information regarding the performance assessment process as well as procedures to be used when unsatisfactory performance is noted by school site administrators. Likewise, for noninstructional employees, performance appraisals are conducted and unsatisfactory performance is documented. For both instructional and noninstructional employees, when unsatisfactory performance is identified, remediation and assistance are provided. In particular, the practice of establishing a team to assist instructional staff exhibiting performance weaknesses before disciplinary action is taken has received excellent results. The district is also exploring ways to link performance and compensation and, as discussed under Best Practice 2 above, has budgeted \$467,508 for performance pay for the 2002-03 school year.

The district is using this best practice and the formal evaluation procedures identify and address performance that does not meet the district's expectations; however, observations at selected schools and information provided in focus groups from a cross section of employees indicate that the supervision and evaluation of custodial staff should be addressed. Action Plan 8-3 in the chapter addressing facilities maintenance contains recommendations for addressing this issue.

Best Practice 5: Using

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 the person's employment.

District employees are in a position of trust with the potential to influence children in both positive and negative ways. To minimize the potential for negative influence on the children within a district, each school district should establish policies and procedures that address issues related to inappropriate conduct or behavior by employees as well as employees who repeatedly do not meet the district's performance expectations. The district should follow these policies and procedures in such a manner that unsatisfactory employee behavior or performance is effectively dealt with so that these employees do not have an adverse effect on students or upon the school environment. District administrators should receive training and district level support in dealing with poorly performing employees. When it is necessary for a district to terminate an employee, then those termination decisions should be defensible in judicial review.

The Sarasota County School District works aggressively to deal appropriately with employees who repeatedly fail to meet the district's performance expectations. These efforts begin with training. Each year the district provides an in-depth orientation/training for administrators who evaluate instructional staff. This training includes techniques needed by administrators to work with poorly performing employees and covers such areas as recognizing deficiencies, identifying strategies to assist poorly performing employees, developing an assistance plan for improved performance, monitoring and evaluating on-going performance, documenting lack of improvement, and recommending dismissal or separation if necessary. Additionally, specially trained professional development staff members work on assistance teams as needed when performance issues with teachers have been observed. Noninstructional supervisors are also trained to follow provisions in the union contract for disciplining poorly performing employees, and they work closely with the Human Resources Department executive director in documenting such performance. The district is especially aggressive in dealing with employees whose performance is potentially harmful to students. These employees are removed from the worksite until an investigation has been completed. In addition, bus drivers failing random drug tests are separated from employment immediately. The district also offers an employee assistance program.

Best Practice 6: Not Using

The district does not have an efficient and cost-effective system for managing absenteeism and the use of substitute teachers and other substitute personnel.

Excessive employee absenteeism can reduce district productivity, disrupt the continuity of classroom instruction, and, when such absences require the district to use substitutes, increase costs. Thus, each school district should monitor rates of absenteeism and the costs associated with the use of substitutes for instructional and noninstructional personnel. It should have a sufficient number of substitute teachers to cover absenteeism peaks, and should have efficient processes for the notification of absences and the placement of substitutes. It also should provide orientation and training to substitutes, and should provide special assistance (coaching, guidance, and oversight) to substitutes for extended teacher absences. A district should have policies that either encourage high attendance or discourage excessive absenteeism.

The district is not using this best practice for several reasons. Numerous opportunities to improve the district's approach to managing absenteeism and to manage substitute teachers effectively have been identified. To start with, absenteeism is not aggressively managed. While the district uses an Access database to monitor absenteeism, it does not analyze the data or report it to principals or cost center heads to allow for intervention or discipline for excessive absenteeism. In addition, while there is a policy concerning attendance before and after a holiday, the policy is not enforced. Moreover, progressive

discipline, as provided in the collective bargaining agreement, is not used in cases of excessive absenteeism. The district in fact does not have a policy that defines excessive absenteeism. Nor does the district provide incentives to reward good attendance. No focused process or incentive plan has been established to decrease absenteeism or reward and recognize good attendance. To address these issues, the district should develop plans to take a more aggressive stance in dealing with poor employee attendance and to provide incentives for good attendance.

By developing an efficient and cost-effective system for managing absenteeism and the use of substitute teachers and other substitute personnel, the district could reduce the need for substitutes, which may translate into reduced costs for substitutes. Any savings can then be used to provide incentives for good attendance.

Action Plan 6-1

We recommend that the district develop and implement a plan to manage and improve attendance for teachers and classified staff.

Action Needed	Step 1. Review and analyze current school district policies governing attendance to determine effectiveness. Step 2. Develop policies defining excessive absenteeism and new policies governing attendance as determined from Step 2. Step 3. Develop and recommend incentive plan to recognize and reward good attendance. Step 4. Establish process for effectively dealing with excessive absenteeism. Step 5. Recommend appropriate policies (for example, an incentive plan for good attendance) and a process for dealing with excessive absenteeism to the superintendent. Step 6. Obtain school board approval for new policies as appropriate. Step 7. Assign responsibility for implementation of the action plan. Step 8. Implement and evaluate incentive plan for good attendance and process for dealing with excessive absenteeism. Step 9. Evaluate the effectiveness of policy changes (especially the incentive plan for good attendance).
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Human Resources
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Absenteeism rates are high for bus drivers, food service workers and custodians. However, substitutes are not provided for most noninstructional staff. Not providing substitutes when needed disrupts the district’s ability to effectively service schools. Moreover, not providing substitutes reduces the incentives for managers to streamline staffing. Relief capacity must be maintained within the unit to ensure needed work can be completed when staff is absent and when substitutes are not provided.

Action Plan 6-2 describes the steps necessary for the district to develop a plan to address the provision of services for absences that occur for bus drivers, food service workers, and custodians.

Action Plan 6-2

We recommend that the district develop a plan to address the provision of services for absences that occur for bus drivers, food service workers, and custodians.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop options for the provision of bus, food and custodial services when regular staff is absent.
	Step 2.	Implement options to ensure that services are continued when bus drivers, food service workers, and custodians are absent.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Human Resources and cost center heads for transportation, food service and facilities	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

The district’s approach to deploying substitute teachers to schools can also be improved. At present, the deployment of substitute teachers to schools is handled manually by two district office substitute callers. The cost of salaries and benefits for the substitute callers is \$57,030 a year, or \$285,000 over five years. This system could be handled more cost effectively by implementing an automated substitute deployment system. Over five years an automated substitute deployment system could save the district \$181,950 to \$198,110, based on estimates provided to the district.

The total estimated savings to the district from an automated system was determined by subtracting the estimated five year savings provided by the lower-cost automated system, \$181,950, from the cost of the current system, \$285,000, and dividing by five. This gives an annual estimated cost savings of \$20,610 through 2008, assuming that implementation would begin in the 2003-04 school year.

Action Plan 6-3

We recommend that the district implement an automated substitute deployment system.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Assign responsibility for review and analysis of available automated substitute deployment systems.
	Step 2.	Establish criteria to evaluate which system will best meet the needs of the district.
	Step 3.	Develop Request for Proposals based on the criteria established in Step 2.
	Step 4.	Select and recommend to the superintendent the selected automated substitute deployment system.
	Step 5.	Obtain school board approval.
	Step 6.	Implement automated substitute deployment system.
	Step 7.	Evaluate effectiveness of automated substitute deployment system.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Human Resources	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

The district would also benefit from focusing more attention on recruiting and maintaining its cadre of substitutes. While district reports indicate that 98% of daily needs are met, discussions with teachers, principals, and department heads indicate that vacancies are more common, particularly before and after holidays. In addition, teachers and principals report that as the school year progresses the number and quality of substitute teachers declines. These problems persist in part because the district lacks a focused recruitment and retention program for substitute personnel. The district should be able to develop and implement a plan for recruiting and retaining substitute teachers within existing resources. The district already has budgeted \$59,000 for the 2002-03 school year and has spent \$25,621 as of February 2003.

We recommend that the district develop and implement a plan for recruiting and retaining substitute teachers.

Overall, the district should be commended for the considerable attention it focuses on providing training and orientation for substitute teachers. For example, all substitute teachers participate in an orientation program and are given a handbook for substitute teachers. Additionally, an endorsement program is provided for substitute teachers, which consists of five courses: The Professional Substitute; Classroom Management; Critical Thinking Skills; Disciplining the Difficult Child; and The Instructive Classroom. This certification program is available to both beginning and long-term substitutes. While this training has many positive features, it is not required or evaluated. This may explain why, in interviews, principals reported no difference in performance for substitutes who participated in the training and those who have not. A comprehensive reassessment of the district’s approach to training substitute teachers is therefore warranted. The district should be able to develop a comprehensive training program for substitutes within existing resources.

Action Plan 6-4

We recommend that the district review and revise its training program for substitutes.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Review current substitute training and revise and expand the training program based on the result of this review.
	Step 2.	Evaluate the effectiveness of the new training program by evaluating the performance of substitute teachers.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Human Resources	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

One final opportunity exists for the district to strengthen its approach to managing substitutes. At present, principals provide oversight over substitutes but no formal process is in place to evaluate substitute performance. Consequently, the district has no basis on which to determine what additional training would benefit a substitute teacher, or whether a given substitute’s performance is exemplary or unsatisfactory. Establishing a process to evaluate substitutes formally would help to identify and encourage the retention of outstanding substitutes as well as to weed out poorly performing substitutes. The district should be able to develop an evaluation process to assess the performance of substitute teachers within existing resources.

Action Plan 6-5

We recommend that the district develop an evaluation process to assess the performance of substitute teachers.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop an evaluation process for substitute teachers.
	Step 2.	Evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in improving the performance of substitute teachers.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Human Resources	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 7: Using

The district maintains personnel records in an efficient and readily accessible manner but could improve its records management process by implementing an automated records management system.

School district personnel files hold essential information on all district employees, which must be maintained in a manner that protects the employees while serving the needs of the district. Each school district should maintain its personnel records in an efficient, readily accessible, and timely manner. When it is more cost efficient to do so, districts should implement automated record-keeping systems that facilitate the ready exchange of personnel information with school sites and other departments. When feasible and cost effective, the district should explore options that would delegate certain data entry responsibilities to school site personnel, so long as this does not compromise the security of those records.

The Sarasota School District has done a good job of maintaining personnel records (including confidential records) in accordance with Florida statutes and regulations. In part, the district's effective record keeping stems from the fact that there are well-established procedures relating to the maintenance of personnel records. (School district policies 6.31 and 3.50 govern records and reports and public information and inspection of records. The collective bargaining agreement also contains provisions governing access to personnel records.) Included among the effective records management procedures the district has established is the requirement that when someone accesses a personnel record, he or she signs a form verifying that confidential records were not available. The district also maintains a records retention schedule which outlines the maintenance of archival records. Records management efforts are also effective because responsibility for the maintenance of records is clearly established. A records management liaison officer has overall responsibility for records and forms management. Additionally, a records coordinator at each cost center is responsible for records management at each school site. It should be noted that while records management procedures are appropriately strong, access to personnel records by appropriate personnel is easy. School personnel with an authorized user ID and password may make changes in employee status through the district's administrative information system (AS400). In addition, personnel action requests are automated and payroll reporting is managed on-line at the school site level. Personnel information is updated within two to three days of each board meeting, including record filing and notification to the employee and cost center head.

While the district has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice, records management is unnecessarily complicated because all personnel records are maintained in hard copy only. The district would benefit from implementing an automated records management system. One way to do this would be by expanding the functionality of the system currently in use only for applicant tracking. The applicant tracking process does not currently interface with the AS400 system so data must be reentered when an applicant is hired. The district has explored expanding the use of this system and received estimated costs, which form the basis for the estimated costs identified in the following recommendation.

We recommend that the district consider expanding the functionality of its applicant tracking system to include creating an interface between the applicant tracking and the AS400 systems, and automating record management. At a minimum, this would require acquiring one additional server and scanner. The savings realized from automating the substitute deployment process could be used to support the estimated \$10,000 cost of implementing this recommendation.

Best Practice 8: Using

The district uses cost containment practices for its workers' compensation program but could improve these efforts by implementing a more structured safety inspection program.

When left uncontrolled, workers' compensation claims can represent a significant expense to school districts and, thus, should be effectively managed to minimize their frequency and costs. A district can do this in a number of ways. For instance, a district should conduct routine evaluation of the claims and expenses. The district also should have an active safety inspection program, and should develop corrective actions such as physical plant repair or employee training based upon information gained from past workers' compensation claims. In addition, the district should implement cost containment steps to limit workers' compensation expenses, such as a light duty program that enables injured employees to return to work as soon as they are able.

The Sarasota County School District has demonstrated improvement in implementing cost containment measures for its workers' compensation program. It uses a third party administrator to manage claims. The district reviews lost time claims and expenses on a quarterly basis. Total claim expenses have been reduced from \$1,863,623.16 in the 1999-2000 school year to \$640,007.67 in the 2001-02 school year. Additionally, a report prepared by Midwest Employers Casualty Company (November 22, 2002) reports that the medical and lost wage benefits incurred by the district are approximately 17% (or \$1,555,400) less than its Florida peers. To further control workers' compensation costs the district has also established a managed medical care arrangement with Integrated Administrators (a managed care network including Charlotte, DeSoto, Sarasota and Manatee counties). This arrangement has been approved for the last three years by the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration. Further, no formal grievances have been filed in the last three years and all complaints and informal grievances have been resolved. The number of litigated claims has also been reduced from 12 in the 1999-2000 school year to 5 in the 2001-02 school year.

While the district is using this best practice, cost containment measures could be improved by implementing a more structured safety inspection and training program. At present staff in the transportation, food service, and maintenance departments are required to conduct their own safety inspections. In addition, some ongoing training relating to blood borne pathogen exposure and electrical safety has been conducted. However, the lack of both consistently implemented safety inspections across all departments and subsequent follow-up limit the effectiveness of these efforts. At best, the response to a problem is *ad hoc* and little attention is paid to identifying systemic solutions. Consequently, a more structured approach to managing workplace safety would be of great benefit to the district.

We recommend that the district develop a more structured safety inspection program. This program should include consistent safety inspections across the entire district, the development of corrective action plans to address identified problems, and the development of data systems that can be used to evaluate the results of implementing corrective action plans and the overall effectiveness of cost containment efforts. Additionally, training as determined by the needs identified through corrective plans should be implemented and evaluated to further improve cost containment practices in the workers' compensation area.

Best Practice 9: Using

The district uses cost containment practices for its employee benefits.

The cost of employee benefits is a substantial, ongoing expense for most school districts. In addition, due to rising health care costs, benefit expenses can increase more rapidly than anticipated resulting in districts having to reduce other services or borrow from reserves. Thus, each school district should use cost containment practices to limit increases in the district's costs for employee benefits and to provide

optimum employee benefits for the costs incurred. The district should periodically review its employee benefit package, in cooperation with the employee unions, to identify alternative delivery options. The district should calculate the short- and long-term fiscal impact on all changes to its benefit packages prior to approval of those changes. For fiscal year 2002-03, the Sarasota County School District's employee benefit package cost about \$15.8 million and, for fiscal year 2003-04, is expected to cost about \$18 million, excluding employees' costs.

The Sarasota County School District has taken a number of prudent steps to control the costs of employee benefits. The district has worked with the employee union through a district benefit committee made up of district staff and union members. District employees choosing family/dependent coverage must pay the difference between that cost and the cost of single coverage which, in fiscal year 2002-03, is expected to be about \$7 million. The district also offers a benefit plan with a variety of options that employees, at their own expense, may select. Rather than an early retirement incentive program, the district provides employees with a contributory retirement plan at the employee's expense. The district benefit committee also reviews options for reducing health insurance costs, which it reports to the school board prior to entering any agreements with a benefits vendor.

The district also periodically evaluates options to reduce health benefits costs within the context of its overall compensation strategy. For example, in 2002 the district's benefits committee obtained the services of a financial advisor who identified alternative approaches to structuring deductibles, prescription drug co-payments, employee out-of-pocket expenses, and health care networks.¹ According to the 2002 study, medical insurance program costs to the district could be reduced by \$1.4 to \$1.7 million a year, depending on the alternative chosen. The district (through the collective bargaining process) ultimately decided not to modify its health insurance program. According to the district, it determined, in conjunction with its collective bargaining agent, that a health benefits program that minimizes insurance deductibles, employee out-of-pocket expenses, and drug co-payments helps to attract and retain high quality teachers and other employees.

However, in the face of rising health care costs and limited resources, maintaining current deductibles, co-payments, and limitations on out-of-pocket expenses may not be practicable. Therefore, district officials, union leaders and members, school board members, and the public should understand the costs and affordability of the district's benefits package as well as those of reasonable alternatives.

We recommend that the district continue to evaluate the costs associated with various modifications to its health benefits plan. With this information, school board members will be able to make informed decisions about the costs of the district's compensation package.

Best Practice 10: Not Using

While the human resources program employs a number of effective management practices, several steps can be taken to strengthen program management.

Like other publicly funded entities, a school district should be held accountable for and provide information to parents and other taxpayers on the performance and cost of its major programs and support services. To accomplish this, each school district should have an effective accountability system that includes clearly stated goals and measurable objectives for the human resource program that identifies the expected outcomes of the program. The district should conduct formal and/or informal reviews of the

¹ The district had last changed these in 2001. In 2002, the district's PPO plan for individuals had a deductible of \$200 and a limitation on out-of-pocket expenses of \$1,000. The district's HMO plan for individuals had a series of co-payments and a \$1,500 limitation on out-of-pocket expenses. Its catastrophic injury plan, implemented on May 1, 2002, had a \$1,000 deductible and a \$2,000 limitation on out-of-pocket expenses for individuals. Approximately two-thirds of school district employees chose the HMO plan.

Personnel Systems and Benefits

program structure and staffing, with sufficient justification for each administrative position. In addition, each district should consider the advantages and disadvantages, as well as the costs and potential cost savings, or alternative means of delivery of human resource services, such as increased use of automation and the use of outsourcing.

The Sarasota County School District's management of the human resources function is sound in many respects. For example, the district updates job descriptions regularly and all job descriptions are approved by the board. In addition, human resources staff has implemented an automated application process for instructional applicants and maintains an electronic applicant tracking system for use by site administrators seeking eligible instructional applicants for open positions. Staff recognizes the need to more effectively integrate the current tracking system with the district's information technology system and is in the process of adding an additional director to the current staff to address this need. (This position was created by a recent district budget enhancement.) One of the main job functions of this new director will be to provide technology expertise to the human resource staff in order to increase efficiency.

The district is not using this best practice, however, because the department has not developed goals with measurable objectives to guide human resource activities. While Human Resource Department staff has developed and implemented a recruitment strategic plan, this plan addresses only a small portion of human resource activities. A more global strategic plan inclusive of all human resource functions is needed. It should include a systematic review of current organizational structure, administrative staffing, and management processes as well as provisions for continuous review of these functions on a regularly scheduled basis. While the department should be commended for taking the steps necessary to establish the recently approved director position (a position that is clearly needed), if a systematic review of organizational structure and staffing were undertaken on a regular basis a case for establishing this position could have been made much earlier. Additionally, as staff changes occur as a result of resignation or retirement, the current organizational structure should be reviewed to determine if the number of administrative positions is appropriate when matched with span of control and budget. Moreover, as the pace of technical change quickens, existing organizational structures and staffing configurations may become outdated. Undertaking a regularly scheduled review of organization, management, and staffing will ensure that the department is well positioned to provide high quality human resource services to the district.

Action Plan 6-6

We recommend the district develop a written strategic plan for human resources that includes measurable objectives that reflect the purpose and expected outcomes of the program.

Action Needed	Step 1. Identify members of a strategic planning task force.
	Step 2. Set goals and time frames for completion of the human resources strategic plan.
	Step 3. Provide OPPAGA report and current recruitment strategic plan to task force for review.
	Step 4. Develop and implement human resources needs assessment if the task force deems this effort appropriate.
	Step 5. Interview selected human resource staff to supplement information generated by OPPAGA and other reports.
	Step 6. Begin process of establishing written goals and measurable objectives with benchmarking incorporated into the plan.
	Step 7. Review continuously with appropriate stakeholders.
	Step 8. Ensure the plan's consistency with other strategic planning initiatives being undertaken in the district.
	Step 9. Include district's plan for recruiting and training substitute teachers once it has been completed.
	Step 10. Include procedures for annually updating the plan.
	Step 11. Seek board approval once plan is completed.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Human Resources
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 11: Using

For classes of employees that are unionized the district maintains an effective collective bargaining process but would benefit from establishing interest-based bargaining.

Each school district should maintain a collective bargaining process that results in fair employee compensation packages that it can afford. To achieve this, district negotiators should receive training to enhance negotiation knowledge and skills, and the roles and responsibilities of the negotiator, superintendent, and school board during the negotiating process should be clearly defined. The district should identify and review issues to be considered during the negotiation process, determining the estimated fiscal impact as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each proposal. The negotiating team should have access to an attorney trained in collective bargaining law and procedure, and records of negotiations should be maintained for a time set by the district.

The Sarasota County School District has done a good job of maintaining an effective collective bargaining process. The district's chief negotiator is an attorney with labor law and collective bargaining experience. (He also serves as the district's labor attorney, advising the district on labor law, contract negotiations, contract administration, and dispute resolution.) Prior to the start of labor negotiations the chief negotiator provides the negotiation team with a briefing on negotiation issues in preparation for bargaining. At this time, the school board, school site administrators, and department heads bring forward issues for negotiation. These issues are presented to the superintendent who, in turn, presents them to the school board to establish negotiation priorities and the protocol for bargaining (which includes maintaining confidentiality during the negotiation process). The director of finance analyzes proposals for fiscal impact, and principals and other administrators analyze the impact of language additions or changes in district operations. The superintendent ultimately determines which proposals are in the best interest of the district and which proposals are accepted for negotiation. Both district and

union officials report that while difficult issues have been addressed, the parties have been able to maintain a nonadversarial relationship. The district strives to build on this good working relationship as it works with the union to address the two major issues discussed in this chapter that require union support, internal equity in the pay for classified employees and health benefit plan design. The district and union would benefit from training in interest-based bargaining to assist in their efforts to work collaboratively on these issues. Interest-based bargaining would provide a means for the district and the union to explore solutions to common problems from the perspective of mutual interests and reach solutions based on these mutual interests.

We recommend that the district and union engage in interest-based bargaining training and use this process to solve internal pay issues for classified staff and health benefit cost issues in the best interest of the district and the union. Estimated cost of training is \$30,000 and could be paid for from savings realized in automating the substitute deployment system.

7 Facilities Construction

Summary

The Sarasota County School District is using 19 of 24 of the best practices in facilities construction. For the most part, the district effectively manages the funding, design, and construction of its projects. However, to use the remaining best practice standards in planning and evaluation, and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its facilities construction services division, the district should establish long-range educational facility planning capacity. It should also create an information system to support facility management. It needs to apply performance standards and accountability measures to site selection, asset management, the design and construction of new schools and the improvement of existing schools. With this expanded facilities management infrastructure in place, the school district should re-evaluate its capital priorities, create a new capital plan and move quickly to implement this revised plan.

Background

Background information on the districts facilities operations and needs are presented in this section. The first section presents general information relating to facilities utilization. The second section presents information on the age and condition of the district's facilities inventory. Next, information on the district's capital budget is presented. A final section presents information on how the district facilities construction operations are organized and managed.

Facilities utilization. The Sarasota County School District has a total of 50,429 satisfactory student stations (42,077 permanent student stations and 8,352 student stations located in relocatables) in its 35 schools, but an enrollment capacity of 46,444 students. With a 2002-03 enrollment of 35,519 students, the utilization rate of district facilities is 76%. The district wide utilization rate masks the challenges facing the district due to shifts in the county population. While enrollment growth in the district as a whole is 2% per year, in the south of the county, where there is currently no excess capacity, enrollment is expected to grow from 9% to 10% per year.

Exhibit 7-1
Overall the District Uses 76% of its Capacity

Description	Number	Total Satisfactory Student Stations	Full Capacity	Satisfactory Permanent Student Stations	Capacity of Permanent Facilities	Capital Outlay Full Time Equivalent
Elementary	19	19,882	19,882	15,203	15,203	15,453
Middle	5	8,393	7,553	8,066	7,259	5,733
Senior High	4	10,405	9,884	9,625	9,143	8,576
Exceptional Student	2	493	493	447	447	423
Combination	3	6,504	5,853	4,955	4,459	5,101
Alternative Education	1	798	798	798	798	32
Vocational Technical	1	1,651	1,981	951	1,141	201
Total	35	48,126	46,444	40,045	38,450	35,519
Vacant ¹	3	2,303	0	2,032	0	0
County Administration	1	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation	4	0	0	0	0	0
Multiple Use Support	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	9	2,303	-	2,032	-	-
Grand Total	44	50,429	46,444	42,077	38,450	35,519

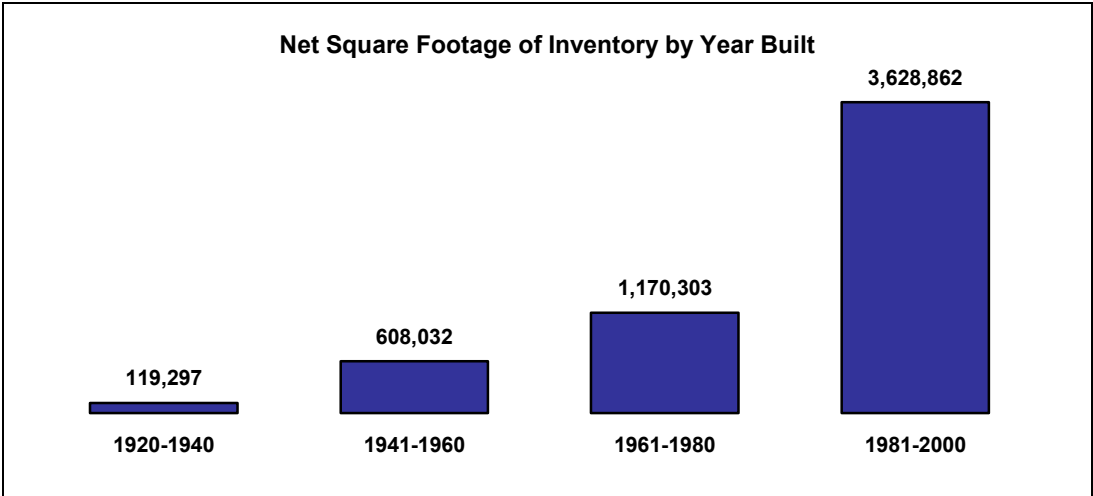
¹ In actuality only Middle School “DD”, which is under construction, is vacant. The other two schools, Triad and Cysis, both special schools, have students enrolled, but because of a problem with the data entry at the State Department of Education, FTEs are not showing up at these locations. Facilities Construction is working with the Department of Education to clear up this problem.

Source: Florida Inventory of School Houses SY2002-03.

The 1999 Educational Plant Survey recommended eliminating 6,238 student stations by discontinuing the use of relocatables and eliminating 1,620 student stations through use change—converting classrooms to office space or resource rooms. If these recommendations were implemented, 7,858 student stations would be eliminated which would, in turn, significantly increase facility utilization. Given current class size reduction requirements, however, the implementation of this recommendation has been put on hold.

Facilities inventory. Sixty-five percent of the school inventory is 20 years old or less. While most of the facilities are still within the useful life of their major systems and components, the school district is working to eliminate the building condition and design deficiencies in the older schools. These schools were built before asbestos was determined to be harmful, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed, hurricane hardening requirements were intensified, and technology and other educational enhancements were standard classroom expectations. The extent of the deficiencies in the older schools is reflected by the five-year capital budget for renovation, remodeling and repairs of nearly \$127 million.

**Exhibit 7-2
Age of Sarasota Public School Buildings**



Source: Sarasota County Public Schools, Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH) Report.

Capital budget. For the 2002-03 through 2006-07 capital budget, only 4.9% of the capital funds come from the State. The balance, approximately \$480 million are funded through local sales taxes, property taxes, and other local sources. Sarasota County voters renewed the school capital outlay surtax in 1999. The district uses the revenue from this surtax to fund school construction on a pay-go basis. The District borrowed \$63 million in 1993 to build North Port HS, Pineview Center and two to three elementary schools. The school board has decided to refinance the \$63 million to take advantage of the lower interest rates. The administration is preparing a proposal for the school board to recommend using some of the millage capacity to finance \$100 million worth of projects. Exhibit 8-4 is the projected capital budget for 2002-03 through 2006-07. (This budget includes only major facilities construction budget items.)

Exhibit 7-3

The Bulk Of The District's Capital Budget For The Next Five Years is Devoted To New School Construction and Remodeling, Renovations And Repairs

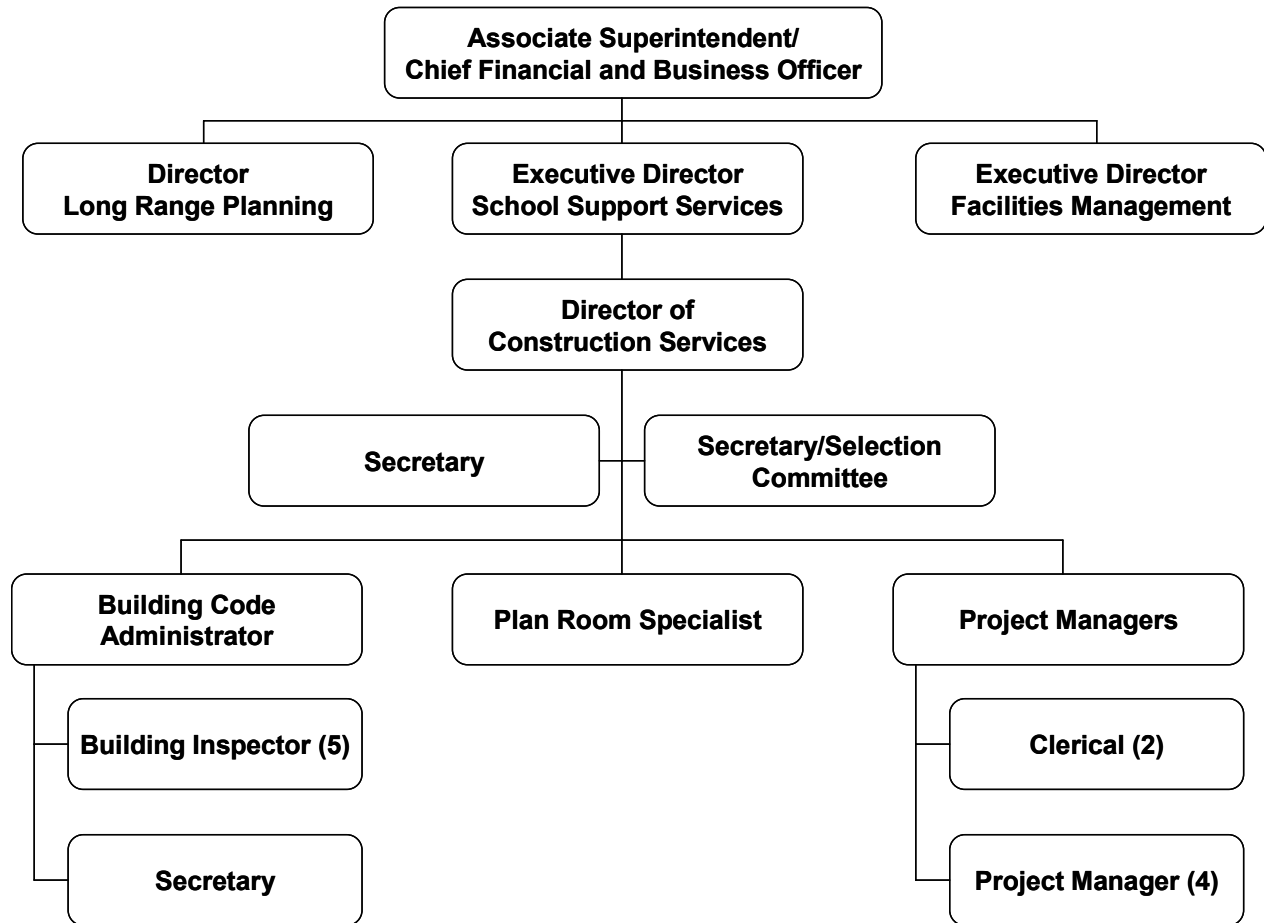
Project Descriptions	2002-03 Projected Budget	2003-04 Projected Budget	2004-05 Projected Budget	2005-06 Projected Budget	2006-07 Projected Budget	Totals
New school construction	\$44,860,472	\$19,858,703	\$21,225,016	\$24,251,836	\$22,679,964	\$132,875,991
Remodeling, renovations, repairs	44,984,099	19,555,201	20,960,013	21,840,450	19,514,908	\$126,854,671
Architecture/engineering	5,714,657	2,529,748	3,278,493	3,557,420	3,326,847	\$18,407,165
Equipment and fixtures	4,253,705	1,883,018	2,012,573	2,183,798	2,042,256	\$12,375,350
Salaries and benefits	1,301,723	1,366,809	1,460,848	1,585,134	1,482,394	\$7,196,908
Land purchase	6,144,726	0	0	0	0	\$6,144,726
Land improvements	181,534	810,778	866,561	940,286	879,342	\$3,678,501
Library books for new libraries	462,245	204,625	218,704	237,311	221,929	\$1,344,814
Total	\$107,903,161	\$46,208,882	\$50,022,208	\$54,596,235	\$50,147,640	\$308,878,126

Source: Capital Projects Funds, 2002-03 Budget, Sarasota County School District, September 3, 2002.

Organization and management. The school district is in a period of transition in the organization of its facilities planning, management and construction functions. The associate superintendent/chief financial and business officer has created an internal construction process study team that is examining the facility management processes. This study team is working to develop improved systems for facilities construction support and quality control. A new position with responsibility for long range planning has been approved and funded by the school board. In addition, a position for an executive director for facilities management was created and approved by the school board. The reorganization and planning work is being done in anticipation of a significant increase in the number of concurrent major capital projects the district is expected to undertake in the near-term future. The organization, while needing to increase the planning and asset management functions of these two new positions, must be sure to integrate these functions into School Support Services and Construction Services.

As the construction services division is currently organized, it is able to take projects that are already planned and designed and see that they are constructed according to their requirements. The division is made up of two types of employees, project managers and inspectors. The clerical and plan specialists help to manage the paper work that such work generates. The planning administrator is a new position that has yet to be defined or filled.

**Exhibit 7-4
The Sarasota County School District's Organizational Structure
Results In Shared Responsibility for Construction Services**



Source: Sarasota County School District.

Activities of particular interest

A number of effective facilities construction practices are in place that are worthy of special notice. For example, the district has entered into joint-use agreement with the City of North Port for the shared use of a high school auditorium. The City of North Port contributed \$3.8 million towards the construction of this state of the art theatre/auditorium. Since the opening of the school in 2001, over 30,000 persons have attended functions at the theatre.

The district has also taken proactive steps to control energy costs by making upfront investments in thermal storage units. These ice storage units enable the district to use electricity at night during low use times to make ice that will cool buildings during the day. The district's effective management of its energy consumption allows it to receive rebates from Florida Power. The construction division estimates that the thermal storage tanks they have installed will pay for themselves in reduced electricity consumption in four years.

Facilities Construction

The third activity that has saved the school district funds for new construction is from the use of change orders. To take advantage of the fact that the district is not required to pay sales tax, the school district buys major mechanical systems or other material directly from the manufacturer or supplier on behalf of the contractors. A project change order is then initiated to credit the district for the amount of the purchase. In the construction of the new North Port High School this technique saved the district approximately \$400,000 in payments for taxes the contractor would otherwise have passed on to the district

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Conclusions for Facilities Construction Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice?	Page No.
Construction Planning	1. The district has effective long-range planning processes.	No	7-9
	2. When developing the annual five-year facilities work plan the district evaluates alternatives to minimize the need for new construction.	Yes	7-12
	3. The five-year facilities work plan establishes budgetary plans and priorities.	Yes	7-12
	4. The school board ensures responsiveness to the community through open communication about the construction program and the five-year facilities work plan.	Yes	7-13
	5. The district has an effective site selection process based on expected growth patterns.	No	7-14
	6. The board considers the most economical and practical sites for current and anticipated needs, including such factors as need to exercise eminent domain, obstacles to development, and consideration of agreements with adjoining counties.	Yes	7-15
Construction Funding	7. Funds collected for school projects were raised appropriately.	Yes	7-15
	8. The district approves and uses 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.	Yes	7-16
Construction Design	9. The district develops thorough descriptions and educational specifications for each construction project.	Yes	7-16
	10. The architectural design fulfills the building specification needs as determined by the district.	Yes	7-17
	11. New construction, remodeling, and renovations incorporate effective safety features.	Yes	7-18
	12. The district minimizes construction and maintenance and operations costs through the use of cost-effective designs, prototype school designs, and frugal construction practices.	Yes	7-18
	13. The district has effective management processes for construction projects.	Yes	7-19
New Construction, Renovation and Remodeling	14. District planning provides realistic time frames for implementation that are coordinated with the opening of schools.	Yes	7-20
	15. All projects started after March 1, 2002, comply with the <i>Florida Building Code</i> .	Yes	7-21
	16. The district requires appropriate inspection of all school construction projects.	Yes	7-21
	17. The district retains appropriate professionals to assist in facility planning, design, and construction.	Yes	7-22

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice?	Page No.
	18. The district follows generally accepted and legal contracting practices to control costs.	Yes	7-23
	19. The district minimizes changes to facilities plans after final working drawings are initiated in order to control project costs.	Yes	7-23
	20. The architect recommends payment based on the percentage of work completed. A percentage of the contract is withheld pending completion of the project.	Yes	7-24
Facility Occupancy and Evaluation	21. The district conducts a comprehensive orientation to the new facility prior to its use so that users better understand the building design and function.	Yes	7-25
	22. 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.	No	7-26
	23. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the construction program.	No	7-27
	24. The district regularly evaluates facilities construction operations based on established benchmarks and implements improvements to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.	No	7-28

CONSTRUCTION PLANNING

Best Practice 1: Not Using

The district does not have institutional structures and systems for effective long-range planning.

Long-range facility planning enables a district to identify its critical needs, establish strategies, and plan for the allocation of resources to address these needs. To ensure that all critical needs are identified, the district should obtain broad stakeholder input by establishing a facilities planning committee, which includes school district personnel, parents, real estate and construction professionals, and other community stakeholders. The decisions made during the planning process should be in writing and the resulting plans should address facilities needs from 5 to 20 years into the future. The planning process should assess enrollment projections, plant capacity, sufficiency of funds, and other relevant information. Primary responsibility for facilities planning should be assigned to a district employee, and that person should be responsible for developing and maintaining demographic information that can be used to predict facilities needs. Because the Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH) is used to report plant capacity and is used to help determine district facilities funding levels, it must accurately reflect the capacities and physical condition of the existing facilities. In addition, to refine projections with more current information, there should be an annual update to the five-year facilities work program, which establishes short-term capital budget plans and construction priorities.

In the Sarasota County School District, a facility strategy team, consisting of the school board president, the associate superintendent/chief financial and business officer, the director of elementary schools, the director of school support services, the director of construction services, the Sarasota County planner and planning representatives from each municipality, is responsible for leading district facility planning efforts. This committee, which has been meeting approximately twice a month since the fall of 2002, analyzes growth patterns, the need for new schools, attendance areas, and issues associated with site selection and purchase. The team is also charged with assuming the tasks of the former capital projects advisory committee, which had been responsible for reviewing school facility improvement needs.

Although the facilities strategy team is addressing long overdue educational facilities planning issues, the district does not have structures and systems for effective long-range planning, which is evident in three ways. First, the district has no single office or person responsible for long-range facility planning. A committee is no substitute for ongoing in-house organizational planning capacity—especially in an organization like the Sarasota County School District that is working to increase the scope of its building program. Unless a large district such as Sarasota focuses full-time attention to planning efforts it will find itself at great risk both of wasting money and of constructing facilities that do not meet district needs. While the district has recently approved a new planner position, it assigned the position to the construction services division, at a mid-level rank, separated from the central office's educational and student enrollment offices. This position can be moved into a planning office to support a senior level planner. Experience in both the public and private sector suggests that effective regular, long and mid-range planning saves money. Effective planning enables a district to minimize design and construction changes and to effectively align construction staffing to work load.

The cost of creating a planning office is already partially covered by the planning position in construction services. However in order to connect the planning to district-wide demographic, educational and budget concerns the office needs to report directly to the associate superintendent/chief financial and business officer, or a comparable level administrator who has cross area responsibilities. The responsibilities for the planning office could be written into an existing senior level position, in order to have no new cost. The long-range savings from implementing this recommendation can be considerable. The savings would

result from land banking, closing or consolidating schools in a timely manner, redistricting done in advance of crowding or underutilization, and saving the cost of moving or adding relocatables.

The district should establish a planning office. Action Plan 7-1 sets out the steps necessary to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 7-1

We recommend that the district establish a planning office.		
Action Needed		<p>Step 1. Define the goals and objectives of the planning office.</p> <p>Step 2. Identify job descriptions and qualifications for in house staff responsible for meeting goals and objectives.</p> <p>Step 3. Obtain approval from superintendent and school board for planning office.</p> <p>Step 4. Advertise to fill planning positions.</p> <p>Step 5. Analyze relationships between executive director of facilities management, executive director for school support services, and executive director of construction services to create clear lines of authority and responsibility.</p>
Who Is Responsible		Associate Superintendent/Chief Financial and Business Officer, Construction Process Study Team
Time Frame		June 30, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

A second weakness in the district’s facility planning efforts is that it does not include broad stakeholder involvement in the process. While the inter-agency and cross school district membership of the facilities strategy team is commendable, no citizen, business, parent or other stakeholder representatives (other than the school board chair) currently participate in the facility planning process. Given the complex decisions that will be required as the district moves forward with its facility planning efforts and the request for additional capital funding that will be forthcoming, it is prudent to include a cross-section of the public early in any major planning initiative.

When there are complicated decisions—considerations of school closings, locating schools, purchasing land to hold, redistricting—required to address the management of school facilities, it is important to involve the public in these decisions early. There is no added cost to formalizing and increasing public involvement. However, communicating and involving the public requires staff time. This would be the responsibility of the new planning office. The savings that result from a clearly defined public strategy come in being able to implement plans without delay.

The district should broaden the membership of the facilities strategy team to include public stakeholders. Action Plan 7-2 sets out the steps necessary to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 7-2

We recommend that the membership of the facilities strategy team be broadened to include public stakeholders.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify various types of stakeholders with an active interest in facilities planning (e.g., from communities under consideration, individuals involved in community programs, active supporters of public schools).
	Step 2.	Identify process for selecting public stakeholders and terms of participation.
	Step 3.	Take process proposal and recommendations on types of stakeholders to school board for approval.
	Step 4.	Select new members.
Who Is Responsible	School board member of facilities strategy team	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Third, while basic data for the Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH) is kept up to date and basic student enrollment projections are accurate, there is insufficient integration of student enrollment and building condition data to support effective long range planning decisions. Commendably, the basic condition of facilities is well understood. However, there is no shared database (other than FISH) that contains school-by-school data and information on each building.

Information is the foundation of good decision-making and the capacity to involve others in consideration of complex concerns. A straightforward data management plan for what data and information is needed to support planning can be done for a low cost. The National Center for Educational Statistics will be publishing a guide on developing such a system. This will be available on their web site in June. The cost savings to such a system will be the result of less time spent in public debate, greater public support, when the facts are available and better ability to set priority based on need, rather than political pressure.

In addition, the district should consider developing an information management system that allows decision-makers to use student, building and municipal information to support planning effort. Action Plan 7-3 sets out the steps necessary to implement this recommendation. Implementing this recommendation will increase costs by a total of \$95,000 over five years.

Action Plan 7-3

If the district has available funds, we recommend that the proposed planning office develop an information management system that will allow decision-makers to use student, building and municipal information to support planning efforts

Action Needed	Step 1.	Ask members of Facilities Strategy Team to identify information needs in their facilities planning discussions and deliberations.
	Step 2.	Compile existing relevant data already maintained on facilities inventory, enrollment, utilization, building condition, capital plans, operating costs and capital project history into an Access database.
	Step 3.	Define a set of eight to ten reports that can be generated from compiled data that will be useful in long range facility planning.
	Step 4.	Work with information technology specialists at Sarasota County Public Schools to create reports from data.
	Step 5.	If insufficient in-house capacity exists, work with programmer to compile data and create reports.
Who Is Responsible	Information Technology Office and Associate Superintendent for Business Services	
Time Frame	December 31, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 2: Using

When developing the annual five-year facilities work plan the district evaluates alternatives to minimize the need for new construction.

Alternatives to new construction such as year-round education, extended day schools, changes in grade-level configuration, changes in attendance boundaries, and use of relocatable classrooms are ways in which a district can avoid the high costs associated with building new space. Alternative methods of using existing facilities can help to mitigate the peaks and valleys in future student enrollments.

In the Sarasota County School District, there is a new North Port Middle School under construction across the street from the just completed North Port High School. When the new school is completed, the two schools will share parking, access to a state of the art theatre, partly paid for by the City of North Port, and, due to their close proximity, will be able to work together to accommodate enrollment shifts.

Riverview High School, Venice, Wilkinson, Southside, Phillipi Shores and Venice elementary schools—are currently under review to determine the most cost effective and educationally appropriate way to improve building condition and support the educational program. Feasibility studies to evaluate the cost effectiveness of replacement, modernization, or consolidation and closings are being examined.

Although the school district uses the best practice, the district needs to reassess its needs due to the new class size reduction amendment.

We recommend including an evaluation of ways to meet new class size reduction requirements and growth in areas with high concentrations of students. In the future, the school district and the public will likely be more familiar with the opportunities and issues associated with alternatives to new construction, if it is incorporated into long-range planning options now.

Best Practice 3: Using

The five-year facilities work plan establishes budgetary plans and priorities.

A five-year facilities work plan, mandated by Florida law (s. 1013.35, *Florida Statutes*), should be prepared, and submitted to the Department of Education. It is primarily a current-year budget document with an additional four-year projection of anticipated revenues and new and continuing capital projects. The plan details a schedule of major projects intended to maintain the educational plant and ancillary facilities of the district properly, and to provide an adequate number of satisfactory student stations for the projected student enrollments. Information developed and contained in the Five-Year Educational Plant Survey is the basis for the work plan. A five-year work plan is not and should not become a district's strategic plan but it is an important element to be used in the planning process. A five-year view of capital needs is inadequate and reactive in nature for a school district; a much longer-term view, a strategic plan, is necessary to assure that the district will develop adequate funding and make appropriate land acquisition decisions. Capital project priorities (site acquisition, site improvement, construction, remodeling, renovation, maintenance) should be established in the strategic plan and linked to the district's anticipated revenues and budget projections through the five-year work plan.

The Sarasota County School district facilities construction staff is experienced and has been able to develop sound estimates for capital projects. Work undertaken is from their five-year work plan. Small capital projects and component replacements are based on need, as determined by maintenance and educational administrative personnel. The small capital project priorities for the district are: HVAC renovations; hurricane hardening; classroom additions; and regular roof replacements. The budget includes an escalation for inflation of 4 percent, which is considered an industry standard.

Although the district's five-year facilities work plan establishes budgetary plans and priorities, there are two areas in which the district could improve capital planning. First, in the area of senior high schools, there is not a clear direction on how to meet enrollment and program needs. The existing high schools of Riverview and Sarasota have grown rapidly without the benefit of long-range campus master planning.

We recommend that a special high school planning committee be created that reviews school size, programs, career/technical programs, potential year round utilization, athletic facilities, parking and other issues unique to high schools, in order to develop a plan that meets the special needs of these schools. The special planning committee should share their findings and conclusions with the facilities strategy team.

Second, in setting capital priorities for major repair or component replacement projects in the older schools, the school district needs to include a method for the principal or central office planners on the education side to raise and discuss design and building condition issues when building improvements are being planned. This will reduce the scope creep that occurs when multi-systemic replacement work is being done in a school. Thorough planning of major repair and component replacement work will help to discipline principals or central office staff so the size of projects does not increase just because the builders are already there. With planning, these can be anticipated and incorporated into major renovation or repair projects, thus reducing add-ons as occurred in the Garden Elementary School remodeling.

We recommend a regular capital workshop be held with local school administrators when major repair and component replacement work is planned for their schools, with discussion of programmatic or other building needs that could be economically incorporated into work scope.

Best Practice 4: Using

While the school board holds official meetings regarding its construction program and the five-year facilities work plan, it could involve the public more in the process.

School districts should be accountable for and provide information to parents and other taxpayers on the performance and cost of their major programs, including the facilities construction program. A school district should provide the public with clear and accurate information regarding its capital program, such as information about planned projects, the priorities it has set for future projects and how those priorities were determined. A district should provide a complete explanation of how the planned projects will help the district meet its educational, site acquisition, construction, remodeling, renovation, and maintenance needs. Effective communications with district stakeholders helps earn the support of the public for its capital program. Typically, districts that successfully communicate their capital program priorities hold regular school board meetings at which information regarding the construction program is provided and clear explanations of each construction project are made available in a format that allows for public input.

In the Sarasota County School District, the school board is responsible for the capital program, and votes on the capital budget annually and on all construction contracts. Most votes on construction contracts are part of a consent agenda, so little or no discussion takes place on these items.

Although the district holds official meetings regarding its construction program and the five-year facilities work plan, it may wish to take additional steps to involve its citizens. The school board and administration seek little input from the public on facility planning decisions even as they are examining options for the future of Riverview High School, and Venice, Phillippi Shores, Wilkinson and Southside elementary schools, as well as looking at other schools which will bring about major changes in these

communities. Receiving public inputs is important because, particularly in a school district where the majority of households are without school age children, providing information and the opportunity to give input on these facilities needs could build support.

Best Practice 5: Not Using

The district does not have an effective site selection process based on expected growth patterns.

The appropriate and timely selection of sites for new facilities is a critical issue for a district’s capital program and ensures that land is available when and where it is needed. A district should use the demographic projections to identify land in areas, which may require school facilities as the district grows or needs change. Early identification of appropriate parcels will allow the district to acquire the land well in advance of construction needs. When multiple sites are to be considered, the district should use the facilities planning committee, which includes experts and community stakeholders, to review the proposed sites.

In the Sarasota County School District, the facility strategy committee reviews potential sites and establishes evaluative criteria for determining which sites need to be added or deleted from the school district’s inventory. There was a Joint County Commission/School Board Workshop on June 24, 2002. At this meeting eminent domain proceedings for the Elementary School G site were discussed, as at this time only 60 of 130-140 sites were controlled by the school district; inter-local agreements on recreation and fields and procedures for how the county and school board will work together were also a matter of discussion.

However, the district does not have an effective site selection process based on expected growth patterns for two reasons. First, the district has not had a long range planning position. However, the school board recently approved funding for planner position and this should provide needed capacity in this areas. Secondly, the facilities strategy team does not include community members and professionals on the planning committee. Again, public involvement in owning a problem and in formulating solutions is important in public management. Public representation of professionals on a committee is also a way to obtain valuable assistance at no cost to the district. The district should be able to find a volunteer real estate professional to assist the facilities strategy committee in addressing site selection issues.

The district should use real estate professionals without a conflict of interest and also involve members of the public in the site selection process. Action Plan 7-4 sets out the steps necessary to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 7-4

We recommend that the district utilize real estate professionals without a conflict of interest and also involve members of the public in the site selection process.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify building industry and real estate professionals who do not have an interest in selling to the district or in being engaged by the district in real estate, design or construction.
	Step 2.	Create guidelines for private sector/public citizen role in site selection.
	Step 3.	Identify two to three representatives to participate in Facilities Strategy Team.
	Step 4.	Create stakeholder committee to work on planning issues with school district and county representatives and to be a link to the broader public.
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent/Chief Financial and Business Officer	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 6: Using

The board considers the most economical and practical sites for current and anticipated needs, including such factors as need to exercise eminent domain, obstacles to development, and consideration of agreements with adjoining counties.

An effectively managed district acquires the right property for its facilities and makes economical land acquisitions. To accomplish this, a district should ensure that the land meets its needs as to location, and that the site complies with the requirements of Florida law as it pertains to land for educational facilities. Moreover, the price should be reasonable. In determining the appropriate price, the district should consider factors beyond the cost of the land itself such as the need for site development and improvement or other work that may be incidental to construction.

The Sarasota County School District is working closely with the county through a new inter-local agreement in order to coordinate plans with the county. The district is also working with the county in the consolidation of lots to create the site for Elementary School G. The district has used the right of eminent domain to acquire the required 130-140 parcels for this school. They have also worked to address obstacles to development through environmental site studies. For example, the district has addressed issues concerning gopher tortoises, one for regulatory issues involving Southwest Florida Water Management District, and another for an urban eagle.

CONSTRUCTION FUNDING

Best Practice 7: Using

Funds collected for school projects were raised appropriately.

Funding for district capital projects is commonly derived from a variety of revenue sources, which include property taxes, bond referendums, sales surtaxes, and certificates of participation. A district should be able to demonstrate that each revenue source is used as authorized in the law. For instance, a district must be able to show that if local bond referendum proceeds were used, the scope of each project was spelled out in the bond referendum; and, that if local sales surtax revenue was used to finance any project, the scope of that project was spelled out in the sales surtax referendum resolution advertisement. The district should have evaluated the advantages and drawbacks of alternative methods for funding and financing construction projects when developing its capital planning budget. The best way to ensure the greatest amount of construction funding is for the district to first maximize the use of local revenue alternatives.

The Sarasota County School District makes extensive use of local revenues to fund capital projects. Indeed, for the 2002-03 through 2006-07 fiscal years, only 4.9% or \$23,800,703 of capital funds is coming from the state; the balance of the \$483,658,495 is funded locally through local sales tax, property taxes, and other local sources. In addition, the school capital outlay surtax was renewed by Sarasota County voters in 1999 and allows the district to use local funds to support bond financing. The district also considers a wide range of capital fund sources when preparing its capital budget. Indeed, in the Capital Projects Fund Budget 2001-02, which is presented and approved by the school board, the document describes all possible sources of capital funds: Capital Millage Fund, Capital Outlay Bond Issue Bonds (COBI) and Capital Outlay and Debt Services (CO&DS) Funds, Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) Fund, Effort Index Grants for School District Facilities Work Program Projects, County Sales Tax Fund, Classroom First Bond Issue and School Infrastructure Thrift (SIT) Program Awards. Other alternatives were not examined because the funds raised through these sources were sufficient to support the facilities construction program.

Best Practice 8: Using

The district approves and uses 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.

A school district must use tax revenues appropriately and for their intended purposes. All capital projects, including new construction, renovation, remodeling, and site acquisition, development and improvement projects may have separate funding sources with differing expenditure requirements. Districts typically rely on a finance officer to ensure that revenues generated for use as construction or site acquisition funds have been collected as authorized by Florida law and are being expended for lawful purposes. Generally, the district finance officer ensures that funds from the Public Education Capital Outlay and Debt Service Trust Fund are used for construction of educational plant space with total student station costs, including change orders, which meet the allowable amount specified in Florida law. The finance officer ensures that the school tax defined in Florida law as two-mill money is only used for construction, maintenance, or other authorized capital or facilities purposes. The finance officer is responsible for the timely use of state funds, avoiding reversion of any unspent revenues. During the budget process, the finance officer should ensure that all available capital resources are applied towards the five-year facilities work plan and limited use capital funds are not diverted to other, lower priority allowable uses.

The district must use formal, institutionalized mechanisms to ensure the Educational Plant Survey is completed accurately and in accordance with the Florida Statutes and the rules of the Department of Education. Information used to develop condition assessments should be based on the Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH) database, which must be updated on a regular schedule. Each capital revenue source must be identified and tied to the project it will partially or wholly fund during the next five-year cycle. This process is required in order for state construction funds to be allocated to the district.

The Sarasota County School District exercises appropriate care in ensuring that its use of construction funds complies with all relevant laws and regulations. To this end, the district ensures that all reports required to ensure construction funding are submitted to the Department of Education on a timely basis. These reports include the following: spot survey, Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH) school inventory information, five-year plant survey, and capital projects reports. The district is also judicious in its use of state funds. Indeed, facilities division managers indicated that since so little of the capital budget is funded by the state, care is taken to ensure state funds are assigned to projects that are proceeding in a timely manner. Care is also exercised to ensure state funds are used only for projects that have been shown to be economical. Some projects included in the capital budget have been funded but have not been cleared to move forward because the district is unsure that the scope of work is the most economical in the long term. These funds are not being used for other projects; they are being saved for these projects once a go ahead from the superintendent and school board has been received. The district's overall success in ensuring that its use construction funds is appropriate is reflected in the fact that a June 2000 audit by the State of Florida found no material weakness in the district's reporting relating to construction funds.

CONSTRUCTION DESIGN

Best Practice 9: Using

The district develops thorough descriptions and educational specifications for each construction project.

Educational specifications are an important part of the planning process allowing stakeholders, including parents, subject matter specialists, educators, administrators, and design professionals to develop working

descriptions of a planned educational facility. Well-written educational specifications will ensure that, once built, the facility meets the needs of a variety of users. Educational specifications should include a rationale for the project, determine the size of the facility, and define the district's program goals, objectives and activities, teaching strategies and instructional methods, all based on staff input. Educational specifications should identify the needs and design implications of advanced technology and provide for adaptability as changes and innovations occur in education. They should address spatial relationships and circulation patterns, security issues, and comply with the 'small schools' requirement.

In the Sarasota County School District, a committee of principal, teachers, parents and school district staff identify goals, objectives, activities and strategies for program descriptions contained in the educational specifications. When a new school is being built—as was the case for North Port High School and Gulf Gate Elementary School—the curriculum specialists and representatives from other local schools assist in the development of the educational specifications. The educational specifications call for a minimum of built-in furniture and equipment. This enables school spaces to be more flexible in use and reduces costs. A former school facility planner, who once worked for the school district, is hired to work in the development of educational specifications.

Although the district develops thorough descriptions and educational specifications for each construction project, the district could benefit from developing standards to guide the site-specific educational specifications process. In addition, the district needs to use educational specifications for remodeling work in addition to new construction. For example, in Garden Elementary School, as the remodeled school is functioning now, it is necessary to reach an interior ring of classrooms by passing through an exterior ring of classrooms. Also a problem is that the school has no windows in most classrooms or the media center. There were no standards to determine whether or not this would require a change when extensive remodeling was done to the interior configuration and systems.

We recommend developing a standardized educational specifications guide for new schools and when going into a school to build classroom additions or to do extensive remodeling or major systems replacements.

Best Practice 10: Using

The architectural design fulfills the building specification needs as determined by the district.

A district should submit a well-developed educational specification to the design professional for use in preparing written construction documents, which include materials and equipment specifications, and schematic drawings. A review of the documents should be made to ensure that the district planning leader, the users of the facility, and the architect and engineers have matched the written construction specifications and schematics against the educational specifications. The final plans must represent the district's needs as expressed in the educational specification.

The Sarasota County School District has established appropriate practices to ensure that building specific needs are identified and reflected in architectural design. To ensure building needs are appropriately identified, the district typically develops educational specifications very early in the planning process. For example, the educational specifications for North Port High School were prepared in 1994, but were not formally approved by the school board until May 1998. Once developed, the educational specifications are given to the architect before the design process begins.

Best Practice 11: Using

New construction, remodeling, and renovations incorporate effective safety features.

To ensure the safety and security of those using school district facilities, all building specifications should include common safety elements such as such as controlled access entrances, appropriate, signage, and circulation patterns that allow unobstructed views of the entrance and hallways. Other safety needs and design elements include lighting, intra-communication systems, security and fire systems, security fencing, and a combination of fenestration and doorways, which provide safe and quick evacuation. A district must review safety and address it as part of the construction process when designing and building new structures, as well as during renovation and remodeling projects.

The Sarasota County School District is proactive in ensuring that new construction, remodeling and renovations incorporate effective safety features. Safety improvements and ADA improvements are incorporated into every renovation and new construction project. (A safety guideline, referred to as CPTED, is used to establish design standards relating to safe school conditions while appropriate building codes are used to ensure life safety requirements are addressed.) In addition, the district is developing a plan to address safety, ADA and other requirements in older buildings. Improvements consistent with this plan are currently underway at McIntosh while planning for improvements that will incorporate the latest mandates and renew old systems and components is being completed for Phillippi Shores, and Wilkinson.

Best Practice 12: Using

The district minimizes construction and maintenance and operations costs through the use of cost-effective designs, prototype school designs, and frugal construction practices.

A district should design new and remodeled space as efficiently as possible in order to minimize the costs of construction, provide for long term-energy efficiency, and reduce lifetime building operations and maintenance costs. The construction design and major equipment selection are to be analyzed to maximize the efficient use of energy and the environment, the potential for joint usage, how technology is used, and the life cycle and costs of the materials chosen. To control the costs of building new facilities, a district should have a written policy that encourages the design team to comply with Florida's SMART school design philosophy and develop practical design solutions that are functional and cost-effective.

The Sarasota School District evaluates and compares the costs of various designs. It is reusing designs within its district and using designs for design build contracts from other districts to minimize design cost. Elementary School "G" is in construction now as a design/build contract. The school has been built 15 times throughout the state. The school won a frugal school award. This school, including design, construction and furniture, fixtures and equipment, will cost considerably less than the state standard even though it is being built 3 years later. Brookside MS design is being reused by the district.

The exception to minimizing construction cost was Gulf Gate Elementary School, which exceeded the state average by \$13 per square foot when it was completed in 2001. Although this school was expensive to build, the principal, librarian, science and art teachers at Gulf Gate Elementary School indicated that they were thrilled with their new school. District officials reported that they will not reuse the Gulf Gate design because of its high cost.

Exhibit 7-5 Comparison of Construction Costs

District Name	Facility Name	Student Stations	Square Feet	Total Cost	Cost/Student Station	Cost/ SF
Duval	Jax Beach Elementary	691	74,809	\$8,700,000	\$12,590	\$116
Clay	Rideout Elementary "Q"	560	81,736	\$8,208,370	\$14,658	\$100
Brevard	Roy Allen Elementary	868	74,148	\$7,600,000	\$8,756	\$103
Manatee	Samoset Elementary	571	54,232	\$7,610,000	\$13,327	\$140
Osceola	Central Ave Elementary	996	100,610	\$13,669,477	\$13,724	\$136
Sarasota	Gulf Gate Elementary	975	132,432	\$18,074,635	\$18,538	\$136
State Av.	ES	968	106,247	\$13,057,732	\$13,489	\$123
Sarasota ¹	ES "G" In construction 2003	975	111,000	\$11,869,000	\$12,173	\$107
Sarasota ²	Brookside MS 1999	1275	164,266	\$21,163,316	\$16,342	\$129

¹ Sarasota County Public Schools, Project Manager Interview.

² Report of Cost of Construction, Florida Department of Education.

Source: Florida Department of Education, Construction Contracts Awarded 1/1/00—12/31/00.

School designs are energy efficient and approved life cycle cost of mechanical and roof systems are analyzed. Project managers work with maintenance personnel to understand what works and what does not work with regard to the maintenance of new facilities. The project managers are willing to make modifications based on feedback and they work with representatives from industry to evaluate new systems and materials.

Architects are asked to incorporate sustainable features into their design. Designs are evaluated for the orientation, siting, roof and wall insulation, overhangs for sun, and efficiency in operating mechanical systems. The school district has determined that the up front cost of thermal storage units is extremely cost-effective. These ice storage units enable the district to use electricity at night during low use times and so get rebates from Florida Power for their management of electricity consumption. The construction division, based on changes in Florida Power bills, estimates that the Calmac Thermal Storage Tanks that they have installed will have a pay back of four years.

NEW CONSTRUCTION, RENOVATION AND REMODELING

Best Practice 13: Using

The district has effective management processes for construction projects.

A district may be able to improve the management of construction projects by exploring alternative service methods. A district has several options on how to complete a construction project, which include whether to do the project in-house or contract out to a private company. The potential cost savings of alternative methods should be weighed before a project begins. This practice ensures that the district has evaluated the various types of construction contracting and chosen the most beneficial method given the circumstances of individual projects. Once the method is chosen the project must be monitored for quality, timeliness, and cost.

Although the district has not explored privatizing the construction program, the district utilizes private construction managers (CM) to manage major construction projects. The district uses construction management at risk, and design build and has analyzed the pros and cons of each method for various projects. In construction management at risk, each project has a not to exceed contract. In this project delivery method the maximum price contract is negotiated with the construction manager. It is then the construction manager's responsibility to see that the project comes in on budget. If it does not, it falls to the CM to use his own profit and overhead to meet the terms of the contract within budget agreed to.

The district cautiously uses design build, and is only using it with a design that has been built in another Florida county, thus minimizing their risk associated with the outcome of design build. In the case of design build, which is being used for Elementary School G, there is also a "not to exceed contract" as part of the design build agreement.

District project managers are assigned to each project and are responsible for keeping projects within budget and on schedule. Staff is well-qualified for project management (resumes for project managers have been reviewed). A number of approved projects are on hold, not because of problems with the implementation of a plan or design, but because the school board is uncertain what plan to follow. Once projects start, construction services keeps them on schedule.

Best Practice 14: Using

District planning provides realistic time frames for implementation that are coordinated with the opening of schools.

A district can obtain maximum use of construction and operating funds by reducing the impact of inflation and ensuring a smooth, non-disruptive transition of students into new facilities at the beginning of a school term. Planning, coordination, and regular communication between the district's representatives and its contractors are required. Realistic expectations for project completion must be established and should include contingency planning for delays caused by bad weather or unanticipated construction problems.

A district must ensure that the tasks for achievement of all phases of each project have been incorporated and timed to coordinate with the opening of schools to cause the least disruption to students and teachers. When time frames are not met, the district should revise them accordingly and identify why they were not met, periodically updating the board and public. The plan should contain an accountability component that provides assurance to the board and to the public that the projects addressed in the plan will be implemented at the proposed budget levels within the time frame outlined. Regular budget updates, prepared at the completion of each phase of design, should be delivered to the board.

The Sarasota County School District does a good job of ensuring that the completion of projects is timed to coordinate with the opening of schools and that projects are completed within budget. A process has been established and implemented that requires that a project schedule be coordinated with the local school once the project itself has been approved. This process was followed successful on three recently completed projects—North Port High School, Gulf Gate Elementary School, and Garden Elementary School. For each of these projects work was completed to meet school schedule requirements. Additionally, the construction services division maintains a monthly project status report on their page of the school district's web site. This report provides the project budget, the cost to date, the construction start date, and the projected substantial completion date, as well as the name of the architect/engineer, contractor, school district project manager, and status of the project. This report is also provided to the school board and public on the school district web page.

Best Practice 15: Using

All projects started after March 1, 2002, comply with the *Florida Building Code*.

The State of Florida has completed a major rewrite of the state building code, including those elements that pertain to educational facilities, which became effective on March 1, 2002. Significant changes included allowing districts to establish alternative methods of obtaining permits and required the re-education of existing staff certified to conduct building code inspections. All school construction projects begun after the effective date are required to meet the new code requirements. Districts must adjust for the code changes in contracted projects and consider the impact the new code will have on future projects. To ensure that districts are aware of and follow these new requirements, construction personnel should have received training in the Florida Building Code or the district should be able to justify why training is not needed.

In response to the revisions to the Florida Building Code, the Sarasota County School District created a new permitting division. The district architect from the construction services division was made chief officer for permitting and code compliance. He has been trained and is overseeing the training of inspectors in the new building code. The new permitting division has developed forms for work order request, building permit application, building permit, and an inspection report. Reasons for failure to pass inspection are included in the inspection report.

Best Practice 16: Using

The district requires appropriate inspection of all school construction projects.

Compliance with the Florida Building Code assures that completed building projects provide a safe and secure facility. Therefore, all school construction projects must be inspected by a competent authority, schooled and certified in the requirements of the state building code. Inspectors must be trained and certified in accordance with Florida law and the inspections must be in accordance with the new Florida Building Code as revised March 2002. All information about the affected space should be recorded in the Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH), a database which contains extensive information about school sites, capacity, and condition.

The Sarasota County School District has extensive inspection capabilities for both code compliance and project quality. They currently have five inspector positions, one secretary, and the permitting and code administrator, who is the former district architect. As of December 2002, four of the five inspector positions were filled. The district has five persons with current licenses as standard inspectors. As of October 2002, the inspectors were also working toward meeting requirements for electrical and plumbing licenses.

The district has had discussions with Manatee and Charlotte County Public Schools about providing inspection services to them. A challenge to establishing in-house inspection capability is that there is a high volume of permits and inspections required for the summer when students are out of school and a lower volume of work while students are in school. The plan for the district is to maintain in-house capabilities for low volume periods and contract out for high volume times. The construction process study team is working to determine the appropriate level of staffing for inspection.

In the North Port High School and the Garden Elementary School projects files from section 29—Construction Close-out documents and section 30—warranty period documents were reviewed. Documentation of final inspections and certificates of occupancy were reviewed and found complete. These items included: Certificate of Occupancy, Consent of Surety, Final Punch List, Payment Affidavit, Release of Liens, inspections and related meeting minutes and correspondence and transmittals associated with close-out and warranty. In addition, documents are well maintained in paper form and on FISH. In a review of FISH records, a log of all changes to FISH was maintained in the records room, so whenever

a change in space or utilization was done by the school district, it was logged into a file and changed in FISH.

Best Practice 17: Using

The district retains appropriate professionals to assist in facility planning, design, and construction.

A district should make reasoned and appropriate selections of design and construction professionals to aid in carrying out the mission, goals and obligations of the school board and in accordance with Florida law. The selection process should be in writing and available to the public. It should begin sufficiently in advance of a proposed project's completion date to ensure that the necessary persons are selected, obligated, and committed to the project. Districts may select from a combination of in-house and out-sourced options to staff a particular project or group of projects. Hiring of permanent employees may not be cost-effective for smaller, low growth districts, but larger districts or districts with significant student population growth may find it appropriate to have permanent, professionally staffed design and construction departments. When out-sourcing, the district should use a selection committee to choose appropriate professionals who will act in the district's best interests during the construction project.

The Sarasota County School District has a well-defined procedure for selection of architects and engineers. There is a Professional Services Selection Committee for selection of architects, engineers and construction managers. This committee is made up of the director of construction services, the district staff architect, school principal, a non-school based administrator and three citizen representatives. They are ranked using pre-defined criteria. The criteria used to rank architects, engineers, and construction managers to be short-listed are: location (5%); ability to perform (25%); current/past performance (30%), and related experience (40%). Once a firm is short listed, in their interview they are ranked based on: ability to perform/team strength (15%); timeliness and budgets (20%); overall impression (25%); problems and solutions (40%).

Minutes are taken of the committee meetings, and interviews are conducted to enhance written documentation and references are checked. Because most projects use a construction manager and the construction manager is often hired to assist with pre-construction services, the school district has the benefit of professionals early in the project planning process.

The district determines its project delivery method based on the time, available budget, project complexity and degree of control the district desires over the project. In general when there is a "narrow scope", defined by the school district as "a project with only two to three individual bid packages, the school district uses a hard bid system. With projects that are complex, such as new schools, major remodeling or projects, which are phased over several years, the preferred method for delivery is "Construction Manager at Risk". For either narrow or complex projects that have an easily defined scope—new classroom wings, covered play shelters, or projects that are repeated at various locations, a Design Build system is the preferred delivery method. The district has a decision support schematic to help guide its decision making for project delivery and a project path description of how a project will proceed under each system. Most projects are managed with construction management at risk.

The evaluation forms and criteria used by the district indicate that careful consideration is given to experience, personnel, locale, and history of responsible work.

Architect contracts are established on a not to exceed basis with specific add-ons defined and calculated at an hourly basis also up to a certain amount. The add-ons and the amount the architect may charge for them are determined as part of the original negotiated contract with the architect. For example, in North Port HS the original architect contract was for \$1.98 million, about 4.5 percent of the \$43.5 million cost of construction. The final architect amount was for \$2.76 million or about 6% of the cost of construction. While an increase in architect fees of almost 40% seems high, the architect's contract anticipates some

increase by pulling out a long list of add-ons. The 6% fee is not high by industry standards for an original design. The determination of cost and type of add-ons is designed to discourage overbuilt or extravagant project costs and reduce the financial contract negotiations for various work that may have been unexpected during the project.

Best Practice 18: Using

The district follows generally accepted and legal contracting practices to control costs.

A district should have policies and procedures in place, which delineate bid solicitation and contracting practices, to control costs and protect itself from litigation. These policies and procedures should have been reviewed by legal counsel for adequacy and conformity to statutes and generally accepted practices. Generally accepted bidding procedures include bids with set opening dates and times that are inspected to confirm that all required documents are in order. Contracting practices include the use of standardized agreements that have been modified to satisfy local concerns and conditions, and review by legal authority. The district should determine the type of contract appropriate for the work to be performed after considering alternative bid and construction systems for each new project. The contract should be awarded to the lowest responsible bidder whose bid, after review by district legal counsel, meets the specifications or to the construction manager or design build contractor selected pursuant to Florida law. The contracts should be submitted to the school board for final contract award.

The Sarasota County School District's construction services division has used various construction delivery systems—including design/build (but only with designs that had already been built) and construction management (CM) at risk with a set price contract.

The district used generally accepted bidding procedures, as described in the best practice indicator. Eighty percent of their projects are delivered using construction management, with a CM hired to do pre-construction and bidding services. This CM then has the opportunity to provide the school district with a guaranteed maximum price contract to construct the project. The school district is under no obligation to extend the CM pre-construction services into the construction contract and can put the project out to bid.

In project documents reviewed for Garden Elementary School and North Port High School, there were signed owner contract agreements with architects, and construction managers/contractors. There were required bond, insurance and completion guarantees.

Best Practice 19: Using

The district minimizes changes to facilities plans after final working drawings are initiated in order to control project costs.

Changes to a facility's design after construction has begun must be carefully considered as they can be very costly to a district or they can save a substantial number of dollars. Design changes have the potential to create substantial delays in the intended completion date of a project, while adding overlooked elements can enhance the educational environment or the delivery of educational services, or reduce future operational/maintenance costs. Necessary changes to the construction agreement, which may be requested by either the contractor or the district's representative, should generate a request for a change order. Change orders should be reviewed for viability, necessity, and cost. A district should use planning and contracting methods that minimize change orders and retain information sufficient to document the reasons behind a change order and the responsible individual. Critical to the change order process is a review that, when possible, ensures change orders implemented do not result in the project exceeding budget, do not compromise educational specifications, do not exceed industry standards, and do not extend the completion date beyond the established completion date.

The Sarasota County School District uses change orders to the district's benefit. In the case of Garden Elementary School the original contract amount was \$472,000. The final contract amount was \$5,090,000. The facilities division, uncertain of the scope of the renovation project and what might arise in the asbestos abating, roofing, replacing HVAC, and interior improvements in this 1970s open plan school, used the original contract amount to pay for a construction manager. Rather than requesting a maximum price bid on work clarified during pre construction services, the construction manager was asked to complete the work essentially on a task order basis. The task orders were brought to the School Board as change orders.

The construction manager sought two to three bids for all subcontractors used and was responsible on a cost plus basis for the approved work. The school system was permitted to select the bidder from among those competing for the contract. There was a record of all bids and an indication of which one the school system selected. In all cases it was the lowest bidder. This particular project did not have clear definition from the start. This way of bidding the project enabled a contractor to keep bids low because he was not assuming the risk for the lack of project definition.

Hiring a construction manager with set fees and then procuring the other contracts, as through a low-bid change order system was the most cost effective way to manage this poorly defined project. Although it does not represent best practice, as well-planned projects are optimal, it was an effective and creative way of the Construction Services to manage a poorly defined project.

The facilities construction division used change orders in another way in the North Port High School project. The original contract amount for North Port High School was \$43,518,626. There was \$8,711,044 worth of change orders. The revised contract sum was \$34,802,588. What the school district did was reduce its contract cost by purchasing material for the contractor, thereby exempting purchases from sales tax. They assumed the liability for material—hence the cost, but saved the District \$470,000 in tax. Among the change orders were additions as well as deletions, so there was still a net savings of \$4,994.

The district maintains good documentation relating to change orders. A number is given to each change order. Any change order less than \$50,000 can be approved by the director of construction and then must be ratified by the school board. Change orders over \$50,000 must be voted on by the school board. Not inappropriately, these are generally approved by the board as part of a consent agenda.

In both projects reviewed (North Port High School and Garden Elementary School) the percent of change orders exceeded industry standards of 2% on new construction and 5-10% on remodeling projects. However, it does not appear that the way the change orders were used in these two projects increased the cost of the projects. In the case of Garden Elementary School, a properly planned project may have resulted in a better outcome—daylight in classrooms, for example, but not necessarily a cheaper project.

Best Practice 20: Using

The architect recommends payment based on the percentage of work completed. A percentage of the contract is withheld pending completion of the project.

Payments to contractors for larger construction projects are usually separated into a series of partial payments known as progress payments. This practice protects the school district and pays the contractor in a fair and reasonable manner and in proportion to the work completed. Once a payment request is received, the district should respond in a timely and efficient manner. A district should retain a predetermined percentage of the contract pending final completion to be used to cover non-performance issues or liquidated damages, should such a situation arise. The district should have a system of internal controls to ensure that payments are made timely and only after the architect has approved the completed work, and with the concurrence of the district's project manager.

In the Sarasota County School District, the architect and project manager must authorize each draw before payment to the construction contractor is approved. The district makes monthly payments based on the agreed percentage of satisfactory work complete. This provides for a regular payment schedule and thus it is just the degree of completion which is negotiated. The district withholds 10% from each payment until substantial completion of the project. At that time the retainage can be released to the contractor if all work is acceptable to the district and its architect. The forms for monthly approvals included the signatures of the architect, the director of construction services, the project manager and the contractor or construction manager at risk. Documents for North Port High School and Garden Elementary School were reviewed and appropriate forms and signatures on all draws were in place. The percentages of work correctly completed are sometimes a matter of dispute, but the school district has the final say on what constitutes the accurate percent complete.

Work is monitored and documentation is maintained by the school district in a standardized filing system—paper and electronic. This makes it easy to track the progress of a project. Files were well maintained for both the North Port High School project and the Garden Elementary School project, even though different project managers managed these projects.

FACILITY OCCUPANCY AND EVALUATION

Best Practice 21: Using

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 proper operation of a school is dependent on the users understanding of the facilities systems and why certain design elements were included in the project. Therefore, school district personnel should be familiarized with a new facility prior to occupation. Orienting users to a facility is a critically important activity that allows the new facility to work as it was designed, provides for the safety and comfort of the occupants, and ensures that the building's components are operated in a non-damaging and efficient manner. An orientation program should include the delivery of clear and understandable users' manuals designed for the appropriate staff, elements of the program being customized for a particular group of users such as maintenance staff, custodians or administrators and teachers. The district should include clauses in the design and construction contracts to require the architect and the contractor to share the responsibility for and provide the orientation programs and supporting documentation.

The Sarasota County School District maintenance and custodial staff are introduced to the facilities even as they are being built so they will know where cut-offs, switches, pipes, wires and other important components and systems are. Formal training is held before occupancy. The project manager is primarily responsible for the orientation program. No provisions for orientation are included in the architect's contract.

At both North Port High School and Gulf Gate Elementary School, the staffs were familiar with the facilities. The construction services division makes itself available to new users to answer questions when they arose, not just as part of a formal orientation but during the first year of operation.

We recommend including provisions for a comprehensive building orientation as part of the construction contract.

Best Practice 22: Not Using

The district does not do formal evaluations of design and operation 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.

A post-occupancy evaluation helps a district determine how well the design of a facility meets the educational, service, community, and administrative needs of the building's users. Information from a post-occupancy evaluation can be used to improve the design of subsequent projects. Such an evaluation should be conducted on every new facility no earlier than one year and no longer than three years after occupancy. This window of time allows for a full school year in the new facility and for the evaluation to occur before any functional design changes or remodeling might take place, which would change elements of the original design. As part of the evaluation, users, including students, parents, district and school-based maintenance and food service personnel, teachers, administrators and bus drivers, should be surveyed or interviewed to determine their attitudes about the design. District facilities design and construction staff, the design professional for the new facility, and a representative of the contractor should also provide input to the evaluation. The information gathered should be compiled into a report, enumerating the positive aspects and difficulties, if any, with the design of the facility. Information obtained through post-occupancy evaluations should be communicated to educational specification committees, the design review committee and when contracted for a new facility, the design professional.

In the Sarasota County School District, the principal and building engineers stay in close contact with the project managers so any problems that arise can be resolved and records of requests for information or assistance are maintained in the project managers file. However, there was no documentation in the district's self assessment completed for this review, documentation provided by the school district, or in files inspected for North Port High School (completed fall 2001) or Garden Elementary School (completed fall 2001) that a written evaluation of the quality of the design or construction was undertaken, although a one year evaluation for North Port High School is planned.

On specific building components the construction services division is more proactive in its reviews. There is roofing committee that reviews various construction techniques and analyzes maintenance requirements and makes recommendations on technical specifications for roofing. There is also a committee that reviews specifications and operational history of mechanical systems.

Although aspects of this practice are in use, the district evaluation is primarily of an informal process, which is not documented. This can be effective as long as the same project managers are working for the district and little change is taking place in school utilization, programs or design. However, we recommend that, in recognition of changing patterns of use and changing educational programs that a formal evaluation of design and operation be undertaken.

Although aspects of this best practice are in use, the district through interviews with principal, teachers, students and school based personnel. It will enable construction services to understand the importance of various design and operational features and include or omit them in future projects accordingly.

The district should undertake a formal evaluation of building design and operation in new and remodeled schools that were completed in the last one to five years. For example, the educational specifications, as they relate to specialty spaces should be examined. At Gulf Gate there is only one art room for a school with a FISH capacity of 1,190 students. With one art room, it would not be possible to schedule all students for art even once per week. At it is, with 932 students, the art teacher teaches eight classes per day for 35 minutes each—a total of roughly 200 students per day. This should be evaluated and modifications made to the educational specification.

Action Plan 7-5 sets out the steps necessary to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 7-5

We recommend that a formal evaluation of building design and operation be undertaken in new and remodeled schools that were completed in the last one to five years.

Action Needed	Step 1. Identify new schools and remodeled schools to be evaluated. Step 2. Establish design issues to be reviewed—building size, classroom size, adjacencies, lighting, acoustics, furniture, fixtures, exterior athletic, play or parking areas. Step 3. Establish operational issues to be reviewed—ongoing maintenance requirements and operating cost. Step 4. Establish team of local school users and professionals to inspect schools. Step 5. Develop recommendations on design and operations and incorporate them into educational specifications and design and construction standards.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Construction Services, Superintendent for instruction
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 23: Not Using

The district has not established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the construction program.

Like other publicly funded entities, a school district should be held accountable for and provide information to parents, other taxpayers, and the school board on the performance and cost of its major programs and support services, including the facilities construction program. To accomplish this, each school district should have an accountability system that includes clearly stated goals and measurable objectives for the facilities construction program that identify whether it is operating efficiently and effectively. An effective accountability system includes performance and cost-efficiency measures, and interpretive benchmarks, including comparisons to adjoining districts, to evaluate the program and use these in management decision making. As part of its accountability system, the district also should establish and implement strategies to continually assess the reliability of program performance and cost data and take advantage of significant opportunities to improve construction operations management.

In the Sarasota County School District, construction services is a small division, with stable staffing, and generally good documentation of work done and underway. There is a culture that makes continual assessment a regular part of the work standard, however there is not a system for formal review and analysis of performance and data.

The Sarasota County School District has a construction process study team that is analyzing the small informal ad hoc systems of the Construction Services Division in order to modify the system so it will be able to manage a much larger construction program and still not lose the benefits of the informal communication and learning that characterize this division. The construction process study team has identified five areas for improvement: educational specifications, “Dimensions of Value”, Selection Committee, Capital Project List/Prioritization, and Instruction Input/Project Definition Process.

However, the district has not established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the construction program. The district could improve its accountability mechanisms by developing organizational goals or objectives and plans and strategies for achieving the program goals. Currently the only stated goals for construction services are still a) new schools and major remodeling shall be designed as frugal schools; b) include indoor air quality design features in all new facilities; c) included ADA features in all new facilities (this is required by law) and d) include Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design features in all schools. These goals are inadequate for a nearly half-billion dollar facilities construction program. Standards need to be developed

associated with school size, classroom size, equity and the allocation of funds within the district, sustainable design, site size and purchase, among many other areas.

Defined goals and measurable objectives should be defined for the capital program. Action Plan 7-6 sets out the steps necessary to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 7-6

We recommend a capital program that has defined goals and measurable objectives.	
Action Needed	Step 1. Clarify goals of new planning office, facilities manager, construction services division, information technology office and maintenance department. Step 2. Incorporate these goals into the school district's strategic plan. Step 3. Develop measures for evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of capital program in relation to its clarified goals.
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent/Chief Financial and Business Officer, Director of Construction Services, Long Range Planner, Maintenance Director, and Facilities Information Technology Specialist.
Time Frame	December 31, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 24: Not Using

The district regularly evaluates facilities construction operations based on established benchmarks and implements improvements to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.

Evaluation of completed projects is an important management tool because it assesses how tax dollars were spent and whether a district took full advantage of available, usually scarce, public funds. Districts should assess their facilities construction operations as a whole at least annually using performance data and their established benchmarks. They should report their progress towards meeting established goals, objectives and benchmarks to the board and the public on at least an annual basis. Strategies should be established and implemented based on the outcomes of these evaluations.

The Sarasota County School District is aware that its facilities construction operations can improve and has begun to identify areas for improvement. Indeed, the newly created construction process study team has identified five areas for improvement: educational specifications; "dimensions of value," selection committee; capital project list prioritization; and instruction input/project definition process.

While the district the district has recently undertaken efforts to identify ways to improve its facilities construction operations, the district lacks an overall approach to guide a systemic evaluation of program operations. Even if benchmarks and performance measures were in place (which they are not) the district currently lacks a context and approach for how to use such measures and benchmarks to drive improvement efforts. Likewise, overall goals for the construction program have not been established that could provide an overall direction for improvement efforts and a basis for reporting improvement progress to the board and other stakeholders.

The district should develop an overall approach and strategy for evaluating its facility construction operations on an ongoing basis. Action Plan 7-7 sets out the steps necessary to implement this recommendation. This action plan can be implemented within existing resources.

Action Plan 7-7

We recommend that the school district develop an overall approach and strategy for evaluating its facility construction operations on an ongoing basis.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Define the mission of the construction services division in the context of the school district's strategic plan and mission.
	Step 2.	Consider renaming the construction services division into a facility or capital program management department.
	Step 3.	Define the priorities for facilities construction based on input from the "clients" of the construction services division—local school users and residents who live next to public school facilities.
	Step 4.	Define long term and mid term outcomes that will result from operating according to the mission and priorities of the division.
	Step 5.	Develop indicators that the school district is moving toward its long and mid term outcomes in the operation of its construction services or capital program management division.

Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent/Chief Financial and Business Officer,
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.



Facilities Maintenance

Summary

The Sarasota County School District is using 14 of 22 of the Best Practices relating to facilities maintenance. The district’s performance is particularly strong in areas relating to health and safety and energy management. In addition, the Facilities Services Department has done a credible job of maintaining district facilities in the face of ever-shrinking budgets. To use the remaining best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its facilities maintenance services, the district must substantially improve its work order data collection and analysis and institute better performance measurement systems.



As shown in Exhibit 8-1, the district has an opportunity to reduce costs and make investments in the facilities maintenance area. Determining whether to take advantage of this opportunity is a district decision and should be based on many factors including district needs, public input, and school board priorities. If the district implements this action plan, it would be able to redirect the funds to other priorities, such as putting more money into the classroom or addressing deficiencies identified in this report.

Exhibit 8-1 Our Review Identified A Way the District Could Reduce Costs in the Area of Facilities Maintenance

Best Practice Number	Fiscal Impact: Cost Savings (Increased Costs)					
	Year 2003-04	Year 2004-05	Year 2005-06	Year 2006-07	Year 2007-08	Total
6 Revise the management structure in the trades areas	\$33,400	\$66,800	\$66,800	\$66,800	\$66,800	\$300,600

Background

The Sarasota County School District’s Facilities Services Department is responsible for all aspects of preventive, routine, and emergency upkeep for the district’s 35 school sites and several other district facilities. In total, the department maintains approximately 6.8 million square feet of building space.

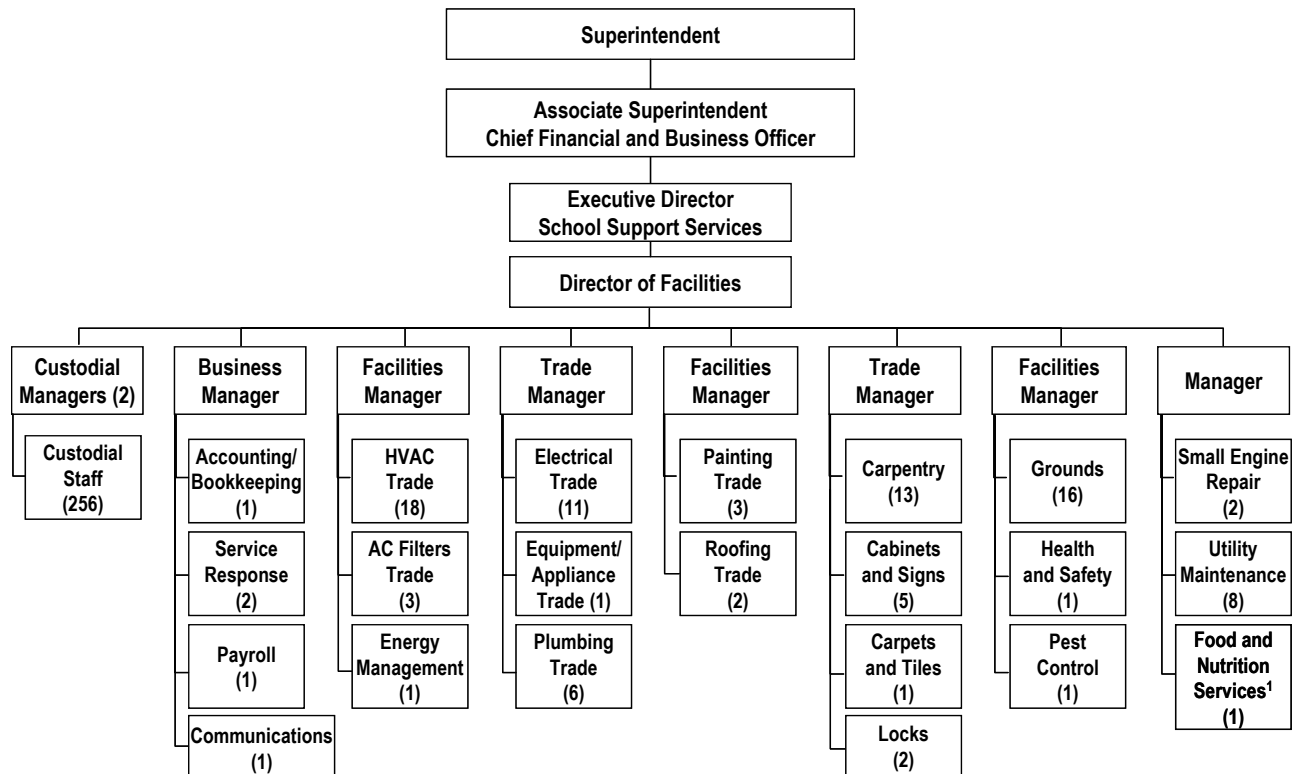
Facilities Maintenance

Additional responsibilities include the maintenance of all grounds and athletic fields, and the installation and relocation of portable classrooms.

The Facilities Services Department employs approximately 366 people in various skilled trades, clerical, supervisory and maintenance support positions. The department had an adopted operating and capital budget of \$12.8 million for the 2002-03 fiscal year.

The department is headquartered at 7889 Fruitville Road in Sarasota and is managed by a director of facilities services. This manager reports to the executive director of school support services who in turn reports to the associate superintendent chief financial and business officer. As shown in Exhibit 8-2, the department is divided into eight sections: custodial services, business operations, and six trades units. Two custodial managers oversee the custodial services section and directly manage the district’s 256 custodians. The department’s business manager oversees business operations and supervises the facilities services office, its accountants/ bookkeepers, and the work order call response unit. The business manager also maintains the district’s computerized work order system. In addition, three trades managers and three facilities managers oversee the department’s six trades areas. (Although these managers have different titles, they serve in similar capacities.) Each is responsible for at least two separate trades areas. In addition, the three trades managers and three facilities managers each serve as the primary departmental liaison to about a half dozen school sites.

**Exhibit 8-2
The Sarasota County School District’s
Facilities Services Organizational Structure Is Hierarchical**



¹ The food & nutrition services technician is funded by the Food Services Department.

Source: Sarasota County School District.

Activities of particular interest

The district's approach to service provision in facilities services is customer-oriented. Each year, facilities services trades managers meet with each principal to establish the next year's maintenance priorities for the principal's school site. This input from the principals is used by the department in the budgeting process. In addition, the trades managers meet regularly—at least monthly—with each principal to update priorities, provide status reports on outstanding work orders, and to get feedback from the principals on the department's performance. Although this process is informal by nature, and therefore of limited use from an analytic standpoint, it does provide a high level of service to school principals and keeps these key “customers” involved in the maintenance process.

The district has also recently implemented an “on-the-job” training program for its heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) trades staff. Each month, one HVAC trades worker is assigned to work directly with the district's energy management controls specialist. The HVAC worker shadows the specialist and receives training in the use of the district's computerized energy monitoring and control system. By using the system, district HVAC employees can remotely diagnose HVAC problems. Some problems can even be corrected remotely. All HVAC trades workers are equipped with their own laptop computer. Once trained by the energy management specialist, these employees can log into the system and prediagnose problems as HVAC work orders come in. The training program has greatly increased the effectiveness of HVAC trades workers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Conclusions for Facilities Services Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice?	Page No.
Program Direction and Accountability	1. The district's maintenance and operations department has a mission statement and goals and objectives that are established in writing.	No	8-6
	2. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance and efficiency of the maintenance and operations program.	No	8-7
	3. The district obtains and uses customer feedback to identify and implement program improvements.	No	8-9
	4. The district has established procedures and staff performance standards to ensure efficient operations.	No	8-10
	5. The department maintains educational and district support facilities in a condition that enhances student learning and facilitates employee productivity.	No	8-12
Organizational Structure and Staffing	6. The district regularly reviews the organizational structure of the maintenance and operations program to minimize administrative layers and assure adequate supervision and staffing levels.	No	8-14
	7. Complete job descriptions and appropriate hiring and retention practices ensure that the maintenance and operations department has qualified staff.	Yes	8-16
	8. The district provides a staff development program that includes appropriate training for maintenance and operations staff to enhance worker job satisfaction, efficiency, and safety.	Yes	8-17
Resource Allocation and Utilization	9. The administration has developed an annual budget with spending limits that comply with the lawful funding for each category of facilities maintenance and operations.	Yes	8-18
	10. The district accurately projects cost estimates of major maintenance projects.	Yes	8-19
	11. The board maintains a maintenance reserve fund to handle one-time expenditures necessary to support maintenance and operations.	Yes	8-19
	12. The district minimizes equipment costs through purchasing practices.	Yes	8-19
	13. The district provides maintenance and operations department staff the tools and equipment required to accomplish their assigned tasks.	Yes	8-20
	14. The district uses proactive maintenance practices to reduce maintenance costs.	Yes	8-20
	15. The maintenance and operations department identifies and implements strategies to contain energy costs.	Yes	8-21
	16. The district has an energy management system in place, and the system is maintained at original specifications for maximum effectiveness.	Yes	8-22

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice?	Page No.
	17. District personnel regularly review maintenance and operation's costs and services and evaluate the potential for outside contracting and privatization.	No	8-22
Information Management	18. A computerized control and tracking system is used to accurately track work orders and inventory.	No	8-24
	19. The maintenance and operations department has a system for prioritizing maintenance needs uniformly throughout the district.	Yes	8-26
Health and Safety	20. District policies and procedures clearly address the health and safety conditions of facilities.	Yes	8-27
	21. The school district complies with federal and state regulatory mandates regarding facility health and safety conditions.	Yes	8-27
	22. The district is aware of and prepared for the permitting and inspection requirements of the Florida Building Code.	Yes	8-28

PROGRAM DIRECTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Best Practice 1: Not Using

The district's Facilities Services Department has an inadequate mission statement and its written goals and objectives are not measurable.

Like other publicly funded entities, a school district should be held accountable for and provide information to parents and other taxpayers on the performance and cost of its major programs and support services, including facilities maintenance. To accomplish this, a school district should have an accountability system that includes a mission statement, clearly stated goals, and measurable objectives that identify the expected outcomes of the facilities maintenance program. The program's goals and objectives should be in writing, tied to the district's strategic plan, and focused on operating facilities in a cost-efficient manner while allowing for maximum utilization of facilities. Maintenance program goals and objectives also should include comprehensive projections of the size of the necessary work force, the amount and types of equipment required, and anticipated long-term budget requirements. These projections should be based on a survey of the physical condition of the facilities and equipment, and should identify repair or replacement needs of district facilities.

The mission statement of the Sarasota County School District's Facilities Services Department is overly broad and vague with its key phrase being "to manage and improve the physical assets of the School District in order to provide the proper support" to academic programs. It contains no goals and objectives that relate directly to any discernable maintenance program, and its only measurable aspect—"85% or more of students, parents and staff will perceive the school environment as safe and orderly"—has never been assessed. Outcomes are communicated through an annual priority-setting process, which starts with face-to-face meetings with all principals and ends with a reprioritization after budgets are set. The results of this priority setting process, however, are not documented, and measurable outcomes are not developed from the informal goals discussed at these meetings.

The lack of a clearly defined mission statement and concrete measurable objectives and priorities makes it difficult for the department to develop a budget that relates manpower, budget, and equipment with short- and long-term needs. Instead, "asset preservation" meetings held with the principals and their trades managers drive the annual budget preparation process. On its face, this process, completed annually, is a zero-based approach to budgeting. However, because the district does not go through a similar process for its long-term maintenance planning, it is only useful for prioritizing its annual budget allocation, not for strategic planning purposes.

Management is aware of the need to improve its mission statement, goals and objectives, and resource allocation process. Accordingly, to address these issues, it is developing a "management plan" which will include more specific measurable goals.

In completing its management plan, the district should develop a more appropriate mission statement and establish performance measures that include work order clearance rates, customer satisfaction standards, and cost containment measures, among other tracking categories. Action Plan 8-1 details the steps the district should take.

Action Plan 8-1

We recommend that the district establish a more appropriate mission statement for its maintenance operations and create measurable goals and objectives that correspond to this mission.

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Develop a new mission statement that reflects the importance of the physical learning environment to the district's performance in educating students.</p> <p>Step 2. Develop measurable goals and objectives for custodial services, each trades area, energy management, and all other discrete maintenance programs.</p> <p>Step 3. Obtain comments from a broad range of maintenance employees, custodians, and department "customers," such as principals, teachers, parents and students, prior to finalizing goals and objectives.</p> <p>Step 4. Establish a periodic mechanism for collecting and assessing performance data against the established measurable goals and objectives.</p> <p>Step 5. Link the performance measurement and budget allocation processes.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 2: Not Using

The district has not implemented sufficient accountability mechanisms to monitor the performance and efficiency of the maintenance operations program.

An effective accountability system includes performance and cost-efficiency measures, and interpretive benchmarks, such as comparisons to adjoining districts or an industry standard, to evaluate the program and use these in management decision-making. By periodically comparing established benchmarks to actual performance, a district can determine if changes are needed in its maintenance program to improve efficiency and effectiveness, reduce costs, and assess whether alternative service delivery methods, such as privatization, may be cost-effective. Measures that should be considered for evaluating the maintenance program include costs per square foot (including energy use), full-time staff per square foot of facility, and costs per student.¹ As part of its accountability system a district also should establish and implement strategies to continually assess the reliability of program performance and cost data. In addition, school board members should periodically receive performance information that helps them assess the efficiency and effectiveness of its maintenance program.

The Sarasota County School District does a credible job of managing the performance of contractors. While the department does not conduct formal performance evaluations, contractors are not paid until the corresponding work order is closed out and signed off as completed. Maintenance representatives have also begun meeting with select contractors—mainly those with which the district has experienced problems—prior to any work being assigned in order to better explain what is expected from them. Management has plans to establish this process for all contractors in the near future.

While this process for managing contractors is effective, the Sarasota County School District has not implemented sufficient accountability mechanisms to monitor the performance and efficiency of the maintenance operations program. There are a couple of improvements the district could make. First, the Facilities Services Department does not currently track and evaluate program performance on a regular basis. This is in part caused by inadequacies with the work order system. For example, the work order system does not allow managers to compare the cost of completing a certain type of work order by in-

¹ All Florida school districts are required to report operations and maintenance costs and energy usage to the DOE annually, and this information is readily available to school districts for comparative purposes.

house staff to that of contracted labor. However, a larger problem results from the fact that the district has yet to implement the management features that the work order system does have. For example, the work order system has the ability to calculate cost and time projections for routine work orders but this system capability is not used. In addition, while the work order system has the ability to distinguish between nonproductive time and actual work time on individual work orders, there is resistance among staff to include that information on work orders for fear that the information will be used for personnel evaluations. Moreover, maintenance managers do use the work order system to periodically track clearance and backlogs because they are often weeks behind in getting them closed out. Thus, the data in the system has limited usefulness for tracking performance. As a result, the managers generally use the information only to check the status of individual work orders.

The Facilities Services Department has not yet established program performance measures, so no strategy is currently in place to assess the reliability of collected data. The work order system does have retrievable time tracking and completion data, and the department has periodically validated that data for accuracy. However, cost estimates are not entered into the system, and actual costs on completed projects are not entered consistently. More importantly, because performance expectations have not been established it is difficult to use the work order system as a management tool. Without a clear expectation for how much time a particular maintenance job should have taken, for example, managers cannot question employees about why it took them significantly longer (or significantly less time) to complete a given project.

Management should establish and implement a performance measurement system that allows managers to accurately track and evaluate performance. This system should also include accountability standards that staff and managers are be evaluated against. Action Plan 8-2 details the steps the district should take.

Action Plan 8-2

We recommend that the district establish and implement a measurement and accountability process to track program and staff performance and efficiency.

Action Needed	Step 1. Implement additional data collecting capabilities of the work order system.
	Step 2. Establish expectations of the cost, staffing, and time required to complete various work plan tasks.
	Step 3. Train managers on how to use the work order system to more effectively monitor the performance of employees.
	Step 4. Track and publish performance data for each operational unit.
	Step 5. Implement a process for incorporating performance data into the periodic evaluation of department managers.
	Step 6. Conduct random periodic reviews of work order paper work and computer system data to ensure accuracy.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Business Manager, Facilities Services
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

A second way the district could improve its accountability mechanisms is to focus more attention on evaluating maintenance and custodial staff. At present, for example, there is no process in place to evaluate work orders completed by internal trades staff for quality or efficiency. Indeed, personnel evaluations for trades staff are only conducted when there is a significant problem. Likewise, custodians do not have their work evaluated in terms of cleaning standards, time management, or other dimensions affecting the cleanliness of the schools. The district’s current contract with the union representing custodians calls for custodial personnel evaluations once every three years. These evaluations are routinely conducted, but they focus on attendance, attitude and discipline issues, not job effectiveness.

Managers and supervisors report that there is little incentive to conduct personnel evaluations on a more frequent basis because of the contractual difficulty of disciplining staff. The process is labor intensive and time-consuming and rarely results in the termination of problem employees.

The district should establish performance standards for maintenance workers and custodians and assess performance against these standards regularly. Action Plan 8-3 details the steps the district should take.

Action Plan 8-3

We recommend that the district establish performance standards for maintenance workers and custodians and assess performance against these standards as part of periodic personnel evaluations.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish quality and efficiency standards for each trades area and for custodians
	Step 2.	Establish performance goals against the standards for each employee
	Step 3.	Amend the performance evaluation process to include supervisory ratings of employees against the established performance and productivity standards on at least an annual basis
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Trades Managers, Facilities Services; Custodial Managers, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 3: Not Using

The district does not use customer feedback to systematically identify and implement program improvements.

Customer feedback drawn from surveys is another tool to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the maintenance program. Customer evaluation surveys should ask stakeholders, such as principals and school-based employees, to provide their perceptions of response times, work order completion times, quality of work, overall facility appearance and cleanliness, and the professionalism of employees in the maintenance program.² This type of survey should be performed at least annually and summary results should be shared with maintenance employees, district managers, the superintendent, and the school board. If the customer surveys identify problems, program managers should assess the situation, prepare corrective action plans for any identified problem areas, and make program improvements.

In the Sarasota County School District, maintenance leaders see the principals—who are the managers of each school—as their primary customers. This is a reasonable viewpoint since other “users” of the schools (e.g., staff, teachers, parents, and students) hold the principals accountable for the condition of school buildings. To help ensure the needs of these primary customers are understood and addressed, the department’s six trades/facilities managers are each assigned as the facilities department’s primary liaison with about six schools. They meet with the principals of their schools at least monthly to determine if service expectations are being met, to receive feedback on staff performance, and to review priorities. Through these relationships the Facilities Services Department obtains and uses feedback from principals in managing their operations. Though informal in nature, this process and feedback is useful.

While the district has taken steps to establish strong working relationships with the principals, the district does not use customer feedback to systematically identify and implement program improvements. Although it does receive feedback from its customers, the department does not collect it in a structured

² A district may also survey students, parents, or other stakeholders as may be appropriate.

way, the feedback is often not in writing, and much of it never is communicated to the facilities services director. As a result, poor practice can be repeated because there is no system for disseminating information throughout the department. Similarly, other department personnel may not replicate exemplary methods of dealing with recurring problems. A better approach to collecting systemic information on customer feedback is to survey customers on at least an annual basis. (While the district does conduct an annual “climate survey” that provides a wealth of helpful information to the district as a whole, climate survey questions do not specifically relate to facilities maintenance services.)

The district should establish a comprehensive customer feedback survey process to aid in management decision-making. Action Plan 8-4 details the steps the district should take.

Action Plan 8-4

We recommend that the district implement a comprehensive customer feedback survey process and use the feedback in the management decision-making process.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish a customer feedback form to be completed by school personnel (i.e., principals or assistant principals) for certain categories of work orders. ¹
	Step 2.	Track customer service feedback on at least a monthly basis, by trade and program area, and provide that data to each trades manager, foreperson and lead person.
	Step 3.	As part of the annual Asset Preservation interview process with each school principal, establish a written service assessment form for principals, teachers, students and parents to anonymously rate the level of service they have received from the Facilities Services Department.
	Step 4.	Incorporate customer satisfaction goals, by trades area and program, into the performance evaluation process for maintenance managers.
	Step 5.	Use customer satisfaction data to help determine where training or other corrective action is needed.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Business Manager, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

¹ Establishing a dollar or time threshold would be an appropriate method of limiting the data collection process to “significant” work order projects.

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 4: Not Using

The district’s maintenance department has not established written procedures and staff performance standards to ensure efficient operations.

Up-to-date procedures, when coupled with appropriate district policies, ensure that activities are carried out in an efficient and effective manner and that districts are in compliance with federal and state laws. In addition, written procedures serve as a district’s institutional memory for key processes and as such help to minimize disruption to essential services and reduce the need for costly training and assistance due to staff turnover. Program management should develop written procedures and employee performance standards with input from maintenance managers, trades and custodial employees, and human resource professionals. Procedures and standards should be developed utilizing a combination of national standards and local imperatives and adjusted for budgetary considerations. Performance standards serve as a basis for measuring how well the maintenance and custodial employees meet or adhere to board policies, and set clear expectations for job performance, giving managers tools that allow them to consistently evaluate employees.

The Sarasota County School District's Facilities Services Department does a good job of ensuring the equitable treatment of all district schools. This is accomplished through three primary means. First, the annual budgeting process, which starts with principals and trades managers assessing building needs, prioritizes health and safety items first and then "spreads around" principals' "wish list" items as funds permit. Second, district custodians are allocated based on a pre-established formula. Third, each school principal has a trades manager liaison he or she can call directly if concerns or questions arise during the year. While these efforts contribute to customer satisfaction levels, the district could better ensure equity in the system by adhering to reasonable performance standards or a rigorous assessment of priorities and needs. Implementing Action Plans 8-2 and 8-3 will allow management to monitor and evaluate program performance at the individual school level.

Another area for district improvement is in the documentation of maintenance related procedures and performance standards. The district has written maintenance procedures for some areas (e.g., building permitting, community use of schools, the hiring process, purchasing, health and safety, and energy use issues), and these are up-to-date and well communicated to staff. However, in other areas, such as custodial and trades staff operating procedures, standards are either nonexistent or staff were not able to locate copies. In addition, because there is no active web site for the Facilities Services Department, its procedures cannot be accessed remotely from the Internet. The only policies pertaining to facilities maintenance on the district's web site are board rules and do not approach the level of detail required for operating procedures.

In addition, as previously discussed, even where procedures have been established, these procedures do not include a statement of performance expectations and standards. As a result, no system exists to monitor performance against procedures and standards and to communicate problems to managers (and other staff) so these problems can be corrected or to communicate effective practices so effective employees can be commended.

As previously noted, Facilities Services Department managers report plans to develop more measurable performance standards as part of the department's new management plan. At a minimum, these standards, when developed, should include completion time standards for routine tasks, clearance rates for work orders, and minimum response time standards for emergencies. As these standards are developed they should also be integrated into the department's procedures manuals. In addition, when performance standards and procedures are developed and put in place as part of the new management plan, the department should consider developing a web site and placing results on that site or at least periodically reporting outcomes to the board and to principals in writing.

The district should establish written operating policies and procedures for all maintenance program areas and take steps to ensure policies and procedures are being followed. Action Plan 8-5 details the steps the district should take.

Action Plan 8-5

We recommend that the District establish written operating policies and procedures for all maintenance program areas, ensure that the policies and procedures are accessible to staff and the public, and implement a system for monitoring adherence to the standards.

Action Needed	Step 1. Identify all program areas without up-to-date policies and procedures. Step 2. Draft detailed operating procedures for these areas. Step 3. Incorporate performance standards developed in Action Plan 8-2 into the operating procedures. Step 4. Centralize within the Facilities Services Department all operating policies and procedures and periodically review them to ensure they are still relevant. Step 5. Publish a combined listing of maintenance policies and procedures (and performance standards) in manual form and supply all maintenance work sites and school sites with a copy of the manual. Step 6. Establish a maintenance services web site and place a downloadable version of the manual on the site. Step 7. Dedicate a portion of the website to reporting information on the department's performance against standards.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Trades Managers, Facilities Services
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 5: Not Using

The district does not maintain its educational facilities in a condition that enhances student learning and facilitates school site employee productivity.

Comprehensive maintenance of the physical plant is critical to sustaining a suitable environment for teaching and student learning and to extending the useful life of a facility. Facilities should be maintained in a condition that supports efficient operation, maximum utilization, and provides appropriate working conditions for district employees. The district's maintenance program should include routine condition inspections, a preventive maintenance component, regularly scheduled repairs, and methods of responding to emergencies, plans for the modernization of building systems, facility enhancements, and general renovations as primary functions.

While many of the Sarasota County School District's schools are well maintained and generally clean, school site visits revealed several cleaning and maintenance concerns, especially among the older and larger school sites. Roughly half of the schools reviewed were in good or passable overall condition; the other half were unacceptable and in need of improvement. Even in some of the schools that were reasonably clean, it is clear that the district is making cleaning compromises, such as reducing the frequency with which bathrooms and locker rooms are cleaned and restocked during the day.

It is likely that part of the reason for the variation in school cleanliness is due to the custodial allocation formula the district uses, which does not take into account the age of each school. All things being equal, older schools are more difficult to keep clean. Buildings with old windows that don't seal properly allow outside dirt and dust into classrooms. Older plumbing fixtures leak more often than new ones. In addition, deferred maintenance and capital issues—such as termite damage, missing ceiling tiles, and mildew from flooding—have exacerbated cleaning problems in some schools. Yet the district's custodial allocation is based almost entirely on square footage with no modifications for school age. The custodial allocation formula should, therefore, be modified. The district should revise its custodial staffing allocation formula to account for the age of its school buildings. Action Plan 8-6 details the steps the district should take.

Action Plan 8-6

We recommend that the district revise its custodial staffing allocation formula to account for the age of each school.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Determine the average age of all district schools and the age of each school relative to that average age.
	Step 2.	Develop a weighting system that gives additional custodial support to older schools and takes away custodians from newer schools.
	Step 3.	Test the weighting formula in a sample of schools.
	Step 4.	Modify the weighting formula based on the results of the analysis performed in Step 3.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Custodial Managers, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

However, the difference in the cleanliness of district schools cannot completely be attributed to school age and the custodial staffing formula. Some custodians are simply not as effective or efficient at cleaning their workstations as others. In virtually all district schools, the custodial work is divided up among the cleaning staff by area. There is no incentive to improve work efficiency in cleaning one’s area. In fact, if a custodian finishes cleaning his workstations early, he is likely to be assigned additional work. As such, there is actually a perverse incentive to work to the “lowest common denominator,” or to the level of the least efficient worker. Schools with good custodial workers—those who take pride in doing a good job—manage to resist this urge and are generally better at cleaning their schools. To institutionalize the higher productivity of these better performing schools, the district should implement a task system which identifies daily cleaning tasks for each custodian each day based on standards for cleanliness and on what a custodian should be able to accomplish in one shift. Custodians would then be responsible for completing those tasks in the time allotted. If they finish early, they are “rewarded” for their productivity by being able to leave early while still receiving full pay for the shift. In many organizations, establishing a task system can increase productivity by 20% or more while reducing the number of hours employees work.

The district should implement a task system for custodians in order to increase cleaning efficiency at school sites. Action Plan 8-7 details the steps the district should take.

Action Plan 8-7

We recommend that the district implement a task system for custodians to improve cleaning efficiency in the schools.¹

Action Needed	Step 1.	Create cleaning stations for custodians based closely on the revised formula used to assign custodians to schools. ²
	Step 2.	Establish written cleanliness standards and expectations for each station.
	Step 3.	Allow custodians to leave as soon as their stations are completely cleaned, even if it is prior to the end of their shift.
	Step 4.	Periodically and randomly inspect custodial cleaning stations to ensure cleaning standards are being applied.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Custodial Managers, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

¹ This Action Plan will impact collective bargaining contracts.

² Prior to implementing this step, Action Plan 8-6 should be completed and the new staffing formula should be used to implement Step 1 of Action Plan 8-7.

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 6: Not Using

The Facilities Services Department’s organizational structure has not minimized administrative layers in the trades areas and is lacking adequate supervision in custodial management.

Well-run school districts are lean administratively and maximize funds available to support their primary mission, educating students. This requires districts to make the most effective use of funds allocated for administrative services, such as facilities maintenance. There is no “one” right way to organize and staff the facilities maintenance program. Critical factors that affect the structure of the maintenance organization include the number, ages, general condition, size (gross square feet), geographic distribution of a district’s physical facilities, and the scope of services that have been assigned to the department. In general, however, the organizational structure of the maintenance function should be relatively flat with appropriate spans of control. Such a structure will result in minimized administrative and managerial costs while providing sufficient managerial controls to ensure operations are properly carried out. Staffing needs to be to the level by which needed work is accomplished in an economical and efficient manner. It is expected in smaller districts with fewer staff will require staff to individually handle multiple areas of responsibility (such as facilities maintenance and transportation) that may be done by different individuals in larger districts.

Some features of the Sarasota County School District’s Facilities Services Department’s approach to managing its organizational structure are sound. For example, the current organizational chart reflects the existing structure of the department, and this structure has recently been reviewed and revised to better reflect current staffing levels. In addition, the department communicates organizational review findings and recommendations up the chain of command and ultimately to the school board.

However, there are several ways the Facilities Services Department’s could minimize administrative layers in the trades areas and improve supervision in custodial management. First, levels of supervision are inadequate in some areas, especially in the custodial area where two managers currently supervise 256 custodians. At five schools principals manage the custodial staff, but even at these schools most cleaning occurs during the second shift after the principals have left for the day. The primary reason custodial supervisors must oversee so many custodians is that all custodians are classified employees and are represented by the same bargaining unit. Consequently, head and lead custodians do not have the authority to discipline and evaluate other custodians and this work falls to the two custodial managers. Because the discipline process involves a great deal of paperwork, administrative steps, and meeting time, it is not often used. More often managers and supervisors use informal “coaxing” to encourage custodians to improve performance or “problem” custodians are transferred to other sites. To address this issue, the district should negotiate the removal of head custodians from the bargaining unit that also represents line custodians.

The district should remove head custodians from the classified category so they can effectively manage school-based custodians. Action Plan 8-8 details the steps the district should take. The district could implement this action plan within existing resources.

Action Plan 8-8

We recommend that the district remove head custodians from the classified category to enable them to effectively supervise other custodians.¹

Action Needed	Step 1.	Reclassify head custodian jobs as management functions.
	Step 2.	Rewrite discipline procedures to allow head custodians to administer disciplinary sanctions for problem employees.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Financial & Business Officer; Director, Facilities Services; Custodial Managers, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

¹ This Action Plan will impact collective bargaining contracts.

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Unlike the custodial area, supervisor/employee ratios in the trades areas were reviewed and amended over the past two years when the organizational structure was flattened and a layer of middle management was removed. The reorganization was intended to provide more direct supervision of the trades staff and reduce the number of schools for which each manager is directly responsible. However, the existing supervisor/employee ratios need further refinement. Direct management by the trades managers ranges from 5 staff to 22, and the ratio of non-field staff (managers and support staff) to total maintenance employees is high at almost 42%, meaning only 58% of all maintenance staff is in the “field.” To address this situation the management and supervisory structure for the trades areas should be revised.

The district should revise the management structure in the trades areas to more evenly distribute supervisory responsibilities. Action Plan 8-9 details the steps the district should take. Implementing this recommendation will result in a savings of \$300,600 over a five-year period.

Action Plan 8-9

We recommend that the district revise the management structure in the trades areas.¹

Action Needed	Step 1.	Combine the management of trades functions so that each trades manager is responsible for between 15 and 22 employees.
	Step 2.	Move trades forepersons to the field in trades groups with few workers, such as plumbing and painting.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

¹ This Action Plan will impact collective bargaining contracts.

² This might most easily be accomplished by combining painting and roofing with small engine repair and utility maintenance under the direction of one trade manager. If feasible, the district could eliminate one trade manager position.

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Another way the Facilities Services Department could minimize administrative layers and improve supervision in custodial management is to review the way it allocates custodial resources. The formula used to allocate custodial resources to schools is out of date and may need to be revised. As discussed in section 5, this formula does not take into account the age of the buildings, the number of students compared to the school’s capacity, or other factors relevant to custodial cleaning issues.³ An initial application of the *American School and University Magazine’s* custodial staffing formula, which suggests

³ For example, factors might include the square footage of various types of flooring material (i.e., carpets vs. tiles), the school type (i.e., high school vs. elementary), and the number of after school events held at the site over a given period of time.

a base rate of 21,429 square feet per custodian, shows the district actually exceeds the standard.⁴ However, modifying the custodial allocation formula to consider the building age (recommended in Section 5), implementing a task systems (recommended in Section 5) and improving custodial supervision (recommended in this section) may obviate the need to increase custodial staffing.

The staffing formula for trades staff also needs to be assessed. The current formula that is used to determine trades staffing needs is the Florida DOE’s standard of one trades worker for every 45,000 square feet modified for the trades work that the district outsources to private contractors. (The district uses outside contractors for specialty trades work and most large-scale trades jobs, such as exterior painting and uses district staff for more routine maintenance and for most projects inside school buildings.) The staffing assumptions on which this formula is based are not, on the surface, unreasonable but without additional analysis the district cannot determine whether or not the current staffing approach is cost-effective. In any case, staffing projections are based on budgetary constraints only, not on projected need from the five-year capital plan. Nor does the district consider building age when developing staffing projections. Consequently, a modified approach to evaluating the district’s trades staffing needs should be developed that links the district’s maintenance needs with staffing requirements.

The district should revise its formula for trades staffing to more accurately reflect actual work projections. Action Plan 8-10 details the steps the district should take.

Action Plan 8-10

We recommend that the district revise its formula for trades staffing based on actual work projections.

Action Needed	Step 1. Review the past year’s record of work orders by trades function to estimate a base level of service provided by facilities services. ¹
	Step 2. Develop estimates for completion time for each trade group for the next five years.
	Step 3. Project trades staffing needs based on estimates of workload in each area.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Financial & Business Officer; Director, Facilities Services; Trades Managers, Facilities Services
Time Frame	January 1, 2004

¹ This could be accomplished by random sampling as opposed to a full review of all work orders.

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 7: Using

The facilities department’s hiring and retention practices ensure that the department hires and maintains qualified staff.

A qualified, knowledgeable, stable group of employees is the cornerstone of any maintenance organization. Complete job descriptions that accurately reflect the knowledge, skills, abilities, duties, and responsibilities of every employee in the department are essential to the development of such a workforce. The job descriptions should be readily available to school district employees and applicants, meet the district’s needs, and they should have been developed by human resource professionals in cooperation with individuals having specific expertise in the job tasks to be performed. Districts should establish competitive compensation to ensure that they can attract and retain qualified candidates. Compensation

⁴ This formula is used here only as an illustration that the district should review the formula it currently uses. Other Florida school districts have managed to effectively clean their schools with less than one custodian for every 21,429 square feet. In addition, implementation of a task system as suggested by Action Plan 8-7 should also impact the district’s custodial staffing analysis. The point is that the district should develop a more sophisticated formula that takes other factors into account as well.

includes salary and benefits, such as health, vacation, and retirement benefits. Districts should establish procedures to ensure that personal and professional references are obtained and contacted.

The Sarasota County School District's Facilities Services Department does an effective job of hiring staff. In particular, the department follows the district's written procedures for recruiting, such as providing a detailed job description, posting the job announcement internally, placing ads in newspapers, and verifying references and employment history. In addition, the department has taken proactive steps to address identified problems in its personnel management systems. For example, the district recently hired a consultant to overhaul all of the organization's position descriptions. This process included obtaining feedback from the employees who were in the jobs at the time. The board approved the updated position descriptions in September 2001. These job descriptions have been posted on the district's website to ensure that they are accessible to potential job applicants.

Best Practice 8: Using

The Facilities Services Department provides a staff development program that includes appropriate training for maintenance and operations staff to enhance worker job satisfaction, efficiency, and safety.

Training ensures that school district employees understand the scope of their responsibilities and performance expectations, and serves to update skills and knowledge necessary to effectively and efficiently carry out their duties. The sophistication of the maintenance employee training plan, training methods, and documentation of training may vary according to the size of the district. However, maintenance training should address custodial operations, grounds maintenance, and specialized trades and should be tailored to the needs of the specific function. In addition, training in maintenance related activities such as operating procedures, use of tools, proper lifting techniques, work place safety, hazardous materials handling, and emergency procedures should be required for all employees. A district can use a variety of training sources available to it including vendors and manufacturers of their supplies and equipment, contract trainers, and professional association meetings. School districts also should take advantage of free training materials and programs available through the Florida Department of Education (DOE), subscribe to publications, and maintain memberships in organizations that provide information on new technologies, equipment, and procedures. Training programs should include an evaluation component so that employee feedback can be used to improve future training.

The Sarasota County School District has demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring its maintenance and custodial staff are adequately trained. This commitment is reflected in the amount of training Facilities Services Department staff has actually received. For example, over 84% of all custodians have had some training in the last two years. The average number of hours of training each custodial employee received over this period is 29.4. In addition, all new custodians receive on-the-job training by the lead and head custodians. The district's commitment to the professional development of its maintenance employees is also demonstrated by the fact that the district pays for membership in the Florida Educational Facilities Planners Association and the National Safety Council. The department's health and safety specialist is also a member of several health and safety organizations including the American Society of Safety Engineers. The department also subscribes to several specialty trade publications and distributes these publications to maintenance staff.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND UTILIZATION

Best Practice 9: Using

The district has developed an annual budget with spending limits that comply with the lawful funding for each category of facilities maintenance and operations.

Like most other organizations, school districts have limited funds and therefore, they must set budget priorities. A school district's budget allocation decisions should reflect its priority goals and objectives. These goals and objectives (which should be part of a strategic plan) may either be explicitly stated in the budget or may be reflected in changes in allocations that are concurrent with the shifting priorities. A school district budget should allocate sufficient resources to ensure that its plant operations and maintenance needs are adequately funded and rely on dollars that are raised and expended in accordance with Florida law. Work force, supplies, equipment, training, and the technology to support the maintenance program are essential budget considerations. The budget should be based on assessments of the physical condition of the district's educational and ancillary facilities, maintenance and custodial staffing standards, historical data, employee input, and projects identified in the strategic and five-year work plans. The annual budget should address long-term goals for maintaining and operating district facilities, recurring maintenance tasks such as preventive maintenance, and provide reasonably adequate funding to avoid the accumulation of significant deferred maintenance projects. The budget also should provide for the correction of deficiencies identified in the annual safety, casualty, and fire safety inspection reports.

The Sarasota County School District identifies and budgets capital and operations projects by school and does a good job of prioritizing these projects based on health and safety issues and financial constraints. Categories of funds are segregated and tracked accordingly. The annual budget reflects the department's assessment of long-term maintenance and operating needs based on the annual "asset preservation" process conducted with the principals. While budget constraints affect the department's ability to address all deferred maintenance needs, the district addresses most planned maintenance activities through the budget process. The district forecasts some preventive maintenance during the budget process, such as for roofing, HVAC, air filter change and elevator service, but the budget process is mostly driven by significant deferred and corrective maintenance items.

We recommend that the district establish a process for analyzing the costs and benefits of shifting some deferred maintenance resources to additional preventive maintenance practices, such as for painting. Up-front costs for instituting preventive maintenance programs may result in significant long-term savings. The district might go about this analysis by comparing the average cost of certain tasks at different age intervals based on actual historical data. Such analysis will assist the district in both establishing an optimal time frame for certain maintenance functions, and to determine if cost savings would justify implementing a scheduled maintenance plan.⁵

⁵ For example, in the area of painting, the department should analyze the average cost of painting building exteriors at between 7 and 10 years compared to the average cost for buildings painted after longer intervals. By projecting out the two approaches over, say, a 20-year period, the district can better determine if the added cost of more frequent painting is more or less cost-efficient.

Best Practice 10: Using

The district accurately projects cost estimates of major maintenance projects.

The cost of major maintenance projects can be a substantial expense for a school district, and therefore, must be effectively managed.⁶ A district can do this in a number of ways. For instance, cost estimates for these projects should be developed considering experience with prior similar projects, current estimating cost standards, local market conditions, and an inflation factor for multiyear projects. A district also should be realistic in its project estimates so that once the five-year work plan is adopted, it is a valid indicator of the work that will actually be accomplished, and the dollars that will both be needed, and available, in the plan's out years.

The Sarasota County School District completes most large-scale projects through the use of outside contractors. Cost estimates for large projects are usually based on costs of contracts already in place, with specified costs for materials and service. As a result, there is little variation between projected and actual costs. This aggressive use of front-end competitively bid contracts with set pricing is an effective way to accurately predict project costs. The district adequately accounts for inflation during its annual budgeting process.

Best Practice 11: Using

The district maintains an adequate maintenance reserve fund for emergency expenditures.

A well-managed school district has funds available to address unanticipated or emergency contingencies that may arise during the fiscal year. The age of the facilities and equipment, the repair history of major systems such as HVAC and roofs, area climatic conditions, and the effectiveness of the district's preventive maintenance program are considerations that will help determine the amount of a maintenance reserve fund. Overall, the district's budgetary policy must be flexible to ensure funding of unforeseen maintenance needs that could adversely affect the district's mission.

The Sarasota County School District takes a number of approaches to ensure that it has adequate reserves for emergency maintenance expenditures. First, the district includes a projection for emergencies as part of each specific maintenance fund account, such as health and safety, roofing, and HVAC. The percentage amount for each account is based on past years' experience. In addition, there is a district-wide allocation for "asset preservation." This account—also referred to as the "Director's Fund"—is a true emergency fund used only to address emergencies in funding account categories that have exhausted their funds. The amount in this asset preservation account is currently set at \$300,000. (Funds remaining in the account at the end of the year roll over to the next program year, but they do not accumulate.) The department also has the authority to shift funds allocated to low priority items (such as renovations) when emergencies occur. These budgetary mechanisms together are adequate to address the district's unforeseen emergency maintenance costs.

Best Practice 12: Using

The Facilities Services Department minimizes equipment costs through its purchasing practices.

Sound purchasing practices foster competition, which yields the best pricing for goods and services. A district should not only establish purchasing policies and procedures that meet the requirements of Florida law but also ensure cost-efficient purchasing practices. The purchasing policies and procedures must be in a purchasing manual that is readily available to employees and the public. Periodically the district

⁶ Individual projects that are beyond the scope of routine maintenance work are considered major maintenance projects.

should conduct cost comparisons to determine whether purchasing practices have minimized costs. Consideration of long-term equipment operating and maintenance costs, inflation, and the cost-effectiveness of repair or refurbishment of existing equipment should be a part of the cost projections made for replacement equipment.

The Sarasota County School District takes a number of steps to control equipment costs through its purchasing practices. In particular, the district's front-end bidder qualifications processes are very effective at ensuring the district uses qualified suppliers and contractors and that it minimizes purchasing costs. The district also makes effective use of volume purchasing as evidenced by the fact that volume discounts are often reflected in vendor bids. In addition, the district has established an effective process to weigh expected future equipment repair costs against the cost of replacing equipment when making purchase decisions.

Best Practice 13: Using

The district provides maintenance and operations department staff the tools and equipment required to accomplish their assigned tasks.

To be efficient and effective in completing their day-to-day activities, maintenance and operations employees require a wide selection of common tools and equipment. Specialty tools may be required to accomplish unplanned or unusual projects. A district should have procedures in place to ensure that maintenance and operations employees have access to the right tools to accomplish their duties. Most maintenance departments have an inventory of commonly used tools that are available for day-to-day use, but usually find it more cost-effective to rent less frequently used specialty tools. Some districts provide small hand tools while other districts require the employees to provide their own. Districts should have written operating procedures that outline acquisition, use, and return of tools, parts, materials, and other equipment required for the day-to-day work and for special or emergency projects.

The Sarasota County School District does a good job of making sure that maintenance staff has access to the tools and equipment they need to be effective. For example, trades personnel receive a \$200 per year tool allowance for hand tools that are used to supplement the major tools and equipment provided by the district. In addition, while the district owns some specialty equipment—large state-of-the-art cabinet making machines, for example—more often the department uses alternative means (such as blanket purchase orders for equipment rental) for major specialty equipment.

Best Practice 14: Using

The district uses proactive maintenance practices to reduce maintenance costs.

An effective proactive maintenance program can reduce maintenance and operations costs, reduce service outages, and extend the useful life of expensive building systems. Therefore, a district should have proactive maintenance policies that include the continuing evaluation of building systems and the costs to maintain them, the development of district-wide equipment and building system standards, preventive maintenance programs, and the surplusing of property. Evaluative information developed by the maintenance department can be used to recommend standard building systems, which are cost-efficient, for future construction projects. Standardizing equipment and building systems reduces employee training and avoids the costs of maintaining multiple parts inventories. Standards should be developed for HVAC, energy management controls, roofing, plumbing fixtures, mechanical and electrical equipment, door hardware, the security and fire alarms, and commonly used finishes such as paint, carpet, and resilient flooring. While larger districts may need a computerized preventive maintenance program to schedule and track work orders, smaller districts may find paper-based systems cost-effective and

sufficient for their level of activity. In addition, school districts should have policies and procedures in place to properly identify and dispose of surplus property in the most cost-effective manner.

The Sarasota County School District's Facilities Services Department is proactive in its effort to reduce maintenance costs. Notably, it works to control future maintenance costs through active participation in the capital planning process. Department managers formally comment on the maintenance implications of all plans prior to their being finalized. The department has also established effective preventive maintenance programs in some areas including programs for roofing, HVAC, air filter changing, and elevator service. There are several other areas, however—such as painting and paving. Where a preventive maintenance program could further reduce long-term maintenance costs.

We recommend that the District expand their preventive maintenance programs to other maintenance areas such as painting and paving. Up-front costs for instituting preventive maintenance programs in these areas should result in long-term savings. To decide what level of preventive maintenance is appropriate the department perform a risk/cost analysis. The results of this analysis can then be used to determine what level of preventive maintenance is warranted by comparing future preventive and corrective maintenance costs on a present value basis.

Best Practice 15: Using

The Facilities Services Department identifies and implements strategies to contain energy costs.

A comprehensive energy management plan guides a school district in ways to lower energy use and utility costs. Plan development should be a collaborative effort of district stakeholders including maintenance employees, custodians, site-based administrators, instructional personnel, utility providers, and other experts on energy conservation. The district's energy manager should contact peer districts, state and local agencies, utility providers and other stakeholders to identify resources available to aid the district in their energy management efforts. The energy management plan, at a minimum, should provide incentives to schools to reduce energy costs, provide for energy audits, implement strategies for effective demand-side energy management, and take advantage of energy rebates or other options to lower rates, which are offered by utility providers. Maintenance administrators should analyze the energy management system's reports and assess major building system conditions regularly to identify anomalies indicating problems that need to be addressed.

The Sarasota County School District has taken a number of effective steps to control energy costs. The district's energy management program includes collaborative efforts with the local utility company. In addition, the district participates in an energy rebate program and contracts with a private energy management firm for its energy controls and software. The energy management program includes equipping schools with thermal storage units that allow the schools to create ice at night—when energy costs are lower—and to use that ice to cool the schools during the daytime—when energy costs are high. This program has been implemented at most of the district's schools. The department has also established a written energy management plan that establishes several broad energy policies.

While the district has taken major steps to address energy consumption and obtain rebates, addition savings may be obtained by developing a more detailed energy management manual. This manual would help school administrators by providing instructions regarding the use of window shades during warm and cold weather based on the geographic orientation of school buildings, optimal watering schedules for the grounds, and other simple instructions that would help reduce energy costs.

We recommend that the district develop a more detailed energy management manual that provides guidance to school administrators and other district building users in policies and procedures that can reduce energy usage costs.

Best Practice 16: Using

The district has an energy management system in place, and the system is maintained for maximum effectiveness.

Ever-increasing energy costs and limited budgets make it advantageous for school districts to install comprehensive, modern energy management systems (EMS), which can substantially reduce energy costs. An EMS enables a school district to remotely operate and monitor HVAC equipment. The EMS controls allow the district to maintain facilities at uniform temperature settings during established operating hours. The system should be capable of generating reports that can help to identify inefficiently operating building systems that may need service or upgrading. Because total replacement or installation of a new energy management system can be an expensive undertaking, a school district should budget for energy control enhancements and system replacements in its five-year work plan until an effective system is in place.

The Sarasota County School District's success in controlling energy costs results, in part, from the effective energy management system it has in place. This system gives the Facilities Services Department's energy management unit the ability to remotely monitor energy usage on all district buildings from an internet-linked computer system. The system also allows the department to diagnose problems in advance of HVAC work crews responding to work orders and/or emergency calls. The district also provides excellent training in the use and management of this system. Indeed, the department recently implemented an on-the-job training program whereby one HVAC trades person is assigned to the energy management specialist for one month. (Each HVAC trades staff will rotate through the training program on an ongoing basis.) The specialist trains the trades person in the use of the computer system as a diagnostic tool and in how to change electronics parts for the monitoring system. All HVAC trades technicians are equipped with laptop computers, so once trained, they can better access and diagnose problems.

The district has also exhibited a willingness to make appropriate investments to control energy costs. To reduce air conditioning expenses—the primary cost driver for district energy usage—a number of schools have been equipped with thermal storage units. Energy costs at these schools are averaging roughly \$2,000 per month less than before the thermal storage units were installed. The district is adding thermal storage units at the rate of about one per year and intends to equip all district schools with the thermal units where it is cost effective to do so.

Best Practice 17: Not Using

The district does not regularly review maintenance and operations costs and services and evaluate the potential for outside contracting and privatization.

Maintenance administrators should consider opportunities for privatizing services, weighing the potential advantages and disadvantages of using in-house resources against alternative service delivery methods. Outsourcing may be cost-effective and allow the district to reduce, reassign, or make better use of in-house staff. An annual review of services to determine if alternative delivery methods are more cost-effective should be an ongoing, established function of the department. These evaluations should be in writing and available to the school board and the public for review. If a service is outsourced, periodic written follow-up analyses should be made to confirm the effectiveness of the service and to verify that

any anticipated cost savings have actually developed. Criteria that may support outsourcing services include opportunities to save money and management time, the opportunity to add specialized skills or training not available in-house, difficulty in hiring qualified employees, and the opportunity to improve the overall quality of the maintenance and operations function.

The Sarasota County School District’s current policy is to minimize contracted services for most projects that will take place inside the school buildings. This policy is based on maintaining the highest level of security for students and staff by keeping nondistrict employees outside of occupied school buildings. Such projects are not generally considered for outsourcing. In addition, existing labor contracts restrict the district’s ability to contract for custodial services. The district can use contracted custodial services only in nonschool sites. The district often uses outside contractors for large projects, specialty projects, and for emergency projects when district capacity is stretched too thin.

However, the district does not complete regular, formal evaluations of existing services and activities and assess whether outside contracting or other alternatives would be more cost-effective because it has not established the performance standards needed to support such an analysis. For example, no cost comparisons are done to determine if any work order could have been done more cheaply in another way. As the department brings additional capabilities on line with its new work order system, it should implement ongoing comparisons between contractor services and in-house provision of similar work orders to determine which is more efficient. In addition, the district should assess the cost savings, if any, that might result if the restriction on using outside contractors to work inside school buildings were loosened. If the potential savings are significant, the district might explore ways to ensure the security of students and staff in a building while also using outside contractors.

The district should periodically evaluate the costs of its maintenance programs and compare those costs with the cost of alternative service delivery methods. Action Plan 8-11 details the steps the district should take.

Action Plan 8-11

We recommend that the district periodically evaluate the costs of its maintenance programs to determine if they can be accomplished for lower cost in some other manner.

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Calculate the total cost for completing each similar type of work order by contracted labor category and in-house labor category.</p> <p>Step 2. Identify alternative methods of work order completion for each category and estimate the costs of completing the same level and quality of work under those alternative methods.</p> <p>Step 3. Switch service delivery mechanisms in areas where a clear cost savings projection is evident.</p> <p>Step 4. Use the analysis performed in Steps 1, 2 and 3 to determine whether the policy restricting the use of outside contractors in schools should be maintained or loosened on a selective basis.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Business Manager, Facilities Services
Time Frame	June 30, 2004 ¹

¹ The district cannot undertake this recommendation until Step 1 of Action Plan 8-10 has been completed and the district has access to more detailed performance data.

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 18: Not Using

The district's computerized control and tracking system is not currently using system capabilities to accurately track work orders.

Work order systems enable school districts to effectively track maintenance work orders and warehouse inventory, and improve maintenance response time and efficiency. Larger school districts should use an electronic work order system to coordinate day-to-day activities including workflow, personnel, budget, and inventory associated with maintaining educational facilities.⁷ There are several types of computerized maintenance management systems available, some specifically designed for a single organization as well as “off the shelf software.” Any system in use should include work order control, scheduling, assignment and billing, inventory, and preventive maintenance scheduling and record keeping as integrated functions. The system should provide statistical information that can be used to assist managers in determining employee productivity, and in developing cost reports and estimates, equipment histories, and facilities condition assessments, while interfacing with other district financial programs. District administrators should receive sufficient training to maximize the potential of the system.

The Sarasota County School District's Facilities Services Department implemented a new work order system about one year ago. The primary reason the district implemented the system was to improve the delivery of services to schools, and from this perspective the system has been a success. Implementing the system improved the ability of managers to track individual work orders. This has greatly reduced the number of work orders that get re-entered (because they have not yet been completed), and it has speeded up the completion rate.

While the district's work order system has effectively served the purpose for which it was acquired, the district's computerized control and tracking system is not currently using system capabilities to accurately track work orders because the department currently makes only limited use of the system as an analytic and management tool. For example, the system has a number of capabilities that the department does not use. These include inventory tracking and controls, cost and time estimates, “windshield” time tracking, and other features. The district plans to implement some of these features at a later time. In the meantime, however, the system's usefulness as an analytical tool is limited.

The district should enable several tracking functions of its work order system in order to monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of its maintenance programs. Action Plan 8-12 details the steps the district should take. The district could implement this action plan at a one-time cost of \$30,000. This amount reflects the estimated cost of hiring a management information system consultant to identify additional work order system needs, modify the system and train key staff in system changes.

⁷ Automated work order and billing systems are not required by all districts to ensure the effective and efficient operation of their maintenance department. Smaller districts with a limited number of daily work order requests and school buildings may find a well-designed paper-based system provides the same type of control as a computerized system in a larger district.

Action Plan 8-12

We recommend that the district implement key efficiency and effectiveness tracking capabilities of its work order system.

Action Needed	Step 1. Engage a computer consultant familiar with the district's work order database system to modify the system and train staff in the use of the new features.
	Step 2. Begin routine cost and time estimates for all work orders.
	Step 3. Begin entering actual total cost and time figures for all completed work orders.
	Step 4. Track actual "productive" work time against total pay period time for each trades area and category of work order.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Business Manager, Facilities Services; Trades Managers, Facilities Services
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

However, managers can and do create and use their own reports for monitoring the work in their trades areas and at the schools for which they are responsible. These "Trade Summary Reports" display all work orders, completion status, date of completion (if applicable), entry date, and a brief description of the work to be performed. There is little doubt that these reports, in their current form, have improved performance. However, the usefulness of these reports is limited for two reasons. First, because cost and time estimates are not routinely entered into the system, it is impossible for managers to use the system to project resources needed to complete outstanding work orders. (The final cost for some work orders that have been entered into the system is \$0.0 because managers have not entered this information.) Second, because of a significant time lag between the time work orders are actually completed and when they are closed out in the system, it is also impossible to obtain an accurate report on what the work order backlog actually is.

Given existing budget constraints, the district should examine existing staffing workload and priorities, and if possible, reassign existing clerical staff to perform data entry to close out completed work orders. However, if the district cannot reassign staff, it may choose to invest in a new position. Action Plan 8-13 details the steps the district should take. The district could implement this plan with \$146,700 in additional resources over the next 5-years if a new position is warranted.

Action Plan 8-13

We recommend that the district use clerical staff to complete the data entry to close out completed work orders in the system more quickly.

Action Needed	Step 1. Reprioritize work or hire a dedicated data entry person to close out all work orders in the system on a permanent basis to free the trades managers from this responsibility.
	Step 2. Establish a process for trades managers to routinely conduct quality control checks of the work order closeouts to ensure accuracy of the data entry.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Business Manager, Facilities Services
Time Frame	January 1, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 19: Using

The Facilities Services Department has a system for prioritizing maintenance needs uniformly throughout the district, but formalizing a priority system could improve the department's ability to track work orders.

All school district maintenance departments must establish a work order system that prioritizes maintenance requests while equitably allocating maintenance resources. Work orders submitted by district employees define the scope of a maintenance department's reactive workload. Additional services provided by the department keep the facilities clean and operating efficiently. Written guidelines and operating procedures should be established for emergency, routine, and preventive maintenance activities. The guidelines should define what is to be considered an emergency, the individuals responsible for reacting to the emergency, and the appropriate response to the emergency. Serious problems that affect the life, safety, or health of any student, district employee, or the public or an event that, if ignored, renders a facility unusable are to be considered an emergency. Finally, the priority system should address routine and ongoing preventive maintenance activities in a way that ensures all district facilities receive equal attention and service for all of their needs.

The Sarasota County School District has developed an overall system for prioritizing maintenance needs. The highest priority is placed on work orders that affect health and safety work, and indeed these work orders are cleared at a faster rate than other work orders. The overall prioritization of other maintenance needs occurs annually (during the annual asset preservation meetings the facilities services staff hold with principals) and these priorities are then re-adjusted based on monthly or more frequent meetings with principals. While this process for setting priorities is generally sound, the management and communication styles of some trades managers are more effective than others which has resulted in a perception among a few principals that some schools receive an inappropriate share of maintenance services and attention. Establishing a more systemic process for receiving feedback from principals would ensure the needs of all schools are effectively communicated to the director of facilities services and he can ensure that any imbalances in the delivery of maintenance services are addressed. By implementing Action Plan 8-4, the director of facilities services can use customer feedback to help ensure maintenance needs are prioritized uniformly throughout the district.

The department's work order system would be significantly improved with a more effective use of the prioritization capabilities already built into the system. Currently, anyone entering a work order into the system can categorize the priority (1 through 4, with 1 being the highest priority). Some schools, however, enter all their work orders as a high priority thinking, incorrectly, that doing so will result in the work orders being completed more quickly. In fact, this practice prevents managers from using the work order system to sort work orders by priority status. Instead, the priority status of work orders is determined on a case-by-case basis, as "emergency" calls come in, by the call taker, the trades foreperson and/or the trades manager.

We recommend that the district establish clear categories of work order prioritization, codify the priority categories in a written procedures manual, and train all district employees who enter work orders into the system to ensure that priority status is applied appropriately. To implement this recommendation, the district should first analyze the frequency of the categories of work orders via a random sampling process. Based on this initial analysis, the district should define the categories in such a way that they reflect the district's ability to deal with them. For example, if only five percent of historical work orders were truly "emergency" in nature, the defined Category 1 should result in roughly five percent of *future* work orders carrying that categorization. Finally, once implemented, the district should periodically monitor the usage of the categories and re-train system users if miscategorizations are occurring too frequently.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Best Practice 20: Using

The district’s policies and procedures clearly address the health and safety conditions of facilities.

Florida law requires school districts to develop policies and procedures establishing a comprehensive program of safety and sanitation to protect the occupants of educational facilities.⁸ All districts are required to conduct annual inspections of each educational and ancillary plant to determine compliance with the sanitation and casualty safety standards prescribed in the rules of the State Board of Education. Florida law also requires that inspectors certified by the Division of State Fire Marshal conduct annual fire safety inspections. Districts should have established written health and safety standards and ensure that documented evaluations are made of the condition of each educational plant and ancillary facility. Districts should have a written plan for maintaining healthy indoor air quality, which includes monitoring of indoor air quality and corrective action plans necessary to address indoor air quality issues.

The Facilities Services Department does a good job monitoring and addressing potentially adverse health and safety conditions at district facilities. In particular, the department’s health and safety specialist evaluates all buildings each year, documents in writing any health and safety issues that are identified, and works with department managers to address any deficiencies that are identified. The district also has a written procedure for dealing with indoor air quality issues. Remediation of such issues involves both the HVAC crew, which cleans and repairs mechanical devices, and the health and safety unit, which diagnoses, tests, and conducts follow up evaluations.

While the district does have written policies and procedures covering most health and safety issues, written standards are not in place for some areas including asbestos handling and removal and equipment operation.

We recommend that the district establish written policies and procedures for all health and safety related operational areas and ensure that relevant staff members have access to them. Implementation of this recommendation will be included as part of Action Plan 8-5.

Best Practice 21: Using

The district complies with federal and state regulatory mandates regarding facility health and safety conditions.

A school district, regardless of size, should have written policies and procedures that direct the district’s compliance with state and federal regulations governing health and safety conditions within its facilities. The district should have established health and safety training programs in place for their maintenance and custodial work force which complies with federal and state regulations such as the EPA guidelines, Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s (OSHA) Regulations—29 CFR, hazardous materials handling, the proper reporting of accidents, and asbestos handling and abatement. Focused training on the safe use of specialized equipment and building systems should be delivered to all custodial and maintenance employees and supervisors.

⁸ See s. 1013.12, F.S.

Facilities Maintenance

The Sarasota County School District has taken a number of proactive measures to ensure a safe and healthy workplace. In particular, the district has focused considerable attention to training workers on health and safety related issues. For example, the district conducts annual OSHA training, and staff attendance at this training is satisfactory. In addition, the annual training maintenance and custodial staff receive covers a range of health and safety related topics including electrical safety, lock out/tag out, blood borne pathogens, and other relevant safety topics. Both training courses were offered on two separate dates, and all employees were required to attend. In addition, the department's health and safety specialist views himself—and is viewed by others—as a safety “watchdog” for the district. All evidence suggests that the work of this unit is taken seriously and is supported by management. The department also recently formed a “Safety Steering Committee” which meets weekly. Anyone can submit safety issues to the committee for review. Minutes from the committee meetings—and policy and procedure changes that result from the group's efforts—are circulated to all facilities maintenance staff in a timely manner.

Best Practice 22: Using

The district is aware of and prepared for the permitting and inspection requirements of the Florida Building Code.

Effective July 1, 2002, the State Requirements for Educational Facilities (Rule 6A-2.001, *Florida Administrative Code*) were merged into the new Florida Building Code (FBC). Under the FBC school districts are exempted from regulation by other local authorities and are required to follow a single state code. They are allowed to review project plans, issue their own building permits, conduct required building inspections, issue certificates of occupancy and generally perform as the local governing authority had in the past.

The department has taken effective steps to ensure permitting and inspection requirements are met. First, staff has been trained on the new FBC requirements and are also familiar with other applicable state and local requirements including those relating to the need for construction permits. To ensure such permits are received before work begins, work orders requiring permits are separated out as they come in. Until the needed permit has been received (acquiring the permits is a responsibility of the Construction Services Department) and a copy of the permit is attached to the work order, work will not proceed. Likewise, no outside contracts for work orders requiring permits are paid unless a copy of the permit is attached to the work order. The district also uses a computer database for tracking permitting activity and inspection records for permits.

9 Transportation

Summary

The Sarasota County School District is using 18 of 20 of the Best Practices in Student Transportation. While the district effectively transports some 17,000 students to and from school each day, it can improve accountability and efficiency. To begin using the remaining best practice standards and improve performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its transportation operation, the district needs to adequately review the prospect for privatizing transportation functions, as a whole or in part, by developing and comparing key unit cost information for transportation functions with private providers. The district should establish an accountability system for transportation with quantifiable goals and measurable performance objectives, and regularly track and report on its performance in comparison with established benchmarks.



As seen in Exhibit 9-1, the district has several opportunities to reduce costs and increase revenues in this area. 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 implements these action plans, it would be able to redirect the funds to other priorities, such as putting more money into the classroom or addressing deficiencies identified in this report.

Exhibit 9-1 Implementing the Recommendations for Student Transportation Will Have a Five-Year Fiscal Impact of Approximately \$1.3 Million in Cost Savings and Cost Avoidance

Best Practice Number	Fiscal Impact: Cost Savings					
	Year 2003-04	Year 2004-05	Year 2005-06	Year 2006-07	Year 2007-08	Total
8 Reduce Spare Buses	\$397,824	\$151,424	\$151,424	\$151,424	\$151,424	\$1,003,520
12 Reduce parts Inventory		50,000				50,000
14 Collect Medicaid Reimbursement	51,000	51,000	51,000	51,000	51,000	255,000
Total	\$448,824	\$252,424	\$202,424	\$202,424	\$202,424	\$1,308,520

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Background

Background information on Sarasota County School District transportation services is presented in two subsections. The first subsection presents general information on the scope of the transportation services provided by the district, state support for transportation services, the number of students transported, district budgets and expenditures for transportation, and an overview of the Department of Transportation (DOT) organization. The second subsection provides comparative transportation information for the Sarasota County School District and five peer districts.

General Information

Sarasota County is located on the Gulf of Mexico on the western side of Florida, south of the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Bradenton area. It is bordered by Charlotte, De Soto, and Manatee counties. The county contains the municipalities of Sarasota, Venice, Longboat Key and North Port; however most of the 335,000 inhabitants live in the unincorporated areas of the county. Most of the County's population is concentrated along the gulf coast. Areas to the east of the coast are primarily rural in nature. The county has 2,191 miles of paved and 29 miles of unpaved roads serving an area of 573 square miles.

The Sarasota School District's DOT currently employs over 360 people—including 258 bus drivers—and is responsible for the home to school transportation of some 17,000 students on some 230 routes. The DOT also maintains over 600 vehicles, including school buses, school police cars, delivery trucks, and various maintenance department vehicles. The Fiscal Year 2001-02 annual operating and capital budgets for the DOT totaled to \$12.4 million (see display of budget and actual expenditures in Exhibit 9-3).

Florida law requires school districts to provide student transportation. The state helps districts fulfill this mandate by providing transportation funding for the following groups of students:

- Students who live two or more miles from their school.
- Elementary school students (sixth grade and under) who live within two miles of their school but who would be required to walk through hazardous conditions (as defined by the state) to attend school.
- Students with disabilities.
- Participants in teenage parent programs and special education, vocational, and dual enrollment students transported from one school to another.

Transportation costs for other students (courtesy riders), extracurricular trips, and costs that exceed the state allotment are paid with district funds.

Students Transported

As Exhibit 9-2 shows, the District transported more than 17,000 eligible students in 2001-02. Of these students the vast majority are regular education students although exceptional student education" (ESE) students comprise 2,710 or 15.9% of the students transported.

**Exhibit 9-2
The Vast Majority of Students Transported
By the District Are Regular Education Students**

Category	Number Transported Per Day	Percentage Of Transported Students
Regular Students	14,053	82.6%
ESE Students	2,710	15.9%
Vocational Students	65	0.4%
Teen Parent Students	140	0.8%
Hazardous	39	0.3%
Total Eligible Students	17,007	100.0%

Source: Sarasota County School District, Department of Transportation. February 2002 Florida Education Finance Program Transportation Survey.

In addition, the District transported 1,046 courtesy riders (students not otherwise eligible for state funding) in 2001-02. By Board policy kindergartners are provided transportation upon request, even if they live within the 2-mile state reimbursement limit. In addition, transportation is provided to students in the open enrollment or “Choice” program. These students, and a limited number of other special circumstances students, are provided transportation on a “space available” basis. During the 2002-03 school year DOT staff determined that there were 108 kindergartners and 602 “Choice” students receiving courtesy transportation. The district believes that most courtesy riders do not add materially to transportation costs because most are transported on a space available basis. (In other words, because the district would be operating the route with or without the courtesy riders it therefore incurs no additional expense by transporting these students.)

District school buses were driven 5,185,000 miles during the 2001-02 year, including 96,000 extracurricular activity trips miles (2% of the district total). Of the 325 buses in the current inventory, 229 are in daily service on the district’s school bus routes, 76 are used as spares, and 20 are out-of-service or assigned to special use. Most buses operate on three routes each morning and afternoon, typically transporting to an elementary school and combined route of middle school and high school students. Coordinating multiple routes per buses with staggered school times is intended to maximize efficient use of the district’s school buses.

Budget and Expenditure Data

As Exhibit 9-3 indicates, operating expenditures have averaged 90% of the total DOT expenditures over the past two fiscal years, while expenditures for capital outlays have averaged 10% of total DOT expenditures.

**Exhibit 9-3
Operating Funds Account For By Far the Greatest
Portion of the Department of Transportation Budget**

	Budget 2000-01	Actual 2000-01	Budget 2001-02	Actual 2001-02	Budget 2002-03
Operating Funds	\$12,341,322	\$10,438,324	\$11,981,114	\$10,614,584	\$12,270,393
Capital Outlay Funds	2,709,908	2,320,389	414,601	185,507	2,020,291
Total DOT	\$15,051,230	\$12,758,713	\$12,395,715	\$10,800,091	\$14,290,684

Source: Sarasota County School District, Budget Office.

Transportation

The budget for the Operating Fund includes specific DOT direct expenses such as personnel, fuel, and parts. The Capital Outlay budget is primarily for the acquisition of new school buses.

Organization

The executive director of operations provides overall management of the Department of Transportation and reports to the associate superintendent—chief financial and business officer.¹ As illustrated in Exhibit 9-4, the supervisor of transportation, who reports to the executive director of operations, oversees three major functional areas: fleet maintenance, student transportation (school bus operations), and routing.

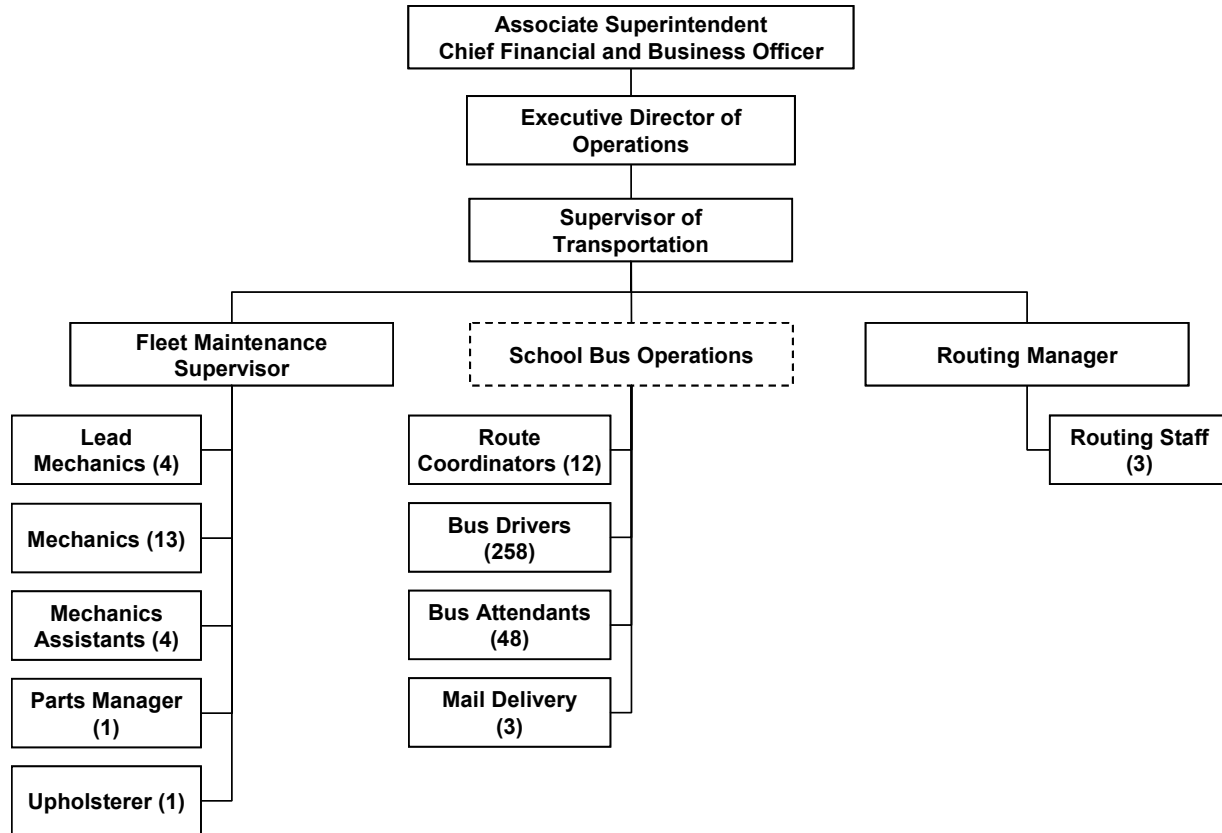
The Fleet Maintenance unit is responsible for maintaining and repairing the more than 600 vehicles owned by the district, including some 325 school buses. Fleet maintenance services are performed primarily at one main garage facility. In addition the district has two satellite locations that are used for bus inspections, parking, fueling, and minor repairs. Staff reporting to the fleet maintenance supervisor includes two lead mechanics, 13 mechanics, four assistant mechanics, a parts manager, an upholsterer and a bus wash operator. The parts manager is responsible for managing a parts inventory worth almost \$200,000 and also for managing the fuel inventory at each of the three fueling locations.

School Bus Operations is depicted in Exhibit 9-4 with a dotted line box to indicate that this represents a group of functions and not a staffed position. This area includes 258 bus drivers, 48 bus attendants, 12 route coordinators, a payroll accountant, and three mail delivery positions. All of these positions report directly to the supervisor of transportation. The route coordinators are in the same collective bargaining unit as the bus drivers and, therefore, cannot supervise or evaluate them. Three of the route coordinators perform the bus dispatch function, one coordinates field trips, two deal with special programs, and the other six oversee school bus operations in the field.

The Routing Unit consists of a routing manager and four staff positions. This unit is responsible for the routing and scheduling of all school buses and also resolves complaint and problems relating to routes.

¹ The executive director of operations is also responsible for the Construction Services Department and the Facilities Services Department.

Exhibit 9-4
An Executive Director of Operations Oversees the District's Transportation Department



Source: Sarasota County School District, Department of Transportation.

Comparison With Five Peer Districts

Exhibit 9-5 presents selected student transportation data for the Sarasota County School District and five peer districts within the state for the 2000-01 school year.

**Exhibit 9-5
The Performance Of Sarasota County School District Operations Compared Favorably
With The Performance Of Five Peer Districts During The 2000-01 School Year**

Measure	Sarasota	Charlotte	Leon	Manatee	Martin	Santa Rosa	Peer Average
Square Miles	573	690	676	747	555	1,024	738
Number of Students Enrolled	35,499	17,170	32,048	36,557	16,307	22,633	24,943
Number of Eligible Students Transported	16,241	8,271	11,298	12,937	8,179	12,995	10,736
Percentage of Students Transported	45.75%	48.17%	35.25%	35.39%	50.16%	57.42%	45.28%
Number of School centers Served	42	NA	44	45	21	30	35
Number of Buses (Daily Service)	221	122	166	163	78	221	150
Total Annual Miles	5,281,000	1,816,055	4,056,579	3,224,187	3,000,000	4,287,000	3,276,764
Average Bus Occupancy	74	68	68	79	105	59	76
Non-Eligible students transported	900	598	805	271	0	2,232	781
Non-eligible percentage of Transported	5.25%	6.74%	6.65%	2.05%	0.00%	14.66%	6.02%
Percentage of Fleet Used Primarily for Special Needs	32.0%	19.0%	33.0%	36.0%	20.0%	17.0%	25.0%
Number of Student Transportation Staff	347	183	299	297	129	306	243
State Allocation	\$6,146,218	\$3,221,566	\$4,389,237	\$5,504,761	\$3,490,252	\$4,852,656	\$4,291,694
Percentage of Student Transportation Funding by State	48.92%	68.06%	51.28%	51.93%	73.33%	53.48%	59.62%
Student Transportation Expenditures (with 10% bus replacement cost)	\$12,085,834	\$5,396,150	\$8,629,679	\$10,198,658	\$4,960,274	\$10,273,432	\$7,891,639
Student Transportation Expenditures Per Annual Mile	\$2.29	\$2.97	\$2.13	\$3.16	\$1.65	\$2.40	\$2.46
Transportation Expenditures Per Transported Student	\$705.08	\$608.43	\$713.02	\$772.16	\$606.46	\$674.69	\$675.95

Source: Q-Link: Florida School District Transportation Profiles for 2000-01, Florida Department of Education. Calculations by Berkshire Advisors.

Review of the comparative information indicates that the district's bus occupancy rate does not significantly differ from that of its peer districts. The Sarasota County School District had an average bus occupancy rate of 74 for the 2000-01 school year compared to a statewide rate of 69. The district's bus occupancy rate is almost identical to that of the peer districts (74 for the district and 75 for the peers).

One of the selected peer districts, Martin, has the highest bus occupancy rate in the state. (Excluding Martin from the peer average results in an average peer rate of 69.) For the 2000-01 school year Sarasota ranked 13th highest among Florida's 67 districts in Average Bus Occupancy. In 1999-2000 Sarasota ranked 24th. These comparisons also reveal that a significantly greater percentage of transportation costs in the Sarasota County School District are paid for from local funds than for peer districts. During the 2000-01 school year the district received 48.92% of its funding for the student transportation program from the state. This compares with an average of almost 60% received by the five peer districts. This difference is attributed in part to the district's slightly lower bus occupancy rate but also how the Rurality Index is applied to the district's allowance in calculating its state transportation aid.²

This comparative information also indicates that the district's transportation operations are roughly as efficient as the transportation operations in the peer districts. While the district's transportation expenditures per student (including 10% for bus replacement) were somewhat higher than the average for the peer districts (\$705.08 for the Sarasota County School District as compared to an average of \$685.20 for the peer districts) this appears to be attributable primarily to the fact that the number of miles students are transported is significantly greater in the Sarasota County School District than in the peer districts. The total number of miles students are transported in Sarasota County (almost 5.3 million miles) is 61% greater than the average number of miles students are transported in the peer districts (almost 3.3 million miles) but the average transportation cost per student is only 29% higher. Based on this analysis, the district's student transportation expenditure per (annualized) mile was \$2.29, compared to the average cost per annualized mile in the five peer districts of \$2.41.

² The Rurality Index is part of the state's transportation funding formula that adjusts a district's funding based on the ratio of rural and urban inhabitants in the county. Districts that are more urban are adjusted downward.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Exhibit 9-6 The Sarasota County School District Using 18 Of 20 Student Transportation Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice?	Page No.
Planning, Organization and Staffing	1. The district coordinates long-term planning and budgeting for student transportation within the context of district and community planning.	Yes	9-10
	2. 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.	Yes	9-10
	3. The transportation office plans, reviews, and establishes bus routes and stops to provide cost-efficient student transportation services for all students who qualify for transportation.	Yes	9-11
	4. The organizational structure and staffing levels of the district's transportation program minimize administrative layers and processes.	Yes	9-12
	5. The district maintains an effective staffing level in the vehicle maintenance area and provides support for vehicle maintenance staff to develop its skills.	Yes	9-13
	6. The district effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants it needs.	Yes	9-14
	7. The district trains, supervises, and assists bus drivers to enable them to meet bus-driving standards and maintain acceptable student discipline on the bus.	Yes	9-15
Vehicle Acquisition and Maintenance	8. The school district has a process to ensure that sufficient vehicles are acquired economically and will be available to meet the district's current and future transportation needs.	Yes	9-16
	9. The district provides timely routine servicing for buses and other district vehicles, as well as prompt response for breakdowns and other unforeseen contingencies.	Yes	9-17
	10. The district ensures that fuel purchases are cost-effective and that school buses and other vehicles are efficiently supplied with fuel.	Yes	9-18
	11. The district maintains facilities that are conveniently situated to provide sufficient and secure support for vehicle maintenance and other transportation functions.	Yes	9-18
	12. The district maintains an inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment needed to support transportation functions that balances the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs.	Yes	9-19
Operations, Management and Accountability	13. The district ensures that all regular school bus routes and activity trips operate in accordance with established routines, and any unexpected contingencies affecting vehicle operations are handled safely and promptly.	Yes	9-20
	14. The district provides efficient transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students.	Yes	9-21

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice?	Page No.
	15. The district ensures that staff acts promptly and appropriately in response to any accidents or breakdowns.	Yes	9-22
	16. The district ensures that appropriate student behavior is maintained on the bus with students being held accountable for financial consequences of misbehavior related to transportation.	Yes	9-23
	17. The district provides appropriate technological and computer support for transportation functions and operations.	Yes	9-23
	18. The district monitors the fiscal condition of transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget.	Yes	9-24
	19. The district has reviewed the prospect for privatizing transportation functions, as a whole or in part.	No	9-25
	20. The district has established an accountability system for transportation, and it regularly tracks and makes public reports on its performance in comparison with established benchmarks.	No	9-26

PLANNING, ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING

Best Practice 1: Using

The district coordinates long-term planning and budgeting for transportation in the context of district and community planning.

Because the transportation function is in the best position to know what the transportation needs of the district are, what priority should be assigned to these needs, and the costs associated with particular options to address each need, transportation staff should be involved in major decisions that will affect transportation operations. These needs and priorities along with cost-saving options should be presented to the school board and public during the budget process along with the factual information needed to assist the school board in making appropriate decisions. In a similar manner, the district transportation function needs to provide the school board and public information on the financial impact certain district decisions such as those involving staggered school start times and school choice programs will have on transportation. Also, because the location of a new school can have a significant effect on a district's transportation costs, the district transportation function also should be involved in the community and school district planning processes as related to community growth and the need for new schools. Failure to be involved and inform decision makers of the impact these decisions will have on district transportation can be very costly and negatively affect district transportation for many years.

The Sarasota School District coordinates transportation planning in context of overall district planning efforts. Some of this coordination takes place through the annual budget process. As part of this process, the district's administration reviews with the school board, in public sessions, potential cost saving opportunities, including redrawing of attendance zones, route combinations, purchase of larger buses and reexamination of bell schedules. Decisions are then made as to what actions will be incorporated into the district's budget. In addition, coordination of transportation planning with overall district planning efforts is facilitated by the active involvement of transportation staff in various district and county planning initiatives. For example, district transportation staff is actively involved in planning to assess and address the impact new schools have on overall transportation needs. Moreover, on an ongoing basis the executive director works with instructional staff, including principals, to address the needs of the district students related to such areas as magnets, choice, charter schools, ESE special programs and other instructional demands.

The executive director of operations actively participates with staff from area municipalities and the county to consider the impact on transportation of future population growth. (Ongoing meetings have also been held to explore the possibility of shared services.) Community studies also aid district efforts to understand student transportation needs in the context of the transportation needs of the broader community.

Best Practice 2: Using

The district provides regular, accurate, and timely counts to the Florida Department of Education on the number of students transported as part of the Florida Education Finance Program.

The main source of transportation funds for most Florida school districts is the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). Approximately 60% of student transportation costs in the state are paid for through the FEFP-based primarily on the number of eligible students in various categories who ride school buses. The school districts determine the number of students riding their buses through sample counts conducted during October and February of each school year and report this information to the Florida Department of Education (FDOE). Because these counts ultimately determine the level of transportation funding each

school district receives, it is important for this information to be accurate. Ridership records are reviewed by state auditors on a periodic basis and, if the district cannot justify its claims for state transportation funds, funds are taken away from the district. The student ridership counts used in this program are useful to district staff in establishing trend lines for the prediction of district student transportation needs.

The Sarasota County School District takes steps to ensure that regular, accurate and timely data on the number of students it transports are reported to FDOE. Bus drivers receive training on how to correctly fill out the survey forms during initial bus driver training and during in-service training. Both the transportation supervisor and the routing staff review the information on the completed survey form for accuracy. This information is used to update the DOT's computer database of students and routes. Survey results are also monitored to verify trends in student transportation.

The most recent Auditor General report of student transportation counts for the Sarasota County School District found the district to be in compliance, in all material respects, with state laws and administrative rules.³ No corrective actions were required of the district as a result of the most recent review. The Auditor General reviews the district's FEFP counts every three to four years. The next Auditor General's review is expected next year.

Best Practice 3: Using

The transportation office plans, reviews, and establishes bus routes and stops to provide cost-efficient student transportation services for all students who qualify for transportation.

Routing is probably the single most important factor in establishing an effective, cost-efficient, and safe district student transportation system. Efficient bus routes incorporate features such as having fewer bus stops that serve larger numbers of students, avoiding transporting students who could safely walk to school and are ineligible for state transportation funding (generally called "courtesy riders"), using school starting and ending times that allow individual buses to have separate bus runs for elementary, middle, and high schools ("three-tiered routing"), and providing sufficient time between school starting and ending times that allow buses to get from the end of one bus run to the beginning of another. Where hazardous walking conditions exist, school districts should work with governmental agencies to provide crossing guards, reducing speed limits, installing sidewalks, and other safety measures. Larger school districts with complex routes usually need the assistance of computerized routing systems to design cost efficient bus routes, while smaller districts can develop efficient routes manually.

The Sarasota County School District plans and establishes bus routes and ensures cost-effective operations without compromising safety by using a computerized system to annually route and schedule its school buses. These efforts are effective as reflected in the fact that the district maintains a reasonable average bus occupancy rate (74 as compared to an average of 69 for the state as a whole). To ensure the safety of students, a two-mile safety survey is reviewed and updated each year. Areas with potentially hazardous conditions are identified and documented in the annual *Safety Survey, Hazardous Walking Conditions*. To address any hazards that are identified in this report, a "Community Traffic Safety Team" or "Sidewalk Committee", consisting of representatives of the local cities, the County Public Works Department, the Metro Planning Organization, the state DOT, the sheriff's office, police, and citizens, evaluates the situations identified and works to develop recommendations and identify funding for the construction of new sidewalks.

A review of a sample of district bus routes indicated that routes were planned effectively. While the sample disclosed several instances of stops within ½ mile of each other, reasonable explanations for these

³ Auditor General draft report: *School District of Sarasota County, Florida; Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP), for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2000, dated July 30, 2001.*

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“short stops” were demonstrated—such as divided roads, major highways, or roads without sidewalks. In some cases ‘short stops’ had been added because of the high concentration of students at a particular bus stop site.

Nevertheless, the district could improve its routing practices in two ways. First, the method the district uses to determine what routes exist to address hazardous walking conditions (and are therefore eligible for state reimbursement) should be modified. At present, routes that might qualify for state reimbursement are identified by route coordinators and submitted to the routing staff for investigation and follow up. These staff then obtain 24-hour traffic counts from the county or state for these potentially hazardous areas and calculate the volume of traffic in the area by taking the total traffic count numbers for the day and dividing by 24. This method of calculating traffic volume on a route, however, results in a lower and less accurate count per hour than would be achieved by obtaining the traffic volume “during the time students walk to and from school”, as allowed by state law. The district should, therefore, maximize state reimbursements by requesting traffic volume studies during the times students walk to and from school for routes that are potentially reimbursable under the state’s Hazardous Walking Conditions statute.

We recommend the district request traffic volume studies during the actual times student walk to and from school for routes that are potentially reimbursable under the state’s Hazardous Walking Conditions statute.

The second area in which the district can improve its routing practices relates to “courtesy riders.” Courtesy riders are students who receive student transportation services although ineligible due to residing less than two miles of their school. At present, when requested by parents, the board’s policy allows the district to transport students who live within the state reimbursement limit of two miles on a space available basis. The district reported 900 courtesy riders in 2000-01 and 1,046 in 2001-02. Although the district has not determined the cost, transporting courtesy riders increase district cost by reducing transportation efficiencies including transporting students for whom there is no state reimbursement. Without a clear understanding of these costs, board members cannot make an informed decision as to whether to continue existing policy, limit the policy in some way such as only transporting kindergarten students, or discontinue service to courtesy riders altogether. The district’s percentage of non-eligible transported students was 5.25% for the 2000-01 school year compared to a statewide average of 5.66% and an average of 6.02% for five peer districts.

We recommend the full cost of providing “courtesy rider” be presented to the school board during its annual budget deliberations. To estimate these costs, the district should prepare at least three routing scenarios to determine: 1) the number of routes that are needed if the number of existing courtesy riders is not changed; 2) the number of routes that are needed if only kindergarten students are transported; and 3) the number of routes that are needed if no courtesy riders are transported. The transportation costs (including both driver compensation and capital) under each of these scenarios should then be calculated. The district may also wish to conduct a survey of parents to understand how these transportation services are valued vis a vis other programs and services provided by the district.

Best Practice 4: Using

The organizational structure of the district’s transportation program has minimal layers.

Well-run school districts are lean administratively and maximize funds available to support their primary mission, educating students. This requires districts to make the most effective use of funds allocated for administrative services, such as transportation. There is no “one” right way to organize and staff the

transportation program. The organizational structure of the transportation function should be relatively flat with appropriate spans of control. Such a structure will result in minimized administrative and managerial costs while providing sufficient managerial controls to ensure operations are properly carried out. Staffing needs to be to the level by which needed work is accomplished in an economical and efficient manner. It is expected in smaller districts that smaller staff sizes require staff to individually handle multiple areas of responsibility (such as repairing buses and ordering replacement parts) that would be done by different individuals.

The Sarasota County School District's Department of Transportation has appropriately organized functional units and minimum administrative layers. The span of control for supervision and evaluation of employees is reasonable in the fleet maintenance and routing units of the DOT.

However, the span of control over bus drivers and attendants is not reasonable. Because route coordinators and bus drivers are currently classified in the same collective bargaining unit, route coordinators are unable to exercise full supervisory duties over bus drivers including conducting their performance evaluations. In the current structure, the district's 258 bus drivers report directly to the supervisor of transportation. The DOT has 12 route coordinators, some of whom would be considered supervisory were it not for them being in the same collective bargaining unit as bus drivers. Because they are in the same bargaining unit they can play no formal supervisory role.

We recommend that the district identify those route coordinator positions that are primarily involved in overseeing transportation field operations. The identified positions should be reclassified out of the collective bargaining unit that includes bus drivers. By reclassifying these positions outside the bargaining unit, these former route coordinators will be able to exercise full supervisory duties, including the evaluation of drivers.

Best Practice 5: Using

The district maintains an effective staffing level in the vehicle maintenance area and provides support for vehicle maintenance staff to develop its skills.

Vehicle maintenance operations have to strike a balance of having enough trained staff to properly maintain vehicles while not having excessive staff, which increases costs and reduces operational efficiency. The number of vehicle maintenance personnel needed can vary depending on factors such as the number of different types of buses being maintained, whether vehicle maintenance maintains the district "white fleet" (cars, trucks, and other on-road vehicles), and whether they maintain other district equipment such as lawn mowers and tractors. In addition to employing adequate maintenance staff, districts need to invest resources into updating the skills of their vehicle maintenance staff to improve vehicle maintenance efficiency. Such resources include the district providing training opportunities for staff and incentive pay for those who achieve certification in applicable work areas.

The Sarasota County School District has adequate staffing levels for its mechanic positions based on the state Department of Education’s technician staffing formula and in comparison with peer districts.⁴ The District provides periodic in-house and outside training for its vehicle maintenance staff. All of the district’s mechanics have obtained Automotive Service Excellence certificates, which have been made a job requirement for new hires.

Best Practice 6: Using

The district effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants it needs.

A stable workforce reduces costs and minimizes the disruption of essential district services. However, for most school districts job turnover among bus drivers and attendants is generally high compared to that of other classes of employees. Contributing to this high turnover is the fact that, unlike many other district employees, bus drivers and attendants are generally part-time employees who must report to work early in the morning and finish late in the day. In addition bus drivers face many other challenges that make their jobs particularly difficult and stressful, such as trying to drive safely while maintaining discipline on a bus. Because of the relatively high rates of turnover among bus drivers and attendants, school districts need to have an effective system for recruiting and retraining these individuals. Job turnover can be addressed through retention and recruitment. Retention is a preferred way to maintain the staffing levels through reduction in job turnover. Districts need to collect data to determine what it will take to keep drivers and attendants working and performing well for the district. Once the district determines why the drivers and attendants want to work for the school district, the district can put together a combination of salary, benefits, and incentives (both financial and non-financial) that will encourage good workers to keep working for the district yet not cause financial difficulties for the district. As there generally will be some turnover in district drivers and attendants each year, the district needs to be prepared to efficiently and effectively recruit high quality drivers and attendants. These efforts include collecting data on wages offered by alternative local employers (both public and private sectors) and knowing the best methods to put their recruiting message to potential drivers and attendants.

Generally speaking, the Sarasota County School District effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants it needs. A variety of approaches are used to publicize job openings including advertising in the local newspaper, posting positions on the district’s web site, and broadcasting job openings on channel 20, the district owned television station. In addition, many candidates become aware of transportation job openings by “word of mouth.”

However, the district should focus more attention on retaining new bus drivers. The district does not believe that the overall bus driver and attendant turnover rate of approximately 10% is unreasonable, but it also disclosed that the 12% turnover rate among its new drivers is higher than it should be. Part of the reason for the relatively high turnover of new bus drivers appears to be that the district pays these drivers

⁴ Ratio of mechanic positions to number of buses in daily service for Sarasota and selected peer districts:

District	Mechanics	Buses	Ratio
Sarasota	14	221	15.8
Charlotte	11	122	11.1
Leon	16	166	10.4
Manatee	10	163	16.3
Martin	n/a	78	n/a
Santa Rosa	16	221	13.8
Peer Average			12.9

The above comparison would indicate the District is not overstaffed in the area of mechanics.

less than new drivers are paid in peer districts. As discussed in Chapter 6, Sarasota County School District bus drivers were paid an annual salary considerably lower than five other districts used for comparison (Manatee, Collier, Lee, Palm Beach and Volusia) and somewhat less than bus drivers in the Charlotte County school district. In addition, the work year for district bus drivers is longer than the work year for bus drivers in three of these districts. There is a further issue on internal salary alignment where bus drivers are drawn to other jobs within the district that are perceived to be “less work for more pay.” (In Chapter 6 a recommendation is presented to address these issues by conducting a pay study for classified staff to assess internal equity and external competitiveness.) In addition to issues of pay, transportation managers could make better use of exit interview information provided by employees leaving the district to better understand the reasons for this turnover. Employees leaving district employment are sent an exit interview form by the personnel department. When the form is returned to the district, a copy is sent to the DOT for review; however copies of the forms are not retained in the transportation department and are not systematically analyzed by department managers.

We recommend that information collected through exit interview forms be compiled and analyzed to identify potential improvements in the district’s recruitment and employee retention efforts. By identifying the reasons that employees are leaving district employment, management can devise strategies to recruit and retain high quality employees.

Best Practice 7: Using

The district trains, supervises, and assists bus drivers to enable them to meet bus-driving standards and maintain acceptable student discipline on the bus.

To effectively and efficiently carry out their duties, school district employees must be aware of the scope of their responsibilities, have the skills to carry out those responsibilities, and understand district performance expectations. Thus, school districts need to effectively train, supervise, and assist employees in the performance of their duties. School districts generally offer commercial driver license training (a commercial driver license is required to drive a school bus) on a no-cost basis in order to successfully recruit bus drivers. Since this license also can be used to drive other commercial vehicles such as tour buses and trucks, the school district needs a policy to recoup these training costs from bus drivers who resign as school bus drivers shortly after completing their driver training. Management also has responsibilities to supervise its drivers to ensure that necessary rules and regulations are followed with buses being safely operated. Supervision responsibilities include direct observation of bus handling, assisting drivers with student bus discipline problems, administering drug and alcohol tests, and enforcement of driving policies. Management can improve job performance by providing in-service training and resolving drivers’ job-related problems.

The Sarasota County School 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 conducts new bus driver training classes each year at times and on days designed to attract and retain the best candidates. The district also conducts a comprehensive annual in-service training meeting for continuing employees. This comprehensive meeting includes recognitions, training, route bidding and the sharing of other information. Route coordinators also conduct monthly meetings with drivers to review current issues. The district has adopted the state’s point system as its safe driver policy and tracks traffic violations of district drivers.

However, there are some weaknesses in the district’s training and supervision of bus drivers. The primary shortcoming stems from the span of control issue that has been previously discussed in conjunction with best practice 4. Route coordinators, most of whom are in a position to provide direct oversight of bus drivers on a day-to-day basis, cannot evaluate them because the route coordinators and bus drivers are in

the same bargaining unit. Consequently, the results of evaluation cannot be used to tailor training programs to employee needs and to develop improvement plans for individual employees.

VEHICLE ACQUISITION AND MAINTENANCE

Best Practice 8: Using

The district has a process to ensure that sufficient vehicles are acquired economically to meet the district's current and future transportation needs.

School buses and other vehicles are an expensive but necessary investment for most school districts. Therefore, school districts need to have systems in place to ensure that decisions to purchase, maintain, and sell vehicles meet the district's needs in the most economical way. These decisions must consider a variety of factors. For instance, the need for buses to transport students is a given for districts, but it is important to buy the right type of buses at the right time. In addition, it is generally more economical to operate larger buses than smaller ones, so long as a high occupancy level can be maintained. Districts should buy the vehicles through economical methods such as the state pool purchase program. Once vehicles are purchased and inspected, districts should track vehicle maintenance costs and age to determine when the optimal time is to remove and replace the vehicle (assuming the need for the vehicle still exists). Districts should minimize the number of spare buses they retain to avoid tying up funds through excess inventory. Vehicles removed from service should be processed so that the district recovers the maximum value possible for the disposal of the vehicle, such as fixing minor cosmetic flaws to encourage higher bids at auctions.

The Sarasota County School District has an effective process for acquiring new vehicles and determining when their replacement is warranted. The school board has established a Vehicle Replacement Committee, with cross-functional representation, to review, evaluate, and make recommendations for replacement of district buses and its other vehicles. The committee's replacement decisions consider the age of the vehicle, its condition, funds available for replacement, the urgency of replacement, reparability, the relative costs of replacement versus repair, and safety considerations. While the district's policy on vehicle replacement does specify an age at which buses are to be replaced, they are generally retired after 13 years of service. School buses are assigned to routes by management based on the most effective use of the vehicle. Newer buses may be assigned to longer or "more difficult" routes. New buses may also be assigned to longer routes to take advantage of warranties. The district uses the annual state contract to purchase school buses. Other vehicles are purchased from state bids or by piggy backing on other local government contracts. New vehicle inspection sheets are completed for all vehicles purchased. Old buses are auctioned off twice a year. There are normally four or more buses included in each auction and a school bus brings about \$4,400, depending on its size and condition.

However, at present, the district's total number of spare buses represents about 23% of its total vehicle inventory. This is relatively high. Its current vehicle inventory is 325 buses. The district uses 229 buses for daily service and 76 buses as spares, or 305 buses. The district uses another 20 buses to either substitute for buses that are out-of-service buses or reserve for special use. To reduce the number of spare buses to a more economical level without disturbing its normal replacement cycle, the district should sell 56 spare buses and begin an annual replacement cycle of 21 buses.⁵ These recommendations benefit the district in two financial ways. One, the district could sell excess spare buses at auction to generate non-recurring revenue of \$246, 400.⁶ Two, the district could reduce its recurring operating cost by

⁵ Of its 325 buses, the district reported that 230 are needed for daily routes, an average of 16 are required to be inspected per day, and 12 are typically used for field trips. It also reported that 11 of its buses mechanically broke down last school year. Taken together, this data indicates that only 269 of the 325 district buses are usually required or necessary for student transportation services.

⁶ Revenue based on recent district auction prices for used school buses and estimated to be about \$4,400 per bus.

\$151,424 per year because it would have 56 fewer buses to maintain and inspect.⁷ By implementing these recommendations, the district could save approximately \$1 million over a five-year period.

We recommend that the District sell 56 of its spare buses and begin an annual replacement cycle of 21 buses. These recommendations benefit the district by generating non-reoccurring revenue of \$246,400 and reducing its recurring operating cost by \$151,424 a year due to having fewer vehicles to maintain and inspect. By implementing these recommendations, the district could save approximately \$1 million over a five-year period.

Best Practice 9: Using

The district provides timely routine servicing for vehicles, as well as prompt response for breakdowns and other unforeseen contingencies.

Good stewardship of district resources dictates district vehicles should be properly maintained to operate properly and maximize their value. District vehicle maintenance operations can be divided into two types: those that service just buses and those that service buses and some or all other district vehicles. No matter what type of vehicle maintenance operation is used, it is important that the district's transportation department tracks vehicle maintenance for all district on-road vehicles to ensure that timely servicing is performed. Use of this tracking can help the district make appropriate decisions on whether to make complex or expensive repairs on older vehicles. The servicing of district vehicles does not have to be accomplished in district-owned facilities (especially if there is lack of facilities and manpower to do so) but can be done on an outsourced basis. Quality control by district staff needs to make sure that servicing and repairs (both those done by district staff and those done by vendors) is done on an economical and timely manner.

The Sarasota County School District uses an effective method for ensuring timely routine inspection of buses. The most recent review of district inspection practices by DOE found a 97% compliance level with state mandated bus inspection practices.⁸ To achieve this record, the due date of the next 20-day inspection is posted in each school bus as well as in the vehicle maintenance office. Each morning the list of buses to be inspected is generated. If a driver fails to deliver his or her bus, it is either pulled from the yard during the split shift or dispatch is asked to call the driver on the radio and direct that the bus be brought to the garage. In addition, school bus drivers are required to maintain a logbook in which they initial the inspection checklist before each trip. These log books are collected and reviewed by the route coordinators every 20 days. The district also employs a computerized Vehicle Maintenance System (VMS) to track the servicing of all district vehicles and to schedule preventive maintenance in coordination with the 20-day inspections. The VMS contains comprehensive information for each vehicle such as; vehicle identification number, type of vehicle, VIN number, license number, manufacturer, model, year, storage location, function, department to which assigned, mileage, fuel type and capacity, oil type and capacity, tire size, and also includes a detailed maintenance history. The district's white fleet is also maintained based on VMS schedules.⁹ The district has established effective procedures for responding to vehicle breakdowns.

⁷ Savings based on the average annual maintenance cost of \$2,704 per bus, per the district's Fleet Manager.

⁸ DOE Compliance Audit dated February 1-3, 1999.

⁹ "White fleet" refers to all other types of district vehicles except school buses, such as service trucks and passenger vans.

Best Practice 10: Using

The district ensures that fuel purchases are cost-effective and that school buses and other vehicles are efficiently supplied with fuel.

School districts need effective systems that ensure that fuel is purchased at the lowest possible cost, prevent unauthorized use of fuel, and that fueling stations are accessible to vehicles. Cost-effective purchases of fuel generally occur when the district and other large users of fuel (such as other school districts and local governments) pool their fuel purchases into a large bid. Part of the bid should include timely deliveries of fuel to district fueling stations. To ensure that the fuel stations have sufficient fuel for district operations, districts must monitor fuel disbursements to prevent theft and know when to reorder fuel supplies. Most districts are sufficiently large to be able to justify using automated fueling systems that are designed specifically to prevent unauthorized fuel disbursements and monitor fuel tank levels as well as log the amount of fuel individual vehicles taken. Leaking fuel tanks can be a major cost for the district. Failure to promptly deal with fuel leaks found either through automated fueling systems or during inspections by governmental environmental agencies can result in large district costs to clean up ground contamination especially if the contamination is underground and in the groundwater.

The Sarasota County School District has established effective procedures for acquiring fuel at a competitive cost and for effectively managing, securing, and controlling the use of district fuel supplies. The district currently obtains fuel for school buses from a master contract that is competitively bid. Prices for fuel are indexed to the “Oil Price Information Service” index. The Parts Manager monitors fuel inventories on a daily basis and coordinates replenishment orders. Reordering is done when a full 7,500-gallon load can be accommodated at any combination of the three district fueling sites. Fences and gates secure fueling areas and close-circuit cameras monitor access on a 24-hour basis. Fuel disbursements are controlled and monitored by a computer system. The system keys control access to fuel pumps and are programmed with fuel type, maximum/minimum gallons, and maximum/minimum mileage for each individual vehicle. Miles per gallon reports are generated each month for district vehicles. These reports are reviewed for reasonableness and exceptions are investigated. Stick measurements of fuel levels are made each month to verify automated system readings and underground tanks are inspected by appropriate outside agencies. The district maintains the fuel supply for other local government operations as well as for district vehicles. Outside agencies and internal departments are billed for usage by the “Gas-Boy” computer system.

Best Practice 11: Using

The district maintains sufficient, secure, and convenient facilities to support vehicle maintenance and other transportation functions.

If uncontrolled, vehicle maintenance costs can represent a significant expense to school districts and, thus, should be effectively managed. To efficiently maintain vehicles and reduce maintenance-related costs, the district must have maintenance facilities that are appropriately situated within the district so as to minimize distances district vehicles have to travel for servicing yet have access to vehicle parts houses and delivery services. Service areas should be equipped with parts rooms, administrative areas, specialized tools, and covered and hard surfaced working areas so that technicians can concentrate on their assigned jobs rather be distracted/prevented from work due to weather, lack of tools, etc. The maintenance facilities will generate hazardous wastes such as antifreeze, which need to be stored and properly disposed of. In general, district vehicles should be parked in secure compounds at the end of the working day to reduce transportation costs for the district. The only time that vehicles should be allowed to be taken home is if it can be shown to be in the district’s best financial interests to allow certain vehicles to be taken home. One example of this exception is when it is cheaper for the school district to allow a bus driver take a bus and park it at home instead of taking it to a distant bus compound. It is also appropriate for district employees in an on-call status (such as district facility staff) to park vehicles at

their homes instead of a district compound if the drivers are frequently responding to calls after normal working hours involving the transport of materials not easily transported in personal passenger vehicles (such as heavy welding equipment or sheets of plywood).

Existing transportation facilities are adequate to meet the needs of the Sarasota County School District. At present, the district operates a central facility for the repair and maintenance of the fleet and two satellite locations for inspections and fueling. Three secured and monitored bus parking areas are located at these facilities. Drivers are required to park their buses at these locations. Drivers are not allowed to take buses home and, of the “white fleet”, only the five service trucks that are on 24-hour call are taken home.¹⁰ Although the district's transportation department does not have a formal process for the periodic review of the sufficiency of transportation facilities, the adequacy of the physical facilities is under continual review by the on-site management of the department.

Best Practice 12: Using

The district maintains an inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment needed to support transportation functions that balances the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs, but the district stocks a small, obsolete inventory that could be eliminated to improve efficiency.

Minimizing the amount of time vehicles spend out of service being maintained minimizes disruptions to district services and reduces the number of vehicles required to support the district's transportation needs. Thus, keeping vehicles on the road in good repair saves the district money. Several factors affect vehicle maintenance time and costs. For instance, insufficient parts inventories can result in higher maintenance downtime for buses and the need to maintain extra spare buses. Conversely, excessive parts inventories can cost the district needed funds that can be used to meet other district transportation needs. Ideally, districts should have the minimum number of parts and supplies necessary to efficiently operate the fleet. Strategies for achieving this goal include standardizing engines and bodies and the using just-in-time inventories. Parts and supplies that are purchased also need to be secured to safeguard district assets, using management tools such as restrictions on who can be in parts rooms, maintaining inventory tracking systems, and periodically conducting part inventory audits. Districts also need to make sure that they fully use the warranties provided by bus manufacturers, thus avoiding paying for repairs and parts that are covered by warranty.

The Sarasota County School District maintains an adequate inventory of parts, supplies and equipment to support transportation functions. The physical inventory of parts and supplies is monitored through a computerized inventory records system that tracks on-hand quantities as well as usage data. At present, the district bids a number of master contracts for transportation parts and supplies. The parts manager then orders supplies from these contracts when they are needed. To ensure ordered items are received, the parts manager receives and inspects all parts and supplies shipments. The fleet maintenance supervisor also checks all orders and compares them to the computerized inventory record. Although the parts room housekeeping could be improved in terms of cleanliness and the orderliness of the stock, the storeroom is secured and monitored. The district performs warranty work in-house to the extent that contracts allow and adheres to written instructions on warranty billing as provided by the vendors.

However, excessive resources are tied up in unneeded inventory. The value of the parts inventory is estimated to be approximately \$180,000 and the inventory has annual “turns” of less than three (i.e. annual inventory disbursements divided by year-end inventory balance). This low rate of turnover would indicate excess inventory and/or a significant number of slow moving items. The fleet maintenance supervisor and parts manager have identified this issue and are beginning the process of evaluating slow

¹⁰ “White fleet” refers to all other types of district vehicles except school buses such as service trucks and passenger vans.

moving items. As part of this effort, the fleet maintenance supervisor has developed a list of some 80 items, with a value of just under \$4,000 (about 3% of the inventory) that have not been issued in five years. He indicated that these items could be discontinued without diminish current levels of maintenance needed to support district vehicles. While this represents a start, the management must continue this effort in a more aggressive manner to reduce inventory levels and improve efficiency. A one time saving can be achieved by reducing the transportation storeroom inventory by approximately \$50,000 through the elimination of slow moving items.¹¹

We recommend that the district reduce the level of the transportation parts and supplies inventory by the elimination of slow moving items. Based on historical usage data and the time required to fill orders for parts, the district should determine the economic reorder points and quantities for each of its inventory items. This inventory management information should be captured in the district computer system and used to determine excess quantities as well as to guide the issuance of inventory replenishment orders. Excess quantities of individual parts should be returned to suppliers for credit, as provided for in the district purchasing contracts.

Best Practice 13: Using

The district ensures that all regular school bus routes and activity trips operate in accordance with established routines, and unexpected contingencies are handled safely and promptly.

Up-to-date procedures, when coupled with appropriate policies, ensure that activities are carried out in an efficient and effective manner and that districts are in compliance with federal and state laws. In addition, written procedures serve as a district's institutional memory for key processes and as such help to minimize disruption to essential services and reduce the need for costly training and assistance due to staff turnover, a particularly important issue to the transportation function. Therefore, districts need effective procedures to handle circumstances that prevent normal bus operations. These include vehicle breakdowns, driver absences, bus overcrowding, and excessive ride times. While the district needs to minimize these occurrences, they also need effective procedures to follow when these situations occur. To recover costs of field trips, districts should also have a policy to charge schools 100% of all transportation costs for these trips.

The Sarasota County School District's department of transportation has procedures in place to effectively deal with breakdowns and other unexpected contingencies. Not only have procedures (which are outlined in the State's School Bus Driver's Handbook) for handling breakdowns been established but interviews with district school bus drivers confirmed that they uniformly knew the process to be followed in case of an accident or breakdown, including the guidelines for the movement of students from one bus to another. In addition, all breakdowns are logged and the log is reviewed by the fleet maintenance supervisor for trends in specific problems. The district also has effective procedures in place to ensure services are maintained when bus drivers are absent. A procedure has been established for the advance notification of absences and drivers also have a special call-in phone number to use for unanticipated absences. In addition, the district maintains a cadre of 29 utility (substitute) drivers to cover for absences of regular drivers. As further backup, the transportation department can call on route coordinators to drive routes, if the need arises. The district has also established procedures to respond to parent complaints and overcrowding situations in a timely manner.

¹¹ By reducing the parts inventory from its current level of approximately \$180,000 to approximately \$130,000, the district will achieve an inventory turnover rate of approximately four and one half and obtain a one-time saving of \$50,000.

Nevertheless, the district can improve its performance with regard to ride times for some students. While the district has adopted the state recommended guideline that ride times should not exceed fifty minutes for elementary students and one hour for middle school and high school students, some students (particularly ESE students) have ride times that exceed this standard. (See Exhibit 9-8)

**Exhibit 9-8
ESE Students Experience Longer Rides Times Than Regular Students**

	Was ride time equal to or less than state standard?			
	Yes		No	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
ESE				
Elementary (50 minutes)	427	72%	163	28%
Middle/HS (60 minutes)	327	77%	99	23%
Regular				
Elementary (50 minutes)	7,525	91%	757	9%
Middle/HS (60 minutes)	13,078	95%	656	5%
Total				
ESE	754	74%	262	26%
Regular	20,603	94%	1,413	6%

Note: The statewide guidelines for elementary student ride time is 50 minutes and for middle and high school students is 60 minutes. The district does not readily report ride time information in sufficient detail to enable it to determine how many elementary students rode more or less than the state guideline. Instead, OPPAGA estimated this amount based upon information provided by the district.

Source: Sarasota County School District routing database and the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

There is a significant difference in ride times between ESE and other students. Based on district routing data, approximately 6% of students riding on regular buses experience ride times in excess of the state standard, while 26% of ESE students experience ride times in excess of the established standard. Difficulties in meeting state ride time standards can be mostly attributed to the district having to provide transportation services to many students attending Choice (Magnet) schools. Also, the high percentage of longer ride times for ESE students reflects the limited number of locations which house special programs and the resulting greater distances these students must travel to school.

We recommend that the district renew its efforts to reduce ride times for ESE students. In this effort the district should consider additional special programs in geographically dispersed locations so that ride distances are reduced. The district should also consider adding bus routes, thereby reducing the number of bus stops and reducing ride time by creating more direct routes. The addition of special programs and/or bus routes will increase cost.

Best Practice 14: Using

The district provides efficient transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students.

School districts are required by law to provide specialized transportation services to certain students with disabilities (i.e., students in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs).¹² While necessary, these

¹² The ESE population in a school includes gifted students, slow learners, emotionally handicapped students, and physically handicapped students.

Transportation

services can be very costly to a district. Many ESE students can ride on regular buses with no assistance or equipment. However, others may require accommodations such as specially equipped buses that lift a student and wheelchair into the bus and secure it for transport. To ensure their compliance with law while controlling costs, school districts need effective systems for determining ESE students' need for special transportation. As the need for special transportation is determined in meetings between teachers, ESE staff, and parents, districts need policies that clearly outline the circumstances that require special transportation. These policies also should identify circumstances in which alternative transportation modes, such as paying parents to drive children who need special supervision. Finally, districts should seek to recover Medicaid reimbursement for ESE transportation whenever possible, as this federal program will reimburse school districts for transporting Medicaid-eligible students on certain approved bus runs. It is rare for the cost to complete Medicaid paperwork to exceed the amount of the reimbursement. Every Medicaid dollar coming into the district frees up a general fund dollar for another district need.

The Sarasota County School District transportation staff works effectively with ESE instructional staff on addressing the special transportation needs of students and attends Individual Educational Plan (IEP) meetings as appropriate. The DOT has also dedicated selected routing staff to deal with specific needs of ESE students and has established procedures to ensure these needs are met. At present, the transportation scheduling of ESE students is generated from a Transportation Request Form sent in by the school ESE liaison. The district reports that ESE students are placed on regular routes where possible; however, this procedure has not been codified as a board policy. During the February 2002 FEFP survey period 2,710 ESE students were transported (See exhibit 9-2), of which 2,228 (82%) were ESE students transported on regular bus routes and 473 (18%) were ESE students transported on routes with special equipment

Although the district generally provides efficient transportation services for exceptional students, it could obtain additional federal funding for its transportation program by securing Medicaid reimbursement to offset the cost of transporting ESE students. However, district management believes that the cost of collecting and compiling transportation reimbursement information for Medicaid is not cost effective because the number of ESE students having specialized transportation on their IEPs is relatively small and most ESE students are served at their home school or ride regular buses. In addition, district management believes that paperwork requirements are excessive and that unless a relatively large number of ESE students are involved in a reimbursable activity, the administrative costs associated with pursuing Medicaid reimbursement exceed the revenues received. District calculations of potential Medicaid reimbursement amount to approximately \$51,000 per year.¹³

We recommend that the district annually review the feasibility of seeking Medicaid reimbursement for ESE transportation services provided. District calculations of potential Medicaid reimbursement amount to approximately \$51,000 per year.

Best Practice 15: Using

The district ensures that staff acts promptly and appropriately in response to any accidents or breakdown.

No matter how competent bus drivers are and how well buses are maintained, accidents and breakdowns occur. Districts need written procedures to guide employees when these situations occur to ensure that

¹³ This estimate does not take into account student or staff absences. In addition, the data is related to estimated revenue only and does not take into account district costs to collect and process the data necessary for reimbursement.

activities are carried out in a safe, efficient and effective manner; proper officials are notified; and they compliance with federal and state laws.¹⁴

The Sarasota County School District's transportation department has procedures in place to ensure that staff responds promptly and appropriately to vehicle accidents and breakdowns. All district buses are equipped with dual channel, two-way radios and the district maintains a radio dispatch operation during regular bus operation hours. The transportation department also has procedures in place to effectively deal with accidents. (The district uses the procedures outlined in the State's School Bus Driver's Handbook.) Interviews with district school bus drivers confirmed that they uniformly knew the process to be followed in case of an accident or breakdown, including the guidelines for the movement of students from one bus to another. Accident reports are completed by route coordinators and maintained centrally. Comprehensive accident files are also maintained by the transportation department and the district's risk manager monitors the disposition of accidents involving damage or injury.

Best Practice 16: Using

The district ensures that appropriate student behavior is maintained on the bus with students being held accountable for financial consequences of misbehavior related to transportation.

Inappropriate student behavior on school buses can distract bus drivers from their responsibility to drive their buses safely and can potentially result in accidents, cause injury to students and others, and saddle the school district with costly legal liabilities. Therefore, school districts need effective methods to control the behavior of students while they are being transported. Several individuals primarily responsible for ensuring the appropriate conduct of these students and should be involved in developing these methods. For example, school principals are responsible for the conduct of students on buses from the time students get on the buses until the time they leave them. School bus drivers assist in the maintaining appropriate student behavior on school buses through various management techniques and by writing disciplinary referrals to principals when appropriate. Principals can assist bus drivers in maintaining student bus discipline by informing them of what disciplinary actions are taking place in response to written disciplinary referrals.

The Sarasota School District has procedures that encourage appropriate student behavior on buses. In the Sarasota County School District disciplinary problems are typically first reported to route coordinators and are subsequently reported to school officials only after the route coordinator's efforts to resolve the problem have proved unsuccessful. Serious infractions, however, such as ones involving weapons, drugs, or fighting, are immediately reported to school officials and documented on the district's Student Discipline Referral Report form. Parents are held responsible for damage done to school buses by students.¹⁵ About 50% of the district's buses have video camera boxes and the district rotates its video cameras among the camera boxes that are mounted on most school buses.

Best Practice 17: Using

The district provides appropriate technological and computer support for transportation functions.

The proper use of technology can make the district transportation function more efficient and safe, and less expensive. For instance, technology can assist school districts in mapping out the most efficient bus routes and can reduce the need to manually manipulate data. Therefore, school districts need appropriate

¹⁴ For example, under Florida law, accidents involving damage of \$500 or more or having student injuries must be reported to the Florida Department of Education.

¹⁵ In 2000-01 five incidents were billed and collected amounting to \$410. In 2001-02 there were three billed and collected incidents amounting to \$125.

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technology to support their transportation systems. This includes providing computers to access databases with driver traffic histories maintained by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles and to maintain data such as vehicle maintenance histories, fuel disbursements, and parts inventories. Districts also need specialized diagnostic tools to accurately troubleshoot bus engine problems. In very small districts, districts may be able to maintain some of this data manually, but most districts require computer systems to enable management to make more informed and appropriate decisions.

While the Sarasota County School District does not directly control all the computer systems needed to support its operations, it does have access to all the systems it needs to effectively manage its operations. Transportation office staff, for example, has access to the district's computerized financial information system and uses this system for inquiry, transactions, and report generation. Likewise, driver's licenses are monitored on the state computer system to which the district has access and the drug-testing file is maintained on a desktop computer file in Risk Management Office. Transportation staff, on the other hand, maintains its own computerized personnel files to track certifications, training, and drug testing. Drug testing file is maintained in a desk top computer file in Risk Management Office.

The Department of Transportation also has a computerized routing and scheduling system with related student information. This system is linked to the district's student data system and twice a year bus scheduling information is uploaded to the student system (SIS). (The SIS is an on-line, real time system installed at school locations). Each week student data on the SIS is down loaded and used to update the routing and scheduling system. Bus scheduling information is also available on web-based files generated from the routing and scheduling system. The DOT has an annual budget of \$20,000 for computer equipment. In addition, the executive director prepares a capital improvement request for major systems or hardware upgrades in coordination with the management information system director.

Best Practice 18: Using

The district monitors the fiscal condition of transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget; however, expenditures for overtime are not separated from regular salaries in basic financial reports.

Like most other organizations, school districts must make difficult decisions during the budget process to control expenses and maximize funds available to support their primary mission, educating students. Exceeding these budgets may require the district to reduce funds to the classroom, forgo other needs, or to dip into reserves to meet unanticipated expenses. Thus, transportation management must monitor operations and control costs to ensure that budgets are not exceeded. Budget categories need to be sufficiently detailed to be useful to transportation managers. Wide variance between actual expenditures and budgeted expenditures indicates problems in either deriving accurate budgeted expenditure figures or controlling actual expenditures. In either case, transportation management can prevent budgeting problems through analysis of expenditures and comparing those expenditures to budgeted items. Such analyses will help alert transportation management to unexpected patterns of expenditures as well as identifying opportunities to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of operations.

The Sarasota County School District's transportation managers monitor the department's fiscal condition on a regular basis. These managers receive regular monthly reports of budget and expenditures and use these reports to compare spending rates to available resources. A Computerized Vehicle Maintenance system also provides managers with a comprehensive computerized history of repairs (life-cycle data) for each vehicle for eighteen months. Additional history is maintained on CDs and paper files and can be retrieved when necessary.

Although the district generally monitors fiscal conditions of transportation functions and its computer systems generate appropriate categories of data for decision-making, the budget and expenditure

documents do not, in some cases, adequately break out budgets in a way that provides meaningful management information. The expenditures for overtime are not separated from regular salaries in the basic financial reports.

We recommend that the district develop management reports that break out budgets and expenditures for salaries by regular wages and overtime. Bus routes should be constructed in such a manner that they can be performed on a regular basis without incurring overtime. Overtime will be incurred for extra curricular trips and in exceptional situations such as breakdowns or accidents. Financial reporting should be of sufficient detail for transportation management to readily determine that routes are being completed within the regular day, that excessive overtime is not being incurred as a result of exceptional situations, and that overtime incurred for extra curricular trips is being recaptured through billing to those funding these extra trips.

Best Practice 19: Not Using

The district has not adequately reviewed the prospect for privatizing transportation functions, as a whole or in part.

To be good custodians of public resources, school districts should evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations continually, which includes examining the benefits of alternative service delivery methods, to reduce costs and maximize funds available for classroom instruction, and/or to improve performance. Certain administrative and support functions, including transportation, are more easily privatized due to the limited scope operations and availability of private providers. Therefore, school districts should conduct periodic analyses to determine if they would benefit from privatization of certain aspects of their transportation systems. Privatizing specialized functions such as rebuilding bus transmissions can save districts money by avoiding the need to buy and maintain equipment and skills for a job that will only be used a few times a year. In some cases, districts have privatized their entire transportation operations and achieved cost savings. However, these steps need to be taken only after “make or buy” analyses are done to ensure that the move will produce real benefits. To conduct these analyses, districts need to identify their unit costs, both direct and indirect, of providing services (such as oil changes, paint and body work, and engine rebuilds) so that they can compare these costs to the prices charged by private vendors.

The Sarasota School District currently outsources some of its repair work (primarily work on transmissions). However, the district has not reviewed the prospect of privatizing transportation functions. The district also does not have a comprehensive effort to document that its in-house operations are cost effectiveness when compared to contracting with outside vendors. The district has not systematically analyze whether all transportation operations could be beneficially outsourced, whether selected routes might be outsourced, or whether selected maintenance related functions (e.g., paint shop, upholstery shop, engine overhaul, and a body shop) could be more cost-effectively provided by outside providers than by in-house staff. A cost analysis of each of these potentially outsourced operations has not been performed. Consequently the district currently has no way to compare its costs with those of outside service providers. Likewise, the DOT has not developed key unit cost information for each transportation function.

The district should develop and compare key unit cost information for transportation functions with private providers. Action Plan 9-1 details the steps the district should take. The district could implement this action plan within existing resources.

Action Plan 9-1

We recommend that the district develop and compare key unit cost information for transportation functions with private providers.

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. The DOT should identify potential candidates among transportation functions for this review.</p> <p>Step 2. The DOT should develop key unit cost data for the selected in-house functions.</p> <p>Step 3. The DOT should obtain quotes from outside vendors for the selected functions.</p> <p>Step 4. In addition to the direct cost data of these selected functions, the DOT should estimate the additional overhead costs associated with the bidding, monitoring, and quality control required when using outside vendors.</p> <p>Step 5. The DOT should develop the appropriate comparison of cost and service between in-house and outside contracting for these functions. This analysis should include an assessment of risks that may be associated with the district no longer having direct and immediate control over these functions.</p> <p>Step 6. The DOT should present the findings and results of this analysis to the district administration and board.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director
Time Frame	June, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 20: Not Using

The district has not established an accountability system for transportation that regularly tracks and reports on its performance in comparison with established benchmarks.

Like other publicly funded entities, a school district should be held accountable to parents and other taxpayers for the performance and cost of its major programs and support services, including transportation. To accomplish this, each school district should have a system that allows managers at both the district and program level to evaluate performance and make informed decisions regarding the use of limited resources. In addition, school transportation departments need to be able to demonstrate to district management, school boards, and the public that they are good stewards of the public’s funds and are constantly striving to improve. This is done by establishing measures, goals, and benchmarks and comparing internal performance to other school districts. Districts should monitor some performance measures on a regular, short-term (e.g., monthly) basis such as the number of bus breakdowns, driver/technician absenteeism, complaints received (e.g., buses not being on time and students not picked up), vehicle maintenance (oil changes, inspections not conducted, etc.) delayed, and overtime paid. Districts should monitor other performance measures on an annual basis, such as the percentage of courtesy students served, annual operational cost per student, vehicle breakdowns per 100,000 miles, the percentage of buses that are spare buses, accidents per million miles, and the percentage of students delivered within established ride time standards. District should compare their performance to those of peer districts as well as against established benchmarks. Transportation department performance should be reported on a regular basis to the district superintendent, school board, and the public.

While the Sarasota County School District’s transportation department has identified certain tasks that are linked to the strategic goals presented in the district’s Campaign for Excellence strategic plan, it has not identified performance improvement indicators or established measurable goals for those performance indicators. Thus, the district does not have performance indicators that can be used on a regular basis to measure the quality and cost of transportation services over time or to compare performance and cost with peer districts. Furthermore, the department does not prepare the district regular management reports on its performance and cost. And, no “report card” is presented to district administrators and the school

board that summarized department performance and cost. Lastly the transportation department needs to coordinate a plan to benchmark and analyze all aspects of the organization on an annual basis.

The district should develop an accountability system with quantifiable goals and measurable performance oriented objectives. Key performance indicators may include; cost per student, on-time performance, cost per mile, spare bus ratio, average ridership per bus, parts inventory turn over rate, and accident and breakdown data (per 100,000 miles). Action Plan 9-2 details the steps the district should take.

Action Plan 9-2

We recommend that the district develop an accountability system with quantifiable goals and measurable performance oriented objectives.

Action Needed	Step 1.	The transportation department should establish performance goals and measurable, performance-related key indicators.
	Step 2.	The transportation department should measure its performance by key indicators.
	Step 3.	The transportation department should compare its performance to peers and exemplars using the key indicators.
	Step 4.	The transportation department should establish benchmarks for measuring future performance.
	Step 5.	The transportation department should report its goals and performance to the district administration and the board.

Who Is Responsible	Executive Director
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Time Frame	June, 2004
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Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

10 Food Service Operations

Summary

The Sarasota County School District is using 7 of the 11 food service operations best practices. Among other effective practices that are currently in place, the Food and Nutrition Services Department complies with federal, state and district policies relating to nutrition and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), works proactively to ensure that customer needs are met, takes appropriate steps to improve services and food quality where needed, and manages the program to optimize its financial opportunities. The district is organized to succeed and has an excellent training program for employees.

To use the remaining best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency and effectiveness of its food service program the district should negotiate removal of all cafeteria managers from the same bargaining unit as the employees they supervise (Action plan 10-1) to facilitate full managerial responsibilities, improve determination of indirect expenses payable by food services to the general fund (Action plan 10-2), compare prices, quality, and ease of use of selected current menu items with directly processed commodities (Action plan 10-3), and perform simple time and motion studies to determine the actual labor hours needed to perform the work required (Action plan 10-4).



As seen in Exhibit 10-1, the district has several opportunities to reduce costs and increase revenues in this area. 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 implements these action plans, it would be able to redirect the funds to other priorities, such as putting more money into the classroom or addressing deficiencies identified in this report.

Exhibit 10-1

Implementing the Recommendations for Food Service Operations

Should Have a Five-Year Fiscal Impact of Approximately \$750,000 in Cost Savings

Best Practice Number	Fiscal Impact: Increased Cost Savings					Total
	Year 2003-04	Year 2004-05	Year 2005-06	Year 2006-07	Year 2007-08	
6 Modified use of USDA commodities	\$60,000	\$ 60,000	\$ 60,000	\$ 60,000	\$ 60,000	\$300,000
7 Update operational standards	0	90,000	90,000	90,000	90,000	360,000
Total	\$60,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$660,000

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Background

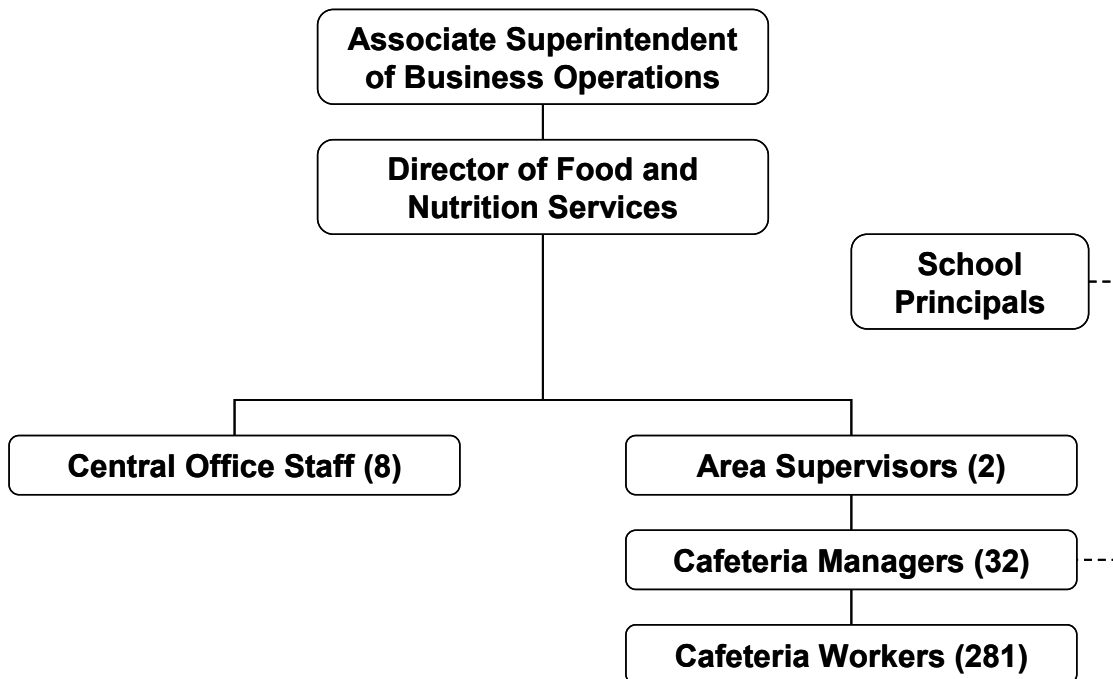
The Sarasota County School District’s food service program provided approximately 5.3 million meals during the 2001-02 school year. In doing so, the program produced approximately 0.7 million breakfasts, 3.0 million lunches, and sold the equivalent of 1.6 million meals in the form of a la carte items. The program provided meal services at thirty-three schools and six satellite locations. At the time of our review, the program employed 313 benefited food service staff at thirty-three school locations plus 11 staff members at the central office. The food service budget for the 2002-03 school year is approximately \$12.5 million.

The district’s food service director manages all aspects of the food service program, including new construction and nutrition education. The current food service coordinator has been overseeing the program for 11 years.

Program organization

A food service director who focuses primarily on managing the business aspect of the program manages the Food and Nutrition Services Department. As shown below in Exhibit 10-2, the director works directly for the district’s associate superintendent of business operations. District-level food program staff consists of 11 employees. Two employees on the district level staff are food service coordinators who directly oversee the daily operations in the cafeterias and write the employee evaluations for all department personnel except the central office staff.

Exhibit 10-2
Food Service Organizational Chart



Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

National School Lunch Program participation

The district participates in the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program and the after school snack program, which are regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). These programs assist states through grant-in-aid and other means such as menu design in establishing, maintaining, operating, and expanding school feeding programs. The purpose of these federal programs is to safeguard the health and well-being of the nation's children as well as provide and encourage the consumption of nutritious domestic agricultural commodities (USDA Donated Foods).

These breakfast and lunch programs are administered through Florida's Department of Education and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Each school district executes an annual agreement with these state agencies to operate the programs at the local level. The school board, superintendent, and food service department share local responsibility for program administration within the district.

As a participant in these programs, the district receives monthly federal reimbursement income for the free, reduced, and paid meals it serves. Quarterly, the state also provides required partial matching funds to lunch programs and to supplement breakfast meals. Exhibit 10-3 shows the federal reimbursement rates for the National School Lunch Program for 2002-03 school year. Based on relative economic need, districts receive a standard reimbursement of \$0.20 or \$0.22 for each lunch meal served, plus additional monies based on the number of free and or partially paid (called "reduced") meals served. Under the program guidelines, Sarasota County is relatively affluent and therefore receives the \$0.20 reimbursement rate. Students pay the full, reduced, or free meal rate based on individual family economic conditions set by the USDA.

Although somewhat different rules apply, breakfast meals are similarly funded based on each school's participation rates and the economic need of its students. The state requires that all elementary schools provide a breakfast opportunity to students and supplements some of this cost. The Sarasota County School District also offers breakfast to its middle and high school students.

Exhibit 10-3
Per Meal USDA Reimbursement Rates and Fees for School Year 2002-03

Meal	Federal Assistance	Fees Paid by Student	Program Total Revenue
Elementary Schools—Sarasota County			
Full price paid			
Breakfast	\$0.22	\$0.75	\$0.97
Lunch	\$0.20	\$1.50	\$1.70 ¹
Reduced price			
Breakfast	\$0.22 + \$0.65	\$0.30	\$1.17
Lunch	\$0.20 + \$1.54	\$0.40	\$2.14 ¹
Free			
Breakfast	\$0.22 + \$0.95	0	\$1.17
Lunch	\$0.20 + \$1.94	0	\$2.14 ¹
Middle and High Schools—Sarasota County			
Full price paid			
Breakfast	\$0.22	\$0.75	\$0.97
Lunch	\$0.20	\$1.75	\$1.95 ¹
Reduced price			
Breakfast	\$0.22 + \$0.65	\$0.30	\$1.17
Lunch	\$0.20 + \$1.54	\$0.40	\$2.14 ¹
Free			
Breakfast	\$0.22 + \$0.95	0	\$1.17
Lunch	\$0.20 + \$1.94	0	\$2.14 ¹

¹ In addition, the state quarterly pays partial matching funds to the district. For school year 2001-02 this equaled about \$0.07 per lunch served.

Source: United States Department of Agriculture and Florida Department of Education.

Food Service Operations

As Exhibit 10-4 illustrates, the account balance of the Sarasota County School District's food service program has fluctuated for the past four years. The account balance declined substantially between Fiscal Year 1998-99 and Fiscal Year 1999-2000 due to operating losses. In fiscal year 2000-01 however, the program revenues exceeded expenditures. In fiscal year 2001-02 the program again operated at a deficit although the size of this deficit was approximately 50% less than in Fiscal Years 1998-99 and 1999-2000. Our team was told that the program management is recommending price adjustments for the 2003-04 school year.

Typical for school food programs, participation in the federal National School Lunch Program and cash food sales account for the majority of revenue, while food costs, salaries, and benefits represent the majority of expenditures.

Exhibit 10-4

The Sarasota Food Service Program Has a Positive Fund Balance, But This Balance Has Been Declining Over the Last Several Years

	Fiscal Year			
	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
REVENUE				
Food Sales Revenue				
Federal Meals Program	\$3,667,064	\$3,816,459	\$4,010,163	\$4,295,546
State Supplement	\$154,235	\$147,848	\$144,057	\$154,932
Meal Sales	\$2,340,003	\$2,622,658	\$2,702,295	\$2,691,207
A La Carte Sales	\$2,759,787	\$2,882,591	\$3,176,726	\$3,409,536
School Snack Program	\$27,341	\$23,345	\$22,017	\$66,559
Other Food Sales	\$313,187	\$416,784	\$398,627	\$407,757
Other Revenue				
USDA Donated Food	\$851,718	\$363,396	\$785,363	\$739,363
Interest	\$40,626	\$26,574	\$18,472	\$11,973
Other Revenue	\$183,988	\$187,464	\$138,882	\$185,138
Total Revenue	\$10,337,949	\$10,487,119	\$11,396,602	\$11,962,011
EXPENDITURES				
Salaries	\$3,328,232	\$3,491,038	\$3,653,714	\$3,721,435
Employee Benefits	\$1,560,582	\$1,643,945	\$1,777,731	\$1,997,203
Purchased Services	\$357,490	\$406,836	\$418,696	\$492,564
Energy Services	\$31,866	\$18,356	\$17,364	\$29,581
Material and supplies	\$4,570,961	\$4,843,422	\$5,082,148	\$5,252,232
Capital Outlay	\$603,814	0	0	0
Other Expenses	\$16,024	\$9,511	\$9,839	\$39,915
Transfers Out	\$175,000	\$375,000	\$375,000	\$575,000
Total Expenditures	\$10,643,969	\$10,788,108	\$11,334,492	\$12,107,930
Net Income (Loss)	(\$306,020)	(\$300,989)	\$62,110	(\$145,919)
Account Balance	\$1,518,987	\$1,217,998	\$1,280,108	\$1,134,189

Source: Sarasota County School District

Peer districts used for comparison

To evaluate the Sarasota County School District food service program, food operations in this district were compared to a set of similar, or peer, districts. Through an analysis process conducted by OPPAGA

and approved by the Sarasota County School District, the five districts selected were Charlotte, Leon, Manatee, Martin, and Santa Rosa counties. Although the Sarasota County School District has a lower percentage of free and reduced price students than any of the peer districts, it still is able to serve approximately the same number of meals per student.

**Exhibit 10-5
General Comparison of Peer Districts**

Districts	Reported Student Population (FY 2001-02)	Total School in District Serving NSLP Meals (FY 2001-02)	Total NSLP Claimed Meals Served (FY 2001-02)	NSLP Claimed Meals Served per Student for the Year (FY 2001-02)	Free and Reduce Eligibility Percentage (Elementary) (FY 2001-02)
Sarasota	36,697	44	2,961,005	81	29.4%
Charlotte	17,000	20	2,004,624	118	44.1%
Leon	31,319	43	2,409,760	77	31.9%
Manatee	37,576	41	3,517,079	94	45.4%
Martin	16,505	19	1,386,251	84	34.8%
Santa Rosa	22,623	32	1,824,737	81	32.7%

Source: Florida Department of Education data sources.

Activities of particular interest

The food service director has developed an innovative program to ensure food safety. The break and lunch schedules for employees at each school are organized so that an employee is always in the kitchen. This practice prevents outside contamination and guarantees that someone is available to remove food from the oven close to the time it will be served.

The district also requires that one meal from each school be saved for three days so that if a food contamination complaint occurs the saved meal can be sent to an outside laboratory for analysis.

Conclusion and Recommendations

**Exhibit 10–6
Sarasota County School District Using Seven Food Service Operations Best Practices**

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice?	Page No.
Planning, Organization, and Staffing	1. The program has developed strategic or operational plans that are consistent with district plans and the program budget, and approved by the district.	Yes	10-7
	2. The district and program are organized with clear lines of responsibility and in a manner that provides the food service program sufficient authority to succeed.	No	10-7
	3. Program management has developed training designed to meet basic program needs as well as improve food services, both based on a needs assessment.	Yes	10-8
Management	4. Program management has developed comprehensive procedures manuals that are kept current.	Yes	10-9
	5. The district performs sound cash and account management.	No	10-10
	6. District and program management optimizes its financial opportunities.	No	10-11
Performance and Accountability	7. Food service program management has developed comprehensive performance and cost-efficiency measures that provide management with information to evaluate program performance and better manage operations.	No	10-12
	8. At least annually, the program inspects and evaluates its operational components and the system as a whole, and then takes action to initiate needed change.	Yes	10-14
	9. District and program administrators effectively manage costs of the food service program and use performance measures, benchmarks, and budgets on a regular basis to evaluate performance and use the analysis for action or change.	Yes	10-15
	10. The food service program and district complies with federal, state, and district policy.	Yes	10-16
	11. The district conducts activities to ensure that customer needs are met and acts to improve services and food quality where needed.	Yes	10-16

Source: OPPAGA.

PLANNING, ORGANIZING, AND STAFFING

Best Practice 1: Using

The food service program has developed plans that are consistent with district plans, the program budget, and approved by the district.

The school district and its food service program should have coordinated, approved plans that give the program a logical direction. These plans should include a mission statement, goals, objectives, and strategies that describe what the program desires to accomplish. However, the extensiveness of such plans may differ. For instance, larger districts should have more highly developed, detailed plans for their food service operations, whereas smaller districts may need less extensive, more general plans. Because school districts generally have seemingly unlimited demands for available funds, the food service program budget should be an extension of the district's plan and financial decisions should reflect the program's priority goals and objectives. The budget also should have school-level, detailed forecasts of revenue and expenses. In addition, the food service director should be involved in major capital projects such as kitchen-related design or renovation.

The Sarasota County School District has taken a number of steps to provide an overall direction and plan for the food service program. For example, the district has established vision and mission statements that articulate the overall objectives and purpose of the food service program. In addition, operating plans and goals are established to guide the program (the program's goals deal primarily with ensuring the financial viability of the program and ensuring federal and state regulations are adhered to). In addition to establishing operating plans and goals, the district has established effective approaches to monitoring progress in meeting these goals both at a district and program level. At the district level, for example the associate superintendent for business operations reviews operating statements that summarize the program's financial performance. In addition, an annual report is provided to the board outlining the financial performance of the department as well as any other significant accomplishments or changes in the program. Moreover, the department's point of sales system supports the preparation of detailed and timely reports on activity at the school level. These reports are reviewed by the director and her staff and are used to actively manage department operations. It is worth noting that in addition to her food service responsibilities the director is involved in a number of district committees. For example, she is an active participant in discussions relating to new construction and the renovation of kitchens.

Best Practice 2: Not Using

The district and program are organized with clear lines of responsibility but cafeteria managers lack the full managerial authority over their employees.

For the food service program to function well, the district food service director, the school's cafeteria manager, and its principal need to balance authority and responsibility. If not closely monitored, this shared responsibility and authority can create barriers to student meal purchases and program success. Food service staffing at both the district and the school cafeteria level should balance efficiency and effectiveness. Supervising too few workers is wasteful, but supervising too many can result in a loss of control. Management theorists generally agree that managers should oversee between 3 and 10 employees; more than 10 may be supervised if they are in close proximity to the manager and perform very routine or similar duties, such as in a cafeteria. All districts, even those with few employees, should maintain basic organizational charts to help management and employees understand their organizational relationships, explain lines of authority, assign responsibilities, and avoid conflicts.

The Sarasota County School District’s food service program is well organized. The department has excellent organizational charts that are current and easily understood. In addition, detailed work schedules have been made to guide the day-to-day operations of the food services program. The department and school principals work well together to ensure that food services are an integral part of district programs.

However, the district can improve operations and use this best practice if the cafeteria managers who supervise the cafeteria employees are removed the same bargaining unit as their employees. These cafeteria managers are members of the same union as their employees and by union rule cannot implement full managerial actions over their employees such as writing letters of reprimand, nor can they complete annual employee evaluations for employees at the sites they manage. As a result the two area food service coordinators who oversee the managers must write performance evaluations and conduct disciplinary actions for over 300 employees. Obviously, this span of control is excessive. It is not reasonable to expect these coordinators to know enough about the performance of these employees to monitor their performance, provide discipline when necessary, and complete credible performance evaluations.

We therefore recommend that the district remove cafeteria managers from the same bargaining unit as the employees they supervise. Action Plan 10-1 describes the steps to implement this recommendation, which could be accomplished within existing resources.

Action Plan 10-1

We recommend that the cafeteria managers be removed from the same bargaining unit as the employees for which they have oversight.

Action Needed	Step 1. During the next union negotiations ask to have the cafeteria managers removed from the bargaining unit.
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent of Business Operations
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Best Practice 3: Using

The district has developed training designed to meet basic program needs as well as improve food services, both based on a needs assessment.

Training ensures that school district employees understand the scope of their responsibilities and performance expectations, and serves to update skills and knowledge necessary to effectively and efficiently carry out their duties. Thus, school districts should have a process for identifying and tracking employee-training needs. All food service employees should be required to complete at least a minimum level of sanitation, safety, and food production/handling training. In addition, comprehensive training, though not necessarily required of all employees, should include essential program functions such as food safety, portion control, production control, special diets, inventory, meal count procedures, receiving and storing food and supplies, emergency procedures, and customer service. The district should have an annual training plan that addresses routine and special needs. Care should be taken to ensure that all levels of food service employees (managers, assistant managers, interns, and line-production staff) receive the appropriate level of training. The district also should have strategy for addressing cafeteria manager turnover, such as an intern program or an assistant manager program. The sophistication of the training plan, training documentation, and training methods may vary by the size of the district. Very large districts may designate an employee as a trainer, while in small districts training may be the responsibility of the food service director and cafeteria managers. All districts should be taking advantage of training materials available from DOE.

The Sarasota County School District has established an excellent training program for both new employees and managers. The training of new employees, which takes advantage of materials offered by the American School Food Service Association and the Florida Department of Education, meets all of the requirements for the union contract. Our review found that this training covers such subjects as nutrition, food production, and sanitation. In addition, potential managers are placed in a ten month long manager intern training program, working alongside a training manager at a school site. This prepares them well for assumption of managerial duties.

MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 4: Using

The district has developed comprehensive procedures manuals that are kept current but the recipe manual should be modified to include some additional instructions.

Up-to-date procedures, when coupled with appropriate policies, ensure that activities are carried out in an efficient and effective manner and that districts are in compliance with federal and state laws. In addition, written procedures serve as a district's institutional memory for key processes and as such help to minimize disruption to essential services and reduce the need for costly training and assistance due to staff turnover. To ensure that employees know and use program policy and directives, school districts should make comprehensive procedures manuals available to all food service managers. The manuals should cover important areas of food service operations and district policy. The district should conduct a scheduled and documented review process to keep manuals current and complete.

The Sarasota County School District has a complete procedures manual that addresses all aspects of program operations. We found that the manual is comprehensive, sufficiently detailed, and easy to follow.

Although the district uses this best practice, there is one area in which the district can enhance its operations. We did find that the program's recipe manual lacks some important instructions. The recipes do not address how far in advance each food item may be prepared. For example, we found that some schools prepare food items as much as two days in advance, while others prepare it on the day of serving. This variance in production times is not addressed in the recipe manual. In addition, we found that recipes do not include the final temperatures that cooked food should achieve before removal from the oven. While no health hazards relating to food not achieving a high enough temperature before being served were observed or reported during our review, including this information in the recipe manual would be beneficial by preventing hazardous conditions.

We recommend that the district modify its recipe manual. Each recipe involving heated food should be reviewed and the final temperature the food should reach before being served should be included in the instructions. Any recipe that involves production covering more than one day should also include instructions on safe handling, overnight storage and the conditions that permit advance preparation.

Best Practice 5: Not Using

The district could improve its cash and account management by developing more accurate procedures to determine which direct and indirect expenses should be incurred or paid by the food service program.

School districts should run the food service program much like a business, ensuring that it remains in a healthy financial position, pays its share of operating expenses, and maintains a reserve fund balance within legal limitations to protect it from unanticipated emergencies. At a minimum, district management should require the food program to be self-sufficient by paying all appropriate direct and indirect expenses so that it does not drain general revenue dollars from the classroom. Management should also ensure that program account balances, plans, and budgets support future self-sufficiency. Districts of all sizes should make prompt requests for payment to the federal National School Lunch Program because payments are so substantial they affect cash management and interest income.

Some aspects of the food service program's cash and account management are sound. For example, overall, the district maintains an ample fund balance. Over the past four years this fund balance has ranged from approximately \$1.5 million in Fiscal Year 1998-99 to approximately \$1.1 million in Fiscal Year 2001-02. The district also does a good job of submitting claims for federal and state reimbursements in a timely manner. For example, we found that claims for federal reimbursement are routinely submitted within 10 days of the close of each month. Thereby, the Sarasota County School District maintains an appropriate fund balance and submits claims for federal and state reimbursements in a timely manner.

However, the district can improve its operations and use this best practice by addressing one issue. Despite the strength of the program's approach to cash and account management in some areas, the district should improve its procedures for accurately determining what support expenses should be charged to the program. Appropriate support expenses of the food program include payment directly or by transfer to the general account for general account funded staff and incurred costs provide to the food program. These expenses include such areas as utilities, shared custodial services, shared trash disposal, and procurement. Some other expenses are appropriately charged to the program under a fixed fee called indirect expense (account 790). These indirect charges are appropriately base on the district's federal indirect rate, also used for other district federal grant programs. Generally, these indirect charges cover personnel and accounting office support provided to the food program. This district opted to pay all expenses by transfers. However, even these transfers have varied significantly over time and not always been appropriately documented as to basis of the charge amounts. For example, transfers to the general fund for reimbursement of program support expenses over the last four years have ranged from \$175,000 to \$575,000 per year (see Exhibit 10-4, this chapter). Accurate and consistent assignment of non-direct expenses to the program is very important in determining true program operating expenses and allows for accurate accounting and budgeting. Without a proper procedure to determine true costs the district lacks the ability to determine whether or not a food service program is overly absorbing general account resources, or properly paying program related expenses.

At present, in the few areas where formulas or documentation are used to determine the support expenses charged to the department, we frequently found them lacking inappropriateness. For example, the Food and Nutrition Services Department currently pays 60% of the entire district refuse bill. In another example, custodial charges to the program are based on a square footage formula of areas used for student eating which overly penalizes the food service program. That is, the food program is charged for full eating areas used by all students, even if they bring a bag lunch from home, and the room is used for other activities such as assemblies.

The district should more accurately determine the actual or appropriately estimated support expenditures that should be charged to the food service program to improve program accountability. Action Plan 10-2 describes the steps necessary to implement this recommendation. The district should be able to implement Action Plan 10-2 within existing recourses.

Action Plan 10-2

We recommend that the district determine the actual indirect expenditures that should be charged to the food services program in order to properly account for program expenses.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify the indirect expense categories which are incurred by the general fund on behalf of food services. Use the district’s federal indirect rate to pay for personnel and accounting office support only.
	Step 2.	Determine the fair share amount for each of these expenses that should be charged to the food services program. Where practical, charge the program with itemized expenses such as utilities and refuse removal. Limit use of lump sum transfers.
	Step 3.	Revise the general fund and food service budgets to reflect the actual costs of indirect services.
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent of Business Operations	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Best Practice 6: Not Using

District and program management could further optimize its financial opportunities.

If the food service program takes advantage of opportunities to reduce costs and enhance revenues, it can avoid the need to raise meal prices and/or supplement the food service program with general operating funds that otherwise could be directed to student education. For instance, the district should make optimal use of federally donated foods, which can substantially reduce food costs, and maximize its participation in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs to increase federal reimbursement income. In addition, meal prices should be reasonable but sufficient to provide for quality food and service, as well as enable the district to make needed capital investments and pay employees a fair wage. To respond to changing conditions and control costs, the district should also periodically review core processes such as warehousing and procurement. These reviews should help the district make informed decisions as to which functions the program should perform and which should be outsourced.

The Sarasota County School District’s food service program has taken a number of worthwhile steps to optimize its financial opportunities. For example, the district’s excellent a la carte program in secondary schools brings in additional revenue and satisfies customer needs. Likewise, the district has implemented an after school snack program and provides contract meal service to area charter schools to raise additional program revenue that would otherwise not be available. The district has outsourced the distribution of both purchased and commodity foods. These bids are reviewed and analyzed annually to ensure that purchasing these serves is more cost effective than purchasing refrigerated trucks and hiring new employees.

However the district can improve its financial status and use this best practice by modifying how it uses USDA commodities. For example, the district’s current pizza provider would reduce the price of each slice of pizza if the district directly diverted commodity mozzarella cheese to the company under a program developed by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Instead, the district brings all commodity cheese to the district where it incurs state shipping and handling charges, as well as local distributor storage and delivery charges before use in a cafeteria. In another example, the district is acquiring diced chicken with a fair market value of \$1.70 per pound then paid state and distributor charges to pre-process this menu item. However, this item is much less popular among

students as a menu item than chicken nuggets. As an alternative, the district could ship fresh commodity chickens at \$0.48 cents per pound directly to their current processor, who in turn could provide the district with preprocessed chicken nuggets for six cents per portion less than the district currently pays to purchase the like item. For another example, commodity non-fat dry milk can be processed into individual servings of yogurt or blocks of mozzarella cheese. Thus, by sending some commodities directly to a commodity processor the district can more efficiently use some USDA foods versus use as cafeteria-level meal preparation.

In addition, the district could save money by not using its commodity allocation (Fair Market Value) dollars to purchase some low value items such as flour at \$5.12 for 40 pounds, plus \$1.81 shipping and handling, plus local storage and delivery. These additional charges can increase final costs as much as 50%. Generally, these allocation dollars can be more efficiently spent on higher value items such as cheese, chicken, or other commodities that can also be shipped directly to a processor, and thereby avoiding these additional charges.

Using these strategies we forecast that the district can decrease its food costs through expanded use of USDA commodity contract processors. Action Plan 10-3 describes the steps necessary for the district to expand its use of commodity contract processors, saving the district about \$60,000 per year, or about \$300,000 over five years.¹

Action Plan 10-3

We recommend that the district reduce its food costs by use of USDA commodities.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Determine which processed commodities are available.
	Step 2.	Compare the available commodity processed items with the items the district currently uses.
	Step 3.	Evaluate the available processed commodities for quality and price.
	Step 4.	Contract for commodity items that provide the best value to the district.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Food Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Best Practice 7: Not Using

Food service program management has developed performance and cost-efficiency measures that provide management with information to evaluate program performance and better manage operations, however, a major standard and benchmark needs to be validated.

Like other publicly funded entities, a school district should be held accountable to parents and other taxpayers for the performance and cost of its major programs and support services, such as food services. To accomplish this, school districts should have a performance measurement system that allows managers at both the district and program level to evaluate performance and make informed decisions regarding the use of limited resources. A comprehensive set of program measures should include input, output,

¹ The estimate is conservatively based on improving the district's use of USDA commodities by 8% each year ($\$750,000 \times .08 = \$60,000$). This figure is likely even greater since this action plan cannot only reduce purchased food costs but also USDA commodity shipping, handling, and distribution costs. The 8% conservative estimate is based on savings experienced in other school districts taking similar actions. This percentage can be increased depending on commodities, end products, and processors selected by the district.

outcome, and cost-efficiency measures. Districts need to periodically verify that their performance information is reliable by testing its accuracy and assure its validity by assessing whether it is useful. Managers also need to review performance benchmarks and efficiency standards for appropriateness. The degree of sophistication of the district's performance measurement system may vary with the size of the district; smaller districts may have a less formal reporting system and simpler methodology for development and validation of benchmarks.

The Sarasota County School District utilizes both month-to-month and year-to-date comparisons at the school and department levels to measure each school's performance. After review by central office staff, individual managers are provided with the information and any area of concern noted by management is discussed and resolved. Applications of these performance measures have resulted in relatively steady ratios of labor and food costs for the district. Despite efforts, the fund balance has declined over the last four years, a trend that could become a concern. Over time, the district has integrated more modern equipment and facility design into its program. In addition, staffing levels have been monitored and adjusted as needed by using existing performance measures and standards.

However, the district can improve operations and use this best practice by addressing one issue. A key cafeteria staffing level performance benchmark, Meals Per Labor Hour (MPLH), has not been validate recently and needs updating. The complete validation process is not simple, but can provide the program with improved financial performance. Periodically performance standards need to be updated and validated against current program conditions. Most notably, in recent years student preferences, federal requirements, new equipment, upgraded point of sale equipment, changes in meal times and periods, new feeding and training programs, and increasing use of convenience foods have all affected the amount and type of work needed to provide food services. Consequently, over time the benchmarks have not been adjusted and it is not known if the standards accurately reflect need. Too low of a staffing standard can over-allocate scheduled hours and waste labor costs, whereas, too high a standard may not allow staff adequate preparation and service time to meet health and customer needs. Our team experience, observations of district operations, review of program records, and published industry standards resulted in an opinion that the current standard is slightly too low and the recommended studies will result in minor raising the standard, thus slightly reduced program expenses.

But before revising the meals per labor hour standards, the district should first ensure that the best menu options are in use. To do this the district needs to conduct a market survey of students, update cost and quality analysis of menu items, and then update recipes. See the recommendation in Best Practice 11 of this chapter for suggestions to improve student survey response. The cost and quality analysis of menu items should challenge current food specifications and a view toward expanded use of pre-prepared food items. Considering the districts high labor and benefit cost per hour, cooked from scratch items should be minimized where possible. Expanded use of pre-prepared food items should be able to lower overall program expenses. Some of the type items suggested in Action Plan 10-3 should be included in this analysis. Revision of food items and menus naturally call for revision of recipes and preparation instructions.

After analyzing and revising the programs menu and recipes, the district should conduct simple time and motion studies and use the results to update its MPLH formula used to staff school cafeterias. Use of multiple sites to test the timing for preparation of new items as well as current items can thus update staffing needs. Action Plan 10-4 delineates the steps necessary to accomplish this recommendation. The action plan could be completed the first year within existing resources and save the district about \$90,000

per year, or about \$360,000 over the next four years.² The estimated savings will be a result of a combination of new food items, food costs, and scheduled labor costs.

Action Plan 10-4

We recommend that the district review and revise its current menus, conduct simple time and motion studies, and then use the results to update its MPLH formula used to staff school cafeterias.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Update student meal preferences. See recommendation in best practice 11, this chapter.
	Step 2.	Revise menus after determining which convenience foods can be used more cost effectively in place of items that are currently prepared from scratch.
	Step 3.	Revise the recipe book to reflect actual practices and equipment to be used.
	Step 4.	Perform simple time and motion tests/studies on the most frequently used menus to determine the actual labor needed to prepare and serve the items.
	Step 5.	Update the MPLH formula used for staffing cafeterias.
	Step 6.	Implement the new standards and benchmarks.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Food Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Best Practice 8: Using

At least annually, the program inspects and evaluates its operational components and the system as a whole, and then takes action to initiate needed change; however the department could improve operations by instituting a formal preventive maintenance program as well as strengthen some purchasing procedures.

School districts should have a system for inspecting individual cafeterias and for evaluating overall program operation to ensure efficiency and compliance with public safety standards. Cafeteria inspections should address, at a minimum, program assets, safety, food preparation, and training. Evaluations of the program should analyze functions such as procurement and accountability. District managers should use inspection and evaluation results to ensure that corrective actions are taken and to make changes to improve the program. As part of overall operational efficiency and to assist in budgeting and planning, the district should have a long-range equipment replacement plan and preventive maintenance program.

The Sarasota County School District has a systematic inspection program for the school cafeterias. To the program’s credit, the evaluations are more comprehensive than required by the Florida Department of Education or USDA. These inspections, along with their recommendations, are reviewed and signed by the cafeteria managers. This process assists in implementation of improvements and more readily ensures that corrective action results. The district plans to implement a new program of Hazard Analysis And Control Points during the 2003-04 school year. This program should provide greater assurances of food safety and evidence of due diligence if a food contamination incident occurred.

Although the district uses this best practice, there are two areas in which the district can enhance its operations. First, the district would improve operations if it implemented a formal preventive maintenance program that allows the department to better schedule equipment replacement as well as a maintenance history for major equipment.

² A 1.5% reduction in labor would result in a savings of approximately \$90,000 per year. This estimate is based on observations during our site visits, district financial reports, and reported performance of the current system. Using a common reported week, some elementary schools (Ashton El, Gocio El, Gulf Gate El, Phillippi El.) were producing significantly more meals per hour than required by the current MPLH standard and every secondary school except one (Vams) is out producing even the current standard of 16 MPLH.

We recommend the district establish a preventive maintenance program that should provide improved equipment maintenance and create historical data that can be used to assist in the forecasting and budgeting for new equipment purchases.

Secondly, we also noted that the district should revise and enhance some of its purchasing procedures. Specifically, the current procurement contract for frozen food has a cost escalation calculation that is not based on an outside market indicator as required by Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR). That is, the current contract allows for price increases based on cost increases incurred by the manufacturer and to be passed on to the distributor and the district. In contrast, the district should use outside market indicators to grant price increases in contracts awarded under the FAR. Also, when evaluating a bid proposal, all products of the same type should be evaluated the same way. However, we noted that the district has occasionally used different evaluation forms to compare the same product on competing bids.

We recommend all bids subject to FAR should use only an outside market indicator, such as the Consumer Price Index, to determine contract price adjustments. In addition, we recommend the district use a single evaluation document for similar products as part of purchasing procedures.

Best Practice 9: Using

District and program administrators effectively manage costs of the food service program and use performance measures, benchmarks, and budgets on a regular basis to evaluate performance and use the analysis for action or change. However, the district could improve its ability to forecast production if it modified record keeping procedures for a la carte food and satellite locations.

School district and program administrators should be making informed management decisions based on a goal driven, performance measurement system that is linked to the district's overall mission and strategic plan. Best practice 7 addresses the design, development, and maintenance of a comprehensive set of performance measures and benchmarks that comprise an accurate, complete, and reliable system of reporting for management to use. This best practice addresses management's use of the performance measurement system through the routine collection, analysis and reporting of performance information. All districts should keep upper management informed with some form of performance reporting and analysis of operations.

As noted previously in this chapter, the district has established excellent systems for monitoring and managing the costs and productivity of the food service program. Management uses performance data at both district level and cafeteria level to evaluate operations on a monthly and annual basis against budget forecasts. In addition, management compares performance among individual cafeterias. Also, the department director meets on a regular basis with the associate superintendent for business operations to review the department performance. In a similar manner, cafeteria managers meet with area supervisors on a regular basis to review performance.

Although the district uses this best practice, there is one area in which the district could improve its production monitoring system. Properly, the district does maintain historical left over food information on menu items produced on-site. Management uses this information to monitor if over-production or over-ordering is occurring and accurately forecast future production. However, we found that production records do not document the amount of food left over from a la carte sales or for satellite locations. Therefore, without this information program managers cannot accurately determine how much food should be prepared or ordered in the future for ala carte items or satellite locations.

We recommend the district improve its ability to forecast production needs by modifying its production records and systems used to track a la carte and satellite food leftovers.

Best Practice 10: Using

The district complies with federal, state, and district policy for the NSLP, nutrition, and competitive foods.

To operate safely and efficiently, school districts must comply with applicable federal, state, and district policies. Therefore, the district should have a systematic process for identifying these policies, performing the activities necessary for compliance, conducting internal periodic inspections to test for compliance, and implementing corrective action when areas of non-compliance are found. Of particular interest are policies pertaining to the pricing of a la carte items and the availability of certain beverages. For example, a la carte items should be priced to promote the purchase of complete meals designed to fulfill nutritional needs of students. Certain beverages, such as carbonated soda, should not be available for one hour before or after meal serving periods, except in high schools when the board approves such sales.

The Sarasota County School District has successfully passed the most recent state reviews and inspections for School Meals Initiative, Coordinated Review Effort, and USDA commodities. In addition, district policies rightfully encourage the purchase of complete meals by pricing a la carte component items greater than combined nutritious meals. Also, the school board has an approved policy, which is in compliance with the federal and state rules for the sale of foods of minimal nutritional value, such as soft drinks and candy. During site visits to cafeterias and schools, no incidents of violation of the board's policies were found.

Best Practice 11: Using

The district conducts activities to ensure that customer needs are met and acts to improve services and food quality where needed; however the survey instrument used to gather student menu input should be modified to improve the return rate.

Like most businesses, to be successful, school district food service programs must be responsive to customers, particularly that of students, teachers, and other employees. Therefore, food service programs should solicit feedback actively and use it to identify needed improvements, eliminate barriers to student meal participation, and gauge reactions to changes in program operations, promotional campaigns, and service levels. The district can use a variety of mechanisms to obtain this information such as individual cafeteria evaluations, regular customer surveys, suggestion boxes, customer taste tests, and website access.

The Sarasota County School District Food Services Department has a web page that provides information on menus and nutrition for parents and students. The program's extensive use of prepayment for breakfast and lunch encourages participation in the National School Lunch Program and reduces barriers to student participation.

Although the district uses this best practice, there is one area in which the district can enhance its operations. The food service program currently uses a customer survey on the back of a menu once a year to discover barriers to participation. However, the district reports a very low return rate for this method. At the same time, the district food service program conducted over 200 nutrition classes for students in the classroom last year. The program could use this classroom exposure to significantly increase the

distribution of the customer survey and thereby increase the return amount. Thus, by increasing feedback, the information could be used to further reduce barriers to participation.

We recommend the district distribute a student food preference survey during the classroom training already conducted by department staff. This information should then be used to further reduce barriers to program participation.

11

Cost Control Systems

Summary

The Sarasota County School District is using 13 of the 22 cost control systems best practices. Among the many effective practices currently in place, the district has established excellent internal controls, employs effective financial systems, manages cash and investments effectively, and works aggressively to address any internal control weaknesses that are identified. To use all the best practice standards and enhance the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its cost control systems, the district needs to establish an internal audit function and enhance its operational efficiency by developing comprehensive procedures manuals. In addition, the district should assess the use of purchasing cards for all purchases under \$750 so that the purchasing function can devote more resources to managing the district's high-dollar purchases. The district should also strengthen its efforts to link financial objectives to strategic plan goals.

Background

The Sarasota County School District's cost control activities are primarily managed by the Financial Services Department which reports directly to the associate superintendent chief financial and business officer. Operational functions performed by the Financial Services Department include treasurer, general accounting, accounts payable, payroll, and risk management. Five administrative staff, four professional staff, and 14.5 clerical staff are responsible for performing these tasks. (The Department's budget for the 2002-03 fiscal year is \$8,935,737, which includes budgeted self-insurance expenses of \$5,779,247.) In addition to the Financial Services Department, two other departments currently play important roles in managing the district's financial affairs. The warehouse, fixed asset accounting, and purchasing units are assigned to the Materials Management Services Department which, like the Financial Services Department, reports directly to the associate superintendent chief financial and business officer. The Budget Department, however, reports directly to the associate superintendent of instructional support services.

The executive director of the Financial Services Department has been with the district for 21 years and will retire at the end of the 2006-07 fiscal year. The executive director is supported by three administrative positions—treasurer, supervisor of payroll and retirement services, and supervisor of risk management—all of whom have at least 16 years of experience. In addition, the district recently added the position of accounting supervisor. The incumbent is a certified public accountant who reports to the treasurer function. Management has indicated that the treasurer title and position will be eliminated. It will be replaced by the title and position of controller who will be responsible for treasurer and

accounting duties. Appropriate changes to the position descriptions and organization chart are being prepared for approval by the board.

Fund Accounting

As a governmental entity, the district uses governmental accounting to report its financial position and results of operations. Governmental accounting breaks up parts or segments of a governmental entity's operations and activities into funds based on the nature and restrictions placed on the revenue sources of each fund. The district's governmental funds include the general fund, special revenue funds, debt service funds, and capital projects funds. The district also reports fiduciary funds (trust and agency funds) and proprietary funds (internal service funds that account for self-insurance plans). Significantly all of the district's resources are accounted for in the governmental funds. As Exhibit 11-1 shows, the district reported revenues of \$321,652,920 in its governmental funds during the 2001-02 fiscal year.

Exhibit 11-1

The General Fund was by Far the District's Largest Governmental Fund During the 2001-02 Fiscal Year

General Fund	Special Revenue Funds	Debt Service Funds	Capital Projects Funds	Total
\$219,872,840	\$27,834,084	\$1,797,162	\$72,148,834	\$321,652,920

Source: Superintendent's Annual Financial Report.

Within the governmental funds, debt service and capital projects funds are used to account for resources restricted specifically for the payment of debt and for the acquisition of real property and the construction, renovation, remodeling, and maintenance of district facilities. These resources are not used to finance ongoing operating activities of the district.

Resources of the general and special revenue funds are used to finance ongoing operating activities of the district. Special revenue fund resources consist of moneys restricted by federal and state grantors to be used for specific educational program purposes. Examples include Federal Title 1 and National School Lunch Act revenues. Because these resources are restricted, school districts can use them only for those educational activities that meet the specific purposes of the granting agency. Most federal grant programs contain grant terms under which revenue is earned when appropriate expenditures are incurred. As a result, grant resources frequently equal the amount of grant expenditures.

General fund. The general fund accounts for most of the operating resources and expenditures of the district and provides most of the operating resources for K-12 education programs. Exhibit 11-2 shows federal, state, and local revenue sources reported in the general fund for the 2001-02 fiscal year.

Exhibit 11-2

Local Sources Comprised the Largest Share of General Fund Revenues in the 2001-02 Fiscal Year

Federal	State	Local	Total
\$914,041	\$44,248,752	\$174,710,047	\$219,872,840

Source: Superintendent's Annual Financial Report.

Revenue sources. The preponderance of the resources the district receives from state and local sources are allocated to the district through the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). This program, which is designed to provide a base level of educational resources for all school districts, is the primary

mechanism for financing the operating costs of public schools. Florida Education Finance Program moneys are primarily generated by multiplying the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students in funded educational programs by various weights and cost factors determined by the Legislature to determine base funding from state and local FEFP funds. Each school district participating in the state allocation of funds for current operation of schools must levy the millage set for its required local effort from property taxes.

Local revenues for financing operating costs are generated from ad valorem (property) taxes. (This revenue provided approximately 80 percent of the district’s general fund resources during the 2001-02 fiscal year.) Exhibit 11-3 shows the taxes levied for education for the 2001-02 fiscal year.

**Exhibit 11-3
Required Local Effort Based on the FEFP Represented the Largest Category of Ad Valorem (Property) Taxes Levied for District Purposes during the 2001-02 Fiscal Year**

Type	Millage	Taxes Levied
General Fund:		
Required Local Effort	5.906	\$155,642,808
Basic Discretionary Local Effort	0.510	13,440,201
Supplemental Discretionary Local Effort	0.072	1,897,440
Capital Projects Funds:		
Local Capital Improvements	2.000	52,706,674
Total	8.488	\$223,687,123

Source: Superintendent’s Annual Financial Report.

Four state revenue sources, administered by the Florida Department of Education, comprise the majority of state revenue accounted for in the district’s general fund. First is resources provided for categorical education programs, which are earmarked for certain programs such as supplemental academic instruction, instructional materials, and transportation. Second is the FEFP funding, which is used for current operations. Third is workforce development funds, which are used for adult and other vocational educational services. Fourth is lottery funds earmarked for educational enhancement and school advisory council activities.

The general fund and capital projects funds tax levies are non-voted levies provided by law and appropriations act provisions. As mentioned previously, the required local effort is tied to state FEFP funding and represents the amount school districts must levy in order to receive FEFP funding.

Expenditures. As is characteristic of governmental accounting, the district presents expenditures by character or functional purpose. Within the general fund, functional expenditures are segregated into current and non-current capital outlay and debt service categories. General fund current expenditures comprise the largest portion, representing 99.2 percent of the 2001-02 fiscal year expenditures. Current expenditures are broken down into three major functional classifications; instruction, instructional support services, and general support services. Exhibit 11-4 shows general fund current expenditures for each of these core functions.

**Exhibit 11-4
Instruction and Instructional Support Services Expenditures Made Up More than 70 Percent of General Fund Functional Expenditures During the 2001-02 Fiscal Year**

Instruction	Instructional Support Services	General Support Services	Total
\$142,961,039	\$22,678,317	\$66,442,259	\$232,081,615

Source: Superintendent’s Annual Financial Report.

Instruction and instructional support expenditures represented 71.37 percent of total general fund expenditures for the 2001-02 fiscal year. Expenditures for instruction include activities directly related to teaching students, including the interaction between teachers and students. Instruction expenditures also include those for basic K-12 programs, exceptional student instruction, vocational-technical instruction, adult general instruction, and other instruction, such as pre-kindergarten, lifelong learning, and workforce development. Instructional support services include those activities related to providing administrative, technical, and logistical support for the instruction program. These services include such activities as attendance, guidance, health, and psychological services. General support services expenditures represented approximately 28.63 percent of total general fund expenditures for the 2001-02 fiscal year. Although technically not a part of general support services, community services are included in this category because they represent a very small portion of the overall general fund expenditures. General support services include expenditures related to the functional categories of board activities, general administration (superintendent’s office), school administration (school principal’s office), fiscal services (financial accounting, payroll, etc.), central services (information technology, staff services, inventories, etc.), pupil transportation services (school buses), operation of plant (utilities, insurance, etc.), and maintenance of plant (grounds keeping, repairs, preventative maintenance, etc.).

Exhibit 11-5 shows the district’s general fund expenditures by object for the 2001-02 fiscal year. As primarily a service organization, the major expenditure objects for the school district are salaries and employee benefits, which comprised approximately 83.8 percent of total expenditures. Expenditures for purchased services, energy services, materials and supplies, capital outlay, and other expenses in the 2001-02 fiscal year were consistent with those of previous years.

**Exhibit 11-5
Compensation Related Expenditures Accounted For by Far the Greatest Percentage of General Fund Object Expenditures in the 2001-02 Fiscal Year**

Salaries	Employee Benefits	Purchased Services	Energy Services	Materials and Supplies	Capital Outlay	Other Expenses	Total
\$153,020,559	\$41,427,332	\$18,286,067	\$6,581,281	\$8,652,967	\$3,452,315	\$661,094	\$232,081,615

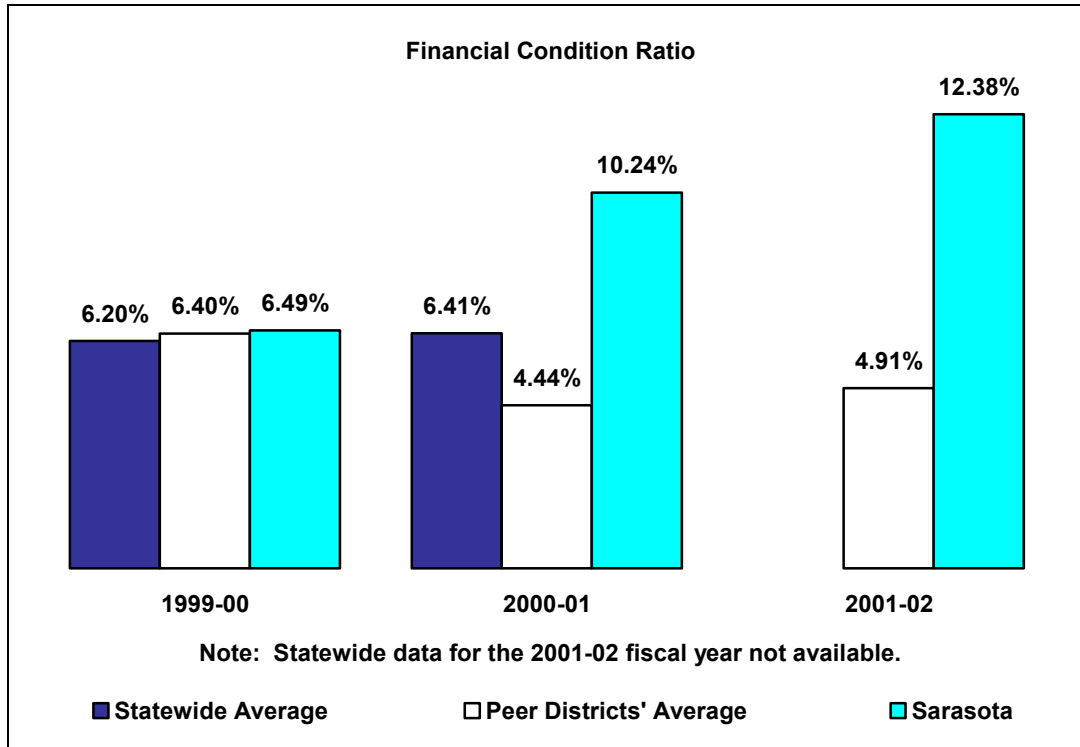
Source: Superintendent’s Annual Financial Report.

Although general fund expenditures are higher than its revenues for the 2001-02 fiscal year, the general fund had a transfer in (other financing source) from the capital projects fund to pay for budgeted maintenance activities. This transfer resulted in revenues and other financing sources exceeding expenditures and other financing uses.

Fund balance. The district’s general fund balance was analyzed to determine if the district’s efforts to control costs and enhance revenues have had a beneficial impact on its financial position. This analysis focused on a common measure of financial position—the ratio of fund balance to operating activity. (Please note that for the purpose of this analysis, only the unreserved portion of the fund balance was considered because only this portion of the fund balance is available to address unexpected needs.)¹ Exhibit 11-6 compares the financial position for the district with peer school district averages for the three-year period ending June 30, 2002, and with the average for school districts statewide for the years ending June 30, 2000, and 2001, the most recent year for which this information is available.

¹ 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.

**Exhibit 11-6
The District's General Fund Financial Position
is Higher than the Statewide Average and the Average of Its Peers**



Source: School Districts; Auditor General.

Activities of particular interest

The Sarasota County School District is the only district in Florida that has a voter-approved additional property tax for operating expenses. The approved four-year property tax of one mill will be used to improve and/or preserve sensible class sizes, support technical and dropout prevention programs, and to enhance extracurricular and athletic programs. The voted property tax will also provide for quality pay for teachers, up-to-date textbooks and technology, and be used to support honors classes and music programs.

Additionally, the district should be recognized for its achievements in financial systems and systems of internal control. As indicated in the September 2002 Auditor General report (No. 03-025), for the year ended June 30, 2001, the district was the only school district in Florida to not have audit findings from its external auditors.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary of Conclusions for Cost Control Systems Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice?	Page No.
Financial Management	1. The district periodically analyzes the structure and staffing of its financial services organization.	Yes	11-8
	2. Management has developed and distributed written procedures for critical accounting processes and promotes ethical financial management practices.	No	11-8
	3. The district has adequate financial information systems that provide useful, timely, and accurate information.	Yes	11-10
	4. District financial staff analyzes significant expenditure processes to ensure that they are appropriately controlled.	Yes	11-11
Internal Controls	5. The district has established adequate internal controls.	Yes	11-11
	6. Management proactively responds to identified internal control weaknesses and takes immediate steps to correct the weaknesses.	Yes	11-12
	7. The district produces an annual budget that is tied to the strategic plan and provides useful and understandable information to users.	No	11-12
	8. Management analyzes strategic plans for measurable objectives or measurable results.	No	11-13
External and Internal Auditing	9. The district ensures that it receives an annual external audit and uses the audit to improve its operations.	Yes	11-14
	10. The district has an effective internal audit function and uses the audits to improve its operations.	No	11-14
	11. The district ensures that audits of its internal funds and discretely presented component units (foundations and charter schools) are performed timely.	Yes	11-16
Cash Management	12. The district periodically reviews cash management activities, banking relationships, investment performance, and considers alternatives.	Yes	11-17
Capital Asset Management	13. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of capital assets.	Yes	11-18
	14. The district ensures that significant capital outlay purchases meet strategic plan objectives.	No	11-19
Debt Management	15. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective debt management.	Yes	11-19
	16. The district ensures that significant debt financings meet strategic plan objectives.	No	11-20
Risk Management	17. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective risk management.	No	11-21
	18. District staff periodically monitors the district's compliance with various laws and regulations related to risk management.	Yes	11-22

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using Best Practice?	Page No.
	19. The district prepares appropriate written cost and benefit analyses for insurance coverage.	No	11-22
Purchasing	20. The district has established written policies and procedures to take maximum advantage of competitive bidding, volume discounts, and special pricing agreements.	Yes	11-23
Inventory Management	21. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of inventories.	Yes	11-25
	22. The district periodically evaluates the warehousing function to determine its cost-effectiveness.	No	11-25

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 1: Using

The district periodically analyzes the structure and staffing of its financial services organization.

In recent years, a variety of external factors have had direct and indirect effects on school district finances. Some school districts have experienced significant changes in student population size—mostly getting larger, but some getting smaller. Similarly, changes in existing laws and new laws have changed financial documentation and reporting requirements which have impacted workload requirements. Because of this, districts should regularly evaluate the financial services function's organizational structure and staffing to ensure that needed financial services are being provided effectively and efficiently. Similarly, it is important that financial services staff receive timely and relevant training to ensure that the services they provide comply with current laws and reporting requirements.

The Sarasota County School District's financial services unit is well organized and managed, and staff receives the training it needs to be effective. The unit's organizational chart is current and position descriptions exist for all unit positions. These position descriptions show that educational and experience requirements for established positions are commensurate with the responsibilities for each position. In response to attrition and budgetary constraints, the executive director of the financial services unit and other management staff frequently evaluate the services provided by the financial services organization with a view towards minimizing the number of positions while also ensuring effective performance of unit responsibilities. The executive director and management have identified critical financial and accounting processes and have ensured that appropriate staff is cross-trained to perform these processes when the employees who are primarily responsible for performing those processes are absent. The financial services unit staff also receives training in the use of the accounting system when hired and periodic training updates. In addition, selected staff members attend training courses at state finance officers' association meetings and participate in other training relative to emerging issues in their responsibility areas.

Best Practice 2: Not Using

Management has not developed and distributed written procedures for critical accounting processes and should develop a process for reporting suspected improprieties.

It is critical that districts be able to continue day-to-day financial operations. Even small school districts must have numerous control processes and safeguards to ensure that district resources are adequately protected and used. These control processes should be documented to ensure consistency in their application. Written procedures frequently represent the best way to document these processes.

Every school district has board policies that generally include policies related to accounting and financial services. However, these policies are not considered procedures. Procedures show district employees how to carry out board policies. Well-written and organized procedures:

- Implement and ensure compliance with board policies as well as document the intent of those policies;
- Protect the institutional knowledge of an organization so that as experienced employees leave, new employees will benefit from the experience of prior employees;
- Provide the basis for training new employees; and
- Offer a tool for evaluating employee performance based on their adherence to procedures.

The development and maintenance of procedures manuals can be cumbersome and time-consuming tasks. For this reason, districts should, at a minimum, identify critical accounting and finance processes and ensure that written procedures are maintained for these processes. For example, if a key accounting employee that has responsibility for generating a payroll leaves the district, are there sufficient written procedures that someone else can follow to generate a payroll? Other critical processes can include bank reconciliations, processing of accounts payable checks, budget amendment processes, and so on.

Similarly, even small school districts benefit from having strong ethics standards (policies) for district accounting and financial staff and from processes that encourage reporting of suspected improprieties. When employees understand the importance of ethical conduct of their responsibilities and the ramifications of unethical conduct, the overall control environment is enhanced. Also, processes that encourage reporting of suspected improprieties without fear of reprisal further strengthen the control environment.

The Sarasota County School District’s financial and accounting managers express their commitment to maintaining a system of strong internal controls. This commitment, however, has not been fully documented and communicated. For example, while the district has various policies that adequately address employee professional conduct and ethics, it has not established policies and procedures for reporting suspected improprieties nor developed and maintained comprehensive procedures manuals for fiscal operations.

Documented procedures. Well-written and comprehensive procedures for critical processes are essential to maintaining a system of strong internal controls and processing financial data in an efficient and effective manner. Procedures manuals are useful reference sources for staff, an important tool in training new staff, as well as to provide assistance to employees during the transition of key finance-related personnel. In addition, if individuals take actions that compromise needed controls, it is much easier to take appropriate corrective action if procedures documenting district policies, procedures, and standards relating to internal controls are in place. Currently, the district’s procedures manuals only broadly summarize, by position, the frequency of reports and procedures to be performed or reviewed. The district also supplements the existing manuals by developing other miscellaneous procedural documents. However, no comprehensive documentation of financial procedures currently exists.

The district should develop a comprehensive procedures manual to guide financial operations. Action Plan 11-1 describes the steps necessary to develop such a manual. The district could implement the procedures manual with existing resources.

Action Plan 11-1

Develop comprehensive procedures manuals to guide financial operations.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Determine the existing procedures for critical functions.
	Step 2.	Ascertain the feasibility and appropriateness of the existing procedures, and develop and modify critical processes, as necessary.
	Step 3.	Assign the responsibility of developing formal procedures to the accounting manager or another senior member of the administrative staff that reports to the controller.
	Step 4.	Submit the revised procedures manuals for school board approval.
	Step 5.	Distribute the approved procedures manuals to all users.
Who is Responsible	Executive Director of Financial Services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Reporting suspected financial and ethical improprieties. Policies that emphasize the timely reporting of suspected financial and ethical improprieties by employees also imply a strong commitment to internal controls. Such policies enable the district to become aware of weaknesses in internal controls that might otherwise have been overlooked. The process of reporting improprieties should be designed to ensure:

- Anonymity of the person reporting the impropriety.
- A process for providing feedback on the results of the investigation.
- Immunity from reprisals.
- A process for allowing the suspected impropriety to be reported to someone other than the direct supervisor.

The district should develop policies and procedures for confidential reporting of suspected improprieties. These policies and procedures should describe whom employees should contact and provides for anonymity and immunity from reprisal. Action Plan 11-2, which delineates these steps, could be implemented within existing resources.

Action Plan 11-2

We recommend that the district develop policies and procedures for confidential reporting of suspected improprieties.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Prepare and submit proposed policies to school board.
	Step 2.	Subsequent to board approval and adoption of the policy, distribute policies to all employees and post the policies at all work sites to ensure proper implementation.
Who is Responsible	Superintendent	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 3: Using

The district has adequate financial information systems that provide useful, timely, and accurate information.

Florida school districts are subject to significant federal, state, and local (board) oversight of their financial activities. Also, given the limited financial resources provided to school districts, it is important that they have adequate financial information systems that provide useful, timely, and accurate information. Users of this information must be able to understand the information provided so that they can make informed spending and resource use decisions.

The Sarasota County School District has an integrated enterprise accounting system that uses various subsystem modules (such as accounts payable, fixed asset accounting, and payroll accounting) to interface seamlessly with the general ledger module. This accounting package facilitates collecting, processing, maintaining, and reporting the district's financial transactions. This system also permits users to make entries at the subsidiary level and these entries are then automatically updated in the general ledger. As a result, the degree of manual reconciliations required between subsidiary ledgers and the general ledger are minimized. The reporting features of the system are also quite good. Users can create user-defined reports at any time with the assurance that these reports (for example, accounts payable details) agree with general ledger balances. In addition, the system facilitates the timely completion of the Superintendent's Annual Financial Report (which is consistently completed before its due date) and other reports needed by users. Our interviews with board members and surveys of other users showed that these users are satisfied with monthly financial report products they receive and that they believe they

receive these reports in a timely fashion. Although the district uses a largely manual process for tracking multiple-year projects and project costs, the process appears to be effective based on the number of projects currently in progress.

Best Practice 4: Using

District financial staff analyzes significant expenditure processes to ensure that they are appropriately controlled.

Other than salaries, the expenses of many school districts are frequently concentrated among a few vendors who are paid for goods and/or services on a repetitive basis. Examples include employee benefits, utility payments, payments for frequently used supplies, progress payments on contracts, and periodic payments for the use of assets, such as lease payments. It is important that employees approving such bills for payment are knowledgeable about relevant contracts, payments, and other provisions to ensure that the bills are accurate and to ensure that only appropriate amounts are paid. In the case of utility payments, appropriate stewardship includes analyses of the payments to identify and determine the reasons for unusual fluctuations in consumption.

Sarasota County School District assigns responsibility for analyzing significant contract methods and financial negotiations to cost center heads, procurement staff, and legal counsel, not with finance staff. Cost center heads, procurement staff, and legal counsel, as applicable, are responsible for monitoring, identifying, and analyzing significant contracts and billings for reasonableness and compliance with contract terms. They review all bills and invoices related to these contracts and must approve them prior to payment. The cost center heads are also responsible for understanding contract terms and discussing any questionable issues related to payment and request for proposal terms with the Purchasing Department and the district's legal counsel. The Finance Department will process invoices for payments only after final approval from the cost center heads. The district has adequate procedures in place for monitoring, approving, and processing recurring expenditures, such as utility and travel expense payments.

INTERNAL CONTROLS

Best Practice 5: Using

The district has established adequate internal controls.

School districts must practice sound financial management in order to maximize the effectiveness of limited resources and to plan for future needs. Effective financial management ensures that internal controls are in place and operating as intended.

The Sarasota County School District receives an annual external audit and is also subject to monitoring reviews by federal and state grant monitors, which also assess the district's systems of internal controls. A review of reports issued for the past three fiscal years disclosed that, with the exception of minor internal control weaknesses, the auditors and monitors found that internal controls were generally adequate. Notably, for the year ended June 30, 2001, the district's audit report issued by independent certified public accountants did not include any findings related to weaknesses in internal controls or instances of noncompliance. Moreover, according to a report issued by the Auditor General in September 2002, of the 67 Florida school districts, only the Sarasota County School District had no findings for the audits conducted for that fiscal year.

In interviews with the financial and accounting managers, a commitment to maintaining a system of strong internal controls was consistently expressed. Also, our review of critical revenue and expenditure

classes, such as collection cycles, payroll processing, and disbursement processing indicated adequate internal control processes and that the processes appeared to be operating as intended.

Best Practice 6: Using

Management proactively responds to identified internal control weaknesses and takes immediate steps to correct the weaknesses.

As noted previously, school districts must practice sound financial management in order to maximize the effectiveness of limited resources and to plan for future needs. Effective financial management ensures that internal controls are in place and operating as intended. School districts demonstrate effective financial management when they proactively respond to internal control weaknesses identified in external audits and other monitoring reviews.

As part of this engagement, the district's efforts to resolve internal control weaknesses identified in the external financial audits and other monitoring reviews made over the past three years were reviewed. This analysis disclosed that district staff responded promptly to the findings related to internal control issues for financial and accounting areas and corrected them in a timely manner. The fact that the district had no audit findings during its most recent external audit is a testament to the effectiveness of these efforts.

Best Practice 7: Not Using

Although the district produces an annual budget that is useful and understandable to its users, the budget is not tied to the district's strategic plan.

The district can improve operations and use this best practice by tying its budget to its strategic plan to show that budgeted activities are those that meet strategic plan goals and objectives. Districts that make the best use of their resources and achieve high student performance rates generally practice some form of strategic planning that looks at all district operations, links support functions to the achievement of institutional goals, and has a direct link to the annual planning and budgeting process. Effective strategic planning includes:

- Identifying priorities through surveys of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders;
- School board input on goals and major priorities;
- Developing objectives for strategic plan goals that include measurable outcomes and achievement dates as appropriate;
- Assignment of responsibility for achieving objectives;
- Annual performance monitoring and adjusting of objectives as necessary to ensure achievement of strategic plan goals; and
- Budgets that require expenditures to be tied directly to the strategic plan priorities of the district.

The Sarasota County School District's annual budget document for the 2002-03 fiscal year is presented in an easy-to-read, understandable format that provides useful and understandable information to users. For each school, the budget document clearly identifies total school staffing units funded by state and federal sources, and school staff funded by tax referendum revenue. In addition, for each noninstructional area, detailed organizational charts and budget data are presented.

Overall, the budget development process is sound, involves the appropriate stakeholders, and conforms to state requirements. The results of the survey of district employees conducted as part of this engagement indicates that a majority of respondents agree that the budget development process results in district (63.6% agree), department and program (50.0% agree), and school (58.6% agree) needs being addressed.

However, the budget development is not directly linked to the district’s strategic plan (the Campaign for Excellence which provides direction primarily to instructional areas through 2005). As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the shortcomings of the strategic plan is that it does not articulate priorities. As a result, it is difficult to link plan components to specific financial objectives and goals for instructional areas and noninstructional departments and functions. Although the district has clearly directed budgetary resources to support instructional goals in a manner that is consistent with the strategic plan (the resources devoted to instruction have grown from 58 percent of the total expenditures in 1990 to 62 percent of total expenditures in the 2001-02 fiscal year), a specific link between budget development and the strategic plan does not exist.

The district should take steps to develop a budget that reflects measurable strategic plan priorities and evaluates financial results against those measurable goals, which steps are outlined in Action Plan 11-3. The district could implement this action within existing resources.

Action Plan 11-3

We recommend that the district take steps to develop a budget that reflects measurable strategic plan priorities and evaluates financial results against those measurable goals.

Action Needed	Step 1. Identify strategic plan priorities and measurement criteria for instructional and non-instructional areas, including capital asset management and debt financing.
	Step 2. Assess resources needed to comply with the strategic plan.
	Step 3. Incorporate the strategic plan priorities in the budget development process.
	Step 4. Monitor and evaluate progress in achieving strategic plan objectives using measurement criteria.
Who is Responsible	Budget Director
Time Frame	January 1, 2004

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 8: Not Using

Management does not analyze strategic plans for measurable objectives or measurable results.

As mentioned previously, districts that make the best use of their resources and achieve high student performance rates generally practice some form of strategic planning that looks at all district operations, links support functions to the achievement of institutional goals, and has a direct link to the annual planning and budgeting process.

The district can improve operations and use this best practice by developing measures to determine progress towards meeting strategic plan goals and objectives. As indicated in the discussion of Best Practice 7, the Sarasota County School District’s strategic plan (i.e., the Campaign for Excellence), provides direction to instructional areas. However, the strategic plan has not articulated specific priorities and goals and objectives that can be clearly related to specific financial goals and objectives. While the district generally used the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test and other universal objectives to measure educational achievement, the strategic plan has not been tied to financial objectives. In addition, the strategic plan does not address the need to maintain adequate levels of unreserved fund balances.

We recommend that the district take steps to strengthen the link between strategic plan objectives, goals and priorities, and the district’s budget. Action Plan 11-3 (page 11-13) details the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL AUDITING

Best Practice 9: Using

The district ensures that it receives an annual external audit and uses the audit to improve its operations.

Sections 11.45(2)(d), and 218.39, *Florida Statutes*, require school districts to annually obtain a financial audit. Section 11.45(1)(c), *Florida Statutes*, defines a financial audit as an examination conducted in order to express an opinion on the fairness of the financial statements 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.

A review of Sarasota County School District's annual financial audits for each of the last three years indicates that the audits were performed in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and government auditing standards. A review of these audit reports also makes clear that the district makes reasonable efforts to resolve findings related to financial and accounting issues and improve operations. Notably, for the year ended June 30, 2001, the independent certified public accountant's report stated that there were no audit findings related to weaknesses in internal control or instances of noncompliance with applicable laws or rules.

Best Practice 10: Not Using

The district does not have an internal audit function.

The district can use this best practice by establishing an internal audit function. Section 1001.42(10)(l), *Florida Statutes*, permits school boards to employ internal auditors to perform ongoing verification of the financial records of the school district. This law requires the internal auditor to report directly to the board or to the board's designee. Internal auditing is a managerial control that can be used to measure and evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness, and cost/benefit of operations, programs, other controls, and systems. The objective of internal auditing is to help management effectively discharge its responsibilities by providing analyses and recommendations on the activities reviewed. The internal audit function typically performs the annual risk assessments in private sector businesses.

Sarasota County School District currently does not have an internal audit function; however, the chief financial and business officer (and other managers) recognize the need for such a function, have identified 18 potential areas that an internal audit function could positively impact, and presented a recommendation to establish an internal audit function staffed with one audit position at the December 2002 board meeting. The district's proposal has established monitoring full-time equivalent student reporting as a main priority for the internal audit function. The operations of school internal accounts, another high risk area identified by the district, are audited by an external independent certified public accounting firm and these services are expected to continue to be outsourced until such time as the district determines that there are cost savings or efficiencies that justify adding this responsibility to its proposed internal audit function.

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 evaluating and improving the effectiveness of risk management, control, and governance processes." An effective internal audit function will assist an organization by evaluating its exposure to risk, ensuring the reliability and integrity of financial and operational information, safeguarding assets, and ensuring

compliance with laws, regulations, and contracts. The Institute of Internal Auditors also requires that the internal audit activity be formally defined in a charter and approved by the board.

Several key elements must be in place to have an effective internal audit function. Key elements include:

- Internal audit staff must have appropriate skills and experience
- Adequate resources must be devoted to the function
- Appropriate priorities must be established
- Audit staff must be granted appropriate authority
- Audit staff must be independent and objective
- Work must be appropriately planned and managed

Regardless of whether or not the district has an internal audit function, it should perform a formal risk assessment of its operations and activities on an annual basis to determine and prioritize risks that should be addressed and corrected. Risk assessments are typically conducted in all large organizations as a means to protect against undesirable acts and to identify ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of operations. The internal auditor can address risks identified in the risk assessments.

Recommendations made by the internal audit function to resolve these identified risks often result in cost savings and avoidances. The internal auditor can perform the formal annual risk assessment, which can be used to direct the internal audit activities.

Given existing budget constraints, the district should examine staff workload and priorities, and if at all possible, conduct this risk assessment in-house. However, if the district determines that it cannot effectively conduct its own risk assessment it may choose to contract with a certified public accountant to conduct the first year risk assessment and provide a methodology so that district staff can conduct risk assessments in subsequent years. We estimate that the cost of contracting for the risk assessment would be a one-time cost of approximately \$20,000. This amount is based on an estimate of 225 hours at an average rate of \$90 per hour (\$20,250 rounded to \$20,000). As management addresses identified risks, the district will likely experience cost savings and avoidances that will offset the cost of the risk assessments. However, the cost impact of these potential savings and avoidances cannot be determined at this time.

Upon receiving the risk assessment and determining how the district is addressing or intends to address identified risks, the district should analyze the costs of addressing these risks with the costs of having its own internal audit function. If cost-beneficial to do so, the district should consider establishing an internal audit function.

The district estimates that an experienced auditor, preferably a certified public accountant, could be hired for a salary of \$82,000 plus fringe benefits of approximately 30 percent, for a total of \$106,931 per year. Action Plan 11-4 shows the steps necessary to implement a recommendation for the district to establish an internal audit function. Over the next five years, this recommendation will cost the district an estimated \$106,931 per year for a five-year cost of \$534,655. It is likely, however, that addressing the risks identified in the formal risk assessment that will be performed by the internal auditor will result in cost savings and avoidances that will more than off-set the associated costs. However, the cost impact of the potential savings and cost avoidances cannot be determined at this time.

Action Plan 11-4

We recommend that the district conduct annual risk assessments.

Action Needed	Step 1. Develop and distribute a request for proposal for risk assessment services.
	Step 2. Review proposals and select a firm that will perform the risk assessment for the district.
	Step 3. Review the results of the risk assessment and prioritize high-risk activities.
	Step 4. Assign responsibility for addressing and resolving prioritized risks.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Finance and Business Affairs
Time Frame	August 2003—the start of the 2003-04 school year

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 11: Using

The district ensures that audits of its internal funds and discretely presented component units (foundations and charter schools) are performed timely.

The financial transactions of individual school activities and organizations are accounted for in the school internal accounts (funds). Florida law requires that the school districts provide for the annual audits of the school internal funds. Also, school districts may have related organizations such as foundations and charter schools. Due to the nature of these organizations, their financial activity generally should be included with that of the school district. Florida law also requires these organizations to provide for their annual financial audits.

School districts frequently provide little, if any, oversight of the internal accounts and of these related organizations other than to monitor their activity. Monitoring responsibilities frequently are achieved by review of the annual audit reports of the internal accounts and these related organizations. Accordingly, it is important that the school districts receive timely audits of the internal accounts and these related organizations and perform appropriate review of the reports.

Internal funds. Legal provisions require that the Sarasota County School District provide for the audit of the district’s school internal accounts. The district currently engages a certified public accounting firm to perform the school internal accounts audits. These audits are completed on a timely basis and the results are presented to the board. A review of the results of the audits of school internal accounts for the 2001-02 and 2000-01 fiscal years performed by an independent certified public accountant disclosed that 86 percent and 92 percent, respectively, of the total schools had two or less audit findings. The percentage of schools with no audit findings was 39 percent and 56 percent for the 2001-02 and 2000-01 fiscal years, respectively.

Charter schools. The Sarasota County School District has the following charter schools:

- Suncoast School for Innovative Studies, Inc.
- Island Village Montessori Charter School, Inc.
- Richard Milburn Academy of Florida, Inc.
- Sarasota School of Arts & Sciences
- Roy McBean Charter School (closed 6/30/2002)
- Wings Academy (opened 7/1/2002)
- Sarasota Military Academy (opened 7/1/2002)

From an accounting perspective, charter schools are considered discretely presented component units whose financial statements are included in the district's Combined Annual Financial Report (CAFR). Since legal requirements for these discretely presented component units provide that these organizations be audited by auditors other than those employed by the district, the district requires that these organizations provide audited financial statements within a certain timeframe (by November) after the June 30 fiscal year to ensure that the financial information is received and can be included in the district's financial statements. The guidelines have been adhered to.

CASH MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 12: Using

The district periodically reviews cash management activities, banking relationships, investment performance, and considers alternatives, but the review process would be enhanced if the district solicited periodic requests for proposals for banking services.

Although the district uses this best practice, it should enhance its cash management processes by soliciting periodic requests for proposals for banking services. Cash and investment management involves the systematic coordination of cash-flow forecasting, cash-flow management, investment of surplus cash, and sound banking and investment relationships. Even small school districts have annual cash-flows of millions of dollars and effective cash management and investing of these resources can generate beneficial results and resources, which can be used to meet district needs. Similarly, beneficial banking services arrangements should promote the investment of idle cash and limit any banking service fees.

The Sarasota County School District has adequate policies and procedures regarding the cash management function, which include using qualified public depositories and providing for timely deposit of collections, ensuring adequate segregation of duties relating to bank reconciliations and adequately forecasting cash needs. To further strengthen the cash management and investment function, the district recently created a position of treasurer and promoted a staff member to this position who has appropriate experience relating to cash management and investment activities in the district to enhance the cash management and investment functions.

Cash management. The district maintains ten bank accounts at two local banks, which include a main operating account and accounts used for cafeteria receipts and self insurance. There are also 89 bank accounts maintained by the school bookkeepers at four local banks. The district receives the majority of its cash in the form of wire transfers from the state or the local tax collector. These funds are sent directly to the district's investment account with the State Board of Administration. Adequate segregation of duties appears to exist for the cash receipts and disbursement functions. In addition, the bank reconciliation process is performed by an accountant with no cash handling responsibilities.

Although the district periodically reviews cash management activities, the review process would be enhanced if the district solicited periodic requests for proposals (RFPs) for banking services. The district does not use banking contracts and banking services have never been awarded through a formal competitive process. Instead, services and fees are negotiated with the three banks that serve the district and bank service fees are monitored as part of the bank reconciliation process. Although there has been successful negotiation for the reduction and/or elimination of certain bank fees, the district should consider seeking RFPs for banking services to determine whether further cost reductions can be achieved.

We recommend that the district seek RFPs for banking services to ensure that the district receives competitive banking services. Other factors to consider in the evaluation of RFPs should include maximizing banking services and convenience of locations.

Investment activities. The district's investment policy provides guidance on investing of excess funds. Investment objectives include (1) safety of principal, (2) maintenance of liquidity, and (3) return on investment. Authorized investments include those with the State Board of Administration's Florida Local Government Surplus Funds Trust, United States Government Securities, United States Government Agencies and Instrumentalities, and interest bearing time deposits or saving accounts.

District accounting staff prepares a daily cash-flow analysis. Based on this analysis, excess funds (funds in excess of \$10,000) are generally wired to the State Board of Administration (SBA) for investment. The district places most of its investments with the State Board of Administration's Local Government Surplus Funds Trust Fund, a Securities and Exchange Commission Rule 2a7-like external investment pool. 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 withdrawals to be requested based on periodic cash needs with no type of withdrawal penalties. The district also invests a small portion of its available funds in United States Government Agency Securities, which is an authorized investment pursuant to s. 218.415, *Florida Statutes*. The district indicated that it might begin to utilize other investment alternatives to compensate for the recent reductions in interest rates paid by the State Board of Administration's Local Government Surplus Funds, and is in the process of developing an investment policy as required by Florida law.

CAPITAL ASSET MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 13: Using

The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of capital assets.

Capital assets include all properties, vehicles, equipment, and building contents. School districts should keep and maintain accurate accounting records because:

- Accurate capital asset records provide the basis for adequate insurance coverage;
- Annual physical inventories of capital assets allow the district to survey the physical condition of its assets and assess the need for repair, maintenance, or replacement;
- Reliable information about currently owned capital assets provides assistance when determining future needs and provides a basis for budgeting capital asset needs; and
- Accurate capital asset records provide users with documentation of how taxes have been used to carry out the operations of the district.

The Sarasota County School District currently does an effective job of ensuring that the responsibility for initiating, evaluating, and approving capital asset transactions are segregated from the responsibilities for project accounting, property records, general ledger, and custodial functions. The Financial Services Department is charged with accounting for tangible personnel property and the Fixed Asset Accounting Group ensures the proper assignment of property record numbers and the issuance of property record tags, as appropriate. School principals and department administrators, or their designees, serve as custodians for capital items and are responsible for safeguarding the assets. In the 2001-02 fiscal year, the district effectively implemented Government Accounting Standards Board Statement No. 34 that relates to the reporting of fixed assets, including depreciation, in governmental financial statements. The district also

does a creditable job of counting fixed asset inventories. In the 2001-02 fiscal year, inspection results indicated that only .12 percent of total property costs were unaccounted for. This good performance is attributable, at least in part, to the fact that the district's Fixed Asset Accounting Group has established written policies and implemented detailed procedures to adequately account for capital assets and ensure that capital assets are effectively managed. These policies and procedures adhere to state law and the *Rules of the Auditor General*, which stipulate a district's responsibility as it relates to fixed assets.

Best Practice 14: Not Using

The need for significant capital outlay purchases is not related to strategic plan objectives.

As mentioned previously, districts that make the best use of their resources and consistently have high student performance generally practice some form of strategic planning that addresses district operations, including the capital acquisition program, and links operational functions to the achievement of institutional goals.

The Sarasota County School District's approach to managing the acquisition of capital assets is generally effective. To account for these assets, the district maintains separate accounts for all capital outlay and maintenance projects. In-progress costs are properly recorded and completed and project costs are transferred to fixed asset accounts in a timely manner. The district also has procedures in place to ensure compliance with funding source restrictions on allowable and appropriate expenditures. The current accounting system also maintains and tracks project cost detail on a fiscal year basis. Although the district uses a manual process for tracking multiple-year projects and project costs, the process appears to be working effectively. The district also clearly assigns responsibility for adequately monitoring progress payments, unsatisfactory contractor performance, and construction delays.

The capital budgeting process also has a number of strengths. As part of this process, the district prepares an educational facilities survey, which identifies and makes recommendations for new schools, major renovations, and classroom replacement for a five-year period. The survey and the capital projects funds budget highlight the funding and financing composition and the amounts funded for each projected capital outlay project. While this process is generally effective, as indicated in the discussion of Best Practice 7, it is not apparent that the capital outlay budget is developed and prepared based on and in conjunction with the district's strategic plan. To address this deficiency, we recommend that the district take steps to develop a budget, including capital outlays, which reflect measurable strategic plan priority areas. Capital outlay purchases should also be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that these purchases support achieving strategic plan goals. Action Plan 11-3 (page 11-13) details the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

DEBT MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 15: Using

The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective debt management.

In addition to property taxes for construction and state funding, most school districts issue debt instruments to finance construction projects as authorized by Ch. 237, *Florida Statutes*. Also, most debt instruments are highly complex financial transactions that require a high level of expertise to ensure compliance with federal (primarily arbitrage), state, and district requirements as well as ensure that the transactions are appropriately accounted for and monitored. Many school districts, depending on the extent of their debt program, must have effective procedures to ensure that debt service requirements are appropriately followed.

The Sarasota County School District effectively manages its debt. As of June 30, 2002, the district has general bonded debt of \$17,995,000 and lease revenue bonds totaling \$66,595,000. The district's total outstanding long-term debt is \$84,590,000 which compares favorably to its peer districts. Currently, the district uses only 24 percent of the 2 mill debt capacity. Effective debt management also includes determining when refunding or refinancing debt is practical and cost effective. The district recently refunded its \$3,175,000 race track bonds, which will save the district approximately \$460,000 in interest expense over the life of the bonds. In addition, the district is also in the process of evaluating other financing alternatives. Management anticipates that certificates of participation will be considered for financing new school construction in the future—a financing instrument the district has not previously used. Certificates of participation are considered by the district to be an excellent financing option because they are authorized for school districts by Florida Statutes, may be authorized by the board without a voter referendum, may be less costly in overall fees than voter-approved general obligation bonds, and can be paid back using existing millage. District financial staff is also knowledgeable of debt service requirements, which are reflected in the district's debt service fund budget and are reported in the district's audited financial statements. Prudent steps are taken to ensure timely payment and compliance with bond covenants. As such, detailed procedures have not been considered necessary. The district consults with a 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 and the economic climate.

Although it has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective debt management, the district could enhance its debt management processes by including written procedures of critical debt management processes in its procedures manuals recommended in Best Practice No. 2. In recent years, many school districts have replaced bonded debt with issuances of certificates of participation. Regardless of the type of long-term debt issued, financial management systems must be in place and procedures established to ensure efficient and effective accumulation of data and timely reporting; also, district staff must be knowledgeable of financial reporting requirements. Understandably, documenting such policies and procedures was deemed unnecessary because the district rarely entered into long-term financing arrangements. Management has indicated, however, that in the future new and additional financing alternatives will be needed. To ensure that the district is adequately prepared to address these needs, documenting policies and procedures relating to debt management would now be prudent. Action Plan 11-1 (page 11-9) presents the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

We recommend that the district consider including written documentation for debt management as is addressed in our previous recommendation regarding the need to develop a more comprehensive policies and procedures manual for the financial and accounting functions.

Best Practice 16: Not Using

The district does not ensure that significant debt financings meet strategic plan objectives.

As mentioned previously, districts that make the best use of their resources and achieve high student performance rates generally practice some form of strategic planning that covers all district operations, including the capital acquisition program, and links them to the achievement of institutional goals.

The Sarasota County School District evaluates financing alternatives when considering major capital projects. As capital project needs are prioritized and are given a value, the district evaluates revenue streams and fund balance resources as well as optional revenue streams such as the capital outlay millage levy and the half-cent sales tax and financing options. As previously noted, when evaluating these financing options, the district engages a financial advisor to assist in identifying the best financing alternative given the district's specific needs and the economic climate. The best financing alternative is then presented to the board for approval.

The district could improve its capital financing and use this best practice by considering strategic priorities when evaluating financing alternatives. As noted, however, the district's current strategic plan does not specify priorities in a way that would allow the district to tailor financing alternatives to overall strategic objectives. As the district works to strengthen the relationship between the strategic plan and financial planning (as recommended in Action Plan 11-3, page 11-13), specific attention should be focused on determining ways to ensure that the district's long-term financing strategies support its strategic objectives.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 17: Not Using

The district has not established written policies and procedures relating to effective risk management.

Managing risks has become a critical component of school district operations. Rising costs of property, liability, and other insurance coverage has forced school districts to carefully evaluate the risks they are insuring and to identify ways to contain costs. Effective risk management involves:

- Evaluating insurance alternatives such as self-insurance and other current industry trends;
- Evaluating current insurance programs for deductible amounts, co-insurance levels, and types of coverage provided;
- Evaluating risks and implementing programs to minimize exposure to potential losses; and
- Monitoring district compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

The Sarasota County School District has a policy (School Board Policy 7.8) to guide its risk management activities. This policy states that the district is required to submit a comprehensive risk management program to the board for approval. The policy also allows for competitive quotations and direct negotiations whenever possible for all insurance obtained for commercial coverage. In addition, the policy lists the required elements of the insurance program. The district's Risk Management Department, which is led by an experienced risk manager, is charged with implementing this policy and ensuring that the district has acquired all insurance coverage required by law. In addition, the risk manager and the insurance consultants review the district's risk management needs and provide recommendations on the applicability of coverage, availability of coverage, the market regarding the cost of coverage, and on reasonable limits of liability for insurance coverage.

While the district documents some aspects of the risk management program (for example, documenting types of risks, determining insurance program needs that address those risks, and documenting procedures for processing claims), the documentation of how the district implements the risk management policy is incomplete. This documentation should include detailed procedures that relate to the process for reviewing proposals. At a minimum, this documentation should specify who will review proposals, the requirement that the reviewers be free of personal or financial relationship with providers, requirements for clear and complete financial terms for all contracts, and requirements that insurance contracts and contracts with third-party administrators are entered into on the basis of requests for proposals on a periodic basis.

The district could start using this best practice by developing written, task-oriented procedures for its critical risk management processes. Risk management, as it applies to this section, relates to insurance coverage required by law other than employee group benefits, such as group health insurance, which is discussed in Chapter 6-Personnel Systems and Benefits. The district should develop a formal policies and

procedures manual for risk management. The steps to implement this recommendation are delineated in Action Plan 11-5, which could be implemented with existing resources.

Action Plan 11-5

We recommend that the district develop a formal policies and procedures manual for risk management.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify all risk management related policies, procedures, and processes.
	Step 2.	Review existing documentation and update as needed.
	Step 3.	Develop written documentation for the major policies for which no documentation currently exists.
	Step 4.	Combine all written documentation into a policies and procedures manual for the risk management function.

Who Is Responsible	Risk Manager
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Time Frame	January 1, 2004
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Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

Best Practice 18: Using

District staff periodically monitors the district's compliance with various laws and regulations related to risk management.

The school districts are 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 and allows them to purchase insurance, to be self-insured, to enter into risk management programs, or to have any combination of the above. The district's Risk Management Department is charged with the responsibility of implementing the district's risk management policy and ensuring that the district has acquired all insurance coverage required by law.

The Sarasota County School District summarizes the various risks of loss in its annual insurance program summary, which discusses the levels of self insurance and commercial coverage employed to indemnify the district. The district is self-insured for general liability claims and automobile liability claims up to \$100,000. For individual claims in excess of that amount, the district relies upon the doctrine of sovereign immunity to limit its automobile and general liability exposures. The district is also self-insured for workers' compensation and property insurance up to certain specified limits and has entered into agreements with insurance companies to provide coverage for individual claims in excess of \$750,000 for workers' compensation and \$250,000 for property. The district uses a third-party administrator for workers' compensation claims and self-administers certain general and automotive liability claims. However, a third-party administrator is used for complex liability claims.

Best Practice 19: Not Using

While the district prepares appropriate written cost and benefit analyses for insurance coverage, it does not compare insurance costs with peer districts.

As mentioned previously, managing risks has become a critical component of school district operations. Rising costs of property, liability, and other insurance coverage has forced school districts to carefully evaluate the risks they are insuring and to identify ways to contain costs. Effective school districts regularly evaluate the costs of their risk management programs and compare their costs with their peers and continually evaluate new risk management products to determine the cost benefit.

The Sarasota County School District could start using this practice by developing a process to compare its insurance costs with other districts. The district prepares written cost and benefit analysis when evaluating insurance coverage. In performing this analysis and determining whether a risk is worth assuming, district staff considers the availability and cost of the insurance, whether there are cost savings related to self-insuring and whether risks are too great or too complex to self-insure in a cost effective manner. The district does not currently compare insurance costs with peer districts in performing this analysis. The district has indicated, however, that its insurance consultant has recently been engaged to prepare an analysis of current trends in the industry, which will include comparisons of costs and coverages with local governments and peer districts.

Action Plan 11-6 describes the steps necessary for the district to prepare insurance cost comparisons with peer districts which can be implemented with existing resources.

Action Plan 11-6

We recommend that the district prepare insurance cost comparisons with peer districts.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Receive cost comparisons from insurance consultant.
	Step 2.	Review results and prepare appropriate recommendations.
	Step 3.	Present recommendations to the board.
Who Is Responsible	Risk Manager, Executive Director of Financial Services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

PURCHASING

Best Practice 20: Using

The district has established written policies and procedures to take maximum advantage of competitive bidding, volume discounts, and special pricing arrangements, but it should evaluate whether using a purchasing card program for small purchases would provide more effective and efficient purchasing practices.

An effective purchasing system allows a school district to provide quality materials, supplies, and equipment in the right quantity in a timely, cost-effective manner. A good purchasing system has established purchasing policies implemented through effective and well-developed procedures. Careful planning and cost-effective practices such as bulk-purchasing and price/bid solicitation provide the framework for the efficient procurement of goods and services. School districts must also ensure that goods and services are obtained to the specifications of the users; at the lowest possible costs; and in accordance with applicable state laws and regulations. Although the district is meeting this best practice, it should evaluate whether using a purchasing card program for small purchases would provide more effective and efficient purchasing practices.

The Sarasota County School District has established a purchasing and warehousing services function that consists of separate departments for purchasing, warehousing, and property records. 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. The district also reduced the need for additional staffing with the development and implementation of DemandStar, an Internet bid notification system that allows all vendors online access to bid information.

Cost Control Systems

The objective of this partnership is to further enhance the ability to obtain goods and/or services with the best quality for the lowest cost.

In addition, the district has procedures to consolidate and bid recurring purchases when feasible. To determine feasibility, the Purchasing Department conducts departmental surveys to determine their upcoming equipment and supply needs. When practical, the district also uses various state purchasing contracts, piggybacks on the bids of other school districts, and conducts searches of various Web sites.

The district currently uses blanket purchase orders to facilitate small dollar purchases. The blanket purchase orders, which are issued up to \$25,000, are generated on a cost center basis and can be coded with up to four to five different categories of functional expenditures, which are usually specific to a particular cost center. Blanket purchase order transactions are initiated at the point-of-sale and do not require processing through either the on-line purchasing system or by a direct payment request form. In the 2001-02 fiscal year, the district issued 10,390 purchase orders for \$25,000 or less totaling \$15,895,288. While using blanket purchase orders has helped the district reduce the costs of processing small dollar purchases, many districts have found the use of purchasing cards more efficient because such programs reduce the number of invoices and checks that must be processed by accounts payable (which, in turn, reduces district costs).

As mentioned previously, districts that make the best use of their resources and consistently have high student performance generally practice some form of strategic planning that addresses district operations, including the capital acquisition program, and links operational functions to the achievement of institutional goals.

The district, however, has not performed studies to ascertain whether the current blanket purchase order method of processing small dollar purchases is more economically feasible than a purchasing card system. These studies would help the district to ascertain if the blanket purchase order method is more economically feasible than a purchasing card system. The district should focus considerable attention on determining what controls need to be established over the use of purchase cards. Such controls could include card features that prohibit certain classes of purchases or using the card for certain classes of vendors. Also, the purchase card features should identify the department of each employee that is issued a card. With this information, the district could upload purchase card activity on a daily basis directly into its accounting system without manually entering the information. The district should also consider establishing a two-level approval process that requires supervisory staff to review employee charges and approve them. Decentralized card users could then access the system to approve the purchases and identify remaining cost information, such as object coding. The second level of approval would require that supervisory staff review actual invoices and bills prior to approving the charges. Detailed support for the charges could remain at the department or cost center that made the charge. Verification audits of purchasing card charges should also be provided for in the district's assessment of the purchasing card option. District procedures should also provide that any employee that misuses the card would be subject to paying the disallowed charges and termination. This analysis should also identify what purchases by their nature are better suited to issuing purchase orders and which are better suited to purchasing cards. Likewise, the assessment should consider what employees should be issued a purchase card. In addition, this analysis should consider not only the efficiencies achieved from purchasing card programs in terms of reducing the number of invoices and checks processed by accounts payable, but also the costs that would be incurred to provide needed controls over the program.

We recommend that the district perform studies to ascertain if the blanket purchase order method is more economically feasible than a purchasing card system. In performing this analysis, the district should focus considerable attention on determining what controls need to be established over the use of purchase cards.

INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 21: Using

The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of inventories.

Effective policies and procedures for inventory management should include cost-effective methods for conducting annual physical inventories, the results of which should be compared to control counts to ensure that all inventories have been properly accounted for. Additionally, procedures would exist to provide effective accountability for inventory issues and receipts as well as establish reorder points so that items are always available when needed and ensure that stale-dated inventory items are kept to a minimum.

The Sarasota County School District's approach to inventory management is sound. To minimize the risk of loss and theft, it is important that the duties and responsibilities relating to inventory management be appropriately segregated. In the Sarasota County School District, care has been taken to appropriately segregate these responsibilities. The district has also established and implemented controls for requisitioning items from inventory and ensuring that the responsibilities for inventory requisitioning, approving, accounting, and custody are properly segregated. The district's central warehouse has effective security controls and is designed to provide physical and environmental safeguards for inventory contents. The district also does a creditable job of manually performing the annual physical inventory count at the warehouse. As part of this process, inventory results are reconciled with the district's perpetual inventory accounting system after all discrepancies have been acceptably resolved. The district has also done a good job of documenting its procedures relating to inventory management. The procedures are included as part of the electronic procedures manual maintained by Materials Management Services.

Best Practice 22: Not Using

The district does not periodically evaluate the warehousing function to determine its cost effectiveness.

School districts that have centralized warehousing functions can meet this best practice by evaluating the total cost of its warehousing operation and comparing this cost with alternative inventory procurement services. Recently, many organizations have been reassessing the need to maintain central warehousing facilities by assessing the potential economies of outsourcing warehouse operations to inventory supply companies. Some organizational studies have found that some inventory suppliers can provide services comparable to the central warehouse function at costs equal to or lower than the central warehouse function. The end result for these school districts has been to fully eliminate central warehouses and replace them with inventory supply delivery services for applicable and appropriate items.

In general, the Sarasota County School District has established procedures to suitably monitor and evaluate warehouse services and user satisfaction. Recently, the purchasing and warehouse service functions were ranked 4.74 and 4.97, respectively, out of a possible ranking of 5 in a district-generated user satisfaction survey. The district also frequently evaluates the competitiveness of its warehouse prices with state contracts and retail vendors. However, it has not evaluated the cost-effectiveness of the warehousing function nor has it identified the overall costs of its warehouse operations (salaries and salary-related costs, direct costs and indirect costs) and evaluated the economic feasibility of maintaining the warehouse function and inventories with other warehousing alternatives. Additionally, the district has not compared its operations with peer districts.

Cost Control Systems

However, the district could begin using this practice by evaluating the total cost of its warehousing operation and comparing this cost with alternative inventory procurement services. It is not easy to assess which inventory items should be stored in warehouses and for which inventory items the district should consider alternatives, such as next-day direct delivery. Factors such as, but not limited to, purchase costs, storage and delivery charges, and level of service must be considered. The district currently lacks the information needed to perform such a comprehensive analysis. At present, the district does not compare its inventory levels and items stored with other districts. While great care must be taken in assessing the implications of such comparisons, collecting information on the experience of other districts can also be used to identify potential areas for improvement.

We recommend that the district periodically evaluate the warehousing function to determine its cost-effectiveness. This evaluation can include an assessment of the cost-effectiveness of current operations as well as assessments of the feasibility of employing alternative warehouse services. By doing so, the district can expect to identify cost savings and efficiencies, if any, which can lead to a reduction in the inventory function staffing, streamlined accounting and operational processes, less money tied up in inventory, and more money available to meet other district needs. The district should evaluate the feasibility of alternative warehouse services. Action Plan 11-7 describes the steps necessary to implement this recommendation, which could be implemented with existing resources.

Action Plan 11-7

We recommend that the district evaluate the feasibility of alternative warehouse services.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Determine the costs associated with maintaining inventories in-house by review and analysis of activity cost reports and all other variables.
	Step 2.	Ascertain the types of inventory-related services available in the industry and the costs associated with the services.
	Step 3.	Determine the costs and benefits associated with utilizing alternative inventory management resources.
	Step 4.	Document the results of the study and present the analysis and the recommendations to the superintendent.
	Step 5.	If more beneficial, the associate superintendent chief financial and business officer should pursue contracting the storage and distribution of supplies to private companies.
Who is Responsible	Associate Superintendent Chief Financial and Business Officer	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.



Action Plans

Management Structures

Action Plan 2-1

We recommend that the district strengthen its efforts to establish and disseminate procedures and that administrative procedures be summarized in a single document.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify the administrative procedures that have been established by individual district departments.
	Step 2.	Review these procedures and determine where procedures are not current or lack sufficient specificity.
	Step 3.	Revise administrative procedures using the existing approaches; however, modify these approaches to ensure a review by the Board Attorney prior to the procedures being reviewed by the superintendent, the superintendent's cabinet and the school board.
	Step 4.	Develop and provide training on any new administrative procedure or for any procedure that has been significantly modified.
	Step 5.	Post the updated administrative procedures on the district's website.
	Step 6.	Post the procedures for individual departments on the website as well.

Who Is Responsible Board Attorney, Associate Superintendents

Time Frame December 31, 2004

Action Plan 2-2

We recommend that the district establish formal procedures governing the interactions of the superintendent, district administrators and staff with the board attorney.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Categorize the types of legal assistance provided by the board attorney.
	Step 2.	For each type of legal assistance, determine who (e.g., board members, the superintendent, department heads, other district staff) typically require the assistance.
	Step 3.	Make an overall assessment (high, medium, low) of the typical costs associated with providing legal assistance of each type.
	Step 4.	For each category of legal assistance consider the extent to which conflict of interest issues might arise.
	Step 5.	Use the information developed in the previous steps to establish formal procedures governing the interactions of the superintendent, district administrators, and staff with the board attorney.

Who Is Responsible Board Attorney, Associate Superintendents

Time Frame June 30, 2004

Action Plan 2-3

We recommend that the district establish a formal process for evaluating the board attorney on an annual basis and assessing legal fees every three to five years.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop and implement an annual evaluation process for the board attorney.
	Step 2.	Establish a schedule—every three to five years depending on the needs of the district—to conduct a review of legal fees.
	Step 3.	The district should annually monitor its total legal costs and, if legal costs show an unusual increase, the district should investigate the cause of this increase.
Who Is Responsible	Board Chair, Superintendent	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 2-4

We recommend that the district evaluate its current organizational structure.		
Action Needed	Step 7.	Review the organizational suggestions presented in this chapter and assess their merits.
	Step 8.	Evaluate the organizational placement of the budget, student accountability and the information services functions.
	Step 9.	If the organizational placement of the budget function is not changed, develop procedures to ensure the independence of the budget compliance function.
	Step 10.	Clarify roles and responsibilities and reporting relationships in the approved structure.
	Step 11.	Seek board approval for the revised organizational structure.
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Action Plan 2-5

We recommend that the district include the number of contract employees assigned to a given unit on staffing rosters and staffing summaries.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Require each department manager to develop a list of the contract employees that are currently employed on a full-time or part-time basis in their unit. ¹
	Step 2.	For each function or activity performed by these contract employees determine the full-time equivalent (FTE) capacity that is currently employed. ²
	Step 3.	Update staffing rosters to indicate the number of FTE contract employees currently employed.
	Step 4.	Establish a procedure for updating staffing rosters when new contract employees are hired (or the contracts of existing employees are not renewed).
	Step 5.	Require that information on contract employees be included in staffing summaries provided to the board.
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent – Business Operations	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

¹ For the purposes of this analysis contract employees should include both individual contractors and the employees of firms with which the district contracts to provide services; however, contract employees who are used on an intermittent basis or for modest amounts of time (less than .25 FTE) can be excluded from this analysis.

² Some contract employees may be year-round employees who work on a part-time basis. Other contract employees may be seasonal workers who work full time during a specified period of the year but are not employed at other times of the year.

Action Plan 2-6

We recommend that the district develop a schedule and process for reviewing organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practices on a regular basis.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Review the scope of the reviews currently conducted of instructional functions to ensure they assess organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practices.
	Step 2.	Articulate the objectives of the recommended reviews of organizational structure, administrative staffing, and business practices for non-instructional functions.
	Step 3.	Establish a framework for conducting reviews of organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practices to ensure a consistent approach is taken when conducting reviews of all district departments.
	Step 4.	Develop strategies and approaches to communicate the results of organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practice reviews to the board, district staff, and the community.
	Step 5.	Select one department and test the framework to conduct a review of organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practices.
	Step 6.	Communicate the results of this initial review.
	Step 7.	Modify the framework and communications approaches based on the results of this review.
	Step 8.	Develop a schedule for completing reviews of organizational structure, administrative staffing, and business practices for all departments every four years.
	Step 9.	Include in this schedule a review, at least once every four to five years, of the district's overall organizational structure, administrative staffing and business practices.

Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent—Business Operations
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Time Frame	June 30, 2004
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Action Plan 2-7

We recommend that the district take steps to strengthen its approach to strategic planning for instructional activities.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Review the district's current approach to strategic planning (e.g. the need to integrate priorities into the plan itself, the need to formally review progress in achieving the plan; and the need to determine what modifications, if any, are needed to the plan at regularly scheduled intervals).
	Step 2.	Modify the plan to include clearly defined strategic priorities.
	Step 3.	Develop a schedule for reviewing progress against the plan and for assessing whether the plan should be modified to reflect changing conditions, needs, or board direction.
	Step 4.	Implement the recommended changes.

Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendents
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Time Frame	June 30, 2004
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Action Plan 2-8

We recommend that the district continue its efforts to establish a strategic planning process for the Business Services Division.

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Complete efforts to establish a strategic planning process for the Business Services Division.</p> <p>Step 2. Integrate the Business Services Division’s strategic plan with the existing Campaign for Excellence.</p> <p>Step 3. Establish overall priorities for the entire district (including both instructional and non-instructional activities) and incorporate them into the integrated strategic plan.</p> <p>Step 4. Monitor progress against strategic plan goals and objectives using the schedule developed in Action Plan 2-7.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent, Associate Superintendents
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Action Plan 2-9

We recommend that the district strengthen the link between its instructional priorities and its financial plans and budgets.

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Develop strategies for allocating budgeted resources to priority areas established by the board and included in the district’s strategic plan.</p> <p>Step 2. Develop and implement approaches to communicating these strategies to schools.</p> <p>Step 3. Modify existing budgetary practices to identify the funds that are being provided to support improvement efforts.</p> <p>Step 4. Require schools to articulate how budgeted resources (in addition to lottery funds) provided at the school level are being used to address school needs.</p> <p>Step 5. Assess the extent to which school level budgeting tools are adequate to strengthen the link between school improvement planning and budget.</p> <p>Step 6. Develop additional school level budgeting tools as necessary.</p> <p>Step 7. Modify budget systems and reports to facilitate the “rolling up” of school level budgetary information to the district budget in a way that will demonstrate how the overall budget supports efforts to achieve district objectives.</p> <p>Step 8. Redesign the budget process, as necessary, to reflect the modified budgeting and financial planning process.</p> <p>Step 9. Train staff from throughout the district on the modified budget process.</p> <p>Step 10. Provide schools with training on the budgeting tools they will be provided to strengthen the link between school needs, strategies for addressing those needs and budget.</p> <p>Step 11. Implement the modified budget process.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendents, Budget Director
Time Frame	December 31, 2004

Action Plan 2-10

We recommend that the district strengthen the link between its priorities for non-instructional and support services and its financial plans and budgets.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Using the goals and priorities for non-instructional and support services (developed as part of Action Plan 2.8) identify the key factors in each business and support area that affect the district's ability to achieve its objectives.
	Step 2.	At the same time, identify factors that are less central to the district's ability to achieve its objectives.
	Step 3.	Assess existing budgetary allocations to ensure budgeted resources have been allocated to optimize efforts to achieve objectives for non-instructional and support services.
	Step 4.	Modify budget allocations as appropriate.
	Step 5.	Develop a process to systematically assess budget allocations as part of the annual budget and financial planning effort.
	Step 6.	Provide training to affected staff on the recommended budgetary approach.

Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent – Business Operations, Budget Director
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Time Frame	December 31, 2004
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Action Plan 2-11

We recommend that the district takes steps to ensure its financial plans and budgets reflect an appropriate balance between instructional and non-instructional priorities.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Using the strategic plan as a starting point, incorporate as part of the district's financial planning and budgeting process an explicit step in which instructional and non-instructional priorities are weighed and balanced.
	Step 2.	Review budget allocations and priorities with the school board as part of the annual budget process.

Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendents, Budget Director
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Time Frame	December 31, 2004
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Performance Accountability Systems

Action Plan 3-1

In coordination with the district’s ongoing efforts to establish a strategic planning process for the Business Services Division we recommend that a performance accountability system be established.

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Review overall district strategic plan objectives that will be articulated as part of the strategic planning process being developed by the Associate Superintendent – Business Operations.</p> <p>Step 2. Identify core activities performed by each non-instructional support unit that supports (either directly or indirectly) the articulated strategic priorities.</p> <p>Step 3. Identify other core activities that must be performed even if they do not directly or indirectly support achieving a strategic objective.</p> <p>Step 4. Assess the impact each core activity has on a strategic objective (high, medium, or low).</p> <p>Step 5. Gather information on the district’s performance for each core activity identified in Steps 2 and 3.</p> <p>Step 6. Determine the impact improving (or reducing) performance related to each core activity will have on the district’s overall priorities as well as on its ability to perform other necessary activities that are not priorities.</p> <p>Step 7. Assess the cost of improving (or reducing) performance.</p> <p>Step 8. Establish performance goals and objectives that can be achieved within existing resources for each core activity.</p> <p>Step 9. Identify appropriate benchmarks and performance measures.</p> <p>Step 10. Develop systems to collect performance data and monitor progress in achieving goals and objectives.</p> <p>Step 11. Provide training on how managers can use information to optimize performance against goals and objectives.</p> <p>Step 12. Develop strategies for communicating information on performance accountability to district stakeholders.</p> <p>Step 13. Implement the recommended performance accountability system.</p> <p>Step 14. Implement the recommended communication strategies.</p> <p>Step 15. Monitor implementation efforts and make adjustments as necessary.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent, Associate Superintendents
Time Frame	December 31, 2004

Action Plan 3-2

We recommend the district establish a process for evaluating potential problem areas and opportunities for improvement relating to non-instructional areas.

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Use the results of the performance accountability system developed in Action Plan 3-1 to identify potential problem areas and opportunities for improvement and develop a list of these problems/opportunities.</p> <p>Step 2. Prioritize each problem/opportunity based on its impact of achieving district objectives and/or the opportunity for reducing costs.</p> <p>Step 3. Discuss each issue to determine whether any “quick fixes” for addressing the problem and/or taking advantage of the opportunity for improvement exist.</p> <p>Step 4. Make an order of magnitude estimate of the level of effort required to evaluate the problem and develop recommendations for improvement.</p> <p>Step 5. Determine whether this effort is warranted given the magnitude of the problem/opportunity for improvement. ¹</p> <p>Step 6. If the potential benefits of conducting a formal evaluation outweigh the costs develop an evaluation plan (including whether the evaluation will be performed by internal staff or external consultants). ²</p> <p>Step 7. Implement the evaluation plan.</p> <p>Step 8. Document evaluation findings in a written report and prepare a plan to implement evaluation recommendations.</p> <p>Step 9. Review the evaluation findings, recommendations, and implementation plans with senior district managers and make modifications as appropriate.</p> <p>Step 10. Review the evaluation findings, recommendations, and implementation plans with the school board and make modifications as appropriate.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent, Associate Superintendents
Time Frame	December 31, 2004

¹ If the level of effort needed to complete this formal evaluation does not seem cost-effective the issue should be “tabled” and addressed as part of the formal review of unit organization, administrative staffing, and business practices recommended to be performed once every four years.

² If the evaluation is performed by internal staff, these staff should be independent of the program they are evaluating. For example, the evaluation should not be supervised by the manager of the program being evaluated.

Educational Service Delivery

Action Plan 4-1

We recommend that district complete a comprehensive review of the Sarasota County Technical Institute (SCTI) to create an effective and cost-efficient program responsive to the needs of the district.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Evaluate enrollment data in each SCTI course offering for the past three years.
	Step 2.	Determine courses that have been at or above enrollment capacity.
	Step 3.	Determine if any current courses have had identified waiting lists.
	Step 4.	Determine the per course cost based on staffing and operating costs.
	Step 5.	Determine an acceptable per pupil cost for providing each course at SCTI.
	Step 6.	Determine the minimum enrollment required (based on type of course, teaching stations available for that type of course and district and state funding) for each course.
	Step 7.	Based on enrollment and course cost, determine current cost per pupil for each course.
	Step 8.	Based on all of the above, determine courses where enrollments have and have not supported staffing and operating costs.
	Step 9.	Use this data to determine those courses whose enrollments have not supported operating costs and should be discontinued or should have a short term recruitment plan developed to increase enrollment before opting to discontinue.
	Step 10.	Use this data to determine those courses whose enrollments and waiting lists indicate the need for additional sessions.
	Step 11.	Revise course offerings and staffing based on the above.

Who Is Responsible: Director of Secondary Schools and Workforce Development

Time Frame July 2003-July 2004

Action Plan 4-2

We recommend that district develop a system to regularly assess the programs provided through SCTI to ensure course offerings are adjusted based on cost-efficiency and effectiveness.

Action Needed	Step 1.	When developing budget and program plan for the school year, evaluate student enrollment and performance data for each program and course provided at SCTI for the current and previous school year.
	Step 2.	Determine courses and programs where enrollment does not support and has not supported the costs associated with providing the course or program.
	Step 3.	Determine courses and programs where demand for slots has exceeded availability.
	Step 4.	For under enrolled courses and programs that the school wants to continue to offer, develop a short term recruitment plan designed to increase course and program enrollment within one year.
	Step 5.	Develop new course and program schedule based on data analysis and review.
	Step 6.	Determine staffing needed to offer scheduled courses and programs.
	Step 7.	Repeat this process each semester.

Who Is Responsible: Director of Secondary Schools and Workforce Development

Time Frame July 2004

Action Plan 4-3

We recommend that the district evaluate its secondary career development programs to determine programming needs and to coordinate offerings among schools.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop a comprehensive matrix (to include specific focus of each program, number of courses offered and number of teachers assigned to each program) of specific career/technical programs offered at each comprehensive high school and SCTI.
	Step 2.	Determine, in collaboration with high school teams and SCTI Director, which programs would be most cost-effectively operated at SCTI rather than across the district focusing on offering most specialized, highly technical programs at SCTI.
	Step 3.	Determine where any of high school programs are under-enrolled, overcapacity, or have waiting lists.
	Step 4.	Determine where similar programs are offered in more than one setting and one or more program is below capacity.
	Step 5.	Based on each schools' strategic plan, determine what programs each school is planning based on small learning communities and other initiatives.
	Step 6.	Review data gathered above, school strategic plans, and district strategic plan and come to agreement regarding the specific career/technical programs for each high school and the specific capacity of each program.
	Step 7.	Determine, based on district demography, where discrepancies exist in providing all students access to each type of career/technical program.
	Step 8.	Make adjustments in projected offerings at each high school to ensure equal access in north and south areas of district and to ensure optimal program capacity.
	Step 9.	Adjust staffing and course offerings at each high school and SCTI as required.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Secondary Schools and Workforce Development	
Time Frame	July 2004	

Administrative and Instructional Technology

Action Plan 5-1

We recommend that the district establish a replacement cycle for all technologies.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish guidelines for the acceptable age of technology equipment and software for various software and equipment categories
	Step 2.	Use the detailed Technology Resource Survey inventory established for the Florida Department of Education or another method to assess existing equipment and software. Focus on inequalities by campus and department.
	Step 3.	Develop a cycle that will address every campus and department. (The cycle should be developed using the information developed in Steps 1 and 2 above.)
Who Is Responsible	Technology Oversight Committee	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 5-2

We recommend that the district develop a standards-based approach to technology purchasing.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish a list of all technologies currently purchased by the district and include a brief description of how the technology is used.
	Step 2.	Group items that perform the same function, (e.g., desktop computers, printers, etc.) while considering the specific use for which the technology is intended (technology should not be removed from service when it is need for a very specific function or instructional need).
	Step 3.	Compare the listed items with the industry information technology market.
	Step 4.	Compare supportability and cost for alternatives.
	Step 5.	Develop a schedule for removing items that duplicate function and/or increase cost.

Who Is Responsible	Technology Oversight Committee
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Action Plan 5-3

We recommend that the district re-allocate, re-design, and re-engineer the technology support aide function.

Action Needed	Re-allocate technology support aides:
	Step 1. Develop a way/method to collect workload data.
	Step 2. Monitor workload and performance.
	Step 3. Reassess workload based on assessment of demand analysis.
	Step 4. Reassign technical support staff as needed to meet demand.
	Privatize part of the technology support aide's work:
	Step 5. Contact hardware manufactures to recommend value added resellers (VARs) with whom they have established working relationships
	Step 6. Interview VARs to find a company that will meet the needs of the district.
	Step 7. Select a VAR using an established process for selecting purchased services.
	Step 8. Use the VAR for imaging and installations, thus reducing the level I work of the technical support aide.
	Re-engineer technology support aide function:
	Step 9. Redefine level I support to include simple repair, e.g., opening computers and upgrading memory.
	Step 10. Re-train technology support aides to perform their newly defined duties.
	Step 11. Re-title and re-classify the technology support aide to Technology Support Specialist I and increase compensation to MIS2 salary scale.
	Step 12. Align the technology support specialists under the Information Services Department.

Who Is Responsible	Technology Oversight Committee, Information Services Department
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Personnel Systems and Benefits

Action Plan 6-1

We recommend that the district develop and implement a plan to manage and improve attendance for teachers and classified staff.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Review and analyze current school district policies governing attendance to determine effectiveness.
	Step 2.	Develop policies defining excessive absenteeism and new policies governing attendance as determined from Step 2.
	Step 3.	Develop and recommend incentive plan to recognize and reward good attendance.
	Step 4.	Establish process for effectively dealing with excessive absenteeism.
	Step 5.	Recommend appropriate policies (for example, an incentive plan for good attendance) and a process for dealing with excessive absenteeism to the superintendent.
	Step 6.	Obtain school board approval for new policies as appropriate.
	Step 7.	Assign responsibility for implementation of the action plan.
	Step 8.	Implement and evaluate incentive plan for good attendance and process for dealing with excessive absenteeism.
	Step 9.	Evaluate the effectiveness of policy changes (especially the incentive plan for good attendance).
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Human Resources	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 6-2

We recommend that the district develop a plan to address the provision of services for absences that occur for bus drivers, food service workers, and custodians.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop options for the provision of bus, food and custodial services when regular staff is absent.
	Step 2.	Implement options to ensure that services are continued when bus drivers, food service workers, and custodians are absent.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Human Resources and cost center heads for transportation, food service and facilities	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 6-3

We recommend that the district implement an automated substitute deployment system.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Assign responsibility for review and analysis of available automated substitute deployment systems.
	Step 2.	Establish criteria to evaluate which system will best meet the needs of the district.
	Step 3.	Develop Request for Proposals based on the criteria established in Step 2.
	Step 4.	Select and recommend to the superintendent the selected automated substitute deployment system.
	Step 5.	Obtain school board approval.
	Step 6.	Implement automated substitute deployment system.
	Step 7.	Evaluate effectiveness of automated substitute deployment system.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Human Resources	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 6-4

We recommend that the district review and revise its training program for substitutes.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Review current substitute training and revise and expand the training program based on the result of this review.
	Step 2.	Evaluate the effectiveness of the new training program by evaluating the performance of substitute teachers.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Human Resources	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 6-5

We recommend that the district develop an evaluation process to assess the performance of substitute teachers.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop an evaluation process for substitute teachers.
	Step 2.	Evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in improving the performance of substitute teachers.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Human Resources	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 6-6

We recommend the district develop a written strategic plan for human resources that includes measurable objectives that reflect the purpose and expected outcomes of the program.

Action Needed	Step 1. Identify members of a strategic planning task force.
	Step 2. Set goals and time frames for completion of the human resources strategic plan.
	Step 3. Provide OPPAGA report and current recruitment strategic plan to task force for review.
	Step 4. Develop and implement human resources needs assessment if the task force deems this effort appropriate.
	Step 5. Interview selected human resource staff to supplement information generated by OPPAGA and other reports.
	Step 6. Begin process of establishing written goals and measurable objectives with benchmarking incorporated into the plan.
	Step 7. Review continuously with appropriate stakeholders.
	Step 8. Ensure the plan's consistency with other strategic planning initiatives being undertaken in the district.
	Step 9. Include district's plan for recruiting and training substitute teachers once it has been completed.
	Step 10. Include procedures for annually updating the plan.
	Step 11. Seek board approval once plan is completed.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Human Resources
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Facilities Construction

Action Plan 7-1

We recommend that the district establish a planning office.

Action Needed	Step 1. Define the goals and objectives of the planning office.
	Step 2. Identify job descriptions and qualifications for in house staff responsible for meeting goals and objectives.
	Step 3. Identify potential contractor roles and responsibilities.
	Step 4. Obtain approval from superintendent and school board for planning office.
	Step 5. Advertise to fill planning positions.
	Step 6. Procure and negotiate contractor support for planning office.
	Step 7. Analyze relationships between executive director of facilities management, executive director for school support services, and executive director of construction services to create clear lines of authority and responsibility.
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent/Chief Financial and Business Officer, Construction Process Study Team
Time Frame	June 30, 2004

Action Plan 7-2

We recommend that the membership of the facilities strategy team be broadened to include public stakeholders.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify various types of stakeholders with an active interest in facilities planning (e.g., from communities under consideration, individuals involved in community programs, active supporters of public schools).
	Step 2.	Identify process for selecting public stakeholders and terms of participation.
	Step 3.	Take process proposal and recommendations on types of stakeholders to school board for approval.
	Step 4.	Select new members.
Who Is Responsible	School board member of facilities strategy team	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 7-3

We recommend that the proposed planning office develop an information management system that will allow decision-makers to use student, building and municipal information to support planning efforts		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Ask members of Facilities Strategy Team to identify information needs in their facilities planning discussions and deliberations.
	Step 2.	Compile existing relevant data already maintained on facilities inventory, enrollment, utilization, building condition, capital plans, operating costs and capital project history into an Access database.
	Step 3.	Define a set of eight to ten reports that can be generated from compiled data that will be useful in long range facility planning.
	Step 4.	Work with information technology specialists at Sarasota County Public Schools to create reports from data.
	Step 5.	If insufficient in-house capacity exists, work with programmer to compile data and create reports.
Who Is Responsible	Information Technology Office and Associate Superintendent for Business Services	
Time Frame	December 31, 2004	

Action Plan 7-4

We recommend that the district utilize real estate professionals without a conflict of interest and also involve members of the public in the site selection process.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify building industry and real estate professionals who do not have an interest in selling to the district or in being engaged by the district in real estate, design or construction.
	Step 2.	Create guidelines for private sector/public citizen role in site selection.
	Step 3.	Identify two to three representatives to participate in Facilities Strategy Team.
	Step 4.	Create stakeholder committee to work on planning issues with school district and county representatives and to be a link to the broader public.
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent/Chief Financial and Business Officer	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 7-5

We recommend that a formal evaluation of building design and operation be undertaken in new and remodeled schools that were completed in the last one to five years.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify new schools and remodeled schools to be evaluated.
	Step 2.	Establish design issues to be reviewed—building size, classroom size, adjacencies, lighting, acoustics, furniture, fixtures, exterior athletic, play or parking areas.
	Step 3.	Establish operational issues to be reviewed—ongoing maintenance requirements and operating cost.
	Step 4.	Establish team of local school users and professionals to inspect schools.
	Step 5.	Develop recommendations on design and operations and incorporate them into educational specifications and design and construction standards.

Who Is Responsible	Director of Construction Services, Superintendent for instruction
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Time Frame	June 30, 2004
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Action Plan 7-6

We recommend a capital program that has defined goals and measurable objectives.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Clarify goals of new planning office, facilities manager, construction services division, information technology office and maintenance department.
	Step 2.	Incorporate these goals into the school district's strategic plan.
	Step 3.	Develop measures for evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of capital program in relation to its clarified goals.

Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent/Chief Financial and Business Officer, Director of Construction Services, Long Range Planner, Maintenance Director, and Facilities Information Technology Specialist.
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Time Frame	December 31, 2004
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Action Plan 7-7

We recommend that the school district develop an overall approach and strategy for evaluating its facility construction operations on an ongoing basis.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Define the mission of the construction services division in the context of the school district's strategic plan and mission.
	Step 2.	Consider renaming the construction services division into a facility or capital program management department.
	Step 3.	Define the priorities for facilities construction based on input from the "clients" of the construction services division—local school users and residents who live next to public school facilities.
	Step 4.	Define long term and mid term outcomes that will result from operating according to the mission and priorities of the division.
	Step 5.	Develop indicators that the school district is moving toward its long and mid term outcomes in the operation of its construction services or capital program management division.

Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent/Chief Financial and Business Officer,
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Time Frame	June 30, 2004
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Facilities Maintenance

Action Plan 8-1

We recommend that the district establish a more appropriate mission statement for its maintenance operations and create measurable goals and objectives that correspond to this mission.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop a new mission statement that reflects the importance of the physical learning environment to the district's performance in educating students.
	Step 2.	Develop measurable goals and objectives for custodial services, each trades area, energy management, and all other discrete maintenance programs.
	Step 3.	Obtain comments from a broad range of maintenance employees, custodians, and department "customers," such as principals, teachers, parents and students, prior to finalizing goals and objectives.
	Step 4.	Establish a periodic mechanism for collecting and assessing performance data against the established measurable goals and objectives.
	Step 5.	Link the performance measurement and budget allocation processes.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 8-2

We recommend that the district establish and implement a measurement and accountability process to track program and staff performance and efficiency.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Implement additional data collecting capabilities of the work order system.
	Step 2.	Establish expectations of the cost, staffing, and time required to complete various work plan tasks.
	Step 3.	Train managers on how to use the work order system to more effectively monitor the performance of employees.
	Step 4.	Track and publish performance data for each operational unit.
	Step 5.	Implement a process for incorporating performance data into the periodic evaluation of department managers.
	Step 6.	Conduct random periodic reviews of work order paper work and computer system data to ensure accuracy.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Business Manager, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 8-3

We recommend that the district establish performance standards for maintenance workers and custodians and assess performance against these standards as part of periodic personnel evaluations.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish quality and efficiency standards for each trades area and for custodians
	Step 2.	Establish performance goals against the standards for each employee
	Step 3.	Amend the performance evaluation process to include supervisory ratings of employees against the established performance and productivity standards on at least an annual basis
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Trades Managers, Facilities Services; Custodial Managers, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 8-4

We recommend that the district implement a comprehensive customer feedback survey process and use the feedback in the management decision-making process.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish a customer feedback form to be completed by school personnel (i.e., principals or assistant principals) for certain categories of work orders. ¹
	Step 2.	Track customer service feedback on at least a monthly basis, by trade and program area, and provide that data to each trades manager, foreperson and lead person.
	Step 3.	As part of the annual Asset Preservation interview process with each school principal, establish a written service assessment form for principals, teachers, students and parents to anonymously rate the level of service they have received from the Facilities Services Department.
	Step 4.	Incorporate customer satisfaction goals, by trades area and program, into the performance evaluation process for maintenance managers.
	Step 5.	Use customer satisfaction data to help determine where training or other corrective action is needed.

Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Business Manager, Facilities Services
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Time Frame	June 30, 2004
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¹ Establishing a dollar or time threshold would be an appropriate method of limiting the data collection process to “significant” work order projects.

Action Plan 8-5

We recommend that the District establish written operating policies and procedures for all maintenance program areas, ensure that the policies and procedures are accessible to staff and the public, and implement a system for monitoring adherence to the standards.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify all program areas without up-to-date policies and procedures.
	Step 2.	Draft detailed operating procedures for these areas.
	Step 3.	Incorporate performance standards developed in Action Plan 8-2 into the operating procedures.
	Step 4.	Centralize within the Facilities Services Department all operating policies and procedures and periodically review them to ensure they are still relevant.
	Step 5.	Publish a combined listing of maintenance policies and procedures (and performance standards) in manual form and supply all maintenance work sites and school sites with a copy of the manual.
	Step 6.	Establish a maintenance services web site and place a downloadable version of the manual on the site.
	Step 7.	Dedicate a portion of the website to reporting information on the department’s performance against standards.

Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Trades Managers, Facilities Services
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Time Frame	June 30, 2004
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Action Plan 8-6

We recommend that the district revise its custodial staffing allocation formula to account for the age of each school.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Determine the average age of all district schools and the age of each school relative to that average age.
	Step 2.	Develop a weighting system that gives additional custodial support to older schools and takes away custodians from newer schools.
	Step 3.	Test the weighting formula in a sample of schools.
	Step 4.	Modify the weighting formula based on the results of the analysis performed in Step 3.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Custodial Managers, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Action Plan 8-7

We recommend that the district implement a task system for custodians to improve cleaning efficiency in the schools.¹

Action Needed	Step 1.	Create cleaning stations for custodians based closely on the revised formula used to assign custodians to schools. ²
	Step 2.	Establish written cleanliness standards and expectations for each station.
	Step 3.	Allow custodians to leave as soon as their stations are completely cleaned, even if it is prior to the end of their shift.
	Step 4.	Periodically and randomly inspect custodial cleaning stations to ensure cleaning standards are being applied.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Custodial Managers, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

¹ This Action Plan will impact collective bargaining contracts.

² Prior to implementing this step, Action Plan 8-6 should be completed and the new staffing formula should be used to implement Step 1 of Action Plan 8-7.

Action Plan 8-8

We recommend that the district remove head custodians from the classified category to enable them to effectively supervise other custodians.¹

Action Needed	Step 1.	Reclassify head custodian jobs as management functions.
	Step 2.	Rewrite discipline procedures to allow head custodians to administer disciplinary sanctions for problem employees.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Financial & Business Officer; Director, Facilities Services; Custodial Managers, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

¹ This Action Plan will impact collective bargaining contracts.

Action Plan 8-9

We recommend that the district revise the management structure in the trades areas.¹

Action Needed	Step 1.	Combine the management of trades functions so that each trades manager is responsible for between 15 and 22 employees.
	Step 2.	Move trades forepersons to the field in trades groups with few workers, such as plumbing and painting.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

¹ This Action Plan will impact collective bargaining contracts.

² This might most easily be accomplished by combining painting and roofing with small engine repair and utility maintenance under the direction of one trade manager. If feasible, the district could eliminate one trade manager position.

Action Plan 8-10

We recommend that the district revise its formula for trades staffing based on actual work projections.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Review the past year's record of work orders by trades function to estimate a base level of service provided by facilities services. ¹
	Step 2.	Develop estimates for completion time for each trade group for the next five years.
	Step 3.	Project trades staffing needs based on estimates of workload in each area.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Financial & Business Officer; Director, Facilities Services; Trades Managers, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

¹ This could be accomplished by random sampling as opposed to a full review of all work orders.

Action Plan 8-11

We recommend that the district periodically evaluate the costs of its maintenance programs to determine if they can be accomplished for lower cost in some other manner.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Calculate the total cost for completing each similar type of work order by contracted labor category and in-house labor category.
	Step 2.	Identify alternative methods of work order completion for each category and estimate the costs of completing the same level and quality of work under those alternative methods.
	Step 3.	Switch service delivery mechanisms in areas where a clear cost savings projection is evident.
	Step 4.	Use the analysis performed in Steps 1, 2 and 3 to determine whether the policy restricting the use of outside contractors in schools should be maintained or loosened on a selective basis.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Business Manager, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004 ¹	

¹ The district cannot undertake this recommendation until Step 1 of Action Plan 8-10 has been completed and the district has access to more detailed performance data.

Action Plan 8-12

We recommend that the district implement key efficiency and effectiveness tracking capabilities of its work order system.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Engage a computer consultant familiar with the district's work order database system to modify the system and train staff in the use of the new features.
	Step 2.	Begin routine cost and time estimates for all work orders.
	Step 3.	Begin entering actual total cost and time figures for all completed work orders.
	Step 4.	Track actual "productive" work time against total pay period time for each trades area and category of work order.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Business Manager, Facilities Services; Trades Managers, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 8-13

We recommend that the district use clerical staff to complete the data entry to close out completed work orders in the system more quickly.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Hire a dedicated data entry person to close out all work orders in the system on a permanent basis to free the trades managers from this responsibility.
	Step 2.	Establish a process for trades managers to routinely conduct quality control checks of the work order closeouts to ensure accuracy of the data entry.
Who Is Responsible	Director, Facilities Services; Business Manager, Facilities Services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Transportation

Action Plan 9-1

We recommend that the district develop and compare key unit cost information for transportation functions with private providers.

Action Needed	Step 1.	The DOT should identify potential candidates among transportation functions for this review.
	Step 2.	The DOT should develop key unit cost data for the selected in-house functions.
	Step 3.	The DOT should obtain quotes from outside vendors for the selected functions.
	Step 4.	In addition to the direct cost data of these selected functions, the DOT should estimate the additional overhead costs associated with the bidding, monitoring, and quality control required when using outside vendors.
	Step 5.	The DOT should develop the appropriate comparison of cost and service between in-house and outside contracting for these functions. This analysis should include an assessment of risks that may be associated with the district no longer having direct and immediate control over these functions.
	Step 6.	The DOT should present the findings and results of this analysis to the district administration and board.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director	
Time Frame	June, 2004	

Action Plan 9-2

We recommend that the district develop an accountability system with quantifiable goals and measurable performance oriented objectives.

Action Needed	Step 1.	The transportation department should establish performance goals and measurable, performance-related key indicators.
	Step 2.	The transportation department should measure its performance by key indicators.
	Step 3.	The transportation department should compare its performance to peers and exemplars using the key indicators.
	Step 4.	The transportation department should establish benchmarks for measuring future performance.
	Step 5.	The transportation department should report its goals and performance to the district administration and the board.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director	
Time Frame	June, 2004	

Food Service Operations

Action Plan 10-1

We recommend that the cafeteria managers be removed from the same bargaining unit as the employees for which they have oversight.

Action Needed	Step 1.	During the next union negotiations ask to have the cafeteria managers removed from the bargaining unit.
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent of Business Operations	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 10-2

We recommend that the district determine the actual indirect expenditures that should be charged to the food services program in order to properly account for program expenses.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify the indirect expense categories which are incurred by the general fund on behalf of food services. Use the district's federal indirect rate to pay for personnel and accounting office support only.
	Step 2.	Determine the fair share amount for each of these expenses that should be charged to the food services program. Where practical, charge the program with itemized expenses such as utilities and refuse removal. Limit use of lump sum transfers.
	Step 3.	Revise the general fund and food service budgets to reflect the actual costs of indirect services.
Who Is Responsible	Associate Superintendent of Business Operations	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 10-3

We recommend that the district reduce its food costs by use of USDA commodities.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Determine which processed commodities are available.
	Step 2.	Compare the available commodity processed items with the items the district currently uses.
	Step 3.	Evaluate the available processed commodities for quality and price.
	Step 4.	Contract for commodity items that provide the best value to the district.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Food Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Action Plan 10-4

We recommend that the district review and revise its current menus, conduct simple time and motion studies, and then use the results to update its MPLH formula used to staff school cafeterias.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Update student meal preferences. See recommendation in best practice 11, this chapter.
	Step 2.	Revise menus after determining which convenience foods can be used more cost effectively in place of items that are currently prepared from scratch.
	Step 3.	Revise the recipe book to reflect actual practices and equipment to be used.
	Step 4.	Perform simple time and motion tests/studies on the most frequently used menus to determine the actual labor needed to prepare and serve the items.
	Step 5.	Update the MPLH formula used for staffing cafeterias.
	Step 6.	Implement the new standards and benchmarks.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Food Services	
Time Frame	June 30, 2004	

Cost Control Systems

Action Plan 11-1

Develop comprehensive procedures manuals to guide financial operations.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Determine the existing procedures for critical functions.
	Step 2.	Ascertain the feasibility and appropriateness of the existing procedures, and develop and modify critical processes, as necessary.
	Step 3.	Assign the responsibility of developing formal procedures to the accounting manager or another senior member of the administrative staff that reports to the controller.
	Step 4.	Submit the revised procedures manuals for school board approval.
	Step 5.	Distribute the approved procedures manuals to all users.
Who is Responsible	Executive Director of Financial Services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Action Plan 11-2

We recommend that the district develop policies and procedures for confidential reporting of suspected improprieties.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Prepare and submit proposed policies to school board.
	Step 2.	Subsequent to board approval and adoption of the policy, distribute policies to all employees and post the policies at all work sites to ensure proper implementation.
Who is Responsible	Superintendent	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Action Plan 11-3

We recommend that the district take steps to develop a budget that reflects measurable strategic plan priorities and evaluates financial results against those measurable goals.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify strategic plan priorities and measurement criteria for instructional and non-instructional areas, including capital asset management and debt financing.
	Step 2.	Assess resources needed to comply with the strategic plan.
	Step 3.	Incorporate the strategic plan priorities in the budget development process.
	Step 4.	Monitor and evaluate progress in achieving strategic plan objectives using measurement criteria.
Who is Responsible	Budget Director	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Action Plan 11-4

We recommend that the district conduct annual risk assessments.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop and distribute a request for proposal for risk assessment services.
	Step 2.	Review proposals and select a firm that will perform the risk assessment for the district.
	Step 3.	Review the results of the risk assessment and prioritize high-risk activities.
	Step 4.	Assign responsibility for addressing and resolving prioritized risks.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Finance and Business Affairs	
Time Frame	August 2003—the start of the 2003-04 school year	

Action Plan 11-5

We recommend that the district develop a formal policies and procedures manual for risk management.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify all risk management related policies, procedures, and processes.
	Step 2.	Review existing documentation and update as needed.
	Step 3.	Develop written documentation for the major policies for which no documentation currently exists.
	Step 4.	Combine all written documentation into a policies and procedures manual for the risk management function.
Who Is Responsible	Risk Manager	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Action Plan 11-6

We recommend that the district prepare insurance cost comparisons with peer districts.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Receive cost comparisons from insurance consultant.
	Step 2.	Review results and prepare appropriate recommendations.
	Step 3.	Present recommendations to the board.
Who Is Responsible	Risk Manager, Executive Director of Financial Services	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	

Action Plan 11-7

We recommend that the district evaluate the feasibility of alternative warehouse services.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Determine the costs associated with maintaining inventories in-house by review and analysis of activity cost reports and all other variables.
	Step 2.	Ascertain the types of inventory-related services available in the industry and the costs associated with the services.
	Step 3.	Determine the costs and benefits associated with utilizing alternative inventory management resources.
	Step 4.	Document the results of the study and present the analysis and the recommendations to the superintendent.
	Step 5.	If more beneficial, the associate superintendent chief financial and business officer should pursue contracting the storage and distribution of supplies to private companies.
Who is Responsible	Associate Superintendent Chief Financial and Business Officer	
Time Frame	January 1, 2004	